

פרשת חודש

Ezekiel, chapter 45, verse 16 to chapter 46, verse 18

Introduction

Connection of haftarah and sidra:

The Shabbat derives its name from the additional selection read from the Torah, which begins: "This month (Hebrew, *Ha-chodesh ha-zeh*) ... shall be the first of the months of the year for you."¹ The month of Nisan marks the liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery, and on the eve of its fifteenth day the festival of Passover is celebrated by a special offering.

The haftarah brings us Ezekiel's vision of the sacrifices to be offered in anticipation and observance of the festival that will take place in the new Temple, after the people have returned from captivity.

The setting:

Ezekiel lived in the days before and after the destruction of the First Temple and preached in the early part of the 6th century B.C.E. He was exiled to Babylon and, like the Second Isaiah after him, foresaw the day when the captives would be restored to their homeland.

For more on Ezekiel and his time, see our *General Introduction*.

The message:

The Prophet's message gave our traditional interpreters great difficulty. They asked: what kind of Temple did Ezekiel have in mind? If it was the actual edifice that was to be erected once the Jews returned to their homeland, then this was new legislation, since it was not mentioned in the Torah and, in fact, significantly differed from it. For that reason, some argued that one should understand Ezekiel's words as prophecies for a Third Temple, which would be built only when the Messiah comes.

Others were not satisfied and suggested that the book of Ezekiel should not be taught publicly because it contravened the Torah. Indeed, certain restrictions became customary with regard to reading it, especially chapter 1, with its mystical vision of the heavenly chariot (on this, see the haftarah for the first day of Shavuot).²

The haftarah belongs to the last nine chapters of the book (which contain the Prophet's vision of the rebuilt Temple) and begins in the middle of the 45th chapter. Its first part starts with a description of the location of the Temple, then proceeds to a reminder that moral behavior must be a cornerstone of the rebuilding, but also, once the Temple is rebuilt, that its ritual must take certain forms.