

Haftarah

'See, it is the king who leads you now.'



If you fear the LORD and serve him and heed his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well.

1 Samuel 12:14

Connection

- In the Jewish calendar the Torah portion *Korach* (Numbers 16:1-18:32) and the Haftarah (1 Samuel 11:14-12:22) both tell of a conflict over the issue of leadership. In the Torah Korach challenges Moses' leadership and in the Haftarah the people demand an earthly king.

Background

- The biblical figure of Samuel emerges as a military leader, judge and prophet to the people of Israel in the period immediately prior to the establishment of a monarchy (11th c. BCE). In ch. 8 we read that the people's demand for an earthly king displeases Samuel. He turns to the Lord who is also offended by the people's demand yet tells Samuel to comply. Thus Saul is anointed king over three ceremonies described in chapters 9-12. Our Haftarah passage takes up the last ceremony.

Ponder

- *'Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced'* (11:15). But Samuel's name is not mentioned. He is not rejoicing in what he regards to be a dangerous path chosen by the people.
- *'If you will not heed the voice of the Lord...then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king'* (12:15). Despite the decision to anoint Saul king, Samuel clearly regards the Lord as Israel's true sovereign.
- *'Whose donkey have I taken?'* (12:3). Like Moses in the Torah portion (Num.16:15), Samuel testifies to his integrity as a leader; he has taken no bribes, not a single donkey.
- *'The Lord sent thunder and rain... and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel'* (12:18). As with Moses in the Torah portion, a miracle confirms the status of Samuel as a prophet-leader.
- *'I will declare to you all the saving deeds of the Lord...'* (12:7). Samuel reminds the people of their sacred history as a divinely chosen people whom the Lord led out of Egypt (12:6f).
- *'For the Lord will not cast away his people'* (12:22). The people are reassured of God's fidelity to them despite their misguided judgment in demanding a king.

Discuss

- In the Talmud one finds differences in rabbinic opinion as to whether or not God approved of a monarchy. (You can appreciate this discussion all the more by reading Deut. 17:14ff). Aware of the pros and cons of this critical turn in Israel's history, discuss the challenges of leadership and decision-making—of steadfastness and compromise—in the face of unchanging truths and pastoral needs.

Bibliography: Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996). Scripture quotations: NRSV.

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