

Erroneous Practices: Repeating a Verse on Shabbat Zakhor, and Repeating Megillah Verses on Purim

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Reading זָכַר and זִכָּר

In some congregations, on Shabbat Zakhor the Torah reader chants Devarim 25:19 twice, once reading the sixth-to-last word זָכַר, and then again, reading זִכָּר (or vice versa). This practice is based on the belief that two versions of this word have been passed down, one with 2 dots under the *zayin* and one with 3 dots under the *zayin*. Because people did not know which vowel is correct, some read it twice, once each way.

Accuracy is particularly important for the Shabbat Zakhor reading (Devarim 25:17–19). Hearing that portion read accurately from the Torah is considered by the Rabbis to fulfill the Torah commandment to remember Amalek's attack after the people Israel left Egypt.

Research over the last half-century leaves no question. The evidence from the oldest and most reliable manuscripts is definitive. The tenth-century Aleppo Codex was the first complete Hebrew Bible containing vowel markings, *te'amim* (tropes), and the all-important Masoretic notes. The eleventh-century Leningrad Codex, the oldest intact complete Masoretic Bible, was completed in consultation with the traditions of the Aleppo Codex. These manuscripts contain the oldest and most correct readings. The only acceptable version of this word is זָכַר, that is, 2 dots under the *zayin*.

Rabbi Mordechai Breuer ז"ל, master Masorete of this generation, studied these manuscripts and the traditions that derive from them, for decades. He wrote extensively on the question of the proper reading of *zekher*, definitively dismissing the reading with 3 dots under the *zayin*. He considered any continuation of the practice of repeating the verse to be foolishness that needlessly calls into question the authenticity of the traditions that have reached us.

Some congregations continue to read the verse twice, either not knowing why they repeat it or without regard for the evidence available. The author of the Mishnah Berurah, who instituted the practice in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, did so because he had no evidence that was definitive. He would gladly have relied on the evidence we have now.

Repeating Verses in the Megillah

Some congregations repeat two verses in the Megillah, mistakenly believing there are two traditions for each that must be honored. These repetitions are based on printers' errors that go back several centuries.

Most printed editions since the 1960s have corrected the errors. But Ashkenazic Megillot still tend to have the mistakes in them—in the nineteenth century, Ashkenazic Jews persuaded their *soferim* to correct their Megillot to match the *mistaken printed editions!* Your Megillah may contain these mistakes—Ester 8:11 should read וְלִהְרֹג, not לִהְרֹג; Ester 9:2 should read לְפָנֵיהֶם, not בְּפָנֵיהֶם. When chanting, read these words correctly, even if your Megillah contains the errors.

No verses in the Megillah should be repeated, despite evolving practices to repeat various verses, supposing alternate readings for various words.