



PROBING THE PROPHETS

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Moving Forward – When Moving Together

The tradition of reading the haftarah on Shabbat and Yom Tov was instituted during the Tanaitic period, as found in the Mishnah [Megillah 4:5], which indicates that the practice was well-established by then. Its institution was, according to many, the result of decrees of foreign rulers who forbade public Torah readings. In response to these “diktats”, Chazal then introduced the readings from Sifrei Nevi'im that would correspond to the weekly Torah portions, to be read in place of the banned public Torah readings.

Our Rabbi's institution of the haftarah reading should keep us mindful of the past realities and history and its impact on our world. Reflecting upon the events of ancient Israel is especially important in understanding the weekly haftarot! This helps uncover the prophetic messages shared to that generation

and its importance for us today. It is also why I often touch upon the preceding-or subsequent- events to better understand what the haftarah teaches us.

The connection between the parasha and haftarah is quite obvious, as the reading from the Sefer Shofetim [perek 11] parallels and, indeed, even uses the exact wording found in the Parashat Chukat. The parasha relates how Israel avoided invading the nation of Ammon when conquering the land from Arnon to Yabok and the haftarah tells of the argument of against the Ammonite enemy who demanded the return of the very same land, “from Arnon to Yabok” – although it was never taken from Ammon.

The haftarah certainly recounts an interesting clash (and eventual battle) between these two opponents. But it is far more than an “exciting” conflict.

It reveals a sad and difficult era that reflects the struggles of a failed generation.

Consider:

Gil'ad is threatened by Ammon...**but has no army to fight them!!**

No neighboring tribes offered to help them!

They reluctantly choose Yiftach – **whom they had driven out from Gil'ad!!**

Yes, Yiftach was successful in repelling the

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enemy – was this a victory?

Consider the sad “epilogue” to this entire episode:

After Yiftach’s glorious victory, **the tribe of Ephrayim mustered an army and marched northward to confront the new leader.**

Upon reaching Yiftach **they threatened to burn down his house** for never having summoned them to join him in the battle.

The disagreement led **to a civil war between Yiftach’s army and the army of Ephrayim.**

That war that **led to the deaths of 42,000 men of the tribe of Ephrayim.**

This horrific closing to the era of Yiftach (he ruled for only 6 years) grants us a peek into the condition of the nation at that time. Israel was divided! Unable to muster an army, they manage to gather-only- a group of malcontents (“anashim reikim”). Even when victorious, the tribes did not contribute to the victory but thought only of themselves - **not** the nation as a whole. When granted respite from their enemies, when Israel was miraculously spared a predictable massacre, they still could find no common ground upon which to build a united nation.

History teaches us over and over again that the divisions within our people weaken us and, all too often, lead to heartbreak and misfortune. And, yes, once again, our haftarah **DOES**, indeed, leave a message for us today.

The most dangerous menace that our nation confronts is when we forget that we are **one** nation and, despite our differences, we can-and should- move forward.

But we can move **forward** only when we move **together**. ■

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