

Shabbat Chol Hamoed Pesach: Ezekiel 36:37¹-37:14²

Exiled to Babylon with King Jechoniah of Judah in 597 BCE, Ezekiel prophesied destruction upon his own people and other nations for seven years. These prophecies comprise the majority of his book. Ezekiel's prophecies after the destruction of the Temple blend rebuke, comfort and startling visions of redemption; they form the final third of his book. This Haftarah and the Haftarot of Parashat [Vayigash](#), [Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot](#), and [Shabbat Parah](#) are taken from Chapters 33-39. They address the exiled nation, their concerns about God leaving them, and their future redemption. Chapters 40-48 continue this theme with a grand vision of a new Temple.

The Haftarah opens as Ezekiel prophesies that Israel's dwindling population will become as numerous as the flocks of animals brought to the Temple on holidays, such as Passover. Ezekiel then reports that God whisked him to a faraway valley. God shows him around this valley, and within it, he sees that it is filled with desiccated bones. God asks Ezekiel if these bones will live again, and Ezekiel responds that only God knows if that will occur.

Immediately after this, God commands Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones, that they will be revived and given flesh once more. As Ezekiel finishes doing so, the bones noisily join back together and regrow their muscle and skin. However, they do not yet live again. God again commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the four winds, which He commands to enter into the lifeless bodies to give them the breath of life. After they do so, God explains to Ezekiel that this massive army of resurrected individuals is the exiled people of Israel, who thought that God had cut them off from Him. In response, God exclaims that he will take Israel out of their exilic graves, revive them, and return them to the Land of Israel. In doing so, and in appreciation of all that had been done throughout this prophecy, Ezekiel, the revived army, and the people of Israel will appreciate that God fulfills His promises.

Much like the Exodus centuries earlier, this redemption will unite God and His people, redeem them from "death" in a foreign land, and return them to the Land of Israel.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 36:37-38: God will transform Israel's small population into a 'flock of people' as numerous as the flocks of animals sacrificed on holidays in the Temple in Jerusalem. This vast populace will fill the Land's destroyed cities.

Ezekiel 36:38	יחזקאל ל"ו:ל"ח
Like a flock of sacrifices, like Jerusalem's flock in her appointed times- so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. They shall know that I am the Lord.	כְּצֹאן קִדְשִׁים כְּצֹאן יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּמוֹעֲדֶיהָ בְּןֵי תַהֲלִינָהּ הַעָרִים הַחֲרָבוֹת מְלֵאוֹת צֹאן אֲדָם וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי ה' {פ}

Verses 37:1-3: Ezekiel reports that God brought him to a valley full of very dry bones, and showed them to him. God asked Ezekiel whether these bones can live again. Ezekiel replies that only God knows that.

Ezekiel 37:3	יחזקאל ל"ז:ג
[God] said to me [Ezekiel], "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I said, "O Lord God, [only] you know."	וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בֶּן־אָדָם הֲתַחְיֶינָה הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וַאֲמַר אֲדֹקִי ה' אַתָּה יִדְעָתָּ:

¹ Yemenites begin at 36:37. Ashkenazim and Sephardim began at 37:1.

² With emendations, all translations are from Sefaria.org. To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email haftarahhelper@gmail.com.

Verses 37:4-8: God commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones: God will make them live and breathe again by giving them tendons, flesh, and skin. After completing this prophecy, Ezekiel sees and hears the bones noisily join together, as well as the formation of their bodies. They do not breathe, however.

Ezekiel 37:6	יחזקאל ל"ז:ו
I will place sinews upon you [dry bones], bring up flesh upon you, cover you with skin, and give you breath [so that] you shall live. You shall know that I am the Lord.	וְנָתַתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם גִּידִים וְהֵעֵלַתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם בָּשָׂר וְקָרַמְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם עוֹר וְנָתַתִּי בְּכֶם רוּחַ וְחָיִיתֶם וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי ה':

Verses 37:9-11: God commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind, to come from all four directions to fill the slain (dead) bodies with breath so they will live. After the wind does so, a vast army of resuscitated people stands upon their feet. God tells Ezekiel that they are Israelites who thought they were dead, cut off, and without hope.

Ezekiel 37:11	יחזקאל ל"ז:יא
Then [God] said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are clean cut off.’ ”	וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בְּוֹאֲאֵלֶם הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה כָּל־בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל הִמָּה הִנֵּה אֲמָרִים יִבְשׁוּ עֲצָמוֹתֵינוּ וְאָבְדָה תִּקְוַתָּנוּ נִגְרַרְנוּ לָנוּ:

Verses 37:12-14: God commands Ezekiel to tell His people that He will open their exilic graves, transport them to the Land of Israel, and revive them there with His spirit. They will then know God fulfilled His promise to them.

Ezekiel 37:14	יחזקאל ל"ז:יד
“I [God] shall put my spirit in you [the exiles], and you shall live, and I shall place you upon your land. You shall [then] know that I am the Lord [for] I have spoken, and acted [accordingly],” says the Lord.	וְנָתַתִּי רוּחִי בְּכֶם וְחָיִיתֶם וְהִנַּחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם עַל־אֲדָמְתְּכֶם וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי ה' דִּבַּרְתִּי וַעֲשִׂיתִי נְאֻם־ה':

Connections

The second stanza of **Hatikvah**, Israel’s national anthem, **reverses the groan of the exiled Israel** in 37:11.

Hatikvah	התקווה
Our hope is not yet lost / The hope of two thousand years / To be a free nation in our land / The land of Zion and Jerusalem.	עוֹד לֹא אָבְדָה תִּקְוַתָּנוּ / הַתְּקוּהָה (בַּת) שָׁנוֹת אֶלְפִים / לִהְיוֹת עִם חֻפְשֵׁי בְּאֶרֶצְנוּ / אֶרֶץ צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם.

The Talmud records a dispute about whether the Haftarah records **a historical event or a prophetic vision**.

Sanhedrin 92b	סנהדרין צב:
R. Eliezer says: “The dead that Ezekiel revived stood on their feet, recited songs to God, and died.”... R. Yehuda says: “Truth, it was a parable.” R. Nehemya said to R. Yehuda: “If it was truth, why do you say ‘parable’, and if it was a parable, why do you say ‘truth’? Rather: ‘In truth, it was a parable.’” R. Eliezer, son of R. Yosei HaGelili, says: “The dead whom Ezekiel revived ascended to Israel, married wives, and fathered sons and daughters.” R. Yehuda, son of Beteira, stood on his feet and said: “I am one of their descendants, and these are <i>tefillin</i> that my father’s father left me of theirs.”	ר"א אומר מתים שהחיה יחזקאל עמדו על רגליהם ואמרו שירה ומתו ... ר' יהודה אומר אמת משל היה. אמר לו רבי נחמיה אם אמת למה משל ואם משל למה אמת אלא באמת משל היה ר"א בנו של ר' יוסי הגלילי אומר מתים שהחיה יחזקאל עלו לארץ ישראל ונשאו נשים והולידו בנים ובנות. עמד ר"י בן בתירא על רגליו ואמר אני מבני בניהם והללו תפילין שהניח לי אבי אבא מהם.