

Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation

(Under same management for over 5778 years)

SHABBAT SERVICE

June 2nd – 10:30 AM Lolo Community "Synagogue"
12:30 PM Oneg Shabbat & Interactive Torah Discussion



"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



Numbers 8: 1

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

Va y'daber Adonai el Moshe lemor
(And spoke the Lord to Moses, saying,)
And the Lord Spoke to Moses saying,

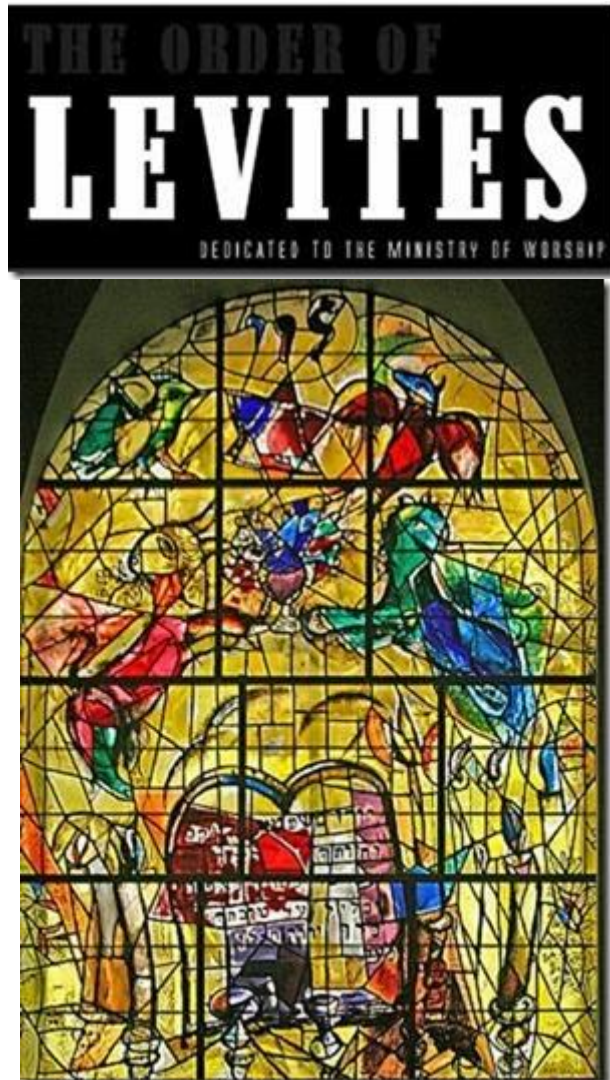
דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו

Daber el Aharon v'amarta elav
Speak to Aaron and say to him,

בְּהַעֲלֹתָ אֶת־הַנֵּרוֹת אֶל־מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יֵאִירוּ שִׁבְעַת הַנֵּרוֹת:

B'ha'a lot'cha et ha nerot el mool p'nei ha m'norah
[In your making, go up (to) the lamps, to the area (at the) face of he menorah
ya'iru shiv'at ha nerot
will give light, the seven lamps]

When you mount the lamps, the seven lamps will give light in front of the menorah.



Marc Chagall Windows for Jerusalem, The Tribe of Levi

Numbers 8: 14

וְהַבְּרַלְתָּ אֶת־הַלְוִיִּם מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיוּ לִי הַלְוִיִּם:
וְהַבְּרַלְתָּ אֶת הַלְוִיִּם מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיוּ לִי הַלְוִיִּם

V'hivdalta et-haLevi'im mitoch b'nei Yisra'el
Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel,
v'hayu li haLevi'im.
and the Levites shall be Mine.

Numbers 8: 16

כִּי נְתֻנִים נְתֻנִים הָמָּה לִּי מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
כִּי נְתֻנִים נְתֻנִים הָמָּה לִּי מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Ki netunim netunim h'mah li mitoch b'nei Yisra'el....

For they are wholly given to Me from among the sons of Israel....

The Journey Begins



1) Towards Physically claiming the Promised Land

2) Towards a Spiritual Descent into Unbelief & Rebellion

In the Torah portion from last week, I stated that "God gave Moses orders for the orderly march of His people towards the land He promised to Abraham and his descendents forever. Preparation for the march involved both physical (logistical) preparation and spiritual preparation. The physical preparation required the assembling of the people by tribes into an orderly arrangement and the assembly/disassembly of God's tabernacle, where His visible presence dwelled among His people. Spiritual preparation for the journey involved the separation of the people from things that "defiled" them. (The Leper was separated from the camp. The Nazirite was separated from normal enjoyment of some things of life to serve God for a short time. A husband's spirit of jealousy that could separate him from his wife was removed via a God-given ritual.) The basis of their spiritual preparation was their obedience, faith, trust, and worship of God alone. I suggested last week that we would observe in the next several Torah portions that the undoing of God's people was their failure to prepare themselves spiritually, fully trusting the leadership of God through Moses. I concluded that without the proper spiritual preparation of obedience, faith, trust, and worship of God alone we, too, like the Israelites, may find ourselves wandering in circles throughout the deserts of our lives.

