

פרשת מטות - מסעי *Parshiyot Mattot/Massei*

*Bamidbar / Numbers 30:2-36:13, Jer. 2:4-28, 3:4
Matthew 23:1-39-25:46*

Building Your Spiritual Life on Shifting Sand

This week is the last two Torah portions before the nation of Israel entered into the Promised Land. While reading through the Torah, what is the most important commandment the Lord gave to the Children of Israel they are to do when enter to take possession of the Land? Following the definition of the borders of the Land of Canaan, the land they are to inherit, Moshe gives instructions on how to possess the land. The Torah states the following, *Bamidbar / Numbers 33:52* וְהוֹרֵ-נְשָׂתָם אֶת-כָּל-יְשֵׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵיכֶם וְאַבְדֹתֶם אֶת כָּל-מִשְׁפֵּיתָם וְאֵת כָּל-צִלְמֵי מִסְכֹּתָם תִּסְכְּתֶם תִּאבְדּוּ וְאֵת כָּל-בְּמֹתָם תִּשְׁמִידוּ: *33:52 you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land; you shall destroy all their figured objects; you shall destroy all their molten images, and you shall demolish all their cult places. (NASB)* The Lord commands the people as they dispossess all the inhabitants of the Land they are to destroy all of the peoples figures (מִשְׁפֵּית) and graven images (צִלְמֵי מִסְכֹּתָם). Moshe goes on to say in *Bamidbar / Numbers 33:55*, וְאִם-לֹא תוֹרִישׁוּ אֶת-יְשֵׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ, מִפְּנֵיכֶם וְהָיָה אֲשֶׁר תּוֹתִירוּ מֵהֶם לְשֹׂכִים בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וּלְצַנְיָנִים בְּצַדֵּיכֶם וְצָרְרוּ אֵתְכֶם עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּהּ: *33:55 But if you do not dispossess the inhabitants of the land, those whom you allow to remain shall be stings in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you*

in the land in which you live; (NASB) Moshe speaks of the importance of dispossessing the inhabitants of the Land due to their sin and most importantly to destroy their way of worship. These verses presents us with one of the most morally challenging statements in the Torah which contain very contemporary overtones for us today. The text is explicitly clear here, Israel must uproot the seven nations that are currently in possession of the land. Based upon what Moshe is writing here in the Torah, no compromise is possible. Compromise would consist of moving into the Land and living along side of the peoples at peace. The Text states (*Bamidbar / Numbers 33:55*) if any of the inhabitants remain they will be thorns in their eyes and sides tormenting them for the remainder of their days. Note something here, these seven nations are being dispossessed due to their sins. This is the most important command the people were given by entering into the Land in order to possess the land and the promises God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The nature of the people who lived in the Land (their sins) would lead to the invitation of Israel to participate in idolatry if they were to remain. In the same way, if their sons and daughters were to intermarry, they would invite their family to sin in idolatry. As we study this process of dispossession in the Scriptures, looking at Israel's history, the Promised Land is marked with thousands of years of possession and dispossession, over and over again. Modern Israel takes claim to the land based upon its historical right to the Promises of God that are intimately connected to the Land. We have a 3400 year old document (the Torah, 1400 BCE) that describes Israel's right to the Land of Israel. The other nations also lay claim to the Land (such as the Palestinians) however they do not have a historical right as we see based upon the Scriptures about the nation of Israel. The point is, this command to dispossess these seven sinful and idolatrous nations and to destroy their idolatrous forms of worship is the most important command for remaining in the Land, and this is relevant to us today on how to possess our inheritance (His Promises) as we walk before God. Under the leadership of Moshe, the children of Israel journeying towards the Land of Promise. However, due to their waywardness, what might have taken less than a month resulted in 40 years of wandering. They wandered back and forth in the wilderness, sometimes close to the border of their inheritance, getting close but yet not quite making it while

remaining in the great desert. How this relates to us is in relation to whether we have built our spiritual life on shifting sand? For example, it is one thing to know about Yeshua and believe in him; it's another thing to heed his words and obey them. Sadly, if we think about this, many of God's people are still in this unsatisfactory condition of the people in the wilderness where they believed but did not heed or obey His word (see *Hebrews 4:1-3*). Many have come out of Egypt, but yet remain bound up in sin because they have not yet entered into God's rest. As we live our lives as God's people, we desperately seek the peace of God which passes all understanding. The point is, it isn't simply for lack of faith that God's people go about missing His rest, it is a matter of modern theologies that prevent us from entering into the rest the Lord has promised because of the rejection of God's Torah, His ways which lead to peace, righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth. Let's discuss these things further in this week's Torah portion.

