

# MATTOT – “Tribes”

## NUMBERS (BE’MIDBAR 30:1 – 32:42)

### INTRODUCTION

1. This portion begins by discussing a vow or an oath.
  - a. It declares the sanctity of a vow or an oath.
2. A “vow” in Hebrew is נָדַב *neder*.
  - a. Can prohibit something for himself that the Torah allows.
  - b. Can obligate himself to do something in addition to Torah or that might be optional.
3. It is a solemn promise to consecrated something to God or do something in His service.
  - a. Many times vows are made in a time of distress.
  - b. Motive is to secure help from above.

**“And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, and I come again to my father’s house in peace, then shall the LORD be my God. And this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God’s house. And of all that You shall give me, I will surely give the tenth to You.’” – Genesis 28:20-22**

**“And Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh and after they had drunk. And Eli the priest sat on the seat by the side post of the tabernacle of the LORD. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD, and wept sorely. And she vowed a vow and said, ‘O, Lord of Hosts, if You will indeed look upon the affliction of Your handmaid and remember me, and not forget Your handmaid, but will give to Your handmaid a man-child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.’ ” – 1 Samuel 1:9-11**

4. Notice that, in both cases, they are in midst of a crisis:
  - Jacob is fleeing from Esau to a foreign land.
  - Hannah desperately wants a son.
5. Notice also that God is the only to hear their vow.
  - Jacob is alone.
  - Hannah spoke in her heart, only moving her lips.
6. Emphasizing that once the vow is made, regardless of who hears, it is to be performed.
  - a. God expects it to be honored because it is a vow.
7. Rabbinical sources contend that making a vow is equivalent to something only God can do.
  - a. Meaning, once the person makes a vow, obligated to keep as if it was a commandment.
  - b. Whatever the person has vowed is bound to be kept as strictly as God’s own law.
8. Sometimes the vow is an expression of gratitude for Divine favor and blessing.

### CHAPTER 30: SACREDNESS OF VOWS

1. Verse 1: “And Moses spoke unto the heads of the **tribes**.”

2. Verse 2: “When a man vows to the LORD or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond...”
  - a. Word “oath” is שבועה *sh’vuah*.
  - b. The root word means “complete, full” and is source of word for “seven.”
  - c. Implies that one making oath is “incomplete” and submits in order to be complete.
3. Word “bond” is אסר *issar* which is considered a negative oath.
  - a. The word means to “restrain.”
  - b. Thus, a self-imposed pledge to abstain from something that is perfectly lawful.
  - c. Infers it might be something that could be a weakness for him but not for others.
  - d. Wine is not unlawful but for some it might be a stumbling block.
4. Whether a positive vow or negative one, the goal is to be complete.
5. Verse 3: “He shall not break his word but shall do all that proceeds from his mouth.”
  - a. “Break his word” is literally “profane his word” – ignore his word.
  - b. Treat it flippantly.
  - c. Profaning the name of YHVH is ignoring His authority.
6. When all is well, humans forget what they have vowed in midst of crisis.
  - a. Person is still obligated to keep their word – all that proceeds from their mouth.
  - b. God honors all that proceeds from His mouth.
  - c. See how vows become equivalent to commands in terms of obedience.
7. Torah now focuses upon vows made by women under authority:
  - Women before marriage.
  - Married women.
  - Women after marriage (widows or divorced).
8. Verses 3-5: Unmarried woman who makes vow can have it affirmed or annulled by her father.
  - a. If he remains silent, it stands; if he speaks up and refutes it, the vow is not valid.
9. Verses 6-8: Address vows of a married woman.
  - a. Instead of father, the husband can ratify by silence or annul by disallowing.
10. Verse 9-12: The vows of divorced or widowed woman.
  - a. All vows she makes in that situation stand.
  - b. If she made them before she was divorced or widowed and husband ratified, stand.
  - c. If he annulled them, they are void.
11. Verse 15: If husband affirmed them by silence and later recants to annul them, he bears guilt.

