

### NUMBERS

#### Lesson 2 - Chapter 1

As we enter a new book of Torah, there are always some preliminaries to deal with so that we can approach things in proper perspective. If you have not heard the introduction to Numbers I suggest you get the CD or listen to it on the Web, as there are some important fundamentals brought out that will benefit your study.

Its about 1350 B.C. as Israel prepares to leave Mt. Sinai. After spending 400 years in Egypt, the last 2 centuries of that time as Egypt's slave labor force, God has finally rescued them from their plight; the Bible word used for this rescue is redemption; and this is because what occurred in their exodus from Egypt entailed much more than just a massive jailbreak.

Redemption is at its core a spiritual issue, and therefore redemption is an important theme for the remainder of Torah. It also establishes a key God-principle for our understanding of the New Testament: **first** comes redemption **and then** comes understanding and relationship. I'll reiterate this somewhat controversial statement that I've alluded to at other times: the laws and commands of Torah, and of all the Bible for that matter (OT or New), is NOT for **non**believers to follow....it is ONLY for the already redeemed. Once we are redeemed, **then** we can BEGIN to develop our relationship with God, which involves not only trust in Him, but obedience to His commands. The error comes when we think we can follow the laws of God like a recipe or a check-off list in order to become a child of God. In fact perhaps the greatest untold lesson of the Word of God is that the laws of God are only FOR those who trust Him.

Don't let the word redeem or redemption throw you; it means essentially the same as the church-word "salvation". So when we study the Torah and other books of the Bible you can freely interchange the words redemption and salvation to a great degree. The only real difference is that salvation has taken on a meaning of including the belief that it is Yeshua the Messiah who has redeemed us from our sins; but from a generic and purely literary standpoint, redemption and salvation mean basically the same thing. And notice, the Law did NOT redeem Israel; God redeemed them and then sometime AFTERWARD He gave them the Law

Let's follow this God-pattern that is established in the Torah. Recall that upon Israel being rescued, redeemed, the very first thing God did was to remove them from all that they had been familiar with; Egypt. Slavery to a cruel and evil taskmaster was over, but that doesn't mean difficulty and challenge was ended. Already in the earliest stages of their exodus the fears and insecurities of the unknown had caused some of the Hebrews to want to turn back; to discard their newly found freedom and reconnect themselves to the awful slavery they knew but were at some level comfortable with rather than to fully submit themselves to God to be

remolded and remade into HIS image (which, in itself is a long and sometimes fearful process under the best of circumstances).

Once the Lord put some distance in between the Israelites and their past, the next thing He did was to **teach** them about holiness, HIS holiness. And this was accomplished by means of the very Torah we are now studying. Upon the summit of Mt. Sinai God gave Moses many ordinances and rules, laws and commands, to give to the people of Israel; how else would a people who didn't know God LEARN about who He is and what He expects of His worshippers?

Though modern Christians tend to think about those 613 laws of the Torah as being about US.....things we're to do and NOT to do.....in reality they inform us all about HIM. They tell us how immeasurably holy and just is the God of the Bible. They tell us what holiness amounts to and what it looks like; they tell us WHO God is and that He fully expects those who He has bought and paid for to **strive** throughout the duration of their lives towards HIS definition of holiness and justice.

My dear friends this exact pattern established 3300 years ago is still what the Believers' walk is supposed to look like today. Israel wasn't redeemed by a **knowledge** of God; they were redeemed by a **work** of God. We also can't be intellectually persuaded to turn to Messiah; it is a work of the Holy Spirit upon us. Yet once that work of the Spirit of God has occurred, and once the Ruach HaKodesh has indwelt us, what comes next...at least that is what it is intended... is our quest for knowledge.

Too much the Church has implied that upon our Salvation experience whatever knowledge of God we are to have will come by some mystical means. That we can just sit in our armchairs, watching TV, and somehow in our subconscious the Holy Spirit will implant in us an understanding of God's holiness and what that entails. That as Christians **nothing** outside our Salvation experience matters one whit; that striving to learn God's ways, and to experience them by our deeds and works, is even something to be avoided. Yet that is in no way the example we are given in Scripture, Old or New Testaments.

