

MASEI { מַסְעֵי } (Journeys Of)

Numbers 33:1-36:13, Jeremiah 2:4-28, 3:4, 4:1-2, James 4:1-12

A Messianic Jewish Commentary

By Hannah Neshet www.voiceforisrael.net

“These are the journeys of the children of Israel... (Numbers 33:1)

Shalom and welcome to this week’s Torah study, Masei, which describes the journeys of the Israelites from Egypt to the Plains of Moab. This may be likened to a father who, after having taken his ailing son to a distant place to be cured, recounts their journey together and all that transpired along the way. Israel is God’s child, whom He leads, guides, loves and disciplines as a good Father.

Israel went out from Egypt **with a ‘high hand’ in the sight of all the Egyptians**, while they were still burying all their dead - those that the God of Israel struck in the final plague. (Numbers 33:3-4)



"Departure of the Israelites", by [David Roberts](#), 1829

There was nothing secretive or humiliating about Israel’s exodus from Egypt; but rather, it was a public display of God’s victory over all the gods of Egypt. This beaten down groups of slaves went out in triumph while their former oppressors remained broken and defeated!

When God delivers us from the circumstances that have held us in bondage for so long, we will also go out with a ‘high hand’: “**You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace....**” (Isaiah 55:12)

“These are the journeys of (massei) the people of Israel, when they went out of the land of Egypt by their companies under the leadership of Moses and Aaron.” (Numbers 33:1)

This week’s Scripture portion (which is often combined with Parashat Matot) describes the entire travelogue of the children of Israel. Moses chronicled all of their stops and starts along the way since Israel’s exit from Egypt.

Creating a Chronicle of our Personal Journeys

Each of us is on a journey as we walk with Adonai; and sometimes it is helpful to recount the path, with all its twists and turns, as Moses did with the children of Israel. Why is this important? It is because so often, memory fades and what we thought we would always remember becomes something we seem to forget.

Also, if we don't chronicle our journey, then future generations will be left in the dark as to the events that shaped us in our lifetime and continue to have an effect on our descendants. Therefore more and more people, especially in their latter years, choose to create personal memoirs, either written or now in video format.

“Moses wrote down their starting places, stage by stage, by command of the LORD, and these are their stages according to their starting places.” (Numbers 33:2)

What was the purpose for Moses chronicling in such a precise fashion, the entire Israelite desert itinerary of 42 places? It seems dull, repetitive (each place is mentioned twice), tedious and monotonous:

“So the people of Israel set out from Rameses and camped at Succoth. And they set out from Succoth and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. And they set out from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which is east of Baal-zephon, and they camped before Migdol....” (Numbers 33:5-7)

On and on continues the list of places, with a length of stay from less than 24 hours to days, months and even years. A total of 20 journeys occurred within the 38 intervening years between the first and last years of wilderness wanderings.

Moses was showing us that life is not simply a final destination, but a succession of destinations, each bringing us towards a progressive fulfillment of our destiny. In other words, life is not just about the end goal, but rather, is more about the journey that takes place along the way.



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The Jewish people have been called the ‘Wandering Jews’ since being exiled into all the nations, have endured many forced expulsions and persecutions. Jewish history has always been one of movement, as we travelled a long and winding road back to redemption.

However, in this generation, the Jewish people are coming back to the Land, never again to be uprooted from the Land God has given us.

“I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,” says the LORD your God.” (Amos 9:15)

The question we may ask ourselves about our own personal journey is whether or not we have been moving like a Jonah, trying to escape from God – or following the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Ruach Hakodesh).

Driving out the Inhabitants

The Lord spoke to Moses by the Jordan at Jericho, giving directives regarding their imminent entry into the Promised Land. God’s first command was to **“drive out all the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein; for unto you have I given the land to possess it.”** (Numbers 33:53)

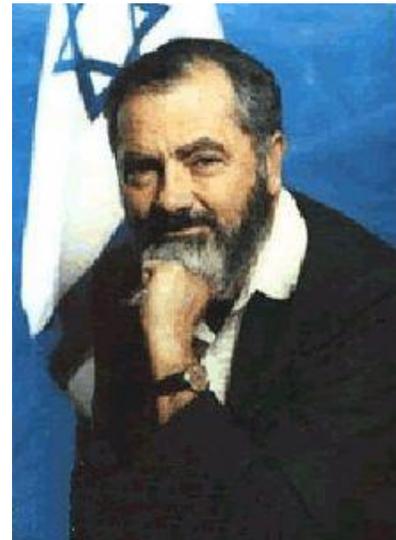
God warned Israel of the consequences if they failed to drive out the inhabitants of the Land: **“But if you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then all those that you let remain of them be as thorns in your eyes, and as pricks in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land wherein you dwell.”** (Numbers 33:55)

Although not ‘politically correct’ to admit, this is the exact situation we have in Israel today. Because Israel did not drive out the inhabitants of the land when the modern state of Israel was re-established, the former inhabitants of the land continue to harass the people of Israel through terror attacks and the launching of missiles into Israeli territory.

