

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Matos-Masei 5784

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Hashem gives Moshe one last task.

נָלֶם נִקְמַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֵת הַמִּדְיָנִים אַחַר תִּאָסֵף אֶל-עַמִּיךָ:

“Bnei Yisroel shall surely take revenge from the Midyanim; after that you shall be gathered to your people.” (Bamidbar 31:2).

Why did Bnei Yisroel have to “take revenge” against the Midyanim instead of just destroying them, without specifying that it was for revenge? Of all the nations that harassed Bnei Yisroel on their way to Eretz Yisroel, why was Midyan singled out for such revenge? (Moav was untouchable, Edom was left alone, and even Amalek was let be).

It is important to find out who these Midyanim were. Sarah passed away, “And Avraham took for himself an additional wife.” (Bereishis 25:1). His offspring with her included Midyan. (Ibid 25:2). The fact that Midyan was a descendant of Avraham and Bnei Yisroel was descendant of Avraham may be sufficient reason to understand why Midyan was jealous of Bnei Yisroel coming to obtain Eretz Yisroel. Still, why of all of Avraham’s other children did Midyan get jealous and get pulled so easily into this dispute between Moav and Yaakov? Moav had an issue. They should have paired up with their brothers, Amon. However, Moav was the oldest and the one that really may have had a stake in the land. Amon—while remaining an untouchable—allowed its brother to take what it thought was its.

The next logical step for Moav would be to turn to Yishmael or Esav. Yet, Yishmael and his children don’t seem to be mentioned at all in these episodes. Esav is mentioned, but Edom simply refuses entry, water, and provisions to Bnei Yisroel. (Bamidbar 20:18). Moav does not seek their aid. Curiously, Moav then goes to Midyan. The pasuk says, וַתֵּלֶד: “And she gave birth to him Zimron, Yakshon, Midan, Midyan, Yishbak, and Shuach.” (Bereishis 25:2). Midyan is fourth, not nearly the eldest and, therefore, had no stake in inheriting Eretz Yisroel. Furthermore, the Torah gives the lineage of these other children of Avraham, and only the descendants of Yakson and Midan are mentioned. Midyan was not an important inheritor.

Another question is, the pasuk says, וְלִבְנֵי הַפִּילְגִשִּׁים אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְרָהָם נָתַן אַבְרָהָם מִתְּנַת וַיִּשְׁלַחם, “And to the sons of the concubines of Avraham, Avraham gave gifts and he sent them away from Yitzchok while he was still alive, he sent them to lands in the east.” (Ibid 25:6). Avraham did not leave these children empty-handed. He gave them gifts and he sent them east. The city Midyan—where Yisro was head priest and where Moshe married Tziporah, and the people that joined Moav—is located south of Eretz Yisroel along the eastern bank of the Yom Suf (Gulf of Aqaba). In that case, this Midyan did not go east, but went south. Therefore, since Avraham’s child Midyan went east, was not an eldest, and already received other gifts, there is no reason

to assume that he is the progenitor of this city Midyan that is mentioned in Shmos and Bamidbar. Avraham's son Midyan is unrelated to this city.

Another proof that this city Midyan is not made up of the children of Avraham is Miriam and Aharon's concerns for Moshe. וַתִּדְבֹר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמִשְׁחָה עַל־אֲדֹת הָאִשָּׁה הַכַּשִּׁית אֲשֶׁר לָקַח "And Miriam and Aharon spoke in regards to Moshe, because of his Cushi wife that he married, because he married a Cushi wife." (Bamidbar 12:1). The pasuk repeats that Tziporah was a Cushi twice. If the Midyanim were Avraham's, and Yisro was from Midyan, then Miriam would be happy that Moshe found a wife from within the family. However, she was not thrilled and called her a Cushi. She could be a Cushi (from Africa) and Yisro's daughter because Yisro may not have been a Midyani, "The priest of Midyan had seven daughters." (Shmos 2:16). These daughters "returned to their father, Reuel." (Ibid 2:18). Years later, "Moshe was attending flock for Yisro, his father-in-law, priest of Midyan." (Ibid 3:1). The Torah continues to connect Yisro as priest of Midyan and his father-in-law to assure that despite his name changes (Reuel, Yaser, Yisro), we recognize who he was when Moshe married his daughter. Thus, even though we know it already, he is called "his father-in-law, priest of Midyan" almost every time. Yisro may not have been from Midyan but merely their priest at the time Moshe met him. Thus, Tziporah was not a descendant of Avraham. Both, because Yisro was not a Midyani and because the Midyanim were not Avraham's offspring. Who were they?

Yishmael settled in Ha Paran, south of Eretz Yisroel. (Bereishis 21:21). He married a woman from the "Land of Egypt." (Ibid). Not "an Egyptian" but a woman living in the area. His wife may have been a Cushi, which is just south of Egypt. Thus, Yisro, who might have been a descendant of Yishmael, can produce a Cushi daughter.

Only Yisro heeded the call and met Bnei Yisroel despite the entire area hearing of Kriyas Yam Suf. This is because he an outsider and/or was tolerant of Yisroel because of Moshe, his son-in-law. Moshe, too, was able to take revenge and not estopped by hakaros hatov. He had no hakaros hatov to the Midyanim, merely to his wife and father-in-law.

The city of Midyan were made up of Yishmaelim, near Har Paran. Where do we see that Midyan is Yishmael? When the brothers wanted to sell Yosef, they threw him in a pit. Then, וַיַּעֲבְרוּ אַנְשִׁים מִדְּיָנִים סְחָרִים וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף לַיִּשְׁמָעֵאֵלִים: "And Midyani men, merchants, passed by, and they drew him and they lifted up Yosef from the pit, and they sold Yosef to Yishmaelim." (Ibid 37:28). Who is "they" in "they sold him?" It could be the Midyanim sold him to the Yishmaelim. It also could be the brothers. Midyani merchants were passing by so the brothers went to fetch Yosef, lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the...Yishmaelim. They did not sell him to the Midyanim? They did. The pasuk is saying the people from Midyan were Yishmaelim. Potiphar bought Yosef from Yishmaelim. (Ibid 39:1). Thus, it was Yishmael that had a dispute with Yisroel, his nephew. He was eldest, he should have gotten Eretz Yisroel, not Yitzchok. Thus, Moav joined with Yishmael. That is why Hashem wanted revenge on Midyan. They bought Yosef, harassed Yitzchok, and attacked Bnei Yisroel. It was personal.