

TORAHSCOPE: Bamidbar (In the wilderness)

by Mark Huey posted 22 May, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Numbers 1:1-4:20
Hosea 2:1-22

"The God of Order and Authority"

"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, '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 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'" (Numbers 1:1-3).

As we turn the Book of Numbers, the Torah shifts from giving us commandments about the holiness of God, and we begin to read about some of the activities that Israel conducted in the second year of its wilderness sojourn. After receiving specific instructions from God about how the people are to conduct themselves, the practical application of implementing these commandments in Israel is described. However if you glance at Numbers 9:1 you will discover that the chronological order of events is not necessarily followed in the writings. The events that Numbers details continues from where we left off half-way through Exodus:

"Thus the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, **in the first month of the second year** after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, 'Now, let the sons of Israel observe the Passover at its appointed time'" (Numbers 9:1-2).

We later see in Numbers 10:11 that about a month passes between the first "wilderness Passover" and the first significant move of the Israelites from the wilderness of Sinai to the wilderness of Paran:

"Now in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud was lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony; and the sons of Israel set out on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai. Then the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran" (Numbers 10:11-12).

This opening *parashah* of Numbers describes how our Heavenly Father is concerned about the proper order and conduct of His chosen people. We are given the description of the leadership of the twelve tribes of Israel, a census of some of the men, how the camp of Israel is arranged, and the specific duties and responsibilities of the tribe of Levi as they are divided according to various family groups. As the Holy One coordinates the intended march to the Promised Land, He first focuses on the necessity for the people to become organized for the commencing sojourn. We see that the God of Creation, who placed the cosmos in perfect order, is a God of order and not the author of confusion. When Paul writes this to the Corinthians, is he perhaps reflecting on some of the organization that we see in Numbers?

"[F]or God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the [assemblies] of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

The Lord is a Sovereign who operates on principles and practices that are reflected in the remotest part of the Heavens down to the atomic structure of matter. Within those two extremes, influenced by the precision of time, the Creation and its creatures must operate. Since God chose a man, Abraham, and his descendants to bring the knowledge of who He is to the rest of the world, it is imperative that His people function in a manner that embodies His attributes and perfect character.

The principle of order has been on my heart and mind for the past few weeks leading up to *Bamidbar*, coupled with some daily devotional readings of other Scriptures. As I have been contemplating a wide variety of thoughts from God's Word, what I have discovered is that when you discipline and order your time devoting a portion of it to Him, the reception of His blessings

are overwhelming. All of a sudden you become synchronized with the Creation and your cup overflows with His favor!

Experiencing His presence through the confirming unction of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) is beyond description. Amazingly at times, you sense the Lord giving you profound understanding even about the minutest detail of common daily occurrences. His presence in your walk is so profound, as He illuminates your limited mind about how He sees the world, so that demonstrating a great fear or awe of Him is the obvious by-product. When you perceive that everything you see or hear has His hand upon it, you are compelled to simply pause and give Him all the glory, praise, and honor for choosing you as a vessel for His occupation and usage. When God starts orchestrating events and conversations that require your participation, you are required turn to Him for His wisdom and guidance on how to react or respond. Without much hesitation, you start applying the principle of loving your neighbor as yourself by placing his or her needs ahead of yours. You slow down enough in your thought processes to tap into His wisdom, as conversations may elicit responses of Divine counsel, knowledge, and understanding. The joy and satisfaction you experience because you have been used by Him is indeed inexpressible!

In your heart, mind, soul, and spirit, you should be constantly affirming that there is a God who is intimately concerned about the infinitesimal aspects of your life. It is quite humbling to know that God is concerned with you, because we have a self-centered nature that is often at odds with His will for us. And yet, as you bring forth heartfelt confessions, and through repentance change your ways, the attainable, but often-elusive sanctification process becomes real. As you turn yourself over to the Lord, the Holy Spirit transforms your attitudes and actions to be oriented toward Him and His service.

God's order for His Creation is extremely foundational for our lives, even for the unredeemed to recognize. After all, does not the sun rise and fall every morning and evening? Is Planet Earth not placed the correct distance close to and away from the sun? Is not the moon in the correct orbit around the Earth? Are we not placed on the proper axis so that the tectonic plates shift in the proper way so that we do not have massive earthquakes or violent volcanic eruptions every day?

To a degree even the heathen and idolaters agree that something is controlling Planet Earth. But for those of us who submit to God's Instruction about the Creation and our relationship to Him as the Creator, the understandings are much more profound. Consider the basic principle of reaping what one sows. This need not be deep theology, because the essence of cause and effect is even understood by the scientific community. But for the most part, they focus on physical manifestations and not spiritual ones. For us as God's people, though, who have been called to be a light to the world, the understanding is far more substantial. We can read Scripture and see that obedience to God results in blessing, while disobedience generates curses—meaning that sin has consequences. If you read Deuteronomy 28, you will find an extensive list that is provided as a springboard for the related blessings and curses seen throughout the balance of the Holy Scriptures.

