

Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation

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SHABBAT SERVICE



**July 14th - 10 AM Lolo Community "Synagogue"
12:30 PM Oneg Shabbat**

"Blessed are those whose way of life is blameless; who live by the Torah of Adonai.
Blessed are those who observe His instruction; who seek Him with all their heart." Psalm

119

Parsha Matot - Numbers 30 - 32

"Every vow and every binding oath to humble herself, her husband may confirm it or her husband may annul it."

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-רָאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה:

va-y'daber Moshe el-rashei ha-matot li-v'nei Yisra'el lemor zeh ha-davar asher tsivah Adonai

And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel saying,
"This is the word which the Lord has commanded."

אִישׁ כִּי-יִדְוֹר נָדָר לַיהוָה אִוְ-הִשְׁבַּע שְׁבַעַה לְאָסֹר אָסֹר עַל-נַפְשׁוֹ

Ish ki-yidor neder l'Adonai o-hishava shvu'ah lesor isar al-nafsho

"If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation,

לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ כְּכֹל-הַיֵּצֵא מִפִּי יַעֲשֶׂה:

lo yachel dvaro kechol-hayotse mipiv ya'aseh.

he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

Obeying God.... By Keeping His Word To Us and Our Word to Him

The Torah portion for this week, Matot (Tribes), continues from the parsha of last week, Pinchas, with God's people still encamped on the plains of Moab, East of the Jordan River opposite Jericho. This Parsha could be entitled "Vows, Midianites, and the Trans-Jordan land settlement" because these subjects neatly divide themselves into the three chapters of the Parsha. However, the one theme that encompasses the whole Parsha is "obeying God." We obey God by keeping His word...His commandments...and keeping our word to Him. In this Torah portion we will see that our words to God have meaning to Him and must be kept. God's words to His people regarding the Midianites are still in force and must be kept. We will also examine the type of people who take their focus away from their obligations to keep God's words and only consider themselves.

The Importance of Keeping One's Word

Chapter 30 begins with the only address of Moses to the heads of the tribes in the Torah. Moses explained God's law regarding vows made to Him by both men and women. Implicit in God's commands regarding vows is His categorization of men and women. Although treated separately, there are areas of commonality and areas of differentiation between the vows of men and women. Also implicit in Chapter 30 are relational aspects of life between men and women that illustrate a "chain of command" for the protection of women.

Verse 2 begins "If a man makes a vow to the Lord...." The Hebrew word for "man" is "**ish**," which is used only for man and indicates maleness as opposed to "humanness" or "mankind." Vows to the Lord by men must be kept totally and completely. There is no excuse for a man not keeping his word to the Lord! Ecclesiastes 5:5 states, "It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay." While no one is required to make a vow to the Lord, if one does do so, the vow must be performed totally and completely or the person incurs the guilt (vs.15) of sin. A vow is to do something for the Lord. It might be to give property, money, or something of value to the Lord's work.

A vow may also be to abstain from some normal function or enjoyment for a period of time, while doing God's work or communing with Him. For this Shabbat, think of some vows made in scripture. Look at Matthew 5:33-37. What is meant by "make no oath at all? (This is an example of how misinterpretations can occur by not understanding the context from the Torah from which these verses are taken.) Ask yourself how are vows different from oaths or covenants?

Scripture takes only one verse (verse 2) in Chapter 30 to basically state that a man's word is his bond. The rest of the chapter is given to various aspects of the vow of a woman. Implicit in the vow of a woman is God's view of the value of a woman "in a man's world." The Hebrew word for "woman" in verse 3 is "**Ishah**," which indicates femaleness. Therefore there are two categories of vows...one for males and another for females. The fact that women are allowed to make vows to the Lord indicates God's elevated status for women. Women can also be used in service to the Lord....as women....not just as an adjunct to the service of men. Women in their own right may give something of value to the Lord, choosing to serve Him in a specific way, or decide to abstain from something within their realm in order to become closer to the Lord. One should surely note that no other society of the time elevated women to a similar status as men. Because their status is similar but not the same as men,

God gave regulations regarding the vows of women.

