



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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The Opening...or the Closing?

This Shabbat is commonly known as Shabbat Chazon, a name drawn from the opening word of the haftarah and, seemingly, from the first words of the prophet Yishayahu himself. Indeed, the stark prophetic message found in the opening chapter of Sefer Yishayahu is particularly fitting for this Shabbat, which always falls on the one preceding Tish'a B'Av.

However, it is important to note that, according to Chazal (see *Mechilta*, *B'Shalach*, and elsewhere), this first chapter was not necessarily the prophet's initial prophecy. Rather, Yishayahu's official call to prophecy appears in **sixth** perek of the sefer, suggesting that his inaugural vision came later in the text.

This raises a significant question: Were the words of the **first** perek actually Yishayahu's **first** prophetic message, or not?

The challenge in understanding the message of this haftarah lies in determining **when** this prophecy was delivered to the nation. Some commentators do regard this first chapter as the prophet's initial address and consider the sixth perek **not** as the beginning of his prophetic career per se, but as a broader introduction

to the sefer as a whole (see Malbim). According to this view, the timing of the prophecy is less critical; as a message about events yet to unfold, the first perek could indeed serve as Yishayahu's opening warning to the people.

However, this approach raises a fundamental question: What relevance would such prophecies have for people living in a different generation? How could those experiencing entirely different circumstances relate to harsh words seemingly directed at a past—or future—generation?

Rav Yigal Ariel, in his sefer *Hamevaser*, explores the prophecies included in this haftarah and challenges us to consider the following:

Would Yishayahu have condemned the generation of King Uzziah by declaring that “your land is desolate, your cities burned with fire” (*“Artzechem sh'mama; oreichem s'rufot aish”* [v. 7]), when it was a time of righteous leadership, national strength, and territorial expansion? Would such a prophecy have inspired teshuvah, or would it have led the people to dismiss the message entirely—perhaps even undermining their faith in both the prophecy and the prophet?

Rav Ariel suggests it is more plausible that such a stark portrayal would have been delivered during a later period—specifically, during the reign of King Achaz, when Jerusalem was under siege by King Pekach of Israel and

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*Michael, Channie, Rivka (Gross),
Daniel, Naomi,
and Benjamin Greenberg*

King Retzin of Aram. Moreover, Yeshayahu's condemnation of the nation's sacrificial service—"Why do I need your many offerings?" (*"Lamah li rov zivcheichem"* [v. 11])—is also more consistent with the era of Achaz, who notoriously introduced idolatry into the Beit HaMikdash itself.

Additionally, the prophet's denunciation of widespread bloodshed in Judea—"*Yedeichem damim malei'u*" ("Your hands are full of blood" [v. 15])—more accurately reflects the reign of King Menasheh, about whom the text states, "He filled Jerusalem with innocent blood" (Melachim B 21:16). However, Menasheh's reign began only **after** the conclusion of Yeshayahu's prophetic career!!!

In light of these discrepancies, Rav Yigal Ariel proposes that our haftarah was not the **beginning** of Yeshayahu's prophecies, but rather among his **final** messages, delivered during the reign of the righteous King Chizkiyahu. It was Chizkiyahu who launched a sweeping movement of national teshuvah, reversing the idolatrous practices of his father, Achaz. He dismantled the bamot (private altars), reestablished centralized worship in the Beit HaMikdash, and restored the sacrificial service.

However, despite Chizkiyahu's spiritual reforms, the kingdom remained militarily vulnerable. The weakened Judean forces were no match for imperial aggression. It was during this precarious period that Sancheirev, king of Assyria, launched his invasion of Yehudah, destroying many Judean cities and eventually laying siege to Yerushalayim itself.

It is highly likely that such a contrite generation would have possessed a strong belief in Hashem and in His prophet, and a clear awareness of the devastation that could befall them. The sins of previous generations were well known to them. They understood what

had provoked God's anger, and the destructive power of Assyria was still vivid in their collective memory.

It was precisely this kind of generation—spiritually awakened and historically conscious—that would be most open to teshuvah and return. And therefore, **this** generation would be most receptive to the prophet's message.

And so, although this opening chapter may have been delivered later in Yishayahu's career, it served as a fitting introduction to his prophetic mission—a call to a nation in need of remorse, repentance, and atonement.

As Rav Ariel suggests, this haftarah may have been one of Yeshayahu's **closing** prophecies—but it made for a perfect **beginning**. ■

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Tisha B'Av Kinot Sunday August 3rd Beit HaKnesset Migdal HaShoshanim Pinsker Shul **With Rabbi Chaim Ilson**

Program begins 10:15 am
Mincha Gedola 1:30 pm

Rav Ilson's remarks are based on the *Chiddushim* of HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik זצ"ל with whom Rav Ilson studied for over 10 years.

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