

26 – Bamidbar – Outline

Bamidbar Summary

- “Bamidbar” = “In the Wilderness”
- single sentence parsha summary: Everyone counts, but know your place.

Placing Bamidbar

- After the many laws given in the book of Vayikra, we now are seeing a major change to HOW ISRAEL LOOKS AND MOVES IN THE WORLD
 - after receiving the commandments to be holy, we see here the VISIBLE, TANGIBLE example of what holiness looks like reflected in the body
 - what is the outward, tangible response?
 - order from chaos
 - recognition of degrees of holiness
 - recognition of our place within the body, and going to occupy that place
 - which creates a larger “superbeing,” a larger body
 - application of the Word beginning to get a body to Shavuot
 - the rabbis consistently mention that this portion is read before Shavuot, which is a celebration of the receiving of the written Torah
 - the written Torah is the Word becoming more concrete, tangible
 - at Pentecost (Shavuot) in Acts, we also see the Word being translated, another concretization
 - new lines separating the holy from the common always precede new life
 - there’s some pain involved with death
 - Leviticus draws a bunch of lines, and these lines manifest in Bamidbar as lines of distinction within the camp – this side more honorable, that group assigned holier work than this group
 - at Shavuot, submitting to the Torah requires a kind of death for the purpose of greater life, lines being drawn in every area of our lives between the holy and common, but it’s all for a higher life, in the end

“Bamidbar” = “In the Wilderness;” Death Before Life

- the idea of the death before new life is central to the entire book of Bamidbar because the midbar, the wilderness, is known as the dying place, the place of extreme death forces
 - lacks water, but is also populated by venomous creatures and a great many large predators, especially in ancient times (lions, leopards, jackals, hyenas, wolves)

- God clearly states that His reason for keeping them in the wilderness for 40 years is so that that first generation of adults can die off, this dying being mentioned over and over again in Numbers 14:26-38.
- Is death merely punishment?
 - the better perspective is that it is a first stage of cleansing, inward cleansing
 - inward cleansing precedes outward cleansing (the cleansing of the Land)
- the idea of dying in the midbar is also connected to God's speech
 - the root of "midbar" (wilderness), is "dabar," "to speak"
 - it's like the name of this book could be understand as "in God's speech"
 - what is the connection between dying and God's speech?
 - truth divides, separates
 - light is truth, and the shining of the light causes a separation between those inwardly aligned to the light and those inwardly aligned to the darkness
 - Yeshua's words were truth and inevitably divided His listeners
- the other side to speech is that it brings life, connection
 - after the initial division, the Word continues working in those destined for the light, drawing them closer and closer together as they work together to digest the truth and live it out
- we see both the division of the Word and the unification of the Word in the names of the last two books of the Torah
 - "Bamidbar" and "Devarim" both share the root "dabar," "speech;" Bamidbar is about dying, while Devarim is about man speaking the Word to his fellow man, the body meditating upon the Word and helping its members to understand it and walk it out

A Brief Salvation Pattern Reading of the 5 Books of Torah

- look for the overarching progression here of 1) beginning in oneness, 2) moving to separation, then 3) to reunification, and 4) to deep unity
- the salvation pattern in the 5 books
 - B'reisheet: root is "rosh," a comparatively undifferentiated unity (as with the brain).
 - separation begins very early, man's sin
 - the fall is not dwelled upon; the narrative slows when we get to Abraham
 - the seed of salvation is the emphasis of this book
 - the three-part seed: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
 - Shemot: nevertheless, separation continues in the second book, which is especially focused on separation
 - a plural word ("Names")
 - indicates a separation into individual identity and ego, distinct essences described by names

- the book is about the separation of birth, a nation achieving a unique identity as it comes out of another, the creation of a holy, separated people
- Vayikra: the beginning of unification
 - begins with letter vav, the letter of connection, means “and,” “and He called”
 - “calling” implies that God is reaching out to connect to His people by sending His Word to them
 - focus on the priesthood, those who connect God and mankind
- Bamidbar: the cleansing that the Word brings
 - the death of a generation
 - begins a phase of deep unity as the people learn to walk daily with God
- Devarim: the bride has now submitted to being the vessel through which the Word is spoken
 - Moses’ words (“Devarim” = “Words”), his repetition in his own words of the Torah
 - the beginning of the “Oral Torah”
 - the flow of the Word/Spirit through one who has freewill is the yielding of the bride to the Groom

