



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>

I begin this week's article with a question, wondering if any others have shared my experience - or not? During my first years after our Aliya, I entered my car one day to drive my usual morning route, only to find that the road I had been traveling each morning had suddenly become a one-way street...in the opposite direction?! I read of no warnings the day before nor saw any signs as I traveled that morning - but there it was! Everything had changed overnight!

Well, whether or not you have also undergone this kind of experience, I am relatively sure that you have heard even frequent visitors to Israel remark of how there had been so much growth in the little time that they were away. Which gets me to this week's haftarah.

As we marked Rosh Chodesh Elul just two weeks ago – on Shabbat Re'eh – the traditional haftarah of consolation was replaced by the selection read on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh. As a result, this Shabbat we add the haftarah we “missed” to the usual haftarah for this parasha, giving us the opportunity to read the entire perek 54 in Sefer Yishayahu (as we also do for the haftarah of parashat Noach) that is made up of both of these selections.

“Roni Akara!!!”, the navi cries out to Yerushalayim at the outset of the haftarah and perek itself. Describing the Holy City as an “akara”, a barren woman, Hashem is

quoted as reassuring the city that, although she has been “barren” for so many years, bereft of her “children” – her population, she should now rejoice. But why? “Ki rabim bnei shomeima...” – “For the children of the barren (Jerusalem) will (yet) outnumber those of the (present) inhabited Jerusalem” – explained by most commentaries as Hashem's promise that the future population of Yerushalayim would increase significantly.

The Malbim, however, “tweaks” this common explanation with what is, I believe, an especially meaningful approach for us today. He explains that G-d comforts Israel with the promise of a renewed and repopulated Jerusalem, whose rebirth will be due to the arrival of those who were “barren” of their motherland and who will return to her and fill her streets once again. The Malbim elaborates on his unique “take” of these p'sukim by explaining that the prophet emphasizes his description of the barren Yerushalayim as a woman who “lo challah”, never had experienced birth pains and yet, her lost brethren from the Diaspora would pour into her borders, providing her with innumerable “children” – without causing her to suffer the pains that accompany birth! The Malbim even supports this view by pointing to the p'sukim in perek 49 (v. 21 – the haftarah we read for parashat Ekev) where we read of the astonished city wondering from

where all of her population had suddenly appeared. “Who has begotten these?” she will ask, “For I have been bereaved and alone!”

A fair question, I believe. After all, who would ever imagine it? A quiet 18th century village with few inhabitants would overflow with a population close to one million?! Dusty roads once traveled only by caravans and camels would become streets and boulevards that would change overnight to one-way routes in order to absorb the ever increasing traffic?! And the once-barren plots of land would be humming with the never-ending sounds of heavy machinery, busily constructing more apartments to satisfy the growing demand for living space, and changing the country’s horizon each month?!

Indeed, could they imagine hearing Amharic, French, Russian and English - languages reflecting diverse origins – emanating from the mouths of their once “lost” brothers and sisters?!

Yes. Certainly a fair question!

And so, the next time you get a bit frustrated at the traffic tie-ups or at the cacophony of construction noises – just think of our haftarah and remember the Malbim!

Or, perhaps just close your eyes and listen - you might just hear Yishayahu’s words echoing in your ears.

Because they may well be the sounds of the Geula. ■

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