

Haftarah

'that they may be one'



“Bring them close to each other, so that they may become one stick, joined together in your hand...

“Thus says the Lord God: I am going to take the stick of Joseph— which is in the hand of Ephraim—and of the tribes of Israel associated with him, and I will place the stick of Judah upon it and make them into one stick; they shall be joined in My hand.”

Ezekiel 37:17,19

Links

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (Ezekiel 37:15-28) accompanies the Torah portion *Vayigash*: Genesis 44:18—47:27.
- Both readings tell of a reunification: in the Torah portion it is Joseph with his brothers; in the Haftarah it is the Israelite tribes that formed the southern kingdom reuniting with the lost tribes of the north.
- In the Torah portion Judah plays a key role in the reunion of his family; in the Haftarah the tribe of Judah is vital to the prophet’s message of unity.

Background

- After the death of King Solomon, the Israelites split into two kingdoms. The southern kingdom (‘Judah’) was comprised of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Its capital was Jerusalem. The northern kingdom (‘Israel’) was made up of the other ten tribes. Its capital was Samaria, in the territory of Ephraim.
- Both kingdoms were eventually conquered by foreign powers. In 721 BCE the northern kingdom fell to Assyria, its leaders deported and its people assimilated, its tribes never to re-emerge (‘the ten lost tribes’). In 587 BCE the southern kingdom fell to Babylon, and the Babylonian exile began. Those exiled eventually returned to Jerusalem; thus the Jewish people survived and rebuilt their lives and their Temple.
- Ezekiel, from a priestly family in the south, was a prophet caught up in the Babylonian exile. His prophecy speaks of a time when all the exiled Jews will be restored to their land, united as one people, faithful to God.

Ponder

- The dramatic image of the two sticks... The prophet’s way of communicating resembles a kind of street theatre. Can you visualize it?
- Note the repetition and subtle reversal of word order in: *‘They shall be My people, and I will be their God’* (37:23). *‘I shall be their God and they shall be My people’* (37:27).
- Meditate on these powerful lines as part of your prayer:
 - > *‘There shall be one shepherd for all of them’* (37:24).
 - > *‘It shall be an everlasting covenant with them’* (37:26).
 - > *‘My sanctuary abides with them forever’* (37:28).
- Ezekiel’s vision reflects the ancient promises of the Abrahamic covenant—land, peace, descendants (37:25-26)—which in turn is a blessing not only for Israel but for the nations (37:28).

Reflect

- Reflect on the dreams and tasks of reconciliation/unity in your lifetime—in your family, parish, nation, global community. In what way are you personally impacted by these processes? How does Ezekiel speak to you?

Bibliography: Sarna, ed., *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarat* (Philadelphia, 2001); Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996). Scripture quotations: JPS.

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Text: Teresa Pirola. Illustration: Sarann Ryan. © The Story Source, 2011. *Haftarah* (from the Hebrew root word; ‘to conclude’) is the name given to the reading which, in accordance with the Jewish lectionary, is read after the Torah portion of the day, at Shabbat and festival services.