



## PROBING

## THE PROPHETS

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Rabbi Winkler's popular Jewish History lectures can be viewed by visiting the OU Israel Video archive: <https://www.ouisrael.org/video-library>

With the arrival of the three weeks of (semi) mourning that precede Tish'a B'Av, our Mesorah calls for the haftarah readings to serve as a reflection of the seasonal theme. As a result, the selections that lead up to Tish'a B'Av are not ones that touch upon the theme of the weekly Torah readings but are, instead, prophecies of doom and destruction, of punishment and forewarning. These haftarot that are called “t'lat d'paranuta”, three (readings) of affliction, begin with this week's reading from the opening perek of Sefer Yirmiyahu.

Although there are many prophecies of retribution and reprimand found throughout the Nevi'im Acharonim (the books of the later prophets), Chazal saw it particularly fitting to open the series of haftaroth with the prophecies of Yirmiyahu HaNavi, who lived through the horror of the churban and galut. It was he who was denounced as a traitor by his countrymen, he who

was thrown into prison by his government and he who was despised by the majority of his nation. But Yirmiyahu was also the one who entreated G-d to spare the nation throughout his Sefer, he was the prophet who lamented the destruction of the Bet HaMikdash AND the fall of so many victims in his Megillat Eichah and he who wrote Sefer M'lachim to help the survivors understand what had led to such devastation.

And, although he was one so closely attached to his people and the one who directly Hashem's words to Israel, Hashem states in this first chapter that he was chosen as a “navi lagoyim”, a prophet for the nations (v.5), adding that He had appointed Yirmiyahu “al hagoyim v'al hamamlachot” as an agent for the nations and kingdoms (v. 10). As the text continues, the wicked nations were tasked to carry out G-d's command to “destroy and uproot” Israel – a mission given to them by the righteous navi!!!

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It would seem that G-d saw the Churban Bayit and subsequent galut as a world shaking event – one that would involve and impact all nations. The devastation would be executed by Hashem's chosen agents. And we might wonder why G-d would allow that to occur and thereby encourage idolaters to believe that their “god” is the most powerful.

Rav Soloveitchik addresses this question in explaining the final pasuk of our haftarah. There the navi describes Israel as “Reish-eet T’vuatu”, “the first of His grain”. The Rav basing himself on the Zohar, explains that Hashem intervenes in nature and performs miracles only when He has no other acceptable choice. Holiness is defined by separation, the Rav explains, so when G-d intervenes supernaturally, as He did at Yetziat Mitzrayim, His “separateness”, and therefore His holiness, is “diminished” in the eyes of the nations. But Israel is “Reish-eet T’vuatu” His first grain that is controlled by nature and with whom He deals through nature.

G-d's glory and His sanctity grows when His will is done through natural events – not supernatural ones.

So Bavel might destroy the Bet HaMikdash and Rome will exile Israel....but where are they now?

And where is Israel? We, despite our shortcomings, are “Reisheet T’vuatu”. ■

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