

# Haftarat Tetzaveh תצוה

Torah: Exodus 27:20–30:11

Haftarah: Ezekiel 43:10–27

## A Place for God to Dwell

### General Overview

This haftarah is found in one of the most interesting prophetic sections of the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel is the only prophet who recorded the departure of the Shekinah, the residing visible Divine presence in the First Temple. As we read chapter ten, we can learn from an eyewitness what it was like to see the glory of the Lord leave the Temple shortly before it was destroyed. The day of the glory's leaving was one of the saddest days in the history of Israel.

However, in our haftarah, chapter 43 of Ezekiel, we see Ezekiel predicting the reversal of that momentous event. In the verses preceding the haftarah, Ezekiel describes for us the return of the Shekinah. Then, in the actual section that constitutes the haftarah, Ezekiel describes for us the basic layout and functions of the future Temple which will be the home of the returned Shekinah.

Rabbi Hertz summarizes the basic thrust of this haftarah when he states,

This new Temple was also to symbolize and embody in concrete form the teachings of Holiness and Purity preached by the Prophet in the preceding 39 chapters of his book.<sup>1</sup>

### Connection to the Parasha

It is fun to compare the Torah portion with the haftarah. In *Parashat Tetzaveh*, Exodus 27:20–30:10, Moshe taught Israel about the kohanim, including their clothing and their functions. With the teaching in the previous parasha concerning the place where the priests were to serve (the Mishkan), we now have the complete basics concerning the sacrificial element of the Torah. This, in essence, is the sum of the haftarah. Only instead of the sacrifices taking place in the Mishkan, or even the First and Second Temples, Ezekiel is predicting the establishment of a future, Messianic, Temple where these sacred services will be performed.

### Exposition

Although this haftarah consists of Ezekiel verses 43:10–27, the first nine verses of the same chapter are of such critical importance that we cannot leave them out of our discussion. Accordingly, our outline will reflect some of the contents of these verses. Additionally, this week, our passage has been given a title. The phrase “This is the Torah of the house,” *zot torat habayit*, זאֹת תּוֹרַת הַבַּיִת, occurs twice in verse twelve. Because of that, we have decided that this phrase would

make a great title for our haftarah. Hence, this passage is called “The Torah of the Temple” (keeping in mind that the word “house” means “Temple!”). It concerns itself with the major teachings about the yet-to-be Messianic Temple, better known as “Ezekiel's Temple.” From this passage we can see that there are at least four purposes for such a Temple. These four purposes have become our outline:

“The Torah of the Temple”

- I. A Place for God to Dwell
- II. A Place for Repentance
- III. A Place for Atonement
- IV. A Place for Acceptance

### **I. A Place for God to Dwell 43:1–2, 4**

As mentioned in our introductory notes, one of the saddest events in all of human history was when the Shekinah left the Temple in Jerusalem. The prophet Ezekiel was more than qualified to write about this tragic occurrence. Not only was he a faithful prophet who heard from God, but he was also a priest. As a *kohen*, he was quite familiar with all of the locations both in and around the Temple. This experience enabled him to write a vivid description of the departure of the glory of the Lord from the Temple.

#### **A. One Sad Moment**

Chapters 10 and 11 describe what happened. Ezekiel testifies that there were about four or five stages to the Lord's going. First, Ezekiel says that he saw the glory of the Lord go up from its location between the Cherubim in the Holy of Holies and make its way to the threshold of the Temple (10:4). Next, the glory departed from the threshold and stood above the angelic beings that escorted it (10:18). The third stage is recorded in 10:19 where we see how the angels left the scene and the glory hovered over them. Fourth, the glory left the city entirely and stood over the Mount of Olives, (11:23). After that, it is unclear where the glory went. We can only assume that it took its place somewhere in the heavenlies with God.

