

פרשת כי תבא begins with מצות בכורים, the obligation to bring the first fruits to the Temple and present it to the Priest along with reciting the section of ארמי אויבד אבי. What connection does this have to the conclusion of פרשת כי תצא, which commanded us to recall what Amalek did to us and to eradicate them?

Both of these sections include the pre-requisite of inheriting the land. In פרשת זכור the Torah tells us בארץ אשר אתה בא שצה לרשתה and in פרשת בכורים the Torah tells us וירשתה וישבת בה. The Talmud (סנהדרין כ:ב) tells us that the Jewish People were given three commandments to perform when they entered the land: 1) appoint a king, 2) eradicate Amalek 3) build the Temple. What connects these three commandments? Why are they dependent on conquest and division? These commandments could only be performed after the conquest and division, כבוש, of the land among the tribes. The pre-requisite of ירושה for Amalek and the Temple was noted above. ירושה וישיבה is also required for appointing a king, בי תבא אל הארץ אשר ד' אלקיך נותן לך וירשתה וישבת בה, the king must be appointed only after the land is conquered and divided.

Rashi notes (דברים כו:א) that the obligation to bring בכורים started after the conquest and division of the land. Why doesn't the Talmud include בכורים among those obligations that commenced with conquest and division? Because the initiation of בכורים depended on the existence of a Temple. Until a Temple of some type was built, there was no way to fulfill this obligation. In other words, בכורים is subsumed under the obligation to build the Temple upon completing the conquest and division of the land.

(Note that there is a dispute as to when the obligation of בכורים began. According to some opinions it began in Shiloh, Nov and Givon, 3 places that preceded the Temple in Jerusalem and were characterized as במה גדולה, a large altar. Other opinions, based on the ספרי, say that it applied only to Shiloh and the Temple, which were referred to as בית, a more permanent structure. And according to others, Shiloh also may not have been considered a בית, which would have excluded it from the obligation to bring בכורים. According to virtually all opinions, the obligation to bring בכורים did not apply in Gilgal, the first resting place of the Ark of the Covenant as it was established prior to the conclusion of the conquest

and distribution of the land. Based on this, the obligation to bring בכורים commenced after the people took possession of the land and a significant enough structure was built to contain the altar and Ark. The obligation to build a structure to house the Ark and Altar was still based on the obligation to build a Temple that was one of the 3 obligations the people were commanded to fulfill after the conquest and division of the land.)

The Torah warns us that a human monarchy is not the most ideal institution. Optimally, the people should recognize that there is only One True King, Gd. However the Torah understood that ultimately the people would desire to be like other nations and appoint a king. The Torah placed severe restriction on the Jewish King. It limited the number of wives he could take, limited the wealth he could amass, restricted him from owning too many horses. All of these restrictions were implemented because the Torah sought to prevent haughtiness in the Jewish king. He was commanded to listen to the priests and write multiple Torah Scrolls. The Torah tells us why we need to be careful with a king: לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו ולבלתי סור מן המצוה ימין ושמאל. The Torah recognized that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Judaism has no place for a self-centered king. He should pursue righteousness and kindness instead of vanity and self-glorification. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, the kings of Israel and Judah failed to this test and violated these prohibitions. Even the greatest of men can become intoxicated with themselves and quickly lose sight of Gd.

It is interesting to note that in an adjoining section, פרשת שופטים includes the obligation to appoint a prophet who will lead the people. If there is a king, why was there a need for a prophet? Because the Torah understood well the proclivity of a king to seek absolute power and violate the Torah itself. It was necessary to have a check and balance on the king's power and attitude. The prophet was the built-in guide that the king and people were obligated to follow. He would guide and rebuke the king when necessary. He would not fear the king, because he carried the word of the One True King, Gd. Even the king of Israel ultimately was a human being who had to adhere to the laws of the Torah and obey Gd like any of his subjects. Throughout Jewish history each king was paired with a prophet whose role was to fearlessly rebuke and guide the king as needed.

