

7-09-26 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene

Torah Portion: Num 30:1 – 36:13 *Matot* (tribes) and *Mas'ei* (journeys of)

Haftarah: Jer 2:4-28

Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Acts 17:24-29

National Borders are Scriptural

Central question of this message: Why should our nation have a national culture and a defined, defended border?

We have a double portion today. It begins with *Matot*, and ends with *Mas'ei*, which records the journeys of the Hebrews from the Exodus to the entry to the Land. This is the final reading from the book of *B'Midbar* (Numbers). Next week we will continue with the first portion from the book of *Devarim* (Deuteronomy), which is arguably the longest single recorded sermon ever delivered to any congregation.

The name of parasha *Matot* comes from the ninth word in the English and the fifth word in the original Hebrew.

Num 30:1-5

30 Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the word which the Lord has commanded. 2 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.

וַיְדַבֵּר	מֹשֶׁה	אֶל-	רֹאשֵׁי	הַמִּטּוֹת	לְבָנֵי		
And spake	Moses	unto	the heads of	the tribes	concerning the children of		
1696	4872	413	7218	4294	1121		
יִשְׂרָאֵל	לֵאמֹר	זֶה	הַדָּבָר	אֲשֶׁר	צִוָּה	יְהוָה:	
Israel,	saying,	This	the thing	which	hath commanded.	the Lord	
3478	559	2088	1697	834	6680	3068	
אִישׁ	כִּי-	וְיָדַר	נֶדָר	לַיהוָה	אוֹ-	הַשְּׁבַע	שְׁבַעַה
a man	If	vow	a vow	unto the Lord,	or	swear	an oath
376	3588	5087	5088	3069	176	7650	7621
אֶסֶר	עַל-	נַפְשׁוֹ	לֹא	יַחַל	דְּבָרוֹ	כָּכָל-	
a bond;	with	his soul	not	he shall break	his word,	according to all	
632	5921	5315	3808	2490	1697	3605	
הֵיזָא	מִפִּי	יַעֲשֶׂה:					
that proceedeth	out of his mouth.	he shall do					
3318	6310	6213					

This parasha deals in some detail with vows and oaths.

A vow and an oath are closely interrelated. Both invoke heavenly solemnity. Both also bind the speaker. I have taken a solemn oath on a number of occasions. Several times I have been called to

be a witness in a court proceeding. Before offering testimony, I was given an oath – promising that my words would be truth, and nothing but the truth.

I have also given an oath to my country upon becoming a soldier in its army. My oath was as follows:

I, H. J. Ledbetter Jr., do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.

I received a discharge from the Army back in 2001, but I have never been relieved of my oath of allegiance. And I will never turn my back on it until death. That is because I wish to walk in integrity and not be found a liar.

Likewise, I have made an oath, a vow, and a covenant with Pam, my wife. I will remain faithful to that commitment to her until death as well.

An oath of fewer words, and with what seems to be a somewhat lesser level of commitment is administered to the newly-elected President of the United States upon his acceptance of that office. Its source is the US Constitution, Article 2, Section 1, which provides:

Before he enter on the execution of his office, he shall take the following oath or affirmation: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Oaths and vows have bound people of faith and fidelity since Biblical times. And that dynamic is important to how the conversation between Ruth and Naomi ended as the two ladies went to Israel from Moab.

Naomi had urged Ruth and Orpah to return to their people and to their land. She urged a return three times, refusing Ruth's desire to

continue to Israel. Ruth brushed-off Naomi's urgings and persisted. And in what seems to be a bit of higher emotion, Ruth finally gave an oath, which settled the matter.

Ruth 1:15-18

15 Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." 16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me." 18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

It is important to note that in a legal dispute under Biblical law, when one party gives an oath affirming any fact as true, then that oath seals the matter completely, and that fact is taken as true by all concerned.¹

¹ Ex. 22:11

So, after Ruth made an oath, the matter was settled. Ruth would not go back to her former people and her former family. She would go on a new path – that of being a fully grafted-in Jewish woman, living in a new country, and living a different life.

The truth is that when Naomi turned once again to walk toward Bethlehem, Ruth walked with her, never turning back. Ruth stepped into Israel not as a Moabite woman, but as a Jew.

One of the important aspects of oaths and vows seems to go unnoticed today – these words of oath serve to separate the past from the future.

They divide a life lived before the oath from the life lived after the oath. An oath is in many ways much like a *mikveh* – it marks a “change of life” which not only is marked in Heaven, but is also to be evidenced on earth.

Before I was an officer in the military, the dictates of men of higher military rank might have been interesting, but were not binding upon me. After the oath, proper orders passed down through my chain of command were to be followed.

Before I was married to Pam, her wants, needs and desires might have been interesting to me,² but once I was married, I was commanded by G-d to place her in a priority position in my life above my own wants, needs and desires. I was required to give my life for hers.³

In a very real way, an oath becomes much like the border that Ruth crossed from Moab to Israel – it defines and divides whom we once were from whom we now are.

And that brings me to the core of my teaching for you today. Are national borders biblical?

I have heard many sweet normative Christians proclaim that America should have no borders because it should serve as a place of refuge for all who would come here seeking a better place to live.

The same sweet believers also seem to proudly acknowledge the ancient indigenous tribes who once occupied the lands upon which they are standing, while they engage in some sort of ceremony or other which is inconsistent with that primitive tribe's patterns and

² And you can be assured that before marriage there was much about Pam which was very interesting to me.

³ Eph 5:25-33

practices. These people haven't done enough research to determine which of the various native tribes should be honored in such a proclamation, because native tribes eagerly murdered and displaced one another to gain the best lands for their tribes. And even the first natives to step foot upon some lands plundered the plants and animals for food – those plants and animals who had come to that place and had displaced former plants and animals as they asserted dominance. How might these well-meaning people actually determine which occupier has the preeminent right of occupation, and thus be worthy of honor? Possibly the most hostile and ruthless warriors who were the last to conquer the territory before the white man prevailed against them? There is no end to that analysis, and thus I consider the act of “recognition of original people ownership” to be a fool's errand.

What I hear from many normative Christians is that we are to welcome the stranger and foreigner, and that this is consistent with what G-d told the Jews after the Exodus.

Lev 19:33-34

33 'When a **stranger** resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. 34 '**The stranger** who resides

with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

And,

Zech 7:8-11

8 Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying,
9 "Thus has the Lord of hosts said, 'Dispense true justice, and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; 10 and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, **the stranger** or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.'

And,

Matt 25:31-41

31 "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 "And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as

the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; **I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;** 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? 38 'And when did we see You **a stranger**, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

Many sweet believers would insist that these verses counsel against having defended national boundaries. Further, they suggest that these verses command us to treat those who have come into our

country – whether legally or illegally – with the same honor and compassion as we should treat native-born Americans.

I believe that belief system is incompatible with the bulk of Scripture. Certainly, we are not to treat poorly those who have come into our country wrongfully, because that is not consistent with G-d's character. But neither are we to ignore the fact that someone has come into our country wrongfully, or has refused to leave when their temporary visa expired. G-d does not require us to ignore truth when we exercise compassion. Neither does G-d require us to ignore justice as part of compassion. There is a bright dividing line between justice and compassion.

Pure justice without a consideration of mercy leads to tyranny. Pure mercy without a consideration of justice leads to chaos and anarchy. There must always be a balance in a healthy society.

So, what about boundaries? Let's begin with personal boundaries.

Personal Boundaries.

Not everyone is invited into our personal prayer times. Yeshua went off by Himself to pray.⁴ Yeshua set personal boundaries involving enforced distance from others for carrying out holy tasks.

When we marry, we are to establish a firm boundary around that relationship, and exclude all outside persons and influences which might harm that relationship. We are to turn our backs to many things of the world, and turn our faces toward the one which G-d has established for us as a life's partner. And then as men we are to also place our spouse at our back as we face the danger, so that we might protect her from anything in the world that can harm her. A G-dly man forms a boundary around his marriage and his wife.

Yeshua guarded the Sabbath and the holy festivals by keeping them Himself. He gave us the example of setting apart the Sabbath day from the foundations of the world.⁵ Yeshua kept personal boundaries regarding holiness and G-d's appointed times.

Tribal Boundaries.

⁴ Luke 5:16

⁵ Gen 2:2-3

The earliest commands of G-d are that mankind was to scatter and to populate the earth.

Gen 1:28-29

28 And God blessed them; and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth**, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

As easy as those commands were to observe, mankind rebelled and decided to come together in defiance of G-d's instructions.

Gen 11:1-5

11 Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. 2 And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city,

and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

We know that G-d then frustrated their rebellious plan, and established many different languages among them. They lacked that common language, so they naturally distanced themselves from the other people speaking a different language. Thus, separate people groups were born. They became tribes.

Those separate people groups migrated away from the plains of Shinar and then populated the earth. As each group grew in number, their children learned the culture and language of the people in their group. Because tribal cultures developed without any significant influences from other tribal cultures, a significant divergence in what was considered right and wrong also developed.

Some cultures developed norms more aligned with G-d's instructions, and so they prospered. Other cultures who chose fewer of the societal norms consistent with G-d's instructions developed different value systems.

