

Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

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

REISHIT TZ'MICHAT GE'ULATEINU

YOM HA'ATZMA'UT

On this special Shabbat, a day when we are privileged to read two parshot - Tazri'a and M'tzora - and to mark Rosh Chodesh of Iyar, we find much material to discuss regarding both of the Torah portions and concerning the significance of the month. However, I have decided to "pass over" these opportunities, favoring, instead, the chance to focus on the holiday that is NEVER observed on Shabbat - but IS celebrated this week. It is for this reason, that I begin this article by sending the warmest MAZAL TOV wishes to all who will be rejoicing on the 78th Yom Ha'Atzma'ut of the State of Israel this coming week!

And it is for the same reason that my message this week will focus on the "non-Shabbat" haftara, the haftara of Yom Ha'Atzma'ut.

In 1949, the first year after the establishment of the State of Israel, the Rabbanut instituted the reading of the eleventh and twelfth p'rakim of

Sefer Yishayahu for the haftara of Yom Ha'Atzma'ut. They chose this specific selection, as its depiction of the Messianic Era is one that is unparalleled in all of Tanach. Clearly, the Rabbis of the last generation saw the establishment of a Jewish State as nothing less than REISHIT TZ'MICHAT GE'ULATEINU - "the first flowering of our redemption".

Yeshayahu's vision of an idyllic world that is portrayed in these p'rakim - its picture of a peaceful world realized through the leadership of a king from the Davidic dynasty - may not be yet reached, but throughout those years of struggle, Jews remained confident that G-d's promise would, ultimately, be fulfilled. This prophetic vision includes the establishment of a just and righteous society, one inspired by a divine spirit of wisdom and understanding and by a leader who would judge the destitute with righteousness and who would strike down wickedness. And when Yishayahu paints the portrait of a world where natural enemies - the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid - would live in peace, we understood all too well that the ultimate goal and the ultimate blessing would be that of peace.

However... the haftara does NOT begin with the depiction of this idyllic world! It actually begins with the last three verses of the tenth perek, a chapter in which the navi relates the

many misdeeds and failings that Israel committed during the era of the first Beit HaMikdash. In fact, these final verses that open the haftara, begin, quite poetically, with a portrayal of Sancheriv's victorious march through the Judean cities that he had conquered! The opening words, OD HAYOM B'NOV LA'AMOD, describe the powerful Assyrian army standing at the outskirts of Yerushalayim (Nov), with her general contemptuously waving his hand over the Holy City and boasting of his inevitable victory!

Given this truth, why would our scholars, celebrate the REISHIT TZ'MICHAT GE'ULATEINU by opening Yeshayahu's wonderful prophetic description of Y'mot HaMashi'ach with the frightening depiction of the enemy's victory?

Actually, our Rabbis had good reason to do so.

The Rabbanut understood well that this portrayal clearly reflected the widespread attitude of the Arab enemy in 1948, boasting - contemptuously "waving their hand" - that they would soon push the outnumbered and ill-equipped Jews into the sea. Our scholars recognized how well the second and third verses of the haftara reflected the miracles of 1948, in which Yishayahu prophesies how Hashem will bring down the haughty enemy and crush those who

hoped to destroy G-d's nation. It is for this reason, that the ancient Tana'itic scholars established the reading of this haftara for the eighth day of Pesach - for they also saw this nevu'a as a fitting message for the final day of Chag HaGe'ula! And Israel's Gedolei HaRabbanim of 1948-9 saw the very same message.

The eighth day of Pesach is seen as a Chag HaGe'ula for Jews in the Diaspora... but today, the fifth day of Iyar must be regarded as the Chag HaGe'ula for ALL Jews around the world.

It is, after all,

Reishit Tz'michat Ge'ulateinu! ✨