

Haftarah Helper 5781: Sukkot

Zachary Beer (Nachshon Project Fellow, The City College of New York) and
Barry Kornblau (Rabbi, Young Israel of Hollis Hills-Windsor Park, Queens, NY)

Sukkot commemorates forty years of God's care for His people in the wilderness after redeeming them from Egypt; its Haftarat carry that theme forward in history. One of its Haftarat recounts the peaceful, political culmination of that redemption 480 years later with Solomon's building of the Temple (see below)¹. Its other two Haftarat - Day 1 (below), and Shabbat Chol Hamoed (not read this year) - relate to His apocalyptic, providential redemption of His people from amidst their enemies.

Day 1- Zechariah 14:1-21

Living in the early Second Temple period, the prophet Zechariah predicted many apocalyptic events, including a horrific plague, the blooming of the land of Israel, and more. His final prophecy recounts God's victorious battle for Israel against its enemies. After their defeat on a day that is "neither day nor night", the remaining nations will celebrate Sukkot in a renewed Jerusalem along with the Jewish people, ultimately recognizing God's rule over the entire world.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 1-5: God will fight in an apocalyptic battle of Jerusalem...

Zechariah 14:3	זכריה י"ד:ג
The Lord shall go forth and wage war with those nations, like the day he waged war on the day of the battle.	וַיֵּצֵא ה' וְנִלְחָם בַּגּוֹיִם הַהֵם כְּיוֹם הַלְחָמֹו בְּיוֹם קָרֵב:

Verses 6-7: ... on a day which is "neither day nor night".

Zechariah 14:7	זכריה י"ד:ז
It shall be one day that shall be known to the Lord, neither day nor night; and it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light.	וְהָיָה יוֹם־אֶחָד הוּא וְיָדַע לָהּ לֹא־יוֹם וְלֹא־לַיְלָה וְהָיָה לְעֶת־עֶרֶב יְהִי־אֹר:

Verses 8-11: After the battle, Jerusalem will be renewed and dwell in safety, under God's kingship.

Zechariah 14:11	זכריה י"ד:יא
They shall dwell therein, and there shall be no more destruction; but Jerusalem shall dwell in safety.	וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בָּהּ וְחָרֵם לֹא יְהִי־עוֹד וַיֵּשְׁבָה יְרוּשָׁלַם לְבִטָּח:

¹ The Haftarah of the 1st day of Shemini Atzeret serves as a sequel to this Haftarah. So does the Talmud's designated Haftarah for its 2nd day (Megillah 31a), although nowadays, we read chapter 1 of Joshua instead.

Haftarah Breakdown (cont.)

Verses 12-15: All those who rise up against Jerusalem will perish from plague.

Zechariah 14:12	זכריה י"ד:י"ב
This shall be the plague with which the Lord will smite all the nations who besieged Jerusalem; his flesh will waste away while he stands on his feet; his eyes will waste away in their sockets, and his tongue shall waste away in his mouth.	וְזֹאת הַתְּהִיָּה הַמִּגַּפָּה אֲשֶׁר יִגַּף ה' אֶת-כָּל-הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר צָבְאוּ עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם הַמֶּמְקֵם בְּשָׂרָו וְהוּא עֹמֵד עַל-רַגְלָיו וְעֵינָיו תִּמְקְנָה בְּחַרְיָהוּן וְלִשׁוֹנוֹ תִמְקַם בְּפִיהֶם:

Verses 16-21: However, the survivors will celebrate Sukkot along with the Jewish people.

