

Numbers 30:1-16 Oaths and Vows**Vv. 1-2 (v. 2-3 in Hebrew)**

Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the word which the LORD has commanded. "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Our text begins with the general rule concerning the making of vows unto God: a man shall keep his word, "***he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.***" This is qualified by the expression "he shall not profane his word," the typical understanding of the Hebrew chalal, חָלַל. To break your word to God is to profane your own mouth, your word. Thus we can call this profanity of the worst kind! ***Deuteronomy 23:21 "When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you. "However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. "You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, what you have promised.***

The address however, is made unto all the heads of the tribes of Israel. We have our familiar "rosh," ראשׁ, for head and then our Parashah title, Mattot, meaning "tribes." Most mitzvot are addressed to the people in general rather than to the heads of the tribes. It is suggested that the reason is found in the cases listed below since the young woman remains under the protection of her father, and the married woman under the protection of her husband. Thus this address is made to the heads of the Tribes, Clans, and Families of Israel.

We have two separate situations mentioned in our text: first the making of a vow, neder, נִדֵּר, and then bind himself with an obligation. The Hebrew expression is אָסַר אֶסֶר, asar issar. ***Word Biblical Commentary distinguished between the two: the neder is a positive commitment to give something, such as a sacrifice; issar is a negative commitment, to abstain from something, such as a fast.--p. 322.*** Most also regard the gift to be given to the Sanctuary, as in the case below regarding Jacob. On top of that is the word for oath, shevuah, שְׁבֻעָה. The taking of an oath involves calling upon the Name of God. It is used for testimony in a court of law, a beit din. In this case an assertion is being made of a person's innocence. An oath can also be spoken in the sense of a promise, such as when David took an oath to afford himself no rest until a resting place was to be found for the Ark of the Covenant, ***Psalm 132:2.***

The Jewish Study Bible concurs: Vow and oath obligations differ from one another in that a vow is conditional. It binds the devotee only after God fulfills the requested blessing. For example, Jacob vows to erect a shrine at Bethel if

God delivers him safe from the wrath of his brother, Genesis 28:20, 22.--p. 343.

Other examples of a vow include *Numbers 21:2* where the victory of Israel over the Canaanites would lead to the cherem, devotion to destruction to ADONAI as He blessed them with victory; *Judges 11:30-31* where in like manner, Jephthah devoted his daughter to ADONAI (the first to emerge from his house). These are the result of an "If you will" - "Then I will" arrangement between the one who vows and ADONAI. The vow is made specifically to ADONAI, and thus involves the Sanctuary, much like Samuel was given to God and left at the Mishkan at Shiloh.

Let's take just a moment to be reminded that the end of our last chapter mentioned "votive offerings," neder, in *Numbers 29:39*, that are to be in addition to the regular scheduled offerings and festivals. Thus we enter into a discussion of "votive offerings" in this chapter. Additionally there are the "free will offerings," that are given just in love for God for His Blessings, and the "peace offerings."

Another assessment of the difference between vows and oaths:

A vow was generally taken in a moment of crisis (e.g., Gen. 28:20–22; Num. 21:2). But once the crisis had passed and the vow had been answered, there remained the ever-present temptation to forget the vow—even unconsciously (Lev. 5:4). Hence, the frequent scriptural admonition not to desecrate one's vows (see Deut. 23:21–23; Eccles. 5:4).

The Dead Sea sectaries held that any act that was intrinsically a violation of the Torah was automatically annulled: "Everything that a man has imposed upon himself by oath so as to depart from the Torah let him not carry it out even at the price of death." The rabbis, however, allowed for the annulment even of legitimate vows under some circumstances (see Excursus 66). Despite this, however, they were opposed to the very principle of making vows because of the many possibilities (and probable instances) of nonfulfillment: "If one vows it is as if one has built a bamah (a forbidden altar), and if one fulfills the vow it is as if one had sacrificed upon it."--JPS Torah Commentary, p. 251.

Tim Hegg records the following: ***The Sages were aware of the difficulties that vows, oaths and obligations presented in the normal course of daily life, and they developed an elaborate system for annulling vows. Yet they were well aware of the solemnity of vows, and did much within their power to discourage them, since they recognized their binding nature.***

y. Shevuot vi 6, 37a - Be you guilty or innocent, do not swear.

b. Mattot 79a - Be careful with vows, and not hasty with them, for he who is hasty with vows will end with false swearing, and he who swears falsely denies Me, and will never be forgiven.

