

34 – Mattot-Massei - Outline

Mattot-Massei Summary

- Mattot
 - commandments regarding oaths and vows
 - vengeance on Midian
 - agreement with 2½ tribes (trans-Jordan tribes)
- Massei
 - 42 wilderness encampments
 - boundaries of the Land
 - 42 cities and 6 Cities of Refuge given to the Levites
 - laws pertaining to the Cities of Refuge
 - conclusion to the story of the Daughters of Zelphechad

Final Preparations

- in both portions, God is clearly giving final instructions before they cross into the Promised Land
 - in a way, the story of the exodus and the formation of Israel ends here at the conclusion of the book of Bamidbar, since Deuteronomy is Moses' restatement of the Torah; this is a kind of ending point
 - Deuteronomy is sometimes called the "beginning of the Oral Torah"

Placing Mattot-Massei

- meaning of the names
 - "Mattot" = "tribes/branches/staffs"
 - "Massei" = "the journeys of"
- "Mattot"
 - two ways to say "tribe" in the Torah, each also meaning "branch," (the tribes are branches from the trunk of the patriarchs and matriarchs) but each carrying different connotations
 - "shevet" is a branch that is still supple, filled with the sap of life (still connected to the tree or freshly cut)
 - "matteh" is a branch that is cut and has dried out, becoming hard, no longer having the sap and the connection to the root
 - this might seem entirely negative, but we need to see that "matteh" is a stage of development; it's a goal for us to become independent and to find our set place of service
 - connection between "mattot" and "massei:" the walking stick and the journey
- The Exile of Mattot-Massei
 - How do these two relate?
 - first, we are cut loose from our roots, and then we journey with God; it's the journey of adulthood

- if we're walking with the Lord, we will grow stronger and stronger over the course of that journey, and we will achieve the fixed form that we are meant to have, a specific role in the world
- these ideas can all be summed up with one word, one important biblical concept: exile
 - exile is both a punishment that cleanses and the forge that strengthens us; it's a regular part of development that goes hand-in-hand with maturity
- more evidences that the subtext in these portions is exile
 - this is what the rabbis tell us:
 - R' Raskin: When the Jewish people were in Israel, or they were united in the desert, at that time they were called 'shevatim' because they were still connected to the source, and they still retained the moisture and the sap of the tree of Moses and the forefathers. However, when a Jew goes into golus,...into exile, they are compared...to a stick, a staff that is dried out, because they could no longer recall their roots and they no longer feel the sap and the moisture of their heritage" (https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2639844/jewish/Parshah-Mnemonics-Matot.htm 2m)
 - strangely, both the haftarah and the Brit Chadashah are filled with rebuke, which seems to be a strange choice for portions that are looking ahead to the settling of the Land
 - the calendar pushes us toward exile: these portions are read during the Three Weeks, which we now find ourselves in; these weeks open and close with fasts connected to the exile story, the breaching of Jerusalem's walls (17th of Tammuz) and the destruction of both the Temples (9th of Av)

Going Deeper Into Exile

- it's among the most important themes in Scripture
- again, it's both cleansing from sin and the context for the final stages of growth in the development process
 - it exists to be overcome, transcended
- it's a time when God is hidden somewhat, as in the Purim story; this hiding allows us to be immersed in a much more physical environment, a much darker environment
 - this is our opportunity to shine in the darkness, our opportunity to prove ourselves faithful when we tested by a hostile environment, like Daniel
- exile is not necessarily connected to the Land of Israel
 - Israel can be in exile even while they are in the Land
 - as is currently happening – the continuing Roman exile, even while the nation is reconstituted in the Land
 - during one of the four exiles, the Greek exile, Israel was in the Land, but they were ruled by Greece, which was imposing its culture on them
- the essence of exile

- exile is any movement from a place of spirituality and light to a place of greater physicality and darkness; golus happens any time we take a step into deeper darkness and settle there, a relative thing
 - the Greek worldview partly emphasized physicality, the glorification of the human body
 - for Israel, a step into the darkness of physicality
 - today: the current exile of Rome will continue until the large portion of secular Israelis turn wholeheartedly to God; they are in the Land, but the hearts of the secular Jews are in Rome
 - the rebuilding of the Temple is simply how the turning of the whole nation's heart to truth will be reflected
- God's design on every level
 - we are always moving from light to dark and back again: daily, monthly, yearly, each of which have a light side and a dark side; it's God's design
 - the physical and the darkness are not inherently evil
 - in fact, we are to embrace our physical home in order to elevate it for spiritual purposes, and, thereby, make a home for God here as we become echad with Him here
 - the fact that we are constantly entering the darkness shows us that exile is an inevitable and good part of the process of maturity
- this idea of exile being an entering into physicality is how it can be that these Torah portions that are looking ahead to the settling of the Land have exile as their subtext, somewhat ironically
 - the wilderness is a place of comparative light and nearness to God; therefore, for this generation born in the wilderness, they are STEPPING DOWN into physicality as they settle the Land
 - Kehot Chumash on Masei: "The safe and sequestered life of the desert, of seclusion in a totally spiritual environment, naturally encourages spiritual growth. Of course, it is possible to stagnate in a spiritual environment as well, but **the main challenge to remaining spiritually alive is in the settled land of mundane, material living**" (p. 207).
 - the Land is a place of the mundane, the place of permanent homes and fields allotted to each family and sowing and reaping rather than receiving each morning the bread of heaven from the hand of God
 - the final stage of development for this generation
- exile in the calendar
 - the energy of exile is especially associated with the "dark" half of the year, starting in the 7th month, when the night starts to dominate the day
 - the energy of exile is obviously already present earlier in the year, however (in a beginning form)
 - winter is when God takes a step back, allowing us to shine in the darkness, maturity

