

January 6, 2019 - Num. 1:1-54 - The Census
Torah reading: Numbers 1:1-54 - The Census
Psalm 90
Haftarah: Hosea 2:1-25 (Hosea 1:10 - 2:23)
Isaiah 35:1-2

Beginning the Book of Numbers

One ancient Hebrew name for Numbers is *Chumash Ha-Pekudim* or "The Book of the Musterings" because of the censuses taken at the beginning and toward the end of the book.

The more common name, *Bamidbar*, means "in the wilderness," which are the first words that appear in the Hebrew text.

The pivotal point in the book comes with the "bad report" of the spies, which causes God to condemn that generation to die in the wilderness.

God Requires a Census

Numbers 1:1-2 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls"

Iyar is the second month of the ecclesiastical year, which begins with Nisan. The tabernacle had been set up on the first day of the first month of the second year (**Exodus 40:17**).

So this part of the story begins a month after the end of the Book of Exodus.

With the setting up of the Tabernacle, the giving of the Law was completed. The Book of Numbers is about what happens when Israel tries to *live* by this covenant and fails - and the consequences are dire.

Why Take a Census?

Rashi - Because they were dear to Him, He counted them often. When they left Egypt, He counted them (Exod. 12:37); when [many] fell because [of the sin] of the golden calf, He counted them to know the number of the survivors (Exod. 32:28); when He came to cause His Divine Presence to rest among them, He counted them. On the first of Nissan, the Mishkan (Tabernacle) was erected, and on the first of Iyar, He counted them.

God Keeps Count of His Own

- **Luke 12:6-7** - "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is

forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."

- **Matthew 18:12-13** - "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices more over that one sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray."

Passing Under the Rod

"every male by their polls" - according to Nachmanides, "The Holy One, blessed be He, ordered Moses to number them in a manner that would confer honor and greatness on each one of them, individually. Not that you would say to the head of the family, 'How many are there in your family? How many children have you?' But rather all of them should pass before you in awe and with the honor due to them and you should number them."

Each would be truly seen and acknowledged, and their individual importance as one of God's people confirmed.

Similar to sheep "passing under the rod" to determine the first fruit offering (**Leviticus 27: 32**).

- **Ezekiel 20:37** - "And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant"

As the sheep passed under the rod — a symbol of the authority of the word of God — they would undergo a close scrutiny. The shepherd would run his rod backward or across the grain, as it were, of the wool. The rod separated the wool, allowing the shepherd to look down onto the sheep's skin. He was then able to see both the quality of the skin and of the wool. The shepherd could also separate out sheep from some other flock. - *Forerunner Commentary*

John 10:14 - "I am the Good Shepherd. I know My Own, and My Own know Me."

A Promise to Multiply

- **Deuteronomy 10:22** - "Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude."

God had promised to increase Abraham's seed, so these numberings could serve to show that the promise was being fulfilled: When they first went down to Egypt, they were only 70 souls. Now they were a multitude.

- **Genesis 15:5** - "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy

seed be."

- **Genesis 22:17-18** - "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." (Repeated in **Genesis 32:12**)

See also **Hosea 1:10**, which Paul explains refers ultimately to Gentiles being adopted and engrafted into the Israel of God. (**Romans 9:25-26** and **Romans 11:11:24-26**)

A previous census was already noted (Exodus 38:26), taken by priests for the tax for the works of the tabernacle, but another one is here described for purposes of war in Canaan and the future division of the land. This census was made not by the priests but by an assessor assigned from each tribe reporting to Moses and Aaron.

"The Lord's spiritual Israel are a numbered people, written in the book of life, placed into the hand of Christ, and exactly known by Him, even by name; yea, all that belong to Him are numbered, and the very hairs of their heads." - *Gills Exposition*

Numbers 1:3 - "From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies."

"By their armies"— Better, their hosts or companies.

The mixed multitude was not numbered, according to the rabbis.

The Tribes and their Assessors - Numbers 1:5-16

The tribes are listed according to the order or quality of their birth, first the children of Leah, then of Rachel, and then of the handmaids.

They are also listed in the order of their subsequent encampment - south, east, west, and north. Gad alone is displaced, in order that he may be classed with the other sons of the handmaids after the sons of the free women. Asher, though the second son of Zilpah, is placed before Gad, the first son, because, according to Aben Ezra, the Lord knew that he would be the head of those that encamped by the standard of Dan.

