

#42-#43 Mattot-Massei Numbers 30:2-36:13

By Moshe Schwab

While Praying:

- * God is doing His kingdom work; He is at work powerfully. (Even if it is not so apparent.)
- * Let our good ways show the amazing goodness of God.
- * God's light is there and is beautiful. Those in darkness don't see the light.
- * God lifts His people up. They respond by being committed to Him.

Today is a double portion, Mattot and Massei. We have a few double portions because there are 54 portions during the year. There are also Shabbat portions that are dedicated to the holidays (God's feasts). How we cover the Torah can be subjective; the important thing is that we cover the basics (the Torah) every year because the prophets instituted the weekly reading. A reading schedule helps with that. We talk about the Torah in our teachings because the Torah says it gives us understanding and wisdom (Deuteronomy 4:5-6). Also, I try to talk about what I think God is leading me to talk about. I personally long to hear what God wants me to hear, and teaching what God is leading me to teach, is a way that I can accomplish that for others, and also help them to learn and grow spiritually.

Mattot means, "tribes". This Torah portion begins by talking about the keeping of vows. Vows were to be kept, but the man of the house could annul a vow. Vows to God and legal agreements are binding. Promises should be kept, but they are not binding. Sometimes something might come up. We should always try to be a people of our word. Decisions and plans are the same; they may need to be changed sometimes; we should try to follow through with our schedule and intentions and be courteous to others. Vows to God are binding, but sometimes cannot be kept because of extenuating circumstances; for example, someone who abuses their spouse. Yeshua used adultery as one of the reasons for divorce; He was addressing a specific situation in His time where men were making frivolous excuses to divorce their wives in order to commit adultery (He was not addressing all situations.).

Breaking a vow to God is sin and we must ask for forgiveness. In Yeshua's time, people were making frequent vows. They thought that they could swear by the Temple or other things and that gave them an out to not fulfill their vow. Yeshua said not to swear falsely in the Hebrew manuscripts. The Greek manuscripts are missing the word falsely. Because of the missing word in the Greek manuscripts,¹ we have people acting inordinately scrupulous. Yeshua said it is important to be a people of our word and to lead people to do what is right: "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned;" Matthew 12:35-37 NKJV. The content implies that we are to lead people to do what is right. Also, the intents of our heart should be to do what is right.

We must keep God's commandments. If we sin, we can ask God for forgiveness and we are forgiven. We must be truly sorry and determined not to do it again (1 John 1:9). Kefa (Peter) said that false teachers who teach people not to obey God's commandments will go to the lake of fire (2 Peter 2:4-11). There was no New Testament at the time; the early believers followed the Old Testament. Shaul (Paul) said the Old Testament commands have not been done away with: "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law;" Romans 3:31 NKJV. Shaul was addressing the issue of just keeping commands and man-made ritual without faith in God. That was the context of his teaching. It was a problem back then and it is wrong practice; we aren't on good terms with God by just doing commands and rituals without faith in God.

¹ The Hebrew manuscripts were put together in around 150 AD and are a valuable resource for understanding the Bible.

No one will have an excuse when they stand before God. They will stand before the Bema; that is the Greek word used for where Yeshua will judge from (2 Corinthians 5:10). The Greek word "bema" is where the Torah is read from in Jewish synagogues. People who don't teach God's commands from the Old Testament will go to the lake of fire. I am not talking about man-made commands; people sometimes end up following ritual and custom instead of God's commandments. Some Old Testament commands also have other practical application and are valid applications of the Torah. That's how we got 1,050 commands in the New Testament portion. God doesn't want anyone to go to the lake of fire, but He is a just God (2 Peter 3:9). I genuinely care about you and I don't want you to go to the lake of fire either.

Israel attacks and defeats the Midianites because the Midianites had caused the sin of Baal-Peor. Israel cleansed and divided the booty and any Midianite woman who had had sexual relations was to be killed. The tribe of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh asked to have the land east of the Jordan, but they would continue to fight until the land west of the Jordan was conquered.

Israel did not start any of its wars up to this point, but they were drawn in by people who plotted against them. The tribes of Israel that settled east of the Jordan perhaps were never supposed to be there, but that is what they chose just as Lot chose to look to the east and ended up living with the ungodly people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Was there really not enough room for both Abraham and Lot to live peaceably?

