

# HAFTARAH EXHORTATIONS: Haftarah BeHa'alotecha

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Zechariah 2:14-4:7

## “Pure Light of the Branch”

This week's Torah reading, *BeHa'alotecha* (Numbers 8:1-12:16), describes various events during the wilderness march of Ancient Israel. It begins with a brief overview of the seven branches of the *menorah* (cf. Exodus 25:31-40). At the concluding verse of last week's reading (*Naso*: Numbers 4:21-7:89), it is understood that this impressive candelabra was to be located in the Tent of Meeting where Moses communed with the Lord. Just imagine the Holy of Holies with the Ark of the Covenant being illuminated by light from this *menorah*:

“Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him” (Numbers 7:89).

In the lighted Tent of Meeting, from above the mercy seat, the Lord spoke with Moses giving him the two principal instructions that are connected to this week's Haftarah selection from Zechariah. Read the instructions about the proper mounting of the lamp, and then the more explicit instructions about the ancient Levites were to be purified for service unto Him. The Levites have been separated out to perform duties associated with the Tabernacle and Israel's worship before God:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to Aaron and say to him, “When you mount the lamps, the seven lamps will give light in the front of the lampstand.” Aaron therefore did so; he mounted its lamps at the front of the lampstand, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Now this was the workmanship of the lampstand, hammered work of gold; from its base to its flowers it was hammered work; according to the pattern which the LORD had showed Moses, so he made the lampstand. Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Take the Levites from among the sons of Israel and cleanse them. Thus you shall do to them, for their cleansing: *sprinkle* purifying water on them, and let them use a razor over their whole body and wash their clothes, and they will be clean.’ Then let them take a bull with its grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil, and a second bull you shall take for a sin offering. So you shall present the Levites before the tent of meeting. You shall also assemble the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, and present the Levites before the LORD; and the sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites. **Aaron then shall present the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the sons of Israel, that they may qualify to perform the service of the LORD.** Now the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls; then offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. You shall have the Levites stand before Aaron and before his sons so as to present them as a wave offering to the LORD. Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. Then after that the Levites may go in to serve the tent of meeting. But you shall cleanse them and present them as a wave offering; for they are wholly given to Me from among the sons of Israel. I have taken them for Myself instead of every first issue of the womb, the firstborn of all the sons of Israel. For every firstborn among the sons of Israel is Mine, among the men and among the animals; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself. But I have taken the Levites instead of every firstborn among the sons of Israel. I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the sons of Israel, to perform the service of the sons of Israel at the tent of meeting and to make atonement on behalf of the sons of Israel, so that there will be no plague among the sons of Israel by their coming near to the sanctuary.’ Thus did Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the sons of Israel to the Levites; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so the sons of Israel did to them. The Levites, too, purified themselves from sin and washed their clothes; and Aaron presented them as a wave offering before the LORD. Aaron also made atonement for them to cleanse them. Then after that

the Levites went in to perform their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron and before his sons; just as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them. Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'This is what *applies* to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall enter to perform service in the work of the tent of meeting. But at the age of fifty years they shall retire from service in the work and not work any more. They may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep an obligation, but they *themselves* shall do no work. Thus you shall deal with the Levites concerning their obligations' (Numbers 8:1-26).

With these emphases on the *menorah* and the purifying of the Levites, the Jewish Sages turned to a prophetic word from Zechariah for the complimentary Haftarah selection. Zechariah, similar to Haggai, was a post-exilic prophet who spoke for the Lord as the scattered Jews were returning back to the Land of Israel and Jerusalem during the Persian era. The reconstruction of the city and the Temple had begun. But the former exiles needed admonitions—and sometimes even rebukes—from the prophets that God raised up so that their necessary tasks would not be forgotten.

Zechariah received a series of visions that were used by the Lord to encourage the children of the Jewish exiles to persevere. After a declarative statement that many nations will join themselves to the Lord when He comes to dwell in their midst, a vision of a high priest, named Joshua, is detailed. This Joshua is being accused by Satan as he stands in his filthy garments. But, the Lord has his filthy garments removed, and he is cleansed, purified, and redressed for proper service unto Him. Note how after this cleansing and change of clothes, that there is still a requirement upon Joshua to walk in God's ways, adequately performing His required service and administration:

"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?' Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.' Again he said to him, 'See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.' Then I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.' So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by. And the angel of the LORD admonished Joshua, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "If you will walk in My ways and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you free access among these who are standing *here*!"' (Zechariah 3:1-7).

