

MORDEKAI'S DRASH — ב' מִדְבָּר



Torah: B'Midar (In the wilderness), B'Midbar (Numbers) 1.1-4.20
Haftorah: Hoshea (Hosea) 2.1(1.10)-22(2.20)
Suggested Messianic Writings: Romans 9.22-33

Shalom,

We now begin book 4 of Torah, known in English as *Numbers*. Unless one had a particular interest in arithmetic, to the uninformed this book may seem like something of little interest. The original Hebrew title is *B'Midbar*, which means “In the Wilderness;” the Hebraic title of the books of Tanakh generally comes from the first few words of the writing. The majority of the book details the events of Israel’s 40 years of wandering in the desert. But to many, a title like *Numbers* could appear to be a writing that is impersonal, boring and uninteresting. The title *Numbers* is the English translation of the Greek title given to the book, *Arithmoi*, from which the word “arithmetic” comes. The Greek title came from the fact that the first few chapters record the census taken of Israel as commanded by HaShem. Following this census, the tribes were allocated their positions surrounding the Tabernacle.

For those who tend to be bored with Scriptures such as these first chapters of B'Midbar, I should point out that the numbers themselves reveal a miracle from the Creator. B'Midbar 1.40 relates that the total number of men 20 years old and up eligible for military service was 603,550. (Note there was no *upper* age limit, so we can assume that men of all ages were expected to be available for military service, or if still able, to contribute to any war effort as needed.) Since the count did not include women and children, Biblical historians place the Israeli total population at the time would have been around at least 2 million, perhaps even closing in on 3 million. Skeptics of course argue with the Biblical numbers, overlooking the miracle. We must realize that these 2 million or so people would be spending 40 years in a desert. The Sinai was a desert region at the time of Moshe just as it is now. Could not a miracle providing Creator provide for His children here in the desert? Of course, He did just that, and there is a miracle. (Also, the tribe of Levi was not to be part of the military and thus was not included in the census, but we find later in B'Midbar (3.39) their count to be 22,000 males from a month old and up.) Plus there were a large number of “foreigners” had joined themselves with Israel. So upwards of 3 million people were sustained for 40 years in a dry, arid land – a land with minimal water and edible vegetation. Thus, with personal as well as historical reference, King David could write, centuries later, in Psalm 63.1, “O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

How do the events from the book of Numbers, as well as actually the rest of the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) relate to us as believers today? Is it necessary to study these books? *Sha'ul* (Saul, also known as Paul) gives us a concise answer to that in 1 Corinthians 10.1-11, stating that those historical events were written down as a warning to us to concern ourselves with how we live:

1) For, brothers, I don't want you to miss the significance of what happened to our fathers. All of them were guided by the pillar of cloud, and they all passed through the sea, 2) and in connection with the cloud and with the sea they all immersed themselves into Moshe, 3) also they all ate the same food from the Spirit, 4) and they all drank the same drink from the Spirit – for they drank from a Spirit-sent Rock which followed them, and that Rock was the Messiah. 5) Yet with the majority of them God was not pleased, so their bodies were strewn across the desert. 6) Now these things took place as prefigurative historical events, warning us not to set our hearts on evil things as they did. 7) Don't be idolaters, as some of them were – as the Tanakh puts it, “The people sat down to eat and drink, then got up to indulge in revelry” [Ex 32.6]. 8) And let us not engage in sexual immorality, as some of them did, with the consequence that 23,000 died in a single day. [Here Sha'ul includes a “census”.] 9) And let us not put the Messiah to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by snakes. 10) And don't grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the Destroying Angel. 11) These things happened to them as prefigurative historical events, and they were written down as a warning to us who are living in the acharit-hayamim [the end of days].

Lest we fall into the trap of thinking that our lives – what we do, think and say – are insignificant, remember that our Father, the uncreated Creator God cares about a sparrow falling, and just as the little things a child does is important to a loving parent, the same it is between a loving God and His children. In fact, our lives

are so important to Him that He gave up His only begotten Son to redeem us and return us to his heart. What more could we want? We humans tend to make a relationship with Him so complicated, with all of our religious ways.

Israel began a wilderness journey with a “count”. We all tend to wander through a wilderness from time to time in our walk with Yeshua. We must make what we do “count”. Messianic Jewish Rabbi Russ Resnik points out in his Torah study guide *Creation to Completion*, “Our greatest challenges in life can lead us into either revelation or rebellion. We can emerge from the wilderness experience as better and stronger people, or embittered and defeated. What makes the difference? Our response. As we trust in the God who reveals himself as trustworthy throughout the Torah, our wilderness becomes a place of encounter with him. Difficulties and disappointments in life can draw us into greater understanding of God and his ways – or they can drive us away from God altogether. Again, it all depends on our response. How am I responding to the tough, frustrating situations that are in my life right now, and how will I respond to difficulties in the next few days or months?”

The wilderness was a test for Israel; your wilderness is a test for you. It’s not always a comfortable journey. As you face your difficulties, remember Israel and all the difficulties she has faced in the past centuries and millennia. Most of all, remember the difficulties our Messiah Yeshua faced. Hebrews 12.1-3 gives us a great reminder:

“1) So then, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us, too, put aside every impediment – that is, the sin which easily hampers our forward movement – and keep running with endurance in the contest set before us, 2) looking away to the Initiator and Completer of that trusting, Yeshua – who, in exchange for obtaining the joy set before him, endured execution on a stake as a criminal, scorning the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3) Yes, think about him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you won't grow tired or become despondent.”

שְׁאַלוּ שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם – *Sha’alu shalom Yerushalayim* – Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

B'rakhot v'todah rabbah
(Blessings & thank you very much)

Mordekhi

This Yeshua, who has been taken away from you into heaven, will come back to you in just the same way as you saw him go into heaven.
(Acts 1.11 CJB)