

B'MIDBAR (In the Wilderness)

Numbers 1:1-4:20, Hosea 2:1-22, Romans 9:22-33)

This week's study is from the opening chapters of the book of Numbers, the fourth of the five books of Moses, which describes the numbering of the Israelites. In Hebrew, it came to be known as Bamidbar – “In the Wilderness” - from the fourth word of the opening line: “**And the Lord spoke unto Moshe in the wilderness (B'midbar) of Sinai**”. Bamidbar is a book about Israel's desert or wilderness experience. Have you ever felt yourself to be the wilderness? Are you in a desert right now? It is a dry and thirsty land where water is scarce; a land of scorpions and huge spiders. As someone who has lived in the Negev (desert) of Israel, ‘schvitzing’¹



in the sweltering July heat while six months pregnant yet, I can honestly say, “*Been there; done that!*” And, may I add, “...*wouldn't want to do that again*”. The desert may seem to be a place hostile to life - in fact I almost lost my life there when giving birth to my last child, Avi-ad - but the wilderness can also have much to teach us. The Hebrew word midbar מדבר comes from the same root as m'daber, מדבר which means to speak. It is in the wilderness times of our lives that God can speak a word in due season to our hearts. ² Being a ‘Wandering Jew’, I have gained some experience in ‘wilderness wandering’ and recorded a DVD, Walking Through the Wilderness, which gives insight and revelation on what we can learn in the desert seasons of our lives and – more importantly – how to get out of them as quickly as possible! [Click here to order through the website:](#) or I will send you by mail for any offering.

What's in a Name? EL SHADDAI

Moshe is commanded to take a census of all adult males. They are numbered according to family, by their father's houses, according to name. I love the names in Israel. Most people walk around carrying God's name or some attribute of His character in one form or another. In Hebrew, names carried significant meaning. For example, Elitzur means My God (Eli) is a rock (Tzur). Of the twenty-four proper names here given, nine contain the Divine name, El (God), three the name Tzur (Rock), frequently used for God as in Tzur Yisrael (Rock of Israel) or Rock of Ages. Also Shaddai appears three times in the names listed. Shaddai is a very interesting word study. I recommend viewing a message called El Shaddai, recorded at a Canadian congregation called El Shaddai. [Click here to listen to audio recording El Shaddai.](#)

Shaddai שדי is usually translated ‘Almighty’ in English but does not do justice to the meaning of this name of God. It is derived from a Hebrew roots that means ‘to overpower’. Interestingly enough, this root also can mean a demonic power. Therefore, El Shaddai means that God overpowers or prevails against all demonic powers. It has also been derived from an Arabic word which means ‘to heap benefits upon’. The Hebrew root also means a woman's breast. It reveals the maternal, merciful nature of God. In His image we were created – male AND FEMALE we were created. God, then, is not only the paternal, male, Father but is also a mother and if we read the Word carefully we will see this aspect of God's nature as Shaddai – the woman's breast – the source of all nourishment and comfort to her children.

These three Hebrew letters, spelling the name Shaddai, is often artistically displayed on the mezuzah, the little box containing special Hebrew Scriptures that is affixed to the doorposts in most Jewish homes and places of business. Shaddai can also mean ‘to reconcile persons at enmity with one another.’ This expresses the uniquely feminine ability to bring peace between two opposing and often hostile parties. “**He Himself (Yeshua) is our peace who has destroyed the enmity (hostility) between Jews and Gentiles by breaking down in His own flesh the dividing wall (machitzah) between us!** (Eph. 2:14-16) Yeshua has made a way

1 Schvitzing is a Yiddish expression for profuse sweating

2 The DVD Walking Through the Wilderness gives an entire message on this subject. Recorded at Polish Gospel.

that we may be reconciled one to another and also to Himself. All this from one name - Shaddai!

The Word says that the **‘name of the Lord יהוה is a strong tower and the righteous may run to it and be saved.’** (Proverbs 18:10). All who call upon this name, the true name of God, will be saved. When Moses asked God for His true name, He told him, **“Ehye Asher Ehye”**, which is not really translated as ‘I am’, but **I will be what I will be**. There are so many facets to the name, character, nature of Elohim that He can be to us whatever is our need at any given moment: Rock, Comforter, Provider, God who is there, I once read of a professor who stood up at a conference and all he did was recite the names of God and His Son, Yeshua, for forty five minutes. At the end, everyone in the audience was moved to quiet tears. We can run into His name and be safe in the shelter of knowing that He will be to us what He will be, based on a loving, intimate relationship.