The regulations for women's vows allow for their elevated status, while preserving their protection within the Jewish community. If the woman (girl) is "in her youth, living in her father's house," her vow can be annulled by her father, who is her authority. Talking with an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi this week about this section of Torah, he felt that since the Hebrew word used here means "youth," which he understands to be under 13 years old, a girl over 13 years old is bound by her vow. I wondered whether "in her father's house" modified the age limit, so that the vow of any girl (<13) or woman (>13), who resides in her father's house and is under his authority, could be annulled by her father, when he first hears of it. I prefer my view, since it follows along with the protection of women. When the woman marries, her authority is transferred from her father to her husband. The husband, then, has the ability to annul the vow of his wife, when he first hears about it. If he waits to annul her vow until later, he bears her guilt for failure to perform a vow to the Lord.

Unfinished Business: God's Word of Judgment on the Midianites

Chapter 31 continues with the unfinished business left over from Chapter 25. After Balaam had been dismissed by King Balak to "return to his place," Balaam, instead went to the Midianites. Balaam sought to earn his reward by corrupting the Jewish people through the seduction of Midianite women, who then invited the men to join with them in worshipping the Baal of Peor. God's word of judgment on the Midianites was for Moses to "...strike them, for they have been hostile to you..." (Ch. 25:17). In

Chapter 31, we see that Moses is instructed by God to carry out "the Lord's vengeance on Midian" (vs.3). Rashi comments on this verse, "whoever stands against Israel, stands against God." It is important to note that what occurs to the Midianites is judgment from God, rather than from the anger of Moses or the blood-thirstiness of God's people. Here is the definition of a "holy war," God's war of judgment; a war initiated and fought by God. God's priest, in this case Phinehas, went with the army accompanied by the holy vessels and trumpets.

Moses assembles 12,000 men, one thousand from each tribe, to go against five clans of the Midianites. The king of one of the Midianite clans, Zur, was the father of the woman, Cozbi, whom Phinehas killed in 25:15. [Ironically the Israelite army was only 1/2 of the number of God's people, who died as a result of God's plague to judge the idolaters (25:3), who had joined themselves to the idolatrous Midianite women. Commentary from the Talmud Sanhedrin 106a holds that the Midianite women were following the advice of Balaam, who remained among them in order to secure his reward, when Israel's God destroyed the idolaters among Israel.] Deuteronomy 20:1-4 tells God's people not to worry about fighting against a well armed army because God would be fighting for them.

This fact is quite evident as seen in the after-war census taken in Numbers 31:49, which tells us, "

Your servants have taken a census of men of war who are in our charge, and no man of us is missing." In the battle, all of the adult males of the Midianites, including their five kings and Balaam, who was living among them, were killed. The army returned with the captured women and children.

Moses and Eleazar meet the army outside the camp (one of the few times a High Priest is seen outside the camp). Moses is angry that the women, who had seduced Israel to sin, and the younger males, who could pass on Midianite genealogy (the male line produces nationality), had been spared. Moses gave orders that they be killed, and only the virgin girls be spared and incorporated into Israel.

This is the principle of extermination. While it may offend Western sensibilities, it was part of a holy war that was initiated on orders from God, who fought for His people. God's purpose was to eliminate the influence of idolatry from His people. This was during the time when Israel was a theocracy (rule by God) but not for today. It illustrated that God keeps His word to His people. It should also be noted that not all Midianite clans were destroyed. Midianite clans lived in other places, such as with the Ishmaelites and Amalekites (Judges 6) and in the Sinai, Negev, and trans-Jordan valley (Genesis 25).

Some of them (the Kenites of Exodus 2 & 3; Judges 1:16 & 4:11) sided with Israel.