One man who radically advocated for Israel and world Jewry based upon this Scriptural admonition (from the book of Numbers) was **Rabbi Martin David Kahane** also known as **Meir Kahane** (1 August 1932 – 5 November 1990). He was an ordained Orthodox rabbi and later served as a member of the Israeli Knesset.

Rabbi Kahane favored the idea of a ‘Greater Israel’ which would annex the areas of the West Bank and the Gaza strip. In order to prevent the Arabs from becoming a majority in Israel, Kahane proposed a plan to allow Arabs who do not accept Israel as a Jewish state to voluntarily leave and to receive compensation for their property. Those Arabs who refused this offer would be forcibly removed.

By 1988, the Israeli government had banned Kahane as being ‘racist’. And following the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre,¹ which was perpetrated by a Kahane follower, Baruch Goldstein, the political party of *Kach* (founded by Kahane) was banned completely.



¹ This attack on Muslims praying in a mosque left 29 dead and 125 wounded. Most Israelis denounced the perpetrators’ actions as terrorism and considered him insane.

In 1994, it was listed as a terrorist organization by the U. S. State Department.

In November 1990, Rabbi Kahane was assassinated by an Arab gunman in a Manhattan hotel lobby, after giving a speech warning American Jews to emigrate to Israel before it was "too late." Although Kahane is dead, his ideology lives on amongst some in Israel who believe that God was right in warning Israel to drive out the inhabitants of the Land.

This may seem a radical solution; but there are many who agree with the late Rabbi Kahane, especially when terrorist attacks increase against Israeli citizens. All over Israel we may often see graffiti that reads, "Kahane Tzadak", **כהנא צדק**, meaning 'Kahane was right!'"



Many people criticize Israel for defending herself against terrorism and maintaining her God-given right to live in this tiny piece of land.

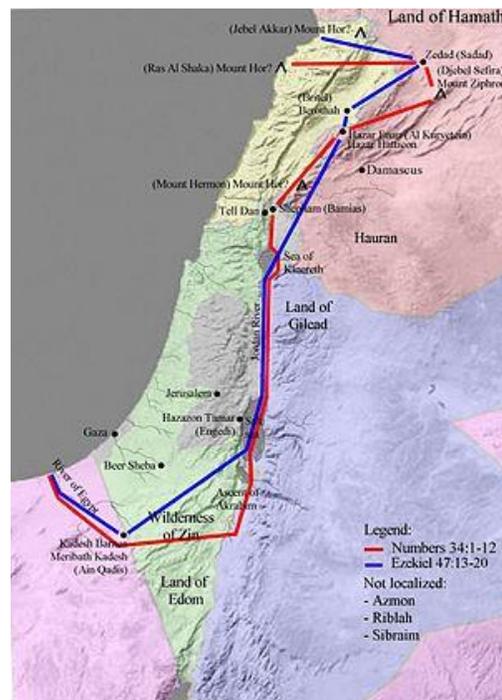
Israel comes under heavy criticism from the international community which demands a return to pre-1967 borders and the creation of a 'Palestinian state' within the state of Israel; but no one would suggest that the United States give back their territory to Mexico or to the Native American people.

Stickers in Hebrew: "Today Everybody Knows: Kahane was Right!"

Nor would anyone dare to suggest that Canada should give back the territories she conquered from the French and British; and yet this is demanded of Israel. The fact is that there is not a country in existence today which did not obtain their territory by conquering and driving out the former inhabitants of the land.

So the real question is, "*Who is occupying whose land?*" If we believe the Bible, then we know that this land belongs to Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What are the borders of the land?

In this week's parashah, God set the borders of the territory of Israel which are far larger than what Israel has settled today.



The Land of Israel as defined in [Numbers 34:1–12](#)

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Command the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘**When you come into the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance—the land of Canaan to its boundaries.**” (Numbers 34:1-2)

Any attempt on the part of any nation to divide up this Land will only bring God’s judgment. ² As the Creator of the Universe, God has the right to set the boundaries for the nations which He created. “**From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.**” (Acts 17:26)

The prophet Isaiah promised us that one day Hamas (Hebrew for violence) would be destroyed and would no longer be a thorn in Israel’s side.

