



## 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>

Over these years, I have shared with you the approach taken by the Tosafot in Masechet Megillah (31b) that these seven haftarot of consolation following Tish'a B'Av, the "shev d'n'chemta", were compiled by the rabbinic scholars to be read in ascending order, with each haftarah expressing a greater promise of comfort and consolation than did its previous one. In studying this week's haftarah with the hope of uncovering its additional promises of comfort over last week's haftarah, HaRav Moshe Lichtenstein is struck by a uniqueness that makes this reading stand out from last week's haftarah... as well as from every other one of the seven selections of consolation.

Rav Lichtenstein notes that these nevuot shared by Yishayahu were not for the generation of the churban alone but were meant to be messages of solace to all the generations who would suffer throughout the long galut. For that reason, every one of the prophecies of comfort read during these weeks addresses the pain of the nation who witnessed the destruction of the Beit Mikdash, but speaks as well to those who would struggle in the Diaspora from the oppression – the hatred, the expulsions, the pogroms, – that they would suffer over the years. Hence, much of the prophecies focus upon the

glorious future that awaits them, the geula that would surely arrive and the comforting promises that the grief that accompanied the people throughout their unwelcome stay in foreign lands would come to an end.

That, however, is not the focus of this week's haftarah. In these prakim of Sefer Yishayahu (49-51) the navi faces a more basic – and a more threatening – fear of the generation. It was a national depression brought upon by the feeling of total desperation, even surrender, caused by the belief that, as the haftarah's first words express, Hashem had abandoned them. And, given that assumption, they were convinced that they were lost; that they had no hope at all. If G-d had abandoned them there could be no return, no redemption and no future.

And, as absurd as it may seem to us, it was a very real belief for those who, for generations, had seen Hashem as the national protector of Israel and viewed the Beit HaMikdash as – quite literally – the "House of Hashem" that could never be destroyed and who knew that

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Eretz Yisrael was their eternal home, promised to them by G-d.

Yet, now they were defeated by a seemingly more powerful “deity”, now they had seen the “House of Hashem” destroyed and now they were exiled from the land G-d had promised them.

Would you not feel abandoned? Depressed? Hopeless? This was the challenge that faced Yishayahu.

But we would be mistaken to believe that the prophet was speaking to but one generation (a generation that was yet to experience the disaster some 150 years later!). The words of the navi cried out to many generations in the future. Whether they were heard by the Ashkenazic Jews who saw the Rhine River flow with Jewish blood after the Crusaders massacred the center of Jewish life in Western Europe, or they were read

by the Sepharadic communities expelled from Spain and watching one third of their number killed, or studied by those Jews who impoverished themselves to witness the arrival of the self-proclaimed mashiach, Shabbatai Tzvi – only to watch him convert to Islam, or chanted by those who suffered through the Russian pogroms, or the German death camps. Did they not also feel abandoned? Depressed? Hopeless?

Yishayahu spoke to all of them.

“Hatishkach isha ulah?” Hashem could no more abandon His children – in ANY generation – than could a mother abandon her young child!

His message is eternal. And that is precisely the purpose of reading the words of the nevi'im each Shabbat. Not to read what WAS said then – but to realize what it IS saying... to us now. ■




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