

Haftarat Vayechi וַיַּחֲיוּ

Torah: Genesis 47:28–50:26

Haftarah: 1 Kings 2:1–12

The Last Words of a Dying King

General Overview

This haftarah records the final words that were spoken by King David, the greatest king of Israel, except for the Messiah, of course. David is about to pass on the throne to his son, Solomon, in accordance to the covenant that God made with him, found in 2 Samuel chapter seven. Accordingly, David passes on some valuable advice in his dying words to the new king. The passage concludes with a summary of David's reign over Israel.

Connection to the Parasha

The corresponding Torah portion, the final parasha in Genesis, records the final words of Jacob to his sons. That event provides the connection between this haftarah and the Torah portion. Both passages are about the final words and deaths of two great men in Israel. In essence, the message from fathers to sons is the same: if they are faithful to the Lord, there will be blessing. If there is unfaithfulness, they could expect great difficulties.

Exposition

The narrative in this passage is straightforward. In fact, it is surprisingly brief, considering it records David's final words to his son and successor to his throne. Our outline will reflect the simplicity of the passage. This week, we have even given the haftarah a title: "*The Last Words of a Dying King.*"

- I. Guard Your Life
 - II. Guard Your Torah
 - III. Guard Your Realm
- Epilogue — The Passing of a Legend

The Last Words of a Dying King

It is always instructive to listen to someone's final words, especially the final words of a great person. Accordingly this haftarah affords us a wonderful opportunity to share the final intimate moments between two of the greatest kings Israel ever had, David and Solomon.

What would a wise and godly king say to his son, the next king? In this haftarah, we learn the answer. In fact, there are at least three lines of advice that David passes on to Solomon.

I. Guard Your Life

The first words of wisdom that David leaves with his son are that Solomon must, first and foremost, watch out for his own life (1 Kings 2:1, 2). According to the teachings of Torah, David had a divinely ordained responsibility to convey its standards and regulations to his successor.

In Solomon, David found a responsive and humble heart. Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, Solomon's three older brothers, were spiritually and morally deficient; but Solomon had a heart prepared by God, and he responded willingly to David's instructions.¹ Therefore, since Solomon was to inherit the throne, he needed to be especially diligent in walking out the instructions of Torah in his own personal life.

II. Guard Your Torah

The second word of advice that David gave to Solomon followed on the heels of the first, and, consequently, is related to it. In what area was Solomon to show particular strength and maturity? He is to be strong and mature in his relationship with God. Thus, David advises his son,

And keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the law of Moses (1 Kings 2:3).

Just as God encouraged Moshe's successor, Joshua, so now David is encouraging his successor, Solomon. In English, verse three reads, “keep the charge of the Lord.” The Hebrew, however, is more picturesque. It reads, *v'shamarta et mishmeret adonai*, ושמרת את-משמרת יהוה. Literally, it translates, “and guard the protective guards of the Lord.” The context reveals that David was referring to the Torah. Consequently, we learn that David considered the Torah to be God's protective guards for his son. As such, therefore, he was admonishing Solomon to carefully guard those protective guards. If he would, then those protective guards would surely protect him from unwise decisions and from temptations.

This same phrase (guard the protective guards) is also used in reference to Abraham, although the grammar is slightly different because of the different context. In Genesis 26:5, we read that our father Abraham guarded God's protective guards, the Torah (or as much of it that was then revealed to Abraham). The difference between the reference to Abraham and the reference in our haftarah is that in Genesis chapter 26, we are told that protecting God's protective guards was a characteristic of Abraham's life. Whereas in 1 Kings chapter two, we see it given as a warning and advice as Solomon begins his life as the king of Israel.

King David's wording would have reminded Solomon to look back and remember his father Abraham. By doing so, David was telling Solomon that like Abraham, he, too, could live a long, fruitful, successful, and godly life — if only he would walk in Abraham's footsteps and guard the protective guards that God has given to him.

¹Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* ("EBC"), vol. 4, 34.