



5786 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Tazria-Metzora/פרשת תזריע-מצרע

Shomron: the City that Pretended to be Yerushalayim

This week's *Haftorah* retells the dramatic story of *Aram's* siege of *Shomron* during the reign of King *Yehoram*. *Yehoram*, son of *Achav*, was a wicked king of *Malchut Yisrael*. As *Aram* tightened its grip around the capital, the people experienced devastating famine. *Elisha HaNavi* reassured *Yehoram* that salvation would arrive in an instant: food prices would plummet and the city would be saved.

Sure enough, four *metzorayim* were dwelling outside *Shomron's* walls. *Chazal* identify them as *Geichazi* and his three sons (stricken with *tzara'at* in the preceding narratives of *Melachim*). They decide to surrender to the Aramean camp, hoping at least to be fed.

Instead, they find it completely abandoned. Miraculously, *Hashem* caused the Arameans to hear what they believed was the advance of a massive Egyptian-Hittite force. They fled in panic, leaving behind a camp fully stocked with food and valuables. As the people pour out of the city to plunder the abandoned camp, *Elisha's nevuah* is fulfilled.

It is a powerful story. But there is a basic, fundamental problem with the narrative. The *Navi* tells us that *Geichazi* and his sons were dwelling outside the city. *Rashi* explains (*Melachim Bet* 7:3) that this fulfilled the biblical requirement that *metzorayim* dwell מחוץ למחנה – outside walled cities.

However, *Rebbe Akiva Eiger* notes that this seems to contradict the *halachik* requirements recorded by *Toras Kohanim* and the *Mishnah* in *Keilim* (*Tosafot Rebbe Akiva Eiger* to *Keilim* 1:8). *Chazal* explain that מחוץ למחנה applies specifically to sanctified cities like *Yerushalayim* that are surrounded by walls from the time of *Yehoshua's* conquest. The city of *Shomron* was built by *Yehoram's* grandfather, *Omri*, long after the times of *Yehoshua*. Hence, this city was secular and unsanctified! Why is *Rashi* saying that these *metzorayim* were expelled under a biblical mandate that seemingly did not apply?

Rav Yaakov Ettlinger (in *Binyan Tzion* 60) offers a striking answer: their expulsion wasn't a function of what *Shomron* was, but rather what it was pretending to be. *Chazal* explain that *Omri* built this city to rival *Yerushalayim*. Just as the king of *Yehuda* had *Yerushalayim*, the kings of *Yisrael* would have their own glorious capital. In an attempt to surpass and outshine the holy city, *Omri* built a massive walled metropolis that would become a shining alternative. But architectural grandeur was not enough. *Shomron* had to project sanctity as well. If *metzorayim* were cast out of *Yerushalayim*, they would be expelled from *Shomron* as well.

Hence, *Geichazi* and his sons were thrown out of *Yerushalayim* as an expression of the *malchei Yisrael's* vain attempts to supplant *Yerushalayim* as the spiritual center of *Klal Yisrael*.

An astounding point emerges. What set *Elisha's* prophecies of redemption in motion? First, its agents were deeply flawed individuals. *Geichazi* is counted by *Chazal* among the select few wicked individuals who



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forfeited their portion in the World to Come (*Sanhedrin* 90a). Yet, this abandoned servant of *Elisha* became the unlikely vehicle through which his former master's prophecy would be realized.

Even more striking: it was *Omri's* arrogance and his attempts to replace *Yerushalayim* that placed *Geichazi* in precisely the right place at the right time. Despite his corrupt intentions, that very project became the mechanism for the salvation of his grandson's kingdom.

Flawed individuals, yet Divine messengers. Even when they abandon the sanctity of *Yerushalayim*, they remain instruments of *Hashem's* plan. Ironically, their effort to supplant the holy city and its Torah may itself become bring about their redemption.