

The Book of Numbers, 43rd Sedrah

Our forty-third Torah portion is Massey. It is the last of the book of Numbers. The Hebrew word Massey refers to the stages of the forty year trek that Moses rehearses in Chapter 33. This Sedrah is encompassed in **Numbers 33-36**. In this Chapter 33 Torah summarizes the entire route followed by Israel as directed by the Lord from the exodus from Egypt until they stood poised to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land. In all there were forty-two journeys; the first fourteen were before the mission of the twelve sent out to scout the land. The last eight journeys were in the fortieth year after Aaron's death. Thus during the thirty-eight intervening years there were only twenty journeys. The fact that these forty-two journeys are the same number of letters in the mystical forty-two letter name of God imply there may be revelations in these journeys hid from human view. In the midst of all their journeys the people saw it as going to their destination geographically. Whereas God's objective was the making of a unified nation. The children would not attain their goal until God had attained His.

Verse 4 describes the Egyptians burying their firstborn sons as Israel boldly left the land. In smiting the firstborn of all living beings, man and beast, God smote objects of Egyptian worship. All the deity of Egypt were represented by some beast.

All these places named by Moses and the journey between each were meant to bring forth a flood of memories to the children and certainly their Lord's miraculous provision. His undisguised love and the reliability of His judgments would stand out through it all. For now, they were encamped by the river Jordan from Beth Jeshemoth to Abel-Shittim in the plains of Moab. It was here that the Lord gave these instructions "When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land, you shall destroy their idols and all their cult places of worship. You shall take possession of the land and settle in it for I have given it to you to possess it." They were to settle in the portion belonging unto their tribe. Each family's plot would be decided by lot, and if the family was large the lot would be increased, and if the family was small it would be reduced - all things being equal. They were told again if they did not dispossess the people of the land but let them remain, Israel, who was to be a light to the nations, would be swallowed up in the Canaanite evil and themselves be expelled from the Lord's land.

In Numbers 34 the boundaries of their inheritance is described by Moses to the nine and one half tribes that it is to be proportioned to. By this time everyone knew that the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had already received their portions east of the Jordan opposite Jericho. The Lord chose Eleazar the high priest and Joshua the son of Nun to oversee the distribution of the land. The purpose of occupying God's land was so to live a holy life there and preserve the sanctity of the land by keeping Torah with its commandments. Without Torah what good is the land. Without Torah what good is life. In Numbers 34:1-12 is a most detailed and identifiable boundary given of the land they are to possess at this time. The boundaries outlined here in this chapter are smaller than those described in Genesis 15:16 and Deuteronomy 11:24 both of which speak of the Euphrates as the eastern border. So the question remains, what was the basis for these borders mentioned by Moses here in Numbers 34. The

term Canaanland in Moses day referred to the old Egyptian province of Syria / Palestine which for centuries had been under dominion of the Pharaohs. Pharaoh had signed a treaty with the Hittite king in which the Egyptian holdings were locked to comprise the area that Moses just delineated. Thus Canaan was not some projection not known by anyone but God, but rather settled borders that Canaan itself and the surrounding nations were well aware of. The Hittite king who has a treaty concerning these very mapped out borders with Egypt was about to be ousted by the Lord of all creation. In giving these precise landmarks all the nations would know and all Israel the immediate intention of Israel's God. Do we understand, the immediate portion of the promised land now being deliberated was known to be Egypt's province with the Canaanite dwelling there by treaty with Egypt. We have today what we call geopolitical shorthand, per/example, America today usually refers not to the continent (the whole local) but to the United States which has defined boundaries within that continent. The graphics of such things is certainly not unknown to God, Moses or any people at the time of Numbers 34. And finally if none of this argument suffices read, Deuteronomy 19:9 wherein the Lord instructs if they walk in His ways they'll need three more cities of refuge as He will expand their borders to that which He promised their fathers.

