

Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation
(Under same management for over 5778 years)

SHABBAT SERVICE

MAY 19th- 10:30 AM Lolo Community "Synagogue"
12:30 PM Oneg, Shabbat/Shabbaton

"Blessed are those whose way of life is blameless; who live by the Torah of Adonai.
Blessed are those who observe His instruction; who seek Him with all their heart." Psalm 11



Bamidbar (in the wilderness) -- Numbers 1 - 4:20

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ

Va-y'daber Adonai el-Moshe b'midbar Seenai b'Ohel Mo'ed b'echad
Adonai spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai in the Tent of Meeting on the first

הַשָּׁנִי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִיית לְצֵאתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר:

la-**chodesh** ha-sheni ba-shanah ha-shenit l'tsetam me-erets Mitsrayim
lemor

of the second month in the second year of their going out of the land of Egypt saying

שָׂאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל

Se'u et-rosh kol-adat b'nei-Yisra'el

Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel

לְמִשְׁפְּחוֹתָם לְבַיִת אֲבוֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת כָּל־זָכָר לְגֻלְגֹּלֹתָם:

I'mishp'chotam l'b'yt avotam b'mispar shemot kol-zachar l'gulg'lotam.

by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, every male head by head...

Parsha B'midbar -- (Numbers) Chapters 1 - 4:20

As is typical for the books of the Torah, we get its Hebrew name, "**B'midbar**," from the first few words of the book. "Then the Lord 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 they had come out of the land of Egypt." Its English title, "**Numbers**," was derived from the Greek (Septuagint) title, "**Arithmoi**" (**arithmetic**) because of the prominence of census figures in the book. Numbers was written by Moses approximately between 1446 B.C.E. and 1406 B.C.E. Comparing dates in Exodus 40:2 ("On the first day of the first month, you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.") with Numbers 1:1, ("On the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt....") we see that one month had passed since the tabernacle was set up. During that one month, the book of Leviticus was written as an instruction manual for the Levites on how to worship God using the tabernacle. As we begin Numbers, God's people are again in obedience to Him. They have set up the tabernacle, and the priests and Levites have begun to offer sacrifices, as prescribed by God. The people are ready to begin the march towards their "promised land." Although Numbers was written over 3400 years ago, the lessons of believing, trusting, and obeying God are the same for us today as they were for the children of Israel then. If we want to live abundant, Godly lives in His will for us, we must fully believe, trust, and obey Him in our daily lives! Numbers illustrates that **disbelief and disobedience result in divine discipline**. We will see that the ultimate consequence for disbelief was physical death. None of those who distrusted God in the wilderness, even though they saw the power of God, freeing them from the Egyptians and preserving them in the wilderness, would live to enter their "promised land." Yet even in disbelief, God sustained His people and kept His promise to Abraham (**Genesis 12:7**), Isaac (**Genesis 26:24**), and Jacob (**Genesis 28:14**) to protect them, multiply their descendants, and to return them to the land of their inheritance. Numbers begins the narrative that takes the people from Mt. Sinai to Moab (on the border of the land) in 39 years.



Census - Shmensis

In **Genesis, Chapter 46**, God instructed Jacob to move his family to Egypt. A census was taken to number those who went to Egypt. God's people took a census before they left Egypt (**Exodus 12:37**). God freed His people from Egyptian slavery through mighty miracles and then provided them safety from the mightiest army of that time. His purpose was to be their God and dwell among His people. At Mt. Sinai God gave His people His law....His rules for life that would allow His people to approach Him in worship. Before Moses could bring the Ten Commandments, written by God onto two stone tablets, down from the mountain to present to the people, the people had Aaron fashion a golden calf to worship (**Exodus 32**). When Moses saw the idol worship, he cried out, "whoever is for the Lord, come to me!" "And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him (vs. 26)." After the judgment of God for their sin by the Levites and then through a plague, the repentant people took a census of those left, who were 20 years old and up. This was a census to provide the half-shekel "temple tax" for the work of the tabernacle. God's people will also be counted once in connection with the division of the land (**Numbers 26**), twice in the days of Saul (**I Samuel 11:8 and 15:4**), once in the days of David (**II Samuel 24:9**), and also in the days of Ezra (**Ezra 2:64; Nehemiah 7:66**). The last census will be in the future era of Messiah, when "The flocks shall again pass under the hands of Him that counts them" (**Jeremiah 33:13**).

