

Chukat/Balak **Ordinance of/ Destroyer** **Setting the Stage for the Conquest of Canaan**

Torah: Numbers 19:1-22:1/Numbers 22:2-25:9

Haftarah: Judges 11:1-33/Micah 5:6-6:8

Brit Chadashah: John 3:10-21/Romans 11:25-32

Today is a double Torah Portion and the first portion deals with the big detour our people made around Edom, Moab and Ammon, before they arrived at their final staging point before they crossed the Jordan into Canaan. The second portion deals with Balak's unsuccessful attempt to get Balaam to curse Israel.

Chapter 19 deals with the ritual of the Red Heifer and it actually occurs later in the account, after the death of Aaron. The chapter mentions Eleazar, the son of Aaron, as the priest who supervises the ritual. Now that Israel is going to conquer Canaan, they need a means to deal with ritual defilement, so as not to defile the land they are about to take possession of.

A careful reading of Joshua, reveals that he crucified 31 kings, in order to remove the curse from the land and transform it from Canaan to the Holy Land. Our Messiah died on the cross, to cleanse creation from the curse of sin and we also need to learn how to be cleansed from any defilement we contract in our own lives.

Red Heifer in Hebrew is Paran Adamah and means Adam's cow. Our Messiah is both the lamb of G-d and Adam's cow because He took Adam's flesh upon Himself and lived a totally sinless life, so that He could bring this victory to the cross. He wants to show us how to have victory over our flesh and not let Adam's flesh drag us down into sinfulness.

It is quite a complicated ritual and was designed to produce atonement ashes which could be mixed with fresh water and sprinkled over people who encountered involuntary defilement by contact with the dead. The red heifer had to be spotless and never used for plowing. Once it was offered to the High Priest, it was taken outside of the camp and slaughtered. Its blood was brought into the camp and sprinkled seven times over the tent of meeting.

The Talmud claims that the blood was also sprinkled over the people, but this is not the testimony of the Scriptures. Only the tent of meeting was sprinkled. The entire carcass had to be turned into ashes and cedar wood, hyssop and crimson were added to the mix during the burning. Some see a prophetic vision of the cross of our Messiah, but it was unlikely that His cross would have been made of cedar.

The priest doing the sprinkling had to wash himself and his clothes, as was considered impure until the evening. The one doing the actual burning also had to wash himself and his clothes and was considered unclean until the evening.

The ashes were then gathered and kept in a clean place outside the camp. The one gathering the ashes was also considered unclean until the evening, but the passage suggests that this gathering of the ashes could also be done by a stranger dwelling in the camp.

The ashes were added to atonement water and sprinkled over a person who was unclean because of contact with a dead body and the person performing the sprinkling would also be unclean until the evening.

The people had to be pure, rather than perfect and the ritual was always performed over seven days, whenever someone came into contact with a dead body or even human remains in the field. We serve the lord of life and not the lord of death.

Chapter twenty introduces us to a return to Kadesh at the end of the wilderness wandering, as the new generation prepares to enter Canaan. Miriam dies while they are camping there and the new generation complains during the mourning period because of the lack of water at the camp site. They are even homesick for the fertility of Egypt. Moses and Aaron fall on their faces at this sign of rebellion by the new generation. They did not want to go back into the wilderness for another 40 years!

Moses is told to gather the assembly and to speak to a specific rock. In his impatience and anger, he wrongly strikes the rock (or has Aaron do it for him) and because of this disobedience, both Aaron and Moses lose their right to lead the people into Canaan. The campsite is now called Meriba which means the water of grumbling.

Edom refuses to grant them passage through their lands and may think that because they beat them once, they could do it again. Before they begin their long detour, they camp at the foot of Mount Hor. Aaron and Moses climb the mountain with Eleazar and Aaron dies. They strip off his priestly garments and consecrate Eleazar as the new high priest. The people mourn Aaron's death for 30 days. The length of time Miriam was mourned is not given.

As Israel begins the detour, the Canaanite king of Arad attacks Israel and even takes some prisoners. They had no reason to attack Israel and the House of Israel devotes this kingdom to destruction and it was totally annihilated. The place where this occurred is called Horma, which means destroyed.