The northern tribes didn't expel all the Canaanites; perhaps because some tribes lived east of the Jordan. The northern tribes ended up worshipping idols as least in part because not all the Canaanites had been conquered. Consequently, the northern tribes became sinful and because of that they were conquered and dispersed. Perhaps this portion shows us that we should be careful what we choose. Although we can be chosen by God, what we choose might not be what's best for us. Instead, seek what God wants for us.

The portion Masei is Numbers 33:1-36:13. Masei (Mas-ay) means, "journeys". It is the last Torah portion in Numbers. This Torah portion begins by talking about the journeys of Israel. Moshe told Israel that when they crossed over the Jordan that they were to take over the land, get rid of the people who lived there and their idols, and divide the land to the tribes by lot.

They were warned if they didn't get rid of the idolatrous people in the promised land that the people there would harass Israel – they would be thorns and stings. The boundaries of Israel were given and also the leaders for the tribes to divide the land by lot. Israel was to give the Levites 48 towns and 6 were to be cities where someone who killed a person by accident could seek refuge and their case heard. Many of the original laws in the United States came from the Bible; we assume people innocent until they are proven guilty in the United States. Murderers were to be put to death, but there had to be more than one witness to a crime. Women who inherited land were to marry inside their own tribe.

God made provision for Bible teachers to live throughout Israel. In Acts 15: 20-21 NKJV, referring to the Gentiles following the Old Testament, "But that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." God's true teachers teach people to follow the Torah. Don't go to the lake of fire with false teachers who deny the Torah (2 Peter 2:4-11).

Sometimes we wonder where is God, but He is there, keeping all his creation together. He is not removed from His creation as some say. Even the tiles in our kitchen floors contain the molecules that God has created. Science has found a particle called the Higgs boson. Science says that if it wasn't for this particle, everything would just disappear. So, God created this particle to make all matter exist and God sustains

all matter to continue to exist. God is always at work including doing the work of the kingdom; He is at work powerfully (even if it is not apparent.). There are perhaps millions of miracles occurring every day. God can do that because He is God.

Sometimes God gives us examples in the natural that explain the spiritual. I once looked at a building in the beginning stages of its construction. I thought to myself; that is a picture of God at work. Spiritually speaking, we only see the girders that God has put in place, but there is a finished work of God that we do not see. Ecclesiastes 8:17 NKJV says, "Then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it."

Shaul (Paul) said, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" Romans 11:33 NKJV. Shaul says that God's wisdom and knowledge is incredible; so much so that we can't understand them. In spite of mankind's shortcomings and willfulness, the almighty powerful God reaches out to mankind to rescue us. In fact, if possible, God wants everyone to be rescued. 1 Timothy 2:4 NKJV says, "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." The word used for saved (sozo, Greek) in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *malat*² which always means rescued.

God has rescued His people and helps us so that we can live in His good ways by keeping His commandments. We should let our good ways show the amazing goodness of God. It says in Romans 12:2 NKJV, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." There is a big difference between who we are and what the worldly are like. Recently, we talked about how Balaam had an evil eye.

There is a good eye, "If there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things;" Philippians 4:8 NKJV; and there is an evil eye that is contrary to the way God wants us to view life and live life. The evil eye views things with mistrust, evil intentions, envy, resentment, and can even see others as threats. It produces greed and arrogance. Proverbs 22:9 NKJV says, "He who has a generous eye will be blessed." This is a characteristic of a good eye. Yeshua talks about the good eye and the evil eye, "Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness;" Luke 11:34 NKJV. The good eye and the evil eye are standard Jewish teachings. That is why Yeshua is talking about them. He is a Jew and the Jews were trying to follow the commandments of our almighty God Yehovah (Yehovah is His name forever the Bible says; Exodus 3:15).

I should also mention that in some cultures, people will curse others with their eyes. That can be another meaning of the term evil eye.

In Jewish thought, light is understanding. Psalms 119:130 says, "Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." God's word contains God's commandments which give us understanding and wisdom. Deuteronomy 4:5-6 NKJV, "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'" God's ways fill us with light (understanding).