The reason for the meeting outside the camp was so that God's camp would not be defiled by the army and the spoil having come into contact with the dead of battle. Everyone and everything would have to be purified. It is thought that some of the Rabbinic laws for making cooking pots & pans and cooking stoves & ovens kosher come from these verses on purification. Probably the ashes of the red heifer were used to purify the people who had contact with dead bodies. God told Moses that he and

Eleazar would account for and divide the spoil of war captured from the Midianites including the human spoil, animals, and valuable possessions, levying a "tax" for the support of the Levites and priests, who did not go into battle.

Two and a Half Materialistic Tribes

Today we should pay particular attention to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in **Chapter 32**. These were tribes that took their attention away from following God's promises to His people and, instead, wanted their own way. Like Lot in Genesis 13:10-11, these tribes chose "sight" over "substance;" immediate materialism over a future "promised land," according to God's promise to Abraham. Having already vanquished Sihon and Og, the kings East of the Jordan, and the

Midianites, these 2 1/2 tribes wanted to stay where they were. Although they knew that the land promised to them by God as their own "possession" was West of the Jordan River, they requested from Moses to stay where they were. The land East of the Jordan was good for cattle grazing. Evidently they were wealthy tribes, having an abundance of cattle. By "sight" they appeared to have every material thing they needed right where they were. Why follow God into a different land? Especially in America, where material possessions are abundant, it is so easy to take our focus away from God's promises and think instead of fulfilling our immediate material desires. They devised a plan with Moses, who initially was reminded of the spies at Kadesh, who did not want to take possession of their "promised land," so that the 2 1/2 tribes could have their own way. They would take their armed men across the Jordan and fight for the "promised land" with the other tribes. Only after victory would they return to their families and cattle herds East of the Jordan. If they failed to keep their "vow," they will have..."sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out" (vs.23). Comparing verses 16 and 24 in their negotiation with Moses, we find that these materialistic tribes first mention their livestock before their children. Moses corrects them, putting their children into the most important position. Their focus was on their wealth, rather than on their legacy. So the question can be asked, "Do materialistic people keep their vows?" Comparing the tribal census of the 2nd generation in Numbers 26 with the participants from these 2 1/2 tribes found in Joshua 4, we find that only about a third of their armed men participated. What were the consequences for not keeping their vow to the Lord? We will find out in our Torah portion for next week (Chapter 35) that six cities of refuge will be given for all 12 tribes. Three of the cities of refuge will be East of the Jordan for only 2 1/2 tribes. Could it be that considerably more crime exists in a land of materialism? History tells us that the tribes East of the Jordan were the first tribes to be conquered. Could it be that peoples who replace God as their primary focus also remove themselves from God's "umbrella of protection?" As was stated above, our words to God have meaning to Him and must be kept by us, guided by the **Ruach Ha Kodesh** (Holy Spirit). God's words to us will be kept by Him! Blessings to God's people occur when they keep their vows to God and focus their lives on following His promises to them!



Parsha Mas'ei - Numbers 33 - 36

אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים לצבאתם ביד משה ואהרן:

eleh mas'ei b'nei- Yisra'el asher yats'**oo** me-erets Mitsrayim l'tsiv'otam b'yad-Moshe v'Aharon

These are the journeys (stages) of the sons of Israel by which they came out from the land of Egypt by their armies under the leadership of Moses and Aaron.

ויכתב משה את מוצאיהם למסעיהם על פי יהוה ואלה מסעיהם למוצאיהם:

Vayichtov Moshe et-motsa'eyhem lemas'eyhem al-pi Adonay ve'eleh mas'eyhem lemotsa'eyhem.

And Moses recorded their starting places according to their journeys by the command of the Lord, and these are their journeys according to their starting places.

Life Legacies

In the Torah Parsha Mas'ei we come to the last four chapters in Bamidbar (Numbers). Moses comes to the last of his life and takes a look back. The Lord commands Moses to distribute the "promised land" to His people as an everlasting legacy. The Levites receive their legacy as they are given 48 special cities. Lastly the legacy of the daughters of Zelophehad, which represents the legacy of women, is spelled out through specific regulations. A legacy is something of material or spiritual value that is given to us and then passed on to our children (both our biological children and our spiritual children), as our legacy to them. As we finish Bamidbar and see the legacies that were left for the Jewish people, let us also think about the legacy that we will leave.

