TZAV

6 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Command Aaron and his sons thus:

This is the ritual of the burnt offering: The burnt offering itself shall remain where it is burned upon the altar all night until morning, while the fire on the altar is kept going on it.

THE PRINCIPAL TYPES OF SACRIFICE (continued)

2. where it is burned On top of the altar grill, where the firewood was placed.

The rituals for each of the various sacrifices outlined in chapters 1–5 are presented in chapters 6 and 7. These chapters also offer us a unique glimpse into the participation of the priesthood in the sacred meals within the precincts of the sanctuary.

The important Hebrew word torah, which appears in these chapters, derives from the verb הָרָא, “to cast, shoot”—an arrow, for instance. The verb, in one of its forms, means “to aim, direct toward”—hence “to show the way, instruct.” The word torah here is limited to the content of the instruction.

THE BURNT OFFERING (olah) (vv. 1–6)

For the preparation and presentation of this offering, see Lev. 1.

In this parashah, we can see why the book is thought to be a manual for kohanim. How the kohen carries out his part of the sacrificial service is the focus of most of the text.

Nehama Leibowitz suggests that chapters 1–5 are addressed to the Israelite public. Therefore, they begin with voluntary offerings (olah, minhah, and sh’lamim) and continue with those that apply only to certain individuals in certain circumstances (e.g., the purification offering of the kohen). Chapters 6–7 are directed to the officiating priests. For that reason, the sequence of offerings is changed, beginning with the offerings that have the highest degree of sanctity (“most holy”) and continuing with those of a lesser level of sanctity.

CHAPTER 6

2. Command Aaron . . . This is the ritual of the burnt offering The Talmud reads the Hebrew word torat (“ritual of”) as “Torah for”: “In our day, the study of Torah takes the place of bringing animal offerings” (BT Men. 110a). If so, then why command Aaron? Because Aaron might be reluctant to tell the people that the study of Torah is equivalent to bringing sacrifices. That would make the role of the kohanim less prominent, as it would present the people with an alternative form of worship (Hatam Sofer).

the fire on the altar is kept going on it The last Hebrew word can also be read “within him” (instead of “on it”). This prompted the comment that the fire on the altar must be paralleled by a fire in the heart of the officiating priest, whose enthusiasm for the sacred nature of the work must never be lost. The congregation, for its part, must recognize its responsibility to see that the enthusiasm and dedication of the clergy are never extinguished.
3 The priest shall dress in linen raiment, with linen breeches next to his body; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and place them beside the altar. 4 He shall then take off his vestments and put on other vestments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a pure place. 5 The fire on the altar shall be kept burning, not to go out; every morning the priest shall feed wood to it, lay out the burnt offering on it, and turn into smoke the fat parts of the offerings of well-being. 6 A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar, not to go out.

7 And this is the ritual of the grain offering: Aaron’s sons shall present it before the Lord, in front of the altar. 8 A handful of the choice flour and oil of the grain offering shall be taken from it, with all the frankincense that is on the grain offering, and this token portion shall be turned into smoke on the altar as a pleasing odor to the Lord. 9 What is left of it shall be eaten by Aaron and his sons; it shall be eaten as unleavened cakes, in the sacred precinct; they shall eat it in the enclosure of the Tent of Meeting.

10 It shall not be baked with leaven; I have given it as their portion from My gifts; it is most holy.

4. take off his vestments The priestly vestments were to be worn only in the sanctuary precincts (Exod. 28:43).

outside the camp to a pure place Called “the ash heap” in 4:12. The spot near the eastern side of the altar where the ashes were dumped is called “the place for the ashes” in 1:16.

6. perpetual fire . . . on the altar, not to go out The requirement to keep the fire burning at all times is also implied in verse 2. Perpetual fire expressed the Israelites’ devotion to God by showing that they were attendant on Him at all times in the sanctuary.

THE GRAIN OFFERING (minhah)

(vv. 7–11)

For the preparation and presentation of this offering, see Lev. 2.

