

Do we need Mashiach Now?

This weeks reading is a double portion, Parshiot **Mattot** and **Massei** (*Bamidbar / Numbers 30:2-36:13*). In Parashat Mattot, the Lord commands the men of Israel saying יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֵת הַמִּדְיָנִים assemble to make war against Midian to “*avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites.*” The men went and made war with Midian, burning their cities and killing the men but they kept the women and children alive. Moshe was angry with the military officers for keeping the women alive because they were the ones who caused the people to sin against the Lord at Baal-Peor on the counsel of Bilam. In addition to this, the Scriptures tell us that the sons of Reuben and Gad had a large number of cattle and they desired to remain on this side of the Jordan to make their homes. The Scriptures say they asked to not be taken across the Jordan river into the Promised Land. After the war with Midian, the people keeping the women and children alive, and wanting to remain on this side of the Jordan, these Scriptures appear to be speaking to us about bondage and the lust for our own desires verses a life that is surrendered to God’s will and purpose. Did the sons of Reuben and Gad desire God’s will for their lives? Remember the Torah says the Lord God will bless and prosper Israel in the Promised Land, did they lack faith in God’s promises?

In Parsahat Massei, Moshe recounts the various places that Israel had traveled during the wilderness journey. Following these things, the Lord speaks to Joshua to be sure that Israel gives to the Levites cities and land for their cattle. The Scriptures go on to describe the cities of refuge where one may flee to if one accidentally kills another person. According to the Torah, the person who accidentally kills someone is required to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.

In Parashat Mattot, Moshe recounts what happened when Israel had previously come to this point to enter into the Promised land that resulted in the people spending 40 years in the wilderness. These are significant statements after so many years in the wilderness the people were finally ready to enter into the Land again. According to the narrative, the sons of Reuben and Gad wanted to stay on this side of the Jordan river. Based upon their request to remain on this side of the Jordan river, Moshe and

Aaron thought they were again trying to discourage the sons of Israel from crossing over into the Land.

ספר במדבר פרק לב Bamidbar / Numbers 32:8-15

ח כה עָשׂוּ אֲבֹתֵיכֶם בְּשָׁלֹ-
חי אַתֶּם מִקְדָּשׁ בְּרַנֵּעַ לְרֵאוֹת
אֶת-הָאָרֶץ: ט וַיַּעֲלוּ עַד-
נַחַל אֶשְׁכּוֹל וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ
וַיִּנְיֵאוּ אֶת-לֵב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְבַלְתִּי-בֹא אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-
נָתַן לָהֶם יְהוָה: י וַיִּחַר-
אֵף יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיִּשְׁבַּע
לֵאמֹר: יא אִם-יִרְאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
הָעֲלִים מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים
שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה אֶת הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר
נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק
וּלְיַעֲקֹב כִּי לֹא-מָלְאוּ אַחֲרָי:
יב בְּלַתִּי פָלֵב בֶּן-יִפְנֶה הַקְּנִזִּי
וַיְהוֹשֶׁעַ בֶּן-נּוּן כִּי מָלְאוּ אַחֲרָי
יג וַיִּחַר-אֵף יְהוָה בְּיַ-
שְׂרָאֵל וַיִּנְעַם בַּמִּדְבָּר אַרְבָּעִים
שָׁנָה עַד-תָּם כָּל-הַדּוֹר הַעֹשֶׂה
הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה: יד וַהֲנִה
קִמַּתָּם תַּחַת אֲבֹתֵיכֶם תַּרְבוֹת
אֲנָשִׁים חַטָּאִים לְסַפּוֹת עוֹד עַל
חֲרוֹן אַף-יְהוָה אֶל-יִשְׂרָאֵל: טו
כִּי תִשׁוּבוּן מֵאַחֲרָיו וַיִּסַּף עוֹד
לְהַנִּיחוֹ בַּמִּדְבָּר וְשַׁחַתְתֶּם לְכָל-
הָעָם הַזֶּה:

32:8 'This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. 32:9 'For when they went up to the valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the sons of Israel so that they did not go into the land which the Lord had given them. 32:10 'So the Lord's anger burned in that day, and He swore, saying, 32:11 'None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, 32:12 except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the Lord fully.' 32:13 'So the Lord's anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the Lord was destroyed. 32:14 'Now behold, you have risen up in your fathers' place, a brood of sinful men, to add still more to the burning anger of the Lord against Israel. 32:15 'For if you turn away from following Him, He will once more abandon them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people.' (NASB)

The discussion point for this week is with regard to Moshe's words here in *Bamidbar / Numbers 32:8-15*. Moshe speaks of a group of "Sinful men" who were raised up in the place of their fathers who appear to be adding to the burning anger of the Lord against Israel. This was because Reuben and Gad were requesting to remain on the other side of the Jordan. They

preferred the land on the side of the wilderness before they had even seen the Land of Promise. The point Moshe is making here is that the children of the previous generation are also “*sinful men*” having been raised up in the place of their parents, and their request places them into the same situation as their parents. The desire to remain on this side of the Jordan may have the effect to lead them back into the wilderness for another 40 years, or worse yet, to die right where they stand. The significance of these words is Moshe’s description of this generation of men who were raised to know the Lord *32:14 ‘Now behold, you have risen up in your fathers’ place, a brood of sinful men, to add still more to the burning anger of the Lord against Israel. (NASB)* These men from the tribes of Ruben and Gad were not in doubt of the power of God or of His presence. There appears to be something more that is needed in their lives. Having been raised to know the Lord, we may also find ourselves in the same situation. We are still sinful needing the Lord God in heaven to pardon our sins as He had done so many times for the children of Israel in the wilderness. In the Christian faith, this ever present need is fulfilled in the Messiah sent by God. However, some modern Jewish commentators teach that Judaism does not believe the Messiah is the one through whom we are pardoned from sin. Let’s study this a little further.

To begin, an interesting point may be taken from the psalm of David in *Tehillim / Psalms 72*. According to *Tehillim / Psalms 72:12*, David speaks of his son saying, כִּי-יִצִיל אֶבְיֹֹן מִשּׁוֹעַ וְעַנִּי וְאִין-עֹזֶר לוֹ: *72:12 For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help, The afflicted also, and him who has no helper.” (NASB)* Study the context of the Psalm and note how David is describing his son as the one who helps when one cries out for help, the afflicted, and also to the one who has no helper. In addition, study the context of the Aramaic Targum on this psalm stating that this person is the King Messiah who does these things. David’s psalm appears to be a description of the ideal king, the one who listens, hears the plea of the people, and is devoted to both the people and to God. In Judaism, the name or title of the “*ideal king*” is the one who comes in the time of the Messianic age known as “*Mashiach*” (see the *Aramaic Targum, the Babylonian Talmud, and the midrashic literature*). In the Tanach, the earliest use of the word Mashiach is with the Lord God (YHVH, and/or with a pronominal suffix referring to the Lord God in heaven). Its usage in the Tanach is as a title of the ruling sovereign Mashiach YHVH (“*God’s*

anointed one”) according to *1 Samuel 2:10, 2:35, 12:3-5, 16:6, 26:9-23, 2 Samuel 1:14-16, 19:21, 2 Chronicles 6:42, Tehillim / Psalms 18:51, 20:7, 132:17, and Lamentations 4:20*. In post-exilic times, the high priest filled the place formerly occupied by the king, and is spoken of as “*ha-Kohen ha-Mashiach*” (*the anointed priest, see Vayikra / Leviticus 4:3, 4:5, 4:16, and 6:5*). Also in *Daniel 9:25-26*, it is written as “*Mashiach Nagid*” (an anointed one, a ruler) and/or simply “*Mashiach*” (an anointed one).

In the rabbinic apocalyptic literature the conception of an earthly Messiah is the prevailing one. We find many references to the King Messiah in the Aramaic Targumim and in the Midrashim (For example, see *Midrash Rabbah on Bamidbar 1:2 which speaks of the Spirit of the Lord hovering over the surface of the waters as the spirit of the King Mashiach*). The rabbinic midrash illustrates the significance of the King Messiah in the body of exegesis of Torah texts along with homiletic stories as taught by Chazal (*Rabbinical Jewish sages of the post-Temple era*) that provide an intrinsic analysis to passages in the Tanach. In addition, the significance of the Messiah in Judaism is found in Judaism’s central prayer, the Amidah (תפילת העמידה, *Tefilat HaAmidah, “The Standing Prayer”*) which is often designated simply as tefila (תפילה, “*prayer*”) in Rabbinic literature. Tefila is also called the Shemoneh Esreh (שמנה עשרה, “*The Eighteen,*” in reference to the original number of constituent blessings, the number of which is now nineteen). We read the following in the fifteenth benediction on the coming of the Messiah.

