

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler**

Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

"So that they know that I am G-d!"

**VA'EIRA - 23 p'sukim
- Yechezkeil 28:25-29:21**

It is somewhat curious.

Our haftara commences with the closing p'sukim of the 28th perek - the final verses concluding the prophet's previous nevu'a! It is, indeed, quite strange to have the haftara begin with the final p'sukim of a prophecy! In truth, however, it is only problematic were we to ignore the earlier nevu'ot, those themes that flow logically into Yechezkel's lesson he prepares to share with the exiled Jewish community in Bavel.

In the earlier prophecies [chapters 25-28] we read of the navi's criticisms that focus upon the corruption of Israel's six neighbors: Amon, Moav, Edom, Philistia, and, later on, Tzor (Tyre) and Tzidon (Sidon). It is significant to note that the navi's condemnation of Israel herself (i.e., Judea, for the bulk of the northern kingdom had already been exiled), is first found in the opening of the 29th perek. It is there that we learn of the

specific date when Yechezkel pronounced his nevu'a, as our haftara relates: "In the tenth-year and the twelfth day of the tenth month..." This tells us that the prophet's oration was pronounced a mere two days after the Babylonian army had begun their siege around Yerushalayim (Asara b'Tevet). In other words, Yechezkel shared his words to a nation in exile who had just heard about the "beginning of the end" to Jerusalem and their brethren in the capital. And yet, the prophet says nothing of the Babylonian enemy - the besieging hordes that surrounded Ir HaKodesh!? He condemns Amon and Mo'av, he censures Edom and Philistia, and he denounces Tzor and Tzidon. But says no word against Babylonia!

And, perhaps even more surprising, is the fact that the bulk of Yechezkel's rebuke that we do find in our haftara, is directed toward none of these threatening enemies, but, rather, toward Egypt, the one nation who established a military alliance with Yehuda!

Yes, this too is quite curious. But, in truth, it is not so surprising.

Multiple messages found in the books of our nevi'im emphasize the treacherous behavior of the Egyptian Empire that denied their promised support for the Judean kingdom in their struggle against the Babylonian

Empire. Undoubtedly, the inconstancy of the Judeans in their belief in Hashem, their lack of reliance upon HaKadosh Baruch Hu to relieve them from the threat of Bavel, is what led them to ally themselves with Mitzrayim, and was the essential cause - and primary sin - of their destruction and exile.

But Rav Amnon Bazak clarifies the reason why Yechezkel focuses upon the sins of Egypt and her King. The navi "spotlights" the boast of Par'o: LI Y'ORI VA'ANI ASITI, "The river (Nile) is mine and I made myself!" - Par'o's boast claiming his divinity as an all-powerful creator. It is this outrageous attitude - together with Egypt's treacherous behavior toward Judea - that brought G-d's prophecy of their approaching punishments pronounced by Yechezkel.

Additionally, the harsh words directed to Egypt were also meant for the ear of Judea. Rav Bazak pointed to the punishments waiting for Egypt as those threatened to Israel as well. The prophetic penalties promised to Egypt, the warning that her land would become desolate and her cities - destroyed [29:9], closely parallels the cautionary notice Yechezkel gives to Israel that "the populated cities shall be destroyed and the land will be desolate" [12:20]. Likewise, the prophet's threat to Egypt that G-d would disperse them among the nations and scatter them to other

lands [29:12], echoes the navi's intimidating words to Israel: "I shall scatter them among the nations and disperse them to others lands" [12:15]

Why was this connection essential? Because the sins of both Egypt and Israel were the same: A denial by each reigning monarch (and many of their nation) of the existence, power and divinity of G-d Himself. The need to teach these deniers Who Hashem is, was the very theme of our parasha. Note how, after almost every plague brought upon Egypt, we are told "so they/he shall know that I am G-d". To know G-d, to believe in Him and to recognize His presence was essential - both for Egypt AND Israel.

And this is precisely why the haftara starts at the end. For the final words of the previous prophecy stated exactly what the theme of the following nevu'a, our haftara:

"So that they shall know that I am G-d!" ✨