

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash  
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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHOT MATOT – MASEI**

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In memory of Fred Stone, Yaakov Ben Yitzchak A"H,  
beloved father, grandfather and great grandfather,  
whose Yartzheit is 25 Tammuz

Dedicated by Ellen & Stanley Stone, Jake & Chaya,  
Micah, Adeline, Zack & Yael, Allie, Isaac, Ezra & Talia,  
Yoni & Cayley, Marc & Eliana, Adina, Gabi & Talia.

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**The Conclusion of Sefer Bamidbar**

**By Rav Gad Eldad**

Translated by Kaeren Fish

**a. What was conveyed “in the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Yericho”?**

*Sefer Bamidbar* concludes with a verse that reads:

These are the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded by the hand of Moshe to *Bnei Yisrael* in the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Yericho. (*Bamidbar* 36:13)

We recall that the arrival of *Bnei Yisrael* on the plains of Moav was recorded many chapters previously, following the war against Sichon and Og:

And *Bnei Yisrael* journeyed and they encamped on the plains of Moav on the far side of the Jordan by Yericho. (*Bamidbar* 22:1)

Since then, the text has recorded the story of Balak, the war against Midian, and various commandments conveyed to the people, including the additional (*musaf*) sacrifices prescribed for the various festivals, instructions concerning the spoils taken from Midian, and the laws of annulling vows.

However, it seems that the concluding verse of the *sefer* does not refer to all the commandment included in the 14 chapters since the arrival at the plains of Moav. An overview of the second half of the *sefer* seems to indicate that “the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded... in the plains of Moav...” refers to certain specific commandments that are preceded by an explicit noting of the fact that they are given there:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe on the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Yericho, saying... (*Bamidbar* 22:50)

And the Lord spoke to Moshe on the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Yericho, saying... (*Bamidbar* 35:1).

It turns out that the concluding verse refers to two consecutive units in the text. We are now prompted to ask, as Abravanel does:

Why are the five particular commandments that are mentioned here written after the record of the journeys? If these commandments were given at Sinai, like all the rest of the commandments, then why did Moshe not convey them to *Bnei Yisrael* until now? (Abravanel, *Bamidbar* 35:1)

**b. At Mount Sinai**

Let us first try to understand the inner structure of the *parshiot* concluding the *sefer*, by means of comparison with the conclusion of *Sefer Vayikra*:

These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moshe for *Bnei Yisrael* at Mount Sinai. (*Vayikra* 27:34)

Here, too, the specification of the place where the commandments were given seems to direct us to a specific section of the text. And in the preceding chapters we do indeed find the corresponding introduction:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai, saying... (*Vayikra* 25:1)

But then we encounter a surprise. In between this opening formula and the end of the *sefer*, there is another verse that mentions Sinai. This verse, too, looks like a conclusion that closes the unit introduced by the opening formula:

These are the statutes and the judgments and the teachings that the Lord set between Him and *Bnei Yisrael* at Mount Sinai, by the hand of Moshe. (*Vayikra* 26:46)

Thus, we have one single introductory verse, with two different conclusions.

If we look more closely at the two concluding verses, however, we see that they address different aspects. The earlier concluding verse comes at the end of the verses of rebuke, which represent the content of the covenant between the nation and God.<sup>1</sup> The later conclusion refers to the commandments *qua* commandments.

This seems to indicate that at Mount Sinai, two events took place simultaneously. There was a forging of a covenant, and at the same time commandments were given as normative instructions. Since it is the same

<sup>1</sup> The unit reads as follows: “Then I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember, and I will remember the land... And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God; I am the Lord. These are the statutes and the judgments and the teachings which the Lord set between Him and *Bnei Yisrael* at Mount Sinai by the hand of Moshe” (*Vayikra* 26:42-46).

