



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>

Today's reading is an especially difficult one to follow as almost half of its psukim describe the horrific punishments that would befall Israel if they ignore the laws Hashem commands them. These warnings include horrible diseases, military defeat and subjugation, drought and famine, eventual exile and, with that, the loss of their land. Studying the verses of the "tochacha", indeed, simply listening to them, is not an easy task-especially for a generation who has seen the fulfillment of the horrific prophecies.

The tannaitic scholars faced the unenviable task of choosing a fitting selection from the nevi'im (prophets) to serve as the haftarah for this parasha. Unfortunately, there are ample prophecies in the Tanach that speak of the terrible punishments that would befall the fickle nation (we need only peruse the selections we read over the pre-Tish'a B'Av Shabbatot), so it is understandable for us to wonder why,

given to many possible prophetic readings, the Rabbinic scholars choose these 16th and 17th prakim of the navi Yirmiyahu, those chosen as this week's haftarah.

I would suggest that perhaps the rabbanim, in their choice of these chapters, purposely left a subtle message of hope for future generations. The admonition found in the parasha is preceded by a description of the rewards awaiting the faithful and closes with the reassurance that Hashem would remember them and redeem them. The "curses", therefore, are "sandwiched" in between the comforting words of reward and those of redemption. (Indeed, as I have pointed out before, the very usage of "curses" to describe this section is misleading, for they are meant as "warnings" of what COULD happen – not what WILL happen).

The navi Yirmiyahu follows that same pattern in the chapters of the haftarah. The opening words mark a break from the preceding prophecies of doom as Yirmiyahu



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calls out to Hashem as his “refuge” and “stronghold, depicting a time when G-d will be recognized by all and when all idolatry would be rejected as falsehood. Only then does the navi go on to condemn Israel for her sins. But even these words of condemnation are followed by a beautiful description of the reward that awaits the righteous who trust in Hashem and close with the message that Hashem remains the source of hope for Israel. An uplifting ending to the harsh prophetic words of criticism.

The truth is that these prophecies, difficult as they are, were meant to bring Israel back to G-d; not frighten them away. The prophet knows full-well that there must always be hope in his message so that his words will encourage people and not depress them.

We have witnessed the realization of the frightening predictions found both in the parasha and in the haftarah. But we have also begun to see the fruition of the promised blessings and consolations from G-d. Chazal, through their choice of prophecies, reminded us that curses will be followed by blessings and tragedies with celebrations.

We, who have passed through the weeks of Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron and have, over the years, felt the misfortunes and heartbreaks; now look forward to experiencing the celebrations. ■

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