

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
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The Waters of No'ach

NO'ACH - 22 p'sukim - Yeshayahu 54:1-55:5

Chazal selected this week's haftara reading from the 54th and 55th chapters of Sefer Yishayahu, a prophecy somewhat familiar to us. The navi's message in this haftara focuses upon the theme of comfort and consolation, which explains why it was designated as haftara to be read part on Parashat R'ei and part on Parashat Ki Teitzei. It is, certainly, a fitting message for these post-Tish'a b'Av Shabbatot.

But why, we might wonder, were these same verses chosen to be read on this Parashat No'ach?

The popular, widely-accepted, reason why these chapters were designated to be read on this Shabbat is due to Yishayahu's usage of the words MEI NO'ACH - the waters, i.e., the flood, of No'ach's time - hence the direct connection to the events depicted in our parasha. But there are other connections as well, understated, perhaps, that touch upon the events depicted in our parasha.

For example: might the opening

words of the haftara, RONI AKARA, "Rejoice, O barren woman", be hinting to the final episode in the parasha, the final p'sukim that tell of the barren woman, Sarai, who would rejoice upon the birth of her son - even calling him "Yitzchak", laughter. Such a mention connects us to our parasha and would also serve as comforting reassurance to a grief-stricken nation, searching for hope for the future - thereby a fitting theme for the haftarot of consolation. The prophet's recalling how the nation of Avraham, born of a once-barren woman, became, as Hashem promised, "too numerous to count" would be a source of solace to the post-churban generation.

Furthermore, there could be a subtle message for the prophet Yishayahu himself in the fact that the flood is referred to as the "waters of No'ach" - a term implying, according to the Zohar HaKadosh, that the flood came as a result of No'ach's failure to pray for his generation. May we infer that Hashem was urging the navi to pray on behalf of his generation as well?

Perhaps.

But I turn to another difficulty I have found in our understanding the prophet's quotation. Many are misled in believing that the navi's reference to "No'ach's Waters" is limited to Hashem's promise never to bring such destruction again when, in fact,

Yishayahu's words of comfort were referring NOT to the flood itself but to the post-flood era. A simple glance into the previous pasuk would make it clear that the navi was comparing the moments of destruction to the promised, soon-to-be, years of construction. Yishayahu used his poetic expression B'SHETZEF KETZEF [v.8] - "in an outburst of wrath" - to depict the fleeting moments of G-d's anger as being of short duration compared to His many years of mercy and everlasting kindness that would follow: B'CHESED OLAM RICHAMTICH [v. 8]. The moments of punishment reflected in the MEI NO'ACH did not equal the decades of growth, development and recovery that began in the aftermath of the flood - precisely as Hashem had promised No'ach and the survivors.

The psalmist pleaded with Hashem, and urged Him: SAMCHEINU KIYMOT INITANU" - "Bring us joy to equal those days of affliction." I would submit that such was precisely Yishayahu's guarantee to his generation - that G-d's years of blessing and joy would far outweigh the difficult times of our suffering.

Given this promise, we would be wise NOT to focus on the days of affliction alone, not on MEI NO'ACH, but always to remember the guarantee of B'CHESED OLAM RICHAMTICH and,

thereby, look forward to future years of blessing and happiness. ✨