



NUMBERS

NAMES
IMAGES
TABERNACLE
AARON
RED HEIFER
ROCK
BRONZE SERPENT
ANGEL
MANIFESTATIONS

MESSIAH

The Messiah in the Book of Numbers

By Jacques Isaac Gabizon

At first sight, the book of Numbers may seem plain, even unattractive, with its many genealogies, the never-ending measurements of the Tabernacle, and the many laws of offerings. However, understanding that *every word of God is pure*, as Solomon discovered (Prov. 30:5), and being convinced that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*, as Paul understood (2 Tim. 3:16), the reader will quickly discover that, indeed, all Scripture converges toward our Lord and Savior—even the book of Numbers.

The first chapters of Numbers bring us to the time when Israel was being formed as a nation of priests, and it is here that we begin to see how the nation of Israel reflected so many facets of Yeshua - in their formation, in their names, in each of their ministries.

The Names of Numbers 1

Beginning in Numbers 1:5, the names mentioned in the first genealogy speak of Yeshua. “Reuben” means “I see a son.” The name marks the history of redemption. This was, in a sense, Israel’s first task: to show the world the Son. The same applies to us today.

The names of Reuben’s sons speak of God’s nature: *from Reuben, Elizur the son of*

Shedeur (Num. 1:5). Translated, the names read: “I see a Son;” “My God is a rock;” “Son of the One who gives light.”

These are the opening words for the list of the 12 tribes of Israel.

The next brother mentioned is Simeon (Num. 1:6). His name means “he who hears” or “man of hearing.” In Hebrew, hearing is obeying, and so Simeon’s name reminds us that when we see the Son, we hear and obey Him. Verse 6 continues: *from Simeon, Shelumiel the son of*

Zurishaddai. Translated, this means: “I followed Him,” [I became] “the friend of God,” “the son of my rock is almighty.”

In verse 7, we meet Judah, whose name means “praise.” The word “Jew” is derived from this name. The verse goes on to say, *from Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab*. This may be translated as “the One whom I praise,” “the wise and noble One.” Thus, the plan of redemption unfolds: Once we see the Son, we



follow Him and praise Him, because He is the wise and noble One.

This is a grand entry into the book of Numbers: “I see a son. My God is a rock. Son of the One who gives light. I followed Him. I became the friend of God, the Son of my rock is almighty. The One whom I praise, the wise and noble One.”

In the body of the Messiah today, each representative of God brings glory to Him and is different and unique. No testimony is the same. Each has a word, a ministry tailored for him or her. It is not only in their individuality that the believers in Messiah Yeshua mirror their Savior; it is in their formation as a group as well, as it is with the congregation of God. This is where Numbers 2 brings us.

The Image of Redemption in Numbers 2

Numbers 2 provides in great detail the number of men in each tribe and their position in the camp. Combining the information, the image of redemption emerges. In the center of the nation of Israel was the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolized the presence of God. Positioned around the ark were the Levites, who took care of it. They were surrounded by the 12 tribes of Israel, whose positions in the camp formed the letter *tav*. In Paleo-Hebrew script, this letter looked like a cross. The Israelites may have understood this letter as the sign of redemption because they had used it to protect their firstborn from the last plague in Egypt. As we well

remember, the Israelites were instructed to put blood on the lintel and door posts of their homes. If we were to extend these lines, vertically and horizontally, they would form a *tav*, or a cross. So, we have the formation of the tribes of Israel surrounding the Tabernacle reflecting this letter “*tav*” and we have Yeshua crucified on a cross that looked like a *tav*. Hence, we can see the deep connection between Israel’s election by God and her responsibility to carry this *tav*, or symbol of salvation, to the nations around her.

At the door of the Tabernacle of God was Judah, the tribe from which the Messiah was to come. Next to him were Zebulun and Issachar. In the first century, they were located in Galilee of the Gentiles, where Yeshua began His ministry. Nazareth, where Yeshua spent thirty years of His life, was in Zebulun. Furthermore, Cana, where He performed His first miracle turning water into wine, was located in Zebulun.

The Tabernacle in Numbers 3 and 4

Numbers 3 and 4 deal with the Tabernacle and all it contains. The chapters show how sacred and holy each of the items in the Tabernacle were, so much so that the Levites were to be careful all the time. Their demanding work is an image of the believers handling the Scriptures and how each word should be protected.

At the time of the book of Numbers, there were three groups of priests: the

Levites (or Kohathites), the Gershonites, and the Merarites. Each group had a specific ministry of handling the things of God. The Kohathites were the only ones who could handle the most sacred items. If anything went wrong, they were primarily responsible.

