

6-4-22 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene
Torah Portion: Numbers 1:1-4:20 (B'midbar)
Haftarah: Hos 1:10-2:20
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Rom 2:17-29

Family of G-d

Central question of this message: What is your spiritual lineage?

This parasha is the first of the book of B'midbar (lit. "in the wilderness"), or as it appears in most Bibles of today, "Numbers." It takes its name from the seventh through the ninth words in the English, and the fifth word in the original Hebrew.

Num 1:1-4

1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses **in the wilderness** of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, 2 "Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, every male, head by head 3 from twenty years

old and upward, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel, you and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

וַיֹּדֶבֶר	יְהוָה	אֶל־	מֹשֶׁה	בְּמִדְבַּר	סִינַי	בְּאֶהֱל	מִוֶּעֶד	בְּאֶחָד	1:1
And spake	the Lord	unto	Moses	in the wilderness of	Sinai,	in the tabernacle of	the congregation,	on the first	
1696	3068	413	4872	4057	5514	168	4150	259	
לַחֹדֶשׁ	הַשְּׁנִי	בַּשָּׁנָה	הַשְּׁנִית	לְצֵאתָם	מֵאֶרֶץ	מִצְרַיִם	לֵאמֹר:		
day	the second	in year	the second	after they were come	out of the land of	Egypt,	saying,		
9999	8145	8141	8145	3318	776	4714	559		
שָׂאוּ	אֶת־	רֹאשׁ	כָּל־	עֵדָת	בְּנֵי־	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם		2
Take ye	the sum of	all	the congregation of	the children of	Israel,	after their families,			
5375	853	7218	3605	5712	1121	3478	4940		
לְבֵית	אֲבֹתָם	בְּמִסְפָּר	שְׁמוֹת	כָּל־	זָכָר	לְגִלְגָּלָתָם:			
by the house of	their fathers,	with the number of	names, their	every	male	by their polls;			
1004	1	4557	9999	3605	2145	1538			
מִזֶּכֶן	עֲשָׂרִים	שָׁנָה	וְנִמְעָלָה	כָּל־	יָצָא	צָבָא	בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	הִפְקִדוּ	אֹתָם
From old	twenty	years	and upward,	all	that are able to go forth	to war	in Israel:	shall number	them
1121	6242	8141	4605	3605	3318	6635	3478	6485	853
לְצִבְאוֹתָם	אַתָּה	וְאַהֲרֹן:							
by their armies.	thou	and Aaron							
6635	859	175							

Here we see a counting that is so prominent, that it gives the book in Christian tradition its name – “Numbers.”

I have heard many times some of our sweet brothers and sisters in the normative Church mock this portion of Torah for what they believe to be a ponderous passage of census-taking which has little or no relevance to the “Christian life” today. I think they do this at their peril. There is much to see in these passages, if we will only but look.

This census is important to the historical record of the exodus, and to the entry into the Land, because an entire generation was to perish in the wanderings because of the sin of the spies which comes a bit later in the story. We will see that the numbers found in this census will be very close to the numbers of those who will enter the Land. That shows us that G-d will execute judgment, but He nonetheless preserves the People for His purposes.

So, the question is simply this: Who was counted among those who were counted? Only ethnic Jews who could quickly relate their tribal affiliation? What about those of the “mixed multitude” that came out of Egypt who had no family lineage in Israel – they didn’t have a “father’s household” to be part of.

In our nation, we regularly conduct a census of the people who are living here. For many years we have counted among the “residents” of any state even those who are in that state illegally, and who are not legitimate “residents” in the classical sense. They are more in the nature of “trespassers” who would not be counted among the residents of any home in America, even if found within its four walls.

But in the counting we have here in today's parasha, there are no "illegals" nor "trespassers." There are only members of the covenant. But it seems that people just keep wanting to create dividing walls based upon some sort of irrelevant category.

Here, the text itself gives an opportunity for those who insist upon division to find division. But any text will do, if you are intent on division.

It was a division between believers with Jewish ancestry and believers who came to faith from among the nations, which was dividing the congregation at Rome, and caused Paul to write maybe his most theological letter of all.

I have heard a question asked, particularly by messianic believers, which seeks to determine whether a person is "Jewish by birth" or not. So, I want us to first consider what it means to be "Jewish by birth" as that phrase is generally used today to distinguish between Jews who have an established lineage in the Jewish people, from those who do not have such a demonstrable lineage, regardless of their grafted-in status.

I find this genetically-based distinction to be troubling, and entirely unbiblical. It is clear to me that the “mixed multitude”¹ which left Egypt in the exodus was considered as “sons of Israel” from the night of the Passover forward, even as it stood before the Mountain to receive Torah. And the example of Ruth is conclusive proof that the grafting-in process is effective to join a person – even from the people of Moab – to the People of G-d and into the lineage of Messiah. If there was any question left, Paul in his letter to the Romans (in chapter 11) removed all doubt.