9. eaten by Aaron and his sons An important element not stressed in chapter 2: Participation of the priests is indispensable to the efficacy of this ritual.

enclosure of the Tent of Meeting The tabernacle had an enclosed courtyard (e.g., see Exod. 27:9–19; 35:17), an arrangement later duplicated at the temple in Jerusalem. This sacred area, here and in verse 19, is called “courtyard” (battaer); usu-
like the purification offering and the reparation offering. 11 Only the males among Aaron’s descendants may eat of it, as their due for all time throughout the ages from the LORD’s gifts. Anything that touches these shall become holy.

12 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 13 This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to the LORD on the occasion of his anointing: a tenth of an ephah of choice flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half of it in the evening, 14 shall be prepared with oil on a griddle. You shall bring it well soaked, and offer it as a grain offering of baked slices, of pleasing odor to the LORD. 15 And so shall the priest, anointed from among his sons to succeed him, prepare it; it is the LORD’s—a law for all time—to be turned entirely into smoke. 16 So, too, every grain offering of a priest shall be a whole offering; it shall not be eaten.

10. The purification offerings and the reparation offerings are called “most holy.” A greater degree of holiness is ascribed to the person who has struggled with sin and overcome it than to the person who never has been tempted.

11. only the males Most Conservative synagogues have extended the honor and responsibility of serving as religious officiants, rabbis, and cantors, to women as well.

12. ephah See Comment to Exod. 16:36.

THE GRAIN OFFERING OF THE HIGH PRIEST (vv. 12–16)

13. offering Hebrew: korban; see Drash to 1:2.

on the occasion of his anointing The rite of anointing (unction), described in 8:10ff., was essential to the status of the High Priest. The altar, too, was anointed.

regular Hebrew: tamid, used for the most part to characterize regular daily offerings.

16. every grain offering of a priest Every offering of grain brought by a priest on his own behalf, or on behalf of the priesthood, in expiation or as a voluntary offering, was to be burned entirely on the altar. This affirms the rule that priests could benefit only for services undertaken on behalf of other Israelites, not on their own behalf. When the offering served only the priests themselves, the usual share of the priests had to be surrendered to God.
17 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 18 Speak to Aaron and his sons thus: This is the ritual of the purification offering: the purification offering shall be slaughtered before the Lord, at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered: it is most holy. 19 The priest who offers it as a purification offering shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in the sacred precinct, in the enclosure of the Tent of Meeting. 20 Anything that touches its flesh shall become holy; and if any of its blood is spattered upon a garment, you shall wash the bespattered part in the sacred precinct. 21 An earthen vessel in which it was boiled shall be broken; if it was boiled in a copper vessel, [the vessel] shall be scoured and rinsed with water. 22 Only the males in the priestly line may eat of it: it is most holy. 23 But no purification offering may be eaten from which any blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting for expiation in the sanctuary; any such shall be consumed in fire.

This is the ritual of the reparation offering: it is most holy. 2 The reparation offering shall be slaughtered at the northern side of the altar (1:11). Here we are informed that this rule also applies to the purification offering.

**THE PURIFICATION OFFERING** (battat) (6:17–23)

18. The burnt offering (olah) was to be slaughtered at the northern side of the altar (1:11). Here we are informed that this rule also applies to the purification offering.

**most holy** The purification offering is in the category of offerings that are “most sacred” (kodesh kodeshim). This category, first encountered in 2:3, is mentioned in 6:10; it recurs in 6:22 and in 7:6.

19. **enclosure of the Tent of Meeting** The entire courtyard is sacred. See Comment to 6:9.

20. **Anything that touches its flesh shall become holy** Rather, anyone who is to touch its flesh must be in a holy state. See Comment to 6:11.

blood . . . spattered upon a garment Part of the blood of the purification offering was to be placed on the horns of the altar and the rest poured down its side, as ordained in 4:25. Should any sacrificial blood stain a garment, that garment must be laundered, because it would be improper for any of this blood to be used for anything other than its ordained purpose.

THE REPARATION OFFERING (asham) (7:1–10)

1. **ritual of the reparation offering** The procedures specified in verses 1–6 for the “reparation offering” (asham) correspond to those already mandated for the purification offering in 6:17.

