

The Torah Portions They Never Told Us About – The Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy
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Introduction to the Book of Numbers

- A) Four part Structure
- 1) Chapters 1 – 10 – Preparations for the trek to the Land of Israel
 - 2) Chapter 11 – 20 – Seven different complaints of the Israelites on the way to the Land
 - 3) Chapters 21 – 25 – Parshat Balak
 - 4) Chapters 26 – 36 – Issues pertaining to division and inheritance of the Land
- B) Focus on the first unit of the Book of Numbers - Chapters 1 to 10
- 1) Material that fits the theme of preparations for the trek to the Land of Israel
 - a) Chapter 1, verses 1 – 46; all of chapter 2 - Counting the people and arranging for how they will be encamped as they travel.
 - b) Chapter 1, verses 47 – 53; all of chapters 3 and 4 - Counting the Levites and assigning them their tasks in transporting and disassembling /assembling the Tabernacle, and the commandment to consecrate the Levites to their sacred status, which includes having them symbolically replace the firstborn.
 - c) Chapter 5, verses 1 – 4 – Purifying the camp in preparation for the journey. [see below 2) (a), (b), (c), (d)]
 - d) Chapter 7, verses 1 – 88 - Gifts of the chieftains of carts and oxen (among other things). Moshe gives them to the Levites to transport the Tabernacle. [see below b (e), (f)]
 - e) Chapter 8, verses 5 – 26 – The actual execution of the consecration of the Levites and their replacement of the firstborn. [see below (g)]
 - f) Chapter 9, verses 15 - 23 - Explanation of how the cloud will lead them in their travels.
 - g) Chapter 10, verses 10 - Instructions to fashion trumpets to (among other things) facilitate conveying travel orders to the people.
 - h) Chapter 10, verses 11 – 36 - The actual descriptions of breaking camp and beginning to move.
 - 2) Material that does not seem to fit the theme
 - a) Chapter 5, verses 5 - 10 –Law of restitution for thievery and embezzlement
 - b) Chapter 5, verses 11 - 31 – law of the wayward wife
 - c) Chapter 6, verses 1 - 21 – Law of the Nazarite
 - d) Chapter 6, verses 22 - 27 – The priestly blessing
 - e) Chapter 7, verse 89 – Moshe hearing God’s voice
 - f) Chapter 8, verses 1 - 4 – Lighting the Menorah in the Tabernacle
 - g) Chapter 9, verses 1 – 14 – Offering the Passover sacrifice
 - 3) We may be able to explain the presence of about half of material that appears extraneous
 - a) The Passover offering simply occurred at this time of year (and see very end of class)
 - b) In order to understand the mention here of the priestly blessing, God’s voice, and the Menorah, we have to go back and see how the Book of Numbers fits in the story line of Exodus and Leviticus.
- C) The big picture from Exodus, through Leviticus
- 1) Bondage in Egypt, Ten plagues
 - 2) The Exodus – in the spring. The month of the Exodus, Nisan, becomes the first month of the calendar. The Israelites journey to Mt. Sinai.
 - 3) Giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai – 50 days later on the 7th of Sivan, the 3rd month.
 - 4) Moshe immediately goes up the mountain to God for 40 days, and is given a whole body of civil law and instructions to build the Tabernacle and whole it will function.
 - a) Chapter 25, verses 8, 21 – 22 – This is the whole purpose of the Tabernacle.
 - b) Chapter 28, verse 1; chapter 29, verses 1, 9b, 35 – 37 – Commandment of seven day consecration/ordination ceremony for the priests
 - 5) The people make the Golden Calf and it takes 80 days for forgiveness to be achieved. Moshe passes on the people all the commandments about the Tabernacle and construction begins only on the day after Yom Kipur. This is in the seventh month, in the fall.