- in Israel’s history, we see them maturing as a people for the final two thousand years of human history as we know it, IN EXILE, the exile of Rome – exile is the context for becoming mature
- why are we talking about exile now, in the fourth month?
 - the portions are looking ahead
 - secondly, we’re getting the seeds of exile now
 - the nights are already getting longer, since the summer solstice (end of June)
 - the energy has shifted to the darkness growing rather than the light
 - each season has some kind of harvest, which means seed
 - right now it’s the grape harvest (starts in June in Israel)
 - crushed grape is associated with blood and death, separation, and exile is a kind of death, but one whose goal is life and joy
 - Yeshua compares wine to blood: “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood,” (Luke 22:20)
- everyone in exile for a lifetime on earth
 - one more layer for exile from the broadest perspective: when our spirit left the heavenly realm and entered into our bodies, it went into exile because it left the realm of light and spirituality and entered the realm of the darkness of physicality
 - we are all becoming experts in thriving in exile, taking the broken pieces and putting them back together, making echad
 - we are all becoming stronger as we stand up for Him in this darkness
 - Kehot Chumash (Mattot): “Spiritually, *shevet* can be considered to refer to the soul before it descended into the body, when it was fully conscious of Divinity and its own connection to its source. *Mateh* would then refer to the soul as it has entered the body and lost this conscious connection—at least temporarily—and been charged with elevating the body and the portion of reality under its purview. In such a state, we must evince the inflexibility of a hardened stick in our devotion to principles and resistance to evil. If successful, we can face the challenges of life confidently and proceed to fulfill our purpose on earth and make reality into the home for God it was intended to be.” (p. 187)

Lessons on Thriving in Exile from Mattot-Massei

- On Vows
 - what might prevent us from keeping a vow? When we take our eye off the realm of truth, the spiritual, and place our focus on the physical, we start to doubt, and we may break a vow to God
 - exile being a more physical place, one way to thrive in exile is to stay focused on the spiritual; we fill our lives with truth, with Torah and friends and community who also see what’s real
 - a second lesson from vows: vows can have great power to help us when we fall into the pit

- when we realize how seriously God takes vows, and when we see the serious consequences of breaking vows to Him, we can be highly motivated to stay on the path of the vow
 - this could be helpful for someone stuck in addiction, for example
 - note that Paul apparently took at least two Nazirite vows, one recorded in Acts 18, and the second in Acts 21
- Vengeance on Midian
 - “Midian” means “strife,” and the Sages have connected it to the idea of “baseless hatred”
 - baseless hatred is what the Sages say caused the destruction of the second Temple
 - factions such as the Sadducees and Pharisees fighting – filled with hatred that, in the end, had very little foundation
 - lesson for exile: do whatever you can to get along with your brothers and sisters who are journeying in exile with you; focus on what you have in common rather than what you don’t have in common; focusing on differences leads to baseless hatred
 - thriving in exile is about putting pieces back together, not focusing on the petty differences that divide us
- The 2½ Tribes
 - again, we need to have grace for each other in this journey of exile
 - it’s not easy, this life – fraught with many obstacles and temptations and ways to get a bit off track
 - don’t cut people off just because they made a decision that you can see perhaps lacked wisdom
 - you might be wrong
 - in this case, there was something deep in these tribes that was calling them to those territory east of the Jordan – all were first sons of their mothers, including the tribe of Dan that would later settle on that side
 - was it a weakness to settle for an adjacent land, or were they maybe being brave to protect the rest, like a big brother sometimes does?
 - their decision was between each of them and God; it’s far too complex for us
 - recognize that everyone won’t have a portion that looks like yours, even if they are from the same family
 - offer advice if they ask for it, but after the decision is made, accept it; stay connected if possible, as long as you are not dragged down
- Cities of Refuge
 - this topic has a clear connection to exile: the one who accidentally kills becomes an exile, leaving the former life behind to flee to a City of Refuge
 - God is watching how we extend grace to each other while in exile because, at least partly, the way we extend grace to each other is how He will extend grace to us