21. **An earthen vessel in which it was boiled shall be broken** Earthenware, being more porous than metal, absorbs particles of the flesh boiled in it. Some of the sacrificial flesh very likely would remain in the vessel. Such flesh would constitute “leftovers of the sacrifice” (nosta), forbidden for consumption according to 7:15–17. If other foodstuffs were subsequently boiled in the same vessel, the forbidden sacrificial particles would contaminate the rest. To prevent this, the earthenware vessel had to be broken, because there was no possible way to purify it.

23. This rule refers to the priestly battat as set forth in 4:1–12, to the rites prescribed in 8:17 for the investiture of the priests, and to the Yom Kippur ritual in chapter 16.
be slaughtered at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered, and the blood shall be dashed on all sides of the altar. 3 All its fat shall be offered: the broad tail; the fat that covers the entrails; 4 the two kidneys and the fat that is on them at the loins; and the proterbance on the liver, which shall be removed with the kidneys.

5 The priest shall turn them into smoke on the altar as a gift to the Lord; it is a reparation offering. 6 Only the males in the priestly line may eat of it; it shall be eaten in the sacred precinct: it is most holy.

7 The reparation offering is like the purification offering. The same rule applies to both: it shall belong to the priest who makes expiation thereby. 8 So, too, the priest who offers a man’s burnt offering shall keep the skin of the burnt offering that he offered. 9 Further, any grain offering that is baked in an oven, and any that is prepared in a pan or on a griddle, shall belong to the priest who offers it. 10 But every other grain offering, with oil mixed in or dry, shall go to the sons of Aaron all alike.

11 This is the ritual of the sacrifice of well-being that one may offer to the Lord:

12 If he offers it for thanksgiving, he shall offer together with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unspared from disaster, which produces probably one of the most profound emotions that person will ever know. The Talmud (BT Ber. 54b) identifies the circumstances in which a person...
leavened cakes with oil mixed in, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour with oil mixed in, well soaked. 13. This offering, with cakes of leavened bread added, he shall offer along with his thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being. 14. Out of this he shall offer one of each kind as a gift to the Lord; it shall go to the priest who dashes the blood of the offering of well-being. 15. And the flesh of his thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being shall be eaten on the day that it is offered; none of it shall be set aside until morning.

16. If, however, the sacrifice he offers is a votive and disposition of the grain offerings of both unleavened and leavened cakes that accompanied the animal sacrifice, a matter not taken up elsewhere in Leviticus. It then deals with the animal sacrifice itself, the basic information for which is in chapter 3.

13. No leaven may be placed on the altar of burnt offerings (Lev. 2:11). Thus only the unleavened cakes are offered on the altar, not the leavened cakes.

14. one of each kind as a gift to the Lord
Sacificial procedures in biblical Israel, and in the ancient Near East generally, often dictated that the offering first be presented to the deity for acceptance, at which time it belonged entirely to that deity. Only then did the deity grant portions of the offering to the priests and, occasionally, to the donors as well. Consequently, even in this case, in which no part of the leavened grain offering was placed on the altar, it could be considered as an offering to the Lord.

15. The flesh must be eaten on the day the altar sacrifice is made. If not consumed then, it must be burned. This is yet another difference between the thanksgiving sacrifice (todah) and other sh’lamim sacrifices.

16. Except in the case of a thanksgiving offering (todah), the flesh of sh’lamim sacrifices may be eaten until the third day, a rule also stated in 19:5–8. There were no restrictions regarding where the donor of a sh’lamim could eat his or her portion of the offering, so long as no person in an impure state partook of the flesh (v. 19).
or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice, and what is left of it shall be eaten on the morrow. \[17\] What is then left of the flesh of the sacrifice shall be consumed in fire on the third day. \[18\] If any of the flesh of his sacrifice of well-being is eaten on the third day, it shall not be acceptable; it shall not count for him who offered it. It is an offensive thing, and the person who eats of it shall bear his guilt.

\[19\] Flesh that touches anything impure shall not be eaten; it shall be consumed in fire. As for other flesh, only he who is pure may eat such flesh. \[20\] But the person who, in a state of impurity, eats flesh from the Lord’s sacrifices of well-being, that person shall be cut off from his kin. \[21\] When a person touches anything impure, be it human impurity or an impure animal or any impure creature, and eats flesh from the Lord’s sacrifices of well-being, that person shall be cut off from his kin.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the Israelite people thus: You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat. \[23\] Fat from animals that died or were torn by beasts may be put to any use, but you must not eat it. \[24\] If anyone eats the fat of animals from which gifts may be made to the Lord, the person who eats

