

Torah: Numbers 4:21-7:89
Haftarah: Judges 13:2-25
Brit Chadasha: Acts 21:17-26 (John Parsons)
Acts 1:3-11; 1 Thessalonians 4 (Aaron Shaw)

John 7:53-8:11; Acts 21:17-32 (David Stern)
John 12:20-36 (Jeff Feinberg)

Let’s summarize what this week’s passages contain, then I’d like to share my meditation, entitled: “Be encouraged to allow wonderful things to happen!”

In last week’s *Torah* portion (*Bamidbar*), a census was taken of all Levite males 1 month old and up (the Levites were descendants of Jacob and Leah’s son Levi [*Levi*]). This week’s portion begins with another Levite census, but this time, only males age 30-50. The census details how each of those counted was related to *Levi*, and the results were presented. Those descended from *Levi*’s firstborn son *Gershon* (the Gersonites) were to carry and maintain all the parts of the *mishkan* (the tabernacle) which were woven or made of animal skins. The Gershonites lived on the west side of the *mishkan*¹. The Kohathites were descended from *Levi*’s middle son Kohath. They lived on the south side of the tabernacle², and carried and maintained the articles needed for tabernacle worship. Then, there were the Merarites, descendants of *Levi*’s youngest son Merari. They lived on the north side of the tabernacle³, and carried/maintained all the wooden parts of the tabernacle, and the ropes, sockets and tent pegs. Finally, on the east side of the *mishkan*⁴ was the *Cohanim*, the Aaronites, a sub-group of the Kohathites. They actually performed the tabernacle worship and sacrifices and produced the oil for the menorah.

In chapter 5, those with any infectious skin disease, those who had touched a dead body, or were otherwise ritually unclean were to go outside the camp and be purified before they could come back in. In their unclean state, they were not permitted to participate in community worship, and while unclean, they could transmit their impurity to others, disqualifying others from engaging in public worship.

Then there are regulations about how restitution was to be made if one person wronged another. Not only was the wronged person to be paid back in full, but twenty percent was to be added.

When an Israelite gave a gift to a priest, the giving was to be full and complete, nothing was to be expected back in return, the giver was not to hold the gift over the recipient’s head later.

¹ <http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Parashah/Summaries/Naso/naso.html>

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Numbers 5:11 to the end of chapter 5 details The Law of the *Sotah*⁵. If a husband suspected his wife of marital unfaithfulness, a ritual was performed where the woman would swear her innocence before a priest. If she was guilty, bad things would happen to her physically, and she would become a social pariah. If she was innocent, she would be vindicated and would even become able to bear children if she was sterile.

In chapter 6, we have the Nazirite vow (no connection to Nazareth or Nazarene). The word *Nazir* means to crown, dedicate, or set apart for a special purpose. This was a voluntary vow of fixed time duration, open to both men and women. The *Nazir* 1) ate or drank nothing derived from grapes, 2) left his or her hair uncut, and 3) swore not to approach a dead body even if the deceased was a close relative. The uncut hair was a symbol of the dedication of the vow. If any of the 3 conditions was broken during the length of the vow, the *Nazir* had to do a purification and start all over again, until however long the vow was made for was fulfilled.

At the end of chapter 6, we have the Aaronic benediction, which nowadays ends the service in Sephardi synagogues, and here at our congregation. Ashkenazi congregations only recite it at major festivals.

Chapter 7 details the ordination of the tabernacle after it's set up was completed. The *mishkan* and everything used in it was anointed and consecrated. Over 12 days, the leaders of the 12 tribes brought gifts to be used in the *mishkan*, oxen and wagons to help transport *mishkan* articles whenever the camp moved, and offerings to inaugurate the altar. All 12 tribes brought the same gifts and offerings, honouring G-D and respecting each other. No one-upmanship, no tribe trying to out-do the other or show off.

The *Torah* portion ends with *Moshe* (Moses) hearing G-D speak from the ontop of the earthly representation of HIS throne – the Ark of the Covenant.

The Judges *haftarah* reading recounts the events surrounding the birth of a well known nazirite – *Shimshon* (Samson). Samson was born during the oppression of the Philistines because Israel had drifted away from G-D. An angel appeared to Samson's barren mother (but she didn't know it was an angel) and told her she would have a son who would start the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines. This child would be a Nazirite from birth, and she learned what she had do to help him become what G-D intended for him to become. Samson's parents made a burnt offering to G-D, and the messenger, a visible manifestation of G-D Himself⁶, went up through the flames into the sky!

In Acts 21:17-26, this is where *Rav Sha'ul* (the apostle Paul) came to the believers at Jerusalem and reported the good things G-D was doing among Gentile (non-Jewish) believers. The Jerusalem leadership correctly understood that at one and the same time, there are 2 equally valid contexts of the gospel: one Jewish and the other Gentile. The 2 legs of the One New Man⁷ walking side-by-side with each other and with G-D into the

⁵ <http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Parashah/Summaries/Naso/naso.html>

⁶ Judges 13:22

⁷ Ephesians 2:15

future. The Jerusalem leaders encouraged *Sha'ul* to keep ministering to the Gentiles, but they pointed out a misunderstanding that was developing among some members the believing community; namely that when a Jew receives *Yeshua* (Jesus), there is no longer any point to maintaining a Jewish identity. Paul did something that some today think was a compromise, but it was anything but. He helped 4 Jewish believers fulfill a Nazirite vow, and he took the vow with them, confirming that Jewish believers in *Yeshua* are to maintain their calling as Jews. 4 believers + *Sha'ul* = 5 guys. 5 books in the *Torah*. Coincidence? Probably not!

