

Haftarat Yitro יתרו

Torah: Exodus 18:1–20:26

Haftarah: Isaiah 6:1–7:6; 9:5–6

The Holiness of God

General Overview

Chapters six and nine of Isaiah are some of the most well known sections within this magnificent prophetic book. Isaiah chapter six is a passage where we find God conferring upon Isaiah His call to ministry as a prophet. In doing so, the Holy One gives Isaiah a vision of His holiness, cleanses him, and describes to him specifically what his mission is to be.

From the loftiness of this sacred vision of the very throne of God, Isaiah comes down to earth, so to speak, and in chapter seven describes a desperate situation in which God's chosen people are led by their unholy leadership. Here Isaiah warns the evil king, Ahaz, not to make an alliance with an ungodly foreign nation (Assyria) in order to protect himself and his kingdom (Judah) from an attack by the alliance of Israel (the northern ten tribes) and Syria. Instead, the prophet bids the House of David to trust only in their God for their defense.

Between chapters seven and nine, Isaiah provides some of the reasons why it would behoove them to trust God to defend them. The primary reason is that the very land upon which they were standing was not really their land to begin with. Isaiah says that it is "Immanuel's Land." Consequently, because of that, Immanuel could be counted upon to protect and lead those with whom He had entrusted the Land's care: the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Unfortunately, most of chapter 7, and all of chapter 8, are not included in this haftarah.

Finally, the haftarah concludes with two verses from chapter nine, wherein we witness the birth of Immanuel. In chapter six we will see Immanuel's glory. In chapter seven we will learn of the need for Immanuel. Chapter eight will speak of Immanuel's Land, and in chapter nine, Isaiah will predict the actual birth or incarnation of Immanuel, and will share with us the nature of some of the tasks that He will perform.

Connection to the Parasha

Parashat Yitro is the section of the Torah that recounts the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The Torah is God's written revelation of His holiness and relates the guidelines of how His people can be joined together into a holy community.

Haftarat Yitro is also a revelation of the holiness of God. Chapter six gives us a little peek into God's holy throne room. However, immediately following

the grandeur of this chapter, we find Isaiah, in chapter seven, attempting to minister to a people who had become most unholy. They had forsaken the Torah of God and were experiencing what the holy community is like when they were not holy.

Then, in chapter nine, we see a revelation of the Living Torah, the Messiah. He would come to make men holy and administer the Torah to those holy people once again.

Rabbi Hertz has provided a beautiful and fitting summary of the connection between the sidra and this haftarah. The quote, at length, will enhance our study.

The Sidra describes the Revelation on Sinai that was to turn Israel into a Holy Nation, and guide the children of men in the paths of Reverence and Righteousness. The haftarah records the revelation that came to Isaiah in his early manhood, when, one day in the Temple, he heard the Seraphim sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." This cry out of eternity, proclaiming the ineffable holiness, the supreme majesty, and the universal sovereignty of God has been called the quintessence of all the teachings of the Prophets. It is the quintessence of the teachings of all true Religion.¹

Exposition

There are several possible ways by which this passage can be approached. If we were only studying chapter six by itself, we might utilize one kind of an outline. The same applies if we were solely studying chapter nine. But our task here is to provide a working outline which takes into account all three sections of this haftarah, Isaiah 6; 7:1–6; and 9:5–6.

With that in mind, we need to notice the intended line of thought through this haftarah. The student will observe that the outline centers on the person of Immanuel, although Immanuel is not mentioned in the haftarah. The reason for this is that Immanuel is the subject of the greater context of Isaiah 7–12, and is mentioned in chapter eight. Any exposition of this section in Isaiah needs to take that context into account.

Furthermore, chapter six is not usually studied in conjunction with chapters 7–12. Those chapters, 7–12 are usually called "The Book of Immanuel" because Immanuel is the subject of the contents. By connecting chapter six with the Book of Immanuel, the sages have made our job a little more complicated. However, though stumped by their sense of context, the sages have not stifled us! Hence, the following outline is offered in compliance to their formation of the haftarah:

The study outline is as follows:

- I. The Holiness of Immanuel — Chapter 6
- II. The Need for Immanuel — Chapter 7
- III. The Coming of Immanuel — Chapter 9

I. The Holiness of Immanuel

Isaiah chapter six is one of the most unique, majestic, and important of all the sections of Isaiah's prophecy. It describes God's calling of Isaiah to the ministry. In this call, God grants to Isaiah a peek into His throne room where the prophet beholds a holy God.

Let us pause for a word on the concept of holiness before proceeding. Many people confuse the idea of holiness with the state of being morally or ethically upright. That is not necessarily true. The basic root for the word "holy" is q - d - sh, *קדש*. When we compare Hebrew with other very closely associated ancient Semitic languages, we find that this root is used to merely indicate a sense of "separation."

A good example of this is what archaeologists have found about the religious practices of the ancient inhabitants of Ugarit, a Canaanite city near the Mediterranean coast. The Bible and the Canaanite texts at Ugarit use the words *qodesh* and *qedesha*, [the root is *ק-ד-ש*] which mean "holy one" — the first is the masculine form, the second is the feminine form.ⁱⁱ

At Ugarit these "holy ones" were homosexual priests and priestesses who acted as prostitutes. The prostitutes at Ugarit were not morally upright people, yet they were called "holy." Rather, they were people who were separated from the rest of society in order to serve their gods.

This use of the root for "holy" sheds considerable light on the nature of the word "holy" in the Bible. From this we can see that biblical holiness has to do with being separated from the rest of society in order to serve God. It would naturally follow that when people are separated unto God, they will live morally and ethically upright lives. But that is not the primary meaning of the term "holiness."

The Scripture alone is the perfect revelation of the nature of God. In it, God has described a measure of what it means for Him to be holy, totally set apart from His creation. We will turn to A. W. Tozer for help in summarizing what the Scriptures teach about the holiness of God.

Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is. Because He is holy, all of his attributes are holy; that is, whatever we think of as belonging to God must be thought of as holy.ⁱⁱⁱ

In addition, Tozer informs us that the English word "holy" is derived from a word that means "well, whole." Thus,

whatever is holy is healthy. Evil is a moral sickness that must end ultimately in death...Since God's first concern for His universe is its moral health, that is its holiness, whatever is contrary to this is necessarily under His eternal displeasure. . . . The holiness of God, the wrath of God, and the health of the creation are inseparable united^{iv}

Finally, James M. Boice sees four elements in the concept of God's holiness. First is the majesty, dignity, stateliness, or grandeur of God. Second, is the will of

God. This is what makes God personal rather than impersonal, abstract, or static. Boice says that God's holiness also consists of His wrath. As noted above with Tozer, if holiness is the health of the creation, unholiness must be rooted out of it. God will not allow anything or anyone to take His rightful place as the Sovereign of the universe. His wrath is truly levied against any and all that attempt to do so. Lastly, the fourth element of God's holiness is God's righteousness. Righteousness is the ethical and/or moral expression of God's holiness.^v

ⁱ J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 302.

ⁱⁱ James I Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, and William White, Jr., *Everyday Life in the Bible*, 177.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, 112–113

^{iv} *Ibid*, 113.

^v James M. Boice, *The Sovereign God*, vol. 1, 164–165.