In fact we hear the Sages saying, "Let your yea and nay both be zedek" b. Bava Metzia 49A. R. Huna (250-290 CE) said, "The yea of the righteous is a yea, their no is a no." (Midrash Rabbah Ruth vii. 6 on Ruth 3:18.--Parashah 121, p. 2.

Hegg also pointed out the words of Yeshua in our Apostolic Portion for today, *Matthew 5:33-37*; and connected that also to *Matthew 23:16-17*. Hegg summarizes that Yeshua does not forbid the use of vows, but rather the making of vows in such a manner that they could be broken without consequence. We are to have honest dealings, and "swear to our own hurt and not change," *Psalm 15:4*.

Matthew 5:33-37 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.--literally from the Evil One

Matthew 23:16-17 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?"

Once we move past this general concept of payment of one's vows, oaths, and standing behind whatever comes out of your mouth, we then deal with the limitations upon women. We have two instances where a woman's vows are limited: by the father or by the husband. Most relegate this idea to the fact that women were subservient to their fathers or husbands in those days. I disagree!

Vv. 3-5 (4-6 in Hebrew) An Unmarried Woman

"Also if a woman makes a vow to the LORD, and binds herself by an obligation in her father's house in her youth, and her father hears her vow and her obligation by which she has bound herself, and her father says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand and every obligation by which she has bound herself shall stand. "But if her father should forbid her on the day he hears of it, none of her vows or her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will forgive her because her father had forbidden her.

The vows of widows or the divorced woman stands, as she is an autonomous person. Our text deals with the woman who has the covering of a husband or a father. The men are to serve as guardian, provider, and protector of the women and the children in a Mishpachah, a family. The men also led in the business, legal and religious affairs of the Mishpachah. The woman's greatest role was in giving birth, raising children, and seeing to the affairs of the home. The home is of primary

importance in God's ordering of society. As goes the home, so goes the country, and so goes the Messianic Community of Faith. The home is the single most basic building block of society.

What this passage is teaching is that the responsibility for the vow made by a woman is either the father's responsibility, or that of the husband. The father may permit the vow, or he may annul the vow, for he decides what is in the best interests of the family at large. In this verse the literal Hebrew is "made himself deaf to her," or "caused himself to be silent to her." So silence gives consent. If he permits the vow, then the woman becomes obligated to the vow that she has made, but the ramifications of that vow, and the impact that it has upon the woman, the father, the family, and the household, become that of the one who has permitted the vow, ie the father. Some oaths, vows or obligations could impoverish a poor family or even endanger a family with some means.

The Sages however, came to distinguish the time of a woman's youth in her father's house, and the time after puberty when she would become responsible for her vows whether she still resided under her father's roof or not. This time came to be narrowly defined in Halachah as the 6 month period following her puberty, or her bat mitzvah. After that, she would become subject to the words of her mouth even as the men.

Our text concludes that if the father forbids the vow on the day that he hears of it, then ADONAI shall forgive the woman. The time period explained in our verses for either father or husband, is 24 hours after having heard the vow itself. If he does nothing for that 24 hours, then the vow, the oath, or the obligation becomes binding upon the woman. But if he forbids the vow, then the woman is relinquished of any wrong, but the man himself may be liable.

Vv. 6-8 (7-9 in Hebrew) Case Two - A Married Woman

“However, if she should marry while under her vows or the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself, and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her on the day he hears it, then her vows shall stand and her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand. “But if on the day her husband hears of it, he forbids her, then he shall annul her vow which she is under and the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself; and the LORD will forgive her.

There are four states of a woman as outlined in our parashah. The virgin living at home under her father's roof; the engaged woman, where the kiddushin, the first step in marriage has been performed, but she still reside in the father's home; the married woman; and the widow or divorced woman. In the case of the engaged woman, it would appear that both the father and the groom had some say over the vows of the woman during that 24 hour period. The Sages determined that *Vv. 7-8*

meant that either husband or the father could give assent to the engaged woman's vows, and thus they would become binding upon her, and her failure to comply would then become punishment upon him. Others insist that while she is still at home, the father has the authority to bind or loose this vow, and the husband to be then has no power over the vows.

Keil & Delitzsch however, suggest that the concept of taking a vow "upon herself" while in her father's home, then must pass the authority of the husband once she enters into his home. In the day that he heard of it, he could still forbid the vow since she is now under his authority and covering.

V. 9 (10 in Hebrew) The Widow or Divorced Woman

“But the vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, everything by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her.

