

Bamidbar:	In the Wilderness	(Ruth)
Torah:	Numbers 1:1-4:20	
Haftarah:	Hosea 1:1-2:20	
Brit Chadashah:	Romans 9:22-33	

On the first Day of the second month of the second year, Moses got the camp ready to travel from the mountain to the Promised Land. They had spend a year learning how to relate to YHVH and learning how to make His Word the foundation of their lives. All the rituals were learned and all the furniture and fixtures of the tabernacle were finished.

In order to establish both a marching order and a camping order, Moses instructs 12 princes of the people to count all the men from 20 years on who were capable of bearing arms. The Levites were counted separately because they were not expected to bear arms. There were just over 600,000 men capable of bearing arms. Children under the age of twenty were not counted. They grew up during the wilderness wandering as they watched the rebels die off.

A silly rabbinic myth says that when the 40 year wanderings were over, any of the rebels who were left alive, suddenly dropped dead. There is no record of this in the Bible. The camp was already organized into groups of 1,000, 100, 50 and 10 for the purposes of spiritual progress, but their travelling order and camping order were yet to be set in place.

The Tabernacle was to be the centre of the camp and the tribes were to camp and to march under four banners – with three tribes per banner. They were to camp East, South, West and North of the Tabernacle. The Eastern banner would have been facing the Tabernacle. The Levites camped according to their families (houses) in an inner circle around the Tabernacle. They camped West, South, North and East, with the Eastern families facing the direction which the Promised Land was in.

Each tribe is then listed according to their banners and the census of each tribe is given. The Levite groups were assigned which holy objects they were to carry. The House of Aaron carried the ark on their shoulders, along with the furniture from the Holy Place. It must have been a wonderful sight with the tribes camping in a big circle around the Tabernacle. Have you found your place in the camp and in the wandering journey we are on to our Father's Home in Glory?

It is traditional to read the scroll of Ruth at Shavuot, because it was during this festival that she arrived home and entered into a Levirate marriage with Boaz. This means that Boaz did not take her into his home, but had relations with her until she conceived a replacement son for her husband, his brother and her father-in-law. We are not told what the men died of, but they spent more than a decade in Moab. The two daughters-in-law had a kinship obligation to stay with their mother-in-law, even after the death of their husbands.

Naomi tries to release both of them, but Ruth refuses to abandon her and return to the paganism of Moab. Her speech is often quoted at marriage ceremonies, but it actually deals with Ruth's expression of faith in YHVH, whom she also refuses to abandon. Naomi returns to the house she and her family lived in before they went to Moab. It was still unoccupied and their arrival was during the barley harvest and Ruth gleans in her rich relative, Boaz' fields until the end of the wheat harvest.

Naomi was both too old to have any more children or to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. During this time, Ruth is allowed to dip her bread and roasted grains in vinegar and to rest whenever the harvesters rested. She gleans a lot of grain and is trying to get enough to see them through the winter. Naomi is impressed by Boaz' generosity and did not seek a levirate marriage with him, because she was likely post-menopausal. At the end of the harvest, while the grain was being winnowed (removed from the stalks), Naomi proposes to Ruth that she seek out a levirate marriage with Boaz.

She may have been disappointed that no relative came forward to offer a levirate marriage, but she wants Ruth to act before the grain is stored and Boaz becomes less accessible. She is not really propositioning him in a sexual manner. She marks where he lies down to guard the grain and uncovered his feet, but not his nudity.

When he wakes in the night, she makes her intentions even clearer and asks him to spread his wing over her. Boaz is impressed that she did not seek for a younger man (and perhaps a full marriage) and asks her to stay the night, so there is no chance she might be seduced or raped in the dark. Boaz tells her that there is one relative closer who also had the right of redemption (Levirate obligation) and he must refuse first.

She returns home with six measures of grain (all her apron could hold) and reports her success to Naomi. As the workers come in from the fields, he sets up a formal tribunal of elders at the gate and asks the relative if he intends to redeem Ruth. He declines to protect his own heritage. He may have been working Abimilech's land and did not want to give it back. Boaz agrees to the Levirate arrangement.

