

Haftarah Helper 5781: Shabbat Chanukah

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Zechariah 2:14-4:7

After defeating the Seleucid Greeks and returning to the Temple, the Maccabees faced a dire situation: a completely defiled Temple, devoid of God's presence. Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Zechariah faced a similarly hopeless situation relating to the Temple. Despite the decree of Cyrus the Great allowing Jewish exiles in Persia to return to the Land of Israel and rebuild the Temple, only a small portion of the exiles did so. Many of these returnees were intermarried. Additionally, they succeeded in building only a sacrificial altar to God; constructing the rest of a new Temple was mired in difficulties. Therefore, Zechariah and his prophetic contemporaries' sought to reignite the returnees' passion for the Temple and God's presence.

Zechariah's words in the Haftarah begin by telling the people to rejoice, as God's presence is returning. These words of hope are followed by a charge to the High Priest, Joshua, reminding him to follow God's commandments and to work in harmony with the Jewish governor of Judea, Zerubabel. The Haftarah concludes with a vision of the Temple's menorah surrounded by olive branches. Just as the oil flows into the candlesticks, God's will was flowing, through the prophets, down to Zerubabel. Accordingly, Joshua and Zerubabel must emphasize following God's will as much as, if not more than, their own political power.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 2:14-17: God promises to “dwell” again in Jerusalem and Judah, inspiring other nations as well.

Zechariah 2:16	זכריה ב:ט"ז
And the Lord shall inherit Judah as His share on the Holy Land, and He shall again choose Jerusalem.	וְנָחַל ה' אֶת-יְהוּדָה חֶלְקוֹ עַל אֲדַמַּת הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבָחַר עוֹד בִּירוּשָׁלַם:

Verses 3:1-5: Joshua the High Priest is judged in the heavenly court.

Zechariah 3:1	זכריה ג:א
And He showed me Joshua, the High Priest, standing before the angel of the Lord. And Satan was standing on his right, to accuse him.	וַיֵּרָאֵנִי אֶת-יְהוֹשֻׁעַ הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל עֹמֵד לְפָנַי מִלְאָךְ ה' וְהַשָּׂטָן עֹמֵד עַל-יְמִינוֹ לְשֹׁטְנוֹ:

Verses 3:6-10: God commands Joshua: Keep my charge in the Temple.

Zechariah 3:7	זכריה ג:ז
So said the Lord of Hosts: If you walk in My ways, and if you keep My charge, you, too, shall judge My house, and you, too, shall guard My courtyards, and I will give you free access among these who stand by.	כֹּה-אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֱמֶן בְּדַרְכֵי תֵלֶךְ וְאִם אֶת-מִשְׁמַרְתִּי תִשְׁמָר וְגַם-אֶתְּהַלְכִּין אֶת-בֵּיתִי וְגַם תִּשְׁמָר אֶת-חֲצַרֵי וְנִתְּתִי לָךְ מֵהַלְכִים בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים הָאֵלֶּה:

Verses 4:1-5: The Vision of the Menorah..

Zechariah 4:2	זכריה ד:ב
And he [the angel] said to me [Zechariah], "What do you see?" And I said, "I saw, and behold [there was] a candelabrum all of gold, with its oil-bowl on top of it, and its seven lamps thereon; seven tubes each to the lamps that were on top of it.	וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי מַה אַתָּה רֹאֶה וַיֹּאמֶר [וַיֹּאמֶר] רֵאִיתִי אֶת הַמְּנוֹרָה זָהָב כְּלָהּ וְגִלְגָּל עַל-רֹאשֶׁיהָ וְשִׁבְעָה נִרְתִּיחֵי עָלֶיהָ שִׁבְעָה וְשִׁבְעָה מְוַצְקוֹת לְנֵרוֹת אֲשֶׁר עַל-רֹאשֶׁיהָ:

Verses 4:6-7:.. And its message to Zerubbabel

Zechariah 4:6	זכריה ד:ו
And he answered and spoke to me, saying, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, saying: 'Not by [military] force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts.	וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי לְאֹמֶר זֶה דְּבַר־ה' אֶל-זֶרְבָבֶל לְאֹמֶר לֹא בְחַיִל וְלֹא בְכֹחַ כִּי אִם-בְּרוּחֵי אֲמֵר ה' צְבָאוֹת:

Holiday Connections

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains the Haftarah as follows “ The spiritual light of the divine law is self-sufficient. It is victorious by means of its innate strength. It achieves victory without outside support, without state support, without military might. It carries sufficient energy to supply the lamp as well as the tree on which the fruits of its supply ripen. Although the difficulties facing Zerubbabel mounted steadily they were all destined to be solved. The spirit was the cornerstone to which the abundance of mercy would flow... This was the Third Chanukah, the third dedication of a Temple. It took place at winter’s end, on the third of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of the Persian king Darius. It was attended by those who had returned from exile under Zerubbabel and Joshua, inspired by the spirit of the prophets Chagg and Zechariah, by the decree of the God of Israel... It was the dedication of the Galuth-Temple” ¹

Other Connections

Zechariah 3:2 is read as part of the bedtime recital of Shema.

Siddur Ashkenaz, Weekday, Keri'at Shema al Hamita	סידור אשכנז, ימי חול, מעריב, קריאת שמע על המיטה
And the Lord said to Satan: The Lord shall rebuke you, O Satan; and the Lord shall rebuke you, He who chose Jerusalem. Is this one not a brand plucked from fire?	וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל הַשָּׂטָן יַגְעֵר ה' בְּךָ הַשָּׂטָן וַיַּגְעֵר ה' בְּךָ הַבְּחַר בִּירוּשָׁלַם הֲלֹא זֶה אֹד מִצֶּל מֵאֵשׁ

With emendations, biblical translations are by [Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg](#) and other translations are from [Sefaria.org](#).

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¹ From “The Collected Writings of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch Vol. II” pg 225