

Tell a story
Parshah Matot
by Julie Zhuk on 2022-07-30

Comments

When I first tried to read this parsha it didn't come off so appealing. The reason for that is it's all about the laws of vows that Jews follow. They aren't just laws, there is a beginning, a middle part to them, and ending as well. Whatever resources on this I found, didn't stick with me. What I did find entertaining and I wanted to bring up is a resource that commented on the Women of Menesseh. Reading this got my attention fast, it started out like a story. The first thing we learn is this parsha is the fourth book of the Torah.

This parsha is focused heavily on five sisters who we learn to discover are very crucial to the Jewish people. The Jewish people are stationed at the eastern bank of the Jordan River. The time has finally come, for these Jews are ready to cross into the land they have been promised by G-d. This is known as the Promised Land. This is the final segment of the saga of the Jewish people and how they are described within the Torah.

The fifth book will consist of Moses' repetition of the first four books. In this fourth book, we Jews sit back and read with the hope that we will find an important story, idea, or lesson that will help express the culmination of the story of the Jewish people. What we find to be the concluding story sounds pretty trivial and inconsequential for us today. This Torah portion is going to be a lot about the Jews from the tribe of Mensseh. These people approach Moses for they are concerned about the possibility of marriage for the five daughters of a man who died; his name was Zelophehad.

In the parsha of last week we learn how these daughters no longer having a father, came to Moses asking for some part of the land. There was an idea of how these daughters of Zelophehad could find husbands from other tribes then they would ultimately be giving their inherited land to their own children. The problem would be that the land these daughters had inherited would be transferred from their own tribe to the tribe of their husbands. Back then everything seemed to belong to the men. The tribal division was patriarchal. If women married men from tribes other than their own, they would be depriving the tribe of Menesseh of tribal land.

Moses agreed with the members of Menesseh and told the women to stick to finding men in their own tribe. That way there would be no problem with the land getting split up. The women did as was instructed and these five sisters married their cousins. A long time ago marrying into your family such as your cousins was not such a bad thing. They married into the families of the sons of Manashe, the son of Joseph, and whatever inheritance they got stayed within the tribe of their fathers' family. The story of these five sisters captures a central theme of the Torah. It also symbolizes the purpose for the Jewish people on this earth.

There is a backstory to this, there were two tribes Rueven and Gad. These two requested they be granted some land east of the Jordan and outside the borders of Israel. They had some

discussion with Moses and he reluctantly let them have what they wanted. While this was happening, half of the tribe of Menasseh didn't put in the request, but Moses decided to have them move over where the tribes of Reuven and Gad were as well. Moses had his reasoning for this, the rebbe taught us that our mission on earth is not only to live a holy and wholesome life in Israel. We are also supposed to spread the holiness of Judaism so other Jewish people can learn as well.

Reuven and Gad didn't want to enter the land of Israel, the tribe of Menasseh was divided between both banks of the Jordan. They had a foot in both worlds. Half of the tribe was in Israel and the other half was tasked with expanding the holiness of Israel to foreign soil. These five sisters were embodying the message of spreading the light of holiness of Israel everywhere. For a long time the collective tribe lived on both sides of the Jordan. Each individual member of the tribe lived either in Israel or outside of it.

They had the best of both worlds, they were very spread out and the individuals in both groups saw more than the people who remained in whatever the one tribe they were part of. The five sisters inherited their own land within Israel. The way these sisters lived they were able to optimize the purpose of the Torah. First they created a holy environment in Israel and then they started to spread the word out. This next part is a message for women. The women in America or outside of Israel look up to those living in Israel now. The women in Israel are our inspiration.

The women living outside of Israel/the diaspora shouldn't feel rejected from the holiness of Israel. That was originally the attitude that Reuven and Gad had, our attitude should be like the five sisters of the tribe of Menasseh. Those women and us as well are given the job of spreading the wholeness of Israel, wherever we are. Those five sisters stood on either side of the Jordan River. May we strive to get to a time when G-d will expand your boundaries. This way the holiness of the land of Israel will spread to other places, not just Israel.

Parsha Masei
Numbers 33:1-36:13

This part of the Torah portion covers the sons of Reuven and Gad promise to help the other tribes settle in the land of Israel. They promised to do this before they themselves crossed the Jordan River. They make this promise to Moses, and he records the journey of the Jews from when they left Egypt and made their way to Israel. That's what a lot of this parsha is about Moses keeping track of all the places and stops they made.

They were led out of Egypt with the help of Moses and Aaron from the first month on the fifteenth day, it happened on the morning of the Passover offering. The Jewish people left Egypt in the eyes of all the Egyptians, it so happened at the time G-d had struck the Egyptians down with the death of the first born, with judgement upon their own gods. G-d had a long talk with Moses, He told him to inform the Jews when they would cross into the land of Canaan the goal was to drive out all the people living there and destroy their symbols of idols and places that they worshiped.

