

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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<sup>2</sup>Moses spoke to the heads of the Israelite tribes, saying: This is what the LORD has commanded:

<sup>3</sup>If a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath imposing an obligation on himself, he shall not break his pledge; he must carry out all that has crossed his lips.

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-רָאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה:  
אִישׁ כִּי-יִזְדָּר נָדַר לַיהוָה אֶו־הַשְּׁבַע  
שָׁבַעָה לְאַסֵּר אֶסֶר עַל-נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא יַחַל  
דְּבָרוֹ כְּכָל-הַיְצֵא מִפִּיו יַעֲשֶׂה:

*The Generation of the Conquest (continued)*

THE ANNULMENT OF VOWS AND OATHS MADE BY WOMEN (30:2–17)

Any pledge made by a man in the name of God must be fulfilled. A woman's vow or oath, however, can be countermanded and annulled by her father or her husband on the day he learns of it, if she is under his authority.

**2. heads of the Israelite tribes** It is rare to find a law addressed to Israel's leaders rather than to the people as a whole.

**This** The section that follows.

**3. man** Not a minor or a woman.

**vow to the LORD** This vow involves a declaration that the man will dedicate to the sanctuary the value of a person or of an animal if his prayer will be answered.

**break** Literally, "desecrate." A vow generally was taken in a moment of crisis. Once the crisis had passed, however, the temptation to forget the vow—even unconsciously—remained. Hence, the frequent scriptural admonition against desecrating one's vows.

**has crossed his lips** Literally, "has come out of his mouth." Vows and oaths made in the name of God are endowed with self-fulfilling powers regardless of the consequences. Once expressed, words are binding, even when the expression does not correspond with the intention (see Isaac's blessing of Jacob, Gen. 27:33–35).

CHAPTER 30

As we approach the end of Numbers, the focus shifts to settlement of the Land. This *parashah* begins with a series of regulations emphasizing the seriousness of oaths and vows and then describes the battle against Midian. Next is a request by two of the tribes to settle in the choice grazing land outside the designated borders of the Promised Land. These chapters, with their promise of the people Israel settling the land God swore to give them, are always read in the weeks before *Tish-ah b'Av*, a day when we mourn the destruction of the Temple and the beginning of the Exile.

The Bible stresses the power and the solemnity of words, from the opening verses of the Torah, in which God creates a world with words, to the commandment to distance oneself from falsehood, to the repeated emphasis against insulting the convert or the physically handicapped. This emphasis continued in postbiblical Judaism. A word is not merely a sound; it is real, it has substance, with the

power to hurt or to heal, to elevate or to denigrate. The seriousness with which the Torah takes vows and promises is the basis of the words with which the service begins on the eve of *Yom Kippur*. With those words (known as *Kol Nidrei*, "All Vows") we declare that any promises to God that we make and are unable to keep in the New Year are hereby publicly retracted and should not be held against us.

The power of speech is one of the unique gifts of a human being, a power we share with no other creature. In these rules governing vows and oaths, we see that human beings, like God, have the power to make things holy by words, by proclaiming them holy. By uttering words, an Israelite can impose an obligation on himself or herself as binding as God's commands in the Torah. Hirsch defines a "vow" (*neder*) as "self-imposed legislation."

**2.** Why are these laws about vows and oaths directed primarily to the heads of the tribes? Because people in high public office are more often tempted to make promises that they cannot keep (Hatam Sofer). Their behav-

<sup>4</sup>If a woman makes a vow to the LORD or assumes an obligation while still in her father's household by reason of her youth, <sup>5</sup>and her father learns of her vow or her self-imposed obligation and offers no objection, all her vows shall stand and every self-imposed obligation shall stand. <sup>6</sup>But if her father restrains her on the day he finds out, none of her vows or self-imposed obligations shall stand; and the LORD will forgive her, since her father restrained her.

<sup>7</sup>If she should marry while her vow or the commitment to which she bound herself is still in force, <sup>8</sup>and her husband learns of it and offers no objection on the day he finds out, her vows shall stand and her self-imposed obligations shall stand. <sup>9</sup>But if her husband restrains her on the day that he learns of it, he thereby annuls her vow which was in force or the commitment to which she bound herself; and the LORD will forgive her.—<sup>10</sup>The vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, however, whatever she has imposed on herself, shall be binding upon her.—<sup>11</sup>So, too, if, while in her husband's household,

וְאִשָּׁה כִּי-תִזְכֹּר נָדַר לַיהוָה וְאָסְרָה אָסֶר בְּבֵית אָבִיהָ בְּנַעֲרִיהָ: <sup>5</sup>וְשָׁמַע אָבִיהָ אֶת-נִדְרָהּ וְאָסְרָה אֲשֶׁר אָסְרָה עַל-נַפְשָׁהּ וְהַחֲרִישׁ לָהּ אָבִיהָ וְקָמוּ כָּל-נִדְרֶיהָ וְכָל-אָסֶר אֲשֶׁר-אָסְרָה עַל-נַפְשָׁהּ יִקְוּם: <sup>6</sup>וְאִם-הִנִּיא אָבִיהָ אֶתָּה בְּיוֹם שָׁמְעוֹ כָּל-נִדְרֶיהָ וְאָסְרֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר-אָסְרָה עַל-נַפְשָׁהּ לֹא יִקְוּם וַיְהִי וַיִּסְלַח-לָהּ כִּי-הִנִּיא אָבִיהָ אֶתָּה:

<sup>7</sup>וְאִם-הָיוּ תְהִיָּה לְאִישׁ וְנִדְרֶיהָ עָלֶיהָ אוֹ מִבְטָא שְׁפָתֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר אָסְרָה עַל-נַפְשָׁהּ: <sup>8</sup>וְשָׁמַע אִישָׁהּ בְּיוֹם שָׁמְעוֹ וְהַחֲרִישׁ לָהּ וְקָמוּ נִדְרֶיהָ וְאָסְרָה אֲשֶׁר-אָסְרָה עַל-נַפְשָׁהּ יִקְמוּ: <sup>9</sup>וְאִם בְּיוֹם שָׁמַע אִישָׁהּ יִנִּיא אוֹתָהּ וְהִפָּר אֶת-נִדְרָהּ אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ וְאֵת מִבְטָא שְׁפָתֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר אָסְרָה עַל-נַפְשָׁהּ וַיְהִי וַיִּסְלַח-לָהּ: <sup>10</sup>וְנָדַר אֶלְמָנָה וְגִרוּשָׁה כָּל אֲשֶׁר-אָסְרָה עַל-נַפְשָׁהּ יִקְוּם עָלֶיהָ: <sup>11</sup>וְאִם-בְּבֵית אִישָׁהּ נִדְרָה אֶו-

**4–6.** The vows and oaths of an unmarried female who is still under the authority of her father can be annulled by her father if he expresses disapproval on the very day he learns of them.

**If a woman** Not a man, however.

**by reason of her youth** This refers to a woman who is young and even marriageable but still in her father's house.

**offers no objection** His silence implies consent.

**on the day he finds out** If he waits until the next day to express his disapproval, however, it is too late (see Comment to v. 15).

**forgive** If the woman is thwarted from fulfilling her vow by her father, God will forgive her.

**7–9.** If the woman made her vow or oath when still under her father's control, her husband may annul it on the day he learns of it even though it was approved by her father.

**commitment** Hebrew: *mivta s'fateha*; literally, "utterance of her lips." This implies an oath.

**still in force** She made the vow or oath while she still was in her father's house, and he did not nullify it.

**10.** This statement appears to have been inserted by a later editor. It is not included in the summation (v. 17).

**11–13.** A woman's vow or oath can be annulled by her husband on the day he learns of it. Thereafter, his protests are of no avail. Her vow or oath must be fulfilled.

ior could lessen the respect others have for the spoken word.

5. These rules, reflecting an age when women were subordinated to a father or a husband, have been superseded by developments in the modern world. Already by the time of

the Talmud, the Sages limited the applicability of this law by restricting its time (the year between ages 11 and 12) and circumstances. The sense here of the married woman as subservient in the early period of our tradition, however, seems unavoidable.

she makes a vow or imposes an obligation on herself by oath, <sup>12</sup>and her husband learns of it, yet offers no objection—thus failing to restrain her—all her vows shall stand and all her self-imposed obligations shall stand. <sup>13</sup>But if her husband does annul them on the day he finds out, then nothing that has crossed her lips shall stand, whether vows or self-imposed obligations. Her husband has annulled them, and the LORD will forgive her. <sup>14</sup>Every vow and every sworn obligation of self-denial may be upheld by her husband or annulled by her husband. <sup>15</sup>If her husband offers no objection from that day to the next, he has upheld all the vows or obligations she has assumed: he has upheld them by offering no objection on the day he found out. <sup>16</sup>But if he annuls them after [the day] he finds out, he shall bear her guilt.

<sup>17</sup>Those are the laws that the LORD enjoined upon Moses between a man and his wife, and as between a father and his daughter while in her father's household by reason of her youth.

אָסְרָה אִסָּר עַל-נַפְשָׁהּ בַּשְּׁבָעָה: <sup>12</sup> וְשָׁמַע אִישָׁהּ וְהַחֲרַשׁ לָהּ לֹא הִנִּיא אֶתָּה וְקָמוּ כָּל-נִדְרֶיהָ וְכָל-אִסָּר אֲשֶׁר-אָסְרָה עַל-נַפְשָׁהּ יִקֹּום: <sup>13</sup> וְאִם-הִפִּיר יָפֵר אֶתָּם | אִישָׁהּ בְּיוֹם שָׁמְעוֹ כָּל-מוֹצֵא שְׂפָתֶיהָ לְנִדְרֶיהָ וּלְאִסָּר נַפְשָׁהּ לֹא יִקֹּום אִישָׁהּ הַפֶּרֶם וַיְהוּהוּ יִסְלַח-לָהּ: <sup>14</sup> כָּל-נִדָּר וְכָל-שְׂבֻעַת אִסָּר לְעֵנַת נַפֶּשׁ אִישָׁהּ יִקִּימוּ וְאִישָׁהּ יִפְרֶנּוּ: <sup>15</sup> וְאִם-הַחֲרַשׁ יַחֲרִישׁ לָהּ אִישָׁהּ מִיוֹם אֶל-יוֹם וְהִקִּים אֶת-כָּל-נִדְרֶיהָ אוֹ אֶת-כָּל-אִסָּרֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ הִקִּים אֶתָּם כִּי-הַחֲרַשׁ לָהּ בְּיוֹם שָׁמְעוֹ: <sup>16</sup> וְאִם-הִפִּיר יָפֵר אֶתָּם אַחֲרֵי שָׁמְעוֹ וְנָשָׂא אֶת-עוֹנָהּ:

<sup>17</sup> אֵלֶּה הַחֻקִּים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת-מֹשֶׁה בֵּין אִישׁ לְאִשְׁתּוֹ בֵּין-אָב לְבִתּוֹ בְּנִעֻרֶיהָ בֵּית אָבִיהָ: פ

**31** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

לֹא יוֹדֵבֵר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: שְׁנִי

**15. from that day to the next** The vow or oath must be annulled on the same day that the father or husband learns of it.

**he has upheld** Not now but on the day he had learned of it and was silent.

**16.** He shall bear her punishment from God, punishment that otherwise would have befallen

her for not fulfilling her vow or oath. Either the husband has forced her to break her vow or oath or he has deceived her into believing that he had annulled her vow or oath as soon as he was informed of it. In such cases, it is as if he had taken over her vow and violated it.

## CHAPTER 31

**1–3.** It seems poignant that Moses' last great task before his death is so out of character—a war of vengeance. However, Moses will choose to end his career not with this battle and the discord that followed (v. 14ff.) but with the stirring oration that forms the Book of Deuteronomy.

In verse 2, God directs Moses to avenge the Israelite people. In verse 3, however, Moses speaks to the people about "the LORD's venge-

ance." This will not be a war primarily for land or personal gain but to redeem God's name from the dishonor that the Midianites attached to it at Baal-peor. Presumably this is why Phinehas the priest is listed as leading the effort rather than Joshua. "Had we been idol-worshippers, they would not have striven so hard to lead us astray" (Num. R. 22:2).

The reader is likely to be uncomfortable with the notion of a "holy war." Does placing the seal of religious approval on a military undertaking change and sanctify the battle or

<sup>2</sup>“Avenge the Israelite people on the Midianites; then you shall be gathered to your kin.”

<sup>3</sup>Moses spoke to the people, saying, “Let men be picked out from among you for a campaign, and let them fall upon Midian to wreak the LORD’s vengeance on Midian. <sup>4</sup>You shall dispatch on the campaign a thousand from every one of the tribes of Israel.”

<sup>5</sup>So a thousand from each tribe were furnished from the divisions of Israel, twelve thousand picked for the campaign. <sup>6</sup>Moses dispatched them on the campaign, a thousand from each tribe, with Phinehas son of Eleazar serving as a priest on the campaign, equipped with the sacred utensils and the trumpets for sounding the blasts. <sup>7</sup>They took the field against Midian, as the LORD had commanded Moses, and slew every male. <sup>8</sup>Along with their other victims, they slew the kings of Midian: Evi, Rekem,

<sup>2</sup>נָקַם נְקַמַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֵת הַמִּדְיָנִים  
אַחַר תֵּאָסֵף אֶל-עַמִּיךָ:

<sup>3</sup>וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם לֵאמֹר הִחְלְצוּ  
מֵאֵתְכֶם אַנְשִׁים לְצַבָּא וַיְהִיו עַל-מִדְיָן  
לְתֵת נְקַמַת-יְהוָה בְּמִדְיָן: <sup>4</sup>אֶלֶף לַמַּטֵּה  
אֶלֶף לַמַּטֵּה לְכָל מִטּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּשְׁלְחוּ  
לְצַבָּא:

<sup>5</sup>וַיִּמְסְרוּ מֵאֶלְפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶלֶף לַמַּטֵּה  
שְׁנַיִם-עָשָׂר אֶלֶף חֲלוּצֵי צָבָא: <sup>6</sup>וַיִּשְׁלַח  
אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה אֶלֶף לַמַּטֵּה לְצַבָּא אֹתָם  
וְאֶת-פִּינְחָס בֶּן-אֱלֶעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן לְצַבָּא וְכֹלֵי  
הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְחֻצְצֹרוֹת הַתְּרוּעָה בְיָדוֹ:  
<sup>7</sup>וַיִּצְבְּאוּ עַל-מִדְיָן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת-  
מֹשֶׁה וַיַּהַרְגוּ כָּל-זָכָר: <sup>8</sup>וְאֶת-מַלְכֵי מִדְיָן  
הֲרָגוּ עַל-חֲלִילֵיהֶם אֶת-אֹוֵי וְאֶת-רְקֻם

#### THE WAR AGAINST MIDIAN (31:1–54)

**2. Avenge . . . on** Hebrew: *n'kom . . . me-*, which means “redress [past wrongs] from.” Translating it as “avenge . . . on” has no basis in Scripture when the subject is God.

**3. to wreak the LORD’s vengeance on** Better: “to exact the LORD’s retribution on.” The Israelites seek redress or compensation from the Midianites for causing the devastating plague of Baal-peor, but the Lord desires to exact retribution from them for the sacrilege they committed by seducing the Israelites into worshiping Baal-peor.

**4. thousand** Given the differences in the size of the tribes, it is highly unrealistic that the same number was mustered for each one. This word can also be rendered “division,” a much smaller, elite unit that every tribe could provide.

**6.** Phinehas is involved, not Eleazar, who as high priest was forbidden to expose himself to contamination by a corpse.

**servicing as a priest on the campaign** Phinehas’s function is not to lead the army, but to act as chaplain, to render priestly services, especially in consulting the Urim and Thummim.

**the sacred utensils** The priest probably accompanied the troops with all the sacred paraphernalia, including the Ark, trumpets, and the Urim and Thummim. He thereby could consult the Lord when necessary, but from a position behind the battle lines to protect the sacred vessels from both capture and contamination.

**7. slew every male** That is, every adult male of that Midianite tribe in the Transjordan.

does it compromise the religion and contaminate it with the stain of bloodshed? When is war “the LORD’s vengeance” and when is it human vengeance to which the name of God has been attached?

**6.** Moses himself does not take part in the campaign. Was this because of his advanced age, or because he had found refuge among the Midianites when he fled Egypt as a young man (Num. R. 22:4)?

**8.** It would seem that Balaam, instead of returning home, lingered to see if his plan of seducing the Israelites would work. The Midrash comments on his death by sword (Tanh. Balak 8). Isaac had blessed Jacob with the gift of prayer and had told Esau that he would live by the sword (Gen. 27). Balaam set out to use Jacob’s “weapon” against his descendants, trying to harm them with words. In retaliation, Israel used Esau’s weapon, the sword, against him.

Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. They also put Balaam son of Beor to the sword.

<sup>9</sup>The Israelites took the women and children of the Midianites captive, and seized as booty all their beasts, all their herds, and all their wealth. <sup>10</sup>And they destroyed by fire all the towns in which they were settled, and their encampments. <sup>11</sup>They gathered all the spoil and all the booty, man and beast, <sup>12</sup>and they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the whole Israelite community, at the camp in the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho.

