YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Understanding the haftarot**

**By Harav Yaakov Medan**

**PARASHAT SHEMOT**

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Dedicated by Cheryl and Richie Broth and Stefanie and Yitzchak Etshalom
in honor of the marriage of their children, Yoni and Ariella

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Dedicated in memory of my grandmother,
Szore bat Simen Leib (Weinberger) *z”l*,
whose *yahrzeit* is on the 18th of Tevet.
May her soul be among the Righteous in Gan Eden.

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**Destruction and Redemption**

**The *Haftara* According to the Ashkenazi Custom**

In days to come, Yaakov will take root, Israel will put out buds and flower, and all the land on all the earth will be covered with the fruits. Was he beaten as are beaten those who beat him? Was his slaying like the slaying of their slain? With a faithful measure, driving them out You fight them; He blew them away with His blasting spirit on the day of the gale. This, then, is how the iniquity of Israel may be atoned – and that, all the fruit of removing his sin – by rendering all his altar stones smashed limestone, no sacred trees or incense shrines rising again. The fortress city will sit alone, a shelter left behind, lonely as desert. Calves will graze there, there will they lie, and eat up all their branches. When their yield dries up they will be broken down. Women will come and use them as firewood, for this is not a wise people; and so its Maker will have no compassion, its Creator will grant it no grace. On that day, the Lord will beat the branches from the Euphrates’s surge to the River of Egypt and gather you up one by one, you children of Israel. It will be, on that day: a great ram’s horn will sound, and they will come, all those lost in the land of Assyria, and those who are exiled to the land of Egypt, and bow low to the Lord on the holy mount in Jerusalem.

Woe to the proud garland of Efrayim's drunkards, for the withered lotus flower that was the glorious supremacy crowning the oiled valley of the wine benumbed. See what comes – something strong and determined of the Lord, like pelting hail, like a cataclysmic storm, like a river of great waters, flooding waters, heavy-handed, casting people down to earth, trampling underfoot the garland pride of Efrayim’s drunkards. Like a withered lotus flower it shall be, its glorious supremacy that crowned the fat valley like the first fig before harvest; the one that all who saw would swallow up sooner than hold it.

On that day the Lord of Hosts will be a garland of splendor, the crown of supremacy, to the remnant of His people, He will be the spirit of justice in those who preside over justice, and of might in those who drive war back from the gate. For these men too have gone astray with wine, they have lost themselves in ale – priest and prophet – gone astray with their ale, been swallowed up in wine, got lost by their ale, gone astray in their vision, fallen over in judgment; the tables are soaked, all, in vomit and filth, until there is no space left.

Whom would he teach knowledge, whom bring to comprehend his words? Those barely weaned of milk, those just taken from the breast? *Law after law, law after law, line after line, line after line, a little bit here, a little bit there –* in a babble of words, in a different tongue he speaks to this people. He told them, "This is rest: leave the weary be; this is calm." They would not hear. So the word of the Lord is to them law after law, law after law, line after line, line after line, a little bit here, a little bit there, for them to walk and stumble on backward, be broken, be beaten, be caught. (*Yeshayahu* 27:6-28:13)

And so, this is what the Lord has said – Avraham's redeemer – to the House of Yaakov: No more will Yaakov be ashamed, his face no more grow pale, for when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, sanctifying My name, it is Yaakov’s Holy One they sanctify; it is Israel’s God they worship. (Ibid. 29:22-23)

[The division of the *haftara* into sections here is artificial, done for convenience; it is in no way connected to the division of the sections according to the *Mesora.*[[1]](#footnote-1)]

**I. The Connection Between the *Parasha* and the *Haftara***

It is commonly assumed that our *haftara* was chosen because of the formal verbal similarity between its opening words ("In days to come [*ha-ba'im*], Yaakov will take root") and the beginning of the *parasha* ("who came [*ha-ba'im*] to Egypt"). But this explanation is not very spiritually satisfying, and so I wish to suggest a more fundamental connection.