As the people make a detour around Edom, Moab and Ammon, they grow impatient and complain because there is no water and they are tired of the miserable manna bread. G-d sends fiery serpents among them. The snakes are not actually on fire, but their bite gives its victims a deadly high fever which felt like they were burning. The people repent and ask for mercy, so Moses has a bronze serpent fashioned and placed on a pole. Those who look at the serpent are spared.

In the New Testament portion it says that the Messiah will be lifted up like the serpent on the pole and that whoever believes in Him, will not perish but have everlasting life. The people camp eight more times before they arrive at the foot of mount Pisgah and set up their second last camp before they enter Canaan. The land they are camping in once belonged to Moab and to Ammon, but was now occupied by Sihon and Og, the latest and the toughest conquerors of the region.

The House of Israel asks for permission to pass through so they could camp on the plains of Moab across from Jericho. They are refused and Sihon attacks and he and his people are totally destroyed. Israel now occupies the fertile plain of Moab which extends all the way to the hill fortresses of both Ammon and Moab. When Og sees what happened to Sihon, he also attacks Israel and is likewise destroyed, giving Israel all the fertile grazing area of Bashan. Here they experience their first long break from wandering, as they get ready to cross the Jordan, after they receive the entire Book of Deuteronomy. Now they are going to experience their last attack before they begin the conquest.

In the second portion, King Balak is afraid that now that Israel has wiped out Sihon and Og, they will follow up on their success and displace Moab and Ammon from what remains of their kingdoms. He sends a delegation of Moabites and Middinaites (south Moabites) to invite the powerful prophet, Balaam to come and curse the militarily unstoppable House of Israel.

At first YHVH refuses to give Balaam permission to go with the messengers, but eventually relents on condition that Balaam will only say what he is instructed to and do nothing against the orders which he has been given. Balaam sets out without having formally agreed not to go beyond his mandate and G-d causes Balaam's donkey to warn him that without agreeing to the terms of his limited mandate, he is heading for certain destruction. Balaam agrees to only say what he is told and not show Israel's enemies how to destroy the people of G-d.

Balak takes the prophet to four sacred Moabite sites, so that Balaam can curse the Jews. Instead, each time, Balaam blesses Israel and prophetically declares Israel's victory over her enemies. Balak is disgusted and Balaam heads home, likely without receiving any of the promised payment. Later, we learn that he returns to Moab on his own initiative and shows Moab how to defeat Israel. He outlines a twofold spiritual attack on Israel. If you get them to commit both Idolatry by worshiping Moabite gods and also fornication by having ritual sex with priestesses, G-d will destroy His own people. Balaam is transformed from a prophet of G-d into an enemy of the people of G-d. There are too many of these around in today's world.

The severity of the crime is as bad as the incident of the golden calf. YHVH requires the execution of all those who have succumbed to this criminal behaviour before the disciplinary plague which He has sent among the people, completely destroys all of them. Eleazar's son, Phineas takes the lead and executes an Israelite man who had taken a Moabite priestess into his tent. Others do likewise and once all the idolatrous fornicators are executed (along with their pagan priestesses), the plague is stopped. Twenty four thousand people are killed by the plague, but we are not told how many were executed before the plague stopped.

This is the last spiritual attack on Israel before they enter Canaan and after the people deal with Moab and also execute Balaam, they are ready to settle down and receive the book of Deuteronomy, as they make final preparations to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. While they camped, they still would have maintained their original camping order as they continued to receive manna in the morning and quail at night (as needed). They were also shaded by the cloud during the day and illuminated by the fire at night. It must have been a magnificent sight that terrified their enemies.

The same level and kind of protection is available for us today, no matter how many valleys we have to wade through and no matter how many mountains we have to climb on our way home to our Father's home in Glory. When we walk with the L-RD according to His Word, we are also unstoppable, no matter how many enemies rise up and try to destroy us.

As we learn to keep ourselves free from the defilement of the world and as we learn not to give the enemy any footholds in our lives, nothing can stop us from walking joyfully and powerfully towards our final destination. Israel is poised to enter the Promised Land, are we poised to walk in His promises and see His joy and peace and love fill our lives?

Sermon: Messianic Bible Basics: How the Sword of the Spirit was Forged.