The fact remains that we can no more intellectualize our way to a relationship with Christ, than we can sleep our way to knowledge of holiness. The Israelites didn't learn about God's righteousness and His laws and then as a result strategize and organize and rise up against Pharaoh, and free themselves.....the Lord did it all. Yet AFTER their redemption it was expected they would learn about holiness and the ways of light; first by knowledge and then by the acting out of what they'd learned in every facet of their lives.

I have a couple more matters to address with you and then we'll read Numbers chapter 1 together. First, the book we have just completed, Leviticus, was all about the announcing and teaching of God's holiness. Numbers on the other hand, is all about putting that knowledge to work. Leviticus was all about the **imparting** of God's laws and commands to His people. Numbers tells us the historical story of His people's 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness after they had gained that knowledge (after they had received the Law).

The second thing I'd like to tell you is this: you've heard me pronounce God's name slightly differently than many others. I've done a fair amount of study on His name because of all the controversy that surrounds it, and all the times you have asked me about it. And the difficulty of knowing with absolute certainty how to pronounce the Lord's formal name that is spelled in Hebrew, Yud-heh-vav-heh, is that the Jews stopped pronouncing it well over 2000 years ago and so in some sense the sound of His name has been lost. Further when we attempt to pronounce it in English we are trying to mimic the sound of Hebrew letters with English alphabet sounds. This process of converting Hebrew words to English words is called transliteration.

The problem with all transliterations from the original language is that there are letters and vowel sounds and grammar rules that don't have direct equivalents from language to language. There are also words and phrases and idioms and even entire concepts that don't have direct equivalents between Hebrew and other languages. Grammatically speaking there are letters in Hebrew that don't have direct Greek, Latin, or English equivalents. Hebrew doesn't have past or future tenses as we're used to dealing with, because in English and Greek tenses are used to place the action they're referring to in relation to TIME, such as WAS (past), IS (present), and WILL BE (future). Instead Hebrew employs what is called perfect and imperfect tenses. These indicate whether an action is COMPLETE or INCOMPLETE. And often when translating those Hebrew tenses to Greek or English we automatically equate complete with past and incomplete with future, which is incorrect. So it is the CONTEXT of what one reads in Hebrew, PLUS the tense, that tells us whether an action was in the past, present, or future. And of course this is all just the tip of the iceberg in transliteration and translation issues. So how can we reasonably and honestly and (most importantly) reverently deal with the matter of God's name and our Savior's name?

From the very best Hebrew and gentile sources available to me I can tell you that regardless of how we might precisely verbalize the Lord's name, it cannot be anything but a **3-syllable** word. It is simply a matter of basic Hebrew grammar. When a Hebrew word begins with a Yud, and then follows with 3 more standard consonants, generally each consonant REQUIRES a vowel sound. So we must have THREE vowel sounds in the Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh.....the name of God.

The pronunciation Yah-weh, therefore, is less likely because it is 2 syllables and employs but 2 vowel sounds; more correct is probably Yeh-ho-veh. So where did the idea of calling God Yah-weh come from? It is unclear, actually. Some think Yahweh is simply a contraction of the word Yeh-ho-veh.....a contraction is when we take a word or a phrase and shorten it.....like instead of saying "do not" (two syllables), we say "don't", which is 1 syllable. Some contractions have occurred not because of how the word is spelled, but because of how the word is pronounced; when one says Yeh-ho-veh rapidly, it can to the Greek or English speaking person SOUND like a 2 syllable word. Saying Yah-weh may also represent kind of a rebellion against using the English 3 syllable word Jehovah; but, in the end, saying Yah-weh is likely nothing more than a misconception by well meaning gentile scholars who simply didn't understand standard Hebrew grammar rules or didn't hear the very subtle "o" sound in the middle of the word. The word Jehovah that is standard in western Christianity is born out of a German way of spelling of Yeh-ho-veh, and then centuries ago was English-ized into our common Jehovah. So Jehovah is a pretty reasonable English language based pronunciation of God's name, as long

as we understand that saying Jehovah is the equivalent of calling a Russian person named Mikhail, Mike.....which we wouldn't normally do.

Now, as concerns Messiah's name: Yeshua suffers from the same problem as God the Father's name. Scholars have long known that Jesus' Hebrew name is identical to the name of Moses' protege who conquered Canaan, Joshua. And in Hebrew Joshua is Y'hoshua. There we see that middle "o" added that effectively adds one more syllable to his name that has been contracted to Yeshua.