**freewill offering** Hebrew: *n’davah*, which also serves as a general term for many types of voluntary contributions to the sanctuary. Like the *vadah*, it expresses gratitude to God and is often mentioned together with the vow (*neder*).

\[18\] Because the sacrificial meat was left uneaten for an improper length of time, the sacrifice itself was not efficacious. In this verse, the penalty for eating flesh remaining from the *sh’lamim* sacrifice after the third day is stated merely as “bearing one’s guilt,” whereas in 19:5–8 the same offense brings on the penalty of being cut off from the religious community.

\[19\] Beginning with this verse, the text deals more explicitly with the subject of impurity, a concern particularly relevant to the *sh’lamim*, because parts of it were handled by ordinary Israelites outside the sanctuary.

\[23\] **You shall eat no fat**  See Comment to 3:3.

\[24\] **Fat from animals that died**  An animal torn by beasts (*t’refah*) and the carcass of a dead animal (*n’velah*) are forbidden in their entirety (Exod. 22:30, Lev. 17:15). Hence, any part of such an animal would also be forbidden. It is likely that this seemingly superfluous rule was included here for emphasis, to reinforce the ban on eating organ fat (*feilet*) (see 3:16).

\[25\] **from which gifts may be made**  This clarifies the provisions of verse 23. The *feilet* of large and small cattle is forbidden, because such animals are of the kind offered as sacrifices.
it shall be cut off from his kin. 26And you must not consume any blood, either of bird or of animal, in any of your settlements. 27Anyone who eats blood shall be cut off from his kin.

28And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 29Speak to the Israelite people thus: The offering to the Lord from a sacrifice of well-being must be presented by him who offers his sacrifice of well-being to the Lord; 30his own hands shall present the Lord’s gifts. He shall present the fat with the breast, the breast to be elevated as an elevation offering before the Lord; 31the priest shall turn the fat into smoke on the altar, and the breast shall go to Aaron and his sons. 32And the right thigh from your sacrifices of well-being you shall present to the priest as a gift; 33he from among Aaron’s sons who offers the blood and the fat of the offering of well-being shall get the right thigh as his portion. 34For I have taken the breast of elevation offering and the thigh of gift offering from the Israelites, from their sacrifices of well-being, and given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons as their due from the Israelites for all time.

35Those shall be the perquisites of Aaron and the perquisites of his sons from the Lord’s gifts, once they have been inducted to serve the Lord as priests; 36these the Lord commanded to be given them, once they had been anointed, as a due from the Israelites for all time throughout the ages.

29–30. The donor of the sh’lamim had to personally participate in the presentation of the offering. Because nonpriests could not actually place sacrifices on the altar—indeed, they were banned from the adjacent area—the rite of “presentation” (t’nufah) afforded them some measure of participation in sacrifices of lesser sanctity such as this one.

30. the breast to be elevated as an elevation offering before the Lord The offering was raised up, in dedication to God. “Elevation offering” here is the designation for t’nufah, derived from the verb benif (lift, raise).

31. the priest shall turn the fat into smoke The priest was entitled to take the breast and the right thigh of the sacrificial animal only after God’s share of the offering (i.e., the fatty portions) had been burned on the altar.

34. the thigh of gift offering See Comment to 7:14.
8 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Take Aaron and his sons, and the vestments, the anointing oil, the bull of purification offering, the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread; and assemble the whole community at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Moses did as the Lord commanded him. And when the community was assembled at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, Moses said to the community, “This is what the Lord has commanded to be done.” Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. He put the the High Priest, prescribed in 6:12–16. The ordination rites are presented in chapters 8–9.

38. This verse asserts that in the wilderness of Sinai, the Israelites already had worshiped God with sacrifices.

THE INITIATION OF FORMAL WORSHIP (8:1–9:24)
tunic on him, girded him with the sash, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him, girding him with the decorated band with which he tied it to him. He put the breastpiece on him, and put into the breastpiece the Urim and Thummim. And he set the headdress on his head; and on the headdress, in front, he put the gold frontlet, the holy diadem—as the Lord had commanded Moses.

10. Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the Tabernacle and all that was in it, thus consecrating them. He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, anointing the altar, all its utensils, and the laver with its stand, to consecrate them. He poured some of the anointing oil upon Aaron’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him. Moses then brought Aaron’s sons forward, clothed them in tunics, girded them with sashes, and wound turbans upon them, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

14. He led forward the bull of purification offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands

ments, four of which were unique to him (see Exod. 28 and 39).

8. breastpiece Made of wool and linen, with gold threads woven into the fabric, and 12 gem stones were set into the cloth, with the name of a different tribe of Israel engraved on each stone. Urim and Thummim These were flat stones used for the casting of lots. The act of casting lots was the only form of divination permitted in ancient Israelite official worship, which normally objected to the use of omens for predicting the future.

9. headdress Ordinary priests wore turbans; only the High Priest wore the royal headdress.

10–12. In these verses we read of two parallel acts: the consecration of Aaron, the High Priest, and the consecration of the altar and the tabernacle with its vessels. Both were accomplished by the same means—anointing with the same oil. In this way Aaron, too, became a sacred vessel.

13. After the sons of Aaron were robed, the sacrifices of ordination commenced.

14. Large cattle were used in purification offerings when the entire community, or the High Priest in particular, were affected.
upon the head of the bull of purification offering, 15 and it was slaughtered. Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, purifying the altar; then he poured out the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it in order to make expiation upon it.

16 Moses then took all the fat that was about the entrails, and the protuberance of the liver, and the two kidneys and their fat, and turned them into smoke on the altar. 17 The rest of the bull, its hide, its flesh, and its dung, he put to the fire outside the camp—as the Lord had commanded Moses.

18 Then he brought forward the ram of burnt offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the ram’s head, 19 and it was slaughtered. Moses dashed the blood against all sides of the altar. 20 The ram was cut up into sections and Moses turned the head, the sections, and the suet into smoke on the altar; 21 Moses washed the entrails and the legs with water and turned all of the ram into smoke. That was a burnt offering for a pleasing odor, a gift to the Lord—as the Lord had commanded Moses.

22 He brought forward the second ram, the ram of ordination. Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the ram’s head, 23 and it was slaughtered. Moses took some of its blood and put it on the ridge of Aaron’s right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. 24 Moses then brought forward the sons of Aaron, and put some of the blood on the ridges of their right ears, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their

15. be consecrated it in order to make expiation upon it Expiatory sacrifices required an altar.

18–21. The function of this sacrifice was to evoke a favorable response from God before making an approach with other sacrifices.

23. blood...Aaron’s right ear Dabbing sacrificial blood on certain extremities of the body is essentially a rite of purification. In this manner Aaron and his sons were purified as they entered into their new status.

24. the rest of the blood Moses dashed against every side of the altar This is similar to what occurred during the covenantal ceremony at Sinai (Exod. 24:6–8). In the ordination of the priests, the sacrificial blood served a dual function. It purified the priests and also bound them in a covenant of service to God in the tabernacle.
right feet; and the rest of the blood Moses dashed against every side of the altar. 25 He took the fat—the broad tail, all the fat about the entrails, the protuberance of the liver, and the two kidneys and their fat—and the right thigh.

26 From the basket of unleavened bread that was before the Lord, he took one cake of unleavened bread, one cake of oil bread, and one wafer, and placed them on the fat parts and on the right thigh. 27 He placed all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and elevated them as an elevation offering before the Lord.

28 Then Moses took them from their hands and turned them into smoke on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering for a pleasing odor; it was a gift to the Lord.

29 Moses took the breast and elevated it as an elevation offering before the Lord; it was Moses’ portion of the ram of ordination—as the Lord had commanded Moses.

30 And Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it upon Aaron and upon his vestments, and also upon his sons and upon their vestments. Thus he consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and also his sons and their vestments.

