



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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SUKKOT

A Celebration for Foreign Nations

The haftarah selection for the first day of Sukkot is taken from the final chapter of Sefer Zecharya and describes the navi's final vision of the last battle against Gog and Magog, a battle that would herald in the Messianic era. The choice of this reading is mentioned in the Mishna itself (Megilla 31a) for the very logical reason (as pointed out by Rashi) that it mentions the celebration of the future Chag Sukkot. Indeed, we will find that the future observance of this holiday is mentioned not once or twice-but three times in this haftarah.

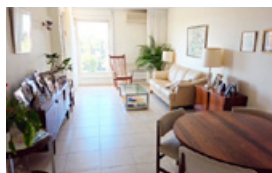
Our Rabbis' view that Sukkot is a holiday for the foreign nations is based not solely on the 70 bulls (representing the 70 gentile nations) that were sacrificed on this holiday but perhaps more importantly, on the words of Zecharya in this haftarah that any nation who failed to observe Sukkot in Yerushalayim

will suffer drought that year.

When we consider the idea of the non-Jewish world bringing sacrifices to the Bet HaMikdash and observing the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, we rightfully are perplexed. As Rav Yehuda Shaviv points out, the sukkot in which the Israelites dwelled during their sojourn in the desert, refers to the protective cloud cover ("ananei hakavod") that surrounded Israel in their journey through the wilderness. As Chazal understand it, these clouds protected Israel not only from the surrounding dangers of nature such as the desert sun and the frequent windstorms, but from the attacks of surrounding desert tribes and foreign nations. Given that the very symbol of the holiday was known as a divine tool to keep the foreign nations out of the camp of Israel, the requirement of these same nations to enter Israel in the future to celebrate the holiday is certainly puzzling. Additionally, this concept stands in direct contradiction to the celebration of Pesach where we read "kol ben neichar lo yochal bo", that no alien, non-Israelite, may partake of the Korban Pesach. What message, therefore, can we derive from this curious phenomenon?

I believe that there is, indeed, an important message that Chazal leave for us. Our perception of the Messianic era includes

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the punishment of those nations who persecuted Israel. As a people who have suffered so long, it is only natural that we focus upon this aspect and see this as one of the goals of Mashiach. But in reality the true goal is to bring the entire world to the recognition of G-d's mastery over the universe and have them humble themselves before Him. We see this in King Shlomo's supplication upon the completion of Bet HaMikdash (Sefer M'lachim A: 8:43), the story of Yonah and the declaration of Yishayahu (56:7) that "My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations".

The holiday of Sukkot, the time when the first Beit HaMikdash was consecrated, will eventually become the time when this universal recognition of Hashem will be celebrated. It will be the time of ULTIMATE joy, when G-d's expectations will be fulfilled. It is not punishment or revenge that we are to seek from the Mashiach, but, rather, a time of peace, reconciliation and, as Yishayahu prophesied [11: 9], a time when the world is filled with understanding and the worship of G-d "kammayim layyam m'chassim". ■

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