

When we review the various haftarot for the holiday of Pesach, we see the following:

First day of Pesach: Book of Joshua. Describes the second Pesach and the mobilization for the conquest of Canaan.

Second day of Pesach: 2 Kings. Tells the story of the discovery of the scroll of Deuteronomy. King Josiah proclaims the nationwide celebration of Pesach.

Seventh day of Pesach: 2 Samuel. David's hymn of praise for God's deliverance resonates with the Song of the Sea, Israel's deliverance from Pharaoh's army.

Chol HaMoed Shabbat Pesach: Ezekiel 37. The Parable of the Valley of Dry Bones.

Why is this haftarah, which doesn't even mention Pesach, recited today? Why is this haftarah different from the others?

Here is some historical context. In 597 BCE, Babylon invaded Judea and captured it. Many captives were sent into exile, including Ezekiel. His prophecies overall involved preaching to a despairing and shattered nation in defeat, teaching that HaShem would restore them to Judea. Indeed, in 538 BCE, the edict of Cyrus did just that and allowed the Judeans to return to Zion and rebuild the Temple.

The imagery of this parable/prophecy is among the most powerful in the Tanach. The defeated Judeans were likened

to a lifeless heap of dried bones. The essence of their mindset is quoted as saying AVDA TIKVATENU—we have lost all our hope. But HaShem commands through Ezekiel that this sorrowful collection of bones come to life, bone upon bone, with sinews and skin to complete the restitution. In a second message, HaShem commands Ezekiel to summon the 4 winds and give RUACH, the breath of life, to the lifeless resurrected bones. This is accomplished and the message is clear: the defeated and despairing people are brought back to life. The parable is a powerful illustration of TECHIYAT HAMATIM, the resurrection of the dead.

So why did CHAZAL choose this prophecy to read on Shabbat Chol HaMoed? It has parallels with the redemption from Egypt. The Jewish people were enslaved for 400 years. They were without hope, lifeless, devoid of spirit. We celebrate their redemption on Pesach. The rabbis saw this parable of the dry bones as the ultimate redemption, i.e. resurrection of the dead. Ezekiel promises in HaShem's name that he will redeem his people again.

And what about today, in our own time? When some of us were children, the Holocaust was in progress. Our people were in a hopeless situation, dealing with genocide and enslavement. No nations welcomed refugee Jews in their distress. Even in Mandatory Palestine, the White Paper of 1939 severely limited Jewish immigration. But the RUACH/spirit of Zionism saved many and ultimately provided a home for all who sought a haven in Israel. Today, we see a flourishing Jewish State with Jewish sovereignty within its borders. Our people are restored to Zion. The national anthem—HaTikva—The Hope— contains the words ODE LO

AVDA TIKVATENU We have not lost our hope, a conscious restatement of the despairing words in our Haftarah.

So we may interpret the parable in a variety of ways: Jewish fortunes have risen and fallen, but we persist. Let us celebrate our redemption from Egyptian slavery 3700 years ago, and our return to Zion 2500 years ago, and our current return to Zion 75 years ago. ODE LO AVDA TIKVATENU!!

Shabbat shalom and Chat Pesach Sameach!!!

SPK

4-2-23