

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : עקב

This Haftorah is from Sefer Yeshayohu, from verse 14 of Chapter 49 till verse 11 of Chapter 50, and it ends with verses 1 — 3 of Chapter 51.

1. This is the second of the Seven Haftorahs of Comfort. Like last week's Haftorah, it is taken from the Sefer Yeshayohu (as, in fact all these seven Haftorahs are) and the general subject of consolation of last week is clearly continued in this week's Haftorah.
2. A number of different themes can be seen in this Haftorah and here are discussed just a few of them. Firstly, the Novvi reassures the Jewish People that they have not been forsaken. "Can then a woman ever forget her baby, can she help herself from having compassion on her child?" Even if her child is exasperating and vexing and the mother might be driven to anger — even so, she cannot stop herself from feeling for her child. So, too, is it with HaShem and His wayward children — the Jewish People will always be His children, His special treasure.
3. The Novvi portrays the time when the multitudes of dispersed people of the Jewish diaspora will return from their various places of exile and Mother Tzion will ask in wonder at their having survived and returned, "Whose beautiful children are these? Who brought them up?" The word "Tzion" means "landmark" and really refers to the Holy City of Yerushalaim because Yerushalaim and its Beis HaMikdash is to be exactly that — a fixed anchor, something which serves as a banner, to guide all of humanity towards HaShem, to serve Him. By extension, "Tzion" means also the whole of Eretz Yisroel and here the Novvi poetically portrays the Land of Israel as a mother, waiting patiently and faithfully for the return of her beloved husband and children. Just like a mother welcomes back her children, so, too, says the Novvi, will the Holy Land stretch and happily accommodate all the returnees and be rebuilt and repopulated.
4. In answer to Mother Tzion's question, "Who has reared these children?" the Novvi says that the very exile has educated them; their experiences and sufferings have ennobled them and while they wandered amongst all types of people, they were fostered by kings and reared by princesses. Through their suffering, they have become the sensitive and feeling people that they are. (In the memorable words of David Lloyd-George, British Prime Minister (1916 — 1922): "You have been hammered into very fine steel, and that is why you can never be broken. Hammered for centuries into the finest steel of any race in the world!")
5. Yeshayohu speaks of kings and princesses returning Tzion's children and bringing them up and as his words are in the past but expressed in the future tense, they also hold the promise that the future return of the Jewish People to Eretz Yisroel will come about with the support and under the royal patronage of the nations of the world — who will all try to make up for their mistreatment of the Jews while they were in exile. The Novvi foretells that however unlikely it might seem that a conqueror returns the booty that he has taken from his victims or that captives are freed from the grip of the tyrant, nevertheless that is what HaShem will bring about when the Jewish People return to their Land, for HaShem will fight for His People.