A half-shekel coin dating from the Second Temple period has been uncovered by archaeologists excavating a drainage channel in Jerusalem. The excavations are being carried out by Eli Shukron and Professor Ronny Reich of the University of Haifa on behalf of the Israeli Antiquities Authority. The half-shekel coin was minted in Tyre and has been dated to the year 22 AD. It bears the image of Melqart - the chief deity of Tyre on one side, and an eagle figurine on the prow of a ship on the reverse. Shukron believes the coin is of the same type that was used for the payment of the annual Temple tax. Each year every Jew was commanded to pay a half-shekel for the administration of the sanctuary. The half-shekel Temple tax also features prominently in the celebration of Purim, which happens to fall this Thursday and Friday. The Feast of Purim commemorates the miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people from the hands of wicked Haman, who conspired to destroy them during the reign of King Ahasuerus. Jews from around the world contribute a sum of money to charity on Purim in remembrance of the half-shekel tax.

Quote: *""Just like today when coins sometimes fall from our pockets and roll into drainage openings at the side of the street, that's how it was some two thousand years ago – a man was on his way to the Temple and the shekel which he intended to use for paying the half shekel head-tax found its way into the drainage channel," theorized archaeologist Eli Shukron of the Israel Antiquities Authority.*

This article reminds us again of that occasion when the disciples were approached by those collecting the Temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27). Jesus Christ used the occasion to teach the disciples an important truth, and to prove beyond doubt that He is none other than the Son of God. When asked whether their rabbi paid the Temple tax, Peter answered "Yes", and entered the Lord's house in Capernaum to collect the money. But before Peter had a chance to say anything, the Lord asked Peter a question, " Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? ". Of course no monarch would demand tribute of their own family. And when Peter answered, "Of foreigners", the Lord said, " Then are the children free ". As the Son of God, Jesus Christ had no need to pay His Father money for the upkeep of the Temple. A greater Temple was now here, the Temple of the Lord's body (John 2:19-21). But so as not to offend those collecting the Temple tax, the Lord instructs Peter to go fishing. And in the mouth of the first fish that he catches he would find a shekel, which he would use to pay the Temple tax for him and the Lord. So how does this prove to us that Jesus Christ is none other than the Son of God? This miracle required the intervention of a greater power Who is in complete control of every little circumstance of life. The Person Who performed this miracle had to be in control of the man who dropped the coin into the sea, of the fish that swallowed the coin, and of Peter himself who would cast his hook into the water at the precise time and place to catch the fish. Of course many people have caught fish that have swallowed

all sorts of different things, but only God could have foretold this event in advance, and in particular the first fish that Peter catches and the fact that it had swallowed enough money to pay the Temple tax for both Peter and the Lord. I don't know what the odds of this event happening by chance are, but they must be staggering. What this shows us is that without a doubt, Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all things (Revelation 1:8). And it shows us that not only does the Lord know the future (Isaiah 46:10), but that He is in complete control of it. If you are a believer then you have no need to fear, for God is in complete control of your life, right down to the most minute detail. Nothing happens to us by chance, and nothing happens to us without the prior consent of our Lord (Job 1:10). If we commit our lives into His hand, He will be our guide even unto the end of the world (Psalm 48:14, Matthew 28:20). But if you have not believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, then you are not free. The Bible says he that commits sin is a slave to sin, and remains in bondage awaiting the judgement of God. Those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation are presently under God's wrath because of sin (John 3:36). But there is good news...

John 8:34-6
Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). All who believe on Him for salvation can be justified from their sins forever, not by keeping the law, but by God's grace through faith in His Son (Ephesians 2:8, Galatians 2:16). Jesus Christ died for you. He gave His life for yours upon the cross 2000 years ago, so that you could have a relationship with your Creator. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation today.

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