We need to feel God's heart at this point. One of His most blessed promises to His people is that He would dwell among them. God's desire to dwell among us was so strong that He had a special place of dwelling with specific instructions about how to build it and what to do there. His only motive was simply to bless His people with His special presence and the intimacy that such a unique relationship offers.

Through the centuries, God tolerated all sorts of unfaithfulness from His people. Like a husband who lives with an unfaithful bride, God witnessed Israel being led astray into spiritual adultery. We are sure that all of this broke God's heart, so to speak. The troubles of this broken marriage between God and His people culminated in the tragedy of the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE. When

the special place of dwelling for God's presence among His people was destroyed through the hand of His judgment. However, at some unspecified time shortly before that horrible destruction, Ezekiel recorded for all to learn, the stage-by-stage solemn departure of God's special presence, the Shekinah glory.

We have just used the term "Shekinah glory." Perhaps it is a term that requires a little explanation. The word *shekinah*, שכִּינָה, is derivative of the basic root "to dwell" (שָׁכַן) However, unlike the other derivatives such as "to dwell" and "mishkan," "Shekinah" is not a biblical word, that is, it is not found in the Bible. Rather, it is a term used by the ancient rabbis to describe the special dwelling presence of God in the Tabernacle and the First Temple. It was, in the words of one scholar, "the numinous immanence of God in the world."<sup>2</sup> It was a term synonymous with the dwelling glory of God, which we saw departing from the First Temple in Ezekiel chapters 10–11.

## **B. Oh Happy Day!**

We are all saddened by the fact that there was once a time in human history when God dwelt with us in a very special and unique way, but because of sin, that presence was removed. However, according to the one who wrote of the Shekinah's departure, the special Presence of God will some day gloriously return to earth. Ezekiel writes in 43:1–2, 4

Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east, and His voice was like the sound of many waters and the earth shone with His glory...and the glory of the Lord came into the house by way of the gate facing toward the east.

Here is the reversal of what happened centuries ago. Just as the Shekinah left, so is He promised to return. Our sadness will be turned to great joy as we are assured that once again, the Holy One of Israel will have a special manifested presence among the people of the earth.

In order to accommodate the return of God's special presence on earth, God gave Ezekiel special instructions, beginning at 43:7, to prepare for His coming.

First, we are told that Ezekiel was instructed to make a building in which to house this Presence. It is called in 43:10 a "house." Most translations render the Hebrew word *bayit*, בַּיִת, as "temple." But we need to remember that its primary meaning is "house." This, of course, is not just any house. It is God's house where He could dwell in safety and happiness with His family — those who believe in Him.

Moreover, this house had specific furniture designed to denote some of the functions of this special house. It had a place where common meals were shared (the Altar and Courtyard), a place where light shined (the Menorah) and a location where special guests were nourished (the Bread of God's Presence). Finally, there was the room designated for that special intimacy shared by all families — the Holy of Holies.

The second feature of the coming of God's glory was that this house was also the site of God's royal throne. The Holy One states in 43:7, "this is the place of My throne." Hence, Ezekiel's Temple will be the seat of government for the future royal Divine Kingdom which will be on earth. Moreover,

The Temple corresponds directly to the Throne of Glory in heaven [Redak]...in the future, God's Divine Presence will be situated on earth, and not in heaven, as it is now, i.e., He will conduct world affairs directly...<sup>3</sup>

Third, we are told that when the Glory returns, this future Temple will be "the place of the soles of My feet." This is the same thing as saying that the Temple will contain the footstool for God's feet (Isaiah 66:1). Moreover, we know from 1 Chronicles 28:2 and Psalm 132:7 that the Ark of the Covenant is called the footstool of God.

There are numerous engravings from the ancient Near East of royal footstools. Thrones tended to be lofty and glorious. To accommodate the kings' comfort, there was often placed a stool at the king's feet. King Solomon is said to have had a footstool made of gold (2 Chronicles 9:18).

