

Haftarah

'Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God'



Yet I have been the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior. It was I who fed you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. When I fed them they were satisfied; they were satisfied and their heart was proud; therefore they forgot me.

Hosea 13:4-6

Link

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (Hosea 12:13 - 14:10) accompanies the Torah portion *Vayetze*: Genesis 28:10 - 32:3.
- The link between the two readings is not obvious, however the Haftarah opens with reference to Jacob fleeing to the land where his uncle dwells.
- Note: depending on which bible you are using, you may need to start reading at Hosea 12:12 due to a slight variation in verse-numbering.

Background

- The Prophet Hosea operated mid-8th century BCE. The Israelites had split into two kingdoms: Israel in the north, Judah in the south.
- Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom which at the time was quite prosperous. However Hosea saw that material prosperity was not matched by religious commitment. He warns of dire consequences unless his people turns back to the God of Israel, but he also points to God's mercy for those who repent.
- In fact, the Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrian super-power in the year 721 BCE, probably after Hosea's death.
- Hosea calls the Northern Kingdom of Israel 'Ephraim' (as its first king had belonged to the tribe of Ephraim).

Things to ponder

- *"I have been the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt"* (13:4). The memory of the Exodus liberation lies at the heart of Hosea's message. In a society of paganism and moral laxness he draws attention to the central relationship: God is the God of Israel, and the people of Israel are God's people. Their identity and freedom as a chosen people is the fruit of what God did for their ancestors, freed from slavery. This is the truth by which they must live. Otherwise their survival is not guaranteed.
- *"It was I who fed you in the wilderness...They were satisfied, and their heart was proud"* (13:5-6). The prophet refers to the ambivalence of their ancestors as they struggled to trust in God's providence.
- *"I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely..."* The Lord will not give up on his people. The Lord's love is 'like an evergreen cyprus' (14:8/9).

Reflection

Religious commitment tends to flourish during times of hardship and persecution, and wanes during times of peace and prosperity. Do you agree? Discuss, and share about your own efforts to be faithful during good times and bad.

(Note that the Torah portion tells how Jacob became prosperous in his life outside the promised land. What hard decisions did Jacob face?)

Bibliography: *Harper Collins Study Bible: NRSV* (NY, 1993); Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996). Scripture quotations: NRSV.

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