We have recorded, on an 11 DVD set, a basic Hebrew course which includes a study on the Hebrew names of God. It includes a workbook and a recording of all lessons. [Click here to order through the website.](#)

Haftarah Bamidbar

The connection between the assigned haftarah (prophetic portion) and parashah is with the opening line from the book of Hosea chapter 2:1, **“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered...”** It is also about numbering the Israelites. This prophetic word of God promises that one day, the children of Israel will be such a huge number of people that they will be as the sand of the sea. How can this be? Obviously this does not refer only to the Jewish people of today who are a tiny minority population. There is something hidden here that we may bring to the Light as we go through this study. It also has to do with names. But first we have to understand the background behind Hosea.

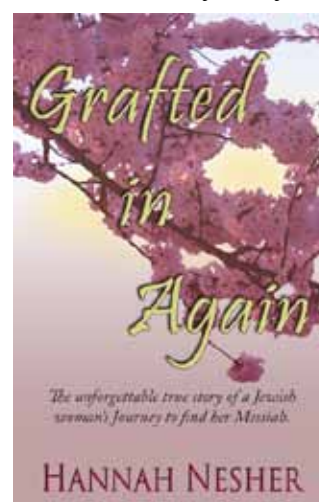
God of All Comfort

God instructed Hosea to take for a wife a woman who would be unfaithful to him. The rabbis believe that Hosea's domestic tragedy was actually ordained by God. Through his personal ordeal of suffering and the agonizing pain of loving a woman who would turn to other men, Hosea came to understand, at a very deep level, and through intense personal experience, how God feels about Israel, His unfaithful Bride. God may take us through periods of suffering - even anguish of heart, soul, and body – not only to identify with God's pain over sin, but also so that we may identify with the pain of others. This is a hard word – that God may actually ordain personal suffering. But how can we really, truly, minister to a suffering, lost, broken, despairing, hopeless, confused, depressed, sick, poor, trapped, hurting humanity unless we have also gone through these same painful states of being? I remember a pastor's wife once trying to give me marital advice. She had never been through anything that I was going through. She had never even come close to my experience. And I thought, *“How can she possibly have anything to say to me? How can she even begin to understand what I am*

going through?” But when we hear from someone who has been through the fiery furnace and has come out alive, then we listen up. Sometimes we feel burdened beyond measure, beyond our strength, so that we despair of life itself (2 Cor. 1:8) But the God who comforts us in all our tribulations, gives us His comfort so that we may be able to comfort those who are also in trouble with that same comfort which we have received from God. (2 Cor. 1:4) He promises not to give us more than we can bear. One morning, I felt so grieved, so broken in heart and spirit, so alone, so lost and confused, despairing even of life itself. And then I read a devotion written by a woman who has also been through the fire and not been burned, through deep waters and she has not drowned. Through the Holy Spirit, I was comforted in my own situation and now can offer this same comfort to others, just as this woman offered it to me.

Are you burdened and grieved seemingly beyond your ability to bear it by some kind of domestic tragedy like Hosea's – an adulterous spouse? Do you struggle with despair over some kind of situation in your home or family that never seems to get resolved? Sometimes we can feel like we live in a storm that never ends and we can even begin to doubt God's love for us. The disciples were in such a storm – a storm of hurricane proportions. Their boat was filling with water and they were sinking fast. They thought that surely they would drown. And where was Jesus? Asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat! And the disciples cried out, **“Master, don't You care that we are perishing?”** (Mark 4:37-38) There are times when we feel like we're drowning and it seems like Jesus is asleep; we wonder if He even cares anymore. Why does He allow this storm to go on and on? We have prayed and fasted and prayed some more but the wind and waves continue to beat against our tiny, sinking boat – the storm rages on. What was Jesus' answer? Faith. Believe. Do not doubt. I had to sit myself down one day and say out loud, *“I may feel like I'm drowning; I may feel like God doesn't care about my situation, but by faith, I know that He is with me, for He has promised, I will never leave you nor forsake you. And so, by faith, I choose to believe that Yeshua is in this sinking boat with me and He has power over the winds and the waves and that He does care and He will say, Peace be still! Yeshua has promised that I can have peace in the storm, a peace that passes all understanding and so I receive His peace now – in Yeshua's name.”* It took a little time, but soon the peace of God came over me, the comfort of God filled me through this message in Hosea and once more my storm-tossed soul was at rest.

Hosea was deeply unhappy in his marriage. He had ‘wasted’ his love on Gomer, a promiscuous, adulterous woman. But this marriage symbolized God's experience with the nation of Israel. God, like Hosea, is a loving, faithful husband who is abandoned and betrayed by a corrupt wife. God chose Israel and delivered her from Egypt to be His own special segulah (treasure). He showered her with blessings, lavished her with love, provided for her a beautiful home, a land flowing with milk and honey (the wedding gift), and made Israel into a mighty nation. And yet, in utter ingratitude, she adopted the customs and worship of the idolatrous Canaanites and forsook the one true God, Creator of heaven and earth. This breaks my heart because, in a way, the story of Gomer is my own personal story. I have written my testimony in a book, Hannah, Grafted in Again, and recorded it in Israel in a DVD, Because He Lives. [Click here to order](#) My story is a testimony of a great



fall but an even greater redemption through God's mercy in Yeshua. The name, gomer, means 'finished'. But for the grace of God, we would all be finished, but because of His great mercy, He redeems us and gives us a hope and a future.