It is interesting that Ezekiel does not mention anything about the Ark (nor does he speak of the Menorah or the Bread of the Presence, for that matter). It appears that the Ark is God's throne in the future Temple. In addition, Jeremiah 3:15–18 indicates that in this same time period, the Ark will apparently not be needed, nor missed. In fact "nor shall it be made again" (Jeremiah 3:16). One of the main features of the Ark, of course, was the copy of the Covenant inside of it. The Scripture does not mean that the Covenant will cease to be important. On the contrary! But it is simply emphasizing the fact that the very embodiment of the Torah Himself will be sitting on the Ark! From His mouth will come all of the words of the Torah — and more. Hence, as an "Ark," this piece of furniture will change its importance to become that of a royal seat. Instead of a box that housed the Torah, it will be the resting place for the Living Torah. So much for the legendary search for the lost Ark! It will not be needed when the Messiah returns.

### **C. Who/What Is the Shekinah?**

There is one question that needs to be answered before we leave this point. What is the real identity of the Shekinah? At the outset, we need to realize that to some this is not an important question. Some rabbis assert that,

The term [Shekinah] must be viewed purely figuratively and not as representing a separable aspect of God or as being in any sense a part of the Godhead. The latter notion is totally alien to the strict monotheism of rabbinic Judaism for which the unity of the divine Essence is a basic premise.<sup>4</sup>

At one level, we would do justice to the text just to say that the Shekinah is not personified, but merely an external glorious manifestation of the innate glory of

God. A “thing.” However, when Ezekiel records the Shekinah’s reentrance to the Temple, it is accompanied by the Divine Presence Himself as He takes residence upon His royal throne. Thus, according to this understanding, the Divine Presence is clearly the Messiah.

Let us expand on this idea a bit. There are some commentators, who also make a connection between the Shekinah and the person of the Messiah. They notice that the angels of God accompany the Shekinah, as we see demonstrated when He both leaves the First Temple, (Ezekiel chapters 10–11) and reenters into Ezekiel’s Temple, (chapter 43). When He leaves, the last point of departure from earth was the Mount of Olives. This, we might remember, was also the final place of departure for Yeshua. Then, when the Shekinah returns to Ezekiel’s Temple, he appears from the east and enters the Temple from the east, whereupon He occupies the Divine throne.

According to Zechariah chapters 12–14 this is quite similar to the return of Yeshua. He also will return to His people from the east of the Temple, from the Mount of Olives. Then, he also will sit upon the throne of His father David and rule as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In this interpretation, the Shekinah is simply another part of the physical manifestation of the Messiah, just like Yeshua revealed His Shekinah (glory) on the mountain of transfiguration. Rabbi Tzvi Nasi provides some support from the ancient rabbis for this interpretation. He cites Rabbi Simon ben Jochai who says,

Come and see Jehovah and Adonai, the Lord, and His Shekinah are the Holy blessed One, and His Shekinah is between two lines: Jehovah to the right, and Adonai, the Lord, to the Left; they are a bright glass, but without the Shekinah it is a dark glass. In the righteous One, the Shekinah, are Jehovah Adonai one.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, there is a line of thought that says that the Shekinah and Messiah are both one and the same. Of course, we cannot be dogmatic about this. There is still much to study on the subject. But thinking along these lines is sure fun!

As we close this first division in our passage, let us not forget the main point: Ezekiel emphatically states that the first and primary function for this future Temple will be that of a dwelling place for God, who in some way, shape, or form, will come to planet earth in a physical manifestation and sit upon the throne of David in the Temple. Concerning this, we can be very dogmatic and we can say that the Temple that Ezekiel foresaw would, therefore, be the home of the Messiah.

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 350.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14, 1350.

<sup>3</sup> A.J. Rosenberg, *The Book of Ezekiel*, vol. 2, 380.

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, 1350.

<sup>5</sup> Tzvi Nassi, *The Great Mystery: How Can Three Be One?*, 32.