<sup>13</sup>Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the chieftains of the community came out to meet them outside the camp. <sup>14</sup>Moses became angry with the commanders of the army, the officers of thousands and the officers of hundreds, who had come back from the military campaign. <sup>15</sup>Moses said to them, “You have spared every female! <sup>16</sup>Yet they are the very ones who, at the bidding of Balaam, induced the Israelites to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so that the LORD’s community was struck by the plague. <sup>17</sup>Now, therefore, slay every male among the children, and slay also every woman

וְאֶת־צֹר וְאֶת־חֹר וְאֶת־רִבֵּעַ חַמֶּשֶׁת מַלְכֵי מִדְיָן וְאֶת בְּלָעָם בֶּן־בְּעֹר הָרְגוּ בַחֶרֶב:

<sup>9</sup> וַיִּשְׁבּוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־נְשֵׁי מִדְיָן וְאֶת־טָפָם וְאֶת כָּל־בְּהֵמָתָם וְאֶת־כָּל־מִקְנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־כָּל־חֵילֵם בְּזָזוּ: <sup>10</sup> וְאֶת כָּל־עָרֵיהֶם בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם וְאֶת כָּל־טִירֹתָם שָׂרְפוּ בָאֵשׁ: <sup>11</sup> וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־כָּל־הַשְּׁלָל וְאֶת כָּל־הַמְּלָקוֹחַ בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: <sup>12</sup> וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶל־עֵדֻת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשְּׁבִי וְאֶת־הַמְּלָקוֹחַ וְאֶת־הַשְּׁלָל אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה אֶל־עֵרְבַת מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל־יַרְדֵּן יַרְחוֹ: ס

<sup>13</sup> וַיֵּצְאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְכָל־נְשֵׂי־אֵי הָעֵדָה לִקְרֹאתָם אֶל־מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: <sup>14</sup> וַיִּקְצֹף מֹשֶׁה עַל פְּקוּדֵי הַחֵיל שָׂרֵי הָאֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמֵּאוֹת הַבָּאִים מִצָּבָא הַמְּלַחְמָה: <sup>15</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם מֹשֶׁה הַחַיִּיתֶם כָּל־נַקְבָּה: <sup>16</sup> הֲנָה הָיָה לְבַנֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּדַבַּר בְּלָעָם לְמִסְר־מַעַל בִּיהוָה עַל־דִּבְר־פְּעֹר וַתְּהִי הַמַּגֵּפָה בְּעֵדֻת יְהוָה: <sup>17</sup> וְעַתָּה הָרְגוּ כָּל־זָכָר בְּטוֹף וְכָל־

שלישי  
[שני]

**13. outside the camp** The returning army, requiring purification from corpse contamination, could not enter the camp.

**14.** The army apparently has no overall commander, for Moses does not turn to a single leader but to the divisional officers.

**15.** The taking of women captives would have been permitted in any war with non-Canaanites (Deut. 20:10ff.). In this instance, however, the sight of the Midianite women

arouses Moses’ wrath, because they were instrumental in the apostasy and the plague of Baal-peor (Num. 25).

**16. at the bidding of Balaam** Reflecting a tradition that after Balaam failed to curse the Israelites he persuaded the Midianites to seduce the Israelites at Baal-peor.

**17. carnally** Literally, “lying with a male.” These women, because they seduced the Israelites, are to be slain.

**16.** Here Balaam is identified as the instigator of the seduction scheme at Baal-peor, a fact the Torah did not mention previously. Had the Torah mentioned Balaam’s role earlier, the Israelites might have excused their behavior by saying “he led us into it.” Therefore the Torah describes and condemns the sin as inexcusable weakness on Israel’s part and only later identifies the instigator.

**17.** The command to kill Midianite women and children can be understood only in light of the Torah’s fear that their sexually charged pagan celebrations would continue to distract and entice the young, immature Israelite people. Ramban, building on a comment in *Sifrei*, suggests that Moses’ instructions to the army in verses 3–4 were vague and did not mention killing the women. Moses may be an-

who has known a man carnally; <sup>18</sup>but spare every young woman who has not had carnal relations with a man.

<sup>19</sup>“You shall then stay outside the camp seven days; every one among you or among your captives who has slain a person or touched a corpse shall purify himself on the third and seventh days. <sup>20</sup>You shall also purify every cloth, every article of skin, everything made of goats’ hair, and every object of wood.”

<sup>21</sup>Eleazar the priest said to the troops who had taken part in the fighting, “This is the ritual law that the LORD has enjoined upon Moses: <sup>22</sup>Gold and silver, copper, iron, tin, and lead—<sup>23</sup>any article that can withstand fire—these you shall pass through fire and they shall be pure, except that they must be purified with water of lustration; and anything that cannot withstand fire

אִשָּׁה יִדְעַת אִישׁ לְמִשְׁכַּב זָכָר הָרְגוּ: וְכָל הַטָּף בְּנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר הַחֲיּוּ לָכֶם:

<sup>19</sup>וְאַתֶּם חָנוּ מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל הָרֶג נֶפֶשׁ וְכָל אֲנִיָּה נִגְעָה בַּחֶלֶל תִּתְחַטְּאוּ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי אַתֶּם וּשְׂבִיכֵיכֶם: <sup>20</sup>וְכָל־בְּגָד וְכָל־כְּלֵי־עוֹר וְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה עֵזִים וְכָל־כְּלֵי־עֵץ תִּתְחַטְּאוּ: ס

<sup>21</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־אֲנָשֵׁי הַצָּבָא הַבָּאִים לְמַלְחָמָה זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: <sup>22</sup>אֲךָ אֶת־הַזָּהָב וְאֶת־הַכֶּסֶף אֶת־הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֶת־הַבַּרְזֶל אֶת־הַבַּדִּיל וְאֶת־הָעַפְרָת: <sup>23</sup>כָּל־דָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־יָבֵא בְּאֵשׁ תַּעֲבִירוּ בְּאֵשׁ וְטָהַר אֲךָ בְּמֵי נֹדָה יִתְחַטָּא וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָבֵא

v. 23. סבירין ומטעין "והנה"

**18.** The virgins are to be kept alive as slaves or wives.

PURIFICATION OF WARRIORS AND CAPTIVES (vv. 19–24)

**19.** Moses now turns from the officers to address all the troops.

*or among your captives* Implies that all persons, Israelites and non-Israelites alike, are capable of contaminating the sanctuary. Therefore, the captives also must be purified before entering the camp.

**20.** All exposed objects in a room containing a human corpse must undergo a seven-day purification. Articles of wood, cloth, or animal skin

coming into contact with an animal corpse must undergo a one-day purification. Earthenware vessels are absent from this list because they cannot be purified (see 19:14–18; Lev. 11:32).

**22.** The metals are arranged in descending order of value. Articles made of earthenware or stone, although also able to withstand fire, are not mentioned. Pottery, being porous, can never be purified and must be destroyed if impure (Lev. 6:21). Stone is not subject to impurity.

**23. water of lustration** Water, when sprinkled on a corpse-contaminated person on the third day and on the seventh day, purifies the person (19:18–19). This passage appears to supplement the rules of purification of corpse-

gry at himself for the omission and directs his anger against the army commanders. Or he may be going out of his way to avoid charges of favoring the Midianites, his wife’s relatives.

**19.** Because the rules of warfare permit be-

havior that is otherwise forbidden, those soldiers who had killed must remain outside the camp for a week, not only because of corpse contamination but as a transition to the world of normal living.

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH  
**31:23. these shall you pass through fire and they shall be pure** This is the basis for how to make utensils, pots, and pans fit for use according to the Jewish dietary laws when they have been previously used for cooking non-kosher food. The same procedure applies for switching them from use for dairy meals to meat meals, or the reverse, or for making utensils that are used throughout the year fit for use during *Pesah* (BT Av. Zar. 75b).



you must pass through water. <sup>24</sup>On the seventh day you shall wash your clothes and be pure, and after that you may enter the camp.”

<sup>25</sup>The LORD said to Moses: <sup>26</sup>“You and Eleazar the priest and the family heads of the community take an inventory of the booty that was captured, man and beast, <sup>27</sup>and divide the booty equally between the combatants who engaged in the campaign and the rest of the community. <sup>28</sup>You shall exact a levy for the LORD: in the case of the warriors who engaged in the campaign, one item in five hundred, of persons, oxen, asses, and sheep, <sup>29</sup>shall be taken from their half-share and given to Eleazar the priest as a contribution to the LORD; <sup>30</sup>and from the half-share of the other Israelites you shall withhold one in every fifty human beings as well as cattle, asses, and sheep—all the animals—and give them to the Levites, who attend to the duties of the LORD’s Tabernacle.”

<sup>31</sup>Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses. <sup>32</sup>The amount of booty, other than the spoil that the troops had plundered, came to 675,000 sheep, <sup>33</sup>72,000 head of cattle, <sup>34</sup>61,000 asses, <sup>35</sup>and a total of 32,000 human beings, namely, the women who had not had carnal relations.

<sup>36</sup>Thus, the half-share of those who had en-

בְּאֵשׁ תַעֲבִירוּ בַמַּיִם: <sup>24</sup> וְכִבַּסְתֶּם בְּגָדֵיכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְטַהַרְתֶּם וְאַחַר תָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה: פ

רביעי <sup>25</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: <sup>26</sup> שָׂא אֶת רֹאשׁ מִלְקוֹחַ הַשְּׁבִי בָאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה אֶתָּה וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְרָאשֵׁי אָבוֹת הָעֵדָה: <sup>27</sup> וְחָצִיתָ אֶת־הַמִּלְקוֹחַ בֵּין תַּפְשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה הַיְצֵאִים לְצָבָא וּבֵין כָּל־הָעֵדָה: <sup>28</sup> וְהִרְמַתְּ מִכֶּסֶּ לַיהוָה מֵאֵת אַנְשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה הַיְצֵאִים לְצָבָא אֶחָד נַפֶּשׁ מִחֲמֵשׁ הַמְּאוֹת מִן־הָאָדָם וּמִן־הַבְּקָר וּמִן־הַחֲמֹרִים וּמִן־הַיְצֵאֵן: <sup>29</sup> מִמִּחְצִיתֶם תִּקְחוּ וְנָתַתָּה לְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן תְּרוּמַת יְהוָה: <sup>30</sup> וּמִמִּחְצֵת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּקַּח | אֶחָד | אֶחָד מִן־הַחֲמֹשִׁים מִן־הָאָדָם מִן־הַבְּקָר מִן־הַחֲמֹרִים וּמִן־הַיְצֵאֵן מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה וְנָתַתָּה אֹתָם לַלְוִיִּם שְׁמֵרֵי מִשְׁמֶרֶת מִשְׁפַּן יְהוָה:

<sup>31</sup> וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: <sup>32</sup> וַיְהִי הַמִּלְקוֹחַ יָתֵר הַבָּז אֲשֶׁר בָּזְזוּ עִם הַצָּבָא צֵאֵן שְׁש־מְאוֹת אֵלֶף וְשִׁבְעִים אֵלֶף וְחֲמֵשֶׁת־אֲלָפִים: <sup>33</sup> וּבְקָר שְׁנַיִם וְשִׁבְעִים אֵלֶף: <sup>34</sup> וְחֲמֹרִים אֶחָד וְשָׁשִׁים אֵלֶף: <sup>35</sup> וְנַפְשׁ אָדָם מִן־הַנָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר כָּל־נַפֶּשׁ שְׁנַיִם וְשָׁלְשִׁים אֵלֶף:

<sup>36</sup> וַתְּהִי הַמִּחְצָה חֵלֶק הַיְצֵאִים בְּצָבָא

contaminated objects in chapter 19 by insisting that they must be passed through fire or water, not just sprinkled with the water of lustration.

**cannot withstand fire** Glassware, for example.

**must pass through water** Presumably this is done on the seventh day after the objects have been sprinkled with the water of lustration.

**24. wash your clothes** Bathing is assumed in rules of purification (Lev. 11:25,28,40).

DISTRIBUTION OF SPOILS (vv. 25–47)

**26.** Moses is assisted by Eleazar and the clan heads in the task of dividing the spoils. Moses su-

pervises distribution to the clergy; the others supervise distribution to the people.

**booty that was captured** The living booty.

**30. one in every fifty** Thus the Levites as a group receive 10 times as much as the priests (see v. 28). The ratio is similar to their respective shares in the tithe, the Levites receiving 9 times as much (18:25–32).

**to the Levites** They are not included in the community, having undergone a separate census.

**32. spoil** Objects that the soldiers plundered for themselves and that were not subject to the

levy.

gaged in the campaign [was as follows]: The number of sheep was 337,500,<sup>37</sup> and the LORD's levy from the sheep was 675;<sup>38</sup> the cattle came to 36,000, from which the LORD's levy was 72;<sup>39</sup> the asses came to 30,500, from which the LORD's levy was 61.<sup>40</sup> And the number of human beings was 16,000, from which the LORD's levy was 32.<sup>41</sup> Moses gave the contributions levied for the LORD to Eleazar the priest, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>42</sup>As for the half-share of the other Israelites, which Moses withdrew from the men who had taken the field,<sup>43</sup> that half-share of the community consisted of 337,500 sheep,<sup>44</sup> 36,000 head of cattle,<sup>45</sup> 30,500 asses,<sup>46</sup> and 16,000 human beings.<sup>47</sup> From this half-share of the Israelites, Moses withheld one in every fifty humans and animals; and he gave them to the Levites, who attended to the duties of the LORD's Tabernacle, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>48</sup>The commanders of the troop divisions, the officers of thousands and the officers of hundreds, approached Moses.<sup>49</sup> They said to Moses, "Your servants have made a check of the warriors in our charge, and not one of us is missing.<sup>50</sup> So we have brought as an offering to the LORD such articles of gold as each of us came upon:

מִסְפַּר הַצֹּאן שְׁלֹש־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף וּשְׁבַע־עַת אֲלָפִים וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת: <sup>37</sup>וַיְהִי הַמִּכָּס לַיהוָה מִן־הַצֹּאן שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת חֲמִשׁ וּשְׁבַע־עִים: <sup>38</sup>וַהֲבִקֵּר שֵׁשָׁה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף וּמִכָּסָם לַיהוָה שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁבַע־עִים: <sup>39</sup>וַחֲמֹרִים שְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת וּמִכָּסָם לַיהוָה אֶחָד וּשְׁשִׁים: <sup>40</sup>וּנְפֹשׁ אָדָם שֵׁשָׁה עָשָׂר אֶלֶף וּמִכָּסָם לַיהוָה שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים נַפְשׁ: <sup>41</sup>וַיִּתֵּן מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מִכָּס תְּרוּמַת יְהוָה לְאַלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

<sup>42</sup>וּמִמַּחְצֵית בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר חָצְּהָ מֹשֶׁה מִן־הָאֲנָשִׁים הַצְּבָאִים: <sup>43</sup>וַתְּהִי מַחְצֵית הָעֵדָה מִן־הַצֹּאן שְׁלֹש־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף שְׁבַע־עַת אֲלָפִים וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת: <sup>44</sup>וּבִקֵּר שֵׁשָׁה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף: <sup>45</sup>וַחֲמֹרִים שְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת: <sup>46</sup>וּנְפֹשׁ אָדָם שֵׁשָׁה עָשָׂר אֶלֶף: <sup>47</sup>וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה מִמַּחְצֵית בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הָאֶחָד אֶחָד מִן־הַחֲמִשִּׁים מִן־הָאָדָם וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם לְלוֹוִים שְׁמֹרֵי מִשְׁמֶרֶת מִשְׁפַּן יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

<sup>48</sup>וַיִּקְרְבוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הַפְּקָדִים אֲשֶׁר לְאַלְפֵי הַצְּבָא שָׂרֵי הָאֲלָפִים וּשְׂרֵי הַמֵּאוֹת: <sup>49</sup>וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲבַדֶּיךָ נִשְׂאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ אַנְשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה אֲשֶׁר בִּידְנֹנוּ וְלֹא־נִפְקָד מִמֶּנּוּ אִישׁ: <sup>50</sup>וַנִּקְרַב אֶת־קַרְבָּן יְהוָה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר מִצָּא כְּלִי־זָהָב אֶצְעָדָה

**40. the LORD's levy** These individuals were most likely assigned to menial tasks in the sanctuary.

RANSOM (vv. 48–54)

**49. have made a check** The Hebrew idiom (*nasu rosh*) most likely means "took a head count," i.e., a census.

**not one of us is missing** All are accounted for.

**50.** This parenthetical comment underscores the magnanimity of the officers' contribution. Although a census requires a monetary ransom from each person (Exod. 30:12), the officers donated more than twice the amount needed to ransom the entire army—½ shekel of silver per soldier

armlets, bracelets, signet rings, earrings, and pendants, that expiation may be made for our persons before the LORD.”<sup>51</sup> Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted the gold from them, all kinds of wrought articles. <sup>52</sup>All the gold that was offered by the officers of thousands and the officers of hundreds as a contribution to the LORD came to 16,750 shekels.—<sup>53</sup>But in the ranks, everyone kept his booty for himself.—<sup>54</sup>So Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted the gold from the officers of thousands and the officers of hundreds and brought it to the Tent of Meeting, as a reminder in behalf of the Israelites before the LORD.