Now we will observe what happens to God's people (and to us as well), when shallow faith and trust in God turns their focus from God and onto themselves and their "predicament," when the first apparent obstacle they encounter becomes an impenetrable barrier to their progress in claiming the land God had reserved for them, and to which God had promised to take them.

As they began their journey towards the "promised land," let us remember that this was the redeemed generation, whom God delivered from Egyptian slavery by His mighty hand. They experienced the miracles of God preserving them, while making a mockery of Egyptian gods and destroying the Egyptian army. They witnessed God's descent onto Mt. Sinai in fire, smoke, and thunder. They received God's law, given to them by Moses, declaring "all that the Lord has spoken, we will do." They built God's tabernacle, sanctified themselves, and began a God-centered life through daily worship in obedience to God's commands. Yet there was also within God's people the seeds of shallow faith and trust in God, causing them to turn their focus away from God and onto themselves. Numerous times the people expressed their impatience with Moses (and therefore with

God). They thought it better to return to Egypt than to "die in the desert." They complained about their lack of food and water. With Moses away on Mt. Sinai, they built an idol to worship and then to lead them back to Egypt.

Numbers, Chapter 8 begins with God telling Moses to have the Levites maintain the menorah in the Holy Place to give light. This functionally fulfills the fabrication of the lampstand in Ex.25,27 and Leviticus 24. Next there was the formal separation of the Levites for God's service, as a substitute for the first-born males from all the Israelite families. Their separation included the sprinkling of water, shaving their bodies and washing their clothes in preparation for their offering of sin and burnt sacrifices. As they stood before Aaron, they became a wave offering to the Lord, which made them a gift to Aaron, the High Priest, to be used in the tabernacle service and to make atonement on behalf of their people. They would begin doing the actual physical work ("**avodah**") of the tabernacle, when they were 25 years old, first as an apprentice for 5 years. When they were 50 years old, they would retire to "God duty," ("**mishmeret**"), acting as assistants for others in the tabernacle service. Although their days of heavy work were over, they persisted in ministry as teachers, mentors, singers, and perhaps even judges in outlying areas.

The principle of serving God is the same for us today, as believer/priests: Serving God may require physical work - either directly or indirectly by donation of money to provide funds, so that materials can be purchased, etc. Yet even as we become older and "retire," we are still to assist others in God's work. Application of this scriptural principle for us today might be the inclusion of older people, especially those with ministry experience, in congregation leadership.

Chronologically, Chapter 9 takes place about the same time as Exodus 40 with additional instructions regarding the first observance of Passover, since leaving Egypt. Thematically, observing the Passover was part of the preparation of the people to begin their march towards their "promised land." There are two notes of interest for us. First, there were no second-class citizens among God's people. All of God's people were required to observe Passover and bring their Passover sacrifice. Anyone who intentionally did not observe Passover was punished by "**karet**" (excision, execution). Plaut's, The Torah, A Modern Commentary defines "**karet**" as "punished by God through death without offspring." The same word is used as the punishment for intentionally profaning the Sabbath in Exodus 31:14. "Everyone who profanes it (the Sabbath) shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people."

The special Hebrew word for "alien," "**ger**," in Numbers 9:14 meant a non-Jew, who lived among Jews and worshiped the Jewish God. By worshipping God alone and observing the Passover, (and other Jewish ordinances like circumcision), he also became one of God's people. Although not Jewish by birth, he would have had the same responsibilities and enjoyed the same privileges as a "native-born" Jew, including the requirement to bring a Passover sacrifice. Special provision was made for those native-born Jews or "new Jews," who were prevented from observing Passover due to being a great distance away or due to their defilement. They would observe Passover one month later.