“**No longer will violence (*hamas*) be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.**” (Isaiah 60:18)

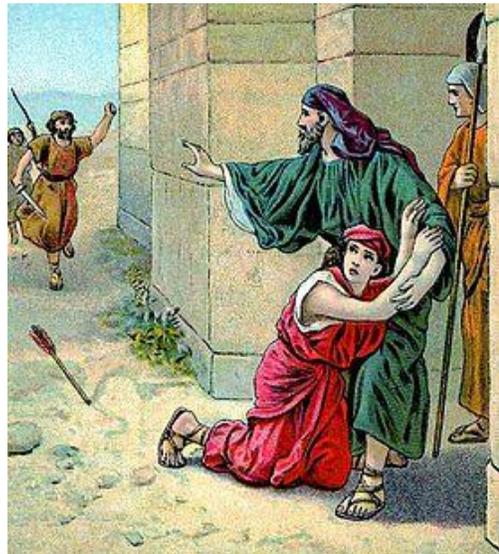
We must make sure that we also drive out all the sin that has been occupying our ‘land’ before we were redeemed, lest the sin we allow to remain become thorns in our eyes, pricks in our sides and a continual harassment in our own ‘journey’ with the Lord Adonai Yeshua.

Cities of Refuge

Six cities of refuge were also to be set aside as a place of asylum for those who commit accidental homicide. ³ In the case of deliberate murder, however, the murderer was to be put to death. ⁴

All human life is holy and the shedding of innocent blood (as in abortion) pollutes the land. (Numbers 35:33)

Thus ends the book of Numbers (Ba’midbar- In the Desert). Shabbat Shalom.



Cities of Refuge (illustration from a Bible card published 1901 by the Providence Lithograph Company)

² Joel 3:2

³ Numbers 35:9-15

⁴ Numbers 35:16

Haftarat Masei

“For two evils My people have done; they left Me, the Source of Living Water, to carve for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which cannot hold water.”

“Although you wash with lye and use soap, the stain of your guilt is before Me, says the Lord God.” (Jeremiah 2:13,22)

Haftarat Ma’asei is one of the few prophetic portions which don’t seem to have a direct connection to the parashah, but rather correspond to its place on the Biblical calendar. It occurs as one of the three haftorot of rebuke, read between the 17th of the month of Tamuz, and the 9th of Av (Tisha B’av).

It is a period of time called ‘**Bein HaMitzarim**’, which means literally ‘**between the straits**’ but is also a reference to labor and childbirth. When a woman is in full, active labor she is said to be ‘bein Hamitzarim.’

This is a critical time, also called transition, when the labor is hopefully going to proceed to the delivery of a healthy baby. If things go badly, however, it can lead to dire consequences, and even death for either or both mother and child.

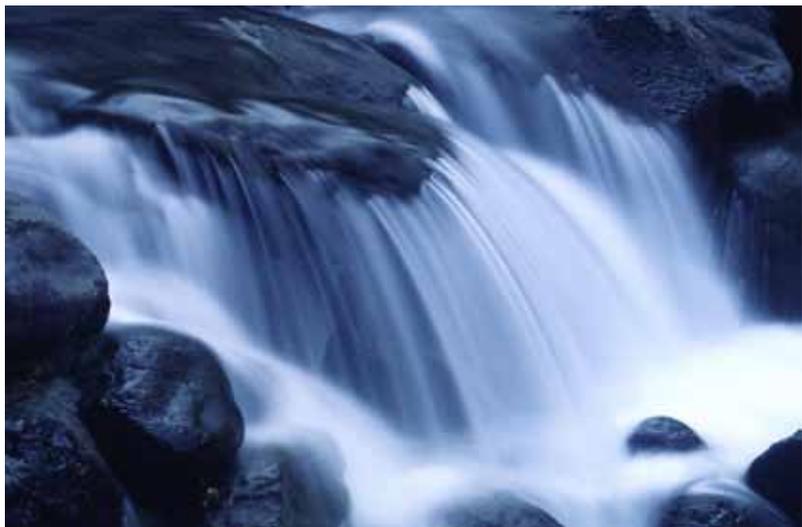
This haftorah describes this transition point, bein hamitzarim, when Israel turned away from God and sought after idols. Israel’s denial and forsaking of God led to her destruction on the 9th of Av (Tisha B’av) at which time both Holy Temples were destroyed and the people sent into captivity.

However, it doesn’t have to be this way. Our ‘transitions’ don’t necessarily have to lead to death and destruction; they can lead to the birth of a new life.

A name for God here is **The Source of Living Water (Makor Mayim Chayim)**. God calls out, through His prophet, Jeremiah, to come back to the source of life.

