

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Metzora

— From the Haftarah: The Four Metzora'im at the Gates of Shomron —

וְאַרְבָּעָה אֲנָשִׁים הָיוּ מְצֻרְעִים בְּפֶתַח הַשָּׁעַר

And four men were metzora'im at the entrance to the city gate¹

In the haftarah to our parsha we read about the four *metzora'im* (lepers) who were outside the city of Shomron, and in whose lot it fell to inform those inside the city that the besieging troops of Aram had fled, and that the city was free. The Gemara² identifies these four men as Gechazi and his three sons. Their tzoraas was a punishment from the prophet Elisha for telling the Assyrian general, Na'aman, that Elisha was prepared to receive gifts for having healed him (Na'aman) from his *tzoraas*, as detailed in *Melachim II, perek 5*.

WALLED FROM THE DAYS OF YEHOSHUA?

A basic question regarding the presence of these men outside of the city is discussed by the commentators. Seemingly, this was in fulfillment of the Torah's requirement that the metzora be sent "outside of the Camp," i.e. the city.³

However, the Mishnah⁴ states that this is only true regarding "walled cities," which the Bartenura and other classic commentators explain as referring to cities that were walled from the days of Yehoshua bin Nun. Now, the city at whose entrance these men were stationed was Shomron, which we are told in sefer Melachim⁵ was built by Omri, king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, on a mountain that he purchased from someone call Shemer. Seeing as all of this took place many years after the time of Yehoshua, we must wonder: Why were these men sent outside a city from which there was in fact no such requirement?

1 Melachim II, 7:3.

2 Sanhedrin 107b.

3 See Vayikra 13:46.

4 Maseches Keilim 1:7.

5 Melachim I, 16:24.

FIRST APPROACH: BUILDING VS. EXPANDING

R' Akiva Eiger,⁶ who cites this question as being posed to him by a certain Torah scholar, suggests that the matter can be explained by consulting the Targum of Yonasan ben Uziel to the verse describing Omri's acquisition of the mountain from Shemer, who translates the words "וַיִּקַּן אֶת-הַהָר" as "וּזְבִין ית כרכא" – *he purchased the city.* In other words, there was already a city on the mountain prior to Omri's purchase. When the verse proceeds to say that "built the city," it means he built it up and fortified it. It is entirely possible, therefore, that the pre-existing city was in fact walled since the days of Yehoshua, and hence these four men were required to be sent outside its gates.

SECOND APPROACH: FABRICATING SANCTITY

A very different approach to this question is taken by the Meshech Chochmah.⁷ According to him, it is possible that the city of Shomron itself was built by Omri, as the simple reading of the verses seems to indicate.⁸ If so, then not being walled from the days of Yehoshua, there was no halachic requirement to send a *metzora* out of its gates. The reason these four men were sent out nonetheless was based on other less noble considerations. Having seceded from the kingdom of Yehuda in the south, the Northern Kingdom of Israel declared the city of Shomron their capital. Their goal in so doing is expressed in the Midrash:

אמרו כשם שירושלים למלכי יהודה, כך שומרון למלכי ישראל

*They said: just as there is Jerusalem for the kings of Yehuda, so too, there is Shomron for the kings of Israel.*⁹

To establish Shomron's status as equivalent to Yerushalayim in every respect, they applied to it all the laws that were required by Yerushalayim. Included among these was sending a *metzora* out of its gates! Hence, it was as a result of this politically conferred "sanctity" to the city of Shomron that these four men found themselves ejected from its midst!

THIRD APPROACH: "THE TZORAAS OF NAAMAN"

A further explanation still of this matter is found in the writings of R' Yehonasan Eybeshutz.¹⁰ Although the term "*tzoraas*" is popularly translated as "leprosy", which is a contagious disease, the two are not the same. *Tzoraas* comes upon a person as a result of various wrongdoings, notably, *lashon hara*, and it is not contagious. Or, to put it differently, as long as you don't catch *lashon hara* from the offender by being in his proximity, you do not risk catching his *tzoraas*!¹¹ As such, there is no requirement to quarantine the *metzora* for health reasons. Any expulsion of the *metzora* will be based purely on halachic criteria, such as whether the city he is in was walled from the days of Yehoshua. Needless to say, if a person should have a case of the contagious medical condition known as leprosy, he will be expelled from the city regardless of when it was walled from, so that no one catches it from him.

What was the background to the *tzoraas* of Gechazi and his sons? As we mentioned, the Navi

6 Tosafos R' Akiva Eiger, Keilim ibid.

7 Haftarah to Parshas Metzora. This approach is also adopted by R' Yaakov Ettlinger, Responsa *Binyan Zion* vol. 2 sec. 60.

8 This also appears to be the simple understanding of the Gemara (Sanhedrin 102b), which states that Omri merited to become king of Israel on account of him adding a city to the land of Israel.

9 Tanna d'Veil Elyahu chap. 9.

10 *Ahavas Yehonasan*, Haftarah to Parshas Metzora.

11 For a discussion as to whether the *tzoraas* which comes as a punishment for *lashon hara* is contagious, see R' S R Hirsch to Vayikra 13:59 and Meshech Chochmah ibid. 13:2.

recounts that when Naaman, a Syrian general who had *tzoraas*, was miraculously cured by the prophet Elisha, he offered gifts as an expression of his gratitude, which Elisha declined. Gehazi then chased after Naaman, telling him that his master had changed his mind and would accept gifts, which he then pocketed for himself. As his punishment, Elisha told him that he and his family would now receive *tzoraas*.

As we can appreciate, the *tzoraas* that afflicted Naaman had was not the halachic type one gets for speaking *lashon hara* – a phenomenon which exists only among the Jewish people. Rather, it was the medical condition of leprosy. Elisha's words to Gehazi were: "וְצִרְעַת נְעֻמָּן תִּדְבֶק בְּךָ וּבְזֵרְעֶךָ" – *And Naaman's leprosy shall adhere to you and your descendants.*¹² Having contracted this contagious form of *tzoraas*, we can well understand why these four men were expelled from the city, notwithstanding the fact that it was built centuries after the time of Yehoshua.¹³

12 Melachim II, 5:27.

13 Further support for this idea is offered by R' Reuven Margoliyos (*Margoliyos Hayam*, Sanhedrin 107b), who notes that when a *metzora* is sent outside the city for halachic reasons, he is not allowed to be even in the company of other *metzora'im* who have also been sent out. In this instance, however, the verse relates that all the four *metzora'im* were together at the gates of the city. Since their expulsion was a matter of medical quarantine, and having all already contracted leprosy, there was no further restriction on them keeping company with each other.