



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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Construction That Led to Destruction

Parashat Terumah opens up the world of sacrificial rite to Israel by detailing the construction of the Mishkan, describing the vessels required for the rites and enumerating the raw materials necessary for the project. Our haftarah parallels the parasha, describing the construction of the Bayit Rishon in detail by including the specific dimensions of each part of the building. And, although our haftarah does not include the chapter's description of all the Temple's vessels (found in subsequent p'sukim), it does contain a closing phrase that parallels the promise we read in the parasha, i.e., Hashem's pledge to dwell in the midst of Israel through the presence of His shechina in the Mikdash, just as He promised regarding the Mishkan.

Given these common themes, there is no need to search for any "esoteric" connection between the parasha and the haftarah. Or is there?

Certainly, this sixth perek forms a perfect connection to the theme of our parasha, but, given that truth, why does the reading begin in the **fifth** chapter? What purpose was there to include the number of laborers involved in the massive undertaking (30, 000) or their division of shifts sent to Levanon for wood (3 shifts, 10, 000 @ month)? Why did our Rabbis insist on including the number of porters (70, 000), stone masons (80, 000) and overseers (3, 300) – details that we do not find in our parasha? As impressive as the entire enterprise was, did this information have to be included in our haftarah?

There must be a reason.

In order to understand the message Chazal wanted to share with us, we turn to the G'mara in Masechet Sanhedrin (21b) where it states:

"The moment Shlomo married Par'oh's daughter, the angel Gavriel embedded a reed in the bottom of the sea on which a sandbank formed and upon which the city of Rome was eventually built."

Yet, this critique of Shlomo seems somewhat puzzling. After all, we first read of his marriage to the Egyptian princess in the beginning of the third perek, in which find no hint of criticism or reproach of the marriage, even though it includes the honor that Shlomo bestowed upon the princess by having her dwell in the royal city (Ir David)!

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It would seem, therefore, that Chazal based their discomfort of the King's actions on the verses in perek eleven that calls attention to how he married many foreign women **including the Pharaoh's daughter!** So, why do our Rabbis rely upon the negative assessment in the eleventh chapter rather than highlighting the more positive depiction described in the third perek?

I would humbly submit that Chazal understood how, in the early years of Shlomo's reign, his marriage to an Egyptian princess had both political and diplomatic impact. It solidified Israel's alliance with this powerful empire and it elevated her stature and influence within the neighboring states. For this reason, it was seen as an acceptable political and diplomatic act.. But Shlomo's increasing political unions that were commonly achieved through his marriages with foreign women, led him astray, leading him to trespass the Torah prohibition against multiple wives - a law meant to prevent any foreign influences that would lead Israel away from Hashem.

And the earliest indication of how these influences impacted Shlomo, is found in the opening verses our haftarah!

“Vaya’al HaMelech Shlomo **Mas...**” –in preparation for the massive construction, we read that Shlomo imposed a levy of **forced labor** upon thousands of his citizens. Chief Rabbi Dr. J. H. Hertz, commented: “Israel had been fatally familiar with the ugly word ‘Mas’, labor, wrung from them by hard taskmasters (in Egypt)”. He continues by suggesting that Shlomo may have learned this practice from his wife’s father, the Egyptian Pharaoh. Rabbi Hertz adds that the nation’s widespread objection to this practice eventually led to the collapse of his kingdom (see chapter 12).

In summation, while the Torah praises the collective volunteerism demonstrated by B’nai Yisra’el in building the Mishkan, the haftarah pointedly includes the contrast to the forced labor instituted by Shlomo in constructing the Mikdash. Perhaps this was the subtle lesson that our Rabbis hoped to teach by including this introductory section to the haftarah – or, perhaps, not.

Regardless, the valuable moral left for all of us –and for all generations – is that the threat to the unity of our nation lies not in avoiding idolatry, but in shunning the adoption of any culture whose values are is imimical to those of Torah – even when they may be politically and diplomatically beneficial. ■

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