The principle here differs from the case of the priest’s daughter who returns childless to her father’s house after being divorced or widowed. In that case, she may still share her father’s sacred food as she had done when she was a member of his house (Lev. 22:13) because she needs his food in order to live. No such concession is made for her vows, however. She does not return to her premarital status whereby her father could annul vows. Only for her sustenance does she rejoin her father’s household; otherwise she is independent.--JPS Torah Commentary, p. 253.

We are told that life for a single woman in that ancient time was very difficult, and that if possible, she would return to the household of her father for her care. We tend to think of women being out on their own in our previous generation, even if widowed or divorced. However, in our current generation, it is quite common to find families moving back in with Mom and Dad when things don't work out. In the ancient society it was very different, and everything revolved around a household, which was much larger and involved far more people than we think of today. Even if a parent was gone, the Household Property, the Inheritance, would then fall to the Eldest Son for its care and protection. It would not be difficult to envision a woman returning home in those times.

Vv. 10-12 (11-13 in Hebrew) A Married Woman

However, if she vowed in her husband’s house, or bound herself by an obligation with an oath, and her husband heard it, but said nothing to her and did not forbid her, then all her vows shall stand and every obligation by which she bound herself shall stand. “But if her husband indeed annuls them on the day he hears them, then whatever proceeds out of her lips concerning her vows or concerning the obligation of herself shall not stand; her husband has annulled them, and the LORD will forgive her.

This section has been understood to represent the woman who has been joined to her husband, and is no longer under her father's roof. The scenario is the same as discussed above. If the husband annuls or forbids the vow on the day that she has made it, then her vows are forgiven her of ADONAI, for the husband has such authority in the home in God's Economy. However, if he remains silent, then his silence is regarded as approval, and her vows must stand. Once the sun has set, the man no longer has the power and authority to annul the vows of the wife.

Vv. 13-16 (14-17 in Hebrew) A Summary

“Every vow and every binding oath to humble herself, her husband may confirm it or her husband may annul it. “But if her husband indeed says nothing to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all her obligations which are on her; he has confirmed them, because he said nothing to her on the day he heard them. “But if he indeed annuls them after he has heard them, then he shall bear her guilt.” These are the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses, as between a man and his wife, and as between a father and his daughter, while she is in her youth in her father’s house.

This section ends with something of a summary, and an admonition to the men who seek to revoke a woman's vow later than the day he heard of it. Then he shall bear her punishment for failure to keep her oath, since he seeks to set it aside after the time frame permissible by ADONAI Himself. Our translation says that he shall bear, or carry her guilt. The actual Hebrew says that he will bear her iniquity. This is one of the basic words indicating the violating of God's Word. So if you profane your wife's word to God, you have profaned God's Word as well.

Hegg sees this from the perspective of her domestic role and responsibilities to the husband, the children, and to the home. The establishment of the home is the higher purpose and calling of the women of the Torah. Wrongful vows made by a woman could be quite costly, and could jeopardize the home and its shalom. That the husband or the father could annul her vows has in view the maintenance of the home and therefore ultimately of the whole society.

The Apostolic Writings require Christian wives to submit to their husbands in the same way as Sarah submitted to Abraham, calling him ‘her master.’ Ephesians 5:24; But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 1 Pet. 3:1-7 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external — braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in

former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

Numbers 31:1-54 The War with Midian

Vv. 1-12 The War

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your people." Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the LORD'S vengeance on Midian. "A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war." So there were furnished from the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. Moses sent them, a thousand from each tribe, to the war, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand. So they made war against Midian, just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian along with the rest of their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword. The sons of Israel captured the women of Midian and their little ones; and all their cattle and all their flocks and all their goods they plundered. Then they burned all their cities where they lived and all their camps with fire. They took all the spoil and all the prey, both of man and of beast. They brought the captives and the prey and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by the Jordan opposite Jericho.

At hand was the retribution promised against the Midianites for they were responsible for the Jewish sins of immorality and idolatry that resulted in the death of 24,000 in the plague of *Numbers 25:1-9*. Bilam, the prophet, had taught Balak how to cause a problem in the ranks of Israel by creating the desire for the women that also led to the immorality and the idolatry. There was a sexual allurements that was tied to the idolatry of the Midianite worship. Sex become the god or goddess of many people in America today, but that is not a new thing. That has been a tried and true means of HaSatan to unseat the people of the world from following after ADONAI. Solomon in all of his wisdom was not wise enough, for it was the multitude of women - wives and concubines - that took his heart away from God. *I Kings 11:1-8*. This was a precedent for such activity that plagued many a king of Israel.