Our *haftara* mentions the hope of leaving the exile for redemption in the land of God, as well as the gathering of the Israelites from Egypt for this purpose:

On that day, the Lord will beat the branches from the Euphrates’s surge to the River of Egypt and gather you up one by one, you children of Israel. It will be, on that day: a great ram’s horn will sound, and they will come, all those lost in the land of Assyria, and those who are exiled to the land of Egypt, and bow low to the Lord on the holy mount in Jerusalem.

These longings relate to the account in our *parasha* of Israel's bondage in Egypt and the announcement at the burning bush that they will be redeemed. We will find an even more significant connection below, in the *haftarot* read according to the Sephardi and Yemenite customs.

**II. First Section: Measure for Measure**

Yeshayahu's prophecies contain relatively difficult language, and the prophecy before us is among the most difficult of them. The main interpretive difficulty in it is the rapid and frequent transition from verses of comfort to verses of calamity and vice versa. The commentators have followed different paths in understanding these shifts, and I will suggest a path here.

The *haftara* begins in the middle of a prophecy dealing with a great calamity that God will bring upon the world as punishment for its iniquities. The prophecy compares the people of Israel to a vineyard that God protects from calamity. In the first verse of the *haftara*, the people of Israel are described as a vine that takes root in the vineyard and produces buds and flowers. In the second verse, God promises, both in relation to the past and in relation to the future, that all the blows and killings that the people of Israel suffer are small in comparison to the blows received and to be received by those who hurt them. In the following verse, He explains the nature of the blows that His vineyard, the people of Israel, have suffered. They are a *se'a* for a *se'a* [*besase'a*], that is, measure for measure, for their sins, and that too was only on days when the attribute of justice was directed against them – described as "on the day of the gale," during a harsh, drying and destructive eastern wind, which does not bring rains of blessing.

In the following verses, the prophet offers the people of Israel a solution of mercy, in which even these relatively limited blows will cease: they must smash the altars of the sun worship, the sacred trees, and the incense shrines. This will lead to the cessation of the curse that existed until then, when the fortress city sat alone, the shelter that had blossomed left lonely as a desert, and the harvest was dried up and broken by the aforementioned east wind. In the shade of the sacred trees and incense shrines, before they were shattered, the people of Israel were a nation without understanding, a nation for whom its Creator had no compassion.

Once the sacred trees and incense shrines are shattered, the great hour will come when God will gather His people one by one and bring them to Zion, and they will come to bow down in His Temple.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**III. Second Section: Destruction in the Kingdom of Shomron – The Crime and Its Punishment**

Pekach son of Remalyahu, king of Israel during the days of Achaz king of Yehuda, was a strong king, due primarily to his alliance with Retzin, king of Aram – but he was evil, corrupt, and an idol worshipper. Towards the end of his reign, a large part of the kingdom of Shomron was exiled by Tiglat Pileser, king of Assyria. Pekach himself was struck down by Hoshea ben Ela, who had conspired against him, and the city of Shomron and its surroundings remained as a kingdom dependent on the mercies of the Assyrian kingdom and (sometimes) of King So of Egypt.

With respect to the sins of idolatry, Hoshea son of Ela, the last king of Shomron, was better than his predecessors, but he was unable (or did not want) to control the lawlessness that had pervaded the kingdom (as described primarily by the prophet of the destruction of the Shomron, Hoshea ben Be’eri). The prevailing atmosphere in Shomron was one that demanded last-minute pleasures, an atmosphere of desperation. The prophet, and with him Chizkiyahu, the king of Yehuda, called upon the inhabitants of the Shomron and its cities to join them, to come to worship God in the Temple in Jerusalem and to renew the Passover covenant with Him, but Chizkiyahu's messengers were met primarily with cynicism and mockery:

The couriers set out all over Israel and Yehuda with letters from the king and his officials proclaiming the royal decree: "Israelites, come back to the Lord, God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisrael, and He will come back to the remnant of you who escaped from the hands of the kings of Assyria… If you come back to the Lord, your brothers' and children's captors will show them mercy, and they will come back to this land, for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and He will not turn His face away from you if you come back to Him." As the couriers passed from city to city in the land of Efrayim and Menashe and up to Zevulun, they were ridiculed and mocked. (II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 30:5-10)

