



Rosh Hodesh Heshvan
Isaiah 66:1-24
October 25, 2014 / 1 Heshvan 5775

The haftarah for Shabbat Rosh Hodesh is taken from the final chapter of the book of Isaiah. Its connection to Isaiah chapter one is indicative of an editor's work but that will not be addressed in this d'rash. The haftarah was chosen to be read on Rosh Hodesh as a result of a quote in line twenty-three. "And new moon after new moon, and Sabbath after Sabbath, All flesh shall come to worship me."

The haftarah is a collection of diverse prophecies, judgments and salvation from a late selection of the Book of Isaiah. The reference to the building of the new Temple (66:1) reflects the concern of those living in the period immediately following Cyrus the Mede (538 BCE) granting permission to the Judean exiles in Babylon to return to our homeland. We find references to the discussions of how the Temple should be rebuilt some eighteen years later in the book of Haggai.

The tone of the text changes in verse 18 and focuses on an ingathering of all the exiles. It is important for us to realize that Isaiah's vision of an ingathering of exiles and bringing everyone to worship God is a much broader and inclusive vision than that of any other prophet. Isaiah's final vision includes non-Jews, some of whom God will take and make priests. This represents a radical diversion from the Torah, which is much more restrictive. Isaiah in chapter 56 states that if eunuchs or foreigners keep the Sabbath and hold fast to the divine commandment, then they shall be accepted into the Temple mount and will be able to offer sacrifices on the altar.

Let not the foreigner say, Who has attached himself to the Lord, The Lord will keep me apart from His people....As for the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, who have chosen what I desire and hold fast to My covenant, I will give them, in MY house and within My walls, a monument. Their burnt offerings shall be welcome on my altar. Is. 56-3-7

The Haftarah for Rosh Hodesh raises the major challenge for the Jew in modernity today. It also challenges us as members of families to consider on a regular basis the non-Jew who seeks to live Jewishly. How we treat the supportive non-Jewish spouse is the litmus test of our survival as a modern, ever growing people. The prophet openly violates tradition and says they will be welcome at "My Altar"-- a much more far reaching approach to than where most of us stand today. The prophet challenges us to consider and to rethink where the supportive non-Jewish spouse should stand and what role they should play in our future.

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one written for the Unraveller for January 11, 2013 by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of "Understanding the Haftarah: An Everyperson's Guide" and "The Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership".