

Haftarah

'God who is my mighty shelter'



*The Eternal lives!
Praised be my Rock!
God is exalted,
the Rock of my salvation...*

2 Samuel 22:47

Connection

In the Jewish liturgical calendar this Haftarah accompanies the Torah portion *Ha'azinu* when it is read on the Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

Overview

The Haftarah is presented (see the opening verse) as King David's song of thanksgiving to God for rescuing him from the 'grasp' of his enemies and of Saul. Military imagery pervades the text. God is depicted in human-like form, as a mighty and victorious warrior, storming the armed forces of his foes in order to save his people from destruction. The hymn carries a deep religious spirit. The text is also preserved, with minor textual variations, in Psalm 18.

Biblical poetry

Both the 'Song of Moses' in the Torah portion and David's 'victory hymn' in the Haftarah are poetic creations. In simple outline below are examples of some of the forms in which biblical poetry appears:

Synonymous parallelism (the second line/colon contains the same thought as the first):

*God is my rock where I seek shelter,
my shield, the source of my salvation (v.3).*

Antithetic parallelism (the second line is the opposite of the first):

*You give victory to the humble
and you look at the proud, to humble them (v.28).*

Synthetic parallelism (the second line elaborates on the first):

*Who trains my hands for battle,
my arms to bend a bow of bronze (v.35).*

Repetition:

*I chase my foes and destroy them,
I do not turn back till they are no more.
I destroy them, I shatter them... (vv.38-39).*

Reflect

In today's religious climate, with its sensitivities to the horror and complexities of global conflict, many Christians are uncomfortable with the use of glorified war imagery to convey spiritual meaning. Even so, our Haftarah calls us to embrace God-given qualities like steadfast courage, hope, determination to defeat evil, the power to do good, relentless commitment to noble goals and, above all, unshakeable confidence in the power of God to save. Discuss this, and share what you take from this reading in terms of illumination of the path of faith.

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

This Haftarah resource accompanies the **Light of Torah** series. www.lightoftorah.net

Text: Teresa Pirola. Illustration: Sarann Ryan. © The Story Source, 2012. *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.