

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter LIV: Vezot haBracha (Deut. 33:1–34:12)

Essay 7. An additional advantage of the east bank of the Jordan

"**וַיִּרְאֵהוּ** ראשית לוֹ כִּי־שָׁם חֶלְקַת מַחֲקֵק סִפּוֹן", פֶּרֶשׁ רַש"י רָאָה לִיטוּל לוֹ חֶלֶק בְּאֶרֶץ סִיחּוֹן וְעוּג, שֶׁהִיא רֵאשִׁית כִּיבוּשׁ הָאֶרֶץ, "כִּי־שָׁם חֶלְקַת" כִּי יָדַע אֲשֶׁר שָׁם בְּנַחֲלָתוֹ חֶלְקַת שְׂדֵה קְבוּרַת מַחֲקֵק, וְהוּא מִשָּׁה עַכ"ל.

“[The tribe of Gad] saw the first part [as fit] for himself, for there the portion of the lawgiver is reserved . . .” (Deut. 33:21). **Rashi explained** the words, “He saw the first part for himself”: **“He saw [fit] to take for himself a portion in the land of Sihon and Og, which was the beginning (ראשית) of the conquest of the Land.”** Rashi further explained the words, **“For there the portion of the lawgiver was reserved”**: **Because [the tribe of Gad] knew that there, in his territory, was the portion of the field with the grave of the lawgiver,”** i.e., Moses.¹

מְקוּשִׁים בְּכָאן מִשְׁמַע שֶׁהַטַּעַם שֶׁרָאָה לִיטוּל חֶלֶק בְּאֶרֶץ סִיחּוֹן וְעוּג לְפִי שֶׁיָּדַע שֶׁעֲתִיד מֹשֶׁה לִיקָבֵר שָׁם, וְלַעֲלֵל בְּפִרְשַׁת מַטּוֹת אֵימָה טַעַם אַחַר דְּכֹתִיב "וּמִקְנֵה רֶב הָיָה לְבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן" דְּמִשְׁמַע שֶׁהַטַּעַם הָיָה מִתְּמַת מִקְנֵה רֶב וְלֹא מִתְּמַת קְבוּרַת מֹשֶׁה.

[People] question here the meaning that the reason that [Gad] saw [fit] to take a portion in the land of Sihon and Og was because he knew that the future of Moses was to be buried there. For above, in parshat Matot, there is a different sense, as it is written, “Cattle in very great number were owned by the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad” (Num. 32:1). Parshat Matot gave **the meaning that the reason** for them wanting to settle in the land of Sihon and Og, which was on the east bank of the Jordan River, and thus outside of the Land of Israel, **was because of the great number of cattle** and the excellent grazing land there. Thus, per parshat

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¹ In Numbers chapter 20, Moses strikes the rock and G-d tells him that he will not enter the Land of Israel. We are not told that Moses shared that conversation with the Israelites at the time. In Numbers chapter 27, Moses is again told that he will not enter the Land of Israel, and he is told to appoint Joshua in front of the people. He does so, but Scripture doesn't say that the Israelites are told at that point that Joshua will lead them into the Land of Israel; that does not explicitly occur until Deuteronomy chapter 31. Yet Rashi understands that at the time of the request to settle the land of Sihon and Og, in Numbers 32, the Israelites already knew that Moses would not make the journey. Perhaps Rashi understands that the Israelites were informed of this at the time of the appointment of Joshua in Numbers chapter 27. Another option is that the sons of Gad knew of this through prophecy. Megillah 14a quotes a Baraita that there were only 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses. Rashi lists them, and among those active during the Exodus and in the Wilderness, he includes Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Pinchas, and Miriam being relevant to the Exodus. But the Gemara in 14a says there were a great many more prophets who were not mentioned.

Matot, it was **not because of the burial of Moses** that would take place there in the land of Sihon and Og.

ויתורץ במה שכתב הרמב"ן בפ' משות שבעיני ג' הם נתנו העצה לבני ראובן לבחור להם ארץ סיחון ועוג, שכן מצונו שבעל הפרשה מזכיר הפתוב בני ג' קודם בני ראובן, ורק בפסוק ראשון "ומקנה רב הנה לבני ראובן ולבני-גד" הקדים ראובן לפי שהנה הפכור וכו' ועיי"ש.

This will be solved by what the Ramban wrote in parashat Matot, that the sons of Gad gave advice to the sons of Reuben to choose for themselves the land of Sihon and Og. For we note that in the entire parsha, the Scripture mentions the sons of Gad before the sons of Reuben, and only in the first verse, "Cattle in great number were owned by the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad," does Reuben precede, because [Reuben] was the firstborn, etc.²

דמשמע מזה שאף על פי שהנה לו לראובן מקנה רב לא הנה מבקש ארץ סיחון ועוג אם ג' לא הנה נותן לו העצה. ואם פן טעם מקנה רב אינו טעם פדאי, אלא ששבת ג' שידע ש"שם חלקת מחקק" משום הכי נתן העצה לראובן, ולפי שהטעם זה תלוי במיתתו של משה ולא הנה מן הראוי להזכירו. ועוד שלא הנה מועיל רק לבני גד ולא לבני ראובן, משום הכי שם בפ' משות הזכיר הטעם של מקנה רב וכאן רמז הטעם האחר ושניהם אמת.

Thus, the meaning from this is that even though Reuben had much cattle, he would not have asked for the land of Sihon and Og if Gad had not given him such advice. If so, the reason of having much cattle is not an adequate reason. Rather, the tribe of Gad knew that there would be "the portion of the lawgiver" in the land of Sihon and Og, and because of this [the tribe of Gad] gave the suggestion to the tribe of Reuben. Because this reason depends upon the death of Moses, it was not seemly to mention it explicitly as a motivation for the two tribes. Furthermore, it was not something that was beneficial only to the sons of Gad and not to the sons of Reuben, as both would benefit. For that that reason, there in parshat Matot it mentions the reason of the cattle in great number, which applied to both Gad and Reuben, and here in Deut. 33:21, it hints at the other reason, the burial place of Moses, and both are true reasons.

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² Ramban writes on Num. 32:2, "In the preceding verse Scripture mentioned the children of Reuben first, [saying], 'Cattle in very great number were owned by the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad,' as is the correct way [of referring to them], for [Reuben] was the firstborn and he was the son of the principal wife [of Jacob, i.e., Leah, whereas Gad was the son of Leah's handmaid, Zilpah]. . . . However, in the whole of this section, He mentions the children of Gad first, because it was they who suggested this idea [of asking for an inheritance on the east bank of the Jordan], and it was they who first spoke to Moses about this inheritance; and they were also stronger than the children of Reuben . . . , and therefore they were not afraid of living alone amongst the inhabitants of that land."