The Maharsha explains that the phrase "that you broke" is (Meiri; Rabbi Avraham min HaHar).

He separated from his wife – Moses acted based on his own perception – the revelation at Sinai. If God had wanted Moses to separate from his wife is not irrefutable. Had it been a place them in the Ark, “which is understood to mean that Moses was set aside for the Ark, and it is not generally understood to indicate approval of an action that a particular individual performed. The Maharsha explains that the phrase “that you broke” is entirely superfluous, as it had already been stated that Moses broke the tablets. Therefore, it must be taken to mean that God affirmed Moses’ decision. The Ramban and the Rambam maintain (Shabbat 8a) that the proof that God approved of Moses’ actions is from the verse in Deuteronomy (10:2) that states asher shihbarta, and continues: “And you shall place them in the Ark,” which is understood to mean that the broken tablets were placed in the Ark together with the second, whole tablets. The fact that God commanded Moses to preserve the broken tablets demonstrates that He approved of his actions.

Moses broke the tablets following the sin of the Golden Calf. What did he interpret that led him to do so? Moses said: In the case of the Paschal lamb, which is only one of 613 mitzvot, the Torah states: “No alien shall eat of it” (Exodus 12:43), excluding not only gentiles but apostate Jews as well, then here, in the case of the Golden Calf, where the tablets represent the entire Torah and where the Jewish people are apostates, as they are worshipping the calf, the all the more so must they be excluded from receiving them.

And his perception agreed with the perception of the Omnispresent, as it is written: “The first tablets that you broke [asher shihbarta]” (Exodus 34:1), and Reish Lakish said: The word asher is an allusion to the fact that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: May your strength be true [yishar kohakha] that you broke the tablets.

When Moses added one day to the days of separation before the revelation at Sinai based on his own perception, what did he interpret that led him to do so? He reasoned that since it is written: “And sanctify them today and tomorrow” (Exodus 19:10), the juxtaposition of the words “today” and “tomorrow” teaches that today is like tomorrow: Just as tomorrow the men and women will separate for that day and the night preceding it, so too, today requires separation for the day and the night preceding it. Since God spoke to him in the morning, and the night of that day already passed, Moses said: Conclude from this that separation must be in effect for two days aside from now, i.e., not including the day of the command. Therefore, he extended the mitzva of separation by one day. And his perception agreed with the perception of the Omnispresent, as the Divine Presence did not rest upon Mount Sinai until Shabbat morning, as Moses had determined.
It is taught in another baraita that Rabbi Natan says that Beit Shammai say: The mitzva to be fruitful and multiply is fulfilled with two males and two females. And Beit Hillel say: A male and a female.

Rav Huna said: What is the reason of Rabbi Natan in accordance with the opinion of Beit Shammai? It is as it is written: “And again she bore his brother [et ahiv] Abel [et Hevel]” (Genesis 4:2). The use of the superfluous word “et” indicates that she gave birth to Abel and his sister, in addition to Cain and his sister. And it states: “For God has appointed me another seed” instead of Abel; for Cain slew him” (Genesis 4:25). This indicates that one must have at least four children. And the Rabbis, how do they understand this verse? In their opinion, Eve was thanking God for granting her another child, but one is not obligated to have four children.

It is taught in another baraita that Rabbi Natan says that Beit Shammai say: The mitzva to be fruitful and multiply is fulfilled: Shemot 1:7; Vilna Gaon). Some commentaries cite this statement as proof that gentiles are commanded to be fruitful and multiply. This is indicated by the Torah as well, because the command to be fruitful and multiply was issued to Adam (Genesis 1:28) and Noah (Genesis 9:1). Others disagree, pointing to the fact that the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply is not listed as one of the seven Noahide mitzvot. This is consistent with the general principle that any mitzva mentioned in the Torah that is not repeated in Deuteronomy was given only to the Jewish people.

Gentiles are also subject to the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply – דוד ויתן לוメール ורבי נatan said: He has not fulfilled the mitzva even if his children do not convert (Mahari; see Tosafot). This dispute depends upon the meaning of the Gemara’s statement that gentiles are subject to the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply.

