HAFTARAH 2 FOR AHAREI MOT / K'DOSHIM

EZEKIEL 22:1-19 (Ashk'nazim)
EZEKIEL 22:1-16 (S'faridim)

(For instructions for Ashk'nazim, see the introduction to the previous haftarah. S'faridim recite this haftarah with Aharei Mot, and the next haftarah with K'doshim.)

In this haftarah the prophet Ezekiel addresses the city Jerusalem as “the city of bloodshed,” accusing Jerusalem for “all her abhorrent deeds” (v. 2). These sins, listed in clusters, focus on moral and sexual crimes in family and society, with special emphasis on the oppression of socially dependent and powerless individuals. The prophet also charges the city with desecrating Shabbat and the sacral offices. For Ezekiel, the city symbolizes the outrages committed by all the people, judging them as a whole. This passage is dated sometime after Ezekiel’s deportation to Babylon in 597 B.C.E. and before 587–586, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the general population was exiled to Babylon.

In his role as God’s prosecutor, Ezekiel accuses the people of crimes specified in the Torah, showing familiarity with a wide range of rules from the Covenant Code (Exod. 21–23), and especially from the Holiness Code (Lev. 18–20), as well as various laws from Deuteronomy. Thus the prophet’s speech testifies to formulations of the laws of the Torah from the early 6th century B.C.E.

This was long before Ezra’s return from the exile and the beginning of the canonization of the Torah in the 5th century B.C.E.

The detailed list of sins reinforces the prophet’s assertion that the people were utterly deserving of divine punishment. This accounts for Ezekiel’s specification of moral misdemeanors from the legal collections cited above. Alongside these faults the prophet specifies violations drawn from earlier priestly traditions, including contempt for Shabbat and the holy offerings, and improper sexual relations.

Undoubtedly there was a basis for these accusations. But their comprehensive and schematic character should be taken into account in any assessment of the religious and moral state of the nation at the time. Ezekiel does not limit his critique to issues of ritual impurity, but absolutely condemns immoral and inconsistent uses of power as well.

For such actions, the people are condemned to exile, where in due course their suffering and “dis-honor” will “consume the impurity” from them (15–16). The polluting effect of idolatry and sexual misconduct is found elsewhere in Ezekiel (see 5:11, 20:7, 18, 31). The prophet’s inclusion of moral and civil behavior in his judgment of impurity is also found in priestly sources (Num. 35:33–34). Nevertheless, Ezekiel’s comprehensive emphasis is noteworthy, as is his view of the punishment of exile as purification through suffering. On this note of judgment (22:16) the haftarah concludes according to Sephardic tradition.

Ashk’nazim traditionally add three more verses to conclude the haftarah with a message of hope (22:17–19). Ezekiel here extends the imagery of purification found in verse 15, offering the good news of restoration to the homeland. This message of the haftarah represents a remarkable and radical transformation of scripture by the Sages, for 22:17–22 constitutes an outright oracle of doom, in which God condemns Israel as “dross” and announces that He will gather them together in Jerusalem and melt them in the fire of His fury. The Sages, determining which verses would constitute the haftarah, decided to stop the prophecy of doom at verse 19. Their truncated passage gives the impression that God will transform the sinful dross of His people in exile, to restore them to Jerusalem in their new and purified state. It is this positive word that prevailed when rabbinic tradition radically transformed the teaching of God’s
The prophecy of hope that concludes the haftarah is thus a revelation of Jewish hope and its triumph over despair—even against the divine dooms of scripture.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

This haftarah stresses cultic and moral sins, many of which are directly connected to laws found in both parashiyyot. There is a clear link to the sexual prohibitions of Lev. 18 (Aharei Mot) and Lev. 20 (K'doshim). The prophet's diatribe also echoes passages found in Lev. 19 (K'doshim), including detailed similarities such as the profanation of Shabbat (Lev. 19:3; Ezek. 22:8), the economic oppression of compatriots (Lev. 19:13; Ezek. 22:12), and base activities leading to bloodshed (Lev. 19:16; Ezek. 22:9).

