

Parashat Bamidbar / פרשת במדבר

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Comments on Midrash Bamidbar Rabba 1:7

This Weeks Reading List:

Torah: Numbers 1:1-4:20

Haftarah: Hosea 2:1-2:23

B'rit HaChadashah: Romans 9:22-33

This week's parsha, Parashat Bamidbar is always read before Hag Shavuot (festival of weeks [Pentecost]) and begins with a census that is taken on the first day of the second month in the second year of the descendants of Aharon and Moshe, and then with the Tribe of Levi. The Torah mentions the death of Nadav and Avihu (*Numbers 3:4*) when counting the cohanim (priests). This is a reminder of the responsibility of the Levi'im in the temple service.

Numbers 3:1-8

3:1 These are the descendants of Aharon and Moshe as of the day when ADONAI spoke with Moshe on Mount Sinai. 3:2 The names of the sons of Aharon are: Nadav the firstborn, Avihu, El'azar and Itamar. 3:3 These were the names of the sons of Aharon the cohen, whom he anointed and ordained as cohanim. 3:4 But Nadav and Avihu died in the presence of ADONAI when they offered unauthorized fire before ADONAI in the Sinai Desert, and they had no children; El'azar and Itamar served as cohanim in the presence of Aharon their father. 3:5 ADONAI said to Moshe, 3:6 "Summon the tribe of Levi, and assign them to Aharon the cohen, so that they can help him. 3:7 They are to carry out his duties and the duties of the whole community before the tent of meeting in performing the service of the tabernacle. 3:8 They are to be in charge of all the furnishings of the tent of meeting and to carry out all the duties of the people of Isra'el connected with the service of the tabernacle.

While reading through this week's parsha, the Torah mentions that HaShem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai. According to Midrash Bamidbar Rabba 1:7 there is a question why it was necessary for the Torah to specify the location in which HaShem spoke to Moshe? According to the Midrash, the Sages determined there were three elements present when the Torah was given, (i) fire, (ii) water, and (iii) desert. This Rabbinic Midrash brings out an interesting correlation to the events following the resurrection of Yeshua which I would like to comment upon this week.

Reading through Parashat Bamidbar, and considering Midrash Bamidbar Rabba 1:7, I was reminded of the events following Yeshua Hamoshiach's laying down of his life for ours during Hag Pesach (Passover), the death, resurrection and subsequent giving of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) to the disciples. I thought it was interesting how the Midrash talked about three elements and there appears to be an interesting similarity in the events following Yeshua's resurrection after Pesach and up to hag Shavuot. The similarity is found in the three elements which the sages have written upon in the Midrash (i.e. desert, water, and fire).

The Desert Place (not knowing what to do)

A few years back I had a chance to visit the Grand Canyon in Nevada USA during the summer. I discovered the place to be very dry, very hot, and hardly any plant life besides the occasional cactus plant. On the way back, I attempted to bring back a souvenir (a pretty stone) however the desert temperature was so hot, I was unable to hold it for more than a few seconds in my hand and it was impossible to attempt to place it in my pocket without burning my leg. If it wasn't for my helicopter ride back to the city, I would have been in big trouble for lack of water, food and shelter from the extreme heat.

Hashem brought Yisrael out into the desert before Mount Sinai to give them His Holy instruction (The Torah) for righteous and holy living. I can imagine how Am Yisrael (the people of Israel) felt during their stay in the desert before Mount Sinai. They had to totally and completely rely upon HaShem for their needs to be met. We shall see many times in Sefer Bamidbar (book of Numbers) Yisrael did not know what to do because of lack of water and food/meat and their subsequent mistake of blaming G-d or Moshe.

Similarly the disciples of Yeshua found themselves in a desert place spiritually speaking after Yeshua's death and resurrection. The apparent messianic age was falling apart because their messiah had died and they did not quite understand the scriptures yet and the role of the messiah as prophet, priest, and king of Israel. It is recorded in the B'rit HaChadashah (NT) that Peter and John returned to their previous jobs as fishermen (read *John chapter 21*). It was only after Yeshua returned and re-commissioned Peter for denying Him three times that these two disciples were able to get out from the spiritual desert place they found themselves in along with a new found understanding of the scriptures. The disciples understood that the Messiah needed to first fulfill his role as prophet and priest, then, he shall return at the end of time to fulfill his role as King.

