YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**PARASHAT KI TETZE**

The War Over the Future of the World

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Step One – awareness

In this *shiur* we will explore the dual voice of the text in relation to Amalek. We have two units, each offering a different view of the motives of Amalek and the proper attitude towards this people. We will start by reviewing the unit on Amalek in *Sefer* *Devarim*, then examine the unit in *Sefer* *Shemot*, and consider the relationship between them.

“Remember what Amalek did to you by the way when you came out of Egypt; how he met you by the way and smote the hindmost of you, all who straggled at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God gives you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.” (*Devarim* 25:17-19)

“Remember” – What is commanded is here not a practical action but rather a consciousness. The unit is introduced with the instruction to “remember” and concludes with the instruction “do not forget.” Together, they recall Amalek’s work as a topic or theme in the spiritual world. This is the topic of the first two verses – the understanding and memory of what Amalek did. Only in the third verse does the text move on to the action to which this consciousness should give rise. The command is formulated in the singular, appealing not to the individual but rather to the nation as a collective entity. “That which Amalek did to you” – likewise, as a collective entity. “When you came out of Egypt” – you had just left Egypt; you had not yet gained your bearings, and with no shame or mercy Amalek attacked. “How he met you (“happened upon you”) by the way” – he attacked you arbitrarily, by surprise, unprovoked and with no reason. “And smote the hindmost of you” – not with military courage, face to face, but rather like a thief in the night he came and attacked from the rear. “All who straggled” – he found the feeble stragglers and pounced on them. “When you were faint and weary” – you, as a nation, were at a difficult moment, faint and weary, and he exploited this weakness, attacking and picking on the easiest targets.[[1]](#footnote-1) “And did not fear God” – since this phrase specifies no subject, there are two ways of reading it: either as a reference to Amalek, who did not fear God,[[2]](#footnote-2) and thus an expression of the immoral nature of his behavior;[[3]](#footnote-3) or as a reference to Israel who did not fear God – and therefore were attacked by Amalek, who took advantage of their (spiritual) weakness.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The verse calls upon Am Yisrael throughout its generations to remember what was perpetrated against it by another nation – Amalek. It is important to remember the actions of those who violated the most elementary moral norms; those who acted in a despicable manner towards a nation that had just set out on its path, following long years of hard labor.

A war for the future of the world

Following the command to keep this memory in our consciousness, the text moves on to action:

“Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God gives you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.”

This command has a specific time-frame: “When the Lord your God gives you rest….” During the process that will lead to rest between you and your enemies, you will be responsible for wiping out the memory of Amalek. This description relates to a future stage: when the processes of reconciliation between Israel and its surrounding enemies are set in motion, then the obligation to go out and fight Amalek will apply. What is the purpose of this war? Why is it postponed for such a distant future? The point of departure for this war is not the memory from the past; indeed, the timing of the war in the distant future indicates that the episode in the past is not the issue.[[5]](#footnote-5) The timing of the command seems to point to the future as an expression of the purpose of the war. A time will come when God will give you rest from your enemies, but it is precisely then that Amalek may rise up *as in the past*. In the past, he attacked you “on the way when you came out of Egypt.” In the future, too, it may be precisely at the stage when there is a process of reconciliation and a move towards rest between you and your enemies, that he will awaken and have his say.

What is the connection between that future situation and the past? Why does Amalek’s first attack have any bearing on his later one? What is the basis for the assumption that it is specifically at a time of reconciliation that he will present himself as an obstacle and an adversary? The keys to these questions would seem to lie in the opening words of the unit, which are its basis and foundation: “Remember what Amalek did to you” – this is not a command about nostalgia, but rather an invitation into the inner world of the spirit, to a memory that includes contemplation of the question – what happened in that war? What prompted Amalek to launch that attack? An understanding and internalization of the logic of the war will facilitate an understanding of what the future holds in store, and how to prepare for it.

