

# BEHA'ALOTCHA

FUSION  
WITH RABBI JASON



with  
**Rabbi Jason Sobel**

5785 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS

**TORAH PORTIONS**  
**Parashat Beha'alotcha**



## THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

# NUMBERS 8:1-12:15

*Parashat Beha'alotcha* / פרשת בהעלתך

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The "LAW" can take on an ominous and foreboding tone in some Christian circles. Some Gentile preachers even refuse to preach from the Hebrew Bible because, they insist, we are not under the Law, but grace. But what if God's people were always living "under grace"?

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

Did you ever play "hooky" when you were in school? If so, you could have used this week's *parsha* as a defense. Two of the men that Moses called to meet God and receive the Spirit stayed back in the camp. What do we make of this? And how could this sub-plot possibly connect to the New Testament? You will be encouraged!

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

Each week's reading from the Torah is accompanied by a text from the prophets known as the *haftarah*. This week's study takes a journey over to the Book of Zechariah and unpacks a term that seems obvious at first glance but, as Rabbi Jason always says: there's more (of course!).



## OVER VIEW

The Hebrew for "when you step up," *Beha'alotcha* is the 11th word, and the first distinctive word, in the *parashat*; it is the 36th weekly Torah portion. Highlights include the setting up of the Golden Menorah in the Tabernacle and the descent of the cloud of God's glory once the Tabernacle was erected. The camp would move in response to the movement of this cloud over the Tabernacle. On a more somber note, we also read how Miriam and Aaron questioned Moses and his authority. This event leads into the selection and consecration of seventy elders to assist Moses.



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Weekly Torah Portions – *Parashat Beha'alotcha* / פרשת בהעלתך | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

## COMMENTARY

When people think of the word "law," they often think of something unyielding, cold, almost. The law's virtue is its detached (i.e., "blind") objectivity, a reality that is devoid of feeling or special consideration for the concern of others. You may have had the ignominious experience of being pulled over by a police officer for speeding. You knew you were speeding, but after you offered your most compelling explanation as to why you were doing so, the officer said something to the effect of, "Well, you *were* speeding, and the law is the law." In one respect, you understood his position, and you knew you were violating the law; nevertheless, you wished he would be a little more understanding of what was going on with you and let you off with a warning.

Many within the Body of Messiah hold a view similar to that regarding God's Law. We even pronounce the term ominously, as if to say, "It'll get you if you don't watch out." These same believers will point out the fact that the same God sent *Yeshua* some 1,500 years after He gave the Law. In their version of history, this same God suddenly presented Himself as compassionate and gracious. The "Old Testament" god<sup>1</sup> transformed into the easy-going police officer who says, "Yeah, I understand you're having a rough go of it, so I'll just let you off with a warning. Just try to drive safely next time. Thanks."

This concept dates back to the second century and Marcion of Sinope (85–160 CE), a theologian in early Christianity. In short, he believed that the god of the Old Testament (a "Demiurge") was not the same god of the New Testament. The Church leadership of the day condemned him as a heretic and pronounced that the God of Moses was (and is!) the Father of *Yeshua*.

*Parashat Beha'alotcha* reveals this. During the second year in the wilderness, the Israelites were supposed to celebrate Passover. This festival was Israel's most meaningful celebration, as it commemorated their liberation just one year prior. Those who didn't keep the Passover, be they Hebrew or Egyptian, would lose their firstborn—a severe consequence for a violation of this law. That dramatic night in Egypt was still a vivid memory. Apparently, some within the camp were ceremonially unclean, and thereby, they couldn't offer the lamb in the Tabernacle. They knew the rules, but they approached Moses and asked him what they should do. His response? "I'll go ask God." God—the Father of *Yeshua*—replied, "Even though the Law clearly mandates that Passover is to be observed on the eve of the 15th of Nisan if someone isn't able to offer the sacrifice, then they can do so one month later." Such grace!

There are two details worth considering. One, though the Law was clear what Israel must do, the people presented extenuating circumstances. They did so confident they would find grace. Two, God modified the Law in a dynamic response to this situation. That "second Passover" would now be available for generations to come. God gave the Torah to instruct His people on how to live, but His heart was always for them. The rules were never more valuable than His children. The same God who sent *Yeshua* to free us from sin and death is the same one who showed us what sin is via the Torah. He has **always** been gracious!