The people bless the arrangement and while Abimilech and Boaz lived among the Ephramites, they were of the tribe of Judah. Once her son is born, Boaz never had relations with her again. We learn that Ruth is three generations before David, so the story happened just before the end of the period of the Judges. Even though her child bearing days were over, Naomi takes the child and feeds him (re-lactates).

What can we learn from this ancient limited love story? It is always better to walk with YHVH during the tough times than to return to the world. A life with Naomi, both of them living as widows and serving YHVH was much better than anything the world had to offer. It is not always easy to walk with the L-RD.

Even in times of trial when we suffer greatly, both the protection and the provision of YHVH will make sure that we survive, in order that later on, we can thrive. It may take time for things to settle down and for the good times to happen, but walking with YHVH according to His Word and letting our lives revolve around the festival cycle is the way to sow for future victory.

Ruth remained a virtuous woman and we should never use whatever trials we are going through as an excuse to misbehave and make moral or spiritual compromises. The timing of G-d makes the universe function the way it should and if we are walking with Him during the process, we will both be blessed and be a blessing. This is the calling and heritage of the House of Israel.

Sermon: Shavuot, a Triple Endowment

Shavuot is the only summer time festival and it is one of three pilgrimage festivals when the people brought in a tithe of their harvests. It marked the second Barley Harvest, the first Wheat Harvest and sometimes, even the first the fruit harvest, since fruit ripens at different times during the year. In the seventies, I lived in a farming community where the farmers only had one harvest, so they were only paid once a year and sometimes may have only offered their tithes once a year.

In our modern world, our salaries are our harvests and we need to pay a tithe of our increase, which means of our net pay. What we pay to the government in deductions helps keep our country moving and provides funds for various initiatives. When we get our Income Tax refund, it is a matter of conscience whether we tithe on it or not. Every time Israel made a harvest, a tithe was paid of the increase. Every time we are paid, we need to pay a tithe of our increase. Israel paid their agricultural tithes three times a year, we also need to tithe whenever we receive our increase.

Now, there is somewhat of a difference of opinion as to the date of Shavuot and it relates to when you start counting down the fifty day Omer. It was to start on the Festival of First Fruits, which is the first Sabbath after Passover. In the Bible, whenever a festival fell on a weekday, that day was considered to be a Sabbath. However, some feel that the counting of the Omer should only begin after the first regular weekday Sabbath after Passover.

Even if there is some difference of opinion about the counting of the Omer, the privilege of observing Shavuot is more important than the timing. On our JNF calendar, this evening is Erev Shavuot and Sunday is the first full day of the festival, which is usually believed to be observed on the 6th of the month of Sivan. It is the time when the Ten Commandments are given for the first time and even though they are sometimes called the Ten Holy or Special Words, they are not really just ten words, but are the ten central concepts of our Biblical faith.

In Hebrew the word: "Torah" really means a teaching and does not always refer to the Ten Commandments. Sometimes the Scriptures use the word Torah for the entire Old Testament, or even for all or some part of the New Testament. When we refer to the teachings of Moses we call them the Torah of Moses. And all of the teachings of Moses are based on these central concepts and even our Messiah agreed that none of the ten sacred concepts had been abolished.

He came to fulfill the promises of G-d contained throughout the Torah or Bible, but the Ten Central concepts are still valid and should not be broken or ignored. The fourth commandment about keeping the Sabbath is still in force today, because it is enshrined in the Ten special Concepts. Replacing the Sabbath with Sunday is never taught in the Bible, but we may have to wait for Judgment Day for all the Sunday worshippers to repent and admit the error of their ways.

The first four commandments deal with our relationship with YHVH. The fifth commandment deals with how we should treat our parents. We should honour both our mother and our father because they passed on the blood of Adam and Eve to us. We can still honour them and yet not listen to them when they ask us to break the Law, either of G-d or of the land we live in. My parents were not believers, but I honoured them, even when my father cut me off.

