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*Shabbat Bemidbar*

*May 15, 2010*

*2 Sivan 5770*

## News

### FACEBOOK

Several days ago we send an e-mail expressing that our Facebook group is about to reach 1,000 members. We are happy to report that as of today our group has reached over 1050 members. Thank you to those who helped to make this possible. Let's continue to advertise about this facebook network which is becoming more and more important in our world.

### WORSHIP IN SANTA BARBARA

I had a very good worship on Shabbat May 8 with one of the Adventist congregations in Santa Barbara, Ca. It is a privilege to travel all over the world and to meet friends who are worshipping the Lord on Shabbat and are ready to witness what they believe with Jews.



### NEXT SABBATH IN THOUSAND OAKS

I made a small mistake last week when I have announced my visits in the congregations of California. In fact this next Sabbath, the 15th of May, I will be in Thousand Oaks SDA Church giving a training to the congregation.

The announcement of this weekend has been made in that way:

**Jewish Ministry Training Seminar**

May 14 and 15

Seventh-day Adventist Church

480 W. Gainsborough Rd., Thousand Oaks

Program is set up this way

**Friday evening, 7:00 p.m.** *Kabbalat Shabbat* [service to open the Sabbath], "Why Jews do NOT believe in Jesus"

**Sabbath school, 10:00 a.m.**

"Why a Jewish Outreach Mission?"

**Sermon, 11:00 a.m.**

"A Messiah Called Joseph"

There will be a church wide potluck following the morning service. All are invited to attend, and also to contribute.

**2:00 p.m.** "The Jewish People and Jesus"

**4:00 p.m.** "To the Jew First: Contextualized Mission"

**6:00 p.m.** *Havdalah* service to close the Sabbath, followed by a reception.

## CHAG SAMEACH

*Shavuot* starts May 18 evening and will be celebrated on May 19 and 20.

The *Torah* calls *Shavuot* the "Festival of Weeks" (Numbers 28:26). The very word "*Shavuot*" is Hebrew for "weeks"; it refers to the seven weeks that one counts from the second day of Passover [when the *Omer* (barley) offering is brought] until the holiday of *Shavuot*. It is one of the three *Regalim* (pilgrimage), holidays, (*Pesach* and *Succoth* are the other two) where every man in the land of Israel was commanded to come up to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival when the *Beit HaMikdash*, (the Holy Temple), stood in Jerusalem. What you can do, 1. **Read the Torah!** The Almighty gave it to you as a gift. 2. **Attend a Torah class** -- or if you wish to visit a congregation near your location, send us an email, we will be happy to help you.

# OVERVIEW

## BEHAR

### NUMBERS 1:1 - 4:20

The Book *Bamidbar*—"In the desert"—begins with G-d commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty—old enough for service.

The count reveals just over 600,000. The levi'im are counted separately later because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the *Mishkan* (sanctuary) and its furnishings and assembling them when the nation encamps.

The 12 Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the *Mishkan* in four sections: east, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out, the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Ephraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp. A formal transfer is made between the first-born and the levi'im, whereby the levi'im take over the role the first-born would have had serving in the *Mishkan* if not for the sin of the golden calf.

The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed levi'im from one month old and up.

Only levi'im between 30 and 50 will work in the *Mishkan*. The remaining first-born sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our first-born today.

The sons of Levi are divided into three main families, Gershon, Kehat and Merari (besides the kohanim — the special division from Kehat's family). The family of Kehat carried the menorah, the table, the altar and the holy ark.

Because of their utmost sanctity, the ark and the altar are covered only by Aharon and his sons, before the levi'im prepare them for travel.

## THE SHECHINA

We always read Parashat Bamidbar immediately before Shevuot, the anniversary of the meeting at Sinai, the day that we accepted God's Torah with the words

"we will do and then we shall understand." The census of our Torah portion is the annual reminder of the wisdom of our choice.

God spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt saying, "Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' household, by number of the males, according to their headcount." (Numbers, 1:1-2). Rashi explains that whenever G-d requests a census, His purpose is not determination but demonstration. He does not request the census because He is interested in knowing the count, He requests it to show His affection for His people. The census in our Torah portion is actually the third census G-d ordered in the short two years that had elapsed from the Exodus. He requested a census when they left Egypt (Exodus 12) to establish the size of his flock. When some people in the congregation fell victim to the sin of the golden calf He requested a second census (Exodus 32) to determine the number of missing.

The impetus behind this latest census was the construction of the Tabernacle. Its completion initiated the 800-year long historic era of the dwelling of the *Shechina*, Divine Presence in the Jewish camp, which ended with the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians.

G-d called this particular census to determine not only the number but also the identity of His people on whom His Presence would rest. Unlike those conducted previously, this one was by tribe, family and name.

