

**Bamidbar**      **In The Wilderness**      **Counted, Commissioned and Chastised**

**Torah:**      **Numbers 1:1-4:20**

**Haftarah:**      **Hosea 1:10-2:20 (2:1-22)**

**Brit Chadashah:**      **Romans 9:22-33**

(Christine p. 151, 153) **Ps. 122** Jewish hero: (Replaced by Kids reading play about Ruth)

Torah Carrier: Marie.      **L-rd's Table**      **ONEG**

The Torah portion deals first with the numbering of the men of war, then with the organizing of the tribes into their marching order (four banners, three tribes to a banner camped around the tabernacle- East, South, West, North). It then goes into the census of the paternal houses of Levi and their camping order (W, S, N, E), with the Tabernacle facing East. It ends with a description of how the Tabernacle furniture was to be wrapped and indicates that The High Priest was to carry the menorah oil, the fragrant incense, the grain offering and the anointing oil.

They were counted because each one of them mattered and each one had a place, both in the camp and in the march. Also, when Levi replaced the first born, all the first born also had to be counted and a ransom paid to cover the number of first born who exceeded the number of the Levites. The number of Levites was 22,300, but the number used for the reconciliation was only 22,000, either because 300 of them were themselves first born and already belonged to the L-rd, or because 300 of them were lost between the count and the reconciliation.

Israel was to be an organized, travelling, worshipping community of study until they settled in the land. Believers today need to all find their place in an organized, worshipping community of study as we travel through this life, generationally until we arrive at our Father's Kingdom under the eternal reign of our blessed Messiah. As strangers and pilgrims in this life our primary identity (belonging) needs to be as integrated members of an organized, travelling worshipping community of study so that we do not lose our way and assimilate into the world we are passing through, but to which we can never belong.

The camp was a joyful thing of beauty centred on the glory and majesty of the L-rd's presence, rolling through the wilderness, focused on celebrating the festival cycle, a community of light shining to the darkness it was passing through. We have the same mandate today, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

The Haftarah portion explains that the people went into captivity because they abandoned the L-rd and would be restored once the wilderness of their captivity turned their hearts back to the L-rd. It was a positive chastisement to return them to their commissioning.

The New Testament portion deals with the double mandate of the Gospel to the Jew and the Gentile and speaks of the sad fate of the generation of Israel who did not recognize the Messiah and crashed into the stone of stumbling. Two mighty forces are at work among His people –

first, His undying love which will never abandon them and also, His stubborn persistence which will always require that they adhere to His unchanging Word.

In the Gospel, we are the camp of the L-rd and we are counted and commissioned and also chastised until we learn to find our place as part of an organized travelling worshipping community of study. Losing our place spiritually means stumbling around in the dark until we are ready to let go of every connection we have to the dark and let the festival cycle of praise return us to the place where we are Sabbath powered and Festival driven.

Passage: **Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of G-d ... (because) all Scripture is inspired by G-d and is useful for teaching, for convicting, for correcting, for instructing in righteousness, so that the man of G-d would be proficient and ready for every good work ... For the Word of G-d alive and active, sharper than any two edged sword, separating (dividing) soul and spirit and joints from marrow and judges the thoughts and intents of the heart** (Eph. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; Heb. 4:12)

Tonight begins the Festival of Shavuot (Pentecost) on the Hebrew calendar and it marks two major transitions in the life of Israel and should continue to do so for all believers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. It took our people some fifty days of travel before they were camped around the holy mountain and were ready to make the transition from rescued slaves to become the hosts of the L-rd. It was an amazing display of signs and wonders where the mountain flamed and smoked and shook and where the mighty voice of G-d thundered out of the cloud until the people had no doubt as to who He was and what He said.

A few thousand years later, on the same date, the disciples of our resurrected Messiah were gathered in the same room where they celebrated the Seder meal and were introduced to the L-rd's Table. The Spirit of the L-rd descended upon them as flaming tongues and the room was shaken by a mighty rushing wind and they all spoke in tongues as they spilled out into the street (making sure that they were not caught in one of the earthquakes the Holy Land was prone to). The Messiah returned to each of them to dwell in their hearts and give them the power and the strength to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth generationally before the advent of Messiah's kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind.

In a very real sense, both groups of people, around the mountain and in the upper room, received a double empowering which had a double objective, which I would like to speak to you about this morning. You see, the Spirit is the author of the Word and the Word is our only reliable guide book on the Holy Spirit, and they both work together so that we learn about who G-d is and discover deep truths about ourselves as their light shines into our lives.

In Numbers 11, at the second Shavuot (Pentecost) which occurred at their first camping spot at a place that had two names (Tabeera [burning] and Kibroth-Hattaava [tomb of coveting]), Moses was overwhelmed by the burden of leading such a fractious group of complainers. To deal with the situation, the L-rd descended in a cloud and took of the Spirit which was on Moses and placed the Spirit also on the 70 elders.

