

Parasha Chukat

וידבר יהוה אל-משה ואל-אהרן לאמר: זאת חקת התורה אשר-צוה יהוה לאמר דבר אל-בני ישראל ויקחו אליך פרה אדמה תמימה אשר אין-בה מום אשר לא-עלה עליה על:

Will you fulfill the destiny God has for your life? Perhaps you have never thought about it. God had a perfect plan for Moshe to lead the people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, but he stopped just short of reaching the completion of his God-given destiny. It was in the 40th year, and they were almost there. After wandering in a maze for all these years, they were right back where they started from Back to Square One. They had come full circle. They were trying to get back on track, but these people had always been rebellious, complainers throughout the entire experience. Moshe hoped that they were ready for a fresh start. The Promised Land was just before them. Would they get there? When the next test came, they were as rebellious as ever. Nothing had changed. The problem they faced was almost identical to that of 40 years earlier when they had run out of water. In spite of their complaining, God was always merciful and faithful to provide for their needs. The Lord knew how to take care of His people in spite of the fact that they were in one desperate situation after another. In fact, they were in an inhospitable environment at the time that God entered into the covenant with them. Adonai shielded them with His protection--the cloud and the pillar of fire--He never once left them without His help throughout all these years of wandering and rebellion. Moshe and Aaron were usually very quick to obey the leading of the Lord, but this instance shows that they had failings just like we do.

There are several things we can apply to our own lives from this account in Torah: How Did Moshe Mess Up? The people were once again complaining that they didn't have any water to drink. It was almost identical to the same problem forty years earlier when God told Moshe to take the rod, the symbol of his power through the Lord, and *strike* the rock. The water gushed out for the complaining and irate people. They knew there was no reasoning with these people. This time, although Moshe and Aaron had gone to the tabernacle to seek Adonai about the situation, God was calling Moshe to a different direction. Moshe was to use his words to speak the miracle. God's answer was there. He said *speak* to that rock before their eyes, and it will pour out its water (Numbers 20:8). Moshe and Aaron got part of it right. They went out before the people and spoke to them, but then in frustration and anger Moshe took the rod and struck the rock not once but twice. He didn't wait to see if the water would come out after he struck it one time. He struck it two times out of a provoked spirit. He was fed up with these people. Maybe there were several reasons for this. Maybe he thought that since this was almost an exact repeat of past history that this would be the beginning of another 40 years of wandering around.

Maybe he felt he couldn't handle more years of wandering. Maybe he was just worn out from the entire ordeal with these people. They were always complaining about something. Maybe he was grieving because his sister, Miriam, had recently died. Whatever the root cause of it was or if it was just an accumulation of all these things, Moshe lashed out at the people and said, *"You rebels. Must WE bring you water out of this rock?"*

A young man was learning to be a paratrooper. Before his first jump, he was given these instructions: Jump when you are told. Count to ten and pull the rip cord. In the unlikely event your parachute doesn't open, pull the emergency rip cord. When you land, a truck will be there to take you back to the airport. The young man memorized these instructions and climbed aboard the plane. The plane climbed to ten thousand feet and the paratroopers began to jump. When the young man was told to jump, he jumped. He then counted to ten and pulled the rip cord. Nothing happened. His chute failed to open. So, he pulled the emergency rip cord. Still, nothing happened. No parachute. "Oh great," said the young man. "And I suppose the truck won't be there when I get down either!" Moshe had troubles all right. He was fed up with their complaining. He failed to realize that God had the answer already worked out, but he began to take matters into his own hands and began to act on his own. He said, *"Do WE have to bring water out of this rock?"* He was taking credit for doing it. He used the rod to take charge of the situation that God already had control of. How many times do we get impatient with God because our prayers are not being answered quick enough to suit us, and we just charge in with both feet to force things to happen prematurely and sure enough we mess up. We try to solve problems in our own strength and ability and make a complete mess of it. All the time God is standing back patiently allowing us to get into one situation after another. He probably shakes His head and says, "I wonder that they are trying to do now?" This was what happened to Moshe. We must learn to let go and let God have His way. When Moshe *struck* the rock rather than speak to it, he was trying to *force* the provision. In spite of his disobedience, the water poured forth for the people. God was not going to fail to give them the water they needed. God was upset with Moshe primarily because he showed a lack of trust and unbelief. When we go ahead and take matters into our own hands we show a distrust in God. Maybe he thought that *speaking* the words wouldn't work. That he had to help God out a little bit. So, he took matters into his own hands. He used human means when he didn't need to. God was upset because of his unbelief. Verse 12 says, *"Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."* Numbers 27:14 says, *"for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes."* Both Moshe and Aaron were denied entrance into the Promised Land as a result.

