



Matot

Numbers 30:2 – 32:42

The people of Israel are the only people in the world who were exiled from their land for 2,000 years and yet remained intact as a people and as a faith.

Numbers chapter 32 describes an interesting encounter between the tribes of Reuben and Gad and Moses. Having just conquered land to the east of the Jordan River, they request permission to settle permanently in this area, in the Gilead and Bashan, an area rich in grazing land and so vital to these two tribes of many cattle. Moses' initial response is a distressed one:

Shall your brothers go to the war while you sit here? Why will you discourage the heart of the people of Israel from going over into the land that the Lord has given them? (Numbers 32:6-7)

Moses then reminds them of the sin of the spies who had returned from the Land of Israel and spoke ill of the land, causing the people to doubt the success of their imminent entry. God's response, of course, was to punish the people and delay the entry for an additional 38 years. Moses fears that if Reuben and Gad remain in the land east of the Jordan, the rest of the people will refuse to enter. After years of experience with the Children of Israel, Moses is quite aware that the slightest provocation can instill fear and lack of faith in the people. As a result, he continues, *"For if you turn away from following him, He will again abandon them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people."* (Numbers 32:15) While Moses' fear of angering God seems very legitimate, and his fear that Reuben and Gad's actions might have a negative influence on the people is logical, the last phrase which indicates that the Nation of Israel would be destroyed seems a bit extreme. After all, the nation survived its first delay. Why wouldn't it survive an additional one?

Remember, however, that at this point in time, Moses is close to his death and God has already told him how he will die (Numbers 27:13). An entire generation has already died in the desert, those adults who had actually experienced the Exodus from Egypt and the revelation at Sinai. The only people who were adults at these two seminal events who are still alive and who will actually enter the Land of Israel are Joshua and Caleb, those valiant spies who were rewarded because of their faith in and love of the Land. If these individuals remain in the desert another generation, no one who enters the land will have experienced the Exodus and Sinai. And it is this vital detail that threatens the continued existence of the nation.

The people of Israel are the only people in the world who were exiled from their land for 2,000 years and yet remained intact as a people and as a faith. What kept us going all those years was the fact that we had the Torah, the Bible, as a guide through the years of exile, and we had a land to yearn for. But those two elements, Bible and Land, had to be linked together, experientially, in some way, in order for the connection to last for eternity. Joshua leads the people into the land, having personally experienced the Exodus, the revelation at Sinai, and indeed all the wars and tribulations of the desert. Through his personal experience, he can help the Children of Israel connect to the land, and experience the meaning of freedom from slavery, of receiving the Torah. Through Joshua, the link is preserved and passed on forever.