

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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**1** On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt, the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, saying:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי בְּאֶהֱל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית לְצֵאתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר:

*The Generation of the Exodus: The Wilderness Camp* (1:1–10:10)

#### CENSUS IN THE WILDERNESS (1:1–54)

The march of the Israelites through the wilderness, from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land, will take them through hostile environments, both natural and human. To meet those dangers, the people must be organized into a military camp, which requires a census.

**1. first day** In ancient times, the first day of each month was a holiday that provided an op-

portunity to bring the people together for important announcements.

**wilderness** Hebrew: *midbar*; it does not mean “desert.” Although the scant rainfall in the Sinai cannot support agriculture, it can provide adequate pasturage for flocks.

**The LORD spoke . . . in the Tent of Meeting** As Moses had been permitted to ascend to the

This fourth book of the Torah is known as “Numbers” in English, because of the census recorded in the opening chapter. In some Rabbinic texts it is called “The Book of the Census” (*Seifer Ha-P’kudim*). Its proper Hebrew designation, from its first significant word, is *B’midbar* (In the Wilderness of), and it describes a people wandering through a spiritual as well as a geographic wilderness.

What must it have been like to experience the transition from the grand events of Sinai and the Sea of Reeds to the daily routine of the wilderness? The answer might lead us to the lesson that life is lived, not so much in the grand moments as in uncelebrated ordinary times. In Numbers, the focus of leadership passes from the prophet Moses to the priest Aaron, perhaps because the prophet issues great demands from the mountaintop, whereas the priest is involved with the people in the complexities and routines of daily life.

Throughout this book, the Israelites, who had experienced the Exodus, the crossing of the sea, and the revelation at Sinai, are described as a petulant, complaining people, constantly trying the patience of God and of Moses. In Hirsch’s words, *B’midbar* contrasts “the people of Israel as it actually is” to “the ideal to which it was summoned in *Va-yikra*.”

The generation of the wilderness dies off in the course of the 38 years covered by this book. At its conclusion, a new generation of Israelites who had never known slavery, a generation for whom the revelation at Sinai was tradition

rather than personal experience, stands poised to enter the Promised Land.

#### CHAPTER 1

This first *parashah* deals mainly with two subjects: the census of Israelite adult males in preparation for the battles to reach and conquer the Promised Land, and the physical arrangement of the various tribes as they marched and as they camped.

**1. in the Tent of Meeting** “The LORD transferred the divine Presence from Sinai to the tabernacle, from a sanctuary established by God to one fashioned by the people Israel. The tabernacle was a portable Mount Sinai, the heavens transplanted and brought down to earth” (B. Jacob). The Israelites never felt lost in the wilderness because they were able to focus on the tabernacle at the center of their encampment.

The Jewish calendar arranges for these opening chapters of the Book of Numbers (which begin with God speaking to the people in the wilderness of Sinai) to be read in most years on the *Shabbat* before the festival that celebrates the giving of the Torah, *Shavu-ot*. According to the Sages, this should remind us that the Torah was given in a wilderness, a place accessible to all, a site that belonged to no one people, and that it was given to a people with no real property and few possessions. “One should be as open as a wilderness to receive the Torah” (BT Ned. 55a). It is intimidating to open oneself to the demands of God, to a new and morally de-

<sup>2</sup>Take a census of the whole Israelite community by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head. <sup>3</sup>You and Aaron shall record them by their groups, from the age of twenty years up, all those in Israel who are able to bear arms. <sup>4</sup>Associated with you shall be a man from each tribe, each one the head of his ancestral house.

<sup>5</sup>These are the names of the men who shall assist you:

From Reuben, Elizur son of Shedeur.

Presence of God atop the mountain, so might he enter the Tent of Meeting—a Mount Sinai on earth, so to speak. The Lord's voice came from within, from between the two cherubim facing each other atop the Ark.

**2.** The census described here follows the procedures of censuses in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. It even uses the same terminology. The census was indispensable for military conscription and for any government levy on persons or property. From 10:11, it is clear that the census was completed in less than 20 days.

**3. twenty years up** The age of conscription in ancient Israel. No upper limit is given here.

manding way of life. The Torah portrays the people Israel as periodically wishing they were back in the predictable, morally undemanding servitude of Egypt. Yet Israel's willingness to accept the Torah, to be "as open as a wilderness" to let the Torah's morality fill the moral vacuum in the lives of former slaves, was the essential first step in God's remaking the world. For the first time, God's world will contain a model people, guided by the Torah to live a God-oriented life.

The wilderness, untouched by human settlement, offered a contrast to Egypt, which was dominated by monuments fashioned by human hands. Thus it was a fitting stage for God's being proclaimed sovereign of the world. We may even see a parallel between the revelation at Sinai (when God imposed moral order in the midst of a wilderness) and the creation of the world (when God imposed natural order on chaos).

**2. Take a census** Literally, "lift the head." This prompted the comment, "Let the Israel-

שָׂאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ כָּל־עֵדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל<sup>2</sup>  
לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת  
כָּל־זָכָר לְגִלְגֻלְתָּם: <sup>3</sup> מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה  
וְמֵעֵלָה כָּל־יָצֵא צָבָא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל תִּפְקְדוּ  
אֹתָם לְצְבָאֲתָם אֹתָהּ וְאֶהְרֹן: <sup>4</sup> וְאִתְּכֶם  
יִהְיוּ אִישׁ אִישׁ לְמִטָּה אִישׁ רֹאשׁ לְבֵית־  
אֲבֹתָיו הוּא:

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמְדוּ  
אִתְּכֶם

לְרֹאוּבֵן אֶלְיָצוּר בֶּן־שִׁדְיָאוּר:

**able to bear arms** The previous statement with no age limit is now qualified.

**5–15.** Tribal lists throughout the Bible may vary in the names and the order of the tribes, but they share in common the concern for preserving the number 12. These lists can be divided roughly into two groups: those that include the tribe of Levi and those that omit it. All the tribal lists in Numbers fall into the latter category, because the tribe of Levi was exempt from military conscription.

**These are the names** The census supervisors, mandatory according to verse 4, are named by God.

ites hold their heads high in pride as they contemplate who their ancestors were" (Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl). Although the purpose of the census was purely functional, mustering the Israelites for battle, the Midrash uncovers another dimension to it, by comparing God to a person who had a store of precious jewels. From time to time, this individual would take out the jewels and count them to take pleasure in their beauty and to be reassured that they were all safely there (Num. R. 4:2). For Ramban, the census testifies to the miracle of Israel's survival and increase despite the efforts of Pharaoh and Amalek and the rigors of the wilderness journey. He points to the enduring lesson of Jewish history: We have not succumbed in spite of devastating losses and persecution. Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev connects the final total of 603,550 Israelites (v. 46) to a tradition that there are 603,550 letters in the Torah. Just as the absence of one letter renders a Torah scroll unfit for use, the loss of even one Jew prevents Israel from fulfilling its divine mission.

<sup>6</sup>From Simeon, Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai.

<sup>7</sup>From Judah, Nahshon son of Amminadab.

<sup>8</sup>From Issachar, Nethanel son of Zuar.

<sup>9</sup>From Zebulun, Eliab son of Helon.

<sup>10</sup>From the sons of Joseph:

from Ephraim, Elishama son of Ammihud;

from Manasseh, Gamaliel son of Pedahzur.

<sup>11</sup>From Benjamin, Abidan son of Gideon.

<sup>12</sup>From Dan, Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai.

<sup>13</sup>From Asher, Pagiel son of Ocran.

<sup>14</sup>From Gad, Eliasaph son of Deuel.

<sup>15</sup>From Naphtali, Ahira son of Enan.

<sup>16</sup>Those are the elected of the assembly, the chieftains of their ancestral tribes: they are the heads of the contingents of Israel.

<sup>17</sup>So Moses and Aaron took those men, who were designated by name, <sup>18</sup>and on the first day of the second month they convoked the whole community, who were registered by the clans of their ancestral houses—the names of those aged twenty years and over being listed head by head. <sup>19</sup>As the LORD had commanded Moses, so he recorded them in the wilderness of Sinai.

<sup>20</sup>They totaled as follows:

The descendants of Reuben, Israel's first-born, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, head by head, all males aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>21</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Reuben: 46,500.

<sup>22</sup>Of the descendants of Simeon, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, their enrollment as listed by name, head by head, all males aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>23</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Simeon: 59,300.

6 לְשִׁמְעוֹן שְׁלֹמִיאֵל בֶּן-צֹרִישָׁדַי:

7 לְיְהוּדָה נַחֲשׁוֹן בֶּן-עַמִּינָדָב:

8 לְיִשָּׁשָׁכָר נֶתְנָאֵל בֶּן-צֹעֵר:

9 לְזְבוּלֹן אֱלִיאָב בֶּן-חֶלֶן:

10 לְבְנֵי יוֹסֵף

לְאֶפְרַיִם אֱלִישָׁמָע בֶּן-עַמִּיהוּד

לְמְנַשֶּׁה גַּמְלִיאֵל בֶּן-פְּדָהצֹר:

11 לְבְנֵימֶן אַבִּידָן בֶּן-גִּדְעֹנִי:

12 לְדָן אַחִיעֶזֶר בֶּן-עַמִּישָׁדַי:

13 לְאַשֶׁר פַּגְעִיאֵל בֶּן-עֹכְרָן:

14 לְגָד אֱלִיסָפ בֶּן-דְּעוּאֵל:

15 לְנַפְתָּלִי אַחִירַע בֶּן-עֵינָן:

16 אֵלֶּה קְרִיאֵי קְרוּאֵי הָעֵדָה נְשִׂאֵי מִטּוֹת

אֲבוֹתָם רָאשֵׁי אֲלֵפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵם:

17 וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה

אֲשֶׁר נִקְבּוּ בְשֵׁמוֹת: <sup>18</sup> וְאֵת כָּל-הָעֵדָה

הִקְהִילוּ בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי וַיִּתְּלָדוּ

עַל-מִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפָּר

שְׁמוֹת מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה

לְגַלְגַּלְתָּם: <sup>19</sup> כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת-מֹשֶׁה

וַיִּפְקְדֵם בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי: פ

20 וַיְהִי בְנֵי-רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל תּוֹלְדֹתָם

לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפָּר שְׁמוֹת

לְגַלְגַּלְתָּם כָּל-זָכָר מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה

וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>21</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטָּה

רְאוּבֵן שֵׁשָׁה וְאַרְבַּעִים אֶלֶף וַחֲמִשָּׁ

מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>22</sup> לְבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן תּוֹלְדֹתָם

לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם פְּקֻדֵיהֶם בְּמִסְפָּר

שְׁמוֹת לְגַלְגַּלְתָּם כָּל-זָכָר מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים

שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>23</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם

לְמִטָּה שִׁמְעוֹן תִּשְׁעָה וַחֲמִשָּׁים אֶלֶף

**18. and on the first day** The date of verse 1 is repeated to emphasize that the census was begun on the very day it was commanded.

