



HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

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The Story We Must Tell

The haftorah of Chukat presents one of the longest speeches in Sefer Shoftim. Before Yiftach wages war against Bnei Amon, he recounts the history of the Jewish people in remarkable detail. He reviews the travels through the desert, the requests made peacefully to Edom and Moav, the confrontation with Sichon and the eventual settlement of the land. At first glance, the speech feels almost excessive. Why revisit events that took place three hundred years earlier?

The Abarbanel explains that Yiftach was doing far more than reviewing historical facts. He was establishing the moral legitimacy of Klal Yisrael's presence in the land. Yiftach wanted to make clear that the Jewish people were not a nation of violence or conquest. Bnei Yisrael had requested passage peacefully. They avoided unnecessary conflict. The land under dispute had already been conquered from Ammon by Sichon before Israel ever fought for it. For the Abarbanel, this


speech is fundamentally about moral clarity.

Yiftach understands that a nation must know how to tell its story truthfully and confidently. If a people loses clarity about its own history, others will define that history in its place. The Malbim develops this further. He notes that although Yiftach was introduced as a "גבור חיל," a mighty warrior, he does not begin with battle. He begins with words, trying to provide explanation and explicit memory. Only after attempting diplomacy and historical clarification does war become unavoidable.

There is something profoundly significant about this sequence. Yiftach recognizes that strength alone cannot sustain a nation. A people also needs memory to understand where it came from, what it stands for and the principles that shaped its journey. Perhaps that is why the speech reaches back centuries. Jewish history in Tanach is never treated as distant or irrelevant. The past remains alive because it defines identity in the present. Memory is not nostalgia, it is responsibility. A nation that remembers its story preserves not only its past, but its moral compass for the future.

In many ways, this feels deeply contemporary. We are living in a moment when history itself is contested, simplified and rewritten with startling speed. The haftorah reminds us that memory is not passive. It requires transmission, clarity and responsibility. Yiftach teaches that telling our story is not merely an act of self-defense. It is an affirmation of who we are, where we came from and the values that continue to guide us forward. ■

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