YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Understanding the haftarot**

**By Harav Yaakov Medan**

**SHABBAT HA-CHODESH**

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**Dedicated *le-zekher nishmot* Morris Ray and Amelia Ray, on the occasion of their 16th *yahrzeits*, by their children Patti and Allen Ray**

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All the people of the land shall give this contribution to the prince of Israel. And it shall be the prince's duty to provide burnt offerings and grain offerings and libations on festivals, New Moons, and Sabbaths; at all the times appointed for the House of Israel, he shall prepare the purification offering and the grain offering and the burnt offering and the peace offering to provide atonement for the House of Israel.

Thus says the Lord God: In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull with no blemish to purify the Sanctuary. And the priest shall take from the blood of this purification offering and put it on the doorposts of the House, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the doorpost of the gate of the inner courtyard. And so shall you do on the seventh day of the month for anyone who has sinned by mistake or due to ignorance: thus you shall provide atonement for the House. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall bring the Passover sacrifice, for a festival of seven days, unleavened bread shall be eaten. On that day the prince shall prepare a bull as a purification offering for himself and for all the people of the land. And on every one of the seven days of the festival he shall prepare a burnt offering to the Lord: seven bulls and seven rams with no blemish every day for seven days, and a daily purification offering consisting of one male goat. And he shall prepare a grain offering consisting of one ephah for each bull and one ephah for each ram and a hin of oil for each ephah. In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, during the festival, he shall prepare offerings just like those on the seven days: a similar purification offering, a similar burnt offering, and a similar grain offering, and a like amount of oil.

Thus says the Lord God: The gate of the inner courtyard that faces eastward shall be closed during the six days of labor, but on the Sabbath it shall be opened, and on the day of the New Moon it shall be opened. The prince shall enter from outside by way of the entrance hall of the gate and shall stand by the doorpost of the gate. The priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offering, and he shall bow down at the threshold of the gate and then leave, but the gate shall not be closed until the evening so that the ordinary people can also bow down before the Lord at the threshold of that gate on Sabbaths and New Moons. The burnt offering that the prince shall offer to the Lord on every Sabbath day consists of six lambs with no blemish and a ram with no blemish. And his accompanying grain offering shall be one ephah for the ram; as for the lambs, his grain offering shall be whatever he chooses to give as well as a hin of oil for each ephah of grain. And on the day of the New Moon his offering shall consist of a young bull with no blemish as well as six lambs and a ram, all without blemish. He shall prepare a grain offering of one ephah for the bull and one ephah for the ram; as for the lambs, his grain offering shall be whatever he chooses to give as well as a hin of oil for each ephah of grain. And when the prince comes, he shall enter by way of the entrance hall of the gate – and by way of it shall he exit. But when the people come before the Lord on festivals, a person who enters by way of the northern gate in order to bow down shall exit by the southern gate, and a person who enters by way of the southern gate shall exit by way of the northern gate. He shall not return by way of the gate through which he entered but shall exit through the one across from it. And the prince shall be among the people on those days: when they enter, he enters, and when they leave, they leave together. And on the festivals and at the appointed times the grain offering shall be an ephah for the bull, an ephah for the ram, and as for the lambs, whatever he chooses to give as well as a hin of oil for each ephah of grain.

Now, should the prince make a voluntary offering, a burnt offering or peace offering, voluntarily offered to the Lord on a weekday, the gate facing eastward shall be open for him, and he shall prepare his burnt offering or peace offering just as he would do on the Sabbath, but when he leaves, the gate will be closed after his exit. And you shall prepare a daily burnt offering to the Lord consisting of a lamb in its first year without blemish; you shall prepare it every morning. And you shall prepare a grain offering for it every morning: one-sixth of an ephah and one-third of a hin of oil to moisten the finely ground flour as a grain offering to the Lord: a perpetual, everlasting decree. Thus shall they prepare the lamb and the grain offering with the oil every morning as a regular burnt offering.