But it seems there is a concept lingering in the minds of people to the effect that if you can demonstrate a robust Jewish heritage, you are in some way superior to the person who has been grafted-into the cultivated olive tree and has no such pedigree. This cancerous theology has crept into the UMJC and the MJAA. This is the main reason that our congregation will not be affiliated with either organization. I refuse to allow anyone who has come into the covenant of faith to be referred to as “second class.”

I find that the theology of genetic hierarchy especially troubling, because it denies one of the highest attributes of G-d, which is to be One who gathers to Himself a people from among all peoples of the

¹ Exodus 12:38

world. Scripture tells us that He gathers all who will come into a covenant relationship with Himself – even if that covenant relationship has internal divisions and levels based upon the heart and dedication of the believer, and the choosing of the Almighty for specific service.

The Jewish people have also been afflicted with this kind of bad theology. Jewish people have historically determined “Jewishness” in a particular way that seems to have begun with one test, then later morphed into another. The initial test is found evidenced in our parasha today.

One of the first things to notice right away in the census of those who are to be in the army, is the phrase,

"Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their families, **by their fathers' households.**"

The distinguished Jewish scholar Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra², also known more commonly as Ibn Ezra, taught this phrase in Torah means that being Jewish, “is not determined by the mother.”

² He lived in Cordoba Spain from 1089 to 1167, and was one of the most noted Biblical commentators of the Middle Ages.

This makes sense, because all throughout Jewish history, Jewish male children have been known as being “son of” their father.³ The common way of expressing that in the Jewish name follows the example of: Elyahu ben Abraham, Yehoshua ben Nun, and so forth.

And this paradigm is further reinforced by the practice of a bride when she leaves her parents’ home and enters into the home of her husband. She then is reckoned to be part of the husband’s family, and his tribe.

In the parasha, we see that all the tribal census is expressed as “sons of...” This not only was important in establishing an army from each tribe, but also illustrated a sense of patriarchal lineage.

It was the lineage of Jewishness expressed by being the son or daughter of the father that allowed Moses’ two sons to be Jews although their mother was a Midianite woman. The same thing applied to the two sons of Joseph, even though they were eventually adopted by their grandfather Jacob.

³ In some instances, the Jew is identified as being the “son of” his grandfather, or an even more remote male progenitor. An example is “Messiah son of David.” This indicates Messiah was of the line of David.

Eventually, some of our people settled on another method of reckoning whether a child was Jewish. They decided that Jewishness was passed on through the mother, and not the father.

The matrilineal view is held by Orthodox and Conservative groups, while the Reform and Reconstructionist groups generally recognize a child as Jewish if either parent is Jewish, and the child is raised with a Jewish identity.

The shift from patrilineal to matrilineal Jewishness seems to have been established well before the birth of Yeshua. The basis in Scripture for that position is based upon a passage in Deuteronomy:

Deut 7:1-5

7 "When the Lord your God shall bring you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and shall clear away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, 2 and when the Lord your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy

them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. **3 Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. 4 For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you. 5** But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire.

In the Talmud at Kiddushin 68b, we find the discussion on this passage.

Rabbi Yoḥanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai: As the verse states with regard to the same issue: “Your daughter you shall not give to his son...for he will turn away your son from following Me” (Deuteronomy 7:3–4). Since the verse is concerned that after one’s daughter marries a gentile, the father will lead his children away from the service of God, this indicates that your son, i.e., your grandson, from a Jewish woman is

called “your son” by the Torah, but your son from a gentile woman is not called your son, but her son.

I find no satisfaction in this analysis, and in fact I find it strained. I suspect that these two Sages of our people had come to a conclusion regarding what a correct interpretation of this passage should be, and forcibly applied it to the concept of Jewishness in mixed marriages.

A careful reading of the passage simply states that intermarriage with foreigners is a source of danger, “For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods.” Need we argue that ungodly women have a tendency to lead godly men astray? Recall the stories of Samson, Pinchas, and the treachery of Baalam.

The second rationale for matrilineal Jewishness I have heard that does make a bit more sense is the fact that you always know the Jewish nature of the mother, but that of the father may be in doubt.

This rationale seems to have been developed from the fact that many nations have conquered our people not only in Israel, but also during the captivities in Babylon and elsewhere. Further, in various places

on the earth outside of the Land, our people have been oppressed and subjugated. The Holocaust is a recent historical example, and the captivity of a number of our people by Hamas in Gaza is still fresh on our minds. Recent reports have documented over 10,000 separate instances of sexual abuse of those hostages by Hamas terrorists.