**32** The Reubenites and the Gadites owned cattle in very great numbers. Noting that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were a region suitable for cattle,<sup>2</sup> the Gadites and the Reubenites came to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the chieftains of the community, and said,<sup>3</sup> “Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon—<sup>4</sup>the land that the LORD has con-

וְצָמִיד טַבַּעַת עָגִיל וְכוּמֹז לְכַפֵּר עַל-  
נַפְשֹׁתֵינוּ לְפָנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>51</sup>וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה  
וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַזָּהָב מֵאֲתָם כָּל כְּלֵי  
מַעֲשֵׂה: <sup>52</sup>וַיְהִי | כָּל-זָהָב הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר  
הָרִימוּ לַיהוָה שֵׁשָׁה עָשָׂר אֶלֶף שֶׁבַע-  
מֵאוֹת וְחֲמִשִּׁים שֶׁקֶל מֵאֵת שָׂרֵי הָאֲלָפִים  
וּמֵאֵת שָׂרֵי הַמֵּאוֹת: <sup>53</sup>אֲנָשֵׁי הַצָּבָא בְּזִוּוֹ  
אִישׁ לוֹ: <sup>54</sup>וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן  
אֶת-הַזָּהָב מֵאֵת שָׂרֵי הָאֲלָפִים וְהַמֵּאוֹת  
וַיָּבִאוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּפְרוּן לְבַנְי-  
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנֵי יְהוָה: פ

**לב** ומקנה | רב הה' לבני ראובן  
ולבני גד עצום מאד ויראו את-ארץ  
יעזר ואת-ארץ גלעד והנה המקום מקום  
מקנה: <sup>2</sup> ויבאו בני גד ובני ראובן ויאמרו  
אל-משה ואל-אלעזר הכהן ואל-נשיאי  
העדה לאמר: <sup>3</sup> עטרות ודיבן ויעזר  
ונמרה וחשבון ואלעלה ושכם ונבו  
ובען: <sup>4</sup> הארץ אשר הכה יהוה לפני

ששי  
[שלישי]

(not to speak of gold), totaling 16,750 shekels. Thus each infantryman could keep his booty (see v. 32).

**offering to the LORD** This offering, which had been set aside and dedicated to the Lord before the census (in accordance with Exod. 30:12–16), is now being turned over to Moses.

**articles of gold** The variety of gold ornaments is not surprising. Even today, nomads wear

more ornaments than do sedentary people.

**for our persons** Better: “to ransom our lives”—because of having undergone a census (see Exod. 30:12). The preceding word *kipper* (“expiation”) implies some kind of atonement. This offering was not ransom for having taken life; ransom (used when slaughtering animals for meat, Lev. 17:11) was unacceptable after homicide—justified or not.

#### THE SETTLEMENT OF TRANSJORDAN (32:1–42)

This chapter inaugurates a new phase in the history of ancient Israel: the settlement period, the record of how the Israelites began to find permanent homes for themselves.

**1. cattle** Refers to all livestock. In addition to cattle there were other domesticated animals, such as donkeys.

**2.** The division of the Land is decided by lot,

by the Urim and Thummim administered by the high priest, Eleazar (27:21). Thus the request of Gad and Reuben to withdraw from the forthcoming apportionment of the Land needed Eleazar’s consent.

**4.** Gad and Reuben claim that because the Lord has conquered Transjordan, it is God’s land as much as is Cisjordan.

quered for the community of Israel is cattle country, and your servants have cattle.<sup>5</sup> It would be a favor to us,” they continued, “if this land were given to your servants as a holding; do not move us across the Jordan.”

<sup>6</sup>Moses replied to the Gadites and the Reubenites, “Are your brothers to go to war while you stay here? <sup>7</sup>Why will you turn the minds of the Israelites from crossing into the land that the LORD has given them? <sup>8</sup>That is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to survey the land. <sup>9</sup>After going up to the wadi Eshcol and surveying the land, they turned the minds of the Israelites from invading the land that the LORD had given them. <sup>10</sup>Thereupon the LORD was incensed and He swore, <sup>11</sup>‘None of the men from twenty years up who came out of Egypt shall see the land that I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for they did not remain loyal to Me— <sup>12</sup>none except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they remained loyal to the LORD.’ <sup>13</sup>The LORD was incensed at Israel, and for forty years He made them wander in the wilderness, until the whole generation that had provoked the LORD’s displeasure was gone. <sup>14</sup>And now you, a breed of sinful men, have replaced your fathers, to add still further to the LORD’s wrath against Israel. <sup>15</sup>If you turn away from Him and He abandons them once more in the wilderness, you will bring calamity upon all this people.”

<sup>16</sup>Then they stepped up to him and said, “We will build here sheepfolds for our flocks and

עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶרֶץ מְקַנָּה הוּא וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ  
מְקַנָּה: <sup>5</sup> וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִם־מִצְאָנוּ חֵן  
בְּעֵינֶיךָ יִתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְעַבְדֶּיךָ  
לְאֶחְזָה אֶל־תַּעֲבֵרְנוּ אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן:

<sup>6</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְבָנֵי־גַד וּלְבָנֵי רְאוּבֵן  
הָאֲחִיכֶם יָבֹאוּ לְמִלְחָמָה וְאַתֶּם תֵּשְׁבוּ  
פֹּה: <sup>7</sup> וְלָמָּה תִּנּוּאוּן תִּנְיָאוּן אֶת־לֵב בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעֵבֶר אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן לָהֶם  
יְהוָה: <sup>8</sup> כֹּה עָשׂוּ אֲבֹתֵיכֶם בְּשַׁלְּחֵי אֹתָם  
מִקְדֵּשׁ בְּרִנֵּעַ לְרֹאוֹת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ: <sup>9</sup> וַיַּעֲלוּ  
עַד־נַחַל אֶשְׁכּוֹל וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּנְיָאוּ  
אֶת־לֵב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַלְתִּי־בֹא אֶל־  
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן לָהֶם יְהוָה: <sup>10</sup> וַיַּחֲרֶ־אָף  
יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיִּשָּׁבַע לֵאמֹר: <sup>11</sup> אִם־  
יִרְאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים הָעֹלִים מִמִּצְרַיִם מִן  
עֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה אֵת הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר  
נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם לִיצְחָק וְלִיעֲקֹב כִּי  
לֹא־מְלָאוּ אַחֲרָי: <sup>12</sup> בַּלְתִּי כָּלֵב בֶּן־יִפְנֹה  
הַקֵּנִזִּי וַיְהוֹשֶׁעַ בֶּן־נּוּן כִּי מְלָאוּ אַחֲרָי  
יְהוָה: <sup>13</sup> וַיַּחֲרֶ־אָף יְהוָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּנְעַם  
בַּמִּדְבָּר אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה עַד־תָּם כָּל־הַדּוֹר  
הָעֹשֶׂה הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה: <sup>14</sup> וְהִנֵּה קָמְתֶם  
תַּחַת אֲבֹתֵיכֶם תִּרְבּוֹת אֲנָשִׁים חֲטָאִים  
לְסַפּוֹת עוֹד עַל חֲרוֹן אַף־יְהוָה אֶל־  
יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>15</sup> כִּי תִשׁוּבֶן מֵאַחֲרָיו וַיִּסַּף עוֹד  
לְהַנִּיחוֹ בַּמִּדְבָּר וְשַׁחַתְתֶם לְכָל־הָעָם  
הַזֶּה: <sup>ס</sup>

<sup>16</sup> וַיִּגְשׁוּ אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ גְדֵרְת צֹאן נִבְנָה

**5. do not move us across the Jordan** That is, for settlement in Cisjordan. Nevertheless, they had every intention of participating in the conquest, as they subsequently clarify (vv. 16–19).

**6.** Moses, assuming that they did not intend to participate in the forthcoming campaign, interrupts their speech to charge them with disloyalty and selfish disregard of Israel’s unity.

**11. from twenty years up** In the Bible, 20

is the legal age of majority and, hence, for liability and punishment.

**15. you will bring calamity** If the other tribes tolerate your rebellion.

**16.** Moses, who interrupted their petition, is now beseeched in a personal, intimate way (see Gen. 44:18, 45:4).

**sheepfolds . . . towns** They would have required adequate manpower to protect them from

towns for our children. <sup>17</sup>And we will hasten as shock-troops in the van of the Israelites until we have established them in their home, while our children stay in the fortified towns because of the inhabitants of the land. <sup>18</sup>We will not return to our homes until every one of the Israelites is in possession of his portion. <sup>19</sup>But we will not have a share with them in the territory beyond the Jordan, for we have received our share on the east side of the Jordan.”

<sup>20</sup>Moses said to them, “If you do this, if you go to battle as shock-troops, at the instance of the LORD, <sup>21</sup>and every shock-fighter among you crosses the Jordan, at the instance of the LORD, until He has dispossessed His enemies before Him, <sup>22</sup>and the land has been subdued, at the instance of the LORD, and then you return—you shall be clear before the LORD and before Israel; and this land shall be your holding under the

לְמִקְנֵנוּ פָּה וְעָרִים לְטַפְּנוּ: <sup>17</sup> וְאֶנְחֲנוּ  
נַחֲלֵךְ חֲשִׁים לְפָנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד אֲשֶׁר  
אִם-הִבִּיאֲנֵם אֶל-מְקוֹמָם וַיֵּשֶׁב טַפְּנוּ  
בְּעָרֵי הַמְּבָצָר מִפְּנֵי יוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ: <sup>18</sup> לֹא  
נָשׁוּב אֶל-בְּתֻנּוֹנוֹ עַד הַתְּנַחֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
אִישׁ נַחֲלָתוֹ: <sup>19</sup> כִּי לֹא נִחַל אִתְּם מֵעַבְר  
לְיַרְדֵּן וְהִלָּאָה כִּי בָּאָה נַחֲלָתְנוּ אֵלֵינוּ  
מֵעַבְר הַיַּרְדֵּן מִזְרָחָה: פ

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם מֹשֶׁה אִם-תַּעֲשׂוּן אֶת-  
הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אִם-תַּחֲלִצוּ לְפָנֵי יְהוָה  
לְמַלְחָמָה: <sup>21</sup> וְעַבְר לְכֶם כָּל-חַלּוּץ אֶת-  
הַיַּרְדֵּן לְפָנֵי יְהוָה עַד הוֹרִישׁוּ אֶת-אֹיְבָיו  
מִפְּנֵינוּ: <sup>22</sup> וְנִכְבְּשָׁה הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֵי יְהוָה  
וְאַחַר תָּשׁוּבוּ וְהֵייתֶם נְקִיִּים מִיְהוָה  
וּמִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְהֵייתָ הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְכֶם

שביעי  
[רביעי]

neighboring tribes. Because the shock troops were a select, elite force, the remainder of the troops could be left behind to construct and protect the home front.

**17. while our children** Literally, “while our dependents” (including women).

**19. east side of the Jordan** Literally, “on the

other side of the Jordan eastward.” Thus the speaker in this verse places himself on the west side of the Jordan.

**22. be clear** That is, free of all obligation, which implies that they took an oath. The root נקה is a legal term found in the context of oaths.

## CHAPTER 32

**16.** The spokesmen for Reuben and Gad betray their misguided priorities by first mentioning “sheepfolds for our flocks” and only later adding “towns for our children” (Num. R. 22:9). One *midrash* suggests that they did not have more cattle than their brethren (v. 1); they just spent more time thinking about their cattle (Mid. Ha-Gadol). Moses in his response (v. 24) reverses the order: “Build towns for your children and sheepfolds for your flocks.” The spokesmen hear and accept his correction, putting “our children, our wives” ahead of “our flocks and all our other livestock” in their reply (vv. 26–27) “as my lord commands.” A later commentator adds that because Reuben and Gad chose to live outside of the Promised Land for financial reasons, their tribes would be the first to be exiled in later years.

**18.** When the leaders of the two tribes emphasize that they are prepared to join in the battle to conquer the Land although they will not claim any of it, they speak of their obligation to their fellow Israelites (vv. 17–18). Moses, however, is not satisfied with that position. He emphasizes that they owe loyalty not only to the Israelite people but to the God of the Israelite people, mentioning “the LORD” six times (vv. 20–23) in the space of four verses (N. Leibowitz). He concludes that if they live up to their commitments (echoing the theme of vows and oaths with which the *parashah* began), “you shall be clear before the LORD and before Israel” (v. 22). The Talmud comments that all should live by this rule, “to be judged favorably not only by God but by one’s neighbors as well” (JT Shek. 3:2).

LORD. <sup>23</sup>But if you do not do so, you will have sinned against the LORD; and know that your sin will overtake you. <sup>24</sup>Build towns for your children and sheepfolds for your flocks, but do what you have promised.”

<sup>25</sup>The Gadites and the Reubenites answered Moses, “Your servants will do as my lord commands. <sup>26</sup>Our children, our wives, our flocks, and all our other livestock will stay behind in the towns of Gilead; <sup>27</sup>while your servants, all those recruited for war, cross over, at the instance of the LORD, to engage in battle—as my lord orders.”

<sup>28</sup>Then Moses gave instructions concerning them to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the family heads of the Israelite tribes. <sup>29</sup>Moses said to them, “If every shock-fighter among the Gadites and the Reubenites crosses the Jordan with you to do battle, at the instance of the LORD, and the land is subdued before you, you shall give them the land of Gilead as a holding. <sup>30</sup>But if they do not cross over with you as shock-troops, they shall receive holdings among you in the land of Canaan.”

<sup>31</sup>The Gadites and the Reubenites said in reply, “Whatever the LORD has spoken concerning your servants, that we will do. <sup>32</sup>We ourselves will cross over as shock-troops, at the instance of the LORD, into the land of Canaan; and we shall keep our hereditary holding across the Jordan.”

<sup>33</sup>So Moses assigned to them—to the Gadites,

לְאַחֲזָה לְפָנַי יְהוָה: <sup>23</sup> וְאִם-לֹא תַעֲשׂוּן כִּן הִנֵּה \* חַטָּאתְכֶם לִיהוָה וְדַעוּ חַטָּאתְכֶם אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא אֹתְכֶם: <sup>24</sup> בְּנֵי-לְכֶם עָרִים לְטַפְּכֶם וְגֵדְרֹת לְצִנְאֲכֶם וְהִיצֵא מִפִּיכֶם תַעֲשׂוּ:

<sup>25</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר \* בְּנֵי-גָד וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר עֲבָדֶיךָ יַעֲשׂוּ כַאֲשֶׁר אָדָנִי מְצִוָּה: <sup>26</sup> טַפְּנוּ נְשֵׁינוּ מִקְנֵנוּ וְכָל-בְּהֵמַתָּנוּ יִהְיוּ-שָׁם בְּעָרֵי הַגִּלְעָד: <sup>27</sup> וְעַבְדֶיךָ יַעֲבְרוּ כָל-חַלוּץ צָבָא לְפָנַי יְהוָה לְמִלְחָמָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָדָנִי דִּבֶּר:

<sup>28</sup> וַיִּצְוּ לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נּוּן וְאֶת-רָאשֵׁי אֲבוֹת הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>29</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם אִם-יַעֲבְרוּ בְנֵי-גָד וּבְנֵי-רְאוּבֵן אִתְּכֶם אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן כָּל-חַלוּץ לְמִלְחָמָה לְפָנַי יְהוָה וְנִכְבְּשָׁה הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֵיכֶם וּנְתַתֶּם לָהֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ הַגִּלְעָד לְאַחֲזָה: <sup>30</sup> וְאִם-לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ חַלוּצִים אִתְּכֶם וְנִאֲחֲזוּ בְּתוֹכְכֶם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

<sup>31</sup> וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי-גָד וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן לֵאמֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-עַבְדֶיךָ כִּן נַעֲשֶׂה: <sup>32</sup> נַחֲנוּ נַעֲבֹר וְנַעֲבֹר חַלוּצִים לְפָנַי יְהוָה אֶרֶץ \* כְּנָעַן וְאֶתְנוּ אַחֲזֹת נַחֲלָתָנוּ מֵעַבְר לַיַּרְדֵּן:

<sup>33</sup> וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם | מֹשֶׁה לְבְנֵי-גָד וְלְבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן

v. 23. סבירין ומטעין "הנהה"

v. 25. סבירין ומטעין לשון רבים

v. 32. סבירין ומטעין "ארצה"

**23. sinned against the LORD** Implies that they had taken an oath.

**26.** This detailed inventory is the final comprehensive summary concerning those to be left behind.

**28.** The high priest, Eleazar, takes precedence over Joshua whenever the Urim and Thummim must be employed—in war (27:21) and in apportioning the Land (34:17).