Amalek’s motives

“Remember what Amalek did to you” – the text could have merely described the act in and of itself – “what Amalek did.” The focus on “*to you*” indicates an act directed towards you specifically; it reflects the opposition that Amalek hold towards the character and path of Am Yisrael. Further on we will note a different focus in the text, in the unit in *Sefer Shemot*, where “Amalek” is described in contrast to “Israel,” highlighting the elevated identity of the latter, who serve as God’s representatives in the world. Here, the subject is “to you” – as a nation, in the personal and human sense. “When you came out of Egypt” – not “at the time of *the Exodus [*impersonal*]* from Egypt” but rather from your perspective at the time. “How he met *you* by the way” – once again, his act was directed against you; “and smote the hindmost *of you*,” “all who straggled *at your rear*,” “when *you were faint* and weary, and did not fear God.” Again and again the text emphasizes the image of Amalek as being focused on the path and the character of Am Yisrael. There is a characteristic, a spiritual expression, that exists within Am Yisrael, which antagonizes him. This was so in the past, when you came out of Egypt, and so it will be in the future, too, when you are acting to perfect the world. And what is this characteristic? At this stage, the question remains open; we will return to it later on.

We conclude this section with a continuation of our reading of the verses, with an awareness of the new meaning that we now detect in the words: “You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” To “wipe out,” “erase,” “blot out.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The blotting out applies not to the individuals but rather to Amalek as an entity. The subject here is the entity that is identified with Amalek and his way, and it is in relation to this entity that there is an obligation to wipe out its memory. “From under heaven” – this expression creates a boundary and a context. This is not heavenly justice for the past, but rather a struggle for the future of “this world.” “From under heaven” is the dwelling place of human beings, and their responsibility makes it obligatory that they wage war against those who threaten their existence. Where Amalek rejects the rules of the game, choosing instead to violate and corrupt them, he loses his right to exist.

Amalek in Sefer Shemot

“Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Refidim. And Moshe said to Yehoshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand. So Yehoshua did as Moshe had said to him, and fought with Amalek; and Moshe, Aharon and Chur went up to the top of the hill. And it was that when Moshe held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moshe’s hands were heavy, and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat on it, and Aharon and Chur supported his hands, the one of the one side, and the other on the other side, and his hands were steady until the setting of the sun. And Yehoshua harried Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” (*Shemot* 17:8-13)

Before paying closer attention to the details, let us consider the scene as a whole. Amalek comes and fights, and Moshe’s first reaction is to instruct Yehoshua to choose men and to go out and fight. He also declares that “tomorrow” he will stand at the top of the hill with the staff of God in his hand. Yehoshua carries out the task he is given, and afterwards Moshe, Aharon and Chur are described as ascending the hill. At this point we would expect to find a description of what is going on at center stage – on the battlefield. However, the text ignores what Yehoshua is doing, and the next two verses focus on Moshe, and how the raising and lowering of his hands affect the fighting. There is also a description of the difficulty of holding up his hands constantly, and how he manages to do so until the setting of the sun. Only after all of this do we find a brief summary of Yehoshua’s part in the episode: “And Yehoshua harried (*va-yachalosh*) Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” What he achieves is not described as “victory,” but rather as a “weakening” of Amalek. Thus, Yehoshua’s role is twice diminished in the text: firstly, the focus is on Moshe, rather than on him, and secondly, he does not bring the battle to a successful completion, but rather merely weakens him.

This inversion of what we would expect is encapsulated in the conclusion of the episode:

“And the Lord said to Moshe, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Yehoshua: that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heaven. And Moshe built an altar and called the name of it *A-donay Nissi*, for he said, Because the Lord has sworn by His throne (or, ‘for a hand is upon God’s Throne’) that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” (*Shemot* 17:14-16)

God now instructs Moshe to write the “lesson” drawn from the war, as it were: it must be written in a book, and must be announced to Yehoshua, the leader of the army, that “I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” God describes His part in the future war. Accordingly, Moshe builds an altar and called it “The Lord is my Banner” (“*nes*” is a banner, it also means a “miracle”), offering an interpretation of what has happened: it is not Yehoshua who has brought about victory, but rather God, through an action that is defined here as a miracle. In conclusion, Moshe unfolds the future picture: God swears by His Throne; as such, the war against Amalek is His, from generation to generation. These concluding words would seem to reflect the process that has taken place, and they point to its climax.[[7]](#footnote-7) It is God Who will blot out the memory of Amalek, for Amalek serves as a hand upon God’s Throne, and thus the war is one that continues from generation to generation.