The last five commandments teach us how to relate to each other. When it says not to kill, it means not to commit murder. Life was born from a committee of two and should only be ended by being judged by a committee of at least two or three. War is another issue as is the use of deadly force by our law enforcement officers. Upholding the law may sometimes require using deadly force to both protect innocent lives and punish criminals who commit violence and break our laws. Not every crime should face the death penalty, but every crime should be subject to a suitable punishment as determined by the rule of law.

When the law of the land violates G-d's laws, we follow the higher law. When our country is invaded or we are attacked by terrorists who want to kill and maim us and our children, we want to enforce justice and not become vigilantes who seek revenge. I am convinced that the war against the Ukraine is an unjust attack on a peaceful, innocent nation. It should be stopped and those who ordered the start of it should be punished. They should face a war crimes tribunal and be obliged to evacuate all of the Ukrainian territory they have unjustly seized and be made to pay reparations for the damaged they have caused.

I am not angry at the soldiers who face each other on the battlefield. I am angry at the political leaders and military leaders who sent them. We should never take the law into our own hands, we should always uphold it, even when we are required to use deadly force against those who break it. I do not want the conflict to widen, I want it to stop so that both sides could begin to recover from the losses they have suffered.

Russia needs leaders and a regime which upholds international law. An elected criminal is still a criminal and we may never see wars ceasing until our Messiah returns, but we are soldiers of the light who uphold biblical standards, even if we are alone in doing so. There are many other criminal regimes in the world and too many terrorist groups. We have to stand for the rule of Law because, truly, we live in G-d's world and will all face the coming judgment, so we had better be good and do the right thing. Nothing less is even minimally acceptable.

Lets move onto number seven which says that we should not commit sexual immorality. All and any sexual activity outside of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage is fornication. In at least three situations, the Bible permits divorce and allows for remarriage to occur. I have prepared a brochure on this teaching which you are invited to read, because all that we believe and all that we permit, should be based on the Word alone and not on the opinions of man.

Sex should occur only in marriage and marriage should never violate three things: kinship, gender or species. Not accepting the LGBT agenda does not make you homophobic, it makes you homo-repulsed. It is still illegal in several countries and while I do not feel that homosexuals should be executed, I do not feel that they have the right to promote their lifestyle as an acceptable expression of a choice or an inclination. However, sexual brokenness extends to all sexual activity outside of a monogamous heterosexual relationship. Idolatry is a form of spiritual fornication and fornication is a form of physical idolatry.

Sexual purity is neither boring nor just optional. It was the reason the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed and any form of sexual immorality is part of the coming darkness which wants to engulf mankind again by asking various versions of: "has G-d really said?". Today I am not going to deal with either abortion or evolution, but hear me – they are both violations of G-d's Word and are never acceptable as concepts or as behaviour.

Moving a long. Do you realize that gossip can be seen as on par with murder and sexual immorality? The same goes for both theft and coveting what does not belong to us.

The Commandments are not divided between those which should be considered absolutes and those which should be taken as optional. The growing political correctness agenda may try to slander the keepers of the Ten and call us fundamentalist red neck criminals who are condemning innocent people, but none of their nonsense can ever overthrow the Word of G-d and one day they will see the light, either in this life or in the one to come.

Centuries after the Law was given, on the Day of Pentecost (Shavuot), two wonder endowments were given in fulfillment of promises which were given, both for the Jewish people and for the Gentile believers. Yeshua said He would return and always be with us and was not referring to His eventual return in His glorified body to inaugurate the eternal Kingdom.

Before He was betrayed and arrested, the Gospel of John records that He blew upon the apostles so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. This was a temporary measure to help them out until Messiah could return to dwell in the hearts of all believers. Some church groups still breathe on people at confirmation, so that they may receive the Holy Spirit. This was a one time accommodation to help the Apostles live through the violence and chaos which was shortly to come.

After the resurrection, the L-rd visited at least five hundred believers to give them a personal confirmation that He had risen from the dead. But before He ascended, He could only be in one place at once and He wanted to be with all believers, everywhere and all the times. On the Day of Pentecost in the Upper room, two related blessings occurred. Messiah came back in the Spirit and took up residence in the hearts of all the gathered believers, including his mother Mary. After this "catch up" experience, whenever anyone accepts the Messiah, He is able to also enter their hearts and indwell each of us.

