

הפטרה לפרשת "זכור"

HAFTORAH OF PORROSHAS "ZOCHOIR"

*The Haftorah is taken from the first Sefer of Shmuel,
Chapter 16, Pessukim 1 — 34 (Ashkenazzim start at Possuk 2 of that Chapter) inclusive.*

1. We are commanded in the Torah to "always remember what Ammolayk did to us when we were on our way out from Egypt" (*see the notes to PORROSHAS "ZOCHOIR"*) with the implication that this public "remembering" should be at least once a year. Our Chachommim, of blessed memory, instituted that this commandment should be carried out by means of the special Torah reading for Maftir on the Shabbos immediately before Purim. This is a most fitting time because the festival of Purim celebrates our deliverance by HaShem from the plot of Hommon, who prided himself on being a direct descendent of the Ammolaykite king Aggag (*see the Megillas Ester, where those miraculous events are all set out*) and our Haftorah is the account of the battle against the Ammolaykites in the time of King Shaul. Incidentally, our Chachommim point out for us that if not for King Shaul's misplaced compassion which delayed the execution of Aggag, we would not have had to endure the very real and frightening threat of his descendent Hommon so many years later.
2. Our Haftorah opens with HaShem's instruction through Shmuel HaNovvi to the newly-crowned King Shaul to go to war against the warlike Ammolaykites who had been sending in mujahidin terrorists to harass the people and the countryside. King Shaul immediately mustered a large army of fighting men and, after warning-off the friendly clan of Kaynites, he led the people into battle against Ammolayk and vanquished them, capturing their king Aggag alive together with a great amount of booty. But he had erred once before when he joined battle with the Plishtim without waiting for Shmuel to be at his side and he erred this time too in that he spared some of the Ammolaykites and their king despite being warned not to. The consequences come quickly. HaShem tells Shmuel that He is angry with Shaul and has taken the kingship from him to give it to someone better. All night long, Shmuel begs HaShem to forgive Shaul but to no avail. The next morning, he makes his way to Shaul and confronts him about his disobedience of HaShem's instructions — and tells him of HaShem's anger and its implications for his kingship. This Haftorah gives us an opportunity to learn lessons from this period in our history.
3. Only a few short years previously, the people had asked Shmuel HaNovvi for a king. Shmuel had stood at the leadership of the Nation and had aged quickly in their service and now seemed to be coming to the end of his life. His sons, although they were great people, were not as great as their father was and the people did not want them to be their leaders. They wanted a king "like all the peoples round us." In itself, there was no harm in that demand — in HaShem's plan for His People, there *is* to be a king. But that king is to come from the Tribe of Yehudah and the demand for a king at that juncture was really premature. Nevertheless, if a king is what the people want, a king they shall have. And if the time had not arrived yet for a king from the Tribe of Yehudah, there would have to be an interim monarchy, so to speak, and for this interim king HaShem told Shmuel to anoint Shaul ben Kish of the Tribe of Binyomin. In all of the Nation, he was the most

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- worthy. A man of noble righteousness and of imposing appearance, he was a man with brave qualities of leadership as well as refined humility. It was understood that the House of Shaul was a monarchy that would not endure for it would have to make way for the House of Yehudah, but even so, it could have lasted for many, many years and indeed could have had a role as a deputy leader (though not king) under a King of Yehudah if Shaul would not have erred in the dramatic ways that he did.
4. When HaShem appointed Shaul to be the first ever king of the Jewish People, he granted him **רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ** — the Divine Spirit — to supplement and enhance his natural qualities of leadership, so that he should rule over His people with sagacity and wisdom. But after the débâcle of, first, the battle against the Plishtim (when Shaul was panicked into going into battle before Shmuel had come) and secondly, the present battle against Ammolayk, when Shaul was mistakenly merciful, HaShem deposed him from being king and that Divine Spirit was taken from him. After being endowed with **רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ**, to have it taken away — the result in Shaul was that he was smitten with a terrible black depression and a deep melancholia. During his attacks of depression, Shaul was not able to see straight and, truly sick man that he was, he tried to do away with Dovid, his own son-in-law and the appointed successor to the throne, who in his eyes was a usurper and traitor to the king (“**מוֹרְד בְּמַלְכוּת**”) and deserving of the death penalty. (See also **HAFTORAH TO SHABBOS EREV ROSH CHODESH**.) As a matter of fact, Shaul was never punished for trying to kill Dovid for he was a stricken man and sick.
 5. Despite appearances, the enmity between Ammolayk and ourselves is not because they attacked us, a peaceful, defenceless and weary people on our way out from the slavery of Egypt to our own country, for if that were the reason, we would be under an obligation to hate and pursue and take vengeance against many other nations and peoples whose encounters with us through the centuries and millennia have been many times more vicious. No, our hatred of Ammolayk is a command of HaShem because Ammolayk set themselves up as the enemy of HaShem and of everything G-dly. But because they obviously can't get at G-d, they attack His People and that was the reason that they attacked us then in the Wilderness. (And that, despite their “rationalizations” and “explanations” to justify their hatred of us, is the true reason for the vicious anti-Semites who hate us — it is because we are G-d's Chosen People.) The attack by Ammolayk then was only the first instance of that hatred against G-d. (See **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : בשלח**.)
 6. The battle that Shaul was to fight against Ammolayk was to have been the completion of the battle we fought in the Wilderness under the leadership of Mosheh our Teacher. It was to have been a battle against the haters of G-d, purely because they were haters of G-d. To take any spoils, as Shaul did, annulled the very purpose of that battle and irretrievably reduced it to no more than an ordinary mercenary battle. The war that was supposed to teach peace through the destruction of those that proclaimed themselves the enemies of G-d and thus bring peace to the world was reduced and diminished to be an ordinary battle for loot, fuelled by vengeance.
 7. Our Chachommim, of blessed memory, tell us that one of the important lessons we are to learn from Shaul is to obey the word of HaShem and to take care not to be more righteous than HaShem Himself. When Shmuel told Shaul that he was to attack Ammolayk and utterly destroy them, he was sorely troubled. After all, the command was terrible and ferocious: “Go now and smite Ammolayk, utterly destroy all that he has and have no pity on them. You are to kill man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and

