

מִטּוֹת

MATTOT/TRIBES Bemidbar/Numbers 30:(1)2-32:42

We begin our reading this week with detailed commands concerning **vows**:

Bemidbar 30:2 "If a man makes a **vow to יהוה**, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, **he shall not break his word**; he shall do according to **all that proceeds out of his mouth**.

What is a **vow**? A vow (neder - נִדְרָה) is a **commitment made to יהוה** (Yahweh) whereby one is **bound by what proceeds from one's mouth**. If such a promise is made, he is **required to fulfill that promise**. The "Biblical vow" is **always to the Almighty**... never a promise **between man and a man**. It is an **oral agreement**...in fact it is literally described as what has gone "out of his mouth" (30:2). Once the **words** of a vow pass through a man's mouth they are **irreversible**, and they have a strange sort of **power** as evidenced by the **vow** (neder - נִדְרָה) of **Jacob**:

Bereshith (Genesis) 28:16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely **יהוה** is in this place, and I did not know it."¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of Elohim, and this is the gate of heaven!"¹⁸ Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it.¹⁹ And he called the name of that place **Bethel**; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.²⁰ Then Jacob made a **vow (neder - נִדְרָה)**, saying, "If Elohim will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on,²¹ "so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then **יהוה** shall be my Elohim.²² "And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be Elohim's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

A **vow** was often taken in a moment of **crisis**. Then once the crisis had passed and the Almighty had kept His "end of the bargain", the **tendency was there to forget the vow** – often unconsciously.

Ecclesiastes 5:4 When you make a **vow to Elohim**, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed --

The Talmud warns that a **vow is a dangerous tool and is best avoided**. Jacob actually **suffered greatly from hesitating to fulfill** his vow. He had said that if Elohim would care for him, then he would **build a house for El upon his return**. So what does Jacob actually do? Jacob returns to the land and **camps near the city of Shechem**. Remember Shechem is the location where Dinah is **raped**, and in a **rage**, her brothers **Levi and Simeon put to death all the men of the city**. It is immediately **after this incident** that יהוה calls Jacob back to **Bethel** (House of El - בֵּית־אֵל) to fulfill his vow:

Bereshith 35:1 Then Elohim said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to **Bethel** and dwell there; and **make an altar there to Elohim**, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."...⁶ So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him.⁷ And **he built an altar there and called the place El**

Bethel (House of El - בֵּית־אֵל), because there Elohim appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.

Could the **tragedy** at Shechem been **avoided if Jacob had kept his vow immediately** when he returned to the land? It is not possible for us to have a definitive answer on this. However, we are **warned** in Devarim (Deuteronomy):

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:21 "When you make a vow to יהוה your Elohim, you shall not delay to pay it; for יהוה your Elohim will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you.

The intention of the **vow made to יהוה** was to give the individual a sense of **fear and reverence** before making an **important commitment**. By the time of Yeshua, vows were being completely **misused**. Yeshua addressed those who were **flippantly making vows** without an understanding of the **gravity** of them. As an every day practice, **instead of making vows**, He encouraged them to just be **truthful**:

*Matthew 5:33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to Adonai.'³⁴ "But I say to you, **do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is Yah's throne;**³⁵ "nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King."³⁶ "Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black."³⁷ "But **let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'** For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.*

Was Yeshua contradicting Scripture? Certainly not. After His resurrection, we see Paul and others **making proper vows**. Rather, **He was referring to the misuse of vows**. As an example, for either **selfish reasons**, or perhaps out of **complete ignorance of Torah**, men were making **vows to Elohim** which **set aside commandments given in Torah**. Yeshua specifically identified this as a “**heart problem**”:

*Matthew 15:3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also **transgress the commandment of Yah because of your tradition?**"⁴ "For Yah commanded, saying, '**Honor your father and your mother**'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'⁵ "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "**Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to Elohim**" --⁶ 'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of Yah of no effect by your tradition."⁷ "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:⁸ 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But **their heart is far from Me.**'⁹ And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "*

Do you see what was happening here? Men were **taking money** that should have been used **to care for their parents (following the commandment to honor your father and mother) and instead vowing it to יהוה**. Yeshua blamed this on the “**doctrines of men.**” Vows were a **serious undertaking** and intended to be **made out of love for יהוה**. Over the years, vows had become **common**. There was **no fear in breaking them**. Perhaps the people were making vows to **look good among their peers**, or to **appear more pious...or maybe just purely out of obligation**. But

the point is that vows no longer carried **weight** in the minds of the ones making them. Yeshua wasn't interested in **vain spirituality**. He simply points them towards **honesty**.

