

מטות *Mattot* Tribes

[Numbers 30.2](#)—32.42 / [Jeremiah 1.1-2.3](#) / [John 18-20](#)

God's Cares about Vows This תורה *Torah*

Law/Instruction portion begins with God explaining how serious it is to keep a vow and not break it. This warning is repeated in [Deuteronomy 23.22-24](#). ישוע *Yeshua* Jesus/Salvation explains in [Matthew 12.36-37](#) how seriously God takes every word we say.



Vow of the Land God has made vows concerning the Land of ישראל *Yisra'el* Israel. In [Exodus 6.8](#), God promises the Land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as a מורשה *mowrashah* possession/heritage. Note the promise is through Isaac, not Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs. In [Isaiah 54.7-10](#), God promises to keep His covenant of peace with ישראל as surely as He will keep his covenant never again to destroy the earth with water. This covenant is

affirmed again in [Psalm 105.8-11](#), to last 1,000 generations. There have been about 100 generations since Abraham until now. So this promise carries for another 900 generations! Again the covenant is with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. [Psalm 138.2](#) goes so far as to say that God has magnified His Word above His Name! Keeping in mind the seriousness God gives to vows, His repeated vows that ישראל is for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and God's unchanging nature, how can the Church ever say that it has replaced ישראל or that the Land of ישראל no longer matters? This attitude in the Church emboldens Muslims, who strive to take the Land of ישראל for themselves and their god.

Releasing a Vow [Numbers 30.3-8](#) describes how a woman's vow can be released by her father, or her husband if she is married, on the day that he hears about it. As a Dad, I say to my daughter, "I release you," if I hear that she promised something unreasonable. We live in a society that takes one's word lightly—too often people are willing to break their word for convenience. [1 Samuel 3.19](#) says that God was with Samuel, and did not let Samuel's words fall to the ground. If we take our words lightly, careless of what we say, why should God listen? I hope to speak so that God won't let my words fall.

Jephthah's Vow The story of **יפתח** [Yiphtach](#) He Opens/Jephthah is told in [Judges 11](#). In verses 30-31, he promises that if God will give him the victory over the Ammonites, he will offer to God as a burnt offering whatever comes out of his home when he returns.

I always understood this to mean that when his daughter comes out of the house, **יפתח** kills her. When studying this **תורה** portion with Pastor Mark Biltz, I heard that **יפתח** does not kill his daughter, but rather devotes her to a life of celibacy. This perspective emphasizes the importance of vows and the plea of the daughters of Zelophehad in [Numbers 27](#), which results in a law allowing inheritance through daughters.

- **יפתח** was already separated from his brothers because he is the son of a harlot. They only come to him when they are in trouble. He has only one child, a daughter, so she is his only hope of his family line continuing. By “sacrificing” her to a life without marriage, his family line ends.
- Child sacrifice as practiced by the Ammonites, the enemy **יפתח** fights against, is repugnant to the people of **ישראל** and only practiced in times of great apostasy. For **יפתח** to win the battle against the Ammonites and then adopt their worst practice would be unlikely, even in this time of the Judges.
- [Leviticus 18.21](#) specifically prohibits sacrificing a child to **מלך** [Molech](#), the Moabite equivalent of the Ammonite god **כמוש** [Kemosh](#). It would be hard for **יפתח** to say, “You mean I can’t sacrifice my child to the true God, either?” And if he did that, would he then be listed in the *Hall of Faith*, [Hebrews 11.32](#)?
- In [Judges 11.31](#), **יפתח** promises that whatever comes out of his house will belong to **יהוה** [YHVH](#) the LORD, and **יפתח** will offer it for a **עלה** [olah](#) burnt offering. **עלה** refers in the Tenach (what the Church calls the Old Testament) to burning an animal sacrifice to God, but never a human sacrifice. [Romans 12.1](#) says that we are to offer our bodies as a living **θυσία** [thysia](#) sacrifice/victim to God, which fits with the **θυσία** of the daughter of **יפתח**.
- [Judges 11.39](#) says **יפתח** “did with her according to his vow...and she knew no man,” which supports this theory of a life of celibacy and a loss of marriage and motherhood, which she had gone into the hills with her friends to bewail.
- [Judges 11.40](#) says that every year the girls of **ישראל** will **תנה** [tanah](#) recount/rehearse/tell again the daughter’s sacrifice, though the KJV translates it “lament.” **תנה** also means to give presents/distribute gifts. These meanings allow that the girls of **ישראל** are celebrating the daughter’s devotion to God and her father in keeping her father’s vow that she would not marry.

