

Bamidbar (Erev Shavuot) In the Wilderness L-rd's Table Getting Ready to Move Out

Torah: Numbers 1:1-4:20
Haftarah: Hosea 1:10-2:20 (2:1-22)

Brit Chadashah: Romans 9:22-33

Reading: Margaret p. 165 and Ps. 122 Jewish hero: Timothy. Torah carrier: Issac

1:1: The First Day of the Second Month of the Second Year. There are many time lapses in the Bible between major events. Here we learn that the people had spent nearly an entire year camping around the mountain and the book of Numbers represents a transition, where the people are going to shift from being trained to getting ready to start their trek from the mountain towards the Holy Land.

1:46: 603,550. The people are counted for the purposes of a census to determine the difference between the number of first born sons and the number of Levites. Two items of note. First, the mixed multitude is not mentioned as a separate group, distinct from the people of Israel. It is understood that they joined the various tribes of the people whom they dwelt amongst. Related to this, it needs to be understood that from the beginning, that Israel functioned as a **phratry** (a group of related people without a common ancestor), which practised **exogamy** (marriage outside their kinship group) and **endogamy** (marriage within their extended family grouping). Outsiders were welcome and they could either live as sojourning strangers or cross over and become part of the people of G-d. This option is still open today. Strangers are still welcome to sojourn in our midst or join with us as full members of the generational community of Israel.

1:54: They conformed to all of the orders that YHVH had given to Moses: they did this. The people still had a series of ups and downs as it concerned their faithful obedience, but, to the best of their ability, they obeyed everything which was taught to them. Here is a lesson for us today. As we practice faithful obedience, G-d will lead us from the place we are to new places, in direct proportion to our acquired obedience to what we have already received and obeyed and to the new places where this acquired obedience can be also be applied. We cannot move on to new places until we have learned obedience where we are right now. How is your faithful obedience doing? Are you ready to move on, or do you need some more camping time around the mountain of His Word?

Chapter two deals with the establishment of their new camping order, around four banners. They were to camp with one group or banner facing east, away from the Tabernacle and another banner facing south. Then the third group or banner faced west, the direction they came from and the last group or banner facing north in terms of their position around the ark. What is your camping position in terms of G-d's Word? We are still called to make His Word the centre around which our lives revolve and we are still called to find our camping place in the midst of G-d's people. Have you found your camping position in our midst?

Chapter three deals with the camping order of the Levites.

And the portion of chapter four which we are to read this week, deals with the functions they were assigned in terms of which part of the tabernacle they were designed to carry. One family

of Levites was to camp behind the arc, while another was to camp south of the tabernacle. A third group was to camp north of the tabernacle, while the Family of Aaron was to camp directly in front of the holy place of meeting.

Our lives are called to revolve both around our position in His Word and around where we are in terms of worshipping the King who has delivered us out of the world, so that He can become the centre of all who we are and of all that we do. In the midst of all the confusion and turmoil we may experience in this life, it is both our spiritual identity and the centrality of G-d's Word which should determine how we walk on our pilgrimage through this life. Have you found your place in our midst and are you walking according to His Word as you face the challenges which this life will always bring your way?

The Haftarah portion is in Hosea where your Bibles will have a different versification than mine, but which deals with the same content. It deals both with the judgement the people's disobedience brought on them and with the undying love which G-d will always have for His people.

2:15: "***I will chastise them for all the days where they offered incense to the Baal's, and where they would adorn themselves with their holy rings and ritual necklaces in order to go into to their lovers and forget me, says YHVH.***" The Bible is full of symbolic pictures which describe the spiritual condition of the people of G-d. In this passage, the people are heading towards captivity because they had divided their spiritual loyalty and sought to cover all their spiritual bases, instead of trusting in the L-rd alone. Where does your spiritual loyalty lie? It has to be exclusively directed towards the L-rd or our divided loyalty will cause Him to go into a defensive mode in order to get our attention. Either we are full focused on His Word, or He will cause things to come into our life, so that we re-establish our entire devotion towards Him, no matter what He has to do to get our attention.