What about us? Are we careful to be **accurate** with our **words**? Do we **fulfill all of our obligations**? **Do we even remember when we tell someone what we will do for them**? Is our casual conversation filled with phrases **we have no intention of keeping**, such as.... "I'll call you sometime." **Words are powerful.** יהוה's words brought **the world into existence**. Our words also have **power**:

*James 3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!⁶ And **the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity**. The tongue is so set among our members that **it defiles the whole body**, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*

We continue now in Bemidbar 30 with the various rules that surround **women making vows**.

Bemidbar 30:3 " Or if a woman makes a vow to יהוה, and binds herself by some agreement while in her father's house in her youth,⁴ "and her father hears her vow and the agreement by which she has bound herself, and her father holds his peace, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement with which she has bound herself shall stand."⁵ "But if her father overrules her on the day that he hears, then none of her vows nor her agreements by which she has bound herself shall stand; and יהוה will release her, because her father overruled her.

This is the first situation and it concerns a minor daughter. **Fathers**, take note. It is **YOU** that is **responsible for your daughters!** **You** are the one accountable for what takes place in your home....**not your wife!** You have the **power to override the words of your daughters** and **prevent the potentially devastating consequence of an irresponsible vow**. A **father's silence implies his consent**. Do you see the importance of teaching children the value of a **simple "yes" or "no"?**

Proverbs 10:19 In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

A **wife's vows can also be annulled by her husband on the day that he learns of it**. Thereafter her vow or oath must be fulfilled. We can make sense of these vows on a **literal level**. On a deeper level **we are the minor child and the bride**. These scenarios **point to our relationship with our heavenly Father, and our bridegroom, Yeshua!** Check out **what happens if the husband does not immediately annul His bride's vow, but later does so:**

*Bemidbar 30:14 "Now if her husband makes no response whatever to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all the agreements that bind her; he confirms them, because he made no response to her on the day that he heard them."¹⁵ "But if he does make them void after (the day) he has heard them, then **he shall bear her iniquity.**"*

Remember, we are looking at this verse as if **WE are the bride of Messiah**. What was the **vow** that was **made by the bride?**

Shemot (Exodus) 24:3 So Moses came and told the people all the words of יהוה and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which יהוה has said we will do."

Obviously, **the bride was not able to keep the promise that she made to keep all of the words of יהוה**. As the young bride was still under the protective care of the Father at Mt. Sinai, did He nullify her vow knowing that she would not be able to fulfill her words?

Bemidbar 30:14 speaks of the **silence of the husband**. Friends, there was a time when **Yeshua, as our husband also remained silent**:

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

Now take another look at Bemidbar 30:15. It says that **sometime after the day the husband heard her vow, he has decided to declare the vow null and void**. But look at **who pays the price now. The husband bears her iniquity and suffers the punishment for her not fulfilling her vows! Yeshua paid the price for His bride! And according to Torah, He had the authority to do this! HalleluYah!**

Bemidbar 31 suddenly changes directions, and יהוה calls for a **battle against the Midianites**. This is a unique battle in that it will be **the last one to be fought during the life of Moses**. It is **also the first battle that is referred to as a battle of "revenge."**

Bemidbar 31:1 And יהוה spoke to Moses, saying:² "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people."

The concept of **revenge** is enough to make most people squirm a bit. We need to understand **divine vengeance** in light of what the Scripture teaches. There are two ways in which יהוה avenges. The first way has to do with man as a sinner and is balanced by the mercy of Elohim. His **wrath** has been **poured out on His Son** and thus through a relationship with Him we can have **peace** with Elohim. The second type of vengeance is what will pour out on those who **come against His people, Israel**.

Torah specifically warns men **NOT to take vengeance in their own hands**:

Devarim 32:35 It is mine to avenge; I will repay...⁴¹ when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me.

There is a time in the future when **the Almighty will avenge** not only all who reject Him, but **all who hate the people He loves – Israel**:

Zechariah 1:14 ... "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says יהוה of hosts: "I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal."¹⁵ I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease...

We are well aware of a **future vengeance**, better known as the **tribulation**, stressed by the prophets:

*Isaiah 34:8 For it is **the day of יהוה's vengeance**, The year of recompense for the cause of Zion.*

Joel 3:2 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.

