

Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

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Yitro

This week's parasha describes for us the great "theophany", the revelation of G-d, at Har Sinai - an event witnessed by the entire nation, experienced by millions of people. This Shabbat's haftara relates to us the personal "theophany" of the navi Yish'ayahu who alone sees the vision of Hashem's throne and His glory and is charged to bring the vision and divine message to the entire nation. The prophet's vision and message is found in the sixth perek of Yish'ayahu but it is the earliest of all the prophecies delivered by this great navi; indeed, it is his formal "induction" to the service of Hashem. Much in the same way, B'nei Yisra'el are "inaugurated" into the service of G-d at Har Sinai, with Hashem declaring V'ATEM TIHYU LI MAMLECHET KOHANIM, "And you will be a kingdom of kohanim (better: attendants) for Me." And just as the people trembled and stood afar in fear of witnessing G-d's revelation, so too did Yish'ayahu believe he would die for having "seen" Hashem.

It is interesting to note that the

Ramban, in his commentary on the Aseret HaDibrot, points out that the pronouncements of G-d heard by the nation were understood by each and every person according to his or her own abilities. It was not simply a communal experience but an intensely personal one as well and, perhaps, the choice of this perek as the haftara was meant to teach that Yish'ayahu's individual encounter with G-d described therein was, ultimately, not that different from the one experienced by all of Israel at Har Sinai.

In essence, however, it is the contrast between the two events that cries out to us, for the glory revealed to B'nei Yisra'el at Sinai was meant to impress upon them the power and majesty of Hashem and, accordingly, the absolute necessity of accepting and keeping His mitzvot. The vision seen by the navi, on the other hand, was part of his inauguration into G-d's service to accept the mission of admonishing the nation who failed to perform the mitzvot and to warn them that G-d's punishment would not cease "until the cities become desolate... and the land become... wasted and Hashem will drive the people away..."

We look back today upon the thousands of years that saw the

fruition of this terrifying prophecy but we look today at the reversal of this vision as the people have returned to their Land, rebuilding from the destruction, repopulating the cities and replanting the fields so the land gives forth its fruit once again.

But, as our haftara reminds us, we must realize that the miracle we see will continue as long as we continue to heed the words pronounced so long ago at Har Sinai. ✨