

Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

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Lech L'cha

The very first parsha of the Torah depicts the creation of the universe but focuses, primarily, on the creation of humankind. Actually, it is not the creation of the human that is the focus of the parsha. Rather, it is the story, the history, of those first generations of modern man. It relates a story of great promise that ends in great disappointment and the closing p'sukim tell us how Hashem regrets that creation because of the growing corruption of Mankind and decreed the destruction of the Man He created.

The second parsha relates the story of that promised punishment, i.e., the story of No'ach and the flood. Here too we read of a creation, actually, a re-creation of a world to be populated by the descendants No'ach, an individual who had proven righteous in the eyes of Hashem and, therefore, one who, Hashem felt, could spread G-d's moral code and create an ethical society. And, by the end of that parsha, we read of the generation that built the Tower of Babel

and, by doing so, ignored Hashem's command to spread out and "fill the earth".

This week's parsha is different from the earlier ones. In this Torah reading of Lech L'cha we read of one who follows G-d's commands and succeeds in drawing others to the worship of the one G-d. We learn of a righteous couple who manage to impact others and influence an entire generation... and more. When this parsha ends we no longer read of the corruption of society but of the BRIT made between Hashem and Avraham. Avraham, just one individual, who, together with Sarah, built the family who would spread the divine message to all.

Our haftara begins with Yishayahu's questioning Israel's doubts about G-d's powers and His ability to keep His promises of protecting them. The navi continues to tell of Hashem's wonders and accomplishments, even mocking the many nations filled with idolaters who labor in creating man-made gods, but will fail to stand up before the power of THE ONE - the Almighty One.

In underscoring his message, Yishayahu explains that their nation are the descendants of Avraham who love G-d. He, as but one, was able to influence the many; he, although

small in number, was able to overcome the powerful multitudes. And all because Hashem protected and empowered him - as He would do to Avraham's nation. This is the primary connection of our haftara to the parsha.

Often, we fail to pick up on the prophet's subtle theme - the theme of G-d helping and protecting those who follow Him, as He did to Avraham, though they might be few and seem to be weak. Yet, it was a powerful message to a tottering nation threatened by larger and stronger enemies. Ultimately, Chazal's decision to read from the 40th and 41st prakim of Sefer Yishayahu for this week's haftara was not based simply on the one mention found of Avraham Avinu in the haftara.

Rather, we should focus on the essential lesson Yishayahu taught his contemporaries.

And, by teaching them, he taught us as well. ✨