

## HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : משפטים

*This week's Haftorah is taken from Sefer Yirmiyohu,  
Chapter 34 verses 8 — 22 and then Chapter 33 verses 25 and 26.*

1. Although there are a great number of laws in this week's Sidra, the first set of laws are concerning the Hebrew servitor and it is the Hebrew servitor that is the subject of the Haftorah. It's quite possible that because the very idea of a fellow-Jew being sold as a servitor to his fellow-Jew is so startling, to the extent that it almost overshadows all the other laws of the Sidra, that this particular law more than any other in the Sidra was chosen as the subject of the Haftorah.
2. Yirmiyohu *HaNovvi* lived in the tragic times leading up to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash by the Babylonians. Much of the country is already under the conqueror's boot and many of the people have been dragged into exile and slavery. Nevuchadnetzar has now set his eyes upon Yerushalaim and has started to besiege the Holy City. The Jewish people, with their King, Tzidkiyahu, are in despair and they cry out to HaShem. HaShem answers their prayers and thus it comes about that Par'o Necho of Egypt, in an attempt to pre-empt Nevuchadnetzar and probably intending to keep the Babylonian invaders off his own land, decides just then to come with his army to the rescue of the Jewish people. The Babylonians, quite unprepared for this new development, beat a hasty retreat.
3. The people recognize the great kindness that HaShem has wrought for them. King Tzidkiyahu gathers the people together and they earnestly resolve to commit themselves to once again diligently observe the laws of the Torah, as in the past. One of the prominent laws that they had ignored was to free their Hebrew servitors after their six-year service and those who had disobeyed that law now undertake to free their servitors, just as the Torah commands. Hopefully, in the merit of compliance with the Torah, the tragedy of they themselves being taken into captivity and slavery to the Babylonians can be averted.
4. But as is so often the case, once the danger has passed, the people slip back into their previous bad ways. In this case, though, the offence was worse. It's one thing to make a good resolution and then slip back into bad practices. It's quite another thing, however, to go back and actually undo the good that one has done. But this, unfortunately, is what happened. For after the great wave of Teshuvah, the people set about regaining their servitors, either simply tricking them into returning to their service or, worse, taking them back by force. This hypocrisy, said Yirmiyohu, HaShem considers unforgivable. Because you did not obey Me, says HaShem, to proclaim freedom to the servitor as I have commanded, I will proclaim freedom instead —

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freedom for the sword and for pestilence and for hunger to roam your land. I will proclaim freedom for the Babylonian destroyer to return and wreak terrible destruction upon the Holy City and the whole country and take the people into slavery, together with their king.

5. Even though clearly not everyone was guilty of going back on their solemn promise to free their servitors, nevertheless our collective responsibility makes it a duty upon all of us that if we see others desecrating the word of HaShem we have to rebuke them and try to stop any Chillul HaShem. For if not, we will all suffer punishment together.
6. The Haftorah ends on a positive note with a couple of Pessukim taken from a previous chapter, where HaShem proclaims that He will never forsake His People forever. He will take them back eventually for so has He promised. And, as Yirmiyohu pointedly reminds us, HaShem's promise is as dependable as the laws of nature which He has set in motion, to function without fail. HaShem does not go back on His promises.