*Sefer Shemot* vs. *Sefer Devarim*

A comparison between the two units presents a clear gap.

In *Sefer* *Devarim*, Amalek’s assault is on Am Yisrael as a national entity, and the subject of the unit is his violation of the most basic rules of human morality. In *Sefer* *Shemot*, his war is waged against their identity as “Israel,” and is perceived as a war against God.[[8]](#footnote-8) Am Yisrael bring God’s word to the world; they serve as God’s Throne in the world, and thus a war against them is a war against God and His Throne. In *Sefer* *Devarim*, the command is given to the nation: as a first stage, they must remember what Amalek did; they must understand and internalize it. As a second stage, they must act: they must wage war so as to blot out the name and the memory of Amalek. In *Sefer Shemot*, there is no command to the nation. The measures that Moshe takes upon Amalek’s approach – the appointment of Yehoshua to muster an army and fight – seem necessary, but it soon becomes clear that the solution to the situation does not lie in the physical realm. It is not by power of the sword that one can defeat a force that wages war against the Master of the universe. The subject is “God,” and spirituality, which are the target of the attack. The solution is for Am Yisrael to remain humble and to make room for the spirit and for God. “I will utterly blot out” – I, God; and the war is mine: “The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” In contrast to *Sefer* *Devarim*, which defines a time when there is to be war with Amalek (as part of the future processes that will build relations between Israel and the other nations), in *Sefer* *Shemot* there is no specific timing. The focus is on God’s action, which is independent of time.

What is the significance of these differences? There are many different subjects that appear in the various *Chumashim* and then are repeated in *Sefer* *Devarim*, as part of Moshe’s speech on the eve of the entry into the land. A closer look reveals that the unit in *Sefer Devarim* is not a repetition. The original unit tells a certain story, and in *Sefer Devarim*, Moshe retells it – differently. There are discrepancies in the wording, the focus, and even in the laws as presented in each instance. The nature of the discrepancy between the original unit and its repetition by Moshe is largely dependent on where the first unit appears. In our case, the original unit appears in *Sefer Shemot*, which recounts the creation of Am Yisrael. The *Sefer* comprises three stages, essentially similar to the process of the creation of man in Chapter 2 of *Sefer* *Bereishit*. The first stage is the physical creation of the nation in Israel, in the midst of the servitude and suffering – corresponding to God taking dust of the earth. The second part sees the nation standing before God at Sinai, and receiving the first and second Tablets – reminiscent of the stage at which God blows life into man’s nostrils. The third part of *Sefer Shemot* describes the construction of the *Mishkan*: “Let them make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (*Shemot* 25:8). This corresponds to the stage where “man became a living soul” – the full natural dimension of man, which now comprises something of God Himself that dwells in this world.

Like *Sefer Shemot*, *Sefer Devarim* describes a process of creation. This time it is not the creation of the nation that is described, but rather the nation as creator. Forty years of wandering in the wilderness have gone by; a new generation has arisen and is ready to enter the land. The description here concerns that which will happen, in the wake of different processes and developments, over the course of which the nation will create life systems and assume responsibility for them. Ultimately, God will come to rest His Presence in these life systems. *Sefer Shemot* deals with the actual formation of the nation; *Sefer Devarim* deals with that formation in its future contexts, at the stage where there will already be connections between the different elements, and they will include many different facets and dimensions*. Sefer Shemot* deals with “beginnings,” while *Sefer Devarim* deals with the future; the ultimate destiny.

Thus, Amalek’s appearance and attack is viewed in *Sefer Shemot* and in *Sefer Devarim* from two different perspectives. In *Sefer Shemot*, the nation has just come out of Egypt; God has just entered the world of Bnei Yisrael, redeeming them from slavery, and His presence in their world is powerful and significant. This presence of God and its dimension of transcendence is what so disturbs Amalek, and so he presents himself, ready to wage war. In response, God declares, as it were: If he is coming to fight against Me, then the struggle will be conducted accordingly: “I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek,” “the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” *Sefer Devarim* offers the perspective of forty years later. Bnei Yisrael have developed in significant ways, and now the nation itself embodies spirituality. This is reflected throughout the *Sefer*: the nation is to enter the land, create life systems, ensure that they function in a precise and moral manner- and then God will cause His Presence to dwell in their midst. These connections will take place within the human arena that is in their hands. The creation – that which they will build up in the land – is theirs, and so is the responsibility for it. Within this context, Moshe now sees a different picture. It is not against God that Amalek seeks to fight, but rather against the nation itself, its path, its aspirations, the connections that it will bring to the world, and its ability to view everything as one, and to disseminate that message.