## ANCESTORS

The Torah states: "And with you shall be one man from each tribe, each man should be the head of his family." (Numbers 1:4). A simple and boorish person who came from a distinguished lineage was arguing with a wise scholar who came from a non-distinguished family. The coarse ignoramus boasted about his illustrious ancestors. "I am a scion of a great people. Your ancestors are nothing compared to mine," he arrogantly boasted. The scholar retorted, "True, you come from a long line of great people. Unfortunately, the line ends with you. My family tree begins with me."

"This," wrote Rabbi Moshe Chaifetz, author of *Melech Machsheves*, "is the idea of our verse. Each

man should be the head of his family's lineage. He should be an elevated person in his own right." Rather than boasting about one's prominent lineage, one should focus on making oneself into an elevated person.

Rabbi Packouz says, "lineage has been compared to a carrot - often times the best part is in the ground. In truth, lineage is like the number "zero." If you make something of yourself, you place a "one" before the zero. If you are a "zero" then all you have are two zeroes. Our lesson: You should live your life so that your descendants will be proud to consider you their ancestor!"

## STOPPING TRANSGRESSION

**T**he Torah states, "But you shall not number the tribe of Levi, nor take the sum of them amongst the Children of Israel" (Numbers 1:49). Rashi, cites the *Midrash*, "The Levites should not be counted among the others in order not to be included with them (every male over 20 years of age who would die during the 40 years traveling in the Desert after leaving Egypt). They are Mine since they did not transgress in the sin of the Golden Calf."

A poignant question arises: The decree of dying in the wilderness for every male over 20 was for the transgression of accepting the negative report about the Land of Israel from the spies. Rashi should have said that the Levites did not transgress in the episode of the spies rather than saying that they did not transgress by worshipping the Golden Calf!

Rabbi Packouz reminds us that the Sifsai Chachomim, a commentary on Rashi, explains that the decree upon the generation was for those who both listened to the spies and were guilty in the sin of the Golden Calf. The Levites had listened to the spies and accepted the negative report about the Land of Israel. However, not only did they not err with the Golden Calf, they immediately came to Moses' side to stop the transgression.

## DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE

**I**n the beginning of Parashat *Bamidbar*, it is says, "The Children of Israel shall encamp, each man by his flag (banner) according to the insignias of their fathers' household..." (Num. 2:2) In addition to

the census that begins the Book of *Bamidbar*, the Torah describes the method and order by which the Children of Israel traveled in the Wilderness. The 12 Tribes were divided into four camps. Each camp had its own flag. Today there are some who might think that the idea of a flag is a Gentile concept. However, we see that on the contrary, this idea has roots in the Torah. Each tribe had its own flag and each of the four camps had its own flag.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand tells us that the *Midrash* in *Bamidbar Rabbah* states that the Almighty demonstrated great love for the nation of Israel by making them flags so that they might be easily recognizable. "And from where do we know," the *Midrash* continues, "that this was such a great demonstration of love for the Jewish people?" The *Midrash* cites the verse in *Song of Songs*, "He brought me to the chamber of Torah delights and clustered my encampments about Him in love." (2:4).

## G-D ASKS MOSHE TO LIFT UP ISRAEL

**T**he book we start to read this week is called in Hebrew *Bamidbar* "in the desert" but in the non-Jewish world it is called "Numbers", probably because of the first command in this third Book of the Pentateuch, "count the Jewish people," thus the name Numbers.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky says that the Hebrew words for count are either *soob*, which also means lift up, and *p'kod*, which can also mean appoint. Thus, when the Torah commands, "*She'u et rosh kol adat bnei-Yisrael*", "count the heads of all the assembly of children of Israel" (Numbers 1:2), God said to Moshe to uplift them as well.

## MIDBAR AND MEDABER

**T**he Hebrew word for wilderness, *midbar*, reveals a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, it refers to a remote and isolated place. At the same time, however, it is closely related to the word *medaber*, one who speaks or communicates, which is quite the opposite of isolation. For the Hebrew tradition, the "Word" comes from the wilderness the very place of silence. This Word is of course "G-d's word".

## STANDING OUTSIDE

**R**av Eliyahu Chaim Meisels, the Rav of Lodz, would raise money for the poor widows and orphans of his city. During one particularly freezing winter, he went to visit one of the prominent members of his community, Reb Isaac, a banker who served as the president of the community council.

Bundled in a coat and scarf, the Rabbi approached the banker's mansion and knocked on the door.

The valet who answered the door was shocked to see the great Rabbi Meisels standing outside in the bitter cold. He immediately asked him to enter the home where he said there would be a hot tea waiting.

Rabbi Meisels refused. "It is not necessary. Please tell Reb Isaac to see me by the door."

The banker heard that the Rav was waiting near the portal and rushed in his evening jacket to greet him. Upon seeing the Rabbi standing in the frigid weather, he exclaimed. "Rebbe, please step inside. I have the fireplace raging, and my butler will prepare a hot tea for you! There is no need for you to wait outside!"

