

Haftarat Behar / Behukotai בְּחֻקֵי / בְּהַר

Torah: Leviticus 25:1–27:34

Haftarah: Jeremiah 32:6–27; 16:19–17:14

God Will Be Known through Israel's Return

General Overview

This haftarah is another double portion, but it is a combination of readings from two entirely different passages in the book of Jeremiah.

The haftarah from *Behukotai* is Jeremiah 16:19–17:14. Essentially this section is one where the prophet is admonishing the people to choose to trust God instead of trusting in idols. All throughout the passage Jeremiah discusses the disadvantages of idolatry and the many blessings of reliance on the one true God.

The haftarah from *Behar* is from Jeremiah 32:6–27, wherein, rather than decrying the sins of idolatry, Jeremiah is instructed by God to do one of his several “prophetic actions.” Here, God told him to purchase a field in Benjamin. Although he could see the Babylonian siege ramps already posed against Jerusalem, the Holy One wanted to assure Jeremiah that one day, he would be able to use the land he purchased. In like manner, the prophetic message is that Israel, although on the verge of disaster and captivity, would return and farm the Promised Land once again by the grace and mercy of God.

Connection to the Parasha

It seems that the sages who chose these haftarot to correspond to the *sedraim* could not have chosen more appropriate passages. *Parashat Behar*, Leviticus 25:1–26:2, is near the end of Leviticus, the instruction book for the kohanim. There, God was discussing what would happen to Israel if they kept the covenant that He made with them and the consequences of covenant unfaithfulness. Then, the final portion in Leviticus, *Parashat Bechukotai*, speaks of the blessings and chastisements that Israel would incur upon obeying or disobeying the Torah respectively.

One of the main areas of God’s concern for both portions is for the Land itself. Leviticus chapter 25 speaks about several regulations regarding the land. For instance, 25:1–7 teach about giving the land a Shabbat rest every six years (called a Shemittah Year) and the verses after that speak about another rest to the land after every seven Sabbaths of years (on the 50th year, called a Yovel Year).

Amidst these instructions about a rest to the land are also teachings about buying and selling parcels of land. Furthermore, Leviticus chapter 26 begins to list the various blessings and curses that would be covenantal responses to Israel’s respective faithful or unfaithfulness to the Covenant of Sinai, one of the things most affected by Israel’s obedience or disobedience is the land.

For example, if Israel consistently obeyed God, He promised to send the rains in due season resulting in fruitfulness and productivity from the land. If there was

continued unfaithfulness, God would withhold those rains. Ultimately, God told Israel that if they persisted with their unfaithfulness, He would remove them from the land—this is the precise scenario in which we find Jeremiah facing with his people in chapter 32.

Thus, we can easily see how the haftarah in Jeremiah 32 and Jeremiah 16 were nothing other than a natural outflow s of the Torah portions. They picked up where the parshiyot left off. The Torah portions gave the predictions while the haftarah demonstrated many of the fulfilments.

Exposition

We are choosing to focus our comments solely in the passage from Jeremiah 32:6–27. The contents of this haftarah are short and to the point. They contain one message — God intends to bring back the captives to Zion! God communicated this message to Jeremiah, and therefore, to the people of Judah, by means of a prophetic action. He charged the prophet to purchase a piece of land and hide the title deed away for future use. Following this, Jeremiah broke forth in a prayer of praise, honouring the Lord who keeps His covenants to the people of Israel.

Accordingly, our teaching outline will reflect the different parts of this parasha as they unfold:

- I. The Purchase
- II. The Problem
- III. The Prayer
- IV. The Promise

In this excerpt of the haftarah commentary, we will focus on Part IV, The Promise.

IV. The Promise

Jeremiah recorded the answer to his prayer in 32:26–27. These verses contain a wonderful promise from the Holy One. The text reads, “Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, ‘Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?’”

God’s answer begins by a firm and concise statement about His identity. He says, “I am the Lord.” Undoubtedly, this is “a declaration of Yahweh’s uniqueness and sole godhead.”¹ This statement was meant for the idolatrous people of Israel (who were already scattered throughout much of the Near East) and Judah. It was intended to confirm to them that there is no other God before them. He was, indeed, the God of all flesh.

It was also, we believe, intended for the Babylonian captors. They were an idolatrous and polytheistic nation as well. Moreover, they gave great glory and honour to their gods for their military victories, of which the defeat of Judah was one. Though this seemed like they defeated Israel’s God, the Holy One was giving them fair warning that in fact, they did no such thing! He alone is God. He will demonstrate that fact to them in the fullness of time.

Then God gives His answer to Jeremiah's prayer. It is, indeed, "One of the great answers — and facts — of history, God gives back to Jeremiah his own words, 'There is nothing too hard for You, (verse 17)'.²

This answer is, in reality continued in the next verse, which states,

Therefore thus says the Lord, "Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it" (32:28).

By this, the Holy One was communicating to Jeremiah that, although He has decreed the Babylonians would take that Jerusalem,

"I can restore it [the land] to Israel. I, therefore, command you to buy the field as a symbol that I will do so."³

Here was his answer. It was a formal and solemn promise by the God of all mankind that He would bring the children of Israel back to the Promised Land once again. Jeremiah was to purchase that tract of land as an eternal witness to that sacred promise. He was to preach about this transaction to all of the people and have it formally recorded for posterity — that all may see it and know that God has showed that He will return them to the Land that He swore to give to them as a gift of grace.

¹ Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Jeremiah*, 414.

² H. Freedman. *Jeremiah* (Soncino Books of the Bible), 220.

³ A. J. Rosenberg, *The Book of Jeremiah*, vol. 2, 265.