**30.** If Gad and Reuben reject these condi-

tions, i.e., if they refuse to risk their lives as shock troops and, therefore, refuse to take the oath, then they will be treated no differently from any other tribe. They will be assigned land to conquer in Cisjordan.

**31. Whatever the LORD has spoken** That is, whatever Moses has spoken. Hence, Moses need not fear that we will disobey.

**33. assigned** Moses gives Gad and Reuben the land provisionally—to rebuild its destroyed

the Reubenites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph—the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of King Og of Bashan, the land with its various cities and the territories of their surrounding towns. <sup>34</sup>The Gadites rebuilt Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, <sup>35</sup>Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, <sup>36</sup>Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran as fortified towns or as enclosures for flocks. <sup>37</sup>The Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, <sup>38</sup>Nebo, Baal-meon—some names being changed—and Sibmah; they gave [their own] names to towns that they rebuilt. <sup>39</sup>The descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, dispossessing the Amorites who were there; <sup>40</sup>so Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there. <sup>41</sup>Jair son of Manasseh went and captured their villages, which he renamed Havvoth-jair. <sup>42</sup>And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its dependencies, renaming it Nobah after himself.

וְלַחֲצִי אֶת־  
 מַמְלַכַת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֲמֹרִי וְאֶת־מַמְלַכַת  
 עֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן הָאָרֶץ לְעַרְיָהּ בְּגִבְלוֹת  
 עָרֵי הָאָרֶץ סָבִיב: <sup>34</sup> וַיִּבְנוּ בְנֵי־גָד אֶת־  
 דִּיבּוֹן וְאֶת־עָרֹת וְאֶת־עֲרֹעֵר: <sup>35</sup> וְאֶת־  
 עָרֹת שׁוֹפָן וְאֶת־יַעְזֹר וַיִּגְבְּהָהּ: <sup>36</sup> וְאֶת־  
 בֵּית נַמְרָה וְאֶת־בֵּית הָרֶן עָרֵי מִבְצָר  
 וַגְּדַרְתָּ צָאן: <sup>37</sup> וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן בָּנוּ אֶת־  
 חֶשְׁבוֹן וְאֶת־אֶלְעָלָא וְאֶת־קִרְיַתַּיִם:  
<sup>38</sup> וְאֶת־נָבֹו וְאֶת־בַּעַל מְעוֹן מוֹסְבַת שֵׁם  
 וְאֶת־שִׁבְמָה וַיִּקְרְאוּ בְשֵׁמֹת אֶת־שְׁמוֹת  
 הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ: <sup>39</sup> וַיִּלְכְּוּ בְנֵי מַכִּיר  
 בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה גִלְעָדָה וַיִּלְכְּדוּהָ וַיִּזְרְשׁ אֶת־  
 הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ: <sup>40</sup> וַיִּתֵּן מֹשֶׁה אֶת־  
 הַגִּלְעָד לְמַכִּיר בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה וַיֵּשֶׁב בָּהּ:  
<sup>41</sup> וַיֵּאִיר בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה הַלֶּף וַיִּלְכְּדוּ אֶת־  
 חֻתֵּיהֶם וַיִּקְרָא אֶתְהֶן חֻת יֵאִיר: <sup>42</sup> וַנִּבַח  
 הַלֶּף וַיִּלְכְּדוּ אֶת־קִנְתָּ וְאֶת־בְּנֵיהָ וַיִּקְרָא  
 לָהּ נֹבַח בְּשֵׁמוֹ: \* פ

towns and to settle their dependents and livestock there, but not to possess it until the leaders certify that they have fulfilled their conditions.

**kingdom of Sihon** It lay between the Arnon and the Jabbok Rivers.

**kingdom of King Og of Bashan** Occupied by the half-tribe of Manasseh.

**39. descendants of Machir** Members of the clan of Machir.

**Gilead** That is, upper Gilead, the territory of Og in upper Transjordan, north of the Jabbok River.

**40.** Moses confirms Machir's conquest, as he confirmed the claims of the 2½ tribes in Transjordan.

**41. son of** Literally, "descendant of."

\* For the haftarah for this portion, see p. 968.

**33** These were the marches of the Israelites who started out from the land of Egypt, troop by troop, in the charge of Moses and Aaron. <sup>2</sup>Moses recorded the starting points of their various marches as directed by the LORD. Their marches, by starting points, were as follows:

<sup>3</sup>They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month. It was on the morrow of the passover offering that the Israelites started out defiantly, in plain view of all the Egyptians. <sup>4</sup>The Egyptians meanwhile were burying those among them whom the LORD had struck down, every first-born—whereby the LORD executed judgment on their gods.

*The Generation of the Conquest* (continued)

THE WILDERNESS ITINERARY (33:1–49)

**1. troop by troop** A reminder that the Israelites marched in military formation.

**2. starting points** Moses did not record other data, such as the date and the distance covered for each stage in the journey.

**as directed by the LORD** This refers to Israel's marches (Ibn Ezra) and not to the writing.

**3. Rameses** Compare Exod. 12:37. Identified

with Qantir or Tanis in the eastern delta of the Nile.

**morrow of the passover offering** It was sacrificed at twilight on the previous day, as noted in Num. 9:3 and Exod. 12:2–6.

**in plain view** In broad daylight.

**4.** This verse implies that the striking down of the firstborn was the punishment inflicted on Egypt's gods.

This concluding *parashah* of Numbers brings Israel to the threshold of the Promised Land. In a sense, it can be seen as the conclusion of the Torah narrative. After this, all that remains is Moses' final oration, which summarizes and repeats incidents from previous books (though there is new legal material in Deuteronomy).

CHAPTER 33

What strikes the casual reader as a dry list of place-names is viewed differently by the Sages. Thus the Midrash imagines God telling Moses, "Write down all the places through which Israel journeyed, that they might recall the miracles I wrought for them," guiding them safely through human and natural dangers (Num. R. 23:1). In addition to crossing the Sea of Reeds, the list includes: the wilderness of Sin (v. 11), where the manna first appeared; Rephidim (v.

14), where the Israelites complained about the lack of water and Moses struck the rock to bring forth water; and Kibroth-hattaavah (v. 16), where the people angered God by demanding meat to eat. The Midrash compares this list of place-names to the situation of a king whose son was taken ill. The king took him to a specialist. On their return journey, at every stopping place, he reminded his son: "Here is where you had a headache, here is where we stopped to rest." Indeed, every oasis that welcomed the Israelites and provided them with food and water was rewarded by being mentioned in the Torah.

Rashi, citing Moses ha-Darshan, calculates that, if we omit the first and the last years, when the Israelites were constantly on the move, there were only 20 stations during 38 years. It is wrong to think of Israel as con-

מסעי  
לג

אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְצַבְאֹתָם בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן: <sup>2</sup>וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מוֹצְאֵיהֶם לְמוֹסְעֵיהֶם עַל־פִּי יְהוָה וְאֵלֶּה מַסְעֵיהֶם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם:

<sup>3</sup>וַיֵּסְעוּ מֵרַעְמֵסֶס בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן מִמַּחֲרַת הַפֶּסַח יֵצְאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיַד רָמָה לְעֵינֵי כָּל־מִצְרַיִם: <sup>4</sup>וּמִצְרַיִם מְקַבְּרִים אֶת־אֲשֶׁר הִכָּה יְהוָה בָּהֶם כָּל־בְּכוֹר וּבְאֵלֵהֶם עָשָׂה יְהוָה שְׁפָטִים:



<sup>5</sup>The Israelites set out from Rameses and encamped at Succoth. <sup>6</sup>They set out from Succoth and encamped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. <sup>7</sup>They set out from Etham and turned about toward Pi-hahiroth, which faces Baal-zephon, and they encamped before Migdol. <sup>8</sup>They set out from Pene-hahiroth and passed through the sea into the wilderness; and they made a three-days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and encamped at Marah. <sup>9</sup>They set out from Marah and came to Elim. There were twelve springs in Elim and seventy palm trees, so they encamped there. <sup>10</sup>They set out from Elim and encamped by the Sea of Reeds. <sup>11</sup>They set out from the Sea of Reeds and encamped in the wilderness of Sin. <sup>12</sup>They set out from the wilderness of Sin and encamped at Dophkah. <sup>13</sup>They set out from Dophkah and encamped at Alush. <sup>14</sup>They set out from Alush and encamped at Rephidim; it was there that

וַיִּסְעוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵרַעַמְסֵס וַיַּחֲנוּ  
בְּסוּכֹת׃ <sup>6</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִסּוּכֹת וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּאֵתָם אֲשֶׁר  
בְּקֶצֶה הַמִּדְבָּר׃ <sup>7</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מֵאֵתָם וַיָּשֻׁב  
עַל־פְּי הַחִירֹת אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי בַעַל צְפוֹן  
וַיַּחֲנוּ לִפְנֵי מִגְדֹּל׃ <sup>8</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִפְּנֵי\* הַחִירֹת  
וַיַּעֲבְרוּ בְּתוֹךְ־הַיָּם הַמִּדְבָּרָה וַיֵּלְכוּ דֶרֶךְ  
שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בְּמִדְבַר אֵתָם וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמָרָה׃  
<sup>9</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִמָּרָה וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵילֵמָה וּבְאֵילִם  
שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרִי עֵינֹת מַיִם וְשִׁבְעֵים תְּמָרִים  
וַיַּחֲנוּ־שָׁם׃ <sup>10</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מֵאֵילִם וַיַּחֲנוּ עַל־  
יַם־סוּף׃ <sup>11</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִיַּם־סוּף וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַר־  
סִין׃ <sup>12</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִמִּדְבַר־סִין וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּדַפְקָה׃  
<sup>13</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִדַּפְקָה וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּאַלוֹשׁ׃ <sup>14</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ  
מֵאֲלוֹשׁ וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּרִפְדִּים וְלֹא־הָיָה שָׁם מַיִם

v. 8. סבירין ומטעין "מפוי"

**6.** Compare Exod. 13:20. Situated in Wadi Tumilat between Lake Timsah and the Bitter Lakes.

**7. turned about** Instead of marching east into the desert, the Israelites turned southward along the Bitter Lakes where the pursuing Egyptians caught up with them. It is difficult to chart the route they followed. It has been suggested that initially they traveled northward to the Sea of Reeds, and then headed south toward Lake Timsah and the Bitter Lakes.

**8. passed through the sea** Before the Suez Canal was dug, there had been below the Bitter Lakes a shallow fordable stretch of water about 2 miles (3.2 km) wide. In ancient times, the Bitter Lakes, at present only 6 feet (1.8 m) above the level of the Gulf of Suez, were probably connected with it.

**three-days' journey** This is possibly an allusion to the three-day journey into the wilderness that Israel pledged to Pharaoh, as recorded in Exod. 3:18. It implies that they kept their word (Exod. 15:22).

**wilderness of Etham** Another tradition refers to the wilderness of Shur (Exod. 15:22). (The

Hebrew word *shur* and the Egyptian word *etham* both mean "wall" or "fortification," probably referring to a defense line built by the Egyptians.)

**Marah** Compare Exod. 15:23. Possibly Bir el-Muwrah, 9 miles (14.4 km) east of Suez. There are no springs between the Bitter Lakes, the possible site of Israel's crossing, and Bir el-Muwrah.

**9. There were twelve springs in Elim** The comment is typical of ancient Near Eastern military itineraries: an account of the sources of water and food.

**10.** The line of march, at this point in the itinerary, was southward.

**11. wilderness of Sin** There the manna appeared, covered by the dew (Exod. 16:14).

**14.** Compare Exod. 17:1. The narrative omits the war with Amalek at Rephidim as well as the manna at Sin, the revelation at Sinai, and other notable events of the wilderness trek. These events were so well known that they did not need to be repeated.

**Rephidim** If the Israelites traveled along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Suez, they would reach the modern Wadi Refayid, 30 miles (48 km) from the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula,

stantly on the march. The list of place-names reminds us that during most of the 40 years in the wilderness, the Israelites were living normally at one oasis or another for years at a time.

the people had no water to drink. <sup>15</sup>They set out from Rephidim and encamped in the wilderness of Sinai. <sup>16</sup>They set out from the wilderness of Sinai and encamped at Kibroth-hattaavah. <sup>17</sup>They set out from Kibroth-hattaavah and encamped at Hazeroth. <sup>18</sup>They set out from Hazeroth and encamped at Rithmah. <sup>19</sup>They set out from Rithmah and encamped at Rimmon-perez. <sup>20</sup>They set out from Rimmon-perez and encamped at Libnah. <sup>21</sup>They set out from Libnah and encamped at Rissah. <sup>22</sup>They set out from Rissah and encamped at Kehelath. <sup>23</sup>They set out from Kehelath and encamped at Mount Shepher. <sup>24</sup>They set out from Mount Shepher and encamped at Haradah. <sup>25</sup>They set out from Haradah and encamped at Makheloth. <sup>26</sup>They set out from Makheloth and encamped at Tahath. <sup>27</sup>They set out from Tahath and encamped at Terah. <sup>28</sup>They set out from Terah and encamped at Mithkah. <sup>29</sup>They set out from Mithkah and encamped at Hashmonah. <sup>30</sup>They set out from Hashmonah and encamped at Moseroth. <sup>31</sup>They set out from Moseroth and encamped at Bene-jaakan. <sup>32</sup>They set out from Bene-jaakan and encamped at Hor-haggidgad. <sup>33</sup>They set out from Hor-haggidgad and encamped at Jotbath. <sup>34</sup>They set out from Jotbath and encamped at Abronah. <sup>35</sup>They set out from Abronah and encamped at Ezion-geber. <sup>36</sup>They set out from Ezion-geber and encamped in the wilderness of Zin, that is, Kadesh. <sup>37</sup>They set out from Kadesh and encamped at Mount Hor, on the edge of the land of Edom.

<sup>38</sup>Aaron the priest ascended Mount Hor at the command of the LORD and died there, in the

which is the usually accepted location. The absence of water there, however, indicates that the Israelites left the Suez coast with its many springs and moved inland.

**15. wilderness of Sinai** Compare Exod. 19:1–2. The region has not yet been identified with certainty.

**17.** Compare with Num. 11:35 and 12:16. Hazeroth has been equated with today's

לָעַם לְשִׁתּוֹת: <sup>15</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מֵרִפְדִּים וַיִּחַנוּ  
בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי: <sup>16</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִמִּדְבַּר סִינַי וַיִּחַנוּ  
בְּקִבְרוֹת הַתְּאֵוָה: <sup>17</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִקִּבְרוֹת  
הַתְּאֵוָה וַיִּחַנוּ בְּחִצְרוֹת: <sup>18</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִחִצְרוֹת  
וַיִּחַנוּ בְּרִתְמָה: <sup>19</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִרִתְמָה וַיִּחַנוּ  
בְּרִמּוֹן פָּרָץ: <sup>20</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִרִמּוֹן פָּרָץ וַיִּחַנוּ  
בְּלִבְנָה: <sup>21</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִלִּבְנָה וַיִּחַנוּ בְּרִסָּה:  
<sup>22</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִרִסָּה וַיִּחַנוּ בְּקֵהֶלֶתָה: <sup>23</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ  
מִקֵּהֶלֶתָה וַיִּחַנוּ בְּהַר־שֹׁפֵר: <sup>24</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ  
מִהַר־שֹׁפֵר וַיִּחַנוּ בְּחֶרְדָּה: <sup>25</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ  
מִחֶרְדָּה וַיִּחַנוּ בְּמִקְהֶלֶת: <sup>26</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ  
מִמִּקְהֶלֶת וַיִּחַנוּ בְּתַחַת: <sup>27</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִתַּחַת  
וַיִּחַנוּ בְּתַרְח: <sup>28</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִתַּרְח וַיִּחַנוּ  
בְּמַתְקָה: <sup>29</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִמַּתְקָה וַיִּחַנוּ  
בְּחִשְׁמוֹנָה: <sup>30</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִחִשְׁמוֹנָה וַיִּחַנוּ  
בְּמִסְרוֹת: <sup>31</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִמִּסְרוֹת וַיִּחַנוּ בְּבִנֵי  
יַעֲקֹן: <sup>32</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִבְּנֵי יַעֲקֹן וַיִּחַנוּ בְּהַר  
הַגִּדְגָד: <sup>33</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִהַר הַגִּדְגָד וַיִּחַנוּ  
בְּיִטְבְּתָה: <sup>34</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִיִּטְבְּתָה וַיִּחַנוּ  
בְּעֵבְרָנָה: <sup>35</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מֵעֵבְרָנָה וַיִּחַנוּ בְּעֵצִיּוֹן  
גֹּבֶר: <sup>36</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מֵעֵצִיּוֹן גֹּבֶר וַיִּחַנוּ בְּמִדְבַּר־  
צֶן הוּא קֶדֶשׁ: <sup>37</sup>וַיִּסְעוּ מִקֶּדֶשׁ וַיִּחַנוּ בְּהַר  
הַהָר בְּקֶצֶה אֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם:  
<sup>38</sup>וַיַּעַל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־הַר הַהָר עַל־פִּי

Ain/Wadi Hudeirat, about 40 miles (64 km) northeast of Jebel Musa.

