

BE'MIDBAR – “IN THE WILDERNESS”

NUMBERS (BE'MIDBAR) 1:1 – 4:20

INTRODUCTION

1. The oldest name for the fourth book in the Torah is “the Fifth of the Musterings.”
 - a. i.e. that one of the five books describes the numbering of the legions of Israel.
 - b. Later it became known by fourth word in opening sentence - במדבר *be'midbar*.
 - c. The name “Numbers” comes from the Septuagint.
2. It deals primarily with the laws and history of the *mishkan* during the wilderness years.
 - a. It is more than a chronicle of events but interprets them as well.
3. For instance, it becomes clear that the *mishkan* – and later Temple – were to serve as a permanent substitute for the incredible experience at Sinai.
 - a. i.e. the Sanctuary served the same purpose of the mountain, yet mobile.
 - b. By the Sanctuary in the midst of camp, Sinai would stay with them.
 - c. Just as they camped around mountain, they would camp around the sanctuary.
4. Consequently, *Be'midbar* contains commandments to safeguard the Sanctuary.
 - a. Also, how the tribes were to encamp around it.
 - b. How the priests were to dismantle and transport it.
5. As a whole *Be'midbar* is divided into three primary sections.
6. Chapters 1 – 10: Contains laws given in wilderness and includes:
 - First census
 - Ordeal of jealousy
 - Nazirite vows
 - Supplementary Passover
 - Consecration of altar
 - Priestly Blessing
6. Chapters 11 – 21 cover 38 years of wandering till the arrival at Moab including:
 - Appointment of seventy elders.
 - Punishment of Miriam
 - Mission of 12 spies (scouts)
 - Korah's rebellion.
 - Sin of Moses.
 - Commandment of *tzitzitot*.
 - Rites of the Red Heifer.
7. Chapters 22 – 36 describe final events at Moab including:
 - Balaam's prophecy.
 - Zeal of Pinchas.
 - Appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor.
8. In short, Numbers forms a transition from *Vayikra* to *D'varim*.
9. The mustering or numbering began one month after the erection of the *mishkan*.
 - a. Moses numbers all the men of military age (20 years and up) by tribal affiliation.
 - b. Total number was 603,550.
10. Rabbinical sources cite opinions as to the purpose.

- To demonstrate the miraculous growth of the nation from seventy who went to Egypt.
 - Each person had a right to benefit from personal attention of Moses and Aaron.
 - The tribes had to be arranged properly.
 - Was necessary because they were about to begin a military campaign.
11. This huge population infers a total population of perhaps over 2 million.
 - a. How did such a large population exist in a barren, arid desert?
 - b. We would suppose the land did not produce enough for them to live.
 - c. Some argue that “wilderness” does not mean desert but “uninhabited.”
 - d. I think it means both considering where Sinai is – Arabia.
 12. They were fed miraculously by the manna from heaven; quail, water from a rock.
 13. Furthermore, מדבר *midbar* (wilderness) is also מדבר *m'daber* (“to speak”).
 - a. Implying what truly fed them – His Word.
 - b. “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word...”

CHAPTER 1: NUMBERING THE PEOPLE

1. Verse 1: “On the first of the second month” – 1 Iyar.
2. Verse 2: “Take a census... according to their families...according to head count” – the tribes.
 - a. The earlier census had counted the nation as a whole without recognizing tribes.
3. The reason for the distinction in these two censuses is thus according to rabbinical sources.
4. Until the *mishkan* was established as the focal point of life in Israel, there was danger that tribal affiliation could lead to factions and division.
 - a. Once *mishkan* established, tribal affiliation could be healthy if one recognized role.
 - b. Tribes served the goal of establishing the *mishkan* (worship of YHVH) as central.
 - c. They were distinct only in terms of the role they would play for national unity.
5. Today, many are overly concerned about which tribe they are from rather than establishing “the fallen tabernacle of David” (Amos 9:11).
 - a. Each facet is important but after foundational issues have been established.
 - b. In other words, Y’shua put it this way (though speaking of different issues):

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” – Matthew 6:3

6. Focusing on other issues first seems to divide rather than unite us as one people.
 - a. If He is to be in our midst, there cannot be strife – no iron tools in building of Temple.
7. Israel did not literally count heads but numbered people by the half-shekel per person.
8. Verse 3: “that are able to go forth to war in Israel” – 20 yrs. old and up.
 - a. As they go forward to Canaan it is as a “host” or “army” not unorganized rabble.
 - b. Thus the counting of the people was to see who was fit for battle.
 - c. The aged, infirmed and maimed were exempt from the numbering.
9. Prophetically speaking, only those prepared for battle and possessing the land are counted.
10. Verse 4: “One man from each tribe” – would aid Moses and Aaron in count of that tribe.
 - a. First mentioned is Elizur – “God is my rock, protector.”
11. Of the 24 names given (12 are their fathers):
 - Nine include *el* – God.
 - Three include *tzur* – “rock.”