This week we are looking at *Bamidbar / Numbers 33:50-34:15*.

Bamidbar / Numbers 33:50-34:15

33:50 Then the Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho, saying, 33:51 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 33:52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places; 33:53 and you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it. 33:54 'You shall inherit the land by lot according to your families; to the larger you shall give more inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give less inheritance. Wherever the lot falls to anyone, that shall be his. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers. 33:55 'But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land in which you

live. 33:56 'And as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you.' 34:1 *Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 34:2 'Command the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance, even the land of Canaan according to its borders. 34:3 'Your southern sector shall extend from the wilderness of Zin along the side of Edom, and your southern border shall extend from the end of the Salt Sea eastward. 34:4 'Then your border shall turn direction from the south to the ascent of Akkrabbim and continue to Zin, and its termination shall be to the south of Kadesh-barnea; and it shall reach Hazaraddar and continue to Azmon. 34:5 'The border shall turn direction from Azmon to the brook of Egypt, and its termination shall be at the sea. 34:6 'As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea, that is, its coastline; this shall be your west border. 34:7 'And this shall be your north border: you shall draw your border line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor. 34:8 'You shall draw a line from Mount Hor to the Lebo-hamath, and the termination of the border shall be at Zedad; 34:9 and the border shall proceed to Ziphron, and its termination shall be at Hazar-enan. This shall be your north border. 34:10 'For your eastern border you shall also draw a line from Hazar-enan to Shepham, 34:11 and the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; and the border shall go down and reach to the slope on the east side of the Sea of Chinnereth. 34:12 'And the border shall go down to the Jordan and its termination shall be at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land according to its borders all around.'* 34:13 *So Moses commanded the sons of Israel, saying, 'This is the land that you are to apportion by lot among you as a possession, which the Lord has commanded to give to the nine and a half tribes. 34:14 'For the tribe of the sons of Reuben have received theirs according to their fathers' households, and the tribe of the sons of Gad ac-*

according to their fathers' households, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received their possession. 34:15 'The two and a half tribes have received their possession across the Jordan opposite Jericho, eastward toward the sunrise.' (NASB)

The most important command given to the Children of Israel in the Torah before entering into the Promised Land is found in *Bamidbar / Numbers 33:52* וְהוֹרַשְׁתֶּם אֶת-כָּל-יִשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵיכֶם וְאֶבְדַתֶּם אֶת כָּל-:33:52 *you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land; you shall destroy all their figured objects; you shall destroy all their molten images, and you shall demolish all their cult places.* (NASB) The Lord commands the people as they dispossess all the inhabitants of the Land they are to destroy all of their forms of worship, their figures (מִשְׁכִּיֹּת) and their graven images (צִלְמֵי מִסְכֹּתֶם). In *Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:12-8:10*, Moshe told the Children of Israel that if they obeyed the Lord God of Israel, He would remain faithful to the covenant, He would bless them with fertility and agricultural productivity, and would ward off sickness. Moshe directed the people to destroy all of the seven nations in the Land of Canaan, those whom the Lord has delivered to them, and to utterly destroy their places of worship not serving their gods. Moshe tells the people not to fear these nations because they were numerous, but to recall what the Lord God did to Pharaoh and the Egyptians and the wonders by which the Lord has liberated them. The God of Israel would do the same to the peoples whom they feared, and would send a plague against them. The Torah states the Lord Himself would dislodge those peoples little by little, so that the wild beasts would not take over the land. Moshe directed the people to burn the images of their gods, not to covet nor keep the silver and gold on them, nor to bring an abhorrent thing into their houses. In *Devarim / Deuteronomy 8:1-9:3*, Moshe warned the Israelites not to forget the Lord God, not to violate His commandments, and not to grow haughty and believe that it was by their own power that had won their wealth, but to remember the Lord had given them the power to prosper. (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 8:18*) Moshe warns that if they forgot the Lord and followed other gods, then they would certainly perish like the nations that are being driven out

and displace from the land. Moses warned the Israelites that they were to dispossess nations greater than they, but God would go before them as a devouring fire to drive out the land's inhabitants. This blessing the Lord gives to His people speaks of the importance of our having the correct motivation to walk in God's Ways, according to His commandments (i.e. to follow in the footsteps of the Messiah.) The question is for us today, have we put to death our worldly ways, or have we embraced sin under the presumption God will forgive me in the absence of repentance? If we repent and walk in the footsteps of the Messiah according to His Torah, in doing so our Father in heaven will recognize us as His children, and do the things that He says He will do for us. The enemy will be dispossessed, and the Lord Himself will be at the center of who we are as the people who bear His testimony.

