

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger ..." John 6:35

NUMBERS 8-11

Last week's portion concluded with the Israelite camp arranged around the completed Tabernacle, furnished and supplied by an identical group of offerings from each of the twelve tribes. "This was the offering for dedicating the altar after it had been anointed." (7:88) ⁸⁹ *And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him.*

We should never skip over these simple verses, but see them in context of what has gone before. Moses is experiencing something unique here. Many times we have read that 'the Lord spoke to Moses' – even that He spoke to him face to face – but why this strangely different terminology here? "The voice" speaks to him (not to Aaron the High Priest), from above the mercy seat. You might recall that the first time "the voice" is heard speaking, is in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve had sinned. "And they heard **the voice** of the Lord God walking in the garden."¹ (Gen. 3:8)

Q. With this in mind, what do you think is revealed to us here?

In looking at this and the following chapters, keep in mind that it flows on from the previous stories, where we saw a clear messianic prophetic metaphor: the ultimate Nazirite; followed by the priestly blessing; the flow of offerings from the tribal leaders – then – Moses goes in to speak with the Lord and the voice speaks to him. Now, what does the voice say?

CHAPTER 8

"Speak to Aaron and say to him, When you set up the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand. And Aaron did so: he set up its lamps in front of the lampstand, as the LORD commanded Moses. "

The question is asked, why the description of the Menorah is mentioned again here – the explanation being that the context of the dedication of the altar demands mention of Aaron's role. An interesting Jewish commentary says: "Aaron steps forward to light the Menorah, for he shines with the spiritual light of Hashem. Hence he himself kindles the lamps, he and no other."² One interpretation of the Menorah is that it symbolized *Klal Yisrael* - "All of Israel". (Discuss in your group)

The importance of the light going forward was so it would shine upon the Table of Shewbread, symbolizing that the 12 tribes of Israel were to operate only under the light of God's Word and Spirit – "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching (Torah) a light," (Prov. 6:23).

Purification of the Levites - read 8:5-19

"It was the destiny of the Levites to remain distinct from the rest of the nation and entirely devoted to Hashem. They were subject to strict discipline which was to continue for all time. "

Who were the Levites? Who was Levi? What was so special about him? Well, nothing really - Levi was the 3rd son of Leah. What set the Levites apart was that they weren't involved in the idolatry of the

¹ Literal translation from Hebrew. KJV follows this, but most other translations do not, thereby losing the profound nature of this link.

² Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of Torah*, p 87

golden calf when Moses brought down the 1st tablets containing the very Word of God – which were broken in response to their sin.

We saw in Numbers 3, that the Levites were set apart—they ‘belong’ to the Lord and are *given* to Aaron—now they will be purified to initiate their service as a sanctified (set-apart) group of Hebrews, assigned the duty of serving God by serving God's High Priest, and in doing so, to also serve the people.

Let's watch the unfolding of this process to try and capture what is happening here:

- *Sprinkle the water of purification upon them* – the purifying water was prepared with the ashes of the Red Heifer (19:2)
- *let them go with a razor over all their body-* “the shaving of bodily hair signified the stripping away of their self-centred attitudes as their personalities rose to a higher level of moral integrity...symbolically stripping themselves of their previous character. it was never subsequently repeated;”
- *and wash their clothes and cleanse themselves.* Does this bring other scriptures to mind?³

The ritual we read in Numbers 8 graphically portrays the Levites as being offered as sacrifice to God. As we read on we see a fourfold repetition of the fact that the Levites were presented as a wave-offering. A wave offering was a portion of a sacrifice presented to God, then released by God for the use of those involved in the sacrifice.

21 And the Levites purified themselves from sin and washed their clothes, and Aaron offered them as a wave offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them.

Understanding Yeshua as our great High Priest, can you see the relevance of this chapter for us as ‘grafted in’ believers?

CHAPTER 9

Observe Pesach 9:1-14

*“Let the people of Israel keep the Passover at **its appointed time**. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time; according to all its statutes and all its rules you shall keep it.”*

Here we again have the linking of the sacred space with sacred time and it might be noted that observing Passover immediately before embarking on the journey from Sinai to the Promised Land mirrors the first observance as they embarked on the journey from Egypt. No-one must miss out for any reason. Failure to observe Passover meant that person would be cut off from his people, and bear his sin (v.13). This also applied to the convert dwelling with them. (Midrash says they kept it only once and subsequently only the Levites kept it “for they have observed thy word and kept thy covenant.”)

