

Haftarah

'When David's time to die drew near...'



“Now Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was secure and strong.”

1 Kings 2:12

Links

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (1 Kings 2:1-12) accompanies the Torah portion *Vayechi*: Genesis 47:28—50:26.
- Both readings describe a deathbed scene. In the Torah portion Jacob delivers his last words to his children. In the Haftarah David instructs his son Solomon who will ascend to the throne after David's death.

Background

The first Book of Kings tells of the political struggles that follow King David's death. It takes a view of Jewish history as judgement according to fidelity to the ways of God.

The story

As 1 Kings opens, David has been king for forty years. As he lays dying, he shares with Solomon his successor some final matters on his mind, including the settling of old scores and generosity to a particular person:

- *'You know what Joab...did to me'* (2:5). Joab killed David's favorite son (2 Sam.18). He also killed Abner, one of David's generals (2 Sam. 3:27). Abner had previously slain Joab's brother (2 Sam.3:22-30).
- *'Be kind to the family of Barzillai'* (2:7). Barzillai supplied David's troops with beds, basins and food at Mahanaim (2 Sam.17:27-29).

Things to ponder

- David's last testament is marked by vengeance and bloodshed. Is this really the way Israel's greatest king should be remembered? In Jewish tradition some commentators have sought to re-interpret this scene in a more favorable light. Others admire the honesty of the text in presenting David as a complex human being with serious frailties amidst goodness and heroism. Whatever our view of David, we should be wary of judging the actions of a warrior-king of some 3,000 years ago by the standards of our 21st century.
- *'I am going the way of all the earth'* (2:2); i.e., *I am about to die*.
- *'David slept with his ancestors'* (2:10); i.e., *died; buried with his ancestors*.
- The final verse (v.12) seems to say that Solomon's reign is secure because it is built on the foundations of David kingship.

Reflect

- How well acquainted are you with the character of David in the scriptures? How significant is David in your religious imagination?
- Have you ever been with a person close to death? Reflect on that experience: what final words were exchanged; what did they mean to you? If you could imagine your own deathbed scene the way you would want it to be, how would it look? What would you say, and to whom?

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

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

Text: Teresa Pirola. Illustration: Sarann Ryan. © The Story Source, 2011. *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.