**were registered** Hebrew: *va-yityaldu*; literally, “declared their lineage,” according to their

households and clans (Onk., Targ. Jon.).

**20. Israel's first-born** Reuben's title is given to account for the fact that he heads the list even though Judah is to lead the march (see 1 Chron. 5:1–2).

<sup>24</sup>Of the descendants of Gad, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>25</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Gad: 45,650.

<sup>26</sup>Of the descendants of Judah, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>27</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Judah: 74,600.

<sup>28</sup>Of the descendants of Issachar, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>29</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Issachar: 54,400.

<sup>30</sup>Of the descendants of Zebulun, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>31</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Zebulun: 57,400.

<sup>32</sup>Of the descendants of Joseph:

Of the descendants of Ephraim, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>33</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Ephraim: 40,500.

<sup>34</sup>Of the descendants of Manasseh, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>35</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Manasseh: 32,200.

<sup>36</sup>Of the descendants of Benjamin, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>37</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Benjamin: 35,400.

<sup>38</sup>Of the descendants of Dan, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>39</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Dan: 62,700.

וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>24</sup> לְבִנֵי גַד תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>25</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטָּה גַד חֲמִשָּׁה וָאַרְבָּעִים אֶלֶף וְשֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁים: פ <sup>26</sup> לְבִנֵי יְהוּדָה תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>27</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטָּה יְהוּדָה אַרְבַּעַה וְשִׁבְעִים אֶלֶף וְשֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>28</sup> לְבִנֵי יִשְׁשָׁכָר תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>29</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטָּה יִשְׁשָׁכָר אַרְבַּעַה וַחֲמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף וָאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>30</sup> לְבִנֵי זְבוּלֹן תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>31</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטָּה זְבוּלֹן שִׁבְעָה וַחֲמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף וָאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>32</sup> לְבִנֵי יוֹסֵף תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>33</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטָּה אֶפְרַיִם אַרְבָּעִים אֶלֶף וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>34</sup> לְבִנֵי מְנַשֶּׁה תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>35</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטָּה מְנַשֶּׁה מֵנַשֶּׁה וּמִשֵּׁשׁ מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>36</sup> לְבִנֵי בִנְיָמִן תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>37</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטָּה בִנְיָמִן חֲמִשָּׁה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף וָאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>38</sup> לְבִנֵי דָן תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כֹּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>39</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטָּה דָן שְׁנַיִם

<sup>40</sup>Of the descendants of Asher, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house, as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>41</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Asher: 41,500.

<sup>42</sup>[Of] the descendants of Naphtali, the registration of the clans of their ancestral house as listed by name, aged twenty years and over, all who were able to bear arms—<sup>43</sup>those enrolled from the tribe of Naphtali: 53,400.

<sup>44</sup>Those are the enrollments recorded by Moses and Aaron and by the chieftains of Israel, who were twelve in number, one man to each ancestral house. <sup>45</sup>All the Israelites, aged twenty years and over, enrolled by ancestral houses, all those in Israel who were able to bear arms—<sup>46</sup>all who were enrolled came to 603,550.

<sup>47</sup>The Levites, however, were not recorded among them by their ancestral tribe. <sup>48</sup>For the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: <sup>49</sup>Do not on any account enroll the tribe of Levi or take a census of them with the Israelites. <sup>50</sup>You shall put the Levites in charge of the Tabernacle of the Pact, all its furnishings, and everything that pertains to it: they shall carry the Tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall tend it; and they

וְשֵׁשׁ־אֶלֶף וְשִׁבְעַת מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>40</sup> לְבִנֵי אֲשֶׁר תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כָּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>41</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטֵּה אֲשֶׁר אֶחָד וְאַרְבָּעִים אֶלֶף וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת: פ <sup>42</sup> בְּנֵי נַפְתָּלִי תּוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמֹת מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כָּל יֵצֵא צָבָא: <sup>43</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם לְמִטֵּה נַפְתָּלִי שְׁלֹשָׁה וַחֲמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת: פ

<sup>44</sup> אֵלֶּה הַפְּקֻדִים אֲשֶׁר פָּקַד מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וְנָשִׂאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר אִישׁ אִישׁ־אֶחָד לְבֵית־אֲבֹתָיו הָיוּ: <sup>45</sup> וַיְהִי כָּל־פְּקוּדֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה כָּל־יֵצֵא צָבָא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>46</sup> וַיְהִי כָּל־הַפְּקֻדִים שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף וּשְׁלֹשַׁת אֲלָפִים וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁים:

<sup>47</sup> וְהַלְוִיִּם לְמִטֵּה אֲבֹתָם לֹא הִתְּפַקְדוּ בְּתוֹכָם: פ <sup>48</sup> וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: <sup>49</sup> אַךְ אֶת־מִטֵּה לְוִי לֹא תִּפְקֹד וְאֶת־רֹאשָׁם לֹא תִּשָּׂא בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>50</sup> וְאַתָּה הַפְּקֹד אֶת־הַלְוִיִּם עַל־מִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדוּת וְעַל כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְעַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ הִמָּה יִשָּׂאוּ אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְהֵם יִשְׁרְתוּהוּ וְסָבִיב לְמִשְׁכַּן יַחֲנוּ:

**46. 603,550** This figure is identical to that obtained by an earlier census of Israelite men over 20, taken during the 1st year in the wilderness (Exod. 30:12–16, 38:26). Another census taken in the 40th year netted a total of 601,730 (Num. 26:51). These figures presuppose a population of more than 2 million supporting itself for 40 years in the Sinai peninsula. The numbers are impossibly large. Some say that they reflect King David's census (see 2 Sam. 24). Others suggest that "elef" here does not mean "1,000" but a military unit averaging 5 or 6 men. The number would then be "600 units [totaling] 3,550 men."

#### DUTIES OF THE LEVITES (vv. 47–54)

This summary of the Levites' encampment and guard duties for the sanctuary anticipates the details in chapters 3–4.

**48. had spoken** Hebrew: *va-y'dabber*, usually "spoke." But the order not to count the Levites must have been given before Moses took the census.

**50. You** Literally, "But you." The Levites are assigned to the tabernacle instead of serving in the regular militia.

**tend it** By guarding it.

shall camp around the Tabernacle. <sup>51</sup>When the Tabernacle is to set out, the Levites shall take it down, and when the Tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up; any outsider who encroaches shall be put to death. <sup>52</sup>The Israelites shall encamp troop by troop, each man with his division and each under his standard. <sup>53</sup>The Levites, however, shall camp around the Tabernacle of the Pact, that wrath may not strike the Israelite community; the Levites shall stand guard around the Tabernacle of the Pact.

<sup>54</sup>The Israelites did accordingly; just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so they did.

**2** The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: <sup>2</sup>The Israelites shall camp each with his standard, under the banners of their ancestral

וּבְנִסְעַת הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹרִידוּ אֹתוֹ הַלְוִיִּם <sup>51</sup>  
 וּבַחֲנֻת הַמִּשְׁכָּן יָקִימוּ אֹתוֹ הַלְוִיִּם וְהָזָר  
 הַקָּרֵב יוּמָת: <sup>52</sup> וַחֲנוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ  
 עַל־מַחֲנֵהוּ וְאִישׁ עַל־דָּגְלוֹ לְצַבָּאתָם:  
<sup>53</sup> וְהַלְוִיִּם יַחְנוּ סָבִיב לְמִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדֻת  
 וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה קֶצֶף עַל־עֵדֻת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 וְשָׁמְרוּ הַלְוִיִּם אֶת־מִשְׁמֶרֶת מִשְׁכַּן  
 הָעֵדֻת:

<sup>54</sup> וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה  
 אֶת־מֹשֶׁה בֶּן עֶשְׂרִי: פ

**ב** וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן  
 לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup> אִישׁ עַל־דָּגְלוֹ בְּאֹתוֹת לְבַיִת  
 שלישי

**51. take it down** Dismantle it.  
**outsider** An unauthorized person, in this case any Israelite not in the tribe of Levi.

**53. shall stand guard around the Tabernacle**  
 Effective guard duty will prevent the outbreak of God's wrath.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE CAMP (2:1–34)

The men in the military are deployed to defend the camp when it is at rest.

ORDER OF THE TRIBES (vv. 1–31)

The tribes are ordered in military divisions

around the tabernacle, each under its chieftain.

**2. standard** Hebrew: *degel*; by extension, it refers to an army division or a tribal military unit.

**banners** Hebrew: *otot*. Each ancestral house had its own, displayed by smaller military units.

**52. encamp troop by troop** Many commentators note the details here of tribal encampments as a way of emphasizing the need for order and organization in achieving a spiritual life. Simḥah Zissel Ziv writes, "A person disorderly in behavior is also confused in thought, incapable of stable, consistent work."

**53. that wrath may not strike** The Israelites are warned repeatedly that the awesome holiness of God can be destructive (see the story of Nadab and Abihu in Lev. 10:1–2; also Num. 3:10 and elsewhere). God is like a fire, capable of warming and comforting, but capable of burning as well.

CHAPTER 2

The key to the physical deployment of the Israelites as they camped and as they marched

was the setting of the Ark at the center of the camp. Every individual Israelite was located in relation to the Ark and the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the first thing one saw on leaving home and the first thing one looked for on returning home. Gradually, this physical centrality must have led to the Ark's gaining a central place in the Israelite soul.

A tradition has it that the tribe of Judah, situated at the eastern edge of the camp, marched backward when the Israelites broke camp and traveled eastward, to avoid turning their backs on the Ark. Thus they found their path to the future by orienting themselves to their past.

**2. each with his standard** A person's identity consists of three elements: the self (the standard), the family (the ancestral banners), and the community (the Tent of Meeting).



house; they shall camp around the Tent of Meeting at a distance.

<sup>3</sup>Camped on the front, or east side: the standard of the division of Judah, troop by troop.

Chieftain of the Judites: Nahshon son of Amminadab. <sup>4</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 74,600.

<sup>5</sup>Camping next to it:

The tribe of Issachar.

Chieftain of the Issacharites: Nethanel son of Zuar. <sup>6</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 54,400.

<sup>7</sup>The tribe of Zebulun.

Chieftain of the Zebulunites: Eliab son of Helon. <sup>8</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 57,400.

<sup>9</sup>The total enrolled in the division of Judah: 186,400, for all troops. These shall march first.

<sup>10</sup>On the south: the standard of the division of Reuben, troop by troop.

Chieftain of the Reubenites: Elizur son of Shedeur. <sup>11</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 46,500.

<sup>12</sup>Camping next to it:

The tribe of Simeon.

Chieftain of the Simeonites: Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai.

<sup>13</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 59,300.

<sup>14</sup>And the tribe of Gad.