² "h4422. מָלַט *mālat*; a primitive root; properly, to be smooth, i.e. (by implication) to escape." – Strong's Enhanced Dictionary. See Joel 2:32.

Shaul talks about us being a people of light (understanding). "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." Ephesians 5:8 NKJV. We were once filled with darkness, but now we can be a people of understanding who are rescued by God to keep His good ways of light. Shaul also says, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is;" Ephesians 5:15-17 NKJV. Understand what's going on, be wise and keep God's commandments, use your time well; the time we live in is evil.

Our present day hasn't changed much, but God's light is there and is beautiful. We just have to make a decision to be a people of light. God's ways should be a light to the world. "I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth." Isaiah 49:6 NKJV (the Hebrew word Yeshua-ti in this verse means, "my Yeshua (salvation);" an interesting reference to Yeshua). In Psalm 36:9 NKJV, "For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light." What a great verse. God is an endless supply of water (blessings) for life; when we are a people of light, we have understanding. In contrast, those in darkness don't see the light.

In John 9, Yeshua heals a man that is born blind. This is one of the miracles the ancient rabbis said the Messiah would do. Even in our day, it is difficult for a person to see after they have had a cornea transplant if they have never seen before. Their brain has never learned to interpret what they are seeing so they can't interpret what they are seeing. Yeshua must have healed the man's sight and brain waves; amazing! Yeshua said to the formerly blind man after he believed that Yeshua is the Messiah, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind:" John 9:39 NKJV. Yeshua came to rescue us and make us His people of light so that we see. Those who think they already have it figured out and think they see, do not see; they are blind.

God lifts His people up just as He did with the man that was born blind. Just as the blind man responded, God's people respond to God by being committed to Him. After my cousin believed, he said that God saved his life and he wanted to live a holy life. I had a miraculous healing. I was very sick and the hospital couldn't figure out what was going on. I didn't know much about God at the time, but I asked God to heal me and He did. I responded by beginning my search for Him and I found Him through the Messiah Yeshua just as the man that was born blind did. The man who was born blind was healed and believed in the Messiah Yeshua; my healing and subsequent search led me to my Messiah as well.

God is at work calling people to Him, "But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all." Matthew 12:15 NKJV. God is healing people, helping people, and leading people. Isaiah 53:5 NKJV says, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." Not only will God do marvelous works for us, we also have God's scriptures of light; God also gives the Holy Spirit to those who believe in His Messiah to help us. Yeshua said, "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father;" John 15:26 NKJV.

Kefa (Peter) said, "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call;" Acts 2:38-39 NKJV. Turn towards God (teshuvah) and accept the authority of the Messiah Yeshua (baptized). The Holy Spirit is the helper for all who are called by God; won't you receive the Holy Spirit today? God is a good God and what He gives us is amazing and good. Luke 11:13 NKJV says, "If you then, being evil,

know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Would you say a prayer with me:

God, I am making a commitment to return to you and to learn and do what you have commanded us to do. I accept the authority of Yeshua (Jesus) as the true Messiah to the world; I confess Yeshua as Lord and I believe He died for my sins (for where I fall short) so that I could be forgiven and I believe that He rose from the dead. I now ask to receive the gift of the promised Holy Spirit; I am now forgiven of my past sins; I will now live a holy life; and by continuing to live and act in faith towards you God and keep your commandments, I will receive eternal life from You. Amen.

This is the beginning of your life of understanding and wisdom. We now live out our lives everyday by learning about God and seeking Him, and keeping His commandments. This is the beginning of the process of being a people of light.

God was real and present with Israel while they were in the desert before they entered Canaan. He is a real and present powerful God who sustains all of His creation and works on behalf of His people every day. God reaches out to mankind to help us find Him and rescue us so we can demonstrate the goodness of God. We are to be a people of light and understanding through an all-knowing and good God. The blind man who Yeshua healed not only saw physically, but understood that Yeshua was the Messiah. Those that think they have it all together are often spiritually blind even though they can see physically. God will help those who believe in the Messiah through the work of the Holy Spirit. God is a good God and wants to give us good things.