



Parasha Bemidbar

May 23, 2020

Torah: Numbers 1:1-4:20

Haftarah: Hosea 2:1-22

Shlichim: 1Corinthians 12:12-31

Shabbat shalom Mishpacha! Parasha Bemidbar begins: וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-חֲנֻשָׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי

va'yadaber ADONAI el-Moshe b'midbar Sinei; ADONAI spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai. B'midbar means "wilderness" or "desert." According to the rabbis, the things which happened in this parasha took place one month after the Tabernacle was dedicated. It begins: 1 In the wilderness of Sinai, on the first day of the second month in the second year from the Exodus from the land of Egypt, Adonai spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting saying, 2 "Do a head count of all the community of Bnei-Yisrael by their families and their ancestral house, with a total of every male one by one" (Numbers 1:1-2 TLV). The purpose of the count was to determine how many men there were from age 20 and up who could serve in the army. Also in this parasha, we find instructions for the Levites. The men of the tribe were taken in the place of the first born sons of the other tribes to serve ADONAI. But, they were not to be counted. 49 "Definitely you are not to number the tribe of Levi, nor take the sum of them among Bnei-Yisrael. 50 Instead, you are to appoint the Levites over the Tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its implements and all pertaining to it. They are to carry the Tabernacle and all its utensils, tend to it and camp around it" (Numbers 1:49-50 TLV). Aaron the High Priest and his sons were also given their duties. 38 Those camping in front of the Tent of Meeting, on the east, toward the sunrise, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons. They were to care for the Sanctuary on behalf of Bnei-Yisrael (Numbers 3:38a TLV). What we see pictured in these three different Scriptures is ADONAI's administrative structure for the nation. Moses was commander in chief and he and Aaron were the spiritual leadership. Aaron and his sons were in charge of the sanctuary and worship. The Levites were the worship support and transport team. And, the defense team was the men of the remaining eleven tribes age 20 and older under the leadership of their tribal heads. ADONAI organized them very precisely so that every different group could work together as a team and through them together, ADONAI's plans would be accomplished. Every group and every person worked together to support His overall mission. That is the underlying spiritual message in this parasha for us today. Under ADONAI's authority and as Yeshua's followers, we must be correctly organized in order to work together the right way.

Before we see how this applies to us today, we need to consider some background information. First, we have to understand the parallel of who those of ancient Israel were in ADONAI's body and who we are in Yeshua's body today, collectively rather than individually. In the *Torah*, there are two words which were used to refer to Israel as a group, a congregation. They are *kehilah* and *edah*. For many years I thought that they were used interchangeably. But, just recently, I've discovered that that is not the case. There is a difference and it is a significant one.

According to Strong's Concordance, *edah* is a feminine noun meaning congregation or assembly. *Kehilah* is derived from the femine word *kahal* and they are also often used interchangeably to mean congregation or assembly. According to Strong's they appear to be the same. But, are they? If you read *Beit Shalom's* full name in Hebrew on our calendar or on our rooftop sign, it says *Kehilah Beit Shalom*. Many years ago, I chose between *edah* and *kehilah* and determined that we would use *kehilah* in our name. Many Jewish congregations of today use *kehilah* and some use *edah*. But, there is a significant difference between the two, and *edah* seems to be the most accurate word to use in our congregational name to describe us. After all these years, I am not suggesting that we change it, but that we understand the difference.

We have to go back to Hebrew to understand the difference. The root word, of *edah* is *mo'ed*, a word already very familiar to you. Two weeks ago we covered Leviticus 23 and the *moedim* listed there. All of the Festivals of ADONAI, including *Shabbat* are *moedim*, the plural of *moed*. Seeing "ed" on the end of this word, we can understand that a *moed* is a calling together of the *edah*, the congregation. In the wilderness, the word *edah* is found in both Exodus and Leviticus and is used to refer to all of Israel in the context of a called out group. Other forms of *edah* are found in the *Tanakh* and can mean the whole congregation or sometimes just a particular group within it.

Here is the difference. According to *Rabbi Ari Shvat* of the *Yeshiva* at *Torah World Gateway*, *edah* means a meeting at a particular place, with particular people, for a particular purpose, where the participants congregate according to their individual roles of leaders and people. In the *Tanakh*, one example is the whole congregation of Israel with the leaders at their head. Or, it could have been descriptive of a particular tribe and its leaders. Or, it could even be a family *seder* with the father leading it. It was and is an organized group with leaders. On the other hand, *kahal* or *kehilah* is a mass gathering of people without a delineating leadership. It would include events such as the uprising against Moses in the golden calf incident and the water complaint against Moses and Aaron at *Meriva*. The general distinction is that there is leadership in one and a group with no leadership in the other.