# New Testament Tie-In

*Parashat Beha'alotcha* contains that well-known story of the seventy elders receiving "some of the *Ruach*" that was on Moses (cf. Numbers 11:25). This fascinating scene has a compelling connection to the holiday we just celebrated: *Shavuot*-Pentecost. Instead of Moses and the seventy elders, the Book of Acts describes *Yeshua* and His 120 followers.

We need to make a crucial distinction here, though. The text states that *ADONAI* descended and placed some of the *Ruach* **on** Israel's elders. The Hebrew word for "on" is 'al and, "usually functions as a preposition. It is translated over thirty different ways in the [Hebrew Bible], the most common being above, against, beside, concerning, on, over, upon."<sup>2</sup> Notice that all of those prepositions describe external realities. In contrast, the Holy Spirit now dwells **in** *Yeshua's* followers (His Body). This seemingly insignificant grammatical detail transforms who we are. Consider Paul's words, "**However, you are not in the flesh but in the *Ruach*—if indeed the *Ruach Elohim* dwells in you**" (Rom 8:9a *emphasis added*).

But let's return to our scene in Numbers 11. This giving of the Spirit occurred at the Tent of Meeting. All who attended were there by invitation, "gathered" as the text reads. And yet, as this wondrous scene unfolded at the Tent, another storyline was playing out back in the camp:

Two men, however, had remained in the camp. The name of one was Eldad and the name of the other was Medad. The *Ruach* rested on them. They were among those listed, but they had not gone out to the Tent. So they prophesied in the camp. – Numbers 11:26

Moses' loyal assistant, Joshua, was understandably provoked. He "**cried out and said, 'Moses, my lord, stop them!'**" (v. 28) There's something understandable and prescient about Joshua's objection. First, to be invited ("listed") and not show up at the Tent is outrageous. That alone should disqualify these two men. Secondly, in the upcoming chapters we're going to read narratives about Miriam and Korah which describe severe consequences for not cooperating with Moses' authority.

## What do we make of these two "unqualified prophets"?

For starters, this tale conveys a common issue in the life of God's people: His work always transcends our expectations and often violates our sensibilities. We must not presume that the Almighty sees the world the same way we do. But beyond this, we see God's unrelenting grace. We don't know why these two men failed to show up for a divine appointment. And yet their delinquency reveals a profound truth: our failures do not have power over God's purposes! God is gracious—even to those playing hooky.

But what if Eldad and Medad serve as prophetic signposts, pointing to a day when unqualified outsiders (i.e., Gentiles) would receive the Spirit? When Peter finally went to Cornelius' home,

"The *Ruach ha-Kodesh* fell on all those hearing the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were astonished, because the gift of the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and magnifying God." – Acts 10:44-46

When word of this spread to Jerusalem, "**those of the circumcision took issue with him**" (Acts 11:2)—a faint echo of Joshua's reaction to Eldad and Medad's experience. Like Moses, Peter considered the manifestation of the Spirit as a sign that God was working, despite clashes with human expectations: "**if God gave them the same gift as also to us after we put our trust in the Lord Messiah *Yeshua*, who was I to stand in God's way?**" (v. 17)

Friends, when God is determined to place His Spirit **in** you, His relentless grace can find you and make this a reality. You may feel like Eldad and Medad, like an outsider, like you missed your appointment. Take heart! If Moses desired that the Almighty "would put the Spirit on all" (cf. Numbers 11:29), how much more does *Yeshua*—the "greater than Moses"—want to pour His Spirit **in** you today!

# Hebrew Word Study

## *tzemach* [צמח] / "sprout or bud"

"Listen well, Joshua *kohen gadol*, both you and your companions seated before you, because they are men who are a sign—behold, I will bring forth My servant the **Branch**." – Zechariah 3:8

The word we will be looking at this week is צמח (*tzemach*). This noun appears a total of twelve times in the Hebrew Bible. One source defines this Hebrew term as "a sprout (usually concrete), literal or figurative—branch, bud, that which...grew (upon)." There isn't as much of a range of meaning with this word. However, *tzemach* has profound and significant prophetic overtones. With this in mind, let's take a different approach to our study. Analyzing the meaning of *tzemach* *outside* of its prophetic contexts just might help us better understand what those prophetic statements mean.

