

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler

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It's Not Just About Purity

**PARA - 33 p'sukim
- Yechezkeil 36:16-38**

S'faradim end 2 p'sukim earlier

Chazal instituted the reading of Para Aduma (Red Heifer) during the time that the Beit HaMikdash stood in Yerushalayim. It was during that time that we were obligated to bring the Korban Pesach and, for that reason, our ancient scholars found it proper to institute this Maftir reading some weeks before Pesach. There, the Torah details the purification ritual, reminding the nation to retain a state of purity, thereby allowing them to partake in the mitzva of Korban Pesach. Chazal saw it fitting, therefore, to have the thirty-sixth perek of Sefer Yechezkel read on each Shabbat Para, as it too, focuses upon the purification ritual, albeit, one that will take place in the future.

Interestingly, Yechezkel tells us that the ritual that will be followed during the era of the Third Temple will reflect the ritual that is used to purify only those who were "infected" with the highest level of tum'a, impurity.

The ritual requiring sprinkling of the purifying waters is depicted in the Torah only in our maftir reading (Bamidbar 19:1-20) where its use is limited only for those contaminated with TUM'AT MEIT, any direct association with the dead. The navi's prophecy of such a procedure reflects a reality that, in the future, the entire nation would be regarded as having been defiled by the highest level of impurity!

But we would be mistaken were we to see the reading simply as the process of purification alone. Doing so, would have us ignore the most impactful section of the haftara. For, in the second section of the Yechezkel's prophecy, the navi describes the impact of this "purification process". Consider the following prophecies:

- "...the nations shall know that I am Hashem... as I will be sanctified through you" [24]
- "I will gather you from the all the countries and bring you to your land [25]
- "...and you will dwell in the land that I gave to your ancestors..." [28]
- "And I will multiply the grain and never decree a famine upon you" [29-30]
- "...the day I purify you from your sins, I shall resettle the cities and the ruins will be built up" [33]

• "The desolate land will be worked... in the sight of all who pass by" [34]

• "And they will say: 'The land that was once desolate has become like the Garden of Eden and the cities that were destroyed...have become settled and fortified'...!" [35]

• "The nations who remain around you will know that I, Hashem, have built up the ruins and planted the desolate... I, Hashem, have spoken - and I will perform it!!" [36]

No, my friends. Do not see this haftara as a simple depiction of a procedure for purifying the impure of tomorrow. NOT AT ALL! Yechezkel's nevu'a is more than an echo of past ritual... It is the reality of the future... OUR future in which we live today! It is for this reason that I urge you to listen to the haftara as it is being chanted, carefully read its words as they are pronounced and ponder the prophetic message that it meant to share with us.

Perhaps, while considering the significance the prophet's cries you will imagine Yechezkel looking down upon our land and our people from on high and saying; "I told you! I told you so!"

I certainly see just that! ✨