In our *haftara*, the prophet describes "Efrayim's drunkards," who run the kingdom. With the death of Pekach, there was a certain sense of renewed blossoming under the rule of Hoshea son of Ela, but the prophet refers to him (twice) as a "withered lotus flower" that will shrivel up and lead the entire kingdom to the abyss. Even if a fruit grows from it, it will be like the first fig before harvest – it will be swallowed up quickly, and no trace of it will be left. Indeed, this is what happened to the kingdom of Hoshea son of Ela: Shomron was destroyed and did not rise again.

**IV. Third Section: The Salvation of the Inhabitants of Jerusalem, Despite Their Sins**

The prophet promises that even when the Divine attribute of judgment determines the fate of Shomron, God will protect the rest of His people – the kingdom of Yehuda, and especially the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The prophet describes them as men of justice and righteousness, and as warriors who fight over the gates of Jerusalem. Yet, immediately afterwards, he abandons these praises and says the people of Jerusalem are also drunkards who stumble in judgment, vomiting up their food.

This contradiction requires explanation. It seems to me that it is difficult to reconcile it without assuming the existence of two different factions in Jerusalem, or as *Chazal* put it (*Sanhedrin* 26a) – the faction of King Chizkiyahu and the faction of Shevna, Chizkiyahu's chief minister during the days of Sancheriv's siege.

After Shomron was besieged and destroyed by the Assyrian king Sargon, the Assyrian king Sancheriv attacked Jerusalem as well. He captured cities and almost brought the kingdom of Yehuda to complete destruction. Jerusalem survived, but it was under a severe Assyrian siege for close to three years.

During that period, Chizkiyahu demonstrated his loyalty to the path of the prophet Yeshayahu. He eradicated from Jerusalem the idol worship that had taken root in the days of Achaz, his father; he purified the Temple, and invited all of Yehuda and Israel to celebrate the festival of Pesach and to enter into a new covenant with God. Chizkiyahu was also a man of integrity and a righteous judge. But the majority of the residents of Jerusalem followed after Shevna, who was responsible for the corruption of the officers of Jerusalem and for showing favor to those officers and to those loyal to them during the difficult days in Jerusalem – before and during the siege. Yeshayahu describes them in terms similar to those found in our *haftara*:as having sunk into despair, wine, and ale, and as practicing iniquity and injustice:

On that day, the Lord God of Hosts called for tears and eulogies, the baldness and sackcloth of grief; but here: festivity and joy, the butchering of cattle, the slaughter of flock. "Eat your meat, drink your wine; eat, drink; tomorrow we die." (*Yeshayahu* 22:12-13)

In the end, at the last moment, Chizkiyahu's faction prevailed. God was "a garland of splendor, the crown of supremacy, to the remnant of His people" (28:5), and Jerusalem was miraculously saved when God, on the festival of Pesach, struck the Assyrian camp and redeemed Jerusalem.

**V. The Fourth Section: The Prophet’s Status Among Shevna’s Faction, the Cynics of Jerusalem**

In the verse that follows the fourth section of our *haftara*, the prophet addresses the faction of Shevna:

And so, hear the word of the Lord, you cynics, you leaders of this people in Jerusalem. (*Yeshayahu* 28:14)

The members of this faction had their own "prophets," and together they "have gone astray with wine…got lost by their ale, gone astray in their vision" (28:7), that is to say, they failed to see the prophecy correctly. They looked down upon the prophet Yeshayahu, who was with Chizkiyahu, as an unimportant teacher of young children, who joins letters to vowels for three-year-olds to teach them how to read and write.