Indeed if we survey the many descriptions of the "land of Israel" both as a promised land and as actually occupied space over the course of centuries from Abraham to Roman times we would find five different conceptions of what constituted the land. First, Canaan as promised to the patriarchs. Second, Canaan plus the territory conquered by Moses (Trans-Jordan). Third, Joshua's land of Israel. Fourth, the land actually settled subsequent to Joshua. Fifth, the kingdoms of Israel from King David and on.

In Numbers 35:1-8 Moses as instructed by the Lord told the people how they were to provide for the Levites out of their inherited land. Throughout the land towns for the Levites to dwell were laid out. Each town was surrounded by pastureland 1,000 cubits (1500 feet) as measured from the outside of the city wall. This pastureland would be the suburb of the city. Then an added 2000 cubits (3000 feet) was added to the dimension. This instruction served a two-fold purpose. It allowed room for growth as the Levite populace flourished to maintain and care for such expanse. Meanwhile the tribe on whose land the town set would know in advance that which would be assumed by the Levites as they multiplied. Forty-eight towns were called for. The more populace the tribe, the more cities they were to provide the Levites. East of the Jordan where Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. Settled there were ten such towns leaving Canaan proper with thirty-eight. In Egypt the priestly cast were wealthy land owners (Genesis 47:22). They sided with the rich and powerful and cultivated a class society of superiority over the common citizen. In Israel there would be an interdependence upon each citizen upon the duty, place and call of each to constitute a one nation under the authority of one Lord. Of these forty-eight cities six were reckoned to be cities of refuge. They were 1) Kedesh located in Naphtali, 2) Shechem in Ephraim, 3) Hebron in Judah, 4) Bezer in Reuben, 5) Ramoth in Gad, 6) Golan in Manasseh. The first three were west of Jordan while the last three were east. Why three cities of refuge east of Jordan where only two and one-half tribes were? It was simply a geographic necessity. In Deuteronomy 19:9 if Israel would guard all His commandments and indeed do them and love the Lord their God three more cities of refuge would be added, why? Because if they walked in His ways, He would add to their present boundaries that which He gave oath unto their fathers to give them, that is all the land which He promised to their fathers. Again this answers the question you might have concerning the border Moses outlined just before they would cross the Jordan in Numbers 34:1-12. The rest of our chapter 35 addresses the

need for these cities of refuge and accompanying legislation.

The divine presence cannot dwell in a land contaminated by murder. These are polluting offenses that lead to God's abandonment of His sanctuary. The land of Israel was not to conduct herself as the surrounding nations wherein kinsmen avenged the blood of their slain by taking the blood of the slayer or even an innocent member of the slayer's kin. An example of this ruthlessness is found in Genesis 4:23-24 where Lamech boasts to his wives of his exploits in blood vengeance. The six cities of refuge served as a place of asylum for the slayer whose act was not premeditated. The Hebrew word translated avenger was (go-el) meaning redeemer. The redeemer was the appointed one to restore the status quo. The slayer would flee to the nearest of these cities and seek shelter from the avenger. The city of refuge did not abrogate the rights of the blood redeemer but made them rather the agents of the state. The courts would decide the guilt or innocence of the slayer. The "go-el- ha-adam" meaning avenger of blood as executioner would rectify then, the blood guilt that would pollute the land if allowed to go on unchecked. We must not confuse revenge with avenge. Revenge implies getting even or paying back in kind or degree. Avenge means to exact satisfaction for a wrong. Avenge means to inflict just or merited punishment. If the go-el went after the slayer with murderous intent in his own heart he would only serve to further the pollution of the land. The redeemer was not chose by his kin indiscriminately else they would be partaking of his lust to shed blood under the cover of legitimacy.

