

# מַסְעֵי

## MASSEI/JOURNEYS Bemidbar/Numbers 33:1-36:13

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This week's Parasha begins with a listing of the Israelite's **encampments** as they travelled through the wilderness:

*Bemidbar 33:1 These are the journeys (מַסְעֵי) of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

**Journeys** (massei - מַסְעֵי) can be defined as **pulling up stakes, breaking camp, setting out**. The **journey** had a **goal** and it was accomplished by moving from one location to another, **under the hand of Moses and Aaron, the High Priest**.

It is probably not an exaggeration to suggest that all of our **focus** is now on **entry into and the inheritance of the Promised Land**. Much of the Torah has in fact been pointing us to the **importance of the land**. Remember that **Abram** was directed to leave his home in Mesopotamia and to travel to a "**land I will show you**" where **יהוה** would make him into "**a great nation**":

*Bereshith (Genesis) 12:1 Now יהוה had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.<sup>2</sup> I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.*

Our fathers **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** lived much of their lives in the **Land of Promise**. When they were forced to leave it, they **longed to return**. However, because of **famine, Jacob's family** (now a **nation**) finds itself in **exile**, and the book of **Shemot/Exodus** begins with the **oppressiveness of slavery in Egypt**. Then **יהוה** again **remembers** his people and raises up a **deliverer** to take them back to the **Promised Land**:

*Shemot 3:7 And יהוה said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.<sup>8</sup> "So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.<sup>9</sup> "Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.<sup>10</sup> "Come now, therefore, and I will send you (Moses) to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."*

**יהוה** takes the children of Israel out of Egypt to **Mt. Sinai** where He gives them His **Torah/instructions** in order to **transform them from slavery to freedom** and to prepare them for **entry** into the **land**. The Torah will teach them precious lessons of **faith, trust**, and the attainment of a **higher moral standard** necessary for a **people belonging to יהוה**. The book of **Vayikra/Leviticus** teaches them how to be a **holy nation**, preparing them for living **life as a sovereign nation** in the **Promised Land**:

*Vayikra 20:24 'But I have said to you, "You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am אלהים your Elohim, who has separated you from the peoples.*

**Bemidbar** has been a book of **travels through the wilderness towards the Promised Land**. The people have been **counted, organized, and tested**. Although a second generation has replaced the first, the **initial goal of reaching the Promised Land** remains fixed on the horizon.

Now as we conclude the book of **Bemidbar**, the people stand at the **very gates of the Promised Land**, patiently awaiting instructions to **move forward**. Moses has been commanded by יהוה to record this complete list of journeys with their **42 encampments**. Each **location** is said to be a **clue** as to the **journey that we will be on** as we keep in mind **our goal of the Promised Land**. It does not escape our thoughts that there are also **42 months** (3 ½ years) in the **Great Tribulation**.

Let's look at just a few of the **names of the places** where the Israelites camped. First, Bemidbar 33:3 gives the **name** of the place they left:

*Bemidbar 33:3 They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians.*

**Rameses** means “**child of the sun**”, and it was from here that they **departed from Egypt**. The **date** given for their departure is actually a **full-moon date**. Most of us have also been “**children of the sun**” as in the past our faith focused on the **solar events of Christmas and Easter**. Today, we have **broken camp (at Passover)** and headed in the direction of **Sukkot**:

*Bemidbar 33:5 Then the children of Israel moved from Rameses and camped at Sukkot.*

The celebration of **Sukkot** is often one of the **first steps** for people as they begin their **Hebrew roots journey**. **Sukkot** is one of the **three times during the year** that Israelites are commanded **to be in Jerusalem**. Yet this **Sukkot** was **located in Egypt**. I think it foreshadows the fact that we will be **gathering for this festival before** we are all actually able **to celebrate it in Jerusalem**.

I read some interesting information on what is believed to be this location of **Sukkot in Egypt**. There was a **large fortress** there which was **guarded by a legion of soldiers**. It was the staging area **for assembling and outfitting Pharaoh's armies before going out to war**. Since **Moses** lived as a **son of Pharaoh** for **40 years**, he would have held a **prestigious position in the army** and been very **familiar** with this **fort**. He was well qualified for leading the Israelites out **by their armies** according to **Bemidbar 33:1** and **Shemot**:

*Shemot 13:18 So Elohim led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.*

Just as our forefathers travelled from **Egypt to the Promised Land**, so shall we as a part of יהוה's **restoration**. The books of the prophets are full of these **prophecies**. Here is one:

*Ezekiel 20:34 "I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury*

*poured out.*<sup>35</sup> "And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face."<sup>36</sup> "Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you," says Adonai יהוה.<sup>37</sup> "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;"<sup>38</sup> "I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am יהוה."