There is truth in their words! The prophet Yeshayahu withdrew from public prophecy when King Achaz, Chizkiyahu's father, refused to listen to his words. This is the prophecy delivered by Yeshayahu at that time:

Bind up the testimony; seal Teaching in My students; I wait for the Lord, who hides His face from Yaakov; I long for Him. You see: I and all the children the Lord gave me are messages, are signs, to Israel from the Lord of Hosts, who rests upon Mount Zion. (*Yeshayahu* 8:16-18)

The prophet stopped proclaiming his prophecies ("bind up the testimony"), and began teaching Torah exclusively to his students ("seal teaching in my students"). These students, "the children the Lord gave me," are the ones who will illuminate the path of the people to God in the generation after Achaz. This is also reflected in the concluding verse attached to our *haftara*:

For when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, sanctifying My name, it is Yaakov’s Holy One they sanctify; it is Israel’s God they worship. (*Yeshayahu* 29:23)

In any case, the cynics, the rulers of the people, see Yeshayahu as an insignificant teacher of young children and they are not prepared to listen to him. They mockingly imitate the expressions of "law after law, line after line" (28:10) that he uses with his young students, and prefer their own prophets, who went astray with their ale.

**VI. “This is What the Lord Has Said – Avraham’s Redeemer – To the House of Yaakov”**

As written in the *Navi*, the opening verse of the addendum attached to our *haftara[[3]](#footnote-3)* proclaims:

And so, this is what the Lord has said to the House of Yaakov, who redeemed Avraham: No more will Yaakov be ashamed, his face no more grow pale.

According to the rules of syntax, it seems the verse should have been formulated as translated above: "This is what the Lord has said – Avraham's redeemer – to the House of Yaakov." *Chazal* exploit the unusual syntax and interpret the verse as saying that Yaakov, as it were, redeemed his grandfather, Avraham:

"This is what the Lord has said to the House of Yaakov, who redeemed Avraham" – But where do we find that Yaakov redeemed Avraham? Rav Yehuda answered: It means that he redeemed him from the pains of rearing children. (*Sanhedrin* 19b)[[4]](#footnote-4)

This idea is expressed more explicitly in the *Tanchuma* and other *midrashim*:

Avraham was crowned with the virtue of Yaakov. When Nimrod caused Avraham to be hurled into the fiery furnace, the Holy One, blessed be He, descended to rescue him. The ministering angels thereupon exclaimed: Master of the Universe, why do You trouble to save him, since so many wicked men will descend from him? The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: I shall save him for the sake of his grandson Yaakov, who will descend from him. From where do we know this to be so? R. Berakhya said: It is written: "This is what the Lord has said to the House of Yaakov, who redeemed Avraham" – he redeemed him from the fiery furnace. (*Tanchuma Toldot* 4)

Of course, a question arises, as formulated by Rabbi Moshe Alschich:

Anyone who sees the words of this statement… his heart will truly become sour… Did Avraham, who loved the blessed One, have no merits [of his own] to be saved from the fire, that [his rescue] depended on the merits of Yaakov? (R. Moshe Alschich, commentary to *Daniel* 3)

According to the kabbalists, the attribute of truth, with which Yaakov was crowned, is required to repair the attribute of kindness in Avraham, so the lovingkindness should not spread too far. Truth must restrain kindness and keep it in its rightful place in God's service; therefore, Avraham needed Yaakov, who would issue from him in the future.

**The *Haftara* According to the Sephardi Custom**

The Sephardim read the first prophecy in the book of *Yirmeyahu* as the *haftara* for *Parashat Shemot*. This section has a closer and more understandable connection to the *parasha*. We will discuss itin great detail when we reach the *haftarot* read during the Three Weeks, of which the prophecy of "the words of Yirmeyahu" is the first. Here, we will briefly discuss the connection between the *parasha* and the *haftara* – between the consecration of Moshe to serve as God's agent, which took place at the burning bush on the eve of the redemption from Egypt, and the consecration of Yirmeyahu to serve as God's prophet and agent on the eve of the destruction.