The Tabernacle was covered with the skins of one particular animal. This fact reminds us of the first act of redemption in the Bible: When Adam and Eve sinned, God covered them with animal skins. Blood was shed to pay for their sin. That was a prophecy of the coming Messiah who was to die for the sin of man, and the Tabernacle is the sequel of this prophecy.

No one knows exactly which animal was used to provide the skin for the Tabernacle. In Hebrew, the word used is *tachash*, which is translated as “badger,” “seal,” “goat,” and even “dolphin.” Ezekiel 16:10 mentions that the skin of the *tachash* was used to make sandals, meaning that it was a common, ordinary skin. This may be seen as a prophecy of the first coming of the Messiah: The most sacred object, the Messiah, the King of kings, came to dwell with us dressed in ordinary, common skin.

In this sea of *tachash* which covered the Tabernacle, one element stood out because it was of a different color: the Ark of the Covenant. It was first covered from sight with the veil which separated the Holy of Holies from the holy place. Then there was the *tachash*, which itself was covered with blue fabric. This was not any shade of blue, but the color *keleth*, which in Hebrew implied a hue of purple and was the



color of royalty. It is estimated that approximately 12,000 snails yielded 1.4 grams of that color dye. Such is our Messiah: He is rare, exceptional, unimaginable; and at His second coming, He will rule as king over the earth.

According to Numbers 15:39, this was the same color each Israelite was asked to wear on his *tzitzit*, the tassels: *And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined.* Through the tassels, the Israelites kept the memory of the presence of God with them. For us, these tassels are a prophecy which speaks of the Spirit who dwells in every believer. We are the priests who carry the presence of God—the “ark of the covenant”—to proclaim that the Messiah came and is coming back.

The Significance of the Items in the Tabernacle

Every item in the Tabernacle spoke of a facet of our Savior. The poles which held the tent and were used to carry the Tabernacle in the wilderness were made of wood covered with gold. They depict the two natures of the Messiah: The wood represents His humanity as fragile, but the gold represents His divinity as strong.

The two altars can also be viewed as representing the Messiah. The first altar was the altar of sacrifice. It was made of wood and covered with brass, symbolizing Messiah’s humanity. All

the sacrifices were made on this altar, but Messiah was the last and ultimate sacrifice.

The altar of incense was also made of wood, but covered with gold. This was the altar of prayer, and here we see the priestly office of Yeshua who sits on the heavenly throne symbolized by the gold.

The lampstand provided the light inside the Tabernacle. The flame was fed by olive oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The arms of the lampstand resembled the branches on an almond tree, with ornamental knobs ending in a flower at the top. The Hebrew word for almond is *saqued*. It stems from the word *soqued*, meaning “to watch,” “to provide light.” This lampstand represents the Messiah, who said in John 8:12: *I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.* The lampstand also represents the believer in Yeshua, who is called *the light of the world* in Matthew 5:14.

Made of solid gold, the lampstand itself reflected the light it gave off. This represents our work of mirroring the Messiah to the people around us. Furthermore, Josephus, himself a Levite, tells us that the lampstand consisted of 70 parts,¹ reminding us of the 70 nations mentioned in the table of the nations in Genesis 10. It has become for now the task of every believer in Yeshua to bless these nations with the light of God.

In front of the lampstand stood the table of the 12 loaves of bread, one for each of the tribes of Israel. This was

God’s way to tell His people that he had bread and provision for each of the three million Israelites. Today, Yeshua tells the believers: *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you* (Mt. 6:33). This bread He will give us—that is a promise.

This bread spoke of Him as well. In the discussion about the Israelites in the desert found in John 6, Yeshua said: *I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst* (Jn. 6:35). He truly is the bread we need, and any person will find in Him the provision for all his needs.

The Messiah in the Person of Aaron

As we move on in the book of Numbers, a progressive revelation of the Messiah ensues. Let’s consider Aaron, the first high priest in Israel. He was given the task to preserve, and many times to save, the nation, but this man clearly pointed to the Messiah. One verse which shows this important and humanly impossible ministry Aaron had is Numbers 16:48: *And [Aaron] stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was held back.* Aaron stood between the dead and the living. As a high priest, he had the power to stop death, to save, but no man can do this. Therefore, Aaron, as the high priest, represented our High Priest, Yeshua (Heb. 8:1), who is the only One who can stand between death and life and impart to us eternal life.

