



Shabbat Chanukah: Zechariah 2:14-4:9¹

After defeating the Seleucid Greeks and returning to the Temple, the Maccabees faced a dire situation: a completely defiled Temple, devoid of God’s presence. Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Zechariah faced a similarly hopeless situation. After Persia’s conquest of Babylon, Cyrus the Great decreed² 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. Zechariah then has a vision about the High Priest, Joshua, who is described as a “firebrand plucked from the fire” - a remnant of the First 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 holy priest At the same time, God will bring forth a “shoot” (3:8)³ 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 the Temple’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 legitimate 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.⁴

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 2:14-17: God exhorts Zion to rejoice as He “awakens” to return to dwell once again in her midst, the “holy land” of Judah. This will inspire other nations with faith in God, and silent awe among all humanity.

Zechariah 2:15	זכריה ב:ט"ו
Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, they shall become My people. I will dwell in your [Judah’s] midst, and you will know that the Lord of hosts sent me [Zechariah] to you.	וּנְלוּ גוֹלִים רַבִּים אֶל־ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְהָיוּ וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְשִׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם וְיָדַעְתָּ כִּי־ה' צָבָאוֹת שְׁלַחַנִי 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 [Joshua].” [God] said to [Joshua], “Look, I removed your iniquity from you, dressing you in [priestly] garments.”	וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הַעֲמֻדִים לִפְנֵי לְאֹמֶר הַסִּירוּ הַבְּגָדִים הַצְּאִים מֵעַלְיוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו רְאֵה הִעֲבַרְתִּי מֵעַלְיָךְ עֲוֹנֶךָ וְהִלְבַּשׁ אֶתְךָ מִתְּלַצּוֹת:

¹ Ashkenazim and Sephardim read until 4:7.

² Ezra 1:1-4 and 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 state that Cyrus attributed his conquests to God, who also directed him to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. He therefore permitted the Jews to return there to do so, aiding them financially, too.

³ Generations earlier, Isaiah (11:1) described a messianic Davidic king as a shoot; see [Haftarah Helper for Last Day of Passover](#).

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

Verses 3:6-7: In the dream, the angel reminds Joshua to walk in God’s 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] and guard My courtyards, too. I will give you paths among these [angels] standing [here in Heaven].”	<p>פֶּה־אָמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת אִם־בְּדַרְכֵי תֵלֵךְ וְאִם אֶת־מִשְׁמַרְתִּי תִשְׁמֹר וְגַם־אֶת־הַתֵּיבִיּוֹת אֶת־בֵּיתִי וְגַם תִּשְׁמֹר אֶת־חֻצְרוֹתַי וְנָתַתִּי לָךְ מַהֲלָכִים בֵּין הַעֲמֻדִים הָאֵלֶּה:</p>

Verses 3:8-10: The angel also tells Joshua and his fellow 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, “each of you shall invite his neighbor [to come] under [your] grapevine and under [your] fig tree.”	<p>בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נֹאמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת תִּקְרְאוּ אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ אֶל־תַּחַת גִּפְנוֹ וְאֶל־תַּחַת תְּאֵנָה:</p>

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 bowl’s right, and one on its left.	<p>וּשְׁנַיִם זֵיתִים עָלֶיהָ אֶחָד מִיְמִין הַגִּלְגָּל וְאֶחָד עַל־שְׂמאלָהָ:</p>

Verses 4:4-9: The angel is astonished that Zechariah does not understand the vision’s meaning but then explains it: Zerubbabel will act through God’s spirit and might, not with an army. Zechariah prophesies that God will ensure that Zerubbabel finishes building the Second Temple. Seeing this, Israel will recognize Zechariah as a true prophet.

Zechariah 4:6	זכריה ד:ו
And he [the angel] replied and spoke to me [Zechariah], 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.' ”	<p>וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי לֵאמֹר זֶה דְּבַר־ה' אֶל־זֵרְבָבֶל לֵאמֹר לֹא בְחַיִל וְלֹא בְכֹחַ כִּי אִם־בְּרוּחִי אֹמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת:</p>

Holiday Connection

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains the Haftarah as follows: “The spiritual light of the divine law is self-sufficient. It is victorious by means of its innate strength. It achieves victory without outside support, without state support, without military might. It carries sufficient energy to supply the lamp as well as the tree on which the fruits of its supply ripen. Although the difficulties facing Zerubbabel mounted steadily, they were all destined to be solved. The spirit was the cornerstone to which the abundance of mercy would flow... This was the Third Chanukah, the third dedication of a Temple. It took place at winter’s end, on the third of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of the Persian king Darius. It was attended by those who had returned from exile under Zerubbabel and Joshua, inspired by the spirit of the prophets Haggai, and Zechariah, by the decree of the God of Israel... It was the dedication of the Galuth-Temple.”⁵

⁵ From “The Collected Writings of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch Vol. II”, pg. 225.