

Haftarah

'I will restore My people Israel'



*A time is coming
—declares the LORD—
When the plowman will meet the
reaper
And the treader of grapes
Him who holds the [bag of] seed;
When the mountains shall drip
wine
And all the hills will wave [with
grain].*

Amos 9:13

Links

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (Amos 9:7-15) accompanies the Torah portion *Kedoshim*: Leviticus 19:1-20:27.
- There is some debate over why the two are linked. It could be based on a contrast between Israel's vocation to be a holy nation (in the Torah portion) and its divergence from the path of holiness as addressed by prophets such as Amos (in the Haftarah).

Background

Amos is among the earliest of the classical prophets, whose ministry is thought to have operated somewhere between 784 and 733 BC. He came from Tekoa, near Jerusalem, but moved north to the kingdom of Israel where he was confronted by a society infiltrated by various forms of cultic and moral sinfulness. Let's explore the prophet Amos' response:

Themes

The Haftarah can be explored in three parts:

- Part I (9:7-8a): *Sinful Israel is doomed*. When one considers Amos' words in a much earlier passage where he speaks of God singling out Israel 'from all the families of the earth' (3:1-2), there is a striking reversal of that thought here as he lumps Israel with other nations ('you are just like the Ethiopians') apparently doomed by their sins.
- Part II (9:8b-10): *Yet sinful Israel is not entirely doomed*. The most arrogant and self-assured of sinners ('who boast "Never shall the evil overtake us"') will be destroyed, while the rest will be dispersed in exile.
- Part III (9:11-15): *For Israel there is hope and restoration ahead*. God will restore the Davidic kingdom (Judah) and promises regeneration to the northern kingdom (Israel). The harvest image here is striking: so fertile is the land that as the old harvest is being brought in, the new planting is already starting (see 9:13 at left).

Reflection

The prophet's message is that being chosen by God as a holy people (see Leviticus) is not enough to guarantee security; fidelity to God must be demonstrated in religious practice and moral lifestyle. Discuss the temptation of complacency which every religious person faces. Even if not personally guilty of gross kinds of immorality, one's spiritual sensitivities can become deadened, and this can lead to unintended culpability in the great moral and social injustices that exist in every era.

- What helps you to stay 'spiritually alive' and religiously/morally sensitive? What challenge and comfort do you take from Amos?

Bibliography: Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996); Sarna, ed., *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarat* (Philadelphia, 2001). Scripture quotations: JPS.

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