The consecration of the prophet Yirmeyahu took place even before his conception and birth:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Before you were born I consecrated you. I placed you as a prophet to the nations. (*Yirmeyahu* 1:5)

Many of *Chazal*’s *aggadot* describe Moshe in a similar fashion:

"Pua" is Miryam; and why was her name called Pua?… Because she used to cry out [*po'a*]through the Holy Spirit and say: "My mother will bear a son who will be the savior of Israel." (*Sota* 11b)

"And when she saw him that he was good."… Rabbi Nechemya says: [She foresaw that he would be] worthy of the prophetic gift; others say: He was born circumcised; and the Sages say: At the time when Moshe was born, the whole house was filled with light. (*Sota* 12a)

Yirmeyahu and Moshe both protested against and tried to escape their missions, but God rejected both of their claims:

I said, "Please, Lord God, I am not capable of speaking, for I am still only a boy." (*Yirmeyahu* 1:6)

Then Moshe said to the Lord, "Please, my Lord, I am not a man of words; I was not yesterday, nor the day before, and still I am not since You spoke to Your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." (*Shemot* 4:10)

Rabbi Yitzchak Abravanel, in his introduction to the book of *Yirmeyahu*, notes the similarity between these two prophets: "And the things regarding which I saw that Yirmeyahu resembled the master of the prophets are those which I will mention to you one by one" – and he goes on to list fourteen similarities between the two.[[5]](#footnote-5) This is important precisely because of the difference between Moshe and Yirmeyahu, between the prophet of salvation and the prophet of destruction.

**The *Haftara* According to the Yemenite Custom**

The Rambam brings a different *haftara* for *Parashat Shemot*:

"*Ve-eleh Shemot*" – "Man, make known to Jerusalem" until "You became known." (Rambam, *Seder Tefillot*, *Ha-maftir be-Navi*)

In the wake of this ruling, Yemenite communities are accustomed to read the following prophecy:

The word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations and say: So says the Lord God to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites. Your father was Amorite, your mother Hittite; and as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, you were not washed clean with water, you were not rubbed with salt, and you were not swaddled. No eye took enough pity on you to do any of these things out of compassion for you. You were thrown out into the open field, loathed, on the day you were born. And when I passed by you, I saw you floundering in your own blood, and I said to you, 'In your blood, live'; I said to you, 'In your blood, live!' I made you flourish like the shoots of the field. You grew up, matured, were beautifully adorned – your breasts were firm, your hair grew long – but you were naked and bare. Then I passed by you and saw that you had reached the age of love, so I spread my mantle out over you and covered your nakedness. I made My vow to you, entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became Mine. I washed you with water, I rinsed your blood off you, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth, I placed on you leather shoes, I wound about your head fine linen, and I covered you with silk. I adorned you with jewelry; I put bracelets upon your arms and a necklace around your neck. I put a nose ring in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a glorious crown upon your head. You were adorned with gold and silver; your clothing was fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth; you ate fine flour, honey, and oil; and you were exceptionally beautiful, fit to be a queen. You became known among the nations for your beauty, for with the splendor I placed upon you it was perfect, declares the Lord God. (*Yechezkel* 16:1-14)

The Rambam's ruling matches the Gemara's conclusion in *Megilla*:

The passage, "Make known to Jerusalem her abominations," is both read and translated. Certainly! This is stated *to exclude the view of Rabbi Eliezer*, as it has been taught: It once happened that a man read in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer: "Make known to Jerusalem her abominations." He said to him, “While you are investigating the abominations of Jerusalem, go and investigate the abominations of your own mother.” Inquiries were made into his birth, and he was found to be illegitimate. (*Megilla* 25b)

Other communities veered from the Rambam’s path and were afraid to read this *haftara*, which contains a blatant condemnation of Jerusalem, because of the illegitimacy found through Rabbi Eliezer, even though the law is not in accordance with his position.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, this prophecy is of great importance for understanding a central issue in our *parasha*.