Today this act of faith and belief in the God of Israel and the willingness to be included in Jewish lifestyle observance could lead to Jewish conversion. Secondly, we see that there could exist a contradiction in God's law. Everyone must observe the Passover, but everyone might not be "ceremonially clean" the day Passover occurred. For example, Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel, the brother of Aaron had moved the dead bodies of their first-cousins, Nadab and Abihu, after the fire of God consumed them for offering "strange fire" (Leviticus 10:4-5). Anyone having come into contact with a dead body would have been considered defiled for a time, and would not have been able to enter into regular Jewish life. Therefore the question arose, how can people be required to observe Passover, if they are required to be ceremonially clean to observe it and are not? Moses replied to the inquirers, "Wait, and I will listen to what the Lord will command concerning you" (verse 8). When there is a contradiction in God's law, Moses asked God for clarification. After all, it is God's law! We should do the same today, seeking solutions from God's Word, rather than simply making up our own "answers," which could be justifications for doing what WE want to do. While Rabbinic

opinions and commentaries are valuable for consideration, we must be sure that we do not elevate Rabbinic tradition and commentaries above the directives and principles of Scripture!



Two Silver Trumpets

The last thing to be accomplished before breaking camp to begin the march towards the "promised land," was the instruction for the people, pertaining to when God was ready for them to depart. They were to listen for the sound of the blowing of trumpets. The trumpets would blow the sound of assembly, the "tekiah," a long, smooth continuous tone. The "tekiah," sound on both trumpets was a call for everyone to gather to Moses. The "truah" sound, short, staccato tones indicated that traveling was to commence -one "truah" for each camp (of three tribes each). The Kohathites were the ones who blew the trumpets.

As they heard the blowing of these trumpets, they understood that they were being remembered by God. **As we begin our services with the blowing of the sound of assembly, let us also remember that we, too, are in God's presence!** Plaut's The Torah, A Modern Commentary quotes Gates of Repentance: The shofar reminds us of our responsibilities as human beings, created in God's Image, and as members of the house of Israel, whose task it is to be a kingdom of priests and a holy people. Plaut also quotes the Union prayer Book: The stirring sound of the shofar proclaimed the covenant at Mount Sinai which bound Israel to God as a kingdom of priests and a holy people. Ever since that distant day, the voice of the shofar has resounded through the habitations of Israel awakening high allegiance to God and His commandments. At the new moon and on joyous festivals as well as on solemn days of fasting and repentance, and in the jubilee year, when liberty was proclaimed throughout the land, our fathers hearkened to the tones of the ram's horn and recalled their obligation to serve the Lord with all their heart and with all their strength. Thus do we their children, prepare to hearken now to the solemn sound of the shofar. May it summon us to struggle against the forces of evil within our hearts and in the world. Let it arouse within us the will to righteousness and strengthen our trust in God's justice and love. May it direct our thoughts to the day when the shofar will sound for the redemption of all mankind.

Comparing the dates in Exodus 40 with Numbers 10:11, and knowing that Leviticus was written in one month, we can see that all of the instructions and physical and spiritual preparations for departure took only 20 days after the completion of Leviticus. As they first departed, notice in verse 11 that there were two levels of leadership. First the cloud lifted, indicating God was ready for them to depart. "Al Pi Hashem" (by the word of God) the People of Israel shall travel, and by God's word they shall camp. [We would do well to conduct all our daily activities "Al Pi Hashem."]]

Then Moses gave the command to depart. One might ask why Moses was involved. Here we might observe the scriptural beginnings of "pastoral leadership." **The spiritual, human leader of the congregation is responsible before God to give the congregation God's vision and leadership; always under the authority and direction of God's word; always accountable to God and congregational leadership.** Thus today we continue this principle of two-level leadership....God's direction through His appointed shepherds. God's methodology seems to involve humans to carry out His will.



As the cloud lifted, the people moved out, and the tabernacle was dissembled and packed into carts for transport. The order of march is given in verses 14-28. They would depart in tribal units of three, each unit under the standard of the lead tribe. For example, under the standard of the tribe of Judah, Judah led the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun. Then followed the Levite clans of Gershon and Merari, leading their carts holding the disassembled tabernacle. The next three tribal units were Reuben, Simeon, and Gad, under the standard of the tribe of Reuben. Following them were the Kohathite clan of the Levites, carrying on their shoulders the holy objects of the tabernacle. When the Kohathites arrived at the next campsite, the tabernacle would have already been partially erected by the earlier arriving clans of Gershon and Merari. The third of the tribal units were Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. The last grouping was Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

Another seemingly insignificant detail again illustrates God involving humans to carry out His direction. Hobab, the son of the father-in-law of Moses, a Midianite, was convinced by Moses to accompany them because Hobab knew the wilderness, and presumably he would know where they could find water in the desert. Why involve Hobab, a Midianite? Wasn't God leading His people? Didn't God know the direction He wanted to take them and where sources of water would be? Of course, He did. But we can again observe two levels of leadership; the combination of divine leadership through humans. God seems to want to use men to carry out His will.