22 The word of the Lord came to me: Further, O mortal, arraign, arraign the city of bloodshed; declare to her all her abhorrent deeds! Say: Thus said the Lord God: O city in whose midst blood is shed, so that your hour is approaching; within which fetishes are made, so that you have become impure! You stand guilty of the blood you have shed, defiled by the fetishes you have made. You have brought on your day; you have reached your year. Therefore I will make you the mockery of the nations and the scorn of all the lands. Both the near and the far shall scorn you, O besmirched of name, O laden with iniquity!

Ezekiel 22:2. arraign, arraign In Hebrew, this is literally a question: “Will you arraign?” A verb repeated at the outset of a prophetic speech (see also Ezek. 20:4) gives it emphatic force, yielding the meaning here: “Surely you will arraign!”

3. fetishes Hebrew: gillulim, meaning “idols.” Abravanel suggests that this is a metaphor for “all the other sins” besides bloodshed that the people have committed.

The instruction in Aharei Mot, stressing the point that observing the laws of the Covenant is something one lives in and through (Lev. 18:5), raises living by the laws of the Torah into a spiritual principle. This haftarah, in contrast, teaches that immorality vitiates and perverts the life and spirit of the perpetrator and of the victim, by emphasizing the point that maltreatment of the poor and needy is an act of bloodshed.

By presenting sin as an act of defilement, both this haftarah and the two parashiyyot present the Covenant as a means of purity or sanctification, for the earth and for its inhabitants. In this way, all actions prescribed by the Covenant constitute a kind of priestly service, transforming the mere natural into acts of holiness and the mere human into spiritual life.

5. O besmirched of name Alternatively, this phrase is the derogatory epithet spoken against them by the surrounding gentiles (Rashi).
midst used his strength for the shedding of blood. 7 Fathers and mothers have been humiliated within you; strangers have been cheated in your midst; orphans and widows have been wronged within you. 8 You have despised My holy things and profaned My sabbaths.

9 Base men in your midst were intent on shedding blood; in you they have eaten upon the mountains; and they have practiced depravity in your midst. 10 In you they have uncovered their fathers’ nakedness; in you they have ravished women during their menstrual impurity.

11 They have committed abhorrent acts with other men’s wives; in their depravity they have defiled their own daughters-in-law; in you they have ravished their own sisters, daughters of their fathers. 12 They have taken bribes within you to shed blood. You have taken advance and accrued interest; you have defrauded your countrymen to your profit. You have forgotten Me—declares the Lord God.

13 Lo, I will strike My hands over the ill-gotten gains that you have amassed, and over the bloodshed that has been committed in your midst. 14 Will your courage endure, will your hands remain firm in the days when I deal with you? I the Lord have spoken and I will act. 15 I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the lands; I will consume the impurity out of you. 16 You shall be dishonored in the sight of nations, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

17 The word of the Lord came to me: 18 O mortal, the House of Israel has become dross to Me; they are all copper, tin, iron, and lead. But in

10-11. The prophet details various sexual offenses (incest, adultery, and cohabitation with a menstruating woman). In terms of both its technical vocabulary and its use of the third person, this legal cluster follows Lev. 20:10-18. 14. I the Lord have spoken and I will act Promise and fulfillment are linked. Alternatively, “I am YHVH; what I have spoken I will do!” (Greenberg).

16. you shall be dishonored Hebrew: v'ni'lahi bakh; a term linked to ritual desecration (see v. 8, and Lev. 18:21, 19:8).

18. dross Hebrew: sig, meaning unclear. Possibly it refers to an alloy of lead and silver. In this 11). They are further told that “I gave them My
22:19 Haftarah 2 for Aharei Mot/K'doshim

HAFTARAH
2
FOR
AJ:1AREI
MOT/
K'DOSHIM

19 As surely as the Lord God says: Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem.

19

A crucible, the dross shall turn into silver. 19 As surely as the Lord God says: Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem.

figurative expression, the people who are "dross" will be refined in fire as a punishment. (In reality, dross is the scum that forms on the surface of molten metal during the process of liquefying.) For Ezekiel, the melting fire is both a proving of the people's guilt and their punishment.

Every one of the princes of Israel was there, every one and his man. O house of Israel, you have sold yourselves by all your iniquities.

