

Torah Portion: Beha'alotcha (Numbers 8:1-12:16)

[The focus of this Torah portion series is family structure and function as revealed in Scripture. I.e., headship, patriarchy, marriage, etc, graduating to understanding the community and Israel as a whole. If you have not read other portions up to this point, you may want to, as parts build on previous lessons in Torah, available at: <https://natsab.com/torah-portion-series/>]

God has a specific order of authority and He affirms it often and in different ways. As Israel went into the wilderness, God appointed and affirmed the Levites as a specific means of Tabernacle maintenance and means of approach to Himself. In doing so, God both affirms the position of the firstborn, but also centralizes (for lack of better word) the worship in Israel. No longer was the firstborn the priest of the family. However, we do need to note that His intent was a Kingdom of priests and His future plan is a kingdom of priests... More in a minute.

First, the appointment and consecration of the Levites in stead of the firstborn:

Numbers 8:¹² Now the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls; then offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the Lord, to make atonement for the Levites. ¹³ You shall have the Levites stand before Aaron and before his sons so as to present them as a wave offering to the Lord.

¹⁴ "Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. ¹⁵ Then after that the Levites may go in to serve the tent of meeting. But you shall cleanse them and present them as a wave offering; ¹⁶ for they are wholly given to Me from among the sons of Israel. I have taken them for Myself instead of every first issue of the womb, the firstborn of all the sons of Israel. ¹⁷For every firstborn among the sons of Israel is Mine, among the men and among the animals; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself. ¹⁸ But I have taken the Levites instead of every firstborn among the sons of Israel.

Recall, Exodus 19,

Exodus 19:^{3b}“Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. ⁵Now then, *if* you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, ***then*** you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶ and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

Notice, this is written to the *whole house* of Jacob. All thirteen tribes. Peter affirms this in,

1 Peter 2:⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God’s* own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

And, he uses multiple prophetic lines from Hosea and Exodus to make his point.

Still, for our purposes, God has an order and He sticks to it. Just as He is very intentional in our portion with assigning particular mediatorial duties to the Levites, He has particular duties assigned to man, as head of house, and to woman, as helpmeet. And, our Numbers passage also affirms the import of the firstborn.

I will not address the very important second Passover, however, I do recommend Steve Moutria’s study and thoughts concerning the prophetic significance of it. What is important for our study to note is that the sons of Israel were instructed to observe the Passover and some were unclean and could not. What is significant is that they didn’t simply make an excuse or assume there was no other option, rather they went to Moshe and essentially asked, ‘how *can* we observe the Passover?’

This demonstrates a wonderful heart of desire and submission to God, their Head! No excuses. No ignoring of the day, rather a *desire* to partake in a righteous manner. Moshe approached God who gives the answer of ‘Second Passover!’ This is a wonderful picture of righteousness. Men, we need to seek out *how* we can walk in obedience to God, rather than avoid His ways. Women, this is a wonderful example of how to approach your husband and walk in submission or

obedience. I.e., if you are unclear on a matter, or need guidance because something he asks isn't possible, then approach and respectfully, out of a heart of desire to please, ask *how* to do what he wants done. Beautiful!

The latter part of chapter nine is filled with examples of obedience to the Head! Notice the underlined.

Numbers 9:¹⁵ Now on the day that the tabernacle was erected the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle, until morning. ¹⁶ So it was continuously; the cloud would cover it *by day*, and the appearance of fire by night. ¹⁷ Whenever the cloud was lifted from over the tent, afterward the sons of Israel would then set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the sons of Israel would camp. ¹⁸ At the command of the Lord the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the Lord they would camp; as long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. ¹⁹ Even when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle for many days, the sons of Israel would keep the Lord's charge and not set out. ²⁰ If sometimes the cloud remained a few days over the tabernacle, according to the command of the Lord they remained camped. Then according to the command of the Lord they set out. ²¹ If sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning, when the cloud was lifted in the morning, they would move out; or if it remained in the daytime and at night, whenever the cloud was lifted, they would set out. ²² Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out; but when it was lifted, they did set out. ²³ At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out; they kept the Lord's charge, according to the command of the Lord through Moses.

Simply, the authority structure was working and the people were obedient to it!!

Chapter 10 gives more details and demonstrates that Israel was obedient in the details of how/when to march, etc...

Chapter 11, however, begins to paint a different picture of complaining and dissatisfaction. Discontent with the head is rebellion.

God uses difficulty and adversity in careful measure to expose the heart. His people, once exposed, are disciplined and purified.

Notice, too, that men are the ones at the door of the tent. They are *leading their families* into judgement through their complaining. In coming portions we will see whole families judged due to the sinful leadership of the head. Here are select verses from chapter 11 with interspersed commentary..

Numbers 11:¹ Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard *it*, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed *some* of the outskirts of the camp. ² The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died out. ³ So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them.

⁴ The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? ⁵ We remember the fish which we used to eat *free in Egypt*, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, ⁶ but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna."

They had flocks and herds. And, I presume that manna could be made into many different things and was perfect, or near perfect food. Still, the people complained!

‘Free in Egypt?’ How quickly they have forgotten the burden of slavery and desire to return to ‘Babylon.’ How will we act in the wilderness? These lessons are written for our instruction... (I Cor. 10:1-11!!!)

The fire on the fringes of the camp is not enough to get the people’s attention, so they cry louder!!

Numbers 11:10 Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased. ¹¹ So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the

burden of all this people on me? ¹² Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You swore to their fathers'? ¹³ Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat!' ¹⁴ I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. ¹⁵ So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness."

Moshe's response is a bit different. He doesn't quite complain, but says, 'Lord, this is too much to bear, please kill me before I come unglued.' Or, 'Don't push me to the edge, I don't want to see my faults. I am weak.'