Unity Through Knowing and Accepting One’s Place

- the census first affirms every person as being equally a part of the body
 - women counted through the men
 - if you are a Believer and if you are looking for your place in this world, start with knowing that you are grafted in, a part of Israel
 - Brit Chadasha reading: the body collected together from the four corners of the earth
 - Grant: the Hebrew idiom for counting people is “lifting the head.”
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McLrOD0jB3Y>, 2m
 - lift the head, look into the eyes, see the person, and say, “You are one of us.” It’s humanizing, rather than dehumanizing.
 - already, though, the census is revealing levels of holiness and honor within the tribes
 - Romans 9:20-21 - “Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?”
- tribes are grouped for camping and traveling according to a hierarchy
 - calculating a tribe’s standing:
 - Leah’s tribes first
 - Rachel’s tribes second
 - Leah’s handmaid Zilpah’s tribes third
 - Rachel’s handmaid Bilhah’s tribes fourth
 - firstborn of each mother is higher than others from that mother

- life choices play some part in one's standing
- Levi, third-born of Leah, has the place of highest honor around the Tabernacle
 - 3 sons of Levi are given positions and work based on their level
- tribes of Leah who did not fumble badly are highest, on the east, led by Judah
- tribes of Leah who had some issues are given second place, on the south
 - leaves one open spot, filled by the firstborn of Zilpah, Gad
- tribes of Rachel get the third side, the west
- tribes of the handmaids are the lowest, the north side, led by the remaining firstborn, Dan
 - Asher and Naphtali are the "lowest" of the tribes
- it is God Who decides our standing and our place of service in the body
 - He does the same with us
 - we need to recognize that we are made to fit into a certain place in this body of Believers
 - kicking against this will make life miserable and make the whole body less organized, less effective, less fruitful, less at peace, less united
 - if you want to sow discord, tell everybody that they all have the exact same potential as everyone else if they all share a level playing field
 - schools do this to children, setting many up for disappointment and labels they will carry for the rest of their lives
 - ranking, comparing – kids pick up on it, and it damages them
 - everyone is to be respected equally, but God's way is not to make every piece with the same potential for fitting into every spot successfully
 - not an excuse to not try to excel with all one's strength, but don't be too dejected if you don't succeed; know your place
 - the haftarah powerfully speaks this message about knowing and accepting one's place, and being fruitful where you're meant to be planted
 - Jonathan and David's story in 1 Samuel
 - Jonathan is a mensch who knows his place, though by rights he could have been the next king; he accepts that God has chosen David for that place of honor, and he is to support him, and the result is that we honor Jonathan down to today
 - I was not born as a genetic descendant of Abraham, so I'm starting out lower than those who are – that's not my place

Yeshua

- the physical manifestation of the Word at Shavuot is one step in the process of the Word becoming concrete; the next mo'edim season brings us something better- the Incarnation of Yeshua, the Word made flesh
 - the Word as a person Who can speak what God would say in every situation
 - the Word with which we can have a relationship

26 – Bamidbar – Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and this Spiritual Seasons series. In this study, we are looking at each Torah portion in the light of the overall calendar and God's pattern for spiritual growth. This week, we are in parsha Bamidbar, the first 3½ chapters of the book of Numbers.