The Fifteenth Benediction: Coming of the Messiah

*The offspring of Thy servant David,
Quickly cause to flourish,
And lift up his power by Thy deliverance;
For Thy deliverance do we constantly hope
And look forward to deliverance.
Blessed art Thou, Lord, who makes the glo-
ry of deliverance to flourish.*

The truth of the matter is, according to the Shemoneh Esreh, all Orthodox Jews believe that God will send the Messiah to redeem Israel, and seek the Lord God in prayer three times a day for His coming. So important

is the Messiah to Judaism that the great sage Maimonides numbered belief in the Messiah among the Thirteen Principles of Faith (http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/332555/jewish/Maimonides-13-Principles-of-Faith.htm). In the second benediction of the Shemoneh Esreh, we interestingly find the word “*deliverance*” written as “*Yeshua*” (יֵשׁוּעַ), which provides an interesting insight into the angel’s injunction to Miryam and Joseph saying, “*You shall call his name Yeshua, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21): Every day, three times a day, pious Jewish men like Joseph, gathered in the synagogues and prayed for the Holy One to send His Yeshuah, Salvation to bring deliverance to the people. In the fifteenth benediction, the line that states, “*And look forward to deliverance,*” is said with the fulfillment of “*the Talmudic teaching that a Jew must look forward to redemption every day*” (see the Artscroll Siddur) and the corresponding commentary that states, “*Here we are taught that the ultimate salvation of the Jewish people is possible only through the Davidic Messiah.*”

With these things in mind, it is questionable why modern Jewish commentators write that the main axiom of Judaism is not concerning the Messiah. Recently, the Torah portion from [Aish.com](http://www.aish.com) titled, “*Balak (Numbers 22:2-25:9) Do We Want Mashiach Now?*” (<http://www.aish.com/tp/i/m/48923592.html>) made this statement:

Aish.com Torah Commentary -- Balak

The commentators are in unanimous agreement with Maimonides regarding the meaning of this prophecy; they all interpret this passage as a reference to the Mashiach. But the fact that his coming was the subject of a prophesy (referring to Bamidbar / Numbers 24:17-24) doesn't automatically elevate the belief in the coming of Mashiach into a basic axiom of Jewish faith. Why does Maimonides consider this belief so fundamental to Judaism?

Notice how the commentator points out that Maimonides found “*belief in the Messiah*” as fundamental to Judaism, however, his conclusion is that belief in the Messiah is not a basic axiom of the Jewish faith. The Apostolic Writings appears to be consistent with the earlier Jewish commentators (*i.e. Maimonides*) placing an emphasis upon the human origin

of the Messiah, being a descendant from David, where the Messiah has both a present day ability to save His people (*Galatians 1:4*), and a future expectation of the world to come (*in the context of Mashiach who leads the people back to the Lord God in heaven in His covenant*). The point of the Aish.com Torah commentary was that Judaism's view on the Messiah was not for the Olam Habah, but only for this present world. We know based upon studies in the psalms and Midrash Tehillim, that the role of the King Messiah, in addition to his present day redemptive actions, is to lead and guide the people to the Lord God in heaven. With this in mind, the interpretation the King Messiah has a role in bringing people to the World to Come is a natural conclusion. This may merely be an interpretative issue at Aish.com due to Christian influences that point to these ancient texts and the corresponding commentary from the Chazal.

David's psalm has this similar mode of thought, that his son, as the annointed one of God, *72:12 "... will deliver the needy when he cries for help, The afflicted also, and him who has no helper."* (NASB) As we have studied previously in the psalms, we have seen one of the roles for the King Messiah was to lead His people to the Lord God in heaven. With this in mind, one aspect of the King Messiah's role is to guide and direct us to the Lord God our Father in heaven, and therefore there is a future expectation of the Olam Habah that is inherent to this aspect of guiding, saving, and redeeming His people. Based upon *Tehillim / Psalms 72*, the Lord God Almighty in heaven also has a role in the ability of the King Messiah to save His people. The Lord God gives His mercy and righteousness to the people for their present day salvation (deliverance) and provide the people with a future hope.

The Lord God giving and placing His mercy and righteousness upon the people is also a very interesting topic that may be observed in the exegesis of Torah texts by the Chazal. The Midrashic literature in fact speaks at length on the topic of the Lord God giving the people His Righteousness for the purpose of saving their lives, as one example may be taken from *Midrash Tehillim 68, Part 5*.

