

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : שמיני

This week's Haftorah is taken from the Second Book of Shmuel, starting with the first verse of Chapter 6. Sefaradim end with verse 19, Ashkenazzim continue till Chapter 7, verse 17.

1. The Mishkan that we built in the Wilderness on our way to Eretz Yisroel was really the transportable version of the Beis HaMikdash that was to be built “in the place that HaShem will choose” once we had come into the Land. For that reason, the account of the preparations in anticipation of the building and dedication of the Beis HaMikdash is a fitting narrative and an apt Haftorah to parallel the building and Consecration of the Mishkan of this week's Sidra.
2. Some twenty years before the events of this week's Haftorah, the Arron HoAydu (the Holy Ark which housed the Two Tablets of Testimony) had been misguidedly taken into battle and was captured by the Pillishtim. At first, the Pillishtim had gloated over the treasure that they had captured. But after some seven months of fearsome plagues wherever the Orron was shown off, they realized the awesome power and holiness of the Orron and they had sent it back, together with a fitting tribute of gold.
3. The Pillishtim had placed the Orron on a newly-constructed cart harnessed to two cows and it had made its own way back to Eretz Yisroel. It had come to rest at the house of Aminodov in Kiryas Ye'orrim (site of today's Telshe-Stone, approximately fifteen kilometres from Yerushalaim) where it was reverently accommodated in a special tent. Our Haftorah tells how Dovid HaMelech, determined to build a permanent Beis HaMikdash in Yerushalaim to replace the Mishkan (which was at that time in Giv'on) far in advance and in eager anticipation had the Orron brought into Yerushalaim for he wanted the Orron to be ready to be installed when that as yet unbuilt Beis HaMikdash would be completed.
4. There is another connexion with the Sidra, too. At one stage, it looked as if the Orron, which was being brought to Yerushalaim on a cart (it should really have been borne with its carrying staves on the shoulders of the Levi'im) was going to slip off and Oozoh, the son of Aminodov, made to steady it with his hand. The consequences were immediate and terrible: he was instantly struck dead. Similarly, the Sidra tells of how the Consecration of the Mishkan was sadly marred by the death of the two sons of Aharon for their misdemeanour then. The death of Oozoh taught everybody that the Orron of HaShem needs nobody to support it — on the contrary, “the Orron carried its carriers” — and showed the people the awesome holiness of the Arron of HaShem, that He shall be feared.
5. Dovid took this tragedy as a sign from HaShem that the Orron was not to be brought to Yerushalaim just then and he ordered that it should instead be kept in the house of the righteous Oved-Edom HaLevi. HaShem rewarded Oved-Edom with quite spectacular

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blessing for his reverence and dedication in looking after the Orron and then, after three months, Dovid arranged to complete the task and bring the Orron into Yerushalaim.

6. This time, Dovid was careful that no tragic mistakes should happen. This time, the Levi'im carried the Orron on their shoulders, as was originally commanded by Mosheh, as it says: "And to the Kehosites he did not allocate any wagons for their charge, of carrying the Orron, was to carry it on their shoulders." (The symbolism is that Torah can only be properly acquired by those that "put their shoulders to the task," to those who work hard to acquire Torah knowledge. Torah cannot be acquired by hitching a ride on a cart, without exerting oneself.) A great number of Korbannos were brought along the ceremonial route till the Orron arrived at its designated place in the City of Dovid. Then Dovid blessed the people in the Name of HaShem and he distributed bread, meat and wine to the people and they all went home. *[Sefaradim end the Haftorah at this point.]*
7. During all this celebration, Dovid himself was supremely elated with the thought that bringing the Orron back, to Yerushalaim, was the first stage of the building of the Beis HaMikdash, and he gave expression to his happiness by dancing in front of the Orron in holy rapture, not concerned at all, in his sheer devotion to HaShem, for the dignity of his own royal status, for in the Presence of HaShem, all human dignity is as nothing. But this was displeasing in the eyes of his wife Michal, the daughter of Shaul and she rebuked Dovid on his return home. She was concerned that Dovid had let himself go in full view of all the people and that he had belittled his regal position.
8. Although she was a great woman and a Tzaddekes — after all, she was the daughter of the righteous king Shaul — nevertheless, she was wrong in this criticism of her husband. Dovid answers her sharply and tells her that indeed this concern for doing what is seemly rather than to serve HaShem without inhibition and with all one's heart could have been the very reason for her father and his house being rejected by HaShem from being king in favour of Dovid, for when it comes to devotion and worship of HaShem, one must be completely self-effacing — even if one is a king!
9. That night, the word of HaShem comes to Nosson the Novvi. He is to tell Dovid that HaShem has indeed chosen him over Shaul and that his will be the Royal House of the Jewish People forever. Even if there will be times when the Davidic successor might be hidden, and even if there might be a long hiatus, nevertheless the royal line of Dovid will always re-emerge, right till the King Moshiach. However, as for Dovid's intention to build a Beis HaMikdash, no, Dovid will not be the one to build HaShem's Beis HaMikdash, but it will be his son, yet to be born, who will build the Beis HaMikdash.
10. The reason is given later (in Divray HaYommim): Dovid had to wage many wars and fight many battles to establish the Jewish People in safety on their Land — he had had to kill many of the enemies of the Jewish People. However justified all this bloodshed was, it meant that he was a man of war. And the Beis HaMikdash is to be G-d's House of Peace, peace between the Jewish People and their Father in Heaven, peace between the Nations of the World and HaShem, the G-d of all Mankind. And it cannot be right that a man of war, however righteous, should build HaShem's House of Peace.