If a man had children when he was a gentile – תבש ויתן לוメール If a gentile had children and subsequently converted to Judaism, he has fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply through them if his children converted as well, in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yohanan. According to many authorities, he has fulfilled the mitzva even if his children did not convert (Rambam sefer Nashim, hilchot Ishut 1:7; Shulhan Arukh, Even HaEzer 12; Vilna Gaon).

A firstborn with regard to inheritance – תבש ויתן לוメール A firstborn with regard to inheritance is like a single male can father children through multiple offspring. Others, however, maintain that he has fulfilled the mitzva even if his children do not convert (Mahari; see Tosafot). This dispute depends upon the meaning of the Gemara’s statement that gentiles are subject to the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply.

The Gemara comments: And they follow their regular line of reasoning, as it was stated: If one had children when he was a gentile and he subsequently converted, Rabbi Yohanan said: He does not have a firstborn with regard to inheritance, i.e., the first son born to him after his conversion does not inherit a double portion, as this man already had “the first of his strength” (Deuteronomy 21:17), the Torah’s description of the firstborn in this context, before he converted. And Reish Lakish said: He does have a firstborn with regard to inheritance, as the legal status of a convert who just converted is like that of a child just born, and it is considered as though he did not have children.

The Gemara adds: And it is necessary to state their opinions in both cases. As, had it only been taught to us with regard to that first case of the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply, one might have said that it is only in that case that Rabbi Yohanan said his opinion, because from the outset, gentiles are also subject to the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply. However, with regard to inheritance, since they are not subject to the halakhot of inheritance, one might say that Rabbi Yohanan concedes to Reish Lakish.

And conversely, if their dispute was stated only with regard to this issue of inheritance, I would have said that it is only in this case that Reish Lakish said his opinion, as the halakhot of inheritance do not apply to gentiles. But with regard to that case, the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply, one might say that he concedes to Rabbi Yohanan. Consequently, it is necessary for both disputes to be recorded.
A Canaanite slave, that he does not have family lineage – רבי יוחנן הוא מוצד על מקורותיו
If a Canaanite slave and his children were freed and thereby become Jewish, the father has not fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply because his children are not halakhically recognized as his offspring. Similarly, if a Jew fathers a son from a Canaanite maidservant, the boy is not considered his son, and therefore the first son born to him from a Jewish mother is considered his son, and therefore the father has not fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply, in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yohanan (Rambam, Hilkhot Ishut 15:6 and Sefer Mishpatim, Hilkhot Nahalot 2:12; Shulhan Arukh, Even HaZer 1:2 and Hoshen Mishpat 277:9).

If a man had children and they died – וַיִּשְׁלָחוּם דְּרַבּוֹ אֲבוֹתָן
If a man’s children died without leaving descendants, he has not fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply, in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yohanan (Rambam, Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Ishut 15:6; Shulhan Arukh, Even HaZer 1:6).

HALAKHA

If a man fathers a son from a Canaanite maidservant, the boy born of a Jewish mother is considered his son, and therefore the father has not fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply, in accordance with the Rambam, Hilkhot Ishut 15:6 and Sefer Mishpatim, Hilkhot Nahalot 2:12; Shulhan Arukh, Even HaZer 1:2 and Hoshen Mishpat 277:9.

The Gemara asks: If so, here too, with regard to gentiles, there is no proof from the verse about Berodach-balanad that they have family lineage. The Gemara answers: There it is different, as the Bible identified him by his name and by his father’s name, thereby emphasizing the family connection. But here, it does not specify the names of Ziba’s children. And if you wish, say instead that the Bible identified gentiles elsewhere by their father and their father’s father, as it is written: “And King Asa sent them to Ben-hadad, son of Tabrimmon, son of Hezion, king of Aram, who dwelled in Damascus, saying” (1 Kings 15:18). This indicates that there is lineage for gentiles.

It was stated that amoraim disagreed over the following issue: If a man had children and they died, Rav Huna said: He has fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply through these children. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: He has not fulfilled the mitzva.