¹Antiquities 3.182



Yeshua's priesthood is also the subject of Numbers 17. In this chapter, we encounter the great story of Aaron's rod, which brings out the exclusivity of Yeshua who, as the Bible affirms, is the only way to heaven. During the wilderness wanderings, some challenged Aaron's priesthood. Therefore, God asked every leader of each tribe to provide a rod which was placed next to the Ark of the Covenant. The day after, the rods were brought out, and *behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.* (Num. 17:8). Aaron's rod budded quickly in a dark place with no window. This may be compared to the believer in this world when he is in the Spirit. The rod also produced *almonds*, like the almonds of the lampstand. This was God's way to say, "If you want to bear fruit, follow the order I established." Only when we follow the law of the Messiah will the rod bud.

Aaron pointed to the eternal priesthood of the Messiah. His rod speaks of our submission to the law of the Messiah, without which we may not bud and produce fruit.

The Red Heifer

In Numbers 19, another powerful light is lit, and the reader is surprised with the story of the red heifer. God asked Moses to bring a red heifer without blemish and to kill it outside the camp, not in the Tabernacle. Then, he had to burn it completely and add to its ashes *cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet* (Num. 19:6). The resulting ashes were then mixed

with water, and the concoction became the "water of separation" between good and evil. It had the power to cleanse those who were ritually or legally rendered unclean.

However, there was a paradox in the commandment which baffled rabbinical commentators. How could an unclean man make another clean? And how could the one who applied the water of purification stay unclean while the one who received it was made clean? Rabbis such as Rashi and Abarbanel could not resolve this dichotomy, but we can! We believe that the Messiah has come to die for the sins of the world, and of Him it is said in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* This is the red heifer fulfilled. The Messiah, who has life in Himself, made Himself *sin for us*, to impart life to us. Without ever sinning, He carried sin for us, thus resolving the paradox of the red heifer. John puts it this way: *And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin* (1Jn. 3:5).

The mixture of water, cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet enhanced the color of the red fur of the heifer, reminding the Israelites of the following truth found at the foundation of all sacrifices: *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul* (Lev.17:11).

Furthermore, the cedar is among the highest trees, while the hyssop is one of the smallest plant. Both point to the two comings of the Messiah: from King in heaven to a persecuted prophet. He

who was with God came and lived with His people, from the highest to be the lowest of men, so we may have salvation.

The word translated as "scarlet" is very important, as it describes the Messiah Himself. In Hebrew, it is *towla*, which means "worm," but it was from this worm that a bright red color was extracted and used in the Temple of God for the veils, the ephod of the high priest, and the door of the Tabernacle. In Psalm 22, David in his foreshadowing of the Messiah says, *But I am a worm (towla) and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people.* And so He was on the *tav*, on the cross.

The Water from the Rock

What we have seen so far would have been *dayenu*—enough. We have certainly made the case for Messiah's presence in the book of Numbers. However, it is in chapter 20 where we encounter one of the clearest symbols of the Messiah yet: the water from the rock. The Israelites were thirsty, and out of a rock, God brought living waters to save them.

Many times in the Holy Scriptures, God is depicted as a rock. David spoke of Him as his rock, and I believe he was referring to Numbers 20 when he said in Psalm 18:2: *The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted.* In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul clearly identified the Messiah as our rock: *and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Messiah.*



Therefore, the LORD in Psalm 18 is the Messiah. He is the One who gives us the water of life.

The Hebrew word translated as “rock” in Numbers 20 does not tell us whether the rock is small or large. However, Paul used a Greek word in 1 Corinthians 10 that allows us to judge just how big the rock was. The word there is *petra*, which indicates a massive rock, not *petros*, which could be as small as a pebble. The amount of water coming forth from such a rock could have been like a waterfall. This is how generous our Lord is. When He gives, He gives abundantly.

The Bronze Serpent

Moving onto chapter 21, we come to one of the most inconceivable stories in the book of Numbers: the story of the bronze serpent. One more time, the people messed up; but this time, it was the drop that spilled the glass in the history of Israel. Numbers 21:5 tells us that the Israelites *spoke against God and against Moses*, “*Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.*” God could either destroy this nation, as He did others in the flood, or provide an unconditional salvation based on a simple response from the people. This is when He *sent fiery serpents among the people* (Num. 21:6), and many died.

From Genesis, we know that the serpent symbolizes sin. God asked Moses to build a long pole, at the end of which he was to put a brass serpent.

And if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived (Num. 21:9).

Here is laid out for
us the great
teaching of
salvation by faith, a
teaching exclusive
to our Bible. While
we see it right from
the beginning in
Genesis, it is clearly
set up for us in
Numbers 21: Look
at the serpent and
be saved. No works
required.