Bamidbar Summary

"Bamidbar" means "in the wilderness." As with the other books of the Torah, the first Torah portion is the Hebrew name of the book. So the Hebrew name for the book of Numbers is "Bamidbar," or "In the Wilderness," which is considerably more exciting than "Numbers." In truth, the book does start with quite a few numbers, but the Hebrew name emphasizes the wilderness. Don't you wonder what life was like with millions of people camping in a desert, living the "simple" life together? Did the tribes interact easily? Was there a place to trade in each camp? How often were caravans from outside visiting them? What did they burn for all their cooking fires? Were there groups of teenagers who liked to go out to explore the wadis and caves? What was it like when three million people were all setting up their homes at the same time before the sun went down because they each needed a place to sleep that night? How did they make allowances for the grandmas and grandpas who had trouble walking? Was there music trickling out of tents? Were there places of study? Were there animals walking around the camps? What were the sounds in the morning? I want to see the documentary! Well, this book, Bamidbar, is about as close as we get to the documentary.

If I had to reduce this first portion of the book to a single sentence, it would be "Everyone counts, but know your place." The main topics of the portion are the first census and the arrangement of the camp by groupings of tribes, which was also the order in which they marched in the wilderness. The Levites become a separate topic here in this portion because they are not counted with the rest of Israel in the census, though they do get counted eventually, just separately and differently. Whereas with the 12 tribes all the men twenty and over are counted, men who can go out to fight, fighting is not the main idea for the Levites. They are counted according to the number of males 1 month old or older. It seems that the main reason the Levites are counted at all is because God takes them in place of the firstborn males of the other tribes, so a count needed to be done for that reason. As these numbers for the Levites are being determined, God also assigns the three branches of the Levites certain duties for breaking down and transporting and putting back up the Tabernacle. The last topic of the portion specifically addresses one of those three branches, the Kohathites, who are given the task of transporting the most holy objects of the Tabernacle. They are given very specific instructions for how they are to transport these objects, which must be treated with the respect of covering them as they are being moved.

Placing Bamidbar

Let's think about this portion now in terms of the calendar. After the many laws given in the book of Vayikra, we now are seeing a major change to HOW ISRAEL LOOKS AND MOVES IN THE WORLD, at the very beginning of this next book. In a way, all that build-up of climbing the holiness mountain in Vayikra is leading to these PHYSICAL CHANGES we're seeing here in the

camp. So, how is organizing the camp a fulfillment of Vayikra, of sorts, and what does this portion have to do with Shavuot? The rabbis consistently point out that parsha Bamidbar is always the portion read before Shavuot.

What we're seeing here is a visible, tangible example of what holiness looks like reflected in the body. This is an expression of holiness that we can actually see if we were to be on a mountaintop looking down on the camp of Israel. The laws of Vayikra are, in a way, speech, the commandments. But the goal is for the speech to yield a result on the outside. It's one thing to hear and absorb and even purpose to do, but it's another to actually go about doing. Here in Bamidbar, we're seeing how Israel changes outwardly according to the instructions of holiness in Vayikra, the response in the body.

So, what is the response? Firstly it's order from chaos. Remember that "Vayikra," the Hebrew for "Leviticus," means "and He called." When we respond to God's call to holiness, our life will become more ordered and less chaotic, and this includes a deep submitting to whatever authority that brings order to our larger groups. Secondly, what we see in parsha Bamidbar is the recognition of DEGREES of holiness. There is a ranking of tribes reflected in their groupings and arrangement around the Tabernacle. We'll talk more about this idea later. So, a second response to God's call to holiness is deep recognition of what holiness actually looks like in our lives and how to separate out the holy and protect it. What is it in your life that is sacred? What is it in your life that specially connects you to God and must be vigilantly kept as special and beyond compromise? Thirdly, Bamidbar is showing us that everyone is created for a certain spot in the body, a particular place for service. So, a third result of responding to God's call to holiness is that WE SEE WHERE WE ARE CREATED TO FIT INTO THE BODY, and we go to occupy that place. In the process, as each piece takes the place it was made for, a whole SUPERBEING is created that is far beyond any one of us and capable of amazingly powerful things as each of these parts works together with one mind and heart. One way to see that camp in the wilderness is as a single unit, a single being, capable of wielding truly massive power. But as long as they're disorganized and not knowing how the whole body fits together, they're divided and weak.

Let me repeat those points quickly: in responding to God's spoken commandments to be holy, we experience 1) order from chaos, 2) recognition of what's holy in our specific situations, and 3) seeing and occupying one's place, which creates a larger body.