In each of those historical persecutions Gentile men found our women to be convenient prey for sexual abuse. Since those Gentile men were not constrained by the limitations of Torah, they took advantage of the opportunity. Some of those Jewish women bore children. What is to be the lineage of those children? Our Sages determined that in any case where a Jewish woman bears a child (regardless of the Jewishness of the father) that child is Jewish.

The most common halacha in the Jewish community of today is that a child's Jewishness is determined by his mother, but a child's status as being of Israel, the Leviim, or the Cohenim is derived through his father.

This halacha resolved that thorny problem of children of rape, but it opened a door to another problem that yet remains – mixed

marriages. And since the genealogical records have been lost in the destruction of the Second Temple, it is rare indeed if any Jew knows his tribal affiliation, or whether he is of the Levitical line. So, the patriarchal lines are mostly unknown as well.

In the case of a mixed marriage, normative Judaism of today (in the Orthodox and Conservative groups) says that when a Jewish man marries a woman from the nations, their children are not Jews. If the wife converts and becomes a Jew, then her children are Jewish. This applies regardless of how the children view their own identity, or whether they are raised in a Jewish faith.

Conversely, if a Jewish woman marries a man from the nations, their children are considered Jewish. Again this applies regardless of how the children view their own identity, or whether they are raised in a Jewish faith.

I find these artificial dividing lines somewhat easy to apply, but also artificially constraining, and prone to inequity. One size never quite fits all. So, I personally reject these halachic determinations as too rigid, and prefer to apply one which is more consistent with what I find in the whole of Scripture.

Let's look at how Scripture shows us a better understanding, and to develop what I believe is a more fair halacha.

But before doing that, I wish to point out how the gospels were able to resolve this dual-lineage issue with Messiah. The gospel of Matthew⁴ gives us Messiah's pedigree through the line of Joseph, showing His right to the throne of David. The gospel of Luke⁵ traces Mary's lineage. Thus, the modern objections to either the Jewishness of Yeshua, or His status as the "Root of Jesse" are answered, and refuted.

Are genealogies important to the Kingdom of G-d today, or in the future?

Scripture suggests that there were some in the Body of faith who considered family lineage to be an important factor in how G-d values us. Paul warned against having disputes regarding these things, for they are destructive to the unity of faith.

⁴ Matt 1:1-16

⁵ Luke 3:23-38

Titus 3:1-11

3 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, 2 to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. 3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. **8 This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good deeds.⁶ These things are good and profitable for men. 9 But shun foolish controversies and**

⁶ The phrase “good deeds” is a Hebrew idiom. It means keeping Torah with a good heart.

**genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law;
for they are unprofitable and worthless.⁷ 10 Reject a
factious man after a first and second warning, 11
knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning,
being self-condemned.**

So, it seems that genealogical one-upmanship has been around for a very long time. But will genealogy be important in the millennial kingdom? We have that answer in Scripture as well. We see the answer in the context of the Second Coming of Messiah, Who will execute judgment on all those who hate Him. In the midst of that, there will be an ingathering of those who love Him, and these gathered will be elevated to positions not only to be adopted as children, but also high positions of service in the Temple.

The passage begins with a statement of the restoration of Israel as a people in the Land.

Isa 66:12-24

⁷ He condemns a prideful assertion of a family lineage which would be used to build oneself up. He also condemns those who wish to impose their personal halacha upon others, rather than allowing others to work-out their own faith walk. See the instructions in Rom 14:5 on being personally satisfied in your individual walk.

12 For thus says the Lord, "Behold, I extend peace to her
like a river, And the glory of the nations like an
overflowing stream;

And you shall be nursed, you shall be carried on the hip
and fondled on the knees.

13 "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort
you; And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

14 Then you shall see this, and your heart shall be glad,
And your bones shall flourish like the new grass;

And the hand of the Lord shall be made known to His
servants,

But He shall be indignant toward His enemies.

15 For behold, the Lord will come in fire

And His chariots like the whirlwind,

To render His anger with fury,

And His rebuke with flames of fire.

16 For the Lord will execute judgment by fire

And by His sword on all flesh,

And those slain by the Lord will be many.

17 "Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go to the gardens,

Following one in the center,

Who eat swine's flesh, detestable things, and mice,

Shall come to an end altogether," declares the Lord.

18 "For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall

come and see My glory. **19 "And I will set a sign**

among them and will send survivors from them to the

nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Rosh, Tubal,

and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither

heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will

declare My glory among the nations.20 "Then they

shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a

grain offering to the Lord, on horses, in chariots, in

litters, on mules, and on camels, to My holy mountain

Jerusalem," says the Lord, "just as the sons of Israel

bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of

the Lord. **21 "I will also take some of them for priests**

and for Levites," says the Lord.