**18–29.** None of these stations is mentioned elsewhere.

**35. Ezion-geber** Usually identified with Tell el-Kheleifeh at modern Elat; it was recently identified with nearby Aqaba, and Abronah (v. 34) with Tell el-Kheleifeh.

**36. Kadesh** Its exact location is uncertain.

fortieth year after the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month. <sup>39</sup>Aaron was a hundred and twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor. <sup>40</sup>And the Canaanite, king of Arad, who dwelt in the Negeb, in the land of Canaan, learned of the coming of the Israelites.

<sup>41</sup>They set out from Mount Hor and encamped at Zalmonah. <sup>42</sup>They set out from Zalmonah and encamped at Punon. <sup>43</sup>They set out from Punon and encamped at Oboth. <sup>44</sup>They set out from Oboth and encamped at Iye-abarim, in the territory of Moab. <sup>45</sup>They set out from Iyim and encamped at Dibon-gad. <sup>46</sup>They set out from Dibon-gad and encamped at Almon-diblathaim. <sup>47</sup>They set out from Almon-diblathaim and encamped in the hills of Abarim, before Nebo. <sup>48</sup>They set out from the hills of Abarim and encamped in the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho; <sup>49</sup>they encamped by the Jordan from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim, in the steppes of Moab.

<sup>50</sup>In the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>51</sup>Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Ca-

יְהוָה וַיָּמָת שָׁם בְּשָׁנַת הָאַרְבָּעִים לְצֵאת  
בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּחֹדֶשׁ  
הַחֲמִישִׁי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ: <sup>39</sup> וַאֲהֲרֹן בֶּן־  
שְׁלֹשׁ וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה בָּמָתוֹ בְּהַר  
הָהָר: <sup>40</sup> וַיִּשְׁמַע הַכְּנַעֲנִי מֶלֶךְ עָרֹד  
וְהוּא־יֹשֵׁב בְּנֶגֶב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בָּבֵא בְנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל:

<sup>41</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מֵהַר הָהָר וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּצַלְמֹנָה:  
<sup>42</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִצַּלְמֹנָה וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּפוּנֹן: <sup>43</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ  
מִפוּנֹן וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּאַבְרִים: <sup>44</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מֵאַבְרִים וַיַּחֲנוּ  
בְּעֵי הָעֲבָרִים בְּגִבּוֹל מוֹאָב: <sup>45</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ  
מֵעֵיִם וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּדִיבֹן גָּד: <sup>46</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִדִּיבֹן  
גָּד וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּעַלְמֹן דְּבַלְתִּימָה: <sup>47</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ  
מֵעַלְמֹן דְּבַלְתִּימָה וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּהַרֵי הָעֲבָרִים  
לְפָנֵי נְבוֹ: <sup>48</sup> וַיִּסְעוּ מִהַרֵי הָעֲבָרִים וַיַּחֲנוּ  
בְּעַרְבַת מוֹאָב עַל יַרְדֵּן יַרְחוֹ: <sup>49</sup> וַיַּחֲנוּ  
עַל־הַיַּרְדֵּן מִבֵּית הַיִּשְׁמֹת עַד אֲבֵל  
הַשִּׁטִּים בְּעַרְבַת מוֹאָב: <sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּעַרְבַת מוֹאָב  
עַל־יַרְדֵּן יַרְחוֹ לֵאמֹר: <sup>51</sup> דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים

שלישי  
[חמישי]

**40.** This verse recounts almost verbatim the beginning of the brief story of the victorious battle against the Canaanites in 21:1–3. Clearly, the earlier account was known to the writer and to his readers. He merely had to quote the opening line to allude to the complete version.

**49. Beth-jeshimoth** Identified with Tell el-'Azeimah, 12 miles (19 km) southeast of Jericho.

**Abel-shittim** Identified with Tell Kefrein in the highlands, about 5 miles (8 km) from the Jordan, and 7 miles (11 km) from the Dead Sea.

## THE DIVISION OF CANAAN (33:50–35:34)

The Israelites have completed their wilderness trek (chaps. 1–21, 33:1–49), secured their base at the Jordan against all enemies (chaps. 22–25, 31), allowed 2½ tribes to settle in Transjordan (chap. 32), and resolved the problem of leadership (27:12–23). They now can turn their attention to the conquest and apportionment of Canaan.

## THE COMMAND (33:50–56)

The divine command is now given for the conquest of Canaan, which needs to be divided among the remaining 9½ tribes; it is to them that the command is now addressed.

**50. steppes of Moab** Here Israel encamped at the end of its wilderness trek (v. 48).

naan, <sup>52</sup>you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land; you shall destroy all their figured objects; you shall destroy all their molten images, and you shall demolish all their cult places. <sup>53</sup>And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land to you to possess. <sup>54</sup>You shall apportion the land among yourselves by lot, clan by clan: with larger groups increase the share, with smaller groups reduce the share. Wherever the lot falls for anyone, that shall be his. You shall have your portions according to your ancestral tribes. <sup>55</sup>But if you do not dispossess the inhabitants of the land, those whom you allow to remain shall be stings in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land in which you live; <sup>56</sup>so that I will do to you what I planned to do to them.

אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶל-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: <sup>52</sup>וְהוֹרַשְׁתֶּם אֶת-כָּל-יִשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵיכֶם וְאִבְדֹתֶם אֶת כָּל-מִשְׁפַּיִתָם וְאֶת כָּל-צִלְמֵי מִסְכֹּתָם תִּאֲבְדוּ וְאֶת כָּל-בַּמֹּתָם תִּשְׁמִידוּ: <sup>53</sup>וְהוֹרַשְׁתֶּם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וְיִשְׁבַתֶּם-בָּהּ כִּי לָכֵם נָתַתִּי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ לְרִשְׁתָּ אֹתָהּ: <sup>54</sup>וְהִתְנַחַלְתֶּם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ בְּגוּרָל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתֵיכֶם לְרֹב תִּרְבּוּ אֶת-נַחְלָתוֹ וְלִמְעַט תִּמְעִיט אֶת-נַחְלָתוֹ אֶל אֲשֶׁר-יֵצֵא לוֹ שָׁמָּה הַגּוּרָל לוֹ יִהְיֶה לְמִטּוֹת אֲבֹתֵיכֶם תִּתְנַחֲלוּ: <sup>55</sup>וְאִם-לֹא תוֹרִישׁוּ אֶת-יִשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵיכֶם וְהָיָה אֲשֶׁר תּוֹתִירוּ מֵהֶם לְשָׂפִים בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְלִצְנִינִים בְּצַדֵיכֶם וְצָרְרוּ אֹתְכֶם עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּהּ: <sup>56</sup>וְהָיָה כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּמְיַתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם אֲעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם: פ

34 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>In-

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: לַד

**52. you shall dispossess** Hebrew: *v'horash-tem*; the subject of this verb is usually God, as in Josh. 23:5. Divine aid is presumed here.

**cult places** Hebrew (sing.): *bamah*; literally, “a ridge” or “a high place.” There is no description of a *bamah* in the Bible, although one has been identified at Dan in the north and one at Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley, which may go back to the 3rd millennium B.C.E.

**54.** The location of each tribe is to be decided by lot, but the actual division of the Land is by clan.

**according to your ancestral tribes** The clan can be assigned land only within its tribe’s boundaries.

**55. stings . . . thorns** Metaphors that imply acts of physical violence committed against

the Israelites by the remaining Canaanite enclaves.

BOUNDARIES OF THE PROMISED LAND (34:1–15)

The area of the Land includes the mountains of Lebanon and Sirion (Anti-Lebanon), extending as far north as Lebo, thereby including the Damascus region and the Bashan, reaching the Galilee along the Yarmuk Valley (but excluding the Gilead and southern Transjordan), and extending as far south as Kadesh before entering the Mediterranean at El ‘Arish. Evidently, Transjordan was not considered part of the Promised Land. Hence the problem with allowing Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh to remain there (see Num. 32 and Josh. 22).

**52.** One senses the Torah’s concern that the Israelites might fall into a pattern of blending their religious practices with those of the indigenous Canaanites, perhaps wanting to incorporate the advantages of each. Such a pattern would presume that God was only God of the Exodus and of the journey, and that when

they settled the Land, they would need to turn to farmers’ gods, experts in fertility.

**55. stings in your eyes and thorns in your sides** Some adversaries are enemies in plain sight, “in your eyes,” making no secret of their dislike for you. Others, equally hostile, claim to be “on your side.”

struct the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as your portion, the land of Canaan with its various boundaries:

<sup>3</sup>Your southern sector shall extend from the wilderness of Zin alongside Edom. Your southern boundary shall start on the east from the tip of the Dead Sea. <sup>4</sup>Your boundary shall then turn to pass south of the ascent of Akrabbim and continue to Zin, and its limits shall be south of Kadesh-barnea, reaching Hazar-addar and continuing to Azmon. <sup>5</sup>From Azmon the boundary shall turn toward the Wadi of Egypt and terminate at the Sea.

<sup>6</sup>For the western boundary you shall have the coast of the Great Sea; that shall serve as your western boundary.

<sup>7</sup>This shall be your northern boundary: Draw a line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor; <sup>8</sup>from Mount Hor draw a line to Lebo-hamath, and let the boundary reach Zedad. <sup>9</sup>The boundary

2 צו את בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם כִּי־אתם באים אל-הארץ פִּנְעַן זאת הארץ אשר תפל לכם בנחלה ארץ פִּנְעַן לגבלתייה:

3 והיה לכם פאת נגב ממדבר צן על יד־יִדִי אֲדוֹם והיה לכם גבול נגב מקצה ים-הַמֶּלַח קדמה: 4 ונסב לכם הגבול מנגב למעלה עקרבים ועבר צנה והיה והיו תוצאתיו מנגב לקדש ברנע ויצא חצר-אֲדָר ועבר עצמנה: 5 ונסב הגבול מעצמון נחלה מצרים והיו תוצאתיו הימה:

6 וגבול ים והיה לכם הים הגדול וגבול זה-יהיה לכם גבול ים:

7 וזה-יהיה לכם גבול צפון מן-הים הגדול תתאו לכם הר ההר: 8 מהר ההר תתאו לבא חמת והיו תוצאת הגבל צדדה:

**2. shall fall to you** That is, by lot.

**land of Canaan** Its borders are the same as those of the Egyptian province of Canaan during the second half of the 2nd millennium B.C.E.

**3. alongside Edom** Because the southern border begins on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, it abuts the northern and western edges of Edom. Alternatively, the territory of Edom may have extended west of the 'Arabah, in which case a longer stretch of Israel's southern border would have adjoined Edom's northern border.

**on the east** That is, from the southernmost tip of the Dead Sea.

**Dead Sea** Hebrew: *Yam ha-Melah*; literally, "Salt Sea."

**4. turn** At this point the boundary changes its course.

**ascent of Akrabbim** Literally, "ascent of Scorpions." The site is unknown.

**Zin** Perhaps this refers to a point along the boundary rather than to the wilderness of the same name.

**limits** This is the terminus of the southwestern border.

**south of Kadesh-barnea** Thus this oasis is within the territory of the land of Israel. Its precise location is not certain.

**5. turn** To the northwest.

**toward the Wadi of Egypt** Modern Wadi El 'Arish, a long and deep watercourse that is full only after a substantial rain. It constitutes a natural barrier between the Negeb and the Sinai Peninsula.

**the Sea** The Mediterranean.

**7. Great Sea** The Mediterranean. The probable point of demarcation lies just north of Byblos, the present-day Jubayl in Lebanon. It marked the northern boundary of the Egyptian province of Canaan, according to the peace treaty at the beginning of the 13th century B.C.E. between Ramses II and the Hittites.

**Mount Hor** Not the Mount Hor that is located near the border of Edom, where Aaron died (20:22–29, 33:38). It is probably one of the northwestern summits of the Lebanese range north of Byblos.

**8.** The boundary line from Lebo-hamath terminates at Zedad. From there it takes a different direction.

**Zedad** Present-day Tsada, east of the Sirion (Anti-Lebanon range) near the Damascus–Homs highway, 35 miles (56 km) northeast of Lebweh (Lebo).

shall then run to Ziphron and terminate at Hazar-enan. That shall be your northern boundary.

<sup>10</sup>For your eastern boundary you shall draw a line from Hazar-enan to Shepham. <sup>11</sup>From Shepham the boundary shall descend to Riblah on the east side of Ain; from there the boundary shall continue downward and abut on the eastern slopes of the Sea of Chinnereth. <sup>12</sup>The boundary shall then descend along the Jordan and terminate at the Dead Sea.

That shall be your land as defined by its boundaries on all sides.

<sup>13</sup>Moses instructed the Israelites, saying: This is the land you are to receive by lot as your hereditary portion, which the LORD has commanded to be given to the nine and a half tribes. <sup>14</sup>For the Reubenite tribe by its ancestral houses, the Gadite tribe by its ancestral houses, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have already received their portions: <sup>15</sup>those two and a half tribes have received their portions across the Jordan, opposite Jericho, on the east, the orient side.

<sup>16</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>17</sup>These are the names of the men through whom the land shall be apportioned for you: Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun. <sup>18</sup>And you shall also take a chieftain from each tribe through whom the land shall be apportioned. <sup>19</sup>These are the names of the men: from the tribe of Judah: Caleb son of Jephunneh. <sup>20</sup>From the Simeonite tribe: Samuel son of Ammihud.

#### APPORTIONMENT (vv. 16–29)

The chieftains listed here appear for the first time in the Bible, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, the lone survivors of the generation of the Exodus to enter the Promised Land. The order of the tribes follows their geographic relationship in Canaan, from south to north, except that Judah precedes Simeon (so that Judah, the chief tribe, may head the list) and Manasseh (the firstborn) precedes Ephraim. There is no satisfactory expla-

nation of why the leaders of the first three tribes enumerated—Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin—are not given the title “chieftain.”

**17.** Eleazar and Joshua take the place of Moses and Aaron in the generation of the conquest. Eleazar is named first because Joshua will have to consult him.

**18. you shall . . . take** Hebrew: *tikhu*, which is plural. This probably refers to Eleazar and Joshua, who are to supervise the apportionment of the Land.

<sup>9</sup> וַיֵּצֵא הַגְּבֹל וּפְרָנָה וְהָיוּ תוֹצְאוֹתָיו חֲצֵר  
עֵינָן וְהַיְיָהִיָּה לְכֶם גְּבוּל צָפוֹן:  
<sup>10</sup> וְהַתְּאֵוִיתֶם לְכֶם לְגְבוּל קְדָמָה מִחֲצֵר  
עֵינָן שְׁפָמָה: <sup>11</sup> וַיֵּרֶד הַגְּבֹל מִשְׁפָּם  
הָרְבֵלָה מִקְדָּם לְעֵינָן וַיֵּרֶד הַגְּבֹל וּמָחָה  
עַל-פְּתָף יַם-כְּנֶרֶת קְדָמָה: <sup>12</sup> וַיֵּרֶד הַגְּבוּל  
הַיְיָדָנָה וְהָיוּ תוֹצְאוֹתָיו יַם הַמֶּלַח  
זֹאת תִּהְיֶה לְכֶם הָאָרֶץ לְגְבוּלֹתֶיהָ סָבִיב:

<sup>13</sup> וַיִּצַּו מֹשֶׁה אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֹאת  
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּתְנַחֲלוּ אֹתָהּ בְּגוֹרָל אֲשֶׁר  
צִוָּה יְהוָה לָתֵת לְתַשְׁעַת הַמִּטּוֹת וַחֲצֵי  
הַמִּטָּה: <sup>14</sup> כִּי לְקָחוּ מִטָּה בְּנֵי הָרְאוּבֵנִי  
לְבֵית אָבֹתָם וּמִטָּה בְּנֵי-הַגָּדִי לְבֵית  
אָבֹתָם וַחֲצֵי מִטָּה מִנַּשֶּׁה לְקָחוּ נַחֲלָתָם:  
<sup>15</sup> שְׁנֵי הַמִּטּוֹת וַחֲצֵי הַמִּטָּה לְקָחוּ נַחֲלָתָם  
מֵעֵבֶר לַיַּרְדֵּן יִרְחוּ קְדָמָה מִזְרָחָה: פ  
<sup>16</sup> וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: <sup>17</sup> אֵלֶּה  
שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-יִנְחֲלוּ לְכֶם אֶת-  
הָאָרֶץ אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נּוּן:  
<sup>18</sup> וְנָשִׂיא אֶחָד נָשִׂיא אֶחָד מִמִּטָּה תִקְחוּ  
לְנַחֲלֵי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ: <sup>19</sup> וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת  
הָאֲנָשִׁים לְמִטָּה יְהוּדָה כָּלֵב בֶּן-יִפְנֵה:  
<sup>20</sup> וּלְמִטָּה בְּנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן שָׁמוּאֵל בֶּן-

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<sup>21</sup>From the tribe of Benjamin: Elidad son of Chislon. <sup>22</sup>From the Danite tribe: a chieftain, Bukki son of Jogli. <sup>23</sup>For the descendants of Joseph: from the Manassite tribe: a chieftain, Hanniel son of Ephod; <sup>24</sup>and from the Ephraimite tribe: a chieftain, Kemuel son of Shiphtan. <sup>25</sup>From the Zebulunite tribe: a chieftain, Elizaphan son of Parnach. <sup>26</sup>From the Issacharite tribe: a chieftain, Paltiel son of Azzan. <sup>27</sup>From the Asherite tribe: a chieftain, Ahihud son of Shelomi. <sup>28</sup>From the Naphtalite tribe: a chieftain, Pedahel son of Ammihud.

