

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler

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This week's haftara is a selection taken from the 54th and 55th p'rakim of Sefer Yishayahu and is the shortest of the seven haftarot of consolation (and the shortest haftara of all the parshiyot in Sefer B'Midbar and Sefer D'varim). Together with that fact, I would add that it is arguably the most difficult of all these haftarot to understand.

ANIYA SO'ARAH LO NUCHAMA, the haftara opens with a description of the "afflicted, tempest-tossed, unconsolated nation who is comforted with Hashem's promise that He would lay their foundation on pearls and rubies. Struggling to understand Yishayahu's portrayal of the glorious rewards awaiting this "afflicted" nation, our meforshim explain that the comforting response of the prophet is to be found in his description of Y'MOT HAMASHIACH, the events and rewards that await Israel in the future Messianic Era. If so, this certainly is a proper choice made by Chazal for these weeks of consolation.

The difficulty that I have when

studying these prophetic promises - a difficulty that I confront each time I prepare these messages - is that I cannot imagine these words as foretelling events from the distant future and NOT ones that apply to our time, as we see these assurances coming to fruition before our very eyes. How else can I understand Yishayahu's prediction (54:13) V'CHOL BANAYICH LIMUDEI HASHEM, that there will be a time when our children will be "students of G-d", unless I am blind to the unprecedented explosion of Torah study in the Yeshivot, in the Batei Midrash and even on the web? There has NEVER been, in all of our history, a time when so much Torah was being learned by so many people. NEVER a time when we have had so many LIMUDEI HASHEM!

And how could I not understand Yishayahu's cry (54:17) KOL K'LI YUTZAR ALAYICH LO YITZLACH, "any weapon sharpened against you shall not succeed", if not as one referring to Israel's miraculous success in defending her population from her many enemies by defeating their massive military and their powerful weapons.

And should I ignore the navi's claim (ibid) V'CHOL LASHON TAKUM ITACH LAMISHPAT - TARSHI'I, that

any tongue raised against you in court will be condemned, when we read today of the constant attempts to criminalize the most moral army in the world for the sin of defending its people? When in history was there an international court, a court that includes representatives of nations who passively watched the murder of 6,000,000 innocents that then attempted to prevent the descendants of those martyrs from protecting the surviving remnants?

So, you see, this is my difficulty. I cannot understand the prophet's words without seeing them come alive in our time. Perhaps I would be misleading my readers. Perhaps I am seeing only what I want to see. Perhaps I am wrong.

Perhaps.

But perhaps not. ✨