The World of the Prophets

By: Reuben Ebrahimoff
The Haftorahman
The Weekly Haftorah
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The Haftorah for Parshat Chukat
The Judge Yiftach Fights Against The Ammonites
The Haftorah is read from the book of Shoftim (Judges), 11:1-33

"The Daughter of Jephthah," Alexandre Cabanel, 1870

The connection of the Haftorah to the Parsha: In this week’s Parsha, Parshat Chukat, the nation of Israel does battle with the Ammonites in order to conquer the land of Israel, situated, east of the Jordan River. In this week’s Haftorah, Yiftach is called upon by the elders of Israel, also to do battle with Ammon, only this time it was Israel who was being attacked.

The storyline of this week’s Haftorah: Yiftach is expelled from his home by his brothers and becomes a warrior outside Eretz Yisrael. The Jews are attacked by the Ammonites, and the elders of Gilead ask Yiftach to become a leader. Yiftach responds by asking, “What has changed that now I am good enough for you?” Yiftach agrees to lead on condition that if he wins, the Elders must make him the leader of the Israelites. Yiftach asks Hashem to help him, and if he is victorious, Yiftach vows he will bring a sacrifice to Hashem of the first living thing he sees.
upon his return. This takes place in the town of Mitzpah. Yiftach tries to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the King of Amon. He sends a delegation to the king proposing that their forces be withdrawn. In response, the Ammonite king lays claim to all Israelite land east of the Jordan River, to the south of Gilead between the Arnon and Yabok rivers that had been occupied by the tribes of Gad and Reuben. The settlement is rejected. Yiftach sends his envoys back with proof showing that this land was captured from King Sichon, who had banned the Israelites transit. The King of Ammon doesn’t agree with him and Yiftach therefore went forward into war. Yiftach triumphs in battle, and to his horror upon returning home the first living being that he sees was his only daughter, Celia. She was dancing with tambourines and celebrating her father’s victorious return. Realizing that he must now sacrifice his daughter to Hashem, Yiftach tears his clothes and cried out in grief. Even his daughter agrees that his sacred oath can not be broken. At her request, she departs to the mountains with her companions and bewails her virginity upon the mountains. On her return the sacrifice is carried out. For this tragic episode, the custom arose for young women to go out each year, and for four days mourn for Yiftach’s daughter.

The Shofet (Judge) Yiftach Fights against the Ammonites

Yiftach’s Biography:

• The meaning of Yiftach-iel is “Hashem opens”.
• Was born in the land of Gilead. Yiftach’s mother was referred to as a harlot. His father was called Gilead. His stepbrothers ostracized him, not providing him with any share any of the inheritance left from their father. He therefore moved away to the land of Tob.
• He was an Israelite military leader, acclaimed as a mighty warrior and a skilled and daring fighter. He mobilized a resistance and led a counter offensive defeating the Ammonites of Trans-Jordan. Yiftach’s life ended tragically; he wasn’t buried, but his limbs would fall from his body and were scattered around the land of Israel.
Yiftach’s daughter welcoming her victorious Father Home.

By: Gustave Dore

Famous Phrases: Shoftim 11:31, “V’haya hayotzai ashur yaitzai midaltai bai’ti likrati b’shalom m’bnei amon, v’haya la’Hashem v’ha’alisihu olah” “And the first thing that will exit the doors of my home, coming towards me when I return in peace from the battle with Amon, I will sacrifice to God”. These are the infamous words of Yiftach’s oath to God, which ultimately cost him his beloved only daughter.

Haftorahman's Lesson of the week: When Yiftach was given the task of battling with Ammon, he immediately realized that the only way he could be victorious was through divine intervention. In order to receive the help of Hashem, Yiftach could have simply prayed for victory. Instead, he offered to bring a sacrifice to Hashem. Yiftach did not merely come to Hashem empty handed; he was willing to give up something of value. Granted he probably should not have sacrificed his daughter, but the sentiment remains the same. Yiftach was so indebted to Hashem for providing him with a victorious battle that he gave up the most valuable thing in his life: his daughter. Perhaps we should take Yiftach’s example
to heart. Just as a guest would bring a gift for a host, so too when we are standing before Hashem in prayer and asking Hashem for anything, we too should come with something. Historically, we would bring offerings of fruit or animals to the temple. Unfortunately today, we do not have a temple, but we can still offer something to Hashem. We have both our time and our money to offer Hashem. Money can be donated to charity, to supporting education by giving to schools, or by donating to hospitals. Time can be given to shuls, schools, hospitals or yeshivas, to help in any capacity, or by simply being a good person, and creating a sanctification of Hashem with our actions.

“Celia, Yiftach’s Daughter, celebrating her fathers return from war”. By: Gustave Dore
1. The Ammonites make war against Israel.

2. Jephthah returns to Mizpah with the elders of Gilead.

3. The Ephraimites cross to Zaphon.

4. The Gileadites take the fords over the Jordan against the Ephraimites.

5. Jephthah defeats the Ammonites.
**Timeline:** The story of Yiftach happened in the time of the Judges about 3200 years ago.
Map: The Haftorah took place east of the Jordan River.

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