

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler

Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

Vayishlach

Although this week's parasha describes the long-awaited reunion and rapprochement between Eisav and Ya'akov, it also indicates that there seems to have been very little subsequent relations between the two. Yes. They did part amicably... but they parted, and except for the cooperative burial of their father Yitzchak, we never read any experience that they shared. It is this very point that leads to the prophecy of Ovadya, the shortest book of nevu'a in the Tanach and the one that makes up this week's haftara. By the time that Ovadya offered his prophetic message, Edom, the nation of Eisav, had no positive relations with Israel and exhibited no brotherly love toward Yaakov's descendants. In fact, they had become an enemy of the Israelite people (as I pointed out in my previous article for Parashat Tol'dot) and the navi's prediction of the harsh punishments that would befall Edom is, in no small part, due to the fact that Edom WAS a brother and should have reflected that relationship in their behavior toward Israel.

Indeed, the enmity displayed by Edom to Yisrael was so intense that they became the very symbol of every enemy of Israel, something to which Ovadya hints when, while speaking of Edom, he includes the punishments awaiting 'all the nations' who opposed Hashem's Chosen People. Additionally, it is interesting to note that when we study the prophecies of Yirmiyahu, Amos and Yechezkel, we find that the name "Edom" is often used as a general term for the foes of Israel - even those who, according to some commentaries, tormented Israel during the second Temple when the nation of Edom no longer existed!

Perhaps this division between the nations should not have been unexpected, given that the blessing of Yitzchak to Eisav stated that the two future nations would never rule at the same time but would, rather, dominate or be dominated by the other. In light of this, we understand more fully why Edom became the symbol of all Israel's enemies, for the success of Israel would only come with the weakening, and eventual destruction, of "Edom".

Ovadya, however, does not suffice relating a nevu'a of the punishment that would be meted out to Edom. In the final psukim of his Sefer, he

offers powerful words to all of the "Edoms" throughout history - to all of Israel's enemies. KI KAROV YOM HASHEM AL KOL HAGOYIM, G-d's day of reckoning of those nations is approaching, Ovadya warns, when He will repay their wickedness by punishing them with the same evil that they visited upon Israel. But he then tells Israel these comforting words: UVHAR TZIYON TIHYEH P'LEITA, after all your suffering and persecution, know well that those who remain will find refuge on Har Tziyon, in Jerusalem. These prophetic words have been realized in our very time. The remnants, the survivors of the worst of all evils, found refuge and built new lives in TZIYON!

Many years ago I heard a well-known story told about the great Chafetz Chayim, Rav Yisrael Meir Kagen, who passed away in 1933. In his final year, the Nazi party had grown in power and the Chafetz Chayim expressed his concern. One of his students asked what would happen to the Jews and the Chafetz Chayim responded prophetically: UVHAR TZIYON TIHYEH P'LEITA, the future Jewish survival would be found in Tziyon.

As we face to Edom of today we are reminded of how we have enemies that face us in every generation. But

we should also be aware that, in a few days, we will mark G-d's victory over the Edom that the Chashmona'im faced. How fitting, therefore, that our annual readings has us hear Ovadya's words only a week or two before Chanuka so that we be reminded that V'HAYTA LASHEM HAM'LUCHA - that ultimately, HaShem alone will judge all of the Edoms as He reigns over all of mankind.

Which is what we hope to witness in our own days! ✨