



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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The haftarah we read on Shabbat Parah is taken from the 36th perek of Sefer Yechezkel and, understandably, focuses upon the purity and impurity, Tum'ah and Taharah, the very theme of the special Maftir we read. The prophet's painful depiction of how Israel had "contaminated" the Holy Land and undermined its essential sanctity, can deflect the reader from appreciating the essential message that Yechezkel hopes to share. Throughout the year, the haftarot readings are meant to connect to a theme found in the weekly parasha or in a separate Maftir read upon a special occasion. Due to that, the haftarah chosen from the books of the nevi'im can be only a short selection taken from a larger prophetic message, and, as a result, does not present the navi's complete message.

And that is true about this week's haftarah.

You will note that our reading starts in the middle of the 36th perek – at the 16th verse. It is there, in the middle of the prophet's message, where Yechezkel first speaks to Israel of their sins and debaucheries that polluted the sanctity of the land. He explains to the people that it was their immoral behavior that caused Hashem's wrath and led to their defeat and exile. And, exacerbating their behavior that had defiled the land itself was their actions in the exile that desecrated Hashem's name among the foreign nations.

These p'sukim of harsh criticism had always troubled me as being an improper message that was supposed to prepare us for the

upcoming joyous celebration of the holiday of Pesach. This year, however, I was fortunate to read the approach of Rav Amnon Bazak, in his sefer: "Yechezkel: The Prophet Who Was Human" [My translation of "Yechezkel: HaNavi Shehayah 'Ben Adam' "] who explained the haftarah segment of the perek in light of the entire theme of the chapter itself.

Rav Barak teaches that chapter 36 is one of Yechezkel's prophecies of redemption! He reminds us that the previous perek (35) was meant as an introduction to the following chapter – that of our haftarah. This 35th perek opens with Hashem's warning to "Har Seir", Mount Se'ir, predicting that it would soon become decimated and desolate, as would all the cities of Edomite nation. The punishments that would befall them are results of Edom's eternal enmity and hatred of Israel. This nevuah was not, however, delivered directly to Edom but specifically to Israel. It was Hashem's assurance to His nation that the enemies of Israel would be humbled as part of the coming redemption of the Chosen People.

And that is what the following chapter is about. Here, the 36th perek begins by addressing "Harei Yisrael," "the Mountains of ISRAEL depicting a glorious future for the Land of Israel and promising the reversal of her state of desolation to one of fertility and growth. Likewise, Yechezkel predicts the nation's return to her homeland, the rebuilding of her cities and the repopulation of her country.

It is only in the final section of this chapter, the “negative” part of our haftarah, that the navi reviews the sins and iniquities that forced Israel into galut. The haftarah’s inclusion of the act of sprinkling the cleansing waters in order to purify the “defiled” nation, is what connects us to the theme of Parashar Parah and why it was chosen to be read on this Shabbat.

But it is essential to understand that this section was NOT the focus of Yechezkel’s message to his, and to the future, generations! The only purpose mentioning these “negatives” was to reinforce the fact that G-d, in His determination to prepare His people for the “Ge’ulah”, would cleanse Israel from those sins, so that they would be deserving and worthy for their redemption.

And THIS theme is why we must realize that our haftarah is not – in any way – an “improper” message for the weeks before Pesach. It is a detailed description of our future release from the golus subjugation - including the preparation that would precede it.

And, as such, our haftarah is, in truth, the perfect prelude to the Festival of Freedom. ■

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