This is indeed a Holy War. It is God's War against the enemy of His Holiness, and that of His People. Our God cannot exist where there is sin, and sin cannot stand in

the presence of God. Our God is a consuming fire, and that fire will cleanse and purify sin. The picture of Hell, and of the Lake of Fire in Revelation 20 both picture this. This final abode of all that stands in opposition to God is a place of cleansing, in order that God might renew the heavens and the earth, and with His renovation, there will be no more sin, no more death. That which pollutes will be absolved by fire. The cleansing of the heavens and the earth will likewise be with fire, *2 Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*

This did not take away Israel's responsibility for their own sin and involvement, as is manifest in the plague that killed 24,000. Interestingly, the Jewish explanation for the exclusion of the Moabites from this annihilation is because Ruth, the ancestress of King David was destined to descend from Moab. The Sages also explain that the Moabites acted out of fear, whereas the Midianites acted out of hatred. This however is mere speculation. *Numbers 25* begins with Moabite women seducing the people, then a Midianite woman is pierced through. She is typically seen as a princess, the daughter of Zur.

All of the tribes were equally represented in the war, including Levi, and accompanied by Pinchas who had begun the task as he pierced through Cozbi and Zimri. Pinchas become the priest in charge of the armies at this time. *According to Midrash Rabbah Numbers 22:4, Phineas was assigned this role so that he could finish the sacred task he began when he smote the Midianite woman in the affair of Baal-Peor.--The Jewish Study Bible, p. 345.* We should note that Aharon is already gone, and that Eleazar is now the High Priest, and thus must maintain his sanctity to function in that role. Presumably he would incur corpse contamination had he involved himself in the battle. *The Israelite forces also included a priest (Deut. 20:2-4). Rabbinic texts give this priest the title meshuah milhamah, "anointed for war," and declare him second only to the High Priest. The role of the priesthood in the military is vastly enlarged in the Dead Sea War Scroll.--JPS Torah Commentary, p. 257.*

The command from ADONAI was to execute ADONAI's vengeance upon Midian. *The main idea behind the Hebrew nakam, נָקַם, is to exact retribution for sins. Most of the uses of נָקַם involve God as the source of vengeance. The classical passage is Deuteronomy 32:35-41, "Vengeance is mine... I will recompense them who hate me." God cannot be true to his character of holiness and justice if he*

allows sin and rebellion to go unpunished. The prophets stressed “the day of the Lord’s vengeance” (Isa 38:8; 61:2; 63:4) as times in history when the Lord sets the record straight. When God executes His vengeance, He will at times use the armies of His Holy People as the means.--Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. This is true in this passage, which is why all the nation must be represented in battle. Thus there is an even representation of the 12 tribes, with 1,000 from each tribe going out to battle. This is a fulfillment of the Covenant with Avraham, **Genesis 12:3** *And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”*

This can be further understood from the results of this battle. This was no ordinary war, but the exaction of God's vengeance upon sin. Thus every male was killed in battle without a single loss of life to the Israelites. In this case the holy vessels also went to war with them, carried upon the shoulders of the Levites. We are left to conjecture what exactly this meant, but the holy vessels were those found in the Sanctuary, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.

With the specific mention of the silver trumpets, it is possible that this is the reference to the Holy Things. *The trumpet was made of beaten silver (Num 10:2). According to Josephus in Antiquities 3.12.6 (291), “In length a little short of a cubit, it is a narrow tube, slightly thicker than a flute....” The trumpets of Herod’s temple are depicted on the Arch of Titus and on silver denarius coins of Bar Cochba. Early Egyptian examples were found in Tutankhamon’s tomb. It should be distinguished from the שׁוֹפָר, the curved ram’s horn trumpet. Moses was commanded to make a pair of trumpets (Num 10:2). The number of trumpets was increased to 7 (1 Chr 15:24) and to 120 (2 Chr 5:12). With the possible exception of their use at the coronation of Joash (2 Kgs 11:14; 2 Chr 23:13), trumpets were used by the priests (Num 10:8; 1 Chr 15:24; 16:6; 2 Chr 23:13; cf. Sir 50:16).*

Trumpets were used for a variety of purposes. They were used to summon the tribes, or their leaders, and to signal the breaking of camp (Num 10:2–4). Trumpets were blown while the burnt offering was being offered in Hezekiah’s rite (2 Chr 29:27–28; cf. Num 10:10).