2:16: "***Behold, this is why I want to take a hold of them and lead them into the wilderness, where I shall be able to speak to their hearts.***" The L-rd always wants us to be prepared to move on in Him, as we walk through this life on our way home to His house. However, sometimes He has to take evasive measures and take us into difficult places so that He can once again get our attention and regain our heart's attention. How well does He have your hearts attention? Do you realize that all that is happening to you and to us is arranged by G-d so that our primary attention will always be focused on Him through His Word. He needs to be the actual centre of our lives, so that we do not spin out of control and lose our primary spiritual focus on His kingdom, through His Word.

When we acknowledge Him, as our first and primary priority, all of the other details of our lives come into focus as opportunities for us to exercise faithful obedience, in order that He would always have our full heart's attention. Does He have your full attention? How prepared are you to move on and grow in Him, no matter what else is happening in your life?

The New Testament portion deals with the calling of G-d which extends beyond Israel and includes people from all the nations and families of mankind.

9:24: "***Thus He has called us, not only from among the Jews, but also from among the nations (pagans).***" His call is extended to all of mankind so that the righteous core, both in Israel and among the nations, should come to faith in Him. Whether you have come to faith as a Jew or as a Gentile, our calling is the same – to walk with Him according to His Word as we

practice faithful obedience. How well are you responding to His call in your life? Israel spent nearly a year getting their act together enough for them to move away from the mountain and begin their long journey to the Promised Land. Are you getting your act together or is your spiritual attention getting distracted to the point where you are forgetting who you are and where you are going?

Are you prepared for the next stages of your walk with the Kingdom, or do you need to do another lap around the mountain until you learn to see things G-d's way? What has your attention and what is your primary focus? Israel had to learn it the hard way, which way do you need to learn it?

Sermon: Empowered, Not Prohibited. Matthew 12:1-13.

This is the story of our Messiah and His disciples travelling through a wheat field on the Sabbath and the false objections which the Pharisees had about Sabbath observance. First of all, 12:1 says that travel is not prohibited on the Sabbath. The Talmud lists some 39 categories of prohibited activities which we are to abstain from on the Sabbath. Instead of making the Sabbath all about what you do not do, it should be how well you are walking with the King who is Lord of the Sabbath.

The flash point in this encounter is when the disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them raw because they were hungry. Snacking and relieving your hunger is not prohibited on the Sabbath. While we are commanded to take a break from the ordinary tasks of the week, when we encounter something which we did not plan for, taking care of our basic needs is not prohibited on the Sabbath. The Pharisees had a double agenda when they opened a dialogue with the Messiah. First they wanted to challenge His authority and next they wanted to establish their authority over Him.

Messiah refers back to what David did when he was hungry and ate the sacred bread which only the priests were supposed to eat and he breached protocol without committing a sin. The Messiah wants us to have a flexible approach to the principles of the Torah, so that we uphold the spirit of the Law and are empowered by it and not prohibited by it. We need to ask ourselves why we are doing what we do and are we upholding the peace and rest of the Sabbath when we encounter things we have not planned for.

The Pharisees did not dare defame the actions of David, nor did they dare to challenge Yeshua's claim to be acting with David's authority. Messiah will keep us on the straight and narrow, not so that we will follow an arbitrary list of do's and don'ts, but so that we will apply the principles of G-d's Word in every situation which we encounter.

Not to let the issue rest, Messiah goes on to challenge these legalistic specialists about how the priest work hard in the temple on the Sabbath, without violating it. They are not exempt from the Sabbath, they just have a special role to play on the Sabbath.

