



Haftarat Parshat Shemot: Another Redemption

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone
5785 / 2025

The Egypt of the haftarah isn't the Egypt we remember.

When we think of our time in Egypt, we picture the familiar narrative: Yaakov and his family sojourned from the land of Israel to Egypt to reunite with Yosef, and no one was left behind. The entire clan, seventy souls strong, lived together in the area of Goshen strong and unified, despite finding themselves on foreign soil.

This unity is what allowed them to maintain their collective identity – as the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 32:5) teaches: they did not change their names, they did not change their language, did not speak *lashon hara* [slander], and not even one of them was found to be promiscuous during their time in Egypt. Holding onto shared ways of living and identity was crucial to carrying the Jews through their centuries of Egyptian enslavement, and in the merit of their doing so, they were redeemed.

But the Egypt described by Yeshayahu in our haftarah tells a very different story. While the context is cryptic, [Rav Yaakov Medan argues](#) that during the First Temple period, small numbers of Jews were exiled to Egypt. Unlike their ancestors who remained united, these Jews found themselves isolated and lost.

“And on that day, God will beat out [the peoples like grain] from the channel of the Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt; and you shall be picked up one by one, O children of Israel. And on that day, a great ram's horn shall be sounded; and the strayed who are in the land of Assyria and the expelled who are in the land of Egypt shall come and worship God on the holy mount, in Jerusalem.” (Yeshayahu 27:12-13)

These Jews didn't have the benefit their ancestors had in Egypt, to be surrounded by a large community to support them during times of trouble. They, the 'strayed and exiled,' must be picked up one by one to be brought back to Jerusalem. The experience of exile, the prophet highlights, is all the more challenging when the center of the Jewish world is in the homeland. Yet even so, God assures them that they, too, will be returned, gathered into Jerusalem and reunited with their people.



Year after year, we recall the original Egyptian exile, when we suffered enslavement, yet we did so together. But much of our history in exile has aligned more with this other Egyptian exile, mentioned in the haftarah with a deep sense of feeling lost, lonely and anchorless. Yet we have always been reminded not to lose our faith or sense of direction.

When our sages chose the text for our haftarah, they deliberately didn't end with the prophecy describing Jews who are too lost to even find the words to make sense of their situation. **Rather, they reached forward thirty-seven verses to add two more lines, taken from Chapter 29.** These closing lines assure us that our forebear Yaakov, the one who descended with his children to Egypt, will not be ashamed of us, but will be proud in the knowledge that we continue to glorify God's name and to live in God's ways.

While this isn't the Egypt we remember, perhaps that's precisely the point. The message of our haftarah is one that speaks to each generation – not just of surviving together, but of maintaining hope even when scattered and exiled.

In the dark days of the haftarah and in the dark days of our time, we are reminded to believe in Yaakov's optimistic legacy, not to give up, but to share the blessed reality of being part of the Jewish people helping to change society for the better. The insistence of our rabbis never lose sight of our capacity for transformational optimism, comes to the fore in the reading of our haftarah.

Even as the Jewish people continue to face serious challenges, we are reminded that our strength lies not in our numbers, but in our unwavering ability to hold onto hope – whether we stand together or must be gathered "one by one". This resilience continues to light our path forward.