Although the ram’s horn (שׁוֹפָר) was usually employed for military purposes, priests sometimes used the trumpets in times of war so that the Lord would respond (10:9; 31:6; 2 Chr 13:12, 14). In Hos 5:8 the prophet commands the blowing of the horn and the trumpet as a signal of the enemy’s approach. The trumpets must have emitted a high, shrill sound. The signals depended upon the number of trumpets used, the types of sounds, and their sequence. The תְּרִיעָה (RSV “alarm”) seems to have been a rapid succession of three notes (Mishnah, Rosh ha-Shanah 4.9). At the first “alarm” the camps on the east set out, etc. (Num 10:5). The ordinary way of blowing the trumpet (תְּקִיעַ) produced a sustained sound. Mazar’s excavation discovered in 1968 a fragment from Herod’s temple

with the inscription “for the house of the blowing (of the trumpet),” designating where the priest stood on the parapet to blow the trumpet: לבית התקיעה.-- Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, p. 315-316.

The difference between the trumpet and the shofar is clearly indicated by the Septuagint on Psalms 98:6 where the hatsotserah is called a “metal trumpet” (salpinx) and the shofar is called a “horn trumpet” (keratines), that is, made from the horn of an animal. In Scripture the shofar is used as follows: to muster an army (Judg. 3:27; 6:34); to frighten the enemy (Judg. 7:8, 16–22); to proclaim victory (1 Sam. 13:3); to terminate a battle (2 Sam. 18:16; 20:22); to proclaim rebellion (2 Sam. 20:1); to warn of an approaching enemy (Jer. 4:21; Hos. 5:8; Neh. 4:12–14); to install the Ark in David’s tent (2 Sam. 6:15); and to proclaim the coronation of kings (2 Sam. 15:10; 2 Kings 9:13; cf. Pss. 47:6; 98:6). When the function of the shofar is compared with that of the trumpet (enumerated in the introductory Comment to this chap.), it is clear that they often overlap. This does not mean, however, as claimed by many critics, that since the trumpet occurs mainly in late sources (the priestly texts in Numbers, according to these critics, are late), the shofar, the original instrument, was replaced by the trumpet in Second Temple times. This theory must be rejected because a number of attestations of the trumpet are clearly preexilic (e. g., 2 Kings 11:14; 12:14; Hosea 5:8). It is more likely that the two instruments were used at the same time and they were distinguished not by their use but by their users: The trumpets were sounded exclusively by the priests. Thus Chronicles deliberately adds to the account in Samuel that a corps of trumpeter priests participated in the celebration when David brought the Ark up to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:15; 1 Chron. 15:24, 28; see the Introduction). Moreover, it is likely that the non-priestly sources did not distinguish between the two instruments, calling both of them by the name shofar. This phenomenon is paralleled in another cultic area: The only expiatory sacrifice known in nonpriestly sources (except for 2 Kings 12:17) is the ‘olah, whereas the priestly texts also speak of the hatta’t and ‘asham. Thus the masses may not have been aware of the technical name for the wind instrument blown by the priests. This possibility is supported by the account of the battle of Jericho in which the shofar plays a central role. But whereas the people blow the shofar (Josh. 6:9, 13b, 20), the priests blow the shoferot ha-yovelim (Josh. 6:4, 6, 8, 13a). Thus this nonpriestly source recognizes that the priests resort to a special kind of shofar; only the priestly tradition identifies it with the hatsotserah, the trumpet. The rabbis escape this textual dilemma by positing that the trumpet was only used during the time of Moses but not by Joshua and later generations (Sif. Num. 75). Certainly by the time of the rabbis of the Gemara, the amoraim, the distinction between the shofar and trumpet was no longer known (Shab. 36a, Sot. 43a; cf. Mish. Kin. 3:6).--JPS Torah Commentary, Excursus 21, p. 372-372.

Not only were the kings, ruler, their families, and all the men of Midian killed, but also Bilam, the son of Beor. The listing of names was due to their responsibility in seeking to destroy the people of Israel, in sending for Bilam. Bilam, because of his insistent attitude to find some means to gain profit from his prophecy, though he was not permitted to curse Israel, he nonetheless gave the advice that caused Israel to stumble. *Luke 17:1-2*, even Yeshua holds in strict judgment the one who causes others to stumble.

Vv. 13-18 The Return from the Battle

Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp. Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. And Moses said to them, "Have you spared all the women? "Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD. "Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. "But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves.

