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WHY A KING LESS WISE THAN SOLOMON WOULD NOT HAVE BUILT THE TEMPLE By Rabbi Aryeh Klapper

This week's haftorah is presumably excerpted to focus on the construction of the Beit HaMikdash. But if so, it begins one verse too early or several too late.

1 Kings 5:27 relates an apparently necessary prelude:

Shlomo the King raised a levy from all Israel, and the levy came to thirty thousand men.

However, the haftorah begins from the previous verse (26).

Hashem *natan*/had given wisdom to Shlomo, as He had spoken to him;

There was peace between Chiram and Shlomo;
They cut a covenant, the two of them.

ויקום נתן חכמה לשלמה פאשר דבר-לו
ניהי שלם בין חירם ובין שלמה
ויקרתו ברית שניהם:

This seems to focus on Shlomo's wisdom rather than on the Temple. And if one should respond that the Shlomo/Chiram relationship was essential for Temple construction, then the haftorah should begin no later than verse 24, which records that Chiram allowed Shlomo to trade for all the *erez*-wood he wanted.

The haftorah editing decision may be grounded in grammar. I translated *natan* as pluperfect = "had given", and as resumptive repetition, meaning that it reviews the past as an introduction to what follows. This sees Shlomo's wisdom as essential to what follows.

However, this translation may be wrong. Forms of the verb n-t-n appear four times in verses 24-26:

24: *Vayehi Chiram notein liShlomo erez (wood)*

25: *U'Shlomo natan l'Chiram (wheat and oil) koh yitein Shlomo l'Chiram (year by year)*

26: *VaHashen natan chokhmoh liShlomo etc.*

Each of these forms can have different implications for tense. (Some things really do depend on context.) Collectively, they enable Verse 26 to be read as consecutive with the prior verses, as in the King James version:

"So Hiram gave . . . And Solomon gave . . . thus gave Solomon . . . And the Lord gave . . ."

Beginning the haftorah from verse 26 therefore reflects a choice to prefer the pluperfect translation.

Reading verse 26 as resumptive repetition reframes the prior section. What might have been seen as a pragmatic quid pro quo – wood bartered for food – is characterized instead as "peace"

and "covenant". Radak understands this as emphasizing the depth and genuineness of the peace between Shlomo and Chiram:

But (Shlomo) had peace with the other kings as well!
Rather: an enduring and strong peace via/in the covenant the two of them cut
and (Chiram) gave him wood sufficient for this (Temple) building which he built.

והלא גם עם המלכים האחרים היה לו שלום,
אלא שלום קיים וחזק בברית שכרתו שניהם,
הספיק לו עצים לבנין זה אשר בנה.

In Chapter 9, well past our haftorah's ending, Shlomo even grants Chiram cities apparently in the Land of Israel, an action that generates halakhic controversies and opportunities to this day. I hope to discuss those in more depth at some future point – for now, consider the heter mekhirah for shemittah and land-swaps for peace.

Radak says that Shlomo had peace not only with "other kings", rather with "the other kings", which I think means "all other kings". Radak presumably based himself on Shlomo's message to Chiram as presented in verses 17-19:

You knew David my father
that he was unable to build a house for the sake of Hashem his G-d

because of the war that surrounded him
until G-d gave them (his enemies) under the palms of his feet.

ועתה הנני יקום א-לתי לי מסביב

אין שטן ואין פגע רע:

והנני אמר לבנות בית לשם יקום א-לתי.

Now Hashem my G-d has given me rest all around
without nemesis and without malicious contact.

Behold I declare (my intent) to build a house for the sake of Hashem my G-d

as He spoke to David my father, saying:

"Your son,

whom I will place in your stead on your throne –
he will build the house for My sake."

So now, command!

and they will cut down for you *arazim* from the Lebanon.

My servants will be with your servants

I will give you the pay of your servants, as much as you say,
because you know that there is no man among us
who knows how to cut down trees (as skillfully) as the men of Tzidon.

Radak (to verse 18) argues that the mitzvah to build the Temple is initialized by peace:

Because following this *menuchah/rest* there came the mitzvah to build the Beit HaMikdash as is written (Devarim 12:5-11):
and Hashem will give you rest from all your enemies surrounding etc.

and the place which He will choose etc.
for His presence seek etc.

