



## Vayigash: Ezekiel 37:15-28

Reconciliation between Jacob’s sons, particularly Joseph and Judah, is central to the Parashah, later Biblical history, and, as reflected in the Haftarah, the messianic era. After his death, King Solomon’s unified kingdom split into two rival kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel (also known as Joseph or as Ephraim since its first king was from that tribe) in the north. After the Assyrians exiled Israel in 722 BCE and the Babylonians exiled Judah in 586 BCE, the exiles of these groups were physically scattered and remained culturally divided. Living among many of them, the prophet Ezekiel prophesied that their conflict will one day be replaced by fraternal and national unity.

The Haftarah recounts that God commanded Ezekiel to perform a symbolic act to illustrate His message. Previously, God commanded him to perform symbolic acts relating to the Temple’s coming destruction. For example, God commanded him to eat a piece of parchment; to lie on his side for months at a time; to build a model city and then destroy it; to prepare bread on a fire fueled by dung; and to prepare “exilic garments.” The Haftarah’s symbolic act, the only one after the destruction, focuses on redemption. It portrays the reunification of the two halves of God’s people by uniting two sticks<sup>1</sup>, each with the name of one of the kingdoms written on it. Ezekiel prophesies that the people will return to the Land where a Davidic messiah will permanently lead them as a unified nation. God will purify them of their sins and they will serve God; their relationship will return to its ideal state. A renewed Temple at their center will radiate God’s presence to all humanity.

### Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 15-17: God commands Ezekiel to use two sticks to symbolize Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom), and to bring them together in his hands.

Ezekiel 37:16	יחזקאל ל"ז:ט"ז
You [Ezekiel], son of man - take unto yourself one stick and write upon it, “For Judah and for the children of Israel his companions,” and take another stick and write upon it, “For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and all the house of Israel, his companions.”	וְאַתָּה בֶּן־אָדָם קַח־לְךָ עֵץ אֶחָד וּכְתֹב עָלָיו לְיִהוּדָה וּלְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲבֵרוֹ [חֲבֵרָיו] וּלְקַח עֵץ אֶחָד וּכְתֹב עָלָיו לְיוֹסֵף עֵץ אֶפְרַיִם וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲבֵרוֹ [חֲבֵרָיו:]

Verses 18-22: Anticipating that the exiles will ask Ezekiel the meaning of the sticks he holds, God instructs him to explain that they represent God returning His people from their lands of exile to live as a unified monarchy in the mountains of His land, never again to be divided.

Ezekiel 37:22	יחזקאל ל"ז:כ"ב
I [God] will make them one nation in the Land upon the mountains of Israel. They all will have one king and no longer be two nations. They shall never again be divided into two kingdoms.	וְעָשִׂיתִי אֶתָּם לְגוֹי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ בְּהָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמֶלֶךְ אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לְכֻלָּם לְמֶלֶךְ וְלֹא יִהְיֶה־[יְהִי־] עוֹד לְשְׁנֵי גוֹיִם וְלֹא יִתְּצוּ עוֹד לְשְׁתֵּי מַמְלָכוֹת עוֹד:

<sup>1</sup> Abarbanel suggests that God selected sticks because trees symbolize man, as per Deut 20:19. He also notes Ezekiel’s unusual emphasis on the return of the Ten Tribes of the Northern Kingdom; their fate is later disputed in Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:3. Abarbanel also reads the Haftarah to refer to a “Messiah, son of Joseph”, and argues that it takes place at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead described in Ezekiel’s prophecy about the Valley of the Dry Bones (the Haftarah for Chol Hamoed Pesach) that immediately precedes the text of this Haftarah.

Verse 23: God will save them from their lands of exile where they sinned, and purify them. God and His people will restore their mutual relationship.

Ezekiel 37:23	יחזקאל ל"ז:כ"ג
They shall not again defile themselves with their idols, their detestable things, or any of their transgressions. I will save them from all their dwelling places where they sinned, and will purify them. They shall be My people, and I will be their God.	וְלֹא יִטְמְאוּ עוֹד בְּגִלּוּלֵיהֶם וּבִשְׂקוּצֵיהֶם וּבְכָל פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי אֹתָם מִכָּל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר הִטְאוּ בָהֶם וְטַהַרְתִּי אוֹתָם וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים:

Verses 24-25: God will permanently restore the Davidic monarchy. God's people will dwell forever on their ancestral land, and follow God's laws.

Ezekiel 37:25	יחזקאל ל"ז:כ"ה
They shall dwell in the land that I gave to Jacob my servant in which your fathers dwelt. They shall dwell there- they, their children, and their children's children for ever. My servant David shall be their prince [king] forever.	וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְעַבְדִּי לְיַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ-בָהּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עַל־הָהָרָה וּבְנֵיהֶם וּבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם עַד-עוֹלָם וְדָוִד עַבְדִּי נִשְׂאֵי לָהֶם לְעוֹלָם:

Verses 26-28: God will restore an eternal covenant of peace with His people and will multiply them. God's permanently rebuilt Temple in their midst will cause other nations to recognize His sanctification of them.

Ezekiel 37:26	יחזקאל ל"ז:כ"ו
I [God] will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them. I will place them [on their land], multiply them, and place My sanctuary in the midst of them forever.	וְכָרַתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם בְּרִית עוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אוֹתָם וְנִתְמַתֵּם וְהָרַבִּיתִי אוֹתָם וְנָתַתִּי אֶת-מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּתוֹכָם לְעוֹלָם:

### Connection

The rabbis of the Talmud contrast the egalitarian nature of the Torah with the **exclusivity of the hereditary institutions of kingship**, as derived from the Haftarah, and of the priesthood.

Avot D'Rabbi Natan 41	אבות דרבי נתן מ"א
Rabbi Simon says: "There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, the crown of kingship – and the crown of a good name is greater than all of them." How [does the] crown of priesthood [work]? Even if one gives all the silver and gold in the world, [we] can't give him the crown of priesthood, as it says (Numbers 25:13), "It will be for him [Pinchas] and his descendants after him, an eternal covenant of priesthood." [For the] crown of kingship[, too] - even if one gives all silver and gold in the world, [we] can't give him the crown of kingship, as it says (Ezekiel 37:25), "My servant David shall be their prince [king] forever." But the crown of Torah is not like this. Anyone who wishes to partake in the labor of Torah may come and partake, as it says (Isaiah 55:1), "Ho, all who are thirsty, go to the water [of Torah]!"	רבי שמעון אומר ג' כתרין הם אלו הן כתר תורה וכתר כהונה וכתר מלכות וכתר שם טוב עולה על גביהן. כתר כהונה כיצד אפילו נותן (לו) כל כסף וזהב שבעולם אין נותנין לו כתר כהונה שנא' (במדבר כה) והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהונת עולם. כתר מלכות אפילו נותן כל כסף וזהב שבעולם אין נותנין לו כתר מלכות שנאמר (יחזקאל לו) ודוד עבדי נשאי להם לעולם. אבל כתר תורה אינו כן עמלה של תורה כל הרוצה ליטול יבא ויטול שנאמר (ישעיה נה) הוי כל צמא לכו למים