Water (Mikvah) and Re-commissioning

In Midrash Bamidbar Rabba water comes from "The heavens dripped with water" (*Judges 5:4*) which the sages say describes the giving of the Torah. Water in the Torah is used for helping a person re-commissioning their lives, a return to a state of ritual purity through the Mikvah. There are five reasons for using the mikvah, (i) woman's monthly cycle, (ii) returning to a state of ritual purity, (iii) preparation for burial, (iv) repentance, and (v) conversion. Similarly, Peter, the disciple who rejected Yeshua three times was seeking repentance and forgiveness for his sin. Reading *John chapter 21*, we see how Yeshua re-commissioned Peter assuring him of G-d's plan for him in his life and that he has been forgiven of his sins. This "water" mentioned in the Midrash is symbolic of our need for change in our lives and gives us a picture of Yeshua's re-commissioning of his disciples Peter and John. Today if you have sinned Yeshua is seeking to re-commission you in your life to repent, believe, and change the direction you have been going in to one that is focused upon G-d's messiah Yeshua.

Fire (Ruach HaKodesh / Holy Spirit)

We get fire from the verse in *Shmot 19:18*:

Exodus 19:18

19:18 Mount Sinai was enveloped in smoke, because ADONAI descended onto it in fire - its smoke went up like the smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently. (CJB)

Fire symbolizes the presence of the most High G-d on the mountain of Sinai. Similarly we find after the resurrection of Yeshua during hag Shavuot the Ruach HaKodesh resting upon the disciples in the form of a flame of fire.

Acts 2:1-5

2:1 The festival of Shavu'ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. 2:2 Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 2:3 Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. 2:4 They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak. 2:5 Now there were staying in Yerushalayim religious Jews from every nation under heaven. (CJB)

In Judaism, the sanctuary lamp is known by its Hebrew name “ner tamid” (נֵר תָּמִיד) which is usually translated as “eternal light.” The ner tamid would hang or stand before the ark in every Jewish synagogue, its purpose is to represent the menorah of the temple in Jerusalem as the continuously burning fire on the altar of burn offerings in front of the Temple. It also symbolizes Hashem’s eternal presence in Judaism, and is therefore never extinguished. The purpose is to illustrate the parallels between G-d and fire which is emphasized in sefer Shmot (book of Exodus). Interestingly during Yeshua’s ministry He also uses the flame/light analogy saying: “

John 8:12

8:12 Yeshua spoke to them again: "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light which gives life." (CJB)

John 9:5

9:5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (CJB)

Conclusion

We find similarities in Yisrael’s journey which parallel the events of Yeshua’s life. While reading through Midrash Bamidbar Rabba 1:7, three elements are present in the giving of the Torah which draws parallels to the events following the resurrection of Yeshua Hamoshiach. In many ways the Torah points to the one true Messiah. Could the events in the Torah be a foreshadowing of things to come? I certainly think so. This is why I continue to encourage everyone to study intently the Word of G-d to gain wisdom in knowing what G-d desires of you in your life, how we should live and worship him each day.

I put together a short list of questions which will help you to evaluate the knowledge level you have about the Torah. Is the bible something that has become an important part of your life or has it been simply a book you read once or twice, or maybe have never read at all?

Questions to think upon

Do you know the bible well enough to be able to draw from memory a basic outline of each book in the bible? Like say for example, the Torah, can you outline the book of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy? If you cannot, have you spent enough time studying G-d's word? Think about the following example questions:

1. Think of the different themes in the books of Chumash (first 5 books of the bible). Can you identify the theme of sefer Bamidbar (book of Numbers)? How does it relate to Genesis and Exodus?
2. Can you identify any distinct sections or general topics?
3. Genesis and Exodus were primarily narrative giving us an ongoing story line. Sefer Vayikra (book of Leviticus) however contained primarily mitzvot (commandments). How is sefer Bamidbar categorized? Does it fall as partly sipur (story) and partly mitzvot (commandments)?
4. Does sefer Bamidbar appear to have a random collection of stories and mitzvot or is there a common theme?

These types of questions can help us to get both a broader scope of the scriptures, looking at the broader sense of the message HaShem was trying to get across to us, and also could help us to understand the details a little better. The point I would like to make here is this: "Do you know the Bible well enough to be able to answer these questions easily?" In our journey as we walk in the ways of the Lord, is it possible to walk in the ways of the Lord without really knowing the overall picture? Do you see how important it is to study G-d's word daily?

Be Blessed in Yeshua our Messiah!

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:

Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
"Yeshua" King Messiah forever and ever