Let's return to Bemidbar:

*Bemidbar 31:5 So there were recruited from the divisions of Israel **one thousand from each tribe**, twelve thousand armed for war.⁶ Then Moses sent them to the war, one thousand from each tribe; **he sent them to the war with Pinchas** the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand.*

There are 1,000 soldiers from each tribe, but remember **the tribe of Levi did not go into battle**. There is an exception here, as **Pinchas**, a **Levite** priest, seems to lead the battle as the **army chaplain**. Remember from last week that Pinchas had already **displayed the perfect "zeal of יהוה"**. Is Pinchas in this role, another picture of **Yeshua leading us into the battle of His vengeance... the battle of Armageddon?**

*Revelation 19:13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called **The Word of Yah**.¹⁴ And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.*

Notice who was killed in the battle:

*Bemidbar 31:8 They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of those who were killed -- Evi, Rekem, **Zur**, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. **Balaam the son of Beor** they also killed with the sword.*

There is a Jewish midrash that concludes that it was **Pinchas who killed Balaam with the sword**. Note another verse from Revelation:

Revelation 19:15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations...

We also learn that **Zur**, the father of **Cozbi**, was killed. Remember Cozbi was the daughter of the Midianite who dared to have sex with Zimri, the Simeonite, with the result that both were slain **with the sword by Pinchas** (Bemidbar 25:8). It seems like the **vengeance of יהוה** is wrapping up all **loose ends**. Here's one more fun little detail:

*Bemidbar 31:11 And they took all the spoil and all the booty -- of man and **beast**.*

Look at who **survives? Balaam's donkey!!!!** Now that's **justice!**

Now let's take a look at the third major topic in this Parasha...**the assigning of land east of the Jordan to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh.** Earlier in Bemidbar, we read of the defeat of the two mighty Amorite kings, Sichon and Og. These kings denied passage to the children of Israel through their land and challenged them in battle. The result was that Israel found themselves in unexpected **possession of a large tract of territory east of the Jordan River.**

We note the situation and the request of the tribes:

***Bemidbar 32:1** Now the **children of Reuben** and the **children of Gad** had a very great multitude of **livestock**; and when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that indeed the region was a place for livestock,² the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying,³ "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebo, and Beon,"⁴ "the country which **ʾṯṯ** defeated before the congregation of Israel, is **a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock.**"⁵ Therefore they said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession. Do not take us over the Jordan."*

Let's dissect the situation and see what we can learn. Who were Reuben and Gad? These tribes have a few things in **common.**

- Reuben and Gad were children of Jacob born to their respective mothers, Leah and Leah's maidservant, Zilpah. **Both of them were first-borns.** **Reuben** was essentially **disowned as Jacob's firstborn** because he had sexual relations with one of his father's concubines. Were the children of **Gad** also **disgruntled**? Gad also was a **first-born** but wasn't even the **head** of one of the four camps as the tribes were situated around the tabernacle. Did the children of Reuben consider it **humiliating** for them to dwell in the Land of Canaan alongside **Judah** who held the crown and the **sons of Joseph** who had been handed the rights of the **firstborn** and who would inherit a **double portion**?
- Both of these tribes were situated in the camp on the south side of the tabernacle, along with **Simeon**. Why didn't the children of Simeon also join in the request? Remember last week it was the tribe of Simeon who **endured heavy losses to their population** as a result of rebellion. The **remnant** who remained probably did not think they were in a position to make any requests.
- It appears that these tribes were exceptionally wealthy as indicated by their large number of **livestock** (32:1). In fact, the Hebrew word for "**livestock**" is mikneh (מִקְנֵה) and is derived from a **root** which means "**to acquire.**" In ancient times, the flocks that one acquired were a **sign of one's success.** Their preference to remain behind was therefore a decision to put their **worldly possessions ahead of the spiritual goal** to enter into the **Promised Land.**

After 40 years, and to be on the boundary of the Promised Land! It is no wonder that Moses responds with **anger**:

Bemidbar 32:6 And Moses said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben: "Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here? "Now **why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which יהוה has given them?**"⁸ "Thus your fathers did when I sent them away from Kadesh Barnea to see the land."⁹ "For when they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, so that they did not go into the land which יהוה had given them."¹⁰ "So יהוה's anger was aroused on that day, and He swore an oath, saying,"¹¹ 'Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and above, shall see the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they have not wholly followed Me,'¹² 'except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have wholly followed יהוה.'¹³ "So יהוה's anger was aroused against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of יהוה was gone."¹⁴ "And look! **You have risen in your father's place, a brood of sinful men, to increase still more the fierce anger of יהוה against Israel.**"¹⁵ "For if you turn away from following Him, He will once again leave them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people."