Passage: *Therefore I intend to keep on reminding you of these things, though you know them already and are established in the truth which has come to you. I think it is right, as long as I am in this body to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our L-rd Yeshua haMashiach has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. For we do not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our L-rd Yeshua haMashiach, but we have been eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received honour and glory from G-d the Father when that voice was conveyed to Him by the Majestic Glory, saying, This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all, you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scriptures is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women were moved by the Holy Spirit, and spoke from G-d." (2 Peter 1:12-21).*

Our Bible is an amazing spiritual weapon that not only tells us all that we need to know about G-d and the Creation, but it also instructs us in all that we need to know in order to walk victoriously with our Messiah through this darkening world (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). It is not an exhaustive spiritual record of all that was said and done by those who walked with the L-RD (Deut. 4:2;. 29:29). Both the Old Testament and the New Testament refer to books that did not survive to be included in the canon of Scripture. However, nothing essential was lost and the selective documents which make up our Bible are a complete record with nothing essential missing. We possess an intact, mighty sword of the Spirit!

If any of this lost material were to surface, it would add nothing essential to our Bible, nor would it take away from what we are already being taught. They would just provide us with details that would enrich what we already have (John 20:30, 31: 21:25). Our passage in 2 Peter gives us a short study in how our Bible was put together by men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to say and to write exactly what they did record. Our Bible is not a cunning collection of fables; it is a clear presentation of the power and the purposes of G-d which all lead up to the coming Kingdom of our blessed Messiah.

It is called a lamp which shines until the Morning Star (our Messiah) rises in our hearts. It will shine until the brightness of Messiah's return finally sweeps away all darkness and the light of His Kingdom shines unopposed for all eternity. In our passage, we are warned not to attach any personal, unintended interpretations to the content of the Bible. We have to accept what it says, the way it says it. Nothing more and certainly nothing less.

It is a totally unique book whose contents exceed all others as the only authentic, flawless and inerrant record of all that G-d is willing to reveal to us about His kingdom purposes. It has come from heaven so that we can hear it and put into practice all that it teaches (Deut. 30:11-14). We know that the fullness of the eternal Word of G-d remains in Heaven and will not be fully revealed until the return. As I have said, we are not just left with a flawed, rough copy of G-d's Word, it is a complete record of all that we need to know and we need to leave the rest with G-d (Deut. 29:29). What are you doing with what G-d has revealed to us in His Word.

The Bible is described as a canon or a measuring stick which will make sure that our feet do not deviate from the straight and narrow. It will also make sure that we build a house of faith which does not lean away from divine truth and that is solid enough to withstand all the storms which will ever come our way.

It does not exist just to satisfy our curiosity, even though a careful study of history can give us deeper insights into what the Word is teaching. Those who do not respect the Bible for what it does say and what it does not say, have no respect for G-d and their words and their traditions do not carry any authority which alone belongs to His Word. The opinions of men and their traditions are merely feeble attempts to establish a spiritual authority which they will never possess. In a very real way, these words and traditions are only attempts to undermine our biblical faith and cause it to crumble as it slips off the solid rock of His Word into the shifting sand of human opinions (Matt. 7:24-27). Nonetheless the Bible remains the only authentic spiritual guide to faith and to practice. Embrace it and you will succeed, abandon it or dilute it and you will falter and fall.

Historically there were two events where the contents of both what is called the Old Testament and the New Testament were collected and organized. I will deal with both of them separately. The firm hand of G-d guided both of these events.

While we have less actual historical information as to how the Tanakh or Old Testament was put together, there is enough detail in the Talmud and other related sources for us to get a clear picture of how this amazing document was collected, organized and passed down to us in its present form. You see, our people went into captivity in some four waves and when Jerusalem was finally destroyed, the survivors were quite traumatized. They wanted to understand why this disaster had happened to them and how they could rebuild their nation, once they were allowed to return. They wanted to turn to the Word of G-d.

A man called Simon the righteous (Shimon haTzadik) gathered all the surviving documents of the once rich literary tradition our people had possessed before their deportation. He had intact copies of the five Books of the Torah and the twelve books of History. He also had all five books of Poetry, along with copies of both the major and the minor prophets. He would have also had to weave his way through all the spurious material whose contents did not have divine truth untainted by human content.