I mention this because there was never a time when the Spirit and the Word did not work together and this combination enables us not only to come to know who G-d is and what His

expectations are of us, the combination also shines into the depths of our hearts and lives to reveal to us what the thoughts and intentions of our hearts really are.

We are equipped to serve the wonderful, mighty King as He shakes us up and shows us who we really are and what we are really capable of. Our faith is never a do it yourself enterprise where we are left with a bunch of pieces which we have to assemble as best we can. It is an experience with both the Word and the Spirit, which work together to remind us of all that G-d says and to help us release our true spiritual potential. Thus, we are no longer just wild horses tossed around by life and our own inner confusion. In Him and by His Word the Sword of the Spirit equips and trains us into thoroughbreds, ready to rise above all and everything which comes our way and accomplish every good work which the L-rd is calling us to perform.

It is not an easy task and it involves a lifelong learning curve where we are challenged and chastised whenever we go off task and begin to sink back into the darkness which surrounds us and which is knocking at the door of our hearts. Over the centuries, Israel struggled with this activity of the Spirit through the Word and discovered both how stubborn (unmovable) and unchanging G-d's requirements are and how compassionate and loving He is even as He has to chastise us and repeatedly bring us back out of the darkness into His light.

The challenge for us remains to keep looking up and not be pulled into looking around to the point where we abandon the One who spoke to us at the mountain and who fell upon us in the Upper Room. It is not always easy to know what to do when we have to make choices in our lives, but the Spirit and the Word will work on us to see the principles upon which we need to base every decision we make on our pilgrimage through this life.

Knowing G-d and learning to respond according to the principles of His Word also opens us to the second challenge which His Word and His Spirit will bring our way – getting to know the thoughts and intents of our hearts and not letting them become the deciding motivations of our lives. The heart can be deceitful and desperately wicked, but G-d's Spirit takes the double edged sword and trains us to respond from the heart desires He places in us and equips us to perform.

The enemy and the world want to pull us away from both the Word and the Spirit and as we learn to handle the Word of truth, the Spirit will give us fencing lessons until the influences of the enemy are defeated and driven out every time they try and force themselves back into our lives. We are empowered and strengthened to successfully engage in this perpetual conflict.

Shavuot reminds us that the voice of the L-rd is the one we need to be listening to as we wander through the stages and circumstances of our lives. Shavuot also reminds us that the Spirit is ready to fill us and teach us how to handle the Word of truth which He inspired so that our knowledge of G-d and His purposes is not tainted by the darkness we are travelling through. As we celebrate our double whammy may the L-rd open our eyes to the potential for spiritual victory because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

I have said that our world is slipping into darkness at an alarming rate and more and more pressure is being put on us to abandon the light in ways which would have shocked and alarmed believers in other generations. However, the same mountain-shaking, fire sending, darkness penetrating G-d is more than capable of equipping us with all we need to meet and overcome the latest versions of the same old spiritual attacks.

As well, His Spirit is able to give us both the strength and the wisdom we need to debunk the nonsense the world is trying to heap upon us, intellectually and sensually. Instead of being afraid and feeling outgunned and outmanoeuvred, we need to remind ourselves that no force or influence has ever risen up which cannot be defeated and brought under the submission of the Spirit and His Sword. And, if we feel that there is too much darkness in our hearts for us to be effective in defeating the darkness which comes to us from the outside, this same dynamic duo is more than abundantly able to also help us defeat this personal darkness.

Over the summer and into the fall, I want to teach and preach about the nature and the scope of the spiritual resources we have in the Spirit and in the Word so that we can keep on feasting on the green grass at the table He sets before us and drinking out of our Shepherd's overflowing cup as His goodness and mercy escorts us through whatever valleys lie between us and our Father's Home in Glory.

We may be mocked and we may be increasingly targeted and persecuted by the global society which is abandoning the riches of G-d's Word for the secular potage the enemy is seducing them into accepting. We may have to deal with deep and dark inner baggage as we suffer heart damage and encounter betrayal and abandonment, but this same double whammy is able to bring inner healing and release and give us the strength and the power to overcome on the inside as well as overcoming on the outside.

We need to let Him shake us up whenever we stumble and we need to let Him fill us up whenever the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune leave us feeling empty, wounded and alone. He has a spiritual solution for every situation we are confronted with and over the summer we are going to explore the resources which His Word and His Spirit first made available around the mountain and in the Upper Room and which are still part of our heritage as we move closer to the closing chapter of this dark and confusing world which cannot pass away too quickly for my liking.

Let us celebrate the L-rd's Table and let this dynamic duo renew us, empower us and challenge us so that no crippling darkness is allowed to pull us away from the healing light which can never go out.

Shabbat Shalom.

Let's pray.