The prophecy opens in the city of Jerusalem, which lies in the middle of the central mountain range of western Israel. What is said about it, that her father was an Amorite and her mother a Hittite, brings to mind the words of the spies:

In the Negev region, Amalek lives; the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country, and the Canaanites live by the sea and by the Jordan. (*Bamidbar* 13:29)

The Jebusites lived in Jerusalem itself, as seen in the story of its conquest by David (II *Samuel* 5). They were a relatively small nation, surrounded by larger nations – the Amorites to the north and the Hittites to the south – and they are a sort of "father" and "mother" of Jerusalem.

Let's consider the metaphor: If Jerusalem's father is an Amorite and her mother is a Hittite, then Jerusalem itself is an “illegitimate” child, because a marriage between two peoples could be considered illegal. This child, whose birth shamed her adulterous mother, was thrown into the field immediately after her birth, to cover up the adultery. She was discarded without being given the care needed by a newborn baby, filthy with the birth blood and her own excrement; it was expected that she would be devoured by the beasts of the field:

And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, you were not washed clean with water, you were not rubbed with salt, and you were not swaddled. No eye took enough pity on you to do any of these things out of compassion for you. You were thrown out into the open field, loathed, on the day you were born. (*Yechezkel* 16:4-5)

Yechezkel turns to Jerusalem and its people on the eve of the destruction, when their spiritual and national situation is in dire straits. He begins with the birth of Israel and their becoming a people in the land of Egypt, while they were slaves – which is also the topic of our *parasha*, *Parashat Shemot*.

Perhaps this is how the Jewish babies looked at the time of Pharaoh's decree to cast them into the river. The Torah paints for us a picture of one baby, the son of Amram, hidden in the reeds along the edge of the Nile without food and without care, barely protected from the crocodiles in the river and the wild animals along its shore by a papyrus basket and his young sister, Miryam.

Was Moshe the only baby whose mother and family did everything they could to save him from Pharaoh's decree? It stands to reason that there were many ploys to save the children born in the years of the decree, equal in number to the number of caring mothers and their families. The children could not be raised at home, and it was necessary to hide them among the reeds, in caves, in pits, and in other hiding places. Food was brought to them in secret and at great risk. There were probably cases in which the rescue attempt failed and the child died, was torn apart by animals, or was discovered by the Egyptians, as there must have been cases of success in which the child was saved.

The prophet describes this in our *haftara* as if God Himself, in all His glory, came down from heaven to save and raise them (through His many agents – whether animal or human). The Midrash describes the phenomenon as follows:

Rav Avira expounded: As the reward for the righteous women who lived in that generation were the Israelites delivered from Egypt… when the time of childbirth arrived, they went and were delivered in the field beneath the apple-tree, as it is stated: "Under the apple-tree I caused you to come forth [from your mother's womb] etc." The Holy One, blessed be He, sent down someone from the high heavens who washed and straightened the limbs [of the babes] in the same manner that a midwife straightens the limbs of a child; as it is stated: "And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, you were not washed clean with water" (*Yechezkel* 16:4) … When the Egyptians noticed them, they went to kill them; but a miracle occurred on their behalf so that they were swallowed in the ground, and [the Egyptians] brought oxen and ploughed over them, as it is stated: “The plowers plowed upon my back" (*Tehillim* 129:3). After they departed, [the babies] broke through [the earth] and came forth like the herbage of the field, as it is stated: “I made you flourish like the shoots of the field" (*Yechezkel* 16:7); and when [the babies] had grown up, they came in flocks to their homes… At the time the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself by the Red Sea, they recognized Him first, as it is stated: "This is my God and I will praise Him." (*Sota* 11b)

We know a few righteous women in our *parasha*: Yocheved, Moshe's mother, who put him in the ark; Miryam, his sister, who watched over him and brought him to his mother; and Pharaoh's daughter, who drew him from the reeds (and later - Tzipora, who saved him from the angel). But the Midrash, based on the verses in our *haftara*, describes countless righteous women who risked their lives to save their children and raised them in the field with the help of animals that cared for the children or with the help of Egyptian women such as Pharaoh's daughter, who found them and brought them up.

