

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler

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CHAYEI SARA - 31 p'sukim - Melachim Alef 1:1-31

Different, Yet Similar

There is little reason to wonder why our ancient scholars chose the very first chapter of the Book of M'lachim, as a fitting haftara reading for this week's parasha. The events narrated in this perek tell of the final days of David HaMelech - much as the parasha of Chayei Sara relates the final days of Avraham Avinu. Indeed, the parallels that we find between the parasha and its haftara are quite striking. The Torah reading details Avraham's calculated measures to prepare his son Yitzchak for the future leadership and patriarchate of the Abrahamic clan. Likewise, our haftara includes David Hamelech's measures to assure that the leadership of his reign be handed over to his son, Shlomo. Additionally, the opening words of the haftara, V'HAMELCH DAVID ZAKEN - BA BAYAMIM, echo the very words that describe Avraham in our parasha. Certainly, both readings seem to be quite analogous to each other.

And yet, I would suggest, that the contrast between the two readings is more striking than the comparisons.

Our parasha depicts an almost idyllic scene. VASHEM BEIRACH ET AVRAHAM BAKOL, Hashem blessed Avraham with everything: a fully functional and cognizant Avraham sends his servant on a mission to choose a wife for Yitzchak. The servant succeeds in that mission, Yitzchak accepts the servant's choice and he grows to love his new wife, who, subsequently, takes over from Sara in an almost seamless fashion. The family has been secured by the selection of Rivka and the unchallenged choice of Yitzchak to succeed his father. Avraham Avinu passes on with the knowledge that G-d's blessing to him would be carried on by his chosen son.

The haftara, on the other hand, paints a very different picture. Here, the aging regent makes no independent decision regarding the immediate future, seemingly, too weak to be involved in palace intrigue, a weakness that is utilized by his oldest surviving son. As a result, Adoniya rebels against his father's choice of successor by garnering support from many former supporters of David and, eventually, by declaring himself king. Throughout all of this, the king is blissfully unaware of what was taking place until his wife and prophet delicately break the news to him. And so, while a vigorous Avraham Avinu took an active role in shaping the future leadership, David

HaMelech can take only a passive role, reacting only when his wife, Bat Sheva, and his prophet, Natan, report the threat to his throne and advise him to publicize his true successor. Only then does the King have his son, Shlomo, publicly crowned and placed on the throne.

The devious plots and wily intrigues that haunted King David's final days, differ sharply from the pastoral and peaceful setting that blessed Avraham's old age.

And yet, there is an underlying commonality between the two saintly leaders. HaRav Yissachar Ya'akovson points out that Avraham Avinu was described by G-d as one who would teach his descendants LA'ASOT TZ'DAKA UMISHPAT, to do kindness and justice, and it was David HaMelech who, despite the "stormy" years, was able to carry on that very lesson modeled by the first patriarch, for he depicted as an OSEH TZ'DAKA UMISHPAT L'CHOL AMO, one who acted with kindness and justice to his entire nation.

Both lived through different final years, but both carried on Hashem's wishes of mercy, justice and kindness.

And that might very well be the reason why they are still blessed by Israel with similar brachot: MAGEIN AVRAHAM and MAGEIN DAVID. ✨