

Parsha Ponders

Mattos–Masei | July 28, 2022 | 29 Tammuz 5782

*The torn garments; the torn tribe*¹

ויתן להם משה לבני-גד ולבני ראובן ולחצי שבט מנשה בן-יוסף את-ממלכת סיחן מלך האמרי ואת-ממלכת
עוג מלך הבשן וגו'

Moshe gave to the tribe of Gad, the tribe of Reuven, and half of the tribe of Menashe, the son of Yosef, the kingdom of Sichon, the king of the Emorites, and the kingdom of Og, king of the Bashan...²

The Torah describes an interesting interaction between the tribes of Reuven and Gad³. They had abundant flock, and noticed that the recently conquered land on the East side of the Jordan river was suitable for flock. They requested to Moshe that they stay on that side of the river, and not join their brothers into the Land of Israel proper, on the west side of the Jordan. After a whole back and forth, Moshe eventually agreed to their request. Seemingly out of nowhere, Moshe also decided to allocate some of this land for *half* of the tribe of Menashe. They seemingly didn't request this, so why did Moshe do this⁴? Also, why only half the tribe, and not the whole tribe?

There's a surprising *Midrash*⁵ which will shed some light on this. Menashe, the son of Yosef, caused the sons of Yaakov to tear their garments. As a result, Hashem caused Menashe's descendants to be torn apart, by being split in two. What is this referring to? When Yosef was under the guise of the Viceroy of Egypt, he sent his brothers home to their father. Before they left, Yosef asked Menashe to sneak the former's precious goblet into the bag of Binyomin⁶. This was a plot to frame Binyomin, in order to test his brothers to see if they've improved their ways⁷. Menashe chased after them⁸, and "caught" Binyomin red handed. The brothers tore their clothing in dismay, and we are taught that Menashe's descendants were punished as a result⁹. Moshe dividing Menashe into two portions of land was a fulfillment of this punishment.

¹ Based on Likkutei Yehudah to Genesis 44:13, quoting his uncle the *Gerrer Rebbe*, the Penei Menachem

² Numbers 32:33

³ The commentaries note that when the Torah describes their interest in this land, it lists the tribe of Reuven and then the tribe of Gad (v. 1), but when they actually make their request, and all subsequent times, it states the tribe of Gad first (v. 2, 6, 25, 29, 31, 33 (our verse), 34, 37) (see for example Ibn Ezra v. 2). It's also interesting how many times their names are mentioned in this short *parsha*. See Ba'al HaTurim to v. 1 for why it's repeated so much

⁴ Cf. Ramban to v. 33 for one approach

⁵ Bereishis Rabbah 84:20

⁶ Targum "Yonasan" to Genesis 44:1, based on Midrash Tanchuma Mikeitz § 10 (brought by Da'as Zekeinim to Genesis 43:17)

⁷ See Ramban to Genesis 42:9

⁸ Targum "Yonasan" to Genesis 44:4, based on Midrash Tanchuma loc. cit. I saw an interesting question on this in Hogei Sha'ashuim parshas Toldos BeDa'as HaRamban D'HaAvos Lo Kiyamu Es HaTorah BeChutz LaAretz, by R' Yosef Moshe Adler, an *avreich* in Lakewood. Bereishis Rabbah 92:4 says that Yosef observed Shabbos in Egypt (see more sources in Torah Sheleimah Bereishis Chapter 43 § 45; it's interesting that Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Chapter 6 omits his observance of this *mitzvah*). From Bereishis Rabbah 92:4 with Maharzu, it's clear that this story occurred on Shabbos. How could Yosef send his son Menashe after them, if he would definitely be violating Shabbos by doing so? Perhaps this Bereishis Rabbah disagrees with Midrash Tanchuma loc. cit. (at least, the way Targum "Yonasan" loc. cit. applies it), which teaches that it was Menashe who was sent. Maybe some anonymous Egyptian was sent instead

⁹ Part of what's surprising about this *Midrash* is that Menashe was at most nine years old when this episode happened (see HaTorah HaTemimah to Joshua 7:6 § 1, who brings sources which prove this, and uses this to discuss a side point). As well, he was simply fulfilling his father's command, and it was for a good purpose. See

However, we can ask a simple question on this teaching, from another *Midrash*¹⁰. Yaakov is described as blessing his grandson Menashe with taking “from here and from here”¹¹. This is understood¹² to be referring to the tribe of Menashe inheriting two separate portions of land. Again, this is being stated in the context of a blessing. How can this then be resolved with the other *Midrash*, which seems to describe the tribe being split up as a punishment?

We can suggest a simple solution to this contradiction. The blessing of Yaakov was that the tribe of Menashe should inherit two portions of land, and indeed that was considered something good. The plan was for this to be manifested as one giant portion of land, split in the middle by the Jordan River. This way, the tribe would not really be separated into two distinct tribes. However, the punishment changed how this blessing came about. It’s clear from verses in the book of Joshua that the portion of land that Menashe received on the East side of the Jordan was surrounded by other tribes¹³. This essentially split the tribe of Menashe in two, without easy access to each other. Just like Menashe caused the sons of Yaakov to tear their garments, so too Hashem caused Moshe to tear the tribe of Menashe into two. Measure for measure.

Good Shabbos

Shiurei Rabbeinu Meshulam Dovid Derush VeAggadah Mishpetei Hashem Emes § s.v. ויקרע who discusses the justice of this punishment

¹⁰ Midrash Tanchuma Pinchas § 9

¹¹ This seems to be the *Midrash’s* interpretation of Genesis 49:22

¹² By the Penei Menachem. The exact language of the *Midrash* is בנות צעדה עלי שור – זה הירדן שנעשה למשה. כחומה שלא יכנס לארץ. ואמר לו יעקב ליוסף בנותיך נוטלות כאן וכאן explain כאן וכאן. Perhaps it’s obvious

¹³ Joshua 17:10