

Date: 2 Elul 5785 (August 26, 2025)

Torah Portion: Shoftim

Topic: Amalek: Scourge of the Sanctuary, Part 1

It is written in Deuteronomy 17:14–15:

"When you come to the land that YHWH your Elohim gives you, and possess it, and settle in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over myself, like all the nations that are around me,' you shall surely set over yourself a king whom YHWH your Elohim will choose. From among your brethren you shall set a king over yourself; you may not place over yourself a foreign man who is not your brother."

According to the Midrash, this passage implies that appointing a king is not merely optional, but a commandment required by the Torah (see ADB 20230818).

Upon entering the Land, Yisrael was commanded to fulfill three *mitzvot*:

1. To erase the memory of Amalek,
2. To appoint a king,
3. And to build the house of YHWH.

Yisrael did appoint a king and engaged in the eradication of Amalek. However, this eradication was not complete. King Saul spared the life of Agag, the Amalekite king (1 Samuel 15:8–9), who went on to father descendants. Therefore, according to the Midrash, although the commandment was not fully realized, the Israelites nevertheless acted on it to the best of their ability.

This raises a question: why did the Israelites not proceed to build the house of YHWH?

After all, Hashem's command to build the Temple is conditional:

"[Hashem] will give you rest from all your enemies all around, and you will dwell securely" (Deut. 12:10–11).

Since Saul's military victory over Amalek appeared to fulfill that condition, one might expect the construction of the Temple to follow. However, the answer lies elsewhere: there were talebearers among the people. It is taught that talebearing causes the Shechinah to depart from the earth, whereas building the Temple would cause the Shechinah to rest upon it. These two conditions are mutually exclusive. Consequently, Hashem arranged matters so that the Temple would not be built at that time. There would be no value in creating a dwelling place for the Shechinah if it would not dwell there due to the prevalence of *lashon hara* (evil speech).

Eshed HaNechalim explains that the presence or absence of the Shechinah has a practical consequence: it determines the degree to which Divine Providence attends to human affairs.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 20b) clarifies the required sequence for these three *mitzvot*:

1. Appoint a king,
2. Eradicate Amalek,
3. Build the Temple.

This order is significant. The Sages teach that Amalek and its ideology are fundamentally opposed to the divine purpose of history—namely, the universal recognition of Hashem's sovereignty. As Rashi comments on Exodus 17:16:

"As long as Amalek's memory endures, Hashem's Name is not complete, and His throne is not complete."

Therefore, the continued existence of Amalek is incompatible with the establishment of the Temple, which serves as the focal point of Hashem's presence and the revelation of His majesty to the world. It logically follows that Amalek must be defeated before the Temple can be constructed.

This principle is illustrated in three key historical moments, each involving the establishment of a new sanctuary:

- **In the Wilderness:** Before the command to erect the Tabernacle, the Israelites fought and significantly weakened an attacking Amalekite force.
- **In the Land of Israel:** Before construction of the First Temple, King Saul waged war against the Amalekites of his time, nearly succeeding in wiping them out.
- **During Persian rule:** Prior to the completion of the Second Temple, Mordechai and Esther orchestrated the downfall of Haman—a descendant of Amalek and a staunch proponent of its ideals. According to *Yalkut Shimoni*, it was Haman and his son Shimshai who influenced the Persian authorities to halt Temple construction after only the foundation had been laid, despite its earlier sanction by King Cyrus.

Thus, when Yisrael entered the Promised Land, the three *mitzvot* outlined in the Midrash could only be fulfilled in the correct sequence. First, a monarchy had to be established, as it was the king's role to lead the nation in war. Then, the battle against Amalek could be undertaken. Only after Amalek's defeat would the conditions be right for building the Temple.

Shalom.