

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : אַחֲרֵי מוֹת

There are various customs

concerning the Haftoras of the Sidras אַחֲרֵי מוֹת and קְדוּשִׁים.

*(Please see introductory note to **HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : אַחֲרֵי מוֹת — AMMOS.**)*

*This is the Haftorah for Sidra אַחֲרֵי מוֹת according to the custom of the Sefaradim
and is taken from Sefer Yechezkel, Chapter 22, from verse 1 till verse 16.*

(Ashkenazzim who read this Haftorah, continue till verse 19.)

1. The Novvi Yechezkel ben Buzzi HaKohen lived through the destruction of the first Beis HaMikdash by Nevuchadnetzar, the king of Babylon and the ensuing Dispersion of the Jewish People to Babylon and beyond. He was thus a contemporary of Yirmiyohu HaNovvi (who was the Torah leader of that generation and the Head of the Sanhedrin) and other Nevi'im, including Chabakkuk, Tsefania and Chaggai. During the years leading up to the Destruction, he warned of the impending catastrophe that would overtake the people if they would not do Teshuvah. His criticism was harsh and was intended to shock his reluctant listeners to repent their ways. Sadly, to little avail.
2. When Nevuchadnetzar carried away the Torah leaders of the people and the ruling classes into captivity, Yechezkel was one of those ten thousand exiles. These first exiles then set about building the Jewish community in exile (as Yirmiyohu had said they should) and so, when the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed eighteen years later and the majority of the people were then driven into exile, they found in their places of dispersion an established community with its functioning infrastructure of Chaddorim and Yeshivos and Mikvo'os and Shules.
3. It must also be borne in mind that although this Destruction and Exile was the first that we had ever experienced and was a most traumatic event, nevertheless, we were able and permitted to build our communities in Babylon. The Jewish people were a defeated people and Nuvuchadnetzar was a cruel despot. But he treated the Jewish people with dignity and recognized that they were a noble people, the People of G-d. The Jewish People was not a humiliated people, nor was it a people singled out for persecution and insult. (That only came about with the emergence of Christianity.)
4. The connexion between the Sidra and the Haftorah is that in the Sidra is a list of prohibitions of abominable practices that we had seen in Egypt and that we were about to encounter when we came to the land of Kenaan. The Haftorah is Yechezkel's rebuke

to the people of Yerushalaim to stop their transgressions of the Torah's prohibitions and the warnings of the dire punishment that is coming to them for their transgressions.

5. Bidden by HaShem to berate the people for their sins, Yechezkel was fierce in his condemnation of the wrongdoers. But his harsh and sweeping criticism was tempered with love and concern for his people and when the Destruction did come, he, with the other Nevi'im of the time, became the Nation's comforters. Yechezkel tells the people that their banishment is not permanent and that HaShem is ready to take back His children if they will but repent of their ways and turn back to HaShem and His Torah. In the midst of the doom and destruction, Yechezkel is a beacon of hope and encouragement to his people, that they will survive this Dispersion and that they will always be HaShem's People.
6. Reading through the harsh words of Yechezkel (and the same is true of other Nevi'im, too) we have to bear in mind that the Nevi'im often spoke in terms that seemed to exaggerate the offences actually committed. **(1)** Often, they condemn the whole Nation for the wrongdoing of the few individuals. **(2)** Many times the sin committed was a much milder form than they speak of and **(3)** in many instances, despite speaking as if the offence was done many times, it only happened only rarely.
7. But there are reasons for this exaggeration. **(1)** When the individual openly defies the Torah and does wrong, he does this only because he knows that the people will tolerate it for otherwise he would not dare. Therefore they all must share responsibility for the wrongdoing. **(2)** The milder infraction invariably leads to a more severe form of the offence and therefore the wrong has to be nipped in the bud. And **(3)** if a sin is repeated, it is perceived as less of a sin and therefore it must be stopped right at the first instance.
8. Reading these warnings of Yechezkel to our people of those times way back then really helps us to appreciate the great people that we are and our responsibilities. For if the Novvi rebukes our Nation for these infractions, and even though he rebukes us in these terms, this in fact attests to the high standard that is expected of us as HaShem's Chosen People. And this lesson applies today just as much as it did then.