

Haftarah

'Walk only in the way that I command you'



Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.

Jeremiah 7:23

Links

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading, Jeremiah 7:21—8:3; 9:22-23 (NRSV: 9:23-24), accompanies the Torah portion *Tzav*: Lev. 6:1—8:36.
- Both readings speak of sacrifices. In the Haftarah Jeremiah warns that sacrifice must be accompanied by a life of good deeds.

Background

The verses of this Haftarah follow what is known as Jeremiah's 'Temple sermon' and continue in that vein, chastizing the people for their sins and challenging the false assumption that by being near to the Temple they would be protected. (Note: earlier, in 7:4, the people chant *'the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'*) The prophet is concerned for the primacy of morality. What God wants is repentance and righteous living. This is the only sure path to happiness and security.

Ponder

- Note the literary use of negation and contrast; what wasn't said/done is stated, followed by the positive assertion of what should be done. E.g., *'I did not speak to them...concerning burnt offerings'* (7:22) followed by: *'But this command I gave them...'* (7:23).
- *'For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices'* (7:22) But weren't sacrifices part of the law given at Mt Sinai during the Israelites' wilderness sojourn (as understood by traditional Jewish interpretation)? This point evoked discussion among generations of Jewish Torah commentators!
- 7:29-34. In these verses the prophet laments and judges the sin of apostasy. Two crimes are mentioned, abominations in the Temple and child sacrifice.
- In 7:31 God is presented as saying he never commanded child sacrifice, that it never entered his mind! We can't help but think here of the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22.
- *'The corpses of the people will be food for the birds'* (7:33). In the ancient world exposure of the dead was considered a terrible desecration.
- In the closing two verses of the Haftarah note the poetic triplet and the reassurance of God's steadfast love, justice, righteousness.

Reflect

- What words and images, rhythms and speech patterns, stood out to you as you read/listened to this Haftarah?
- In your own life, consider how religious habits can at times mask the need to attend to the deeper effort required for renewal of heart and lifestyle.

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

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.