This idea of holiness MANIFESTING VISIBLY is one that we can also apply to Shavuot. This portion is not just a kind of culmination of the previous portions in Vayikra; it's also connected to Shavuot. So we can ask ourselves, how is Shavuot also a MORE PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION of the Word that God has been speaking to us over the course of these fifty days?

Well, it's not hard to see that the giving of a written Torah is a physical manifestation of the Word. At Shavuot, we celebrate the giving of the Torah, at least the beginning of the giving of the Torah. God actually patiently spends many days over the course of the whole summer giving the Torah to Moses. But it begins here, at Shavuot. Receiving a written text is a huge leap

forward in making God's Word concrete, seeing it manifested in the lowest realm. And, too, at Pentecost, which is another name for Shavuot, we see the apostles being empowered to speak out the Word in many languages, which is another physical manifestation of the Word. So, there's a theme here of the beginning of the Word becoming manifested tangibly. We're seeing this tangible manifestation in the ordering of the Israelite camp. We see it as the written Torah begins to be given at Mt. Sinai. We see it in the Good News being translated through the power of the Spirit into a large number of languages. All of these are examples of the Word getting a kind of body, though it's still early in this process. There's much further to go with making the Word concrete. The whole salvation cycle is a process of the concretization of the initial light of truth we are given at the beginning of the cycle. So, we've got further to go, but Shavuot is a big step.

Let me come at this connection between Bamidbar and the mo'ed of Shavuot from a slightly different angle for a minute, in terms of death and new life. New life is always preceding by the drawing of new lines separating the holy from the common. In both Bamidbar and Shavuot, we see this idea that new lines of separation come before a higher level of living.

Holiness implies separation – this is special, holy, and that is common. Lines are drawn, lines of separation. We're seeing these lines being drawn throughout the book of Leviticus, and these lines manifest physically in Bamidbar in the camp of Israel, where lines are drawn to say this part of the camp is more holy than this part, and this side is responsible for holier work than this side. So, there's some pain involved there. Separation is death, and there's some pain with death. You can imagine that when God gave the instructions for how the tribes were to arrange themselves that some people would have been a bit sad. Imagine that you are 10 years old, and you are a member of the tribe of Reuben. Your best friend is from the tribe of Dan. Up until now, your parents could find a way to camp relatively near each other. But not anymore. Now Reuben is south of the Tabernacle, and Dan is north. And so there's some sadness there. But the purpose is for a greater life, the ordering of the camp, the fusing of the tribes together into a greater body where each tribe takes up the place it was made for. So, the death is for the purpose of life.

This is what the Torah is; submitting to the Torah is a kind of death for the purpose of a greater life. The Torah is drawing lines in every area of our lives: this is holy, that is common. Every time we submit on a deeper level to the Torah, we are led to a kind of separation, a kind of death for the purpose of a higher life. A higher level of living always requires first the death of drawing more lines between what is holy and what is common.

“Bamidbar” = “In the Wilderness;” Death Before Life

This idea of the death before the new life is central to the entire book of Bamidbar because the name, itself, is very much connected to death. Let's talk about this word “bamidbar” now, and this fourth book of the Torah.

As I mentioned earlier, “Bamidbar” means “in the wilderness.” “Midbar” is wilderness, no-man's-land. What kind of land is land that no one wants to settle down on and claim? Well,

mostly it's dry land. Most of the area Israel journeyed through during the forty years in the midbar is classified today by scientists as desert, true desert, though some of it is steppe, which gets a little more rain than desert.