We are commanded to eradicate Amalek because they attacked the Jewish People so soon after departing Egypt while they were in a fragile state. Why did Amalek attack the Jewish people immediately after the events at Refidim and the miracle of receiving water from a stone? Our Rabbis tell us that the Jewish people became enamored with themselves. They just left Egypt, walked through the Reed Sea, and were presented Manna from heaven. They began to expect these miracles for their own sake without recognizing Gd. They tested Gd at Refidim to see if He would provide them with water. A people thankful for the miracles performed on their behalf does not test the Gd that performed those miracles. It is the height of vanity and chutzpah to think they are the cause of the blessings they received. Gd immediately sent Amalek to remind the people that these miracles did not occur in a vacuum or because of their inherent greatness as a people. Rather, Gd Himself directed these events. They had to rely on Him and not fall victim to delusions of self-grandeur. They had to lift their eyes towards Gd and ask for His mercy and help. Moses had to lift his arms for them to be victorious in battle, symbolizing that the people had to lift their eyes and bend their hearts to Gd. They realized they were fully dependent on Gd. The lesson of Amalek set the stage for them to respond נעשה ונשמע a short while later at Mount Sinai.

Upon entering the land, the Jewish People were occupied with twin tasks of conquest and distribution of the land. They were commanded to build the Temple but it took hundreds of years till they appointed a king and Solomon built the Temple. The people settled in and reaped the fruits of the beautiful land Gd gave them. At harvest time, one can become intoxicated with himself and think that he alone is responsible for the bountiful harvest, the lush fields and the beautiful home. Like the king. It is easy to forget Who gave him everything and the debt of gratitude he owes.

The Torah therefore commands the Jew to bring his first fruits to the Priest to demonstrate that he indeed recognizes that all he has is because of Gd's blessing. Where the Prophet was charged with the mission of keeping the king in line with the Torah and Gd, the Priest was assigned the responsibility to do the same with the people at large. They were the judges and teachers who taught the people Torah and guided them in their daily religious life. The Priest, as representative or שליח of Gd, was given the first fruit. The first of anything carries special significance and

engenders a unique pride in the individual. After toiling so long and hard, the farmer wants to reap the benefits of his labor and enjoy the first fruits of his labor. The Torah tells us that we must take a step back and recognize that whatever we accomplished was not due to our own efforts but to Gd. It all starts with recognizing that Gd allowed us to inherit this wonderful land, without which this bounty would not have been possible. The best way to show our gratitude is to step away from the thing we prize most and dedicate it to Gd.

After being forced to flee from Laban or Esau, the ארמי who tried to snuff out the nascent Jewish Nation, we should have disappeared in Egypt without a trace, never having the opportunity to inherit such a wonderful land or built the beautiful Temple. It was only because of השגחת הקב"ה that we survived, flourished and inherited the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. By offering the first of everything to Gd, we reject the temptation to say כחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה. We therefore bring the first fruits and recite פרשת מקרא בכורים to express our appreciation and praise to Gd.

Let us return to the issue of identifying a common theme among these three commandments. Samuel the prophet, based on Gd's direction, addressed the people's desire for a king and selected and anointed Saul and David. Samuel the prophet, ordered Saul to lead the people in battle to eradicate Amalek. Samuel the prophet stripped Saul of the monarchy because he failed to heed the command of Gd transmitted by the prophet. Nathan the prophet transmitted to David the order to build the Temple. Nathan the prophet rebuked and guided David during his reign. As noted previously, the Torah connects the appointment of a king with listening to the prophet of the period who acts in his time with the authority Moses the prophet exercised in his. The king, as representative of the people, was obligated to eradicate Amalek and find a permanent place for the Temple. The selection of the king itself required a prophet. Hence all three ultimately are based on their dependence on and connection to a prophet.

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