The Gemara clarifies the reasons for their opinions: Rav Huna said he has fulfilled the mitzva due to a statement of Rav Asi, as Rav Asi said that the reason for this mitzva is that the Messiah, son of David, will not come until all the souls of the body have been finished, i.e., until all souls that are destined to inhabit physical bodies will do so, as it is stated: “For the spirit that enwraps itself is from Me, and the souls that I have made” (Isaiah 57:16). Consequently, once a child has been born and his soul has entered a body the mitzva has been fulfilled, even if the child subsequently dies. And Rabbi Yohanan said he has not fulfilled the mitzva, as we require “He formed it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18), and this is not fulfilled when the children have passed away and no longer inhabit the earth.

The Gemara raises an objection with regard to the opinion of Rav Huna based upon the following baraita:

NOTES

A nation (םָמוֹן) comparable to a donkey – בָּﬠֵת מֵיתִיבֵי המקדש
This interpretation is based on reading the word “םוֹן” as though it were vocalized סָמוֹן, meaning nation. Furthermore, the Sages often interpret the word כְּכָנָא in the Bible as indicating that a comparison can be drawn between two items (Gilyonei Ha’Olan; see Kiddushin 70b).

By his name and by his father’s name – זְכֵרוּ אֶנְיוֹן בֵּית
The Kemen Oras asks: Why does the Gemara choose the particular example of Berodach-baladon when there are many other instances where the Torah mentions the name of a gentile and his father, e.g., the list of Edomite kings in Genesis, chapter 37? The Riva notes that this verse does not merely mention the name of Berodach-baladon’s father, it demonstrates that his father’s name was incorporated into his own name. It may be explained that this fact emphasizes the significance of the father-son relationship.

The souls of the body – חֲמוֹר
See NOTES on 61b for an explanation of this term.
Grandchildren are considered like children. This indicates that if one's children have passed away, he has fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply only if they had children of their own, as they are considered like his own children. The Gemara responds: When that baraita is taught it is with regard to completing the required number of children, e.g., if he had only a son, but his son had a daughter, he has fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply.

The Gemara raises an objection to the opinion of Rav Huna from another baraita: Grandchildren are considered like children. If one of a man's children died or was discovered to be a eunuch, the father has not fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply. This directly contradicts Rav Huna's statement that one fulfills the mitzva even if his children die. The Gemara concludes: The refutation of the opinion of Rav Huna is indeed a conclusive refutation.

It was taught in the baraita that grandchildren are considered like children. Abaye thought to say that if one's children die, he fulfills the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply through grandchildren, provided a son was born to his son and a daughter to his daughter, and all the more so if a son was born to his daughter, as his grandchildren take the place of his children in these cases. However, if a daughter was born to his son, no, she cannot take the place of her father. Rava said to him: We require merely fulfillment of the verse: "He formed it to be inhabited," and there is fulfillment in this case, as the earth is inhabited by his descendants.

The Gemara comments: In any event, everyone agrees that if one has two grandchildren from one child, no, he has not fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply, even if he has both a grandson and a granddaughter. The Gemara asks: And has he not? Didn't the Rabbis say to Rav Sheshet? Marry a woman and have sons, as you have not yet fathered any sons, and Rav Sheshet said to them: The sons of my daughter are my sons? This indicates that one can fulfill the mitzva through grandchildren even if he did not have a son and daughter of his own.

The Gemara answers: There, Rav Sheshet was merely putting them off. The real reason he did not want to get remarried was because Rav Sheshet became impotent from Rav Huna's discourse. Rav Huna's discourses were so lengthy that Rav Sheshet became impotent after waiting for so long without relieving himself.

Rabba said to Rava bar Mari: From where is this matter that the Sages stated derived, that grandchildren are considered like children? If we say it is derived from the fact that it is written in Laban's speech to Jacob: "The daughters are my daughters and the children are my children" (Genesis 31:43), which indicates that Jacob's children were also considered to be the children of their grandfather Laban, if that is so, does the continuation of Laban's statement: "And the flocks are my flocks" (Genesis 31:43), indicate that so too, Jacob's flocks were considered as belonging to Laban? Rather, Laban was saying that you, Jacob, acquired them from me. Here too, with regard to the children, Laban was saying: You acquired them from me, i.e., it is only due to me that you have children.

