



Parasha Bemidbar

May 15, 2021

Torah: Numbers 1:1-4:20

Haftarah: Hosea 2:1-22

Shlichim: 1Corinthians 12:12-20

Shabbat shalom Mishpacha! Our *parasha* today is *Bemidbar* meaning “in the desert.” At this time Israel was camped in the Sinai Desert. The *parasha* is about the first census which ADONAI took of Israel and the title “Numbers,” a name taken from the Septuagint, refers to both this census and the second census in chapter 26.

The census of the ordinary Israelites was a drafting of men for military service. ADONAI said to Moses: 3 “*You and Aaron are to muster by their divisions every son from 20 years and upward available to serve in the army of Israel*” (Numbers 1:3 TLV). The army of Israel, *Tzva Haganah L’Yisra’el*, the IDF, is its modern counterpart. This is an IDF medal which I have worn for a number of years. It is important to me to have this symbol to give me a tangible connection to this group. We all pray for their safety in this current battle and for the safety of all of our people. May ADONAI deliver them in 2021 just as He did in 1948, 1967 and 1973.

This first census of the Levites in the Book of Numbers was to assign them for service in the Tabernacle. All of the first-born in Israel were to be dedicated to ADONAI. Rather than take Tabernacle servants from each tribe, ADONAI took the Tribe of Levi to serve Him in the place of the first-born sons in all of the other tribes. In this census, the first-born of the other tribes outnumbered the Levites and ADONAI commanded that 5 shekels redemption money be paid to Aaron and his sons for each of the excess first-born sons. The order in which to camp around the Tabernacle and the order in which to break camp was also given. Since *Shavuot* is two days away, that will be our topic today. This is as far as we are going with *Parasha Bemidbar*. To see or read a message based on these verses, go to May 23, 2020 on YouTube or the written message on our website.

Today is day 48 of counting the *omer*. We accept counting the *omer* as represented by a sheaf of barley as a wonderful tradition, but *Torah* actually only tells us to count the days. Leviticus 23 tells us how: 15 “*Then you are to count from the morrow after the Shabbat, from the day that you brought the omer of the wave offering, seven complete Shabbatot.* 16 *Until the morrow after the seventh Shabbat you are to count fifty days, and then present a new grain offering to Adonai* (Leviticus 23:15-16 TLV). Seven full *Shabbatot*, seven full Sabbaths, means seven full weeks. The fiftieth day is *Shavuot* or Pentecost as translated from the Greek.

You are aware that at *Beit Shalom* we count the days differently than does the Church. We don’t do this to be cantankerous, but because we believe that it is the correct way of counting. Some within Messianic Judaism count in the same way as the Church, but most count as we do. Why do we count the way we do? It’s a long story, but it’s not a shaggy dog story. *Torah* says: “*you are to count from the morrow after the Shabbat, from*

the day that you brought the omer of the wave offering.” That is where we differ. We have two different understandings of these words. The question is, “which is the *Shabbat* on which the *omer* of wave offering was brought?” We know that the 15th of Nisan, the first day of the Festival of *Matzah* is a Sabbath day and the seventh day of the week is also a Sabbath. After which Sabbath do we begin our count? We begin it after the first one, the first Sabbath of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The others begin their count after the weekly Sabbath. Counting the way we do, from the specific date of Nisan 16, the day after the Sabbath, the 50th day can fall on any one of the seven days of the week, but it always falls on the specific date Sivan 6. But, counting from the day after the weekly Sabbath, the 50th day will always fall on a Sunday.

There were three ancient groups which held different opinions about when the count was to begin. Counting from the day after the weekly *Shabbat*, the first day of the week, is generally attributed to the Sadducees. This may not be completely correct. There was a political group in Yeshua's day called the Boethusians (or Baitusim). They were a branch of the Sadducees founded by Simon ben Boethus, a High Priest appointed by Herod the Great in 24 BCE. They were not in political step with the other Sadducees being loyal to Herod and his descendants. Here is a short rabbit trail about them. In the Gospels they were called Herodians. There are several verses which refer to them (Matthew 22:16, Mark 3:6, 8:15 and 12:13). One is regarding Yeshua's last week in Jerusalem: *6 The Pharisees went out right away with the Herodians and began plotting against Him, how they might destroy Him* (Mark 3:6 TLV). The Herodians are the Boethusian branch of the Sadducees. It is said that they were so rabid about counting from the first day of the week, Sunday, that they would hire false witnesses to trick the Pharisees regarding when the new moon was sighted. Another group that had a different opinion was the sect from Qumran. They understood the Sabbath to refer to the weekly Sabbath following the last day of Unleavened Bread, that is the second weekly Sabbath after Passover. They counted in a way similar to the Boethusians, but a week later. The third group, the Pharisees, said that the *omer* was to be waved on Nisan 16, the day after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a Sabbath, which occurred on the 15th of *Nisan*.