At the same time, tongues of fire appeared, similar to what the 70 elders experienced when YHVH took of the Spirit which was on Moses and placed Him on them (Numbers 11:24-26). When two elders who were absent, had the Spirit come upon them in the camp and Moses asked that all the people would become prophets and also have the Spirit come upon them. This is what happened on the Day of Pentecost (Shavuot) and has been happening ever since.

You see there are three different, but related experiences in the Spirit. The Spirit is with all believers to guide us and help us walk with YHVH and overcome evil in our lives. He is also in all believers and as such is the agent through whom Messiah dwells in the hearts of all the faithful.

Next, He comes upon believers to fill them so that they may experience great joy and be empowered supernaturally. This experience in the Bible is always accompanied by the manifestation of the gift of speaking in tongues. There are five places in the Book of Acts where this infilling is said to have occurred and the initial experience of the 120 will continue for believers until the Kingdom comes.

Now some say that when the Bible was completed, that tongues ceased, because they will when that which is perfect arrives. This is really referring to the coming of the Messiah and throughout the history of the church, whenever people grew close to the Word, tongues appeared.

There are some misinformed, if well meaning, charismatic believers who believe if you have not spoken in tongues, you do not possess salvation. It is called the one third, two thirds and

three thirds gift of Salvation. They say that you are only one third saved when you accept the Messiah into your heart. Then, when you speak in Tongues, you are two thirds saved. And, finally, when you are immersed in the name of Jesus only, you are three thirds saved.

This is a misunderstanding about the disciples of John whom the Apostles encountered when they travelled around the Roman world to share the good news of the Messiah. They discovered many communities of the disciples of John who did not know either that Yeshua was the Messiah or that the Spirit had been to be poured out.

John baptized people in the name of the Father, the yet to be revealed Son and the yet to be given Holy Spirit. When John's disciples heard about Yeshua and the Spirit, they were rebaptized in the name of Yeshua and received the Spirit of promise. Being baptized in Jesus' name only does not represent the biblical model. (Acts 19:2-5 and Matthew 28:19, 20).

Too often there are believers who play Scripture verses against each other, instead of seeing them as pieces of the same puzzle which give the complete picture, once they are put together.

The Spirit came down upon all the gathered disciples in the Upper Room and is still in the business of coming upon believers today, wherever they are.

The Ten Words (concepts) were given on Shavuot, while the people camped around the mountain. It was also around the season of the Second Shavuot when YHVH took off the Spirit which was on Moses and placed Him on the seventy elders.

Please note, being filled with the Spirit is no guarantee of automatic victory in every situation. That only comes from faith and obedience. Saul had a mighty experience with the Holy Spirit and yet became an enemy of G-d (I Sam. 19:18-24). Real spiritual power comes from cultivating the fruit of the Spirit and avoiding the choking works of the flesh. All seventy of the original elders upon whom the Spirit fell, died in the wilderness. Ananias and Sapphira were also Spirit filled, disobedient believers.

I want all the endowments that G-d has in store for believers. I want to learn to walk the bumpy straight and narrow and keep heading for the straight and narrow gate. I want the Ten Central Concepts to remain both the theological and Spiritual centre of my life. I want to remain focused on the Festival Cycle and the weekly Sabbath. I am a Messianic Jewish believer, so I will circumcise my children (they already are) and keep biblical kosher as I keep my eyes focused on the wonder of the coming Kingdom.

I want my life to be full of prayer and Bible study, as I fellowship with other believers and remain a regular worshipper, as I reach out and share my faith, gently and with respect. As a spiritual leader, I want to feed the sheep, correct the sheep, so that they do not fall prey to the enemies who are prowling around our community. I want to keep speaking up for the oppressed and the orphan and the widow.

Have a blessed Shavuot tomorrow and if you are able, eat sweet dairy products, because in YHVH we will always live in a land which flows with milk and honey. Shabbat shalom.