But without getting into the minutiae of the order that God directs Moses to articulate to the Levites, and then to the people of Israel this week, I was drawn to consider the profundity of the orderliness of God and how He desperately wants to shower the faithful with His blessings. Pondering this reality, I remembered a sermon illustration that I heard preached to me back in 1987. Since we had an unusual week of rain this week in sunny Florida (2005), the reminder of rainfall was a constant image crossing my mind. Then, in a conversation with a pastor friend, the words of Jonah 2:8 came into focus:

“Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness” (Jonah 2:8).

I recollected the analogy that was used in this short sermon years ago that illustrates what the Prophet Jonah is communicating. As you recall, Jonah was a man chosen for a specific assignment to proclaim repentance to the citizens of Nineveh. But by the time he recollected these thoughts, he had spent three days in the belly of a large fish, having an experience that none

of us can even imagine. In Jonah's moments of distress, he cried out to the only One he knew could save him—the Lord:

“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, ‘I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. So I said, “I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.” Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head. I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars *was* around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. **Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness**, but I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.’ Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land” (Jonah 2:1-10).

What Jonah communicates is that anyone who regards or embraces “vain idols” forsakes the faithfulness that they should demonstrate toward God. The Hebrew word *chesed* (ds,x,) is used, which typically refers to the loving kindness that the Holy One of Israel wants to cascade upon His children. In this case, it refers to our orientation of blessing God via our service and obedience. This can be interrupted when we put something ahead of Him. One’s “vain idols” can include just about anything that is placed before our reliance upon the God of Creation. If someone is relying upon his or her intelligence, good looks, personality, resources, talents, or natural abilities—rather than relying upon the Almighty—then by default the person is inadvertently forsaking obeying God and reciprocating the good things that He has done for us.

As the illustration goes, imagine the blessings and lovingkindness that the Holy One is showering down upon His Creation like raindrops falling from the sky. Now picture someone taking an umbrella, and then opening it up over his head. While God’s blessings are falling all around, the person who trusts in a vain idol has chosen to let whatever that idol might be prevent them from falling upon him. The challenge for any person is to cast away whatever we are trusting in other than God, and instead raise our hands and receive whatever blessing He is trying to bestow upon us!

This is all related to God’s perfect order, because we can see it appear in our own personal lives, in our marriages and family, in our neighborhoods, cities, state and national governments, our businesses, and just about every aspect of our lives. God is a God of order, and He has providentially let these various institutions materialize to provide for civil well being, but they are all ultimately subject to His Divine order, whether they choose to acknowledge it or not. When these institutions are out of order, then they block God’s ability to guide the affairs of humanity.

For the most part, since fallen man is generally ignorant, or blinded about how all of this works from an eternal perspective, the failure to consider God’s place in running things can result in confusion at best, and chaos at worst. But for those of us who are His children, the calling to line up with His Word in order to accomplish the missions He has destined us for is imperative. Our general problem is that we often resort to falling back upon our human abilities (or inabilities) and grab various umbrellas for different occasions. **We limit God’s ability to bless us.**

But another aspect of tapping into the order of God can be realized when we understand that His authority goes hand in hand with respecting and honoring His proper order for the Creation. In the Gospels, we find a great example of a God-fearing Roman centurion who somehow understood the principle of order, and the complimentary principle of authority. The centurion somehow comprehended that Yeshua was walking in such an orderly fashion that He had authority to heal the sick, by simply speaking a word:

“When Yeshua came down from the mountain, large crowds followed Him. And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Yeshua stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And

immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Yeshua said to him, 'See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' And when Yeshua entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented.' Yeshua said to him, 'I will come and heal him.' But the centurion said, 'Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, "Go!" and he goes, and to another, "Come!" and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this!" and he does it.' Now when Yeshua heard *this*, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' And Yeshua said to the centurion, 'Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.' And the servant was healed that *very* moment" (Matthew 8:1-13).

We have a significant instance where someone outside the Jewish community actually benefits from his observation that Yeshua is absolutely in order with the Creation. He recognizes by Yeshua's proper conduct that He has the authority to make things right and heal people of deadly diseases. The centurion might have known and understood that it would be inappropriate for the Torah teacher and healer to come to his house, because he was a Roman. But that did not deter him from beseeching the Lord to heal his servant. Yeshua was very impressed with the faith of the centurion and makes some rather laudatory remarks, contrasting the lack of faith among His own Jewish brethren. But in this case, the pleadings of the centurion were answered and his slave was healed.

How much more should we today, who have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, be able to walk in the order of God and receive His authority to have dominion and power over the decaying world we occupy? Will our Heavenly Father raise us up as a people who by faith will be able to execute the spiritual authority that has always been there, but not necessarily used? I hope that many of us will be empowered by the Lord do so some mighty deeds in the days ahead. By obeying Him, we receive not only His blessings, but also the power to work miracles.

My friends, I ask you to cast aside any idolatrous umbrellas you may have, and cling to the Rock. Allow our Heavenly Father to bless you from on high. He is the Rock of our Salvation, and in Him is the perfect peace, order, and the authority that goes along with it. May we be those who understand this and apply it to every aspect of our lives!

Mark Huey (B.A., Vanderbilt University in History and Graduate Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) is the Director of Outreach Israel Ministries (www.outreachisrael.net). He is the author of several books, including: *TorahScope, Volumes I & II*, and *Counting the Omer: A Daily Devotional Toward Shavuot*. He is also co-author of *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study*.

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