- from the Brit Chadashah reading: “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also Who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”” (Mark 11:25)
- the Cities of Refuge are both training tools for extending grace and barometers for how Israel is doing
 - there is some sacrifice involved in providing for such a “refugee”

A Salvation Pattern Reading of the Daughters of Zelophechad

- this interpretation comes from Grant’s Joshua 16-17 teaching (<https://bethtikkun.com/joshua-16-17/>)
- first note that it’s meaningful that this ending point of the four books is the story of 5 brides who get their inheritance
 - we are the bride; the end of the story is that the bride gets the inheritance of echad with HaShem
- the five fathers reveal a descent into the pit, while the five daughters show the climb of restoration:
 - Manasseh: forgetful – a purposeful forgetting because you’ve chosen to forget
 - Machir: sold (point of separation)
 - Gilead: a hard, stony region
 - Hefer: pit (place of confinement – result of sin and death)
 - Zelophechad: literally – “wounded echad,” the idea of “fracture” (lowest point)

The daughters will take us from that low place to a place of restoration.

- Machlah: illness/disease (identifying the disease – sin)
- Noah: motion, movement (start moving- esp. repentance)
- Hoglah: partridge/little leaps
- Milchah: journey/queen (journey of healing, ends in echad with the King)
- Tirzah: beauty/pleasantness (beauty is esp. two opposites coming together)

Yeshua

- Where is Yeshua in our exile?
 - He is our leader in exile
 - exile is particularly associated with the portion of the calendar where the darkness comes to dominate the daylight, starting in the 7th month
 - Yeshua likely came near Sukkot, in the 7th month, “tabernacling among us”
 - if coming to earth is a form of exile for our spirits, then who better to lead us through exile than the One Who also came to this place of exile?
 - Yeshua is our example of how to perfectly elevate every aspect of this material world because He “fulfills” the Torah, showing how to apply it in a balanced way to every aspect of the physical world, every part of our mundane lives
 - Yeshua embraced the physical world – for spiritual purposes
 - like His embrace of Zacchaeus to bring him into the kingdom
 - like His acceptance of Mary’s precious gift of the oil for the spiritual purpose of anointing Him for burial

34 – Mattot-Massei – Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and the Spiritual Seasons series, where we are exploring how the Torah portions fit into the pattern of salvation in the year. This week we are in the double portion of Mattot-Massei, the final seven chapters of Numbers.

Parsha Mattot begins with Moses talking to the heads of the tribes, which is where the name comes from. “Mattot” is one of the Hebrew words for “tribes.” Moses tells the tribal heads various commandments related to making oaths and vows to the Lord. We saw a number of commandments in Leviticus establishing that God will not be treated lightly by human beings. You can’t dedicate an animal to God, for example, and then decide to substitute another animal. Both become holy. You can’t make a vow to God and then go back on it. That’s not how you treat God. For men, if they make a vow, that’s it. It’s final. Women, however, have a layer of authority between themselves and God, and that is the men. God gives certain cases in which men have permission to annul the vow of a daughter or wife.

In the next chapter, God instructs Moses to take vengeance on Midian. The combined nations of the Midianites and Moabites had taken Balaam’s advice to seduce Israel into idolatry, resulting in a plague that killed thousands. Moses musters 1,000 fighting men from each tribe, taking 12,000 into battle against Midian, with Phinehas leading. They completely decimate the Midianites, acquiring much wealth in the process.

The final topic in Mattot is the agreement with Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh that they can receive their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan provided that the men cross over with the other tribes to fight for the Land.

“Massei” means “the journeys of.” The portion begins with a recounting of the various encampments in the 40-year wilderness journey, 42 stops in all. Grant points out that we, too, make a 42-stop journey every day that we say the Shema, because the main part of the Shema is composed of 42 words in Hebrew.

Next in Massei we have the enumeration of the boundaries of the Land, the commandment to give the Levites cities with surrounding pasturelands. Interestingly, the Levites are given 42 cities. They’re also given 6 Cities of Refuge, for a total of 48. The laws pertaining to Cities of Refuge are also given here.

The final topic in the whole book is the conclusion of the story of the daughters of Zelophehad. They had previously asked if they could inherit their father’s portion in the Land because he had no sons. An allowance was made for them, provided they marry within their father’s tribe. Here, we learn that they all married within their father’s clan so that they could receive the inheritance and also keep that inheritance from shifting to another tribe.

