



**Shabbat HaChodesh**  
**Haftarah Ezekiel 45:16 - 46:18**  
**March 28, 2014 / 26 Adar II 5774**

The unity of Scriptures was a crucial component of rabbinic belief. Any time it seemed that biblical passages contradicted one another, there was an interpretative solution. It was one thing for the Torah to contain internal disagreement. Clearly, though, the later books of the Bible couldn't contradict the Torah.

And then there's the Book of Ezekiel. As a member of the priestly class, this prophet was fascinated with the details of sacrificial practice. Several of his thoughts on the rituals and details of sacred service—which from exile he wished to see restored—are found in our collection of haftarot. Notably, the haftarah for this Shabbat is laden with priestly instructions. After all, Shabbat HaChodesh is all about ritual preparedness for Korban Pesah, the Paschal sacrifice.

So you can imagine the anxiety the rabbis felt when they read Ezekiel “going off the reservation” about certain ceremonies. In particular, in our haftarah, the prophet gives instructions for purging the Temple of impurity in the first and seventh months. No such ritual is mentioned in the Torah.

How did the rabbis address these contradictions? In the early rabbinic period, they sought to stifle Ezekiel's voice by putting his book in cold storage. It was the first century C.E. sage Hananiah ben Hilkiyah who saved Ezekiel from obscurity: “Said Rav Yehudah: Indeed, remember that man for good—Hananiah ben Hilkiyah was his name—for without him, the Book of Ezekiel would have been hidden, for its words contradicted the Torah's words. What did he do? They brought up for him 300 measures of oil, and he sat down in the balcony and he expounded upon it” (Bavli Hagigah 13a).

Here's Hananiah ben Hilkiyah, a maverick in his time, saying, “You can't merely get rid of a book that doesn't conform to your expectations. So I'm locking myself in a room that isn't easily accessed, and I need enough fuel to keep this space well-lit, because I'm staying as long as it takes to make sense of this book so that it'll be accepted. It may require deep immersion, but I'll find its meaning eventually.” And so he did.

How many great books would have been destined to disappear through the ages were it not for people as courageous as Hananiah ben Hilkiyah. The question is, did Hananiah have to twist

Ezekiel's words until they conformed to the mainstream? Or was it enough that he took the time to make enough sense of it to keep it part of the canon, and thus the conversation?

What do we do with books and writers who contradict the accepted truth? Maybe the presence of Ezekiel in the biblical canon, and even more so the use of his writings in the haftarah cycle, can teach us how to incorporate discordant voices in a sacred fashion.

*This week's Haftarah commentary was written by Rabbi David Wise, who has been Rabbi of the Hollis Hills Jewish Center in Hollis Hills, NY since August 2005. He is a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto, and is a native of Toronto, Ontario.*