This is why Moshe was so upset with the leaders of Israel who went to war with Midian. They kept alive the very ones who had caused Israel to stumble in the first place - the women. They were the ones who were to be destroyed along with the men who put them up to it. Now no male was to be left alive, and only virgins were to be spared! How in the world could they know? ***The Sages came up with an amazing Midrash on this passage. They would bring each female before Eleazar the High Priest while he was wearing the Holy Garments, along with the golden crown, or mitre, which was engraved with the words "Holy to the LORD." If she blushed, she was innocent. But if she turned pale, a sickly color, then she was guilty.--The Chumash, p. 213.*** Unfortunately, this would not work today at all! Today people sin without even the remotest sense of guilt or shame for what they have done.

Vv. 19-24 Outside of the Camp - Purification of Warriors and Spoil

"And you, camp outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves, you and your captives, on the third day and on the seventh day. "You shall purify for yourselves every garment and every article of leather and all the work of goats' hair, and all articles of wood." Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to battle, "This is the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded Moses: only the gold and the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin and the lead, everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean, but it shall be purified with water for impurity. But whatever cannot stand the fire you shall

pass through the water. “And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may enter the camp.”

These soldiers were suffering from corpse contamination, as in *Numbers 19*. They had to remain outside of the camp for 7 days until they were cleansed with the ashes of the red heifer on the 3rd and 7th days. Not only were the soldiers to be cleansed, so were all the captives, and so was all of the spoils of battle. The spoil was divided between the army and the ones who remained in the camp, and from each portion a tribute was raised for the priests and Levites.

These rules apply solely to the Israelite camp in the wilderness, which is conceived as a war camp from which all impurity is to be excluded as prescribed in Numbers 5:1–4; compare Deuteronomy 23:10–15. In the settlements of Canaan the practice is different. Only the leper is excluded whereas all other impurity bearers, even the corpse-contaminated, undergo their purificatory rites within the settlement (see Excursus 48).

V. 20 - This not found explicitly in chapter 19. It can be derived, however, from the rules given there in verses 14–18 and in Leviticus 11:32: All exposed objects in a room containing a human corpse must undergo a seven-day purification; articles of wood, cloth, or skin coming into contact with an animal corpse must undergo a one-day purification. Earthenware vessels are absent from this list because they cannot be purified.--JPS Torah Commentary, p. 260.

V. 21 Ritual Law

Hebrew hukkat ha-torah. The same expression is found only once more, in 19:2. Indeed, the law here purports to be a continuation of the purification procedures of chapter 19, and it does provide new prescriptions. However, the fact that it is Eleazar who cites them and not Moses affirms that they are not really innovations but had already been revealed by God to Moses. Stemming from Eleazar they serve as supplementary reminders, whereas if Moses had pronounced them they could be understood to constitute a new revelation. Interestingly, the Samaritan text senses that Moses has been slighted and inserts a passage to show that he had initially informed Eleazar of these rules.

A midrash understands Eleazar’s intervention differently. God punished Moses for his anger (v. 14) by causing him to forget to communicate the laws of purification to the soldiers; it was Eleazar who made up for Moses’ lapse. Others, however, regard the incident as revealing Moses’ virtue: Already, while still alive, Moses wished the right of making ritual decisions to be conferred upon Eleazar—so that it could not be challenged after his death.

...Hebrew mei niddah (see the Comment to 19:9), which, when sprinkled on the corpse-contaminated person on the third and seventh day, constitutes its purification (19:18–19). Thus, this passage supplements the rules of purification

of corpse-contaminated objects in chapter 19 by insisting that not only must they be sprinkled with the water of lustration, but, in addition, they must be passed through fire or water. However, the rabbis held that the passing of objects through fire or water is not part of the ritual of purification from corpse contamination but that it is a preliminary cleansing of these objects from food they may have absorbed. Thus cooking vessels are heated until they become white hot; silverware is placed in boiling water; and nonporous dishware that is used with cold food only, such as glasses, need only be soaked in cold water—a procedure familiar to every observant Jewish household in preparing for Passover.--JPS Torah Commentary, pp. 260-261.

These are considered to be the laws of Kashering/Koshering, to make them usable by the Jewish people, for they have been contaminated by touching a corpse. There are two groups of materials thus cleansed: those that can survive the fire, and those which burn up. What can survive the fire must be passed through the fire. Fire is a purifying agent. The metal objects were to be passed through the fire and then sprinkled with the ashes of the red heifer. Those items that could not survive the fire were to be thoroughly washed in water and then sprinkled with the ashes of the red heifer.

