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Parashat Bamidbar, Shabbat 28 May 2011

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NEWS

SANTA BARBARA

The Lord is blessing our ministry, it was with a great pleasure I was in the Grace Community of Santa Barbara (CA) on May 21st. I was not there alone but with Rick McEdwards, a Director associate of the Institute of World Mission at the General Conference, and Paul Lippi, Rabbi of the Thousand Oaks Adventist congregation. The service was lead by Paul Lippi to demonstrate to the Santa Barbara how a Jewish style of worship is led. The members were happy to sing in Hebrew, to see the procession of the Torah and to touch the sepher Torah, this service was a refreshing experience doing something they had never done. I had the privilege to preach on Leviticus 26, the text of the parasha which gives blessings and cursing to Israel. Most of the time we like to develop theories about the curses that G-d addresses to Israel, that is why on that Shabbath I spoke much more about the blessings G-d pronounced in this parasha.

SHAVUOT

On Shavuot there is a custom to stay up all night learning Torah. Virtually every synagogue and yeshiva have scheduled learning throughout the night ending with the praying of the morning service. It is good to know what each of your congregation plans to do to promote Bible reading and Bible study. Will you have a night of Bible Study? Will you have a day of Bible Study? Are you going to read the book of Ruth and to study it deeply? What about your children and Bible study, believers are commanded to learn Torah day

and night and to teach it to their children. If a believer wants his family to be believers and his children to marry other believers, then he must integrate a Bible study program into his life and implement the teachings into his home and his being. Since Shavuot is on the 8th and 9th of June, you have time to organize a good program and to send us this information.

YOM YERUSHALAYIM

We hear a lot about Jerusalem (Yerushalayim) this days. President Obama would like to see the border between Israel and Palestine where it was in 1967, that means a divided Jerusalem, the most important part of it like the Old city and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem being part of Palestine and not anymore in Israel.

On the other hand we had the speech of Prime Minister Netanyahu who said that Jerusalem is indivisible and the eternal capital of the Jewish people. Since 1967 Israel celebrates a special day, the day of the unity of Jerusalem, called "Yom Yerushalayim", a great day of celebration in Israel and especially in Jerusalem. This year Yom Yerushalayim will be celebrated on June 1. The month of June is the month of the Six-day-War in 1967, but the day of celebration change every year because it is celebrated according to the Jewish calendar, on the 28th of Iyar, day of liberation of Jerusalem in 1967. We remember that the Six-day War was from June 5 to 10, 1967. Let's remember that the Jewish people hoped for more than 2,000 years to come back to Jerusalem, saying every year at the end of Pessach "Be Shana Habaa Be Yerushalayim" (Next year in Jerusalem).

OVERVIEW

BAMIDBAR

Numbers 1:1-4:20

The Book of 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 in 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.

BEFORE SHAVUOT

This Shabbat is Parashat Bamidbar [Sinai]. With this Parasha we begin the fourth Book of the Torah, the Book of Numbers. Parashat Bamidbar is read on the Shabbat

before the holiday of Shavuot—the holiday which celebrate the receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. This festival will be this year on June 8 and 9, starting on the 7th evening.

WHO IS PROUD OF YOU?

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.”

Rabbi Packouz precise “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!”

WHY TO COUNT?

The Parasha begins with G-d commanding Moshe to count the Jewish people; “**The LORD spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. He said: “Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. You and Aaron are to number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army.”** (Numbers 1:1-3). Contrary to the other counting, here we find a detailed counting for each tribe, plus the total sum of all together. The total amount of men between the ages of 20 to 60, excluding the tribe of Levi totaled: 603,550.

The tribe of Levi was counted separately. They were counted from a month young and up. The sum total of the tribe of Levi was 22,000.

The first count was when Yaakov (Jacob) and his family came to Egypt. They totaled 70 people.

Two hundred and ten years later, at the time of the Exodus, the Torah tells us that the number that left Egypt were “about 600,000 men, besides children.”

After the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jewish people were counted again; for a total of 603, 550 (Num. 38:26). Rabbi Marozov reminds us that “in this week’s Parasha, Bamidbar, they were counted according to each tribe. This counting took place about seven months after the last census, yet it came up with 603,550, the exact number as before.”

Why does G-d command a count at this point in the Torah? From the commentary of Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch, we can derive two complimentary answers to this question.

First of all, a count done in the wilderness serves no political or economic purpose. Rather, the count “testifies on itself” that it was done only for the sake of Torah, as evidenced by the previous verse which reads, “in the desert of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting” — the Torah was given on Sinai, and it’s “center” was the Tent of Meeting. The census served a religious function.

What was this religious purpose of the count? As Rabbi Hirsch points out, throughout Sefer Vayikra, the Book of Leviticus, we learned of all the obligations which the Nation of Israel had to the Mishkan, the Sanctuary. We also learned, at the end, about the sacrifices which each individual could offer as a voluntary commitment.

With all of this, a person might think that the nation could fulfill its obligations without him and his contribution, and as for himself, he could decide to offer no voluntary sacrifices of his own. We do not see that every individual is important as an individual.