In Jewish thinking, the wilderness is the dying place. R' Akiva Tatz calls the wilderness the place of extreme death forces (<https://www.simpletoremember.com/media/a/adams-sin-sin-as-mitzvah/> 12:45m). It doesn't only lack water, which is so necessary for life. Wilderness areas around Egypt and Israel are often starkly beautiful, but they are sun-blasted places populated by venomous creatures and a great many large predators, especially in ancient times. Animals like lions, leopards, jackals, hyenas, and even wolves slink about these wilderness areas, and even today most of these animals can be found there. God clearly states His reason for keeping Israel in the wilderness for forty years – to kill off the generation that is not suited for entering the Promised Land. Listen to how many times God mentions death when He is sentencing them to the forty-year journey. We read it in Numbers 14:

“And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, “How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: YOUR DEAD BODIES SHALL FALL IN THIS WILDERNESS, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. But as for you, YOUR DEAD BODIES SHALL FALL IN THIS WILDERNESS. And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of YOUR DEAD BODIES LIES IN THE WILDERNESS. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.’ I, the LORD, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this wicked congregation who are gathered together against me: IN THIS WILDERNESS THEY SHALL COME TO A FULL END, AND THERE THEY SHALL DIE.” And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation grumble against Him by bringing up a bad report about the land— the men who brought up a bad report of the land—died by plague before the LORD. Of those men who went to spy out the land, only Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive.” (Numbers 14:26-38)

So, the connection is clear: the wilderness is a place to die.

Is this death a mere punishment? I really don't think that with God there is such a thing as mere punishment for punishment's sake. Punishment is always meant to achieve a greater end with God, the bending of the knee in humility, the turning back to Him, and especially the cleansing required of a holy people. On the one hand, we could look at the book of Bamidbar as a delay in entering the Land so that people can die, or we can look at it more positively as the necessary inward cleansing of the people that is required for them to be strong and united enough to step up and do the cleansing of the Land of Israel together, which is an outward cleansing. The

inward cleansing precedes the outward cleansing. It's about cleansing Israel from the inward remnant of Egypt, the reproach of Egypt.

Now, this idea of dying in the midbar is also very connected to the idea of God's speech. This is because the root of "midbar" is "dabar," "to speak." It's like the name of this book could be understand as "in God's speech." What is the connection between God's speech and dying? I think the connection is that truth divides. Truth separates. Truth is a light. When truth is spoken out, those who are inwardly aligned with the light will be drawn to it, and those who are inwardly aligned to darkness will be repelled by it. The two groups will be split from each other. The Word is a sword. Truth is a sword. When Yeshua spoke, everything He said was truth, and over and over again His words divided the crowds who listened to Him.

Now, there is another side to the Word and another side to truth. After truth separates the light and dark, truth continues to do a work in those who are part of the light, and this is a work of joining, not separation. Those who have been drawn to the light are drawn closer and closer to each other as they work together to digest the truth and live it out. So this is how the Word first divides, then brings together. Again, first the Word brings death by separating out those destined for the light and those destined for the darkness. Then those in the light are drawn into an interdependent body as they meditate on and act upon truth.

We can actually see these two steps in the names of the two final books of the Torah, Bamidbar and Devarim, Numbers and Deuteronomy. If Bamidbar is about the Word that brings death, then Devarim should be about the Word that brings life. Well, can you hear in the word "Devarim" that it is from the same root as "Bamidbar"? These last two books of the Torah are both from the root "dabar," "to speak." In Bamidbar, we have the speech that brings death, the wilderness, and in Devarim, we have the speech within the body, within the members, that brings life. Devarim is spoken out by Moses, the body meditating upon the Word, helping each other to understand the Word so that it can be walked out.

A Brief Salvation Pattern Reading of the 5 Books of Torah

Since I've brought up a kind of progression in these last two books of the Torah, and since we're starting a new book now, I want to give just the thousand-foot view of the progression of all five books of the Torah according to the salvation pattern. This is something we need to review and keep meditating upon from time to time as we keep progressing through the Torah. We need to zoom out sometimes to see where we are in the bigger picture. I'm going to do it quickly, so if this is too much condensed info, just hang tight. We'll move on soon.

As we go through the five books, listen for the overarching progression here of 1) beginning in oneness, 2) moving to separation, then 3) to reunification, and 4) to deep unity.