Final Preparations

Well, there's certainly a lot happening in this double portion! Before we go deeper with these portions, let's notice that in both of these parshas God is clearly giving final instructions and leading the nation through final preparations before they cross the river and head into the Land. God again tells Moses before he sends the nation against Midian that after this battle, he will be gathered to his people. The death of Moses will be the end of this era for the nation.

In a way, the story of the exodus ends here at the conclusion of the book of Bamidbar. The final book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, is a bit different than the first four. It's a long speech that Moses delivers to the people over the course of some days while they are camped on the east side of the Jordan. Deuteronomy is Moses' repetition of the Torah. It's actually sometimes called the beginning of the Oral Torah. So here we come to the end of the four books of Torah that detail the formation of the Jewish people.

Placing Mattot and Massei

As we turn now to connecting these portions to the calendar, let's start with going a bit deeper with the meaning of the names. As we said earlier, one meaning of "mattot" is "tribes" and "massei" essentially means "journeys." We'll see that these two names fit closely together, as would be expected from two portions that are in most years read together. Let's start with "mattot."

There are two ways to say "tribe" in the Torah; in some situations, they are called "shevatim" and in others "mattot." The two carry different connotations. Both of these words also mean "branch." The tribes are branches that grow from the trunk of the patriarchs and matriarchs. But the two words describe two different kinds of branches. A "shevet" is a branch that is still supple, still flexible because it still has the sap of life in it. It is either still attached to the tree or has just recently been cut off of it. A "matteh," on the other hand, is a cut branch that has dried out. It no longer has sap in it and has become hardened; the connection to the trunk and the roots is absent. This might seem negative, and it is in a way, but in another way, the matteh is really the goal of the shevet. The goal is not to stay attached to the tree and just keep getting bigger there for no reason. The purpose is to eventually be cut off when the time is right so that the wood can be used by a human being. When the wood becomes hard, its shape is fixed permanently, but it becomes strong enough to be leaned upon, so it becomes the tool a person needs to take a journey. Matteh speaks to separation, but it also speaks to maturity and finding one's set place to contribute in the world.

So there's a connection here between "mattot" and "massei," the walking stick and the journey. Somehow, "mattot" and "massei" are really two sides of one coin, as would be expected from two portions read together.

The Exile of Mattot-Massei

How do the "cut off stick" and the "journey" relate? Well, first we are cut loose from our roots, to some degree, and then we journey with God. It's the journey of adulthood that we're talking about. We have to be cut loose from the family as we journey into adulthood. And if we're walking with the Lord, we will grow stronger and stronger over the course of that journey in the dark world, and we will achieve the fixed form that we are meant to have, which is a specific role in this world.

The ideas I'm describing here connected to these words "mattot" and "massei" can all be collected together under one important word, one concept we encounter over and over again in Scripture: exile. We're going to do a bit of a deep dive into this biblical idea of "exile" today, and part of what I want us to see is that yes, exile is a place of correction, but it's much more than that; it's also our final growth stage. It's both a punishment that cleanses us and the forge that strengthens us. Exile goes hand-in-hand with maturity; it's a regular part of the development process. And we'll talk about why we're reading about this idea now in the calendar.

Before we move forward, though, let's do a little more work establishing that the subtext here in these portions actually is about exile. In fact, this is what the rabbis tell us about these portions. R' Raskin, in discussing Mattot, says, "When the Jewish people were in Israel, or they were united in the desert, at that time they were called 'shevatim' because they were still connected to the source, and they still retained the moisture and the sap of the tree of Moses and the forefathers. However, when a Jew goes into golus,...into exile, they are compared...to a stick, a staff that is dried out, because they could no longer recall their roots and they no longer feel the sap and the moisture of their heritage" (https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2639844/jewish/Parshah-Mnemonics-Matot.htm 2m). So, in this quote, R' Raskin is connecting this word "mattot" to exile. By doing that, he's saying that the entire portion and even the double portion is about exile.

Speaking of evidence pointing us toward the theme of exile here, did you notice that both the haftarah and the Brit Chadashah readings are strangely reprimanding? Jeremiah 2 is one long rebuke of Israel for straying, and Mark 11 contains another account of Yeshua overturning tables at the Temple and speaking words of strong rebuke. What are the sages seeing in these portions that is leading them to choose a haftarah portion of rebuke? On the surface, Mattot and Massei seem quite positive, looking ahead to the life in the Land, final instructions, a recounting of the wilderness journey, delineation of the borders, the laws of inheriting land. The haftarah connection seems unclear, unless you see how critical it is that God chooses to use the word "mattot" here instead of "shevatim."

