

# Haftarah

*'My covenant was a covenant of life and wellbeing'*



Know, then, that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may hold, says the LORD of hosts. My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name.

Malachi 2:4-5

## Links

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (Malachi 1:1 - 2:7) accompanies the Torah portion *Toledot*: Genesis 25:19 - 28:9.
- The Torah portion opens with Jacob and Esau struggling in the womb. The Haftarah begins with a reference to the struggles between the descendents of Jacob and Esau.

## Background

The title Malachi ('My messenger') refers to an anonymous prophet living in the 5th century BCE. The Book of Malachi is thought to have emerged after the rebuilding and re-dedication of the Jerusalem Temple when the Jews of the Babylonian exile had returned home. This religious revival was not sustained, for the prophet demands that the community, in particular its priests, purify their worship and rededicate themselves to God and to Torah.

## Things to ponder

- *"I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau"* (1:2-3). In contradiction to this text, nowhere in the five books of Torah does it speak of God hating Esau. Note that Esau is identified as ancestor of the Edomites in Gen. 36:1.
- *"Says the LORD of hosts..."* Note the constant repetition of this phrase. What effect does it have on the listener?
- *"You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering!"* (1:13). In blatant disregard for ritual requirements, people are offering God their damaged possessions while keeping the best for their own consumption (see 1:14). *"Try presenting that to your governor"* (1:8)! A hint of divine sarcasm?
- *"For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name"* (1:11). As a wake-up call to his own people, the prophet boldly announces a universal vision of the gentile nations embracing the God of Israel. Much later, rabbinic teachings would voice a similar view: "The righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come" [Tosefta Sanhedrin 13:2]. Today, reference to this verse from Malachi appears in the Roman Catholic liturgy: Eucharistic Prayer III.
- *'That my covenant with Levi may hold...'* (2:4). Among the tribes of Israel, the priestly tribe of Levi was esteemed by the prophets for its fidelity to Moses in the crisis of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:25-28).

## Reflection

Malachi rebukes a community that has grown religiously lax. His message is just as relevant to many communities today. Discuss. Where am *I* in terms of my care and vigilance in matters of worship and religious observance?

Bibliography: Harper Collins Study Bible: NRSV (NY, 1993); Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996). Scripture quotations: NRSV.