Thus says the Lord God: Should the prince give a gift to one of his sons, it is his estate that will belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance. But should he give a gift from his estate to one of his servants, the servant owns it until the year of freedom, when it returns to the prince, for his heritors are his sons: it belongs to them. This is so that the prince does not take anything from the people's inheritance, throwing them wrongfully out of their landholding. He shall pass his own landholding onto his sons so that My people will not be scattered, each ousted from his landholding. (*Yechezkel* 45:16 - 46:18)[[1]](#footnote-1)

**I. The Connection Between the *Maftir* (“*Ha-chodesh*”) and the *Haftara***

The *maftir* (*Shemot* 12:1-20) discusses the preparation of the Pesach sacrifice, which begins on the tenth day of Nisan and concludes on the fourteenth, the day it is offered. The *haftara* also deals with sacrifices brought during the month of Nisan – before Pesach and during the seven days of the festival[[2]](#footnote-2) – though the sacrifices it describes are different from those mentioned in the Torah. Various approaches have been taken to this discrepancy. The Gemara writes:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: In truth, that man, Chananya son of Chizkiya, is to be remembered for blessing: if not for him, the book of *Yechezkel* would have been hidden, for its words contradict the Torah. What did he do? Three hundred barrels of oil were taken up to him [to provide light and food], and he sat in an upper chamber and interpreted them [to reconcile the contradictions]. (*Shabbat* 13b)

The Rambam maintains that Yechezkel's prophecy is a temporary ruling for the inauguration offerings to be brought at the time of the dedication of the Third Temple; in his view, a prophet can issue a temporary ruling, not for all generations, even if it differs from what is stated in the Torah:

All of the measures of the accompanying offerings mentioned in the book of *Yechezkel*, the listing of the sacrifices, and the order of service written there are all inauguration offerings and will not be practiced in generations to follow. Instead, the prophet commanded and outlined how the inauguration offerings will be brought at the time of the dedication of the altar at the time of the coming of the Messianic king when the Third Temple will be built. (Rambam, *Hilkhot Ma'aseh Ha-korbanot* 2:14)

Rashi also explains that our *haftara* deals with the inauguration offerings that will be brought at the time of the dedication of the Temple, but in his opinion, we are dealing here with the dedication of the Second Temple, which is mentioned in the book of *Ezra*:

"They brought inauguration offerings [in the days of Ezra],” and this prophecy of *Yechezkel* was delivered regarding the Second Temple, when they brought inauguration offerings. (Rashi, *Menachot* 45a, s.v. *Rav Ashi amar*)

In my opinion, the most persuasive explanation is that of Y. Tz. Moskowitz (*Da'at Mikra*, *Yechezkel*), that the offerings mentioned in our chapter do not contradict what is stated in the Torah, but merely add to it the offerings brought by the prince. I will try to explain the descriptions in accordance with this approach.

**II. The Contribution to the Prince and the Prince’s Offerings**

The *haftara* begins in the middle of a discussion; its first verse, which mentions “this contribution,” is incomprehensible without reading the verses that precede it:

This is the contribution that you shall offer up: one-sixth of an ephah per homer of wheat and one-sixth of an ephah per homer of barley. The rule regarding oil: the *bat* is the measure of oil; you shall offer one-tenth of a *bat* out of the *kor*, which is a homer of ten *bat*, for ten *bat* make up a homer. And you shall offer one lamb out of two hundred from your flock in the well-watered pastureland of Israel. These shall serve as the grain offering and as the burnt offering and as the peace offering to atone for them, says the Lord God.

All the people of the land shall give *this contribution* to the prince of Israel. And it shall be the prince's duty to provide burnt offerings and grain offerings and libations on festivals, New Moons, and Sabbaths; at all the times appointed for the House of Israel, he shall prepare the purification offering and the grain offering and the burnt offering and the peace offering to provide atonement for the House of Israel. (45:13-17)

The contribution that the people of Israel were commanded to set aside for the prince is one-sixth of an ephah for every homer (= ten ephahs) of wheat; that is, one sixtieth of the wheat. A *bat* is a tenth of a homer, and the people must set aside a tenth of a *bat* for every homer; that is, one hundredth of the oil. So too they must set aside one lamb out of two hundred. The prince then uses their contributions to offer the communal offerings in the Temple on their behalf.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The prophet Yechezkel is unique in his description of special communal sacrifices that the prince offers, as part of his office, on the days when a *korban musaf* (additional offering) is brought. We can find allusion to this in the Torah – in the princes’ offerings during the dedication of the *Mishkan* (*Bamidbar* 7), and also in the fact that the *musaf* sacrifices of the festivals (which are similar to what we are talking about in our *haftara*) are discussed in the book of *Bamidbar*, which deals with the tribes, their princes, and the role of the *Mishkan* as the heart of the people of Israel, rather than in *Vayikra*, where the focus is onits being a unit of holiness distinct and separate from the people. On the main days on which *musaf* offerings are brought – the three pilgrimage festivals – the entire nation gathers at the Temple, and giving a place to the prince as the people’s representative in the offering of sacrifices makes a unique statement that is appropriate for the future and for the prophecy of Yechezkel. This is indicated in the chapter preceding our *haftara*:

The Lord said to me: This gate will stay shut; it shall not be opened, and no man may enter through it; because the Lord, God of Israel, entered through it, it shall remain closed. Regarding the prince: as prince, he will sit within it to eat bread before the Lord, arriving by way of the entrance hall of that gate and leaving the same way. (*Yechezkel* 44:2-3)

Yechezkel does not cancel the usual sacrifices, and it is possible that this is why the prophet can add to the sacrifices that the Torah commanded. As Radak writes: "Perforce, there will be something new in the sacrifices in the future." Alternatively, it is also possible to explain in accordance with the words of the Rambam cited above, that we are dealing here with a temporary ruling relevant specifically to the day of the dedication of the Temple, regarding which, as stated, the prophet can certainly intervene.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**III. The Sacrifices of the Month of Nisan, the Day of Pesach, and the Festival of *Matzot***

As mentioned, the prince's sacrifices are communal offerings, brought on behalf of the entire nation, which is why everyone must contribute to the fund from which they will be purchased:

Thus says the Lord God: In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull with no blemish to purify the Sanctuary. And the priest shall take from the blood of this purification offering and put it on the doorposts of the House, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the doorpost of the gate of the inner courtyard. And so shall you do on the seventh day of the month for anyone who has sinned by mistake or due to ignorance: thus you shall provide atonement for the House. (45:18-20)

The prince's offering in the name of the people is a bull sin-offering that similar in part to a *par he'elem davar,* the offering that is brought when the majority of the people of Israel carry out an errant decision of the Sanhedrin (see *Vayikra* 4:13-21), and in part to the goat sin-offering brought on Yom Kippur, as the Torah describes:

He shall then slaughter the goat for the people's purification [sin] offering, bring its blood inside the inner curtain, and do with it as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it on the cover and before the cover. In this way, he shall make atonement for the Sanctuary – from the impurity of the Israelites, from their rebellions and all their sins. And he shall do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is with them in the midst of their impurity. (*Vayikra* 16:15-16)

The prince's bull mentioned in our prophecy, which is brought on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, makes atonement for the more external places – for the entrance to the inner courtyard (the Israelite courtyard, which in the Second Temple was the Nikanor Gate), for the courtyard of the altar, which is the *sovev*, the ledge upon which the priests would walk when involved with the sacrifices on the altar (see discussion of the *haftara* for *Parashat Tetzaveh*), and for the entrance to the Sanctuary. This bull atones for the impurity of the Temple resulting from the intentional sins of the house of Israel, and on the seventh of Nisan, another bull is offered for the unintentional sins (v.20).

The prophet then describes sacrifices brought during the festival:

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall bring the Passover sacrifice, for a festival of seven days, unleavened bread shall be eaten. On that day the prince shall prepare a bull as a purification offering for himself and for all the people of the land. And on every one of the seven days of the festival he shall prepare a burnt offering to the Lord: seven bulls and seven rams with no blemish every day for seven days, and a daily purification offering consisting of one male goat. And he shall prepare a grain offering consisting of one ephah for each bull and one ephah for each ram and a hin of oil for each ephah. In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, during the festival, he shall prepare offerings just like those on the seven days: a similar purification offering, a similar burnt offering, and a similar grain offering, and a like amount of oil. (45:21-25)

Along with the Pesach offering, the prince offers a bull sin-offering for the entire people. On each of the seven days of the Festival of Matzot, he sacrifices seven bulls and seven rams as a burnt offering, and so too on the seven days of the Festival of Sukkot. This offering is similar to Bilam's offering to God (*Bamidbar* 23:1,14,29): "Bilam said to Balak, 'Build me seven altars here and prepare for me seven bulls and seven rams," but the prince's offerings were all brought on one altar, in the Temple. The similarity might express God's desire to bless Israel on Pesach and on Sukkot, just as He put words of blessing in Bilam's mouth. It may also be mentioned that Bilam's blessing dealt primarily with the establishment of the kingdom of Israel, and our prophecy similarly deals with the offerings brought by the prince.

It stands to reason that the goat sin-offering mentioned in the prophecy is the regular one that is offered with the *musaf* offerings brought on a festival, which according to the prophet’s innovation would be brought by the prince.[[5]](#footnote-5) The prince's sacrifices in the name of the people are brought specifically on the festivals, when all the people come to the Temple.

