

B'ha'alotkha (When you set up)

by Mark Huey posted 28 May, 2010 www.outreachisrael.net

Numbers 8:1-12:16

Zechariah 2:14-4:7

“Arise, O Lord!”

B'ha'alotkha conveys a variety of details about the early days of the wilderness journey of Ancient Israel. From a description of use of the *menorah* (מְנוֹרָה),¹ to amplification about the role of the Levites,² to alternative Passover allowances,³ to the Israelites following the cloud,⁴ to instructions about blowing twin silver trumpets,⁵ to encampment movement procedures,⁶ to selecting seventy elders to distribute the workload,⁷ to the infamous incident when Moses is challenged by Aaron and Miriam⁸—this *parashah* is indeed “loaded” with a wide variety of topics to consider. Each descriptive scenario contains insight on how the Lord was firmly molding this unique group of people into a special nation for His own possession and purposes.

As I pondered some of these things, I was reminded of how Israel was to be set-apart as a people of faith, relying on the Lord for its provision and guidance. I thought about how each of the distinctive things seen in our *parashah* this week communicate different aspects of God’s holiness and/or involvement in the lives of the Israelites—but I also reflected on how these would be considered each year as the Torah cycle is read through once again. *Time and space limit us in being able to focus on every one of the above listed aspects.* The visual impressions of all of these activities is certainly vivid. Considering each of these circumstances, I tried to place myself among the masses of Israel, and I contemplated how I would have reacted to hearing the various instructions and whether or not I would learn from them.

For some reason, the proclamation which Moses declared prior to every wilderness departure became a definite point of focus. While it is frequently a part of the traditional liturgy in the Synagogue on *Shabbat*, it also points to the Lord’s greatness as one who defends His people:

“Then it came about when the ark set out that Moses said, ‘Rise up, O LORD! And let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You.’ When it came to rest, he said, ‘Return, O LORD, to the myriad thousands of Israel!’” (Numbers 10:35-36).

The simple statement, “Advance, O LORD! May Your enemies be scattered, and may Your foes flee before You!” (NJPS), seemed to take on more significance for me this year, as I have reflected on a few of the current conflicts in the Middle East, and how the enemies of Israel have been especially vociferous. I thought about the Ark of the Covenant, and pictured how the Levites would carefully lift it up, move it forward, and all of Israel would march with it—following the ubiquitous cloud that led their way. Naturally, what takes place in a traditional *Shabbat* service is that as Numbers 10:26 is read, a congregational ark is opened, and the Torah scroll is brought forth to be canted.⁹ The comparison was not exactly overwhelming, but after further reflection I realized that my even knowing about what occurs in a traditional *Shabbat* service was, in itself, something to be very thankful for.

I began to realize that as a non-Jewish Believer in Messiah Yeshua, for the first time in perhaps many generations, I was actually considering some of the tangible events that took place

¹ Numbers 8:1-4.

² Numbers 8:5-26.

³ Numbers 9:1-14.

⁴ Numbers 9:15-23.

⁵ Numbers 10:24-10.

⁶ Numbers 10:11-36.

⁷ Numbers 11:16-30.

⁸ Numbers 12:1-16.

⁹ Cf. Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, pp 473-475; Jules Harlow, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2007), 139.

in the history of the infancy of Israel. *I was not just looking at them as dusty Biblical history*, or as a part of the Scriptures to just quickly read through. The text I was studying and contemplating from Numbers was very meaningful—especially as our sovereign God has seen to its preservation for over three millennia! Certain procedures discussed in *B'ha'alotkha* began to take on some more significance. The thought of actually participating in these activities—even if just as a theoretical, ancient person—became real. Application of these instructions in modern times on some level became something to seriously consider, rather than simply reading and appreciating these as past historical events.

How should I apply what we are reading in this week's *parashah* to my own personal life? How do I appreciate their ancient setting, and do more than just be knowledgeable of what is recorded?

Seven Pillars of Wisdom

At this point, wanting to focus on the significance of Numbers 10:35-36, I uncovered something that those who are only reading English Bibles are often not aware of. Those of you who have a Hebrew Bible can probably see that bracketing in Numbers 10:35-36 are two inverted *nuns* (נ).¹⁰ This is not normal punctuation that one typically sees in the Bible. What do these *nuns* mean?

