

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : תולדות

*This week's Haftorah is taken from the Sefer Malachi,
one of the shorter Books of the Prophets which together make up "The Twelve"
Chapter 1, verse 1 — Chapter 2 verse 7*

1. In this week's Sidra the Torah shows the contrast between Yaakov and his twin brother, Aysov. Although this week's Haftorah itself has very little to do with the Sidra as such, nevertheless the first Pessukim similarly contrast the Jewish People (that is, the people of Yaakov) with the non-Jewish nations generally, but with the empire that was to become Rome (that is, the people of Aysov) in particular. The prophet proclaims that even though Yaakov and Aysov were twin brothers and really therefore there should be little to choose between them, nevertheless HaShem declares that He loves Yaakov and the people that descends from him because of their great potential for good and that He despises the people that descend from Aysov, even though they become a mighty empire, because of their cruelty and wickedness to others.
2. Malachi is sometimes called one of the Twelve Minor Prophets. Really, this is a disrespectful misnomer: none of the Hebrew prophets were "minor." What people mean, of course, is that the Book of Malachi is one of the minor books of Scripture. But this, too, is wrong. For even if it might not be a very big book with many chapters, the word "minor" is wrongly taken to refer to its status when really all that is meant is its length. Malachi is not a "minor prophet" and neither is the Book of Malachi at all "minor" or unimportant. It's just that the Book of Malachi is one of the shorter books of Scripture.
3. There are various opinions concerning the identity of Malachi. The name itself means "My messenger," that is, G-d calls him so. "Malachi" might therefore not be the personal name of this prophet, but his title, so to speak, his vocation. Indeed, there are some who say that Malachi, known as "the last prophet," is identical with Ezra the Scribe, who likewise was one of the last prophets in the Jewish people, if not the last.
4. Malachi taught Torah and proclaimed his prophetic message to the Jewish People in the time of the second Beis HaMikdash and this Haftorah indeed focuses on the service in the Beis HaMikdash. He says that our service in the Beis HaMikdash must not become stale; it must never become tedious and wearisome. Malachi complains that the people brought blemished *korbonnos* and he asks: Would you dare to offer substandard presents to your boss? Where is the devotion and dedication on the part of the Jewish People or, indeed, the Kohanim? For if the people brought sub-standard *korbonnos*, says Malachi, the Kohanim were at fault in this. For the principle duty of the Kohanim is not, as popularly imagined, to serve as the people's representative in the Beis HaMikdash. This duty only took up a very small proportion of their time. (The Kohen was on duty in the Beis HaMikdash only for one week in every twenty-four.) The main duty of the Kohen (and the Levi, too) was to teach Torah to the Jewish People and if the Jewish People were lapse in their Mitzvos and their service to HaShem, it was due to the quality of Torah teaching and learning — and this is the responsibility of the Kohanim.
5. Speaking in the name of HaShem, Malachi therefore proclaims HaShem's message of rebuke to the Jewish People and to the Kohanim. The Kohanim have been remiss in their sacred task of teaching Torah to the Jewish People and that is why the Jewish People have been half-hearted in their duties towards HaShem. The Haftorah ends with the exhortation to the Kohanim to be an example of virtue and an inspiration, so that the Jewish People shall seek Torah wisdom from them and learn to fear HaShem sincerely.