As we begin **Numbers 1:1**, God instructs Moses to take a census of the people...."from twenty years old and upward, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel....." One purpose of this census was to prepare the former slaves to be able to conquer the land to which God was going to lead them. But there were also several other aspects of this census that should be considered. The organization of the Israelite camp also had functional importance. The census and their orderly encampment, which have military overtones, were intended to free them of the habits of slavery, which they had acquired in Egypt and to take on some of the characteristics of a nation, including acceptance of duty and discipline. As former slaves, the people were used to taking orders, but they had not acted on their own. On this march they would have to maintain discipline. They were to be counted by their "families" (clans), by their fathers' households....head by head. They were to march and to camp maintaining their family units. This family/military census also served to illustrate for the people that each individual was significant. A head-count was the ultimate equalizer. Each family member of the community, from the greatest to the lowliest, counted for no less and no more than "one."

Why was the census taken of the males from twenty years old and upward? The Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, might shed some light: "At five years of age, the study of Scripture; at ten, the study of Mishnah; at thirteen, the obligation to observe the mitzvot; at fifteen, the study of Talmud; at eighteen, marriage; at twenty, begins the pursuit of a livelihood; at thirty, one attains strength; at forty, understanding; at fifty, one can give counsel..." In other words, the first twenty years of a person's life represent those periods and areas of his life in which he focuses almost exclusively on his individual growth: the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom and his moral and spiritual development. "Twenty" represents the point at which he ventures out to the world and begins to concern himself with the material involvements of life.

As the census proceeded by tribes, it appears that the descendants of the sons of Leah were counted first (with the exception of Levi) followed by the descendants of the sons of Rachel, and then lastly the descendants of the handmaids. All of the men of the tribes were counted in this "warrior census" except the Levites, whose job was to carry and set up the tabernacle (Numbers 1:50). The total was 603,550 men. It is estimated that the total population would have been between 2 - 3 million people. Yet in comparing the dates of Numbers 1:1 and 10:11, the census took only 19 days to complete before the march began.

As mentioned above, the Levites had chosen to follow God, when called upon by Moses (Exodus 32:26) after the sin of the people with the golden calf. Therefore the Levites were given the responsibility for the tabernacle. They were to assemble, disassemble, and to transport the tabernacle from camp to camp. They were to camp like a protective shield around the tabernacle area. "The Levites were to guard" (v'shamru haLevi'im) it to prevent members from other tribes from inadvertently entering the tabernacle area, precipitating God's wrath on the congregation. Non-Levites who attempted to usurp the role of the Levites ("the layman who comes near") would be executed (vs. 51-53). How different for God's people today under the law of Messiah! As believer/priests, any of us can come boldly into God's presence at any time. "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). At the conclusion of Chapter 1, the people were in full compliance with God's wishes, having done "all which the Lord had commanded Moses..."

God's Camp Then and Now -- So, then How about our Camp today?

(Taken from Aaron Kasdan)

The (Israelite) encampment was evidently centered on the Mishkan. Although this is a logistic detail, the layout of the camp made it clear what the central focus of the community was, what was most important for the community to preserve and accomplish, and what was most connected to their identity. Naturally, the structure of the community must reflect and represent the community's purpose. In our own communities, we also must organize around our central purpose. What is God's central purpose for our community? Let us discern this and put this first. The camp was organized with preparedness to move in mind. The layout was conducive to moving toward the community's central purpose, toward taking their community closer to what God had promised. There was a communal preparedness to follow the leading of the Lord at his direction and timing. They were to be a moving community and a community of movers. We too are called to be moving communities. We must also see this on an individual level. Are people growing through their involvement in our community? Are people moving closer to the central purpose of the community and the purpose God has for them? In addition to building a moving community, we should be fostering a community of movers. If we seek to build communities of purpose, movement and cooperation, we will certainly find ourselves, our communities, and our efforts more engaging and effective. May our "tents" be a blessing and force for Messiah's Kingdom!