31 Moses said to Aaron and his sons: Boil the flesh at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of ordination—as I commanded: Aaron and his sons shall eat it; 32 and what is left over of the flesh and the bread you shall consume in fire. 33 You shall not go outside the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the

27. all these Included here among the parts of the sacrifice burned on the altar was the thigh, which belonged to the priests (Lev. 7:32). In the rites of ordination, the priests surrendered their own portion to God, because it would have been improper for them to benefit from what was offered on their own behalf. Moses, however, received his portion.

30. A mix of anointing oil and sacrificial blood was sprinkled on Aaron and his sons and on their vestments. This completed their ordination.

31. Moses instructed Aaron and his sons on how to dispose of Moses’ own portion of the sacrifice. It was vital to the efficacy of the ordination sacrifice that the priests actually partake of it.

33. The priests were not inside the tent but,
day that your period of ordination is completed.  
For your ordination will require seven days.  
34Everything done today, the Lord has com-
manded to be done [seven days], to make ex-
piation for you.  
35You shall remain at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting 
day and night for seven days, keeping the Lord’s charge—that 
you may not die—for so I have been com-
manded.
36And Aaron and his sons did all the things 
that the Lord had commanded through Moses.

rather, near its entrance, in the inner section of 
the tabernacle courtyard. They were not to leave 
this sanctified area for seven days, to avoid contact 
with anything or anyone impure.

33. seven days These days parallel the seven days of Creation. The existence of the 
tabernacle and its capacity to atone for human 
sinfulness and imperfection make it possible 
for an imperfect world to survive in the sight 
of a just God. The Midrash emphasizes that “if 
God demands absolute justice, there can be no 
world. If God desires a world, there cannot be 
absolute justice” [Lev. R. 10:1].

36. As is often true, the parashah con-
cludes on a positive note—in this case, by high-
lighting the priests’ faithful obedience to God.
This hafṭarah contains God’s promise to the people in the period after the rebuilding of the Temple in 516–15 B.C.E. The prophet announces that sacrificial offerings will again be favorably received by God, as in ancient times. First, however, God will contend with the nation’s breach of moral and ritual law and bring sinners to judgment. Hope lies in repentance and in observance of the Torah. God’s call to the people through Malachi, the healing mission of Elijah, and the teaching of Moses all show God’s continual concern for reconciliation and human welfare.

Restoration is the recurrent theme of this hafṭarah: the restoration of acceptable offerings in the Temple (3:4), the repair of the Covenant through repentance (v. 7), the renewal of trust in divine justice (v. 18), and the reconciliation of parents and children (v. 24). Most of these statements include variations of the verb ḥuwp (turn, return). Presumably, a crisis of trust in God’s justice has prevailed in the people’s soul, leading to callous indifference in the moral and cultic realms. The hafṭarah is thus pervaded by a deep sense of estrangement from the right order of things, whether in the family, in society, or in the divine—human relationship.

In a rebuke that precedes the hafṭarah, the people are quoted as saying that “All who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord.” Indeed, they mockingly jibe, “Where is the God of justice [mishpat]?” (Mal. 2:17). In response, God comes to redress the cause of mishpat (judgment) in verse 3:5, in which the literal “bring to judgment” is understood as “to contend against you.” God will also attend to the sense of the God-fearers that “It is useless to serve God” (v. 14). Actions have consequences. If the people repent and serve God fully, they will receive the riches of heavenly blessing. Otherwise, they will be blasted to ash—root and branch. So deep is the people’s resistance that God finally announces He will send His prophet Elijah to renew their hearts. This unilateral act is proof of God’s love of Jacob (announced at the beginning of the collected prophecies of Malachi).

This is Malachi’s message of hope. The framers of the biblical canon, placing Malachi as the last of the prophets, believed it to be a final prophetic word to those for whom Scripture teaches divine truth.

RELATION OF THE HAFṬARAH TO THE CALENDAR

The phrase shabbat ha-gadol (the great Sabbath) is a fixed formulation of rabbinic liturgy, found in the Grace after Meals in the special supplication for Shabbat (beginning r’izei). In that context, it emphasizes the special holiness of each Shabbat. The term also traditionally designates the Shabbat before Pesah. Its meaning in this setting is uncertain, which has elicited much speculation.

