

# Haftarah Themes and Analysis by Gidon Rothstein: Sukkot II

- Gidon Rothstein

Haftarah No. 15: Second Day Sukkot, I Kings 8:2-21

## **Verses 2-11: The Temple, Completed, and Dedicated**

Having finished the physical construction of the Temple, King Solomon brings the Ark of the Covenant to its proper place in the Inner Sanctum. The prophet describes the pomp that accompanied the occasion, including the killing of innumerable animals. Once the priests place the Ark in its place and leave, the Temple fills with the Cloud of God, signaling the concentrated Divine Presence, on this occasion appearing so fully that the priests could no longer enter the building.

A verse at the end of the chapter says Solomon and the people celebrated for seven days and then another seven. Moed Katan 9a reads that to mean the dedication took place over Yom Kippur, and that Solomon and the people ate and drank! After, they worried whether they had acted properly, and God signaled that they had.

In that same discussion, the Talmud raises the concept of “*ein m'arvin simcha b'simcha*, we don't mix two sources of joy into one activity.” It is for that reason that tradition does not allow making weddings on holidays, suggesting it is not “just” a story, but a full component of the Jewish view of what ceremonies can outweigh others.

## **Timing A Dedication**

Rashi, Radak, Ralbag, note that the month is referred to as “*yerech ha'etanim*, the month of the mighty,” but that Scripture does not identify those mighty. Targum Jonathan thought the term referred to Tishrei originally being the first month, before Nisan elbowed it out of the way. The Sages suggested the term refers to the Patriarchs, born in this month. Radak suggested that it's a month of strength either because the harvest is in or because there are so many mitsvot.

Each of these interpretations suggests King Solomon made a conscious choice in dedicating the Temple when he did. To take two examples: if we follow Targum Jonathan, Tishrei is the month of the creation; halachah's using the building of the Tabernacle as the paradigm for the prohibited labors of Shabbat already connects that building to Creation, which would justify Solomon's choice.

The Sages's reading the name of the month as a reference to the Patriarchs alerts us to the connection between our forefathers and this building, the culmination of the Jewish people's desires since before the slavery in Egypt even started. And so on with the other possibilities offered.

## **A Multitude of Sacrifices**

The phrase for the offerings that they made as they were bringing the Ark to the Temple—“*asher*

*lo yisafer me'rov*, that cannot be counted or numbered by virtue of their great number”—is rare in Scripture and is used in other cases to describe the multitude of descendants that God promises Abraham, Jewish or not.

If you'll allow me a moment of homiletics, I wonder if there's a connection here—Abraham's known as "*Av Hamon Goyim*, father of many nations," a fact that, according to Maimonides, allows converts to make blessings like other Jews. The Temple, as Solomon is about to say in the prayer that takes up the bulk of the chapter, is meant as the center of God's Presence in the world for all who wish to find God, Jewish or not. If so, characterizing the number of animals offered in a way that reminds us of Abraham's promised number of descendants hints at the idea that Solomon was trying to include the multitudes of humanity promised to Abraham in this event.

### **Verses 12-21: Solomon Tells Us Why We Read This on Sukkot**

Upon seeing the Cloud, King Solomon notes that this had been God's plan all along, since the Torah tells us that God will be seen with a cloud near or on the Kapporet, the top of the Ark.

King Solomon adds that he has built this structure to be a resting-place for eternity, meaning that from that moment on there was no other place in the world where one is allowed to offer sacrifices to God (in contrast to earlier sanctuaries, where individuals were still allowed to have their own altars in addition to the central one).

Solomon then turns to the people, blesses them, and gives them a little history of this building. He mentions God's choosing his father David as the permanent lineage of kingship over the Jewish people, and then God's having told David that his urge to build a permanent sanctuary was a good one, but that David's son would do it, which Solomon has now accomplished.

In his recounting, Solomon makes explicit his understanding that all the events that led up to this moment-- the selection of David, of Jerusalem, and of this House as the residence of the Ark—were the culmination of the process set in motion by the Exodus. (Indeed, the first verse of chapter 6, tells us that Solomon built the Midash in the 480th year from the Exodus, one of the few times after the Book of Joshua that events are ascribed back to then).

If so, the second half of the haftarah, Solomon's emotional recognition of the success of his project, complements the first half. The completion of the Temple was, like the final gathering of a harvest, the culmination of the Exodus. Once it was established, we have in place the city, the monarchy, and the structure that were aimed at making the Oneness of God manifest to the world.

That did not quite happen, but there is no need to mar the happiness of this holiday— a happiness we now see in a new light, as that of having completed a stage of building, and making possible the reaping of the rewards of those efforts—with the memory of how later generations failed to live up to the promise of this moment.

We will instead stop here, noting that on the eighth day of Sukkot (Shemini Atseret) we return to this selection, bracketing our joyous Sukkot with memories of that moment of promise, of commencement, of finishing the Exodus business and moving on, with hope and confidence, to

the bright future made possible by those efforts.

Chag Sameach