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speech that serves both purposes, the text gives them a single introduction. Afterwards, however, each aspect is concluded independently.<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, let us examine the conclusion of *Sefer Bamidbar*.

c. **“On the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Yericho”**

The structure in *Bamidbar* is the opposite of the one we found at the end of *Sefer Vayikra*. Here we have two introductions to two separate units, which share the same conclusion. A brief review shows that each unit includes a few different subjects:

**Unit I – Bamidbar 33:50 – 34:29**

And the Lord spoke to Moshe on the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Yericho:

<p><u>Bamidbar 33:51 – 56:</u> <b>Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them:</b> When you pass over the Jordan <b>into the land of Cana’an</b>, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured pavements... And you shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families; to the larger [families] you shall give more, and to the smaller you shall give less; every man’s inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falls, according to the tribes of your fathers shall you inherit. But if you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come to pass that those whom you allow to remain of them shall be as thorns in your eyes, and stings in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein you dwell. Moreover it shall come to pass that I shall do to you as I thought to do to them.</p>	<p>Command to destroy idols during conquest of the land, along with family inheritance by lot.</p>
<p><u>Bamidbar 34:1-15</u> <b>And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying:</b> Command <i>Bnei Yisrael</i> and say to them: When you come into the land of Cana’an – this is the land that shall fall to you for an inheritance, the land of Cana’an with its borders – then the Negev quarter shall be from the wilderness of Tzin along by the border of Edom, and your south border shall be</p>	<p>Description of the borders of the portion of land that the nation will enter.</p>

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed this point within a broader context in my article, “*Sefer Ha-Mitzvot Ve-Sefer Ha-Berit*,” *Shema’atin* 141-142.

<p>outmost coast of the Dead Sea eastward... And Moshe commanded <i>Bnei Yisrael</i>, saying: <b>This is the land which you shall inherit by lot, which the Lord commanded to give to the nine tribes and the half tribe;</b> for the tribe of the children of Reuven according to the house of their fathers, and the tribe of the children of Gad according to the house of their fathers, have received their inheritance, and half the tribe of Menashe have received their inheritance; the two tribes and the half tribe have received their inheritance of this side of the Jordan near Yericho eastward, towards the rising of the sun.</p>	<p>List of the princes of the tribes who will distribute the inheritances.</p>
<p><u>Bamidbar 34:16-29:</u> <b>And he Lord spoke to Moshe, saying:</b> These are the names of the men who shall share out the land to you: Elazar, the <i>Kohen</i>, and Yehoshua, son of Nun. And you shall take one prince of every tribe, to divide the land by inheritance. And the names of the men are these: Of the tribe of Yehuda – Kalev, son of Yefuneh. And of the tribe of the children of Shimon – Shemuel, the son of Amihud... These are they whom the Lord commanded to divide the inheritance to <i>Bnei Yisrael</i> in the land of Cana’an.</p>	<p>List of the princes of the tribes who will distribute the inheritances.</p>

**Unit II: Bamidbar 35:1 – 36:13**

And the Lord spoke to Moshe on the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Yericho, saying:

<p><u>Bamidbar 35:2-8</u> Command <i>Bnei Yisrael</i>, that they give to the <i>Leviim</i> of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and you shall give also to the <i>Leviim</i> an open space for the cities round about them... And among the cities which you shall give to the <i>Leviim</i> shall be six cities of refuge, which you shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee there, and to them you shall add forty-two cities. <b>So all the cities which you shall give to the <i>Leviim</i> shall be forty-eight cities;</b> both them and their open spaces. And the cities which you shall give shall be of the possession of <i>Bnei Yisrael</i>; from</p>	<p>Command to give forty-eight cities to the <i>Leviim</i>.</p>
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<p>them that much many you shall give much, and from them that have little you shall give little; every one shall give of the cities of the <i>Leviim</i> according to his inheritance which he inherits.</p>	
<p><u><b>Bamidbar 35:9-34</b></u>          And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to <i>Bnei Yisrael</i> and say to them: When you come over the Jordan into the land of Cana'an, then you shall appoint yourselves cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the slayer who kills any person unintentionally may flee to there... And the cities that you shall give shall be six cities for refuge. <b>You shall give three cities on this side of the Jordan, and three cities shall you give in the land of Cana'an, cities of refuge shall they be....</b> And you shall not defile the land which you shall inhabit, in which I dwell, for I, the Lord, dwell among <i>Bnei Yisrael</i>.</p>	<p>Command that six cities be set aside as cities of refuge, and the laws of one who kills unintentionally, for whom the cities of refuge are intended.</p>
<p><u><b>Bamidbar 36:1-12</b></u>          And the chief fathers of the family of <b>the children of Gilad, son of Makhir, son of Menashe</b>, of the families of the sons of Yosef, came near... And they said, The Lord commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to <i>Bnei Yisrael</i>, and my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of Tzelofchad, our brother, to his daughters. But if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of <i>Bnei Yisrael</i>, then their inheritance shall be excluded from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they are joined; so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance... And Moshe commanded <i>Bnei Yisrael</i> according to the word of the Lord, saying: The tribe of the sons of Yosef has said well. This is the thing which the Lord commands concerning the daughters of Tzelofchad, saying: Let them marry whom they think best, only within the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry... As the Lord commanded Moshe, so did the daughters of Tzelofchad....</p>	<p>Complaint by the children of Menashe concerning the possibility that their inheritance would be diminished if Tzelofchad's daughters married into other tribes.</p>

**Shared conclusion for these units: *Bamidbar* 36:13**

These are the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded by the hand of Moshe to *Bnei Yisrael* in the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Yericho.

At first glance, it is difficult to identify any clear distinction between the subjects treated in the two units. However, we note that the subjects comprising the first unit all pertain to the land of Cana'an, where *Bnei Yisrael* have yet to enter. The text emphasizes that it refers only to this area, setting down its boundaries. It also notes that there is no need to relate to the eastern side of the Jordan, since that area has already been divided among the two-and-a-half tribes (*Bamidbar* 34:13-15).

Let us now try to determine which portion of land is referred to in the second unit.

**d. "You shall give three cities on the other side of the Jordan"**

The middle part of the second unit indicates that the text is no longer referring to the land of Cana'an alone; it refers to both sides of the Jordan. Prior to this unit, the text had commanded the appointment of cities for the *Leviim*, and the list of these cities is to be found in *Sefer Yehoshua*. A study of the list shows that the cities of refuge are only a small portion of the cities of the *Leviim*, which likewise are to be found on both sides of the Jordan:

*And Bnei Yisrael* gave to the *Leviim* out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the Lord, these cities and their pasture lands... out of the tribe of Yehuda, and out of the tribe of Shimon, and out of the tribe of Binyamin – thirteen cities... out of the families of the tribe of Efrayim, and out of the tribe of Dan, and out of the half tribe of Menashe – ten cities... out of the tribe of Yissakhar, and out of the tribe of Asher, and out of the tribe of Naftali, **and out of the half tribe of Menashe in Bashan – thirteen cities... out of the tribe of Reuven, and out of the tribe of Gad**, and out of the tribe of Zevulun – twelve cities. And *Bnei Yisrael* gave by lot to the *Leviim* these cities with their pasture lands, as the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moshe. (*Yehoshua* 21:3-8)

The third unit, too, refers to the inheritance of the children of Menashe, which extends over both sides of the Jordan:

Then came the lot for the tribe of Menashe, for he was the firstborn of Yosef; for Makhir, the firstborn of Menashe, the father of Gilad, because he was a man of war, therefore he had Gilad and Bashan. There was also a lot for the rest of the children of Menashe by their families: for the children of Aviezer and for the children of Chelek, and for the children of Asriel, and for the children of Shekhem, and for the children of Shefuer, and for the children of Shemida; these