Chieftain of the Gadites: Eliasaph son of Reuel. <sup>15</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 45,650.

<sup>16</sup>The total enrolled in the division of Reuben: 151,450, for all troops. These shall march second.

אֲבֹתָם יִחַנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִנֶּגֶד סְבִיב לְאֵה־לְמוֹעֵד יִחַנוּ:

<sup>3</sup>וְהַחֲנִים קִדְמָה מִזְרְחָה דָּגֵל מַחֲנֵה יְהוּדָה לְצַבָּאתָם וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי יְהוּדָה נַחֲשׁוֹן בֶּן־עַמִּינָדָב: <sup>4</sup>וּצְבָאוֹ וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם אַרְבַּעַה וּשְׁבַעִים אֶלֶף וּשְׁשׁ מֵאוֹת:

<sup>5</sup>וְהַחֲנִים עָלָיו מִטֵּה יִשָּׁשְׁכָר וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי יִשָּׁשְׁכָר נְתַנָּאל בֶּן־צוּעֵר: <sup>6</sup>וּצְבָאוֹ וּפְקֻדָיו אַרְבַּעַה וַחֲמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת: ס

<sup>7</sup>מִטֵּה זְבוּלֹן וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי זְבוּלֹן אֱלִיאָב בֶּן־חֶלֶן: <sup>8</sup>וּצְבָאוֹ וּפְקֻדָיו שְׁבַעַה וַחֲמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת:

<sup>9</sup>כָּל־הַפְּקֻדִים לְמַחֲנֵה יְהוּדָה מֵאֵת אֶלֶף וּשְׁמֹנִים אֶלֶף וּשְׁשַׁת־אַלְפִים וְאַרְבַּע־מֵאוֹת לְצַבָּאתָם רֵאשֵׁנָה יִסָּעוּ: ס

<sup>10</sup>דָּגֵל מַחֲנֵה רְאוּבֵן תִּימָנָה לְצַבָּאתָם וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן אֱלִיצוּר בֶּן־שְׁדִיאֹור: <sup>11</sup>וּצְבָאוֹ וּפְקֻדָיו שְׁשָׁה וְאַרְבַּעִים אֶלֶף וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת:

<sup>12</sup>וְהַחֲנֹם עָלָיו מִטֵּה שִׁמְעוֹן וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן שְׁלֹמִיאֵל בֶּן־צוּרִישַׁדַּי: <sup>13</sup>וּצְבָאוֹ וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם תְּשַׁעַה וַחֲמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת: <sup>14</sup>וּמִטֵּה גָד וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי גָד אֱלִיָּסָף בֶּן־רְעוּאֵל: <sup>15</sup>וּצְבָאוֹ וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם חֲמִשָּׁה וְאַרְבַּעִים אֶלֶף וּשְׁשׁ מֵאוֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁים:

<sup>16</sup>כָּל־הַפְּקֻדִים לְמַחֲנֵה רְאוּבֵן מֵאֵת אֶלֶף וְאַחַד וַחֲמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף וְאַרְבַּע־מֵאוֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁים לְצַבָּאתָם וּשְׁנַיִם יִסָּעוּ: ס

*at a distance* It was necessary to make room for the levitical encampment, which was set up between the sanctuary and the Israelite camp.

**3. Nahshon** His sister, Elisheba, was the wife of Aaron.

**4. His troop** Literally, "As for his troop, its enrollment was." The chieftain is always associated with his troop.

<sup>17</sup>Then, midway between the divisions, the Tent of Meeting, the division of the Levites, shall move. As they camp, so they shall march, each in position, by their standards.

<sup>18</sup>On the west: the standard of the division of Ephraim, troop by troop.

Chieftain of the Ephraimites: Elishama son of Ammihud. <sup>19</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 40,500.

<sup>20</sup>Next to it:

The tribe of Manasseh.

Chieftain of the Manassites: Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. <sup>21</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 32,200.

<sup>22</sup>And the tribe of Benjamin.

Chieftain of the Benjaminites: Abidan son of Gideon. <sup>23</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 35,400.

<sup>24</sup>The total enrolled in the division of Ephraim: 108,100 for all troops. These shall march third.

<sup>25</sup>On the north: the standard of the division of Dan, troop by troop.

Chieftain of the Danites: Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. <sup>26</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 62,700.

<sup>27</sup>Camping next to it:

The tribe of Asher.

Chieftain of the Asherites: Pagiel son of Ochran. <sup>28</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 41,500.

<sup>29</sup>And the tribe of Naphtali.

Chieftain of the Naphtalites: Ahira son of

<sup>17</sup>וְנָסַע אֶהֱל־מוֹעֵד מִחֲנֵה הַלְוִיִּם בְּתוֹךְ  
הַמַּחֲנֶה כַּאֲשֶׁר יִחַנוּ בֵּן יִסְעוּ אִישׁ עַל־יָדוֹ  
לְדַגְלֵיהֶם: ס

<sup>18</sup>דָּגַל מַחֲנֵה אֶפְרַיִם לְצַבְאֹתָם יִמָּה  
וְנָשִׂיא לְבִנֵי אֶפְרַיִם אֲלִישַׁמַּע בֶּן־  
עִמִּיהוּד: <sup>19</sup>וְצַבָּאוֹ וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם אַרְבָּעִים  
אֶלֶף וַחֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת:

<sup>20</sup>וְעָלְיוֹ מִטָּה מְנַשֶּׁה וְנָשִׂיא לְבִנֵי מְנַשֶּׁה  
גַּמְלִיאֵל בֶּן־פְּדָהצֹר: <sup>21</sup>וְצַבָּאוֹ וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם  
שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף וּמֵאוֹתָיִם: <sup>22</sup>וּמִטָּה  
בְּנִימִן וְנָשִׂיא לְבִנֵי בְנִימִן אַבִּידָן בֶּן־  
גִּדְעוֹנִי: <sup>23</sup>וְצַבָּאוֹ וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם חֲמִשָּׁה  
וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת:

<sup>24</sup>כָּל־הַפְּקֻדִים לְמַחֲנֵה אֶפְרַיִם מֵאֵת  
אֶלֶף וּשְׁמֹנֶת־אֲלָפִים וּמֵאָה לְצַבְאֹתָם  
וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יִסְעוּ: ס

<sup>25</sup>דָּגַל מַחֲנֵה דָן צָפֹנָה לְצַבְאֹתָם וְנָשִׂיא  
לְבִנֵי דָן אַחִיעֶזֶר בֶּן־עַמִּישַׁדַּי: <sup>26</sup>וְצַבָּאוֹ  
וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁשִׁים אֶלֶף וּשְׁבַע  
מֵאוֹת:

<sup>27</sup>וְהַחֲנִים עָלְיוֹ מִטָּה אֲשֶׁר וְנָשִׂיא לְבִנֵי  
אֲשֶׁר פַּגְעִיאֵל בֶּן־עֹכְרָן: <sup>28</sup>וְצַבָּאוֹ  
וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם אֶחָד וְאַרְבָּעִים אֶלֶף וַחֲמֵשׁ  
מֵאוֹת: <sup>29</sup>וּמִטָּה נַפְתָּלִי וְנָשִׂיא לְבִנֵי  
נַפְתָּלִי אַחִירַע בֶּן־עֵינָן: <sup>30</sup>וְצַבָּאוֹ

**17. midway between** That is, in the midst of (see 10:17). The tabernacle and its levitical guards were divided into two groups during the march. The dismantled structure was transported by the Gershonites and Merarites who marched between the first and second divisions, whereas everything else was carried by the Kohathites in the very center of the column, between the second and third divisions.

**the Tent of Meeting, the division of the Le-**

**vites** These two phrases should be understood as connected by "and."

**As they camp, so shall they march** The Levites are broken into two units during the march, but the Israelite troops remain intact at all times.

**20. Next to it** That is, camping next to it, referring to the two tribes associated with a leader.

**25.** Dan was made head of this division because Dan was the firstborn of Jacob's children from his concubines (see Gen. 30:1-13).

**17. As they camp, so they shall march** The verse is interpreted homiletically to teach that

one should be the same person at home as away from home, in private as in public.

Enan. <sup>30</sup>His troop, as enrolled: 53,400.

<sup>31</sup>The total enrolled in the division of Dan: 157,600. These shall march last, by their standards.

<sup>32</sup>Those are the enrollments of the Israelites by ancestral houses. The total enrolled in the divisions, for all troops: 603,550. <sup>33</sup>The Levites, however, were not recorded among the Israelites, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>34</sup>The Israelites did accordingly; just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so they camped by their standards, and so they marched, each with his clan according to his ancestral house.

**3** This is the line of Aaron and Moses at the time that the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. <sup>2</sup>These were the names of Aaron's sons: Nadab, the first-born, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar; <sup>3</sup>those were the names of Aaron's sons, the anointed priests who were ordained for priesthood. <sup>4</sup>But Nadab and Abihu died by the

וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה וַחֲמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת :

<sup>31</sup> כָּל־הַפְּקֻדִים לְמַחֲנֵה דָן מֵאַתְּ אֶלֶף וְשִׁבְעָה וַחֲמִשִּׁים אֶלֶף וְשֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת לְאַחֲרָנָה יִסְעוּ לְדַגְלֵיהֶם : פ

<sup>32</sup> אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַיִת אֲבוֹתָם כָּל־פְּקוּדֵי הַמַּחֲנֵה לְצַבְאוֹתָם שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף וְשִׁלְשֵׁת אֲלָפִים וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁים : <sup>33</sup> וְהַלְוִיִּם לֹא הִתְּפַקְדוּ בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה : <sup>34</sup> וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה כַּכֹּחַ לְדַגְלֵיהֶם וְכֵן נָסְעוּ אִישׁ לְמִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ עַל־בַּיִת אֲבוֹתָיו :

**ג** רביעי וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת אֶהֱרֹן וּמֹשֶׁה בְּיוֹם דְּבַר יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי : <sup>2</sup> וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־אֶהֱרֹן הַבְּכוֹר | נָדָב וְאַבִּיהוּא אֶלְעָזָר וְאִיתָמָר : <sup>3</sup> אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֲנִים הַמְּשֻׁחִים אֲשֶׁר־מִלֵּא יָדָם לְכַהֵן : <sup>4</sup> וַיָּמָת נָדָב וְאַבִּיהוּא לְפָנֵי יְהוָה בְּהַקְרָבָם

### THE FIRST CENSUS OF LEVITES (3:1–51)

The events in verses 1–13 take place at Mount Sinai, where the Levites are designated as the guards and porters of the tabernacle. Verses 14–51 relate what occurs in the wilderness of Sinai, where the Levites are counted and assigned their guard duties in transit.