Another push that we have in the direction of focusing on exile here is the calendar. It could be that the calendar was one of the prime considerations for choosing the Jeremiah passage as the haftarah. These portions are read during the Three Weeks, which we now find ourselves in the middle of. Once again, the Three Weeks start with the Fast of the 17th of Tammuz and end with the fast of the 9th of Av. These fasts, along with the others that have been added to the calendar, progressively tell the story of...you guessed it, exile. The 17th of Tammuz remembers the breaching of Jerusalem's walls by the Romans, and the 9th of Av is the day that both the Temples were destroyed. These are two important steps in the process of being taken into exile. So the calendar is also pushing us to see exile in these portions that are read during the 3 Weeks.

Going Deeper Into Exile

Let's spend some more time thinking about this important idea of "golus" now, "exile." It's among the most dominant themes in Scripture. And I think we miss something important when we approach the idea as being mere punishment and suffering. With God, there is no such thing as mere punishment. Certainly exile is a kind of death, and death has been our main topic for these

summer Torah portions. But as we have been saying, death is the doorway of new life. Again, exile is the context for the FINAL GROWTH STAGE. Exile exists to be overcome, to be transcended, and as we overcome it even while we're in it, it becomes our best classroom and our best means of being drawn near to God. Exile is a time when God has hidden Himself a bit, as in the Purim story. This hiding allows us to be immersed in a much more physical environment, a much darker environment. And that's our great opportunity to shine in the darkness. It's our chance to be tested and to prove ourselves faithful in that testing. It's one thing to be faithful to God when you're surrounded by Believers, but it's quite another to stay faithful when almost everyone around you is pushing you to deny Him, even threatening you and persecuting you. The prophet Daniel and his friends had to stand up to the dominant culture while in exile time and time again, and they grew into spiritual giants as they did so.

Let's go a couple of layers deeper into this idea of exile now as we try to connect the ideas in these portions to the concept of golus. The discussion is going to get a bit in the weeds here, but it's an important one because exile is an important element in the yearly calendar and God's overall pattern of salvation.

One aspect we need to recognize about exile that I don't think we generally do understand is that exile is not necessarily connected to the Land of Israel. That is to say, Israel can be in exile even while they are in the Land. Golus doesn't necessitate leaving the Land. Let me give a couple examples of this. The Jewish people in our times have been recollecting in the Land, yet everyone says this long Roman exile continues. Why? Because outside forces are still ruling over Israel both in terms of the secular Israelis and in terms of Israel's inability to re-build the Temple. It is said that the rebuilding of the Temple is what will bring the 2,000-year-long Roman exile to a close. Here's another example: one of the 4 exiles is the exile of Greece, which we read about in the Hanukkah story. Was Israel taken captive to Greece during this time? No. They remained in the Land, but they were ruled by Greece at the time, and Greece was imposing the Greek culture on Israel.

So if exile is not dependent on geographic location, what is the essence of it? This is important: exile is any movement from a place of spirituality and light to a place of greater physicality and darkness. Golus happens any time we take a step into deeper darkness and settle there. It's a relative thing. When Israel was being ruled by Greece, Greece was imposing its worldview on the nation, and that worldview included a great emphasis on the glorification of the human body. For Israel, this was a step into the darkness of the physical even though they remained in the Land. In this case, the darkness came to them. In our own day, the current golus of Rome continues because a large portion of Israel is secular. They might be in the Land, but their hearts are in Rome, with all of Rome's sensuality and slavery to the flesh. The rebuilding of the Temple is just the outcome that will happen when the hearts of the Israeli people are unified as one to stand against the world culture and embrace the truth.

Now, you might say that we are always moving from light to the darkness and back to the light again. Indeed, this is very natural for us. We do this every day and every month and every year. Each of these has a light side and a dark side. Entering the darkness is part of God's design on every level. The physical and the darkness are not inherently evil. Aren't we supposed to embrace the physical

world God has created for us? We are hybrid creatures that are both spiritual and physical. We are not meant to shun the physical. On the contrary, we are meant to fully embrace the physical so that we can raise it up, elevate it, to use it for spiritual purposes and, in that way, make this physical stuff into a home for God as we become echad with Him here. In other words, we are supposed to embrace the physical world so that we can elevate it, and we grow in that process. The fact that we are constantly doing this shows us that exile is an inevitable and good part of the process of maturity.

And so this idea of exile being an entering into physicality is how it can be that these Torah portions that are looking ahead to the settling of the Land have exile as their subtext, somewhat ironically. Exile is a comparative thing. FOR THE GENERATION THAT IS BORN IN THE WILDERNESS, entering the Land is entering into the veil of the physical. The Kehot Chumash commentary on parsha Masei says, “The safe and sequestered life of the desert, of seclusion in a totally spiritual environment, naturally encourages spiritual growth. Of course, it is possible to stagnate in a spiritual environment as well, **but the main challenge to remaining spiritually alive is in the settled land of mundane, material living**” (p. 207). The Kehot Chumash is saying here that you can grow spiritually in the elevated wilderness, but you’ll grow even more when you are challenged more by the mundane life in the Land.

