**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**PARASHAT MATOT**

**SICHA OF HARAV YAAKOV MEDAN**

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Dedicated by the Wise and Etshalom families

in memory of Rabbi Aaron M. Wise z"l,

whose yahrzeit is 21 Tammuz. Yehi zikhro barukh.

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In loving memory of Fred Stone, Ya'akov Ben Yitzchak A"H, and Alice Stone, Ada Bat Avrum A”H whose yahrzeit is 25 Tammuz and 2 Tammuz, beloved parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, by Ellen and Stanley Stone and their children Jacob, Chaya & Micha, Zack, Yael & Allie, Ezra, Tahlia, Yoni, Cayley Eliana, Marc & Adina and Gabi

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**The Tribes who Remained in Israel**

Translated by Kaeren Fish

We will soon be reaching the end of *Sefer Bamidbar* and starting to read *Sefer Devarim*, also known as “*Mishneh Torah*” (the repetition of the Torah). This repetition is ostensibly bound up with the covenant that is forged anew on the plains of Moav. However, we must ask why the covenant must be forged again, and in what way it adds to the covenant of Sinai. Moreover, yet another ceremony cementing the covenant over the Torah and its observance is held after the nation crosses over the Jordan, on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval, and it is possible that an additional covenant was made in Shekhem (*Yehoshua* 24). What is the purpose of so many covenants made over the Torah?

In order to approach these questions, let us examine the inheritance of Reuven, Gad, and half the tribe of Menashe on the eastern side of the Jordan, as recorded in our *parasha*. A cursory reading of the unit gives rise to several questions. Why is it specifically the tribes of Reuven and Gad that are paired and act jointly in this episode? And what is Menashe’s connection? Nowhere does the tribe of Menashe appear in the negotiations between the tribes of Reuven and Gad and Moshe. Menashe never asks for an inheritance on the eastern bank, nor does this tribe possess “much cattle.” How, then, does half the tribe of Menashe become involved in this initiative?

In addition, we note that Reuven and Gad receive relatively small portions of land, between Wadi Arnon (more or less parallel to the middle of the Dead Sea) in the south and Wadi Yabok (parallel to Kfar Saba) in the north. The kingdom of Ammon was also located within this area. The portion of these tribes also included a strip of the eastern Jordan Valley up to the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee). The half-tribe of Menashe received a portion that extended from Wadi Yabok to the Hermon in the north. Thus, this half-tribe received a portion much greater than that given to the tribes of Reuven and Gad together, along with the portion of the other half of the tribe, on the western side, stretching from the Jordan to the Mediterranean, and from Shekhem in the south to Beit Shean and Dor in the north – in total, an enormous area. Why is this so?

Another puzzle is how the tribe of Menashe grew in the period between the census in the second year in the wilderness (*Bamidbar* 1) and the census in the fortieth year (*Bamidbar* 26) in a manner that is disproportionate to the other tribes (from 32,000 to more than 52,000). The total figures for the two censuses are roughly equal, since the growth of Menashe is balanced by the massive blow to the tribe of Shimon, with the rest of the tribes undergoing more minor demographic changes.

Finally, we pose two questions relating to the period covered in *Sefer* *Bereishit*. Gilad is inherited by Makhir, son of Menashe (*Bamidbar* 32:39). From our *parasha* it seems that this decision was taken in the fortieth year. However, during the census we are told that “Makhir begat Gilad” (26:29). Gilad, the firstborn of Makhir, was born while Yosef was still alive (*Bereishit* 50:23). Is it mere coincidence that Makhir, in ancient times, named his son ‘Gilad,’ and now he inherits the portion of Gilad (which was so named already in the time of Lavan he Aramean - see *Bereishit* 31)?

Furthermore, how is it that Moshe conquered the territory north of the Yabok, when Yaakov promised Lavan at Har Gilad, right next to the Yabok (adjacent to Machanayim), that the Gilad would remain in Aramean hands:

“‘Let this heap [of stones] be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you shall not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Avraham and the god of Nachor, the god of their father, judge between us.’ And Yaakov swore by the Fear of his father Yitzchak.” (*Bereishit* 31:52-53)

And one final question, arising from recent *parashiot*:

“And Israel smote him [Sichon, king of the Emorites] with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon to Yabok, as far as the children of Ammon, for the border of the children of Ammon was strong. And Israel took all these cities. And Israel dwelled in all the cities of the Emorites, in Cheshbon, and in all its hamlets… And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan, and Og, king of Bashan, went out against them – he and all his people – to the battle at Edre’i… And they smote him and his sons and all his people, until there was none left to him alive, and they possessed his land.” (*Bamidbar* 21)

From the narrative preceding the war against Sichon, it seems that *Bnei Yisrael* wanted to cross the Jordan, and they asked permission from Sichon to pass through his land. When he refused them passage, they waged war and conquered Sichon’s land, thereby facilitating passage through the plains of Yericho. But Moshe, instead of turning westward to cross the Jordan, crosses the Yabok, northward, and heads towards Bashan (today, the Golan Heights). Why?