Moses feared that the people would become **discouraged**. What brings about **discouragement**? Discouragement comes about **when we do not believe that יהוה has the power to bring about what He has said He would do...**when He cannot fulfill His promises. Moses was also concerned about the nation's **unity**. Part of the **body** would be **broken off** because of the **priority of their material possessions**. Is this decision of **priorities** also one **we may have to make**?

Reuben and Gad respond to Moses' anger with the following:

Bemidbar 32:16 Then they came near to him and said: "**We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones,**"¹⁷ "but we ourselves will be armed, ready to go **before the children of Israel** until we have brought them to their place; and our little ones will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land."¹⁸ "We will not return to our homes until every one of the children of Israel has received his inheritance."¹⁹ "For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this eastern side of the Jordan."

In Moses' response to their proposal, he made a few **changes**:

- ***Bemidbar 32:20*** Then Moses said to them: "If you do this thing, if you **arm yourselves before יהוה** for the war,
 - Moses exchanges "**armed before יהוה**" for "**armed before the children of Israel**" (32:17)
 - Moses attempts to bring their focus back to **spiritual goals** as opposed to their **wealth**.
 - In fact, Moses emphasizes "**before יהוה**" **four more times** to make his point in the next two verses!

- **Bemidbar 32:21** "and all your armed men cross over the Jordan **before יהוה** until He has driven out His enemies from before Him, ²² "and the land is subdued **before יהוה**, then afterward you may return and be blameless **before יהוה** and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession **before יהוה**."
- **Bemidbar 32:24** "Build cities for your **little ones** and folds for your **sheep**, and do what has proceeded out of your mouth."
 - In contrast to the sons of Reuben and Gad who mention their **sheep first** and the building of the cities for their **little ones second**, Moses **reverses** the order
 - Moses emphasizes the **priority** of their **children**
 - Moses reminds them to **keep their vows**.

The sons of Reuben and Gad seem to **accept Moses' rebuke** as in their **response to Moses** they reverse the **children and flocks** and mention that they will go to war **before יהוה**:

Bemidbar 32:25 And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying: "Your servants will do as my lord commands. ²⁶ "Our **little ones**, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock will be there in the cities of Gilead; ²⁷ "but your servants will cross over, every man armed for war, **before יהוה** to battle, just as my lord says."

Now another question arises. Moses accepts their conditions and assigns them the land they requested. However, he also gives land to **half the tribe of Manasseh** who seem to appear out of nowhere:

Bemidbar 32:33 So Moses gave to the children of Gad, to the children of Reuben, and to **half the tribe of Manasseh** the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land with its cities within the borders, the cities of the surrounding country.

Now while nothing is said of it, there is a strong possibility that there was major **division** within the tribe of Manasseh. Perhaps two men fighting over **leadership**? Maybe Moses saw this as a way to bring about a **peaceful resolution**. There was plenty of land to split and more than enough to keep everyone happy.

It is fascinating that **Manasseh** was also a **firstborn**, and he, too, was displaced in favor of his younger, more successful brother (Bereshith 48:19). Did the children of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh **unite and commiserate** on the inequity of losing the rights associated with being the older brother?

Now just "one more thing". One of the conditions for receiving the land was that Reuben and Gad join the rest of the tribes in **conquering the land**. In fact, the tribes even go **beyond Moses' demand** and say that they will stick around **until each tribe receives their inheritance** (32:18). It is said that this took about **14 years**. Consider the ramifications of the decisions that were made. Fathers who were more concerned about their **flocks than their children**, missed out on **their**

children's growth and spiritual development. Wives were forced to cope as single parents for 14 long years. Families also forfeited additional children.

History teaches us that this area east of the Jordan River became a place of **violence and bloodshed**. For their warped sense of values, these tribes were also the **first to enter into exile**:

1 Chronicles 5:26 So the Elohim of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He carried the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh into captivity....

Now what is the **prophetic significance** of these final events on the shores of the Jordan River? If these **choices** made by the 2 ½ tribes of Israel come **after יהוה's vengeful battle with the Midianites**, which pictures the **vengeful battle of Armageddon**, then it seems that even then there will be a time when the children of Israel have a **choice as to where they will spend the next 1,000 years**. Will those who do not understand the value of the **inheritance in the land of Israel** choose the other side of the Jordan? We know from Zechariah that **not all who survive the tribulation** will have **residence in the land**:

Zechariah 14:16 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, יהוה of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.¹⁷ And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, יהוה of hosts, on them there will be no rain.

There are so many pieces of the puzzle yet to be **revealed**. Keep reading...keep studying...keep praying...the **answers** are all there in Scripture!

Shabbat Shalom,
Ardelle