

Haftarah

'They have sold for silver those whose cause was just'



Hear this word, O people of Israel...

Concerning the whole family that I brought up from the land of Egypt: You alone have I singled out Of all the families of the earth— That is why I will call you to account For all your iniquities.

Amos 3:1-2

Link

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (Amos 2:6 - 3:8) accompanies the Torah portion *Vayeshev*: Genesis 37:1 - 40:23.
- *'Because they have sold for silver those whose cause was just'* (Amos 2:6). Jewish interpretative traditions link this verse with the Torah account of Joseph sold into slavery for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:28). In the Talmud Joseph is called *tzaddik*: 'righteous person.' Amos seems to be saying: 'Just as the brothers mistreated the *tzaddik*, so do you.'
- *'Father and son go to the same girl'* (Amos 2:7). This verse calls to mind the story of Judah who had sexual relations with his son's widow (Gen. 38).

Background

- The Prophet Amos lived in the 8th century BCE. Originally from the vicinity of Jerusalem in the south, Amos felt called to minister to the Kingdom of Israel in the north. There he thundered against the sins of the people, denouncing their greed, moral laxity and social injustices.
- In a midrashic play on the Hebrew language, Jewish tradition associates the name Amos with *amos*: 'heavy (of tongue)' and therefore imagines him to have had a speech impediment like Moses (Exodus 4:10).

Things to ponder

- *'Ah, you who trample the heads of the poor...'* (2:7). Amos displays a major concern that God's ways involve social justice.
- *'And make the humble walk a twisted course!'* (2:7). Says Rashi, the poor lose their way out of fear. Other interpreters suggest legal corruption—the powerful pervert the course of justice and the innocent suffer.
- *'Yet I destroyed the Amorite...'* (2:9)
'And I brought you up from the land of Egypt...' (2:10)
'And I raised up prophets...' (2:11).
These three verses, each beginning with the emphasis on 'I', stress God's personal and continual involvement in history.
- *'You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth—that is why I will call you to account'* (3:2). A reference to the covenant. Here, divine chastisement is motivated by love for a special people, called to a unique service for the sake of the world.
- Note the crescendo of rhetorical questions in 3:3-8. When God moves, things happen.

Discuss

- Which verse in this Haftarah speaks to you most strongly, and why?
- The challenges posed by Hosea resonate as strongly today for Christian communities in affluent parts of the world. Do you agree? Discuss.

Bibliography: Sarna, ed., *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarah* (Philadelphia, 2002); Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996). Scripture quotations: JPS.

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