The significance for us at *Beit Shalom* is that we do have leadership and we are lawfully and spiritually called and assembled together. And, just as Israel in the wilderness was organized as an *edah*, so do we better fit that definition. *Beit Shalom* is an *edah*, a group of called out ones who are organized and equipped with leadership to carry out the mission given to us by Yeshua. We have *rabbis*, we have elders (*zekenim*), we have *shamashim* (deacons) and we have *chaverim*, members. *Chaverim* is a word meaning friends, but the root *chaver*, singular, also means member. You are *chaverim*, members, but you are not just friends. You are *mishpacha*, family. But the point is, that as an *edah*, a congregation, we are made up of properly organized different parts. That is the underlying spiritual message which we find in *Parasha Bemidbar* today. As a part of Yeshua's body, we must be organized together for His efficiency, the efficiency described in the *Torah* and His teachings. Because we are organized, we are an *edah* and not a *kehilah*.

Our reading from the *Shlichim* today begins: *12 For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of the body—though many—are one body, so also is Messiah* (1Corinthians 12:12 TLV). There is one body, the whole body of Messiah, and it has many parts. But also within Yeshua's body are the *eidot*, the congregations, and also within them there are many parts. As individual followers of Yeshua, we are parts, members, of both and fitting into each.

13 For in one *Ruach* we were all immersed into one body—whether Jewish or Greek, slave or free—and all were made to drink of one *Ruach* (1Corinthians 12:13 TLV). Within Yeshua’s body we are either Jew or Gentile. Hopefully, today there are no slaves. And, we were all made to drink of the same Spirit, meaning that through our salvation, we are all equal as individual believers in ADONAI’s sight. But, even though we are one, we are different. Jews remain Jews, Gentiles remain Gentiles, men remain men and women remain women. And, each of us has a special place in Yeshua’s body.

14 For the body is not one part, but many. 15 If the foot says, “Since I’m not a hand, I’m not part of the body,” is it therefore not part of the body? 16 And if the ear says, “Since I’m not an eye, I’m not part of the body,” is it for this reason any less part of the body (1Corinthians 12:14-16 TLV)? Each of us has a calling and a purpose within Yeshua’s body. And, each of us should know what it is. If we don’t know which part of the body we are called to be, we are not fully lending our service to the body. All parts are important. There are no parts which are less than honorable in ADONAI’s sight. And if we start lower and get promoted, so much the better.

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the parts—each one of them—in the body just as He desired. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be (1Corinthians 12:17-19 TLV)? We can’t have a congregation consisting of all rabbis. We can’t have a congregation consisting of all musicians. We can’t have a congregation consisting of all singers. If we were all rabbis, where would the praise and worship be? If we were all musicians, where would the teaching be? As *Sha’ul* said, Yeshua placed us here in the body just as He desired. And, we have our different gifts and talents for the benefit of the entire body.

Sha’ul said a lot about gifts. He seems to be the only one of Yeshua’s disciples who described the different gifts found within the body. Within 1Corinthians 12, the chapter from which we were just reading, he described two different sets of gifts. The nine gifts listed in verses 8-12 are usually called spiritual gifts. They are the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues. Also in chapter 12 in verse 28 we find this list: emissaries or apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, leadership, and tongues. It’s interesting that number 4 in both of these lists is healings. In Romans chapter 12, verses 7-8, *Sha’ul* lists seven gifts: prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading and mercy. It’s also interesting that number 3 on this list, teaching is also number 3 in the 1Corinthians 12:28 list. These listed in Romans are sometimes called motivational gifts or how ADONAI’s Spirit has motivated us to work within the body. In Ephesians 4:11-12, *Sha’ul* lists these five: emissaries or apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. These are sometimes called leadership gifts. According to *Sha’ul*, they are for the purpose of building up the body of Messiah.

As you can see, there is considerable overlap within these four groups of gifts. We have discussed them in detail in the past and will not do that again today. But, as gifts from ADONAI, they are not something which we need to worry about. They come to us directly from the *Ruach*, ADONAI’s Spirit. Many of us are already operating within some of them. Some tend to be permanent or semi-permanent, while others are given at the time of need for a particular situation. But, ADONAI assigns them.