- Three include *shaddai* – “Almighty”
12. *Shaddai* is a word that implies giving of benefits, “provider.”
 - a. Point is, these Hebrews had a vital attachment to knowledge of God of Israel.
 13. The last name on the list of leaders is Ahira the son of עינן Einan.
 - a. Einan is synonymous with עין *ayin* or “eye.”
 14. Rabbis make this connection between these two names where Israel’s destiny is concerned:

“He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept (protected) him as the apple of His eye.” – Deut. 32:10

15. Verse 18: “They declared their pedigrees” – investigated their birth, their age.
 - a. Interestingly, both censuses – seventh months apart – have same total.
 - b. How is that? It is a mystery.
16. Text then gives the different totals for the different tribes.
 - a. Verse 47: The Levites were not counted among them for they did not go to war.
 - b. Complicates the mystery of how the two separate counts are identical.
17. Levites had proven their loyalty to God in aftermath of Golden Calf incident.
 - a. They were elevated to status of being God’s own legion.
18. Their distinction was demonstrated thus:
 - Would be counted separately and differently from rest of Israel.
 - Would be assigned to guard and *Mishkan* and Courtyard.
 - Their camp would surround the *Mishkan* and Courtyard and Israel’s camp around theirs.
19. Verse 51: When it came to dismantling and transporting, non-Levites were forbidden.
 - a. They would, in fact, die if they approached even this process.
 - b. Even disassembled His Sanctuary is holy.
 - c. Even in exile, His Temple – our bodies – are to be holy.
 - d. In fact, more so – that we do not profane His name among the nations.
20. Verse 53: “Levites shall pitch around the *mishkan*” – as a bodyguard around the palace.
 - a. Prevents non-Levite from coming in contact with the holy vessels, etc.
 - b. They were to “safeguard” (*shamar*); sanctity must be maintained.
21. God doesn’t need “protecting” but His holiness must be “guarded” to prevent death to others.
 - a. Adam told to “work” and “guard.”
 - b. *Cheruvim* “guarded” the way to the Tree of Life.
 - c. *Cheruvim* upon the *kapporet* of the *aron*.

CHAPTER 2: ARRANGEMENT OF THE CAMP

1. Verse 2: “Every man with his own standard, according to the ensign.”
 - a. *Degel* דגל is to say, standard or symbol of the camp of three tribes.
 - c. Ensigns were the smaller banners that distinguished individual tribes.
2. In other words, they were arranged by corps (camp) and then by division (tribe).
 - a. Tribes (divisions) were then categorized by families within tribe (regiment)
 - b. The camp and the tribe had their own standards.
 - c. This was to assign military as well as familial organization.
 - d. These are His “legions.”
3. Tradition teaches this division was assigned in same manner Jacob instructed his sons to conduct his funeral bier to Machpelah.

4. Each camp banner contained colors of the three tribes within it.
 - a. Each individual tribe had their distinctive banner.
 - b. Each tribal banner believed to be same color as stone on the *choshen*.
5. Tribal banners were as follows (according to Midrash):
 - Reuben: Red with *duda'im* (mandrakes).
 - Simeon: Green with city of *Sh'kem* – Gen 34:25 Simeon killed males of Shekhem.
 - Levi: White, black and red with *urim v'tummim* – they were camped separately.
 - Judah: Sky-blue with a lion.
 - Issachar: Blue-black with sun & moon to demonstrate knowledge of times (1 Ch. 12:32).
 - Zebulun: White with a ship.
 - Dan: Sapphire with a snake.
 - Gad: Gray with battalion (troop) of soldiers.
 - Naftali: Pale red with a doe.
 - Asher: Bluish-green with an olive tree.
 - Ephraim: Black with ox or bull's head.
 - Manasseh: Black with *re'em* (some unknown beast – wild bull perhaps).
 - Benjamin: Mixture of all other colors with a wolf.
6. The camp banners were:
 - Judah: Lion
 - Reuben: Face of man.
 - Ephraim: Ox or bull
 - Dan: Eagle
7. Though different banners and ensigns but constituted one people with *mishkan* in their midst.
8. One tradition has it that the camp formed a quadrilateral – foursquare with *mishkan* in center.
 - a. Central portion was called camp of the *Sh'kinah*.
 - b. *Mishkan*, Aaron and Moses, Kohathites, Gerarites and Merarites around it.
9. Another tradition has it being similar to layout of the *mishkan* itself.
 - a. Resembling a cross laid on its side.\
10. This is based on the populations of the different camps:
 - Judah (Judah, Issachar & Zebulun): 186,400.
 - Reuben (Reuben, Simeon & Gad): 151,450.
 - Ephraim (Ephraim, Manasseh & Benjamin): 108,100.
 - Dan (Dan, Asher & Naphtali): 157,600.
11. The logic is that Judah was to camp east – not northeast and southeast but directly east.
 - a. This would prevent mingling with Dan and Reuben's camp to north and south.
 - b. Judah had largest population and would extend out farthest distance from Sanctuary.
12. Ephraim was smallest population; Dan and Reuben's were similar in population.
13. Given their banners, this – whichever configuration - would resemble Heavenly Court.
 - a. Midrash teaches that camp in the wilderness was counterpart of the Throne Room.
 - b. Surrounded by four living creatures identical to emblems of four camps.

“Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The

four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" - Revelation 4:6-8

14. Moses was told to make everything as He saw in Mount Sinai.

“As Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘see that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’ ”
– Hebrews 8:5

15. This would also include how the camps and tribes were to be arranged.
- Again, it resembles the throne room of God.
16. An interesting point is made in relation to Judah’s camp.
- Issachar is directly behind him denoting Judah’s need for Torah scholars (Issachar).
 - Zebulun (wealth) behind Issachar – removing influence of wealth from direct contact.
 - Those temptations can be dangerous for a king.
17. Verse 10: Honor of leading second formation given to Reuben – represents repentance.
- His position – south – associated with blessing of dew and rain.
 - Blessing comes with repentance.
18. Verse 17: “The tent of meeting...shall journey in the middle of the camps.”
- Debated just where but one thing is certain, it was central even to the traveling.
 - Still called Tent of Meeting even when disassembled.
19. Serves to teach that God’s House (His people) are always to conduct themselves as such.
- One must maintain his being set apart in any and all circumstances.
 - God doesn’t alter His holiness and, as His people, we should not either.
 - Even scattered about, “His house” is to remain “holy.”
 - Unfortunately, we see that His people have not been faithful to that call.
 - “You have profaned My name among the nations.”
20. Verse 18: Ephraim’s position was to the west – place of extreme weather.
- Two possibilities for this – Ephraim subjected to this because of its sin.
 - These three tribes possess strength of character to withstand difficult circumstances.
21. God’s Presence was on western side of Sanctuary, closer to Ephraim.
- Holy of Holies in Temple was situated in Benjamin’s portion not Judah’s.

“Of Benjamin he said: ‘The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by Him, who shelters him all the day long; and he shall dwell between His shoulders.’” – Deut. 33:12

22. If Judah is in close proximity to the “study of Torah” (Issachar) and Ephraim is in close proximity to the Presence, does this have prophetic ramifications?
- The two branches and their respective roles to the unity of Israel under Messiah.
 - Both had to meet at Sanctuary in order to be united.
 - The Sanctuary was the “spoke” in this wheel.
23. Verse 25: Dan’s camp was in the north צפנה *tzafonah* – צפון *tzafon* (literally “hidden”).
- Symbolized by darkness.
24. Dan associated with darkness in that Jeroboam set up altar and idol in his territory.
- This led to exile of the Northern Kingdom.
 - Nevertheless the camp included Asher (oil) – light in darkness.

- c. Also included Naftali which is blessed with favor.
 - d. Sometimes darkness (*tzafan*) is not a bad thing – Joseph was hidden.
25. Dan's position is not called "fourth" but last.
- a. Spelling of Dan – דָּן – forms the דָּן *tav* which is "last" but in sense a seal.
 - b. Dan means "to judge" – God will seal His decrees at the "last."
 - c. Moses describes Dan as "lion" saying the camp needs lion at lead and last.
 - d. The Messiah is the "first and last" – forward and rear guard.

“For you shall not go out with haste, Nor go by flight; For the LORD will go before you, And the God of Israel will be your rear guard.” – Isaiah 52:12

26. Dan is, in fact, called “rear guard of all the camps” in Numbers 10:25.

CHAPTER 3: LEVITES AND THEIR DUTIES

1. Verse 1: “the generation (offspring) of Aaron and Moses”- yet only Aaron's sons mentioned.
 - a. Technically, Aaron's are *kohenim* and Moses' are Levites.
 - b. Yet, Moses taught Torah to Aaron and his sons – he is a spiritual father.
 - c. A man's influence can extend beyond his biological offspring.
2. Verse 6: The Levites are given in service to the priest.
 - a. Also signifies that the High Priest is ultimately responsible for the sanctity of *mishkan*.
 - b. Verse 9 emphasizes the service of Levites to priests by literally saying, “given, given.”
3. Verse again designates Levi is distinguished from rest of Israel.
 - a. They are “set apart” from those that are “set apart.”
 - b. They were to “safeguard” the priesthood – i.e. maintain sanctity, prevent aliens.
 - c. The priests are distinguished further – “set apart” from “set apart from “set apart.”
 - d. Verse 15: Levi counted a second time (ages 30 – 50) for temple service.
 - e. Kohenim, Levi'im, Yisraeli – Holy of Holies, Holy Place, Courtyard.

