

# BAMIDBAR

FUSION  
WITH RABBI JASON



*with*  
**Rabbi Jason Sobel**

5785 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS

**TORAH PORTIONS**  
**Parashat Bamidbar**



## THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

# NUMBERS 1:1-4:20

*Parashat Bamidbar* / פרשת במדבר

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### COMMENTARY..... 1

Welcome to the FOURTH book of the Torah. The Book of Numbers marks a return to the narrative that we enjoyed in Exodus, but first we have to deal with some...*numbers*. More specifically, let's consider this adage: "age is just a number." Apparently, the Almighty didn't get that memo because this opening *parsha* features some curious age requirements.

### NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

In this article, we step away from the numbers to consider...geography and astronomy? Once again, our theme emerges: God is in the details! In these days of angst and anxiety, we need to embrace (and share!) a message of genuine hope. The Lord's seemingly mundane directives in this week's reading contain a hidden kernel of hope.

### HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

Are you ready to be *enticed*? In this edition of the HWS, we're going to jump over to our weekly *Haftarah* reading, found in the Book of Hosea. Here, the prophet conveys a divine message that is both shockingly severe *and* tender! Let's journey deeper into this text together.



Aside from being the title of this week's portion, *Bamidbar* is also generally used as the Hebrew title for the Book of Numbers. *Bamidbar* is a Hebrew word meaning "in the wilderness of"—referring to the Sinai Desert. The English (Western) name of this book is not entirely unfounded, however, as this portion begins with the Lord instructing Moses to number the people. This passage leads us to a description of the camp as well as a breakdown of the Levites and various clans involved in the priesthood.



# Fusion Global

Weekly Torah Portions – *Parashat Bamidbar* / פרשת במדבר | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

## COMMENTARY

*Bamidbar*, both the *parsha* and the entire book (also known as “Numbers”), often get a bad rap. People frequently skip it entirely. Who wants to read a bunch of names you can’t pronounce as part of some obscure numerical census? It’s not the most compelling content. **Nevertheless**, it is part of the Torah, and as *Rav Shaul* (i.e., the Apostle Paul) wrote, “**All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for restoration, and for training in righteousness**” (2 Timothy 3:16). God put these verses here for a reason. One detail you may not have expected but is worth noting is that *Bamidbar* reveals the Torah as so much more than a set of mere do’s and don’ts—it is the story of a people, the formation of a nation.

*Bamidbar* means “in the desert,” but the Greek word for it is *Arithmoi*, meaning numbers. In it, God instructs Moses to do a lot of counting and arithmetic, a term that stems from the Greek title of the book. *Bamidbar* would undoubtedly be the Count’s (from Sesame Street) favorite book. The divine directive to count the Israelites doesn’t suggest that God needed to know the information. However, it is fair to assume He wanted Moses and the people to know where they stood as they were “coming into their own” as a nation. Once in the Promised Land, counting the people would be strictly forbidden, so the people wouldn’t rely on numbers but instead rely on God for His strength and provision.

The first thing to note is that the people grew. And by people, we mean men over the age of twenty (i.e., able to serve in the army). There were 600,000 such men when the Children of Israel left Egypt (cf. Exodus 12:37). A year and two weeks later, that number stood at 603,550 (cf. Numbers 1:46) despite the loss of life due to the Golden Calf incident. The people were growing, and now God wanted to organize them. He didn’t set them free so that they could just not be slaves; He wanted them to serve Him, and we know that He wants things done “decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Moses tallied all the men able to serve in the army. He did a second recording of all the Levites. Unlike the other tribes, whose men could serve at twenty, the levitical men couldn’t begin to serve until thirty. “Why?” you might ask. One possibility is from the rabbinic commentator נצי”ב (*Netziv-Path*)—an acronym for Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (19th c. Poland)—who suggested that the later age requirement was because those men needed to understand the gravity of what they were about to do. They already saw what happened when the Tabernacle was dedicated. They required the wherewithal to treat this task with the utmost respect and honor. While a 20-year-old certainly has great vigor, a 30-year-old has greater *seichel* (smarts).

