

**Inspirations from the Haphtarah**  
**Haphtarah of Chukas- Nothing has changed**  
**by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh**

The Haphtarah for Parshas Chukas tells us of Yiftach's leadership and victory in the wars against the nation of Ammon. The connection of Ammon to our Parsha is that at the end of the Parsha we read about Am Yisroel capturing the territories of Sichon and Og and deliberately leave over Ammon and Moav as we are commanded. Yiftach, despite his lowly origins, was appointed by the elders of Gilad to lead them in the battles against Bnai Ammon who were harassing the people of Gilad at the time. They promised Yiftach that if he were to be victorious, he would remain their leader. At first, Yiftach was hesitant, being he was ostracized by his family and community but afterwards, he and the elders made an agreement on the matter. Interestingly, Yiftach's first step in organizing the battle was davening to Hashem. Chazal tell us that although Yiftach was not a learned man, he was extremely sincere in his devotion to Hashem.

Before beginning to fight, Yiftach sent messages to the king of Ammon asking why he was waging war against Am Yisroel. The king of Ammon answered that Am Yisroel took his land in the days of Moshe Rabbeinu. Yiftach then sent a very detailed explanation of how we conquered Sichon and Og but deliberately did not attempt to conquer any land belonging Moav or Ammon as Hashem commanded us. Therefore Ammon had no right to attack or in any way harass Am Yisroel. The king of Ammon would not listen and insisted on battle. With Hashem's spirit, Yiftach led his troops into battle and defeated Ammon.

As of this writing [summer, 2011], Ammon's behavior is so similar to the attitudes of the nations around Eretz Yisroel in our times. Though the original nations no longer exist in the Middle East, as Sancheriv mixed up the nations in his time, nevertheless the attitudes are the same. We live today surrounded by hostile nations who want to wipe us off of the map. Yet, every time we try to defend ourselves, the nations around us as well as the United Nations look to us as the 'Terrorists'. The real terrorists successfully demonize the IDF and the rest of Eretz Yisroel by placing their terrorist cells and outpost in

civilian areas, thus ensuring that there will be civilian casualties. So in the end, the world condemns us. Nothing has changed in the last few thousand years.

Unfortunately, too many Jews are also convinced that the Israeli soldiers are terrorists. What we need is the confidence in the Torah's promise that Eretz Yisroel belongs to us. We not only have to realize it for ourselves but also believe it strongly enough to tell the rest of the world that Eretz Yisroel is ours and we have every right to defend ourselves if we have too. The world will always condemn us. But we, Am Yisroel, must have the Emunah in the Torah's promise that Eretz Yisroel was given to Am Yisroel as an eternal inheritance and the Jew's connection to Eretz Yisroel can never be broken.