Yeshua referred to this passage in John 3:14 when He spoke of the salvation He provides for all: *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*. As Moses did, so the Son of Man did. As Moses the mediator raised the pole, so the Messiah raised Himself on the cross to save us. Yeshua continued: *that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life* (Jn. 3:15-16). This is the message of salvation we find in the book of Numbers,

written 1,500 years before Yeshua came to earth.

If I had to speculate, I’d say that Moses stuck the pole through the brass serpent’s head. Speaking to Satan who took the form of a serpent, God said in Genesis 3:15: *And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel*. It is on the pole and later the cross that the serpent’s head was bruised. We have are two pictures side by side: a vanquished serpent and a victorious Mediator.

The Angel of the Lord

So far, we have many symbols and prophecies, but there is one place in Numbers where Yeshua Himself came down from heaven. Balaam, the false prophet, was on his way to curse Israel. It is then that Yeshua appeared: *The angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him* (Num. 22:22). The *angel of the Lord* is a theophany, a physical manifestation of God. What prompted Him to appear? Why was He standing against Balaam?

Looking at the literal translation of this verse, it becomes clear that the angel of the Lord did not stand against Balaam only: “The angel of the LORD took His stand in the way of Satan and of him.” The adversary is really another created being, and his name is Satan. In this appearance of the Messiah, He is standing between Satan and Israel. The Messiah came to protect His people, as He does today.



Other Manifestations in Numbers

Throughout the book of Numbers, Messiah appeared in the form of a cloud (Num. 9:16), which the rabbis called the “Shekinah glory.” The term “Shekinah” comes from the word *shakan*, meaning to dwell. The same Hebrew word found its way into the Gospel of John: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn. 1:14). The word *dwelt* is *skeinei*, a Greek word borrowed from the Hebrew *shakan*. The One who came to dwell with us was Yeshua. His Spirit, who is the Shekinah (1 Pet.1:11), dwells with us today.

During the forty years in the wilderness, God sustained His people by giving them manna, which is a type of the Messiah. Speaking of manna, Yeshua said in John 6:33: “*For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*”

According to Numbers 11:7-9, manna tasted like coriander and bdellium. Coriander is much more than the spice we know today. The Hebrew word is *gad*, and it means “fortune,” “riches.” The term “bdellium” refers to a valuable precious stone and comes from a root word which means “to separate.” This is the same kind of separation found in Genesis 1 when the Spirit separated the waters from the waters and the light from darkness. The idea is that bdellium was something precious, something set apart. Hence, the two words used in the Scriptures to describe the taste of manna have a root which speak of its

uniqueness, and it is as if God was saying, “Look at what they are calling common.” In Hebrew, the term “manna” means “What is it?” The Israelites certainly enjoyed the great benefit of manna, but they did not want to know more than that, like it says in Isaiah 53:1: *Who has believed our report?*

When we look at all 36 chapters of Numbers, one individual stands out: the exceptional man Moses. He, too, is a type of the Messiah, but in his own way. Deuteronomy 34:10 declares: *There never again arose a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom YHWH acknowledged face to face.* If there was one person in history who could save the world, it was this man. Yet, throughout Numbers, he always spoke of his weaknesses and his inability to lead the people, and it is in his complaints and failures where he succeeded to point to the Savior of the world, Yeshua. “I cannot bear the people anymore,” he told God, but the Messiah did bear them and also bore their sins (Isa. 53:4).

After Moses had died, God provided another way of communicating with Him and finding out His will. This is the way He speaks to us today. Moses’ successor, Joshua, did not have the direct revelation of God. He was to *stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim* (Num. 27:21). The Bible does not tell us how the Urim and Thummim (as they are called throughout the rest of Scripture) worked, but they revealed the will of God. The first word, “Urim,” begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*. The second word,

“Thummim,” begins with the last letter of the alphabet, *tet*. Hence, we have the full declaration of the will of God in these two terms. Furthermore, according to Yeshua Himself, two letters are part of who He is. He said, *I am the Alpha and the Omega*, (Rev. 22:13), Alpha being the first and Omega the last letter of the Greek alphabet. The Gospel of John declares that Yeshua is also the very word of God (Jn. 1:1). Hence, today our Urim and Thummim is our Bible, through whom the Lord reveals His will. Moses is gone, but the Israelites had the Torah; and today we have the full revelation of God in His Word.

The Messiah left many more traces in Numbers; too many, in fact, to fit into this article. The book ends beautifully with a wedding, just like our history of this part of eternity will end when the Messiah will come from heaven to take His bride. Until that day, let’s continue to study the Scriptures, for they alone reveal to us the truth about our Messiah.



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