

THE SHEKEL AND THE HEBREW HALF SHEKEL OF SILVER



We hear of the Jewish Shekel and Half Shekel mentioned many times during King Solomon's reign and the building of the Temple. During King Solomon's time the Shekel and Half Shekel were used as a weight or measure. It was used by the Ancient Hebrews, by which the value of metals, metal vessels, census taking and other substances were fixed.

The Shekel and half Shekel being well known Biblical coins, are now a rarity. The first of these coins were struck during the first revolt of the Jews in A.D. 60-70, and bear a Chalice on the obverse with the denomination in Hebrew, and on the reverse a Branch with three Buds and "Jerusalem the Holy, half Shekels were also struck. The Silver Half Shekel of Silver (Half Shekel of Israel), was formerly believed to have been made at the time of Simon Maccabee, but is now credited to the period of the first revolt. On the obverse side is a "Chalice or Cup of 'Manna', the inscription in Hebrew reads "Half Shekel Israel". On the reverse is a "Triple Lily, thought by some scholars to be the "Budding Rod of Aaron", The inscription reads "Jerusalem the Holy".

The second revolt led by Simon Barcoha, the leader of the Jews in their great Insurrection against the Romans, under the Emperor Hadrian, from 131 to 135 A.D. Three times had the oppressed Jews revolted without success from 115 to 118 A.D.; and in 130 A.D., soon after Hadrian's return from Syria, a new rebellion broke out, for which they had been secretly prepared. At the head of it was Simon, who assumed the name of Barcoha, i.e. "Son of the Star", pretending that the prophecy was to be fulfilled in him. "There shall come a Star out of Jacob" (numbers 24:17). He fought at first with great success against the Romans, and even caused them to evacuate Jerusalem, where he was proclaimed King, and caused coins to be minted in his name, that bore the legend "the liberation of Israel."

During the revolt, hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed, many were executed, and very cruel edicts were subsequently issued against them. From this last struggle dates the final dispersion of the Jews over the face of the earth. The Holy city was razed to the ground, and rebuilt as a Pagan city called Aelia Capitolina, and a Temple to Jupiter was erected on the site of the ruined Holy Temple. The Jews still retain in their liturgy, hymns which they chant in mournful memory of this last tragic event.

The second revolt Shekel depicts the "Screen of the Tabernacle with the Ark of the Covenant" and the Hebrew inscription "Deliverance of Jerusalem", together with a couple of "Twigs" and a "Citron". A typical copper Shekel of the second revolt depicts a "Vine Leaf" with the inscription "Second year of the deliverance of Israel", and on the reverse side a "Palm Tree", with the words "Simon".

Three different kinds of Gold, Silver and Copper Shekels are mentioned; the common Shekel, the Shekel of the Sanctuary (probably of double value), and the Shekel of Royal weight.

The Sacred Shekel was equal to 20 Gerahs (beans), and 3000 Sacred Shekels made up a Talent. The heavy Gold Shekel is reckoned approximately to contain 161 Troy grains, the Silver Shekel 275.

The first dated coins appeared about the fifteenth century.

All ancient coins were very crudely made, according to today's standard. Gold and Silver coins were invariably stamped, and most Bronze and Copper coins were cast