

HAFTARAH EXHORTATIONS:

Haftarah Mikketz

by Mark Huey posted 27 December, 2008 www.outreachisrael.net

1 Kings 3:15-4:1

“Leadership Dreams”

Why is a passage describing King Solomon associated with this week’s Torah portion, *Mikketz* (Genesis 41:1-44:17)? One distinct possibility is that “the Hebrew verb used to open this passage (*va-yiykatz*) is the same one used to describe Pharaoh’s awakening from a dream at the outset of the *parashah* (Gen. 41:4).”¹ Our selected passage has prompted me to considerable prayer, reflection, and examination—specifically because when reading I saw some contrasting differences in the character traits of Joseph in Egypt, and King Solomon of Israel. Even though God had providentially chosen them for leadership responsibilities in their respective generations, their approaches toward Him were not the same, but rather, distinctively dissimilar. While the righteous Joseph becomes a Messiah-like figure, directly responsible as viceroy of Egypt for saving his extended family, the eventually-debauched King Solomon is directly responsible for the division of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms and subsequent judgments.

The fact that dreams or the interpretation of dreams play pivotal roles in both Joseph’s and Solomon’s ascension to leadership, is something serious for us to consider. Much later, after both of these men, the Prophet Daniel proclaimed that God is ultimately responsible for placing people in positions of leadership:

“Daniel said, ‘Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding. It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him’” (Daniel 2:20-22).

Knowing that God places people in positions of leadership, and that dreams have been used down through the centuries as a means to move the hearts of kings and decision makers, many questions arose in my spirit. These concerned not only the accounts in the Bible, but also leadership changes and transitions that I have witnessed (and we may witness in the future) here in the United States, and also in Israel. Making connections between the Biblical past and today’s present can be exciting—but it is only useful if we are able to properly consider the record as preserved in Holy Scripture *first*.

One of the many blessings of studying the Torah and Haftarah selections on a consistent basis is the fact that you are often confronted with the humbling realization that your recollection of different passages in the Bible is either incomplete or possibly forgotten. This week, as I re-read 1 Kings 3:15-4:1, I saw that Solomon’s choice of wisdom to rule Israel was not a conscious waking thought, but rather something he related to others upon rising from a dream. For years when contemplating the choosing of Solomon, I was under the mistaken impression that Solomon’s decision to choose wisdom over long life, riches, and power was a *conscious request*. However, the record from 1 Kings states that Solomon received all of these gifts from above in a dream *after* offering sacrifices at Gibeon, just before returning to Jerusalem:

“The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar...God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among

¹ Nahum M. Sarna, “Haftarah for Mi-Ketz,” in David L. Lieber, *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2001), 271.

the kings like you all your days. If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days.' **Then Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream.** And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and made peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants" (1 Kings 3:4, 11-15).

Having previously overlooked when and how Solomon's request for wisdom took place, made me dig deeper into the relationship between dreams and leadership—especially in light of youthful Joseph's obviously recognized gift for interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh. Clearly in Genesis, where others testify of Joseph's proven ability to interpret dreams, Joseph gives *all* credit for his ability to interpret dreams to the God he serves:

"Now a Hebrew youth *was* with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related *them* to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his *own* dream. And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him.' Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.' Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, '**It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer**'" (Genesis 41:12-16).

In a somewhat like manner, the young King Solomon—having just been anointed King David's heir—recognized that his dream was from the Holy One of Israel, because his expansive explanation about the dream takes place after he wakes up in Gibeon (1 Kings 3:15). Solomon wanted his entourage to know that God had come to him in a night vision and given him a choice. Solomon repeated what he asked of God,

"So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:9).

King Solomon obviously recognized the awesome responsibility that he had as heir to David's throne. His desire at this early juncture in his reign was to seek the wisdom necessary to rule effectively. His request appears to be quite sincere.

Yet, when we take a look at the context of what has transpired prior to the dream, we see that King Solomon is well on his way to disregarding the ways, statutes, and commandments of God in which his father David sought to walk. In fact, it is recorded that prior to the dream, King Solomon has just formed an alliance with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. He has also just completed a major sacrifice of a thousand offerings at pagan high places around Gibeon. Take important note that sacrificing and burning incense at pagan high places was contrary to the prescribed ways of the Lord as followed by his father King David:

"Then Solomon formed a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her to the city of David until he had finished building his own house and the house of the LORD and the wall around Jerusalem. The people were still sacrificing on the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the LORD until those days. Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, **except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.** The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, 'Ask what *you wish* me to give you'" (1 Kings 3:1-5).