When a more prosperous culture had contact with a less prosperous culture, the natural human tendency for coveting took hold. Then it seems that violence became the technique used by the less prosperous to enable taking from those who have more. So, tribes developed a warrior class to either take from others, or alternatively to defend themselves from tribes who wished to use force of arms to take from them. War technology then became important to offense, and defense.

The tribes would also push one another out of the best landholdings, to gain better hunting grounds or croplands. The history of the native tribes in North America is replete with stories of taking and retaking of lands by the tribes all the way up to the time of the white settlers moving across the country for more than a century.

But with the tribes of Israel, G-d had us take a more ordered approach. Once He set the tribal boundaries in Josua 13-21, he expected those boundaries to be honored.

Deut 19:13

14 "You shall not move your neighbor's boundary mark, which the ancestors have set, in your inheritance

which you shall inherit in the land that the Lord your God gives you to possess.

National Boundaries.

As pagan tribes grew, they developed into separate nations, and established well-defended borders throughout the earth.

At the time of the Exodus, Egypt was the most powerful nation on the earth, and its lands included what we know as Egypt today but its influence and outposts also extended all the way to southern Israel, and even up to Jerusalem.⁶

G-d clearly instructed the Hebrews to conquer the land of Israel, and He set out the limits of that conquest in the next parasha we will study.

Deut 1:6-8

⁶As the Hebrew conquest of the land of Israel began, a garrison commander wrote urgent letters to Amenhotep III and IV. Those letters are known today as the “Tel El Amarna” letters. Some of the more than 384 clay tablets include letters which clearly state that the Hebrews are easily defeating the other nations in this area, and the Egyptian garrison commander is begging Pharaoh to send reinforcements to fight the Hebrews, or all Egyptian gains in this region will certainly be lost.

6 "The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, 'You have stayed long enough at this mountain. 7 'Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. 8 'See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them.'

G-d had already laid-out the boundaries of the land He was going to give to the descendants of Abraham, and here He was commanding us now to take that land by force. After the final restoration of the People to the Land, the boundaries of the Land will once again be established, and the tribal boundaries will be redrawn to give each tribe a portion of land from east to west.⁷

G-d's promise to Israel regarding the Land will not fail. We are watching the news reports daily demonstrating that those who intend to exterminate Jews and take the Land of Israel for their own are

⁷ Ezek 47:15-48:30

being frustrated. Their greatest frustration shall be after a great alliance comes together to invade Israel, and that great multinational invasion shall be shattered by G-d Himself, and it will take 7 months to find and then bury the dead of the invading armies.⁸

International Boundaries.

It is clear that G-d has done a special thing regarding the Land of Israel, but how about the USA (or any other nation) with regard to boundaries? I submit that the principles that G-d established for Israel's Land can be in many ways applied to the other nations of the earth. G-d has not forgotten the other nations, and has a special place for them as well.

Acts 17:24-29

24 "The God who made the world and all things in it,
since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in
temples made with hands; 25 neither is He served by
human hands, as though He needed anything, since He
Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; 26
and **He made from one, every nation of mankind to**

⁸ Ezek 38-39

live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'

G-d has commanded those aliens who come to sojourn in the Land of Israel that they be assimilated into Jewish culture and practice as well.

Num 15:14-16

14 'And if an alien sojourns with you, or one who may be among you throughout your generations, and he wishes to make an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the Lord, just as you do, so he shall do. 15 **'As for the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the Lord.** 16 'There is to be

one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you.'"

This passage cuts two ways. It warns the Jews that they are not to make a dividing wall against the sojourner. It also warns the sojourner that he is to assimilate into Jewish culture and practice. There is no room in Israel for a culture-within-a-culture as we see in many large urban cities in the USA.

And the sacrifices for unintentional sin also apply to the alien and sojourner.

Num 15:27-31

27 'Also if one person sins unintentionally, then he shall offer a one year old female goat for a sin offering. 28 'And the priest shall make atonement before the Lord for the person who goes astray when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven. **29 'You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them. 30 'But the person who does**

anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. 31 'Because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be on him.'"

Clearly, removal from “among the people” is commanded by G-d as the remedy for defying the Law of G-d at that time. Since the command is not one for death penalty, it must be the equivalent of what we would call deportation. That person must leave the Land, for only those who honor G-d’s commandments are able to remain in the Land.

Do these principles apply to the USA? I believe that when any nation applies the principles of truth that G-d has established for the Land of Israel, blessing will follow. Failing to heed these instructions will likewise lead to destruction.

As Ruth spoke an oath to Naomi to enter Israel as a Jew, a new legal immigrant speaks the following oath to become a naturalized citizen of the USA.

"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."

