

הפטרה לשבת הגדול

HAFTORAH FOR SHABBOS HA-GODDOL

(“THE GREAT SHABBOS”)

*This Haftorah is taken from Sefer Micha
(one of the shorter Books of the Prophets which make up “The Twelve”)
Chapter 3, verses 4 — 24.*

*Most communities read this Haftorah on the Shabbos before Pessach,
whatever the date in Nissan that Shabbos is. According to some customs,
this Haftorah is read only if Erev Pessach falls to be on the Shabbos
and in those years when Erev Pessach is not on Shabbos, the regular Haftorah is read.*

1. The Shabbos immediately before Pessach is called “the Great Shabbos,” and this is one reason why. A few days before we were due to leave Egypt, we followed the instructions of Mosheh our Teacher and each family group took for itself a lamb — an animal sacred to the Egyptians — and tethered it to the bed (generally the heaviest item of furniture in the house) for the purpose of ascertaining that it had no blemish and was fit to be used as the Korban Pessach. When the Egyptians asked what we were doing with these animals, we told them clearly and fearlessly that we were commanded by HaShem to slaughter them and roast them over a fire and eat them up — and the Egyptians were helpless to do anything about it. This happened on the Shabbos before we left Egypt and it demonstrated very clearly that we were free and no longer under the control of the Egyptians. Our Deliverance from Egypt had started. Hence, this Shabbos is called “the Great Shabbos.”
2. The Haftorah of Shabbos HaGoddol has no real connexion with the Sidra of the Week nor with the events of Pessach. Nevertheless, there are two topics in the Haftorah which can be said to be associated with Pessach and with this time of year, as follows.
3. The Novvi Malachi is the last of the Nevi'im who proclaimed a message from HaShem to the Jewish People. As a matter of fact, the name Malachi might very well not be his personal name at all — the word simply means “My messenger” — and there is a suggestion that Malachi was Ezra. In any case, Malachi tells of the third Beis HaMikdash in the future when only righteous Levi'im and Kohanim will officiate, all the unworthy ones having been purged. At that time (*this is where our Haftorah starts*) the Divine Service of the Beis HaMikdash will once again be pleasant to HaShem as it was in the time of the first Beis HaMikdash because the social wrongs will have been put right. (Divine Service in a Beis HaMikdash without justice and righteousness in society is hypocrisy.)
4. Concerning this time of renewal, Malachi tell us that HaShem Himself will condemn and judge the sorcerers who mislead the people and the adulterers and those who swear falsely and the oppressors of the widows and orphans and those who do not fear HaShem to

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harm the stranger who lives in our midst. People talk of “changing times” as if that legitimizes their going off the path of Torah, warns Malachi, but HaShem does not change nor do His values change. What was forbidden in the past is still forbidden. Despite the vociferous protestations and insults of the reformers of the times, the so-called New Morality is nothing but the old immorality and Malachi declares that these reformer priests and clergy will be held to account for misleading themselves and others.

5. Especially in the matter of Terumoh (the gift of agricultural produce that the Torah instructs us to give to the Kohen) and Maaser (a tenth part given to the Levi) Malachi challenges the people. Usually we are not allowed to test HaShem but in this matter of Maaser, HaShem says, “Go ahead and test Me! You bring your Maaser to the distribution points for My trusted Torah teachers (the Kohanim and Levi'im were primarily the Torah teachers of the Jewish People who were for that reason not given a part in Eretz Yisroel. Thus freed from working the Land, they were instead to teach Torah to the entire Jewish People, in return for which HaShem ordained that the people shall support them with Terumoh and Maaser) and you see if I don't open the windows of Heaven and empty out onto you blessings of wealth and prosperity so much till there will not be sufficient room to store it all in your granaries and store houses!” *(Some see in this exhortation a connexion with this Shabbos as Pessach is the season for settling outstanding Maaser debts.)*
6. Malachi addresses the perennial question of why good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people and he assures us that HaShem is in charge, taking note and keeping careful account of everything. HaShem sees all and He sees even into the heart. He takes note of those who do not serve him and even discerns between those that serve Him and those that serve Him conscientiously, that little bit more, to punish and to reward each person according to their just deserts.
7. Malachi's final message is remarkable for the way it closes the circle, so to speak, with the first and greatest prophet that we ever had. “Remember the Torah of Mosheh My servant, that same Torah that I commanded him on Mount Sinai for the Jewish People for all time.” There will never be another Torah and when the Jewish People come round to keeping all the Mitzvos as in days of old, then will they be redeemed from their Exile and once again be seen to be HaShem's special treasure, G-d's Chosen People.
8. But before this, says Malachi, before the scores will be settled in HaShem's awesome Day of Judgement, HaShem will send Eliyohu HaNovvi to prepare the world for Teshuvah, repentance, and return to HaShem. In some families, parents will return to HaShem through their children and in others the wayward children who have gone off the righteous path will be reconciled with their parents, but all will be united to serve HaShem with gladness for they will see that the alternative is only destruction and desolation.
9. Our Chachommim tell us that certain great events leave their mark on the timeline of history. Thus, in the same way that our original redemption from Egypt was in the month of Nissan, it is more than likely that the ultimate redemption and the coming of Moshi'ach, too, will be in Nissan. *(This is the other connection with our Haftorah.)* May it come about speedily and in our days, Amen.