B'reisheet has the word "head" at its root, "rosh," and this is a kind of oneness that we see at the spiritual root. The head is a place of comparative unity within the body. The brain looks like an undifferentiated oneness. The beginning is marked by this undifferentiated oneness, though very quickly we already see separation beginning, almost immediately. Sin comes in very

quickly in the first book, and this causes separation, but the Bible doesn't dwell on this story much. Instead, the narrative speeds forward until we get to Abraham, when it vastly slows down. The focus of the first book then becomes the seed of salvation for humanity. The seed is made of three parts: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Though the seed of salvation is given, the process of separation continues into the second book, Shemot, which is wholly devoted to separation. "Shemot" means "names." The word is plural and indicates a separation into individual identity and ego, distinct essences described by names. It is a book about birth, the birth of a nation, which is the separation of a baby from its mother. A new baby is soon given a new name that describes its unique identity. In Shemot, Israel separates from the world and begins taking on her identity as a holy people, a people separated from the others to be God's special treasure, though they have some work to do before God can really join together with His people.

Vayikra, the third book, is about reunification, the beginning of a process of deep joining. The word "vayikra" begins with a vav, which is the letter of connection and here means "and." The translation of "Vayikra" is "and He called." This calling implies that God is reaching out to connect to His people; He's calling them, which means He's sending His Word to them through which they reconnect to Him. It is a book that has a special emphasis on the priesthood, which is a holy kind of human being that God uses in a special way to connect to His people.

Bamidbar, the fourth book, is about the cleansing that the Word brings. It's a book about the death of a generation, which is a first stage of cleansing of the vessel. This cleansing process begins a phase the phase of deep unity with God where the people learn to walk daily with Him even as they are burying people along the way.

Devarim is the final stage of deep unity in which the bride has now become the vessel through which the Word is spoken. Devarim is named not for God's words but for the words of a man, Moses. The book is Moses' rephrasing of the Torah, his repetition of the Torah in his own words. It is thus regarded as the beginning of the Oral Torah. This is God's bride stepping up to be the bride who has a mind of her own and makes the choice to be a willing vessel for the Spirit of God to flow through. There is great unity in yielding to God in this way, the yielding of a bride with her groom.

Unity Through Knowing and Accepting One's Place

The final topic I have for today related to the portion will help us to get into a few of the details in the text. We can call this topic "Unity Through Knowing and Accepting One's Place." We'll address here why it is that I'm saying the camp is arranged by levels of holiness and honor.

But before the text divides the tribes into groups, we have the census, which is the first matter addressed in the whole book. What is this census doing here? In a way, the census works to affirm every person as being equally a part of the body. The rabbis see the message in the census that everyone counts. Now it's true that only the men were actually counted, but we can understand that it's assumed that these men have wives who are their other half. The

women are counted through the husbands. So the census tells the people, “First, know that you belong in this body.” Let me say to each of you listening today that if you are a Believer, then you are grafted into Israel. And if you are looking for your place in this world, start with knowing that you are part of Israel. Where is your place? Your place is firstly with Israel. It’s a simple truth, but it’s one that we should speak to ourselves frequently. And I think this is alluded to in the Brit Chadashah reading from Matthew 24, where we see greater Israel being gathered together from the four corners of the earth.

Concerning the census, Grant likes to point out here that the Hebrew idiom for counting people is “lifting the head” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McLrOD0jB3Y>, 2m). “Lift the heads of the people of Israel” means that they should be counted. We get the picture of one of the twelve princes chosen by God to do the counting reaching out to lift each person’s head as they are counted, and he looks into each one’s eyes and sees them and says, “Yes, you are one of us; you belong here.” The idiom makes it a humanizing rather than a dehumanizing moment.

Already, though, even in the census, the tribes and their counts are listed according to a certain order that reflects different levels. And this order with the census has similarities to the order of the camp, how the tribes are grouped. You see, it’s one thing to know you belong in a body, and it’s another to know exactly where you fit into that body. Some parts are made for greater honor than others. Something in our modern sensibilities objects to this idea, but this is simply God’s way, and if we can’t accept that God has created us to fit a certain level of nobility and a certain kind of service in this world, then we’re always trying to be someone we can’t be. Paul addresses this idea when he says in Romans, “Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?” (Romans 9:20-21). We know that the tribes are very different from each other, each with their own unique identity reflected by their banners.

