

Haftarat Acharei Mot – Kedoshim

Torah: Leviticus 16:1– 20:27

Haftarah: Ezekiel 22:1–19; Amos 9:7–15

God Will Be Known Through Israel's Return

General Overview

This week, again, we have another potential double portion. Sometimes Parashiyot Acharei Mot and Kedoshim are read together, consequently, when there is a double portion, their haftarot are also combined.

However, It is amazing to see how well these haftarah portions compliment one another. In the passage from Ezekiel, the prophet describes Jerusalem as the “Bloody City.” What a title Ezekiel gives to the Holy City! Indeed, what a depressing passage it is. In these nineteen verses, the prophet denounces the sins of Jerusalem in no uncompromising terms. Verse after verse speak of the multitude of sins that were frequently committed in the Holy City during the years just preceding its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. Aside from the assurance from the Holy One that their discipline is to be considered a smelting of metals in a furnace instead of a total annihilation of the nation, there is very little hope preached by Ezekiel in this passage.

On the other hand, the second passage, from Amos chapter 9, is one of the most encouraging passages to appear anywhere in the prophets. Amos, like Ezekiel, preached repentance to his people. But, also like Ezekiel, Amos had many words of hope and comfort for the wayward nation. The passage from Ezekiel describes the scattering that awaited the people and the passage from Amos speaks about the promised regathering and restoration of the nation. The two passages, therefore, go hand in hand.

Connection to the Parasha

Parashat Acharei Mot begins with the description of Yom Kippur, the national Day of Atonement, and continues by delineating all of the things that contribute to making a holy community. The contents of Acharei Mot continue in a similar vein into Parashat Kedoshim. This haftarah provides us with a good example of why Israel needed a national day of repentance and atonement. It describes many of the sins that were being committed in their political and religious capital. Moreover, it also describes for us some specific violations of the instructions for holiness spoken of in the Torah portion.

Exposition

The passage from Ezekiel is rather straightforward. It describes the sins of Jerusalem, with very little encouraging hope. The section from Amos is the passage that provides the hope and comfort. Our outline for study will reflect those differences:

I. Covenant Consequences — Discipline

- A. The Bloody City
- B. The Backslid City
- C. The Beaten City

II. Covenant Joys — Grace

- A. Restoration of God's Assurance
- B. Restoration of the Line of David
- C. Restoration of the Land
- D. Restoration of the People

This week's excerpt will focus on two of the Covenant Joys, viz., the Restoration of the Land and the People.

C. Restoration of the Land

Having predicted the restoration of Divine assurance and the restoration of the line of David, Amos next predicts the restoration of the Land to the place of productivity and fruitfulness. This is the thrust of Amos 9:13.

One of the many troubles that God said would happen to Israel if they failed to be faithful to the covenant of Moshe was that the Land would lose its productivity. This certainly was characteristic of many of the years before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. We may recall, for example, the famines described in our haftarot about Elijah and Elisha.

In contrast, Amos is predicting a time when the productivity of the Land will once again return. Thus Amos 9:13 speaks of a time when,

They will have so much grain that they will be occupied with the harvest until the time of ploughing, and the ploughman will meet the reaper.¹

Moreover, this verse tells us that there will be so many grapes that it will seem that the mountains themselves are dripping with the juice!

D. Restoration of the People

Finally, Amos predicts a time when the people will be restored to the Land. Our comments cannot do justice to the beauty of the words of Amos as recorded in 9:14–15. We will quote them and let them speak for themselves:

Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live [in them]. They will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. "I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them," says the Lord your God.

These things are happening even as we write and study this commentary. All one must do is to visit Israel and see it. Long ago, places like Gezer, Kiryat Ye'arim, Bet Shemesh, and Ephrat, became ruins — grim reminders of the destruction of ancient Israel at the hands of the Babylonians, Romans, or other

foreign invaders. Indeed, the Promised Land became like a wasteland, devoid of people and sustenance.

American writer Mark Twain toured Palestine in 1867 and wrote as an eyewitness to the barrenness of this Land, when he recorded in his travelling journal,

Stirring scenes ... occur in the valley [Jezreel] no more. There is not a solitary village throughout its whole extent — not for thirty miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent habitation To find ... the sort of solitude to make one dreary, one must come to Galilee for that ... these unpeopled deserts, these rusty mounds of barrenness, that never, never, never, do shake the glare from their harsh outlines, and fade into vague perspective; that melancholy ruin of Capernaum, this stupid village of Tiberias, slumbering under six funeral palms We reached Tabor safely We never saw a human being on the whole route ... Nazareth is forlorn ... Jericho the accursed lies a moldering ruin today ... Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes ... desolate and unlovely ... it is a dreamland.”²

But today, these, and a host of other places are being rebuilt into thriving modern cities where those who have been scattered have once again been “planted on their own land.”

There is an important observation we can make from Amos 9:15. It says that God will return the captives of Israel back to their land, “and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them.” There was a time when many of the captives of Judah returned to the Land after the Babylonian captivity. Eventually, under the Romans, the descendants of these returnees were scattered again. Thus, the fulfilment of this wonderful prediction could not have been during the Second Temple period. However, Amos saw this restoration as being permanent.³

In the late 1800's a steady trickle of the descendants of Jacob began to return once again to the Promised Land. In the early 1900's, this trickle became a flowing stream. Then, the modern State of Israel was born in 1948. Since then, the flowing stream has become a powerful river of people coming back to the Land from all of the nations of the earth.

To be sure there are many more to come. But the return thus far has been impressive. The interesting part of Amos' prediction is that he said that they would never again become uprooted from the Land. Thus, there is no third return predicted in the Scriptures. Indeed, God has begun to plant Israel in our own land, just as He said He would do and they will be here to stay.

¹ A. J. Rosenberg, *The Book of Ezekiel*, vol. 1, 169.

² Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial*, 159–160.

³ Thomas E. McComiskey, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (“EBC”), vol. 7: *Amos*, 331.