Agreement from Commentaries—יפתה Did Not Kill His Daughter

- Easton's Bible Dictionary, <http://refbible.com/j/jephthah's.htm>: “Did Jephthah offer up his daughter as a "burnt-offering"? This question has been much debated, and there are many able commentators who argue that such a sacrifice was actually offered. We are constrained, however, by a consideration of Jephthah's known piety as a true worshipper of Jehovah, his evident acquaintance with the law of Moses, to which such sacrifices were abhorrent ([Leviticus 18:21](#); [20:2-5](#); [Deuteronomy 12:31](#)), and the place he holds in the roll of the heroes of the faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews ([11:32](#)), to conclude that she was only doomed to a life of perpetual celibacy.”
- Finally, one of my favorite Bible commentators, [J. Vernon McGee](#) (scroll to the download for Judges 11.38-40): “...and she knew no man. Now what in the world does that mean? It means *she didn't get married*. She dedicated her life to the LORD...And the word lament means celebrate, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to celebrate...it hasn't anything to do with human sacrifice.” Mr. McGee goes on to explain that this question about Jephthah offering his daughter is one of the most common questions his ministry receives. (Though Mr. McGee died in 1988, his broadcast is still heard in 200 countries and translated into 100 languages, so his ministry is probably still getting this question). He says that's not even the point of this passage. Rather, the point is how seriously Jephthah took his sacred vow. And Mr. McGee says that the main point of this passage is the importance of vows.



Repairing the World תיקון עולם *Tikkun Olam* Repairing the World is a Jewish expression related to this portion. The first time we see the word כבש *kabash* subject/subdue/force/keep under/bring into bondage is in [Genesis 1.28](#) when God tells Adam and Eve to fill up and כבש the earth. This sounds anti-nature until you've worked with nature. For example, if you don't mow your lawn, eventually you will have brush and trees in your yard. If you allow monkeys, cows, and rats to proliferate as in India for religious reasons, people will starve. We need to כבש the earth with wisdom. Otherwise we will destroy it, and God does not want that either, [Revelation 11.18](#). כבש is only seen in the first five Books in this portion, [Numbers 32.22](#) and [29](#).

Reuben and Gad Must Help כבש In [Numbers 32](#), the tribes of Reuben and Gad see that the Land east of the Jordan is good, and they tell Moses they want to stay there to build pens for their livestock and fortify cities for their children. Moses insists that they must first help with the conquest, and then they will be free to inherit.

As in Genesis, the conquest, and still today, God has a job for us. In [Matthew 28.19](#), ישוע says that we should make disciples of all nations. ישראל had the job to כבש the Land; our job is to כבש the world. First step is to כבש our own flesh.

Children First Moses also corrects Reuben and Gad in verse 24, saying that they will build cities for their families first, and then pens for livestock. Livestock brings wealth and it seems these tribes were putting wealth before children. Many parents put wealth before children today. They assume government school will take care of raising their children and all they need to provide is a roof, food, clothes, and some incidentals like the latest fashions. But immediately after the Shema of [Deuteronomy 6.4](#), the command is given for parents to teach תורה diligently to their children in times of non-conflict—while sitting in the house, walking along the road, lying down, and getting up. Government school won't do that. And private schools can't even come close to a loving parent teaching God's commands to his or her children.

Protect the Children [Proverbs 24.27](#) says to take care of the fields first and then build the house. That would be the normal pattern in times of peace. But if the former residents of the Land decide to return in the middle of the night, children and families without protection are in danger. The pattern Moses gives here is the same that modern settlers in ישראל have been using since the start of the 20th century. They knew that they would be attacked by neighboring Arabs the first day they moved onto a new piece of Land. So they learned to put up fortifications that first day with a stockade and a guard tower to help stave off the initial assault.

In some embattled modern cities such as Sderot, near the Gaza border, even the playgrounds have been outfitted with play equipment designed to offer shelter from rocket attacks for the children. From the time the first warning siren sounds, residents of Sderot have 15 seconds to get into hardened shelters. Pictured here is a reinforced concrete toy, also a bomb shelter.



Avenge Midian and Moab In [Numbers 31.1-3](#), God tells Moses to avenge the children of **ישראל** of the Midianites, and then he will be gathered to his people. It's his last campaign before he dies. Knowing this, someone in Moses' position might be tempted to procrastinate. Especially if you consider that Moses' father-in-law Jethro was a priest of Midian. But Moses does not delay. Verse 8 says that **ישראל** wins, killing the kings of Midian and also Balaam. Balaam had taken a bribe to curse **ישראל**, even though he knew God wanted him to bless, and now he pays with his life. According to [Sanhedrin 105b](#) of the Babylonian Talmud, "Ruth [the heroine of the book of Ruth] was the daughter of Eglon [whose death is described in [Judges 3](#)], the grandson of Balak, king of Moab [who hired Balaam]," (bracketed information added). God may judge a nation yet have mercy on an individual.