When we become callused, we can use our skills and abilities to force what we believe should happen, but when we do this, we are in danger of failing to enter the Promised Land of blessings from God. We may never fulfill the destiny that God has planned for us.

You need God in your fortieth year as much as in your first: How could Moshe have avoided striking the rock and losing out at this point in his life? Maybe part of it was that he wasn't getting the self-care and rest he needed. He was stressed out with these people. He was frustrated with the same old complaints year after year. His sister had died. He could have used a time apart to be refreshed. He sounds as if he were "running on empty." Too often we think we have to *do this* and this *for God*, but we fail to *spend time with God*. We run on empty for so long that we don't know what the refreshing of the Lord even feels like. Some congregants went to a conference one year but only attended one or two classes all week. They said smugly, "Oh, we know all of that." Maybe and maybe not. We need God in our Fortieth year just as much as in our first. We never outgrow the need to go to services, to continue learning and growing in the Lord. Once we realize that we have neglected God in our daily life, we can ask His forgiveness and begin again to fulfill His plan for our life. This is what happened to a Rabbi who was scheduled to speak at an all-day conference. He was running late because his alarm had failed to ring. In his haste to make up for lost time, he cut himself while shaving. Then he found his shirt was not ironed. To make matters worse, running to his car he noticed a tire was flat. Disgusted, and by this time thoroughly distraught, the rabbi finally got underway with a sudden burst of speed. Racing through town he failed to notice a stop sign and rushed through it. As fate would have it, there was a policeman nearby, and in just moments he heard the scream of a siren. Jumping out of his car, the agitated rabbi said sharply, "Well, go ahead and give me a ticket. Everything else has gone wrong today." The policeman walked up and said quietly, "Sir, I used to have days like that before I became a Believer." Needless to say, the embarrassed rabbi was shamed by the stranger's rebuke and went his way asking forgiveness and praying for strength to correct his attitude. We all have days when things just don't seem to go right. Even Believers are not free from the tensions of life that tear at our nerves.

Moving into a new spiritual dimension: This week think about ways that you are like Moshe, seeking the Lord but only partially doing what He asks you to do. Sometimes going God's way and sometimes going your own way? The will of God never has been and never will be accomplished by those who are not totally obedient to Him. During the Civil War, it is said that there was a man who was sympathetic to both sides. He lived in a border line state. Finally, he decided that he would affect a compromise. He put on a mixed uniform, wearing the Confederate gray coat, and the Union blue trousers. All went well, it seems, until he became engaged in a hard-fought battle, when the Federals shot him in the coat, and the Confederates shot him in the seat of the pants! To fulfill our spiritual destiny, we've got to be dressed in a matched uniform. Your talk and your walk should match.

Sometimes we fail to move into a new spiritual dimension because we want our own way along with God's way. Satan shoots us down at every turn. Other times we take matters into your own hands out of impatience and frustration because we think God is moving too slowly? Do you often feel that you need to help God out and try to force the provision? Do you trust more in your own abilities than in God's ability? Remember, you need God as much in your 40th year as you did in your first. Think about one thing could you do this week to allow God to work in your current situation without acting in haste and frustration like Moshe did. In what ways are you beginning to move into a new spiritual dimension where you are learning to take God at His Word rather than having to always rely on signs? Remember that Moshe, a great leader, was not exempt from messing up. He needed God in the fortieth year as much as in the first year. He failed to fulfill his complete destiny because of disobedience to God.

A man is known for five things in his lifetime. He's known for his character. That's who he is. He's known for his conduct – that's what he does. He's known for his conversation – that's what he says. He is known by his creed – that's what he believes. He's known by his contribution – that's what he gives. The great need of the hour is great men of God. Men known for their character, conduct, conversation, creed, and contribution. Men who love Yeshua, wives and children, the Bible and others! Men, never underestimate what God wants to do through your life. Perhaps you have a deep-seated desire to be the person God would have you be. However, it doesn't seem like that's possible. Today, let's discover a man in the Bible whom God used mightily in His service, despite many disadvantages. This man named Yiftach (Jephthah) went from the Hall of Shame to God's Hall of Fame. From Judges 11, we are going to focus on Yiftach's humble beginning, his wholehearted belief and his heroic battle Yiftach didn't grow up in a perfect family. In fact, he grew up in a dysfunctional home. A home that lacked leadership. A home that lacked harmony, peace, and joy. If you grew up in a home where your parents loved each other, loved you and brought you up to follow Yeshua, you are in the minority. Most people come from broken homes. But let me tell you, it's not too late. Men don't underestimate your importance in the family. Research shows if a child is the first person in a household to become a Believer, there is a 3.5 percent probability that everyone else in the household will become Believers. If the mother is the first to accept Yeshua, the percentage goes up to 17 percent. But if the father is first, there is a 93 percent probability that everyone else in the household will follow. When father goes first spiritually, good things happen at home. If you find yourself in a home that's not great, will you be the kind of person that begins to make it great? With God's help, that's what Yiftach did. Notice...

