

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
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What or How?

KORACH - 24 p'sukim

- Sh'muel Alef 11:14-12:22

As the focus of the previous parasha of Sh'lach centered upon the rebellion of the meraglim against Moshe, and, by definition, against Hashem, so too this week's parasha of Korach focuses upon the rebellion of Korach and his followers against Moshe, a mutiny which includes a defiance of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as well.

Chazal saw a parallel of this uprising, in the demand they made to the great prophet, Shmuel, to step down from his leadership of the nation and to choose, instead, a King to rule them all. It is for this reason that our ancient scholars established the reading of the 11th and 12th p'rakim of Shmuel Alef as the haftara for Parashat Korach, chapters which, interestingly, do not include the nation's request of Shmuel, but only the prophet's condemnation of the people for the request. After reminding the leadership how he (with God's approval) agreed to choose a king for them, he steps down from his leadership role, by

repeating his just and honest guidance, cautioning them to remain faithful to Hashem and His directives.

But before concluding his final words as leader, Shmuel harshly condemns the people for their very request for a King. He accuses them of being ingrates, ignoring the myriad kindnesses Hashem had done for them by requesting a King to lead them to victory. In doing so, they overlooked the defeat of many enemies who fell before the power of G-d. Shmuel goes out of his way to prove that Hashem Himself was angered with their request, by having G-d bring down heavy rain and thunder - a sign of His displeasure with Israel.

This was Israel's rebellion.

However, were this so, why did Hashem submit to the nation's request that both He and Shmuel knew was wrong and even "rebellious"?

I would submit that Israel's desire for a King was not an act of rebellion at all. In fact, while G-d referred to the insurgents of Korach as B'NEI MERI [Bamidbar 18:25], He never applied such a designation to the nation that spoke to Shmuel. The nation's wish to find a monarch after three-hundred years of no national leader (and during a time when their very existence was threatened by surrounding nations) was far from being an act of

revolt! And, as the Torah itself calls for the people to set up a monarchy, we cannot refer to the nation's wishes as being "defiant".

The reason for Hashem's dismay with Israel's appeal is found in the very commandment found in Sefer D'varim [17: 14-15] that speaks of the people's wish for a King but adds ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM ELOKECHA BO - "whom G-d shall choose". Israel's request for a King from Shmuel never includes a clear mention of having the navi approach G-d [See Shmuel Alef 8:5-6]. The desire for a new leader was, as they clarified to Shmuel, one based upon the aging of their long-standing navi, and their realization that neither of the prophet's sons were proper choices for leadership. In such a situation, we would expect them to turn to G-d... but they never do. They, themselves, decided that they must have a monarchy - and asked Shmuel to do so.

Yes. They were doing that which the Torah had instructed them to do. And, yes, it is true that they were fulfilling a Divine command.

But when performing a mitzva without any regard for Hashem... well, that it a sort of "rebellion". Isn't it? ✨