



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

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As we have learned from previous haftarah selections taken from the final section of Sefer Yechezkel, the navi uses these final chapters to describe the future Temple service that would be observed during the era of Bayit Shlishi, the Third Temple. This particular haftarah from the 44th chapter contains a direct connection to our Torah reading for it focuses on the laws that would be followed by the kohanim serving in the “Messianic” Bet Mikdash, much as the parasha reviews the laws that would be followed by the kohanim during the time of the earlier Batei Mikdash.

Except for certain stringencies that future kohanim will observe, many of the laws mentioned here by Yechezkel echo the very words of the parasha itself, e.g. they shall not shave their heads nor let their hair grow wild; they shall not marry a widow (prohibited to the Kohen Gadol) nor a divorcee, but only a maiden from Israel; they shall not approach a corpse—save that of their father, mother, son, daughter, brother or unmarried sister. Most interestingly, however, is one function of the Kohen that is included in the haftarah but is not mentioned in the parasha at all, although it is found elsewhere in the Torah. The navi states: “V’et ami yoru bein kodesh l’chol... Part of the function of the Kohen was to be a teacher, one who would guide the people and pass down the laws and explanations given at Har Sinai. The Kohen of Israel

could not be compared to the ancient idolatrous priests who served as mere ritual functionaries with limited connection to the daily lives of the people themselves. In fact, quite the opposite was true: these “priests” were usually involved with preparations for death and for the afterworld—not life and this world. Not so the kohen in Israel. His responsibility was far more than merely a ritualistic one. The kohen was required to be involved in many aspects of the people’s lives. He was commanded to take an active role in the LIFE of the nation; a role that would require him to avoid dealing directly with death, that gave him the responsibility of adjudicating the people’s quarrels and that challenged him to educate and inspire both the current and future generations.

Moshe blessed them with the words (D’varim 33: 12): “Yoru mishpatecha l’Ya’akov v’Torat’cha l’Yisrae’l”—to teach Torah to Israel, while the navi Mal’achi put it simply when he stated (2:7): “Ki siftei chohen yishm’ru da’at v’Torah y’vak’shu mipihu”, “The lips of a Kohen must safeguard knowledge and people should seek (Torah) teachings from him”. And by doing so, he fulfills Hashem’s mission, as the navi explains, “ki mal’ach Hashem Tzva’kot hu,” “for he is the agent of Hashem, Master of Legions!” Our haftarah reminds us that serving Hashem cannot be limited to ritual alone. And this truth will be carried on during the Messianic era as well. ■