#### AT MOUNT SINAI (vv. 1–13)

The priestly genealogy properly precedes that of the Levites and also serves to identify Aaron's sons under whom the Levites will serve.

#### THE PRIESTS (vv. 1–4)

1. Moses, whose encampment is alongside

that of Aaron, is counted with Aaron and not with the Levites. He is mentioned after Aaron because Aaron was the firstborn.

**Mount Sinai** As distinct from the wilderness of Sinai.

**2. These were the names** That is, when they were at Mount Sinai, for Nadab and Abihu died a while later (see Exod. 24:1; Lev. 10:1–2).

**3. anointed** The anointing of Aaron's sons as priests by the sprinkling of sanctified oil and blood is described in Exod. 29:21 and Lev. 8:30.

**ordained** Their anointing and ordination entitles them to the priesthood and to authority over the Levites.

**34.** It is noteworthy that there was no struggle for rank here, no argument over who went first or who camped where. They accepted God's word without rancor or jealousy (Sorotzkin).

#### CHAPTER 3

**4. Nadab and Abihu died by the will of the LORD** They died, literally, "before the LORD, in God's presence" (i.e., within the sanctuary)

will of the LORD, when they offered alien fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they left no sons. So it was Eleazar and Ithamar who served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

<sup>5</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>6</sup>Advance the tribe of Levi and place them in attendance upon Aaron the priest to serve him. <sup>7</sup>They shall perform duties for him and for the whole community before the Tent of Meeting, doing the work of the Tabernacle. <sup>8</sup>They shall take charge of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting—a duty on behalf of the Israelites—doing the work of the Tabernacle. <sup>9</sup>You shall assign the Levites to Aaron and to his sons: they are formally assigned to him from among the Israelites. <sup>10</sup>You shall make Aaron and his sons responsible for observing their priestly duties; and any outsider who encroaches shall be put to death.

<sup>11</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>12</sup>I hereby take the Levites from among the Israelites in place of all the first-born, the first issue of the

אִשׁ זָרָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי וּבָנִים  
לֹא-הָיוּ לָהֶם וַיִּכְהֹן אֶלְעָזָר וְאִיתָמָר  
עַל-פְּנֵי אֶהֱרֹן אָבִיהֶם: פ

<sup>5</sup>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: <sup>6</sup>הֲקִרְב  
אֶת-מִטֵּה לְוִי וְהִעֲמַדְתָּ אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן  
הַכֹּהֵן וְשָׂרְתוּ אִתּוֹ: <sup>7</sup>וְשָׂמְרוּ אֶת-  
מִשְׁמֶרְתּוֹ וְאֶת-מִשְׁמֶרֶת כָּל-הָעֵדָה לִפְנֵי  
אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לַעֲבֹד אֶת-עֲבֹדַת הַמִּשְׁכָּן:  
<sup>8</sup>וְשָׂמְרוּ אֶת-כָּל-כְּלֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת-  
מִשְׁמֶרֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲבֹד אֶת-עֲבֹדַת  
הַמִּשְׁכָּן: <sup>9</sup>וְנָתַתָּה אֶת-הַלְוִיִּם לְאֶהֱרֹן  
וּלְבָנָיו נְתוּנִים נְתוּנִים הֵמָּה לְוֹ מֵאֵת  
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>10</sup>וְאֶת-אֶהֱרֹן וְאֶת-בָּנָיו  
תִּפְקְדוּ וְשָׂמְרוּ אֶת-כִּהֲנֻתְכֶם וְהָזֵר הַקָּרֵב  
יּוֹמָת: פ

<sup>11</sup>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: <sup>12</sup>וְאֲנִי  
הִנֵּה לֹקַחְתִּי אֶת-הַלְוִיִּם מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל תַּחַת כָּל-בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם מִבְּנֵי

#### SUBORDINATION OF THE LEVITES (vv. 5–13)

**7–8.** Guard duty was incumbent on the Levites when the camp was at rest (v. 7) and in transit (v. 8). Guard duty constituted half of their work; their labors of removal, the other half.

**duties** The term *mishmeret*, in connection with the tabernacle, means “guard duty.” The levitical cordon around the tabernacle guards it from incursion by the ordinary Israelite and protects the people from suffering what would be the consequent wrath of God.

**and for the whole community** By replacing the firstborn, as commanded in verses 11–13.

**before the Tent of Meeting** The Levites guarded outside the sacred area, whereas the priests were stationed within.

**8.** The Levites guarded the “furnishings of the Tent” while transporting them during the

march but had no access to them when they were set up in camp, where they were under the sole supervision of the priests.

**on behalf of the Israelites** By replacing their firstborn (see vv. 11–13).

**doing** Rather, “in doing” or “in addition to doing” or “while doing.” This phrase is also in verse 7 (about levitical guard duty when the camp was at rest); it may be a mistaken repetition by the copyist, a dittography.

**9. assigned** The root נתן implies dedication. By replacing the firstborn, the Levites are dedicated to the Lord.

**10. observing their priestly duties** That is, guarding their priesthood against encroachment.

**12. first issue of the womb** Replacement of the firstborn by the Levites indicates that the former once held some kind of sacred status. It was the firstborn of the mother who held that status,

as well as “in the lifetime of their father.” This prompted the comment of the Midrash that “God grieves for the death of the young as deeply as their parents do” (Num. R. 2:24). The Torah mentions the death of these two young

*kohanim* several times after it occurs (e.g., Lev. 16:1; Num. 26:61), as if to hint that God too was having difficulty accepting their tragic death.

**12. I hereby take the Levites** Just as the first fruits of the harvest belong to God, both

womb among the Israelites: the Levites shall be Mine. <sup>13</sup>For every first-born is Mine: at the time that I smote every first-born in the land of Egypt, I consecrated every first-born in Israel, man and beast, to Myself, to be Mine, the LORD's.

<sup>14</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying: <sup>15</sup>Record the Levites by ancestral house and by clan; record every male among them from the age of one month up. <sup>16</sup>So Moses recorded them at the command of the LORD, as he was bidden. <sup>17</sup>These were the sons of Levi by name: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. <sup>18</sup>These were the names of the sons of Gershon by clan: Libni and Shimei. <sup>19</sup>The sons of Kohath by clan: Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. <sup>20</sup>The sons of Merari by clan: Mahli and Mushi.

These were the clans of the Levites within their ancestral houses:

<sup>21</sup>To Gershon belonged the clan of the Libnites and the clan of the Shimeites; those were the clans of the Gershonites. <sup>22</sup>The recorded entries of all their males from the age of one month up, as recorded, came to 7,500. <sup>23</sup>The clans of the Gershonites were to camp be-

יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיוּ לִי הַלְוִיִּם: <sup>13</sup> כִּי לִי כָּל־בְּכוֹר  
 בְּיוֹם הַפְּתִי כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם  
 הִקְדַּשְׁתִּי לִי כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאָדָם  
 עַד־בְּהֵמָה לִי יִהְיוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה: <sup>14</sup> ס  
 וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי  
 לֵאמֹר: <sup>15</sup> פְּקֹד אֶת־בְּנֵי לְוִי לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם  
 לְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם כָּל־זָכָר מִבֶּן־חֹדֶשׁ וּמַעְלָה  
 תִּפְקְדֵם: <sup>16</sup> וַיִּפְקֹד אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה עַל־פִּי  
 יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה: <sup>17</sup> וַיְהִי־וְאֵלֶּה בְנֵי־לְוִי  
 בְּשֵׁמֹתָם גֵּרְשׁוֹן וְקָהָת וּמְרָרִי: <sup>18</sup> וְאֵלֶּה  
 שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־גֵרְשׁוֹן לְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם לְבָנָי  
 וְשִׁמְעִי: <sup>19</sup> וּבְנֵי קָהָת לְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם עֲמֶרָם  
 וַיִּזְהָר חֶבְרֹן וְעֻזִּיאֵל: <sup>20</sup> וּבְנֵי מְרָרִי  
 לְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם מַחְלִי וּמוּשִׁי  
 אֵלֶּה הֵם מִשְׁפַּחֹת הַלְוִי לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם:  
<sup>21</sup> לְגֵרְשׁוֹן מִשְׁפַּחַת הַלְבִּנִי וּמִשְׁפַּחַת  
 הַשִּׁמְעִי אֵלֶּה הֵם מִשְׁפַּחֹת הַגֵּרְשֹׁנִי:  
<sup>22</sup> פְּקֻדֵיהֶם בְּמִסְפָּר כָּל־זָכָר מִבֶּן־חֹדֶשׁ  
 וּמַעְלָה פְּקֻדֵיהֶם שְׁבַעַת אֲלָפִים וַחֲמִשׁ  
 מֵאוֹת: <sup>23</sup> מִשְׁפַּחֹת הַגֵּרְשֹׁנִי אַחֲרֵי

whereas the firstborn of the father had the rights of inheritance (see Exod. 13:2).

**the Levites shall be Mine** That is, to serve Me.

**13.** God spared Israel's firstborn and thereby acquired them (see Exod. 13:15).

IN THE WILDERNESS OF SINAI (vv. 14–51)

These verses concern the first census of Levites and the assignment of guard duty for the tabernacle furnishings while in transit.

**15. one month up** The census of Levites be-

gins at the age of one month, the age at which redemption of the firstborn is required.

**16. at the command of** Rather: according to the oracle of. The two censuses of Levites in chapters 3 and 4, in contrast to the Israelite census in chapter 1, are taken by God. Moses is merely to record the totals and the work assignments.

**23. camp** Wherever the three levitical clans camped (south, west, and north, respectively), they presumably performed their guard duty for the tabernacle.

as a gesture of gratitude and as an expression of confidence that more fruit will be coming, the firstborn child "belongs to God."

**15. from the age of one month** For purposes of military readiness, Israelites were counted

only from the age of 20. Spiritual training, however, must begin virtually at birth. A second census in chapter 4 will ascertain the number of adult Levites available for transporting the various parts of the tabernacle.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**3:13. For every first-born is Mine** The ceremony of redeeming a firstborn son (*Pidyon ha-Ben*) is based on the Torah's assertion here that all firstborn belong to God (see Exod. 13:2) but should be redeemed because the Levites serve in their place. See Comment on Num. 18:15. It is through this ceremony of grateful acknowledgement that parents can claim the child for themselves.

hind the Tabernacle, to the west.<sup>24</sup>The chieftain of the ancestral house of the Gershonites was Eliasaph son of Lael.<sup>25</sup>The duties of the Gershonites in the Tent of Meeting comprised: the Tabernacle, the tent, its covering, and the screen for the entrance of the Tent of Meeting;<sup>26</sup>the hangings of the enclosure, the screen for the entrance of the enclosure which surrounds the Tabernacle, the cords thereof, and the altar—all the service connected with these.