Why do we choose to follow the Pharisee's method? One reason is because of the way that the Septuagint translates it. The Greek language translation of the *Tanakh* says: (10) *“Speak to the children of Israel, and thou shalt say to them, When ye shall enter into the land which I give you, and reap the harvest of it, then shall you bring a sheaf, the first-fruits of your harvest, to the priest; (11) and he shall lift up the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you. On the morrow of the first day the priest shall lift it up”* (Leviticus 23:10-11 Septuagint). The *kohen* was to lift up the *omer* on the morning of the next day. Skipping to verse 15, it says: (15) *“And ye shall number to your selves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day on which ye shall offer the sheaf the heave offering, seven full weeks: until the morrow after the last week ye shall number fifty days”* (Leviticus 23:15 Septuagint). This again is a reference to beginning the count on the day after the Sabbath. Verse 11 plainly tells us: *“On the morrow of the first day the priest shall lift it up.”* The morrow is the day after the first day of the feast, the 16th of Nisan. The Septuagint also translates the Hebrew *Shabbatot* as weeks. Although the Hebrew says *Shabbatot*, it is to be understood as “weeks.”

The Jewish historian Josephus, whose real name was *Mattityahu ben Yosef* also wrote about *Shavuot*: “.....and we do celebrate this Passover in companies, leaving nothing of what we sacrifice till the day following. The feast of Unleavened Bread succeeds that of

the Passover, and falls on the fifteenth day of the month, and continues seven days, wherein they feed on unleavened bread; on every one of which days two bulls are killed, and one ram, and seven lambs. Now these lambs are entirely burnt, besides the kid of the goats which is added to all the rest, for sins; for is intended as a feast for the priest on every one of those days. But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them" (Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 3, Chapter 10, Section 5). Josephus verifies that the *omer* was waved on the sixteenth day of Nisan, the second day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This also means that the count began on that day, the day after the first *Shabbat* of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. You say potahta, I say potato. Some celebrate on one day and some celebrate on another. Who is correct? Yeshua will set us all straight when He returns.

This brings us to *Shavuot*. According to Scripture, *Shavuot* is a very important festival, one of the three that ADONAI commanded to be observed in Jerusalem. *Chag HaMatzah*, the Festival of Unleavened Bread, *Chag HaShavuot*, the Festival of Weeks and *Chag HaSukkot*, the Festival of Tabernacles were known as the *shalosh regalim*, the travelling festivals (from *rega-* foot). Each Hebrew adult male was commanded by ADONAI to go up to Jerusalem for these festivals and worship Him. What is ADONAI's underlying message to us in these three Festivals? Why were we commanded to go up to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship Him? Was it because there is a picture in these three that He wants us to see?

Each of the events which ADONAI described in Leviticus chapter 23 are called ADONAI's designated times (or *moadim*) and holy convocations (or *mikrah qodashim*). If each of these six *moadim* is a holy convocation, a time of assembling ourselves before ADONAI, why did He single out the three *regalim* of *Matzah*, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*, and say that all Israelite males were to attend them? It wasn't just a suggestion: 16 "Three times a year all your males are to appear before Adonai your God in the place He chooses—at the Feast of Matzot, the Feast of Shavuot, and the Feast of Sukkot. No one should appear before Adonai empty-handed— 17 the gift of each man's hand according to the blessing Adonai your God has given you" (Deuteronomy 16:16-17 TLV).

