

Fire, Water, and God's Holiness

This weeks reading is from Parshiot Matot and Massei (*Bamidbar / Numbers 30:2-36:13*), Moshe speaks to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel saying *30:1 Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, 'This is the word which the Lord has commanded. (NASB)* Moshe says that if a man makes an oath that he is not to violate his word (*30:2*) according to all that he speaks out of his mouth. A woman who makes a vow to the Lord binds herself to her father's house. According to the Torah, the daughter's father has the right to allow or disallow her from taking the vow (*30:4-7*). The husband also has the right to allow or disallow his wife from taking a vow (*30:8-15*). This confirms the place of the husband and wife, the man is over the woman in authority according to God's design. The Scripture goes on to tell us the Lord speaks to Moshe to take vengeance on the Mideanites for the people of Israel (*31:3*). One thousand from each tribe (12,000 men) are to go out to make war with Midian. Pinchas is described as going with them to war (*31:6*). The army kills the kings of Midian and captures the women and children, cattle and flocks, and all their goods as plunder (*31:8-9*). The people burn the cities of Midian and then bring the spoils of war before Moshe. Moshe becomes angry with the men of war for sparing all of the women, even the women who caused the men of Israel to sin (*31:15*). Moshe commands that all the women who have had sexual relations with men and all of the boys are to be killed. Only the girls who have not known a man sexually are to be kept alive. Moshe goes on to say that everything that can withstand the fire of purification will be clean. Those things that can not withstand fire will be purified by water (*31:21-24*). Moshe gives instruction on how to divide the spoils of war amongst the people and the Cohenim (*31:25-47*). The people then brought an offering before the Lord from the spoils of war (*31:48-54*).

שדוקה יבתח / The Holy Scriptures

ספר במדבר פרק לא

כא ויאמר אלעזר הכהן אל אנשי המלחמה זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה יהוה את משה: כב אך את הזהב ואת הכסף את הנהשת את הפרזל את הבדיל ואת העפרת: כג כל דבר אשר יבא באש תעבירו באש וטהרו אך במי נדה יתחטא וכל אשר לא יבא באש תעבירו במים: כד וכבסתם בגדיכם ביום השביעי וטהרתם ואחר תבאו אל המחנה:

Bamidbar / Numbers 31:21-24

31:21 Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to battle, 'This is the statute of the law which the Lord has commanded Moses: 31:22 only the gold and the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin and the lead, 31:23 everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean, but it shall be purified with water for impurity. But whatever cannot stand the fire you shall pass through the water. 31:24 'And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may enter the camp.' (NASB)

כג כל דבר אשר יבא באש תעבירו באש וטהרו אך במי נדה יתחטא וכל אשר לא יבא באש תעבירו במים: *31:23 everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean, but it shall be purified with water for impurity. But whatever cannot stand the fire you shall pass through the water.* It is interesting the way Moshe speaks of cleansing the things that were taken following the war with Midean, the Scriptures say "all things that are able to come through the fire, passing through the fire, it will be clean (purified) from water like one is clean from menstruation." Fire and water are necessary to cleanse the spoils of war, the valuables that are taken from Israel's enemies. If we think on the biblical usage of both fire and water there are many interesting points that may be made regarding these verses from this week's reading. Regarding "fire," the revelation of the Torah was received in the context of fire. When Israel received the Torah at the Mountain Sinai, the revelation of God's Word was given in fire, "Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently" (*Shemot / Exodus 19:18*) and "The Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God; and on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly." (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 9:10*) Here at Sinai the spirit of wisdom and revelation was given and received in the context of fire. Fire speaks of God's holiness in that all wealth must be purified in God's holy fire. "For our God is a consuming fire" (*Hebrews 12:29*). The fire of God's holiness burns away the worthless things and purifies, just as here in our verse, fire burns away wood, hay, and stubble, so too in our lives, the Lord is purifying us (see *1 Corinthians 3:10-15*). Water on the other hand, the Scriptures say those things that cannot stand the fire will be purified with water like women who are purified following their menstrual cycle. The Apostle Paul wrote our minds are renewed as they are sanctified and cleansed "with the washing of water by the word" (*Ephesians 5:26*). In the Torah portion, the children of Israel chose what is wrong when gathering the spoils of war by keeping everyone alive when God clearly said to destroy the people of Midean. Realize that we need to be careful how we choose to make money and how we spend our finances; these must be done having regard for God's Word. It is possible to obtain a financial ethic that is ungodly from the enemy. Sending our finances through the fire washes them clean for God's use. Note how God gives us the opportunity to choose what is right or to choose what is wrong. Deuteronomy provides us with the choice of life and death "If you obey by loving the LORD your God and walking in His ways, then you shall live and become numerous; but if your heart turns away you shall perish." The dual image of the Torah, to choose between life and death, between what is right and wrong and the Great salvation of the Lord our God is what makes our faith unique. Truly great are the ways in which He works in our lives because in all that we do we seek Him and His glory. *Tehillim / Psalms 21:13 Be exalted, O Lord, in Your strength; We will sing and praise Your power. (NASB)*