

Rabbi Allen Schwartz

Haftarat Tzav: *The Temple of the Lord are These*

The *haftarah* of *Parashat Tzav* begins with an astonishing reversal of the topic of its Torah portion. *Parashat Tzav*, like *Parashat Vayikra* before it, lists a broad array of the instructions of the sacrificial order. Yirmiyahu dismantles a major component of that order in the very first verse of the *haftarah* by exhorting his people to eat their burnt offerings even though the Torah prohibits their consumption. He exhorts his people with the words:

“*Oloteikhem sefu al zivcheikhem ve-ikhlu basar*” – “Add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices, and eat the meat!”

The *olah* is called a burnt offering precisely because it is *not* eaten; it is totally consumed on the altar. Yet Yirmiyahu advises his people to eat *olot*. And if that was not enough, he continues with a diatribe against the sacrificial order that is unparalleled in *Tanakh*.

Yirmiyahu certainly would not be the only prophet who railed against the Israelites’ scrupulous attention to the detail of the sacrifices while ignoring the interpersonal laws of the Torah. Consider these exhortations:

‘What need have I of all your sacrifices?’ says the Lord. ‘I am sated with burnt offerings of rams, and suet of fatlings, and blood of bulls; and I have no delight in lambs and he-goats. That you come to appear before Me, who asked that of you? Trample My courts no more; bringing oblations is futile, incense is offensive to Me. New moon and Sabbath, proclaiming of solemnities, assemblies with iniquity, I cannot abide. Your new moons and fixed seasons fill Me with loathing; they are becoming a burden to Me, I cannot endure them... (*Yeshayahu* 1:11–14)

For I desire goodness, not sacrifice; obedience to God, rather than burnt offerings. (*Hoshea* 6:6)

I loathe, I spurn your festivals, I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies. If you offer Me burnt offerings – or your meal offerings – I will not accept them; I will pay no heed to your gifts of fatlings. (*Amos* 5:21–22)

Yet Yirmiyahu goes one step further in the second verse of our *haftarah*, where he explains why he feels the burnt offering might as well be eaten:

For when I freed your fathers from the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifice. But this is what I commanded them: Do My bidding, that I may be your God and you may be My people; walk only in the way that I enjoy upon you, that it may go well with you. (*Yirmiyahu* 7:22–23)

This is astonishing. How could this be a *haftarah* of a *parashah* that is fully dedicated to the sacrificial order?

The fact is that we rarely read it. *Parashat Tzav* in a non-leap year is almost always *Shabbat Ha-Gadol*, when we replace the regularly scheduled *haftarah* with the final words of Malakhi; and in a leap year it is almost always *Shabbat Parashat Zakhor*, which is read on the *Shabbat* just before *Purim* along with its own special *haftarah*. Incredibly, both these *haftarot* have sacrificial themes, as well.

The real answer to our dilemma, however, is in a close reading of Yirmiyahu's words. He said that God did not reveal anything about sacrifices to our ancestors *on the day* He brought them out of Egypt. This is technically true. While we were certainly told to commemorate the redemption from Egypt with a paschal offering, this did not constitute a sacrificial order. That would have to wait until the command to construct a sanctuary at the end of *Sefer Shemot*, as well as the commandments in *Sefer Vayikra* which teach us how to serve in the Sanctuary. In fact, there is a broad corpus of law interrupting the redemption from Egypt and the eight weekly Torah portions dedicated to the sacrificial order. That corpus of law is contained in *Parashat Mishpatim*. The Torah gave primacy to the interpersonal laws of *Parashat Mishpatim*, ahead of the laws of the sacrifices that would follow. Thus, technically speaking, Yirmiyahu is correct. *The day* we left Egypt, we did not receive a Divine directive regarding sacrifices.¹ The order of the law in the aftermath of our redemption shows how misled and mistaken the Israelites in Yirmiyahu's time had become with regards to their prioritization of Jewish law.

R. Efraim Linschitz, in his commentary, *Keli Yakar*, ingeniously derives this message from the very first verse of *Parashat Mishpatim*.

"Ve-eileh ha-mishpatim asher tasim lifneyhem" –
"And these are the statutes that you shall place before them."

The simple reading of *"lifneyhem"* is "before the Israelites"; however, *Keli Yakar*, in his homiletic style, renders the word to mean "before the section of *korbanot*" which follows. The *Keli Yakar* explains that the Torah consciously taught the statutes in *Parashat Mishpatim* *before* the sacrifices in the next eight *parashiyot*. This is also manifest in the fact that the fourth order of the *Mishnah*, *Nezikin*, which teaches interpersonal law, precedes the fifth, which teaches sacrificial law.

The lesson to be learned from this is clear: There can be no holiness or purity in Israel if we are not in observance of the laws governing our interpersonal behavior. This teaching is in accordance with Yirmiyahu's message earlier in the same chapter. He confuses his listeners with an enigmatic message, not to accept the lies of false prophets who declare:

The Temple of the Lord
The Temple of the Lord
The Temple of the Lord are these.

Rashi, citing the *Targum Yonatan*, explains that the lies refer to assurances to the masses that all they need to do for personal salvation is to attend at God's Temple three times a year for a pilgrimage. Rashi adds that others had taught that all we need to do is to pray, bow, and offer sacrifice, and all will be well. The Radak sees the threefold repetition of the word "Temple" as referring to the three parts of the Temple, the *Ulam*, *Heikhal*, and *Devir*. He sees the repetition as a sign that the people in Yirmiyahu's day took solace and refuge in the physical structure of the Temple and thought that it would save them from the Bablyonians. Lastly, the Malbim renders a message that fits with our *haftarah* perfectly, by pointing out the end of verse 7:4, the word *"heimah."* According to the *Malbim*, this word serves to introduce what constitutes the *true* Temple, as described in the next two verses. While the current Temple of the Lord has ceased to serve as a true Temple in light of the Israelites'

¹. See a similar exegetical rendition of Yirmiyahu 34:13 at *Yerushalmi Rosh Ha-Shanah* 3:5. See also *Torah Temimah Shemot* 6:13.

sinful ways, the ways of the *true* Temple of the Lord, in contrast, “are these,” the words of the very next verses:

Now, if you really mend your ways and your actions; if you execute justice between one man and another; if you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow; if you do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place; if you do not follow other gods, to your own hurt...
(*Yirmiyahu* 7:5–6)

This confusion of priorities with regards to sacrifices was precisely Shaul’s problem in *Parsahat Zakhor*, and Shmuel set him straight when he rebuked Shaul, saying, “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to the Lord’s command? Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice, compliance than the fat of rams.”² Shaul thought that an animal sacrifice could make up for his moral backsliding, but that is not the proper way to approach repentance. *Mishlei* best represents this idea, declaring, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination.”³

The *haftarah* of *Shabbat Ha-Gadol* begins with a hope to return the sacrificial order to the way it was at first, before it fell into misuse. We all recognize Malakhi’s opening statement of that *haftarah* as our own closing prayer at the end of our daily supplication:

וְעִרְבָה לַיהוָה יְהוּדָה מִנְחַת יְרוּשָׁלַם עוֹלָם כִּי־יָמִי וְכַשְׁנִיִם קִדְמֹנִית

Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of yore and in the years of old.⁴

That is the way God wanted it the day He took us out of Egypt.

². *Shmuel Aleph* 15:22.

³. *Mishlei* 15:8; 21:27.

⁴. *Malakhi* 3:4.