I believe He chose these three because they are an unfolding picture which He is revealing to us. If we as Israel, celebrated Passover in the wilderness and then forty years later in the land of Israel, all that we knew was the Egyptian Passover. Our *seder* included only the information that ADONAI had redeemed us with His outstretched arm from Pharaoh and his slavery, and that He caused the angel of death to pass over us because of the shed blood of an innocent lamb that we painted on our doorposts. Year after year, the children of Israel celebrated *Pesach*, remembering Egypt, and celebrating as if we ourselves had been there. What Israel was doing at their *seder* in those days, was rehearsing for a Passover yet to come. Those earlier Passovers were rehearsals. And in the fullness of time, ADONAI sent His son Yeshua to be our Passover lamb, the sinless lamb whose blood paid the price for our sins. At that time, the time of the crucifixion of Yeshua, the rehearsals stopped and the real event was now here. The Passover that we celebrated together several weeks ago was a completion. While the Egyptian Passover was a foreshadowing of the future Passover in which ADONAI would redeem us from the slavery of sin through the blood of His own Son, the Passover that we commemorate now is a fulfillment of that first Passover in Egypt. The blood of lambs, bulls, and goats covered

our sins in those ancient days, but now, Yeshua's spotless blood has put our sins away from us as far as the east is from the west.

Shavuot is also intimately tied to the first Passover. Tradition tells us that ADONAI's giving of the *Torah* on Mount Sinai was on *Shavuot*; that it occurred 51 days after the Egyptian Passover. Don't let the 51 trip you up. This is 51 days after Passover, not after the first Sabbath of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Scripture doesn't tell us that it was *Shavuot*, but I believe it is true. Exodus 19 does say that it was in the third month after Israel left Egypt and 51 days would be within the third month. At Sinai ADONAI said in effect: If you will keep My covenant, I will take you to be my people and I will make you a nation of priests. All Israel answered with one voice; "everything you say, we will do." Israel accepted ADONAI's gracious offer. Gracious is the appropriate word because his salvation of Israel from Egypt was purely due to His grace. Israel did nothing to deserve deliverance. And then His giving of His *Torah* on Mount Sinai gave Israel the opportunity to live under His loving protection.

At Sinai ADONAI wrote His *Torah* on tablets of stone and He also gave Israel other commands to tell them and us today how to relate to Him and how to deal with our sin. In the wilderness Israel rebelled against Him and had to suffer 40 years in a dry and harsh land, when they could have been in *eretz Yisra'el*, the land of promise, within just a few months. And Israel continued to rebel against Him. During the time of the Judges, they rebelled and He had to constantly send a redeemer judge to rescue them. Through the next hundreds of years Israel constantly rebelled against Him, until finally, He brought His punishment upon them. First, the kingdom of Israel in the north was conquered and taken captive by Assyria and then about 125 years later, the southern kingdom of Judah was conquered and taken captive by Babylon. Those in Judah did not listen to the prophet Jeremiah. It is reported that Jeremiah wrote his book over a period of about 70 years and during this time he constantly entreated Israel to make *teshuvah*, to repent and return to ADONAI. I say Israel because some from all twelve tribes were living in Judah; and they didn't listen. About 25 years before Babylon conquered Judah in 586 BCE, Jeremiah wrote his chapter 31. Under the inspiration of the *Ruach HaKodesh* he said: 30 "*Behold, days are coming*" —it is a declaration of Adonai— "*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 31 not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them.*" it is a declaration of Adonai. 32 "*But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days*" —it is a declaration of Adonai— "*I will put My Torah within them. Yes, I will write it on their heart. I will be their God and they will be My people*" (Jeremiah 31:30-32 TLV).

The *rabbis* don't teach about the New Covenant just as they don't teach about Isaiah 53. But both of these Scriptures clearly speak of what ADONAI promised Israel. Through Jeremiah ADONAI told of a New Covenant in days to come. And when the time came, He initiated it through the blood of his only begotten Son, Yeshua as vividly pictured in Isaiah 53. And He wrote his Laws, His *Torah*, on our hearts when we accepted Yeshua. When we trusted in Yeshua, our hearts were circumcised by the *Ruach Kodesh*. Which *Torah*, which Laws, were written on our hearts? It was the only ones in existence, the ones that ADONAI gave to Israel at Sinai. They are still in effect because all of His covenants are everlasting covenants.

