

Parsahs Vayishlach - Inspirations from the Haftarah
By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

The haftarah for Parshas Vayishlach consists of the entire book of Ovadiah. Ovadiah is one of the twelve prophetic books that due to their small size are put together when written on parchment and are known as 'The Twelve'. Though these books are short, they are not any less significant than the rest of the books of the Neviim. On the contrary, this one chapter of Ovadiah contains many important messages as Chazal have taught us that all of the prophets whose writings are contained in Tanach had importance for all times.

Ovadiah, according to our tradition, was a convert from the land of Edom. He was given messages of Hashem's anger at Edom as well as prophecies of his homeland's final downfall. The People of Edom are descendants of Esav. Although, the nation of Edom has not been in existence for quite some time, Chazal tell us that that Rome was founded by descendants of Esav. Therefore, Rome and ultimately, Christianity, has been seen as the continuation of the kingdom of Edom. This is a natural follow-up to the Torah reading in which we read about Yaakov's feared confrontation with Esav after twenty years. Though it turned out to be peaceful and perhaps even cordial on the surface, there was clear dread that it would not be a pleasant occurrence. Indeed, Chazal tell us that Esav's anger and hatred was still there and would have surfaced if Hashem had not intervened and brought out feelings of brotherly love instead. The dread of what Esav might do however remains with us. Ovadiah confirms this for us as Esav's true feelings come out when Yaakov's descendents are down. We are told in verse 14 that Edom helped Bavel when Yerushalayim was being destroyed by making sure that any captured Jews would not run away. Moreover, Edom was completely overjoyed at seeing the horrors of our destruction. In addition Edom always saw themselves to be indestructible as was manifested in the Roman Empire. Indeed, Rome was the most powerful empire the world had ever seen and everyone at the time believed Rome would never fall. But Ovadiah reveals to us that for all their arrogance and all the destruction they have brought upon the earth, Hashem will be struck back at them, punish them to the fullest extent and then they will be gone and forgotten. At that time, Yaakov and his descendents will rise and bring Hashem's message of truth and holiness to the world.

As stated in this column before, these are the types of messages that Klal Yisroel needed to hear throughout their galus. Though the Roman Empire has fallen, our galus continues. We see how the nations of the world continue to thrive, regardless of the way they treat Am Yisroel. But this state of affairs will not remain eternally.

The nations that oppress us will be punished and Yaakov will be elevated to their proper status. At that time, the entire world will recognize Yaakov' role in proclaiming Hashem as king to the world and there will be universal peace. May we merit seeing the fulfillment of these prophesies in the near future. Amen