The census contradicts this mistaken impression. Each person counts. He or she is unique, different from every other, with a unique function and unique contribution to make. Although this count included only the soldiers, males over age twenty, they served as public representatives for the larger nation. The count itself indicated how each individual was part of a family unit, part of a larger tribe, and a crucial building block in the larger whole. This count send a message for all generations: we each have something to contribute, and the entire Nation needs us!

THE LEVITES AND THE CENSUS

The 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). Why was the Tribe of Levi excluded from the census of the whole Jewish people? 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! (By the way, according to the Jewish tradition none of the women listened to the spies nor worshipped the 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. Our lesson: It pays to minimize one’s transgressions!”

EDUCATION

Children played a very important role in the giving of the Torah. Our Sages say that before G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He demanded guarantors that the Torah will be studied and cherished.

The Jews made a number of suggestions which were rejected by G-d. Only when they declared, “Our children will be our guarantors that the Jewish people will cherish and observe the Torah,” G-d immediately accepted and agreed to give them the Torah. Giving our children a Jewish education from a very early age is essential to the survival of Torah and Judaism.

EFFORT IN STUDY

A student once approached his Rabbi, “I have a very difficult time comprehending my Torah studies. It takes a lot of effort for me to understand and then remember what I learned. What can I do about this problem?”

The Rabbi looked at him and said, “You have a problem? What should I do when studying comes easy for me and it is effortless?”

Although there is an advantage when things come easy, there is also an advantage when one puts effort into studying Torah and the service of G-d.

STUDYING THE BIBLE

The Talmudic sage Rabbi Yitzchak says, “If a person tells you, I have made an effort in the study of Torah, but I have not succeeded, do not believe him. If a person tells you, I didn’t make any effort and I have succeeded, do not believe him. When a person tells you, I have made an effort and I have succeeded, believe him!”

WHAT IS YOUR REWARDS

A king once built a beautiful palace. When the palace was completed, he commissioned four well-known artists. Each had to paint a chamber wall by a certain time. The king promised to reward the artists handsomely.

Three of the artists began working immediately. The fourth artist spent his time having fun. The other artists reminded him time and again of the king’s deadline, yet, he did not change his ways. When finally the deadline drew near, he realized that it was too late to start because he could never finish on time.

Seeing the beautiful creations that his friends had developed, the fourth artist had a brilliant idea. He covered his entire wall with a mirror! This way, the other three walls would be reflected in his! He was very impressed with his brilliant idea and so were his colleagues. Finally, the big day came. The

king and many distinguished guests examined the beautiful works of art. After inspecting the first wall, the king placed a bag of gold in front of the wall as reward to the first artist. The second and third walls also pleased the king. He placed bags of gold in front of their work, as well.

When the king inspected the mirrored wall, he stood for a long time admiring how it reflected the work of the others. The clever artist was certain that he would receive a sack full of gold too. At last, the king turned to the artist and said, “What a brilliant idea! As for your reward, look into the mirror. Do you see three bags of gold? That is your reward!”

HE WHO SAVES A LIFE...

The Talmud tells a story about Binyamin the Righteous who supervised the charity fund. One day, during a year of famine, a woman came to him and said, “Master, provide sustenance for me.” Binyamin replied. “There is no money left in the charity fund.” She said, “Master, if you do not provide for me, a woman and her seven children will perish.” He provided for her out of his own pocket.

Sometime afterwards Binyamin became very ill and was about to die. The angels said to G-d: “Master of the universe, You have said that he who saves the life of one soul is considered as if he had saved the entire world. Shall Binyamin the righteous, who saved the lives of a woman and her seven children, die at such a young age?”

The Talmud concludes that, as a result, twenty two years were added to his life!

EDITOR

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HAFTARA

Hosea 2:1-22

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).

What a wonderful love. 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 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).

BRIT HACHADASHA

1 Peter 2:9-10

In our **parasha** G-d said to Moses "The Levites are mine, for all the firstborn are mine. . . . Take the Levites for me in place of all the firstborn of the Israelites... (Lev 3:12, 13, 41). G-d wanted that the whole people of Israel would be priests in the world, but the golden calf experience was a trap for the people of Israel and according to the Jewish tradition only the tribe of Levy did not worship the golden calf, that is why G-d has chosen the Levites for the special purpose of being priests in Israel.

In the text of the **hafatara** we read how much G-d loves his people. She is compared to a woman "Say of your brothers, 'My people,' and of your sisters, 'My loved one.'" The relationship of Hosea and his wife become the type of the relationships between G-d and his people. Hosea wife became adultery. The name he gave to his children were contextualized to the situation of the people of G-d, he called them **Lo-Ruhamah** (1:8), and **Lo-Ammi** (1:9), which means "no mercy" and "not my people" But ultimately G-d in the chapter 3 said "I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'".

In the Brit Hachadasha we see the fulfillment of this desire of G-d to make everyone from every nation who comes to Him to be "the loved one" and "my people". That is what Sim'on says in his letter "Once you were not a people (lo-Ammi), but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy (lo-Ruhamah), but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:10). The role of the Levites will be played not only by a tribe but by the whole people of G-d Gentiles and Jews gathered together "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (9) what a grace, what a great love and mercy, those who were excluded from G-d's people will join Israel to be a "chosen people" a "royal priesthood" for what? "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." The purpose is to declare to the world the wonderful light in Yeshua.