Shavuot is also a very important festival because it was at it about 10 days after Yeshua ascended to the Father, that *Ruach HaKodesh*, the Holy Spirit, fell upon the believers who had come to the festival. That outpouring of the Spirit was the fulfillment of that first *Shavuot* way back at Mount Sinai and also the writing of *Torah* on hearts according to Jeremiah 31. At Sinai, the *Torah* was written on stone tablets, but now in Jerusalem in the 1st century, it was written on the hearts of men and women who had accepted the shed blood of Yeshua as payment for their sins. Mount Sinai was the rehearsal and *Shavuot* in Jerusalem in the 1st century was its fulfillment.

Here is a possible picture of the events which took place on the *Shavuot* following Yeshua's ascension to the Father. Thousands of Jews from all over the known world were present in Jerusalem in anticipation of the festival, both born Jews and Gentile proselytes to Judaism. They had come to bring their offerings to ADONAI and to worship him in accordance with the directions of His *Torah*. They had the significance of the festival in their minds and also remembering that it was on this day that ADONAI gave the *Torah* to Moses at Mount Sinai. The thousands of Jews there were there in obedience to ADONAI's command in Deuteronomy which we read a moment ago.

Yeshua's followers were no different. They believed in keeping the *Torah*, just as Yeshua, their example, had done and taught them to do. He said: 17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the *Torah* or the *Prophets*! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. 18 Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the *Torah* until all things come to pass" (Matthew 5:17-18 TLV). Where would Yeshua's disciples have been on this day, the Day of *Shavuot*? It is very unlikely that they would have been in some other place, doing their own thing on this day that ADONAI had commanded to be observed in such a particular way. They would not have been in an upper room of a house across the city from the Temple. The book of Acts does tell us that they were in a house, but it was not a house somewhere else in Jerusalem. The house they were in was the House of ADONAI, the Holy Temple. The Hebrew words, *Har haBayit*, mean "the Mountain of the House," a name affectionately spoken about the Temple in Jerusalem. And frequently it was shortened to just *HaBayit*, "the House." That's where they were on that *Shavuot*, in *Har haBayit*, the Mountain of the House. They were there on *Sivan* 6 in the year 30 CE. There was only one celebration of *Shavuot* and Yeshua's disciples were there when it took place. The *omer* count had been made from Nisan 16, fifty days to *Sivan* 6, because the Pharisees were the majority and controlling party in the 1st century. The Bothusian sect of Sadducees was a minor party and were unable to overrule the Pharisees. Josephus' confirmed this by saying that "the count began on the 16th day of the month," the counting method used by the Pharisees.

Yeshua's disciples often met in an area on the Temple mount known as Solomon's Porch, a covered area just opposite the actual Temple. In this rendering pictured, you can see the Mount of Olives in the background with Solomon's Porch on the east side of the Temple Mount. Notice how close it was to the Temple on the right. Ever since Yeshua had ascended to ADONAI His disciples had been preparing themselves as he had commanded. He said: 5 "For John immersed with water, but you will be immersed in the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* not many days from now" (Acts 1:5 TLV). They were gathered there on *Shavuot* expecting and waiting for something to happen. And something did.

I encourage you to read Acts 1 and 2 when you have a chance to add to your understanding of what ADONAI did on that particular *Shavuot*. On that day, Temple

sacrifices had been taking place since sunrise. Before 9 AM there would have been thousands of worshippers crowded around the Temple to hear the *Torah* portion for *Shavuot* read. It was followed by a reading from the *Haftarah*, the writings from the prophets. The ancient, traditional *Haftarah* reading for *Shavuot* is Ezekiel 1:1-28 and 3:12. What happened next is my personal speculation, but it could have happened this way. Remember the relationship of Solomon's Porch to the Temple. As the *Haftarah* reading was concluded at the Temple, the Book of Acts tells us that: *2 Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And tongues like fire spreading out appeared to them and settled on each one of them* (Acts 2:2-3). You can imagine the amazement, and possibly even the terror that came upon those gathered at the Temple when they saw this take place. It was a fulfillment of what they had just heard read from the Book of Ezekiel. Verse 4 says: *4 "I looked, and behold, a storm wind came from the north, a great cloud with flashing fire and brightness all around it, and something like a glowing alloy out of the fire"* (Ezekiel 1:4 TLV). Ezekiel had seen living creatures and he said of them: *24 "When they moved, I could hear the sound of their wings like the sound of rushing waters, like the voice of Shaddai, a noise of tumult like the noise of an army. Whenever they stood still, they let down their wings"* (Ezekiel 1:24 TLV). The thousands gathered at the Temple and around the Temple heard the noise and turned to see where the sound was coming from. What they saw was the followers of Yeshua with tongues of fire on their heads. They rushed over to see what was going on. Remaining there, they heard a very moving sermon from *Shimon Kefa*. Three thousand Jews made *teshuvah* and turned from their sin, trusting in Yeshua. They received the gift of the *Ruach Kodesh*, the Holy Spirit and were immersed on the authority of Yeshua the Messiah into forgiveness of their sins. Those 3000 had come to commemorate the giving of the *Torah* to Israel at Mount Sinai, but instead trusted in Yeshua, the "living *Torah*" and had *Torah* written on their hearts.

