

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : בהר סיני

*The Haftorah for this Sidra is taken from Sefer Yirmiyohu, from Chapter 32 verses 6 — 27.
(When Sidra בהר סיני is combined with Sidra בחוקותי, only the Haftorah of בחוקותי is read.)*

1. There are different kinds of prophecy. We all know about spoken prophecy, the prophecy by word, where a person comes to us with a message from HaShem which he then tells over to us in the Name of HaShem. But there is also the phenomenon of “prophecy by deed,” that is, the prophet is bidden to do something, to act out something, and this is the message from HaShem, that is, the act is symbolic of something which is to happen in the future. We are not speaking here of the dramatic style of delivery used by some of our Nevi'im, whose actions were often intended to grab the attention of the people by their startling behaviour and make the people listen to their words. What we are speaking of here is when HaShem actually commands the Novvi to do something to symbolize the message. Our Haftorah is an example of such a prophecy.
2. A somewhat different kind of “prophecy by deed” is that which is said specifically and almost exclusively about Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov (and possibly about the sons of Yaakov, too). As we have seen in the Sidras of Berayshis (see, for instance, **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וישלח**) certain things that happened to them are a precursor of what will happen to the Jewish People in the future. That is, unlike the “prophecy by deed” of the prophet, where he is told to deliberately do something to symbolise an event that is to happen in the future, the very events themselves in the lives of our forefathers were the indicators of things that will happen to their descendants, the Jewish People, later on.
3. The age of the Nevi'im spanned more than a thousand years of our history and it is to be expected that the Nevi'im who lived in very different times and under very different conditions used very different styles of speaking. As has been explained elsewhere (see **HAFTORAH OF ויצא — SEFARD**) although the message came to the Novvi from HaShem, nevertheless the choice of words and idioms of speech were from the Novvi himself (unlike the חמשה חומשי תורה where every word and indeed every single letter was dictated by HaShem Himself to Moshe our Teacher).
4. Nevertheless, the words of prophecy that were actually spoken by the Novvi and were recorded for all time has that special quality of Nevuoh, namely, that it is not limited to one meaning or confined to any one time, for all Nevuoh emanates from HaShem Who is limitless and beyond time. The words of Nevuoh in נביאים וכתובים, therefore, are intended to carry many different meanings and any number of implied meanings are possible, even in the same words. One need not be surprised, therefore, to see how our Chachommim, of blessed memory, often discover very different — and indeed even contradictory — meanings in the prophetic words of נביאים וכתובים. Indeed, we need not be puzzled even at the apparent non-fulfilment of prophecy for not always is the obvious meaning of the words the only meaning — or indeed the true meaning.

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5. Having said that, it is perhaps worth remembering a few rules about prophecy and its fulfilment, as follows. If a prophecy has been made of some good coming about in the future, then, as long as it has not been proclaimed, or the Novvi has not been instructed to proclaim it publicly, the understanding is that the good will come about only on condition that the people concerned are worthy of that good. However, if the Novvi has been commanded to proclaim the good that is to come, then it will come about, whether the people concerned are worthy of it or not. On the other hand, predictions of bad things to come are never irreversible. Even if they have been proclaimed publicly, they are only intended as a threat, not a prediction, and they can always be averted by returning to HaShem in sincerity.
6. It was the sacred mission of Yirmiyohu HaNovvi to proclaim the dire warnings of doom and destruction to a wayward Jewish People, to try to bring them back to Torah and Mitzvos. The Nevi'im were the Torah leaders of the Jewish People (Yirmiyohu was the Head of the Sanhedrin in his time) and their task it was to be the harsh critics of the wayward society of the day, to correct society's failings. Yirmiyohu's words offended the high and mighty (including the king, indeed, *especially* the king) who tended to be the worst offenders against the Torah and often Yirmiyohu's life was in danger. But he had a mission to carry out and he constantly warned the people about the impending threat of the mighty Nevuchadnetzar, King of Babylon and his armies, recognizing them as the instrument of punishment for the Nation's deserting HaShem and His Torah. When Yirmiyohu criticised the alliances that the Jewish king tried to form as puny and futile, he was condemned as guilty of "defeatist talk" and imprisoned for sedition. With all that, when the terrible calamities of which he had warned indeed came about, we never find that Yirmiyohu says in bitterness, "I told you so!" Indeed, he suffered with the people and was their greatest comforter, as were the other Nevi'im and Torah leaders.
7. The Sidra teaches of the laws of buying and selling houses and fields, with the laws of redeeming a house or a field that a person, in straightened circumstances, had to sell. In our Haftorah, too, Yirmiyohu tells of how HaShem commanded him to make arrangements to publicly redeem a field that belonged to his cousin by buying it back from the one who had purchased it. As just said, at the time, Yirmiyohu was incarcerated in the royal prison. This was for warning the people to do Teshuvah: because he told the people to turn back to HaShem and not to rely on alliances with our age-old enemies the Egyptians, he was branded as being "a threat to the safety of the realm and an enemy of the people." Despite the difficulties, he appoints witnesses and in the presence of a gathering of the people there he proclaims in the Name of HaShem that in his action is a message, namely, that the time will come when the Jewish People will return from their exile and they will once again possess their land "flowing with milk and honey." They will once again buy houses, fields and vineyards in this land, promised by HaShem to their forefathers, Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, for HaShem will never reject His People permanently. Even if the Jewish state is about to fall, it is not forever. As soon as they return to HaShem, He will lead them back again to dwell in happiness and security, living by the Torah once again.