I chose a few verses from this week's *parasha* that I'd like to share with you in a meditation entitled: "Be encouraged to allow wonderful things to happen!"

Numbers 4:22-23

"Take a census...of the Gershonites by their families and clans. Count all the men from from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting"
(NIV, emphasis added)

In verse 22, the Hebrew for "*Take a census...of the Gershonites*" is literally "Lift up the head of Gershon's sons". The image comes to mind of someone with their head down, perhaps needing encouragement, and a person coming along and gently lifting their chin in an encouraging way. So we see that this census was not implemented to manipulate and control, or further a political agenda. But the census in *parasha Naso* was motivated by G-D's love.

The following verse, verse 23, reinforces this. Where it says "**Count...the men**", the Hebrew root for **Count** is **פּוֹדַעַת** (Pey-Qof-Dalet). Not just simple counting, but a directed counting, a helping and purposeful counting. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet were originally pictographs. The letter **פּ** (Pey) was a speaking mouth; the letter **ק** (Qof) was the back of someone's head, and the letter **ע** (Dalet) was a door. So you have the image of someone speaking behind someone, perhaps trying to get their attention, and the speaker is leading the person to the door. The person about to go through the door may not have found the door at all had the person speaking behind them not pointed it out. Or, the person may not have tried to go through the door without direction or encouragement.

I wondered why the counted Levites in this week's *parasha* were aged 30-50. Younger than 30, and the chance increased that there wouldn't be the maturity or life experience needed, and G-D didn't want to set them up for failure this way. A man older than 50 could more easily be overtaxed by the physical demands of the job. G-D always knows when the timing of something is right, and what kind of callings are best for what kind of people, and when.

I was blessed this week when I discovered a connection between 2 of this weeks passages: Numbers 6:2 and Judges 13:17-20

Here's Judges 13:17-19 and the first part of verse 20:

*Then Manoah [Samson's father] inquired of the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?" He [the angel] replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is **wonderful**⁸." Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD **did an amazing thing** while Manoah and his wife watched: As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame" (NIV, emphasis added)*

As a side note, when the L-RD told Manoah that HIS name was wonderful, the actual name was still left unstated. The wonderful here is an adjective without a noun with it⁹.

The **wonderful** of verse 18 and the **doing an amazing thing** in verse 19 are both from the Hebrew root, אָלַף (Pey-Lamed-Alef); פּ (Pey-speaking mouth) + אָל (the word "no"). The Hebrew word picture is "Mouth...No!" It's something the nature of which, when you experience it, you are speechless!

Now, Numbers 6:2: *"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman **wants** to make a special vow...'"* (NIV, emphasis added), then the details of the vow are explained. The Hebrew root here for **wants** again is אָלַף (Pey-Lamed-Alef), and the same verb form as in Judges 13:19¹⁰. So you could translate it: "If a man or woman causes amazement by making a special vow..."

One last image came to mind when Samson's parents were watching G-D ascend in a sacrifice toward heaven. Where else do we see Jews watching as G-D ascended to heaven after a sacrifice? Acts 1:11. After Yeshua ascended, the angels told the disciples: *"This Yeshua, who has been taken away from you into heaven, will come back to you in just the same way as you saw him go into heaven."* (Complete Jewish Bible). When Sha'ul describes Yeshua's return in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, he says: "...encourage each other with these words" (Complete Jewish Bible, verse 18).

The nazirites took their vow when there was no obligation to do so, and caused amazement in their fellow Jews, because whenever they saw a person taking this vow, they knew that G-D had motivated that person and the person really wanted to do what they were doing! For us today, when we have the desire within us to do anything for G-D when we don't have to, it's the same kind of an amazing thing! In the last verse of the *hapharah*, the Spirit of the L-RD began to stir in Samson. Let's stop trying to do amazing things in the flesh, and instead allow G-D to stir His Spirit within us. G-D gave *Manoah* so much more than he asked for, *showing him* who HE is instead of just telling him! *Moshe* heard the L-RD speaking right from HIS throne; don't you want that too? G-D can and will do amazing, mouth-stopping things in and through us; all we have to do is let HIM! It is the easiest thing in the world, but I know for myself, I am so good at making it much

⁸ or *beyond understanding* (the NIV translates both ways)

⁹ *The ENGLISHMAN'S HEBREW CONCORDANCE of the OLD TESTAMENT*, George W. Wigram, 5th Printing, 2003, page 1018

¹⁰ Both verbs are *hiphil* (causative). In Numbers 6:2, the verb is future tense; in Judges 13:19, the verb is in the participle form.

harder than it needs to be. Pray for me for this. Let's pray it for each other and encourage each other the same way.

Shabbat Shalom, Chaverim!