



## PROBING THE PROPHETS

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# Two Parashot; Two Goals; Two Haftarot

Although the two parashot of Va'era and Bo recount the story of the ten plagues for us, Chazal separated the narrative by including the first seven plagues in Parashat Va'era and leaving the details of the final three punishments for Parashat Bo. As a youngster, I always felt a bit “frustrated” to have the culmination of the exciting “adventure”, the depiction of Israel’s release from slavery, delayed until the next Shabbat. Understandably, I assumed (at that time), that such a division would create a far-too-lengthy parasha or one that was far-too-concise. Not surprisingly, I was wrong.

In actuality, each of these two Torah portions, though similar, have separate goals, for, although they are both centered around the plagues, the **purpose** of each separate set of makkot differ from each other. As I mentioned in last week’s article, Parashat Va’era includes

those plagues whose primary objective was to impress upon Par’oh and his nation God’s absolute sovereignty and unequaled power – clearly reflected in the repetitive phrase that accompanies the plagues: “so that they know that I am G-d”.

Rav Moshe Lichtenstein enlightens us by revealing how, upon reading the last makkah of Parashat Va’era (the plague of ‘barad’, hail), we sense a change in the Pharaoh’s attitude. For the first time, Par’oh reacts to a plague with the words: “Chatati hapa’am;” “I have sinned this time;” Hashem Hatzaddik, va’ani v’ammi har’sha’im”, “G-d is the righteous One, while I and my nation are the guilty ones.” And this change in attitude leads to Hashem’s ‘adjustment’ to the purpose of the plagues in Parashat Bo, which were meant to punish the Egyptians for their cruelty to B’nai Yisrael.

As the two parashot differ in their ultimate goals, so too, the two haftarot readings, though reacting to the very same historical event in their time, differ in the prophecies of the two contemporary nevi’im, Yechezkel and Yirmiyahu. Yechezkel’s nevu’ah that follows Parashat Va’era, centers on G-d’s anger toward the Pharaoh and his boast of being a god and the creator of the Nile, the life-source of Egypt. His denial of the omnipotence of the One Creator and the One Sovereign reflected the

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very sin of Par'oh that we read in the parasha. For that reason, the punishment prophesied by Yechezkel includes the removal of Egypt's life-source, predicting a serious impact on the population through Hashem's strike upon the Nile itself and their eventual banishment from the Nile and into the wilderness.

Rav Lichtenstein explains that Yirmiyahu's nevu'ah that we read in the haftarah of Parashat Bo [perek 46], echoes the purpose of the three final plagues depicted in the parasha, i.e. to punish Mitzrayim for the heartless behavior of the Pharaoh and his nation. Reflecting the theme of the parsha, Yirmiyahu prophesies of punishments for the **inhumanity** of Egypt-not for her denial of G-d. Just as their behavior toward the Israelites in Egypt was deplorable, so too, was their behavior toward the Jews in Judea in the time of Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel. The treachery of the Pharaoh in abandoning his alliance with Judah in order to avoid his defeat in the hands of Bavel, would be punished by the weakening of his empire and the eventual fall to the Babylonian Empire. Yirmiyahu prophesies of an invasion of Mitzrayim from the North in which the enemy would drive out the Egyptian military, lay waste to her land and put Egypt to shame (see p'sukim 20-24).

Two haftarot sharing two nevu'ot from two nevi'im. Yet, each one echoes a divine message for past, present and future. ■

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