Abaye thought to say, etc. – רבי יוחנן בן יצחק: An opinion is cited in the Jerusalem Talmud that limits the possibility of fulfilling the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply through grandchildren to an even greater degree than Abaye had thought to say. According to this opinion, only the daughter of a daughter and the son of a son are counted as one's own children, but not a son of a daughter or a daughter of a son.

Marry a woman, etc. – רובא, רבא: Rav Sheshet's response does not appear to be sufficient, as Rabbi Yehoshua, cited below, holds that even if one has fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply he should still have more children. Even according to the Gemara's statement that Rav Sheshet became impotent, he still should have gotten married, in accordance with the opinion of Shmuel that it is always preferable for a man to be married. It is possible that since he was constantly involved in Torah study it was permissible for him to remain unmarried, similar to the case of ben Azzi (see 63a; Ramban).

Rav Sheshet – קטינה ב: A prominent third-generation Babylonian amoraim, Rav Sheshet was the primary student of Rav Huna, even though he also served and studied under the rest of the Sages of Rav Huna's generation. Rav Sheshet was famous for his unsurpassed expertise in Mishna and baraita. Many of the Sages of his generation came to study under him, as they knew that his teachings were always based on early sources. In his later years Rav Sheshet became blind, but remained involved in all aspects of life and was a frequent visitor to the house of the Exilarch. He was characteristically extremely forceful, hard as steel, and did not defer even to eminent political leaders. Apparently, He supported himself as a garment merchant and earned enough to live comfortably.

Rav Huna – עלייה ב: One of the great second-generation Babylonian amoraim, Rav Huna was most closely associated with his teacher, Rav. Rav Huna was of aristocratic descent, from the house of the Exilarchs, but despite that lineage, he lived in abject poverty for many years. Later in life he became wealthy and lived comfortably, and distributed his resources for the public good. Rav Huna was the greatest of Rav's students, to the extent that Shmuel, Rav's colleague, used to treat him deferentially and direct questions to him. After Rav's death Rav Huna became the head of the yeshiva of Sura and filled that position for forty years. His prominence in Torah and his loftiness of character helped make the yeshiva of Sura the preeminent center of Torah for many centuries. Because of Rav Huna's extensive Torah knowledge, the halakha is almost invariably ruled in accordance with his opinion in disputes with his colleagues and contemporaries. The only exception is in civil halakha, where the rulings are in accordance with the opinion of Rav Nahman.

Rav Huna had many students, some of whom studied exclusively with him. Moreover, Rav's younger students remained to study with Rav Huna, his disciple, after Rav's death. Rav Huna's son, Rabbi bar Rav Huna, was one of the greatest Sages of the following generation.
The students of Rabbi Akiva – From the farthest to the nearest: It appears from the Gemara that most of Rabbi Akiva’s disciples died in a plague. However, Rav Sherrira Gaon explains in his letter that this was a shemad, meaning their death was due either to governmental persecution or to war. If so, this would appear to be related to the bar Kokheva revolt, of which Rabbi Akiva was an ardent supporter. It is reasonable to surmise that Rabbi Akiva’s students served as soldiers under bar Kokheva and when the Romans suppressed the revolt with great brutality, these students were killed.

The image depicts an engraving that was prepared by the Roman senate in honor of Hadrian after he succeeded in suppressing the bar Kokheva revolt. It is currently at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Engraving in honor of Hadrian after he suppressed the bar Kokheva revolt

From Gevat to Antipatris – The location of Gevat is not entirely clear. Some identify it with a hill just north of Beersheba. According to some sources, Gevat is located on the borders of the desert. Antipatris is the city of Avtarnapíc, built by Herod in northern Judea. The city was located close to the source of the Yarkon River and near modern-day Rosh HaAyin. It served as a landmark, as it was the northernmost point in Judea, with Samaria continuing to the north.

The expression from Gevat to Antipatris means that the area stretched along the entire length of the land of Judea, from its southernmost edge to its northernmost edge.

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Rather, the proof is from here: “And afterward Hezron went in to the daughter of Machir, the father of Gilead… and she bore him Segub” (1 Chronicles 2:21), and it is written: “Out of Machir came down governors” (Judges 5:14), and it is written: “Judah is my governor” (Psalms 60:9). Consequently, the governors, who were from the tribe of Judah, were also called the sons of Machir, who was from the tribe of Manasseh. This must be because they were the children of Machir’s daughter and Hezron, indicating that grandchildren are considered like children.

