

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Matos-Massei

28 Tammuz, 5777 – July 22, 2017

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi

Parshas Matos-Massei

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר ל"ד, ב': צו את בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם פי אתם באים אל הארץ פנעו זאת הארץ אשר תפל לכם בנחלה ארץ פנעו לגבולתיה:

רש"י ד"ה זאת הארץ אשר תפול לכם וגו': לפי שהרבה מצות נוהגות בארץ ואין נוהגות בחוצה לארץ, הוצרך לכתוב מצרני גבולי רוחותיה סביב, לומר לך מן הגבולים הללו ולפנים המצות נוהגות:

Bamidbar 34:2: Command the children of Israel and say to them, “When you arrive in the land of Canaan, this is the land which shall fall to you as an inheritance, the land of Canaan according to its borders.”

Rashi Heading: This is the land which shall fall to you: Since many Mitzvos apply to the Land of Israel and do not apply outside the Land, the Torah found it necessary to chart the outer limits of its boundaries from all sides, to inform you that the precepts apply everywhere within these borders.

Synopsis

This week we read the Torah portion of Matos-Massei. In this Parshah the Torah defines the exact borders of Israel. Rashi explains the need for this. There are Mitzvos which can only be fulfilled in Israel. We must therefore know exactly which land constitutes Israel.

Throughout this entire section the Torah uses the common Hebrew word for border: “G’vul - גבול - Border.” This is a word which Rashi himself defined earlier in the Torah. However, when explaining these verses Rashi most often uses the uncommon word “Meitzar – מצר” which shares the meaning of “G’vul - גבול - Border.” In fact the word “Meitzar – מצר” is so uncommon that it appears only once in the Torah! Why should Rashi use this unusual word in place of the more common “G’vul - גבול - Border?”

The explanation is that there are two possible ways to translate to the word “G’vul. Aside from border as we explained above, it has second definition. The word can also be used to refer to the entire area within a border. Therefore Rashi uses the word “Meitzar.” The use of this word underscores that the landmarks of which the Torah speaks are used to tell us the outer border of the land given to the Jews. It comes to describe a line; inside of which is Israel and outside of which is not.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Matos-Massei, we read of a survey of the Holy Land. The 40 year

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sojourn in the wilderness is nearly over. The time for the Jews to enter the land was drawing near. It was necessary to define the exact borders of the land which they were to inherit. Hashem told Moshe to¹ “Command the children of Israel and say to them, ‘When you arrive in the land of Canaan, this is the land which shall fall to you as an inheritance, the land of Canaan according to its borders.’”

Rashi cites the words “this is the land which shall fall to you” and explains that “since many Mitzvos apply to the Land of Israel and do not apply outside the Land, the Torah found it necessary to chart the outer limits of its boundaries from all sides, to inform you that the precepts apply everywhere within these borders.” Rashi is explaining that the reason for defining the precise borders is because of the fulfillment of Mitzvos. There are precepts which can only be fulfilled in Israel. Therefore the Torah needed to let us know exactly which land is considered a part of Israel.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Our first difficulty in understanding Rashi is different than those we have encountered in the past. The very same difficulty which we will explore exists in many other verses in this section of the Torah. As mentioned earlier this section of our Torah portion is discussing the borders of Israel. The Torah consistently uses the Hebrew word “G’vul - גְּבוּל - Border.” However in Rashi’s comments here we often an unusual word used in place of “G’vul” with the same meaning, The Hebrew word is “Meitzar - מֵיצָר.” We need to understand why it is that Rashi favored this uncommon word.

In the verse² “The border then turns south of Maaleh Akribim,” Rashi comments as follows. “Whenever the term “turns” or “extends to” is used, the Torah informs us that the *border* (“Meitzar – מֵיצָר”) was not straight, but veered outward; the *boundary line* (“Meitzar – מֵיצָר”) bent to the north, angling westward, so that the *border* (“Meitzar – מֵיצָר”) passed south of Maaleh Akribim, so that Maaleh Akribim was within the *border* (“Meitzar – מֵיצָר”).” On this same verse Rashi again uses the word “Meitzar” additional times under a separate heading. We also find that Rashi repeatedly uses this word in the three verses following this³. Throughout this discussion the word “Meitzar” is used quite frequently.

Why would Rashi not favor the word “G’vul” which the Torah itself uses? Furthermore it is a common word in the Torah, which Rashi *himself* explained earlier a number of times. In the verse⁴ “And the border (G’vul) of the Canaanites was ...” Rashi explains that the word “G’vul” means “the end of his land. *Every mention of “G’vul – גְּבוּל” denotes an end and an edge.*” So too does Rashi comment on

1. Bamidbar 34:2.

2. Bamidbar 34:4.

3. Bamidbar 34:5-7.

4. Bereishis 10:19.

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the verse⁵ ” You shall make for the choshen chains at the edges⁶ ...” Rashi explains there that “Every instance of “G’vul - גבול is an expression denoting an end, limit.” Finally Rashi explains the verse⁷ “...extending from the Amorite border (G’vul) ...” Rashi explains the word G’vul as being “a term denoting an edge and an end.”

Rashi prefers the word “Meitzar” which is not found even once to in the entire Chumash! He prefers this to the word “G’vul” which is often used in the Chumash. Moreover Rashi himself has explained it on various occasions.

Additionally, in our verse which marks the beginning of this section, Rashi combines the words “Meitzar” and “G’vul.” We quoted Rashi as saying “the outer limits of its boundaries from all sides.” The actual Hebrew is מצרני גבולי רוחותיה סביב. This literally the borders (“Meitzars”) of the borders (G’vuls) from all sides. How can Rashi say “the borders of the borders?” One would think that he should have used either one word or the other; how could he use both?

