



Parah: Ezekiel 36:16-38¹

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 Haftarat also connect 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 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.

Comforting and challenging Israel’s exiles in Babylon and beyond after the Temple’s destruction, Ezekiel’s invocation of this purification, at the center of the Haftarah, is a unique image among the prophets. He expands on the Torah’s command to purify defilement by sprinkling, transforming into a symbolic, moral, spiritual, and redemptive cleansing of Israel.

The Haftarah begins by stating that God exiled the people for defiling themselves and His Land with murder, adultery, and idolatry. Their presence outside of the Land further profanes God- another idea unique to this Haftarah- by making the Creator appear weak in humanity’s eyes. Despite their lack of merit, God will therefore, for His own sake, return them to the Land, purify them, and renew their hearts to His service. God will restore desolate Judah into an Eden-like state, making the land fruitful and its people numerous as the sacrificial flocks of Jerusalem at holiday time- another reminder of the forthcoming Passover holiday. These transformations will astound other nations, restoring God’s reputation among humanity as the all-powerful Creator who fulfills His promises.²

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 36:16-19: God angrily exiled Israel for defiling His Land with murder, adultery, and idolatry.

Ezekiel 36:18	יחזקאל ל"ו:י"ח
So I [God] 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.	וְאֶשְׁפָּךְ חֲמָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם עַל־הַדָּם אֲשֶׁר־שָׁפְכוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וּבַגְּלוּלֵיהֶם טִמְאוּהָ:

Verse 36:20: Israel’s presence in exile further defiles God’s reputation as their absence from His land causes other nations to consider God powerless to return them there.

Ezekiel 36:20	יחזקאל ל"ו:כ
When they came to the nations where they arrived, they profaned My holy name, [for 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 בְּאֶמְרַת לֵהֶם עַם־ה' אֵלֶּה וּמֵאַרְצוֹ יָצְאוּ:

Verses 36:21-24: In order to restore His name among the nations, and not for Israel’s sake, God will gather Israel from their lands of exile and return them 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 act 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 אֶמַר לְבֵית־יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי ה' לֹא לְמַעַנְכֶם אֲנִי עוֹשֶׂה בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אִם־לְשֵׁם־קְדוֹשִׁי אֲשֶׁר חִלַּלְתֶּם בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בָּאתֶם שָׁם:

¹ Sepharadim read until verse 36.

² With emendations, all translations are from Sefaria.org. To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email haftarahhelper@gmail.com.

Verses 36:25-27: God will metaphorically sprinkle water upon His people to purify them from their sins and will replace their stony hearts with human ones in order to return 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.	וְנָרַקְתִּי עָלֵיכֶם מַיִם טְהוֹרִים וְסָהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל-גִּילוּלֵיכֶם אֲסַהַר אֶתְכֶם:

Verses 36:28-32: After Israel returns to the covenant, God will restore the Land's bounty for His name's sake. Israel will never again starve as they did in exile. They will recall their past sins and be humbled.

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 וְקָרָאתִי אֶל-הַדָּגָן וְהַרְבִּיתִי אֹתוֹ וְלֹא-אֶתֶּן עָלֵיכֶם רָעָב:

Verses 36:33-36: Once Israel is purified, God will rebuild the Land and its cities, make it fruitful, and repopulate it. The Land's restoration to this Eden-like state will astound and restore His reputation among neighboring nations.

Ezekiel 36:36	יחזקאל ל"ו:ל"ו
The nations that will remain around 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 יִשְׁאַרְוּ סְבִיבוֹתֵיכֶם כִּי אֲנִי ה' בְּנִיתִי הַהֲרָסוֹת וְנָטַעְתִּי הַשִּׁמְשָׁה אֲנִי ה' דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי: (ס)

Verses 37-38: God will make Israel as numerous as the sanctified flocks of animals in Jerusalem at holiday seasons.

Ezekiel 36:38	יחזקאל ל"ו:ל"ח
Like a flock of sacrifices, like Jerusalem's flock 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 הַהֲרָבוֹת מְלֵאוֹת צֹאן אֲדָם וְיָדְעוּ כִּי-אֲנִי ה': (ס)

Connection

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

Mishneh Torah, Laws of Mikvehs 11:12	משנה תורה, הלכות מקואות י"א
...Defilement is not mud or filth that can be removed with water but is a biblical decree that 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] is purified after immersion even though nothing new is produced in one's body, so too one who intends to purify oneself from the spiritual defilements- i.e., wrongful thoughts and evil traits- once one decided to abstain from those and brought one's soul into the waters of the intellect, one is pure. Indeed, (Ezek. 36:25) says, "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."	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 קשם שהמכונ לבו לטהר פיון שטבל טהור ואף על פי שלא נתחדש בגופו דבר כד המכונ לבו לטהר נפשו מטמאות הנפשות שהן מחשבות האנון ודעות הרעות. פיון שהסכים בלבו לפרש מאותן העצות והביא נפשו במי הדעת טהור. הרי הוא אומר (יחזקאל לו כה) "וְנָרַקְתִּי עָלֵיכֶם מַיִם טְהוֹרִים וְסָהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל גִּילוּלֵיכֶם אֲסַהַר אֶתְכֶם."