The Gemara comments: The mishna is not in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua. As it is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Yehoshua says: If a man married a woman in his youth, and she passed away, he should marry another woman in his old age. If he had children in his youth, he should have more children in his old age, as it is stated: “In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both alike shall be good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6). This verse indicates that a man should continue having children even after he has fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply.

Rav Akiva says that the verse should be understood as follows: If one studied Torah in his youth he should study more Torah in his old age; if he had students in his youth he should have additional students in his old age, as it is stated: “In the morning sow your seed, etc.” They said by way of example that Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of students in an area of land that stretched from Gevat to Antipatris in Judea, and they all died in one period of time, because they did not treat each other with respect.

And the world was desolate of Torah until Rabbi Akiva came to our Rabbis in the South and taught his Torah to them. This second group of disciples consisted of Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua. And these are the very ones who upheld the study of Torah at that time. Although Rabbi Akiva’s earlier students did not survive, his later disciples were able to transmit the Torah to future generations.

With regard to the twelve thousand pairs of Rabbi Akiva’s students, the Gemara adds: It is taught that all of them died in the period from Passover until Shavuot. Rav Ḥama bar AbbA said, and some say it was Rabbi Hiyya bar Avin: They all died a bad death. The Gemara inquires: What is it that is called a bad death? Rav Naḥman said: Diphtheria.

Rav Mattana said: The halakha is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua, who said that one must attempt to have more children even if he has already fulfilled the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply.

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A man is obligated to visit his wife when he is about to depart on a journey – דף ו׳: One who is about to depart on a journey that does not involve a mitzva must have intercourse with his wife, if she so desires, before he departs. This is permitted even if it is the time when she expects the onset of menstrual bleeding. However, some say that if he can accommodate her in some other manner instead, he is praiseworthy. Some say that if his wife is forbidden to him but will become permitted if he postpones his journey by a day or night, he must delay his departure (Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 201:1 and Yoreh De’ot 184:10, and in the comment of Rama).

**HALAKHA**

The Gemara asks: Is this last statement derived from here? It is derived from there: “And your desire shall be to your husband” (Genesis 3:16), which teaches that a wife desires her husband when he is about to depart on a journey. Rav Yosef said: The additional derivation cited by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi is necessary only near the time of her set pattern, i.e., when she expects to begin experiencing menstrual bleeding. Although the Sages generally prohibited intercourse at this time due to a concern that the couple might have intercourse after she begins bleeding, if he is about to depart on a journey he must have intercourse with her.

**NOTES**

Without blessing – The Beit Yosef cites this statement as a source for the custom that an unmarried priest does not recite the Priestly Benediction, as one who is without a blessing cannot bless others. The Zohar states a similar opinion. Nevertheless, the common practice is that unmarried priests do recite the Priestly Benediction.

Whoever knows that his wife fears Heaven – המילה גורמת לענייה: The meaning here is that since she is God-fearing she is reluctant to express her desire openly. If he realizes from her behavior that she desires him, it is a mitzva for him to have intercourse with her.

Is this derived from here – nichei: Although the verse “And your desire shall be to your husband” does not refer specifically to a woman whose husband is about to depart on a journey, once it has been established that a woman desires her husband, and it is well known that this desire increases before a departure, no additional verse is necessary to teach that a man must satisfy his wife when she desires him (see Tosafot).

Near the time of her set pattern – שיבש עלך: According to Rashi and others, this Gemara indicates that although it is generally forbidden to have intercourse at a time when a woman expects the onset of menstrual bleeding, in this case it is permitted. This is based upon the assumption that the general prohibition is by rabbinic decree, and the Sages did not apply this decree in cases where it would cause the woman suffering. However, other commentaries assert that intercourse at this time is forbidden even under these circumstances. Tosafot explain that the term visit referred to in the Gemara does not refer to intercourse, but to spending time together.

