

Matot / Massei “Marches” / “Journeys”

Torah Reading: Numbers 30:2 – 36:13

Haftarah Reading: I Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4

Study Notes

This week covers two parashas. The focus will be on chapters 33-36.

Israel's Journeys

- We open with a travel-log written by Moshe of all the places which the children of Israel had been since they left Egypt, a complete account of Israel's journeys for the past forty years.
- Altogether there were 42 stops. There were only twenty marches in the middle 38 years.

A Loyal Israel

- It's easy to get a picture of Israel as rebels and grumblers. Through this travel-log we can see another side. Israel loyal to trust, following their God through the wilderness in a land that was not sown, in spite of all the odds.

The Memories

- The beginning – Moshe is careful to not only mention the exodus but to show how God had judged the gods of Egypt as well.
 - The word rendered 'defiantly' means with "upraised hand".
 - God had done the whole work. Israel was able to walk out without a single military action.
- We also see Rephidim (where they lacked water and God provided), Mount Hor (where Aaron died).
- The glance back at history is also a prelude to the remaining laws in the book which deal explicitly with the land. God was about to send them in to possess it and He wanted them to know His will.

Israel's Enemies

- God told Israel they would have to completely destroy the inhabitants of the land or the consequences would be great (33:55).
- The religious systems of the Canaanites were very similar to the Egyptians. Common features were idolatry, polytheism, demonization, and occult practices.
- One of the first commands was to destroy all of their religious implements and worship places. How can that apply to your life right now?
- Some of the Canaanite gods were: El (chief god) [Hebrew and Canaanite languages were related so thus the relationship], Baal (#2 man), Yam (god of the sea). Asherah, or Athirath, or Astarte (wife of Yam). The word Easter derives from Astarte.
- The Canaanites would act out their myths as part of their worship so drunkenness and sex were common parts of their religion. Also, child sacrifice was not uncommon.

Israel's Land

- Here we see where God has defined the borders of the land of Israel. This is the first time they have been laid out specifically. We can also safely assume that the portion east of the Jordan where Gad, Reuben, and the ½ tribe of Manasseh settled are also included.

Levitical Cities

- Levitical cities – these were given instead of a land grant. There were 42 such cities. They were to look like cubes.
- In the middle were the living quarters. Then an open space separated the third cube, their fields and vineyards.
- The area of the cities was to be proportional to the land area within the specific tribe in which they were built.
- In a society where land was wealth, this minute fraction of the land meant that the Levites would still be dependent on the generosity of the other tribes. No one could claim that the priests were taking all the land and gaining wealth through their position.
- Levitical tradition says that such Levitical cities ceased to exist after the fall of the Second Temple.

Havens for Accidents

- God provided cities of refuge for those who had killed accidentally. If you had accidentally killed someone you would escape to one of these six cities and stay there.
- If you were found innocent then you could continue to live there until the death of the high priest. You could not be touched.
- If you left the city then the family could avenge the death.
- This system allowed the land to not become polluted by murder. "...blood is the most effective purifier, the only means of allotment between God and man, but in the wrong context it has precisely the opposite effect."