- 6) Construction is completed is erected on the first day of the first month of the second year since the Exodus. It has been eleven and a half months since then. It is now spring again.
 - a) Chapter 39, verse 32; chapter 40, verses 1 – 2, 9 – 17 – We wonder what the connection is of this anointing and consecrating to the 7 day ceremony commanded earlier.
 - b) Chapter 40, verses 34, 35; Leviticus chapter 1, verse 1 – In light of Exodus, chapter 25, verses 21 – 22, the story is not yet complete.
 - c) Chapter 40, verses 36 – 38 – Pointing us towards the Book of Numbers
 - 7) For the whole book of Leviticus the Israelites remain encamped at Mt. Sinai. The book is completely taken up by commands from God, many of which have to do with the Tabernacle and the priests. They are all undated. The book describes only two narrative events. The second is the incident of the blasphemer. The first is the account of the consecration and ordination ceremony for the priests, which presumably begin on the day the Tabernacle was erected.
 - a) Chapter 8, verses 1 – 5, 33 – 36 – This is the execution of the commandment found in Exodus. What was described in summary fashion at the end of Exodus is described again but this time in full detail.
 - b) Chapter 9, verses 1 – 2, 6, 22 – 24 – An eight day is added to the consecration ceremony, perhaps in expiation for the sin of the Golden Calf. It does not say what was said in the blessing to the people.
- D) Now back to Numbers
- 1) Now that the Tabernacle and the Priests are anointed and consecrated, things are in place to begin the journey to the Land of Israel.
 - 2) The Israelites are still at Mt Sinai and it could very well still be the first month of the second year.
 - a) Chapter 1, verse 1 – The first day of the second month of the second year.
 - 3) Chapter 7, verses 1 – 6 – This is description of events that happened on that 8th day of consecration. This description is placed here – even though it describes events that happened on the day already discussed in Leviticus – because of the carts and the oxen which are for the journey.
 - a) This means that we find that the consecration ceremony is described in three different places:
 - (I) A bare bones description is at the end of the Book of Exodus, to finish off the story of the Tabernacle that was begun in that book.
 - (II) The part focusing on the priests was left for Leviticus before the theme of that book is the priests.
 - (III) The part focusing on the equipment for the journey to the Land of Israel is left for the book of Numbers, where it belongs thematically.
 - 4) Now we can explain some of the material in the first unit of Numbers that appears to be out of place
 - a) Chapter 6, verses 22 – 27 – The priestly blessing
 - (I) Remember where the chronological narrative in Leviticus left off: on the 8th day of the first month, and it said that Moshe and Aaron blessed the people but it neglected there to tell us what blessing they pronounced.
 - (II) Note that the very next verses are chapter 7, about the 8th day of consecration.
 - So it turns out that chapter 6, verses 22 – 27 pick up exactly where the narrative in Leviticus left off, telling what was the content of the blessing mentioned there, and they serve as the segue to chapter 7!!!
 - (It might be asked why these matters that occurred during the first month are not at the beginning of Numbers, before the events that occurred during the first month. The answer is thematic: The Torah did not want to talk about the oxen and the carts until those who will get them and use the – the Levites – have been prepared for their work)
 - b) Chapter 7, verse 89
 - (I) Remember the end of the book of Exodus: Moshe could not enter the Tabernacle and in light of Exodus chapter 25, verses 21 – 22, that meant that the purpose of the Tabernacle was not yet consummated.

- Our verse is the indeed the description of the consummation of the Tabernacle and it comes exactly where it should be – immediately following the third and final description of the ceremony of the ordination and consecration of the priests and the Tabernacle!!!
- c) Chapter 8, verses 1 – 4
- (I) This follows on the heels of chapter 7, verse 89
- Once we have the full and final consummation of the Tabernacle, verses are brought illustrating its daily functioning!!!
- d) Chapter 9, verses 1 – 14
- (I) We explained earlier that this is here simply because it happened at this time, even though it does not fit the theme.
- (II) But one might ask why is it not at the very beginning of the book of Numbers, seeing that it was spoken on the first day of the first month.
- The answer might be that the command of the Second Passover is for the 15 day of the second month, which is right before the journey begins in chapter 10, verse 11 on the 20th day of the second month. So it makes perfect sense that these verses come right before the verses that describe the breaking of camp!!!

For a different approach, see Aviya HaCohen, Parshat Bemidbar – The Order and Contents of Sefer Bemidbar, archive of Virtual Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Har Etzion