

A person giving Bikurim praises Hashem as he gives his first fruits. He includes:

וַיְבִאֵנוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן-לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וּדְבָשׁ:

“And bringing us to this place, and giving us this Land, a land of flowing milk and honey.” (Davarim 26:9).

Before understanding this pasuk understand the context. The Bikurim giver is mentioning this bit of history when giving the Bikurim. Such a statement is not said by any other korban offering or tithe. This is because the holiday of First Fruits (Chag HaBikurim) which we now call Shavuos, has everything to do with the person feeling like a partner in the process, and not just giving a tax on income. There is no size that must be given by Bikurim, just like teruma does not have one (though it is estimated at 2%). Bikurim is not a tithe, a percentage of gains. It is a token of gains to come. It is a korban, as it is placed before the mizbeach. (Ibid 26:4). It is a farmer’s yearly affirmation to appreciate farming in the Land. Going out of slavery, escaping destruction, and going free had an end goal. Hashem “brought us to this place ... that is flowing milk and honey.” First fruits are coming in, summer harvest is growing, the future is bright. It is a celebration of future potential and connecting to the Producer.

“And bringing us to this place.” *This place* is referring to Sodom when the messengers tell Lot they are there to destroy it. (Bereishis 19:13). Yaakov refers to Luz as “the place” when he has his dream there. (Ibid 28:17). The nation quarreled with Moshe complaining, “why did you bring us to this evil place” after Miriam died and the water ran dry. (Bamidbar 20:4). Moshe refers to where he instructed Bnei Yisroel on the eastern Yarden shore as “this place.” (Devarim 1:31). This place is not simply where a person stands but is the exact place the person is meant to be. The messengers were directed to destroy a specific place, they were where they had to be. Similarly, Yaakov had a dream in a specific place, he was where he had to be. Same with Bnei Yisroel as they trekked toward the Land. Hashem put them exactly where they had to be. The Bikruim bringer says “this place.” I am exactly where I am supposed to be. The future is set up from here and I declare I remember my past as I look toward the future.

Also, “bringing” denotes a reluctance. Bnei Yisroel complained along the way. They did not want to go willingly. Hashem knew what was best and brought them, anyway.

“And giving us this Land.” The **אֶרֶץ** makes it a proper noun, certainly referring to Eretz Yisroel. There is no mention of kivush (conquering). Bnei Yisroel did not earn the Land and nor did they win it in battle. Hashem *gave* it to them. With this perspective the farmer understands that the first fruit are also given to the farmer. It is an offering back to the place (the Whom) it came from with hopes of more to come.

“A land.” He mentions the land again, but now refers to the soil. Now he is thanking Hashem for the soil that produced the fruit.

“Flowing milk and honey.” Many translate the phrase as flowing *with* milk and honey. There is no “with.” Also, the land flows milk and honey. Flowing with milk and honey makes it sound like the land flows, too. The land actually flows milk and honey. It gushes it out. Sure, neither come directly from the ground as honey comes from dates and milk comes from goats. However, it is the land that gushes these because it sustains the date trees and the goats’ grazing. Not only can the land produce grain, trees, flowers, and vegetables. It can actually nourish the dates to supply abundant honey. It can nourish the goats to supply abundant milk. The farmer is giving fruit. However, he is connecting the fruit back to the tree and back to the ground. He realizes the fruit is just a small part, a token, of what the land can produce.

There is a connection between Bikurim and Pesach. Pesach observance also commenced after the Bnei Yisroel entered the Land. (Shmos 13:5). The point of the Haggadah is not about how we used to live in the land. It is about the future redemption. Mentioning the first residence in the land is not the point of Pesach. That is the point of Tisha B’av. Haggadah is about hope for the future. It ends at “Hashem freed us from Mitzryaim with a mighty hand, outstretched arm, with awesome power, with signs and wonders.” (Ibid 26:8). That is the point of Pesach. The taking out just like Hashem will take Jews out of their current exile. For the Bikurim giver, however, the point is the Land, enjoying its gifts and potential, and realizing his future is dependent on staying in the Land. Also, the farmer connects the “signs and wonders” to his farming. It is the same Hashem with the same signs and wonders that yields the crop and produce.

BONUS SHTIKEL

When giving the Bikurim the giver says, “An Aramean sought to destroy my forefather; and he went down to Mitzrayim and sojourned there with a small number of people, and there, he became a great, mighty, and numerous nation. And the Mitzryim treated us cruelly and afflicted us, and they imposed hard labor upon us.” (Devarim 26:5-6). Who was the Aramean?

While the Pesach Haggadah uses the verse to prove how bad Lavan was, the Aramean in the verse said by the bringer of Bikurim is not Lavan. There is no connection between “An Aramean sought to destroy my forefather” and “he went down to Mitzrayim.” Lavan did not send Yaakov down to Mitzrayim.

We can say that Lavan did cause Yaakov to go down to Mitzrayim. (See M’M Bonus Shtikel Parshas Vayetzei 5782). However, from the pesukim it is clear it was the Midianites, not the brothers, that brought Yoseph to Mitzrayim and then the family followed voluntarily. (See M’M Bonus Shtikel Parashas Vayeshev 5782). Therefore, the pasuk is not talking about Lavan. It is talking about Balaam.

For more about who Balaam was and how we prove he was the Aramean, see Maamarei Mordechai on Parshas Balak 5781. Therefore, it is Balaam the Aramean that is referred to in the pasuk by the Bikurim giver. The Bikurim giver is reciting the hardship Bnei Yisroel faced in getting to where they were. *An Aramean, Balaam, sought to destroy my forefather.* It is singular tense because it is personal. Balaam tried to curse Yisroel and destroy it. Balaam keeps referring to them as “Yaakov.” (Bamidbar 23:7, 10, 21, 23, and 24:5). He was joining Moav (Lot) and Midian (from Avraham) in a family dispute against Yaakov. Additionally, *my forefather went down to Mitzrayim and lived there with a small number but became great.* (Devarim 26:5). Then he talks about the affliction to Pharaoh and how Hashem took them out and brought them to Eretz Yisroel. (Ibid 26:6-9). The order of the recitation is not chronological. It is based on hardship level and the giver is mentioning two hardships. Pharaoh wanted to oppress the Hebrews but needed them alive in order to be slaves. He refused to give them up. Balaam wanted to curse Bnei Yisroel and completely destroy them. The Bikurim giver says despite these two major adversaries, here I am, in this Land, and I have first fruits to bring.