

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
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Emor - 17 p'sukim, Yechezkeil 44:15-31

Guarding Sanctity

Many of us are familiar with this week's Torah reading since it includes the section known as PARSHAT HAMO'ADOT, the section that contains the Torah's most complete review of the annual Yamim Tovim. This segment reviews the laws of the SHALOSH REGALIM and includes as well the observances followed of Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. It is for this reason that we read this part of Emor both on Pesach and Sukkot and, therefore, its familiarity to us. Despite its familiarity, our ancient scholars did NOT focus upon PARSHAT HAMO'ADOT when choosing a fitting haftara for Parshat Emor. Instead, they chose to have us read from the 44th perek of Sefer Yechezkeil, a selection that reflects the theme found in the opening section of our parsha, i.e., the laws that pertain to the elevated state of sanctity demanded of the Kohanim.

A simple reading of our haftara teaches us of the greater requirements that would be demanded in the future Holy Temple and, specifically, the laws commanded to the kohanic family to be followed in the holier Beit HaMikdash.

Indeed, we might find the words of the prophet to be almost parallel to those we read in this parsha, e.g. their prohibition of defiling for the dead, the limitation of whom they may marry, the obligatory garments to be worn during their service in the Beit HaMikdash, etc. In fact, Rav Soloveitchik comments that the haftara does not only share a common theme with our parsha but its laws are almost identical with those of the parsha, having us wonder what Yechezkeil might be adding to what we learned in the parsha!

The key to understanding what the navi hoped to relay to future generations might be found in the opening phrases of the haftara where we hear Yechezkeil declare how only the Kohanic descendants of Tzadok - those who "kept the charge of My Sanctuary when Israel strayed from Me", would be those who will serve Hashem in His Sanctuary. The statement reveals Hashem's insistence that only Kohanim who kept the purity of the family over the years would be allowed to continue their serve in Bayit Shlishi.

However, it is important to realize that our haftara is only part of the navi's prophecy. Indeed, it first begins in the fifteenth verse of the 44th chapter - and we would fail to fully appreciate the significance of Yechezkeil's message to Israel if we do not read the p'sukim that "introduce" the haftara's message. After taking the prophet on a "virtual tour" of the future Mikdash, Hashem warns the

navi to remember all of the laws and the warnings pertaining to the Temple that he had been taught. He then charged the prophet: V'AMARTA EL MERI - to tell the rebellious people of Israel - specifically the Leviyim and the Kohanim - who failed to "keep the charge of My Sanctuary" and had defiled the Beit HaMikdash with their sinful behavior.

It is at this point, that our haftara begins - when Hashem draws a contrast between the "rebellious" Kohanim and V'HAKOHANIM V'HALVIYIM B'NEI TZADOK - the righteous families of the kohanim who guarded the sanctity of the Mikdash. It is THEY who, in the future, would serve in the eternal Beit HaMikdash. The corruption of the kohanic tribe is well-documented in the Tanach, both in the writings of the prophets and in the reports included in Sefer Ezra HaSofer. Rav Soloveitchik explained that many would have assumed that, in the ideal yet-to-be-built Temple, Hashem would remove the entire kohanic class, as it had been the source of fraud and exploitation for so many years. Therefore, Yechezkeil assures the nation that only the fraudulent among the Kohanim would be denied the right to serve G-d while those descendants of Tzadok who protected the sanctity of Hashem's Temple, would continue to function in the future Temple.

And it will be those righteous ones who would purify and elevate the Temple service, sanctifying the avodat Hashem as described in our parasha. ✨