



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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“V’Hamelech David Zaken” – So what?

This week’s haftarah is divided into two separate events. The initial p’sukim of this first perek of Melachim A are dedicated to the failing physical state of David HaMelech. These four verses describe the King’s inability to stay warm – even when being covered by layers of clothes – a reflection of the aging process that had weakened of the great military hero of Israel. The text continues in describing the suggestion of David’s close attendants to find a young maiden who would tend to the ailing King and keep him warm.

It is a close-up depiction of these final days of the great monarch. But is it necessary, at all?

Consider: The bulk of the story – 27 of the 31 p’sukim in the haftarah – is focused upon the attempted coup to overthrow David’s rule by his oldest surviving son, Adoniya ben Chagit. The text elaborates on the growing support behind Adoniya that included some of the highest officers and military men of David. Indeed, the opposition to David was so powerful that Adoniya gathered his supporters and had them announce Adoniya as the new regent – proclaiming: “Yechi HaMelech Adoniyahu”, “Long Live King Adoniyahu”!

Furthermore, we are also told of the attempts of both the prophet, Natan and David’s wife, Bat Sheva (mother of future King-Shlomo), to convince David HaMelech to take the necessary steps requires to put down this mini-rebellion.

Given the weight and impact of these events that fill the bulk of the haftarah reading, we might rightfully wonder why these first verses telling of David’s “chilly” final days were so important as to be included at all!

Most of us, I’m sure, do realize that the very attempt to remove the King from his throne was fed by his obvious weakness. Would this youngest son have dared to raise any challenge to the powerful and well-liked monarch? Would he have succeeded in gathering a large – even massive - gathering of leaders and influencers to unseat the sitting regent? Certainty not! But the deteriorating physical state of David, combined by the loss of his awareness of what was happening outside of the royal palace (recall that both Natan and Bat Sheva had to inform David of the rebellion) were the encouragement needed for the power-hungry “king-in-waiting” to open his attempt to usurp the throne.

But what we might not realize is that these events impacted the very future of David’s successor, Shlomo. The text continues (beyond the haftarah’s conclusion) to tell of the collapse of the rebellion, with Adoniya and his supporters, submitting to the new King, Shlomo. Indeed, Adoniya pleads for his life with his brother and was

given a reprieve on the condition never to challenge the throne again. HOWEVER, soon after David's death, Adoniya approaches the newly crowned king with a request to take the hand of Avishag, the beautiful attendant of David (of whom we read in the beginning of the haftarah), in marriage. It was an innocent request – but not in the eyes of the wisest of kings. Shlomo understood that Adoniya's wish was but a way to overthrow the throne. Avishag, though never the wife of David (as clearly mentioned in the text), was seen by many as David's wife, having spent his last days with her alone. Marrying the wife of the former King was a clear statement that he was in line for Kingship. Adoniya's request was, in effect, his second attempt to claim the throne as "rightful" successor, being the oldest successor to the deceased Monarch.

The opening verses of or haftarah were, therefore, quite important, sharing with us better understanding of the fate of Adoniya – as well as that of Yoav ben Tzruya, commander and chief of David's army for many years – who had joined in the rebellion with Adoniya.

The haftarah is certainly a fascinating read for its connection to the last days of Avraham Avinu, of which we read in the parasha. But perhaps more than that, our deeper analysis of the story helps us comprehend those events that we might not have known.

“Hafoch Bah, Vahafoch Bah – d’Kulah Bah” – keep reviewing and studying our Torah- for all can be found in it!!! ■

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