The ritual for the people's departure and encampment was set in verses 35-36. As the shekinah glory cloud lifted from the camp, Moses cried out, "Rise up, O Lord! And let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You." When the cloud descended, Moses cried out, "Return, O Lord to the myriad thousands of Israel." Most unusual in the Hebrew text of the Torah, is that these two verse portions are flanked by the Hebrew letters "nun" written backwards.



וַיְהִי בִּנְסוּעַ הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה קוּמָה | יְהוָה וְיִפְצוּ אֹיְבֵיהָ וְיָנֹסוּ מִפְּנֵיהָ:

Vayehi binsoa ha'aron vayomer Moshe kumah Adonay veyafutsu oyeveycha veyanusu mesan'eycha mipaneycha.

When the ark would travel, Moses would say, "Arise O Lord, and let Your enemies be scattered; let those who hate You flee from before You."

וּבְנֻחָהּ יֹאמֶר שׁוּבָה יְהוָה רַבְבוֹת אֲלֵפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: 1

Uvenuchoh yomar shuvah Adonay rivavot alfey Yisra'el.

And when it came to rest he said, "Return O Lord to the myriad thousands of Israel."

This serves to indicate God's leadership over His people and also effectively "splits the Book of B'Midbar into separate books....the first part representing the obedience of the people to God, and the second part representing the rebellion of God's people; one of the most bleak periods of history in God's relationship with His people!

Chapters 11 & 12 begin the section of the Torah that leads God's people to rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea in **Chapter 13**, which we will read for next week. As was said above, **the seeds of their rebellion had been planted by their shallow faith and trust in God, which turned their focus from God onto themselves.**



The common thread of these two chapters is "complaining." When someone complains, there is always an apparent reason given for the complaint. Yet, as we will see, **the underlying problem was distrust and dissatisfaction with God's provision.** The people's complaining was compared to the complaining of the "mixed multitude" in Exodus 12:38. God heard their complaining and His fire consumed some of the people. Verse 4 tells us that the complainers were not satisfied with the manna God had provided. They wanted meat and the food they said they used to have in Egypt. Of course, we must remember that they were slaves in Egypt, so we could wonder if slaves really had available all the food they claimed to have had. In **Philippians 3:17-19**, Paul warns fellow believers in Messiah that the enemies of Messiah, ..."whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, [who] (have) set their minds on earthly things."

When Moses, the "man of God," heard their complaining, he **became depressed** and asked God how he could provide all the necessities the people desired. Their complaining had caused Moses to turn his focus inward too! He, of all people, should have realized that it was God, who supplied the necessities for His people. What this illustrates is how even the most faithful among us can be affected by the contagious sin of complaining. Complaining spreads! **The complaining of the people caused Moses to complain** to God that the burden of all these people was too much for

Him. God granted his request for others to share his burden and allowed him to appoint 70 elders. Meanwhile, Moses promised the people that God will supply them meat to eat. God sent quail, but He also sent a plague that killed the most greedy of the people.

At the beginning of **Chapter 12** we find the wound to Moses that probably hurt him the most. When the closest to us complains, it affects us the most. When the ones we expect to stand by us "through thick and through thin" desert us, it affects our faith the most! Yet when we need spiritual stamina the most, God is there to supply it! Aaron (his brother) and Miriam (his sister) became jealous of his leadership. They asked, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us as well?" God, answered them. God asked Aaron and Miriam why they are not afraid to speak (complain) against His servant, Moses. What God was telling them was that by speaking against His appointed servant, they were speaking against Him and would be judged by Him. Miriam became leprous. Only at the pleading of Moses did God heal her. She had become defiled by leprosy and therefore had to live outside the camp for 7 days. This should have been ample instruction for the people to be content with God's provision for their needs; both for their physical needs and with those He put in spiritual leadership over them. Moses had God appointed authority over the people, and we will soon see that he was held by God to a higher standard than the rest of the people. When Moses usurped the authority of God (**Numbers 20**), his punishment was most severe and kept him out of the "promised land." This Shabbat let us decide to be satisfied with our God-given lot and fully submit to His leadership in our lives! **James 5:7-11** tells us to be patient and not to complain against one another but to endure with the endurance of Job, trusting in the mercy and compassion of God.

Shabbat Shalom

Sabbath Peaceful Rest