Yeshua said, **“I am the way, the truth, and ‘THE LIFE.’** (John 14:6)

On the last day of the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles), Yeshua stood up and boldly proclaimed Himself the source of living water: **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scriptures have said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.”** (John 7:37-39)



It was the Spirit of the Living God that Yeshua spoke of. When we drink of these ‘living waters’, not only may we have life, but that living water will also flow out of us to refresh the lives of others.

The lyrics from one of my very favorite (Vineyard) worship songs (All Who are Thirsty) are these: “All who are thirsty... all who are weak... come to the fountain... dip your heart in the streams of life... Let the pain and the sorrow... be washed away...by the waves of His mercy... as deep cries out to deep, we sing Come Yeshua Come... Holy Spirit come.....

I can’t tell you how often this beautiful worship song has comforted my soul in times of deep distress. I love to play it on my harp and I once sang it to prostitutes at a shelter in Tel Aviv.

Most recently, however, while going through a really difficult time, the Holy Spirit showed me so clearly that Yeshua is the fountain of Living Waters to whom we can turn for life.

While driving one Sabbath to our weekly congregational meeting, the conversations in the car degenerated once again into strife and bitter accusations. It just seemed more than I could bear. It was all I could do to continue driving the car to our destination.

Usually we would arrive early in order for my son Timothy to participate in the pre-service worship practice. We’d often park next to a nice grassy area in the center of Jerusalem to wait for the start of the service.

On this particular day, after this harrowing drive into the city, I ran from the car and fell, face down upon the grass and just sobbed. I felt like a torrent of tears that would never end. It no longer mattered to me who noticed or what people thought of this crazy woman, crying in a public park.

The only thing that existed was this all-encompassing emotional pain that wouldn’t go away – the pain of having a dysfunctional family and feeling that it is all my fault and that nothing I ever do or don’t do, pray or not pray, will ever make a difference. I felt so absolutely hopeless that my family situation would ever get any better; and I felt completely unable to cope.

Have you ever felt this way? So utterly alone and lost?

Avi, bless his young compassionate heart didn’t know what to do, so he just sat beside me, patting my back, until the weeping finally subsided. It was then that I looked up and saw the fountain – streams of water flowed right beside where I lay.

Suddenly, these words of comfort began to run through my head: “All who are weary... all who are weak... Come to the fountain...dip your heart in the streams of life...let the pain and the sorrow...be washed away... by the waves of His mercy...as deep cries out to deep...we sing Come Yeshua come.....

In my heart I began to reach out to that fountain of living waters, to drink from the streams of life, to allow His mercy to wash away the pain and the sorrow – the loneliness, the fear, the frustration, the strife, the confusion, the shame and the guilt.....

The Holy Spirit began to wash over me and brought a beautiful comfort and peace to my soul. Yeshua said, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest...”** (Mathew 11:28)

In our journey through life, we may come to many ‘turning points’, transitions, times when we are truly ‘bein hamitzarim’ (between the straits). As with labor and childbirth, the pain can feel excruciating, but these times do not necessarily have to end in death.

If we will turn to the source of living waters (makor mayim chayim), these turbulent times can lead us towards a healthy birth of a whole new life.

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.

_See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. ..

because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, (Isaiah 43:18-20)



Photo of Liat by streams of water in Jerusalem park

Masei Study Questions

1. Do you have a way of keeping a chronicle of your life's journey for future generations? If so, how do you keep these records? Share your ideas. If not, would you like to start?
2. Why did God tell the Israelites to drive out the inhabitants of the Land? Do you believe this is applicable to the situation in Israel today?
3. Who was Kahane? Do you believe that 'Kahane was right'? Share and discuss your views about this controversial subject.
4. Where is the Scriptural proof that God has set the borders and boundaries of all the nations of the earth?
5. How do the boundaries that God set for Israel compare to the borders of the Land today?
6. Do you believe that Israel is occupying Palestinian land? Share and discuss.
7. What is the great promise that God gives Israel through the prophet Isaiah about Hamas?
8. What are your views on capital punishment? Does the Bible advocate for the death penalty for the crime of deliberate murder?
9. What is a 'haftarah of rebuke'?
10. What does 'Bein Hamitzarim' mean? Have you ever felt the intensity and discomfort of being in this place of transition?
11. What was the outcome of this time of transition? Did it go well for you and birth a new life or did it lead to an unfortunate stillbirth?
12. What does it mean to you that God is the source of living water? How can we satisfy our spiritual thirst in Him?
13. In what ways do people forsake the source of living waters and try to satisfy themselves with broken cisterns?
14. Have you ever experienced the comfort of His Spirit when you were in anguish of soul?

About the Author:

Hannah Neshar grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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