Zechariah 14:16	זכריה י"ד:ט"ז
And it will come to pass that everyone left of the nations who came up against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to prostrate to the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to celebrate the festival of Tabernacles.	וְהָיָה כָּל-הַנוֹתָר מִכָּל-הַגּוֹיִם הַבָּאִים עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם וְעָלוּ מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְמֶלֶךְ ה' צָבָאוֹת וְלַחַג אֶת-חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת:

Connections

As part of a complex discussion about the minimum height of a sukkah wall, the Talmud powerfully envisions God's physical presence touching Earth as imagined by Zechariah in the Haftarah. However, it concludes that **even His spiritual presence ("Shechinah") never enters man's domain in the physical world.**

Sukkah 5a	סוכה ה עמוד א
...But is it not (Zechariah 14:4) written, "On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" [and so the Talmud's earlier assertion that His spiritual presence always remains at least ten handbreadths above Earth's surface is incorrect]? [No: the Shechinah will be] ten handbreadths above the ground.	והכתיב (זכריה יד, ד) ועמדו רגליו ביום ההוא על הר הזיתים למעלה מעשרה טפחים

Verse 9 of the Haftarah is used across Jewish liturgy. It is quoted in "**Aleinu**", among other prayers.

Siddur Ashkenaz, Weekday, Shacharit, Concluding Prayers, Aleinu	סידור אשכנז, ימי חול, תפילת שחרית, סיום תפילה, עלינו
We therefore hope unto You, the Lord our God, to soon behold the glory of Your might banishing idols from the earth. The false gods will be utterly cut off, to perfect the world as the kingdom of God.... And it is said (Zechariah 14:9): "And the Lord shall become King over all the earth. On that day shall the Lord be one, and His name one."	עַל כֵּן נִקְוָה לָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְרִאיוֹת מְהֵרָה בְּתַפְאֲרַת עֲזָרְךָ לְהַעֲבִיר גְּלוּלִים מִן הָאָרֶץ וְהָאֱלִילִים כְּרוֹת יִכְרְתֵנּוּ לְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם בְּמַלְכוּת שְׂדֵי... וְנֹאמַר וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בְּיוֹם הַהוּא יְהִיָּה ה' אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶחָד:

Day 2- 1 Kings 8:2-21

King Solomon inaugurated the First Temple on Sukkot, as stated in the opening verse of Sukkot's second haftarah:

I Kings 8:2	מלכים א ח:ב
And all the men of Israel assembled unto King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim ² , which (is) the seventh month.	וַיִּקְהָלוּ אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה כָּל־אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיַרְחַ הָאֲתָנִים בְּחָג הוּא הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי:

With celebration and sacrifices, the King gathers the people to place the Ark in the Holy of Holies, thereby “moving” God’s presence into His “home.” God’s presence appears, but its power prevents the priests from serving in the Temple. In response, Solomon prays that the Temple that he built, in the stead of his father David, be accepted as God’s true dwelling place.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verse 2-5: Solomon gathers the people to inaugurate the Temple.

I Kings 8:5	מלכים א ח:ה
King Solomon, and the entire congregation of Israel assembled unto him, [were] with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen that could neither be counted nor numbered [due to their] multitude.	וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה וְכָל־עַדְתֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנוֹעֲדִים עָלָיו אִתּוֹ לִפְנֵי הָאָרוֹן מִזְבְּחִים צֹאן וּבָקָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִסְפְּרוּ וְלֹא יִמְנוּ מֵרֹב:

Verses 6-9: The priests place Ark in the Temple.

I Kings 8:6	מלכים א ח:ו
The priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, into the Sanctuary of the House, to the Holy of Holies, under the wings of the cherubim.	וַיָּבֹאוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת־אָרוֹן בְּרִית־ה' אֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ אֶל־דְּבִיר הַבַּיִת אֶל־קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדָשִׁים אֶל־תַּחַת כְּנָפֵי הַכְּרוּבִים:

Verses 10-11: God’s presence fills the Temple, but it is too overwhelming.

I Kings 8:11	מלכים א ח:יא
The priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.	וְלֹא־יָכְלוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים לַעֲמֹד לְשֵׁרֵת מִפְּנֵי הָעָנָן כִּי־מָלֵא כְבוֹד־ה' אֶת־בַּיִת ה' (פ)

Verses 12-13: Solomon’s initial prayer to God, that his Temple be sufficient.