Healing our Backsliding - Ephraim

If we look at the names of the children of Gomer, we see that she bore three children: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah & Lo-Ami. Jezreel (Yizrael) was the name given to the valley from Mt. Camel to the Jordan. It was also the name given to the first son of Hosea to recall the massacre by Jehu in that valley. It brings to remembrance the guilt of Jehu and impending judgment for the blood he shed. The literal meaning of Yizrael is 'He will sow'. God says that He will sow the people of Israel; they will be scattered amongst all the nations. **"Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples:** (Hosea 7:8) They will become assimilated and even lose their Israelite identity; **Ephraim is swallowed up, now they are among the Gentiles (goyim).** (Hosea 8:8) They will consider the Torah a strange thing (8:12) and will eat unclean food that God has declared unfit for His holy people.(9:3)

We have to understand the background of Hosea. He was the prophet of the decline and fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. At this time, the nation had become divided after the death of King Solomon into Israel, the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, and Judah, the two southern tribes of Yehudah & Benjamin. The Jewish people, Yehudim, are descended from the tribes of Judah (Yehudah) & Benjamin who joined them. But God exiled the ten Northern tribes (Israel) where they became 'lost'. But God knows where they are and promises to one day bring them back. **"Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days."** (Hosea 3:5)

Northern Israel forsook God and turned to the gods of the pagan nations around them, just as a wife who plays the harlot turns to other men instead of her husband. **"A spirit of harlotry led them astray."** (Hosea 4:12) God also calls these ten Northern tribes of Israel Ephraim. **For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled...Ephraim shall be desolate...Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked by human precept."** (Hosea 5:3,9,11). We need to have a holy fear of walking by human precept rather than God's commands. Much of the Church and also the modern forms of Judaism walk in a great deal of human precept – man-made rules, laws and regulations, rather than Biblical commands.

But just as Hosea could not give up on Gomer, God says that He, like the maternal El Shaddai, cannot give up on Ephraim. Look at the beautiful, gentle, merciful, long-suffering, ever faithful imagery of a mother in these passages:

"I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them, I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love...I stopped and fed them...How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?" (Hosea 11:3,4,8)

But one day, Ephraim will turn away from their idols and false Gods, back to the one true God, "Ephraim shall say, **'What have I to do anymore with idols?'**" (Hosea 14:8)

The Hebrew letter hey ה often stands for the name of God, like an abbreviation. If you look closely, you will see that it is like a door with a little open space on the top left hand side. This is the true and beautiful message behind Hosea – that no matter how far we have strayed, overcome with a spirit of harlotry, God always leaves a way, a space, an opening, for turning back to Him. **"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely."** (Hosea 14:4) God promises not to bring upon us more than we can bear, but with every temptation to provide a way of escape. Yeshua says "I AM THE WAY...."

If we look at the Christian Church, we see a people from every nation who consider themselves Gentiles, who consider the Torah a strange thing, who walk by many human precepts and eat foods the Bible calls unclean, but have to a certain measure turned to the God of Israel through the blood of the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua. Could this be the promised in-gathering of Ephraim? Could this be why so many in the Christian Church are waking up to their Hebraic roots and discovering an insatiable love for and identification with Israel and the Jewish

people? Could this explain why the numbers within the church are growing who want to study and understand about the Feast of the Lord, the Sabbath, Passover, and Biblical Dietary Laws? Why more and more are wanting to not only visit Israel but to actually stay there and serve there? Perhaps. Many believe that at least a portion of the Christian Church is, indeed, Ephraim, who was once lost and assimilated among the nations but that now God is gathering her back into the commonwealth of Israel through the blood of the Messiah, Yeshua. Wow! This would certainly explain the prophetic word at the beginning of this haftarah, the glorious future promised to Israel. It cannot happen without the re-unification of Judah and Israel. Perhaps what we are seeing is the beginning of this wonderful reconciliation between the Jewish people and the Christian Church.

Re-unification of Judah and Israel – Echad (one) in God's Hand

Gomer's other two children were called Loh-Ruhamah and Loh Ami, meaning no mercy and not my people. What a terrible name to have to bear! It is as if God totally disowned this portion of His people – that He would not have mercy on them or even consider them His covenant people anymore. But God....in His mercy would not hold His anger against them forever. He made a way for restoration and reconciliation through the blood of Yeshua.

