

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara
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A "Vineyard" Reborn!

SH'MOT - 23 p'sukim - Yeshayahu
27:6-28:13 and ends with 29:22-23

Chazal's selection for the haftara of Parashat Sh'mot [according to Ashkenaz custom] is taken from the 27th and 28th p'rakim of Sefer Yishayahu. We find the opening of the selection to be somewhat difficult to understand, perhaps because of the fact that these introductory verses are taken from the middle of the perek [27 v.6]. As a result, we find our meforshim taking different approaches regarding the meaning of the initial p'sukim of the haftara.

Rashi sees the words of Yishayahu, HABA'IM YASHREISH YA'AKOV, as being a connection to the opening pasuk of the parasha, V'EILEH SH'MOT B'NEI YISRAEL HABA'IM... He explains that the prophet was reminding his generation how HABA'IM - those who arrived into Egypt, i.e. the children of Yaakov, YA'AKOV - YASHREISH - grew and flourished there. According to Rashi, Yishayahu was telling his nation that, even in Egypt, G-d blessed the children of Ya'akov with remarkable

growth - a reward for their loyalty and devotion to Hashem.

On the other hand, the bulk of the parshanim, including the Metzudot, Radak and Malbim, see the words of the prophet - NOT as a reference to the past generation, but as a depiction of the future era. As they understand it: HABA'IM - "In the coming days", YASHREISH YAAKOV, "the nation of Yaakov will grow and flourish" and so, according to this approach, the navi foresees a time of revival and rebirth for Israel, when the nation returns to her land.

The Malbim also points to an earlier verse (v.2), one that precedes the haftara itself, as being the connection to the verse that opens our haftara. This pasuk portrays a future when the people will be singing praises about Israel as being "a vineyard of fine wine". He enlightens us by defining this vineyard as Israel herself, declaring that during the long periods of exile, throughout the nation's Diaspora years of suffering and bitterness, the "vineyard" of Israel seemed to have been destroyed. Upon Israel's return - HABA'IM - the "vineyard" of Israel will flourish and blossom - YASHREISH, as the remaining roots of the vineyard, long-thought to be destroyed and lifeless, will be brought back to life.

And yet, despite these different

approaches of our commentators in their respective understanding of the introductory words of the haftara, the prophetic message itself remains unchanged. For, whether Yishayahu was referring to the remarkable growth of the first generation of Ya'akov's descendants in Egypt - as Rashi suggests, or whether the navi was referring to the flourishing of Israel in the generation of redemption - as most meforshim do, the essential message is the same. Yishayahu's lesson was addressed to a population that had witnessed the exile of their brethren in the north, and, therefore, a generation thirsting to hear words of hope, of optimism, of future.

And the prophet Yishayahu does just that.

Certainly, the message as understood by the Malbim et al, comforted the nation by foreseeing a magnificent future for Israel, but even Rashi, who understands the message as referring to the past generation, sees it as an encouraging reminder to the suffering masses that, if Hashem could save an oppressed and enslaved generation, and bless them with growth - than He will certainly do so for the succeeding generation!

The navi teaches; the navi censures; and the navi comforts. *