Camp By Tribes Around the Tabernacle

In **Chapter 2**, God tells Moses and Aaron how to position the tribes around the tabernacle....at a distance. Having each tribe camp at a particular position around the tabernacle would help to maintain internal discipline and would certainly help to avoid confusion, when the pillar of cloud lifted from above the camp, signaling that the march to a new camp would begin. Each tribe had its own flag. The embroidery on each flag was distinct for each tribe. The color of each tribal flag was similar to its representative stone on the breastpiece of the High Priest (Exodus 28:15-21).

According to Rabbinic commentary in the Midrash Rabbah, the following were the stones and colors and embroidery of the flags of each tribe: **Reuben's** stone was a ruby; the color of his flag was red and embroidered thereon were mandrakes (Genesis 30:14). **Simeon's** stone was a topaz; his flag was of a green color, and the town of Shechem was embroidered thereon (Genesis 34:25). **Levi's** stone was a smaragd; the color of his flag was one third white, one third black, and one third red, and embroidered thereon was the Urim and Tummim. **Judah's** stone was a carbuncle; the color of his flag was like the color of the heavens and embroidered on it was a lion (Genesis 49:9).

Issachar's stone was a sapphire; the color of his flag was black like stibium, and embroidered thereon was the sun and moon, in allusion to the verse, "And of the children of Issachar, men that had understanding of the times" (I Chronicles 12:33). **Zebulun's** stone was an emerald; the color of his flag was white, with a ship embroidered thereon, in allusion to the verse, "Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea" (Genesis 49:13). **Dan's** stone was a jacinth; the color of his flag was similar to sapphire, and embroidered on it was a serpent, in allusion to the verse, "Dan shall be a serpent in the way" (Genesis 49:17). **Gad's** stone was an agate; the color of his flag was neither white nor black but a blend of black and white, and on it was embroidered a military camp, in allusion to the verse,

"Gad, a troop shall troop upon him" (Genesis 49:19). **Naphtali's** stone was an amethyst; the color of his flag was like clarified wine of a light red, and on it was embroidered a deer, in allusion to the verse, "Naphtali is a deer let loose" (Genesis 49:21). **Asher's** stone was a beryl; the color of his flag was like the precious stone with which women adorn themselves, and embroidered thereon was an olive-tree, in allusion to the verse, "As for Asher, his bread shall be fat with oil" (Genesis 49:20). **Joseph's** stone was an onyx and the color of his flags were jet black; on it the embroidered design for the two tribes descendant from Joseph, Ephraim and Menasseh, was Egypt, because they were born in Egypt. On the flag of Ephraim was embroidered a bullock, in allusion to the verse, "His firstling bullock" (Deuteronomy 33:17), which refers to Joshua who came from the tribe of Ephraim. On the flag of the tribe of Menasseh was embroidered a unicorn, in allusion to the verse, "And his horns are the horns of the *re'em*" (Deuteronomy 33:17), which alludes to Gideon son of Joash who came from the tribe of Menasseh. **Benjamin's** stone was jasper and the color of his flag was a combination of all the twelve colors; embroidered thereon was a wolf, in allusion to the verse, "Benjamin is a wolf that raveneth" (Genesis 49:27).

Camped on the **East** were the tribes of **Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun**. Camped on the **South** were the tribes of **Reuben, Simeon, and Gad**. Camped on the **West** were the tribes of **Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin**. Camped on the **North** were the tribes of **Asher, Naphtali, and Dan**. Today, if you were to ask any Jew you might meet on the street to name the "tribes of Israel," he/she might very well answer: Hasidic, Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed, Reconstructionist.....Messianic?

Chapter 2 concludes that the sons of Israel camped by their tribal standards, exactly as God told Moses.

