



Haftarah Shabbat Shekalim
Parashat Mishpatim
2 Kings 11:17 - 12:17 (Ashkenazim begin at 12:1)
February 14, 2015 / 25 Shevat 5775

The haftarah for this Shabbat is called Shekalim, the first of four special haftarot that occur leading up to Pesach. While this haftarah is always read just prior to (or on) Rosh Hodesh Adar, the month in which Purim is found, its connection is to Pesach, which will occur in just 6 short weeks!

The half shekel tax is first mentioned in the maftir portion that is read this Shabbat, Exodus 30:11-16. There it instructs every male Israelite 20 years or older to pay this tax, as "the rich shall not pay more, and the poor shall not pay less than half a shekel..." (Ex. 30:15). The money was to go for the building of the mishkan, or tabernacle in the desert. Later, after the Beit Ha-Mikdash (Temple) was built in Jerusalem, this became an annual gift that had to be paid before the first of Nisan. According to the Talmud (Mishnah Shekalim 1.1) the announcement of the deadline for making the gift was made earlier (before the first of Adar) so that the people could fulfill their obligations on time. The money collected could thus help repair the grounds of the Beit Ha-Mikdash and provide communal funds for the sacrifices leading up to Pesach.

The haftarah begins with the reign of the youngest king in the history of the monarchy, seven-year-old Jehoash. The previous ruler of Judah, Queen Athalia, had murdered all of her own grandchildren (!), fearing that they would depose her. One grandchild, Jehoash, had been saved by the priest (cohen) Jehoiada, and when Athalia was indeed killed in a rebellion, Jehoash was put on the throne. Undoubtedly influenced by Jehoiada and the other cohanim in his early years, Jehoash establishes, as we read in this haftarah, a system of keeping the Beit Ha-Mikdash in repair while at the same time allowing for the cohanim to continue their work and flourish.

The text relates to us the difficulty, even in ancient times, in finding enough money for the upkeep of religious institutions. Jehoash at first instructs the cohanim to take the money from gifts to the Beit Ha-Mikdash and to use it to repair the building. After a while, though, this does not appear to be working, so he sets up a chest near the altar. The money could be placed in the chest, and when the chest was full the money would be given to the various workers who would then proceed with the necessary work. The cohanim, however, would keep the funds for the guilt and sin offerings, thus enabling them to continue their work properly.

After the destruction of the Beit Ha-Mikdash and the cessation of the collection of funds for its upkeep, the haftarah of Shekalim continues to remind us of our responsibilities to support the

institutions that make up Jewish communal life. The haftarah also teaches us about the difficulty of doing so, not just for us, but even for our ancestors a few thousand years ago! Nevertheless, just as our ancient institutions continued to function because the community ultimately fulfilled its responsibilities, we take comfort that in our day too people will continue to support those religious institutions, such as the synagogue, which are so vital to our survival as a people today.

This week's Haftarah commentary was written by Rabbi Steve Kane, Congregation Sons of Israel, Briarcliff Manor, NY.