The purification of these vessels was specifically in regard to corpse contamination, for they were taken as booty in battle where every enemy soldier had been killed. The concept however, opens up a whole new world in Jewish Halachah. This concept has been passed on down to today in Orthodox Jews dealing with anything acquired from a non-Jew and therefore needs Kashering. *Mark 7:4*. This Tradition of the Elders, though based upon a Torah requirement, has gone far from the original intention. *The Chumash outlines the process of kosher for cooking that is affected by the Sages interpretation of this passage. Metal must first be cleansed of any rust and returned to its original state before it can be purged - Rashi. Rust is the degradation of metal. It correlates to sin in a person. It degrades, it destroys. Then each vessel is to be purged according to the manner it was used. For people, you must first remove the "rust" on your soul created by sin. This is accomplished through repentance/teshuvah.*

The concept of the fire as it relates to cooking utensils, is that the heat causes the pores of the metal to expand so that it absorbs the taste of foods that have come into contact with it. To remove what has been absorbed, a metal utensil or vessel must be heated in the same way and to the same degree. If used to cook non-kosher foods, the utensil was to be filled to overflowing with water, then boiled to remove the contamination. Then in this ancient time, it still needed to be sprinkled with the ashes of the red heifer.--pp. 214-215.

This concept of Kashering and Hand Washing are linked in the Mishnah. *Luke 11:37-42; Mark 7:1-5*. Luke - Yeshua has a confrontation with some Pharisees.

Remember, they are the ones zealous for the Traditions of the Elders. The host performs the ritual handwashing before a meal, and is shocked to notice that Rabbi Yeshua does not wash His hands at all. The lack of concern for ritual purity at the home and table of a Pharisee would be extremely offensive. But Yeshua rebukes them! The difficulty here is that He moves immediately to the purity of cups and dishes. In the Mishnah, the two subjects are very closely related. Both matters arise from the Traditions of the Elders.

Nowhere in the Torah is there a requirement for this Ritual Handwashing. The ritual purity of vessels and people was in relationship to the sacrifices at the Mishkan and later the Temple, and not to the common meals in someone's home. The Pharisees had taken this and embellished the concept and applied it to their table fellowship. For these Pharisees, to fail to complete these washings was to sin against God. They created sin where there was no sin by their Traditions. Yeshua condemned such Traditions as setting aside the commandments of God for the sake of their Traditions, *Mark 7:8*.

The Mishnah also sheds more light upon Yeshua's remarks about the outside vs the inside. The Halachah relates that when something is capable of being used as a receptacle, it becomes ritually unclean and needs purification before it can be used. This was accomplished by a Mikveh, an immersion in water. Once purified, its inner and outer surfaces are considered to be independent of one another in terms of ritual purity. In other words, the outer surface can become unclean while the inner surface remains pure, or vice versa.

Yeshua compares the Pharisees to such a dish or vessel. The whole vessel is pictured as unclean, but only the outside has been immersed, leaving the inside full of impurity. They need to cleanse the whole vessel, immerse the whole item, and both surfaces will be clean. If they focus merely upon the externals, the inside will remain defiled and full of wickedness. The illustration of the tombs is more clearly stated in *Matthew 23:27*.

Yeshua uses this whole scene as a rebuke of the nature of the Pharisees and their Traditions, which are not Torah. They focus on their outward appearance to the neglect of the inner man, the heart. Thus He denies the concept of the Mishnah, their Traditions, that a vessel can have two independent surfaces, so that at any given point in time, it can be both clean and unclean at the same time. So Yeshua disregards the concept of ritual purity being a part of table fellowship, and the reasoning behind it.

This also applies to the whole study of Galatians. This is the reasoning behind the total disdain of the Gentile people, and why there could not be table fellowship with them, for they would defile their table, and thus their home and themselves. Yeshua rejected this reasoning.