Midrash Tehillim 68, Part 5 opens with the Dibur Hamathil (דיבור המ"ת) (תהיל) saying "*The earth trembled (Tehillim / Psalms 68:9).*" The homiletic introduction to the midrash states, "*and at once all the living in the Land of Israel died, But the dead came to life as the Holy One blessed be He, dropped the dew of resurrection on them, for the verse goes on to*

say, The heavens also dropped as the presence of God.” The concept of the dead raising may be found in *Isaiah 29:16* which states, *29:16 Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, For your dew is as the dew of the dawn, And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits. (NASB)* Here Isaiah says the Lord’s dead men will live and that their corpses will rise. Isaiah is expressing a belief in the resurrection, similar to what we find in *Ezekiel 37:1-14*, the valley of dry bones, and in *Romans 11:15*, Paul speaking of the “*life from the dead.*” Isaiah says “*Your dew is as the dew of the dawn.*” The concept here is to parallel water which is given from heaven to plant life that if withered due to the heat of the day is refreshed and springs to life once watered. With this imagery in mind, the dew of the morning has healing properties for those who are partially and almost dead. The dew of God has complete restorative properties, thus the interpretation of David’s words in the Targum is that Israel stood before the presence of God at Sinai and immediately died and the morning dew of the resurrection was given to quicken or revive them, after which the Lord God gave His Torah. In the midrash, the rabbis say that all of the living in the land of Israel died, but the dead came to life as the Holy One blessed be He dropped the dew of the resurrection on them. The idea contained within the midrashim is that the Lord God gives His righteousness to the people for the purpose of saving their lives and even to the resurrection of their bodies from the dead.

One interpretation of this may be, due to Israel’s sin, they died in the presence of God. The Lord had mercy and resurrected them and then giving them His Torah. These are very important concepts because when one turns from sin, seeks the Lord God our Father in heaven and the Messiah Yeshua, and turns one’s life in Teshuvah (repentance) to walk in His ways, one’s life is as if he has been resurrected, completely transformed for righteousness sake and for the glory of God. Note also how the Lord resurrects for the purpose of the giving His Torah. Unless one is resurrected, one cannot receive the Torah in their heart. This may also be paralleled to the transformation of the person so that he is able to both receive and obey. What does this say about those who reject the Torah of God as applying to our lives today?

The rabbis appear to have this sort of understanding regarding the manner in which the Lord works in our lives, drawing us to Himself, and

enabling us to live obedient lives. Note what Yeshua states in *John 6:37* “*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (NASB)*” Yeshua’s words follow a similar pattern of the Lord drawing, and the Lord enabling one’s eyes to see and ears to hear, and body to obey. Yeshua is speaking in a very rabbinic fashion!

In addition to this, Midrash Tehillim 71, Part 2 states (Dibur Hamathil, דיבור המתחיל) , “*Deliver me in Your righteousness and rescue me (Tehillim / Psalms 71:2).*” The homiletic introduction to the midrash says, “*The congregation of Israel said to the Holy One blessed be He, When You deliver us not because of our righteousness, not because of the good works which we have accumulated, but You will deliver us, whether today, or tomorrow, on account of Your righteousness, as it is said, And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no intercessor; therefore, He put on righteousness as a coat of mail (Isaiah 59:16-17).*” What is interesting is what we find written here the rabbis are teaching that God saves not because of our own righteousness, our own merits (or our own good deeds), but explicitly because of the righteousness of God. The rabbis say “*When You deliver us, You will deliver us not because of our righteousness, not because of the good works which we have accumulated, but You will deliver us, whether today, or tomorrow, on account of Your righteousness...*” This sounds very reminiscent of what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians and to Titus.

Ephesians 2:8-10

2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 2:9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (NASB)

Titus 3:3-8

3:3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. 3:4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love

for mankind appeared, 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 3:6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 3:7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 3:8 This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. (NASB)

The mercy of God is a gift, Paul says that we are not saved by our good works so that no one can boast. We are however created for the purpose of doing good works. The good works that Paul is referring to are those which our Father in heaven has prepared before hand, to live according to the commandments in His Torah. To Titus he says that formerly we were foolish living in sin (*disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another*). The Lord saved us in spite of our sins, and we are called to turn from our sins and to live righteously and in holiness before the Lord. Many times we hear that what the messianic movement espouses is a form of legalism and that Judaism for sure is legalistic in nature teaching that one must earn their salvation. We also hear some modern Christian commentators saying that in the Tanach Israel had to earn their salvation whereas today salvation is the free gift of God in the Messiah Yeshua. The question is “*What does it mean that good works are the result of salvation?*” According to Paul in *Ephesians 2:8-10* and *Titus 3:3-8*, he says that we are not saved by good works but that we are saved “*for good works.*” The point of Paul’s statements is that our works are done in the flesh and are not sufficient to satisfy the requirement for atonement. This draws us back to the Torah portion where there appears to be something more that is needed in our lives due to sin. There is something more that is needed that sits outside of our own merits and the good deeds that we do.