The morality of the war against Amalek

Much has been written and argued concerning the morality of wiping out Amalek. Let us consider this question in light of our two units. In *Sefer* *Shemot*, there is no command to Am Yisrael to go out and fight against Amalek. The text views this war as a war against God. Israel’s part in this war is its faith – or “raising of its hands,” like Moshe.[[9]](#footnote-9) Even if there is a human part in the endeavor, its effect will be a “weakening” of the other side, not an all-out victory.[[10]](#footnote-10) In *Sefer* *Devarim* there is a commandment, but it is given within a very clearly defined context: “When the Lord your God gives you rest from all your enemies round about….” The context presents the subject: in a future reality, as part of the process of reconciliation between Israel and the nations of the world, you will have to engage in war against Amalek. This war is essentially a war about morality; not a war over the past, but rather a war for the future. It is a war over the values that will bring peace and rest between Israel and its neighbors. Reconciliation testifies to a narrowing of the gap between the path of Am Yisrael and the path of the other nations, as well as a new language of connection that appears in the world. In contemporary terms, Amalek as described in *Sefer* *Devarim* is reminiscent of the terrorism that now threatens mankind. Processes of reconciliation are happening in the world, connections are being forged, and essentially they are leading the world towards the future. At the same time, there is world terror, which does not accept the rules of the game and tries with all its strength to stop this process.[[11]](#footnote-11) In this context the command is given: “Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God gives you rest from all your enemies round about” – when Israel assumes a new position on the world stage, then they must fight against those who will not allow this vision to become reality.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In the Oral Law

“It has been taught: Rabbi Yossi said, Three commandments were given to Israel when they entered the land: to appoint themselves a king; to cut off the seed of Amalek, and to build themselves the Temple, but we cannot know which of them has priority. However, since the text says, ‘Because the Lord has sworn by His throne that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation’ (*Shemot* 17), I therefore conclude that the appointment of the king comes first, for ‘throne’ implies a king, as it is written, ‘And Shlomo sat upon the Throne of God as king’ (*Divrei Ha-yamim* I 29). But still we do not know [out of the remaining two commandments] whether the building of the Temple comes first, or whether it is the cutting off of the seed of Amalek that takes precedence. But since the text says, ‘When the Lord your God gives you rest from all your enemies… then the place which the Lord will choose…’ – in other words, the cutting off of the seed of Amalek takes preference…. Accordingly, it is said of David, ‘And it was, when the king dwelled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from his enemies round about…’ (*Shmuel* II 7), and the passage continues, ‘and the king said to Natan, the prophet: See, now, I dwell in a house of cedars….’” (*Sanhedrin* 20b)

This midrash identifies three commandments that are given to Israel when they enter the land. Rabbi Yossi asserts that all three belong to the historical context of their dwelling in the land, but we have no way of knowing, *a priori*, which should be addressed first – i.e., we do not know the essence of the process. He deduces that the appointment of the king must come first, based on the fact that the unit describing the war of Amalek invokes Israelite sovereignty.[[13]](#footnote-13) The midrash then goes on to question whether the eradication of Amalek precedes the building of the Temple, or whether it should be the other way around. As proof for the first option it cites verses from *parashat* *Re’eh*:

“But when you cross over the Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God gives you to inherit, and when He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His Name to dwell there; there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which you vow to the Lord…” (12:10-11).

These verses describe a process that starts with the entry into the land, continues with the attainment of rest from enemies, and finally, when God chooses the place, the building of the Temple. In the simplest sense, the Temple will be built after peace has been made with enemies, and the war against Amalek – like the other wars – belongs to the historical period that preceded the rest. In a deeper sense, the timing of the war against Amalek is “when the Lord your God gives you rest from all your enemies round about” – in the midst of that rest, suggesting that that rest is dependent upon the struggle against Amalek. In this sense, the mention of the war against Amalek is perceived by the midrash as a reference to the realization of that rest.