22 "For just as the new heavens and the new earth

Which I make will endure before Me," declares the Lord,

"So your offspring and your name will endure.

23 "And it shall be from new moon to new moon
And from sabbath to sabbath,

All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says
the Lord.

24 "Then they shall go forth and look

On the corpses of the men

Who have transgressed against Me.

For their worm shall not die,

And their fire shall not be quenched;

And they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind."

Some may speculate that the phrase "Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the Lord," refers only to ethnic Jews, since the passage begins with a prophecy directed especially to those Jews who love G-d. That would be an incorrect assumption. Yeshua cleared that up when He was told that his mother and brothers awaited a conference with Him.

Mark 3:31-35

31 And His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him, and called Him. 32 And a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." 33 And answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" 34 And looking about on those who were sitting around Him, **He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! 35 "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."**

This seems clear that family genealogy is irrelevant to Yeshua, but the heart and the actions of all people are relevant to their status.

So, what about those in the ethnic Jewish community who can prove decisively their “Jewishness” through both their father’s line and their mother’s line? Does their verifiable pedigree alone grant them unbridled favor before G-d? Paul gives us that answer in his letter to the Roman congregation. One cannot remain in the status of “born Jewish” if you are a hypocrite.

Rom 2:17-29

17 But if you bear the name "Jew," and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, 18 and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, 19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth⁸, 21 you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? **23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24 For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," just as it is written. 25 For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26** If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the

⁸ The Torah is also called "the truth."

requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Thus Paul clearly dispels the final basis upon which the normative Jewish community today judges whether a person “is Jewish.”

Isaiah spoke of foreigners who would come to our G-d, and become so grafted-in that they will be permitted to come to the Temple to make offerings (which action is prohibited to those outside the Jewish family circle).

Isa 56:1-8

"Preserve justice, and do righteousness,

For My salvation⁹ is about to come

And My righteousness to be revealed.¹⁰

2 "How blessed is the man who does this,

And the son of man who takes hold of it;

Who keeps from profaning the sabbath,

And keeps his hand from doing any evil."¹¹

**3 Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the
Lord say,**

**"The Lord will surely separate me from His
people."**

Neither let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."

4 For thus says the Lord,

To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths,

And choose what pleases Me,

And hold fast My covenant,

⁹ Lit. "my Yeshua."

¹⁰ Yeshua revealed G-d's righteousness by showing us how to live-out Torah properly.

¹¹ G-d showed us in Torah what is good and what is evil.

5 To them I will give in My house and within My walls
a memorial,

And a name better than that of sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name which will not be
cut off.

**6 "Also the foreigners who join themselves to the
Lord,**

**To minister to Him, and to love the name of the
Lord,**

**To be His servants, every one who keeps from
profaning the sabbath,**

And holds fast My covenant;

7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain,

And make them joyful in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be
acceptable on My altar;

For My house will be called a house of prayer for all
the peoples."

8 The Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel,
declares,

"Yet others I will gather to them, to those already
gathered."

The grafting-in process is a gradual one. One goes from "I believe in the One true G-d" level to "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

This confession of a heart-felt alignment and association, together with following the mainstream traditions of the Jewish people as a visual affirmation of that commitment, is what brings one into fully grafted-in status. There is normally a ceremonial aspect to that full commitment, which involves a mikveh, and the conferring of a new Hebrew name upon the person who has entered the People by full adoption. That process is open to anyone, and we have assisted a number of people in making that final step of transition.

Acts 10:44-48

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45 And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. 46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, **47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"** 48 **And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.**

I want to be clear that it is not essential that any person coming to G-d in faith be fully grafted-into the Jewish people. There are multiple levels in the covenant relationship. A person can rise to the level that he wishes to achieve. There is no pressure to grow more, but the door is always open to progress to higher levels in that relationship. Our ministry here is to keep those doors to

higher levels always open, and to equip and encourage people to grow in their faith.

Our mission at Roeh Israel Abilene has two aspects: to provide a place for those in the normative church where they can find forms of worship together with deeper theological teachings consistent with what Messiah and the Apostles enjoyed; and also to provide a place where Jews can come to worship as their families have done for generations, and while doing so can see that a recognition of Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah is perfectly consistent with the faith of our Fathers, and is the best expression of that faith.

So, don't be concerned about whether or not you might have any Jewish ancestry, or tribal affiliation. Most of all, don't fear that the L-rd will in his kingdom separate you from His people. G-d is in the ingathering business, and we are workers in that field white unto harvest to accomplish His will.

Ps 133

133 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is

For brothers to dwell together in unity!