

The Haftara for Shabbat Chanuka
(Zekharia 2:14–4:7)

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I.

The haftara chosen for Shabbat Chanuka relates to the festival rather than the parasha. The connection is easily detected in the verse which speaks of "the golden menorah ... and its seven lights above it" (3:2) – lights obviously kindled with oil from the olive trees on the right and left of it.

In the opening verses of the haftara, the prophet brings the nation two messages:

1. "Behold, I come and I shall dwell among you";
2. "And many nations shall join themselves to God on that day, and shall be unto Me a people."

Lest Bnei Yisrael fear that their own special status will be lost when the other nations also become a people unto God, the prophet once again declares, "and I shall dwell among you." And lest they fear that when many nations join themselves to God Eretz Yisrael will lose its designation as the land of the nation of Israel, the prophet declares "God shall inherit Yehuda as His portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again."

Chanuka, more than any other time of the year, reminds us of the conflict within the nation itself, the civil war between religious loyalists who wished to preserve Judaism in its purity and Hellenists who were drawn to the gentile lifestyle and sought to introduce their foreign culture into Israel.

The spiritual root of this conflict (perhaps not consciously realized) may have lain in a mistaken understanding of the universalist ideal expressed by Zekharia at the time of the establishment of the Second Temple. They may have understood that the idea of many nations joining themselves to God implied a removal of all barriers and an end to a uniquely Jewish identity. The result of this distorted understanding was that the concept of many nations joining themselves to God was replaced with the idea of parts of God's nation joining themselves to the nations and their culture. Thus began the apparently inevitable conflict between the religious loyalists and the Hellenists.

Any conflict causes the opposing stances to become more extreme and for the opposition to become more marked. Such conflict leads to the creation of barriers between Israel and the nations, such that no contact is possible, much less any influence. It is perhaps for this reason that during Chanuka we read these verses, which describe a vision of many nations joining themselves to God. This vision requires that some channel of communication and positive influence be kept open - a channel to the outside world, and certainly an internal channel between different sectors of the nation of Israel.

On the other hand, these verses also remind those with a universalist view that even when the vision is realized and many nations indeed join themselves to God, the national uniqueness of Israel will still remain, and the nation will still dwell in the holy land.

II.

Two leaders are mentioned in the course of this prophecy: one is Yehoshua, the Kohen Gadol – the religious-spiritual leader; the other is Zerubavel, the political-social leader. While the soiled clothes of the former are removed and he is dressed in festive garments, receiving a promise of Divine assistance if he fulfills his priestly duty in the Temple service and in the administration of justice, the latter is told that his leadership will be built not on might and not on power but by God's spirit. This presents us with a model of leadership: spiritual leadership alongside social leadership, the former embodied by the Leviim and the latter by the sons of Yehuda.

However, the days of Chanuka are reminiscent of a different leadership model. At that time, the leadership was not divided. Matityahu the Kohen was, by force of circumstance, both the social leader and the leader of the religious uprising. This combination of priesthood and royalty continued among his descendants even when the circumstances no longer required it. Lest we think that this might represent the proper model, the prophet describes the model of divided leadership, teaching that this is in fact preferable.

In this context we are reminded of Ramban's harsh criticism in his commentary on the verse, "the scepter shall not depart from Yehuda" (*Bereishit* 49:6), finding two faults with the example set by the Chashmonaim:

"This was the punishment of the Chashmonaim who ruled during the Second Temple period, for they were supremely righteous and were it not for them, Torah and mitzvot would have been forgotten. Nevertheless, a most serious punishment was meted out to them, for the four sons of the elder Chashmonai, the righteous ones who ruled one after the other, with all their bravery and their success, fell to their enemy by the sword... because they ruled even though they were not from the seed of Yehuda and the house of David ... They may also have sinned in ruling because they were Kohanim and as such were commanded 'Guard your priesthood' ... They should not have ruled, but should rather have kept to performing the Divine service."