It is wise for us not to rush into things, nor push others to do so, however passionate and talented they may be. We should be mindful of Paul’s words to Timothy, himself a young leader, regarding overseers: “**He must not be a new believer, or he may become puffed up and fall into the same judgment as the devil**” (1 Timothy 3:6). Strategic patience can be highly advantageous and wise, especially when it comes to leadership in ministry, a truth revealed in the seemingly tedious details we often overlook in *Bamidbar*. This book has much to teach us.

# New Testament Tie-In

The opening chapters of the Book of Numbers have a lot of...*numbers*. It's so easy to skim (skip?) these passages because, frankly, it's challenging to grasp a sense of value for our lives in what appears to be tedious details about ancient tribes. But as the old prospector said, "There's gold in them thar hills!" Consider this detail regarding the arrangement of the tribes in Numbers 2:3, "[Those camping on the east—toward the sunrise—will be of the standard of Judah, according to their divisions.](#)" What could this mean for our lives at this moment?

**Let's highlight some details.** First, the Almighty gave this instruction to Israel directly through Moses. There was no town hall meeting called, or lottery created to determine camp arrangement. This detail was a sovereign act of God, and as such, it's an expression of grace. Like all the other tribes, Judah had no say in this matter. Secondly, there is a world of deep metaphorical meaning in "sunrise." One primary meaning is that of vision, perception, or understanding. The Psalmist declares, "[The unfolding of Your words gives light, giving understanding to the simple](#)" (Psalm 119:130). Another significance of sunrise is hope. David highlighted this with the beloved phrase, "[ADONAI is my light and my salvation: whom should I fear?](#)" (Psalm 27:1)

OK. Fair enough. Perhaps God symbolically positioned Judah to be the tribe of understanding and hope—we still need to tie this into our lives. Perhaps at no other time have we so desperately needed our lives to be washed over with hope. The cliché claims that it's "always darkest before the dawn," and if that's true, we want to be the people who see that sunrise first, don't we?

The first factor to being "sunrise people" lies in the name of this tribe: Judah. In Hebrew, *Yehuwdah* (יהודה) comes from the root word *yadah* (ידה), most commonly translated, "praise." When times are dark, it can be particularly challenging to sing or rejoice, yet that's when praise is needed most. "Sunrise people" are members of the tribe of Judah—people of praise, regardless of their circumstances or emotions. Remember: "Judah" was their identity so that it could be their activity. People of praise are people of hope; hope received from our loving Father. While everyone else is "in the dark," Judah sees the sun!

The other factor, and one that is especially poignant for (Gentile) believers, is that *Yeshua* was born into the tribe of Judah. One could argue that no theological concept in Scripture is more important than the claim that believers are "in Christ." Regarding the tribe of Judah, all believers are, in a real sense, members of that tribe because we are "in Messiah *Yeshua*" – the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (cf. Revelation 5:5). This "divine incorporation" would mean that we have Judah's (spiritual) DNA. Now, the Apostle Paul's words take on richer meaning: "[There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for you are all one in Messiah \*Yeshua\*](#)" (Galatians 3:28).

Paul's words are Good News for your life right now. In His glorious grace, God has placed our lives in Messiah *Yeshua*, which positions us in Judah...toward the sunrise. We are people of praise and as a secondary consequence of that, people of hope! Let's close with these words from Paul: "[\[The Messiah\] also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the Psalmist meant when he wrote: 'For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to your name.'](#)" – Romans 15:9 (NLT)

# Hebrew Word Study

## *patah* [פתה] / “entice, flatter, persuade”

In this week’s *Haftarah*, we read, “So then, I Myself will **entice** her, I will bring her into the wilderness and speak to her heart” (Hosea 2:16). The English word “entice” is a translation of the Hebrew term *mefatteiha* (מפתיה), which comes from the Hebrew root *patah* (פתה).

- *Peh* (פ) / 80
- *Tav* (ת) / 400
- *Heh* (ה) / 5

*Strong’s Definitions* describes *patah* as “allure, deceive, enlarge, entice, flatter, persuade.”<sup>1</sup> It appears a total of twenty-eight times in the Hebrew Bible. It is fascinating to see how these explanations fit together.