As for the name Jesus, there have been many false stories put out about how this name came about. The most common is that Jesus is taken from the spelling of the Greek god Zeus. This is NOT true. To begin with, Zeus is spelled with a Zeta, while there is no Zeta in Jesus' name. We have the form "Jesus" in English due to a standard transliteration process that began with the original Hebrew Y'hoshua, that became contracted to Yeshua, which was transliterated to Greek, then into Latin, and finally into English. Using the name Jesus is NOT pagan OR wrong, but it is a long way from anything He would ever had heard Himself referred to when He walked this earth!

That said it must be understood by those who are gentile Christians that for us to use the word Jesus when speaking to Jewish Believers indicates to them a complete insensitivity to the fact that even though we KNOW and can easily pronounce Messiah's true, historical, given Hebrew name (Yeshua), we CHOOSE to distance Him from His Jewishness and to make Him more gentile-like by insisting on using a thoroughly gentile name for Him.....Jesus. I've even had misinformed people tell me that to say Yeshua is blasphemy because His name is Jesus.

Personally I much prefer Yeshua because that was His given name in His own culture. When I travel to a foreign nation and speak to people there, naturally I use their name as it is in their language. But equally when a foreigner comes here, I also use their name as it is in their language here as well. If a person moves to America and decides he wants to alter his name to reflect western language traditions, that's fine.

Now it is yet another matter as to whether or not we should pronounce God's name at all. I personally see NO Scriptural prohibition against it except if we use it irreverently; but I do understand why some see it differently. So when I'm in Israel or in a predominately Jewish group, out of respect to them I use their connotations for God by saying HaShem, or the Lord. But here in Torah Class, where we have a mixture of Jews and gentiles, and we have people some more familiar with Hebrew and the Old Testament and others who are just beginning, it is necessary for me to use and equate a number of forms of God's and Messiah's name. After all, as your teacher, if I'm using words that make no sense to some of you, I'm not communicating, I'm just flapping my gums.

So at the times when I do pronounce the Y-H-W-H letters that forms God's name I will be saying Yeh-ho-veh. Many times I will NOT pronounce God's name, but use the various forms that modern Jews use....like HaShem or Lord or Adonai and a couple of others.....both out of deference to our Jewish members and as a way of learning for we gentiles. I will also switch back and forth between saying Jesus and Yeshua. My personal preference is Yeshua because

it is an easily pronounced name that is the PROVEN correct historical given name of our Jewish Messiah; but saying Jesus is certainly not wrong.

With those preliminaries out of the way, let's read Numbers chapter 1.

### READ NUMBERS 1 all

The timing of this first chapter is that this is the month after the Wilderness Tabernacle was completed and the priesthood was ordained into existence. The Israelites have been gone from Egypt for 13 months, which means they had been camping at the foot of Mt. Sinai for about 1 year and they have yet to move on.

On this day Yehoveh orders a census of all the people, and that is the focus of this chapter. In fact it is this census of Israelites that led to the English title for this book, Numbers. But this is a terrible choice for a title and leads the uninitiated into thinking that this book is about lists and minute details; nothing could be further from reality. The Hebrew name for this book is B'Midbar, which means, "In the Wilderness". And that is exactly what this book is about: the many stories of Israel's wilderness journey.

Although this begins with census results there is a lot of information here that can be useful for us to know besides the population of each tribe. For instance in the ancient world the 1st day of each month was usually a holiday (Rosh Hodesh, the New Moon) and it was the regular day that the tribal elders would meet; and after the meeting, instructions or decisions regarding the community would be communicated throughout population.

Now the logical question is, why does God want a census of the Israelites to be taken? Does He not know how many Israelites there are? The point of this census is to organize an army; this is all about preparing for war. Just as the meeting of leadership on the 1st day of the month (the New Moon) was customary among all known societies for that era, so was the taking of a census prior to going to war. Typically the census was repeated immediately **after** the battle as well so as to tally the loss of life and determine what remained of the army's strength. Therefore we get the instruction in verse 3 that all Israelites are to be counted and that every male from the age of 20 upward is to be recorded according to his tribe. In other words there is not to be merely a sum total, the statistics are to be broken down tribe by tribe. Just as every nation today has a minimum age for military service, generally speaking it was the same back then; and that age was 20 years. By way of comparison the Roman age of military conscription some centuries into the future would be 17 years of age. During the Viet Nam era in modern times it was 18 in America. In some European nations, not even 150 years ago, the age for military service was as young as 12 and 13 depending on how dire their situation was.