<p><i>V'yehi binso'a ha'aron v'yomer</i> <i>Moshe, "Qumah ADONAI</i> <i>v'yafutzu o'vekha v'yanusu</i> <i>mesanekha mipanekha,</i> <i>u'venuchoh yomar shuvah</i> <i>ADONAI riv'vot alfei Yisrael</i></p>	<p>ז וַיְהִי בִּנְסֹעַ הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה קוּמָה יְהוָה וַיִּפְצְזוּ אֶבְיָד וַיִּנְסוּ מִשְׁנֵאִיךָ מִפְּנֶיךָ וּבְנַחֲזָה יֹאמֶר שׁוּבָה יְהוָה רַבְבוֹת אֱלֹפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ז</p>
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Numbers 10:35-36 are important verses in the Torah, communicating how Ancient Israel would move in the desert, and imploring God to protect Israel from its enemies. Seeing the two inverted *nuns*, I naturally wanted to know what they represented. Were these markings originally made by Moses, or were they later scribal notations to point out something to readers? J.H. Hertz, the editor of *Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, summarizes our options:

"These two verses are enclosed in inverted 'Nuns' to indicate either that they are not here in their original place (Talmud); or that they are taken from another source (possibly from 'the Book of the Wars of the Lord', see 21:14) and form a distinct section, scroll, or even 'book' of the Torah. Some of the Rabbis held that the Book of Numbers consisted of three sections...and accordingly, they counted a total of seven books of the Torah. Thus, according to Rabbi Johanan, 'Wisdom hath hewn out her seven pillars' (Proverbs 9:1) referred to the 'Seven' books of the Torah."¹¹

The textual explanation is that the two inverted *nuns* signify that there is some doubt as to whether or not Numbers 10:35-36 are actually in their correct place within the Hebrew text, being dislocated. The resource *Masorah of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* observes how, "This suggestion is supported by the LXX [Septuagint] where verses 35-36 have been inserted between verses 33 and 34 (i.e., the order is 33, 35, 36, 34)."¹² And in fact, the Greek Septuagint does include what we read as Numbers 10:33-36 in a different verse order from the Hebrew Masoretic Text:

¹⁰ Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, et. al., eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977), 231; Aron Dotan, ed., *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 213.

¹¹ Hertz, *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, 613.

¹² Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford, eds., *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp 34-35.

Ashley also states, "scholars generally agree that [the inverted *nuns*] indicate that the early scribes thought verses so enclosed were displaced from their original context" (p 199).

^[33] And they departed from the mount of the Lord a three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them a three days' journey to provide rest for them. ^[35] And it came to pass when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Arise, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered: let all that hate thee flee. ^[36] And in the resting he said, Turn again, O Lord, the thousands *and* tens of thousands in Israel. ^[34] And the cloud overshadowed them by day, when they departed from the camp.¹³

If some textual witnesses of Numbers 10:33-36 have placed vs. 35-36 in a slightly different order, it does not change our understanding of anything at all in the wider narrative. Moses still implored the Lord to fight on behalf of Israel, and that His enemies would flee at His power.

Of course, the theological explanation offered by Hertz for the inverted *nuns*, is also something quite interesting to ponder. Referencing Proverbs 9:1, we see, "Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars." From this line of reasoning, the two *nuns* do more than just highlight the importance of Numbers 10:35-36, but they might actually serve to represent Numbers 10:35-36 as a kind of separate "book" of the Torah. Rather than the Pentateuch or Chumash only composing Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—Numbers can be thought to compose a Numbers¹, Numbers 10:35-36, and then a Numbers² (for lack of better titles)—concurrent with the seven pillars. Certainly, this is an interesting point of view that one might consider in Torah study, and I do think that the logic has some merit. **Numbers 10:35-36 is something important that people of faith need to take notice of.**

The Ark of Testimony

Going before the Lord in prayer, and querying the Holy Spirit about what *B'ha'alotkha* should instruct me this week, I was simply reminded of some of the previous Torah teachings about the importance of the Ark of the Covenant (or, Testimony). The last verse of *Naso*, examined last week, indicated that the voice of the Lord spoke to Moses from above the mercy seat, which sat right on top of the Ark of the Covenant:

"Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him" (Numbers 7:89).

It is not difficult to be reminded of how many important events in the Tanakh are related to the Ark of the Covenant. The proper movement of the Ark of the Covenant precipitated the splitting of the Jordan River (Joshua chs. 3-4). The Ark of the Covenant being present was instrumental in the destruction of the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6). In the later history of Israel, the location of the Ark of the Covenant is noticeably important, to receive the blessings of the Holy One. The Prophet Samuel heard the voice of God as he slept near the Ark (1 Samuel 3:3). Later on, the Ark's capture by the Philistines, and the glory departing Israel as a result of its loss, are described. The Philistines were judged by improperly withholding the Ark (1 Samuel 6). Eventually, the Ark is recovered and returned to Israel, but not without some dire consequences for some of the transporters (2 Samuel 6). Finally, the Ark is placed in the Tabernacle provided by King David in Jerusalem, and King Solomon builds the First Temple which ultimately houses it.

