

Sefer Bamidbar - one book, two books, or three? /shiur #11

When did the mei Meriva incident take place, and what it matters

Source sheet for shiur by Menachem Leibtag,

INTRODUCTION

After the 'sin of spies', was Moshe Rabeinu supposed to remain the leader of the next generation as well, and bring them into the Land?

If not, when and why was that decision made that someone else would lead them in?

In this week's shiur, we discuss this question from the perspectives of both Sefer Bamidbar & Devarim, as we take into consideration: chronology, geography, climate, and maybe even a little logic.

I. Chronology of the events in Sefer Bamidbar

Explicit dates :

The cloud rises, and travel begins on 20th of Iyar - year II [see 10:11]

The death of Aharon - 1st of Av Year 40 [in chapter 33 - Masei...]

Events in between

Chapters 11 thru 14 - logically in the summer of Year II

The Korach rebellion - no date/ no location - conclusion based on logic

Miriam's death [see 20:1] - first month - but no mention of the Year

The Mei Meriva incident- note the textual & thematic connection to Korach

Aharon's death - followed by the war against the King of Arad

The travel thru Transjordan and the battle against Sichon [chapter 21]

Note the 'name change' to ISRAEL beginning in chapter 21

II. Geography - where is KADESH

How many places are named Kadesh

- Kadesh Barnea - where they send the Meraglim from
- Note Devarim 1:1-2 / 1:18-21 / 2:13-14 compare with Bamid 13:26 & 10:12
- Pay attention to the general area MIDBAR PARAAN [in contrast to MIDBAR TZIN]
- KADESH in Sefer Breishit - 14:7 =Ein Mishpat / 16:14 / 20:1 not far from Grar
- KADESH MIDBAR TZIN see Bamid 20:1, 14-22 / 33-36-37 !! / 34:1-3 /
- Discuss how it's south of the Dead sea on eastern border - CANNOT be Kadesh Barnea

Let's see end of Devarim chapter 1 -

When did we arrive in Kadesh Midbar Tzin?

לט וטפכם אשר אמרתם לבז יהיה, ובניכם אשר לא ידעו היום טוב ורע--המה, יבאו שמה; ולהם אתננה, והם יירשוה. מ. ואתם, פנו לכם; וסעו המדברה, דרך ים-סוף.
מא ותענו ותאמרו אלי, חטאנו ליהוה--אנחנו נעלה ונלחמנו, ככל אשר-צונו יהוה אלהינו; ותחגרו, איש את-כלי מלחמתו, ותהינו, לעלת ההרה. מב ויאמר יהוה אלי, אמר להם לא תעלו ולא-תלחמו--כי אינני, בקרבכם ולא, תנגפו, לפני, איביכם. מג ואדבר אליכם, ולא שמעתם; ותמרו את-פי יהוה, ותזדו ותעלו ההרה. מד ויצא האמרי הישב בְּהַר ההוא, לקראתכם, וירדפו אתכם, כְּאִשֶּׁר תַּעֲשִׂינָה הַדְּבָרִים; ויכתו אתכם בשעיר, עד-חרמה. מה ותשבו ותבכו, לפני יהוה; ולא-שמע יהוה בקלכם, ולא האזין אליכם. **מו ותשבו בקדש, ימים רבים,**

פִּימִים, אשר ישבתם.

א ונפנו ונסע המדברה, דרך ים-סוף, כְּאִשֶּׁר דָּבַר יהוה, אלי; ונָסַב אֶת-הַר-שַׁעִיר, ימים רבים. {ס}

ב ויאמר יהוה, אלי לאמר. ג רב-לכם, סב את-ההר הזה; פנו לכם, צפנה.