But the finished product was put together into a single document with the addition of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther and it has come down to us intact and unchanged. There are two ways of arranging the books of the Old Testament. One is by author, which is what the Tanakh does and the other by content, which is what the Septuagint does. It is the same content, arranged differently.

Just as a side bar, there were several teaching books circulating which were never intended to be included in the canon of the Old Testament and they are called the Apocrypha. They are only included in Catholic Bibles because they mention prayers for the dead. When Jerome translated the Old Testament into Latin, he included a note that these books should not be considered as Scripture. His note was lost and a Catholic council in the 13th century declared these books to be part of the canon, even though they were never part of the 39 Old Testament documents which are inspired.

Every so often, old documents surface and some misguided people clamour for them to be included in the canon of the Old Testament. You only have to read them to discover why they were rejected and not included in the canon. While some four hundred documents mentioned in the Old Testament no longer exist, what we have is a complete record of all the essentials of what G-d communicated to His people. Nothing more is needed and nothing more will likely resurface.

We have an easier time understanding how the New Testament was compiled because of the massive effort by an evil man to produce an official version of what the New Testament teaches. The emperor Constantine wanted to consolidate his power and force one version of Christianity on the Roman Empire. The old pagan religions of Rome had collapsed and no longer acted as a unifying force for this massive, oppressive political machine. Constantine needed a document which summarized authentic apostolic tradition, which he could use to serve his own political agenda.

He gathered three thousand scholars and clergymen at a city called Nicaea and they were tasked with sifting through thousands of documents which claimed apostolic authority. The process was slow and thorough. For a document to be included in the canon of the New Testament, it had to meet three specific criteria: authorship, content and circulation.

It had to be written by an apostle, or the disciple of an apostle, or at least by the disciple of an apostle's disciple. It could not be more than three generations removed from the apostles. Next, its content could not contradict the oral traditions which had come down from the apostles and which had not yet fully disappeared. Lastly, it had to be circulated throughout the empire and not be restricted to one region of the empire.

After considerable discussion and much haggling, the council recognized 27 documents as inspired by G-d. The New Testament also mentions some missing documents and if any of them resurfaced, they would have to reflect the same content as the 27 books of the canon. As part of the selection process, the council examined some 200 Gospels, before they settled on the four which are included in our New Testament.

Constantine thought he had his political weapon, but he was really just another talking donkey whom G-d used to speak His Word to His people. As it is, the New Testament stands as the only authentic, inerrant collection of apostolic tradition. The New Testament also recognizes the canon of the Old Testament and together they constitute the mighty sword of the Spirit, which stands as a sharp two edged sword to help us discover the real thoughts and intents of our hearts (Heb. 4:12).

Both mainline synagogues and mainline churches have strayed from the canon of the Scriptures and have sunk into a debased spirituality based on various carnal versions of the teachings of men. However, both the Old and the New Testaments have come to us virtually unchanged and still stand as a beacon of light to draw all mankind back to G-d as we wait for His coming kingdom. The sword of the Spirit is still as sharp as it ever was.

Both the New Testament and the Old Testament have many detractors who want to reject the Bible's authority and replace its teachings with various lies and strange opinions which go against our Creator and the teachings of the Messiah, His Son.

Our job is to hold firm to this singular source of spiritual authority and to make sure that none of the nonsense and darkness of the world infiltrates our hearts and minds. We possess the sword of the Spirit and we need to do regular triages in our hearts and lives so that we carefully examine what we believe and the choices we have made about how we have decided to live. If in anything, the contents of our lives contradict the Scriptures, we need to remove the junk we have absorbed and return to the truth of G-d's Word.

How is your sword doing? Is your grip of it firm and are you keeping it fresh and sharp in your life? Nothing that it teaches is optional and all that it teaches has one objective – to draw us closer to the L-rd as we learn to fully walk according to the teachings of His Word.

Despite several attempts to suppress and even destroy G-d's Word, it has come down to us intact and we have more translations available to us today, than at any time in history. Time spent studying this amazing document is time well spent and insights we acquire during the process, will guide our steps as we march boldly through the foolishness and darkness of this present age towards our eternal home, when the kingdom of our beloved Messiah finally breaks forth to dissolve the folly which mankind has absorbed for too long.

Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov (Have a good week)