

TORAH FOR K–3 · PARASHAT HASHAVUA

פרשת מטות-מסעי

Parashat Matot-Masei for Kids

Torah reading: Numbers 30:2-36:13

Read on Shabbat: July 11, 2026 · July 31, 2027 · July 22, 2028 (diaspora)

THE STORY IN TWO MINUTES

What happens in this parasha?

Matot opens with promises. A neder — a vow — is a serious thing in the Torah: if you say you will do something, your words matter, and you must keep them. Even a child can understand the rule underneath: your word is precious — don't promise lightly, and when you do promise, do it.

Then two tribes, Reuven and Gad, see that the land east of the Jordan River is perfect for their many flocks of animals, and ask Moshe: "Can this be our portion?" Moshe asks the hard question back: "Shall your brothers go on without you?" So the tribes make a promise — "we will go FIRST and help every other tribe settle into the land, and only then come back to our own homes." And they keep it. Helping your family first, then yourself: that promise becomes their whole story.

Masei means "journeys" — and it opens with something children understand instantly: a list. The Torah names all 42 places the people camped between Mitzrayim and the edge of the Land of Israel — like a family scrapbook of forty years, every stop remembered, even the ordinary ones. Why keep such a list? Because the journey itself mattered — every stop grew them into the people who could come home.

The portion ends with maps and kindness: the borders of the land are drawn, and six arei miklat — cities of refuge — are set aside as safe places where a person who caused harm completely by accident could live protected while things were made right. Even the map of the land has mercy built into it. And with that, the book of Bamidbar ends — chazak chazak v'nitchazek! Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen one another!

THE ONE BIG IDEA

Your word is a treasure: the Torah takes promises so seriously that two whole tribes built their story around one. And the list of 42 journeys says something gentle and true — every stop on a long trip matters, even the ones that felt like just waiting.

READY TO TEACH · AGES 5–9

The 30-minute lesson

- 1 Tell the story** 6 MIN

Three beats: promises are precious, Reuven and Gad's “brothers first” deal, and the scrapbook of 42 journeys. End with the cities of refuge — safe places built right into the map.
- 2 Wonder together** 5 MIN

Ask: “Why do you think the Torah wrote down every single camping spot — even the boring ones where nothing special happened?”
- 3 Learn the Hebrew word** 4 MIN

This week's word: *neder* — a vow, a serious promise. Practice the difference between “I promise” and “I’ll try” — both are honest; one is a *neder*.
- 4 Make your family's masa'ot list** 10 MIN

Draw your own journey scrapbook: every home your family has lived in, or every stop on your last big trip — little boxes connected by a winding line, like the Torah's list. Let your child decorate each stop with one memory.
- 5 Wrap up with chazak chazak** 5 MIN

Finishing a whole book of the Torah is a big deal! Teach the words we say in shul: *chazak chazak v'nitchazek* — “be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen one another.” Say it together, loudly. You finished Bamidbar.

HEBREW, ONE WORD AT A TIME

This week's Hebrew words

SAY IT	WHAT IT MEANS	HEBREW
<i>neder</i>	A vow — a serious promise that must be kept	נֶדֶר
<i>masa'ot</i>	Journeys — the 42 desert stops, each one remembered	מַסְעוֹת
<i>machaneh</i>	A camp	מַחֲנֶה
<i>shevet</i>	A tribe — Reuven and Gad chose land east of the Jordan	שֵׁבֶט
<i>arei miklat</i>	Cities of refuge — safe cities built into the map	עֲרֵי מִקְלָט
<i>chazak chazak v'nitchazek</i>	“Be strong!” — what we call out when a Torah book is finished	חֲזַק חֲזַק וְנִתְחַזֵּק

AT THE SHABBAT TABLE

Three questions to ask

- Reuven and Gad promised to help everyone else settle down before going home themselves. When has our family put someone else first like that?
- If you made a scrapbook of your life's "camping spots," which stop would get the biggest picture? Which tiny stop secretly mattered?
- What's the difference between "I promise" and "I'll try"? When should we use each one?

A GENTLE NOTE FOR PARENTS

Matot also tells of a battle against Midian, and Masei instructs the people about clearing the land — grown-up material we skip entirely at this age, exactly as our holiday lessons skip battle content. The kid-true heart of this double portion is promises, the journey list, brothers-first, and the safe cities. If a child asks why some portions have wars in them, "the Torah tells everything that happened, and we'll learn those parts when we're older" is honest and enough.

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