

Haftarah

'not by might...but by My spirit'



The Eternal will take possession of Judah—God's portion in the holy land—and will again choose Jerusalem.

Zechariah 2:16

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

Connection

- In the Jewish calendar, the Torah portion *Beha'alotkha* (Numbers 8:1-12:16) opens with reference to the seven lamps of the lampstand in the Tabernacle, while the Haftarah from Zechariah includes reference to the candelabrum in the Temple (4:2). This Haftarah also appears during the week of the festival of Hanukah.

*See Zechariah 2:10—4:7 in Catholic bibles.

Background

- The prophet Zechariah lived in the period of the return of the Judean exiles from Babylon to their homeland and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. When the building process slowed, two prophets, Zechariah and Haggai, urged the people to stay focused and complete the task.

Themes

- Zechariah's vision anticipates a new era of reconciliation with God, including the restoration of priestly and lay leadership. It brings into play heavenly and earthly realms. It shows the great value placed on the Temple as an institution central to the people's identity and way of life.
- *'Sing joyfully... I am coming to dwell in your midst'* (2:14). The reading opens with four verses of hope and encouragement.
- *'On that day many nations...shall become My people'* (2:15). The expression has messianic overtones, looking forward to a time when the gentiles will come to worship the God of Israel.
- *'See, I have taken off your iniquity and am giving you something new to wear'* (3:4). The vision involving the high priest's old and new garments suggests a process of purification, forgiveness, renewal.
- *'The Accuser'* (3:2): In Jewish tradition, 'the satan' is a servant of God who, with God's permission, plays the role of a 'prosecuting attorney'.
- *'Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit'* (4:6). The rebuilding of the Temple became complicated by the political tensions. Judah was now a province of the Persian empire. A rebuilt Temple could rekindle Jewish hopes of an independent Judah. Zechariah's vision can be interpreted as urging people to rise above political complexities and keep their eye on God and God's ethical path: the temple will be rebuilt, not through political tactics but because God wills it.
- *Zerubbabel*: governor of the province.
- *'All shall cry: Beautiful! Beautiful!'* (4:7). Literally: *'grace, grace'* (cf. NRSV). The Temple, gift of God's grace, is beautiful to behold.

Reflection

- Discuss the challenges of staying 'focused' on God and one's deepest values amidst politics (of whatever kind: civic, religious, familial).

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.