The Explanation

The explanation is that the word “G’vul” has two definitions. One is as we have been explaining until now. It is the border that surrounds a given area. We find a number of times that Rashi explains the word in that manner. For example⁸, “And you shall set boundaries for the people around ...” Rashi explains this as meaning that Moshe should “Set boundaries for them as a sign that they should not come nearer than the boundary (G’vul - גבול).

The second definition of the word “G’vul” is that it includes all of the area within the boundary. One example of this is from the plague of frogs with which the Egyptians were smitten. The Torah says there⁹ that “...I will smite all your borders (G’vul - גבול) with frogs.” It is obvious that Hashem would not place the frogs on the border, encircling Egypt. Rather it means that all of the area within the border of Egypt would be smitten.

One other example (of many) is the prohibition against owning Chometz – “Leavened Food” during the holiday of Pesach. The Torah says that¹⁰ “... no leaven of yours shall be seen and no leavening of yours shall be seen throughout all of your borders (G’vul - גבול).” Again it is obvious that the prohibition is not merely against having bread on your border. It refers to having leaven within all of your possessions; i.e. the land within the borders.

5. Shemos 28:22.

6. The Hebrew of “edges” is “Gavlus – גַבְלוּסָה” which is related to the word “G’vul - גבול.”

7. Bamidbar 21:13.

8. Shemos 19:12.

9. Shemos 7:27.

10. Shemos 13:7.

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That is why Rashi found it important to use the word “Meitzar” here. He wanted to make it clear that the Torah is describing the border that surrounds Israel. That is also the reason that Rashi wrote in the initial verse of this subject “the “Meitzars” of the “G’vuls” from all sides.” He was not saying that it is a boundary of a boundary. Rather he emphasized that we are discussing the border which surrounds the land of Israel.

A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

Rashi’s comments explain the simple meaning of each verse for a beginning student. However, they also contain deep insights into the Torah on all levels. The Sheloh Hakadosh explains that each Torah portion is related to the time of the year at which it is read¹¹. He specifically explains at great length¹² the connection of the Torah portions of Matos, Massei and Devorim to the three weeks¹³. He explains that this is of special significance inasmuch as these three portions are always read during the Three Weeks¹⁴.

The Three Weeks are also known as “Bain Hametzorim.” The prophet is bemoaning the loss of Jerusalem and the Temple in the verse¹⁵ “...all her pursuers overtook her between the boundaries.” The Hebrew word for boundaries is “Metzorim - מצררים,” which is the plural of Meitzar. Rashi translates the word as boundaries; “the *boundaries* of fields and vineyards.”

This may very well be the deeper reason that Rashi uses the word “Meitzar” rather than “G’vul” throughout this topic. He is highlighting the time of year during which this portion is read. Furthermore, Rashi¹⁶ cites the teaching of the Midrash Rabbah¹⁷. “The Midrash Aggadah explains (that Bain Hametzorim refers to the time) between the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av.”

However the connection between our Parshah and the book of Eichoh seems to require explanation. Our Torah portion is teaching us the borders of the land of Israel; the complete Israel during a time of Redemption. An Israel in which we will have a Tabernacle and eventually build a Holy Temple. On the other hand Eichoh (called Lamentations in English) is lamenting the destruction of Israel and the Holy Temple. How can we compare the two?

11. See the Section of Torah Shebichsav at the beginning of Parshas Vayaishev.

12. See the section of Torah Shebichsav, the discourse for these three portions.

13. The Three Weeks is a period of mourning. It begins on 17 Tammuz, when the Romans breached the walls of Yerushalayim in 69 CE after a lengthy siege. It concludes three weeks later on 9 Menachem Av. That was the time that the Bais Hamikdosh was destroyed.

14. See Sheloh ibid.

15. Eichoh 1:3.

16. Eichoh ibid.

17. Eichoh Rabbah 1:29.

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The connection is as follows. How is it possible for there to be (G-d forbid) a destruction? What is the root of the possibility of having a “Three Weeks?” The fact that that there is a boundary to the holiness of the land. When the sanctity of the Holy Land is complete, its holiness spreads through the entire world¹⁸. Exile and destruction are impossibilities. It is only when the sanctity of Israel is not permitted to spread as it should, it is surrounded by a Meitzar, that exile is possible.

May we exit our current boundaries and limitations and merit the true expansiveness of Hashem. This will bring the true redemption.

(Adapted from a talk given on Motzo'ai Shabbos Parshas Matos-Massei 5739)

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18. This is in keeping with what we know that in the time of Moshiach, Israel will spread throughout all of the lands. This is explained according to Chassidus in Likkutei Torah of this week's Parshah, beginning with page 89, b.

**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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**IN HONOR OF
Chaim and Aiden Oded שיחיו Morris**

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**DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS
Rabbi & Mrs. Menachem M. and Chaya Mushka שיחיו Morris**

* * *

**IN HONOR OF
Sholom Moshe Hacoheh ben Tzivia שי' Cohen
For a complete and speedy recovery**

* * *

**IN HONOR OF
Berocho bas Soroh שתחילי Cohen
For a complete and speedy recovery**

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Hatomim Moshe Shlomoh Zohar שי' Mars**

*

May he merit to be a Chossid, a Yerei Shomayim and a Lamdon

מוקדש לזכות

כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

לזכות

חיילי "צבאות השם" חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס

לזכות

ר' שלום משה הכהן בן צבי' שי' כהן

ומרת ברכה בת שרה שתחי' כהן

לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

נתרם ע"י

הת' משה שלמה זהר שי' מארס

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