

Haftarat Vayetze וַיֵּצֵא

Torah: Genesis 28:10–32:3

Haftarah: Hosea 12:12–14:10

The Ever-Merciful Hand of Grace

General Overview

This haftarah begins with a rather enigmatic reference to Jacob, Israel's ancestor. The material seems to be out of context when compared with its textual surroundings, although it really is not, as we shall see. Moreover, it is a very difficult section to interpret.

Hosea, the prophet, is renouncing Israel's sins and their failure to seek God. If they chose to not come back to the Lord their God, Hosea explained to them that they only await a terrible end. At the conclusion of the passage, the prophet provided hope that despite the fact that Israel would be and had been unfaithful to the covenant, nevertheless, God had still remained faithful to His part of the covenant. He appealed to Israel through the prophets to come back to Him. He Himself, at the same time, promised to bring them back and forgive them.

Connection to the Parasha

The Vayetze haftarah opens with a reference to Jacob fleeing to Aram and acquiring a wife in exchange for keeping Laban's sheep. We can only assume that Hosea intended to remind Israel of this because those were the years when Jacob, though not perfect, was learning to hear from God. In other words, this was an example that Hosea was putting before his nation. Israel was called to remember the good years and the spiritual legacy of their father Jacob and follow after it.

This is the connection to Parashat Vayetze. In the parasha, we learn about the history of Jacob and his encounters with God from the time he fled from Esau to Aram, to when he was about to meet Esau again after many years. During that time God moulded and shaped him into a man of God who knew the voice of God and was willing to follow it. If only Israel's descendants would have followed in his footsteps and heeded his example.

Exposition

As we begin our exposition of this haftarah, we need to point out a slight variation in the verse numbers between the English and Hebrew Bibles. I do not know about translations into other languages. However, in English Bibles, the passage is Hosea 12:12–14:9. In Hebrew, the same passage is Hosea 12:13–14:10. The *JPS Tanakh* (an English translation) follows the Hebrew.

For the most part, this is quite a depressing prophetic passage. Its general tenor is that of stern rebuke. Yet, near the end, we see the Ever-merciful One holding out His hand of

grace to any who would receive it. Accordingly, our outline reflects both of these themes:

Introduction — Important Examples

- I. Ephraim's Crimes
- II. Ephraim's Sufferings
- III. Ephraim's Repentance

Conclusion — Follow Wisdom!

Introduction: Important Examples

What is the purpose of the opening verses in Hosea 12:13–15? They are very strange verses. They appear to be out of context with the verses that both precede and follow. Perhaps the purpose might be an attempt by Hosea to take the people of his day down memory lane. He wanted them to remember at least three things.

First, he wanted them to remember their father, Jacob. Hosea did not need to cite the whole story for them to know to what he was referring. All he had to do was to cite the beginning of the story, "And Jacob had to flee to Aram" for them to know that he was, in reality, referring to the whole story.

The history of Jacob's life was one where we see a man who grew in his knowledge and service of God. However, in his life with God, Jacob certainly had his share of struggles. Life did not always seem like it was full of blessings for him. But that did not seem to matter to the patriarch. He grew in his faithfulness to God anyway. It appears that God intended him to be an example to the people of Israel, his descendants. The point is that God had blessed this ancestor, even though things happened at the time that had not seemed like blessings.¹ Thus, Jacob grew to love God, even though he had a difficult life.

Life was also difficult for Jacob's descendants. Yet they, too, could have learned to love God in the same way instead of forsaking Him as they were doing.

Second, Hosea wanted the people to remember the faithfulness of God. God helped Jacob during the tough times in his life. In the same way, God had remembered the misery of Jacob's descendants while they were slaves in Egypt and He brought them out, performing great miracles as he did so. Hosea wanted to communicate to his people that if they chose to follow this same God, He would do the same for them. He would be just as faithful to deliver them from their enemies as He did for their ancestors back in Egypt.

Finally, Hosea also wanted his people to remember the importance of the prophets, God's spokesmen for Israel. Hosea told them that not only did a prophet bring them out of Egypt, but God also had a prophet caring for them once they were set free and in such a vulnerable state, wandering homeless in the wilderness (12:14). Notice that Hosea did not mention the prophet by name. Obviously he was Moshe. Perhaps he did

not name the prophet because Hosea did not want to focus on any particular prophet. He just wanted to remind his people that, “Insofar as you disgrace the prophets and mock their words, is it not so that through a prophet God brought us? [Rashi]”ⁱⁱ

Conclusion — Follow Wisdom

Just like Hosea had an introduction to this passage, he also wrote a conclusion, 14:10. Here, Hosea alludes to the example he gave at the beginning of the passage, in Hosea 12:13–15. There, Jacob is posed as the example for Ephraim to follow. Here, in 14:10 he states it another way. He says to them that the wise person will consider these words. Jacob would have considered them because he became a wise person. So should Jacob's descendants — the people of Israel.

Finally, Hosea states that there are only two kinds of people who attempt to walk on God's paths. There are the righteous ones and there are the wicked. The righteous ones are those who trust God and show that trust by walking in His ways. Hosea says that that way is “smooth.” The Hebrew word translated “smooth” is the word *yasharim*, ישרים. This can mean “straight,” “smooth,” or “right” [correct].ⁱⁱⁱ Hence, the righteous ones walk on the right path and do not cause people to stumble. This is the way of the Word of God.

On the other hand, the unrighteous (the wicked) are those who do not trust in God and consequently walk on paths that cause them to stumble and get hurt. It is interesting that the wording of Hosea is such that he seems to indicate that the wicked also attempt to walk on the path of the Lord. But, because they are not God's people and used to God's ways, they stumble on God's path. Indeed, God's ways, “lead some to life and others to death, according to the different attitudes which men assume towards God.”^{iv}

The wicked stumble on God's ways because God's ways are so unfamiliar to them, not because God's ways are imperfect. It is man who is imperfect and cannot know the ways and thoughts of God. Hosea, speaking for God, pleads with the people of Israel to be wise, to know and trust God, so when they walk in His paths they would not stumble.

ⁱ Leon J. Wood, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 218.

ⁱⁱ A. J. Rosenberg, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, vol. I., 78.

ⁱⁱⁱ BDB, 448–449.

^{iv} Keil and Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, 167.