

How Were Bikkurim Brought to the Temple?

Source Sheet by Rachel Buckman

One of the names of Shavuot in the Torah is the Festival of the First Fruits. These first fruits (bikkurim) are traditionally of the “seven species” – the special agricultural produce of the Land of Israel: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates (Deuteronomy 8:8). According to Jewish tradition, the bikkurim were brought to the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem, as described in the verse below.

Text 1

שמות כ"ג:י"ט

רִאשִׁית בְּכוֹרֵי אֲדָמָתְךָ תָּבִיא בֵּית ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ

Exodus 23:19

The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God...

Text 2

Additional information about how to bring the bikkurim to Jerusalem is provided in the following verse.

דברים כ"ו:ב'

(ב) וְלָקַחְתָּ מִרֵאשִׁית | כָּל-פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תָּבִיא מֵאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ וְשָׂמַתָּ בַּטֶּנָּא וְהֵלַכְתָּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם :

Deuteronomy 26:2

(2) You shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name.

Text 3

The procedure is further described in the Mishnah in Tractate Bikkurim. The text talks about the cities of the *maamad*. To facilitate a rotation of priests serving in the Temple, the country was divided into twenty-four districts (*mishmarot* or *maamadot*). The city of the *maamad* was the city where the head of the *maamad* lived. When bringing the *bikkurim*, the inhabitants of the entire district would gather in the city of the *maamad* and together travel to Jerusalem.

משנה ביכורים ג'ב-ג'

(ב) כיצד מעלין את הבכורים. כל העירות שבמעמד מתכנסות לעיר של מעמד, ולנין ברחובה של עיר, ולא היו נכנסין לבתים. ולמשכים, היה המקנה אומר ירמיה: קומו ונעלה ציון אל בית ה' אלקינו: (ג) הקרובים מביאים התאנים והענבים, והרחוקים מביאים גרונות וצמוקים. והשור הולך לפניהם, וקרניו מצפות זָהב, ועטרת של זית בראשו. החליל מכה לפניהם, עד שמגיעים קרוב לירושלים. הגיעו קרוב לירושלים, שלחו לפניהם, ועטרו את בכוריהם. הפחות, הסגנים והגזברים יוצאים לקראתם. לפי כבוד הנכנסים היו יוצאים. וכל בעלי אמונות שבירושלים עומדים לפניהם ושואלין בשלומם, אחינו אנשי המקום פלוני, באתם לשלום:

Mishnah Bikkurim 3:2-3

(2) How were the bikkurim taken up [to Jerusalem]? All [the inhabitants of] the cities of the maamad would assemble in the city of the maamad, and they would spend the night in the open street and they would not enter any of the houses. Early in the morning the officer would say: "Let us arise and go up to Zion, into the house of the Lord our God" (Jeremiah 31:5).

(3) Those who lived near [Jerusalem] would bring fresh figs and grapes, while those who lived far away would bring dried figs and raisins. An ox would go in front of them, his horns bedecked with gold and with an olive-crown on its head. The flute would play before them until they would draw close to Jerusalem. When they drew close to Jerusalem they would send messengers in advance, and they would adorn their bikkurim. The governors and chiefs and treasurers [of the Temple] would go out to greet them, and according to the rank of the entrants they would go forth. All the skilled artisans of Jerusalem would stand up before them and greet them saying, "Our brothers, men of such and such a place, we welcome you in peace."

Discussing the Texts

- What are *bikkurim*?
- Who brings *bikkurim*?
- Where are *bikkurim* brought to? Who are they given to?
- What are the *bikkurim* put in?
- Describe the trip to Jerusalem. If you had been there, what would you have seen and heard?
- What questions do you have about the *bikkurim* ceremony?