

# Haftarah Themes and Analysis by Gidon Rothstein: Shabbat Chanukah II

- Gidon Rothstein

Haftarah No. 20: Second Sabbath of Hanukkah, I Kings 7: 40-50

This short *haftarah* is only read when there is a second Sabbath to *Hanukkah* (meaning Friday night is the first night). It is also one temptingly easy to dismiss, since it mostly lists appurtenances of the Temple Solomon was constructing. However, as we noted in the *haftarah* for Parshat Terumah, the discussion of the building of the Temple takes several chapters in Kings, so the choice of what to mention in an *haftarah* is likely to be edifying.

## The Candles of Solomon

The Talmud helps us identify the choice of this selection. When the Talmud at the end of Megillah lists the readings and *haftarot* for special occasions, it refers to this *haftarah* as the “candles of Solomon,” much as it called the *haftarah* of the first Sabbath the “candles of Zachariah.”

In contrast to occasions where I have rejected the simplest explanation for why a certain text was chosen, here the claim that this was simply the best choice for a selection mentioning the *Menorah* might be the closest to the truth. Other than in Zachariah, this selection is the only other place in Prophets that a *Menorah* is prominent. Once Hanukkah was set as a *Menorah* holiday, this selection is in fact almost the only candidate. (The last chapter of Jeremiah mentions that the *Menorot* were taken as part of the plunder of the Temple, but that is obviously not what we would read on a holiday celebrating the Temple’s rededication).

## Solomon’s Disciplined Creativity

Even as I grant that that may be true, I still would point out a striking aspect of Solomon’s Temple, expressed here through the *Menorah*. II Chronicles 4 mentions that King Solomon did not only use the vessels of the Temple that had been constructed in the desert, he built others as well. There, we find out that he built ten show-bread tables, the arrangement and uses of which were a matter of debate and discussion in the Talmud.

In our *haftarah*, we find out that that was true of the *Menorah* as well, that Solomon had his artisans make ten *Menorot* in addition to the one left over from Moses’ time. Since the Talmud made clear that it was the “lights of Solomon” that led to our reading this *haftarah*, paying attention to those lights seems worthwhile.

It is a general truth of Solomon’s Temple that it showed his certainty (and Jewish tradition has agreed) that the Tabernacle built in the desert was only meant to be a model for future such structures, but not the absolute or single design. Only that realization can explain the larger dimensions of Solomon’s Temple, and his adding appurtenances that had not been considered before.

If so, our reading “the candles of Solomon” here carries that message as well. Especially since we don’t see the candles lit—just made—our focus seems to be on the building of the *Menorot*, not so much their being put into place. Again, it may be the force of Scriptural circumstance that led to the situation, but there is also a thematic connection that this opens up.

### **The Maccabees: Improvisors and Creators**

The holiday of Hanukkah, let us remember, is a holiday of rededicating the Temple, but the story also contains numerous examples of the Maccabees improvising, finding new and hitherto unthinkable ways of acting. The beginning of the Hasmonean revolt itself offers an example. In the story that is part of the holiday, the revolt began when Matityahu, of the High Priestly clan, aged enough to have children who could become leaders of an army (meaning he might have only been forty, but that was still an advanced age compared to the presumable age of the soldier), killed a Syrian Greek and the Jew who agreed to join him in a pig sacrifice.

His cry of “*mi l’Hashem ely*, Who is for God to me?,” the way he called for recruits to his rebellion, echoes that of Moses when he saw the Golden Calf. Matityahu’s confidence that the situation he was witnessing deserved the same response as the Golden Calf is a striking continuation of the tradition of Solomon’s Temple, in which the past is not aped, but adapted to the times.

A similar flexibility of thought might be relevant to the *Menorah* itself, depending which version of the miracle of the oil one chooses to accept. For the past several hundred years, rabbis have enjoyed discussing why Hanukkah is eight days, since they had enough oil for that first day. One answer mentioned in the Beit Yosef, R. Joseph Karo’s commentary on the Tur, is that the Jews of the time divided the oil they had into eight parts. That way, they would at least be able to light the Menorah for some part of the day on each of the days until they could secure new oil. The miracle was that each one-eighth of a day’s worth of oil stayed lit the whole day.

This version, not hinted at in the classical sources, fits in well with the spirit of the Temple suggested by Solomon’s candelabra. Instead of business as usual, the Maccabees knew how to innovate when necessary and in a way fully faithful to the principles of the tradition.

This view of Hanukkah as innovative within limits is also emphasized by Maimonides in his first paragraphs of the laws of Hanukkah. Three different times, Maimonides notes that the structure of the holiday of Hanukkah was based on the structure of the holiday of Purim (including the obligation to light candles, which he parallels to the obligation to read the Megillah).

Maimonides does not explain his insistence on these points, but it seems that it was because of the innovation inherent in post-Biblical Jews creating their own national holiday. While Purim was the first post-Sinaitic holiday created (and the Talmud does mention that it raised some discussion), Hanukkah was after the completion of Scripture, was in an era when prophecy had ceased.

To be willing to declare a holiday then was another revolution. As was their pattern—and building off of Solomon in the construction of his Temple—the Hasmoneans looked to earlier times for precedent, and then used that precedent as a model in which to shape their own

innovation, to be sure that, new as it was, it could slip right in to the tradition, becoming another facet of our religion.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Hanukkah