ד וְאֶת-הָעָם, צוֹ לֵאמֹר, אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים בְּגִבּוֹל אֲחֵיכֶם בְּנֵי-עֵשָׂו, הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּשָׁעִיר; וַיִּירָאוּ מִכֶּם, וַנִּשְׁמַרְתֶּם מְאֹד. ה. אֶל-תִּתְּגְרוּ בָם--כִּי לֹא-אֵתֶן לָכֶם מֵאֲרָצָם, עַד מִדְּרֹךְ כַּף-רָגֶל: כִּי-יִרְשָׁה לְעֵשָׂו, נִתְּתִי אֶת-הָר שְׁעִיר. ו. אֲכַל תִּשְׁבְּרוּ מֵאֲתָם בַּכֶּסֶף, וְאֶכְלֹתֶם; וְגַם-מִיָּם תִּכְרוּ מֵאֲתָם, בַּכֶּסֶף--וּשְׁתִּיתֶם. ז. כִּי יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּרֹכֶךָ, בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְךָ--יָדַע לְכַתֹּב, אֶת-הַמִּדְבָּר הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה: זֶה אֲרֻבָּעִים שָׁנָה, יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עִמָּךְ--לֹא חֲסִרְתָּ, דָּבָר. ח. וַנַּעֲבֹר מֵאֵת אַחֵינוּ בְּנֵי-עֵשָׂו, הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּשָׁעִיר, מִדְּרֹךְ הָעֲרָבָה, מֵאִילַת וַיִּמְעָצִין גִּבּוֹר; {ס} וַיִּנָּפֹן, וַנַּעֲבֹר, דֶּרֶךְ, מִדְּבָר מוֹאָב. ט. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי, אֶל-תֵּצֵר אֶת-מוֹאָב, וְאֶל-תִּתְּגֵר בָּם, מִלְחָמָה: כִּי לֹא-אֵתֶן לָךְ מֵאֲרָצוֹ, יִרְשָׁה--כִּי לְבָנִי-לוֹט, נִתְּתִי אֶת-עֵר יִרְשָׁה.

Most all commentators assume that the Mei Meriva incident (as described in Bamidbar 20:1-14) took place in the fortieth year. Hence, it is also assumed that Bnei Yisrael spent most of the 38 years wandering from place to place in the desert.

Nonetheless, the Torah never provides us with a precise date for the Mei Meriva incident. In fact, we are only informed of the month, but not the year (see Bamidbar 20:1). Furthermore, from a careful reading of how Moshe Rabeinu describes those events in Parshat Devarim, one could arrive at a very different conclusion concerning what transpired during those forty years!

There's a very simple reason why everyone takes for granted that the Mei Meriva incident takes place in the 40th year. Later on, in that very same chapter in Sefer Bamidbar, we are told of Aharon's death (see 20:22-29), an event which definitely took place on the fifth month of the fortieth year (according to Bamidbar 33:38).

Therefore, it is only logical to assume that all the events in chapter 20 took place in the fortieth year. Hence, upon reading its opening pasuk:

"And Bnei Yisrael [the entire congregation] arrived at MIDBAR TZIN on the first month, and the people settled down in Kadesh, there Miriam died and was buried." (20:1)

- most all commentators conclude that Miriam died if the first month of that very same year (i.e. four months before Aharon). For example, let's note Rashbam's commentary:

"And Miriam died there: On the first month at the end of the FORTY years - for Aharon died on the fifth month of the fortieth year, as it states [explicitly] in Parshat Masei."

See also Ramban.

Ibn Ezra (to Bamidbar 20:1),

"In the first month: **In the FORTIETH YEAR.** And (thus) there is neither a story nor a prophecy in the Torah other than in the FIRST year and in the FORTIETH year."

Ibn Ezra is making a very bold statement, as he claims that from the moment that God decreed the punishment of forty years (after chet ha'meraglim) Chumash goes into a 'coma' for 38 years, no stories, no mitzvot. Hence, Ibn Ezra must explain that all of the mitzvot and narratives recorded in Chumash between chapters 15 and 20 (i.e. between the story of the spies and the death of Miriam) took place at an earlier time, i.e. before Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai. [See Ibn Ezra on Bamidbar 16:1.]

THE 18 STOP JOURNEY IN PARSHAT MASEI

Parshat Masei provides with a detailed list of Bnei Yisrael's journey through the desert (see 33:1-49). Even though that account mentions many locations that are not mentioned elsewhere in Chumash (and skips many locations that are mentioned - such as Kadesh Barnea itself!) - it will still be helpful for our discussion.

Let's pick up Parshat Masei as it records Bnei Yisrael's journey from Har Sinai (see 33:16).

From Sinai they travel to Kivrot ha'taava, and then to Chatzerot, and then to Ritma.

Now Kivrot ha'taava and Chatzerot have already been mentioned in Parshat Bha'alotcha (see 11:34-35), but Ritma is not.

However, Parshat Bha'alotcha tells us that they camped next in Midbar Paraan (see 12:16), and from there Moshe sent the meraglim (see 13:3) from an area known as KADESH BARNEA in Midbar Paraan.

Therefore, Chazal identify Ritma with Kadesh Barnea, and its 'new name' reflects the events which took place there (see Rashi 33:18). Then Parshat Masei mentions an additional 18 stops from Ritma until Bnei Yisrael arrive in Midbar Tzin (see 33:18-36), which were not mentioned anywhere else earlier in Sefer Bamidbar.