כי אחר המנוחה
הית' המצוה לבנות בית המקדש
כמו שכתוב
והניח לכם מכל אויביכם מסביב וגו'
היה המקור אשר יבחר וגו'
לשכנו תדרשו:

(The last quote is out of order: “For His presence seek” is in verse 5. I don’t know why Radak adds it when the issue is one of sequence.)

This contention is buttressed by the report of David’s initial plan to build the temple in II Shmuel 7:1-2:

It happened, when the king was dwelling in his house and Hashem gave him rest (= *hiniach lo*) all around (= *misaviv*) from all his enemies

The king said to Nathan the Prophet:

See please,

I dwell in a house of *arazim*,
while the Ark of G-d dwells within curtains . . .

This also beautifully resolves a tension in Shlomo’s message to Chiram above. He first says that David could not build the Temple because of the wars that surrounded him; but then that the wars ended with David’s enemies subdued. If peace triggers the obligation, and David eventually achieved peace, why didn’t he build the Temple? We know the reason from David’s own account in 1 Divrei HaYamim 22:8:

The word of Hashem upon me, as follows:

You have shed much blood
and made great battles

You must not build a house for My sake
because you have spilled many bloods to the ground before Me.

וַיְהִי עָלַי דְּבַר-יְהוָה לֵאמֹר
דָּם לְרֵב שָׁפַכְתָּ
וּמִלְחָמוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת עָשִׂיתָ
לֹא-תִבְנֶה בַיִת לַשָּׁמַיִם
כִּי דָמַי רַבִּים שָׁפַכְתָּ אֶרְצָה לְפָנַי.

Shlomo’s message to Chiram thus delicately glosses over G-d’s implicit criticism of David the Warrior without actually lying. It is true that the “wars surrounding him” are what prevented David from building the Temple.

Peace from all surrounding enemies activates a second mitzvah. In Devarim 25:19 we read:

It must be
when Hashem your G-d gives you rest (= *heniach lekha*) from
all your enemies all around (= *misaviv*)

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in the land which Hashem your G-d is giving you as a
homestead to inherit it

You must erase the memory of Amalek from under the heavens
You must not forget.

Rambam Laws of Kings 1:1-2 establishes a sequence of obligation.

Israel became obligated in three commandments at the moment they entered the Land:

To appoint for themselves a king . . .

To destroy the seed of Amalek . . .

To build the Chosen House . . .

Appointment of a king precedes the war with Amalek,
as Scripture says:

Hashem sent me to anoint you as king. Now go and smite Amalek!

Destruction of the seed of Amalek preceded building the House,
as Scripture says:

It happened, when the king was dwelling in his house and Hashem gave him rest all around from all his enemies.

The king said to Nathan the Prophet:

(See please)

*I dwell in a house of arazim,
(while the Ark of G-d dwells within curtains) . . .*

If the mitzvah of destroying Amalek precedes the obligation to build the Beit HaMikdash, why does Shlomo engage only in the second?

Rambam possibly sees the mitzvah as already having been accomplished by Shaul. That however seems unlikely in light of Shmuel’s reaction to Shaul’s actions in that regard, and in light of subsequent Jewish tradition.

Alternatively, it is impossible for one king to fulfill both mitzvot. Rav Yitzchak Zylberstein analogizes David’s ineligibility to build the Beit HaMikdash to the Torah’s ban on using iron tools in its construction. War turned him into an instrument of war, even in peacetime, whereas the Temple is in essence about peace. Perhaps the total war against Amalek necessarily has this effect. Shaul would not have built the Beit HaMikdash had he killed Amalek.

Once the Beit HaMikdash is built (properly), is there still a mitzvah to wipe out the memory of Amalek militarily? Or is it a mitzvah with a very short horizon? Or is it that once the Beit HaMikdash is built as a *house of prayer for all the nations*, the mitzvah must be fulfilled in other ways, such as by directly converting Amalek (as Rambam permits), or through benign cultural influence?

Maybe the wisdom of Shlomo was embodied in his decision to respond to complete peace on all his borders by building the Temple rather than by seeking out the remnants of Amalek. In the narrative of Tanakh, Amalek does not play a serious role again until the Temple is destroyed.

Shabbat shalom!