

Parsha Paths:

Ki Tavo: Closing the Circle

Bikkurim: What

When you enter the land that the Eternal your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the Eternal your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where the Eternal your God will choose to establish the divine name. (Devarim 26:1-2)

Bikkurim are brought only from the seven species. Not from dates grown on hills, nor from [the other species] grown in the valley, nor from olives that are not choice. Bikkurim are not to be brought before Shavuot. The people from Mt. Zevoim brought bikkurim prior to Atzeret (Shavuot), but they did not accept from them (Mishnah Bikkurim 1:3)

We are informed to bring First-fruits as a community, and to bring First-fruits as individuals. Just as the communal First-fruits, mentioned elsewhere (Lv.23:17-20), are from the seven species for which the Land is praised, so, too, the individual's First-fruits, mentioned here must come from the seven species for which the Land is praised! (Sifrei Devarim 297:4)

Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel says, we do not bring first fruits from dates, except for the dates that [grow] in Jericho, (Tosefta Bikkurim 1:8)

Bikkurim: Where

Rabbi Yose the Galilean says: one does not bring [bikkurim] from TransJordan, since that is not a land flowing with milk and honey (Mishnah Bikkurim 1:10)

It was stated: (*Deut.* 26:10) "Which You gave me", not what I took by myself. About what do they differ? Rebbi Abun said, half of the tribe of Manasseh. If one says, "which You gave me, not what I took by myself," half the tribe of Manasseh did not take by themselves. If one says, (*Deut.* 26:10) "a Land of milk and honey," nevertheless it is not a land of milk and honey. (Yerushalmi Bikkurim 1:8)(

There are ten grades of holiness: the land of Israel is holier than all other lands. And what is the nature of its holiness? That from it are brought the omer, the firstfruits and the two loaves, which cannot be brought from any of the other lands. (Mishnah Kelim 1:6)

Bikkurim: How

How were the bikkurim taken up [to Jerusalem]? All [the inhabitants of] the cities of the maamad would assemble in the city of the maamad, and they would spend the night in the open street and they would not enter any of the houses. Early in the morning the officer would say: "Let us arise and go up to Zion, into the house of the Lord our God" (Jeremiah 31:5).

Those who lived near [Jerusalem] would bring fresh figs and grapes, while those who lived far away would bring dried figs and raisins. An ox would go in front of them, his horns bedecked with gold and with an olive-crown on its head. The flute would play before them until they would draw close to Jerusalem. When they drew close to Jerusalem they would send messengers in advance, and they would adorn their bikkurim. The governors and chiefs and treasurers [of the Temple] would go out to greet them, and according to the rank of the entrants they would go forth. All the skilled artisans of Jerusalem would stand up before them and greet them saying, "Our brothers, men of such and such a place, we welcome you in peace (Mishnah Bikkurim 3:1)

Who is the Aramean?

וְעָנִיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲרָמִי אֲבִד אָבִי וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרָיִמָּה וַיִּגְרֶשׁ שָׁם בְּמַתִּי מֶעֶט וַיְהִי־שֵׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל עָצוּם וְרַב: דְּבָרִים כו: ה)

Rashi: a Syrian destroyed my father, which means: Laban wished to exterminate the whole nation when he pursued Yaakov.

Rashbam: MY FATHER WAS A WANDERING ARAMEAN: i.e., my father, Abraham, was an Aramean, who wandered as an exile from the land of Aram. . . The verbs אבד and תועה are both used to refer to a person who has gone into exile.

Ibn Ezra: A WANDERING ARAMEAN. The word oved (wandering) is an intransitive verb. If Aramean referred to Laban then Scripture should have read mavid or me'abbed. Furthermore, what reason would Scripture have had for stating, Laban sought to destroy my father and he went down to Egypt? Laban did not cause Jacob to descend to Egypt. It thus appears to me that the term Aramean refers to Jacob. Scripture, as it were, reads, when my father was in Aram he was "perishing." That is, he was poor, he had no money. . . Its import is, I did not inherit the land from my father, for my father was poor when he came to Aram. He was also a stranger in Egypt. He was few in number. He then became a large nation. You O Lord took us out of slavery and gave us a good land.

Becoming a Nation

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה וְהַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּים אֶל כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר הִסָּכֶת וּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִהְיִיתָ לְעַם
לְיְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

Moses and the levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying: Silence! Hear, O Israel!
Today you have become the people of the Eternal your God. (Devarim 27:9)

What's On the Stones?

As soon as you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the Eternal your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones. Coat them with plaster and inscribe upon them all the words of this Teaching. (Devarim 27:2-3)

Nachmanides: Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra wrote in the name of the Gaon that “they wrote upon the stones a list of the commandments like those written down in the ‘Hilchoth Gedoloth,’ in the form of *Azharoth* (‘Exhortations’ of the liturgical poets). And the meaning of the expression ‘*ba’eir heiteiv*’ (*very plainly*) refers to the writing” [i.e., that it be in legible script] . . . And our Rabbis have said [that ‘*ba’eir heiteiv*’ means] in the seventy languages [of the peoples of the world]. . . . It is likely that either these stones were huge, or it was a miraculous event [for, otherwise, it would have been impossible to inscribe so much on a few stone tablets].

Why Here?

He brought all these and cut them in two, placing each half opposite the other; but he did not cut up the bird. . . . When the sun set and it was very dark, there appeared a smoking oven, and a flaming torch that passed between those pieces. (Bereshit 15)

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Roman Destruction

God will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, that will swoop down like the eagle—a nation whose language you do not understand (Devarim 28:49)

It further states, The Eternal will bring a nation against thee from afar, for, Vespasian and his son Titus came with a very large Roman army into the Land and captured all the fortified cities of Judea, and oppressed them greatly, as is known from the [history] books that they also captured the walls of Jerusalem and there remained only the Sanctuary and the wall of the Court. They [the besieged] ate the flesh of their sons and their daughters. And when the Sanctuary was also captured, then was fulfilled and ye shall be plucked from off the Land. Then the Romans returned to their country taking with them the exile of Jerusalem, as did the many [foreign] peoples, too, who were with them [i.e., the Romans] — from Greece, Egypt, Syria and many other peoples [who had joined the Romans in the destruction of Jerusalem and who took Israelite captives with them]. Then was fulfilled the verse, And the Eternal shall scatter thee among all peoples etc. The verses after that, all refer to their punishment in exile. So also, And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee applies to our fear in exile under peoples who constantly promulgate decrees against us. The correct interpretation is that this verse alludes to those generations that existed at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, for the Romans were then scheming to destroy the Jews completely. (Nachmanides on Devarim 28:42)

Spanish Life

However, once we have been exiled to the countries of our enemies, the work of our hands has not been accursed. Neither have our oxen and the breeds of our flock, our vineyards and our olive orchards and that which we have sown in the field [been adversely affected]. Rather in the countries [of our exile] we are like the rest of the peoples who inhabit whatever country, or even better than them, for His mercies are upon us, because our habitations in exile are by [virtue of] the promise He made to us, And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Eternal their G-d. (Nachmanides on Devarim 28:42)