"That is alright," countered Reb Eliyahu Chaim. "It won't be long, and all I need could be accomplished by talking right here. I'm sure you won't mind. Anyway, why should I dirty your home with my snow-covered boots?"

By this time, Reb Isaac was in a dilemma. The frigid air was blowing into his house. He did not want to close the door and talk outside in the cold, and yet the Rabbi did not want to enter!

"Please, Rabbi, I don't know about you, but I am freezing," cried the banker. "I don't mind if your boots are wet! Just come on in!"

But the Rabbi did not budge. He began talking about the plight of some of the unfortunate members of the community as the banker's teeth chattered in response.

"Please, Rebbe, just tell me what you need! I'll give anything you want, just come inside!"

With that, Reb Elya Chaim relented. He entered the man's home and followed him to the den, where a blazing fire heated the room. Then he began: "I need firewood for 50 families this winter." The banker smiled. "No problem, I commit to supplying the wood. Just one question. You know I give tzedaka, so why did you make me stand outside?"

"Reb Isaac," smiled Reb Eliyahu Chaim. "I know you give, but I wanted to make sure you understood what these poor people are going through. I knew that five minutes in the freezing cold would give you a different perspective than my initial asking while basking in the warmth of your fireplace."

## HILLEL AND SHAMMAI

**T**he Talmud relates a story concerning a gentile who, while passing by a house of study, overheard the description of the Kohein Gadol's garments.

He then went to the great Sage Shammai requesting to be converted so that he may become a Kohein Gadol. Shammai, unimpressed with the motivations of this individual, sent him away. The gentile then appeared before Hillel with the same request. Hillel converted him, but informed him that before becoming a Kohein Gadol, a person must study all of the laws pertaining to the High Priest position. When the convert reached the verse which records the prohibition of a „zar%o, literally „stranger%o to perform the Priestly service, he inquired as to the type of person to which the Torah is referring. Hillel answered that even King David, ruler of Israel, was prohibited from serving in the Beis Hamikdash, for he was not of Priestly lineage. The convert realized that if the monarch of Israel could not perform the Service, for a convert to perform the Service would be inconceivable. The Talmud concludes the story by stating that this individual praised Hillel for his tolerance and expressed his gratitude for being accepted as a member of the Jewish people. The Rambam rules that a conversion is only permitted if the person wishing to convert is not motivated by any external factors. If a person requests to convert for honor, wealth, or marriage, his request should be denied.

## EDITOR

A newsletter published by the  
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## HAFTARA

### Hosea 2:1 - 22

**HAFTARA:** Hosea is a man who loves his people and his wife. His wife is unfaithful as the people of Israel is. Speaking to this children, he said to them: "Plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts," (Hos. 2:2). His wife become an illustration of the unfaithfulness of Israel. Hosea says to his wife the words G-d addresses to Israel, "Now I will uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. I will put an end to all her mirth, her festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed festivals." (Hos. 2:10-11).

Whatawonderfultlove. In spite of her unfaithfulness he wants to love her, "Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her." (Hos. 2:14). The Bible is also a romantic book. "From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.." (Hos. 2:15).

It is clear that Hosea's wife represents Israel. "There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt." (Hos. 2:15).

Then the prophet plays with Hebrew words, the Hebrew word *Baal* means "husband" or "master" and it is also the name of an idol worshiped by Canaanite people. "On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." (Hos. 2:16). All idols will be removed. "For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more." (Hos. 2:17). And will make a covenant with Israel. "I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety." (Hos. 2:18). What a wonderful promise for Israel in this text. "And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD. (Hos. 2:20-21).

## BESORAT YESHUA

### Mark 3:31-4:9

**PARASHA:** At the beginning of the book of Numbers, Moses counts the people of Israel and organizes the tribes for their setting around the sanctuary and for their march. "Take a census of the whole congregation of Israelites, in their clans, by ancestral houses, according to the number of names, every male individually; from twenty years old and upward, everyone in Israel able to go to war." (Numbers 1:3).

**BESORAH:** Yeshua says who are members of his family and his people. "Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" (Mark 3:31-34).

However Yeshua says who are his brothers: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:16-19). Yeshua was a faithful Jew, he fulfilled all the prophecies and performed all the mitzvot of the Torah, then everyone who wants to be his brother has to follow also God's will.

Yeshua like Moses was a great teacher "Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him" (Mark 4:1). Yeshua knows how to adapt his teaching to his listeners, he is in the country side, near the sea. Many people in the crowd are farmers who work every day on agriculture and farming, that's why Yeshua uses a terminology they can understand... "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil... Everyone is invited to continue this reading by his own. The lesson of this portion of the text, is that Yeshua gives us an example of preaching. To preach in parable (rabbinic way to preach) and to let each one to understand by his own, that's why he ends his teaching by the words "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" (Mark 4:9)