As it appears that we have **already begun** our own journey **out of this world (Egypt)** and headed **for the Land of Promise**, I believe the **names of each of the encampments** will become important **revelations for our future**. The Israelites became aware of when it became **time to move** by the **lifting of the cloud containing the Shekinah Glory**. There's not a doubt in my mind that if we are **keeping the commandments** that He has **already revealed to us as truth** (first step in leaving Rameses), that we also will **know when it is time to move on to the next location**. How He will do it, I do not know....but in the **pattern of the 1<sup>st</sup> Exodus**, the lifting of the cloud was **obvious to all**.

Now let's go back to the land that is to be possessed....the **inheritance**:

*Bereshith 15:7* Then He said to him, "I am יהוה, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to **inherit** (יָרַשׁ) it."

Strong's defines the word **inherit**:

**3423 יָרַשׁ yarash**

**Meaning:** 1) to seize, **dispossess, take possession of, inherit, disinherit, occupy, impoverish, be an heir**

Note the almost **opposite meanings....to inherit or to disinherit. To impoverish, or to become an heir. To seize or to dispossess.** We can see these contrasting meanings in the **different translations** of this one verse:

*Bemidbar 33:53* And ye shall dispossess (יָרַשׁ) the inhabitants of the land and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it (יָרַשׁ). (King James)

*Numbers 33:53* Take possession (יָרַשׁ) of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess (יָרַשׁ). (NIV)

To **possess** (יָרַשׁ) the inheritance means that the land must be **seized** (יָרַשׁ) **from the people** that currently lived there. Now let's see how this all came about. First of all, isn't an **inheritance** something that is **owned** and **passed down from generation to generation**? How then, can the **Land of Israel** be called "**our inheritance**" when it was **occupied by people of other nations**?

There are really **two reasons**:

- יהוה owns the land

- *Joel 2:18* Then יהוה will be zealous for His land, and pity His people.

- *Joel 3:1* "For behold, in those days and at that time, When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> I will also gather all nations, And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; And I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up **My land**.
- *Jeremiah 2:7* I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled **My land** and made My heritage an abomination.
- **Israel is His firstborn**
  - *Exodus 4:22* Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what **יְהוָה**' says: **Israel is my firstborn son**,
  - *Jeremiah 31:9* .... For I am a Father to Israel, and **Ephraim is My firstborn**.
  - *Hebrews 12:23* to the general assembly and **congregation of the firstborn who are registered in heaven**, to Yah the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

The **land** given to Israel is **unique in all the world**. Possessing the land is linked to the **keeping of the Torah**. When the inhabitants of the land **keep Torah, the land flourishes**. But when the inhabitants of the land **disobey Torah, the land withers and dies**. The reason why **obedience** is important is because **יְהוָה desires to live in the land**. This is why so many of the **commandments deal with preparation of the land**. In our Parasha we see the **commandment to purge the land**:

*Bemidbar 33:51* "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan,<sup>52</sup> 'then you shall **drive out all the inhabitants of the land** from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places;

At the same time, they were warned that **if they did not fulfill this commandment to drive out the inhabitants, they would suffer trouble**:

*Bemidbar 33:55* 'But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.<sup>56</sup> 'Moreover it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.' "

**יְהוָה** was warning them up front that if they considered **compromising with the residents of the land**, i.e. **dividing the land** with them, then **those nations would not make peace**. Instead, they would **behave with hostility towards Israel**. **Peacefully living side by side with enemies** is an **impossible option**, and we see that so clearly today in Israel. Rabbi Sholom Gold points out a subtle word change in the translation of a phrase in verse 55. He says instead of:

“they shall harass you **in** the land where you dwell”

it should read: “they shall harass you **about** the land where you dwell”

In other words, even though the Palestinians **have their own areas to dwell**, they will continually harass the Jews about the land where **they** are dwelling. They will **never make peace**. Rather they will **constantly be asking the Jews to give up more and more of their land**. It's pretty impressive that יהוה could thousands of years ago, speak so accurately of Israel's situation **today!**

It was יהוה's plan that **only HE be worshipped in the land**. The current state of affairs in Israel is a perfect example of what happens when people decide to **modify His instructions** because it seems **more reasonable, peaceful, or politically correct** to allow those following other gods to live with them in the Land.