Gibeon was the traditional stronghold of the House of Saul. Before all the sacrificial altars were ultimately moved to Jerusalem after the construction of Solomon's Temple, these ceremonial sacrifices, at this particular time, could have been part of consolidating allegiances to the chosen heir of David's kingdom. Historically speaking, we need to remember that relationships among the various factions after the death of David were fragile. The graves of rebellious Adonijah, traitorous and treacherous Joab, and curse-hurling Shimei were still fresh from justified executions (1 Kings 2).

It is providential that right after the declarations about his dream are made, Solomon returns to Jerusalem to stand before the previously relocated Ark of the Covenant, in order to offer up more burnt and peace offerings at a feast with his servants. The text does not state that the famous judgment of the two harlots, which dominates our Haftarah reading (1 Kings 4:16-27), takes place at this specific feast. However, it is obvious that Solomon is back in the king's court in Jerusalem, when his God-given wisdom to discern justice is exercised, and most importantly, recognized by all Israel. **King Solomon's leadership position is being solidified.**

Confirmation that King Solomon had received God's wisdom to rule over Israel came in relatively short order. He recognizes and/or appoints his priests, his cabinet of secretaries, advisers, and various officials over the twelve tribes of Israel. The ability to wisely establish order after the succession of power was critical, to help organize and ultimately finance many of the projects of his peaceful reign (1 Kings 4).

Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams quickly resulted in him being granted a high position in Egypt as viceroy. This serves as confirmation that Pharaoh actually believed in Joseph's interpretations. In a dramatic explanation about how to work through the survival techniques of seven prosperous years followed by seven lean years, Pharaoh is convinced that the Spirit of God is present in Joseph:

"Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, *it means* that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about. Now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth *of the produce* of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard *it*. Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine.' Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. Then Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?' So Pharaoh said to Joseph, '**Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are.** You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you.' Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt'" (Genesis 41:32-41).

Pharaoh and his court and servants recognized God's hand upon Joseph, especially when the next seven years produced abundant crops before the anticipated famine began to create serious survival challenges in the region.

In both the example of Joseph and the example of King Solomon, which we are considering this week, the ability of dreams to effect change is seen. Joseph's ability to interpret dreams elevated him to a position of power, and the revelation of a dream from King Solomon to Israel helped solidify his reign.

Another excellent example you may wish to investigate this week, as dreams are used in relation to leadership, **is found in the testimonies of the Prophet Daniel.** When contemplating Joseph interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh, declaring that he was receiving the interpretation from the Almighty, a much more obvious comparison of somewhat similar circumstances came to my mind. While Solomon received a dream, would not the Prophet Daniel—as he faithfully interpreted the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar—be a better example to consider? After all, the life experiences of Joseph and Daniel are fairly similar. Daniel, a captured Jew in the courts of Babylon, is very much like Joseph. Both Joseph and Daniel were removed from their domiciles, by being forcefully taken against their will to foreign countries. However, both maintained an allegiance to the God of Israel, and accordingly, He orchestrated events so that they would eventually be close to the ruling monarch.

When the local magicians and wise men were totally baffled by Nebuchadnezzar's request to not only interpret his dream, but actually tell Nebuchadnezzar what his dream was (Daniel 2:1-13), they were in danger of losing their lives. The various soothsayers concluded that such a request was impossible to fulfill and that only "gods, whose dwelling place is not with *mortal*

flesh” (Daniel 2:11), could know the actual dream. However, faithful Daniel, aided by the solicited prayers of his companions, appeals to his God for assistance.

Ironically, the Prophet Daniel—even more so than Joseph—first supernaturally receives knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and then has the understanding of what the dream means (Daniel 2:14-45). Correspondingly, we see King Nebuchadnezzar elevating Daniel to a high position within his kingdom (Daniel 2:48).

Within the Biblical record, we find substantial examples of how God has used dreams and/or the interpretation of dreams, to establish or guide the leadership of nations. What does this mean to you today, given the inevitable nature that political regimes change, and that new kings, prime ministers, and presidents will come to power given a little time? When I think about it, **it gives me great comfort** in knowing that our Sovereign God is still—and will forever be—in absolute control of who He places in leadership positions throughout the world. I do not fear the selections He makes, but simply pray that I am instead in the right position He has predetermined for me!

Until the restoration of all things...

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