Parsha Ponders

The temporary temple[1]

לא-יסור שבט מיהודה ומחקק מבין רגליו עד כי-יבא שילה ולו יקהת עמים

The scepter shall not depart from Yehuda, nor the leader[2] from between his feet. Not until Shiloh will come, for he shall congregate nations[3]

The Ramban shares with us[4] an interesting insight into Jewish history. While there was still a Jewish monarchy, there were many generations of kings which were not from the tribe of Yehuda. They were in fact violating the blessing, and really the last will and testament[5], of Yaakov. How so? Yaakov, upon his deathbed, prophetically blessed his twelve sons. Regarding Yehuda, he said that the scepter shall not depart from Yehuda. Meaning, the kingship. All Jewish kings are to come from Yehuda. This wasn't a promise that the kingship would never leave his tribe, as we see it didn't come true. Rather, it was in essence a command that only Judean kings are valid, and all others are violating this directive.

The Ramban tells us that this was the crime of the Chashmonayim, also known as the Hasmoneans, and they were severely punished. Just a few weeks ago we were celebrating the Chashmonayim's victory over the Greek empire, and their recovery of control over the Temple. They rededicated the altar and lit the Menorah, which miraculously lasted eight days. But what happened next in the story? The Chashmonayim, who were Kohanim, and thus from the tribe of Levi, took power. They essentially made themselves kings over the Jewish people. They were the most righteous of people, but in this they erred greatly. Jewish kings can only come from the tribe of Yehuda, not Levi. What happened to them? Their servants made a coup and took over and wiped the whole family out[6].

These comments are hard to digest. If it's true that the Chasmonayim sinned by taking power, why didn't the sages at the time protest. Sure, the family became corrupt over time, but initially they were all extremely righteous! They would have listened to rebuke, had it been given to them. Had they been told that only someone from the tribe of Yehuda may rule, they would have backed down. Were the sages at that time not aware of this law that the Ramban teaches us?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky has a general principle regarding the Second Temple which could shed light on this mystery. In many places[7] and on many occasions he was wont to say that the Second Temple was always meant to be temporary. When it was originally built, they had no intention for this to be the final redemption and for this temple to stand for all time. The sages at the time knew it would one day be destroyed. Why then did they bother building it? To provide the nation the necessary strength and ability to endure the long and difficult exile that was to await them, one that we're still suffering from.

---

[1] Based on Emes L'Yaakov to Genesis 49:10

[2] Radak *ad. loc.* This might be the intent of the Ramban as well. Other *Rishonim* translate this as scribe

[3] Genesis *loc. cit.*

[4] *Ad. loc.*

[5] צוואה

[6] Bava Basra 3a

[7] See Emes L'Yaakov to Exodus 12:2 and to Avos 1:1 for various proofs to this

For this reason, the sages at the time left in place certain things that were reminiscent of the exile. For one, the people's primary language was Aramaic, not Hebrew. The Holy Ark was missing from the Temple[8]. The names of months they used and we use are of Babylonian origin[9].

As well, the sages didn't want to establish a proper king from the tribe of Yehuda. If they had set up a proper king, then it would have appeared to the people that this was the final redemption. In order to make it clear that the time had not yet come, they refrained from anointing a king from Yehuda. Therefore, when the Chashmonayim saw that no one was in charge, they took power. This was in reality against the command of Yaakov. However, the sages at the time couldn't protest, as they couldn't set up a proper king instead.

Good Shabbos

---

[8] See *Ibid* where he proves that the sages knew where the ark was, but they must have chosen not to restore it to its proper place

[9]