And so at the end of the book of Bamidbar, we are looking forward to Israel’s entrance into the Land, and for this generation that has grown up in the spiritual training ground of the wilderness, ironically, they are preparing for exile, the exile of the mundane, the place of permanent homes and fields allotted to each family and sowing and reaping rather than receiving each morning the bread of heaven from the hand of God. The challenge for this generation is TO STEP DOWN from the exalted state of the wilderness and into the relative darkness of the Land and cleanse it and elevate it. That is the final stage of development for this generation. I know it’s a bit hard to wrap our heads around the idea that moving into the Land can be a kind of exile. For this generation, that is the case. The testings will be very different for them in the Land, and the growth they experience there is the growth of maturity.

If exile is associated with entering the darkness, then that’s a clue to where we especially find the energy of exile in the calendar because the yearly calendar has a bright side and a dark side. The dark half of the year, starting in the 7th month, is when the length of the night is greater than the length of the day, so that’s when the energy of exile is starting to dominate, though it’s obviously already present before the 7th month. And haven’t we been saying that the second half of the year is when we are achieving maturity? That is when God has taken a step back from us, having put on His winter clothing. Speaking of exile as a LATTER stage of development, look at Israel’s history. Why is it that the final two millennia of Israel’s historical development has had to occur in this Roman exile? It’s because exile is the context for becoming mature. And it must be this way because in the first half we are first becoming accountable to the Torah. It is in the second half that our walk in the Torah gets corrected. First we have to set about trying to walk in it before God can bring correction to that walk.

Well, if golus is emphasized in the second half of the calendar, why are we talking about it now in the fourth month? For one thing, these portions are looking ahead to the settling of the Land. But secondly, we're getting the seeds of exile now. In fact, the daily darkness actually started growing at the summer solstice near the end of June. The nights are now becoming longer, though they are not dominating the day yet. But the energy now has shifted in the year such that the darkness grows each day. We're not at the point where the night dominates, but we have the seeds of that now.

Every season has some kind of harvest, which means the bringing in of some kind of seed. And the physical harvest associated with these months, the seed that is literally coming in now in Israel, is the grape harvest. What do grapes have to do with anything? It's truly amazing to see how all these details work together. Grapes are crushed to make wine. The crushed grape is symbolic of blood and death, and exile is a kind of death, though its end goal is life and joy, the joy of Purim. Yeshua says, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood," (Luke 22:20), meaning the blood He was about to shed in death was the inauguration of the New Covenant. He compares His blood to a cup of wine made from the crushed grape. And so we are now experiencing the early beginnings of exile in the calendar, seeds that will produce something greater over time.

Let's add one more layer to the topic of exile. Zooming out to the broadest perspective, for all of us, when our spirit left the heavenly realm and entered into our bodies, it went into exile because it left the realm of light and spirituality and entered the realm of the darkness of physicality. The mystics call this place, this world, the realm of separation, though our task here is to put the pieces back together here and make it a place of echad. In other words, from one perspective, our entire life here on earth is a journey of exile. And can't you feel that in your bones? We are all becoming experts here in the life of THRIVING in exile, the life of putting the broken pieces back together. And we know that God strengthens us in our walk here as we are separated to a degree from our Source, which is Him. In fact, in this exile of earth, we are becoming stronger and stronger the longer we are separated from our Source just like a stick does as it continues to dry out. If we are walking with Him here, then we grow stronger as we stand up for Him in the darkness.

Let me just finish this section with another brief quote from the Kehot Chumash which also makes this point that our souls are in a place of exile on earth: "Spiritually, *shevet* can be considered to refer to the soul before it descended into the body, when it was fully conscious of Divinity and its own connection to its source. *Mateh* would then refer to the soul as it has entered the body and lost this conscious connection—at least temporarily—and been charged with elevating the body and the portion of reality under its purview. In such a state, we must evince the inflexibility of a hardened stick in our devotion to principles and resistance to evil. If successful, we can face the challenges of life confidently and proceed to fulfill our purpose on earth and make reality into the home for God it was intended to be" (Mattot, p. 187).

Lessons on Thriving in Exile from Mattot-Massei

Changing gears just a bit, let's ask the practical question, if these portions at the end of Bamidbar are speaking to us about this wilderness generation going into a kind of exile as they go into the Land, what does this list of topics in these portions have to teach us about thriving in exile?

On Vows

Let's start with the topic of vows. What gets in the way of us keeping a vow to the Lord? It's when we take our eye off the realm of truth, the spiritual, and we place our focus on the physical that we begin to doubt and we forsake a vow. When God says, "You absolutely must keep your vows to Me," one thing He's saying is, "Don't take your eye off what's real. Don't let the tangible world flood in and overwhelm you. Stay faithful." So, lesson number one for thriving in the exile of the physical world: keep your eye on what's real. And we do that by filling our lives with truth, with Torah and with friends and teachers and community who also see what's real.