Numbers 31:25-47 Distribution of the Spoils of War

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers’ households of the congregation take a count of the booty that was captured, both of man and of animal; and divide the booty between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation. “Levy a tax for the LORD from the men of war who went out to battle, one in five hundred of the persons and of the cattle and of the donkeys and of the sheep; take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priest, as an offering to the LORD. “From the sons of Israel’s half, you shall take one drawn out of every fifty of the persons, of the cattle, of the donkeys and of the sheep, from all the animals, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the LORD.” Moses and Eleazar the priest did just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Now the booty that remained from the spoil which the men of war had plundered was 675,000 sheep, and 72,000 cattle, and 61,000 donkeys, and of human beings, of the women who had not known man intimately, all the persons were 32,000. The half, the portion of those who went out to war, was as follows: the number of sheep was 337,500, and the LORD’S levy of the sheep was 675; and the cattle were 36,000, from which the LORD’S levy was 72; and the donkeys were 30,500, from which the LORD’S levy was 61; and the human beings were 16,000, from whom the LORD’S levy was 32 persons. Moses gave the levy which was the LORD’S offering to Eleazar the priest, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. As for the sons of Israel’s half, which Moses separated from the men who had gone to war — now the congregation’s half was 337,500 sheep, and 36,000 cattle, and 30,500 donkeys, and the human beings were 16,000 — and from the sons of Israel’s half, Moses took one drawn out of every fifty, both of man and of animals, and gave them to the Levites, who kept charge of the tabernacle of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

On fiftieth of the fighting men went to the war - 12,000 out of 600,00 - and so the Levites received that ratio as their share. The on five-hundredth given to the Kohanim corresponded to the tithe as the Levites gave them from the tithe they received from the general population, as commanded in 18:26 (Abarbanel).--The Chumash, p. 216.

Basically we have a sharing of the spoils of war to all of the people, to the Levites and to the priests. Additionally, there is a special offering made since not a single Israelite was lost in this battle. The amounts are astounding, and many think way too much. However, as Hegg noted, this would not be excessive for a nomadic people.

The soldiers received half and the people in the camp received half. Then a portion is taken from both the soldiers and the people of the camp to give to the Levites and

the priests. The soldiers, perhaps because of their putting themselves into harms way, contribute a much smaller donation, giving only a tenth as much as the people in the camp. Interestingly, from the soldiers the levy was given to Elazar and the priests. This was one soul from every 500, both of persons and of animals. From the people of the camp, one from every 50 of both persons and of animals, but their levy goes to the Levites.

Vv. 48-54 A Zikkaron for the People

Then the officers who were over the thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, approached Moses, and they said to Moses, “Your servants have taken a census of men of war who are in our charge, and no man of us is missing. “So we have brought as an offering to the LORD what each man found, articles of gold, armlets and bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD.” Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, all kinds of wrought articles. All the gold of the offering which they offered up to the LORD, from the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, was 16,750 shekels. The men of war had taken booty, every man for himself. So Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it to the tent of meeting as a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD.

We have two references for that which was donated by the officers over the thousands of each tribe of Israel: first it is referred to as an atonement, a kaper, because they had taken a census of their armies under their command. This is consistent with the census that was ordered by ADONAI, and the counting was done by the ransom, kaper, of a half shekel, *Exodus 30:11-13 The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying, “When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them. “This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the LORD.*

These commanders are understood to have made a willing contribution to ADONAI prior to taking the census of their troops. They then bring this donation to Moshe and Elazar, to be given to God because they made a census.

The second word used for this donation is a Zikkaron, a reminder or remembrance. Our text notes that not a man of Israel was lost. They were acting as the Arm of Justice, the Arm of God's Divine Displeasure, and acting as a agent of God, not a single man was lost. I tend to hold to the remembrance being that of God's Divine Actions in this battle so that no one of the armies of Israel was lost.

However, the typical thoughts are concerning the virtue of the armies, in that they

violated not His Torah, nor any of the women during this incursion. *The use of the gold in the sanctuary service was to function as a perpetual reminder to the Lord to prevent the punishment of Israel for taking a census.*

A midrash taking an opposite point of view holds that the gold donation to the sanctuary was to remind the Lord of Israel's virtue, for when they stripped the Midianite women of their ornaments they did not violate their persons:

Each of us had gone into the houses of the Midianites, into the bedchambers of their kings. And we (desired) saw their daughters, pretty and beautiful, delicate and tender; and we unfastened the garlands, the gold crowns from their heads; rings from their ears, necklaces from their necks, chainlets from their arms, chains from their hands, signet rings from their fingers, clasps from the breasts. Nevertheless, not one of us was joined with one of them in this world, so as not to be with her in Gehenna in the world to come. May this stand up in our favor on the day of Great Judgment, to make atonement for us before the Lord.--JPS Torah Commentary, p. 265.

We could reckon this to be a remembrance of them since they had followed God fully in this battle, and thus did not succumb to the temptations of the flesh. However, I still tend to think of the remembrance that God blessed so that no Israelite life was lost.

There are only two of the typical 613 Mitzvot taken from this Parashah:

30:3 Revoking of Vows Positive Commandment 183

30:3 Infringing any oral obligation Negative Commandment 292