

Tribal Equality, Pride and Discipline

The Book of Exodus, Leviticus, as well as Numbers are in a sense parallel narratives, with reference to Israel's years wandering in the Wilderness. We are conventionally disposed to thinking they follow each other in chronology, because the three books follow each other in the Torah's order. But many of the same narratives, lore, and law are in all three books, which tell accounts of the wanderings between leaving Egypt and coming into the Land. The time-frames of the events and lore actually overlap. Deuteronomy also has a parallel narrative; however, it is told differently, from the first-person perspective of Moses. Also, its action is supposed to take place at the end of the Wanderings, and it is consciously specified as a later-occurring narrative which "reviewed" or recalled events which happened earlier. The other three narratives purport to be of events "as they happened."

The placement of Numbers as the last of three makes some sense chronologically, since the book does concentrate attention mostly at the end, upon the conquest of the Trans-Jordanian areas just prior to crossing the Jordan and entering the Promised Land proper. Unlike Exodus, there is little attention to leaving Egypt. Leviticus is intermediary since it doesn't deal with the Exodus nor does it deal with the final preparations before entering the Land. But Numbers does span the full time period, according to its first sentence, from "the first day of the second month in the second year since their Exodus from the Land of Egypt." Its stories repeat narratives found in Exodus, such as the "manna and quail" episodes, found in Exodus 16:13 as well as in Numbers 11:31-32. The story of the Spies told in our Parashah had to take place soon after Israel left Egypt, if the forty years of wandering came afterwards.

So as a parallel narrative, not a successive one, what is Numbers trying to convey that is different from the others? In my previous essays, I've discussed Leviticus' view of the Law and Lore from a "Priestly" point of view, and Numbers' narrative as told from the "tribal" perspective of the clan elders and leaders. Yet another way of interpreting Numbers is that its narrative tells of Israel's Wilderness years in terms of their military discipline and readiness for the Conquest of the Land, a military preparedness which was poor at first but improved as the narrative continues. The Conquest itself as well as the subsequent apportionment largely occurred on a tribe-by-tribe basis, and even the ranks of the Israelite forces were arranged tribally, so this too is part of the "tribal" focus.

(continued inside)



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Shelah Lekha

June 24-25, 2022 | 26 Sivan, 5782

SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 623 | Haftarah: p. 635
Kaplan: p. 722 | Haftarah: p. 1192

Candle Lighting | 8:13 pm

Friday Evening Services | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:30 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Paved Paradise

Youth Program | 10:00 am | Teen Leaders | Fidanque Youth Room

Kiddush | following services | Paved Paradise

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 7:25 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 8:10 pm

Shabbat Ends | 9:13 pm

Rosh Hodesh Tammuz begins on Tuesday night.

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): 6:45 pm

(continued from back panel)

The Census, Quail and Spies episodes had to be mentioned in terms of a narrative of readiness or non-readiness of the tribal troops to enter the Land. But there are also legal sections in Numbers which must be interpreted consistent with this theory. One of the major questions in our Parasha is why sacrificial law is discussed here, as opposed to other laws. Here the law is stated in general quantitative terms, in terms of amounts of flour, oil, and wine necessary to go along with the three most common sacrificial animals: For a lamb or kid, a tenth of an ephah flour and a quarter of a hin of both the two liquids, oil and wine. Two-tenths of an ephah flour and one-third hin of both liquids were required for an adult ram, whereas an ox/bull required three-tenths of an ephah of flour and a half-hin of each of the two liquids. The same procedures were to be followed for Israelite as for resident sojourner. Then comes the requirement to give to God a dough portion “off the top” of the first dough being prepared for bread-making, the “hallah.” That is followed by the laws of the sacrificial offerings offered in atonement for when either a leader accidentally doesn’t follow a law, sinning to God, or when one of the people accidentally doesn’t follow a law, sinning thereby. This is followed by the law of one who intentionally sins, and it is then exemplified by a narrative of somebody who intentionally obtained wood (either by gathering or cutting) on the Sabbath and was stoned to death. How does the mention of these laws in particular fit into this “tribal” perspective in Numbers?

Well, the presentation of all of sacrificial law, whether for voluntary offerings or as atonement for inadvertent sin, in this rather generalized way, applying to all sorts of offerings, does create a simple and easy order of discipline for everyone, even the resident alien who is needed to fight alongside Israel, to be able to follow. We find here no mention of priests, not even for the “hallah” dough-offering. It fits into a simple “tribal” order, lacking the detailed differentiation of type of offerings and sins and procedures we find in Leviticus. There is a simple equity of tribal leadership implied here, as if this version of sacrificial law had not yet envisaged the appointment of specialized Aaronic Priests and the simple rituals were expected to be carried out by firstborn clan and tribal appointees. I’ve said before that the “tribal” stage of Israelite life implied a greater degree of democracy, since there had to be a basic equality accepted among the citizen-soldiers. On the other hand, this basic equality of the tribes and a multiplicity of leadership could backfire, as it did with the “spies” and as it does in the following Korah narratives. Perhaps the laws about a leader sinning and the death sentence for the intentional infraction is meant to anticipate the Korah episode. Israel needed a degree of fighting-men camaraderie and equality, and the esprit de corps which comes from tribal flags and pride, but they also needed to submit to a centralized system of discipline before this raging ragtag bunch of tribesmen.

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Members, use our promo code "Shearith15" for a 15% discount!

Super Soccer Stars in partnership with Congregation Shearith Israel is going to be back for Summer Soccer Camps! Check out the registration links in our emails to find the option that’s right for your kids.

Summer Schedule

Shearith Israel’s summer season has officially begun

Throughout the summer, Shabbat morning services begin with Zemiroth at 8:30 am, are held outdoors on Paved Paradise (weather permitting), and are followed by a congenial *kiddush*.

More things to look forward to during our summer season:

- Additional **outdoor services and events** in our beautiful and shaded Paved Paradise Pavilion
- Our **Soccer Camps** for youth, in partnership with Super Soccer Stars
- Continuing our **weekly virtual classes**, including Morning Zoom, Duties of the Heart, and Z.’s “Random Walk” series
- Pre-Shabbat **Virtual Hashcobot**
- **Shabbat Youth Program** with our teen leaders
- and of course, **special lectures and programs with Rabbi Soloveichik!**

Host Your Event on Paved Paradise!

Many individuals and local organizations are hosting events under our tent. With plush turf, shade, ambient lighting, and attractive pricing, you may want to hold your next outdoor event on Paved Paradise too.

Contact Sarah Gross at sgross@shearithisrael.org to inquire.