

# Haftarah

*'First he repaired the altar of the Lord...'*



Answer me, O Lord, answer me,  
so that this people may know that  
you, O Lord, are God, and that you  
have turned their hearts back.  
Then the fire of the Lord fell and  
consumed the burnt offering, the  
wood, the stones, and the dust,  
and even licked up the water that  
was in the trench. When all the  
people saw it, they fell on their  
faces and said, 'The Lord indeed is  
God; the Lord indeed is God.'

1 Kings 18:37-39

## Links

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (1 Kings 18:1-39) accompanies the Torah portion *Ki Tisa*: Exodus 30:11—34:35.
- Both readings refer to a serious crisis relating to idolatry among the people of Israel: the golden calf (Torah), and the cult of Baal (Haftarah).

## Background

- The setting is the reign of King Ahab (871-852 BCE) in Israel's northern kingdom where pagan worship had infiltrated Israelite society to varying degrees. The king himself had built an altar to Baal, and his Phoenecian wife, Jezebel, encouraged pagan cults and persecuted Israelite prophets. It is against this idolatrous and dangerous state of affairs that the prophet Elijah battles.
- The figure of the prophet Elijah looms large in the Jewish imagination. Through the lens of biblical story and interpretative traditions, he is viewed as a champion of the ordinary person; one prepared to confront powerful kings and queens in the name of divine justice. He is a mysterious presence, appearing and disappearing unexpectedly, and associated with the advent of the messianic age. The latter point is reflected in Matthew's Gospel with reference to John the Baptist (11:10).

## Ponder

- A desperate situation is described: a parched land (drought) and a spiritually fickle people (Baal worshippers).
- Note the tensions between characters, even the heroes of the story. Obadiah is afraid that Elijah's unpredictability will cost him his life. If he tells the king that Elijah is here and then Elijah disappears, the king will think Obadiah is lying!
- *'The god who answers by fire'* (v.24). Just as God was present to Moses and the Israelites through fiery signs (burning bush, Mt Sinai), here fire is the sign that demonstrates the supreme power of the God of Israel.
- In the contest between God and Baal, note the repetition of *'all the people.'* The success of the miracle on Elijah's side is not the work of a lone prophet but occurs through the power of God, amidst the Israelite assembly, and invoking the names of the Patriarchs.
- The Haftarah concludes with the verse which reinforces its dominant message: *'The Lord indeed is God!'* [JPS: *'The Lord alone is God.'*]

## Reflect

Resisting 'foreign gods' (e.g., the worship of Hollywood celebrities; the god of money) remains a challenge today. From the decisions/struggles of your own life, share what it means to give 100% allegiance to the one, true, living God.

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

This Haftarah resource accompanies the **Light of Torah** series. [www.lightoftorah.net](http://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.