Let me just add here that a vow holds great power, and vows can, in fact, be used to strengthen us. When we recognize how seriously God takes our vows to Him, when we realize the great consequences of breaking a vow to Him, then we can find a powerful motivation for staying on the path of the vow. For someone struggling with addiction, for example, this can be very helpful. So this is another lesson about vows: if you find that in your exile, you really slip into the belly of the pit, a temporary extra vow to the Lord along with prayers that He would help to give strength to fulfill the vow, can be a lifeline, though it's a pretty extreme move. Let's note from the book of Acts that the Apostle Paul apparently took two Nazirite vows for two different reasons – and those are just the ones we know about. We read about the first in Acts 18, when he cuts his hair at Cenchreae because, we are told, he was under a vow, though we are given no further information about it. And we read about him taking a second vow in Acts 21 when the elders wanted him to show that he was not standing against the Torah.

Vengeance on Midian

Let's take another topic, God's commandment to take vengeance on Midian. "Midian" means "strife," "contentiousness." Israel decimates this enemy. The Sages specifically connect Midian to the idea of "baseless hatred." Israel had done nothing to provoke Midian in the affair of Peor. Their hatred of Israel had no good basis. Now, "baseless hatred" is also what the Sages say caused the destruction of the second Temple, which is connected to the 9th of Av and the cycle of exile. So this topic of Midian has strong connections to exile. Yeshua's generation was one that was fighting internally between such groups as the Pharisees and Sadducees. Yeshua had many harsh words for them.

Here's a lesson for thriving in exile: do whatever you can to get along with your brothers and sisters who are journeying in exile with you. Focus on what you have in common rather than what you don't have in common. Focusing on the differences tends to lead to baseless hatred. Let your thinking be filled with grace toward your fellow travelers. R' Raskin tells a joke that applies as equally to the Christian world as the Jewish world. A single Jewish man is the lone survivor of a shipwreck. He swims to a deserted island. Years later, when he is rescued, he proudly shows his rescuers the wonderful structures he managed to build using the simple materials available to him, including not one but *two* synagogues. "Two synagogues?" questioned a rescuer. "Why did you need two?" "The first was for me to pray in," said the man, "And the second was the one I'll never step foot in."

We fracture for so many stupid reasons. Exile is about putting pieces back together, not the petty differences that divide us. Find a way to make it work, partly for your own survival. We're stronger

when we are together. Recognize that much of our internal hatred is baseless and show no mercy to that internal enemy.

The 2½ Tribes

On the topic of the settling of the 2½ tribes east of the Jordan, the point I want to make here is again that we need to have grace for each other in this journey of exile. It's not easy. It's a journey fraught with many obstacles, many temptations, many trials, many ways to get a bit off track. Don't cut people off just because they made a decision that you can see perhaps lacked wisdom. First of all, maybe you're the one that's wrong. Clearly there was something deeply seated in these tribes that pulled them to the territory east of the Jordan. What they all have in common is that they are the firstborn of their mothers, including Dan, who later at least partly settles east of the Jordan alongside Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. There are deep movements of the soul at work here that we are not privy to. Does their decision reflect a fault in them, a kind of baser attraction to that which is lower, a willingness to settle for a lesser goal? Or does it reflect maybe a kind of bravery to be the wall of defense for the rest of the nation? I think it's probably both, and more, and maybe it's not the same for each tribe. But one thing I know for sure is that it's ultimately between each of them and their God. We need to recognize that not everyone's portion in this life is supposed to look just like ours, even if we're talking about close family. We can offer some advice, particularly when we are asked for it, but after the decision is made, just do what you can to stay connected as long as you are not in danger of being dragged down by them, yourself. Offer a hand when its needed, and accept a hand from them, too, when you need it. In that way, you stay connected to them.

Cities of Refuge

Lastly here, let's think about the Cities of Refuge in this context. What can we learn about exile from them? This topic has perhaps the clearest connection to the idea of exile. The one who has accidentally killed and has to drop everything he or she has known and flee to a city of refuge is one who is in exile. What is this topic teaching us here? I think it's teaching us that God is watching how we extend grace to each other while in exile because, at least partly, the way we extend grace to each other is how He will extend grace to us. Through the commandments regarding Cities of Refuge, God gives us an opportunity to extend life to the one who God, Himself, has brought to a place of falling. I think maybe the main way we should read these special cities is that they are both a teaching tool for grace and a barometer for how Israel is extending grace inwardly. Are they doing this or not? Through the Cities of Refuge, God is saying, "Go out of your way to make a path back to life for this one who, mostly through no fault of their own, is in exile. And as you sacrifice for these people, watch how I will bless you by making the way to life open for you, too."