Interestingly there is no **upper** age limit set for this census. When we look at other societies from that era we find that when there was a particularly important war coming, the usual deferment for the elderly was set aside, and the aged were expected to contribute to the war effort in whatever way they could, even if it was not fighting; but, they were considered part of the military nonetheless.

Further this census was accomplished by means of separating people according to their family units within their tribes. The book of Numbers (*B'Midbar* in Hebrew) is going to show us the typical Hebrew societal structure and thus we are going to get several Hebrew words used to describe the various family and social units. One of the most used Hebrew terms that we'll usually find translated, as "family" in the English Bible is *Mishpachah*. And probably a better alternative translation than family is "clan". The best way to think of clan is as kind of an intermediate size of social unit, somewhere in between a single family and the entire tribe.

Now in verse 4 Moses is instructed that the tribal chieftains (also at times translated as "princes") who are the headmen of each of the 12 tribes are to assist him. The idea is that Moses and Aaron are to delegate this job of census taking to the leader of each tribe, and then Numbers proceeds to give us the name of the current *nasi* for each tribe (*nasi* is the Hebrew word usually used to indicate the chieftain or prince...the top dog....of a tribe).

So that we can better understand Israelite social structure, and get a good grip on the typical Biblical way a person is identified let's look at the first name in the group in verse 5. It begins by identifying the first level of division of Israel; it identifies one of the 12 tribes, which all together form Israel. And, the tribe is called "Reuben". The current chieftain of that tribe is someone named Elizur; and Elizur comes from the family, or really, clan of Shedeur. In general tribes were divided up into clans and clan units were powerful. The easiest way to understand this process is to begin with the person who first formed the tribe, and then see how it proceeds. Rueben, the first son born to Jacob, was the founder of the tribe of Rueben. Rueben had several children. Each of his male children would have started their own family. Within 2 or 3 more generations there would have been enough people that each of those sons of Rueben would now have been considered the head of a clan of people. So now there would have been several heads of clans that together formed the tribe of Rueben. Yet the fact remains that when Rueben (the head of the tribe) died, ONE of his sons (one of those clan leaders) would have to assume his place. Usually, but not always, it was the head of the tribe's designated firstborn who would take over; and when he died HIS firstborn would assume control over the whole tribe, and so on and so on. However there were glitches and exceptions in this procedure. After several generations perhaps a firstborn and his family were wiped out with disease or in battle, or another clan grew greater than the others in power. So it fell to one of the other clan leaders to assume the role of the head of the entire tribe. How this was determined varied but usually it was according to which clan was the most powerful. And as you can imagine there was much intrigue and politicking (and sometimes murder) when the usual and customary line of succession was interrupted.

So the structure for identifying just WHO the head of each tribe is, here in Numbers, is first to state the tribe, then to state the name of the current tribal ruler, then to state from which of the several clans that formed the tribe this particular tribal ruler was from. Therefore we must be cautious in this kind of listing NOT to assume, for instance, that Elizur was literally the son of a man named Shedeur; likely Shedeur was the name of a large clan and Elizur was simply from the *clan* of Shedeur.

So the listing of the tribal chieftain doubles as the list of census supervisors; and in verse 17 we're told that Moses and Aaron led the chieftains into doing what Yehoveh had instructed.

Before we go any further notice that one significant tribe is missing from the list of tribes that are to take part in the census, the tribe the Levi. We'll find out why that is, soon.

