

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : אצ"ו

***For Sefaradim, this week's Haftorah is taken from Sefer Hoshe'a
(the first of the shorter Books of the Prophets which together make up "The Twelve")
Chapter 11, verse 7 — Chapter 12, verse 12***

1. Much of what has been written for the Ashkenazzi Haftorah of this Sidra can be applied to this Sefaradi Haftorah as the Haftorah for the Ashkenazzim starts where the Haftorah for the Sefaradim ends and the comments concerning the one Haftorah really apply just as much to the other. As explained in the general Introduction to the Haftoras, the original purpose of the Haftorah was to call to mind the Sidra of the week and there are usually therefore some points in the Haftorah which connect with the Sidra. In both these Haftoras of this Sidra, although some points of connexion with the Sidra can be discerned, they are rather tenuous.
2. After the death of Shlomo ben Dovid, the Jewish Kingdom split into two. The northern part of the country was known as the Kingdom of Israel, while the southern part was called the Kingdom of Yehudah. The southern Kingdom of Yehudah consisted in the main of the people of the Tribe of Yehudah and some of the Tribe of Binyomin and the Northern Kingdom of Israel comprised in the main people of the other ten-and-a-half Tribes. (This Northern Kingdom is often referred to as Efrayyim because of that Tribe's prominence and because its first king, Yerovom ben Nevvot, came from that Tribe.) The capital city of the Southern Kingdom of Yehudah was Yerushola'im and the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was the later-built Shomron, for which reason the Northern Kingdom is often also referred to as Shomron.
3. The Beis HaMikdash, representing the spiritual centre of the Jewish people, was in Yerushola'im and so, too was the Sanhedrin and, consequently, most of the Torah teachers and Torah leaders of the Nation. Thus it came about that generally speaking the Southern Kingdom of Yehudah was more loyal to HaShem and His Torah whereas the people of the Northern Kingdom were more prone to turn away from HaShem and His Torah and the Mitzvos. Right at the beginning of the split, the king, Yerovom ben Nevvot, wanted to stop his people from going to Yerushola'im for the *Sholosh Regollim* (the three Pilgrimage Festivals) as commanded in the Torah, and to that end he erected temples, complete with calf-worship (the predominant religious fad of the time amongst the idol-worshipping nations of the day) and even posted guards along the roads leading to Yerushola'im to stop any would-be pilgrims.
4. Of course, without proper Torah leadership, the people of the Northern Kingdom quickly slid into idolatry and neglected the laws of the Torah, both, those between man and G-d and those between man and his fellow. Many and various were the calls by the prophets of the day to the people of the Kingdom of Israel and their kings to return to HaShem and His Torah. This Haftorah opens with Hoshe'a speaking in the Name of HaShem and His wonder at how the Jewish People vacillate between returning to HaShem or to continue in their wrongdoing. This was the task of the prophet, to bring the people back to HaShem and the observance of the Mitzvos. Sometimes the people would rally themselves to *Teshuvah* but too often the warnings of exile and punishment for defecting from HaShem fell on deaf ears and indeed often the prophets who spoke out were in real danger of death. (Their crime: "defeatist talk in a time of national threat from an outside enemy.") Sadly, of course, the prophecies were fulfilled. At the time of our Haftorah, the danger was the empire-building aspirations of the king of Ashur,

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Tiglas Pilesser, and indeed it was not long before he invaded the Northern Kingdom and dragged some of its people into exile. The rest were taken into exile some forty years later.

5. Hoshe'a lived in the Northern Kingdom and his prophecies are directed to his own region of Eretz Yisroel but he has a similar warning for the Southern Kingdom of Yehudah, for their conduct too has fallen way below the standard demanded by HaShem. They do not deal with one another fairly and they, too, formed alliances with foreign kings instead of relying on HaShem. Why do you not take an example from Yaakov, your great ancestor? asks Hoshe'a. *He* trusted in HaShem and therefore was able to persevere over his brother Aysov and his uncle Lovvon. (*This is one of the points of connexion with our Sidra.*) So too if you all would but return to Me and My Torah, I would protect you from all harm without your needing to form alliances with foreign rulers (who are unreliable in their promises, anyhow). Cease your disloyalty to Me and get rid of your idols, stop cheating each other in trade and commerce, pay attention to the defenceless and protect them. Stop justifying your ill-gotten gains and stop relying on your own strength and business acumen. Return to HaShem and to the study of Torah as your ancestor Yaakov studied in the Tents of Shem (*another possible point of connexion*) and I will protect you.
6. With all the predictions of punishment and exile, Hoshe'a nevertheless prophesies that even after HaShem has exiled the Jewish People from their land, He will take them back again for He has promised that never will He substitute any other people for the Jewish People.
7. The twenty-four Books of the Holy Scriptures is made up of three component parts, namely, Torah, Nevi'im and Kesuvvim, the Hebrew initial letters of which form the acronym "TeNaCH." Torah (also known as the Chumash) consists of the Five Books of Mosheh (the word "Chumash" refers to a fifth); Nevi'im is made up of the eight Books of the Prophets and Kesuvvim is the Writings, made up of eleven Books amongst which are the Psalms (Tehillim) and Proverbs (Mishlay) and the Five Megillos. The difference between Torah and the other two parts of TeNaCH is that whereas the Five Books of Mosheh are the Word of HaShem as dictated by Him to Mosheh, word for word, letter by letter, the words of the Nevi'im and Kesuvvim are the word of G-d but in the words of the Novvi. That is to say, the message is from HaShem but the choice of words and style and idioms of speech are from the prophet himself. That is the reason for the greater sanctity of the Torah over Nevi'im and Kesuvvim.
8. The language of the prophets can be very different from the language of the Torah and can be very challenging to us to understand properly; the Holy Tongue, "Leshon HaKodesh," has so many meanings and nuances and the divinely inspired prophets who authored the books of Nevi'im and Kesuvvim intended them all. In addition, each prophet has his chosen style of speaking and delivery and often he uses a particular style reflecting the speech conventions of the day — for Leshon HaKodesh changes as does any living language change and develop. Thus we find that one prophet will speak in flowing language and another in short phrases, almost enigmatic in their brevity. One will use parables and analogies and another use rhetorical question and answer to give over his message. One prophet is dramatic and almost theatrical in his delivery, another poetic and romantic. But always there are to be found numerous meanings — sometimes even conflicting with each other — as the Nevi'im utilised the beauty and richness of Leshon HaKodesh to give over their many-faceted divine message.
9. The reason for our studying today the words of our prophets delivered so many years ago is that these prophecies, coming from HaShem, are timeless, they are not confined to any one time or age. They are intended for all future times, too. As our Chachommim say: despite that the Jewish People had "prophets double the number of the people coming out from Egypt, nevertheless only those prophecies that were for all time were written down and are part of Holy Writ." This short note will perhaps explain the different styles of the various Haftoras which are taken from all over the Books of the Prophets.