Levites -- A Special Place for Special Service

Chapter 3 begins with the listing of the generations of Aaron and Moses. However, only the sons of Aaron are mentioned. Why are the sons of Moses not listed? Why is Aaron mentioned before Moses? Since the text does not tell us, we are left to Rabbinic speculation. Perhaps the sons of Moses are not mentioned because they did not come from Egypt with the rest of the tribes. They did not experience God's miracles of deliverance in Egypt or by walking across the Red Sea, as did the other tribes. Aaron might be mentioned before Moses because it could be considered that Aaron's sons were also the sons of Moses, since Moses had taught them Torah. Even today we consider that we have spiritual sons, whom we have brought to Messiah.

After the death of Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's first and second born sons, who died before the Lord, after offering "strange fire," Aaron's third and fourth sons are mentioned, Eleazar and Ithamar.

God told Moses to bring the tribe of Levi before Aaron. The Levites were assigned the duties of the tabernacle under the supervision of Aaron and his sons. They were to "keep" (V'shamru) ("guard") the tabernacle and all its furnishings. A distinction was made among the Levites. Aaron and his sons were to V'shamru "keep," ("guard") the priesthood. It should be noted that **while all priests (sons of Aaron) are Levites, not all Levites are priests**. There were **three clans of Levites, the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites**. **Only the descendants of Kohath, which were descendants of Aaron could be priests**. The Levites would serve God as the substitute for the first-born of every male from every other tribe. They were numbered from the age of one month old. Obviously the census of Levites was not a military census. Although numbered at a very early age, Levites would have a five year "apprenticeship" and then begin their duties at thirty years of age. They would serve for twenty years, and then go into "retirement," helping to train the young male Levites.

[It is interesting to note that the total number of male Levites was listed at 22,000. However, if one added up the individual clan totals, 7,500, 8,600, and 6,200, the total would be 22,300. Rabbinic theory, not wanting to admit any textual errors, have decided that the "extra" 300 Levites must, themselves be first-born and therefore could not be part of the exchange for the first-born of all the other tribes. A more simple explanation might be that there was a scribal error. The difference

between 8,600 (Sheish) and 8,300 (Shalosh) in Hebrew letters is only one "!" (lamed). Leaving out the "!" would increase the total by 300.]

Because there were an extra 273 of the first-born from all the tribes in excess of the Levites, who could redeem them, a 5 shekel "redemption fee" was given to those 273 males. Therefore it could be said that all of God's people were "redeemed" for a price. Today, we would say that our redemption price was the shed blood of Messiah, Yeshua. Those who have not appropriated the "redemption price" have not been redeemed. This "ransom money" was given to Aaron and his sons.....again (as Chapter 3 closes) "just as the Lord commanded Moses. For three chapters, the people have been in perfect obedience to God.

In **Chapter 4**, verses 1-20, the duties of the priestly tribe, the Kohathites, are given. They are to be under the direct supervision of Eleazar, Aaron's eldest son. When the camp moves the Kohathites are to take charge of moving all the furniture in the holy place and the holy of holies. God's protocol was quite specific and His punishment for "messing up" was severe....death. No one "messed up" more than once!

When the camp must move, only Aaron and his sons can take down the parochet, the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies. It was to be placed over the ark along with several other skins or cloths. Then its poles were inserted for carrying. Similarly, the other furniture and its attendant articles were to be covered with skins and cloths by Aaron and his sons and made ready for transport. Other Kohathites were not to even see the articles of furniture before they were covered...lest they die. Their job was to come carry the covered articles. The parsha closes with God admonishing Moses to be sure that Aaron and his sons take their job seriously, so that other Kohathites do not die. Why do you think God's punishment for simply looking at the uncovered articles was so severe? Hint: the principle of limited access....remember? We talked about limited access when we discussed the building of the tabernacle. If God's priestly tribe could not approach Him, except on His terms, how can the unredeemed today expect to have any relationship with Him?

Today we, who are God's redeemed ones, are part of God's census. He knows who we are. He has given us specific jobs to do for Him. The question for us is whether we are willing to be obedient to God's call to work for him in our daily lives. This Shabbat let us recommit ourselves to do so.

SHABBAT SHALOM



Jerusalem Day

Yom Yerushalayim, Jerusalem Day, commemorates Jerusalem's reunification in
1967

28 Iyar, May 13th



Shavuot

Giving of the Torah by God to Moses
Outpouring of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit)

For Messianic Jews, it's a "two-fer!"

