



Haftarah for First Day of Pesach **Joshua 3:5-7, 5:2-6:1, 6:27** **April 15, 2014 / 15 Nissan 5774**

“The Wave From the Ocean Which Renews Itself”

We all know that Pesach celebrates the yetziat mitzraim (exodus from Egypt). The four haftarat of each of the four days of Yom Tov of Pesach each mark a Pesach which occurred in either the past or projected future of the Jewish people. Today's Haftarah is from the Book of Joshua at the conquest and entrance of the B'nai Yisrael into the land of Canaan.

The text of the haftarah is divided as follows.

1. The consecration of the people for the ensuing battle is the first stage of the conquest. (parts of Joshua 3:5-7)
2. The males of Israel are circumcised in preparation for the battle. (5:2-9)
3. Celebration of the first Passover in Canaan. (5:10-12)
4. Joshua's encounter with the angel. (5:13-15)
5. Two postscripts:
 - a. Jericho under siege. (6:2)
 - b. Joshua's spreading fame. (6:3)

What overall theme connects all the components of this haftarah? It is the power of a past event to renew itself and grip us with even greater power and energy at a later time. This is analogous to a wave which erupts from an ocean and grasps us. No matter how many times we have that experience, the next wave emerges from the same ocean water, in the same manner as previously, but washes us yet again with a renewed force. So let's see how this sacred wave occurs in the events of the haftarah.

The circumcision of adult males at Gilgal (ouch!) after those born in the wilderness have not been circumcised through the whole journey. Of course, Brit Milah first occurred with Abraham, and was a significant event in the past at the beginning of Genesis. But after forty years of neglect it reoccurs here, as B'nai Yisrael enter the Promised Land for the very first time. The combination of conquering the Promised Land, and the Brit Milah to males combined to be an experience as powerful, or perhaps more powerful, as the first to Abraham himself. (In modern times, it was noteworthy that whole wings of hospitals in Israel were devoted to Russian immigrants – adults – who elected to be circumcised so as to be Jewish, after generations of the neglect of the mitzvah in Russia.) The sacred wave emerges with a new power and energy.

The Passover sacrifice, which had also been neglected in the wilderness for the generation who exited Egypt, was renewed and done for the first time in Eretz Yisrael. The repeat of an ancient obligation from God was as powerful if not more powerful than the original Korban Pesach at the Exodus from Egypt. A second example of a sacred wave which emerges with a new power and energy equal to the first.

The third event is the encounter with the messenger of God, with his sword drawn by Joshua (5:13-15). This encounter with a mysterious messenger on the eve of a transition occurred first to Jacob at Beth El and is renewed here. Again, in a new geographical context, and new era, the event emerges as a sacred wave with power and energy.

Consider how a past event can echo in our secular lives too with new power and energy. What about an annual significant sporting event – the World Series or the Super Bowl? Certainly we have “done” it before but the circumstance and event are renewed in our national culture annually and freshly. It comes along with a new power and energy as if happening for the first time.

How about in personal life? Those of us who are grandparents – consider the birth of a grandchild! Surely we have already gone through the birth of a new member to our family with a child? As the comedian Jerry Seinfeld once quipped “our children are our replacements.” With each “replacement” that comes along – either with a child or a grandchild, the event is as new. It happens with a renewed power and energy even though we have done it before.

And those of us who visit Israel, over and over again? Likely, we still feel the rush as the plane sets down on the Holy Land, yet once again. Each time it is as a sacred wave to come fresh and with new power perhaps even greater than the previous time.

So we can recognize this theme of the haftarah – a past event, either sacred or secular, renewing and echoing yet again with equal power to the first time it happened.

The haftarah commentary for the first day of Pesach was written by Rabbi Gerald L. Zelizer, Congregation Neve Shalom, Metuchen NJ. Rabbi Zelizer is a fourth generation rabbi who was born in Columbus, Ohio. He was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America where he also received a Masters in Hebrew Literature (1964). Rabbi Zelizer has written over 70 op/eds on matters of religion and American society for USA TODAY and also has written extensively for many other journals and newspapers, including the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, the Chicago Tribune, and many major Jewish publications.