<sup>29</sup>It was these whom the LORD designated to allot portions to the Israelites in the land of Canaan.

**35** The LORD spoke to Moses in the steppes of Moab at the Jordan near Jericho, saying: <sup>2</sup>Instruct the Israelite people to assign, out of the holdings apportioned to them, towns for the Levites to dwell in; you shall also assign to the Levites pasture land around their towns. <sup>3</sup>The towns shall be theirs to dwell in, and the pasture shall be for the cattle they own and all their other beasts. <sup>4</sup>The town pasture that you are to assign to the Levites shall extend a thousand cubits outside the town wall all around. <sup>5</sup>You shall

#### LEVITICAL TOWNS (35:1–8)

Instructions to the Levites always follow those given to the other tribes. Hence, here too, the Levites receive their apportionment only after the other tribes have received theirs. Although the Levites are to receive no permanent property in the Promised Land (18:23), they are to be provided with permanent residences for themselves and pasturage for their livestock in the form of 48 towns and surrounding fields.

עַמִּיהוּד: <sup>21</sup> לְמֵטֶה בְּנֵימִן אֶלִּידָד בֶּן־  
כְּסִלּוֹן: <sup>22</sup> וּלְמֵטֶה בְּנֵי־דָן נְשִׂיא בְּקִי בֶן־  
יִגְלִי: <sup>23</sup> לְבְנֵי יוֹסֵף לְמֵטֶה בְּנֵי־מְנַשֶּׁה  
נְשִׂיא חַנִּיאל בֶּן־אֶפֶד: <sup>24</sup> וּלְמֵטֶה בְּנֵי־  
אֶפְרַיִם נְשִׂיא קֶמוּאֵל בֶּן־שִׁפְטָן:  
<sup>25</sup> וּלְמֵטֶה בְּנֵי־זְבוּלֹן נְשִׂיא אֶלִּיצָפָן בֶּן־  
פְּרָנָךְ: <sup>26</sup> וּלְמֵטֶה בְּנֵי־יִשְׁשַׁכָּר נְשִׂיא  
פְּלִטְיָאֵל בֶּן־עֲזֹן: <sup>27</sup> וּלְמֵטֶה בְּנֵי־אָשֶׁר  
נְשִׂיא אַחִיהוּד בֶּן־שֶׁלְמִי: <sup>28</sup> וּלְמֵטֶה בְּנֵי־  
נַפְתָּלִי נְשִׂיא פְּדָהֵאל בֶּן־עַמִּיהוּד:  
<sup>29</sup> אֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה לְנַחֵל אֶת־בְּנֵי־  
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: פ

**ל** חמישי וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּעֶרְבַת  
מוֹאָב עַל־יַרְדֵּן יְרֵחוֹ לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup> צַו אֶת־בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָתַנוּ לְלוֹיִם מִנְחָלֹת אַחֲזֹתֶם  
עָרִים לְשֹׁבֹת וּמִגְרָשׁ לְעָרִים סְבִיבֹתֵיהֶם  
תִּתְּנוּ לְלוֹיִם: <sup>3</sup> וְהָיוּ הָעָרִים לָהֶם לְשֹׁבֹת  
וּמִגְרָשֵׁיהֶם יִהְיוּ לְבַהֲמֹתָם וְלִרְכֻשָׁם  
וְלִכְל חֵיטָתָם: <sup>4</sup> וּמִגְרָשֵׁי הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר  
תִּתְּנוּ לְלוֹיִם מִקִּיר הָעִיר וְחֹצֵה אֶלֶף  
אַמָּה סְבִיב: <sup>5</sup> וּמִדֹּתָם מִחוּץ לְעִיר אֶת־

**1. at the Jordan near Jericho** Literally, “at the Jordan of Jericho.” That is, at the Jordan River, which flows by Jericho.

**2.** Levitical towns will be assigned by lot.

**3. their . . . beasts** Hebrew: *hayyatam*, ritually impure domesticated animals, like donkeys.

**4. a thousand cubits** Approximately 500 yards (450 m).

**outside the town wall** Literally, “from the town wall outward.” The measurement is taken perpendicular to the town wall, not from the wall

#### CHAPTER 35

The tribe of Levi, unlike the other tribes, would receive no land to farm. Perhaps this was to prevent a recurrence of what the Israelites had

seen in Egypt, where the priests were wealthy land owners (see Gen. 47:22) who tended to side with the rich and powerful. Because the Levites still had to live somewhere, these are the arrangements that were made for them.

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measure off two thousand cubits outside the town on the east side, two thousand on the south side, two thousand on the west side, and two thousand on the north side, with the town in the center. That shall be the pasture for their towns.

<sup>6</sup>The towns that you assign to the Levites shall comprise the six cities of refuge that you are to designate for a manslayer to flee to, to which you shall add forty-two towns. <sup>7</sup>Thus the total of the towns that you assign to the Levites shall be forty-eight towns, with their pasture. <sup>8</sup>In assigning towns from the holdings of the Israelites, take more from the larger groups and less from the smaller, so that each assigns towns to the Levites in proportion to the share it receives.

<sup>9</sup>The LORD spoke further to Moses: <sup>10</sup>Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, <sup>11</sup>you shall provide yourselves with places to serve you as cities of refuge to which a manslayer who has killed a person unintentionally may

itself but from the rectangle that circumscribes it. This enables the pasturage to grow in proportion to the size of the town.

**wall** Hebrew: *kir*, a rare word for a town wall. It probably refers to the outside surface of the wall. Because large cities had walls up to several yards thick, it had to be specified that the measurement was to be taken from the wall's exterior face.

**5. two thousand cubits** About 1000 yards (900 m).

**outside** Hebrew: *mi-hutz*, the antonym of *mi-bayit* (inside), must be distinguished from the 500-yard measurement (v. 4), which is "outward" (*hutzah*) from the town wall. Thus the four points at 500 yards in each direction from the town (each assumed to be a point) form a square of 1000 yards per side, which increases in area in proportion to the growth of the town.

**in the center** The measures given here presume that the center (and town) is a point.

**6.** This verse anticipates the section on the cities of refuge for those who commit involuntary homicide, beginning with verse 9.

פֶּאת־קְדֻמָּה אֲלֵפִים בְּאַמָּה וְאֶת־פְּאֵת־  
נֶגֶב אֲלֵפִים בְּאַמָּה וְאֶת־פְּאֵת־יָם |  
אֲלֵפִים בְּאַמָּה וְאֶת פֶּאת צָפוֹן אֲלֵפִים  
בְּאַמָּה וְהָעִיר בְּתוֹךְ זֶה יִהְיֶה לָהֶם  
מִגְרָשֵׁי הָעָרִים:

<sup>6</sup>וְאֵת הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנוּ לְלוֹיִם אֵת  
שֵׁשׁ־עָרֵי הַמִּקְלָט אֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנוּ לְנֶס שָׁמָּה  
הָרֹצֵחַ וְעָלִיהֶם תִּתְּנוּ אַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁתַּיִם  
עִיר: <sup>7</sup>כָּל־הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנוּ לְלוֹיִם  
אַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁמֹנֶה עִיר אֶתְהֶן וְאֶת־  
מִגְרָשֵׁיהֶן: <sup>8</sup>וְהָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנוּ מֵאַחֲזַת  
בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֵת הָרֶב תִּרְבוּ וּמֵאֵת  
הַמְעַט תִּמְעָיטוּ אִישׁ כְּפִי נִחְלָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר  
יִנְחָלוּ יִתֵּן מֵעָרָיו לְלוֹיִם: פ

<sup>9</sup>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: <sup>10</sup>דַּבֵּר  
אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם כִּי  
אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן:  
<sup>11</sup>וְהִקְרִיתֶם לָכֶם עָרִים עָרֵי מִקְלָט  
תִּהְיֶינָה לָכֶם וְנָס שָׁמָּה רֹצֵחַ מִכֶּה־נַפֶּשׁ

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**manslayer** Hebrew: *rotze-ah*; the term embraces both deliberate and involuntary homicide. Its underlying concept is clear: The blood of one slain even accidentally must be redeemed. Here the focus is on involuntary homicide.

**8. the larger groups** Literally, "the greater." (The translators supplied the word "groups.") The Israelite tribes are meant.

CITIES OF REFUGE (vv. 9–15)

The divine Presence cannot dwell in a land contaminated by murder, an offense that pollutes the earth and leads to God's abandonment of His sanctuary and people. Hence the special treatment given the laws of homicide in this section on cities of refuge. The establishment of such cities for homicides was further necessitated because of the prevalence of the institution of blood vengeance in the ancient world (see Gen. 4:23–24). Kinsmen avenged the blood of the slain by taking the blood of the slayer or of a member of the slayer's family. The institution of cities of refuge is attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East, but the form adopted by the Israelites is



flee. <sup>12</sup>The cities shall serve you as a refuge from the avenger, so that the manslayer may not die unless he has stood trial before the assembly.

<sup>13</sup>The towns that you thus assign shall be six cities of refuge in all. <sup>14</sup>Three cities shall be designated beyond the Jordan, and the other three shall be designated in the land of Canaan: they shall serve as cities of refuge. <sup>15</sup>These six cities shall serve the Israelites and the resident aliens among them for refuge, so that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.

<sup>16</sup>Anyone, however, who strikes another with an iron object so that death results is a murderer; the murderer must be put to death. <sup>17</sup>If he struck him with a stone tool that could cause death, and death resulted, he is a murderer; the murderer must be put to death. <sup>18</sup>Similarly, if the object with which he struck him was a wooden tool that could cause death, and death resulted, he is a murderer; the murderer must be put to death. <sup>19</sup>The blood-avenger himself shall put the murderer to death; it is he who shall put him to death upon encounter. <sup>20</sup>So, too, if he pushed him in hate or hurled something at him on pur-

unique and revolutionary. The right of asylum is limited solely to the slayer whose act was not premeditated.

**12. avenger** Hebrew: *go-el*; literally, “redeemer,” one who restores the status quo—a responsibility that rests with the next of kin. Cities of refuge do not abrogate the rights of blood redeemers but make them agents of the state; they become state executioners. Bloodshed pollutes the land (v. 33), and then the land becomes barren. But with the blood of the slayer, the *go-el* neutralizes the deleterious effect of the blood of the slain, restoring the ecologic balance. The earth again yields its fruit. The institution of the blood redeemer (*go-el ha-dam*) is ancient. It was abolished by the monarchy, which set up a court system to try all who were accused of crimes. Cities of refuge, too, were an archaic institution, and some of them were lost after the reign of King Solomon.

**trial before the assembly** Thus, according to this legislation, all homicides must be tried in a national court.

**14.** The 2½ tribes in Transjordan are to have

בְּשִׁגְגָה: <sup>12</sup>וְהָיוּ לָכֶם הָעָרִים לְמִקְלָט  
מִגֹּאֲלָל וְלֹא יָמוּת הָרֹצֵחַ עַד-עֲמֹדוֹ לִפְנֵי  
הָעֵדָה לְמִשְׁפָּט:

<sup>13</sup>וְהָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנוּ שֵׁשׁ-עָרֵי מִקְלָט  
תִּהְיֶינָה לָכֶם: <sup>14</sup>אֶת | שְׁלֹשׁ הָעָרִים תִּתְּנוּ  
מֵעֵבֶר לַיַּרְדֵּן וְאֶת שְׁלֹשׁ הָעָרִים תִּתְּנוּ  
בְּאֶרֶץ בְּנֵעַן עָרֵי מִקְלָט תִּהְיֶינָה: <sup>15</sup>לְבְנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִגֵּר וְלַתּוֹשָׁבִי בְּתוֹכָם תִּהְיֶינָה  
שֵׁשׁ-הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְמִקְלָט לְנוֹס שָׁמָּה  
כָּל-מִפְּהֵנֶנֶפֶשׁ בְּשִׁגְגָה:

<sup>16</sup>וְאִם-בְּכֵלִי בְרוֹזָל | הִכָּהוּ וַיָּמוּת רֹצֵחַ  
הוּא מוֹת יוֹמֵת הָרֹצֵחַ: <sup>17</sup>וְאִם בְּאֵבֶן יָד  
אֲשֶׁר-יָמוּת בָּהּ הִכָּהוּ וַיָּמוּת רֹצֵחַ הוּא  
מוֹת יוֹמֵת הָרֹצֵחַ: <sup>18</sup>אוֹ בְּכֵלִי עֵץ-יָד  
אֲשֶׁר-יָמוּת בּוֹ הִכָּהוּ וַיָּמוּת רֹצֵחַ הוּא  
מוֹת יוֹמֵת הָרֹצֵחַ: <sup>19</sup>גֹּאֲלֵי הַדָּם הוּא  
יָמִית אֶת-הָרֹצֵחַ בְּפָגְעוֹ-בּוֹ הוּא יִמְתְּנוּ:  
<sup>20</sup>וְאִם-בְּשִׁנְאָה יִהְדֹּפְנוּ אוֹ-הִשְׁלִיךְ עָלָיו

the same number of asylum cities as the more numerous—and more populous—tribes in Cisjordan, a geographic criterion for their distribution. Slayers should not have to flee too far lest the blood redeemers overtake them.

**15.** The alien is entitled to the same protection of basic rights as the Israelite.

#### DELIBERATE VERSUS INVOLUNTARY HOMICIDE (vv. 16–23)

The distinction is one of intention, evidence for which is the nature of the instrument and the manslayer's state of mind. Concrete examples serve to make the distinction: six for deliberate homicide and three for involuntary homicide.

**17. stone tool** Hebrew: *even yad*; literally, “stone of the hand.” (a) It can be gripped by the hand, (b) it is large enough to fill the hand, or (c) it is directed by the hand, i.e., thrown. In any case, the stone and wooden (v. 18) implements must be large enough “to cause death.”

**18. wooden tool** Literally, “a wooden tool of the hand.” That is, a cane.

pose and death resulted, <sup>21</sup>or if he struck him with his hand in enmity and death resulted, the assailant shall be put to death; he is a murderer. The blood-avenger shall put the murderer to death upon encounter.

<sup>22</sup>But if he pushed him without malice aforethought or hurled any object at him unintentionally, <sup>23</sup>or inadvertently dropped upon him any deadly object of stone, and death resulted—though he was not an enemy of his and did not seek his harm—<sup>24</sup>in such cases the assembly shall decide between the slayer and the blood-avenger. <sup>25</sup>The assembly shall protect the manslayer from the blood-avenger, and the assembly shall restore him to the city of refuge to which he fled, and there he shall remain until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the sacred oil. <sup>26</sup>But if the manslayer ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which he has fled, <sup>27</sup>and the blood-avenger comes upon him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the blood-avenger kills the manslayer, there is no bloodguilt on his account. <sup>28</sup>For he must remain inside his city of refuge until the death of the high priest; after the death of the high priest, the manslayer may return to his land holding.

**21.** A slayer may kill by hand, in which case malice must be proved.

**22. without . . . aforethought** Literally, “suddenly.” That is, unawares.

**23.** Even if death resulted from the use of a murderous implement, the slaying is nevertheless judged to have been involuntary if two conditions can be demonstrated during the trial: the manslayer did not see the victim and was bearing no grudge.

