

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
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Koresh the... Mashiach?

**LECH L'CHA - 21 p'sukim
- Yishayahu 40:27-41:16**

This week's selection from the 40th and 41st p'rakim of Sefer Yishayahu, opens with the navi's words to Israel, questioning their lack of faith in Hashem's constant guidance and guardianship over His nation. Reminding his generation of G-d's unequalled abilities to "right the wrongs" for Israel, he closes the 41st perek by encouraging the people that those who retain faith in Hashem will renew their strength, "yachalifu ko'ach", never to fall or flag.

The beginning of the 41st perek, however, is an interesting - and even surprising - prophetic message directed to the foreign nations and not to Israel, explaining to them that, they too, like Israel, "yachalifu ko'ach", would renew their strength, IF, they too, would recognize the boundless power and limitless achievements G-d had wrought. In detailing some of the achievements of the Divine, Yishayahu begins reminding them "mi he'ir baMizrach", "Who stirred up one from the East?" -

a statement that has been explained as referring to Avraham Avinu (hence, the connection to our parasha). There is, however, a different approach, that we might consider to be a more logical message for the non-Israel nations.

Rav Moshe David Cassuto contends that he who was "stirred up from the East", actually refers to Koresh, Cyrus the Great, who overthrew the Babylonian Empire and called for the exiled Jews to return to Yerushalayim and rebuild the Beit HaMikdash. Nor should we be surprised to hear Yishayahu refer to the pagan King as a model for G-d's power and accomplishment. After all, the navi opens his 45th perek by quoting Hashem, saying: KO AMAR HASHEM - "this is what G-d said". But to whom was He addressing His words? LIMSHICHO, to his MASHI'ACH, i.e. His appointed agent. And the very next word reveals who this MASHI'ACH is: L'KORESH - YES! Hashem's appointed agent to whom He spoke was Koresh - Cyrus the Great! G-d refers to him as mashi'ach!

This surprising choice of mashi'ach is, actually, quite understanding. We must remember that the navi Yishayahu was addressing the foreign powers at this moment, and these nations would not relate to, or even recognize, the remarkable miracles G-d had performed for B'nei Yisrael. For this reason, the prophet uses

Cyrus, a well-known conqueror and powerful emperor, to stand as an example of a Divinely-gifted regent.

The aim of this prophetic message - and its importance - was to educate the pagan worshipers (and to remind the Israelite population) that HAKADOSH BARUCH HU was not a "national deity", meant to defend or protect a specific nation or land. The message that Yishayahu was sharing with all nations was HASHEM ELOKEINU - HASHEM ECHAD - that there is but ONE and ONLY true power in the universe and that K'VODO MALEI OLAM - His presence and glory is EVERYWHERE!

This is what the first seven p'sukim of the 41st perek were teaching the nations. It explains for us why these verses include the prophet's condemnation of idolatry and the foolishness of their attempts to reinforce their man-made statues and sculptures to stand against Eternal One when they stand in judgment before Him. The final part of the haftara, therefore, stands as a powerful message to Israel. Yishayahu explains that, as opposed to the wayward pagan nations, they are descendants of Ya'akov and Avraham (note the connection to the parasha) and, therefore, they were chosen by G-d to be protected, supported and fortified - with no reason to create false gods.

Parashat Lech-L'cha tells of the first individual who understood the One and Only. Our haftara hopes to bring that understanding to all of Israel. ✨