

Haftarat Beha'alotekha בהעלתך

Torah: Numbers 8:1–12:16

Haftarah: Zechariah 2:10–4:7 (English)

Zechariah 2:14–4:7 (Hebrew)

God Will Be Known through the Re-Building of His Temple

General Overview

This haftarah contains a rich array of visual prophetic images. From the opening picture of the daughters of Jerusalem rejoicing, through the heavenly dual between the high priest Joshua and Satan, to the final vision of a giant menorah flanked by two olive trees, Zechariah speaks words of hope to the downtrodden returnees from the Babylonian exile. Amidst these pictures, we are furnished with a prophecy of the Messiah depicted as the Servant and Branch.

Connection to the Parasha

Concerning the connection of this haftarah in Zechariah with the parasha, Rabbi Hertz observes,

The Prophet's vision of the “candlestick all of gold” in chapter 4, with its teaching that God alone is the Source of all light, connects with the Sidrah [Parashat Beha'alotekha], which opens with the command concerning the Menorah.¹

Exposition

The Book of Zechariah is actually divided into two main sections. Chapters 1 through 8 are a series of prophetic visions that God gave to Zechariah. These visions have particular relevance to the prophet's contemporary situation, yet also look to future ages. Chapters 9 to 14, the second main division, are mainly prophetic words speaking about important future events that will happen to Israel.

The central purpose of the prophecies of Zechariah is to show that the glorification of Zion, the overthrow of Israel's enemies, and the universal reign of the Messiah — in fact all the promises of Israel's glorious future — would yet be realized in the distant future.²

Like the book of Revelation in the Brit Hadasha, Zechariah also records an Apocalypse, portraying God's dealings with His chosen people Israel. His prophecies, therefore, are usually ones of great hope and encouragement for Israel.

That is especially the case with the prophecies in our present haftarah. Our reading for this week brings us to, in reality, the end of one of his eight prophetic visions in chapters 1 through 8. The haftarah only includes the very end of that one particular vision. We will, however, include the whole vision in our study of this passage.

The first vision, therefore, that we will explore has to do with the divine protection of Israel. Safety was one of the hindrances that kept the people from completing the work of the temple. God wanted to encourage them that He was behind that work and therefore they could confidently finish it.

The second vision of this haftarah consists of seeing Joshua the High Priest before the heavenly court being accused by Satan. During this vision, the angelic attendants are ordered to put clean clothes on Joshua, especially before his accuser. Thus, the second vision we will study speaks of divine cleansing.

The third vision is one of a candelabra followed by some of the most encouraging words found anywhere in the Bible: teaching the people that God's work will be accomplished — but only by the grace and power of God's Spirit.

Based on these three visions, the approach we will take for our study will be:

- I. Divine Protection
- II. Divine Cleansing
- III. Divine Empowerment

In this excerpt from *Briteinu*, we will focus on the last section, Divine Empowerment.

III. Divine Empowerment

We have finally arrived at the last section of this haftarah. In the first two parts, we have seen that Zechariah's main objective was to encourage his people to complete the building of the temple. He did this by sharing the words from the Holy One that spoke of Divine protection for them, as well as Divine cleansing of their sins.

Finally, in this last section, the prophet will tell them that to finish their task, they will also have Divine empowerment.

In Zechariah 4:1–1 ff. we have yet another vision that he received from the Lord concerning the situation in his day among the returnees from Babylon. Like the other visions, it is also difficult to properly interpret. The vision is one where Zechariah sees a menorah, like the one that was in the temple. It had a bowl on top of it and two olive trees flanked it.

Zechariah is also confused by the vision, so he himself asks the angel who delivered the vision what the meaning of the vision was. The answer was provided beginning in 4:6.

In verse 10, we learn that the seven-branched menorah in the vision, are the "eyes of the Lord that range to and fro throughout the earth." The number seven stands for completion and perfection. It is a perfect image for the Lord's presence in the temple as well as His presence all throughout the earth. The same verse also tells us these "eyes" will be glad when they see the completion of the temple. This would be an indication that the project will come to pass.

The angel identifies the two olive trees as, “the two anointed ones, who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth” (4:14). Most all commentators agree that,

The angel is referring to Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor of Judah, who, although not anointed with the anointing oil because it had been hidden by Josiah, were, nevertheless, called “anointed ones” because of their lineage from the anointed Aaron and David. [Malbim to Sifra Leviticus 7:35].³

Thus, this vision was principally directed to Joshua and Zerubbabel in order to encourage them to complete the temple. How, specifically did it encourage them?

We have already noted one way from Zechariah 4:10. There is a second line of encouragement found in 4:9. Here, the angel plainly states, “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish [it]. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. What more encouragement can one get? It is as if the Holy One himself spoke to them telling them that the job will be completed.

It will be completed, said the Holy One. But it will not be finished as a result of human effort. Their strength will not come from within. Their protection will not stem from their own human efforts. And their spiritual power will not emanate from their own flesh. Rather, God spoke directly to the governor Zerubbabel in 4:6 saying, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

To this Rabbi Hertz so eloquently remarks,

As the lights are controlled by an unseen agency, so behind Zerubbabel and his allotted work is the invisible spirit and help of God. And the difficulties in the way will disappear; and, in spite of the hostility and mocking of the people who have hitherto opposed, he will complete the building of the Temple, “not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”⁴

Our haftarah has supplied us with the vision of the menorah and the oil lamps attached to it. We also have been given the picture of the olive trees standing next to it. Once again, with the mention of “olive” the subject of oil is brought to our attention. “Oil” seems to be a dominant theme in this vision. Oil, indeed, was in abundance in the land of Israel. Zerubbabel’s task seemed impossible. But,

Just as there was a constant and sufficient supply of oil without human agency, so Zerubbabel’s work on the temple and in the lives of the people was to be completed, not by human might or power, but by divine power — constant and sufficient.⁵

The oil of the Spirit was that power — as it still is for all that attempt to perform the tasks that the Holy One lays upon them.

¹ J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, p. 620.

² Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, 335.

³ A. J. Rosenberg, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, vol. 2, 336.

⁴ Hertz, op. cit., p. 622.

⁵ Kenneth L. Barker, "Zechariah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* ("EBC"), vol.7, 629.