

Haftarat Ki Tisa

Torah: Exodus 30:12–34:35

Haftarah: 1 Kings 18:1–39

The Consequences of Covenant Unfaithfulness

General Overview

This haftarah consists of one of the thrilling stories from the episodes of Elijah the prophet, found in 1 Kings chapters 17–19, 21 and 2 Kings chapter 1. The story contained within *Haftarat Ki Tisa* is, perhaps, one of the better-known tales of this great prophet of God. It is the story of how Elijah challenged the wicked King Ahab, resulting in the confrontation between the prophets of Baal and the prophet of God, Elijah, which took place on Mount Carmel.

Connection to the Parasha

Some things never change. This seems to be true concerning the propensity of the people of Israel to idolatry. *Parashat Ki Tisa* relates the sad story of how the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai, even as Moshe was receiving the covenant and revelation of the Torah.

Now, during the time of Elijah, some 600 years later, the descendants of Jacob were still at it. They were committing spiritual adultery against the God who brought them out from slavery in Egypt; they were worshipping idols again.

It is interesting to see some parallels between Moshe and Elijah. First, both of these important prophets of God had to flee for their lives from unbelieving rulers who sought to kill them because of their stands for justice and righteousness. Moshe fled from Pharaoh and Elijah fled from Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

Second, both of these prophets had to confront Israel concerning their idolatry. Moshe did so in the golden calf incident and Elijah did so all throughout his career. In addition, both prophets experienced special relationships with the Holy One. Moshe was granted to speak with God face-to-face as one speaks to a friend. Elijah's relationship with God was such that he did not even experience death. Instead, he was merely taken up from earth in a whirlwind.

It was, perhaps, because of these and other parallels that the sages designated this Elijah story with *Parashat Ki Tisa*. It is also because of the similarities between Moshe and Elijah that both Moshe and Elijah appeared glorified with Yeshua on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew chapter 17.

Exposition

The stories of Elijah are always interesting and exciting. He is one of the most colourful figures in the entire Bible. It seems like his next move is just about impossible to anticipate. These stories would make great videos!

The power of his stories lies in the very words themselves. Since the words are Divinely inspired (in the most theological and literary sense!), then it is impossible to improve on them when they are retold. Because of this, our attempt to comment on any of Elijah's adventures is done so with fear and trepidation. We can only hope that this commentary will enhance the sacred record of the acts of this great man of God. In our feeble attempt to do so, the following will be our outline for this week's study:

- I. Elijah's Reputation 18:1–18
- II. Elijah's Reprimand
- III. Elijah's Roundup
- IV. Elijah's Romp

In this excerpt of the Haftarat Ki Tisa, we will just look at section two of the study.

II. Elijah's Reprimand 18:16–19

In 18:16–19, we read about Elijah's reprimand of Ahab's sin. Ahab was certainly not expecting a visit from this godly prophet. Ahab was busy attempting to solve the water problems of his kingdom by his own efforts. He thought he would have enough time to do so because his wife had all of God's prophets slain. He was not counting on the faithfulness and courage of Obadiah. Nor was he counting on the fact that Elijah was still alive. When informed about Elijah's presence in his proximity, Ahab must have turned white with fear and red with anger.

Indeed, he had much to fear and many reasons for anger — not only were his own schemes being thwarted, but he also had to be confronted once more by this persistent prophet.

What was the nature of Elijah's case against Ahab? It was really quite simple. Elijah had two things against him, both of which are related.

A. *Covenant Unfaithfulness*

First, Elijah told Ahab that he forsook the commandments of the Lord. This is a reference to the Torah, the sacred covenant of God. One way in which the commandments were forsaken was by the actions of the king. He did evil things, as did his wife.

Besides the fact that he persecuted God's prophets, this descendant of Israel married a Canaanite wife (Jezebel was from Tyre, a coastal Canaanite city) which was a clear violation of specific commands of the Torah. Moreover, because of this marriage, Ahab as well as the entire nation was induced to follow the sinful practices of the Canaanites, Baal worship. Another way in which the commandments were forsaken was that Ahab ignored the covenant. He did not see fit to follow the sacred promises that his forefathers made by oath that they would do.

B. Going after Idols

Ahab's second problem was that Elijah accused him of following after Baalim. One thing leads to another. The moment one forsakes the covenant of God, he immediately follows after other gods. Idolatry is the natural consequence of covenant unfaithfulness. One of the main reasons that Ahab practiced such idolatry was because of the influence of his pagan wife.

The worship of Baal was the national religion of the Canaanites. Since she was a Canaanite, it followed that she would have brought her idolatrous and sinful religion into their household and into their nation. To worship such a god constituted spiritual adultery. Thus, through his Baal worship, Ahab, as the leader of Israel, was responsible for leading the bride-nation into committing adultery against her faithful and loving Husband.

The Holy One was very clear in the Torah about the outcome for being unfaithful to the covenant and worshipping false gods. The consequences were recorded in Deuteronomy chapters 27 through 29: famine, war, oppression, and all other kinds of troubles would overcome the people. Thus, Ahab is the real troublemaker in Israel and his crimes have been forever inscribed upon the pages of the Tanakh.