We find in the Brit Chadashah reading for this portion this idea that God will mirror to us what we are doing to our brothers and sister. In Mark 11, Yeshua says, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also Who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."" (Mark 11:25)

A Salvation Pattern Reading of the Daughters of Zelophechad

Before we close with a word directly about Yeshua, it's time to bring out another salvation pattern progression from the portion in the story of the daughters of Zelophechad. On this topic, let's first notice that it's not an accident that this end of Bamidbar, this first ending of the story of the exodus journey, details how five brides receive their inheritance. WE ARE THE BRIDE. In the second half of the salvation pattern, the groom and the bride finally unite and go about the business of becoming echad. This is the true inheritance of the bride. It's not fully realized until the end, and here we have this story of women achieving their inheritance, and it is literally the final topic in these first four books of the Torah.

This salvation pattern that emerges from the text here actually comes to us from Grant, who taught it in his Joshua 16 and 17 teaching many years ago (<https://bethtikkun.com/joshua-16-17/>). I'll put it in my own words, but if you're interested, I'll link to that Grant teaching below the video. I'm not going to spend a lot of time here, as simply reading out the meanings of the names is basically enough.

Grant walks us through the salvation story through not only the names of the five daughters of Zelophechad but also the male lineage that introduces them. The five male ancestor names lead us through a fall and a slide into a very low place. The names of the five daughters will walk us through the restoration.

The ancestors, starting with the oldest, are Manasseh, Machir, Gilead, Hefer and Zelophechad. Manasseh means forgetful – a purposeful forgetting because you've chosen to forget. This is the beginning of the fall. Machir means "sold," which is the point of separation and death. Gilead means "a hard, stony region" and "Hefer" means "pit," the uncomfortable and confined life that is the result of sin and death. Finally, "Zelophechad" literally means "wounded echad," the idea of fracture. This is the point of greatest distance from God.

Now we begin the climb with the five daughters. "Machlah" means "illness" or "disease." We can see this as identifying the sin problem. "Noah" here means "motion" or "movement." Once the problem is recognized, start moving, particularly down on your knees in repentance. "Hoglah" means "partridge," which seems a bit mysterious at first, but Grant points out that it also means "little leaps." We're starting to be able to make real progress. "Milchah" means "journey" and it also means "queen." Now that we've learned how to move, we embrace that healing journey, the journey that leads to an intimate marriage to the king, becoming a queen. "Tirzah" means "beauty" and "pleasantness." Beauty is the result of two opposites coming together in perfect balance. Tirzah speaks to the end goal of echad.

And you thought it was just a list of 10 names! God's Word is a wonder. We will never get to the bottom of it.

Yeshua

Finally, turning to Yeshua now, let's ask where Yeshua is in our exile? Yeshua is our leader in exile. Recall that exile is particularly associated with the portion of the calendar where the darkness comes to dominate the daylight, the winter half of the year. And when did Yeshua come? He likely came near Sukkot, in the 7th month, tabernacling among us. He comes at the beginning of the

darkness. And He leads us through it. If coming to earth is a form of exile for our spirits, then Who better to lead us through this exile than the One Who also came to this place of exile?

Yeshua is our example of how we perfectly elevate every aspect of this material world. This is because it is through Yeshua that the Torah is fulfilled, meaning that it is through Yeshua that the Torah is applied to all aspects of our mundane lives, the application of the Torah to its fullest extent. When we have a question about how to express truth and love, which is Torah, in some mundane aspect of our lives, we first ask that question that was once popular on bracelets, “What would Jesus do?” In Yeshua’s example, we see the balanced walk, the walk that both embraces everything kosher this physical world has to offer but always with a spiritual intention in mind. He went to dine with a rich tax collector named Zacchaeus, this one who was surrounded by deep physicality, and He was criticized for that. But Yeshua didn’t shy away from that physicality, that table of food and wine. But He went into that place for a spiritual reason, in service to the kingdom of God as He brought salvation to that home. Yeshua allowed a jar made of alabaster and filled with costly oil to be broken and poured upon Him, and He was again criticized. He answered that what Mary had done was anoint Him for burial, the grand spiritual purpose for this physical extravagance.

Well, that’s all for today. Thank you for listening. May God make us a people who follow Yeshua through the exile of this life, a people who take from His example and teachings how we can fully indwell this physical home He has given us so that we can elevate it into a home for God. May we be a people of peace who pursues peace, particularly with our fellow travelers. And may we fully rise up to be the people He has made us to be.

And as we say when finishing a book of the Torah, “Chazak, chazak v’nit chazek!” “Be strong, be strong, and let us be strengthened!”

Shalom!