Going back to *Sha'ul's* words to the Corinthian congregation regarding eyes, ears, hands and feet, in the TLV they are called parts. The Greek word is *mélos* meaning, a member or a part belonging to the whole, in *Sha'ul's* example the whole human body. He also used this same word in Ephesians 5:30 to refer to each of us as parts or members of Yeshua's body of believers. But, looking locally first, as a part of the *edah*, the congregation, each of us is to have a function, a job. As a part of our local body, the *edah*, each of us can and should contribute something toward the function of the whole. I am not speaking of tithing because it something we all do. I am also not speaking of spiritual gifts because the *Ruach* provides those for us as He wills. What I am referring to are the individual ways that each of us adds our efforts, our talents and our skills to the overall operation of the congregation. If you don't have a congregational function right now, please begin to think and pray about how ADONAI would use you. In the past, everyone readily participated in helping in the various situations when the need arose, but I am speaking more now about a permanent or semi-permanent job. During our present situation caused by the coronavirus, we are not able to work in these various ways, but now is the time to begin to think about them. This situation will eventually pass and we will be able to return to what we consider normal operation of the congregation. Please pray about how ADONAI would use you individually in *Beit Shalom*.

Since the coronavirus pandemic was identified worldwide, we have seen many different kinds of reactions from the people of the world and also many ways of doing things have changed. I believe that most followers of Yeshua recognize that during this time, He has been speaking specifically to His body. The coronavirus has caused a number of those who don't know Yeshua to speak. I am referring to non-Messianic Jews, particularly the orthodox and ultra-orthodox. They have focused on are continuing to focus on repentance in the belief that Messiah is coming soon. We believe that too. Within Yeshua's body, there have been words of prophesy given which tell us that in the coming days, ADONAI will pour out His power upon many in the body and will even pour it out upon some who have not yet trusted Him. Signs and wonders are prophesied to take place, not only through the saved, but also upon the unsaved, something which will turn many other unsaved to Yeshua. Within the body, ADONAI's gifts of healing, including sight for the blind and even raising the dead, are prophesied to occur. We understand that such prophecies are in line with Yeshua's words and we receive them expectantly. He said: 12 *"Amen, amen I tell you, he who puts his trust in Me, the works that I do he will do; and greater than these he will do, because I am going to the Father"* (John 14:12 TLV). We are more than ready for it to happen. But also, as individual followers of Yeshua, we must be prepared to receive it when it comes. Pray that the time is soon. When it happens, many of the gifts described by *Sha'ul* will be poured out upon Yeshua's body.

How do we prepare ourselves? We do it by emulating Yeshua, walking in the way in which He walked. You *mishpacha* are already mature believers. You have been off milk for a long time. Your understanding of Scripture is very good and you are filled with the *Ruach*. But, He is calling each of us to come closer today. The Spirit of G-d is speaking today to every person who has trusted Yeshua and is encouraging us to draw nearer to Him. As ADONAI has told us, we are to be holy, set apart for Him, even as He is holy. As followers of Yeshua and as parts of the Commonwealth of Israel, Jew and Gentile together, we are called to be *kohanim*, priests, to the nations. As Israel was approaching Mount Sinai, ADONAI told Moses to say to them: 5 *"Now then, if you listen closely to My voice, and keep My covenant, then you will be My own treasure from among all people, for all the earth is Mine. 6 So as for you, you will be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation"* (Exodus 19:5-6 TLV). Israel

as a whole has not fulfilled their calling to be priests to the nations during the thousands of years since ADONAI gave them that charge. Even as He knew that they would sin and fall away, He also knew that in the end that He would redeem them. He promised this through Ezekiel: 24 “*For I will take you from the nations, gather you out of all the countries and bring you back to your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. 26 Moreover I will give you a new heart. I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the stony heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Ruach within you. Then I will cause you to walk in My laws, so you will keep My rulings and do them. 28 Then you will live in the land that I gave to your fathers. You will be My people and I will be your God*” (Ezekiel 36:24-28 TLV). This has been partially fulfilled and I believe that we are also living in the days of its final fulfillment. Many Jews have been already been regathered to Israel. From less than 200,000 Jews when independence was declared in 1948, there are now over 9 million in the Land. And, they are from almost every nation to which Jews had been scattered. Even the coronavirus has had a part in sending them back as many Jews from the United States recently made *aliyah*.

There has also been a partial fulfillment of ADONAI’s promise to remove their stony heart and to give them a heart of flesh. When Yeshua died on the stake as the perfect sacrifice for Israel’s sins, during the thirty or so years, many Jews came to trust in Him. The Book of Acts tells us that when *Sha’ul* returned to Jerusalem, the brothers there said to him: 20...“*You see, brother, how many myriads there are among the Jewish people who have believed—and they are all zealous for the Torah*” (Acts 21:20b TLV). Myriads are tens of thousands. Those tens of thousands and many others are the first fruits of ADONAI’s promise given through Ezekiel. It began in Israel in the 1st century and continues today. And, ADONAI has placed His *Ruach*, His Spirit, in each of them who was given a heart of flesh. Since that time many more thousands of Jews have trusted Yeshua. And today, we have the first fruits of the salvation of all Israel, Messianic Jews all around us. In Israel, we know of more than 20,000 first fruits, Messianic Jews, who are actively participating in Messianic congregations and other ministries. All Messianic Jews of today are a fulfillment of Ezekiel 36:26. By trusting in Yeshua, they were given a heart of flesh to replace their heart of stone and ADONAI placed His Spirit within them. They are the first fruits of the full harvest which is to come.

