

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
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Vayeishev-Chanuka

This year, the only Shabbat that coincides with Chanuka is Shabbat Parashat Vayeishev - not Parashat Miketz. This confluence is rather rare as it occurs but once in ten years, on the average. Nonetheless, this unique occurrence does not impact the choice of the haftara, as the selection remains the same as on every Shabbat Chanuka, i.e. a reading from Sefer Zecharya, p'rakim 2-4, which is also read on Shabbat Parashat B'ha-alo-t'cha.

The exultant opening of the haftara in which Zecharya promises G-d's return to Israel, reflects the reality that faced Zecharya's generation, Jews who were returning from the Babylonian exile, and were struggling to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash. The prophet's promise that Hashem would, once again, "dwell in your midst", i.e. through the "new" Beit HaMikdash, was certainly a welcomed one to the nation and, in fact, echoed the exact promise made by Chaggai - a contemporary of Zecharya - who also urged the returnees to build Bayit Sheni and

promised that Hashem V'ERTZEH BO V'IKAVDA - would be pleased with the Mikdash and be honored (through it). Chazal saw the rededication of the purified Beit HaMikdash by the Chashmona'im as form of "reconstruction" of Bayit Sheni by the returning exiles of Chaggai's time. Our Tana'im (early rabbinic scholars) regarded both events to be the fulfillment of the promised return of Hashem's presence to Yerushalayim.

The second vision of the navi, the image of the Menora and its lights, creates the obvious connection to Shabbat Chanuka and is therefore the most familiar reason given as to why the haftara was chosen to be read on Chanuka.

These two visions are certainly convincing links to Chanuka, but we would be remiss in our study were we to ignore the introductory section Zecharya's nevu'a that, at first glance, does not seem to be connected to the holiday at all. The prophet describes a scene in which the Sahtahn stands to the right of Yehoshua, the Kohen Gadol, in order to condemn him and prevent him from fulfilling his mission of returning the sacrificial rite to the Temple. It appears that Chazal saw this as a parallel to the many obstacles that faced the Chashmona'im that would "prevent" or hinder their efforts to

rededicate the defiled Mikdash. G-d Himself responds by defending Yehoshua and reprimanding the Sahtahn for daring to attack one who had "survived a conflagration" (UD MUTZAL MEI'EISH).

I would submit that Hashem's message was directed not to the Kohen Gadol alone but to his entire generation. Throughout his sefer, Zecharya speaks pointing to the shortcomings of this generation in an effort to have them repair their ways - criticism that could easily have the people believe that their efforts to rebuild Jewish life once more was doomed to failure. For that reason, G-d teaches Yehoshua and His entire nation that the promised redemption would arrive - despite their sins - as Hashem understands fully the great suffering Israel had endured.

G-d's message should echo in our ears for His condemnation of the Sahtahn applies to all those who fail to stand behind Hashem's nation when they struggle to return and rebuild. He denounces those who criticize the UD MUTZAL MEI'EISH, the generation of survivors, those who rebuild their own lives in their homeland and who thirst to return to G-d and His Torah by reestablishing yeshivot and batei Knesset!

Who, after all, would dare to censure those who marched from Holocaust

to Independence, from the ghettos of Europe to the Army of Israel? Could there be ANYONE so insensitive or so selfish to find reason to chastise the generation who, like that of Chaggai, struggles against enemies who endeavor to chase them out of their land - a mere 75-80 years after their near destruction? Or would there be anyone with the chutzpa to join in the despicable effort of defending the slaughter of innocents, babies and elderly, of the very descendants of that UD MUTZAL MEI'EISH?

Who could ever do such a thing?

YES! A Sahtahn!

The message for Chanuka is a message for all time. So when we see these followers of Sahtahn criticizing and condemning, we can be confident that YIG'AR B'CHA HASHEM - G-d will denounce them and will continue to defend the UD MUTZAL MEI'EISH!