## CHAPTER 31: WAR AGAINST MIDIAN

1. Verse 2: “Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites.”
  - a. Afterwards he would be gathered to his fathers.
  - b. Execute the LORD’s vengeance – attacking Israel equivalent to attacking the LORD.
2. This war is waged in retaliation for the role Midian played in the incident at Ba’al Peor.
  - a. The war was ruthless and involved all the tribes including Levi.
  - b. Pinchas participated as well; he had begun what was about to escalate.
  - c. Tribes of Midian affected lived in close proximity to Moab.
3. Because of this war, Midian continued to harass Israel in later years.
  - a. God made sure that enmity existed between the two nations.
4. Verse 5: 12,000 (thousand from each tribe) went to war.
  - a. Verse 6: Pinchas went with vessels and trumpets to sound alarm.
  - b. Apparently went before Israel into the battle to encourage and exhort.

**“And it shall be, when you are come near unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people, And shall say unto them, ‘Hear, O Israel, you approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be terrified because of them; For the LORD your God is he that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.” – Deuteronomy 20:2-4**

5. If the vessels Pinchas took into the battle included the Ark of the Covenant, consider:
  - a. This battle resulted in great victory for Israel.
  - b. Compare to battle in 1 Samuel 4 which was a great defeat for Israel.
  - c. Another Pinchas took the ark into the battle against the Philistines.

**“So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwells between the cherubim: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.” – 1 Samuel 4:4**

6. Verse 7-8: “The slew every male” including five Midianite chieftains (kings).
  - a. They also killed Balaam with the sword – the “weapon” he wanted to use.
  - b. God turns the intent of Israel’s adversaries back on them.
  - c. Obviously delayed his departure for Mesopotamia and went to claim reward.
7. Balaam was from Mesopotamia (Babylon) and is a type of Adversary.
  - a. Can’t curse them but can seduce them into sin.
  - b. He was ultimately destroyed with the sword.
  - c. Tradition says after a trial.
8. Verses 9 -14: The officers of the army took women and children captive.
  - a. Along with flocks, herds and other spoils of war.
  - b. This provokes Moses to say:

**“Have you saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit sin against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and the plague was on the congregation of the LORD. And now kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that has known man by lying with him.” – Numbers 31:15-17**

9. The women were the ones used to seduce Israel into sinning against God.
  - a. They represent the evil that threatens Israel’s existence.
  - b. Rabbinical commentary suggests the women who were known to have participated.
  - c. They are your weakness and are willing to destroy you.
  - d. Better to destroy them before they destroy you.

**“You have heard that it was said by them of old time, ‘You shalt not commit adultery:’ But I say unto you, That whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye offends you, pluck it out, and cast it away: for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell. And if your right hand offends you, cut it off, and cast it away: for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell.” – Matthew 5:27-30**

10. These women hearkened unto the counsel of Balaam (type of Adversary).
  - a. Those females who were virgin and not part of the sin were made domestic servants.
  - b. It appears cruel to us but cancer left to spread will kill the entire body.
  - c. We weren't there and impossible for us to judge accurately given situation.
  - d. Keep in mind, through marriage, Midian was Moses' physical kinsmen.
11. Verses 19-24: Everything and everybody that came in contact with Midian must be cleansed.
  - a. Those who touched a corpse must be cleansed along with their captives.
  - b. They had to camp outside the camp – that is, the tabernacle courtyard.
  - c. They weren't forbidden to leave the congregation because of contacting a corpse.
12. Spoil, including vessels, must be purified by fire and / or water of purification.
  - a. The vessels had to be purged of any unclean food that had been placed in them.
  - b. After purging, they had to be purified.
  - c. Seeing that we are earthen vessels, purging the unclean precedes purifying.
  - d. The purifying, not the purging, allows us to approach the Creator – through Y'shua.
13. Verses 25-54: Details the “sum of the prey that was taken.”
  - a. Verse 32: Gives the sum of the livestock suggests Israel conquered prosperous nation.
  - b. Verse 40: 16,000 people were taken captive.
  - c. Verse 52: Indicates an incredible amount of gold was taken as spoil.
14. Verse 49: Not a man of Israel was missing after this battle – no casualties at all.
  - a. Indicating that when God advises Israel to war, there should be no fear of enemy.
  - b. Also indicates that Midian should have stayed out of Balaam's plot.