Let’s start with Genesis 9:27, “May God **enlarge** [*yafit*] Japheth, may he dwell in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave.” This verse is the first instance in Scripture where *patah* appears, and in this case, it describes physical and geographical growth.

Here are some examples of *patah* in a negative context: “If a man **seduces** [*yefatteh*] a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife.” –Exodus 22:15

“So the Philistine lords came up to her and said to her, ‘**Coax** [*patti*] him, see where his great strength comes from and by what we may overpower him, so we may bind him to subdue him—then we’ll each of us give you 1,100 pieces of silver.’” –Judges 16:5

“Watch yourselves, so your heart is not **deceived** [*yifteh*], and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them.” –Deuteronomy 11:16

With these wildly different takes, one might struggle to understand how it all makes sense. In the initial example, we saw the idea of creating space so that Japheth might fill it. Now, let’s get psychological for a moment. In order to effectively deceive, seduce, entice, or persuade, the agent needs to create figurative “space” for their new idea to grow in the mind of the person they’re acting on.

Stay with me. Consider that Dr. Elizabeth Loftus, a leading memory expert, managed to convince (one could say “deceive”) Alan Alda that he despised one of his favorite foods during an afternoon picnic. She was also regularly able to convince people that they had taken hot air balloon rides even though they hadn’t left the ground.

Even popular works, such as Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, share the same premise. “Space” has to be made in the person’s psyche for them to consider a new, alternate possibility. Whether this is done ethically and morally, like a parent trying to convince their child to eat their vegetables, or unethically and immorally, like a con artist, is simply a matter of ethical outworking.

In the case of Hosea, it’s intriguing to consider that God is making space in our hearts for Him. As we clear out the clutter of sin and the stinking thinking of this carnal life, we just may find ourselves gloriously and divinely “enticed.”



# FUSION

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present  
**HEBREW WORD STUDY**

פתה

**פתה / *patah*:** VB. **to entice, flatter, persuade.**

The verb *patah* appears twenty-seven times, primarily in the Piel and Pual stems. The basic verb idea is “be open, spacious, wide,” and might relate to the immature or simple one who is open to all kinds of enticement, not having developed a discriminating judgment as to what is right or wrong.

The verb usage is seen in the tactics of Samson’s bride-to-be in wrangling the secret of his riddle (although in the end she lost her husband, Jud 14:15–16). Enticement is described in terms of a man seducing a woman (Ex 22:15). The immature are warned not be enticed by sinners (Prov 1:10). Another arresting usage of enticement is what happens when a man refuses to follow God’s direction. He is enticed to do wrong to his ultimate hurt, a discipline or judgment for rejecting the Lord (II Chr 18:19–21).

taken from the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

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## THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- Sometimes the most profound truths are hidden beneath the surface of seemingly unrelated details in the text. The older age of the Levites invites us to consider the wisdom of waiting, especially in regard to assuming spiritual leadership. Are you waiting for anything right now? How might the Lord be using this to set you up for success?
- This week’s *Haftarah* features a beautiful image of the Lord lovingly enticing Israel. This theme appears in C.S. Lewis’ quote, “Merely to override a human will (as His felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for Him useless. [God] cannot ravish. He can only woo” (*The Screwtape Letters*, ch 8). Have you experienced this wooing?

# GLOBAL

**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** *Parashat Nasso* / פרשת נשא

## **TORAH**

*Sunday* / Numbers 4:21-37

*Monday* / Numbers 4:38-49

*Tuesday* / Numbers 5:1-10

*Wednesday* / Numbers 5:11-6:27

*Thursday* / Numbers 7:1-41

*Friday* / Numbers 7:42-71

*Saturday* / Numbers 7:72-89

## **Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*):**

Judges 13:2-25

## **New Covenant Reading:**

Luke 1:11-20

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.

<sup>1</sup> Strong's Hebrew: 6601. פתה (*pathah*) -- to entice, deceive, persuade, seduce, allure, accessed May 27, 2025, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6601.htm>.