One likely explanation for the choice of Mal. 3:4–24 as the hafṭarah for Shabbat ha-Gadol is the old tradition that the future redemption will occur on Pesah, the prototype of redemption (BT RH 11a). Because the hafṭarah could be construed to herald God’s great day, it is to be proclaimed in hopes and in warning before the festival itself. The term shabbat ha-gadol would then simply be a shorthand designation for saying that on this Shabbat the hafṭarah proclaiming the final “great” (gadol) day is read. This is very much like the formulation Shabbat Shuvah, which is one way to designate the Shabbat before Yom Kippur, when the theme of repentance (t’shuwp) is stressed through a hafṭarah selection beginning with the word shuvah (repent; Hos. 14:2).

The hafṭarah’s focus on the tithe obligations would have reinforced the rabbinic selection. Indeed, according to the Mishnah, “on Passover
Surely the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of yore and in the years of old. But [first] I will step forward to contend against you, and I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of Me: Who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert [the cause of] the widow, orphan, and stranger, said the Lord of Hosts.

For I am the Lord—I have not changed; and you are the children of Jacob—you have not ceased to be. From the very days of your fathers you have turned away from My laws and have not observed them. Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you—said the Lord of Hosts. But you ask, “How shall we turn back?” Ought man to defraud God? Yet you are defrauding Me. And you ask, “How have we been defrauding You?” In tithe and contribution. You are suffering under a curse, yet you go on defrauding Me—the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said the Lord of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you; and I will banish the locusts from you, so that they will not destroy the yield.


Malachi’s exhortation assumes the people’s ability to respond to God’s initiative.
of your soil; and your vines in the field shall no longer miscarry—said the Lord of Hosts. And all the nations shall account you happy, for you shall be the most desired of lands—said the Lord of Hosts.

13You have spoken hard words against Me—said the Lord. But you ask, “What have we been saying among ourselves against You?”
14You have said, “It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His charge and walking in abject awe of the Lord of Hosts?” And so, we account the arrogant happy: they have indeed done evil and endured; they have indeed dared God and escaped.” In this vein have those who revere the Lord been talking to one another. The Lord has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at His behest concerning those who revere the Lord and esteem His name. And on the day that I am preparing, said the Lord of Hosts, they shall be My treasured possession; I will be tender toward them as a man is tender toward a son who ministers to him. And you shall come to see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him who has served God and him who has not served Him.

19For lo! That day is at hand, burning like an oven. All the arrogant and all the doers of evil shall be straw, and the day that is coming—said the Lord of Hosts—shall burn them to ashes and leave of them neither stock nor boughs.

16. **those who revere the Lord** Hebrew: yir-éi YHVH. Used as a technical designation for those who revere God’s name (3:20), in contradistinction to those who despise it (1:6). They shall be vindicated on the day of judgment (3:20–21). Presumably, this refers to a group of particularly pious people.
19. **the day that is coming** References to the future “day” of judgment punctuate the prophet’s speech (3:2, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23). A complex scenario is envisaged, dominated by the advent of an angelic messenger, the admonition of sins, the interventions of Elijah, the fiery purgation of sinners, the vindication of the pious, and the visible distinction between the righteous and evildoers. This scenario was variously explicated and ordered by medieval Jewish commentators, in light of other biblical and Rabbinic evidence. In turn, the images were understood in either literal or figurative terms. The prophet Malachi was himself the heir to a long tradition of this rhetoric, produced in a period of more than 300 years and in various patterns.
20 But for you who revere My name a sun of victory shall rise to bring healing. You shall go forth and stamp like stall-fed calves, 21 and you shall trample the wicked to a pulp, for they shall be dust beneath your feet on the day that I am preparing—said the Lord of Hosts.

22 Be mindful of the Teaching of My servant Moses, whom I charged at Horeb with laws and rules for all Israel.

23 Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the Lord. 24 He shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents, so that, when I come, I do not strike the whole land with utter destruction.

Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the Lord.

24. He shall reconcile parents with children
The language is difficult. The act of reconciliation here is literally “restore the heart” (bechov lev). Different meanings of the preposition translated “with” (ad), however, make it an open question whether the prophet envisions the reconciliation of parents “with” their children or “along with” them. In the first case, divine wrath will be forestalled by intergenerational reconciliation; in the other, both generations together will return to God.