## **CHAPTER 32: TRIBES REMAIN ON THE EAST OF JORDAN**

1. As chapter begins, Reuben and Gad request to remain on the eastern bank of Jordan.
  - a. Had this not ultimately been granted, east bank would have been jointly owned by all.
  - b. Eventually this area given to Reuben, Gad and half tribe of Mannaseh.
  - c. Specifically given to Machir and Gilead.
2. The area became known as Gilead and was covered with forests, orchards and vineyards.
  - a. It produced perfumes and medicines for the ancient world.
  - b. It also produced or was home to the prophet Elijah, the Gileadite.
3. Verses 6-15: Moses asks the question:

**“Shall your brothers go to war, and shall you sit here? And why do you break the heart of the sons of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD has given them?”**

**– Numbers 32:6-7**

4. Basically, what gives you the right to be exempted from the war of conquest?
  - a. Furthermore, you'll prompt the other tribes to want to stay on this side of Jordan.
  - b. It will be a repeat of what happened when the 10 spies gave their evil report.
  - c. All those Moses spoke to at this time had not been born or had been very young.
5. Verse 12: Reminds the people that Caleb and Joshua were only ones of that generation who would enter the land.
  - a. They were the only prepared to enter the land.
6. Verses 16-19: These tribes responded to Moses with a promise:
  - a. Allow us to build pens for livestock and repair and fortify cities for our families.

- b. We will go at the head of the column to fight the war until all Israel is settled.
- c. Meaning they committed for a number of years (war was 7 yrs).
- 7. Moses responds favorably to request reminding them of the vow they have made.
  - a. The beginning of this portion addresses the sanctity of a vow.
  - b. It must be honored just as surely as commands from God.
  - c. Did not require them to remain after the war was won.
- 8. Verse 22: Makes it clear that they must be “clear before the LORD and before Israel.”
  - a. The only way to do this is to keep your word.
- 9. Not only must their conscience be clear (before LORD) but actions must be above reproach (before Israel).
  - a. Must avoid things that appear to be wrong.

**“Abstain from every appearance of evil.” – 1 Thessalonians 5:22**

- 10. If they had not, Moses warned, “your sin will find you.”
  - a. Like a curse, sin has an individual existence.”
  - b. Sinner cannot escape its consequence – it will find you and overtake you.
  - c. The only thing that can stop this is repentance and the atonement of the Messiah.
- 11. Later we see that they kept their vow.

**“Then Joshua called for the Reubenites and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and said to them, ‘You have done all that which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you. And you have listened to my voice, to all that I have commanded you. You have not left your brothers these many days until today, and have kept the observance of the command of the LORD your God.’ – Joshua 22:1-3**

- 12. This sequence of events prompts this question: if we are Israel (in Messiah) at what point do we go to war for the sake of the Land and for our brethren?
  - a. Would seem that we must also be willing to deny ourselves at some point for His sake.
- 13. Verse 33: Moses gave the land of Sihon and Og to Reuben, Gad and half-tribe of Mannaseh.
  - a. Interesting that Joseph’s descendants were among those settled on the east of river.
  - b. “Half” is not accurate, only “part” of Manasseh - specifically Machir and Gilead.
  - c. Interesting that these families did not request to live on east bank.
- 14. It is believed Moses placed them there knowing there would be close contact with those on the western bank of the Jordan.
  - a. This would have collateral effect on Reuben and Gad.
  - b. Verse 39: Makes a point of emphasizing the “children of Machir.”
  - c. They dispossessed the Amorites there and dwelt in that land.
  - d. Again, interesting because this is the land where Elijah would one day dwell.
- 15. Manasseh was the one who represented “forgetfulness” of where I came from.
  - a. Elijah is the one who comes to recall to “remember” who we are.