

King After Conquest

PARSHA INSIGHTS - SHOFTIM (5758)

WHY NOT APPOINT A KING BEFORE ENTERING THE LAND?

“When you come to the land which Hashem your G-d gives you, and possess it and settle in it, and you say, ‘I will place upon myself a king like all the nations who are around me’...You shall surely set over yourself a king whom Hashem your G-d will choose...” (17:14-15). Our sages explain that three *mitzvos* [commandments] were incumbent upon us after we conquered and settled in *Eretz Yisroel* [the Land of Israel]. They are listed in the *Gemara Sanhedrin* 20B: To appoint a king, destroy the nation of Amalek, and build a *Bais Hamikdash* [Temple]. The *Gemara* points out that these three are interdependent. It is proven from *psukim* [verses] that first, a king was to rule, then Amalek was to be obliterated, and only afterward a *Bais Hamikdash* was to be erected.

Did we really HAVE TO establish a monarch over us? Rabbi Nehorai states that the whole topic of selecting a king was only brought up to address the future DEMANDS of the Jewish people. It was not meant to be a requirement. G-d knew ahead that at the time of Shmuel the prophet, *Bnai Yisroel* would complain that they needed a king. This is the meaning of today’s *pasuk* [verse], quoted above (17:14): “...and YOU WILL SAY, ‘I will place upon myself a king...’” *Rashi* on *Sanhedrin* 20B explains that this was a prediction of Hashem, that the Jews would make such a request in the future. This is indicated by the words, “...and you will say...”

The *Gemara* continues to analyze what transpired at the time of Shmuel *Hanavi* [Samuel the prophet]. The elders, the wise people of that generation, asked properly for a king. This is proven from a *pasuk* in *Shmuel* [Samuel] which shows that their desire was for a supreme JUDGE, an individual who would guide them in Torah matters and discipline the wrongdoers. The ones who erred were the ignorant people. Their wish was for a man who would fight their wars for them. This was considered a misplacement of trust and a mistaken impression of what a king was supposed to do for *Bnai Yisroel*.

Now that we have some background from the *Gemara Sanhedrin*, a question arises. The following are the Lutzker Rav’s remarks on 17:14. Why did Hashem not advise us to designate a king BEFORE entering *Eretz Yisroel*? This sovereign could have performed some crucial functions for us. His services would have come in quite handy! He might have led us in the wars to conquer the land, aided us in dividing it among the tribes, or accomplished other feats necessary in that transition period. Although Moshe *Rabainu* [Moses our teacher] and Yehoshua were faithful shepherds for *Bnai Yisroel*, they were never officially crowned as “kings”, says the Lutzker Rav in his *Oznaim L’Torah*. This can be supported by the fact that Hashem told us to appoint a king only AFTER entering *Eretz Yisroel*, as we see in our *parsha* [Torah portion].

☞ I would like to add that even according to Rabbi Nehorai, cited above, that the directive to appoint a king was merely a prediction that we would demand one, the *Oznaim L’Torah*’s question can still be asked. Since the Jews could have made this request any time in history, even before entering the land, why was Hashem so specific that this designation of a monarch could certainly not occur until AFTER entering *Eretz Yisroel*?

Rav Sorotzkin answers: If a king would have helped us take possession of the Land of Israel, the Jews might easily have attributed their success to HIS rulership and guidance. Perhaps, *chas v’shalom* [heaven forbid], *Bnai Yisroel* would have neglected to acknowledge the miraculous nature of their conquest. They might have given credit to a mortal, a mere human being. **For this reason, Hashem intentionally gave the task of conquering and settling the land to His TRUSTWORTHY prophet, Moshe Rabainu, and to his disciple, Yehoshua, not to a new king.** Remember, it says in the end of *Parshas Chukas* (21) and it is reviewed in *Parshas Devarim* (3) that Moshe led the conquest of the lands of Sichon and Og, east of the Jordan River. The *shevatim* [tribes] of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe possessed these areas. Yehoshua officiated after Moshe’s death, leading us to take hold of *Eretz Yisroel* west of the *Yardain* [Jordan]. Moshe was already proven loyal to Hashem, as the Torah testifies in *Beha’aloscha* 12:7 and in other verses. Consequently, Hashem did not hesitate to assign him and his student the job of leading us to possess *Eretz Yisroel*. With Moshe and Yehoshua at the helm of the ship, there was no risk that the Jews would forget about the Divine Providence responsible for their success.