The slayer was to stand trial before the assembly. Guidelines were given to help the court decide guilt or innocence. If the slayer struck another with an iron object or a stone tool or a wooden tool that would cause death, he was guilty. If he pushed another in hate or threw something at him on purpose and death resulted, he was guilty. If he struck at him with his bare hand in enmity and death resulted, he is guilty. But if he pushed him without malicious intent or threw something at him without the intent to harm or inadvertently dropped a heavy object on another causing death the assembly shall decide and protect the innocent from the blood avenger. Of course even if death resulted from the use of the so called murderous implement, other conditions brought out in the trail would prevail such as the slayer did not see the other in time to avert the tragedy and that he did not bear any grudge toward the other nor laid in wait for him. This trial would be held within the boundaries of the community where the event took place. The decision being reached the guilty would be executed by the avenger. The death penalty could only be sentenced if two witnesses gave evidence and no matter rich or poor no ransom was permitted for the life of the guilty. He must die else the land will be in a state of pollution. Even if the redeemer himself would accept money to let the guilty slayer go, the state then would see to his death. The land must not be defiled for the Lord dwells in the land in their midst. The man then who innocently caused the death of another would spend his days within the walls of the city of refuge that he first fled to until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the sacred oil. After the death of the high priest the man was free to return to his land holding. But if at any time the man went outside of the city walls before the death of the high priest, he could be slain by the avenger and no blood guilt would be put to the go-el's account.

Just as one could not enter the sanctuary in a condition of impurity because the sanctuary is a holy place neither can one live in the land of Israel in a condition of moral impurity because the land is consecrated to holy living.

Numbers 36 is the last chapter in the book. It is concerned with the law of the Heiress. If you remember in Numbers 27:1-11 the law was laid down that permitted daughters to inherit property in the absence of brothers in the family. But the result of this would mean that as the

daughter married into other tribes their own tribe would lose the portion of land that was assigned to it. This is the way the law read: when daughters inherit land in their father's tribe because there were no sons to inherit it and they then marry outside their tribes, the children of such unions will follow their father's ancestry not their mother's and thus the property inherited by these children of their mother's will now be vested in the tribe of their father. This would upset each tribes holdings and cause considerable tension. The family heads in the clan of the descendants of Gilead appealed to Moses and the chieftain family heads of all the Israelites concerning this very matter. The daughters of Zelopheahad had no brothers thus they inherited their father's portion allotted to the tribe of Manasseh. If they married outside their father's tribe it would be gone from Manasseh. The answer to this dilemma was - the Lord commanded that every daughter among the Israelite tribes who inherits a share must marry someone from the clan of her father's tribe in order that each Israelite may keep his ancestral share. No inheritance was allowed to pass over from one tribe to another. The daughters of Zelopheahad complied. They married sons of their uncles. The ancestral share refers not to the tribe in general but to the particular clan (family) of that tribe. The daughters could have married any one of their tribe but they chose to keep the inheritance within the clan of their father by marrying cousins. The last verse in the book of Numbers reads "these are the commandments and regulations that the Lord enjoined upon Israel through Moses on the plains of Moab at the Jordan near Jericho." Now just a brief and final summation of these commandments just referred to. First the regular public sacrifices (Chapter 28 – 29). Second the division of the land (Chapter 26:52-56). Third the law of succession in inheritance (Chapter 27:1-11 and Chapter 36). Fourth, the succession of leadership for the priesthood (Chapter 25). Fifth the succession of leadership civil (Chapter 27:12-23). Sixth a woman's vows and oaths (Chapter 30). Seventh a division of the spoils of war (Chapter 31). Eighth the laws of homicide (Chapter 35:9-34). This ends the book of Numbers. Our Haftorah for Massey will be the last Haftorah for Numbers.

The Haftorah for Massey which refers to the stages of Israel's journeying in the wilderness is found in **Jeremiah 2:4 - 28 and Jeremiah 3:4 and Jeremiah 4:1 - 2**. This is the second of the three Haftorahs of affliction or rebuke that precede the 9th of Av which is the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem. This Haftorah portion is read on the second Shabbat after the 17th of Tammuz, the day Babylon breeched the walls of Jerusalem. We will start with Jeremiah 2:4-28. Both the Ashk'nazim and S'fardim chose this portion. Jeremiah cries, "hear the word of the Lord house of Jacob and all you families of the house of Israel." From verse 5 to the end of the chapter verse 28, it is the Lord speaking, as though one wonders in himself at the utter astonishment of events. Should not the heavens, the isles, the whole earth be in utter astonishment at the choice Abraham's descendants have made? Should not Israel be astonished? Should not her children's children come to an astonishment and cry out? The Lord asked of them what was the unrighteousness that their fathers found in Him that they would leave Him, to walk after another that was nothing and that they themselves had become nothing. They never stopped to ask "where is our Lord who brought us out of Egypt - led us through the wilderness - a land of deserts and pits - of drought and shadow of death that no man could pass through?" He had brought them to a land of fruitful fields, a good land that they upon entering it defiled "My Land" and made "My Heritage" an abomination. The priests that were to instruct the nation in the Lord's ways knew not the way and neither did they ask "where is the Lord?" Nevertheless He will not cease pleading His case before all Israel with their children's children down through time.

