

Haftarah

'These are the dimensions of the altar...'



'As for you, mortal, describe the temple to the house of Israel, and let them measure the pattern; and let them be ashamed of their iniquities.'

Ezekiel 43:10

Links

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (Ezekiel 43:10-27) accompanies the Torah portion *Tetzaveh*: Exodus 27:20—30:10.
- Both readings describe cultic details: in the wilderness Tabernacle (Torah) and in a future temple in the vision of Ezekiel (Haftarah).

Background

- Ezekiel, from a priestly family in the south (Judah), was a prophet caught up in the Babylonian exile of 587 BCE. This reading comes from a later section in Ezekiel which describes a vision of the new temple: Ezekiel is transported to Jerusalem, takes a tour of the future temple, and witnesses the temple rebuilt and filled with the Lord's glory.

Ponder

- *'And let them be ashamed of their iniquities'* (43:10). Ezekiel's vision would be of comfort to the Jewish population suffering through conquest and exile, but he continues to remind the people of the need for repentance.
- *Cubit*: the ancient world distinguished between a long cubit (approx. 52cm) and a short cubit (approx. 43-46cm).
- *'From the base on the ground'* (43:14). Literally, 'from the bosom of the earth.' Plaut notes that this expression reflects an ancient view of the altar extending to the depths of the earth, while its top (where the sacrifice took place) represents the heavens.
- *'Burnt offering'* (*olah*): the whole animal (minus the skin) was burnt; nothing was eaten. *'Peace offerings'* (*sh'lamin*—which is related to the Hebrew word *shalom*—also translated as 'offerings of wellbeing'): gifts brought to the altar as thanksgiving gifts.
- Following the Talmud (B. Sota 36a), the 11th century Torah scholar known as Rashi says that the reason the builders of the Second Temple did not follow Ezekiel's building plan was because of their sinful ways.
- *'Mortal'* (43:10). Hebrew: *ben Adam*. Literally: *'son of Adam.'* Mendel Hirsch (19th c. rabbi) interprets this to mean that Ezekiel and all Israel in the Diaspora (outside the Land) are to be 'priests to humanity,' witnessing to those worthy ideals that make a person most truly human.

Reflect

- Ponder the boldness of Ezekiel's vision—the detailed description, the direct language. Reflect, too, on your own capacity/willingness to ascribe to a bold vision for the future amidst difficulty and suffering, and the role of prayer, hope, scripture, community in that visionary experience.
- Name a visionary/prophet today who points you toward God's kingdom.

Bibliography: *Harper Collins Study Bible: NRSV* (NY, 1993); Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996). Scripture quotations: NRSV.

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