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The interpretation I propose here is based on the commentary on *Divrei Ha-yamim* that is attributed to a disciple of Rav Sa’adia Gaon (R. Kirchheim edition, Frankfurt 5634, p. 12). Commenting on *Divrei Ha-yamim* II, he writes that Makhir ben Menashe, Yair ben Menashe and Novach, mentioned in our *parasha*, inherited the Gilad already in the days of Yosef. The same explanation is offered by R. Yehuda he-Chassid on *Shemot* 1:6-12:

“My father proved from *Divrei Ha-yamim* that so long as Israel were in Egypt, they would sometimes [go] to Eretz Yisrael, upon the land of our forefather Yaakov, and they built towns there. And I maintain that it was specifically the descendants of Yosef who did this, and that it was they who had permission from Pharaoh, for it was out of honor to Yosef that Pharaoh gave honor to enhance and strengthen their inheritance, and they would settle tenants there, who paid them a tax […] And *Bnei Yisrael* had many portions of inheritance in Canaan, their father’s land, and although Israel were in Egypt, they would send [emissaries] to Canaan to maintain their fields and vineyards, and they would reap [their grain] and harvest [their grapes] and bring them money….”

In what follows, I shall try to develop this idea further.

A.

The key to the puzzle may lie in the following verse: “The sons of Menashe: Asriel, whom she bore; the Aramean concubine bore Makhir, father of Gilad” (*Divrei Ha-yamim* I 7:14). It is not clear whether the Aramean concubine belonged to Menashe or to Asriel, his son; if the latter is true, then Makhir was the son of Asriel. Menashe was the son of Yosef, second to the king of Egypt. We must therefore assume that if Menashe or his son had a concubine from Aram, which is far from Egypt, then she probably would have been a woman of some distinction: the daughter of an Aramean minister or prince, or the like. The father of this concubine might have been the governor of Gilad and perhaps also of Bashan – these were the western-most regions of Aram. In any event, Makhir, the son of the concubine, inherited from his mother (or from his mother’s father) the land known as Gilad, and he named his firstborn son after this inheritance: Gilad.

We might go so far as to suggest that the connection with the Aramean governor of Gilad went further back, even before the marriage mentioned above, perhaps to the time of Yosef. This would explain the route taken by the funeral procession that brought Yaakov from Egypt to Me’arat Ha-makhpela:

“And Yosef went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt… And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great company…. And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the floor of Atad, they said, ‘This is a heavy mourning for Egypt’ – so that the name of it was called Avel Mitzrayim (the Mourning of Egypt), which is on the other side of the Jordan.” (*Bereishit* 50)

We know from Tanakh that the journey from Egypt to Chevron was considered dangerous for Egypt nobles, and the funeral procession was a military campaign for all intents and purposes. It would seem that someone planned to prevent the convoy from reaching Canaan. Perhaps this explains why the procession, headed for Ma’arat Ha-makhpela, took a circuitous route via the threshing-floor of Atad, which is on the other side of the Jordan, rather than simply heading directly northward from the Negev, or from the southern coastal plain, towards Chevron. Despite the extra mileage, it seems, it was preferable to travel via friendly territory on the other side of the Jordan. Perhaps Gilad was one of these territories, owing to possible ties between Yosef, the deputy to the king of Egypt, and the local governor. And perhaps these ties eventually led to a marriage.

Thus, Makhir inherited Gilad from his mother’s father, and this made it possible early on, owing to his lineage from the family of the deputy to the king of Egypt, to build cities in Gilad, and to establish farms for his extended family and to take possession of his inheritance. Thus it is possible that, even as early as Yosef’s time, or perhaps afterwards, in the days of Menashe and Makhir, that a community of descendants of Makhir lived in Gilad, along with other members of Menashe’s extended family, including Yair, who is mentioned in our *parasha* as having established Chavvot Yair in Bashan.

This hypothesis concerning Jewish settlement in Canaan and the surrounding areas even prior to the Exodus from Egypt seems, at first, rather surprising. But we might consider a different example:

“And the sons of Efraim… and Zavad, his son; and Shutelach, his son; and Ezer and Elad, whom the men of Gat who were born in that land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle. And Efraim their father mourned many days, and his brothers came to comfort him. And he went in to his wife, and she conceived, and she bore a son, and he called his name Beri’a, because evil had befallen his house. And his daughter was She’era, who built both the lower and the upper Beit Choron, and Uzzen-She’era.” (*Divrei Ha-yamim* I 7)

The sons of Efraim held a portion in Canaan during the lifetime of Efraim himself, and even before Efraim had borne all of his children! Efraim’s daughter (or Beri’a’s daughter) built cities in the south-western part of Mount Efraim, close to the portion which the tribe of Efraim was destined to inherit later on, in the days of Yehoshua. Those cities were probably inhabited by the children of Efraim who went up to Canaan in earlier waves, prior to the Exodus – and perhaps even during the lifetime of Efraim himself. (Their defeat near Gat is also mentioned in *Tehillim* 78 and in the midrash.)