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were the male children of Menashe, the son of Yosef, by their families. But Tzelofchad, son of Chefer, son of Gilad, son of Makhir, son of Menashe, had no sons, but daughters... And they came near before Elazar the Kohen, and before Yehoshua, son of Nun, and before the princes, saying: The Lord commanded Moshe to give us an inheritance among our brethren. Therefore according to the commandment of the Lord he gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father. And there fell ten portions to Menashe, besides the land of Gilad and Bashan, which were on the other side of the Jordan, because the daughters of Menashe had an inheritance among his sons, and the rest of Menashe's sons had the land of Gilad. (*Yehoshua* 17:1-6)

The daughters of Tzelofchad inherit on the western side of the Jordan, but this fact is weighted into the calculation of the inheritance of the tribe as a whole, on both sides of the Jordan.<sup>3</sup>

In summary, while the first unit of the commands "on the plains of Moav" refers to the land of Cana'an alone, the subjects covered in the second unit refer to an inheritance that extends over both sides of the Jordan. Now we will try to understand why the Torah structures the text in this way.

e. **"But if the land of your possession is unclean..."**

When the conquest of the land is complete, Yehoshua sends the soldiers belonging to the two-and-a-half tribes back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan. On their way, they build an altar, which arouses the anger of the tribes who are now living in the land of Cana'an. The "western tribes" organize themselves to wage war against the soldiers of the "eastern tribes," but before launching their attack, they send a delegation to clarify the intention behind the altar.

As part of their inquiry they note the possibility that the builders of the altar, who live on the eastern side of the Jordan, might feel that their inheritance is not as holy as the western side of the Jordan:

And they came to the children of Reuven and to the children of Gad and to the half tribe of Menashe, to the land of Gilad, and they spoke with them, saying; Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord: What trespass is this that you have committed against the God of

Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, by building for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel this day against the Lord?... If the land of your possession is unclean, then pass over to the land of the possession of the Lord, where the Lord's Sanctuary dwells, and take possession among us; but do not rebel against the Lord, nor rebel against us, in building an altar for yourselves besides the altar of the Lord our God. (*Yehoshua* 22:15-19)

The "western" tribes show understanding for such a perception, and as such they call upon their brethren to cross over the Jordan and join them on the western side. But the "eastern" tribes explain that they are mistaken:

Then the children of Reuven and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Menashe answered and said to the heads of the thousands of Israel: The mighty One, God, the Lord, the mighty One, God, the Lord, He knows, and Israel shall know; if in rebellion or if in transgression against the Lord – save us not this day – if we have built an altar for ourselves to turn from following the Lord, or if to offer a burnt offering or a meal offering upon it, or if to offer peace offerings upon it, let the Lord Himself demand reparations, or if we have not rather done this out of anxiety, saying: In time to come, your children might speak to our children, saying: What have you to do with the Lord God of Israel? For the Lord has made the Jordan a border between us and you, you children of Reuven and children of Gad; you have no part in the Lord; so shall your children make our children cease fearing the Lord. Therefore we said: Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but that it may be a witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might perform the service of the Lord before Him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings, that your children may not say to our children in time to come: You have no part in the Lord... God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn this day from following the Lord, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for meal offerings, or for sacrifices, besides the altar of the Lord our God that is before His Sanctuary. (*Yehoshua* 22:21-29)

The two-and-a-half tribes reject the proposed interpretation of their actions, insisting that their inheritance is just as worthy as that on the western bank. The only difference between the two sides is the location of the *Mishkan*, which is on the western side. It is precisely because the "eastern" tribes also view themselves as committed to God and to His *Mishkan* that they build the altar, to preclude any possibility of being cut off from it in the future.

f. **"And you shall not defile the land which you shall inhabit"**

In view of the above incident, let us try to understand the significance of the division of the Divine

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<sup>3</sup> Metzudat David writes: "For the daughters of Menashe..." – This means to say that since the daughters of Menashe also receive a portion, and the remaining sons of Menashe received the land of Gilad, it was therefore appropriate that they receive these ten portions within the Land of Israel itself, no more and no less, for this was the proper allotment due to them" (Metzudat David, *Yehoshua* 17:6).