Verse 20 begins to announce the RESULTS of the census, which goes on for 22 more verses. And the numbers are substantial. Remember that these numbers are NOT the total population of Israel; rather they are of the male population, 20 years of age and older (in general it was those who are suitable to participate in battle). The largest tribe at this moment in history was apparently that of Judah, and it amounted to 74,600 warriors. The next largest was actually Joseph. Even though we don't technically have a named tribe of Joseph at this point in Israelite history; instead Joseph is represented by his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Therefore we arrive at the total population of Joseph by adding Ephraim and Manasseh together, which brings us a total of 72,700. As we study Torah and all the other books of the Bible that deal with latter day prophecies, we'll often be reminded that Ephraim and Manasseh are essentially temporary (though long term) place-holders for Joseph; that for special divine purposes the authority and rights given to Joseph have been transferred to Ephraim and Manasseh for a time. Because these issues of the 12 tribes of Israel are so central in understanding the past, present, and future of not just Israel but of all mankind we need to constantly be making mental note that Ephraim and Manasseh must often be looked at as a conglomerate representing their father, Joseph.

The total tally of military eligible men comes 603,550. This exactly matches the number recorded back in Exodus 38, when a census was taken for the purposes of collecting a half-shekel tax on all military aged men. And there certainly shouldn't have been much difference between the two counts because the first census had been taken only a few months earlier than this new one. But apparently it had been conducted in a different manner than the one we're looking at here in Numbers. The earlier one had to do with atonement for the nation of Israel as a whole, not forming an army for Holy War. Therefore in the Exodus census there was no breakdown by tribe, nor was there a recording of each male according to which clan he belonged to; rather all males 20 years and older were just lumped together (it mattered not which tribe or clan or family they belonged to).

In this **B'Midbar** census, however, a different purpose was the point; it was to establish battle order. Therefore clan and tribe mattered because the tribe one came from indicated the most basic battle unit one belonged to and fought beside. For those of you who have studied the American Civil War you'll know that most of the conscriptions of troops were made based on the state (or even county) one came from. Each state that joined in the war was expected to contribute a certain number of troops to the war effort. So these Civil War battle units were usually named according to either the state or the county they were from, as they were composed primarily of men hailing from that particular state or county. So if this were happening today we might have the Merritt Island regiment composed of men from Merritt Island, or the Orlando regiment formed from men living in the Orlando area. The reasons for this are obvious: men who know each other or are family will be more loyal to one another and stick together. And they'll feel like they are fighting for a land they are attached to and have a stake in, rather than some ideological or philosophical thing like a hoped for nation or confederation that may or may not result from their sacrifice of life and limb.

The same idea is taking place here in Numbers whereby the clan and the tribe one belongs to automatically determines which battle unit one belongs to. It would be pretty much unthinkable that a member of the tribe of Judah, for example, would be under the control of a commander from the tribe of Dan. So each tribe was going to be in a sense its own army. As Israel readied for its conquest of the Land of Canaan, the situation was going to be like Desert Storm or WWII where we had different nations participating, each with their own national armies loyal to their own nation but fighting together as allies in a coordinated way. This is different than with (say) Viet Nam where we had different units of the same American army fighting under one flag and one commander for one nation. It was going to take a very long time before this idea of Israel being one singled unified nation would come about under King David. Until then each of the Israelite tribes looked more like separate nations and they behaved more as allies of one another than as a single united nation.

Now without doubt, this enormous tally of 603,500 fighting men presents problems for historians and Bible scholars. Because depending on one's guessimate on what the TOTAL population of Israel must have been when including woman and children, the numbers would likely have been somewhere upwards of 2 million, likely approaching 3 million people. And, there has been all manner of speculation, and downright disbelief, that this was possible.

Many attempts at justifying a supposed "error" in the reporting of these numbers have been proposed, ranging from saying that the Hebrew word **elep** that has been translated as "thousand" should have been translated as "hundred" or even "family", all the way to saying that these numbers were redacted in a much later period to reflect the population of Israel at the time of the redaction and not at the time of Moses. Others say it must simply be legend because there is no way that the Sinai could have supported 2 to 3 million people for 40 years because the Sinai was just as much a desert wasteland in Moses' day as it is now.

Yet most scholarly arguments against the large population suggested in Numbers stem from looking at this issue from a purely secular and pragmatic point of view, using the same methods as looking at all Biblical events in which a "miracle" of God is the only possible answer. That is, it is the assumption that there is no such thing as a "miracle of God" and therefore all proofs must be rational or lie in natural occurrences (even if rare) and in verifiable and testable scientific findings. From that viewpoint these scholars are correct; there is utterly no earthly way whatsoever that 20,000, let alone 2,000,000 or more, Israelites could have camped and survived for 40 years in the wilderness of Sinai.

