

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Chukas-Balak – 5783

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Bnei Yisroel are marching toward Eretz Yisroel.

וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לְרַגְלֵי אֶת־יַעְזֹר וַיִּלְכְּדוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הָאֱמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם:

“And Moshe sent to spy Yaazor, and they capture its forts, and dispossessed the Amorim that were there.” (Bamidbar 21:32).

Where is Yaazor and why was it special? If Bnei Yisroel already captured the Amori towns and forts (ibid 21:25) why did Moshe have to dispossess the Amorim from there? Moshe sends spies on his own, why? The ten scouts' failure did not deter him?

In the final year of the forty-year journey, Bnei Yisroel marched toward the Land of Canaan with every intent to possess it. In their way are several countries. They encamped at Arnon which is the division between Moav and Amori. (Ibid 21:13). Bnei Yisroel passed around Moav and now faced Amori. They wanted to pass through to get to the Land of Canaan. King Sichon of Amori denied them access. (Ibid 21:22). Bnei Yisroel had no choice but to defeat him. (Ibid 21:24). “And Yisroel took these cities and Yisroel settled in all the cities of Amori, in Cheshbon and all its strongholds.” (Ibid 21:25).

This land formerly belonged to Moav but was conquered by Sichon. (Ibid 21:26). The Torah says this to teach that while Bnei Yisroel could not dispossess Moav, they could take land that was already taken from Moav. Since Moav lost it to Amori it was no longer Moav's and Bnei Yisroel could take it. This is how the Torah treats conquered lands. There is no need to return it to former residents.

וַיָּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ הָאֱמֹרִי: “And Yisroel settled in the lands of Amori.” (Ibid 21:31). This land now became part of Eretz Yisroel. Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe would settle in these lands on the eastern Yarden bank. (Ibid 32:33). Then Moshe spied in Yaazor. (Ibid 21:32). Yaazor was adjacent to Gilead and was a fortress city on the western portion of the Amori land. However, it was clearly not in their land proper because Bnei Yisroel was said to have possessed all their land. Therefore, it must have been fortified and built by the Amorim and used as a fortress but was not attached to their land.

At first blush it would be presumed to be on the western bank of the Yarden in the Eretz Canaan. However, the Torah describes it as connected to Gilead which is on the eastern bank of the Yarden. (Ibid 32:1). It is flush with lush grazing area and is cattle country. (Ibid 32:4).

After the entire area was conquered and settled, including the Bashan and King Og, Yaazor became just a regular city. However, at this point, before conquering Eretz Canaan, and before wiping out the Bashan people, it was a detached stronghold that was occupied by Amorim.

It was important enough strategically for Moshe to spy it out. Why did he send spies? מְרַגְלִים “Spies” is mentioned only twice in the entire Chumash. First is when it refers

to the brothers as spies seven times. The second is Moshe sending spies to Yaazor. Yaakov's sons, the brothers, came to buy food and supplies in Mitzrayim during the famine, and they arrived at the palace. Yoseph was distributing the food and the brothers did not recognize him. He called them spies. (Bereishis 42:9). He accused them of seeing the עֲרֹת הָאָרֶץ "the land's nakedness." (Ibid 42:12). He claims they came to see how the land looked bare. This means, below the surface, not what the casual observer can see.

A scout walks through the land and evaluates it from the exterior. He observes where the fortifications are, the main rivers and cisterns, the quality of the food and produce, the goodness of the land for farming and building, and surveys the elevations. He judges the people and sees what they look like and how much military is visible. A spy does more. He sees what is beneath the surface, as if the land is naked. He sees where the hidden stores of food and supplies are, where the hidden placement of military and cavalry are, what the politics of the region is, and how happy the people are with the current government. When is ready to conquer it is best to send spies. Moshe sent spies to Yaazor and Yehoshua sent spies to Yericho. (Yehoshua 2:1). Hashem told Moshe to send men just to encourage the people how good Eretz Canaan was.

There is a third time spies are mentioned. In his last days, Moshe recounts the nation's history and prepares them for living in Eretz Yisroel. He recounts, in his version, that it was the people that wanted to send men to look at Eretz Canaan. (Devorim 1:22). Moshe approved the plan. (Ibid 1:23). "They turned and went up to the hills, and they came to the Eschol wadi, and spied it out." (Ibid 1:24). Moshe uses the word "spy." Contrarily, when the Torah records the event earlier, it was Hashem that told Moshe to send the men (Bamidbar 13:2), Moshe chose them (ibid 13:16), and to see what type of land it is and how the inhabitants are (ibid 13:18-20). That entire segment calls them men, agents, scouts. They were not spies. What changed?

Forty days is a significant amount of time. The mabul took place over forty days. (Bereishis 7:17). The Embalming of Yaakov took forty days. (Ibid 50:3). Moshe was on Har Sinai twice for forty days. (Shmos 24:18 and 34:28). There are forty days from the end of Pesach to the three-day preparation before Shavuos. There are forty days from Elul through Yom Kippur. The scouts were in Eretz Canaan for forty days. (Bamidbar 13:25).

Forty days changes a person. The world needed changing so the deluge took place for forty days. Moshe needed the forty-days to from a leader without the Torah to one with it. Change is not always for the better. The nation changed during the forty days Moshe was missing and sinned with the molten calf. The scouts went from scouts – who were supposed to see the good of the Land – to spies – who focused only on the military might of the enemy. For forty days these men left the bubble of the clouds, the mahn and meat from Hashem, the Mishkan, and Moshe. Forty days was enough for them to forget. They returned, Korach was having his treason, and there was no return for them.

Moshe did not need Hashem to tell him to spy out Yaazor. It was all part of the command of taking these lands. With the right mindset and right people, the job was done without incident. The nation had forty years to change for the better and was ready now to conquer.