There is a **Psalm** that describes today's plight of those who wait for יהוה to make a move on their behalf. It is a plea for יהוה to **recover His land and His people**. Some of these verses could have been plucked right out of today's newspapers:

*Psalm 83:1... Do not keep silent, O Elohim! Do not hold Your peace, And do not be still, O Elohim!<sup>2</sup> For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; And those who hate You have lifted up their head.<sup>3</sup> They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, And consulted together against Your sheltered ones.<sup>4</sup> They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more."<sup>5</sup> For they have consulted together with one consent; They form a confederacy against You:<sup>6</sup> The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites;<sup>7</sup> Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;<sup>8</sup> Assyria also has joined with them; They have helped the children of Lot. Selah<sup>9</sup> Deal with them as with Midian..... Who said, "Let us take for ourselves the pastures of Elohim for a possession."...<sup>16</sup> Fill their faces with shame, That they may seek Your name, O יהוה.<sup>17</sup> Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; Yes, let them be put to shame and perish,<sup>18</sup> That they may know that You, whose name alone is יהוה, Are the Most High over all the earth.*

Okay, we are going to skip over to chapter 35. We know that יהוה **cannot abide in a land** that has been **polluted by murder**. **Blood spilled on the land of Yah pollutes and defiles that land**. When we think back to the book of Vayikra (Leviticus), we remember how key **blood** is to all of His **instructions**. While **atonement for sin was made possible by the blood of a guiltless substitute**, the **improper spilling of blood is an abomination to the Almighty** and therefore **defiles** whatever it touches. In the first **unlawful homicide, innocent blood was shed and cried out from the land for vengeance**:

*Bereshith 4:9 Then יהוה said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"<sup>10</sup> And He said, "What have you done? **The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.***

For this reason, Bemidbar 35 contains many **instructions concerning homicide**. The possibility of **asylum** is discussed and should be understood to be limited solely to the **unpremeditated manslayer**. In verse 19, the person who is to be the **executioner for the murderer** is called the **blood-avenger**:

*Bemidbar 35:19 'The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.*

In Hebrew, the term for the “**avenger of blood**” is the “**go’el hadam**” (גֹּאֵל הַדָּם). Hadam means “**the blood**”, and although “**avenger**” is the translation for “**go’el**”, the word is more commonly translated as “**redeemer**”. The **redeemer** is the “**restorer of the status quo**”, a responsibility that rests on the **next of kin**. Redeemers performed several functions. For example, a redeemer would **provide his deceased kinsman with a survivor by marrying the childless widow** (such as Boaz did for Ruth’s husband). A redeemer was **obligated to bring his kinsman out of a debt** that resulted in his being sold into slavery (Vayikra 25:48). In cases of **homicide**, the obligation of the **blood redeemer/avenger** (גֹּאֵל הַדָּם) falls on the **brother, the uncle, or the cousin, in that order**.

Okay, now let’s try to make some sense of this and tie it all back to **Yeshua**. Jewish commentator Jacob Milgrom writes (emphasis mine):

“**Adam is created in God’s ‘image’** (Gen. 1:27; 9:6), an **idiom** that is used for the **father-son relationship** (Gen. 5:3). By declaring **Himself** to be **man’s kinsman, God automatically becomes man’s blood redeemer, obligated to execute each and every murderer.**”

Take another look at Bemidbar 35:19. We see that there is one called the **avenger of blood**, the blood redeemer, who has the **responsibility of finding and executing the murderer**. Who was behind the **murder of the first man** and is therefore called “**murderer**” by Yeshua in John?

*John 8:44 "You are of your father **the devil**, and the desires of your father you want to do. **He was a murderer from the beginning**, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.*

*John 10:10 "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

So we see that the **murderer is satan!** According to the Jewish teaching above by Milgrom, יהוה has declared **Himself to be man’s kinsman and man’s blood redeemer**. This is why Yeshua who is **Yah in the flesh qualifies to be our kinsman Redeemer/Avenger!** He is the **firstborn** among the **brethren (kinsmen)!**

*Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the **firstborn among many brethren**.*

The **Promised Land** must also be **redeemed** because it has been **defiled by blood**:

*Bemidbar 35:33 'So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for **blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.***