To this we might add that according to Moshe's instructions to the daughters of Tzelofchad, they were meant to marry men from their own tribe – including those who might live on the eastern side of the Jordan. Thus, these women themselves were a bridge between the two parts of the inheritance.

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command "on the plains of Moav" and its repetition.

Since the Exodus from Egypt, the nation has dreamed of the land of Canaan. Towards the end of their journey, they are forced to fight unexpected wars, as a result of which they conquer additional territory. The climax of this development is the request by the two and a half tribes to perpetuate the situation that has been created and to make their home there. At first, their proposal is denounced, but after they reformulate it, it is accepted.

From the perspective of someone who has been part of the journey from the beginning, the region on the eastern side of the Jordan might be considered as having become part of the inheritance of *Bnei Yisrael* "after the fact," as a result of a compromise achieved with the tribes that insisted on settling there, and hence as being of lesser religious value. It is reasonable to assume that something of this feeling lurked among the "western" tribes, and that they expressed this in the first incident of friction between them and the "eastern" tribes. The same impression also arises from the conclusion of *Bamidbar* 32, with the acceptance of the compromise concerning inheritance on the eastern bank of the Jordan.

In order to counter such a perception, the text sets forth a structure of parallel commands: the first part deals with the western bank of the Jordan; the next part deals with both banks. In this way, the text hints that there are two aspects to the "plains of Moav." On the one hand, the nation is still stationed outside the borders of the promised Land of Canaan, and therefore they must still engage in the final arrangements and preparations for the conclusion of their journey. On the other hand, since part of the nation has already settled in these regions, the land here has become part of the possession. The eastern tribes are therefore warned now concerning defilement of the land, just as the people are warned concerning the defilement of the western side:

And you shall not defile the land which you shall inhabit, in which I dwell, **for I, the Lord, dwell among *Bnei Yisrael***.<sup>4</sup> (*Bamidbar* 35:34)

For this reason, at the end of the two corresponding units the text unites them with a joint conclusion:

These are the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded by the hand of Moshe to *Bnei Yisrael* **in the plains of Moav by the Jordan near Yericho**. (*Bamidbar* 36:13)

This explains the commands that are left to the end of the

*sefer*.<sup>5</sup> Following the agreement with the two and a half tribes that they will settle on the eastern side of the Jordan, the text lists the stations in *Bnei Yisrael's* journey, indicating that, in a sense - for these tribes, at least - the journey has culminated and they have arrived:

These are the journeys of *Bnei Yisrael*, who went out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moshe and Aharon... And they journeyed from Mount Avarim, and encamped in the plains of Moav, by the Jordan, near Yericho. And they encamped by the Jordan, from Beit ha-Yeshimot to Avel ha-Shittim, on the plains of Moav. (*Bamidbar* 33:1-49)

This feeling is reinforced by the series of commands that appear in the order discussed above. Thus, the text informs us that although the journey was originally planned with a defined region as its destination, the Divine Presence is not restricted to that portion of land. God's Presence accompanies *Bnei Yisrael* wherever they are:

In every place where I cause My Name to be pronounced, I will come to you and I will bless you. (*Shemot* 20:21)

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<sup>4</sup> The site of the Sanctuary nevertheless remains on the Temple Mount, as noted by the children of Reuben and Gad in the episode of the altar:

"There are ten degrees of holiness that the Land of Israel possesses over and above all other lands. What is the land's holiness? That the *omer*, the two loaves, and the *bikkurim* are brought from its produce, whereas these are not brought from the produce of all other lands. **The Land of Canaan is sanctified over and above the eastern side of the Jordan, for the land of Canaan is fit for the Temple, whereas the eastern bank of the Jordan is not fit for the Temple...**" (Sifri Zuta 5:2).

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<sup>5</sup> Abravanel answers his own question on the level of Moshe himself. To his view, these commands are meant to give Moshe the sense that he has participated in some measure in the processes of giving the nation possession of the land. We, in contrast, have focused on the national significance of the commands.