<sup>27</sup>To Kohath belonged the clan of the Amramites, the clan of the Izharites, the clan of the Hebronites, and the clan of the Uzzielites; those were the clans of the Kohathites.<sup>28</sup>All the listed males from the age of one month up came to 8,600, attending to the duties of the sanctuary.<sup>29</sup>The clans of the Kohathites were to camp along the south side of the Tabernacle.<sup>30</sup>The chieftain of the ancestral house of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel.<sup>31</sup>Their duties comprised: the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the sacred utensils that were used with them, and the screen—all the service connected with these.<sup>32</sup>The head chieftain of the Levites

הַמְשָׁפָן יַחְנוּ יָמָה: <sup>24</sup>וְנָשִׂיא בֵּית-אָב לְגֵרְשֹׁנֵי אֱלִיסָפ בֶּן-לְאֵל: <sup>25</sup>וּמִשְׁמֶרֶת בְּנֵי-גֵרְשֹׁן בְּאֵהֶל מוֹעֵד הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְהָאֵהֶל מִכְסֹהוּ וּמִסָּךְ פֶּתַח אֵהֶל מוֹעֵד: <sup>26</sup>וְקַלְעֵי הַחֲצִיר וְאֶת-מִסְךְ פֶּתַח הַחֲצִיר אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְעַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב וְאֵת מִיתְרָיו לְכָל עֲבֹדָתוֹ:

<sup>27</sup>וּלְקָהָת מִשְׁפַּחַת הָעֵמֶרְמִי וּמִשְׁפַּחַת הַיִּצְהָרִי וּמִשְׁפַּחַת הַחֲבֵרֹנִי וּמִשְׁפַּחַת הָעֲזִיאֵלִי אֵלֶּה הֵם מִשְׁפַּחַת הַקְּהָתִי: <sup>28</sup>בְּמִסְפָּר כָּל-זָכָר מִבֶּן-חֹדֶשׁ וּמַעְלָה שְׁמֹנֶת אֲלָפִים וְשֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שְׁמֵרֵי מִשְׁמֶרֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ: <sup>29</sup>מִשְׁפָּחוֹת בְּנֵי-קָהָת יַחְנוּ עַל יַרְךְ הַמִּשְׁכָּן תִּימָנָה: <sup>30</sup>וְנָשִׂיא בֵּית-אָב לְמִשְׁפַּחַת הַקְּהָתִי אֱלִיצָפָן בֶּן-עִזִּיאֵל: <sup>31</sup>וּמִשְׁמֶרֶתָם הָאָרֶן וְהַשֻּׁלְחָן וְהַמִּנְרָה וְהַמִּזְבֵּחַת וְכֵלֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׂרְתוּ בָהֶם וְהַמָּסָךְ וְכָל עֲבֹדָתוֹ: <sup>32</sup>וְנָשִׂיא נְשִׂיאֵי הַלְוִי אֱלֶעָזָר בֶּן-אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן פְּקֻדַת שְׁמֵרֵי מִשְׁמֶרֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ:

**24. ancestral house** Here, the larger unit of the clans making up the Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites.

**25. duties** That is, guard duty. The tabernacle furnishings placed in the custody of the Gershonites and Merarites are clearly delineated. The former are to guard the fabrics; the latter, the planks and posts.

**Tabernacle** The innermost tent covering composed of 10 finely twisted linen and woolen cloths with a design of cherubim worked into them.

**tent** A second covering made up of 11 cloths of goat's hair.

**its covering** The outermost covering made of tanned ram skins and yellow-orange skins.

**screen** The entrance to the tent was of lesser sanctity than the inner curtains, because the

screen could be seen by anyone in the tabernacle court, whereas the inner curtains could not be seen from the outside.

**27. Amramites** To which the descendants of Moses would belong.

**28. attending to the duties of the sanctuary** It was the responsibility of the Kohathites to transport and to guard the most sacred objects, as itemized in verse 31.

**29. south side** Starting with the east, which is the most prestigious position (see v. 38), the position next in importance, rotating to the right (clockwise), is the south. The Kohathites merited this because it was their honored task to carry the most sacred objects. Note the proximity of Kohath to the tribe of Reuben (see 2:10), which possibly accounts for their collaboration in chapter 16.

**32.** Although Eleazar was chief officer, he was given a great deal of physical labor (4:16). "There is no special privilege in the palace

of the king" (JT Shab. 10:3); there is no room for an "honorary" position in the service of God.

was Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, in charge of those attending to the duties of the sanctuary.

<sup>33</sup>To Merari belonged the clan of the Mahlites and the clan of the Mushites; those were the clans of Merari. <sup>34</sup>The recorded entries of all their males from the age of one month up came to 6,200. <sup>35</sup>The chieftain of the ancestral house of the clans of Merari was Zuriel son of Abihail. They were to camp along the north side of the Tabernacle. <sup>36</sup>The assigned duties of the Merarites comprised: the planks of the Tabernacle, its bars, posts, and sockets, and all its furnishings—all the service connected with these; <sup>37</sup>also the posts around the enclosure and their sockets, pegs, and cords.

<sup>38</sup>Those who were to camp before the Tabernacle, in front—before the Tent of Meeting, on the east—were Moses and Aaron and his sons, attending to the duties of the sanctuary, as a duty on behalf of the Israelites; and any outsider who encroached was to be put to death. <sup>39</sup>All the Levites who were recorded, whom at the LORD's command Moses and Aaron recorded by their clans, all the males from the age of one month up, came to 22,000.

<sup>40</sup>The LORD said to Moses: Record every first-born male of the Israelite people from the age of one month up, and make a list of their names; <sup>41</sup>and take the Levites for Me, the LORD, in place of every first-born among the Israelite

לְמֵרָרִי מִשְׁפַּחַת הַמַּחֲלִי וּמִשְׁפַּחַת  
הַמוּשִׁי אֵלֶּה הֵם מִשְׁפַּחֹת מֵרָרִי:  
וּפְקֻדֵיהֶם בְּמִסְפָּר כָּל-זָכָר מִבֶּן-חֹדֶשׁ  
וּמֵעֵלָּה שֵׁשֶׁת אֲלָפִים וּמֵאֲתָיִם: <sup>35</sup> וַנִּשְׂאֵא  
בֵּית-אָב לְמִשְׁפַּחֹת מֵרָרִי צוּרִיֶּאל בֶּן-  
אֲבִיחַיִל עַל יְרֵךְ הַמִּשְׁפָּן יַחְנוּ צִפְנָה:  
<sup>36</sup> וּפְקֻדַת מִשְׁמֶרֶת בְּנֵי מֵרָרִי קָרְשֵׁי  
הַמִּשְׁפָּן וּבְרִיחָיו וְעַמֻּדָיו וְאֲדָנָיו וְכָל-כֵּלָיו  
וְכָל עֲבֹדָתוֹ: <sup>37</sup> וְעַמֻּדֵי הַחֲצָר סָבִיב  
וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם וַיִּתְּלֵתֶם וַיִּמְתְּרֵיהֶם:  
<sup>38</sup> וְהַחֲנִיּוֹת לַפָּנִי הַמִּשְׁפָּן קִדְמָה לַפָּנִי  
אֶהֱל-מוֹעֵד | מִזְרְחָה מִשֶּׁה | וְאַהֲרֹן וּבְנָיו  
שֹׁמְרֵי מִשְׁמֶרֶת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזֶּהר הַקָּרֵב יוֹמֵת: <sup>39</sup> כָּל-פְּקוּדֵי  
הַלְוִיִּם אֲשֶׁר פָּקֵד מִשֶּׁה וְאַהֲרֹן\* עַל-פִּי  
יְהוָה לְמִשְׁפַּחֹתֶם כָּל-זָכָר מִבֶּן-חֹדֶשׁ  
וּמֵעֵלָּה שָׁנִים וְעֹשְׂרִים אֶלְפֵי: ס

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה פָּקֵד כָּל-בְּכֹר  
וְכָל לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִבֶּן-חֹדֶשׁ וּמֵעֵלָּה וְשֵׂא  
אֶת מִסְפָּר שְׁמֹתָם: <sup>41</sup> וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת-הַלְוִיִּם  
לִי אֲנִי יְהוָה תַּחַת כָּל-בְּכֹר בְּבִנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

39. v. נקוד על ו' א' ה' ר' ו'

**32. attending to the duties** That is, performing the guard duty.

**38. to camp** Because the priests had no watch posts outside the sacred area, their encampment in the east was also the place of their watch. This is to be expected, for the entrance to the tabernacle was in the east, which made that zone most vulnerable to encroachment.

**on behalf of the Israelites** By replacing their firstborn.

#### REPLACING THE ISRAELITE FIRSTBORN

(vv. 40–51)

The number of Israelite firstborn exceeds that of the Levites by 273. The latter, chosen by lot, are redeemed by the payment of 5 shekels per person to the priests. This procedure became the standard for the redemption of all Israelite firstborn.

**40. one month up** An infant younger than 30 days was not considered a viable person, presumably because of the high rate of infant mortality.

**39.** The Levites were by far the smallest of the tribes. This was fitting, because they owned no large tracts of land and had to be sup-

ported by the gifts and tithes of their fellow Israelites. Their small numbers reduced the burden of support imposed on their neighbors.

people, and the cattle of the Levites in place of every first-born among the cattle of the Israelites. <sup>42</sup>So Moses recorded all the first-born among the Israelites, as the LORD had commanded him. <sup>43</sup>All the first-born males as listed by name, recorded from the age of one month up, came to 22,273.