Q. Why was this important for them – and is it relevant to us?

Follow the cloud (not the crowd) 9:15-23

Cloud by day, fire by night - again, this parallels the exodus from Egypt (Ex.13:21). They must always be prepared to move on and camp whether two days, a month or a year. *“At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out.”*

³ Ex. 19:10 They must wash their clothes and be prepared by the third day

CHAPTER 10

Understand the trumpet blasts - 9:1-10

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Make two silver trumpets. Of hammered work you shall make them, and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for breaking camp."

The trumpets were to be sounded before Moses as before a king, in addition to the specific occasions described in the subsequent verses (*Rashi*) Indeed, Moses had been elevated to the position of king over Israel (see Deut. 33:5). The trumpets were marks of honor and prestige for him. Moses had no equal in Israel. The trumpets were put away just before his death and never used again. ...Joshua used the shofar, not trumpets.⁴

It is enlightening to see the two roles of Moses and Aaron, as 'king' and High Priest respectively. The sons of Aaron are to sound the trumpets for the calling the people together, signalling for marching, as a warning against an approaching enemy, etc. —different sounds had different meanings.

Matt. 24:31, *"And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."*⁵

The journey begins

*v.33 So they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey. And the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them.*⁶

Numbers 10:35-36

*And whenever the ark set out, Moses said,
"Rise up, O LORD! And let Your enemies be scattered,
And let those who hate You flee before You.
And when it rested, he said,
"Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel."*

This is a very unique passage in the Torah because it is set apart from the rest of the text by *two inverted nuns* (Hebrew letter equivalent to our letter *n*). The Talmud speaks of it as a 'separate book' indicating that it has a special message of its own. (Read Psalm 68)

These verses clearly mark an end and a new beginning. The central books of the Torah are Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. We have now journeyed through a long, central section of these books in which time seemed to come to a standstill. The Israelites arrived at the foot of Mt Sinai in the 3rd month after they left Egypt (Ex.19:1); At the end of the book of Exodus we read, "So the Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year" (Ex. 40:17)⁷; In Numbers chapter 9:1 we read, "Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt."

So, for more than half of the central three books, the Israelites hardly move in time or space. They have been suspended in the 'holy' – the world of covenant, tabernacle, priesthood, offerings, and law-giving—as God imbedded into their souls, His holiness and their 'set-apartness,' promising that, if they walk in His ways, they will be blessed; if not they will suffer consequences.

⁴ Munk, *ibid*, p103.

⁵ 1 Cor. 15:52, 1 Thess. 4:16, 7 Trumpet blasts in Revelation, Zech. 10:14 - This is not music.

⁶ When we see the number 3, it always has reference to Messiah, especially to the resurrection.

⁷ Could this point to a 9 month gestation period?

At every departure and halt in the journeys through the desert, these two verses were said as a prayer. They are said to this day when the Torah scroll is removed and replaced in the Ark during synagogue worship. The quote below shows that Jewish sages see these verses as speaking of Messianic times:

The Ark, which went before them, symbolized the Law. The LORD knew that as long as the Law was borne on the shoulders of the people, it would endure. Furthermore, the day will come when God's will, will find acceptance among mankind at large, and Israel too will unite around it, in perfect harmony, and in numbers that will far exceed the Jewish population of the past. Israel's increased population in Messianic times is alluded to here—*myriads of thousands*. "These verses highlight that making Hashem's will our will in every detail, is the ultimate goal. Thus, these two verses offer a true guide for the nation, not only in the desert, but for all time."⁸

We have noticed the theme of warfare has become a dominant theme – numbering, camping and marching in formation under banners. Why? Because, they are about to march to the Promised Land to inherit it. Remember, God has made no secret of the fact that the Land He is bring them to, is inhabited with enemy tribes, which will have to be defeated before the people of Israel can fully inherit it and live there in peace. Recall that, after Abraham was willing to offer Isaac as an offering, the LORD promised him that his seed would possess the gates of his enemies. On a surface level of understanding, yes, there were certainly enemy tribes occupying the land. On a deeper level, this also speaks of the spiritual enemies of God and all who belong to Him, as we see in several NT passages.

