

Haftarah

'I will abide among the children of Israel'



'King Solomon imposed forced labor on all Israel; the levy came to 30,000 men. He sent them to Lebanon in shifts of 10,000 a month: they would spend one month in Lebanon and two months at home.'

1 Kings 5:27-28, NJPS
(cf. 5:13-14, NRSV)

Links

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (1 Kings 5:26—6:13) accompanies the Torah portion *Terumah*: Exodus 25:1—27:19.
- Both readings describe a building project: the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Torah portion) and the Temple in Jerusalem (Haftarah).
- Note: variations in verse numbering; see 1 Kings 5:12—6:13, NRSV.

Background

- The first Book of Kings begins with the death of King David and tells of the political struggles that follow his death. It takes a view of Jewish history as being judged according to fidelity to the ways of God.
- As our Haftarah takes up the story, King Solomon (David's successor) has established himself as a strong ruler and enjoys a period of relative peace which enables the Temple construction to commence.

Ponder

- At the beginning and end of our Haftarah we find a divine promise: *'The Lord had given Solomon wisdom, as He had promised him'* (5:26, NJPS; cf. 5:12, NRSV); *'If you...faithfully keep My Commandments, I will fulfill for you the promise that I gave to your father David'* (6:12).

The Temple project involves a political alliance with Hiram, but the protection of Jerusalem rests on a religious covenant between God and Israel.

- *'I will abide among the children of Israel, and I will never forsake My people Israel'* (6:13). As in the case of the wilderness Tabernacle, the material construction is not to 'house' God but to reassure the people of God's closeness in their earthly lives.
- *'King Solomon imposed forced labor on all Israel...'* (5:27, NJPS; cf. 5:13 NRSV). Contemporary commentator Ismar Schorsch points out a great difference between the wilderness Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple. The former is built by voluntary effort, a labor of love *'from all whose hearts prompt them to give'* (Exod. 25:2). But the latter is built through forced labor. This led one medieval source to say: *'The Tabernacle for which the people volunteered wholeheartedly never fell victim to the enemy. The Temple, however...fell victim to his hand.'* (Torah Shelamah) Solomon's Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BCE.

Reflect

- Reflect on the relationship between spiritual values and material works. As a person of faith, what kinds of 'building projects' have you been part of, and how were they expressive of your faith tradition/community?
- Under Solomon is built a Temple of incredible beauty and religious value, but at a heavy cost. Discuss the timeless dilemma raised by this story.

Bibliography: Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996); Sarna, ed., *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarah* (Philadelphia, 2001); Schorsch, *Canon Without Closure* (NY, 2007). Scripture: NJPS

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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.