Like all matters concerning the Bible faith is at the core. If we **cannot** believe in miracles of God then we cannot possibly have trust in Him. When edicts and actions of God defy human logic and sensibilities, we have a choice: believe Yehoveh, or believe our intellect. Even though we may get scoffed at and laughed at, the idea that a few million Israelites lived in the Sinai for 40 years is actually easier to believe, for me, than the concept that God Himself came down from His heavenly throne, put on a skin suit and made Himself vulnerable to humans. Or that He came to earth as Yeshua the Messiah and gave up his OWN life to pay the price for our iniquities, so important are we to Him that He would do such a thing. If you are one who has made the decision to trust Yeshua then that IS what you believe. And if you can believe that, believing all the rest is a piece of cake. And I'm here to tell you that you CAN trust the

Word the God. But be cautious because sometimes the various translations are littered with ancient and modern agendas of their translators. But once we have learned the Torah those agendas are going to be much easier to spot and to reckon with.

We began today's study on Numbers Chapter one by discussing the census of the Israelites that Yehoveh ordered Moses to take. The thing we noticed was that the tribe of Levi was left out of the count and up to now we haven't been told why. But we also find that NOT INCLUDING the tribe of Levi the number of Israelite men aged 20 and up was an astonishing 603,550; an enormous number that, if accurate, means the population of the nation of Israel as it left Egypt, and as it camped in the plains under Mt. Sinai, must have been somewhere between 2 and 3 million people.

Now that's all well and good but we also know that a large portion of the folks who left Egypt with Israel were not Hebrews; they were Egyptians and various groups of Semites and who knows what other combination of nationalities that had been in Egypt for one reason or another at the time of the plagues God had poured out on Egypt. And these various people had been so impressed with the power of the God of Israel that they wanted to join up with Israel, enjoy the benefits of worshipping such a god, and participate in the Exodus from Egypt to a Promised Land

So the question is, where and how do these non-Hebrews fit in the mix? Were they counted in the census as being part of one tribe or another? The short answer is that we don't know. For sure it was a mixed bag, though. Some of these foreigners had married Israelite men or women and so were easily associated with one or the other of the 12 tribes and thus would have figured into the final census totals. But the foreigners who were not genealogically connected with Israel, nor had they married into Israel, would have had to make a choice: declare allegiance to one or the other of the 12 tribes or tag along as non-members of Israel. As non-members of Israel they would NOT have been counted in the census. And they would NOT have been allowed to live within the camp of Israel; rather they would have had to set up their tents beyond the Israelite camp limits. We have no way of knowing how many would have fallen into that category. But, understand: these foreigners were welcomed to tag along and they were not considered enemies. Without doubt these same foreigners helped to contribute to the delinquency of Israel as it pertained to idol worship (not that Israel needed much help in that area!)

### **RE-READ NUM.1:47- end**

Here it states specifically that the Levites were not to be counted for the purpose of a MILITARY conscription. We'll find later that indeed the Levites were counted, but it had nothing to do with being part of the war effort, and that is the gist of what is being said here. Further from this time forward (which is essentially indefinitely) the Levites are NOT to be counted as a regular part of Israel. Instead they are being put in charge of the newly constructed Wilderness Tabernacle.....that glorious tent shrine that would be central to the worship and lives of Israel for the next several centuries. Further it is the Levites who are to disassemble it when it is time to move on and carry it during the journey and re-assemble it when they arrive at their next

destination.

The Levites are in charge of everything that pertains to the Tabernacle including its furnishings and such things as the Bronze Altar for burnt offerings. But they also have another important duty: they are guard the sanctuary from those who would encroach upon it.

So starting in verse 52 and moving on into Chapter 2 we find a very specific order that each of the 12 tribes is to camp around the Tabernacle; further, the Levites are to camp BETWEEN the 12 tribes and the Sanctuary..... acting as a defensive barrier.....in order to fulfill their new roll as guardians of God's earthly dwelling place.

And just WHY are the Levites set apart to guard to the Sanctuary? Verse 53 says this was so "wrath may not strike the Israelite community".

Now this all sounds rather straightforward, but we need to fully grasp what a momentous thing has happened here, both historically and spiritually.

And we'll explore that next week.