Using this concept, the *Oznaim L'Torah* further interprets our *pasuk*. “When you come to the land WHICH HASHEM YOUR G-D GIVES YOU...you shall set over yourself a king” (17:14-15). Do you notice the connection between the phrases? Hashem is giving you the land, not some human ruler! Only AFTER you enter that land, with Hashem’s intimate involvement and assistance, you will be permitted to designate a ruler of flesh and blood. In this way, you will be safe from the danger of thinking that your king acquired the land for you. We now understand, according to this one approach, why the king was set over us only after our conquest of *Eretz Yisroel*.

One point does need clarification, though. The *Oznaim L'Torah* stated that Moshe and Yehoshua were not officially labeled as “kings”. Please be aware that this is brought up in numerous places in our *sefarim* [books]. I will mention a few sources that show without a doubt that Moshe was at least “like a king”. Plus, the *Chizkuni* seems to hold that Yehoshua achieved the rank of a *melech* [king]. The following is not meant to be a comprehensive source list, but it certainly sheds some light on the issue.

In *Parshas Beha'aloscha*, Hashem told Moshe to construct for himself two silver trumpets for summoning the congregation, causing the camps to travel, plus other purposes. Why two silver trumpets? *Rashi* on 10:2 quotes the *Midrash Tanchuma*: “So that they (the *kohanim* [priests]) will blow (these instruments) before you, like a king.” *Rashi* brings the basis for this, a *pasuk* in *V'zos Habracha* 33:5: “He became a king over Yeshurun (*Bnai Yisroel*)” - this indicates that Moshe was a king among the Jews, according to one interpretation of the *pasuk* in *V'zos Habracha*. Trumpets are sounded in honor of kings. Also, see *Rashi* on *Korach* 16:19. Korach complained that Moshe took “for himself the *malchus* [royal dominion] and for his brother, the high priesthood”. These pieces of evidence can reveal Moshe’s kingly status. About Yehoshua, the *Chizkuni* in *Vayailech* is straightforward. Moshe had instructed Yehoshua to read the *Sefer Torah* [Torah scroll] for the *mitzvah* [commandment] of *Hakhel* [public Torah reading] (see *d'var Torah* [lesson] for *Vayailech* 5757). “He was commanding Yehoshua (himself to read the Torah); therefore, the king reads it” (*Chizkuni Vayailech* 31:11).

☞ Copies of the essay are available by clicking the following link, or online at TorahMax.com under: “Sefer Devarim”, “Parshas Vayeilech”, “[Divine Intellectual Wonders](#)”- R. Moshe Heigh.

In his comments on the *Chizkuni*, Rav Moshe Menachem Aharon explains: According to the *Chizkuni*, since Moshe instructed Yehoshua that he should read it, we derive that all kings are to read the portions of the Torah for *Hakhel*. It comes out from this that Yehoshua had the status of a king. He expands the topic much further, but we will not get into this now. These are some proofs to the royal status of Moshe and Yehoshua. Despite this, one can easily argue that they were not formally crowned as “*melachim*” [kings] the way our other kings, such as Shaul and Dovid, were. If so, we truly did not have a genuine “*melech*” until AFTER conquering and settling in *Eretz Yisroel*.

All technical points aside, we can derive some important lessons from this. The main one is that our victories are ultimately credited to Hashem. It was His wish that we realize His involvement in our lives, so He delayed the permission to appoint a king until after we entered the land. In that way, we would attribute our victory to Him. Similarly, we must continuously recognize the Heavenly assistance we receive each and every moment.

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