Let's start with Genesis 19:25,

"So He demolished these cities and the whole surrounding area, all the inhabitants of the cities and **the vegetation [vetzemach]** of the ground." – Zechariah 3:8

In Psalm 65:10, we read,

"You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its **growth [tzimchah]**." NRSVUE

Moving over to Isaiah 61:11,

"For as the earth brings forth its **sprouts [tzimchah]**, and as a garden causes things sown to spring up, so *ADONAI Elohim* will cause justice and praise to spring up before all the nations."

Finally, consider Ezekiel 17:9,

"Say, thus says *ADONAI Elohim*: 'Will it thrive? Will it not be uprooted and stripped of its fruit so it withers? All its **new roots [tzimchah]** will wither. It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it up by its roots.'"

All of these verses have a very similar trend. They refer to a specific form of horticulture in which the "sprout" or "branch" is new and emerging. While farmers plant wheat and similar crops annually, vines—especially grape vines—as well as trees, such as olive trees, are retained and pruned. Occasionally, you may even need to remove them entirely to their root systems.

For instance, in Slovenia, there are grape vines over 400 years old. In Jerusalem, there are olive trees that are believed to be over 2,000 years old. At times, fire will destroy these types of plants down to the dirt; however, the root system remains alive and active. From what remains, a new sprout or branch will shoot forth and regenerate above the surface. Ultimately, those vines will continue to produce grapes for wine, and those trees will produce olives for oil.

Now, we come to prophetic texts, such as this week's *haftarah*. Or look at Jeremiah 33:15, which reads, "In those days and at that time, I will cause a **Branch of Righteousness to spring up for David, and He will execute justice and righteousness in the land.**" It's helpful to remember that at the time of Jeremiah's prophecy, Judea was about to go into exile, and David's throne seemed to be cut off. Though Babylon seemingly razed the royal line to the ground, new growth could burst forth from the roots and bring forth fruit once again. **In this case, it would be the Messiah!**



# FUSION

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

צמח

**צמח/ *tzemach*: N. sprout, growth, branch.**

The noun appears twelve times and is used as a messianic term in at least five passages. A late Phoenician inscription discovered at Larnaka, Cyprus dating from the 3rd century b.c. contains the phrase *tzemach tzedek* "the rightful shoot" which meant that the individual was the legitimate heir to the throne. A similar idea is found in the 15th century b.c. Ugaritic Keret epic which calls Keret *sph ltpn*, i.e. "the shoot or progeny of Ltpn." Thus *tzemach* is a technical term signifying a scion or son. While the idea is attested in Ugaritic with the root *sph*., so far the only use of the root *smh* attested in Ugaritic is in several personal names.

As David reflects on the everlasting covenant which Nathan previously announced to him, he asks rhetorically; "Will not God cause all my salvation and all my desire to sprout?" (II Sam 23:5). The later biblical writers take up this theme and answer, as did one of the Psalms of Ascent (132:17), with a "yes!" In Jerusalem God will cause the horn of David to sprout up; in fact, it will spring forth for the whole house of Israel (Ezk 29:21).

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:

- Unfortunately, the heretical teaching of Marcion still plagues the Body of Messiah. Granted, few believers will come out and say that they believe the god of the Old Testament is distinct from the one in the New Testament, but the idea is easily assumed in subtle ways. Have you experienced this? How can we help people understand that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God of Peter, James, and John? Why does it matter?
- The fear of missing out is a major motivator for many. Unfortunately, this can also lead to despair when one presumes that their "ship has sailed." Our foolish choices or circumstances beyond our control can seem to keep us from experiencing God's purposes for us, but the story of Eldad and Medad suggests otherwise! Be encouraged today—God still meets His people, even when they're "outside the camp."

# GLOBAL

**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** *Parashat Shelach* / פרשת שלח-לך

## **TORAH**

*Sunday* / Numbers 13:1-20

*Monday* / Numbers 13:21-14:7

*Tuesday* / Numbers 14:8-25

*Wednesday* / Numbers 14:26-15:7

*Thursday* / Numbers 15:8-16

*Friday* / Numbers 15:17-26

*Saturday* / Numbers 15:27-41

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

Joshua 2:1-24

## **New Covenant Reading:**

Matthew 10:1-14

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

<sup>1</sup> The use of a lowercase “g” here is intentional, as only the true and living God revealed in Scripture and incarnate in *Yeshua* is distinguished by an uppercase “G.”

<sup>2</sup> G. Lloyd Carr, “עֵלָה 1624,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 669.