Mishnah Bikurim, chapter 3

(1) How does one set aside firstfruits? If one goes down to his field and sees a ripening fig or a ripening cluster of grapes, or a ripening pomegranate, he ties a reed rope around it and says: Let it be brought to the priest. Rabbi Shimon says: Even so, he designates them again as firstfruits.

This is deduced from the verse which states: “And now behold I have brought the first of the fruit” (Deuteronomy 26:10), as long as it is brought, it is valid. Rabbi Shimon says: Even so, he designates them again as firstfruits after they were picked from the ground because designating firstfruits before they are detached has no validity, he deduces this from the verse which states: “That you must take from the first of all the fruit of the ground” (ibid. v. 2), just as the fruit in verse 10, must be after it was picked, so, too, fruit in verse 2, also means, designated as firstfruits after being picked, the halachah does not follow Rabbi Shimon.

(2) How were the firstfruits taken up to Jerusalem? Israel was divided into twenty four regions, or ma’amadot, corresponding to the twenty four priestly watches, each Sunday, Israelites from one ma’amad were sent to the Temple to stand with the priestly watch at sacrificial offerings for the public. All cities that constituted the ma’amad [the people bearing baskets of firstfruits] gathered in the city of the [head of the] ma’amad [so that they may go up together in large groups] and [lest they become defiled by overshadowing a corpse] they spent the night in the open square of the city without entering any of the houses.

First Rashi

1. [God] need not have begun the Torah - R' Yitzchak said: - but from “This month shall be for you [the beginning of the months],” - because it is the first commandment which Israel was commanded. - What is the reason that it began with the Book of Genesis? - It then thus because it wished to convey the message of the verse, “The power of His acts He told to His people,” - “The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, Blessed is He,” - “You are bandits, - for you conquered the lands of the seven nations who inhabited the Land of Canaan,” - “Israel will say to them, - “The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, Blessed is He,” - “You are bandits,” - and He gave it to the one found proper in His eyes.” - “By His wish He gave it to them” - “By His wish He took it from them” - and by His wish He took it from them and gave it to us.”
greeted them: Our brothers of such and such, come in peace.

(4) The flute played before them until they reached the Temple Mount. When they reached the Temple Mount, even King Agrippa would take his basket and place it on his shoulder [not allowing a servant to carry it, since he would have to hand it over to the priest, as the verse states: “And the priest will take the basket from your hand” (Deuteronomy 26:4), and would enter until he reached the Courtyard. At the approach to the Courtyard the Levites would sing the song: “I will extol You O Lord for You have raised me up and have not allowed my enemies to rejoice over me” (Psalms 30:2).

(5) The Turtle-doves [tied] on [to the outsides of] the baskets were [offered as] burnt-offerings and that [i.e., those firstfruits] which were in their hands, they would give to the priests.

(6) While the basket was still on his shoulder he would recite [the verses]: “I declare this day to the Lord your God,” (Deuteronomy 26:3) until he finishes the passage. Rabbi Yehudah says: Until “An Aramite sought to destroy my forefather” (ibid. v. 5) [the halakah does not follow Rabbi Yehudah]. When he reached “An Aramite sought to destroy my forefather,” he removed the basket from his shoulder, held it by its rim, and the priest would place his hand underneath it and wave it [bringing it in, then out, then lifting it up and then letting it down].

those that woke [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). [On the way to Jerusalem they would say: “I was glad when they said to me; Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psalms 122:1). When they reached Jerusalem they would say: “When our feet stood within your gates O Jerusalem” (Psalms 122:2), when they reached the Temple Mount they would say: “Halleluya! Praise God in his Sanctuary” (ibid. 150:1), when they reached the Temple courtyard they would say: “Let all that have breath, praise the Lord (ibid. v. 6)).

(3) Those [living] close [enough, so that the fresh fruit would not ruin] brought [fresh] figs and grapes. Those [living] far would bring dried figs and raisins. A [peace-offering] ox whose horns were bedecked with gold and a crown of olive branches upon its head, would lead the way. The flute would play before them until they reached near Jerusalem. When they reached near Jerusalem they sent [messengers to announce their impending arrival] and adorned their firstfruits [so that the nicest fruit would face the top of the basket]. The officers [who were assistants to the priests], the deputies, and the Temple treasurers, went out to meet them. According to the honor [i.e., to the size] of those entering they went out to meet them. According to the honor [i.e., to the size] of those entering they...
actual fig or grape-cluster upon which he tied the reed rope (see Mishnah 1 above), the additions to the firstfruits [which were additional fruit he added when he picked the firstfruits] and the [decorative fruit used for] decorations of the firstfruits. The additions of the firstfruits, had to be of the same kind, but the decorations of the firstfruits, could be other kinds [of decorative fruit]. The addition to the firstfruits could be eaten only in a state of purity and [if given to the priest by an am ha'aretz whose fruit was doubtful as to whether or not they were tithed] were exempt from the laws of demai, but the decorations of the firstfruits were subject to the laws of demai [and the priest had to tithe them before eating].

(11) When did they say that the addition to the firstfruits is [to be treated] as firstfruits? When it comes from the Land [of Israel], but if it does not come from the Land [if it came from beyond the Jordan (see above 1:10)], the additions to the firstfruits [which may be collected by a creditor, or for payment of a ketubah].

(12) In what respect did they say that firstfruits are the property of the priest? That he may [sell them and use the proceeds to] purchase with them slaves, property, and non-kosher animals. A creditor may take it in payment of a debt, and a woman in payment of her ketubah, as is the case of a Torah scroll [which may be collected by a creditor, or for, payment of a ketubah].

Rabbi Shimon says: There are three elements in firstfruits: The firstfruits [the basket] with fruit other than the seven species [from which firstfruits are brought].
Yehudah says: [Since it is not offered on the altar people may not treat it carefully and thus defile it, therefore he holds:] It may only be given to a priest who is a haver [and thus eats all of his food in a state of purity] and [it may not be sold, but, rather is given] as a favor. But the Sages say: It is given to members of the priestly watch [regardless, of whether, they are, or are not, haverim] and they divide it among themselves, as they do with any other consecrated items of the Temple [since anything which enters the Courtyard, even those items which are not offered on the altar, are treated with special care].