The Legacy of One's Life Journey

Chapter 33 lists 42 different places that God's people "journeyed" after their release from Egyptian slavery by God's almighty hand until the second generation was ready to cross the Jordan River into the land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants. One should note that this is not a

complete list, since some places previously listed as encampments along the way are not listed here. Additionally, 16 of the encampments listed here have not been previously listed. The Gunter Plaut Torah commentary notes that the first 15 verses enumerate the relatively few encampments of the first year that took our people to Mt. Sinai, where they received God's law ("words") and pronounced, "All the words which the Lord has spoken, we will do"(Ex.24:3).

Yet the seeds of disobedience began before leaving Egypt and were cultivated along the way by the stress of their journey. (Jeremiah 2:19, part of this week's Haftorah, states,"Let your misfortune reprove you; let your afflictions rebuke you; Mark well how bad and bitter it is that you forsake the Lord you God; that awe for me is not in you, declares the Lord.") By the time they arrived at Mt. Sinai, they had complained, grumbled, threatened open rebellion, and were about to fashion for themselves an idol to replace God. By the time they reached Kadesh in Ch.13, they had forgotten their promise, "All the words which the Lord has spoken, we will do," and were ready to stone Moses, replace him, and return to Egypt. As their grumbling and complaints against God's appointed leader (and therefore against God, Himself) increased, the faith of the people in God's ability to drive out the Canaanites before them decreased to the point that all they could imagine was defeat, if they continued into the land promised to them. Their open rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea was a "point of no return " after which they had to endure God's judgment.... another 38 years of "journeying" in the desert until all of the first generation who had rejected God's leadership had died. While much more detail of their "journeys" of the first year is given than is given of later years, we do know that during the whole 40 years, God took care of their physical and spiritual needs. They might not have always been happy with God's provision, but God was there nevertheless....even while His people were in rebellion against Him. God has never forsaken His people!

As Moses recounted the legacy of his journeys, he certainly remembered specific things that occurred at each of the encampments that were part of his legacy, even though they might not have been recorded in the Torah. Each day was part of his legacy, whether or not God moved their encampment. Each time the pillar of cloud lifted, signaling that God was leading them onward to their next camp, there was the stress of breaking camp, taking down the tabernacle, and following the leading of God. Following God in our daily lives can also be stressful and difficult, especially when we take our focus away from serving Him and begin complaining and grumbling. If we have to "break camp" and move to another place, there is the additional stress of moving and starting over in a new place. Typically, for our people then and for us today, when we have turned our backs on God, choosing to "go our own way," calamity comes. It is only then that we cry out to God, "Arise and save us!" (Prayer of Confession of Sin, asking for forgiveness, as we return to Him) (Jeremiah 2:27) Yet God is still there. He has not forsaken His people.... then or now! "If you return, O Israel; if you return to Me; if you remove your abominations from My presence and do not waver, and swear, 'As the Lord lives,' in sincerity, justice, and righteousness -- nations shall bless themselves by you and praise themselves by you" (Jeremiah 4:1-2).

The people of Israel were still encamped at Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab (across the Jordan River from Jericho), when God gave Moses instructions for the people, who would take possession of the land of their inheritance. Their instruction were: 1) To drive out (dispossess) all the inhabitants already dwelling there.