**28. until the death of the high priest** Just as the high priest brings atonement for all Israel through the rituals of *Yom Kippur*, his death brings atonement for the inadvertent manslayer. Some commentators understand this law homiletically: Because the high priest was beloved by all and considered by all Israelites as a virtual member of their family, his death

בְּצַדִּיקָהּ וַיָּמָת׃ <sup>21</sup> אוּ בְאֵיבָהּ הִכְהוּ בְיָדוֹ  
וַיָּמָת מוֹת־יּוֹמָת הַמִּכָּה רֹצֵחַ הוּא גֹאֲלֵ  
הַדָּם יָמִית אֶת־הָרֹצֵחַ בְּפָגְעוֹ־בּוֹ׃  
<sup>22</sup> וְאִם־בִּפְתָּע בְּלֹא־אֵיבָהּ הִדְפּוֹ אוֹ־  
הִשְׁלִיךְ עָלָיו כָּל־כְּלִי בְּלֹא צְדִיקָה׃ <sup>23</sup> אוּ  
בְכֹל־אֲבָן אֲשֶׁר־יָמוֹת בָּהּ בְּלֹא רְאוֹת  
וַיִּפֹּל עָלָיו וַיָּמָת וְהוּא לֹא־אוֹיֵב לוֹ וְלֹא  
מִבְּקָשׁ רָעָתוֹ׃ <sup>24</sup> וְשִׁפְטוּ הָעֵדָה בֵּין הַמִּכָּה  
וּבֵין גֹּאֲלֵ הַדָּם עַל הַמְּשַׁפְּטִים הָאֵלֶּה׃  
<sup>25</sup> וְהִצִּילוּ הָעֵדָה אֶת־הָרֹצֵחַ מִיַּד גֹּאֲלֵ  
הַדָּם וְהִשִּׁיבוּ אֹתוֹ הָעֵדָה אֶל־עִיר מְקַלְטוֹ  
אֲשֶׁר־יָנוֹס שָׁמָּה וַיֵּשֶׁב בָּהּ עַד־מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן  
הַגָּדֹל אֲשֶׁר־מָשַׁח אֹתוֹ בְּשֶׁמֶן הַקֹּדֶשׁ׃  
<sup>26</sup> וְאִם־יֵצֵא יֵצֵא הָרֹצֵחַ אֶת־גְּבוּל עִיר  
מְקַלְטוֹ אֲשֶׁר יָנוֹס שָׁמָּה׃ <sup>27</sup> וּמִצָּא אֹתוֹ  
גֹּאֲלֵ הַדָּם מִחוּץ לְגְבוּל עִיר מְקַלְטוֹ וְרֹצֵחַ  
גֹּאֲלֵ הַדָּם אֶת־הָרֹצֵחַ אֵין לוֹ דָּם׃ <sup>28</sup> כִּי  
בְעִיר מְקַלְטוֹ יֵשֶׁב עַד־מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדֹל  
וְאַחֲרֵי מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדֹל יָשׁוּב הָרֹצֵחַ  
אֶל־אָרֶץ אֲחֻזָּתוֹ׃

INVOLUNTARY HOMICIDE:  
THE PROCEDURE (vv. 24–29)

The trial is conducted by national judges. Manslayers who are found guilty of second-degree murder (involuntary homicide) are returned to their city of refuge, where they remain until the death of the high priest.

**25. restore** The trial is held outside the city of refuge.

causes them to mourn, eclipsing the mourning for their previous loss and purging them of the wish for revenge in the earlier death. The Sages picture the high priest's mother knitting articles of clothing for the exiles in the city of refuge, so that they would think kindly of her and not pray for her son's death to release them from exile.

<sup>29</sup>Such shall be your law of procedure throughout the ages in all your settlements.

<sup>30</sup>If anyone kills a person, the manslayer may be executed only on the evidence of witnesses; the testimony of a single witness against a person shall not suffice for a sentence of death.

<sup>31</sup>You may not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of a capital crime; he must be put to death. <sup>32</sup>Nor may you accept ransom in lieu of flight to a city of refuge, enabling one to return to live on his land before the death of the priest. <sup>33</sup>You shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and the land can have no expiation for blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. <sup>34</sup>You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I Myself abide, for I the LORD abide among the Israelite people.

וְהָיוּ אֵלֶּה לָכֶם לְחֻקַּת מִשְׁפָּט  
 לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם:  
<sup>30</sup> כָּל־מִפְּהַ־נֶּפֶשׁ לְפִי עֵדִים יִרְצַח אֶת־  
 הָרָצֹחַ וְעַד אֶחָד לֹא־יִעַנֶּה בְּנִפְשׁ לְמוֹת:  
<sup>31</sup> וְלֹא־תִקְחוּ כֹפֶר לְנַפְשׁ רָצֹחַ אֲשֶׁר־הוּא  
 רָשָׁע לְמוֹת בִּי־מוֹת יוּמַת: <sup>32</sup> וְלֹא־תִקְחוּ  
 כֹּפֶר לְנוֹס אֶל־עִיר מִקְלָטוֹ לָשׁוּב לְשִׁבְתָּ  
 בְּאֶרֶץ עַד־מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>33</sup> וְלֹא־תִחַנִּיפוּ  
 אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם בָּהּ כִּי הָדָם הוּא  
 יִחַנֵּף אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא־יִכָּפֹר לְדָם  
 אֲשֶׁר שָׁפַךְ־בָּהּ כִּי־אִם בְּדָם שִׁפְכוּ: <sup>34</sup> וְלֹא  
 תִטְמָא אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּהּ  
 אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי שֹׁכֵן בְּתוֹכָהּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה שֹׁכֵן  
 בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: פ

**36** The family heads in the clan of the descendants of Gilead son of Machir son of Ma-

לֹו וַיִּקְרְבוּ רֵאשֵׁי הָאָבוֹת לְמִשְׁפַּחַת  
 בְּנֵי־גִלְעָד בְּן־מְכִיר בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת  
 שְׁבִיעִי

SUPPLEMENT AND  
 CONCLUDING WORDS (vv. 30–34)

Monetary payment for murder is provided for in several law codes of the ancient Near East—save that of the Israelites, which required that homicides must pay with their lives. Otherwise, the Land becomes polluted, with the consequence that neither God nor Israel can abide there.

**30. the manslayer may be executed** Literally, “[one] shall murder the murderer.” That person must be the redeemer (*go-el*).

**31.** This prohibition clearly has in mind the blood redeemer who might accept monetary compensation for the life of a slain kinsman. If the redeemer does, the nation cannot acquiesce; a murderer must be brought to death.

**32.** The principle stated in verse 31 applies to involuntary as well as deliberate homicide.

**33.** The Holy Land (like the Israelites) is polluted by bloodshed, idolatry, and incest (see Lev. 18:24–25).

**34. abide** Hebrew: *shokhen*, which refers to the indwelling of God in the earthly tabernacle (*mishkan*). This is the derivation of the Rabbinic term *Sh’khinah* to represent the earthly presence of the Deity, which supplemented the biblical *k’vod YHVH* (Presence of the LORD). Because the land of Israel is also God’s residence, it is equivalent in holiness to the sanctuary. The Lord’s demand in the wilderness that the camp be kept pure is, in Canaan, extended to all of God’s land.

**for I the LORD abide among the Israelite people** A reminder that the Lord had consented to transfer the divine Presence from the summit of Sinai to the portable Sinai of the tabernacle, to abide forever within the people Israel.

**33. for blood pollutes the land** Just as one may not enter the sanctuary in a condition of impurity because the sanctuary is a holy place,

one cannot live in the land of Israel in a condition of moral impurity because the land is consecrated to holy living.

nasseh, one of the Josephite clans, came forward and appealed to Moses and the chieftains, family heads of the Israelites. <sup>2</sup>They said, “The LORD commanded my lord to assign the land to the Israelites as shares by lot, and my lord was further commanded by the LORD to assign the share of our kinsman Zelophehad to his daughters. <sup>3</sup>Now, if they marry persons from another Israelite tribe, their share will be cut off from our ancestral portion and be added to the portion of the tribe into which they marry; thus our allotted portion will be diminished. <sup>4</sup>And even when the Israelites observe the jubilee, their share will be added to that of the tribe into which they marry, and their share will be cut off from the ancestral portion of our tribe.”

<sup>5</sup>So Moses, at the LORD’s bidding, instructed the Israelites, saying: “The plea of the Josephite tribe is just. <sup>6</sup>This is what the LORD has commanded concerning the daughters of Zelophe-

בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וַיִּדְבְּרוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וּלְפְנֵי הַנְּשָׂאִים רֹאשֵׁי אֲבוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>2</sup> וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶת־אֲדֹנָי צְוָה יְהוָה לָתֵת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ בְּנַחֲלָהּ בְּגוּרָל לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲדֹנָי צְוָה בִּיהוָה לָתֵת אֶת־נַחֲלַת צֶלְפַחַד אֶחָיו לְבָנָיו: <sup>3</sup> וְהָיוּ לְאֶחָד מִבְּנֵי שְׁבֻטֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְנָשִׁים וְנִגְרַעַה נַחֲלָתָן מִנַּחֲלַת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְנוֹסַף עַל נַחֲלַת הַמַּטֵּה אֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶינָה לָהֶם וּמִגֵּרַל נַחֲלָתָנוּ יִגְרַע: <sup>4</sup> וְאִם־יִהְיֶה הַיָּבֵל לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנוֹסְפָה נַחֲלָתָן עַל נַחֲלַת הַמַּטֵּה אֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶינָה לָהֶם וּמִנַּחֲלַת מַטֵּה אֲבוֹתֵינוּ יִגְרַע נַחֲלָתָן:

<sup>5</sup> וַיִּצַו מֹשֶׁה אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־פִּי יְהוָה לֵאמֹר בֵּן מַטֵּה בְנֵי־יוֹסֵף דְּבָרִים: <sup>6</sup> זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־צְוָה יְהוָה לְבָנוֹת צֶלְפַחַד

### MARRIAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR HEIRESSSES (36:1–13)

Moses has ruled that daughters may inherit in the absence of sons (27:1–11). The leaders of Zelophehad’s clan respond with an objection. If the women marry outside their tribe, their land will pass to their husbands’ tribes. Moses informs them that God finds their complaint justified and, as a result, He has decreed that all heiresses must marry within their tribe. Zelophehad’s daughters marry their first cousins on their father’s side.

**1. the chieftains, family heads** These terms are in apposition to each other; they explain each other.

**2. my lord** Moses is addressed in this deferential manner by Joshua (11:28), Aaron (12:11), the chieftains of Reuben and Gad (32:25,27), and now by the chieftains of Gileadite clans.

**4. the jubilee** Ancestral land that has been sold—not inherited—reverts to its original owner in the jubilee year.

### CHAPTER 36

This last passage is not a mere postscript; it implements at the individual level the grand vision of social justice just expressed: “You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I Myself abide” (35:34). It reconciles competing legitimate claims—that of the individual (a daughter’s right to inherit) and that of the community (“our ancestral portion should not be diminished because these women marry men of another tribe”). Moses’ creative solution

leaves both sides satisfied and respects both the letter and the spirit of the law.

Throughout the Book of Numbers, we have been shown an Israel composed of rebels and grumblers, having degenerated since the moment of their lofty spiritual experience at Sinai. The book concludes with an image of an Israelite nation loyally following its God through the wilderness, anticipating a Jewish people that would remain loyal to God through all the generations of the Exile (N. Leibowitz, after Sferno).

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

**36:2.** Regarding the inheritance rights of daughters, see Comment on Num. 27:1.

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had: They may marry anyone they wish, provided they marry into a clan of their father's tribe. <sup>7</sup>No inheritance of the Israelites may pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelites must remain bound each to the ancestral portion of his tribe. <sup>8</sup>Every daughter among the Israelite tribes who inherits a share must marry someone from a clan of her father's tribe, in order that every Israelite may keep his ancestral share. <sup>9</sup>Thus no inheritance shall pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelite tribes shall remain bound each to its portion."

<sup>10</sup>The daughters of Zelophehad did as the LORD had commanded Moses: <sup>11</sup>Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, Zelophehad's daughters, were married to sons of their uncles, <sup>12</sup>marrying into clans of descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph; and so their share remained in the tribe of their father's clan.

<sup>13</sup>These are the commandments and regulations that the LORD enjoined upon the Israelites, through Moses, on the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho.

לֹא־מֹר לְטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיהֶם תִּהְיֶינָה לְנָשִׁים  
אֲךָ לְמִשְׁפַּחַת מִטָּה אָבִיהֶם תִּהְיֶינָה  
לְנָשִׁים: <sup>7</sup> וְלֹא־תִסָּב נַחֲלָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
מִמִּטָּה אֶל־מִטָּה כִּי אִישׁ בְּנַחֲלַת מִטָּה  
אָבִיתּוֹ יִדְבְּקוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>8</sup> וְכָל־בַּת  
יְרֻשַׁת נַחֲלָה מִמִּטּוֹת בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָחֻד  
מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת מִטָּה אָבִיהָ תִהְיֶיהָ לְאִשָּׁה  
לְמַעַן יִירָשׁוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ נַחֲלַת  
אָבִיתּוֹ: <sup>9</sup> וְלֹא־תִסָּב נַחֲלָה מִמִּטָּה לְמִטָּה  
אֲחֵר כִּי־אִישׁ בְּנַחֲלָתוֹ יִדְבְּקוּ מִטּוֹת בְנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל:

<sup>10</sup> כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה בֶּן עָשׂוֹ  
בָּנוֹת צֶלְפַּחָד: <sup>11</sup> וְתִהְיֶינָה מַחֲלָה תִרְצָה  
וְחֻגְלָה וּמִלְכָּה וְנַעֲמָה בָנוֹת צֶלְפַּחָד לְבְנֵי  
דִידֵיהֶן לְנָשִׁים: <sup>12</sup> מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת בְנֵי־מְנַשֶּׁה  
בְּנֵי־יוֹסֵף הָיוּ לְנָשִׁים וְתִהְיֶינָה נַחֲלָתָן עַל־  
מִטָּה מִשְׁפַּחַת אָבִיהֶן:

<sup>13</sup> אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת וְהַמְשָׁפְטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה  
יְהוָה בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶרְבַת  
מוֹאָב עַל יַרְדֵּן יְרֵחוֹ:

v. 13. סכום הפסוקים של הספר 1,288 וחציו 17:20

## חוק חזק ונתחזק

**8. his ancestral share** Literally, "his father's share." This can occur only if the land remains within the clan, not just the tribe.

**11. sons of their uncles** Although the daughters could have married anyone from their tribe, they selected husbands from their clan, a fact that also coincides with the law of succession. When there are no surviving children, the brothers of the deceased inherit the property (27:9). Thus, in effect, the daughters did not inherit. They merely transferred the property to those who stood next in the line of succession in any event.

**12.** Because they married cousins, they remained in their own clan.

**13.** This final note in the Book of Numbers refers to all the laws given to Israel once they encamped at the steppes of Moab (22:1). These include: the regular public sacrifices (chaps. 28–29); the division of the Land (26:52–56); the law of succession in inheritance (27:1–11; 36); the leadership succession, both religious (chap. 25) and civil (27:12–23); a woman's vows and oaths (chap. 30); the division of the spoils (chap. 31); and the laws of homicide (35:9–34).

# הפטרה שנייה דפורענותא

## SECOND HAFTARAH OF ADMONITION HAFTARAH FOR MAS'EI

JEREMIAH 2:4–28, 3:4 (*Ashk'nazim*)    JEREMIAH 2:4–28, 4:1–2 (*S'fardim*)

(Recite on the second Shabbat after the 17th of Tammuz, coinciding with the reading of Mas'ei either separately or combined with Mattot.)

The main part of this *haftarah* is an extensive indictment of widespread faithlessness, ingratitude, and apostasy, addressed to the entire nation. A reference to political alliances with Assyria and Egypt seems to fit the final decades of the Judean state, when such attempts were made for the sake of protection against the neo-Babylonian empire. Otherwise, the accusations are without reference to specific events.

The harsh judgment of the *haftarah* is counterposed by brief words of hope and renewal, from Jer. 3:4 or 4:1–2 according to the traditions of *Ashk'nazim* and *S'fardim*, respectively. The first conclusion to the *haftarah* (Jer. 3:4) is a remarkable counterpoint to an accusation. God's hopeful statement that the people have now called Him "Father!" thoroughly reverses their earlier avowal of wood as "my father" (2:27). Nothing could express more succinctly the return of the nation to their divine patrimony than this bold formula of rededication.

The conclusion of the *haftarah* among *S'fardim* (4:1–2) follows a different course, in which God lays down conditions to be fulfilled if the Israelites ever are to be blessed and praised by the nations. Repentance, here, is still an option, not an accomplishment. It must begin with a turning back to God and conclude with an oath of loyalty. Pagan practices must be divested. This scenario anticipates later Jewish tradition on repentance, as formulated by Saadia and Maimonides.

For Jeremiah, such a transformation is the prelude to blessing. A dim allusion to God's opening promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3) may be dis-

cerned here as well. In both instances, faithfulness to God leads to the nations blessing "themselves by you." This echo of antiquity in Jeremiah invests the future with patriarchal promise.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

This is the second week before *Tish-ah b'Av*, during which a prophetic reading of admonition is recited (see introduction to the first Haftarah of Admonition). Originally Jer. 2:4–28 was a diatribe rooted in a specific historical reality. Recited as a *haftarah*, the rebuke transcends its original occasion and reminds subsequent generations of the folly of false worship and the perversity of betraying historical memory.

Rabbinic tradition notes the opening particularly, with its call to "hear" (*shim-u*) the word of God that calls them to account (2:4). The Hebrew evokes the formula imprinted on Israelite religious consciousness (*na-aseh v'nishma*, lit., "we will do and hear") by which the nation had affirmed the covenant at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:7).

