

Parshas Matos – Masai – 5781

As the Israelites approached the Land of Canaan, the Promised Land, HaShem gave Moshe a commandment that the Israelites must conquer the entire land and drive out the inhabitants.

Numbers 33:53 says,

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וְהוֹרַשְׁתֶּם אֶת־כָּל־יְשֵׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵיכֶם וְאַבְדֹתֶם אֶת כָּל־מִשְׁפֵּיתָם
וְאֵת כָּל־צִלְמֵי מַסַּכְתֶּם תִּאַבְדּוּ וְאֵת כָּל־בְּמוֹתֵם תִּשְׁמִדוּ:

“You shall inherit all the inhabitants of the Land from them, you should destroy all their idols, all their images that they serve, and demolish their alters.”

How come this commandment was not given directly to Yehoshua if he was responsible for the conquering of the Land? Also, we know, that this commandment was never completed. The northern territories were never taken from the Phoenicians. In fact, Dovid Hamelech buys a lot of wood and supplies from Tsur, the ancient city of Tyre, which is located in Phoenicia (Shmuel II 5:11). The cities along the coast were not conquered until Dovid HaMelech conquered them when he was king. Additionally, it wasn't until King Dovid did it that Jerusalem fell into Israelite hands. Furthermore, even King Dovid did not drive out the inhabitants as it was a Jebusite that sold him the land for the Temple Mount (Shmuel II 24:11).

We also know that the molten images and idols were not destroyed. Dan had a priest and idols (Judges 18:31).

Further, the Gemara elaborates in Megillah 11:a, Rabbi Levi said his introduction from here: “But if you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come to pass, that those whom you allow to remain of them shall be as thorns in your eyes” (Numbers 33:55). King Saul's failure to completely annihilate Amalek allowed for the existence of his descendant Haman, who acted as a thorn in the eyes of Israel during the Purim episode.

Clearly, the inhabitants were not completely destroyed, and that almost destroyed Israel. We also know that the purpose of crossing the Jordan River was to conquer the land. The Gemara says in Sotah 34a: “that while the Jewish people were still in the Jordan River, Yehoshua said to them: Know for what purpose you are crossing the Jordan River. It is in order to drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, as it is stated: “And you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you” (Numbers 33:52).” For if they did not have this intent then the waters would not have split for the Israelites to cross.

However, we know this commandment was never fulfilled as Israel never possessed the entire land and never drove out the inhabitants completely. Not in Yehoshua’s lifetime and never afterwards.

Gur Areyeh explains that our word for “והורשתם” does not mean inheritance per se, because it says “from all the inhabitants of the Land.” They could not inherit from those living in the land. Clearly והורשתם means something else. Sifsei Chachamim says it cannot mean to “inherit.” Because it would say “וירשתם” with a Yud not a Heh. So it means “You shall oust.” Alternatively if it meant inheritance, the Torah should not have said, “Before you” because the word “before you” is not appropriate for inheritance. You cannot inherit from someone that is before you, only one that has passed.

Haemek Hadvar also says along these lines that the shoresh is “Rash” and it does not necessarily mean inherit, it can mean many other things.

Rashi explains that the word horashtem means to drive out. Ohr HaChaim similarly explains that the actual meaning of the passuk is "You are to drive out all the inhabitants of the land." Even though the Torah says in Deuteronomy 20:16 "you must not allow a single soul (of these seven nations) to survive." In this instance the Torah does not speak of the seven Canaanite

nations but about others who lived amongst them. This is the reason the Torah chose its words carefully, when it says in our verse "all the ones who dwell in the land," that the Israelites were to drive out even those people who lived there who were not members of the seven nations.

He ends off and says alternatively, the Torah refers again to a nation which the Israelites do not possess the strength to kill. At least they should ensure that they would leave the land and not remain in it.

This can mean that they must possess the land, and displace the inhabitants, those that dwelt there. Ralbag mentions that this commandment was not fulfilled, as we see multiple times in the book of Shoftim where the Israelites worshiped other idols and were constantly harassed by their neighbors.

Thus the Akeidas Yitzchak points out that it was the failure in this commandment that led the Israelites to suffering and to never really hold the land. Tolerance of the inhabitants was a direct result of them having "pins in their eyes" (Numbers 33:55). He also points out that the Torah talks about the murderer and the refugee cities immediately after this because even when there seems to be cruelty, there is justice. He says, "in discussing the nuances of awareness by the murderer of the severity of his crime, one point needs special emphasis. Any killer, however innocent, must be aware that the victim would revenge himself, were he but able to do so. For this reason, the relative of the victim can be expected to take the place of the murdered person and execute this revenge. Even the avenger, however, is duty bound to consider the killer's motivation, degree of awareness etc. Therefore, the Torah establishes some objective criteria by describing the weapon that caused the death. If the instrument of death is one that would not normally be used to commit murder, then surely the killer's intent had not been murderous. If bad blood had existed between the victim and the killer, even a harmless looking instrument might

have been rigged to become lethal. If, however, neither the instrument of death could be classified as a weapon, nor was there evidence that animosity had existed between the victim and the killer, then no criminal intent is presumed to have existed.” Even when there is the right for revenge there must be justice. And even if a relative can take revenge there must be justice for he who killed mistakenly, and that is the City of Refuge.

Just as there is justice in the criminal laws of murder, so is there justice in driving out the inhabitants of the Land. Failure to do so led to Israelites downfall.

Clearly there was intent to drive the inhabitants out as the Israelites passed the split Jordan River and it yielded for them. However, it was never fulfilled and it has haunted the Israelites and the Jewish people since. This command was not given from Moshe to Yehoshua because it was not on Yehoshua to fulfil this. It was upon all future generations. When Yehoshua died and this was not fulfilled, it was upon the rest of the Israelites to fulfill it. However, the Shoftim did not. Saul, the first king did not, and the entire Israel people almost were destroyed by a Haman, as the Gemara in Megillah pointed out. Even King Dovid did not win the north (instead he traded and received gifts from Tzur) and did not drive out the inhabitants (as he bought land from a Jebusite).

We are now facing the reality of this situation as we are entering the Nine Days, and step up our mourning over the lost Holy Temples. They were both destroyed on the Ninth of Av and the result was we were driven from the Land. We must focus and realize that we live among great outside influences. Outside influences are attractive and blind us to the heritage that HaShem wants. HaShem was clear in the Torah when He wanted us to drive out the inhabitants. Take over the land, not simply inherit it as is. Inheritance would mean having the same possession as the person previously with a mere change of hands legally. However, we were

meant to *drive them out*. The Land would be different. Physically, it would be the same boundaries. However, it would be without the idols, the foreign influence. It would be purely based on the Torah.

Even in Israel today there is the foreign influence. In our lives in exile, especially, we have the foreign influence. We must *drive out* those forces. We must not inherit our place in the world, but make it a heritage from the Torah.

As the Torah points out in the next verse, Numbers 33:53, “And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land to you to possess.” HaShem will give us the heritage and inheritance. We must drive out the foreign influences. It is very attractive to say how modern society has things to teach us. However, as justice is found in the criminal law of murder, both for the relative of the victim and for the accidental killer, so too, is there justice in focusing on the Torah and driving out all other influence. We should not fear excluding others.

May we focus on our heritage, and may we inherit the Land, drive out the foreign forces, and *possess* the Holy Land according to the Torah’s commandments. May we see the Holy Beis Hamikdash rebuilt soon.