

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
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Finding the Final Closure

**VAYISHLACH - 21 p'sukim -
the whole Book(let) of Ovadya**

Sefer Ovadya that we read as our haftara this Shabbat, focuses upon but one theme - the destruction of Edom, the descendants of Eisav, a penalty for the many years of their hatred and mistreatment of Israel, the offspring of Ya'akov, Eisav's brother. The nevu'a of Ovadya is rather straightforward, depicting the abusive behavior of Edom toward Israel and the eventual destruction the Edomite kingdom itself.

Interestingly, Sefer Ovadya is the only book in the Tanach that contains but one perek and has the least p'sukim and the fewest words of all other sifrei nevu'a. Nonetheless, despite its succinct length, there is much for us to uncover in this haftara - especially regarding who this navi was, from which family/tribe did he come and when did he prophesy.

Chazal suggest that Ovadya was the self-same individual mentioned in Sefer M'lachim Alef (ch. 18) as the

righteous attendant/palace "administrator" of the wicked King Ach'av. The fact that his one nevu'a centers upon Edom and the fact that the text never include the name of his father or of his tribe, led our ancient scholars to see Ovadya as an Edomite convert - one who condemned his former nation's cruelty toward Israel [see Sanhedrin 39b].

However, other parshanim (including the Ibn Ezra) regard Ovadya as a prophet who served Israel during the years of Churban Bayit Rishon, and was a contemporary of Yirmiyahu HaNavi. These commentators point to a number of his quotations that echo the words we find in Sefer Yirmiyahu [see perek 49] and see support for their approach in our haftara's harsh reproach of Edom's treacherous behavior during the Babylonian invasion [verse 11]:

"[For] the day you stood afar [when]... strangers captured their (Israel's) wealth and foreigners came to the gates and cast a lottery on Jerusalem - YOU TOO were like one of them."

The two p'sukim that follow continue in berating Edom for their deceitful behavior against their brother, Israel, when Yerushalayim was attacked - powerful censure that, logically, would have been spoken during the era of the Churban. Undoubtedly, it was for this reason that, in the prophecies of Yirmiyahu, Amos and

Yechezkel, we find the name "Edom" as a general term for the foes of Israel - even those who, according to some commentaries, tormented Israel during the second Temple period - when the nation of Edom no longer existed!

And yet, Chazal are adamant in stating that this foretold destruction of the nation of Edom could be avoided were she to change her ways and treat Israel with kindness and compassion - as a brother should. In fact, we can read the words of Ovadya himself who, when speaking of the sins of Edom, repeats and emphasizes how their behavior was particularly odious as it targeted the descendants of their own forefather, Avraham, and were, therefore, "brothers" to Israel [see verses 10,12).

These p'sukim had Chazal resolutely state that this foretold destruction of Edom could be avoided were she to change her ways and treat Israel with kindness and compassion - as a brother should. In fact, Rav Yehuda Shaviv sees the haftara as a logical closure to the unfinished saga found in the parasha itself. The story of Ya'akov vs Eisav as depicted in the Torah finds the two parting from each other with the promise to reunite at Se'ir (B'reishit 33:14). But that never occurred.

The ultimate reunion of the two, as Rav Shavit sees it, is found in the final

verse of the haftara: when Eisav/Edom reconnects to Ya'akov/Yisra'el only when she is judged for her treatment of Israel and recognizes that V'HAY'TA LASHEM HAM'LUCHA - that the ultimate kingship belongs to Hashem.

Only when the nation of Eisav faces the people of Ya'akov and accepts the universal sovereignty of the G-d of Israel - only then will the incomplete saga find a final closure. ✨