The Jewish commentator Rashi has the following to say concerning *Bamidbar / Numbers 33:52*.

Rashi on Bamidbar / Numbers 33:52 Part 1

והורשתם. וגרשתם: והורשתם *means, AND YE SHALL DRIVE OUT.*

Part 2

משכיתם. כתרגומו — “בית סגדתהון”, על שם שהי ו מסכין את הקרקע ברצפת אבנים של שיש להשתחוות עליהם בפשוט ידים ורגלים, כדכתיב “ואבן משכית לא תתנו בארצכם להשתחוות עליה” (ויקרא כ“ו): משכיתם — *Understand this as the Targum does: THEIR SPOTS FOR WORSHIP; it is called משכית (connected with the root סכה = סך “to cover”), because they used to cover the ground with marble stone to prostrate themselves upon it with hands and feet stretched forth, as it is said, (Leviticus 26:1): “And no stone of משכית, covering (no mosaic) shall ye put on your ground to prostrate yourself upon it” (because this is a heathen form of worship).*

Part 3

מסכתם — *Under-* כתרגומו — “מתכתהון”: מסכתם

stand this as the Targum does: their molten gods.

Rashi speaks of these places of worship as the peoples living in the land creating special places, laying down marble stone in order to prostrate themselves upon the stone in the service of the worship of their gods. In a previous Torah Portion, we learned of the sexual nature of worship by their fertility rites and rituals which lead to wide spread immorality and unrighteousness. Rashi's description of preparing a marble stone altar and prostrating one's self, the stretching out the hands and feet lead to this interpretation of ritual sexual immorality being involved in the worship of their gods. This deception would be quite great and has the capacity to draw male worshipers to ungodliness and to forsake the Word of the Lord which calls for moral behavior. This is further reasons why the Lord calls the way of the nations a detestable practice.

Yeshua told His disciples, *"Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock"* (Luke 6:47-48). Note the common theme here of laying the foundation of stone upon which to build one's something that is connected to God. The nations also had their foundation stones upon which they practiced their occult faith. Yeshua compared the disciple who heard His words but did not do them to a foolish man who built his house on sand. The fluid nature of sand causes the structure upon which it is build to tilt from left to right preventing it from standing up straight. This is the effect of sin upon our lives and illustrates the importance of remaining on the solid foundation of God's Word and walking in His ways.

Rashi also states the following in regards to *Bamidbar / Numbers 33:55*.

Rashi on Bamidbar / Numbers 33:55 Part 1

והיה אשר תותירו מהם. יהיו לְכֶם לְרָעָה: והיה אשר תותירו
מהם **THEN IT SHALL COME TO PASS THAT THOSE
WHOM YE LEAVE OF THEM shall be a misfortune for
you.**

Part 2

לשכים בעיניכם. ליתדות המנקרות עיניכם, תרגום של יתד

ולצנינם. פותרין בו הפותרים לשון מסוכת קוצים הסוככת אתכם, לסגור ולכלוא אתכם מאין יוצא וקבא: ולצנינים — *The lexicographers explain it in the sense of a hedge of thorns (צנים is another form of צנינים) so that the meaning here is: they will become as something which hedges you in, enclosing and imprisoning you in order that none can go forth nor come in (cf. Rashi on Joshua 23:13) (The meaning is they will hedge you in on all sides*

Part 3

ולצנינם. פותרין בו הפותרים לשון מסוכת קוצים הסוככת אתכם, לסגור ולכלוא אתכם מאין יוצא וקבא: ולצנינים — *The lexicographers explain it in the sense of a hedge of thorns (צנים is another form of צנינים) so that the meaning here is: they will become as something which hedges you in, enclosing and imprisoning you in order that none can go forth nor come in (cf. Rashi on Joshua 23:13) (The meaning is they will hedge you in on all sides*

Part 4

ולצנינם. פותרין בו הפותרים לשון מסוכת קוצים הסוככת אתכם, לסגור ולכלוא אתכם מאין יוצא וקבא: ולצנינים — *The lexicographers explain it in the sense of a hedge of thorns (צנים is another form of צנינים) so that the meaning here is: they will become as something which hedges you in, enclosing and imprisoning you in order that none can go forth nor come in (cf. Rashi on Joshua 23:13) (The meaning is they will hedge you in on all sides*

