



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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A Prophet of Hope

The haftarah we read this week is a selection chosen from the second perek of Sefer Yirmiyahu, and a direct continuation of the navi's message that we read in last week's haftarah. However, in this second perek of Sefer Yirmiyahu, the prophet is no longer conversing with Hashem but, rather, is delivering a harsh message directly to the people themselves, thereby, beginning the mission upon

which G-d had sent him. Picking up on the theme he opened in the last perek, Yirmiyahu condemns the nation for their ingratitude toward Boreh Ha'Olan. In order to accentuate the extent of Israel's sin, the navi reviews the kindnesses Hashem had done for them over the many years. Among them the exodus from Egypt, the wonders G-d had wrought for them during their sojourn in the desert and His gift of a bountiful and fruitful land.

The prophet contrasts G-d's faithfulness to Israel with Israel's faithlessness to G-d. The nation's sins were not limited simply to their disregard of Hashem's will but, even worse, their abandonment of His worship. By turning to other powers, Israel proved that they found G-d's gifts and His wonders were insufficient for them and, by seeking alternatives to G-d, they indicated that they regarded the Al-mighty as not All Mighty. It is for this reason that Yirmiyahu charges his generation that the behavior of Hashem's chosen nation was even more corrupt than the other nations who, sadly, remained faithful to their false gods.

Nonetheless, the navi tempers his harsh words by suggesting that Israel's infidelity to Hashem was less a result of rebelliousness and more one of confusion and error. Pointing to the leadership of the nation, Yirmiyahu charged them as being guilty of leading the people astray. He criticizes the kohanim who did not search for G-d, the scholars who did not seek to understand Hashem's ways, the leaders who openly rebelled against G-d and the (false) prophets who prophesied in the name Ba'al.

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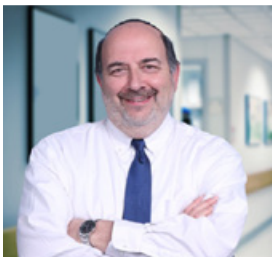
Given this reality of unethical and immoral behavior of these role models, G-d admits that the nation should not shoulder the entire guilt for their sins. Therefore, He tells Israel: “Od ariv it’chem,” “I will yet contend with you” - the implication being that G-d would not yet punish the people but would “contend,” argue, debate with the hope of convincing the nation to return and avoid punishment. And this, indeed, was the very mission of Yimiyahu. He was not only the “prophet of doom” that we often think him to be, but also the “prophet of hope.” This would illuminate G-d’s words to Yirmiyahu in the last perek where the prophet is told that his job would be “to uproot and smash” but also “to build and to plant.”

G-d sends prophets to try and bring His children back to Him. Declaring a message of hope to a sinful nation, (as Yirmiyahu did when the enemy had already built ramparts up to the wall of Yerushalayim!) is an essential part of the prophet’s mission. Hashem desires return and not ruin.

And it was that message of hope that helped us survive the centuries of ruin until we could finally return home. ■

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