Yiftach's Birth, "...the son of a harlot..." Here's a man whose father's name was Gilead ...but all we know about his mother was that she was a prostitute. This was not the ideal beginning to Yiftach's life. How do you think he answered other kids when they asked him what his mom did for a living? Still, it didn't hold him back from becoming the man God called him to be. Do you know what bothers me today? We are raising a generation of people who want to blame all their problems on others. If a young man begins to drink, he blames his dad the alcoholic. If the young girl sleeps around, she blames it on her mother who had affairs. Rare is it to find a person who will honestly say, "I am the way I am because I'm a sinner." Booker T. Washington said, *"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in his life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."* Then Yiftach's Brothers, *Judges 11:2* says, *"Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Yiftach out, and said to him, 'You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another's women.'" Because of Yiftach's illegitimate birth, they barred him from the family's blessing. It's a sad thing when families don't get along like they should. It's a sad thing when siblings turn against one another and estrange themselves from each other. Life is simply too short to go around carrying grudges against people. But these brothers of Yiftach lived with their noses turned down at Yiftach. Next, we have Yiftach's "band of brothers". *Verse 3* says, *"Then Yiftach fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. Some worthless fellows joined with Yiftach and went out with him."* His family rejected him, but God still had a plan for his life. Some of you who come from tough families – maybe you were born out of wedlock, maybe your mom or dad left you, walked out. The old saying says, *"...there are no illegitimate children, only illegitimate parents."* You were not a mistake or accident in the sight of God. In fact, the Bible says, *"Now Yiftach the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor..."* The Christian Minister, John Wesley said, *"Give me one hundred men who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergyman or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon the earth."**

About Yiftach's wholehearted belief - Evidently, Yiftach began experiencing great success in his battles over his enemies, the Ammonites. The Bible never tells us how he became such a man of faith, but perhaps it was in his alone times. Maybe it was when he was far removed from family, friends, familiar that he discovered God in a real way for the first time. Trials and tribulations can do one of two things, make you bitter or better. Our young people need to know they don't know everything about God and life right now. Neither do we adults. God has a way of taking you a place where you may not know anyone, you may be out of your comfort zone, and there your relationship with God will begin to take on a whole new level of meaning. What evidence do we see of Yiftach's wholehearted belief in God? Well...

He became a man of forgiveness - The news began to get around in the land that God was using Yiftach to take hold of the enemy. Still, the enemy of God's people, the Ammonites wouldn't stop. They continued to war with the people of God. Understand what was going on in Israel's history during these days. Under the leadership of Joshua, God had led them out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Once Joshua passed away, the people turned aside from worshiping and serving God alone and worshiped idol gods. They would follow the Living God for a time, fall into sin, get in alignment with pagan neighbors, fall into defeat, and then they would cry out to the Lord for deliverance. In love, God disciplined them for this time and again. Well, surprise, surprise, guess who showed up at Yiftach's door when Israel was about to be defeated by their enemies? It was Yiftach's brothers! Pick up in *verse... 4-11* *Now it came about after a while that the children of Ammon fought with Israel. When the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Yiftach from the land of Tob. They said to Yiftach, "Come and be our chief, so we may fight the children of Ammon." Yiftach then said to the elders of Gilead, "Didn't you hate me and drive me out of my father's house? So why are you coming to me now that you're in trouble?" "Here is why we're now turning to you," the elders of Gilead said to Yiftach. "Come with us, fight the children of Ammon, and then you will become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." So, Yiftach said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight the children of Ammon, and Adonai gives them over to me, I should become your head!" The elders of Gilead said to Yiftach, "Let Adonai be witness between us if we don't do as you say." Then Yiftach went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them, after Yiftach repeated all his terms before Adonai at Mizpah.* That's forgiveness in action. Yiftach was demonstrating the same kind of forgiveness and mercy He had received from the Lord in his lifetime. Have you reflected on the forgiveness you've received from our Savior, Yeshua haMashiach this week?

