



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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“Blessings” vs. “Warnings”

This week's haftarah taken from the open perek of Sefer M'lachim A, records David HaMelech's address to his son, Shlomo, Israel's successor to the throne. We have no question as to why Chazal chose the specific reading, as it closely echoes the theme of our parasha - the farewell messages given by Ya'akov to his sons. Our Rabbis saw the patriarch's blessings to his sons as a fitting counterpart to the advice of the founder of Israel's first dynasty to his son.

Nonetheless, we are confounded each year by the **contrast** between the messages of our founding fathers – more than their **similarity**. As opposed to the beautiful blessings granted to most of Jacob's sons, the final message given by David is not a blessing but, primarily, a warning. We are rightfully troubled by the **UN**inspiring words of Israel's monarch filled with the possible threats to the throne in the future. In previous articles, I discussed the clear difference between a father's blessing to ones' sons and a ruler's concern for a nation's future.

It is, therefore, fully understandable why David reminds Shlomo to reward the family of his faithful friend, Barzilai HaGil'adi, who remained true to the throne during the widespread rebellion that forced David to flee from Yerushalayim. Similarly, it is logical why he warns his successor not to trust Shim'i ben Geirah, of the tribe of Binyamin, who publicly cursed David during the King's flight from Jerusalem and who led his tribesmen against David during the rebellion.

However, what we might see as most troubling, is David's treatment of Yo'av ben Tzruya, his own nephew, who served as a loyal general of the King, leading the army to many victories against the enemies of the throne (including his victory over Avshalom's rebellion) and who had actually saved David's life - more than once!! The resolution to this troubling decree of David will better explain the King's fears and will, I believe, give us a greater appreciation of this founder of the Judean dynasty.

As outstanding a leader that Yo'av was, and despite his relationship to his family, Yo'av was, clearly, a powerful figure who quite often, disagreed with the King and, with that, disobeyed the royal demands. While David hoped to make peace with his domestic opponents, thereby creating a calmer, united society, Yo'av saw any of David's adversaries as challengers to the throne and threats to the nation. And, as a result, he chose to destroy them.

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He (and his brother Avishai) urged David to assassinate Sha'ul when he had the opportunity – but David would not so do, thus avoiding the possible civil war.

He disregarded the King's command to protect Sha'ul's general, Avner, who was negotiating with David to hand Saul's army to him – thereby uniting the tribes under the David's alone. Instead, Yo'av regarded Avner as a dangerous rival-and so, he murdered him.

When Avshalom rebelled against his father, Yo'av was told to "be gentle" in handling the rebel. Ignoring David's charge, Yo'av, who saw Avshalom as a dangerous enemy, murdered the King's successor.

And when peace finally returned to Israel, when the tribes agreed to place David back on his throne, the returned monarch wisely chose Ammasa ben Yeter, the general who had led the rebellious army, to be his new commander-in-chief – an act that would further unite the fractured nation. But Yo'av decided that he was a traitor, and killed him, as well.

So, this was Yo'av: a hero, a general, a defender of his King....and one who soon joined the rebellion of Adoniya, to remove David from the throne.

Do we now better understand David's harsh final words to his successor? A King who needed to protect his nation from civil war and rebellion, was wise enough to know who were the real dangers that could take down the young regent and threaten the very future of the new dynasty.

David was neither harsh nor vindictive; rather, he was a wise and compassionate leader who placed the welfare of his nation above personal sentiment. ■

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