Part of Jeremiah's challenge is his repeated exclamation "how" (*eikh*), as in 2:21: How you have changed from a noble vine into a base, alien vine! With this word the prophet expresses puzzlement at Israelite perversity and obtuseness; and he anticipates the pain of the word *eikhah* ("Oh, how?!" or "Alas!") that begins the Book of Lamentations, recited on the 9th of *Av* over the destruction of the First and the Second Temples. For biblical tradition, the verbal connection of *eikh* / *eikhah* evokes the spiritual and physical doom that awaits those who follow the path of paganism and ignore their covenantal obligations.

**2** <sup>4</sup>Hear the word of the LORD, O House of Jacob,

Every clan of the House of Israel!

<sup>5</sup>Thus said the LORD:

What wrong did your fathers find in Me

That they abandoned Me

And went after delusion and were deluded?

<sup>6</sup>They never asked themselves, “Where is the LORD,

Who brought us up from the land of Egypt,

Who led us through the wilderness,

A land of deserts and pits,

A land of drought and darkness,

A land no man had traversed,

Where no human being had dwelt?”

<sup>7</sup>I brought you to this country of farm land

To enjoy its fruit and its bounty;

But you came and defiled My land,

You made My possession abhorrent.

<sup>8</sup>The priests never asked themselves, “Where is the LORD?”

The guardians of the Teaching ignored Me;

The rulers rebelled against Me,

And the prophets prophesied by Baal

And followed what can do no good.

<sup>9</sup>Oh, I will go on accusing you

—declares the LORD—

And I will accuse your children’s children!

<sup>10</sup>Just cross over to the isles of the Kittim and look,

Send to Kedar and observe carefully;

**Jeremiah 2:6. Where is the LORD** This charge has a broad, polemical background. It recurs in the Hebrew Bible as a query seeking assurances of God’s presence and might.

**7. defiled My land** Acts of idolatry and false worship defile both the land and the perpetrators (Lev. 18:24–25).

**8. guardians of the Teaching** The “guardians” are included in a larger list of indicted peo-

**ב** <sup>4</sup>שָׁמְעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה בַּיִת יַעֲקֹב  
וְכָל־מִשְׁפָּחוֹת בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

<sup>5</sup>כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

מִה־מִּצְאוּ אָבוֹתֵיכֶם בִּי עוֹל

כִּי רָחֲקוּ מֵעָלַי

וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרַי הַהֶבֶל וַיִּהְבְּלוּ:

<sup>6</sup>וְלֹא אָמְרוּ אֵיךָ יְהוָה

הַמַּעֲלָה אֲתָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

הַמּוֹלִיךְ אֲתָנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר

בְּאֶרֶץ עֲרָבָה וְשׁוּחָה

בְּאֶרֶץ צִיָּה וְצַלְמוֹת

בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא־עֵבֶר בָּהּ אִישׁ

וְלֹא־יֹשֵׁב אָדָם שָׁם:

<sup>7</sup>וְאָבִיא אֶתְכֶם אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַפְּרִמָּל

לְאֶכֶל פְּרִיָּה וְטוֹבָה

וּתְבָאוּ וְתִטְמְאוּ אֶת־אֶרְצִי

וַנְחַלְתִּי שְׂמֹתֵם לְתוֹעֵבָה:

<sup>8</sup>הַכֹּהֲנִים לֹא אָמְרוּ אֵיךָ יְהוָה

וְתִפְשִׂי הַתּוֹרָה לֹא יִדְעוּנִי

וְהָרְעִים פִּשְׁעוּ בִי

וְהַנְּבִיאִים נִבְּאוּ בַּעַל

וְאַחֲרַי לֹא־יֹועֵלוּ הִלְכוּ:

<sup>9</sup>לָכֵן עַד אָרִיב אֶתְכֶם

נְאֻם־יְהוָה

וְאֶת־בְּנֵי בְנֵיכֶם אָרִיב:

<sup>10</sup>כִּי עֲבְרוּ אֵינִי כַתְיִים וְרָאוּ

וְקָדַר שְׁלַחוּ וְהִתְבּוֹנְנוּ מֵאֵד

ple, including priests, prophets, and kings (see also v. 26).

**10. isles of the Kittim** The western edge of civilization is represented here by an ancient Greek city, Kition (Citium), modern-day Larnaca on Cyprus (cf. Isa. 23:1; Ezek. 27:6).

**Kedar** An old Arab tribe (Gen. 25:13), located in the east of Transjordan, in northern Arabia.

See if aught like this has ever happened:

<sup>11</sup>Has any nation changed its gods

Even though they are no-gods?

But My people has exchanged its glory

For what can do no good.

<sup>12</sup>Be appalled, O heavens, at this;

Be horrified, utterly dazed!

—says the LORD.

<sup>13</sup>For My people have done a twofold wrong:

They have forsaken Me, the Fount of living waters,

And hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns,

Which cannot even hold water.

<sup>14</sup>Is Israel a bondman?

Is he a home-born slave?

Then why is he given over to plunder?

<sup>15</sup>Lions have roared over him,

Have raised their cries.

They have made his land a waste,

His cities desolate, without inhabitants.

<sup>16</sup>Those, too, in Noph and Tahpanhes

Will lay bare your head.

<sup>17</sup>See, that is the price you have paid

For forsaking the LORD your God

While He led you in the way.

<sup>18</sup>What, then, is the good of your going to

Egypt

וְרָאוּ הֵן הַיְתָה כְּזֹאת:

<sup>11</sup> הֲהִימִיר גּוֹי אֱלֹהִים

וְהִמָּה לֹא אֱלֹהִים

וְעַמִּי הִמִּיר כְּבוֹדוֹ

כְּלוֹא יוֹעִיל:

<sup>12</sup> שָׁמוּ שָׁמַיִם עַל־זֹאת

וְשָׁעְרוּ חָרְבוּ מְאֹד

נֶאֱסִי־הוֹה:

<sup>13</sup> כִּי־שָׁתִּימַר רְעוֹת עָשָׂה עַמִּי

אֶתִּי עֲזָבוּ מִקּוֹר | מַיִם חַיִּים

לְחַצֵּב לָהֶם בְּאֵרוֹת \* בְּאֵרֹת \* נִשְׁבְּרִים

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִכְלוּ הַמַּיִם:

<sup>14</sup> הֲעֶבֶד יִשְׂרָאֵל

אִם־יֵלִיד בֵּית הוּא

מִדּוֹעַ הִיָּה לְבָז:

<sup>15</sup> עָלָיו יִשְׁאָגוּ כְּפָרִים

נִתְּנוּ קוֹלָם

וַיִּשְׁתִּיחוּ אֶרְצוֹ לְשָׁמָּה

עָרָיו נִצְתָה נִצְתָה מִבְּלֵי יֹשֵׁב:

<sup>16</sup> גַּם־בְּנֵי־נֹף וְתַחֲפַנְס וְתַחֲפַנְחָס

יִרְעוּף קָדְקָד:

<sup>17</sup> הֲלוֹא־זֹאת תַּעֲשֶׂה־לָּךְ

עֲזָבָךְ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

כַּעַת מוֹלִיכֶךָ בְּדָרְךָ:

<sup>18</sup> וְעַתָּה מֵה־לָּךְ לְדָרְךָ מִצְרַיִם

v. 13. יתיר א' פעמיים

**11. its glory** Hebrew: *k'vodo*, which also can mean “His glory” (i.e., God’s heavenly glory), which the people denied and exchanged for “no-gods.” Rabbinic tradition named this passage as one of the “scribal corrections” (*tikkunei sof’rim*) introduced into the biblical text to avoid speaking disrespectfully of God. (See the list in Mekh. Shirata 6, on Exod. 15:7.) This implies that the original reading here was “My glory” (*k'vodi*); presumably the starkness of this formulation led certain scribes to soften and obscure it through a slight change. Whether this was truly a scribal correction—or a *midrash* formulated to make a theological point—is open to question.

**13. Fount of living waters** This image may derive from the homily in Deut. 6:11–12, a passage that also includes the themes of hewn wells, forsaking God, the Exodus, and slavery (see also Jer. 17:13).

**16, 18.** Egyptian place-names have been Hebraized here.

**Noph** A corruption of “Moph” (see Hos. 9:6) or Memphis (Saqqara, in the lower Nile region).

**Tahpanhes** Consists of two words meaning “fortress of the Nubian” (Tall al-Dafana). The second word (*panhes*) is known as the name of the priest *Pinhas* (Phinehas).



To drink the waters of the Nile?  
 And what is the good of your going to Assyria  
 To drink the waters of the Euphrates?  
<sup>19</sup>Let your misfortune reprove you,  
 Let your afflictions rebuke you;  
 Mark well how bad and bitter it is  
 That you forsake the LORD your God,  
 That awe for Me is not in you  
 —declares the Lord God of Hosts.

<sup>20</sup>For long ago you broke your yoke,  
 Tore off your yoke-bands,  
 And said, “I will not work!”  
 On every high hill and under every verdant  
 tree,

You recline as a whore.  
<sup>21</sup>I planted you with noble vines,

All with choicest seed;  
 Alas, I find you changed  
 Into a base, an alien vine!

<sup>22</sup>Though you wash with natron  
 And use much lye,  
 Your guilt is ingrained before Me  
 —declares the Lord God.

<sup>23</sup>How can you say, “I am not defiled,  
 I have not gone after the Baalim”?  
 Look at your deeds in the Valley,  
 Consider what you have done!

Like a lustful she-camel,  
 Restlessly running about,  
<sup>24</sup>Or like a wild ass used to the desert,

לְשִׁתּוֹת מֵי שְׁחֹר  
 וּמַה-לָּךְ לְדֶרֶךְ אַשּׁוּר  
 לְשִׁתּוֹת מֵי נְהַר:  
 תִּיַסְרֶךָ רַעְתֶּךָ <sup>19</sup>  
 וּמִשְׁבוֹתֶיךָ תוֹכְחֶךָ  
 וּדְעֵי וּרְאִי כִי-רַע וּמָר  
 עֲזַבְךָ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
 וְלֹא פָחַדְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ

נְאֻם-אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:  
 כִּי מֵעוֹלָם שָׁבַרְתִּי עֲלֶיךָ <sup>20</sup>  
 נִתְקַתִּי מוֹסְרֹתֶיךָ  
 וְתֹאמְרֵי לֹא אֶעֱבֹר  
 כִּי עַל-כָּל-גִּבְעָה גְבוֹהָה וְתַחַת כָּל-עֵץ  
 רַעֲנָן

אֶת צֵעָה זֹנָה:  
<sup>21</sup>וְאֵנְכִי נִטְעַתֶיךָ שֵׁרֶק

כֹּלָה זָרַע אֲמַת  
 וְאִיךָ נִהְפַכְתָּ לִּי  
 סוּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן נִכְרִיָּה:  
<sup>22</sup>כִּי אִם-תִּכְבְּסִי בַנָּתָר

וְתִרְבִּי-לָךְ בְּרִית  
 נִכְתָּם עֲוֹנֶךָ לִפְנֵי

נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה:  
<sup>23</sup>אֵיךָ תֹאמְרֵי לֹא נִטְמַאתִי  
 אַחֲרֵי הַבְּעָלִים לֹא הִלַּכְתִּי

רְאִי דְרֹכְךָ בְּגִיא  
 דְעֵי מָה עֲשִׂית  
 בְּכָרָה קָלָה

מִשְׁרַכַת דְּרֹכֶיהָ:  
<sup>24</sup>פָּרָה | לְמַד מִדְּבָר

**waters of the Nile** The Hebrew (*mei shihor*) derives from the Egyptian phrase *p' sh-hr*, “Pool of Horus” (cf. Isa. 23:3).

**20. you broke** Hebrew: *shavarti*. The Hebrew here is not what it seems to be, namely, the common first person form “I broke.” It is the archaic (or Aramaizing) second-person feminine singular form. So also the Hebrew *nitakti* (“you . . . tore off”) in this verse.

**work** Hebrew: *e-evod*, per the *k'tiv* (writing tradition); the usually preferred *k'rei* (reading tradition) here has *e-evor* (“transgress”) [Transl.].

**21. Into a base, an alien vine** The divine planting contrasts with the verdant trees under which Israel commits pagan sins (v. 20). The image also alludes to God’s planting of Israel in the Land at the time of settlement (Exod. 15:17, Ps. 80:9ff.).

Snuffing the wind in her eagerness,  
Whose passion none can restrain,  
None that seek her need grow weary—  
In her season, they'll find her!

<sup>25</sup>Save your foot from going bare,  
And your throat from thirst.  
But you say, "It is no use.  
No, I love the strangers,  
And after them I must go."

<sup>26</sup>Like a thief chagrined when he is caught,  
So is the House of Israel chagrined—  
They, their kings, their officers,  
And their priests and prophets.

<sup>27</sup>They said to wood, "You are my father,"  
To stone, "You gave birth to me,"  
While to Me they turned their backs  
And not their faces.  
But in their hour of calamity they cry,  
"Arise and save us!"

<sup>28</sup>And where are those gods  
You made for yourself?  
Let them arise and save you, if they can,  
In your hour of calamity.  
For your gods have become, O Judah,  
As many as your towns!

בְּאוֹת נִפְשׁוּ נִפְשָׁהּ שְׂאֵפָה רוּחַ  
תִּאֲנָתָהּ מִי יִשְׁבְּנָהּ  
כָּל־מִבְקֶשֶׁיהָ לֹא יִיעֲפוּ  
בְּחֻדְשָׁהּ יִמְצְאוּנָהּ:

מִנְעֵי רַגְלָךְ מִיְחֹף <sup>25</sup>  
וּגּוֹרֶנֶךָ וּגְרוֹנְךָ מִצְמָאָה  
וּתְאֻמְרֵי נוֹאֵשׁ לֹא  
כִּי־אֶהְבֵּתִי זָרִים  
וְאֶחְרִיהֶם אֵלֶיךָ:  
כְּבִשְׁתָּ גִבְבִּי כִּי יִמְצְא  
כִּן הִבִּישׁוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל  
הַמָּה מַלְכֵיהֶם שָׂרֵיהֶם  
וְכִהְיִיהֶם וּנְבִיאֵיהֶם:  
אֲמַרִים לְעֵץ אָבִי אַתָּה <sup>27</sup>  
וְלֶאֱבֹן אַתָּה יִלְדַתְנִי יִלְדַתְנוּ  
כִּי־פָנּוּ אֵלַי עֵרָף  
וְלֹא פָנִים  
וּבָעַת רָעַתְם יֹאמְרוּ  
קוֹמָה וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ:  
וְאֵיחָהּ אֶלְהֵיהָ <sup>28</sup>  
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ לָךְ  
לְקוֹמוֹ אִם־יוֹשִׁיעוּךָ  
בְּעַת רָעַתְךָ  
כִּי מִסָּפֵר עָרֶיךָ  
הֵיוּ אֶלְהֵיהָ יְהוּדָה: \* ט

**3** <sup>4</sup>Just now you called to Me, "Father!  
You are the Companion of my youth."

**27.** The formula "You are my father" has the technical resonance of a legal adoption formula, as when God says to the king: "You are My son, / I have fathered you this day" (Ps. 2:7; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14). The prophet mocks and condemns the people's pagan allegiances, giving themselves a wholly natural religion. For him, this is an utter rejection of divine transcendence.

\* Ashk'nazim read the next verse; S'fardim do not read it.

\*\* Ashk'nazim stop here.

**ג** <sup>4</sup>הֲלוֹא מֵעַתָּה קִרְאתִי קִרְאת לִי אָבִי  
אֵלֹהִים נִעַרִי אַתָּה: \*\*

**Jeremiah 3:4. Just now** Hebrew: *me-atah*. "At that moment [when you saw that I had stopped the rain]" (Radak, referring to the preceding verse from the original context). Alternatively, "as of now" (with Targum; see Rashi).

**Father!** Repentance now becomes the theme via a reversal of the false formula of patrimony (2:27).

**4** If you return, O Israel  
—declares the LORD—

If you return to Me,  
If you remove your abominations from My  
presence  
And do not waver,  
<sup>2</sup>And swear, “As the LORD lives,”  
In sincerity, justice, and righteousness—  
Nations shall bless themselves by you  
And praise themselves by you.

**ד** אִם-תָּשׁוּב יִשְׂרָאֵל |  
נְאֻם-יְהוָה  
אֵלַי תָּשׁוּב  
וְאִם-תָּסִיר שְׁקֻצֶיךָ מִפְּנֵי  
וְלֹא תִנּוּד:  
<sup>2</sup>וְנִשְׁבַּעְתָּ חַי-יְהוָה  
בְּאֵמֶת בְּמִשְׁפָּט וּבְצִדְקָה  
וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בּוֹ גּוֹיִם  
וּבּוֹ יִתְהַלְּלוּ: ס

**Jeremiah 4:2. As the LORD lives** A fixed oath formula, denoting here a commitment to the national God.

**sincerity** The first of a triad of covenantal terms. (Compare the variant triad in Jer. 9:23 and the extended cluster in Hos. 2:21–22.)