



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>

Listening to the Torah reading this week can be a rather difficult challenge. The first parasha of B'har delineates the various mitzvot that would be incumbent upon Israel to observe upon their entry to the land, including the laws of *Shemita* and of *Yovel*, as well as the proper regulations regarding the sale and redemption of ancestral estates. In short, the first parasha lays down these requirements to impress upon the nation the inherent sanctity of the land – and the privilege they received to live there. In contrast to that theme, the second parasha of B'chukotai focuses on the punishments and eventual exile from the land were the people to ignore the holiness of Eretz Yisrael and fail to observe those laws and regulations. The theme of the second parasha, therefore, is one a denial of the sanctity of the land and the loss of our privilege to live there.

One parasha of promise; one parasha of doom.

Further upsetting our peaceful Shabbat is the worrying choice of past scholars to read the 16th and 17th prakim of Sefer Yirmiyahu for our haftarah. These chapters seem, at first glance, to focus our attention upon the *tochacha* (admonition) portion of B'chukotai, with the navi's harsh words assailing the sins of the people. The navi's forewarnings such as: "Chatat Yehuda k'tuva b'et barzel" – "The sin of Yehuda is written with a pen of iron", or "v'ha'avad'ti-cha et oyvecha ba'aretz asher lo yad'ta" – "I shall make you serve your enemies in a land you do not know"..." and "'ki esh k'dachtem b'api, ad olam tukad'" – "the fire you've kindled in My anger will glow into the future." – these are not messages that we would want to keep in our hearts as we turn back to our tefillah on Shabbat!

With these disconcerting thoughts, I turned to HaRav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch to see how he understands these troubling messages. And I am glad that I did. Rav Hirsch sees this haftarah in a totally different light. "Hashem Uzi U'ma'uzi", the opening words of the haftarah, praising Hashem as his "strength and refuge", sets the tone for the entire haftarah, argues Rav Hirsch. The navi, who was witness to the destruction of the Mikdash and the galut of his people, nonetheless glorifies G-d as

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his “strength” and his “refuge” because he does not see the galut experience simply as a punishment. Rather, he sees the sad years of the Diaspora as a prelude to the great redemption.

As Rav Hirsch writes:

“G-d, who made this powerless, helpless, abandoned...people triumphant, and gave them indomitable independence and endurance ...and always accorded them refuge and salvation in every hour of danger....will ultimately gather all the nations to Him.”

In the eyes of Rav Hirsch, our haftarah is not a reflection of the *tochacha* in the parasha, but its very antithesis! Our ancients chose this message of Yirmiyahu in order to grant us comfort after having listened to the *tochecha*. Israel's survival of the galut - with its sufferings, its pogroms, its ghettos – proves why Hashem is “Uzi Uma'uzi”. The terrible *tochacha* of the parasha must be seen as the precursor to the magnificent geula!

And, when we see the haftarah as Rav Hirsch does, if we regard the parasha's admonitions as part of the redemption process, we are able to return to our tefillot in a much better frame of mind.

I know that I will! ■


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