Ezekiel 22:19

This is literally a question: Will you exercise justice (measuring fairness)? It is not fulfilled in the sense of a moral imperative, as the word is here used. The phrase, therefore, seems to be a rhetorical question, asking whether the people will do justice to one another, or whether they will continue to oppress and wrong each other as they have done in the past.

The people of Israel have sold themselves to their own iniquities, and have become dross. Therefore, the Lord God says: Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem.

The Israelites have sold themselves to their own iniquities, and have become dross. Therefore, the Lord God says: Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem.

The people of Israel have sold themselves to their own iniquities, and have become dross. Therefore, the Lord God says: Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem.

The people of Israel have sold themselves to their own iniquities, and have become dross. Therefore, the Lord God says: Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem.

The people of Israel have sold themselves to their own iniquities, and have become dross. Therefore, the Lord God says: Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem.

The people of Israel have sold themselves to their own iniquities, and have become dross. Therefore, the Lord God says: Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem.
The verses of this haftarah (from 591 B.C.E.) are part of a long sermonic retrospective on Israel’s sinful past and present that concludes with prophecies of restoration.

God commands Ezekiel to call the people to account: “Arraign, arraign them” (v. 4). In Hebrew, this command is in the form of a double question—“Will you arraign them, will you arraign?”—which has the effect of an urgent direct request to “arraign” them. In calling them to account, the prophet is commanded to declare to them (literally, “make known” to them) the details of their sins as a people in the past (v. 4). To counterpoint this derogatory information, the prophet uses the same verb to indicate God’s past favor in having made Himself “known” to the Israelites and to the Egyptians (vv. 5, 9).

As a further expression of beneficence, God also “made known” His law to the nation (v. 11) and even gave them the holy Shabbat so that they might “know” Him (vv. 12, 20). By such linguistic emphasis Ezekiel drives home the point that Israel has been a historical ingrate and that the stress on their sins is appropriate because of their ongoing apostasy.

The prophet shows himself to be well versed in Torah traditions. For example, Ezekiel recalls the Israelite rebellion in the wilderness and God’s subsequent decision not to “make an end of them” (‘ikhalatam, v. 13) so that His name would “not be profaned” (heipel) among the nations (v. 14). This, too, recalls a passage in the Torah: The sin of the Golden Calf and God’s initial statement that “I may destroy them” (vu-akhallem) in the wilderness, although He subsequently relented owing to Moses’ entreaty (va-y’hal) for forgiveness (Exod. 32:10–12). Significantly, Ezekiel does not refer to Moses’ intervention here or to Moses’ response to God’s decision to destroy the people after their lack of faith in His ability to bring them to the Land. In his sermon, Ezekiel repeatedly and solely portrays mercy as a unilateral divine act.

Yet the people deserve punishment for their continuous sin and rebellion in the past, as pointed out in vv. 7–8 and 11–13. Ezekiel, in his closing exhortation, refers to a second divine appeal to the nation in the wilderness—urging a new generation to reject the ways of their ancestors and to observe God’s laws and sanctify Shabbat (vv. 18–20). Here, again, the choice is between the defilement of idolatry and rebelliousness versus the sanctifying power of divine instruction.

This conclusion produces a new teaching. In its original setting, Ezek. 20:18–20 is but another exhortation, urging the people to obey the laws before presenting another account of their rebellion and sin. The ancient Sages decided not to include in this, haftarah the people’s negative response found in subsequent verses. With this decision they transformed Ezekiel’s historical arraignment into a divine instruction for all generations, not limited to the people of biblical times.

Thus Ezekiel’s prophetic word is transformed from an old lawsuit into an ever-new summons to heed and obey the Covenant.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

Like Moses, Ezekiel emphasizes the centrality of God’s law and the divine sanctification of the people by and through it. At the outset of the parashah, Moses speaks for God in calling on the people to “be holy” and to “keep My sabbaths” (Lev. 19:2–3). Thereupon a pattern of behavior is specified as leading to holiness in God’s sight. This theme recurs at the end of the parashah, when God instructs the people: “You shall faithfully observe My laws; I the Lord make you holy” (Lev. 20:8). Ezekiel, correspondingly, repeats God’s instruction that the people “Follow My laws and be careful to observe My rules” (Ezek. 20:19, cf. v. 11). They are further told that “I gave them My