The meal offering in our *haftara* is very large relative to the offering – a full ephah for a bull or a ram, instead of three tenths of an ephah for a bull and two tenths for a ram. A hin of oil is added to the meal offering, which is a reduced amount of oil relative to the amount in the meal offering described in the Torah. It should be noted that the meal offering for the lambs mentioned in the continuation is a gift of the prince, and the prophet does not set its measure. The difference between what is stated in our prophecy and what is stated in the Torah requires the words of the Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yochanan in tractate *Menachot* (45a): "this section will be expounded in the future by Eliyahu."[[6]](#footnote-6)

**IV. The Laws of Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh**

Thus says the Lord God: The gate of the inner courtyard that faces eastward shall be closed during the six days of labor, but on the Sabbath it shall be opened, and on the day of the New Moon it shall be opened. The prince shall enter from outside by way of the entrance hall of the gate and shall stand by the doorpost of the gate. The priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offering, and he shall bow down at the threshold of the gate and then leave, but the gate shall not be closed until the evening so that the ordinary people can also bow down before the Lord at the threshold of that gate on Sabbaths and New Moons. The burnt offering that the prince shall offer to the Lord on every Sabbath day consists of six lambs with no blemish and a ram with no blemish. And his accompanying grain offering shall be one ephah for the ram; as for the lambs, his grain offering shall be whatever he chooses to give as well as a hin of oil for each ephah of grain. And on the day of the New Moon his offering shall consist of a young bull with no blemish as well as six lambs and a ram, all without blemish. He shall prepare a grain offering of one ephah for the bull and one ephah for the ram; as for the lambs, his grain offering shall be whatever he chooses to give as well as a hin of oil for each ephah of grain. And when the prince comes, he shall enter by way of the entrance hall of the gate – and by way of it shall he exit. (46:1-8)

The gate of the inner courtyard is the gate of the inner *azara*, where the altar stands (or the gate of the priestly courtyard, according to Radak). The people come to the Temple on Shabbat and on Rosh Chodesh, as is also mentioned by Yeshayahu (66:23): "And it will be – every New Moon, every Sabbath – all flesh will come to worship Me, so says the Lord." Therefore, the gate will be opened then for the prince, who brings the offerings of the people and stands at the doorpost of the gate of the inner courtyard to observe the sacrifices as they are being brought. The gate is also opened for all the people, so they can bow down through it from the outer court. On ordinary weekdays, those who come to the inner courtyard (the priests or a *metzora* at the time of his purification) can enter though the north or the south gate of the inner courtyard.[[7]](#footnote-7) The east gate, which is closed, and the entrance hall that leads to it, are reserved for the prince who brings his own sacrifices or those of the people. Through them he is present on the outside and watches the offerings that are brought by the priests, and so too with his personal offerings on a regular weekday:

Now, should the prince make a voluntary offering, a burnt offering or peace offering, voluntarily offered to the Lord on a weekday, the gate facing eastward shall be open for him, and he shall prepare his burnt offering or peace offering just as he would do on the Sabbath, but when he leaves, the gate will be closed after his exit. (46:12)

On Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, the gate will remain open until the evening, so the people who come to the outer gate can bow down through it toward the Sanctuary.

The prince's sacrifices in the name of the people on Shabbat (a ram and six sheep) and on Rosh Chodesh (the same, with the addition of a bull) are not mentioned in the Torah; they are unique to the prophecy of Yechezkel.

In addition to the daily offerings and the regular *musaf* offerings on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, and in addition to the offerings of the prince, the people come, as stated above, to bow down to God in the outer courtyard of the Temple. The inner courtyard is set aside for the offerings, and the prince goes there for that purpose with the people. One who enters to bow down before God must continue to the opposite gate of the outer courtyard, however, and not return to the gate through which he had entered:

But when the people come before the Lord on festivals, a person who enters by way of the northern gate in order to bow down shall exit by the southern gate, and a person who enters by way of the southern gate shall exit by way of the northern gate. He shall not return by way of the gate through which he entered but shall exit through the one across from it. And the prince shall be among the people on those days: when they enter, he enters, and when they leave, they leave together. (46:9-10)

**V. The Daily Offering**

And you shall prepare a daily burnt offering to the Lord consisting of a lamb in its first year without blemish; you shall prepare it every morning. And you shall prepare a grain offering for it every morning: one-sixth of an ephah and one-third of a hin of oil to moisten the finely ground flour as a grain offering to the Lord: a perpetual, everlasting decree. Thus shall they prepare the lamb and the grain offering with the oil every morning as a regular burnt offering. (46:13-15)

The sacrifice mentioned here is the daily morning offering. According to the Torah, its meal offering is a tenth of an ephah, whereas in our prophecy, it is a sixth of an ephah – as I wrote earlier, the meal offerings in *Yechezkel* are larger – but here the ratio between the oil and the flour is close to that of the Torah. The commentators (Rashi, Abravanel, and the Malbim) reconcile the contradiction, each in his own way, between the daily offering and its meal offering described here and how it is commanded in the Torah. I will not expand upon the matter, and will rely on the reader to investigate further.