We see God angry at the nations who fought against **ישראל**, Midian in particular here. In [Joel 3](#), God says that He will avenge Himself on those nations who fought against Judah and Jerusalem. Today we see many nations of the world, the United States included, trying to divide up the Land and give it to the enemies of **ישראל**. "If there's one thing we've learned from history, it's that we haven't learned anything from history."

In [Numbers 31](#), verses 1-3, Moses sends 12,000 Israelites against Midian, 1,000 from each tribe, including **פינחס** [Pinchas](#) Phineas the priest of Numbers 25, trumpets, and the vessels of the sanctuary. In verses 10-13, **ישראל** wins the battle with zero losses. Eleazar speaks to the returning soldiers in verse 21...

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלְעָזָר	הַכֹּהֵן	אֲנָשִׁי - אֵל	הַצָּבָא	הַבָּאִים	לְמִלְחָמָה
u·iamr	alozr	e·ken	al - anshi	e·tzba	e·baim	l·mlchme
and·he-is-saying	Eleazar	the·priest	to	mortals-of	the·ones-coming	to·the·battle

Why would this passage describe the soldiers as "coming to battle" when they are in fact returning from winning the battle?

One Reason for Just Entering the Battle There are at least two explanations for this literal translation, *coming to battle*, which is usually translated [that went into battle](#), [had gone into battle](#), or [which went to the battle](#).




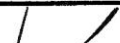



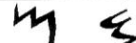
Since this is the last campaign before entering the Land, the real battle for the Land of **ישראל** is finally at hand. These are the battle-hardened, victorious soldiers, who just won a major battle without a single loss on their side, who are about to experience their greatest challenge—the hope of generations, conquering the Land of **ישראל**.

Another Reason for Just Entering the Battle The second reason could be explained by a story a rabbi told a soldier returning from war. The rabbi observed the soldier's pride, swagger, medals, and tales of heroism. The soldier was looking forward to some well-deserved R & R. But the rabbi warned him, "The battle here at home is more severe!" The rabbi went on to explain over the soldier's doubts,

Here is no fight to the death or sleeping in the field. But here you will have to fight against your own evil inclination. Satan knows no rules, no boundaries, and no cease fire. He will win the battle if he can get you to disregard prayer, dishonor your parents, or ignore the needs of others. You need moral, not physical, strength now.

Too often, we perceive the only battles to be those of war, while taking a passive role in battles for the souls of families, neighbors, and congregations. Being a watchman is not primarily looking for a sign, though that could be the case, but watching out for the hearts and souls of those around us, to שמר *shamar* keep/guard/observe/give heed.

This is our duty as we תיקון עולם and כבש the earth. Often we think of peace as a passive, wimpy ideal. But a closer look at the letters in שלום *shalom* peace reveal a different truth. ש *sheen* is teeth/figuratively destroy, ל *lamed* is shepherd's staff/authority, ו *vav* is nail/establish, and מ *mem*, final form of מ, is water/chaos:

21		SHEEN ש	 to consume, to destroy	TEETH s, sh
12		LAMED ל	 control, authority, the tongue	CATTLE GOAD l
6		VAV ו	 'and', to add, to secure	NAIL, PEG v
13		MEM מ	 liquid, massive, chaos	WATER m

Together, שלום means *To Destroy the Authority that Establishes Chaos.*

שלום

Glossary, in order of appearance:

מטות	<i>Mattot</i>	Tribes
תורה	<i>Torah</i>	Law/Instruction
ישוע	<i>Yeshua</i>	Jesus/Salvation
ישראל	<i>Yisra'el</i>	Israel
מורשה	<i>mowrashah</i>	possession/heritage
יפתח	<i>Yiphtach</i>	<i>He Opens</i> /Jephthah
מלך	<i>Molech</i>	Moabite equivalent of כמוש
כמוש	<i>Kemosh</i>	fertility god involving child sacrifice
יהוה	<i>YHVH</i>	the LORD
עלה	<i>olah</i>	burnt offering
θυσία	<i>thysia</i>	sacrifice/victim
תנה	<i>tanah</i>	recount/rehearse/tell again
תיקון עולם	<i>Tikkun Olam</i>	Repairing the World
כבש	<i>kabash</i>	subject/subdue/force/keep under/ bring into bondage
פינחס	<i>Pinchas</i>	Phineas
שמר	<i>shamar</i>	keep/guard/observe/give heed
שלום	<i>shalom</i>	peace
ש	<i>sheen</i>	teeth/figuratively destroy
ל	<i>lamed</i>	shepherd's staff/authority
ו	<i>vav</i>	nail/establish
מ, מ	<i>mem</i>	water/chaos