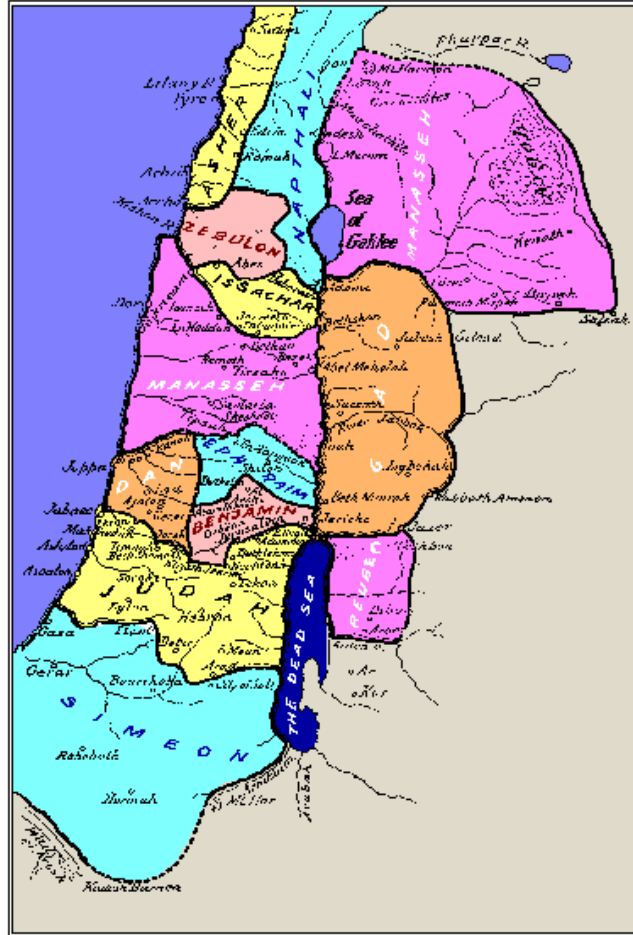
2) To destroy all vestiges of Canaanite gods and places of worship. 3) To distribute the land to individual tribes in proportion to their population (without giving preference to favorite tribes). Failure to obey God by driving out all the Canaanites would result in the following consequences for the people: 1) The remaining Canaanites (and people who worship other gods) would become "as pricks in your eyes and thorns in your flesh." 2) Those remaining would be "trouble" for the people. 3) In the future (when God's people would join them in worshipping their false gods), God would drive His people from the land. Today, it is not "politically correct" to speak about conquering a people and driving them out of their land. A good example of the consequences of allowing a conquered people, who worship false gods, to remain as a distinct people within the land is the example of the Palestinian people, living within Israel. An article by Eddie and Jackie Santoro, elders of Tiferet Yeshua in Israel (esant@netvision.net.il), states that Ariel Sharon's policy of "heetnatkoot"

(disengagement) will this month result in Israelis being forced by the Israeli Army to vacate their property located in Israeli towns close to those where the hostile Palestinian population makes them difficult for the army to protect. The article recounts that in the 1967 "six day war," Palestinians did not fear the Israeli army and therefore remained in their homes, rather than fleeing out of Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs that remained in the conquered areas have mushroomed to a population of more than three million. Unlike their Arab counterparts, the Israeli army did not slaughter civilians left in conquered land. (They also did not take the opportunity to "repatriate" Palestinian civilians with their brothers in the surrounding Arab countries of the 7 hostile armies that attacked them.) As a consequence, many of the remaining Palestinians have become a "trouble" for Israel...."pricks in their eyes and thorns in their flesh." Israel is willing to expel their own people from their own land and give up some of its land legacy in the hope it will bring peace. Israel would do well to remember God's words, "The land shall not be sold permanently.....for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me." (Lev 25.23) While the Abrahamic Covenant gives unconditional ownership of the land promised by God to Abraham and to his descendants, peaceful and productive use of the land requires the obedience of the Jewish people to God's Torah. Because the land on which the Canaanites in Numbers Chapter 33 and the Palestinians of today occupy belong to the people of Israel, both of these people groups should have been expelled from the land. Today's news from Israel reflects the consequences of "political correctness" placed above obedience to God.

The Legacy of the Land

In **Chapter 34**, God fulfills His promise to Abraham by providing the boundaries of their "promised land." Although smaller than the less defined boundaries of Genesis 15:16 and Deuteronomy 11:24, this chapter provides the most detail and some feel the best accuracy. Land boundaries allow God's people to feel the right of possession; that this land is really theirs. Some view these "boundaries" as merely a stereotype of the land of Canaan, while others with a high view of scriptures take these boundaries as borders of Jewish land.

