

## Parshas Zachor - The Lost Dynasty by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

The Shabbos before Purim is called Shabbos Zachor, Shabbos of Rememberance, based on the special added Torah reading and Haftarah. The special Torah reading begins with Zachor, Remember. Through this Torah reading, we perform the special mitzvah of remembering what Amelak did to us when you came out of Mitzraim. The entire world was petrified of us after the miracles Hashem did for us at our exodus and they attacked us even with the awareness that they would be defeated and only for showing that the Bnai Yisroel can be attacked; it was no longer totally inconceivable that anyone should attack us. In other words, they were out to show that Hashem's nation, Am Yisroel, was not special and that it would no longer be beyond anyone's imagination that they would be attacked. Therefore, when we come into our own land, we have a mitzvah to totally wipe out the existence and memory of Amalek but never to forget about them and their evil intentions. This mitzvah could be done any time but Am Yisroel does this right before Purim because Haman, the villain of the Purim story, was descended from Amalek. We know this from the fact that the Megillah often refers to Haman as the son of Hamdasa the Agagite and Agag was the king of Amalek.

The Haftarah continues the saga of our struggle against Amalek. It begins with the prophetic order to Shmuel Hanavi [Shmuel I 15: 1] for Shaul Hamelech to make war and conquer Amalek as Hashem remembered what Amelek did to us and now it was the appropriate time to take revenge. Halachically, it fits in very well that such a prophecy would come at this time. The Rambam codifies for us in the opening statement of Hilchos Melachim, laws of kings, that there were three obligations for Bnai Yisoel when they entered Eretz Yisroel: To appoint a king, to destroy Amalek and build the Bais Hamikdash. As Shaul had been crowned as the first king, the other two obligations still remained to be fulfilled. The prophetic order included that we were not to spare anything from Amelak but to utterly destroy them together with all their animals and property. This order even included young children which is unusual for the Torah to command. Unfortunately, Shaul Hamelech did not listen to the command and spared many of the animals as well as Agag the king of Amalek. Hashem then sent Shmuel to inform Shaul that, because he did not obey Hashem and destroy Amalek as he was told, he would lose the kingship. At the end of the Haftarah, Shmuel Hanavi finishes the job and kills the king of Amalek stating, "Just as your sword has made many women childless, so too, will your mother be among the childless women".

The narrative of the Haftarah presents some deep questions. First of all, why did Shaul Hamelech not listen to Hashem? Secondly, what was so severe about this particular disobedience that he lost his kingship forever? The Ralbag and the Radak, two major medieval commentators on Tanach, both explain that Shaul Hamelech understood that there was to be no personal benefit from the spoils of Amalek but thought that it was acceptable to bring the kosher animals as sacrifices from which there would be no personal benefit. The verses indicate that in a weak moment, he gave in to the people who wanted to spare the healthy animals. In addition, he did not understand a specific command to kill Agag. From here we see that Shaul Hamelech missed an important point about being king and an important point about this mitzvah of eradicating Amalek. The king's role is to be the example to everyone in following Hashem's mitzvos. While he has absolute authority over the people, we are told in Devarim 19:18-20 that the king has a Sefer Torah with him at all times, to constantly remind him that he has to listen to Hashem from top to bottom and his own position does not put him above Hashem's law. [This is in addition to the sefer Torah that every Jew is required to possess.] In this case, Shaul Hamelech was to wipe out Amalek completely and not look for any excuses or have any compassion whatsoever. As stated above, our various midrashic sources teach us about how Amalek was the first to attack us and introduce the world to the idea that Am Yisroel can be attacked.

The motivation was pure hatred of Hashem's nation and all that they represent; Am Yisroel represents kedusha, morality, and living a consecrated life for a higher purpose. Amalek represents everything that is the exact opposite such as immorality, profanity and living only for self gratification. While it may seem cruel on the surface that Amalek has to be eradicated completely, we are told in Mishlai 12:10 that the mercy on the wicked is cruelty. And Chazal tell us that because Shaul allowed Agag to live a short time longer, he had the opportunity to father a child who was the ancestor of Haman! If we apply compassion to the wrong people, against Hashem's will, we will pay for it in the end. We see from here that we always have to listen to Hashem, even when it goes against our understanding. And that is also an important message of the Purim season. The Jewish People formally reaccepted the Torah even without miracles. Just as we said *Naaseh venishmah*, we will do and we will hear at Har Sinai, accepting Hashem's commandments whether or not we understand them, it was the same in the days of the Purim Story. We also accepted the Torah with the awareness that Hashem is there even when he is concealed. We must always see Hashem's hand in our lives and to follow his Torah even the absence of open revelation.

***Freilichin Purim to All***