The imagery of this vision may not be absolutely clear to you, but the need for cleanliness or purity among those who serve in God's priesthood is easily seen. Joshua is a high priest, not that much different than Aaron, but he is not intended to represent the Messiah of Israel. Instead, the high priest Joshua is told that God is going to send *avdi tzemach* (עֲבָדִי צִמְחָה), "My servant the Branch." This will be ultimately accompanied by the Land of Israel being removed of iniquity, and following will be peace and prosperity:

"Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch. For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree'" (Zechariah 3:8-10).

Following this, Zechariah shares another vision—one which parallels the description of the *menorah* seen in our Torah reading for *BeHa'alotecha*. We see a reference to a seven-spouted candelabra, perhaps a connection to the seven eyes on the stone in the previous vision. It is evident from the various objects depicted, that God is trying to communicate some deep spiritual truths, and added to this are two olive trees that stand before the Temple. The reconstruction of

the Temple is something that is very important, because as the Lord tells Zechariah, it will only take place by His Spirit:

“Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep. He said to me, ‘What do you see?’ And I said, ‘I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side.’ Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, ‘What are these, my lord?’ So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ And I said, ‘No, my lord.’ Then he said to me, ‘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. ‘What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel *you will become a plain*; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of “Grace, grace to it!”’” (Zechariah 4:1-7).

In these different visions, we see Joshua the high priest, and now we see Zerubbabel. We see two chosen people: one to restore a purified Levitical priesthood, and another chosen to rebuild the Temple. Reading just a little further, we see what the two olive trees specifically represent:

“Also the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘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. For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel—*these are* the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth.’ Then I said to him, ‘What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?’ And I answered the second time and said to him, ‘What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden *oil* from themselves?’ So he answered me, saying, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ And I said, ‘No, my lord.’ Then he said, ‘**These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth**’” (Zechariah 4:8-14).

Zechariah is told by God, *elleh sh'nei b'nei-ha'yitzhar ha'omdim al'Adon kol-ha'erezt* (אֵלֶּה שְׁנֵי בְנֵי־הַיִּצְחָר הָעֹמְדִים עַל־אֲדֹנָי כָּל־הָאֶרֶץ), or “*These are* the two sons of the oil, who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth” (YLT). These two anointed ones (Heb. *sh'nei b'nei-ha'yitzhar*) may represent how the religious priesthood and the secular authorities were used by God, following the Babylonian exile, to restore not only the rebuilt Temple, but its services and the people back to proper worship.<sup>1</sup>

There appears to be an interesting connection between the seven bulbs of the *menorah*, and how the Prophet Isaiah refers to seven important aspects of the Messiah's mission and ministry. In the opening verses of Isaiah 11, prophecies of the shoot (Heb. *choter*, חֹטֶר) springing forth from Jesse, we see a clear reference to a descendant of King David. This branch (Heb. *netzer*, נֶצֶר) will bear much fruit because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him:

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked” (Isaiah 11:1-4).

As you read the balance of the description given of “the branch,” we see that He is One who will possess significant wisdom, power, and strength. He will have the ability to enact righteousness in the lives of the oppressed, and will judge the wicked. Both Isaiah and Zechariah were privileged to have visions of the work that the Messiah would be destined to perform. And,

<sup>1</sup> Many in today's Messianic Two-House sub-movement think that the two trees standing before the Holy One, represent the Two Houses of Judah and Israel/Ephraim. Yet with a consideration of the larger context of Zechariah's prophecy, the two olive trees are more likely related to the offices and functions of the high priest Joshua and builder Zerubbabel.

we should take comfort in knowing that even though He has yet to enact complete righteousness on Earth—He will surely return and one day it will be manifest!

Today, after more than 2,500 years of history having moved forward—and most especially after the atoning sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah—we as born again Believers should have a much fuller appreciation of the Prophet Zechariah's ancient words. Both the high priest Joshua and builder Zerubbabel did help play a role in seeing the priesthood reestablished and the Temple rebuilt (cf. Haggai 1:1-2). Jewish exiles returned to the Land of Israel and Jerusalem, and they reestablished their lives and religious worship.

How important is this? Before the time of Yeshua, Herod the Great enacted a significant refurbishing of the Second Temple, a place where our Messiah spent a great deal of His time teaching and meditating. He used the imagery of the Temple to speak about Himself and the work that the Father sent Him to do. At the appointed time, Yeshua was offered up for our sins—because He was the Branch upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rested. Today as we place our trust in Him, we can not only experience redemption from sins, but also have the assurance that He will not judge us as wicked sinners!

Yeshua is the Light of the world (John 8:12), our pure Branch, endowed with all the attributes of God, who came to die for fallen humanity. This is a great blessing for us to contemplate, as we all need to persevere in the call upon our lives to serve the Lord like the high priest Joshua and builder Zerubbabel. Let us all maintain our purity before the Father, obeying Him via His Spirit, as we bask in the light of His Son.

Until the restoration of all things...

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