Numbers 11:¹⁸ Say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, "Oh that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well-off in Egypt." Therefore the Lord will give you meat and you shall eat. ¹⁹ You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, ²⁰ but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"' ²¹ But Moses said, "The people, among whom I am, are 600,000 on foot; yet You have said, 'I will give them meat, so that they may eat for a whole month.' ²² Should flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to be sufficient for them? Or should all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to be sufficient for them?"

Clearly, the people not only had flocks and herds, but fish as well... They just wanted a handout and they wanted to dictate what the handout is! Mob rule. God says, 'NO!!!'

He gives them what they think they want, then judges the greedy ones!

Numbers 11:³¹ Now there went forth a wind from the Lord and it brought quail from the sea, and let *them* fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp and about two cubits *deep* on the surface of the ground. ³² The people spent all day and all night and all the next day,

and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers) and they spread *them* out for themselves all around the camp. ³³ While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague. ³⁴ So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah (meaning: graves of the greedy), because there they buried the people who had been greedy. ³⁵ From Kibroth-hattaavah the people set out for Hazeroth, and they remained at Hazeroth.

Understand, God tests His people. He did it then. He will do it in the future wilderness.

Ezekiel 20:³³ “As I live,” declares the Lord God, “surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. ³⁴ I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; ³⁵ and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. ³⁶ As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,” declares the Lord God. ³⁷ “I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; ³⁸ and **I will purge from you the rebels** and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the Lord.

Obedience, quiet submission, and patient waiting are the proper reaction of those who place their trust in their Head. Paul affirms in many places that a woman’s treatment of her husband is to reflect the man’s treatment of his Head. Breakdown at either level is rebellion. Rebellion is sin and brings judgment. Chava rebelled, Adam rebelled, etc...

If we are to be His people, if Israel is to be restored, then we must consider the authority structure and learn to operate within it as HIS guideline for how we are to function and interact. Stepping outside of that structure leads to judgment!

I’ll not belabor the point.

Numbers 12 opens a different discussion related to headship and patriarchy.

Numbers 12:¹ Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman);

This verse often causes a stir because most of Christendom just cannot wrap their heads around the possibility that Moshe had more than one woman. So, let's consider the possibilities and several related verses and options.

Without question, we know that Abraham and Jacob both had more than one woman and God offers not a single syllable of condemnation. In fact, in both circumstances He blesses, and in both circumstances the strife arises from women not content with their lot/condition and instead push for more than what God has given. [Hagar demands higher recognition and placement than her master (Genesis 16:4), Sarai; Rachel begrudges Leah because of her own lack of children due to a womb God closed (Genesis 30:1-2.) Shades of the same types of discontentment in the wilderness, eh?]

We further know that Egypt was a pagan culture that was reflected by later Greco-Romanism that codified monogamy only as the sole practice. Egypt itself was most likely monogamy-only with the exception of royalty, therefore after 283 years of captivity, Israel was pretty steeped in that doctrine.

Moshe was married to Zipporah decades before this chapter (Exodus 2:15-22), but had sent her back to her father for some reason between Exodus 4:20 and Exodus 18:2. In Exodus 18:5, we find Jethro bringing Zipporah back and again placing her in Moshe's care. The point is, we clearly see Moshe with Zipporah within a year of the Numbers 12 scenario. Further, Numbers 10:29 identifies Moshe as married to Zipporah at that point by naming his then father-in-law as Reuel (Jethro) the Midianite.

Numbers 12:²⁹ Then Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out to the place of which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us and we will do you good, for the Lord has promised good concerning Israel." ³⁰ But he said to him, "I will not come, but rather will go to my *own* land and relatives." ³¹ Then he said, "Please do not leave us, inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will be as eyes for us. ³² So it will be, if you go with us, that whatever good the Lord does for us, we will do for you."

Hobab is further listed as Moshe's father-in-law (I'll let the reader sort that out, ;)) in Judges 4:11 and 1:16.

There are some who argue that Moshe divorced Zipporah and then married the Cushite woman, however, the text never says that and the circumstantial evidence just presented is that Yitro/Reuel remained Moshe's father-in-law. Typically, this argument stems from a monogamy-only paradigm that is entirely absent from the Torah that Moshe wrote.

Others argue, again from a monogamy-only paradigm, that the Cushite woman *is* Zipporah, however, we know that Zipporah was a Midianite and both Miriam and Aharon had known her for at least two years before this eruption. Those who take this position often try to claim she could be both Cushite and Midianite which is a real stretch considering the regions are quite different.

Then, there is the apparent complication of Moshe having a Kenite father-in-law who was the son of his Midianite father-in-law....

Here's what I think was really going on: I believe that one of the tasks that Moshe was accomplishing in the wilderness was reestablishing polygyny among Israel as a God allowed, even ordained, means of caring for and covering/protecting women. Miriam and Aharon didn't approve and God demonstrated very clearly whose side *HE* stood on. Moshe was acting righteously and Miraim/Aharon were not. Period.

Both Christendom and Judaism have a Greco-Roman induced monogamy-only mindset that God never establishes or encourages. God *never* disciplines or castigates a single man in Scripture for taking more than one woman, though He does address, in very clear terms, the taking of *another man's woman* (adultery). God describes Himself as having more than one wife in Ezekiel 23 and Jeremiah 3, and He ensures the Hall of Faith chapter (Hebrew 11) lists numerous men 'approved by God' who have more than one woman. E.g., Abraham, Jacob, Gideon, David, etc.

Moshe, by taking the Cushite woman, is demonstrating that any, including teachers and elders in Israel (see the mistranslation of 'mia' in nearly every English translation of 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6), may have more than one woman as long as they walk righteously and treat each with the dignity and respect the Torah demands.

Selah!

Shabbat shalom.