Now among the 18 locations we find Yotvata and Etzion Gaver, sites which almost for sure are somewhere in the SOUTHERN Negev, not far from the Red Sea (i.e. near Eilat). Most likely, this journey SOUTHWARD was a fulfillment of God's command to leave Kadesh Barnea towards the Red Sea (see again 14:25).

Then, Parshat Masei tells us that Bnei Yisrael travel from Etzion Gaver and arrive at Kadesh Midbar Tzin (see 33:36-38/ compare with 20:1), but does not tell us on what year they arrived.

[However, it is quite clear that they LEAVE Kadesh Midbar Tzin in the fortieth year, for from Kadesh they travel to Hor Ha'Har to bury Aharon - and that event for sure took place in year 40 as the pasuk itself testifies (33:38).]

So was Kadesh Midbar Tzin the LAST stop after a long 38 year journey wandering through the desert, OR was Kadesh Midbar Tzin the LONG stopover where Bnei Yisrael may have spent MOST of the years while waiting for the first generation to die?

Enter Parshat Devarim!

Recall that in Moshe Rabeinu's first speech in Sefer Devarim (chapters 1->4), he explains why forty years had elapsed since Bnei Yisrael SHOULD have entered. Therefore, the first part of that speech includes the story of chet ha'meraglim, for that was the primary reason for the forty year delay.

That story states specifically that the meraglim were sent from KADESH BARNEA (see 1:19), and also includes God's commandment that Bnei Yisrael must immediately leave and travel back into the desert toward the Red Sea (see 1:40). But after the story of the "ma'apilim" (see 1:41-45) there is one small, but very important pasuk:

"va'teshvu ba'KADESH yamim rabim, kayamim asher ya'shavtem."

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So what KADESH is this pasuk referring to? There are two 'candidates':

- 1) KADESH BARNEA - where the meraglim were sent from
- 2) KADESH MIDBAR TZIN - where the Mei Meriva story took place

But based on our analysis above, it CANNOT be Kadesh Barnea! After all, God commanded them to LEAVE Kadesh Barnea - "machar" -the NEXT DAY. Why then would they stay there for a long time?

III. Climate

Recall, it doesn't rain in the summer, but the winter rains fill up the aquifer

Which can be tapped, even in the Negev in the summer via digging wells/ [beerot]

Let's study the story of Mei Meriva, noting its similarity to the Korach incident

Bamidbar Chapter 20

א וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל-הָעֵדָה מִדְּבַר-צֹן, בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן, וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעָם, בְּקִדְשׁ; וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם, וַתִּקָּבֶר שָׁם.

1 And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.

ב וְלֹא-הָיָה מַיִם, לָעֵדָה; וַיִּקְהָלוּ, עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן.

2 And there was no water for the congregation; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

ג וַיִּרְבּוּ הָעָם, עִם-מֹשֶׁה; וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאָמֹר: 'וְלֹו גִּוְעָנוּ בְּגֹועַ אַחֵינוּ לִפְנֵי ה'.

3 And the people strove with Moses, and spoke, saying: 'Would that we had perished when our brethren perished before the LORD!

ד וְלָמָּה הֵבֵאתֶם אֶת-קֹהֶל ה', אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה, לָמוּת שָׁם, אֲנַחְנוּ וּבְעִירָנוּ.

4 And why have ye brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, to die there, we and our cattle?

ה וְלָמָּה הֶעֱלִיתֵנוּ, מִמִּצְרַיִם, לְהָבִיא אֹתָנוּ, אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה: לֹא מָקוֹם זֶרַע, וַתֵּאֲנָה וְגִפְנוֹ וְרִמּוֹן, וּמִיִּם אֵין, לְשָׁתוֹת.

5 And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us into this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.'

ו וַיָּבֹאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן מִפְּנֵי הַקָּהָל, אֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, וַיִּפְּלוּ, עַל-פְּנֵיהֶם; וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד-ה', אֲלֵיהֶם.

6 And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tent of meeting, and fell upon their faces; and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them.

ז וַיְדַבֵּר ה', אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר.

7 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:

ח קַח אֶת-הַמֶּטֶה, וְהִקְהַל אֶת-הָעֵדָה אֹתָהּ וְאַהֲרֹן אֹחִיךָ, וְדַבַּרְתֶּם אֶל-הַסֵּלַע לְעֵינֵיהֶם, וְנָתַן מִמִּיּוֹ; וְהוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם מַיִם מִן-הַסֵּלַע, וְהָשְׁקִיתָ אֶת-הָעֵדָה וְאֶת-בְּעִירָם.

8 'Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, that it give forth its water; and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock; so thou shalt give the congregation and their cattle drink.'