Today, Jew and Gentile together, the “one new man” spoken of by *Sha’ul* in Ephesians 2, work side by side praying for the salvation of all Israel. We are pregnant with expectation that the prophecy given by *Sha’ul* in Romans 11 will soon come true. And, not only the salvation of the Jews, but the salvation of many from the nations. We are eagerly anticipating and awaiting our next great revival, a time when ADONAI will pour out His spirit on all flesh, the latter rain of His *Ruach HaKodesh*, His Holy Spirit.

Even though Israel has not yet fulfilled their greater calling as priests to the nations, the remnant of Israel has. It is the same group which we just referred to as the first fruits of salvation. *Sha’ul* said: 5 “*So in the same way also at this present time there has come to be a remnant according to God’s gracious choice*” (Romans 11:5 TLV). The remnant, the first fruits of the nation of Israel of today, the Messianic Jews, are fulfilling their calling as priests to the nations. Those in Israel are not only proclaiming the Good News in Israel, but all around the world. The Messianic Jews of the United States are not only proclaiming Yeshua to their brother and sister Jews, but also to the nations. And those of us who are the Gentile part of the “one new man” are working shoulder to shoulder with them.

Several weeks ago in *Parasha Emor*, we read about many of the regulations, the restrictions and the requirements which ADONAI placed upon Aaron and his sons and their descendants after them. They had to strictly obey them in order to retain their holy status. If they violated any one of these rules, they became unclean and were unable to enter the Tabernacle. Today, there is no physical Temple and there is no Levitical priesthood. Yet, there is an active priesthood today, the priesthood of Yeshua our Messiah. The writer of Hebrews tells us: 14 “Therefore, since we have a great Kohen Gadol who has passed through the heavens, Yeshua Ben-Elohim, let us hold firmly to our confessed allegiance” (Hebrews 4:14 TLV). It is to His priesthood that Messianic Jews, the first fruits of salvation, belong as *kohanim*. And, not only them, but also us from the nations who have trusted Yeshua. All of us are the ordinary *kohanim* under our *Kohen Gadol*, Yeshua. And, without a physical Temple, our bodies are now the Temple of His Holy Spirit. There is no longer a physical Holy of Holies in which ADONAI dwells. Now His Spirit dwells in each of our hearts. Our hearts are the sanctuary of His Temple, the Holy of holies within us.

Shimon Kefa in his first letter to the Jews who were scattered in the diaspora in the 1st century, said this: 9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1Peter 2:9 TLV). Peter reminded them of their calling. He reminded them that as Jews, ADONAI had chosen them, the descendants of Abraham, to be priests to the nations, the calling given in Exodus 19:5-6. He exhorted them as Yeshua’s *kohanim* to take the truth of Yeshua as Messiah to the people of the nations where they lived. They were to take the Gospel to Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Today as the “one new man,” all of us, Jew and Gentile together, are *kohanim*, priests and specifically, “priests to the nations.” The word *kohen* means “to serve” and that is our calling, to serve our *Kohen HaGadol*, Yeshua, our Great High Priest.

Unfortunately today, Yeshua’s ordinary *kohanim*, are a divided priesthood. It’s almost like what *Sha’ul* said about some following Paul and some following Apollos in Romans 3:4. It is our doctrines today which divide us. Some follow this belief and some follow that belief and generally don’t have anything to do with those who believe differently. But, we all have a part to play in changing that; doing away with that division. We must begin to love and accept each other in spite of our many different doctrines. Yeshua has commanded us to love, not agree.

Parasha Bemidbar and the administrative structure which ADONAI set up within Israel in the wilderness is a reminder that He has a structured plan for us today. Each of us is to be a special and particular part of the *edot*, our local congregations, and also parts in the greater *edah*, the worldwide assembly of the followers of Yeshua. Each of us is called to contribute our talents to both of these entities. And each of us is also being called to greater holiness as faithful *kohanim* of Yeshua, our great High Priest. Soon ADONAI will pour out His Spirit upon His entire body, one in Messiah Yeshua, Jew and Gentile together. That’s important. And, more and more Jews will accept Yeshua as we draw nearer to the salvation of all Israel. It is coming. Believe it! This morning, we prayed the fourth benediction of the *Shemonei Esrei*. Let’s pray its concluding blessing together as we close: “May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in compassion. *Baruch atah Adonai, ha'machazir sh'chinato l'Tziyon*. Blessed are You, ADONAI, Who restores His Presence to Zion.” May it be soon! *Shabbat shalom!*