B.

The picture arising here is reminiscent of the modern Zionist renaissance. At the time of the establishment of the State of Israel, there were six hundred thousand Jewish inhabitants. Most arrived in the country in two great waves of immigration following the two World Wars. However, they had been preceded by the smaller number of pioneers who comprised the First and Second Aliya, who in turn had been preceded by the disciples of the Vilna Gaon, the disciples of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, and others. Similarly, the six hundred thousand inheritors of the land in the time of Yehoshua arrived to find a “first aliya” and “second aliya” already settled in the country: these were descendants of Efraim and of Menashe, who had family ties with the second to the king and therefore had political connections and might even have been able to raise an army, and were able to settle in the country during the period of servitude in Egypt. Of all of Yaakov’s sons it is specifically Yosef who wishes to be gathered to his children and not only to his fathers, and he commands his brothers to bury him in the inheritance of his sons, in Shekhem.

As noted, the sons of Makhir built cities in Gilad and settled them in earlier times. They did not cross over the Yabok to fight against Aram, which would have been a violation of Yaakov’s commitment to Lavan. They moved there as descendants of Lavan’s family and as the inheritors of the father of their mother (Menashe’s Aramean concubine). Eventually, Og seized control of the northern Gilad and the Bashan region, and the descendants of Makhir were forced to become his subjects.

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*Bnei Yisrael* conquer the land of Sichon, from Wadi Arnon in the south to the Yabok in the north. As I understand it, it is possible that already then, even before the conquest of the northern Gilad and the Bashan from the hands of Og, that the tribes of Gad and Reuven requested this conquered land as their inheritance. The cities (listed in our *parasha*) that they asked for are all located in the land of Sichon and Ya’azer. None are cities that belonged to the kingdom of Og – since, as noted, it is possible that that region had not yet been conquered.

It may be that the entire southern camp – Reuven, Shimon and Gad – came to request the eastern bank of the Jordan as their inheritance. I have discussed elsewhere the possibility that Shimon settled in Shittim and that it was this tribe that began to go astray after the women of Moav. The ensuing plague eliminated much of the tribe, and perhaps owing to this sin Shimon lost his portion and was relegated to the distant Negev, within the inheritance of Yehuda. The tribe of Menashe had nothing to do with this episode. However, when Bnei Yisrael reached the Yabok, it became necessary to connect with their brethren to the north of the Yabok – the descendants of Makhir – and to make them part of the nation that had emerged from Egypt and received the Torah. Then the war was waged against Og, his land was conquered, and the children of Makhir, son of Menashe, who had remained in Egypt, joined their brethren – the descendants of Makhir who inherited the Gilad, and the descendants of Yair who inherited the Bashan – in an inheritance that was not part of the portions that were distributed by casting lots. This may explain the disproportionality between the inheritance of Menashe and those of the other tribes. The census taken in the plains of Moav now included the descendants of Makhir, living in the Gilad, such that the figures for Menashe were boosted to 52,000.[[1]](#footnote-1)

C.

With awe and trepidation and many questions and reservations, I raise the following hypothesis as an introduction to *Sefer Devarim* – “Mishneh Torah” – and the Covenant of the Plains of Moav. Perhaps the repetition of the Torah and the forging anew of the covenant were meant (mainly, or partly) to integrate the descendants of Makhir, son of Menashe, in the Gilad, and the descendants of Yair, son of Menashe, in the Bashan, within the nation that had received Torah at Sinai. When they joined the gathering on the plains of Moav, heard Moshe repeat the Torah, and accepted the Covenant of the Plains of Moav upon themselves as they were “standing this day before God,” these long-lost brethren who had been separated were now reintegrated as part of the nation about to inherit its land.

It is possible that the covenant that Yehoshua makes at Mount Eval concerning “all the words of this Torah” is intended for the descendants of Efraim, who had dwelled in their inheritance in Mount Efraim all the way back to the days of Efraim, their forefather, in a process similar to the covenant on the plains of Moav, which had been intended for the descendants of Menashe.

1. It is noteworthy that the Book of Jubilees (46) discusses a Jewish presence in Canaan even while the majority lived in Egypt:

“And the king of Egypt went out to fight with the king of Canaan in the forty-seventh Jubilee (*Yovel*), in the second week, in the second year thereof; and *Bnei Yisrael* brought out the bones of all the sons of Yaakov except for the bones of Yosef, and they buried them in the field, in Me’arat Ha-makhpela, in the mountain [region]. And many returned to Egypt, while a few remained behind in the mountains of Chevron, and your father Amram [note: the Book of Jubilees speaks to Moshe in the second person] remained with them. And the king… devised an evil plan against *Bnei Yisrael*, to afflict them… And they enslaved them forcefully, but as they afflicted them, so they increased and multiplied… And in the seventh week, in the seventh year of the forty-seventh Jubilee, your father came from the land of Canaan, and you were born… and that time was a time of persecution for *Bnei Yisrael*….” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)