

## HAFTARAH



### The Best Man Will Not Be King

**Vered Hollander-Goldfarb**

*Haftarah*

One may not choose the situations one will face, but one can choose how to manage them. At the center of this week's haftarah is Jonathan, the son of king Saul and the heir to the throne, in a tug-o-war between his father, the current king, and his best friend David, whom Jonathan realizes will be the future king. To whom should Jonathan pledge his loyalty and what are his best interests? Those questions might have contradictory answers.

His father wants David killed, not for any crime for which he could be tried but rather because David is a charismatic and talented leader. Saul understands deep down that David is the anonymous "fellow better than you" that Samuel had told him (I Sam 15:28) would be given the kingship after God removed the right to it from Saul. As long as David lives, the future of Saul's family as the royal dynasty is doomed. The solution is simple: Keep your enemies very close and get rid of them when you can.

Jonathan realizes the same thing that his father sees but takes a very different approach to that understanding. To him, the best person should be king. It is a concept not often heard in royal families that by their very nature prefer rights-by-birth over merit. Jonathan puts excellence as the top qualification of a king. Unintended, Jonathan taught David this invaluable lesson, one that formed the face of the Davidic line and accounted for its longevity. The test case and first time that a dynasty is formed is when David passes the throne to one of his children. While he might have intended to give it to Amnon his first born, this proved to be a poor choice (II Sam 13). At the end of David's life we discover that David does not choose by birth order. It is not his eldest son who is destined to inherit the throne, but rather a younger son that was specifically chosen. Having opted away from designating an heir based on his place in the birth-order of the King's sons gave the Kingdom of Judah and the line of David the flexibility needed in the monarchy.

Back to Jonathan's options. While he recognizes David's natural right to be king by virtue of his capabilities, Jonathan has loyalty to Saul as his father. Saul demands that Jonathan choose between the two kings, but Jonathan opts for a third way: He chooses David as king and Saul as his father. He could have done well by following David, but instead Jonathan helps David escape while he himself returns to his father's side. He opts to remain with the king that he knows is destined to lose, but power is not the value that Jonathan measures the world by. After parting with David in a heartbreaking scene, Jonathan will remain at his father's side as his kingship tanks, going down with the ship. In the midst of the power struggles, Jonathan is an inspiration.