Rashi points out the importance of removing the people and their way of life from before God's people. The rabbinic interpretation is these people who remain will become pins to prick the eyes. The pricking of the eyes provides us with the idea of not being able to see. The people who remain will cause blindness to come upon God's people. This is what happens when we keep the company of ungodly friends, to participate and enjoy what they do. This is what happens under the guise of compromise. Rashi says compromise, allowing sin to enter our lives, *“will become as something which hedges you in, enclosing and imprisoning you in order that none can go forth nor come in (cf. Rashi on Joshua 23:13) (The meaning is they will hedge you in on all sides.”* When we consider the significance of the command for keeping the Land and the promises of God, these things are connected to the compromise Israel had with the people of the Land and their sinful way of life. Compromise has a way of hedging us in and imprisoning us, even to the extent of deceiving us to sin. In a similar way, the problem with

the modern theologies of today concerns the doctrinal presuppositions that one has on Scripture and Faith. These presuppositions (doctrines) lead to the disregard of the words of the Messiah Yeshua, particularly in relation to the radical obedience and discipleship to which the Messiah calls us, according to His Torah.

The question then is, *“Have we placed our concerns with doctrinal presuppositions and having the right set of beliefs rather than in the radical obedience and discipleship to which the Master calls us?”* This is the foundation stone of *“faith alone.”* If we hold on to the theologies as opposed to God’s Word, we set ourselves up as foolish men, just as Yeshua said, *“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”* (Luke 6:46). Note how the message Yeshua taught was not of theology or doctrine, but that of the righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth found in the Torah. He invited all peoples to come into the kingdom through faith and repentance which is characterized by good works, obedience to Torah, and the training of discipleship. He also called His disciples to practice a standard of righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, (Matthew 5:20) a standard without which one cannot enter the kingdom.

The *Mishnah Pirkei Avot 3:17* states the following:

Mishnah Pirkei Avot 3:17

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר, אם אין תורה, אין דרך ארץ. אם אין דרך ארץ, אין תורה. אם אין חכמה, אין יראה. אם אין יראה, אין חכמה. אם אין בינה, אין דעת. אם אין דעת, אין בינה. אם אין קמח, אין תורה. אם אין תורה, אין קמח. הוא הנה אומר, כל שחכמתו מרבה ממצעשיו, למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מרבין ושרשיו מעטין, והרוח באה ועוקרתו והופכתו על פניו, שנאמר (ירמיה יז) והנה כערער בערבה ולא יראה כי יבוא טוב ושכן חררים במדבר ארץ מלחה ולא תשב. אבל כל שמצעשיו מרבין מחכמתו, למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מעטין ושרשיו מרבין, שאפלו כל הרוחות שבעולם באות ונושבות בו אין מזיזין אותו ממקומו, שנאמר (שם) והנה כעץ שתול על מים ועל יובל ישלח שרשיו ולא יראה כי יבא חם, והנה עלהו רענו, ובשנת בצורת לא

וְלֹא יִמְיֵשׁ מִעֲשׂוֹת פְּרִי: Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah says: *If there is no Torah, there is no worldly occupation; if there is no worldly occupation, there is no Torah. If there is no wisdom, there is no fear; if there is no fear, there is no wisdom. If there is no understanding, there is no knowledge; if there is no knowledge, there is no understanding. If there is no flour, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no flour. He would say: Anyone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, to what is he compared? To a tree whose branches are many but whose roots are few; and the wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down; as it is said; “And he shall be like a lonely juniper tree in the wasteland and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places of the wilderness, a salty land that is uninhabitable.” (Jeremiah 17:6). But one whose deeds exceed his wisdom, what is he like? Like a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are many; since even if all the winds of the world come and blow upon it, they do not move it from its place, as it is said; “He shall be like a tree planted by the waters, and spreads out its roots by the river, and shall not perceive when heat comes, but its leaf shall remain fresh; and it will not be troubled in the year of drought, nor will it cease to bear fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:8).*

The rabbis speak of the presence versus the absence of the Torah, and the presence and absence of fear and wisdom, knowledge, and flour (food). These things are paralleled to those who have great wisdom but few deeds, as opposed to those who have great amount of deeds to fewer wisdom. The point of these statements from the Mishnah, and what Yeshua the Messiah is teaching in the Gospels, is related to what we are discussing in this study, many have come out of Egypt, but yet remain bound up in sin because they have not yet entered into God's rest. It is not simply for lack of faith that God's people go about missing His rest, it is a matter of modern theologies that prevent us from entering into the rest the Lord has promised because of the rejection of

God's Torah, His ways which lead to peace, righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth. Israel wandered back and forth in the wilderness, sometimes close to the border of their inheritance, getting close but yet not quite making it while remaining in the great desert. This was because they rejected God's Torah as a way of life. How this relates to us is in relation to whether we have built our spiritual life on shifting sand of theology, or on the solid foundation of God's Holy Word?