What role is the Messiah calling you to fulfil as you keep the Sabbath? He goes on to say that when you walk with Him, you need to know that He is greater than the temple and all the complicated rituals which tradition had cluttered authentic Sabbath observance with. If all you can do when it comes to the Sabbath, is to come up with a list of arbitrary rules, then you will end up condemning the innocent and not making this day the best and most awesome day of the week. Yes, it is a time for study and for worship and yes, you should do your best to have

everything ready for this special day, but G-d is not rigid and desires that we show mercy and not restrict our worship to the offering of ritual sacrifices.

Is G-d pleased by the way you keep the Sabbath? Is G-d pleased by the way you handle things which you have not planned for? The Sabbath is designed to be a day of rest in our beloved Messiah, but it is not destroyed when we encounter things we have not planned for. The apostles should have planned for food to eat, but for one reason or another, they didn't and what they did to compensate for this, did not constitute a sin.

Our Messiah needs to be the L-rd of our Sabbath, both when things go according to plan and when things we have not planned for crop up. In passing, let me make a plug for Sabbath observance - Yeshua rightly claimed that as the Son of Man, He was the L-rd of the Sabbath – nowhere in the Scriptures does He ever claim to be L-rd of any other day of the week, including Sunday.

Right after this, we learn that Yeshua and His disciples were headed for their local Synagogue, because regular praise and worship and Bible Study needs to be the focus of how we walk with the L-rd, even as we traverse the wheat fields of this life. He had silenced His critics, but evidently they followed Him, looking for other things to challenge Him with. They knew about His healing ministry and when they noticed the crippled man among the worshippers in the synagogue, they tried to trick Him with a rhetorical question.

When someone seated at a meal with you asks if you are going to eat the last piece of chicken, what they are really saying is that they want it and are trying to make you feel bad if you do not give it to them. So rather than expressing the opinion that healing is a prohibited category of work which should not be practised on the Sabbath, they turn their objection into a rhetorical question with only one perceived answer.

Indirectly they are telling Him firmly that healing is not permitted on the Sabbath, but He does not fall for their trick. He asks them a rhetorical question which says that it is permitted to help an animal in distress, and not wait for the end of the Sabbath to come to its rescue. Then He applies this principle to the crippled man who is of greater value than any animal and proceeds to heal him. It is permitted to do good on the Sabbath when you encounter a need which you are capable of meeting. Yeshua did not go looking around for people to heal on the Sabbath, but when He encountered a person in distress, He did not violate the Sabbath by responding to this valid need.

He is upholding our need to be in service as part of our Sabbath observance, because that is how He lived His life when He walked among us, but walking with Him supersedes merely following a set of do's and don't's. We do not neglect our needs on the Sabbath and we do not neglect the needs of others.

We are called to participate in our weekly rest as we observe the Sabbath, but we should not neglect the needs of others when we encounter someone in distress. If you get a flat tire on the Sabbath, you do not have to wait until sundown to fix it. If you spill something on the kitchen floor, you do not have to walk around it and wait for sunset to clean it up. Diapers need to be changed on the Sabbath and even helping someone move on the Sabbath is permitted if that is the only day this task can be performed.

We condemn the innocent when we hand them an arbitrary list of do's and don't's because the

Sabbath should be about so much more than what you refrain from doing on this special day. You should not plan a whole bunch of last minute jobs to do that you did not get around to during the week, because the Sabbath is so much more than just a time to catch up. It is all about rest and worship and studying as we are celebrating who He is and what He has done for us. But while we are participating in this marvellous reality, we need to learn to respond to those unplanned personal and ministry opportunities with wisdom and compassion.

He states clearly that He is greater than the temple, with its lists of do's and don'ts because we can rely upon Him to guide us and give us wisdom, when we encounter needs we have not planned for. He wants us to meet needs as part of our Sabbath rest, without making the Sabbath all about meeting needs.

When He says that He is lord of the Sabbath, He means that He wants us to get the maximum benefit from observing the day, even when that requires that we perform a good deed along the way. Is He the Master of your Sabbath? We need to fully observe the Sabbath, both by what we do not do and by what we do, as we balance meeting needs with our overall primary need to worship G-d on the Sabbath. It should be a time to rest in what He has done for us and also rest in what He will continue to do for us, as we walk with Him, from conception to the grave and beyond.

