

# COMMENTARY ON GENESIS HAFTARAH

## *Haftarah Bereisheet* “Israel: The Light from Darkness!”

Isaiah 42:5-43:10 (A); 42:5-21 (S)

The recipients of the revelation from the Creator God, read in the opening few verses of Genesis, that the first recorded spoken words of the Almighty are: “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). Hovering over a formless and void Earth that was part of an earlier-created cosmos (Genesis 1:1), the omniscient Holy One knew that light was necessary for His Creation to proceed through time according to His preordained plans. He understood that light, as opposed to the absence of light, allowed Him to make a distinction between the light and the darkness—as it ultimately was divided into day and night (Genesis 1:14-19). He also foresaw a group of people who in the future would be declared a “light to the nations” in order to significantly share with humanity at large not only His ways, but Himself as the One True Creator God.

Fast forward to the words of the Prophet Isaiah, and we see that concept of “light” (Heb. *or*, אור) is used to describe a critical role for Israel as God’s chosen people. Of all the nations that came forth from the union of Adam and Eve, there was always going to be one nation which was formed to be a “light” to the other nations. In God’s plan for the world, in eternity past, He formulated the strategy of eventually selecting one nation among the others with the obligation to speak of the light of their understanding about Him, sharing His goodness with the other nations. A part of what that light would be is mentioned in the opening chapters of Genesis, as Eve is promised that her seed would crush the serpent:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; **He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel**” (Genesis 3:15).

The light of revelation about the Creator and Israel’s (intended) righteous status before Him was not simply for the sake of Israel’s being chosen—but was to open the blind eyes of the prisoners encased in the darkness of their sin. The Prophet Isaiah declares,

“Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it, ‘I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and **I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light**

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**to the nations**, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison” (Isaiah 42:5-7; cf. Luke 2:32).

The responsibility placed upon Israel to be a witness for the Most High is reiterated at the end of this week’s Haftarah selection. Not being a light to the nations is just as bad as disobeying the commandments of God in the Torah. His people are without excuse if they do not fulfill their role as His representatives on Earth. After all, from God’s perspective, some chosen nation needs to explain and enlighten the rest of the world—people who are all in relative darkness—about who He is:

“All the nations have gathered together so that the peoples may be assembled. Who among them can declare this and proclaim to us the former things? Let them present their witnesses that they may be justified, or let them hear and say, “It is true.” **You are My witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me”** (Isaiah 43:9-10).

The concept of Israel being a light to the nations is understood centuries later by the Apostle Paul, who recognized his personal role as a steward of the mysteries of God. Paul recognized that the mystery of God had unfolded from just general promises about Israel being a light, to now being a bearer of the good news about Yeshua the Messiah and His redemptive work as the Light of the World (John 8:12). He wrote the Believers in Corinth about being found worthy of the calling to be God’s servants, teaching those in darkness about the mysteries of God. In view of our modern-day responsibilities, Paul’s words of admonition are quite sobering to those who are taking their walk with the Messiah seriously:

“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Messiah and **stewards of the mysteries of God**. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, **but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts**; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God” (1 Corinthians 4:1-5).

Everyone who claims to be a part of God’s people needs to remember that ultimately, whether we are corporately the light to the nations, or whether we are individually declaring the work of Yeshua—the Light of the World—all of our acts are going to be brought to light by the Lord Himself. Whatever our motives are, whatever is hidden in our hearts, will be revealed by the light of the Holy One. He will bring light to all that is hidden in our hearts, especially if some things are darkened by the deceitfulness of sin! Let those motives brought to light be found to be holy and righteous, as opposed to evil.

Does this give you another perspective on your role as a “light to the nations”? What are your motives for pointing other people to the Messiah? Or Torah study? Or Haftarah exhortations? How are you handling the mysteries of God as they have been revealed to you? Are you able to handle them with the skill and eloquence becoming of someone transformed by the gospel?

When it is all said and done, will God reward you? Or will you be among those who thought they knew Him, but in the end were merely using His name for dark and deceitful purposes? These are the people who thought they knew the Light, but their motives were

actually hidden by the darkness in their hearts. Yeshua's warning to us on this matter is quite clear:

“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’” (Matthew 7:22-23; cf. Psalm 6:8).

Being a part of Israel requires responsibility. *We are to be God's light to the nations.* Take this very seriously as you bring your light into this darkened world—to those in search of answers to the mysteries of God!

## ***Haftarah Noach*** **“Walking by Faith”**

Isaiah 54:1-55:5 (A); 54:1-10 (S)

The cataclysmic Flood described in *Noach* (Genesis 6:9-11:32) is undoubtedly the most memorable event that most of you will be considering this week. However, it is the post-deluge Noahic Covenant that God unilaterally established with Noah and his progeny, which is reflected upon by the Prophet Isaiah as he attempted to encourage his contemporaries in Ancient Judah. Ultimately, it is the reference to a “covenant of peace” that the Holy One unilaterally instituted with His people, which is something worthy of shouting for joy.

If you will recall, God was so aggravated with the corrupt and violent direction of the human race that He had to destroy all the people of the Earth, except Noah and his immediate family:

“Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth’” (Genesis 6:11-13).

Further illumination about how an angry God was going to handle evil in the future is recorded after righteous Noah offered up sacrifices to Him as the Flood waters recede. Note that God declared what the evil heart of humanity is, promising to extend grace even though He knew unrighteousness would continue among people:

“Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, **‘I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease’**” (Genesis 8:20-22).

In a comparative manner, the blessing that God would never forsake Israel is what Isaiah describes as he foresaw and understood the brief moment in time when the Lord in His anger, would hide His face from His idolatrous people, allowing the Babylonian exile to take place. However, as this section of the prophecy declares, the punishment upon Israel would only be