If someone who is **guilty of murder** is **let off the hook**, then the **land is not considered redeemed**. Only the **justice of Elohim** can keep the land from being **defiled**. This is an instance where יהוה

demands **retribution**. The land has been **polluted** which means it has been made **common** rather than **holy and set apart**. Once the Land of Israel has been **defiled**, it is **no different than the land of the rest of the world**. Now the **death of the High Priest** was an **acceptable substitute** for the killer if he had taken a life by **accident**. The **High Priest's death** relieved the land of its **defilement**. However, a **purposeful killing required the death of the murderer**. It brought on the **wrath** of the **blood avenger** (גֹּאֵל הַדָּם). Is this not what we will see when **Yeshua returns**? The **wrath** of יהוה will come upon those who have **murdered and persecuted His people**:

*Isaiah 34:2 For the wrath of יהוה is against all nations, And His fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter.<sup>3</sup> Also their slain shall be thrown out; Their stench shall rise from their corpses, And the mountains shall be melted with their blood.<sup>4</sup> All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down As the leaf falls from the vine, And as fruit falling from a fig tree.<sup>5</sup> " For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; **Indeed it shall come down on Edom, And on the people of My curse, for judgment.**<sup>6</sup> **The sword of יהוה is filled with blood... a great slaughter in the land of Edom.***

Those who are **victorious over the beast** will understand the importance of **His avenging** as they will be singing of it as a part of the **Song of Moses**:

*Revelation 15:2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the **victory over the beast**, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of Yah.<sup>3</sup> They sing the **Song of Moses**, the servant of Yah, and the Song of the Lamb...*

These are some of the words from the **Song of Moses**:

*Devarim 32:39 Now see that I, even I, am He, And there is no Elohim besides Me; **I kill and I make alive**; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.<sup>40</sup> For I raise My hand to heaven, And say, "As I live forever,<sup>41</sup> If I whet My glittering sword, And My hand takes hold on judgment, **I will render vengeance to My enemies**, And repay those who hate Me.<sup>42</sup> **I will make My arrows drunk with blood**, And My sword shall devour flesh, With the blood of the slain and the captives, From the heads of the leaders of the enemy."<sup>43</sup> "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For **He will avenge the blood of His servants**, And render vengeance to His adversaries; **He will provide atonement for His land and His people.**"*

Those **martyred for their testimony** will also call for the **avenging of their blood**:

*Revelation 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of Yah and for the testimony which they held.<sup>10</sup> And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Adonai, holy and true, until You judge and **avenge our blood** on those who dwell on the earth?"*

**Justice** will prevail as **Yeshua** will be leading the charge at the **Battle of Armageddon** in response to the lives taken and as our **Kinsman Redeemer**, our **go'el hadam** (גֹּאֵל הַדָּם), our **Avenger of Blood**:

**Revelation 19:1** After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to Adonai our Elohim!"<sup>2</sup> "For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and **He has avenged on her the blood of His servants** shed by her."

For the land to enjoy the peace and safety יהוה promised, the **Messiah must purge it completely. Blood will be avenged for in the battle of Armageddon.** The land will then be completely cleansed by fire and returned to a **Garden of Eden-like existence:**

**Joel 2:1** Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; **For the day of יהוה is coming,** For it is at hand:<sup>2</sup> A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; Nor will there ever be any such after them, Even for many successive generations.<sup>3</sup> A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; **The land is like the Garden of Eden before them,** And behind them a desolate wilderness; Surely nothing shall escape them.

I want to understand the **wrath and the justice** (which includes **avenging**) of Elohim. It is as much a part of His **character** as **His love and grace**. Today we are witnesses of a seemingly never-ending cycle of violence in the Middle East. It is all about **man's avenging** and **blood feuds among families and sects**. As believers we have been taught not to seek **revenge**:

**Romans 12:19** Beloved, **do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath;** for it is written, "**Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,**" says Adonai.

Still, however, do you realize that this line concerning **vengeance** comes straight from **the Song of Moses...the song that we will be singing in the tribulation?**

**Devarim 32:35** **Vengeance is Mine, and recompense;** Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.<sup>36</sup> "For יהוה will judge His people and **have compassion on His servants, When He sees that their strength is gone....**

**Revenge** is not the same as **defending yourselves**. **Going to war** can be a **necessary action**. But **vengeance** belongs to יהוה. The verses above tell us that יהוה's **vengeance will occur when His servants' strength is gone**. I'm not sure whether that's encouraging or not. I guess it means if we are survivors, we will have to **remember to never, never give up. He will deliver!**

Shabbat Shalom!

**Ardelle**

And very appropriately, we end the book of Bemidbar with the traditional exclamation:

**Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!**

חזק חזק ונתחזק