**VI. The Prince’s Estate**

Thus says the Lord God: Should the prince give a gift to one of his sons, it is his estate that will belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance. But should he give a gift from his estate to one of his servants, the servant owns it until the year of freedom, when it returns to the prince, for his heritors are his sons: it belongs to them. This is so that the prince does not take anything from the people's inheritance, throwing them wrongfully out of their landholding. He shall pass his own landholding onto his sons so that My people will not be scattered, each ousted from his landholding. (46:16-18)

The prince's estate, in the re-division of the land of Israel and Jerusalem (*Yechezkel* 45:7), was intended both to increase his glory and to ensure that the story of Navot's vineyard, in which the king forcibly took the ancestral estate of one of his people, would not be repeated. Both above (45:8) and also here, mention is made of the prohibition for a prince to take of the people's property. The prophet also innovated for us here a law similar to "inheritance during the decedent's lifetime," regarding an estate that a prince gave to one of his sons, for inherited property is not removed from its recipient in the Jubilee year.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Unless otherwise specified, all references are to the book of *Yechezkel.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Torah distinguishes between the Festival of Pesach (the 14th of Nisan, the day of the Pesach sacrifice) and the the Festival of Matzot (from the 15th to the 21st of Nisan). In the prophecy in our *haftara*, and in *Chazal* as well, the seven days of the Festival of Matzotare also called Pesach*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Regarding a prince bringing sacrifices, see next note. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Perhaps there is room to suggest that Yechezkel prophesies here about the Hasmonean house, whose princes were priests and offered sacrifices, and thus the difficulty of a prince offering sacrifices is to a large extent resolved. It may be noted that the Torah also alludes to the princedom of the priests of the Second Temple Period in two places:

a. In the command regarding the *menora* in *Bamidbar* 8:1 – which, according to *Megilat Setarim* of Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon (cited by the Ramban in his commentary, ad loc.), alludes to the Chanuka of the Hasmonean house. (I expanded upon this in my book *Ki Karov Eilekha* on *Bamidbar*, pp. 127-132.)

b. In the blessing to Aharon and his sons, in the framework of the blessing of Levi, Moshe speaks of the victory of the priests over their enemies (*Devarim* 33:11): "Bless, O Lord, his vigor, and accept the work of his hands; crush the loins of his foes; let his enemies rise no more."

However, if we adopt this approach, we will have to distinguish between the prophecy in chapter 45, in which it appears in the plain sense of the text that the prince himself offers the sacrifices, and that which begins in chapter 46, which deals with a prince who is an ordinary Israelite – for chapter 46 states explicitly (verse 2) what is not stated in chapter 45, that the prince hands over his sacrifices to the priests. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As mentioned, perhaps the prince is a priest from the Hasmonean house who would in the future serve as a prince (or a king). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In my view, Eliyahu is Moshe’s successor, as mentioned in the book of *Malakhi* (3:22-23), and is a combination of prophet and Torah sage. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rashi compares this verse to what is stated above in Chapter 44 (1-3): "He brought me back by way of the outer gate of the Sanctuary that faces eastward, and it was closed. The Lord said to me: This gate will stay shut; it shall not be opened, and no man may enter through it; because the Lord, God of Israel, entered through it, it shall remain closed. Regarding the prince: as prince, he will sit within it to eat bread before the Lord, arriving by way of the entrance hall of that gate and leaving the same way." But according to the Mishna (*Middot* 4:2), there the reference is to the small southern door between the entrance hall (*Ulam*) and the Sanctuary (*Heikhal*): "The great gate had two small doors, one to the north and one to the south. By the one to the south no man ever went in, and concerning this the rule was distinctly laid down by the mouth of Yechezkel, as it is stated: 'The Lord said to me: This gate will stay shut; it shall not be opened, and no man may enter through it; because the Lord, God of Israel, entered through it, it shall remain closed.' He [the priest] took the key and opened the [northern] door and went in to the cell, and from the cell to the *Heikhal*."

 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)