The Sabbath was designed by G-d as a day for restful contemplation, which is not violated when we encounter a need that we can fulfil without taking our primary focus off the L-rd. We cannot use the Sabbath as an excuse not to respond to valid needs which the L-rd brings our way. You see the Sabbath has both a positive focus and a negative focus.

Yes, it is a day which is set aside for restful worship and Bible Study so that we can recharge spiritually and renew our spiritual perspective. And yes, it is a day when we pause and refrain from those chores and responsibilities which occupy our time during the week. It is true that the Sabbath is both about what you do not do and about what you do do, because it is the day of the L-rd set apart for us put our lives on pause and consider the Life which is still come.

But it is never a day where we are excused from our duty to perform **tzedakah** (acts of mercy) and **mitzvoth** (fulfilling the requirements of His Word). Having said this, the Sabbath is not a day where our primary focus should be on tzedakah or mitzvoth, because both our time and energy should belong to the Messiah on this special day. The best good deed you can perform on the Sabbath is to get a complete rest from your weekly work a day world. This does not mean that you cannot also perform other good deeds along the way.

Observing the Sabbath is a life discipline which should be part of every believer's walk with the L-rd and we should do everything we can to protect this sacred time, so that our lives can have time to heal, and to recharge and to renew. There is no excuse for laziness or for a lack of planning that ends up derailing our weekly heaven break. It should be our weekly shut down where we come away, far from the maddening crowd and spend quality time with our Saviour and Messiah.

It is about so much more than a mere list of things you have to do or are not allowed to do on this special day. It is the L-rd's Day and it should be all about Him and His Word. If we encounter something which requires our attention and that we have not planned for, then protecting the spirit of the Sabbath may mean that we respond to it with wisdom and compassion, according to the model and example we have in our Messiah.

He said clearly that it is permitted to do good on the Sabbath, as long as doing good, does not diminish or take our focus away from the original purpose of the day. May the L-rd continue to give us wisdom as we balance the principles of His Word with the circumstances of our lives. Moses said that we should organize and number our days so that we can apply our hearts to wisdom and not be dragged down by the cares, pleasures and riches of this world.

Our Sabbaths should always be otherworldly encounters of the best kind, as we walk through this life on our journey to our Father's home in glory. Good deeds and acts of mercies should not be seen as unwanted distractions which are trying to violate our Sabbath observance. We should see them as opportunities where we can apply the rest and the renewal of the Sabbath and not be like those religious experts who ignored the wounded man in the ditch, and passed by on the other side of the road.

We should not go ditch hunting on the Sabbath and sometimes we can turn down some good deeds which are not urgent and which can wait until our special time is over. Fulfilling both essential services and deeds of mercy (tzedakah) is not a violation of the Sabbath as long as they do not take our focus off the kingdom of G-d and His righteousness. If we are asked to work the occasional shift on the Sabbath and there is nobody else available, we can show mercy and kindness by helping out.

But if we are asked to work shifts on the Sabbath as a regular part of our routine, then it is time to seek the L-rd to find the strength and wisdom to resist this attempted theft of our sacred time. Doing good and showing mercy are part of our sacred duty and performing them on our sacred day is not a violation of our sacred time, as long as we make our Saviour and Messiah the L-rd of our time and keep our heavenly focus.

It is never an easy thing to protect our Sabbath observance, because there will always be just one more thing to get done which is screaming for our attention. But as long as our focus remains on the L-rd according to His Word, then the One who is greater than the temple and who is the L-rd of the Sabbath can give us the wisdom and the courage to both fulfil our duty to keep this special day sacred and balance this with our sacred duty to show kindness and mercy whenever they are needed.

Shabbat shalom and may you walk in rest today for the rest of the day.