Here is the story that I see in how the tribes are first listed in the census (according to their initial potential) and then grouped and listed for establishing the camp and marching (according to how they have lived up to that potential). Each tribe begins with a certain level of honor based on WHICH OF THE FOUR MOTHERS the tribe comes from: Leah is first and imparts the most honor, Rachel second, and the handmaids below. Leah’s handmaid Zilpah is higher than Rachel’s handmaid, Bilhah. For all four mothers, a firstborn son is given more honor than the other sons born to that mother. Still, though, regardless of where they begin their journey on that scale of honor, their life decisions do affect their standing at any given moment. Based on all these factors, when God provides the order, each tribe falls into a certain place in the camp that is only that tribe’s place. It’s a calculation based on who your mother was, whether you were born to that mother first or second or third or lower, and what you have done so far with the potential that you’ve been given. God does the calculation, and each tribe is assigned a place.

As we quickly go around the four sides of the camp, it might be helpful to open the outline file linked below. Leah’s third son Levi is given the highest place immediately surrounding the

Tabernacle, the highest level of holiness and honor. Now, the patriarch Levi had three sons, and within the camp of Levi, there is a ranking that is reflected by which side of the Tabernacle certain Levite clans are assigned to and the work each clan does in transporting certain parts of the Tabernacle, from the holiest parts to the least holy. Beyond the Levites, Leah's sons who act most honorably are given the choicest places on the east side. These on the east are Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, Judah being the oldest of these three and the leader of the east-side tribes. The Levite group on this side nearer the Tabernacle is also the holiest group, the priests. Aaron and Moses camped on the east side with these sons of Leah. Leah's other sons who had some fumbles are still ranked higher than Rachel's tribes. Reuben and Simeon, both from Leah, are given the next places on the south side, where Reuben, the firstborn, leads. The Levite group on that side, the Kohathites, carried the holiest objects of the Tabernacle but were lower than Moses and Aaron and the priesthood. One more spot is open on the south side, and this is filled by Gad, who is the firstborn of Leah's handmaid Zilpah. On the west side are the tribes descended from Rachel. They belong to a middle tier of honor despite Joseph's great accomplishments. These tribes are Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. The north side is mentioned last and is led by the remaining firstborn son, Dan, Bilhah's first son. He is joined on that side by the two second-born sons of the handmaids, Asher and Naphtali, who are the lowest two of all the tribes. The Levite group on that north side were the ones who tote the bars and posts and sockets of the Tabernacle, which are the least holy pieces.

If you didn't follow all that, my point is to say that God calculates a person's standing and assigns you a place of service accordingly. Much of that standing is given at birth, but one's decisions in life can add to or take away a bit from that starting point. God is the One Who created these tribes, and He is the One Who decides where they fit into the body at any given point in time. And He does the same with us.

What I want to say here is that we need to recognize that we are made to fit into a certain place in this body of Believers, and if we don't recognize that, if we kick and kick against that, we will be miserable. We will be miserable because we will be trying to camp where we don't belong. And the whole body will suffer. The whole body will be less organized, less effective, less fruitful, less at peace, and in the end, less united. If you want to sow discord, tell everybody that they all have the exact same potential as everyone else. That's actually cruel, and it's one of the problems with our modern school systems, which make so many students feel like utter failures when, sometimes, they didn't have the potential to get the A to begin with. It's not right. When we preach that everyone in a class is built with the same potential, we set up at least half of them for deep disappointment at an age when they can't really process what's happening; they just absorb labels others smother them with and which they put on their own selves, burdening themselves for the rest of their lives. It's ok if the label is accurate, but how often does the world see us accurately? If the label is "slow, stupid, lazy, rebellious, a follower, weak"- whatever, there's real lasting damage there. The idea that we are all born with the same potential is not what we see either in the Word or in the world.

