

Haftarah Helper 5781: Beha'alotcha

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Zechariah 2:14-4:7

The prophet Zechariah faced a seemingly hopeless situation. After Persia's conquest of Babylon, Cyrus the Great decreed that Jewish exiles there could return to Judah to rebuild the Temple. Only a small portion of the exiles did so; many intermarried. They built an altar, but local tribes prevented the reconstruction of the rest of the ruined Temple. Zechariah and his prophetic contemporaries sought to reignite the returnees' passion for God's presence, the Temple, and a prosperous commonwealth led by men sanctioned and inspired by God.

The Haftarah opens with Zechariah telling the people to rejoice, as God's presence is returning to Judah, the "Holy Land." Zechariah then has a vision about a High Priest, Joshua, a "firebrand plucked from the fire" - an inspiring remnant of the Temple's destruction. Joshua is cleansed of sin in a heavenly tribunal, then dressed as a purified High Priest; by following God's righteous ways, he will worship, judge, and lead as a true, angelic priest. At the same time, God will bring forth a "shoot" (3:8)¹ to govern Judah- Zerubbabel, a descendant of the penultimate Davidic king, Jechoniah; a mysterious seven-eyed stone cleanses the Land of sin.

Zechariah next envisions an expanded version of Parashah's menorah. It is surrounded by two olive branches and has seven branches, each with seven lights. The two olive branches represent olive oil (4:12) to anoint and legitimize Judah's religious (Joshua) and governing (Zerubbabel) leaders who will bring a prosperous, righteous peace to the Land. The Haftarah concludes with a reassuring flourish: despite lacking military might, Zerubbabel will rebuild the Temple (where Joshua and priests will serve) by the divine Spirit and mountain-moving might God granted him.²

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 2:14-17: God promises to dwell again in Jerusalem and Judah, inspiring other nations with faith in God.

Zechariah 2:15	זכריה ב:ט"ו
Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, they shall become My people, and I will dwell in your midst - you [Judah] will know that the Lord of hosts sent me [Zechariah] to you.	וְנָלוּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים אֵלֶי-ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְשִׁכְנֹתִי בְּתוֹכָם וְיָדַעְתָּ כִּי-ה' צִבְקוֹת שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֶיךָ:

Verses 3:1-5: In Zechariah's prophetic dream, a fiery remnant of the First Temple, Joshua the High Priest, is tried in a heavenly court. An angel cleanses his sins and dresses him as a High Priest to serve and lead in a rebuilt Temple.

Zechariah 3:4	זכריה ג:ד
He [God] answered, saying to the [angels] standing before Him, "Remove the filthy garments from him [Joshua]." [God] said to [Joshua], "Look, I removed your iniquity from you, dressing you in [priestly] garments."	וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-הַעֲמֻדִים לִפְנֵי לֵאמֹר הִסִּירוּ הַבְּגָדִים הַצִּלְמִים מֵעַל יוֹשֻׁעַ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו רְאֵה הֵעָבַרְתִּי מֵעֲלֶיךָ עֲוֹןְךָ וְהַלְבִּשׁ אֹתָם מְלָאָצוֹת:

¹ Generations earlier, Isaiah (11:1) described a messianic Davidic king as a shoot; see [Haftarah Helper for Last Day of Passover](#).

² Radak and Ibn Ezra (on 4:7) state that this power was granted to resist the tribes who opposed the Temple's reconstruction.

Verses 3:6-7: In the dream, the angel reminds Joshua to walk in His ways, serve Him, and judge Judah.

Zechariah 3:7	זכריה ג:ז
Thus said the Lord of Hosts: If you [Joshua] walk in My ways, and if you keep My charge, [then] you, too, shall judge My house [of Israel]; you shall also guard My courtyards, and I will give you paths among these [angels] standing [here in Heaven].	כֹּה־אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֱסֹבְדֶךָ תֵּלֶךְ וְאַתָּה אֶת־מִשְׁמַרְתִּי תִשְׁמָר וְגַם־אֶת־הַבַּיִת תִּדְרֹךְ אֶת־בֵּיתִי וְגַם תִּשְׁמָר אֶת־חֲצָרֵי וְנִתְּנִי לְךָ מַהֲלָכִים בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים הָאֵלֶּה:

Verses 3:8-10: The angel also tells Joshua that he and other priests that a Davidic heir, Zerubbabel, will rule and bring prosperous peace to Judah, which a mysterious seven-eyed stone will cleanse of sin.

Zechariah 4:10	זכריה ד:י
“On that day,” declares the Lord of Hosts, “everyone of you shall invite his neighbor to come under [his] grapevine and under [his] fig tree.”	בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נֹאמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת תִּקְרָאוּ אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ אֶל־תַּחַת גִּפְנוֹ וְאֶל־תַּחַת תְּאֵנָה:

Verses 4:1-3: The angel shows Zechariah a vision of a golden menorah with seven, seven-wicked lamps. It is draped with two olive branches.

Zechariah 4:3	זכריה ד:ג
There are two olive branches on it, one on the right side of the bowl, and the other on its left side.	וּשְׁנַיִם זֵיתִים עָלֶיהָ אֶחָד מִיְמִין הַגִּלָּה וְאֶחָד עַל־שְׂמאלָהּ:

Verses 4:4-7: The angel is astonished that Zechariah does not understand the vision's meaning. The angel explains its meaning to Zechariah: Zerubbabel will act through God's spirit and might, not with an army.

Zechariah 4:6	זכריה ד:ו
And he [the angel] replied and spoke to me, saying, "This is the Lord's word to Zerubbabel, saying, '“Not by [military] force and not by [physical] strength, but by My spirit,” says the Lord of Hosts.’ ”	וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי לֵאמֹר זֶה דְּבַר־ה' אֶל־זֵרֻבָּבֶל לֵאמֹר לֹא בְחַלֵּל וְלֹא בְכֹחַ כִּי אִם־בְּרוּחִי אֶמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת:

Connections

Maimonides considers **Zechariah's prophetic dreams to be representative of many prophetic experiences:**

Guide for the Perplexed, Part 2:43	מורה נבוכים, חלק ב:מ"ג
...similar to a man having a dream, imagining in that dream that he is awake, related his dream to another person, who explains the meaning, and it's all a dream. Some [other] dreams, one understands their matter [only] after waking up. Prophetic allegories are similar. Some are interpreted in the prophetic vision, as occurred with Zechariah. After [his] allegorical visions, Scripture states, "The angel speaking with me [Zechariah] returned and awakened me as a man awakened from his sleep, saying to me, 'What do you see?' " etc. (Zech. 4:1-2), and then [the angel] explained the allegory to him (4:6-7).	כמו שיראה האדם חלום וידמה בחלומו שהוא שהוא נעור וסיפר החלום לזולתו ופרש לו ענינו - והכל חלום... ומן החלומות גם כן מה שיודע ענינם אחר ההערה. כן משלי הנבואה - יש מהם יפורשו עניניהם 'במראה הנבואה'. כמו שהתבאר בזכריה באמרו אחר אשר הקדים המשלים ההם "וישב המלאך הדובר בי ויעירני כאיש אשר יעור משנתו ויאמר אלי מה אתה רואה? וגו'" - ואחר כן פרש לו המשל.

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