donkey!" Indeed, because this command ran so fiercely against the compassionate nature of any normal human being and how much more so against the especially merciful and kind character of the Jewish People, for that reason Shmuel HaNovvi had to impress upon Shaul his duty to obey this dreadful command from HaShem. For HaShem knows the future and when He does give us a command whereby we are to be instrumental in forging that future, and He tells us exactly what to do, it is not for us to try to interfere in HaShem's plans. If we do, at the time it might seem as if we have ameliorated a harsh order but then, when events unfold, oftentimes the horrific results of a supposed kindness can be unspeakable and horrific cruelty to so many others, if not at that time, then later.

8. By way of an example, the miserably misguided idiot woman who stopped the young Adolf Hitler from committing suicide can be said to be directly responsible for the death of over fifty million people, so many of them in hideously cruel circumstances. Of course, nobody can dare to say who is going to grow into a Hitler. Nobody, that is, except HaShem. In this rare instance of HaShem commanding the destruction of Ammolayk and the ridding of evil even before it had materialised, Shaul committed a terrible wrong which had far-reaching results down to today. Our Chachommim tell us that Shaul wrestled with himself that night over the command of Shmuel. He wondered whether it was possible that HaShem would command such slaughter. Maybe Shmuel was exaggerating HaShem's command, perhaps. Might it be his, Shaul's, duty, that despite the clear command from HaShem, he, Shaul, should nevertheless show some compassion. After all, such wanton destruction is a sin! If already one unsolved murder calls forth a whole ceremony of expiation, how much more wrong is it to kill so many people and such valuable livestock — which can be used in sacrifices to HaShem! But our Chachommim teach from here, "Do not be overly righteous!" They warn that "anyone who is merciful when he has to be cruel, in the end turns out to be cruel when he should be merciful." See how Shaul was merciful to Aggag and some of his henchmen and then ended up pursuing to the death the innocent Dovid!
9. From this sad figure of the fallen king we learn too how a person becomes attached to power and honour. Our Chachommim point out for us how when Shmuel came to anoint Shaul as king, he hid away, so much did he dislike being in a position of authority over others. In fact, Shaul was humble to a fault, as indeed on one occasion Shmuel had had to rebuke him, "Even though you are a small person in your own eyes, remember! you are the leader of the Tribes of Israel!" Yet once he was king, and then kingship was taken away from him, he struggled to hold on to power. He could not bear that the honour was taken from him and he viewed Dovid as a traitor deserving to be killed. In the words of Rabbi Yehudah ben Tabbai (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Nosson, Chapter 10, Paragraph 3*): If anyone would have told me before I came to this high position, "Take the position!" I would have harassed him to death! But now that I am in this high position anyone who tells me, "Get down!" I would pour a kettle of boiling water over his head — so great is the attraction of power! For as difficult as it might be to assume power, it is more difficult to divest oneself of power."
10. It must be emphasised that despite his shortcomings, Shaul was a righteous man. As said above, at the time when HaShem chose him to be the first ever King of the Chosen People, there was no one who was greater than he in Torah and Fear of G-d in the entire Nation. He was a true servant of HaShem and dedicated his life to HaShem's People. Eventually he gave his life for them, too. With all that, the greater the person, the greater his responsibility and because he did wrong, he was rejected by HaShem.