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Parsha Matot and Masei
by Julie Zhuk on 2024-08-03

This week's Parsha are typically read together, Matot and Masei. They are at the end of the Book of Numbers. The story is about the tribe of Reuben and Dan who are about to settle in the land that is east of the Jordan River that was located outside of Israel. At the time it was really rich with a lot of animals. Moses told both tribes that G-d struck down before the congregation of the Jewish people with a lot of animals and the servants had animals as well. Moses was telling the Jewish people if it pleases them, the land should be given to the servants as a heritage and they shouldn't take it across the Jordan. The Jewish people were happy with this bit of news, they had enough animals to go around and the Jewish people had just taken over all of this land from the Romans. This land was perfect for raising cattle. The Jewish people realized they did not need to go to Jordan proper if their needs were already met. The tribes of Gad and Reuben were showing Moses they had no interest in going to Israel, so he was not happy. This reminded Moses of the sin that the spies had committed.

This sin had led to the tragic episode of the Jewish people spending 40 years wandering around in the desert which was their punishment. Moses also felt uneasy because the two tribes would stay home and take care of their livestock. While the other ten tribes would go to war with Canaan. Moses asked the tribes of Reuben and Gad why they were discouraged from crossing over to the land that G-d had given to them. The tribes of Reuben and Gad had a different perspective to answer Moses. It's not that they were not interested in what G-d wanted, they were concerned. They assured Moses they wouldn't sit by while the war with Canaan would go on. They didn't want to discourage anyone from conquering or settling in the land at the time either. Instead, they would build fortified cities for their wives and children. They believed that this would ensure their safety. After this, they would join in the war in the Holy Land and then they would stay there until the conquest was over.

Having heard all of this made Moses happy, he was quite moved. He felt the tribes of Reuben and Gad were arming themselves for battle by doing this. This week's Parsha, teaches us to focus on keeping our word and following through the promises that we make. It's important to follow through with whatever promises we make to others. In the Ten Commandments we learn that we should not give false testimony. Furthermore, the Jewish people are urged to distance themselves from anything that is false. At the end of this week's Parsha, the Jewish people have been reminded many times about keeping their word. The tribes Reuben and Gad were different than the rest of the Jewish people. Reuben and Gad wanted to just take care of their animals, but G-d did not want any of the Jews to be hermits hiding in caves avoiding materialism. Instead, G-d wanted the Jewish people as a whole to engage in materialism. He had a plan that included the Jews to engage in the material world. In the end of the Parsha, Moses agreed to grant the tribes of Reuben and Gad, but also the tribe of Manasseh.

Moses gave them a portion of the land that the Amorites (Romans) had conquered. The Manasseh tribe were the five daughters of a man named Zelophehad. He was from that tribe. He had once approached Moses with a deep concern regarding a connection to the Holy Land.

Zelophehad had died in the desert and his daughters worried that their father wouldn't get a share in the land of Israel. Moses didn't know what to do, so he turned to G-d. G-d instantly decided that the daughters should be able to get a share in the land of Israel since the father never had any sons. We learn in this Parsha, that Manasseh demonstrated a huge love for the land of Israel Moses opted to strategically place them next to Reuben and Gad. This way it gave a positive influence to serve as a constant reminder for every Jew to always love Israel.