<sup>44</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>45</sup>Take the Levites in place of all the first-born among the Israelite people, and the cattle of the Levites in place of their cattle; and the Levites shall be Mine, the LORD's. <sup>46</sup>And as the redemption price of the 273 Israelite first-born over and above the number of the Levites, <sup>47</sup>take five shekels per head—take this by the sanctuary weight, twenty *gerahs* to the shekel—<sup>48</sup>and give the money to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for those who are in excess. <sup>49</sup>So Moses took the redemption money from those over and above the ones redeemed by the Levites; <sup>50</sup>he took the money from the first-born of the Israelites, 1,365 sanctuary shekels. <sup>51</sup>And Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons at the LORD's bidding, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

**4** The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

<sup>2</sup>Take a [separate] census of the Kohathites among the Levites, by the clans of their ancestral house, <sup>3</sup>from the age of thirty years up to the

וְאֵת בְּהֵמַת הַלְוִיִּם תַּחַת כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּבֵהֶמַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>42</sup> וַיִּפְקֹד מֹשֶׁה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ אֶת־כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּבִנָּי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>43</sup> וַיְהִי כָל־בְּכוֹר זָכָר בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת מִבְּנֵי־חֹדֶשׁ וּמַעְלָה לַפְּקֻדֵיהֶם שָׁנַיִם וְעֶשְׂרִים אֶלֶף שְׁלֹשָׁה וּשְׁבַעִים וּמֵאֲתָיִם: פ

<sup>44</sup> וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: <sup>45</sup> קח אֶת־הַלְוִיִּם תַּחַת כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּבִנָּי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בְּהֵמַת הַלְוִיִּם תַּחַת בְּהֵמַתָּם וְהָיוּ לִי הַלְוִיִּם אֲנִי יְהוָה: <sup>46</sup> וְאֵת פְּדוּיֵי הַשְּׁלֹשָׁה וְהַשְּׁבַעִים וְהַמֵּאֲתָיִם הָעֵדָפִים עַל־הַלְוִיִּם מִבְּכוֹר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>47</sup> וְלָקַחְתָּ חֲמִשָּׁת חֲמִשָּׁת שֶׁקֶלִים לַגֹּלְגֹלֶת בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ תִּקַּח עֶשְׂרִים גֵּרָה הַשֶּׁקֶל: <sup>48</sup> וְנָתַתָּה הַכֶּסֶף לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו פְּדוּיֵי הָעֵדָפִים בָּהֶם: <sup>49</sup> וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת כֶּסֶף הַפְּדוּיִם מֵאֵת הָעֵדָפִים עַל פְּדוּיֵי הַלְוִיִּם: <sup>50</sup> מֵאֵת בְּכוֹר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָקַח אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף חֲמִשָּׁה וּשְׁשִׁים וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וְאַלֶּף בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ: <sup>51</sup> וַיִּתֵּן מֹשֶׁה אֶת־כֶּסֶף הַפְּדוּיִם לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו עַל־פִּי יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: פ

**ד** וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר:

<sup>2</sup> נִשְׂא אֶת־רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי קֹהַת מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי לֵוִי לַמִּשְׁפָּחָתָם לְבֵית אֲבוֹתָם: <sup>3</sup> מִבֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים

חֶסֶר ו' v. 51.

**41. every first-born among the cattle of the Israelites** The firstborn of pure animals automatically belonged to the Lord. They must be sacrificed on the altar and may not be redeemed (according to Lev. 27:26 and Num. 18:15,17). Therefore the Sages concluded that any Israelite animal that was redeemed must have been impure, ineligible for the altar (BT Bek. 4b).

**45. their cattle** That is, the cattle of the Israelite firstborn. Just as the firstborn Israelites must be redeemed, so must their cattle. The cattle of the Levites release the animals of the firstborn from their sacred status.

**47. shekel** See Comment to Gen. 23:9.  
**by the sanctuary weight** See Comment to Exod. 30:13.



age of fifty, all who are subject to service, to perform tasks for the Tent of Meeting. <sup>4</sup>This is the responsibility of the Kohathites in the Tent of Meeting: the most sacred objects.

<sup>5</sup>At the breaking of camp, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the screening curtain and cover the Ark of the Pact with it. <sup>6</sup>They shall lay a covering of dolphin skin over it and spread a cloth of pure blue on top; and they shall put its poles in place.

<sup>7</sup>Over the table of display they shall spread a blue cloth; they shall place upon it the bowls, the ladles, the jars, and the libation jugs; and the regular bread shall rest upon it. <sup>8</sup>They shall spread over these a crimson cloth which they shall cover with a covering of dolphin skin; and they shall put the poles in place.

שָׁנָה וּמַעֲלָה וְעַד בְּנֵי־חֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה כָּל־בָּא לְצַבָּא לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכָה בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: וְאֵת עֲבֹדַת בְּנֵי־קָהָת בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד קָדֹשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים:

וּבָא אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו בְּנֹסַע הַמַּחֲנֶה וְהוֹרְדוּ אֶת פְּרֻכַת הַמָּסָךְ וְכִסּוּ־בָהּ אֶת אֲרֹן הָעֵדוּת: וְנָתְנוּ עָלָיו כֶּסוּי עוֹר תַּחֲשׁ וּפָרְשׂוּ בְּגַד־כְּלִיל תְּכֵלֶת מִלְמַעְלָה וּשְׂמוּ בְּדָיו:

וְעַל ׀ שֻׁלְחַן הַפָּנִים יִפְרְשׂוּ בְּגַד תְּכֵלֶת וְנָתְנוּ עָלָיו אֶת־הַקְּעֵרֹת וְאֶת־הַכַּפֹּת וְאֶת־הַמִּנְקִיֹּת וְאֵת קְשׁוֹת הַנֶּסֶךְ וְלַחֵם הַתָּמִיד עָלָיו יִהְיֶה: וּפָרְשׂוּ עֲלֵיהֶם בְּגַד תוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְכִסּוּ אֹתוֹ בְּמִכְסֵה עוֹר תַּחֲשׁ וּשְׂמוּ אֶת־בְּדָיו:

## THE SECOND CENSUS OF LEVITES (4:1–49)

A second census of the Levites between the ages of 30 and 50 is taken to determine the size of the work force necessary to transport the sanctuary during the wilderness march.

### REMOVAL DUTIES OF THE KOHATHITES (vv. 1–20)

The Kohathites are listed first, even though Kohath is not the firstborn, because the work of the Kohathites involved greater responsibility: They transported the most sacred objects, and their work was more hazardous because they risked their lives (see vv. 15–20).

**4.** The specific job of the Kohathites is the portage of the most sacred objects by shoulder. Only the priests, who were sacred, were qualified to handle the Ark and the other sacred objects. The Kohathites had no sacred status; hence their touching and even seeing the uncovered objects could be fatal. Thus Aaron and his sons had to cover the objects before the Kohathites could enter the sacred area to attend to their transport.

**5. screening curtain** It separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the sanctuary.

**Ark** The most sacred of the objects is covered first.

**6. cloth** Hebrew: *begeg*; literally, “garment.” In the Hebrew Bible, “*begeg*” usually covers only human beings, yet here all the sacred objects are initially covered by a *begeg*. They are treated with the same respect as human beings. Indeed, they are treated like royalty—dressed in regal garb of violet or purple.

**put its poles in place** The Ark, the display table, and the altars were fitted with rings into which poles were inserted for carrying, whereas the lampstand, some utensils, and probably the laver were set into carrying frames.

**7. table of display** The full term is the “table of display bread”; every *Shabbat*, 12 loaves of bread arranged in two rows were displayed on it before God in the sanctuary.

**regular bread** The 12 loaves of bread regularly changed every *Shabbat*.

## CHAPTER 4

**3.** A Levite male, in the prime of his life, during the years from 30 to 50, would be given responsibility for the arduous tasks of main-

taining the tabernacle (and later the Temple). After age 50, his new tasks would require more wisdom and less physical strength: singing the Psalms, opening and closing the gates, and acting as mentor to younger Levites.

<sup>9</sup>Then they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand for lighting, with its lamps, its tongs, and its fire pans, as well as all the oil vessels that are used in its service. <sup>10</sup>They shall put it and all its furnishings into a covering of dolphin skin, which they shall then place on a carrying frame.

<sup>11</sup>Next they shall spread a blue cloth over the altar of gold and cover it with a covering of dolphin skin; and they shall put its poles in place. <sup>12</sup>They shall take all the service vessels with which the service in the sanctuary is performed, put them into a blue cloth and cover them with a covering of dolphin skin, which they shall then place on a carrying frame. <sup>13</sup>They shall remove the ashes from the [copper] altar and spread a purple cloth over it. <sup>14</sup>Upon it they shall place all the vessels that are used in its service: the fire pans, the flesh hooks, the scrapers, and the basins—all the vessels of the altar—and over it they shall spread a covering of dolphin skin; and they shall put its poles in place.

<sup>15</sup>When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sacred objects and all the furnishings of the sacred objects at the breaking of camp, only then shall the Kohathites come and lift them, so that they do not come in contact with the sacred objects and die. These things in

<sup>9</sup>וְלָקְחוּ | בְּגָד תְּכֵלֶת וְכֹסֹו אֶת־מִנְרֹת  
הַמָּאוֹר וְאֶת־נִרְתִּיָּה וְאֶת־מִלְקָחֶיהָ וְאֶת־  
מִחְתֵּיתֶיהָ וְאֶת כָּל־כְּלֵי שְׂמֵנָה אֲשֶׁר  
יִשְׂרְתוּ־לָהּ בָּהֶם: <sup>10</sup>וְנָתְנוּ אֹתָהּ וְאֶת־  
כָּל־כְּלֵיהָ אֶל־מַכְסֵה עוֹר תַּחַשׁ וְנָתְנוּ  
עַל־הַמוֹט:

<sup>11</sup>וְעַל | מִזְבֵּחַ הַזֹּהֵב יִפְרְשׂוּ בְּגָד תְּכֵלֶת  
וְכֹסֹו אֹתוֹ בְּמַכְסֵה עוֹר תַּחַשׁ וְשָׂמוּ  
אֶת־בְּדִיו: <sup>12</sup>וְלָקְחוּ אֶת־כָּל־כְּלֵי הַשְּׂרָת  
אֲשֶׁר יִשְׂרְתוּבָם בְּקֹדֶשׁ וְנָתְנוּ אֶל־בְּגָד  
תְּכֵלֶת וְכֹסֹו אוֹתָם בְּמַכְסֵה עוֹר תַּחַשׁ  
וְנָתְנוּ עַל־הַמוֹט: <sup>13</sup>וְדִשְׁנוּ אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ  
וּפְרָשׂוּ עָלָיו בְּגָד אַרְגָּמָן: <sup>14</sup>וְנָתְנוּ עָלָיו  
אֶת־כָּל־כְּלָיו אֲשֶׁר יִשְׂרְתוּ עָלָיו בָּהֶם  
אֶת־הַמַּחְתֹּת אֶת־הַמְזֻלְגֹת וְאֶת־הַיָּעִים  
וְאֶת־הַמְזֻרְקֹת כָּל כְּלֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּפְרָשׂוּ  
עָלָיו כְּסוּי עוֹר תַּחַשׁ וְשָׂמוּ בְדִיו:

<sup>15</sup>וְכִלָּה אֶהְרֹן וּבָנָיו לְכַסֹּת אֶת־הַקֹּדֶשׁ  
וְאֶת־כָּל־כְּלֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּנֹסַע הַמַּחֲנֶה  
וְאֶחָרֵיכֵן יָבֹאוּ בְנֵי־קֹהֵת לִשְׂאת וְלֹא־

**9. lampstand** Hebrew: *m'norah*; see Exod. 25:31–40.

**lamps** The lamps and the lampstand are separate objects.

**fire pans** For removing the ashes from the lamps.

**10. carrying frame** The *m'norah* and its utensils, which could not be suspended on poles like the Ark and table, required the construction of a special carrying frame.

**11. altar of gold** Also known as the altar of incense, it was carried on poles.

**12. service vessels** Whatever additional vessels are used inside the tent, especially with the incense altar, which is too small to hold any utensils.

**13. altar** The text turns to the bronze sac-

rificial altar of the courtyard, because all the sacred objects inside the sanctuary have been covered.