Don't get me wrong, everyone is to be respected equally as a child of God, but it's simply not true that everyone is born with the same potential to fill any role in society if you work hard

enough and have a totally level playing field. This is a lie that causes great dissatisfaction in life and great bitterness and, in the end, discord and disunity.

Many of us even if we are older still have a great deal of healing to do from the wounds we received as children, all the disappointments, all the rankings, all the comparisons of yourself to others. Parents do this to kids, too. They compare this child to that one. And then you go to the park and this mother goes on and on about her child's accomplishments, and that father feels bad that his child is not accomplishing like that. These ideas, these comparisons, trickle down to the children, who often directly overhear these conversations, and they cause great pain. And it's usually built on a lie. We spend the rest of our lives trying to come to terms with those scars.

What I want to say today is that you may have not been created to be that straight-A student you so admired and wished you could be like. You may not have been created to be that fantastic athlete. You may not have been created to be the person who is able to be a leader at work and earn that salary. Maybe you never had that potential because that's simply not the role you're made for. That's no excuse to not give it a shot, to push yourself to maximize the potential you HAVE been given with all your strength. You don't even know what you're capable of until you try, and REALLY try. But if you have tried and found yourself unable in this area or that one, stop beating yourself up; just accept that that's not you. Know your place and be okay with that. I'm not talking about failing in terms of sin, here. I'm talking about skills and roles. Stop beating yourself up because your little sister was a whiz kid on the piano while you couldn't seem to ever tie your shoes right. Accept who you are made to be, and be at peace, and fully indwell that space, that land that you are given to inhabit.

The haftarah powerfully speaks this message to us about knowing and accepting one's place, and being fruitful where you're meant to be planted. It is the story in 1 Samuel of Jonathan and David. By rights, Jonathan should have been the next king, but Jonathan was a mensch, and he recognized that someone else was created to fill that role. He saw that God was elevating David, not him. And he just accepted that! Brave and honorable and loving Jonathan is one of the greatest characters in the whole Bible. And we can say this because Jonathan had the faith to accept his position, even when his father was yelling at him for staying friends with David. King Saul even says, "Don't you know that as long as David lives, you will not be secured on the throne?" But none of that matters to Jonathan. He saw what he was created for, to be a friend and support to the future king, and that brought great honor too, and he put his energies into the role that he was given. We remember him down to today as being worthy of much honor.

I was not born as a genetic descendant of Abraham, at least not that I know of. So I'm starting out in a different and a lower place of honor than those who ARE descended from Abraham. Fine. I don't need to have that kind of honor if I'm not made for that place. My life won't run as it should if I'm endlessly pining away for the honor that I'm not created for. Dan and Asher and Naphtali had to accept their places on the north side, mentioned last. And once you do accept your spot, you can really bloom there, and the whole body benefits and is united and empowered.

Yeshua

Well, let's move on now to a couple of direct applications to Yeshua in this discussion. We started out today talking about how this portion represents a kind of manifesting of holiness in the physical realm so that we can see it. It's one thing to receive the Word, the commandment, to be holy, and it's something else to arrange your camp according to that commandment. We talked about Shavuot being a step where the Word is manifested in writing on parchment. The Word is made concrete in this way, but God has more in store where that came from. At the next great feast season, in the fall, we see the Word manifested even more tangibly than as the written Torah. We see the Word born in human form, tabernacling among us, placed in a manger. He grows up and becomes a teacher, and He opens His mouth to teach, and what comes forth is the living Word in an even more concrete form. Yeshua is the Word that we can have a real relationship with. The Word made flesh is even greater than the Word on parchment. He lived among us and spoke to us the very words of God that the people needed to hear in each moment. It's amazing to think about.

Well, that's all for today. Thank you for listening. I will include a link to an outline below. May God make us into a people who not only hear the call to holiness but who also manifest that holiness outwardly. May we be a people who embrace the death that is necessary to enter into a higher level of life, the new lines that separate the holy from the common in our lives. And as we rise up to that higher level, may we wholeheartedly accept our role in the body in that place, in that time, so that we can fully rise up to be the people He has made us to be. Shalom.