Note that good works (maasim tovim) are pleasing to the Lord even though they fall short of His glory (*Romans 3:20 and Isaiah 64:6*). Note also what we had discussed earlier, in the Psalms and in the Torah portion,

salvation has both an eternal and temporal application. We are saved only by the mercy and graciousness of God and by reason of His Son Yeshua the Messiah from both a temporal (present day) and eternal perspective. In this temporal earthly world, the Lord works in our lives with a combination of both His righteousness and our obedience to the commands. We are saved in this world and in the world to come because the Lord God is gracious and merciful and has designed a way for His righteousness to be placed upon His people (*Tehillim / Psalm 86:5, Ephesians 2:4*). The teaching from the Apostolic Writings is that when Yeshua became sin for us (*2 Corinthians 5:21*), and we believe he did this for us, we are given His righteousness. His death paid the price and his resurrection showed God's acceptance of the work of His Messiah. This is similar to the midrashic and Psalms concept of "*Deliver me in Your righteous and rescue me (Tehillim / Psalms 71:2).*" The Lord God in heaven is using His Messiah to lead and guide us back to him, just as the rabbis have taught in ancient times. When we believe in the Messiah, the Lord empowers us to live our lives for His glory. The former sins of disobedience, deceit, being enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our lives thinking in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another, we now are given the conviction of heart and spirit to not do those things any longer. To know our Father in heaven is to see sin the way He sees it and to walk in His footsteps and in the footsteps of the Messiah according to the Torah.

The Apostle John wrote saying in *1 John 3:9* "*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.*" John again is speaking of this transformation of the individual who is obedient to the commands and seeks to honor the Lord God in heaven. Instead of sin, the faithful child of God produces "*fruit in keeping with repentance*" (*Matthew 3:8*). Remember that Teshuvah is the act of turning from sin, turning one's life in a new direction, away from sin and towards the Lord God in heaven and His ways. The Salvation (Righteousness) the Lord provides us, gives us both a testimony in our lives of His glory, and enables us to live "*in the Spirit*" and thereby truly performing good works (*Galatians 5:16*) with a fully committed heart for the glory of God. This is why Paul wrote in *Ephesians 2:10* *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (NASB)* The goal of the Lord saving us was not just to

rescue us from hell, but also that we would walk in His ways and reflect His character and goodness to the world. The Lord God delights to see us becoming more like His Son (*Romans 8:29*) which is why our good works are pleasing in His eyes. When the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) makes His dwelling place inside of us, God's Spirit prompts us to do things that bring glory to His name (*John 14:26*). Our desire to please the Lord grows as our understanding of Him grows. The desire to please God results in our good works.

When we study the greater body of the rabbinic literature, the statement that the main axiom of Judaism is not concerning the Messiah, appears to be a bit off-base and seems to be more of a subjective interpretive polemic against Christianity. The Apostle Paul wrote in *Galatians 1:4* that the Messiah saves us "*from this present evil world.*" This is very consistent with Judaism's interpretation of the King Messiah. In no uncertain terms, *Galatians 1:4* teaches that there is a present day reality of the power of God to deliver His people from anything! The rabbinic literature also speaks at length with respect to the King Messiah's role in guiding and directing us to the Lord God our Father in heaven. The natural conclusion is in His guiding and directing us to our Father in heaven, we have a future expectation of the Olam Habah which is inherent to this aspect of guiding, saving, and redeeming His people. This is why Yeshua said in *John 13:15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (NIV)* Faith in the King Messiah is not just a mental exercise, our eyes should be focused upon Yeshua who set the example. When we say that one must believe in the Messiah Yeshua in order to be saved, these are the reasons why taken from the Tanach, the Apostolic Writings, and the rabbinic commentary. Judaism is very concerned with the Messiah, and this is the crux, the major vein of thought that is being taught throughout the Apostolic Writings. The Mercy of God has led to His sending the King Messiah, whereby, in and through him we have the forgiveness of sins. In Yeshua the Messiah, we have a present day salvation from our enemies (*the evil world, sin, sickness, etc*) and a future hope and expectation of the World to Come. Halelluia!