ט וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַמֶּטֶה, מִלִּפְנֵי ה', כַּאֲשֶׁר, צֻוְּהוּ.

9 And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as He commanded him.

י וַיִּקְהָלוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן, אֶת-הַקָּהָל--אֶל-פְּנֵי הַסֵּלַע; וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהֶם, שְׁמָעוּ-נָא הַמְּרִים--הַמֵּן-הַסֵּלַע הַזֶּה, נֹוצֵיא לָכֶם מַיִם.

10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said unto them: 'Hear now, ye rebels; are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?'

יא וַיִּרָם מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ, וַיִּךְ אֶת-הַסֵּלַע בְּמֶטֶהוּ--פַּעַמַּיִם; וַיֵּצְאוּ מִיִּם רַבִּים, וַתִּשָּׂף הָעֵדָה וּבְעִירָם.

11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and smote the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle.

Compare with the complaints in the Korach story – see Bamidbar chapter 16

Especially re: leadership [Datan & Aviram]

יב וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה, לִקְרֹא לְדָתָן וּלְאַבִּירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיָּאָב; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, לֹא נַעֲלֶה. יג הַמַּעֲט, כִּי הֶעֱלִיתָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וּדְבַשׁ, לְהַמִּיתָנוּ, בַּמִּדְבָּר: כִּי-תִשְׁתַּרְר עָלֵינוּ, גַּם-הַשִּׁתָּרָר. יד אַף לֹא אֵל-אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וּדְבַשׁ, הֵבִיאָתָנוּ, וַתִּתֵּן-לָנוּ, נַחֲלֹת שָׂדֵה וְכָרִים; הַעֲיֵנִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָהֵם, תִּנָּקֶר--לֹא נַעֲלֶה....

יח וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִחֻתָּתוֹ, וַיִּתְּנוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֵשׁ, וַיִּשְׂימוּ עֲלֵיהֶם, קִטְרֶת; וַיַּעֲמְדוּ, פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד--וּמֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן. יט וַיִּקְהַל עֲלֵיהֶם קִרַּח אֶת-כָּל-הָעֵדָה, אֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד; וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד-יְהוָה, אֶל-כָּל-הָעֵדָה.

לה וְאִשׁ יִצְאָה, מֵאֵת יְהוָה; וַתֹּאכַל, אֶת הַחֲמֻשִּׁים וּמֵאֲתָנִים אִישׁ, מִקְרִיבֵי, הַקִּטְרֶת.

Sefer Bamidbar – What 'belongs' & what doesn't!

Chapter	Ongoing Narrative	Mitzvot l'dorot (Commandments)
**	<i>Preparing to leave Har Sinai</i>	
1->4	Organizing the camp, army etc.	
5		Laws of "asham" * "sotah"
6		Laws of "nazir" & birkat kohanim
7	Dedication of Mishkan by the Nsiim	
8	Ceremony for Leviim, replacing bchorim	
9	Pesach in the desert; instructions on how to travel following the 'anan'	[Pesach sheni/ reason for delay?]
10	Using the "chatzrotot" for travel signals; Travel begins on 20 Iyar; "va'yhi b'nsoa"	
**	<i>Failure of first generation</i>	
11	Sin of the "mitavim"; 70 elders appointed	
12	Sin of Miriam, talking against Moshe	
13-14	Sin of the spies; & the "maapilim"	
15		Laws re: korbanot, taking challa, Sanhedrin, shabbat, & tzizit
16-17	Korach's rebellion; test of the 12 staffs	
18		Laws re: Compensation for shevet Levi
19		Laws re: 'para aduma' / "tumat meyt"
20	Moshe & Aharon's sin at Mei Meriva; Fortieth year/ journey around Har Seir	
21	War with Arad; sin of "nachash nchoshet" War with Sichon/ Conquer of Transjordan	
22-24	Story of Bilam & Balak	
25	Sin of Bnei Yisrael with 'bnot Moav'; revenge taken by Pinchas etc.	
**	<i>Preparing to Enter Canaan</i>	
26	Census, who will inherit the land	
27	Daughters of Tzlofchad request 'nachala'; Moshe is told to die, Yehoshua appointed	
28-29		Laws of Tmidim u'Musafim (holidays)
30		Laws re: annulling vows
31	War against Midyan	
32	Inheritance taken by Reuven, Gad & Menashe; & their promise to fight....	
33	Summary of Travel thru the desert	[Commandment to conquer the land?]
34	Borders of Eretz Cannan (to conquer)	
35	Cities of Levites & Cities of Refuge	
36	Bnot Tzlofchad - protecting inheritance	