

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
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Chukat - 33 p'sukim - Sho-f'tim 11:1-33

GIBOR CHAYIL - Do We Care?

V'YIFTACH HAGIL'ADI HAYA GIBOR CHAYIL - quite a powerful opening to our haftara - "Yiftach from Gil'ad was a GIBOR CHAYIL." GIBOR CHAYIL! That phrase is often misunderstood as describing a brave warrior when, in fact, it depicts an individual with outstanding attributes, not necessarily including military prowess. The expression is used to define as a person who is "accomplished", "skillful", or "gifted". Throughout the Tanach, only a few individuals were described as GIBOR CHAYIL, among them: Bo'az (Ruth 2:1), the judge, Gidon (Shof'tim 6:12), King Sha'ul (Shmuel Alef 9:1) and even David HaMelech (16: 18).

We would imagine, therefore, that Yiftach must have been quite an outstanding individual to have been included in such outstanding company! So we would think... until we reach the very next phrase: V'HU BEN ISHA ZONA - he was born to Gil'ad, his father, out of wedlock. Clearly, such a "tainted" lineage had no bearing on the Tanach's depiction of Yiftach as a GIBOR CHAYIL

- but it had much bearing on the treatment he received from his brothers, from his tribe and, in the end, treatment that impacted his entire life story.

Yiftach's (half)-brothers denied him any rights to a share in their father's estate, as his mother had never been married to his father. In an effort to distance him from the family and the estate, they chased him away from their home, forcing him to flee to Eretz Tov (a scarcely inhabited area of Aram). There, he attracted ANASHIM REIKIM, refugees who, like Yiftach, had no home or estate - or means of support - and, in time, formed a small army.

[Parenthetically, I would point out that David, another GIBOR CHAYIL, was forced to flee the palace by Sha'ul's attempt to prevent him from inheriting the throne, and escaped to Adulam where he formed a small army that brought victories for Israel (!)]

With this background to the Yiftach story, we better understand the haftara, including why the leaders of Gil'ad approached Yiftach to lead their fight against the invading Ammonim and how he was successful in defeating the enemy. It was during the negotiations with Ammon that Yiftach recalled the factual events found in this week's parasha, proving that the land legitimately belonged to Israel. But, to no avail. (It seems that historical proofs have no impact on enemies who wish to take Eretz HaKodesh from Am HaKodesh!).

But I find it most interesting to compare the events in the parasha to those in the haftara. In both stories we read of Israel's desire to avoid war, negotiating with the enemy before any hostilities would begin. In both cases - whether when Israel faced Sichon or when she faced B'nei Ammon - the enemy rejected their peaceful solutions. And so, in both stories, the enemy attacked Israel.

But the contrast is equally interesting and, perhaps, even more revealing. Note that, in the Torah's narrative, Moshe's name is strangely missing. It was YISRA'EL who sent agents to negotiate, YISRA'EL who was attacked and YISRA'EL who was victorious. No specific leader leading the negotiations with Sichon is mentioned, no general gathering or training the army is named and no great hero bringing Israel to victory is specified. This was a united effort - a national campaign - so much so, that no one person is singled out, not even Moshe or Yehoshua. And, not surprisingly, it is this victory that began Israel's KIBUSH HA'ARETZ, conquest of the land.

On the other hand, the haftara tells us a story of a fractious people who would drive out a GIBOR CHAYIL in order to prevent him from inheriting from his father. It was a community that, when threatened by an enemy, could find no leader among them to protect them from the enemy. And, as a result, it was a victory that eventually led to a civil war

and the death of 42,000 Israelites (see Shof'tim 12:1-7).

And this is why it is so important for us to both compare and contrast the parasha and haftara. By doing so, we have learned the difference between the pre-conquest era of cooperation and the pre-monarchial era, of disunity and civil war. A difference between victory and tragedy.

And, a lesson we must learn today as well. ✨