

# Haftarah Themes and Analysis by Gidon Rothstein: Terumah

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Haftarah No. 7: Parshat Terumah-- I Book of Kings 5:26-6: 13

## Selecting Issues to Discuss

In a fairly obvious relationship between the *haftarah* and the Torah reading, we read about King Solomon building the Temple. Among the many issues this haftarah raises, we here only have room to deal with four: 1) Why focus on this part of the building process? 2) The ethics of making pacts with non-Jews, 3) The superhuman effort needed for building a Temple, and 4) The role of converts in the process.

Our text opens with a comment on Solomon's wisdom, on there being peace between him and Hiram the king of Tyre, and their having made a *berit*, a covenant with each other. But this was not their first interaction, even about the building of a Temple. Figuring out why we start here, then, should tell us about the message the *haftarah* seeks to send.

## Focus on God

In line with the Torah's stress that donations to the Tabernacle should reflect personal generosity and freewill gifts, the *haftarah* might be trying to de-emphasize Solomon's contribution. Just as the Torah wants the money and materials to be given with no thought of personal recognition, the haftarah does not want us to put Solomon in the center of the proceedings. Starting where we do stresses God's giving Solomon the necessary wisdom, de-emphasizing Solomon himself.

Alternatively, the *haftarah* might be pointing out that approaching a supplier, even when the meeting goes well, is not the same as actually embarking on actual building. Perhaps the haftarah starts here because Solomon's getting the necessary wisdom and his signing an agreement with Hiram were the start of the building process.

## Making a Pact with a Non-Jew: An Interesting Problem

The pact with Hiram is no simple matter, since Tosafot in Yevamot 23a is of two minds as to whether the Torah's prohibition of "*lo tichrot lahem brit v'lo techanem*, you shall not make a covenant with them nor show them favor," includes all non-Jews. In their first answer, they suggest that Hiram was a *ger toshav*, a person who formally accepted *the sheva mitzvot bnei Noach*, the Noahide laws. Accepting this view makes it unclear how we could make pacts with non-Jews in modern times, since we generally assume that only a Sanhedrin can certify non-Jews with this *ger toshav* status.

In our search for another answer, we can point to the Talmud in Avodah Zarah 20a, which seems to see the prohibition of pacts as limited to the 7 Canaanite nations. For other nations, the pact-rule would apply only if the point of the treaty was to agree to worship idols; Solomon could not have made an agreement with Hiram to help him worship idols in any way, nor could he have made reached a covenant with any of the Seven Nations. Other than that, foreign policy was

unfettered.

### **The Sum of All Energies: The Call of the Project**

The opening reference to God giving Solomon wisdom is odder than we as readers of the haftarah might realize, since the prophet had already mentioned it, in parts of the book we don't read. Nachmanides repeatedly hints that the verse means to imply that God in some way rested His Divine Presence within Solomon.

Not only did God give him sufficient wisdom to rule the people, a huge challenge, He additionally and separately made him able to build a Temple, an endeavor that apparently calls for skills beyond pure intelligence. To build the House of God (for all that we know that the term is a metaphor) requires a metaphysical and superhuman understanding of the Divine, something that can only come with an extraordinary influx of wisdom from God.

Another example of how Solomon had to stretch to the boundaries of human capability to build the Temple comes in the staffing of the project. The verse tells us thirty thousand people would rotate on a three month cycle, spending a month at a time away from home. R. Yohanan, in Ketubbot 61b, reads this as the outer limit of a husband's acceptable absence from home, showing us that Solomon was demanding as much as he could of the people. The building of the Temple, then, called for everyone involved to reach the limits of human capabilities, not only in wisdom but in physical and emotional commitment.

### **Call in the Converts**

Yevamot 79a assumes that all the tens of thousands of workers who helped Solomon build the Temple were converts, not natural born Jews. Further, the Talmud assumes they were inspired to their conversion by an incident in David's career, where God visited famine on the Jewish people until David atoned for Saul's having mistreated the Gibeonites.

It seems odd that those who joined the people after seeing our dedication to justice should then be pressed into hard labor. The Talmud seems not to notice the irony, perhaps because we err in envisioning these tasks as undignified.

To highlight the contrast, I once heard of a family where the grandfather was blind and largely deaf. Friday night, the mother would place her father in law at the sink, show him (by hand) the faucet, the dishes, the washcloth, and the drying rack and leave him to his task. Rather than fobbing off an unwanted chore on a defenseless old man, the incident was this family's way of showing that he was still a valued contributor to the workings of the household.

So, too, I suspect the Talmud would say that Solomon was giving these converts the privilege of being directly involved in building a structure that would be at the center of the nation's existence, which also shows them how readily and fully they had been accepted into the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom