

Bringing the Prophets to Life

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

Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

Renewal Demands Reunion

**MACHAR CHODESH - 25 p'sukim -
Shmuel Alef - 20:18-42**

At first glance, we might assume that few haftarot would have a more obvious reason for their selection than today's reading. The opening words alone express the significance of this day: MACHAR CHODESH - "tomorrow is a new month", and, indeed, it is! And yet, it is difficult to imagine that these mere two words would motivate Chazal to choose this selection from Shmuel Alef, and none other.

HaRav Yissachar Ya'akovson, in his classic work "Chazon HaMikra", wonders why as well, and therefore, he points to a number of other connections between the haftara and the upcoming Rosh Chodesh. Among them is the fact that the beginning of a month which is declared upon witnessing the renewal of the moon, reminds us of the general concept of renewal - a fresh beginning, a new start, a beginning! This simple truth is the most basic teaching for Israel as

she faces a new month, a Rosh Chodesh. In the same way, we can sense an emerging "power struggle" between the King Sha'ul and the future King David, a struggle that is reflected in the events depicted in this haftara. The eventual flight of David from the royal family must be seen as the dawning of a new beginning and fresh start for the entire kingdom of Israel. In fact, as Rav Ya'akovson suggests, the Midrash that declares that the moon's brightness was reduced when it complained that "two kings cannot share the same crown", can be well understood as a description of the Sha'ul vs David struggle, with these two kings vying for one crown.

We would be mistaken, however, were we to see this struggle as a personal battle between these two righteous men. Sha'ul, depicted in the Tanach as having lost G-d's "spirit", struggled with bouts of depression and as a result, was often not in control of his own actions. Indeed, during his moments of clarity, he admitted that he had behaved poorly toward David, admitting that his son-in-law would succeed him upon the throne. David, meanwhile, never actively sought the kingship, despite the fact that he had been promised the throne and had even been anointed by the navi Sh'mu'el. When we study David's behavior throughout his years, we might well be

surprised to find that he eschewed using violence to rise to power and punished those who did so in attempting to place him on the throne. David would accept the crown only if he was both the choice of G-d AND the will of the people.

And with that "mandate", David left us with a lesson for today.

David HaMelech understood that there could not be a renewal, a rebirth, without a reunification. A new era could not be forced upon a reluctant people. Change would be successful only if the nation united behind the change and supported it. We must therefore realize that MACHAR CHODESH, tomorrow could be the beginning of an age of renewal, the messianic era. It could be the time when the Mashiach, the scion of David, arrives. But he will not take his rightful place on the throne until we, as a united people, support it, desire it and work together peacefully to make it happen. ✨