In essence, the oath rejects former ties and nationality, and adopts a new nationality and commits to assimilation.

You now see how dangerous it is to allow into our nation those who will not commit to what this oath requires.

In the former times when Torah controlled Israel, and most certainly in the time of the Kingdom Temple in which Yeshua will reign, the only people permitted into the Land of Israel will be those who have joined themselves to the L-rd and to the Jewish people by assimilation, and whose hearts are governed by Torah.

That law of assimilation (grafting-in) gave (and will give) Jewish society cohesiveness, unity, and prevents any “alternative lifestyles” being honored within the Land. That prevents dissention and chaos.

Today our nation is wracked with division, “alternative lifestyles” and chaos. That is, in my opinion, because of the practice we have had in the past of permitting so many people into our nation who have no intention of assimilating, or adopting the values of the founding fathers of our nation, which gave us the greatest degree of human freedoms the world has ever known.

Today, people identify themselves as “African Americans,” “Pakistani-Americans,” Russian-Americans,” etc. So many seem to have some sort of modifier attached to their identity which sets them apart from all other Americans. There are people in America who have been here for years and who still cannot read, speak, or write

passable English. I have seen in-person the real effects of this kind of provincialism in Africa and India.

In Zambia, there are more than 70 tribes, and all have their own language and tribal lands. Although English is the official language of Zambia (because of the influence of the English for many years), the nation is not truly united at the deepest levels. The national boundaries were established by England without regard to tribal lands. Tribes still claim lands belonging to neighboring tribes, and the tribal values and customs are so divergent (some the opposite of others) that a cohesive agreement regarding universal national values is continually fleeting. In Zambia, it seems that the political party with the most zealous (and violent) supporters seems to prevail.

Zambia, with roughly the same national boundaries has existed as a for generations. Although the national name has changed, the people have not. The defining hurdle of national unity in Zambia seems to me to be a refusal of individual tribes to fully adopt national unity, and a stubborn insistence upon provincialism. When you ask a Zambian who he really is, he will likely tell you of his tribal affiliation. Zambia could be a world-class leader in Africa, and beyond. Lacking a deep common foundation in biblical values, and

while suffering under deep provincialism, Zambia is stuck being a third-world nation, regardless of its amazing abundant natural resources.

India faces similar issues. India today officially recognizes 30 languages, of which 22 are the most predominant. Each region of India features a different language. Within each region, there are diverse religious faiths and practices. The five-tiered caste system has created a permanent stratifications between upper classes and lower classes. In traditional Indian culture, whatever caste you are born into, you remain. Migrating from the lower castes to the upper levels is deeply discouraged, although some inroads to upward mobility have been realized in the last generation.

The Indian people are resourceful and energetic. Some have developed cottage industries, and some of which have grown into very successful world-class businesses. India is the most populous place on the earth, and has abundant natural resources. What holds it back from being the world's greatest economic engine? It seems that internal divisions based on religion, caste, and language drive a provincialism that defeats the highest levels of national unity.

Let's recall Ruth's example. She began as a Moabite woman, with a different language, a different culture, and a different national identity. She turned her back on all of that, to fully adopt what it meant to be a Jew living in Israel. Because she brought her natural strengths and gifts to bear for her new people group, she was honored to be in the lineage of Messiah.

We each are born with unique skills, gifts, and talents. When we unify under the banner of a single nation, and use the best of who we are to advance the righteous causes in that single nation, we become what we are to be – salt and light – in a dark world.

Our national motto is *e pluribus unum* – “from many, one.” Soon after our founding, many cultures have come to this country fleeing one oppression or another, and seeing what opportunities lay ahead in an unspoiled nation.

Now, after 250 years of immigration, we are seeing the seeds of divisiveness and provincialism take root and flower in America. When immigrants come to the USA and decide to reject cultural assimilation, refusing to embrace our finest Bible-based qualities and values, but rather set on a course of internal conquering, chaos

and domination – our nation has an internal disease that can one day be fatal.

Our nation was founded 250 years ago on G-dly principles and Biblical values. Every inch we drift from those solid truths of G-d puts us closer to a precipice that leads to an unrecoverable fall.

It is our duty as followers of the One true G-d to influence our society every day to draw closer to G-d and His ways, and to reject all efforts to divide and to dilute our holy values. We are to be salt and light in this world – in this nation.

Sadly, I feel that most Americans lack the courage or the conviction to take action, even as we see the forest aflame on the near horizon.

What you should do to preserve our national integrity is not up to me to determine. If you will pray fervently, you will be able to hear from the Spirit what you should do every day. I pray that our nation will survive yet another 250 years – but I think it will do so only if it returns fully to G-d.