A different explanation is cited by the Ritva and the Nimukei Yosef. They claim that this passage does not address the case of a woman who expects the onset of menstrual bleeding. Rather, the case is where the woman has already experienced menstrual bleeding, and the time for her to immerse herself in the ritual bath, and thereby become permitted to her husband, has almost arrived. In this case, the traveler must wait to leave home until it is permitted for him to have intercourse with his wife. It is with regard to this halakha that the Gemara states that the period of waiting is a night or a day, meaning that he must delay his trip if all he will have to wait is this amount of time. The next statement of the Gemara would then be understood as saying that if he is departing to fulfill a mitzva he should not delay his journey.
The Gemara asks: And how much before the expected onset of menstrual bleeding is considered near the time of her set pattern? Rava said: An interval of time, i.e., half a daily cycle, either a day or a night. The Gemara comments: And this statement that a man must have intercourse with his wife before he departs on a journey applies only if he is traveling for an optional matter, but if he is traveling in order to attend to a matter pertaining to a mitzva, he is not required to have intercourse with his wife so that he not become preoccupied and neglect the mitzva.

The Sages taught: One who loves his wife as he loves himself, and who honors her more than himself, and who instructs his sons and daughters in an upright path, and who marries them off near the time when they reach maturity, about him the verse states: And you shall know that your tent is in peace. As a result of his actions, there will be peace in his home, as it will be devoid of quarrel and sin. One who loves his neighbors, and who draws his relatives close, and who marries the daughter of his sister, a woman he knows and is fond of as a family relative and not only as a wife,

Separating from one’s wife for an interval of time: It is prohibited for a husband and wife to have intercourse at the time when the onset of menstrual bleeding is expected to occur. If this is expected to occur during the night they are forbidden to each other from the beginning of the night, and if it is expected to occur during the day they are forbidden to each other from the beginning of the day (Rambam Sefer Kedusha, Hilkhot Issurei Bia 4:12; Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De’a 184:2).

One who loves his wife as he loves himself: The Sages said that a man should love his wife as he loves himself and honor her more than himself. If he is a wealthy man, he should provide for her in accordance with his means (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Issurei Bia 15:19).

Marries them off near the time when they reach maturity: The Sages advised a man to marry off his sons and daughters near the time when they reach maturity so that they not be tempted by sinful thoughts (Rambam Sefer Kedusha, Hilkhot Issurei Bia 21:25; Tur, Even HaEzer 1).

The daughter of his sister: The Sages counseled that a man should marry his sister’s or his brother’s daughter (Rambam Sefer Kedusha, Hilkhot Issurei Bia 21:14; see Mishne LaMelekh).

And who honors her more than himself: With regard to all matters of honor a man must put his wife before himself. An example is with regard to clothing; a husband must make sure that his wife is dressed in a more respectable manner than himself (Nimkuke Yeosef). Rabbi Yehuda al-Madari explains that the shame felt by a woman when her dignity is not upheld is greater than that of a man, and therefore upholding her dignity takes precedence.

Who marries them off near the time when they reach maturity: Most commentators explain that this means that he marries them off before they reach adulthood. See Tosafot, who discuss how it is possible for a boy to get married at this age. Some say the baraita is referring to a father who makes sure his son gets married as soon as he reaches the age of thirteen. See Yom she’el Shelomo. The Meiri cites a different interpretation according to which the baraita is referring to a father who ensures that his son gets married near the usual age of marriage, eighteen.

And who marries the daughter of his sister: Some commentators claim that this does not refer only to his sister’s daughter but includes a brother’s daughter as well (Rambam, Tosafot, citing Rashbam). The Mishne LaMelekh explains that familial affection is a more natural feeling than the contingent, albeit stronger, love for a woman, and therefore a combination of these two emotions will ensure the success of the marriage.

Rabbeinu Tam and the Meiri maintain that this statement applies only to the daughter of a sister, because she is likely to be more compatible with him than the daughter of his brother. Rashi states that a man has stronger feelings for a sister than for a brother, and therefore he is closer to her daughter. Others contend that he should not marry his brother’s daughter, as she would be unable to fulfill the mitzva of levirate marriage (Tosafot Yeshanim; Rivan). Yet others suggest that this is referring to a case of a sister’s daughter who is fatherless, and it is a particular mitzva to marry her as an act of kindness, in order to provide for her (Rid). The Yad Rama explains in a similar fashion.