Bringing the Prophets to Life
Weekly Insights into the Haftara
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Two Accounts that Equal One

Haftara - 31 p'sukim - Melachim Alef 1:1-31

We need not wonder why Chazal selected the first perek of M'lachim Alef as a fitting choice for the haftara of Chayei Sara, for it echoes the events we find in the parasha. The Torah reading recounts the final years of Avraham Avinu's life, during which he lays the foundations for his son's future and, ultimately, for the future of the nation yet to emerge. Similarly, our haftara tells of David HaMelech's final days and his preparations for the future reign of his son and, ultimately, for the dynasty of his nation. Indeed, just as the parasha details Avraham's preparations to hand over the reins of leadership to his son, Yitrzchak, the haftara echoes the same, including David HaMelech's efforts to ensure that the leadership of his reign be handed to his son, Shlomo. It is no 'coincidence' that our text opens the haftara with the phrase: V'HAMELECH DAVID ZAKEN, BA BAYAMIM reiterating precisely what the parasha states: V'AVRAHAM ZAKEN, BA BAYAMIM.

And yet, despite the many similarities between these two accounts, I am particularly troubled by the striking differences of the portrayal of David's final days in Sefer M'lachim with the description found in Divrei HaYamim Aief [perek 29].

Our haftara portrays David as an aging, weakened monarch, confined to his palace, increasingly sensitive to the cold and, consequently, seemingly oblivious to the events unfolding around him. On the other hand, the final days of David described in the last chapter of Divrei HaYamim, presents the King as a vibrant, animated leader! The text relates how David gathered the nation's leaders to proclaim that Shlomo, his son, would succeed him upon the throne, to detail what valuables he had already gathered for the soon-to-be construction of the Beit HaMikdash and to bless and thank Hashem - included in the prayer VAYVAREICH DAVID that we recite every morning.

How can we understand these two contradictory accounts of David's final days? Not only do the descriptions of David's physical state contradict each other, but the time-

table of the events clash with each other as well! The story that opens in the haftara is completed only after the haftara concludes. There, we learn that David, having heard of the attempted coup by his son, Adoniya, commands the Navi, the Kohen Gadol and the General to lead Shlomo down to the Gichon river and have him anointed as King. And, throughout the enthronement of the new king and its accompanying celebration... David HaMelech remains in his palace, too weak to attend this historic event.

And now, consider this: the very same episode we read in our haftara is depicted quite differently in Divrei HaYamim. There, we do not find any mention of the weakening of David, nor any reference to Adoniya's attempt to usurp David's throne or the report of Bat Sheva and Natan regarding the coup! Additionally, the text places David HaMelech in the center of Shlomo's coronation and its festivity, something that the haftara clearly denies!?

Over the years, I struggled to understand these inconsistencies and, only recently, did I find a possible key to resolve this conundrum - I hope.

David's detailed instructions regarding the construction of the Beit HaMikdash and his promise of have Shlomo as his successor, were given first to Shlomo and, later, to the nation's leaders. This took place before the waning strength of the King began. He had the strength to bless the entire congregation as well but, soon after that, could do little more. The text adds three crucial words in the verse that follows David's 'bracha' to the nation - MIMOCHORAT HAYOM HAHU - "on the morrow of that very day" - which was when all of Israel offered sacrifices to Hashem and wildly celebrated the coronation of Shlomo. But there is no mention of David on that day.

We might very well understand "the morrow´ as referring to more than the very next day. Perhaps, David was weak but not yet incapable of blessing the people. Perhaps.

When we understand that this later text authored by Anshei Knesset HaG'dola was written some 500 years after these events, an era of Israel's return from exile, and a time that Chazal hoped to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash AND to return the Davidic dynasty to leadership... well, we understand why they chose to include the positive accomplishments of David to the newly returned.

No, there is no "fake news" in Tanach [ch'v] but this was a desire to impact a struggling generation with the hope of building a new nation, blessed be HKBH!