The Lord asks, go inquire from the far west the isles of Kittites or send to the far east Kedar and see if any nation has changed its gods which are no gods at all. The isles of the Kittim represented the western edge of civilization at that time. An ancient Greek city Kition was there (today's Cyprus). Isaiah in 23:1 and Ezekiel 27:6 referred to Kittim. Its inhabitants were known as Kittites meaning "islanders." Kittim was an old Arab tribe in Genesis 25:13 located in the east of Trans-Jordan in northern Arabia. But Israel "My people" had exchanged the glory of the one true God for that which is utterly nothing. God's people had not only forsaken Him, the fountain of living waters, but had labored vigorously to hew themselves out cisterns even broken cisterns that could not ever hold water. Israel was more than a servant but a son; how then had he become prey before the nations around him who made his land desolate like young lions that roar and frighten everyone. Even the children of Noph and Tahpanhes fed upon the crown of Israel's head. Noph is Memphis, the capital of northern Egypt, while Tahpanhes was a fortress on the northeast frontier and commanded the road between Israel and Egypt. Jeremiah was taken there after the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah 43:7. Why did they forsake the Lord their God who led them in the right way? What had Israel to do with Egypt to drink the waters of Shihor (the Nile) or with Assyria to drink the waters of the river Euphrates. They sought protective alliances with these enemy nations rather than keep faith with the Lord. As they have chosen, their own wickedness shall correct them and their backsliding shall reprove them, for the results will be disastrous; their reward will be evil and bitter. There is just no fear of the Lord God of Hosts. In the past He broke the yoke of their enemies and they said, we will not again transgress, while upon every high hill they celebrated the primitive cults of Canaan which brings death to any national love or holiness unto God. How could this be, they had been planted as a noble vine altogether a right seed, this refers to Abraham their father. Though carefully and tenderly tended, a strange vine as from a degenerate plant came up. Their iniquity has left its mark on them, no amount of washing with the strongest of soaps will cleanse them. (Nitre was a cleansing solution made from potash, it had a bleach quality about it.) How could Israel say they were not defiled that they had not gone after Balaam. Their argument was simply that participation in harmless local cults was not apostasy. Nothing they had done was all that bad. They are told, open your eyes see what you have done in the valleys, child sacrifice to Moloch in the Valley of Hinnom. They are compared to a she camel in heat impelled by her desire, running from one lover, Egypt, to another, Assyria, and as a wild ass in her lust who can tie her down or keep up with her craving lusts. They were wearing themselves out in their lustful pursuits but could not stop. They were addicted to the alien gods and could not help themselves. Just as a thief is dazed and confused when caught, so is the house of Israel. Their kings - their princes, priests and prophets. They all say to a piece of carved wood "you are my father and to a rock you have brought me forth" while they turn their back and hide their face from the Lord. In time of utter despair they will turn to Him who is the only source of help saying, "arise - save us".

Jeremiah 3:4 was selected by the Ashk'nazim to close this Haftorah. "Will I not hear you cry unto Me - 'My Father' you are the familiar friend of my youth." The S'fardim selection is Jeremiah 4:1-2 if Israel will return - and put away their detestable things and will not waiver and shall swear an oath, then shall the nations bless themselves by Israel's God and in Him shall they glory. Just what is the oath that Israel is to swear, "as the Lord liveth" in truth, in justice, and in righteousness. When Israel returns to God all humanity will participate in the blessings of their spiritual regeneration. This finishes the book of Numbers.

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