**purple cloth** Actually, red-purple. In distinction to the objects of the sanctuary whose covering was made of violet or blue-purple, the outer altar was wrapped in red-purple, a mark of the decreasing degree of holiness in moving from the shrine out into the courtyard.

**15. Aaron and his sons have finished** This concludes the priestly assignment that began in verse 5 with “Aaron and his sons shall go in.”

**come** That is, go in.

**contact . . . and die** The Kohathites' contact with the covered objects can be as fatal as seeing them uncovered. Their removal labor is appropriately termed “skilled labor” (v. 3).

the Tent of Meeting shall be the portorage of the Kohathites.

<sup>16</sup>Responsibility shall rest with Eleazar son of Aaron the priest for the lighting oil, the aromatic incense, the regular grain offering, and the anointing oil—responsibility for the whole Tabernacle and for everything consecrated that is in it or in its vessels.

<sup>17</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: <sup>18</sup>Do not let the group of Kohathite clans be cut off from the Levites. <sup>19</sup>Do this with them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most sacred objects: let Aaron and his sons go in and assign each of them to his duties and to his portorage. <sup>20</sup>But let not [the Kohathites] go inside and witness the dismantling of the sanctuary, lest they die.

**portorage** The dismantling and reassembling of the sacred objects is performed by the priests; the Kohathites are responsible only as porters.

**16.** Eleazar the priest, who personally is in charge of the sacred ingredients used with the objects carried by the Kohathites, must scrupulously supervise their portorage by reliable Kohathites. In addition, he supervises the Gershonite and Merarite clans, as well as his own clan, and is the chief of the Levites' labor battalions.

**regular grain offering** This probably refers to the private daily offering of the anointed priest.

**18.cutoff** The penalty of being "cutoff" (*karet*) is inflicted only by God. Because the Kohathites face divine wrath for any mishap with the sacred objects, this term is quite appropriate here.

**20.** There were special restrictions on the Levites who would handle the most sacred articles. Abravanel understood this verse to express concern lest the clans of Kohath become so fascinated by staring at the sacred objects that they would fall into a mystic trance, un-

יָגֵעוּ אֶל-הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּמָתוּ אֵלֶּה מִשָּׂא בְנֵי-קָהַת בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד:

<sup>16</sup>וּפְקֻדֹת אֶלְעָזָר | בֶּן-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן שֹׁמֵן הַמֵּאֹר וְקִטְרֹת הַסַּמִּים וּמִנְחַת הַתְּמִיד וְשֹׁמֵן הַמִּשְׁחָה פְּקֻדֹת כָּל-הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ בְּקֹדֶשׁ וּבְכִלָּיו: ס

<sup>17</sup>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: <sup>18</sup>אֶל-תִּכְרְיִתוּ אֶת-שִׁבְט מִשְׁפַּחַת הַקְּהָתִי מִתּוֹךְ הַלְוִיִּם: <sup>19</sup>וְזָאת | עֲשׂוּ לָהֶם וַחֲיּוּ וְלֹא יָמָתוּ בְּגִשְׁתֶּם אֶת-קֹדֶשׁ הַקֹּדְשִׁים אֲהֲרֹן וּבְנָיו יָבֹאוּ וְשָׂמוּ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אִישׁ עַל-עֲבֹדָתוֹ וְאֶל-מִשְׁאָו: <sup>20</sup>וְלֹא-יָבֹאוּ לְרֹאוֹת כְּבָלַע אֶת-הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּמָתוּ: פ

**from the Levites** Only the Kohathites, who carry the sacred objects, are in mortal danger, not the Gershonites or Merarites.

**19. approach** Literally, "have access, handle," implying direct contact. Except for the Ark, there is no prohibition against approaching the sacred objects, only against encroaching on them.

**to his duties and to his portorage** Better: "to his portorage work." The Kohathites have no duties in the sanctuary removal except the transport of sacred objects.

**20. inside** Into the tent.

**witness the dismantling of the sanctuary** Literally, "look at the sacred objects even for a moment." Even the chance viewing of exposed objects inside the sanctuary could prove fatal.

able to do their work. Hirsch offers an opposite view; for him, the Torah's concern is that the Kohathites might become too accustomed to the routine of seeing the sacred objects packed and unpacked: "lest they die" spiritually, losing their capacity to see the tabernacle as holy.

# הַפְּטָרָה בַּמִּדְבָּר

## HAFTARAH FOR B'MIDBAR

HOSEA 2:1–22

Hosea (8th century B.C.E.) was the first prophet to portray the covenantal bond between God and the people Israel in terms of a marriage. In chapter 1, before the opening of this *haftarah*, Hosea is bidden to marry a “wife of whoredom” who will bear “children of whoredom” with her many lovers. These acts symbolize the apostasy of the people Israel, turning away from God and pursuing other gods.

God now calls on Hosea and his fellow northern Israelites to rebuke their “mother” (the embodiment of the nation) who has gone astray after false lovers (i.e., gods), producing children conceived shamelessly through acts of promiscuity (i.e., apostasy).

Apostasy will not go unpunished, yet hope for the people Israel’s future is proclaimed from the outset, a sign that divine mercy transcends judgment for sin. The covenant, perverted by national sin, will be renewed for the straying people.

The prophet marks these shifts of attitude with symbolic changes of names. The shifts of status are underscored by the negative particle *lo* (not) and by its absence. Thus the rejected people called “Not-My-People” (*lo ammi*, 2:1, also 1:9) and “Not-accepted” (*lo ruhamah*, 1:6) will in the end be called “My People” (*ammi*). Removal of *lo* is the symbolic removal of distance between the nation and its God. Renewal of the covenant does not depend on Israel’s repentance or initiative. It is a transformation initiated and guided by God; through His commitment to justice, mercy, and faithfulness, the nation will be devoted to the Lord (2:21–22). God’s moral attributes stand at the center of the covenant.

Hosea’s perception of the covenant, grounded in the sanctity of love and marriage, led to the Sages’ understanding the Song of Songs as a dialogue of spiritual love between God and Israel. The Midrash underscored this theme and gave permanent status to Hosea’s bold motif.

Covenant renewal is the climax of the *haftarah*, culminating the divine longing for reconciliation through entreaty and patient love. Through the divine attributes of justice, righteousness, and mercy—which make up the essence of the Covenant and covenantal living—Israel is promised knowledge of the Lord, overcoming the forgetfulness and unknowing that has characterized its recent behavior (2:10,15). Hosea implores the nation to transcend the seductions of nature and recognize God as the one and only source of life (2:10). Speaking for God, Hosea regards this new religious consciousness as an essential transformation, the prerequisite for any covenant renewed in faithfulness and truth.

### RELATION OF THE *HAFTARAH* TO THE *PARASHAH*

The *parashah* inaugurates the period of wandering in the wilderness with a census of the Israelite nation. Their wandering with the Ark of the Covenant, following their apostasy with the Golden Calf, could be perceived as a time of purification and regeneration before entry into the Promised Land (see Maimonides, *Guide* III:24).

The wilderness serves a similar function in the *haftarah*. Hosea details how the seductions of idolatry once again perverted Israel’s worship, corrupting their religious consciousness. Transformation will come about only through God’s coaxing and tender speech to the people in the “wilderness,” a symbolic image for the destroyed land (Ibn Ezra). This healing will inaugurate a period in which the rejected nation is restored in its homeland, regenerated beyond all measure or counting (Hos. 2:1). It will be a time of unification of the entire nation under one “head” (*rosh*, 2:2), a glorious transformation of the ancient past when each tribe was accounted for by its own head man (*rosh*) in the wilderness (Num. 1:4).

The wilderness is also a symbolic realm marking a spiritual journey of birth and rebirth. Later generations, reading Hosea 2:1–22 in association with the *parashah*, readily imagined the original

wandering as a prototype for all generations conscious of their religious failures and of their need for covenantal renewal.

**2** The number of the people of Israel shall be like that of the sands of the sea, which cannot be measured or counted; and instead of being told, “You are Not-My-People,” they shall be called Children-of-the-Living-God. <sup>2</sup>The people of Judah and the people of Israel shall assemble together and appoint one head over them; and they shall rise from the ground—for marvelous shall be the day of Jezreel!

<sup>3</sup>Oh, call your brothers “My People,”  
And your sisters “Lovingly Accepted!”

<sup>4</sup>Rebuke your mother, rebuke her—  
For she is not My wife  
And I am not her husband—  
And let her put away her harlotry from her  
face

And her adultery from between her breasts.  
<sup>5</sup>Else will I strip her naked

And leave her as on the day she was born:  
And I will make her like a wilderness,  
Render her like desert land,  
And let her die of thirst.

<sup>6</sup>I will also disown her children;  
For they are now a harlot’s brood,

**ב** וְהָיָה מִסְפַּר בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּחֹל הַיָּם  
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמָּד וְלֹא יִסְפָּר וְהָיָה בְּמִקְוֹם  
אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמַר לָהֶם לֹא־עַמִּי אַתֶּם יֹאמְרוּ  
לָהֶם בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים: <sup>2</sup> וְנִקְבְּצוּ בְּנֵי־יְהוּדָה  
וּבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל יַחְדָּו וְשָׁמוּ לָהֶם רֹאשׁ אֶחָד  
וְעָלוּ מִן־הָאָרֶץ כִּי גָדוֹל יוֹם יִזְרְעֵאל:  
<sup>3</sup> אָמְרוּ לְאַחֵיכֶם עַמִּי  
וּלְאֲחֹתֵיכֶם רַחֲמָה:

<sup>4</sup> רִיבוּ בְּאִמְכֶם רִיבוּ  
כִּי־הִיא לֹא אִשְׁתִּי  
וְאֲנִכִּי לֹא אִישָׁה  
וְתָסַר זְנוּנֵיהָ מִפְּנֵיהָ  
וְנִאֲפֹפֶיהָ מִבֵּין שִׁדְיָהּ:  
<sup>5</sup> פֶּן־אֶפְשִׁיטָנָה עֵרְמָה  
וְהִצַּגְתִּיהָ כַּיּוֹם הַהוּלָדָה  
וְשָׁמְתִיהָ כַּמִּדְבָּר  
וְשָׁתָהּ כְּאָרֶץ צִיָּה  
וְהִמַּתִּיהָ בְּצָמָא:  
<sup>6</sup> וְאֶת־בְּנֵיהָ לֹא אֶרְחַם  
כִּי־בָנֵי זְנוּנִים הֵמָּה:

**Hosea 2:1. like . . . the sands of the sea** This image recalls God’s promise of numerous descendants to Abraham (Gen. 15:5). The sharp contrast of this promise with the verse preceding the *haftarah* (“you are not My people, and I will not be your [God]”) anticipates divine mercy and restoration.

**2. rise from the ground** The image seems to point to rejuvenation of the national condition, particularly through a rise in population (see Exod. 1:10).

**4. Rebuke your mother** God urges the Israelites (i.e., the children) to rebuke their mother Israel for her spiritual harlotry (Radak).