The prophet Yechezkel describes this colorfully, and sheds the light of heroism, dedication, and heavenly miracles on the early days of the people of Israel in Egypt. These are the righteous women in whose merits Israel was redeemed from Egypt, according to Rabbi Avira.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Unless specified otherwise, all references are to the book of *Yeshayahu.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. a. It is possible that a contrast should be drawn between the poor women, who gather together the broken stalks of grain, one by one, and God, who gathers His children, one by one, from their places of exile.

b. The prophet's words require explanation: When was Israel exiled to the River of Egypt, that God will have to gather them from there? After all, the inhabitants of the kingdom of Shomron were exiled to the north!

Exiles to the south during this period are in fact also mentioned in the prophecy of the redemption of Jerusalem from the hands of Sancheriv: "On that day this will be: The Lord will stretch forth His hand again to take back the remnant of His people, those who remain, from Assyria and Egypt, from Patros and from Kush, from Eilam and from Shinar, Chamat and the islands of the sea" (*Yeshayanu* 11:11). It is possible that these exiles are captives taken by Shishak, King of Egypt, who attacked Jerusalem in the days of Rechavam and destroyed twenty-two cities of Yarovam's kingdom over the course of his journey. It is also possible that these are captives who were sold into slavery at the time of the Philistine-Edomite-Arab invasion, in the days of Yehoram son of Yehoshafat (see II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 21), and who were taken to the slave markets in Egypt.

c. Thirty years ago, we all experienced, captivated by the television screen, "Operation Solomon," in which fifteen thousand "Beta Israel" Jews were brought to Israel from Addis Ababa in Ethiopia over the course of a day and a half – just before Ethiopia fell into civil war, famine, and other severe calamities. At that time, my revered teacher, Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, suggested to me: "The prophet speaks of a great *shofar* that will be blown at the time of the ingathering of the exiles, and upon hearing it, the exiles will return to Israel. With the passage of time, the *shofar* may also be a television screen, on which the entire world sees the sanctification of God's great name – how brothers who disappeared from us thousands of years ago are joining us, thanks to the State of Israel, in an event that has no parallel in the history of the nations."

R. Yoel Bin-Nun did not say this about the *shofar* in our *haftara*, but about a different *shofar* Yeshayahu mentioned, which is closer to Ethiopia: "Woe to the land of buzzing insect wings, far away beyond the Kushite rivers, that sends its messengers out by sea, reed vessels crossing the waters: 'Go now, swift messengers, to a people pulled apart and mauled, to a people always fearsome until now, a nation trampled piece by piece, despoiled by kings of the river land.' All you who live upon this earth, all dwellers on the land, when the banner is raised up on the mountains you shall see; when the horn [*shofar*] sounds its blast, then you shall hear" (*Yeshayahu* 18:1-3). However, I brought his words here with respect to the *shofar* in our *haftara*, as well – which tomorrow could be the screen of any modern telephone or other mass media technology. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The *haftara* closes with two verses that are not consecutive to the rest of the *haftara*; they are taken from the next prophecy, and are intended to end the *haftara* with goodness and hope rather than with rebuke. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Editor’s note: Rashi and others explain that Rav Yehuda is referring to the fact that Yaakov, not Avraham, was the one who faced the difficulties of raising the twelve tribes. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. a. He lists very important points of similarity, though some of them are not convincing. (E.g., the fifth point he notes is that Moshe's relatives cast him into the Nile and Yirmeyahu's relatives cast him into the pit. The difference between the two cases speaks for itself.)

b. He fails to mention one point, which in my opinion is the key to the similarity between the two. We will discuss it when we examine the *haftarot* read during the Three Weeks. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. One of the distinguished personalities of Jerusalem in our generation, Rabbi Shmuel HaKohen Weingarten (father of Rabbi Yedaya HaKohen *z"l*, administrator of our Yeshiva for over fifty years), testified that it was also customary in Jerusalem not to read the *haftara* for *Acharei Mot* (or *Kedoshim*), which discusses the guilt of Jerusalem in a similar style – "Will you accuse, will you accuse the bloody city? Make all her abominations known to her." We will address this when we come to the *haftarot* for the book of *Vayikra*.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)