

Haftarah Helper 5781: Va'erah

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Ezekiel 28:25-29:21

The Haftarah begins on an uplifting note, with God's promises to redeem His exiled people, punish nations who scorned them, and return them to His land to dwell as a people projecting His sanctity to all of humanity. These mirror God's promises at the beginning of the Parashah about the Israelites' exile in Egypt and their eventual establishment as His people in His Land.

Ezekiel's next prophecy occurs during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. Judah's ally, Egypt, has turned out to be a "weak reed" against the enemy. In vivid terms reminiscent of God's plagues against Egypt in the parashah, Ezekiel foretells God's destruction of Egypt, its crocodile god-king, Pharaoh, and its people. God will exile Egypt for forty years, and then return the survivors to their point of ethnic origin in Southern Egypt - so distant from Judah that the two nations won't ally again.

A third prophecy to Ezekiel, many years later, closes the Haftarah. God will give Egypt to King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylonia as a reward for having done His will. Out of Egypt's formerly powerful shadow, Israel will flourish.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 28:25-26: By returning His exiled people to dwell securely in its Land, God will sanctify Himself among all nations.

Ezekiel 28:25	יחזקאל כ"ח:כ"ה
So says the Lord God: "When I gather in the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they have been scattered, and I have been sanctified through them in the eyes of the nations, then shall they [the Israelites] dwell on their land that I gave to My servant, to Jacob."	כֹּה-אָמַר אֲדֹנָי ה' בְּקִבְצִי אֶת-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן-הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר נִפְצוּ בָם וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בָם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם וַיָּשׁבוּ עַל-אֲדָמָתָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְעַבְדֵי לִיעֶקֶב:

Verses 29:1-7: God will destroy Egypt and its Pharaoh for claiming to be a creator god, and for betraying Judah during the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 29:3	יחזקאל כ"ט:ג
Speak and say: "So says the Lord God: 'Behold I am upon you, O Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great crocodile that lies down in the midst of its rivers [the northern deltas of the Nile], who said, "My river is mine, and I made myself."'"	דַּבֵּר וְאָמַרְתָּ כֹּה-אָמַר אֲדֹנָי ה' הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ פֶּרַעַה מֶלֶךְ-מִצְרַיִם הַתַּנִּים הַגְּדוֹל הַרְבֵּץ בְּתוֹךְ יַאֲרֵיו אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לִי יַאֲרֵי וְאֲנִי עָשִׂיתִנִּי:

Verses 29:8-12: God will lay waste to all of Egypt, making it desolate and exiling its people for forty years.

Ezekiel 29:12	יחזקאל כ"ט:י"ב
I will make the land of Egypt desolate [even] amongst the desolate lands; and its cities, a desolation even amongst cities in ruins - for forty years. I shall scatter Egypt among the nations, and disperse them through the lands.	וְנָתַתִּי אֶת-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׂמָמָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶרְצוֹת נִשְׁמָוֹת וְעָרֶיהָ בְּתוֹךְ עָרִים מְחֻרְבוֹת תְּהִיִּין שְׂמָמָה אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה וְהִפְצַלְתִּי אֶת-מִצְרַיִם בְּגוֹיִם וְזָרִיתִים בְּאֶרְצוֹת:

Verses 29:13-16: God will then return Egyptians to southern Egypt, where it will be a weak nation upon which Israel will not rely.

Ezekiel 29:14	יחזקאל כ"ט:י"ד
I will return the captivity of Egypt. I will return them to the [southern Egyptian] land of Pathros, to the land of their origin. There shall they be there a lowly kingdom.	וְשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־שְׁבוּת מִצְרַיִם וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי אֹתָם אֶרֶץ פַּתְרוֹס עַל־אֶרֶץ מְכוּרְתָם וְהָיוּ שָׁם מַמְלָכָה שְׁפִלָּה:

Verses 29:17-21: Sixteen years after the Temple's destruction, Babylonia fails to conquer Tyre¹ to Israel's north; nonetheless, God rewards Babylonia with Egypt for doing His will. Independent of Egypt, Israel will flourish.

Ezekiel 29:19	יחזקאל כ"ט:י"ט
Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Behold I will give Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, the land of Egypt, and he shall carry away its multitude, pillage its spoils, and plunder its booty, and that shall be the reward for his army.	לֵכֵן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי ה' הִנְנִי נֹתֵן לְנְבוּכַדְרֶאֱצַר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְנִשְׂאָה הַמְּנָה וְשָׁלַל שְׁלָלָהּ וּבָזַז בָּזָה וְהִיתָה שָׂכָר לְחִילוֹ:

Haftarah Egyptology

Ezekiel's calling Pharaoh "the great crocodile" (see 29:3, above) refers to the Egyptian crocodile deity Sobek, seen at right. As early as Narmer, the first Pharaoh of Egypt, Sobek was worshipped as a fertility god connected with the flooding of the Nile. During the Middle Kingdom Period (c. 2055–1650 BCE) Sobek was combined with Ra, the chief god of Egypt, thereby becoming associated with the Pharaohs and their dynasties. He then became known as the creator of the Nile and the world. Many mummified crocodiles have been discovered at his main center of worship, Crocodopolis.²



Connections

The Midrash derives a **meaning of Moses's sign of the snake-like staff** from the Haftarah.

Shemot Rabbah 9:4	שמות רבה ט:ד
Why did he [God] say to them [Moses and Aaron] that the sign would be of a serpentine creature? Because Pharaoh is compared to a serpentine creature, as (Ezekiel 29:3) says: "The great [serpentine] crocodile that lies down in the midst of its rivers [the northern deltas of the Nile]". When Moses would depart Pharaoh's presence, he [Pharaoh] would say, "if the son of Amram [Moses] comes to me, I will kill him, I will crucify him, and I will burn him." Yet when Moses would enter [Pharaoh's presence], Pharaoh would immediately become as a staff [rigid and unwilling to act on his threats.]	לָמָּה אָמַר לָהֶם נֹס שֶׁל תַּנִּין, לְפִי שֶׁפָּרְעֹה נִדְמָה לְתַנִּין, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (יחזקאל כט, ג): הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדוֹל הַרְבֵּץ בְּתוֹךְ יַאֲרִיו, כְּשֶׁהָיָה מִשֶּׁה יוֹצֵא מֵאֶצֶל פָּרְעֹה הָיָה אוֹמֵר אִם יָבוֹא אֶצְלִי בֶן עַמְרָם אֲנִי הוֹרְגוֹ אֲנִי צוֹלְבוֹ וְאֲנִי שׂוֹרְפוֹ, וְכִשְׁהָיָה מִשֶּׁה נִכְנָס מִיַּד נִעְשֶׂה פָּרְעֹה מִטָּה.

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

¹ A prominent Phoenician mercantile city in Southern Lebanon which had colonies and traded all over the ancient world.

² Thanks to Nachliel Selevan for providing this insight.

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