“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.” - Psalm 24:3-4

4. Only the priests could stand in holy place; only High Priest in the most Holy Place.
 - a. We are to be priests unto Him.
 - b. Must have a pure heart and clean hands in order to handle the “holy things.”
5. Perhaps indicating that we must strive to be set apart from those already “set apart.”
 - a. Inferring the “bride” is distinguished from the guests and the friends?
6. Verse 12: “I have taken the Levites” – literally “I am taking them” – they're mine.
 - a. Instead of “every first born.”
7. Sanctity of first born established at least from time of slaying first born of Egypt.
 - a. Implications are it goes back to very beginning.

“And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD.” – Exodus 24:4-5

8. This is before Golden Calf incident and implies these were first born.
 - a. God called Israel to be a “kingdom of priests.”
9. At worship of Golden Calf, first born forfeited their privileges.
 - a. Reuben forfeited his rights as firstborn to Joseph (1 Chronicles 5:1).
10. Levites were chosen in the stead of first born.
 - a. Levites resisted the temptation to engage in worship of Calf.
 - b. God adds, (verse 13) “I am YHVH” indicating He didn’t change, the firstborn did.
11. Levi is “His Legion” assigned to teaching His people His Torah and distinguish between clean and unclean.
12. In the future, the same is true: those who kept His charge:

“Shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” - Ezekiel 44:23

13. Footnote: Sages teach that the firstborn will return to their former state.
 - a. A hint at a different priesthood – Melchizedek priesthood?
 - b. Nevertheless, the above points to those who are of Levi, sons of Zadok.
14. The Levites, divided into groups, camped around the *mishkan* thus:
 - Gershonites camped to the west – transported the tapestries, i.e. tent.
 - Kohathites camped to the south – transported the holy furniture.
 - Merarites camped to the north – transported the boards, pillars and sockets.
 - East (most honored place) was reserved for Moses, Aaron and *kohenim*.
15. Second to the eastern camp came the Kohathites, the 2nd most favored – carried furniture.
 - a. This is interesting because this included Korah and family.
 - b. Reuben was closest to this group and became entangled in their rebellion.
 - c. Interestingly, the rebellion came from the south.

CHAPTER 4: RULES OF SERVICE

1. Verse 2: The Kohathites (favored with carrying the furniture) are organized.
 - a. Verse 3: They are qualified by age for service, literally “warfare.”
 - b. Those who serve the Creator are in a warfare, though not carnal.
 - c. We war against principalities.
 - d. Also fair to say our biggest adversary is ourselves.
2. Interesting to point out that Gershon was firstborn of Levi, Kohath was second born.
 - a. First born did not carry the most holy articles, second born did.
 - b. Cain, Abel; Ishmael, Isaac; Esau, Jacob – notice the 2nd born.
 - c. This was also the line of Moses and Aaron.
3. Verse 5: Aaron was to cover the holy things first without Kohathites touching or gazing upon.
 - a. Ark was covered with the veil and then a blue *tachash* skin.
 - b. Seems to me, the veil would have been quite large for the ark.
 - c. Was carried by the staves.
4. This accentuates the sanctity of these things.
 - a. Priests had to prepare these things for transport that Kohathites not die.
 - b. Remember Uzziah was struck dead for touching the Ark.

5. How we treat God's holy things is very important.
 - a. How we carry His message is very important as well – not flippantly.
 - b. Priests were appointed to Levites to make sure they did not overstep their bounds.
 - c. If not, possibility that some would have and been killed.
6. Verse 10: The menorah had no staves and had to be placed in a bag-like receptacle and carried upon a pole.
7. Verse 13: The altar was transported and this brings up question of perpetual fire.
 - a. Was it extinguished? Some say yes and some say no.
8. Verse 16: Notice that the *kohen*, Elazar personally appointed to carry oil and incense.
9. Verse 20: “As they are being covered” contains the word that means “to divide, destroy.”
 - a. Why? Because as being covered, *mishkan* is being disassembled.
 - b. Verse emphasizes that those who transport should not look upon holy furniture.
10. Point is this: They should not think that because it is being disassembled that it has lost any of its sanctity and mishandle it.
11. To us this would say, the “Sanctuary” has been divided and scattered, nevertheless, we should not look upon this as excuse to “mishandle” its sanctity.
 - a. It is disassembled solely for the purpose of transporting it to another location.
 - b. Also, each group must present their part – their charge – when it is time to reassemble.
 - c. Amos 9:11 speaks to us – we will be responsible for our part when the time comes.