

# PARSHAT KI TEITZEI

September 29, 2020 – 9 Elul 5780

Annual (Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19): Hertz p. 840

Haftarah (Isaiah 54:1-10): Hertz p. 857

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## Torah Portion Summary

Using different ways of counting mitzvot finds either 72 or 74 of the Torah's mitzvot – either way, more than 10 percent of the 613 – in this parsha. It opens with three difficult laws – the treatment of a woman captured in war, the rights of the first-born son of an unloved wife, and the punishment of a “wayward and defiant” son. The parsha continues with a variety of mitzvot. A person must return lost property to its owner. A person must help someone trying to raise a fallen animal. Men and women may not wear clothing associated with the other gender. A person must shoo away the mother bird before taking eggs or chicks from her nest. The roof of a house must have a parapet or railing. Mixtures – of different types of seeds in a single field, of an ox and an ass yoked together, or wool and linen in a single cloth – are prohibited. A man who marries a woman and then falsely claims she was not a virgin is flogged, fined, and forbidden to divorce her. If the claim is true, the woman is put to death. Adulterers, both male and female, are to be put to death. Laws concerning rape are given. The Torah names those who may not be “admitted into the congregation of the Lord.” Laws concerning impurity and hygiene in military camps are given. A runaway slave must not be returned to his master. Cult prostitution is forbidden. Jews may not take interest on loans to other Jews. A person must fulfill his or her vows. A man is permitted to divorce his wife. Laws concerning collateral on loans are given. No one may oppress the powerless – poor laborers, strangers, widows, and orphans. The rituals of *yibum*, Levirite marriage, and *chalitzah* are given. A person may use or even own only completely honest weights and measures. We are commanded to remember *Amalek*.

I. You shall not have in your pouch alternate weights, larger and smaller. You shall not have in your house alternate measures, a larger and a smaller. You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures, if you are to endure long on the soil that the Lord your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 25:13-15)

1. It is forbidden to keep an inaccurate measure in your house, even if you do not use it for measuring, and even if it is used as a chamber pot, lest someone use it [innocently] for its proper purpose. (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 231:3)
2. The Talmud states that the punishment for inaccurate measures is more severe than the punishment for incest. Someone who committed incest can repent. Complete repentance for someone who constantly deceives the public in weights or measures, however, is almost impossible, since it is obligatory to return that which was stolen to every individual who was cheated. (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Love Your Neighbor*, pp. 315-316)
3. Throughout the Talmudic period the rabbis appointed agronomoi – a Greek word for market commissioners – whose job it was to inspect measures and weights and to fix prices for basic commodities (Talmud Bava Batra 89a). The agronomoi eventually disappeared, but the ideal was still there as late as the nineteenth century, when Rabbi Israel Salanter wrote: “As the rabbi must inspect periodically the slaughtering knives of the shoachim in town to see that they have no defect, so must he go from store to store to inspect the weights and measures of the storekeepers” (Dov Katz, *Tenuat Hamussar*, Vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1996, p. 281). (Rabbi David Golinkin, “Some Basic Principles of Jewish Business Ethics,” *United Synagogue Review*, Spring 2003)
4. “If you will heed the Lord your God diligently, doing what is upright in His sight” (Exodus 15:26) – In business dealings. This teaches that if someone is honest in his business dealings and the spirit of his fellow creatures takes delight in him, it is accounted to him as though he had fulfilled the whole Torah. (Mekhilta, Vayassa 1)

5. Rava said, "When a person is brought to judgment, the following questions will be asked: Did you conduct your business affairs honestly? Did you study Torah regularly? Did you bring children into the world? Did you hope for salvation? Did you argue with wisdom? Did you understand one thing from another?" (Talmud Shabbat 31a)

### Sparks for Discussion

Logically, we should know that inaccurate weights and measures are forbidden by the prohibition of theft. Why do you think the Torah makes this prohibition explicit? What do you imagine a person brought before the heavenly court would be asked? Why does Rava say that the first, and therefore most important, question has to do with ethical business practices? Today manufacturers often disguise price increases by reducing the quantity of product in each container – a can of coffee that once held one pound now holds twelve ounces, the two-liter soda bottle is redesigned and now holds one and a half liters. Does this violate the law of honest weights and measures? Why do you say that?

II. Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt – how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when the Lord your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

1. This is evidently the reason why we were commanded to blot out the memory of Amalek, since they came and fell upon the defenseless and weary without any pretext whatsoever. The Children of Israel were not entering their territory and it was purely a wanton attack. "Amalek" against whom the Almighty declared eternal war is not any more an ethnic or racial concept but is the archetype of the wanton aggressor who smites the weak and defenseless in every generation. (Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim*, p. 253)
2. We were commanded to remember what Amalek did to the Israelites – that he was the first to attack them when they went out from Egypt... For all were in fear of them [the Israelites], as they heard of the great feats which the Eternal Lord wrought for them in Egypt. Yet the Amalekites, with their evil heart and evil temperament, paid no heed to all this, and they attacked them. As a result of this, they removed the great fear of them from the heart of the other nations. (Sefer Hachinuch--attributed to Rabbi Aharon of Barcelona, 13th century, Spain)
3. "Undeterred by fear of God." This phrase explains why Amalek is more despised than any of the many other nations that waged war against Israel. Had Amalek made a brave frontal attack like the others, defying both God and its intended human victims, the crime would not have been so heinous. But Amalek did fear people – that is why it chose to ambush the Jews who straggled at the rear of the nation, the people who were faint and exhausted, and least able to defend themselves. By doing so, Amalek showed special contempt for God. (Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, cited in the Stone Edition Chumash (Artscroll), edited by Rabbi Nosson Scherman)

### Sparks for Discussion

Why is Amalek singled out from all the nations that fought the Israelites? Rabbinic tradition holds that Haman was a descendent of Amalek; some modern Jews refer to the Nazis as Amalek. Should we consider all enemies of Israel and the Jewish people to be Amalek? Why? Is it possible to make peace with Amalek?