

Who interprets מקרב אחיך; the רבנן

מאן דריש מקרב אחיך רבנן –

OVERVIEW

הורדוס, who was an עבד כנעני, became the king of the בני ישראל. There were however many misgivings about his regal status since he was an עבד. The תורה states clearly מקרב אחיך תשים עליך מלך. The king must be appointed from the midst of the Jewish people. הורדוס as an עבד was not מקרב אחיך. תוספות anticipates the question, that seemingly הורדוס' anger should not have been directed to the רבנן. The פסוק states מקרב אחיך. Why was he angry at the רבנן? They did not institute this ruling.

תוספות explains:

דפשיטיה דקרא לא משמע למעוטי עבד שהוא אחיך במצות¹ אלא עובד כוכבים –

For the simple meaning of the פסוק מקרב אחיך תשים עליך מלך does not indicate that an עבד should be excluded from becoming a king. The reason is for the עבד is indeed your brother in regards to observing the מצות. Rather the term מקרב אחיך would imply that a gentile be excluded from becoming a מלך. A gentile is not obligated in any מצוות; therefore he cannot be considered אחיך. This is how we would have interpreted this verse were it not for the רבנן, and הורדוס would then have been accepted as king.

ורבנן דרשו (בבא קמא פח,א) ממובחר² שבאחיך:

However the רבנן interpreted the פסוק מקרב אחיך to mean from the choicest of your brothers. A king has to be appointed from the highest quality of the Jewish people. An עבד, obviously does not fulfill that criterion. This is the reason why הורדוס became enraged against the חכמים. For if not for the חכמים he would have been accepted fully as a proper king.

SUMMARY

The רבנן interpret the term מקרב אחיך to mean ממובחר שבאחיך; thus excluding even עבדים from becoming king. Without this דרשה, we may have thought that it comes to exclude עכו"ם.

THINKING IT OVER

Why would it have been necessary for the תורה to teach us that a gentile cannot be appointed as a מלך? Would someone have thought otherwise!

¹ See previous תוספות ד"ה כל עבד. An עבד is obligated to perform the מצוות like a woman

² It would seem that the רבנן interpret the word מקרב 'from the midst', to mean those from the core; not from those on the periphery.