As you recollect the recorded history of the Ark of the Covenant, you should be reminded of its significance in the life of Ancient Israel. After all, the tablets of the Ten Commandments, written by the very finger of God, were placed in the Ark. These are some of the most tangible objects of our Creator's involvement with the development of His chosen people:

"When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18).

¹³ Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, ed & trans., *The Septuagint With Apocrypha* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 188.

When we realize that the Ark contained these tablets of stone, we can more fully comprehend its significance. But as I considered and meditated upon this truth, I was reminded of some of the greater benefits which have been promised to and have been received by followers of the Messiah of Israel. The Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel both detail a promised New Covenant, where God's Instruction would be supernaturally transcribed upon redeemed human hearts:

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

“And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God...Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27).

As you read these parallel passages, I sincerely pray that your old, stony heart has been removed. Being forgiven and cleansed of sin by the sacrifice of Yeshua, such a heart should now be replaced by a new heart of flesh. This heart of flesh loves God and neighbor, and wants to obey Him as a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Such an obedience is able to serve the community of faith, and make a difference in the world so that others might come to know the goodness and grace of God. This obedience is by no means stirred on by some drive to “earn salvation,” but comes from a Divine empowerment by the supernatural activity inaugurated by the gospel.¹⁴

New Covenant Arks

Being given a new heart of flesh, by the salvation work of the Messiah, is it appropriate for Believers to consider themselves as functioning like an ark of testimony for the Living God? The Apostle Paul did teach that Believers compose a temple of the Most High:

“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

If we compose a kind-of temple of God today, with His Instruction supernaturally written on redeemed hearts—then perhaps it would be prudent for us to employ some of the same techniques that Moses used as he followed the cloud leading Ancient Israel. *Believers are supposed to be led by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit.* Is there a parallel between the cloud that led Ancient Israel, and how we are supposed to be led by the Holy Spirit?

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

Moses certainly knew that the enemies of God were everywhere, and that they hated everything that His people stood for and represented. Should we not internalize this same reality as Messiah followers today? By faith, just prior to moving the Ark of the Covenant, Moses declared “**Rise O LORD**”—summoning the Most High to take note that Israel was preparing to move. Then he exclaimed, “**and let Your enemies scatter, and Your foes flee before You!**” (Numbers 10:35, Alter). With great authority, Moses calls upon God to establish who He is, as he prepares the people to follow the cloud. The Lord then clears a path for the movement of the Ark of the Covenant so that the enemies of Israel would not be allowed to disrupt its transport.

¹⁴ For further consideration, consult the exegesis paper “What is the New Covenant?” by J.K. McKee.

The inverted *nuns* seen in the Masoretic Text of Numbers 10:35-36 certainly do set these two verses apart, so that readers can take notice of them. Likewise, Numbers 10:35 is canted in the traditional liturgy of the Synagogue as the Torah scroll is removed from its ark during the *Shabbat* service, a practice also adhered to in much of the Messianic community.¹⁵ But might there be something more for us to realize?

Born again Believers, with God's Instruction written on their hearts by His Spirit, do make up a kind of "ark." Do we ever personally pray the protection of Numbers 10:35-36 as we move from location-to-location or place-to-place? We certainly know that we will be hated for being Messiah's followers. Should we not know that the enemy and his minions often lie in wait for us? In going out into our sinful world, do we go out with the confidence of Moses who appealed to the Lord for His power to strike down Israel's enemies? Or, either forgetting or being ignorant of words like Numbers 10:35-36, do we just go out into the world unprepared and forgetting to appeal to the Holy One for His protection?

Perhaps if we thought of ourselves as a kind-of ark, we might be more mindful of the responsibility we have to protect ourselves from the schemes the Devil. Then, in God's faithfulness toward us, He will truly be able to return to us, *and shower us with His blessings*, after the enemy flees! I simply encourage you to walk by the Spirit, and be confident in the Lord that He does go before us, protecting us from all those who would seek to harm or destroy us.

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

¹⁵ Consult "A Traditional Morning Shabbat Service" in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by TNN Press.