

HAFTARAH EXHORTATIONS: Haftarah Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

by Mark Huey posted 02 May, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Amos 9:7-15
Ezekiel 20:2-20
Ezekiel 22:1-19

"A Holy Nation"

This week's Torah teaching will often combine the readings for *Acharei Mot* (Leviticus 16:1-18:30) and *Kedoshim* (Leviticus 19:1-20:27) into one large *parashah* for reflection and study. From the dramatic tragic deaths of Nadab and Abihu, followed by the instructions for the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur*, to the penultimate admonition in the second to last verse—"Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine" (Leviticus 20:26)—the theme of pursuing and attaining holiness persists. There is no doubt that *if* a people faithfully obeyed God as laid out, that they would be a distinct nation, set-apart from the other nations of the world.

Depending on whether one is following the Sephardic or Ashkenazic suggested Haftarah, or whether both readings are chosen, the traditional passages from Amos and Ezekiel remind Bible students that the challenges for Ancient Israel to maintain holiness is a recurring theme expressed by the Prophets down through the centuries. The Lord anointed Amos to prophesy primarily to the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim, and later Ezekiel to the Southern Kingdom exiles in Babylonian captivity. While these are both different vantage points, their selected admonitions for this week have a similar tone, as the rebellious nature of God's people requires them to be punished. By not adhering to God's commandments regarding holiness, the Lord is compelled to punish the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and later the Southern Kingdom Judah—by banishing them to foreign nations. Yet by His grace, there is a promise of restoration given to them, as the punishment issued will only be temporary, and the people will be restored to the Promised Land:

"For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel,' declares the Lord GOD, 'there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I will accept them and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things'" (Ezekiel 20:40).

Our selection from the Book of Amos is directed to the Northern Kingdom Israelites, who will be attacked, taken into Assyrian exile, and then dispersed by God into the Earth. The Prophet Amos speaks in a metaphor, as though the Lord will scatter them like grain shaken in a sieve. Yet even though scattered, He will scatter the people deliberately, knowing where each kernel goes:

"Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?' declares the LORD. 'Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir? Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,' declares the LORD. **'For behold, I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, but not a kernel will fall to the ground.** All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, those who say, "The calamity will not overtake or confront us'" (Amos 9:7-11).

Of those who will not be killed by the sword, God promises to scatter the rebellious House of Israel like seed. *But all hope is not lost.* Amos prophesies how there will be a future restoration of the Tabernacle of David, and the ultimate return of the whole House of Israel to the Land:

"In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name,' declares the LORD who does this. 'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'When the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; when the mountains will drip sweet wine and all the hills will be

dissolved. 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" (Amos 9:7-15; cf. Acts 15:16-18).

The conclusion to Amos' prophecy is actually one of the passages that many in today's Jewish Diaspora have clung to for future fulfillment. With the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, many religious Jews have particularly cited these verses as "God's promise" that once the return and rebuilding process is underway, there will never again be a future expulsion. However, there is a valid argument that appropriating the holiness commandments, seen in *Kedoshim*, might be part of the bargain. For surely if the Almighty punished Ancient Israel for lack of obedience during the times of Amos and Ezekiel, will His immutable nature now give modern day Israelis a "pass"? I would ask you to consider this, as the pressure of the world today continues to grow, as a part of what is often known by the oxymoronic label: "the Mideast peace process."

To expand your study this week—one that coincidentally includes the 61st anniversary of Israel's declaration of independence and formation—take a look at Ezekiel 20 and 22. Note the similarities about disobedience to the commandments of God, and parallels that you might be considering from the Torah in *Acharei Mot* and *Kedoshim*:

"But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they *lived*, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live. Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them. But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, before whose sight I had brought them out" (Ezekiel 20:8-14).

If you read a little further in the larger context (beyond the prescribed Haftarah verses), you will discover the expectation of not only Israel returning to obedience, but God bringing them back into the Promised Land:

"As for you, O house of Israel,' thus says the Lord GOD, 'Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols. For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel,' declares the Lord GOD, 'there the whole house of Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I will accept them and there I will seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things. As a soothing aroma I will accept you when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I will prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers'" (Ezekiel 20:39-42).

Additionally, Ezekiel 22 also speaks of the scattering of Israel, and its future restoration, as our selected Haftarah passages come to a close:

"I will scatter you among the nations and I will disperse you through the lands, and I will consume your uncleanness from you. You will profane yourself in the sight of the nations, and you will know that I am the LORD.' And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are the dross of silver. Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem'" (Ezekiel 22:15-19).

As you take the time to read our three critical selections from the Prophets, you will note a degree of overlap and consistency. Our Heavenly Father had a plan to scatter His disobedient people into the nations of the world for chastisement. However, at His appointed time, He promises to gather them back to the Land of Israel, with the ultimate aim of them being molded into a people who diligently obey Him and are blessed by Him.

While we may not be necessarily seeing all of these things today, we are likely on the way to seeing the fulfillment of these prophecies some time in the future. Today's Messianic movement has been responsible for bringing many Jewish people to saving faith in Yeshua the Messiah, and exposing non-Jewish Believers to their Hebraic Roots. **Being the people that God wants us to be, is a challenge for much of the present generation.** How we learn to be obedient to Him, *and* fulfill the mandate that He has given to us, is something that may take us some time to learn and refine. However, with all of the complimentary prophecies seen elsewhere in the Scriptures, we can have comfort that all of what has been promised will take place in the Father's time!

The challenge for Believers in the Messiah Yeshua is waiting upon Him. In the interim as we wait—let us learn to be joyful, and be obedient to the Lord. Let us sit down and be encouraged by the message of these ancient prophecies, and what they mean for men and women of faith.

Until the restoration of all things...

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