Eph. 6:12 *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

1 Pet. 5:8 *Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

Col. 2:15 *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

To return to the passage we began with, the people are now to 'come down to earth' – to walk out the journey. They were now called to follow the Ark – the presence of God and the Word of God. Israel has survived as a nation because they have lived in the tension between the holy – called to be God's chosen people on earth – and being a people of history who have had to walk out their calling in time. Whether setting out or halting, the Ark must always be there at the heart of Jewish life,

Q. How do these verses speak to you? Can you see a NT application?

CHAPTER 11 – Complaining and Rebellion

Read verses 1-10 - In marked contrast, the second half of Numbers is marked by complaining and division. The Hebrew word translated complaining means 'without cause', for they sought a pretext for drawing away from God. At first Moses interceded for them to stay the LORD'S wrath, but again they cried out to Moses. The whole camp effectively had a huge pity party, indulging in selective memory about their time in Egypt. The mixed multitude's craving was intense, and was very contagious! Back in Exodus they complained of hunger and were given manna. Now, they complain that 'all we have is manna!'

Jewish Midrash says that the manna was a supernatural food that changed its taste according to the faith and gratitude of the one who ate it. 'To the righteous it tasted wonderful; to the wicked & faithless, it tasted dry & boring.' We can certainly see a parallel there with modern day thought regarding the Bible and religion in general.

⁸ Munk, ibid, p114.

11-15 – Now it was Moses turn to cry out. Up until this point, he has always defended the people? Now everything appears to go downhill fast? Moses is completely overwhelmed and desperate.
Q. What stands out for you in these verses? Q. How do you respond to Moses' grief?

God responds calmly and simply: *"Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel,... And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone."*

21-22 – It seems even Moses himself has trouble believing that God can provide for the people.
Q. What does this tell us? God's response: *"Is the LORD's hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not."*

We then have a strange interweaving of God promising to give the people meat to eat until 'it comes out their nostrils;' the spirit of prophecy from Moses being placed on the 70 elders; the Eldad and Medad question; then a wind from the LORD springs up, and it brought quail from the sea in masses, and before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD rose up and He struck down the people with a very great plague. What are we to make of this interweaving of seemingly disparate stories?

We are not told what the 70 elders prophesied, including Eldad ('God has loved'), and Medad ('love'), who prophesied in the camp, but it does say that they all prophesied—that is, they all spoke out the words God gave them - *But they did not continue doing it.*

Moses had already told the people the words the LORD had given him: *"You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, 'Why did we come out of Egypt?'"* And we can assume that the very same words came from the mouths of the 70 elders. Had the people heeded these words from the Spirit of the LORD, the *wind* may not have brought the quails,⁹ and the plague would have been averted. The second wind brought meat to fulfil the fleshly cravings of the people.

34 *Therefore the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah (graves of craving), because there they buried the people who had the craving.*

Another point worth considering is the use of the Hebrew word, *ruach*. In this passage, it is translated as both 'spirit' (3 times), and 'wind'. The people didn't heed the 'spirit' words that came through the the prophets, so God sent the 'wind' that brought plague and death.

This provokes much reflection – Share your thoughts

Before completing this study, we will return briefly to Eldad and Medad. Joshua was disturbed when he heard them prophesying when they had remained in the camp, and said, "My lord Moses, stop them." But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

I wonder did he see the day when the Spirit of God would fall at Pentecost? Or even beyond, to the last days, when, "God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy..." (Joel 2:28).

Apostle Paul tells the church at Corinth: "Earnestly pursue love, and earnestly desire spiritual gifts, and **especially that you might prophesy.**" Are we taking up that challenge ourselves? Let us not be like the people in the wilderness, who were 'sluggish' and craved 'meat' to feed their flesh, for Jesus said, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after **righteousness**, for they will be filled"; and "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you."

⁹ The Hebrew word for "quail", comes from a root meaning 'sluggishness' (quails are fat and slow in flight.)