

HAFTARAH EXHORTATIONS:

Haftarah Yitro

by Mark Huey posted 14 February, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Isaiah 6:1-7:6, 9:5-6

“Smoke-Spoken Revelation”

Encountering the Living God is an awesome experience no matter when it occurs. In this week's Torah portion (Exodus 18:1-20:23[26]) and its corresponding Haftarah reading, two eyewitness accounts—those of Moses and Isaiah—depict their personal experiences of theophany. We have the privilege of comparing and meditating upon them, being encouraged that we too can see God in all His glory.

First in *Yitro*, we find Moses receiving wise organizational counsel from his father-in-law, as the infant nation of Ancient Israel begins its wilderness crawl and transformation into a kingdom of priests. In short order, *Yitro's* instructions on how to handle disputes and delegate the work of serving in order to lead the people, are followed by the Ten Words spoken directly to Moses on a smoke-shrouded Mount Sinai by the Lord. These essential commandments on how to love God and one's fellow establish the foundational preamble for the rest of Israel's constitution found in the balance of the Torah.

For comparative reflective purposes, Isaiah's testimony comes several centuries later as the *holy* nation is reeling from disobedience and finds itself on the precipice of judgment. In the smoke-filled Temple of God that the Prophet Isaiah envisions, he receives further revelation about not only his calling, but the judgment coming to a dim-eyed and dull-of-hearing *unholy* Israel. Thankfully, our Haftarah reading concludes with a description of the future Kingdom of God established on justice and righteousness that will last forever.

There is little doubt that while many in today's world may not know the exact details of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai, their impact on how Western Civilization has legally and morally developed is unparalleled. Part of God's plan for the Creation was to set-apart a specific group of people for His own possession who would be His voice-obeying, covenant-keeping, kingdom of priests and holy nation. Moses heard and recorded the following in the third month of Israel's wilderness sojourn:

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel” (Exodus 19:5-6).

Furthermore, to confirm to the Israelites that Moses was His spokesman to bring His Word to them, the Lord tells Moses that there would be a visible and audible recitation of His Instruction to make it perfectly clear that Moses was the intermediary:

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever.’ Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD” (Exodus 19:9).

When the day of reckoning came after the warnings were adhered to, the presence of visible smoke, accentuated by thunder, lightning, a quaking mountain, and the sound of the trumpet—generated great fear among the Israelites assembled:

“So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai *was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace*, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder” (Exodus 19:16-19).

After the Decalogue is communicated, the people of Israel declare that listening to the voice of God is so frightening that they would prefer to have Moses listen for them instead because they feared death:

“All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, **they trembled and stood at a distance**. Then they said to Moses, ‘**Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.**’ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.’ So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God *was*” (Exodus 20:18-21).

We see that the primary reason that God spoke forcefully from the smoke-laden mountain was **to instill a fear of Himself so that the people would not sin**.

By the time we witness Isaiah’s experience in the smoke-filled Temple, God’s people were on the verge of judgment, requiring Him to appointing another spokesman to deliver His words—this time words of rebuke:

“In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.’ **And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke**” (Isaiah 6:1-4).

This theophany of God’s Throne occurred at a time when both the Southern and Northern Kingdoms of Israel were not obeying the voice of the Lord and following His commandments. Isaiah responds to the Lord’s question about who He should send with the hard words of judgment, exclaiming *hineni shelacheni* (הִנְנִי שְׁלַחְנִי), “Here am I. Send me!”:

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ **Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’** He said, ‘Go, and tell this people: “Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.” Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed.’ Then I said, ‘Lord, how long?’ And He answered, ‘Until cities are devastated *and* without inhabitant, houses are without people and the land is utterly desolate, “The LORD has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, and it will again be *subject* to burning, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump”’” (Isaiah 6:8-13).

The judgment on the disobedient people is manifest in insensitive hearts, dull ears, and dim eyes—resulting so that they will not understand with their hearts, hear with their ears, or see with their eyes in order that they might return and be healed. God is preparing to judge the disobedient, but there will always be a remnant—perhaps as large as a tenth—similar to the stump of a tree. After the various judgments are completed against disobedient Israel, there would be a future time when a child who is born will bring in the time of justice and righteousness:

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. **There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this**” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Messiah Yeshua has come and has inaugurated a reign where lasting peace, justice, and righteousness will be established and maintained forevermore over not only the world, but the whole of Creation. *Such a reign begins in our hearts today!* It is our responsibility as Believers to make sure that we are performing our call as a part of His kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9) where we can see that His reign has begun in the lives of others *before* He returns to Earth and judges

those who fail to repent. Despite the different tests that His people down through the ages have had to face, often because of disobedience, a zealous remnant of the faithful has always been present. Is it possible that in our obedience to Him today, we can see that *more than a remnant* might be saved?

Those of us living today need to regularly envision the stark scene of Mount Sinai covered in the smoke of God's presence, or His Temple filled with the smoke of His glory. In so doing, we place the attention of our hearts and minds upon that future day when God will be "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). May we persevere until that glorious time!

Until the restoration of all things...

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