The midrash describes the war against Amalek as a link in a future chain, which starts with Israelite sovereignty. In our *shiur* on *parashat Shoftim*, we noted that this represents a stage when there matures amongst the nation a desire to appoint its own leadership and thereby assume responsibility for itself.[[14]](#footnote-14) The next stage is the war against Amalek, which the midrash regards as a link in the process of rest from all the enemies. A precondition for rest from enemies is the struggle against those who will, by their very presence, halt the process of reconciliation and the connections that it represents. The third stage, the Temple, is dependent on rest from the enemies. This rest is significant, since the Temple is not just an internal matter pertaining to Am Yisrael. It is built in the days of Shlomo, who represented in his life the concepts of rest and peace.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Three commandments are given to Am Yisrael when they enter the land. The first pertaining to the sovereign position of the nation, the building up of the kingdom. The second - the eradication of Amalek – pertains to the faith that Am Yisrael has in humanity. This faith includes an extension of a hand of fraternity and rest, on one hand, but also an uncompromising war against those who will not allow that vision to be realized. All of this is a precondition for the third stage, because the Temple is not just a national institution for Israel. It is a House that serves also as an address for “the foreigner who comes from a distant land,” it is a House concerning which God promises, “My House shall be called a House of Prayer for all the nations” (*Yishayahu* 56:7).[[16]](#footnote-16)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. The midrash describes it as follows: “‘On the way’ – at a time when you were unsettled; ‘when you came out of Egypt’ – at the time of your redemption, ‘how he came upon you’ – the word ‘*karekha’* means happenstance; ‘and struck the hindmost among you’ – this teaches that he killed only those individuals who had distanced themselves from the ways of God and were weakened in their faith in Him.” (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Ki* *Tetze* 938) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rashi: “And did not fear” – Amalek [did not fear] God in causing harm to you.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In biblical terms, “fear of God” means commitment to moral rules. Thus, Avraham tells Avimelekh, “Surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me on account of my wife” (*Bereishit* 20:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibn Ezra: “‘And did not fear’ – this goes back to the first subject [of the verse] – Amalek….” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As time goes on and the episode recedes into the distant past, an instruction to wipe out Amalek on the basis of the historical accounting would increasingly become an act of vengeance devoid of context. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Similarly, “`I, I am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins” (*Yishayahu* 43:25). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. At first, Moshe thought that the solution was to be a military one. In the midst of the war he discovered that the real story was what had happened on the hill: the raising of his hands, the faith, and finally – the miracle (*nes*) that facilitated the victory. The final verse can serve as commentary on God’s words. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The introductory verse in *Shemot* states that Amalek came to fight against Israel in Refidim, pointing to the identity of the place as a significant element. This identity refers the reader back to the preceding unit, where the text describes what happened when the nation was stationed at Refidim. There was no water for the people to drink, and they quarreled with Moshe. Moshe asks, “Why do you strive with me?”, and also defines their attitude as a “test” or “tempting.” “Why do you tempt the Lord?” It appears that he means to rebuke them for not addressing themselves to God in the first place, even though it is clear that it is He Who has led them into this situation. In the background is the fact that the manna has just begun to fall – indicating very clearly God’s concern for the nation. Thus, the nation’s complaint to Moshe is understood as dissatisfaction that God is not sufficiently present. The people expect a sort of fatherly indulgence. Moshe turns to God, and God’s response is to draw closer and make His Presence more clearly felt: “And God said to Moshe, Pass before the people and take with you of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand your staff, with which you smote the river, and go. Behold, **I will stand before you** there upon the rock in Chorev, and you shall smite the rock, and water shall emerge from it, that the people may drink. And Moshe did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.” (17:5-6) God is present at the place, and Moshe strikes the rock. Thus, God does indeed accede to the covert wish of the people, and He comes to the camp. In the concluding verse, the text interprets this “testing” of God: “And he called the name of the place Masa u-Meriva, because of the strife (*riv*) of Bnei Yisrael, and because they tempted (*nasotam*) the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?” This was the concern underlying the nation’s complaint. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rav Amiel, in his *derashot*, sets forth something like this principle: “With what means do we fight against Amalekism and all the various warmongers? … Judaism believes that “the accuser cannot become the defense”… Terrorism cannot be removed from the world by means of terrorism by the other side, and therefore we do not fight against might using might, and we do not fight against the sword using a sword… ‘Write this for a memorial in a book’ – meaning, the war against the sword using the Book… Even concerning Amalek, the Torah emphasizes mainly the ‘memory of Amalek’ – (i.e.,) that which Amalek made into a memorial, a symbol, a lofty ideal… and it is this ‘memory of Amalek’ that we are commanded to blot out.” (*Derashot El Ami*, part III). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Clearly, wherever physical harm is involved, the principle “One who arises to kill you – kill him first” applies, but this rule has nothing to do with the additional value of the war against Amalek. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The comparison with the contemporary situation is more complex than the picture we have drawn here, because at the same time connections are also being forged that are difficult to view as leading to rest for Israel from its enemies; some of them actually cause the world to regress. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. We have already noted that the command in this *parasha* is given in the singular; it is addressed to Israel as a sovereign entity, and this means that the command is not given to individuals. On this basis, the Rambam deals with these laws in his Laws of Kings, and *Sefer Yere’im* similarly understands the law as applying to the nation and to the king. In contrast, Minchat Chinukh, the Meshekh Chokhma and Abravanel view the commandment as applying to the individual. This latter interpretation is difficult to reconcile with the plain meaning of the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. He understands the words ‘God’s Throne’ (*Shemot* 17:16) as hinting to the kingdom of Israel (which is God’s Throne) – thereby framing Amalek’s sin as a sin against the king and the sovereignty of Israel. This interpretation does not reflect the plain meaning of the text. According to the plain meaning, the Divine Throne embodies God’s presence in the world. The midrash connects this with Israelite sovereignty, which facilitates God’s presence in the land, in the broader sense. As noted, the allusion to sovereignty arises from the verses in *Sefer* *Devarim*, too. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. We argued that the coronation of Shaul was a fulfillment of this unit only in a technical sense, but in reality was far removed from the concepts envisaged in *Sefer* *Devarim*. It was only in the days of David that the process got underway in earnest. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This is eloquently expressed in the verses: “And David said to Shlomo: My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a House to the Name of the Lord my God, but the word of the Lord came to me, saying, You have shed blood abundantly, and have made great wars; you shall not build a House to My Name, because you have shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of tranquility, and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about, for his name shall be Shlomo, and I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days.” (*Divrei* *Ha*-*yamim* I 22:7-9) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Many questions might be raised concerning the above in light of the verses in *Sefer Shmuel*, which would seem to present the commandment in a different light. The point of departure there is: “So says the Lord of Hosts: I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have and do not spare them, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (*Shmuel* I 15:2-3). The description focuses on an accounting with the past, not a future vision. Likewise, the war is not against Amalek as a people, but rather an obligation to wipe out its individuals. A local display of compassion is viewed as disobedience to God’s command, and it is over this matter that Shaul loses his kingdom. We might counter such questions by pointing out that this unit in *Sefer Shmuel* is the exception. Only once in the entire history of Am Yisrael did the king deliberately go out and pass from house to house, killing in this fashion. Later on, David fights against Amalek in a totally different way: a great number of Amalekites escape, and he does not ensure that they receive their proper punishment (*Shmuel* II 30:17). In addition, he takes the spoils of Amalek, dividing it up amongst the children of Yehuda, thereby instituting a law for future generations that the portion of those who stay to guard the army’s equipment receive the same reward as those who go out to fight. In another context, he devotes the spoils of Amalek to God (“which also King David dedicated to the Lord, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated of all the nations which he had conquered; from Aram, and Moav, and the children of Ammon, and from the Pelishtim, and Amalek, and of the spoil of Hadad-Ezer, son of Rechov, king of Tzova” – *Shmuel* II 8:11-12). We therefore submit that Shaul’s war against Amalek is a unique phenomenon related to the generation and circumstances of both *Shmuel* and Shaul, and that a great chasm separates it from the plain meaning of the text concerning Amalek. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)