Even those doing accounting reflect great reverence for God revealed in their names. For example: Elizur, signifying "my God the rock"; and Shelumiel may be rendered, "God my peace"; and Zurishaddai, "my rock the Almighty", or "all-sufficient"; and Pedazhur, "the rock redeemeth"

Numbers 1:16 - "These were the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel."

"renowned" = *qariy'* - called, summoned, chosen

NET - "These were the ones chosen from the community"

They were called specifically by God (**Numbers 1:5**). This is the only way true ministry happens. We don't just decide to teach or preach, or perform any of the offices or exercise any gifts of the Spirit, simply choosing from a variety of options. We obey a calling from God or the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The Numbering Reported - Numbers 1:20-46

Numbers 1:46 - "And all those numbered totaled 603,550."

Levites Not Counted - Numbers 1:47-53

Numbers 1:53 - "But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony."

Rashi - there will be wrath, as we find with the incident with Korah [that is says,] "for the wrath has gone forth from the Lord" (**Numbers 17:11**).

The Deadly Foreshadowing of Rebellion

Between the census taken here and the one taken in **Numbers 26**, an entire generation died, swallowed up by the wilderness for their disobedience and unbelief.

Interestingly, the same number of people remain, except that only Caleb and Joshua remain of the original body. Moses also dies before entering the Promised Land.

Death and a New Creation

Like the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus, the Book of Numbers records another picture of death/baptism and resurrection. After the spies bring a pessimistic report, a generation has to die in order for Israel (made up of all new people) to enter and conquer the land.

The drowning of Egypt in the Red Sea is replaced by the swallowing of an entire generation of Israel in the sands of the wilderness.

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, in her commentary on Numbers called "Bewilderments," says at that point "their main business is to die, to complete the dying process... for only in the absence of this dying generation can a new and viable nation prepare once again to leave this wilderness and enter the Land."

This is the Gospel:

- **Luke 9:23** - "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

- **Romans 6:4** - "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Paul emphasizes that the sad and horrifying story of the wilderness is for our admonition:

- **1 Corinthians 10:5-6, 11** - "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. ...Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

What about Joshua and Caleb? - A Different Spirit

- **Numbers 14:30** - "Surely none of you will enter the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun."

- **Numbers 14:23-24** - "None of those who have treated Me with contempt will see it. But because My servant Caleb has a different spirit and has followed Me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he has entered, and his descendants will inherit it."

Joshua (*yeshua*/Jesus) was a type the Messiah. Caleb was a type of John the Baptist, a friend of the Bridegroom, whose preaching made straight the highway of our God. They could also reflect the two witnesses in Revelation, the two olive trees in Zechariah, priest and prophet, wisdom and prophecy, etc.

What About the Levites?

Remember, the tribe of Levi was not included in this curse. They were not among those numbered in the first census.

Why?

Rashi - The Holy One, Blessed Be He, foresaw that a decree was destined to be enacted against all those counted from twenty years and upward [condemning them] to die in the desert. He said, "Let these not be included, for they are Mine, since they did not err in [the sin of] the [golden] calf." - [B.B. 121]

Psalm 90 - the Psalm reading for this week - is entitled "a Prayer of Moses." It looks ahead to what this census means, and has been regarded as a kind of "dirge" for those sentenced by God to waste away in the wilderness.

King David's Sinful Census

- **2 Samuel 24:1** - "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah."

- **1 Chronicles 21:1** - "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel."

What was the problem with this census?

David's pride and unbelief

It was proper to number Israel in preparation for war. But Israel then lived in peace from all its enemies round about and had no need of military force. The purpose of David's census was to begin creating a larger standing army, for his own glory. Even his main general Joab tried to dissuade him, saying it was not needed: "are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing?" (**1 Chronicles 21:3**) - i.e. in case of emergency, an armed force could be called up quickly already.

Previously God had ordered a census. David orders this one on his own.

Possibly he wanted to have a better sense of control, possibly he wanted to levy a new tax. Sometimes the greatest test of faith comes in times of peace and prosperity, and David failed.

Besides, these were God's people, not David's. A standing army would press free men into service, and put soldiers' lives in danger at the whim of the King, rather than in response to an attack or invasion.