Yiftach became a man of faith (prayer) - "he repeated all his terms before Adonai in Mizpah." He took his job as commander seriously. How do we know that? He took it all to God in prayer first. He wanted God to be his witness of the decision that he was making before Israel. You don't have to have the title "rabbi" to be a true minister of Yeshua. The great majority of rabbis don't enter into occupational ministry, but they are ministers wherever they go. The Bible teaches us in *Colossians 3.23*, *"as working for the Lord, and not for men."* In your family, on the job, in the neighborhood, reading a book, listening to your spouse's concerns - that's some of your greatest ministry times of all! Yiftach also became a man of focus. If you go and read through verses 12-28, you will find Yiftach as a man of great military focus. We could really use him around today. Yiftach first sent delegates to the king of Ammon asking why they were attacking Israel in the first place. The King of Ammon said, *"Israel has stolen our land, and we want it back."*

First, Yiftach says, "No sir." He goes on to give King of Ammon a lesson in history of how God has led His children to the Promised Land in total fairness. God's people had intentionally avoided being hostile to other nations, despite the fact the surrounding nations had been hostile to them. On top of this, Israel had been attacked by the Amorites unfairly and God had given Israel the victory. Second, in these days, nations believed their gods had given them whatever land they possessed. The Ammonite god was named "Chemosh." The Ammonites were to take hold of the land "Chemosh" had given them. Israel would take hold of the land Adonai their God had given unto them. Yiftach even appealed to Balak, who was the royal representative of "Chemosh." Balak had never led his people to attack Israel and was superior to the King of Ammon. If Balak, the greater never tried to attack, why would King Ammon, the lesser try to attack? Third, Yiftach says, "Why have you waited so long to attack? After all, God has given us this land for over 300 years. Why attack now?" Fourth, Yiftach gave the whole matter to God. Yiftach was wise to realize that although he was judge over Israel, there was even One greater than he. He says, "We have done nothing wrong – you have done everything wrong... we are going to let the Lord decide who is right." The king of Ammon paid no attention to Yiftach. (I'm sure there's a lesson in here for America)!

Do you see how God is taking Yiftach from "zero" to "hero." He is fulfilling the destiny Adonai has called him for. I see a lesson here about becoming a great person of faith. Check yourself, the last time someone rejected you, did you drown in self-pity? Say, "I can't be a leader." Or did you say, "What could I have done better? What can I learn to make myself a better person here?" Also, are you a person of prayer? Do you take your vows of marriage seriously before God? When you say, "God, if you help me out of this, I'll do (fill in blank). Did you, do it? Third, do you have a history with God? Can you remember the ways He's led you through some troubled territory? If someone says, "God isn't faithful," can you refute it and says, "Oh yes, He is! Let me tell you, my story!!"

In verse 29 we are told about the key to Yiftach's heroic battle. The Bible says, "*Then the Ruach Adonai came upon Yiftach...*" There was a Holy Spirit fire in his bones to move forward with the people of God in victory over the enemy! We need more people like this around today. We need more men of God who can stand up and say, "Enemy, you've gone too far this time, the Lord rebuke you." We need more men who are going to rise up and be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. We need more young people who are going to quit listening to what the world says about God and find out what God says about God – then get busy following His will for their lives. We need more congregations who will stand and proclaim "...there is no other name but the name of Yeshua for salvation." We need rabbis, pastors, who will preach that God says marriage is between one man and woman, and the two become one. We need congregants, who by the power of the Spirit of God, live more like Yeshua in their homes, offices, gyms, sports fields.

On our own, it's impossible. In the words of *Zechariah 4:6*, "*Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit,*" says the Lord. What battle are you facing today, you cannot win in your own might? *Verse 32*, "*Yiftach led his army against the Ammonites, and the Lord gave him victory.*" Maybe what is needed in your life is a great leader? That leader is the Yeshua, His Spirit inside of you, His Word guiding you, His truth emboldening you. What would that look like in our lives today? Yeshua is our Great Judge. He is our Lord. He is our commander in chief. What if it read, "Yeshua led (your family, His people, your business) against the enemy...and the Lord gave him victory." The story is told about an elementary school class that went to the studio of a famous sculptor. As the children entered, they had to pass by the statue of a very ferocious and realistic lion. One of the students said, "Hey mister, how were you able to make such a realistic looking lion?" He answered, "Son, it was easy. I took a large block of marble, and then I simply chipped away everything that didn't look like a lion." In the same way, you are like a large block of marble. So how can you live a character filled life? Simply bring yourself into the presence of God and invite the Holy Spirit to chip away everything that doesn't look like Yeshua. You must be faithful to God in the small daily choices and don't burn bridges with those who have done you wrong. You should think about what God has done in your life and share a brief portion with a friend. You need to relinquish that battle you are facing to God in prayer. Rely more on God's Holy Spirit and finally we should sing, "Our God is greater," a few times through this week when faced with difficult odds.

Remember, we will not fear for God has willed, His truth to triumph through us! The process may be tough and long, but you are His masterpiece to put on display in the Hall of Faith! It is never an easy road to fulfilling your destiny... but if Adonai calls you to it, He will equip you to accomplish it... get started today...

b'Shem Yeshua, haMelech v'haMashiach Shelanu! Amein.
(*"in the name of Yeshua, our King and the Messiah! Amein."*)