G-d put a decree out there, that the land of Canaan was going to now belong to the Jewish people. G-d warned Moses that if he and the other Jews didn't drive out every single person living there, anyone left over would remain as a thorn in the side of the Jewish people. G-d

continued to warn Moses that those living in Canaan now, would oppress the Jews as enemies in the land. G-d's final warning was very severe, if there were any Jews who didn't go along with this plan G-d had come up with, His wrath would happen to them too. G-d told Moses about the borders of Canaan and which part of the land of Israel every tribe would receive.

Whatever information G-d gave Moses, he passed onto the Jewish people. Every tribe was to give part of their possessions, land, and this included their animals to the Levites. The Levites were the ones taking care of the Tent. That Tent was an important place, because that's where the Jews went to worship G-d, and study the Torah as well. G-d told Moses to inform the Jews, when they would reach the land of Canaan there would be "safe cities". These cities or refuge venues were places for people to go if they murdered someone. The one who murdered is to stay there and wait until they have been judged, whether they are guilty or innocent.

G-d wanted there to be six safe cities all together, three on the side of Jordan and the other three in Canaan. The laws of murder were very important and Moses passed the information down to the Jews. It was complicated for one thing, if one killed another out of hatred they would be punished with death. They could only be punished by death if there were two people witnessing the murder. That person who killed someone out of hatred can't be put to death if there is only one witness. No Jew was to accept a bribe in order to keep the person who murdered someone alive.

If the murder is to die, then do so. If a murder happens not because of hatred or desire to hurt anyone that person is to be taken to a safe city. If the killer leaves the safe city, then it is okay for them to be killed. This was the law of justice for everyone in the land of Canaan. G-d told Moses to inform the Jews to not turn the Promised Land in a place where they could sin, tell lies, and practice injustice. G-d wanted for the Jews to keep the Promised Land pure. It was important for the Jewish people to know that G-d was going to be watching them to make sure no one was to attack them, but also that they were going to follow His laws.

In this parsha we learn about the five sisters who receive part of the land themselves, since their father died before. G-d told Moses that if there were no male inheritances of Zelophehad's daughters they could have some part of the land. At first the tribal members were concerned because of the transference of land when these daughters were to get married. Moses came up with a law that G-d was okay with, for these daughters to marry someone in the family of their father's tribe that way no inheritance would transfer from one tribe to another. The five sisters did end up following the plan Moses had set up.

Haftarah Matot/Masei Jeremiah: 2:4-28- 4:1-2

This week's haftara is going to be coming from the book of Jeremiah. It's the second series of the three haftarot that covers affliction. These three haftarot come together, because they are read during the three weeks. During the time of the three weeks, Jews mourn for Jerusalem. There is a fast on the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av. Jeremiah did a very important thing for the Jewish people, he transmitted a message G-d sent to the Jews. Jeremiah was a prophet that used strong tones and he chastised all of the different groups of Jewish people.

He was calling them out on their leadership and their abandonment towards G-d. G-d asked Jeremiah to pass along the question to the Jews: "What wrong did your forefathers find in me that they would distance themselves from Me and they went after futility and then themselves became futile? G-d had to remind the Jewish people of the kindness he showed them when they fled Egypt and how they got to the point where they were now. This reminder covered the travels they had through the desert and all the miracles they witnessed.

He asked them why they were repaying Him in this way of being so disloyal to Him. G-d told Jeremiah the Jewish people transgressed twice, they had forsaken Him. G-d was going to punish them now, they were no longer going to have fresh spring water at their luxurious use. The Jews were ordered to dig for themselves, finding cisterns. They found broken cisterns and these didn't hold any water. G-d asked the Jews to view the actions of their neighboring nations specifically Kitties and the Kedarites and to see whether there was any such thing, whether a nation exchanged a god or there never was a god to begin with. G-d had a point with what He was saying to the Jews.

G-d was telling the Jewish people they had exchanged their glory for what was not really there. Since the Jews mistreated G-d and His commandments in this way He had a plan for them. They weren't going to like it and as much begging and pleading a prophet such as Jeremiah could do or even Moses their leader before he passed away to be kind to the Jews, they weren't getting out of this punishment. G-d wanted to teach the Jewish people their lesson and He told Jeremiah that they were going to suffer for a long time in their foreseeable future. Jeremiah was to pass this message along to the Jews.

Jeremiah said to the Jewish people that they would suffer at the hands of their enemies and also their erstwhile allies. This meant that their evil will chastise them and they will be reprimanded for their backsliding. The last thing G-d told the Jews was they would know soon enough how their forsaking the L-rd your G-d is evil and bitter. G-d really did love the Jewish people. All of these things He stated towards them was not going to happen forever or last forever. He was warning the Jews what life was going to be like if they continued to have their backs turned away from Him.

The parsha ends on an encouraging note, Jeremiah lets the Jews know that no matter what G-d will always FORGIVE them for their transgressions. All G-d is wanting from the Jewish people is they turn back to Him and show how much they want Him in their lives. Jeremiah's last comment on this to the Jewish people was, if they were to turn back to G-d with sincerity they would be restored to their full glory.