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 36:16-38

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ezekiel 36:18</th>
<th>יחזקאל ל״ו:י״ח</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>ואשפָּדוּ חֲמָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם עַל־הַדָּם אֲשֶׁר־שָׁפְכ֤וּ עַל־הָאָ֙רֶץ וּבְגִלּוּלֵיהֶ֔ם טִמְּאֽוּהָ׃</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ezekiel 36:20</th>
<th>יחזקאל ל״ו:כ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.”</td>
<td>וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בָּם שָׁמָּה וַֽיְחַלְּל֖וּ אֶת־שֵׁם בֶּאֱמֹר לָהֶם עַם־ה' אֵלֶ֔ל יֵצָֽאוּ וְלֹֽא־בְּאַרְצ֖וֹ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ezekiel 36:22</th>
<th>יחזקאל ל״ו:כ״ב</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.’”</td>
<td>לָכֵַֽן אֱמֹר לְבֵֽית־יִשְׂרָאֵ֗ל כֹּ֤ה אָמַר֙ אֲדֹ-נָ֣י ה' לְמַעַנְכֶ֛ם אֲנִ֥י עֹשֶׂ֖ה בֵּ֣ית יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל כִּ֤י אִם־לְשֵׁם־קָדְשִׁי֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר חִלַּלְתֶּ֔ם בַּגּוֹיִ֖ם אֲשֶׁר־בָּ֥אתֶם שָֽׁם׃</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Sephardim read until verse 36.
Verses 25-27: God will purify and soften the peoples’ hearts and spirits, returning them to His service.

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

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.

I [God] will save you from all your impurities. I will summon the grain and make it abundant, and lay no famine upon you.

Ezekiel 36:29

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

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.

Ezekiel 36:36

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

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.

Ezekiel 36:38

Connections

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

...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)