Boundaries of the Tribes of Israel



Interestingly from the picture given in Numbers 34, the Southern border does not extend to the Red Sea, so that the present-day city of Eilat would not be included. The Western border would extend into today's Palestinian controlled area to the Wadi el-Arish. The Northern border would be the most controversial. It appears to extend into what is now Syria and include area well beyond the capital of Syria, Damascus. The territory East of Jordan given by Moses to the 2 1/2 tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the 1/2 tribe of Manasseh was not in this description of the land promised to Abraham. The "Salt Sea" was the Dead Sea, and the "Great Sea" was the Mediterranean Sea. Moses instructed that the

land West of the Jordan be divided by lot among

the 9 1/2 tribes receiving land West of the Jordan, and that the 2 1/2 tribes receive their inheritance East of the Jordan River. Because specific borders are mentioned and specific leaders from each tribe are named to distribute their tribe's inheritance, one must conclude that God's land promises to Israel from the Abrahamic Covenant are true and will come to pass. Each tribe (except the Levites) will receive a legacy of land, which will be allotted to individual families within their tribe. The miracle of their legacy of land was that they were alive after 40 years in an inhospitable desert. For 40 years God took care of them, providing food, water, and clothes, as well as His presence. The miracle of their legacy of land was truly a miracle of God!

A Legacy for the Levites

Not all the Levites could serve in the tabernacle at the same time. The Levites were divided into groups who lived in 48 "Levitical" cities taken from the inheritance of the rest of the tribes. Scripture indicates that the Levites "lived" in these particular cities but never says that the Levites owned land in these cities. In fact, Leviticus 25:34 indicates that the land on which they lived could not be sold because it was their perpetual inheritance. The Levites were given a measured amount of pasture land for their animals outside the Levitical cities. Perhaps the Levites who lived in these cities taught Torah, instructed the local population about laws regarding daily Jewish living, and helped to judge cases brought to them according to Jewish law. Even in ancient times, God thought it necessary for His people to have spiritual counseling, so that His presence was before them at all times. The legacy of the Levites was serving God in any capacity they could do so. Serving God was the legacy they taught their children and then passed on to the next generation. Land could be used or misused, bought or sold within tribes, but serving God was their inheritance....a spiritual legacy!



Cities of Refuge.... a Legacy of Justice

Verses 9 - 34 of **Chapter 35** commands that 6 cities of refuge be allocated throughout the land, so that the legacy of the Jewish people may be preserved undefiled. While the penalty for pre-meditated murder was death, the penalty for unintentional murder (manslaughter) was banishment to a City of Refuge for the duration of the life of the High Priest. Otherwise a family member might avenge the unintentional death and spill "innocent" blood on the land, thereby defiling God's land. It might be noted that the Hebrew word for "avenger" in verse 12 and "blood avenger" in verse 21 is "**go'el**," which is also used of a kinsman redeemer. Here the "go'el" is the redeemer of family honor, who accomplishes vengeance to redeem family honor. Our kinsman redeemer is Messiah, whose blood redeems those who confess sin and accept its atonement. Messiah is our "City of Refuge" to whom we flee for refuge from the guiltiness of sin!



.....then you shall select.....cities of refuge that the manslayer who has killed any person unintentionally may flee there. Numbers 35:11

A Legacy for Women

It was the law among the Jewish people that a woman may inherit land from her father, if there are no brothers to whom to pass on her father's legacy. The first example was given in Numbers 26:33 and 27:1-11 when the daughters of Zelophehad were given their father's inheritance; his legacy became their legacy. In **Chapter 36**, regulations regarding the inheritance of women are given to preserve their legacy within their tribe. Within their own tribe, women may marry any man they choose. Therefore their legacy will remain within their own tribe and may be passed on to their children.

SHABBAT SHALOM

Chazak, Chazak, v'Nit'chazek! Be strong, be strong, and may we be strengthened!

