

September 1, 2019 - Num, 33:1-56 - Recap of Israel's Journeys
Torah Reading: Numbers 33:1-56 - Recap of Israel's Journeys
Psalm 106:19-27
Haftarah: Isaiah 11:16 -12:6 + 14:1-2

Israel's Journeys Thus Far

Numbers 33:1-49 - A list of everywhere Israel journeyed after leaving Egypt.

Numbers 33:1-2 - "These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD: and these are their journeys according to their goings out."

Rashi - "These are the journeys": Why were these journeys recorded? To inform us of the kind deeds of the Omnipresent, for although He issued a decree to move them around [from place to place] and make them wander in the desert, you should not say that they were moving about and wandering from station to station for all forty years, and they had no rest, because there are only forty-two stages.

Deduct fourteen of them, for they all took place in the first year, before the decree, from when they journeyed from Rameses until they arrived in Rithmah, from where the spies were sent, as it says, "Then the people journeyed from Hazeroth [and camped in the desert of Paran]." (12:16); "Send out for yourself men..." (13:2), and here it says, "They journeyed from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah," teaching us that it [Rithmah] was in the desert of Paran. Subtract a further eight stages which took place after Aaron's death-from Mount Hor to the plains of Moab-during the fortieth year, and you will find that throughout the thirty-eight years they made only twenty journeys. I found this in the commentary of R. Moshe (Hadarshan) [the preacher] (Mid. Aggadah).

R. Tanchuma expounds it in another way. It is analogous to a king whose son became sick, so he took him to a far away place to have him healed. On the way back, the father began citing all the stages of their journey, saying to him, "This is where we sat, here we were cold, here you had a headache etc. So the Holy One blessed be He said to him: Moses! Enumerate all the places where they provoked me to anger. For this reason it is written: "These are the stages of the children of Israel." - [Mid. Tanchuma Massei 3, Num. Rabbah 23:3]

i.e. it is an opportunity to review God's miracles, His gracious care and kindness to them, as well as a warning about the times they disobeyed and received His chastisement. They can recall their own faithfulness in following God through all that terrible wilderness, but also their rebellion and ungratefulness.

- **Hebrews 13:14** - "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." The journeys are analogous to our being strangers in this world, but laboring to enter the rest.

Maimonides laid down a general rule for passages like this that seem superfluous, dry or trivial. "In like manner there is a good reason for every passage, the object of which we cannot see. We must always apply the words of our Sages: "It is not a vain thing for you" (**Deuteronomy 32:47**), and if it *seem* vain, it is your fault. (Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 1:1)

Numbers 33:50-56 - Instructions for entering Canaan

The rabbis understood that living in the Promised Land was related to a blessed spiritual state of being.

Commenting on **Leviticus 25:38** - "To give you the land of Canaan, to be your God." Do you mean to say that whoever does not reside in the land of Israel has no god? But what is meant is - Whoever resides outside the land is as if he worships idols. David said so too: **1 Samuel 26:19** - "For they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord (i.e. in Eretz Israel, from where he fled from the anger of Saul), saying "Go, serve other gods." But whoever told David to go serve other gods? But this teaches you that whoever resides outside the Land of Israel is as if he served idols. (Ketubot 110b)

This doesn't make sense in the physical, but spiritually the Promised Land is the "Rest," the place of *shalom*, of trust, of being at one with God.

Numbers 33:50 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places:"

"pictures" - *maskiyth* - images, carved figurines, idols. It can also mean inner imagination, opinion, desires:

- **Psalm 73:7** - "Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish (*maskiyth*)."

- **Ezekiel 8:12** - "Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery (*maskiyth*)? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth."

That is how idolatry originates in our heart.

- **Ezekiel 14:3** - "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?"

- **Ezekiel 20:16** - "For their hearts continually went after their idols."

God had previously promised to precede Israel in driving out the Canaanites:

- **Exodus 23:23, 27** - "...For mine Angel shall go before thee...I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land."

But here, He describes the consequences if they *don't* complete the task.

Numbers 33:53 - "And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it."

Numbers 33:55 - "But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell."

Repeated in **Joshua 23:13** - "Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out [any of] these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you"

"pricks" in your eyes = *sek* - a briar, a thorn, a briar hedge

"thorns" in your sides = *tsaniyn* - thorns, prickles, barb, hooks (it can also be positive, a hedge or shield that protects you)

"snares" = *pach* - snare, a net spread out, a noose to catch birds. Metaphorically, plots by which one falls, hence destruction

"traps" = *mowqesh* - a noose for catching animals, iron ring for the nose of an ox (Job 40:24). Metaphorically, a cause of injury

"scourges" in your sides = *shotet* - a scourge, a flog or whip, a goad

Rashi - "pins which prick out your eyes." Another form of meaning here is: they will become as something which hedges you in on all sides, enclosing and imprisoning you in order that none can go forth nor come in.

Jesus described a similar situation of those who "hear the word, but the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the

word, and it becomes unfruitful." (**Mark 4:18-19**)

The prophet Ezekiel also references this:

- **Ezekiel 28:24** - "And there shall be no more a pricking briar unto the house of Israel, nor [any] grieving thorn of all [that are] round about them, that despised them; and they shall know that I [am] the Lord GOD."

Jesus on the Cross

Moses' warning is actually a curse. This is part of the "curse of the Law" (**Galatians 3:13**)

Galatians 3:10-14 - "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them." Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for "He who through faith is righteous shall live"; but the law does not rest on faith, for "He who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree"—that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

This curse, along with all the others, Christ literally took on Himself: Christ's crown of thorns, the scourging he endured, the lance into His side, and the nails driven into His hands and feet.

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Paul also might be referring to this passage:

- **2 Corinthians 12:7-9** - "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

This could be a physical ailment, or a weakness in his temperament, or lust or another temptation of the senses. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformers interpret the expression as denoting temptations to unbelief.

If the reference is to the warning of thorns representing Canaanites that were not driven out, it could mean any of these things, or even Paul's human opponents questioning his apostleship within the churches.

It was probably kept purposely vague to leave open the widest possible interpretation for us.

What are enemies to faith now?

The left-over ideas and lies in our mind that still speak to us in the quiet moments. Voices that say Christ's blood could not possibly cover your guilt and shame. Voices that generate resentment and hurt feelings against your brother. The rising up of injured pride or self-pity. Impatience. Sexual temptation. Ideas that feed despair, fear or defensiveness. Whatever causes me to follow my own will rather than His. The list goes on to include every type of self-seeking.

Spiritually, the warning is to us - the former occupants of our "land" must be driven out. We must have a readiness to "revenge the disobedience" when we encounter it within our own heart (**2 Corinthians 10:6**). Otherwise, they will hinder our spiritual walk and eventually pull us off the path.

Numbers 33:56 - "Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them."

God wasn't kidding. When Israel turned away from Him to idolatry, they were driven from the land, exiled to Babylon.

We "drive them out" by agreeing in faith that Christ took this curse on Himself, and as Captain of the Lords Host (**Joshua 5:13-15**) He has preceded us into the Promised Land, defeating every foe.