I Kings 8:12-13	מלכים א ח:יב-יג
Then Solomon said, "The Lord said that He would dwell in the thick darkness. I have surely built You a house to dwell in; a settled place for You to dwell in forever."	אָז אָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה ה' אָמַר לְשֹׁן בְּעֵרְפָל: בְּנֵה בְּנִיתִי בַּיִת זָבֵל לְךָ מְכוּן לְשִׁבְתְּךָ עוֹלָמִים:

²Biblical months are counted from Nisan. Ethanim is an ancient name for the seventh month, now known as Tishrei. See Rashi on this topic, https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_I_Kings.8.2.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

Haftarah Breakdown (cont.)

Verses 14-19: God refused King David's request to build God's house, promising him that his son would do so.

I Kings 8:15-16	מלכים א ח:ט"ו-ט"ז
He [Solomon] said, "Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, Who spoke with His mouth unto David, my father, and has fulfilled it with His hand, saying: 'Since the day that I brought forth My people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house, that My name might be therein; but I chose David to be over My people Israel.'"	וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּפִיו אֶת דְּוִד אָבִי וַיַּבְדִּי מִלֵּא לֵאמֹר: מִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־עַמִּי אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם לֹא־בִחַרְתִּי בְעִיר מִכָּל־שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבִנוֹת בַּיִת לַיהוָה שְׁמִי שֵׁם וְאֶבְחַר בְּדָוִד לַיהוָה עַל־עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Verses 20-21: Solomon indeed built the Temple, fulfilling the Divine promise to his father, David.

I Kings 8:20	מלכים א ח:כ
The Lord has established His word that He spoke. I have risen up in the place of David my father. I sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord spoke, and have built a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel.	וַיִּקֶּם ה' אֶת־דְּבָרֹו אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וְאָקֶם תַּחַת דְּוִד אָבִי וַאֲשַׁב עַל־כַּפְּאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכָאֶשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' וְאֶבְנֶה הַבַּיִת לַשֵּׁם ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Connections

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, current Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Har Bracha and author of the Peninei Halacha series, relates the clouds that filled the Temple to the [process of Divine revelation](#).

Peninei Halakhah, Days of Awe 10	
To grasp the meaning of this cloud of incense smoke, one must first realize that this was patterned on how God revealed Himself to Israel – in the opacity of the cloud... The cloud connotes an exalted and sublime divine revelation, beyond human comprehension. Yet through the fog and cloud, one can reach an understanding of the divine, albeit only partially, in accordance with his capabilities...when the First Temple was dedicated, we read, "The kohanim brought the Ark of the Lord's Covenant to its place underneath the wings of the keruvim, in the Shrine of the House, in the Kodesh Ha-kodashim.... When the kohanim came out of the Kodesh, the cloud had filled the House of the Lord, and the kohanim were unable to stand and serve because of the cloud, for the Presence of the Lord filled the House of the Lord" (1 Melakhim 8:6, 11). First was a sublime, exalted revelation that no human being could endure, and only afterward, from within the cloud and fog, would the divine idea become revealed gradually, according to the abilities of the kohanim.	

The talmudic Rabbi Eliezer identifies the [biblical name of Tishrei](#) with its greater history.

Rosh Hashanah 11a	ראש השנה י"א עמוד א
Rabbi Eliezer says: "From where [in the Bible can one see that] in Tishrei the Patriarchs were born? As [I Kings 8:2] states: 'And all the men of Israel assembled unto King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim [the mighty ones], which (is) the seventh month.,' [Tishrei.] It is the month in which the mighty ones of the world [the Patriarchs] were born."	ר"א אומר מנין שבתשרי נולדו אבות שנא' (מלכים א ח, ב) ויקהלו אל המלך שלמה כל איש ישראל בירח האיתנים בחג ירח שנולדו בו איתני עולם

With emendations, biblical translations are by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg and other translations are from Sefaria.org.

To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email zbeer570@gmail.com.