**she is not My wife / And I am not her husband** Hosea uses legal and covenantal formulas to dramatize the divine–human relationship. Here, the wife’s guilt is emphasized by this divorce formula. Likewise, in Hos. 1:9, a repudiation formula (“I will not be your [God]”) reverses the opening of the Decalogue (“I the LORD am your God,” Exod. 20:2) and positive covenantal asser-

<sup>7</sup>In that their mother has played the harlot,  
She that conceived them has acted shame-  
lessly—  
Because she thought,  
“I will go after my lovers,  
Who supply my bread and my water,  
My wool and my linen,  
My oil and my drink.”

<sup>8</sup>Assuredly,  
I will hedge up her roads with thorns  
And raise walls against her,  
And she shall not find her paths.  
<sup>9</sup>Pursue her lovers as she will,  
She shall not overtake them;  
And seek them as she may,  
She shall never find them.  
Then she will say,  
“I will go and return  
To my first husband,  
For then I fared better than now.”

<sup>10</sup>And she did not consider this:  
It was I who bestowed on her  
The new grain and wine and oil;  
I who lavished silver on her  
And gold—which they used for Baal.  
<sup>11</sup>Assuredly,  
I will take back My new grain in its time  
And My new wine in its season,  
And I will snatch away My wool and My linen  
That serve to cover her nakedness.

כִּי זָנְתָה אִמָּם  
הַבִּישָׁה הַזֹּרְתָם  
כִּי אָמְרָה  
אֲלֶכָה אַחֲרֵי מְאֹהָבֵי  
נִתְּנֵי לַחֲמִי וּמִימֵי  
צִמְרֵי וּפְשָׁתַי  
שִׁמְנֵי וְשִׁקּוּיֵי:

לְכֹן  
הִנְנִי־שֹׁף אֶת־דַּרְכֶּךָ בְּסִירִים  
וְגִדְרֹתַי אֶת־גְּדֹרְךָ  
וְנִתְּיבוֹתֶיךָ לֹא תִמְצָא:  
<sup>9</sup>וְרִדְפֶךָ אֶת־מְאֹהָבֶיךָ  
וְלֹא־תִשְׁיֵג אֹתָם  
וּבְקִשְׁתָּם  
וְלֹא תִמְצָא  
וְאָמְרָה  
אֲלֶכָה וְאָשׁוּבָה  
אֶל־אִישֵׁי הָרִאשׁוֹן  
כִּי טוֹב לִי אִזּוּ מֵעַתָּה:  
<sup>10</sup>וְהִיא לֹא יָדְעָה  
כִּי אֲנֹכִי נִתְּתִי לָהּ  
הַדָּגֵן וְהַתִּירוֹשׁ וְהַיִּצְהָר  
וְכֶסֶף הַרְבִּיתִי לָהּ  
וְזָהָב עָשׂוּ לְבַעַל:  
לְכֹן  
אָשׁוּב וְלִקְחֹתִי דָגְנִי בְּעֵתוֹ  
וְתִירוֹשִׁי בְּמוֹעֲדוֹ  
וְהִצַּלְתִּי צִמְרֵי וּפְשָׁתַי  
לְכִסּוֹת אֶת־עֲרוֹתֶיךָ:

tions (“I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God,” Exod. 6:7; cf. Lev. 26:45, Deut. 26:17–18).

7. The mother’s own thoughts (or words) are cited as self-incriminating evidence and proof of infidelity.

9. *seek them . . . never find them* Hosea uses the verbs “seek” and “find” to stress the failure

of pursuing false gods. Elsewhere this pattern is used in positive terms, emphasizing God’s readiness to respond to Israelite repentance or supplication (see Deut. 4:29: “you will find Him, if only you seek Him with all your heart”).

10. *gold—which they used for Baal* Israel misuses the bounty of God for idolatrous rites.

11–12. The punishment of stripping and

12Now will I uncover her shame  
In the very sight of her lovers,  
And none shall save her from Me.  
13And I will end all her rejoicing:  
Her festivals, new moons, and sabbaths—  
All her festive seasons.  
14I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,  
Which she thinks are a fee  
She received from her lovers;  
I will turn them into brushwood,  
And beasts of the field shall devour them.  
15Thus will I punish her  
For the days of the Baalim,  
On which she brought them offerings;  
When, decked with earrings and jewels,  
She would go after her lovers,  
Forgetting Me

—declares the LORD.

16Assuredly,  
I will speak coaxingly to her  
And lead her through the wilderness  
And speak to her tenderly.  
17I will give her her vineyards from there,  
And the Valley of Achor as a plowland of  
hope.  
There she shall respond as in the days of her  
youth,  
When she came up from the land of Egypt.

12 וְעַתָּה אֲגַלֶּה אֶת־נִבְלָתָהּ  
לְעֵינַי מֵאֲהַבְיָהּ  
וְאִישׁ לֹא־יִצְלֶנָה מִיָּדַי :  
13 וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי כָּל־מְשׁוֹשֶׁהָ  
חֲגֵה חֲדָשָׁה וְשַׁבָּתָהּ  
וְכָל מוֹעֵדָה :  
14 וְהִשְׁמֹתִי גִפְנֵהָ וְתַאֲנָתָהּ  
אֲשֶׁר אָמְרָה אֶתְנָהּ הֵמָּה לִי  
אֲשֶׁר נִתְּנוּ־לִי מֵאֲהַבֵּי  
וְשִׁמְתִים לְיַעַר  
וְאֶכְלֹתֶם חֵיַת הַשָּׂדֶה :  
15 וּפְקַדְתִּי עָלֶיהָ  
אֶת־יָמַי הַבְּעָלִים  
אֲשֶׁר תִּקְטִיר לָהֶם  
וְתַעַד נִזְמָה וְחִלִּיתָהּ  
וְתִלֵּךְ אַחֲרַי מֵאֲהַבְיָהּ  
וְאֵתִי שָׁכַחָה  
נְאֻם־יְהוָה : פ

16 לָכֵן  
הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מִפְתִּיחָהּ  
וְהִלְכְתִּיהָ הַמְדַבֵּר  
וְדִבַּרְתִּי עַל־לִבָּהּ :  
17 וְנָתַתִּי לָהּ אֶת־כַּרְמֵיהָ מִשָּׁם  
וְאֶת־עֵמֶק עַכּוֹר לְפֶתַח תְּקוּהָ  
וְעָנְתָה שְׁמָהּ כִּי־יָמִי נְעוּרֶיהָ  
וְכִיּוֹם עָלְתָה מֵאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם : ס

shaming is a featured motif elsewhere as well (Ezek. 16:36–39). These elements may have been part of common law or practice in ancient Israel.

**14. fee** Hebrew: *etnah*, a harlot's fee, like the *etnan* paid to a harlot in Hos. 9:1 and Deut. 23:19. The word puns on the payment itself (*t'enatab*, "her fig trees"). It also alludes to sexual passion (*ta-anatab*, Jer. 2:24).

**15. days of the Baalim** The plural "Baalim," here and in verse 19, presumably is used to correspond to the many "lovers" (see 2:7,9,12,14). Baal was the Canaanite god of the storm and of vegetation.

**16. through the wilderness** Or, "into the desert"; a metaphor for the exile (Rashi, Radak,

Eliezer of Beaugency) or for the devastated homeland (Ibn Ezra) where God will comfort the nation and begin the process of renewal. Alternatively, it is a figure for God's revelation (cf. Hos. 13:5) and the place where Israel demonstrated its faithfulness to God (Jer. 2:2).

**17. her vineyards** Restored vineyards are a counterpoint to the destruction of vines in verse 14 (Ibn Ezra, Radak). Similarly, the covenant with the beasts of the field (v. 20) constitutes a counterpoint to their former destructive rapacity (v. 14).

**Valley of Achor** This may refer to the scene of Achan's sin at the beginning of the conquest of the Promised Land (Josh. 7:24–26; Radak).

18And in that day

—declares the LORD—

You will call [Me] Ishi,

And no more will you call Me Baali.

19For I will remove the names of the Baalim  
from her mouth,

And they shall nevermore be mentioned by  
name.

20In that day, I will make a covenant for them  
with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air,  
and the creeping things of the ground; I will also  
banish bow, sword, and war from the land. Thus  
I will let them lie down in safety.

21And I will espouse you forever:

I will espouse you with righteousness and  
justice,

And with goodness and mercy,

22And I will espouse you with faithfulness;

Then you shall be devoted to the LORD.

That ancient site of infidelity will now become a  
gateway of renewal.

**18. *Ishi*** The term for “my husband,” used  
figuratively for God in verse 9 and as part of the  
divorce formula in verse 4. Here it is a counter-  
point to the term “Baali” (my Baal). The latter  
designation for a husband evokes the Canaanite  
god of that name, with whom the people sinned;  
hence that term will be avoided.

**19.** Unilaterally God will produce a religious  
transformation, not only by removing pagan  
terms from the nation’s mouth, but also through  
words of loving-kindness (v. 16) and gifts of es-  
pousal (vv. 21–22). No human act of repentance  
is indicated.

18 וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם-הַהוּא

נִאֲמַר-יְהוָה

תִּקְרָאֵי אִישִׁי

וְלֹא-תִקְרָאֵי-לִי עוֹד בַּעֲלִי:

19 וְהִסַּרְתִּי אֶת-שְׁמוֹת הַבַּעֲלִים מִפִּיהָ

וְלֹא-יִזְכְּרוּ עוֹד בְּשֵׁמָם:

20 וְכָרַתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עִם-חַיֵּת

הַשָּׂדֶה וְעִם-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְרִמָּשׁ הָאֲדָמָה

וְקִשְׁתׁ וְחֶרֶב וּמִלְחָמָה אֲשַׁבֵּר מִן-הָאָרֶץ

וְהַשְׁכַּבְתִּים לְבֶטַח:

21 וְאֲרֻשְׁתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם

וְאֲרֻשְׁתִּיךָ לִי בְצֶדֶק וּבִמְשֻׁפֵּט

וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים:

22 וְאֲרֻשְׁתִּיךָ לִי בְאֱמוּנָה

וַיִּדְעַתְּ אֶת-יְהוָה: ס

**21–22.** God promises an everlasting, unal-  
terable commitment. This act of espousal in-  
cludes gifts by God as the bride-price. These gifts,  
the central terms of covenantal fidelity and social  
ethics, are the means by which the people shall  
renew their relationship with God (cf. Jer. 9:23).

This espousal formula is recited by faithful Jews  
daily, while binding the strap of the hand *t'fillin*  
around the fingers of one hand. Thus they pledge  
to show their commitment to God through the  
covenantal behavior of justice and loving-kind-  
ness. It is the human response to God’s spiritual  
initiative as proclaimed in the *haftarah*.

***be devoted*** The Hebrew *v'yada-at* (literally,  
“know”) echoes Near Eastern treaty terminology.