



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

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

*In honor of Dan Kupfer
for his generosity and his
diligent work in the community*

The source of this week's haftarah is Sefer Yrmiyahu, beginning with perek 34 with its final psukim taken from perek 33. Although most of the text found in nevi'im acharonim is made up of the prophecies relayed to the people by the fifteen prophetic authors, the section from which this haftarah is taken is one that retells the prophet's experiences at that time. The story that is related to us is that of Yirmiyahu's divine message given to him after the last King of Yehuda, King Tzidkiyahu, established a brit with the nation – a covenant in which they agree to set their Hebrew servants free - as our parasha commands. After the people went back on their promise and took the freed servants back into servitude, Hashem issues His warning through His faithful prophet.

That warning details the terrible punishment that would befall Israel for her failure of observing this mitzvah –actually, the very first mitzvah “ben adam lachaveru” that the Torah commands. In fact, Rav S. R. Hirsch opines that this first mitzvah underscores the importance of personal freedom, which, if ignored, brings on the loss of independence for all – as attested to by the threatened punishments. The punishments, relayed by Yirmiyahu, would include war, plague and famine – all of which would precede the destruction of her cities and, accordingly, the exile and a national loss of freedom.

As is commonly found, the haftarah ends with a “gift” granted to us by our Rabbinic scholars in order close the haftarah with encouraging words - two verses that are actually “out of order” (because they are taken from the preceding perek) that leave us on a “happier note” than does the message left by the navi.

In retrospect, the haftara's connection to

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the parasha would seem clear to all of us as it harkens back to the very first mitzvah found in the parasha – that of setting free all Hebrew servants after six years of service. However, HaRav Nobel, in his work on the yearly haftarot, suggests that the closing psukim connect to the haftarah’s “brit”, made by the people and subsequently broken by them, with the Torah brit at Har Sinai in our parasha – also agreed to by the nation but, over the years, ignored and broken by them. The comfort offered by Hashem in those closing verses is that, just as the laws of nature, which Rav Nobel sees as a form of “brit” Hashem made with all His creations, just as these natural laws, this “brit”, is eternal and its laws would never be broken, so too the nation of Israel is eternal and G-d’s relationship with them will never be broken.

With this understanding of the message left by the navi, generations of suffering Jews found solace and hope and, after 2,000 years could exclaim: “Od lo avda tikvateinu”. ■

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