We have seen thus far that the two Spring Festivals of ADONAI, both *Matzah*, which includes *Pesach*, and *Shavuot* have been fulfilled. But the three Fall Festivals have not been fulfilled. Year after year, we continue to rehearse *Rosh Hashanah*, the Festival of Trumpets, to rehearse *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, and to rehearse *Sukkot*, the Festival of Tabernacles. It does seem that ADONAI is fulfilling them in the order in which He gave them and we might expect *Yom Teruah*, the Day of Trumpets, also known as *Rosh Hashanah*, to be fulfilled next. Is it likely that at some future *Rosh Hashanah* Yeshua will return as *Melekh Mashiach*, King Messiah? We don't know the day, but do know that He will return on the day that the last *shofar* is sounded in heaven. And that, and what takes place on a coming *Yom Kippur*, is a whole other teaching. But we do need to consider *Sukkot* today. Why did ADONAI include this festival with the Festivals of *Matzah* and *Shavuot* in the *regalim*, the festivals He commanded Israel to attend? I believe it is because *Sukkot* is a picture of the coming eternal reign of Messiah Yeshua. *Pesach* and its fulfillment through Yeshua gave us the way to be in right-standing before ADONAI. The Festival of *Shavuot* reminds us of the written *Torah* and the fulfillment of it causes *Torah* to be written on our hearts. The *Ruach Kodesh* given on that 1st century *Shavuot* and the Holy Spirit given to us today enables us to walk out our salvation before ADONAI. And the hope of *Sukkot*, a picture of the coming eternal reign of Yeshua, encourages us to persevere as we await His return to defeat his enemies and rule and reign over us from Jerusalem. Today Israel is in the throes of war, the birthpangs of the Messiah. The *Shavuot* of 2021 will be a day marred by war. We who know and serve Yeshua prayerfully urge Him to return and deliver Israel and us from this wicked world. *6 "Pray for the peace of*

Jerusalem— “May those who love you be at peace! 7 May there be shalom within your walls— quietness within your palaces” (Psalm 122:6-7 TLV).

Look forward to this Sunday evening, May 16th as *Shavuot* begins this year. Be here for our fellowship meal and *Shavuot* service. Spend the night with us here at the synagogue and join in reading the Scriptures all night long. Expect an outpouring of ADONAI's *Ruach*. Look forward to what Yeshua told His disciples just before He ascended to His Father: 8 “*But you will receive power when the Ruach ha-Kodesh has come upon you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and through all Judah, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8 TLV)! Pray that the Holy Spirit will fall on us tomorrow night and we will all receive even more of the Spirit in our lives. Pray that we would be effective witnesses for Yeshua in this “end of the earth.” Pray for revival to begin and especially that it would begin in Israel.

Torah has been written on the hearts of each of us who have trusted in Yeshua. The Holy Spirit has impressed upon our hearts that ADONAI's festivals are important and that we should keep them as best we can in this day and time. We all look forward to *Shavuot* just as we look forward to *Pesach* and *Rosh Hashanah*. We do not want to miss any one of ADONAI's special holy days! But we are neglecting *Shabbat*, ADONAI's Holy Convocation, the *moed* which ties all the other festivals together. We must prayerfully seek to look upon *Shabbat* in the same way as we do the others. Living in these changing and sometimes violent last days, we need to bind ourselves together more tightly. Ask the *Ruach* to guide you into ADONAI's truth about *Shabbat* and its importance to Him and to you. *Shabbat shalom!*