

Haftarah Helper 5781: Parah

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On four Shabbatot beginning in Adar, additional Torah readings (the “Four Parashiyot”) are read after the weekly Parashah, reflecting seasonal themes relating to Purim and Passover. Their associated Haftarot also relate to these themes. The third of the Four Parashiyot, “Parah” (Num. 25:17-19), records the commandment to burn a red heifer. A priest sprinkles its ashes, mixed with water, on people and objects defiled by contact with a corpse to purify them. Pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem for Passover to partake in the Korban Pesach festivities and meal typically require such purification in advance of the holiday. We read about this purification as we prepare for Passover’s arrival a few weeks from now.

Ezekiel 36:16-38¹

Speaking to his fellow exiles in Babylon, Ezekiel offers hope and rebuke. In this prophecy, God tells His people why He exiled them: they defiled themselves and His Land with murder, adultery, and idolatry. They have not repented in exile, further profaning God’s name. Not in their merit but rather to sanctify His name, God will return them to the Land and initiate a mass repentance movement. Reflecting the Red Heifer purification process described above, God will purify them by sprinkling them with water. The Land and His repentant, renewed people will be restored, further sanctifying His name among the nations.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 16-19: God exiled Israel for defiling His Land.

Ezekiel 36:18	יחזקאל ל"ו:י"ח
So I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it.	וְאֲשַׁפְּךָ חֲמָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם עַל־הַדָּם אֲשֶׁר־שָׁפְכוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְגִלּוֹלֵיהֶם טִמְאוּהָ:

Verses 20: Israel’s presence in exile also defiles His name.

Ezekiel 36:20	יחזקאל ל"ו:כ
And when they came to the nations into which they came, they profaned My holy name, in that [the nations] said of them, “These are the Lord’s people, and they are gone out of His land.”	וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ שָׁם וַיְחַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם קְדוֹשִׁי בְּאֵמַר לְהֵם עַם־ה' אֵלֶּה וּמֵאַרְצוֹ יָצְאוּ:

Verses 21-24: In order to restore His name among the nations, God will return His people from exile to His land.

Ezekiel 36:22	יחזקאל ל"ו:כ"ב
Therefore say to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord God: ‘I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations, to which you came.’”	לָכֵן אָמַר לְבֵית־יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי ה' לֹא לְמַעַנְכֶם אֲנִי עוֹשֶׂה בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אִם־לְשֵׁם־קְדוֹשִׁי אֲשֶׁר חָלְלִתֶם בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בָּאתֶם שָׁם:

¹ Sepharadim read until verse 36.

Verses 25-27: God will purify and soften the peoples' hearts and spirits, returning them to His service.

Ezekiel 36:25	יחזקאל ל"ו:כ"ה
I [God] will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be purified from all your impurities, and from all your idols will I purify you.	וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מַיִם טְהוֹרִים וְטַהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל גְּלוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהַר אֶתְכֶם:

Verses 28-33: God will restore the Land's fruitfulness for His name's sake, reminding the people of their past sins and humbling them.

Ezekiel 36:29	יחזקאל ל"ו:כ"ט
I [God] will save you from all your impurities. I will summon the grain and make it abundant, and lay no famine upon you.	וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וְקִרְאתִי אֶל־הַדָּגָן וְהַרְבִּיתִי אֹתוֹ וְלֹא־אֶתֵּן עֲלֵיכֶם רָעָב:

Verses 34-36: God's restoration of the Land will restore His reputation, astonishing neighboring nations.

Ezekiel 36:36	יחזקאל ל"ו:ל"ו
The nations that are left round about you shall know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places, and have replanted that which was blighted. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it.	וְיָדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאָרוּ סְבִיבוֹתֵיכֶם כִּי אֲנִי ה' בְּנִיתִי הַתְּהַרְסוֹת וְנָטַעְתִּי הַנְּשֻׁמָּה אֲנִי ה' דִּבַּרְתִּי וַעֲשִׂיתִי: (ס)

Verses 37-38: God will make His people as abundant as sheep.

Ezekiel 36:38	יחזקאל ל"ו:ל"ח
Like the flock of sacrifices, like the flock of Jerusalem during its holidays, so shall the destroyed cities be filled with flocks of men: they shall know that I am the Lord.	כְּצֹאן קִדְשִׁים כְּצֹאן יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּמוֹעֲדֶיהָ כֵּן תִּהְיֶינָה הָעָרִים הַתְּהַרְסוֹת מְלֵאוֹת צֹאן אָדָם וְיָדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי ה': (ס)

Connections

Maimonides provides a **definition of Tumah** (defilement) and an **ethical lesson** from the Haftarah.

Mishneh Torah, Immersion Pools 11:12	משנה תורה, הלכות מקואות י"א
...Defilement is not mud or filth to be removed with water but is a biblical decree: it depends on the heart's intent. Accordingly, the sages have declared: "If one immersed without a definite purpose, it is as if one did not immerse." Nevertheless, [immersion] contains a hint: just as one who intends to purify [oneself] becomes pure after immersion even though nothing new is produced in one's body, so too one who intends to purify oneself from the spiritual defilements (e.g., wrongful thoughts and evil traits) - once one decided to abstain from those notions and brought one's soul into the waters of reason, one is pure. Indeed, Scripture declares: "I [God] will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be purified from all your impurities and from all your idols will I purify you." (Ezekiel 36:25)	אין הטמאה טיט או צואה שתעבר במים אלא גזרת הכתוב היא והדבר תלוי בכונת הלב. ולפיכך אמרו חכמים טבל ולא התזק כאלו לא טבל. ואף על פי כן רמז יש בדבר כשם שהמכונ לבו לטהר כיון שטבל טהור ואף על פי שלא נתחדש בגופו דבר כד המכונ לבו לטהר נפשו מטמאות הנפשות שהן מחשבות האון ודעות הרעות. כיון שהסכים בלבו לפרש מאותו העצות והביא נפשו במי הדעת טהור. הרי הוא אומר (יחזקאל לו כה) "וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מַיִם טְהוֹרִים וְטַהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל גְּלוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהַר אֶתְכֶם."

With emendations, all translations are from Sefaria.org. To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email zbeer570@gmail.com.