

# Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara  
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**EIKEV - 27 p'sukim - Yeshayahu 49:14-51:3**

The tragic words that open this week's haftara - VATOMER TZIYON AZAVANI HASHEM, VASHEM SHECHECHANI) are more than cries of hopelessness from an exiled Israel who believed that Hashem had abandoned or forgotten her. This unfortunate cry also reflects the belief of many in the "post-churban generation" that their exile and their enemy's destruction of both Yerushalayim and the Beit HaMikdash indicated that they should no longer worship the One G-d. Having been overwhelmed by the Babylonian power that defeated Hashem's Chosen Nation and succeeded in destroying Hashem's "House", the people were convinced that they would now worship the Babylonian "god" who, clearly, they believed, proved his strength to be "greater" than that of their G-d (ch"v).

However, we should not be surprised that, due to their defeat, the people assumed that they should no longer worship Hashem, Who, in their mind, had "abandoned" them. In fact, Israel's embracing the pagan belief that victory of one's nation proved its

"god's" supremacy over the defeated deity, is condemned throughout the writings of the prophets. Yirmiyahu, for example, authors Sefer M'lachim, recording the nation's growing corruption and sinfulness, in order to teach the population that, even in the Diaspora, they were expected to follow Hashem's laws. Yirmiyahu impressed upon them that their defeat was NOT that of Hashem nor was it a reflection of His "powerlessness" (ch'v). The defeat was one of theirs alone and was brought upon them by G-d Himself, a punishment to their own refusal to heed the warnings Hashem sent to them over the course of many years.

We see this misguided assumption being addressed to the exiled masses quite clearly in the writings of the navi Yechezkel as well, when he warns the exiles (Yechezkel 20:32) - "And that which you believe will not come to be, when you say: 'We will be like other nations and worship (gods of) wood and stone'"

However, Yishayahu's reaction to the nation's beliefs that we read in our haftara, is different from the responses of both Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel. Rather than criticize and condemn the people, Yishayahu turns to Israel in a soothing tone and with comforting words. He explains that, as a mother could never forget her infant child or fail to show compas-

sion, so G-d could never forget His nation or fail to be merciful to them. The navi reasserts that Israel is eternally bound to G-d through the covenant made to their ancestors and, sin though they might, they will always remain chosen by G-d. In simple terms, this suffering generation is taught by Yishayahu that Hashem's punishment does not mean Hashem's rejection.

That is why the subsequent p'sukim of the haftara describe the bright future that awaits Israel. Yishayahu supports his comforting words with a prophecy of a massive return to Israel, of a repopulating of the currently barren cities and of a rebuilding of destroyed edifices. He even adds that the other nations will lend their support to Israel's return and closes his message by guaranteeing that joy and gladness will return to the once-grieving land so that it will be filled with jubilant music and prayers of thanksgiving to Hashem.

It is a vision that we hope to see soon with our own eyes. ✨