



In the third Haftorah of consolation (out of seven,) the prophet speaks to the exilic community of its return to Zion and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Though the nation is “unhappy and storm tossed,” God promises the people that the walls of Jerusalem will be rebuilt with precious stones and the children will again become “disciples of the Lord.” God is all powerful and Israel is a passive partner in redemption. “Surely no harm can be done without my consent; whoever would harm you shall fall because of you.”

But there is a reciprocal side to this promise as of redemption. God not only promises to protect the people but challenges them to live accordingly. Spiritual renewal not only comes from God but from within each person as well. The Haftorah ends with a messianic promise. Just as God has chosen David and made him a leader, so the Jewish people shall become world leaders who summon the other nations to the service of God.

Isaiah 54:13-14

And your children shall be disciples of Adonai, and great shall be the happiness (*shalom*) of your children. You shall be established through righteousness. You shall be safe from oppression, and shall have no fear from ruin, and it shall not come near you.

Babylonian Talmud Berachot 64a

Rabbi Elazar said on behalf of Rabbi Chanina: Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it said, “And all your children will be students of the Lord, and your children shall have peace.” (Isaiah 54:13) Do not read *banayikh*, your children, but *bonayikh*, your builders. “There is abundant peace for the lovers of your Torah and there is no stumbling block for them.” (Psalms 119:165) “May there be peace within your walls and serenity with your palaces. For the sake of my brethren and comrades I shall speak of peace in your midst. For the sake of your House of Adonai, I will seek God for you.” (Psalm 122:7-9) “Adonai will give might to his nation; Adonai will bless His nation with peace.” (Psalm 29:11)

Michael Fishbane, The JPS Bible Commentary, Haftorot

The assuming promise, “and great shall be the happiness of your children, *banayikh*,” bears comment. A well known rabbinic Midrash on this verse puns the assonance between *banayikh*, “sons” and *bonayikh*, “builders.” On this basis, it was taught that knowledgeable children are the “culture builder” of the next generation. (B. *Berachot* 64a) In fact the words original sense may have been “your learned ones” (from the verb *byn*, “to know”). It would thus have paralleled “disciples” in the first line.

Gunther Plaut, The Haftorah Commentary

54:13 -- Happiness: *shalom* means more than peace; it conveys total well-being.

Joseph H Hertz, Pentateuch and Haftorahs

This verse is an important landmark in the history of civilization. In obedience to it, Israel led the world in universal education. “The Jewish religion, because it was a literature-sustained religion, led to the first efforts to provide universal elementary instruction for all children of the community.” (H.G. Wells) The word play proclaims a wonderful truth: The children of a nation are the builders of the future. And every Jewish child must be reared to become such a builder of his People’s better future.

Questions for Discussion

1. How is it possible to read the same word in a verse in three different ways: as “your children”, as “your builders” or as “your learned ones?” What connection might there be between these different interpretations of the same word? Which interpretation of this word do you think comes closest to its original meaning?
 2. The verse in Isaiah implies that knowledge leads to happiness. Do you think this is true? Why does the translator of this verse conclude that Shalom is happiness?
 3. What does it mean to be a disciple of Adonai? In what way do we become disciples of God by studying and teaching Torah?
 4. The passage from Berachot above is the final passage in this Talmudic tractate. In addition to the comment about students being builders, the Talmud ends with several verses from the Bible for which no explanation is offered. What do you think the connection is between these verses and the discussion in the Talmud?
 5. Does the study of religion necessarily lead to peace? How do you account for so much divisiveness and warfare among those most devoted to the study of the word of God in today’s society?
 6. How can religion promote peace in the world today? What is the connection between peace and righteousness (*tzedakah*)?
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