“And it shall come to pass that, instead of that which was said unto them: ‘Ye are not My people (lo ami); it shall be said unto them. You are the children of the living God. And the children of Judah and the children of Israel (Ephraim) shall be gathered together. (Hosea 2:1-2)

Wow! Great shall be the day of Yisrael! If we look at Ezekiel chapter 37, we also see the re-unification of the nation of Israel under one king, (Melech Mashiach) King Messiah, son of David, no longer to be two nations (Judah and Ephraim) but one (echad) in God's hand.

“They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things....I will deliver them...and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people (ami), and I will be their God.” (Read the whole portion from Ezekiel chapter 37 from verse 15-the end) □

The New Testament portion refers to these prophecies in Romans 9:23-26 in explaining how God has made known the riches of His glory to both Jews and also the nations as He says also in Hosea.....**I will call them Ami, who were not Ami (My People), and her Ruhamah (mercy) who were loh-ruhamah (referring to the children of Gomer). There they shall be called sons (and daughters) of the living God.**

Peter, in the book of the New Testament also confirms this prophecy when he says, **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. His own special people,; that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light, who once were not a people (loh ami) but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy (loh ruhamah) but now have obtained mercy (ruhamah).** (1 Peter 3:9-10) Halleluyah!

But where does that leave poor Hosea and where does that leave us in the middle of our storms of life? It may be wonderful to find out that we may actually be part of Ephraim, but how do we deal with our own ‘domestic tragedies’? Is the message behind Hosea telling us that no matter how abusive someone has been to us, no matter how grievous their sins of betrayal, abandonment and unfaithfulness that we should always welcome them back into our hearts and lives? I don't think so. I believe that God is showing us how far above His ways are from our ways – that His ability to love and forgive someone who is faithless and totally undeserving of our love is so much higher than our own human ability to do so. And yet God calls us to be conformed into the image of His son and so we strive to love the unlovable, to forgive the unforgiveable – and yet so often we stumble and fall in this area.

Husbands – Lord or Lover (Ba'al or Ishi)

I believe that in this Haftorah from Hosea, God is teaching us something about the nature of 'husbanding' and about His desire for an intimate, passionate, loving relationship between husband and wife. God says, **"No longer will you call me ba'ali but Ishi."** Here Hosea is using a Hebrew play on words. Ba'al can mean husband or Lord, but it is also the name of a false god – ba'al. We can call our husband Ba'al, but it indicates a 'Lord', someone who rules through domination and fear. Ba'al indicates ownership and subservience on the part of the wife. But the bond between God and Israel, between God and us, and between husband and wife is to be one of enduring love and devotion. We can also make, even our husbands (or wives) into a kind of false god (Ba'al) by putting expectations on them that only God can meet. But 'ishi', although it may also be used for husband is more of an intimate term of endearment - 'my man'. God wants an intimate relationship with us – **"I will betroth you to Me forever..."**, where we serve Him out of love and devotion. So too, does God want wives to love and honor and respect and submit to their husbands, not because they are 'Lord and master', not because they dominate and rule with intimidation and fear, but because they love as Yeshua loved – by giving themselves for their wives and loving them sacrificially as Messiah loves his kehilla (community). Perhaps God wants us to stop looking to man to meet our deepest needs (or even our surface ones), stop making man into a ba'al, and instead turn to God to be our 'ishi', the true lover of our souls.

[Click here to read related article, "I will Change Your Name"](#)

God, speaking through the Prophet Hosea, said that He would bring His bride into the wilderness, the midbar, but not to harm her. Rather, He would **speak tenderly to her in the midbar and turn the valley of Achor (trouble) into a door of hope** (Petah Tikvah). ³ (Hosea 2:17) [Click here to read article, Valley of Achor](#)

There are times when God must, by necessity, hedge our way with thorns, cause all of our mirth and parties to cease, cause friends and lovers to flee from us, and bring us into a midbar (wilderness) season – a dry and weary land where water is scarce. We can feel abandoned and lonely for a time. But do not lose heart, dear friends, because this is the place where God will speak tenderly to your heart and will allure you back to Himself.

"I will betroth you unto Me forever; says the Lord.

Shabbat Shalom and I hope that this message has been a word in due season, a drop of living water, in your midbar – in your wilderness journey. May God lead us ever close to His heart.

Please receive this blessing I send you from Zion:

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YA'ER ADONAI PANA V'LECHA VICHUNECHA
YISA ADONAI PANA VALECHA
V'YASEM L'CHA SHALOM**

**MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU
MAY THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE SHINE UPON YOU AND BE GRACIOUS TO YOU
MAY THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON YOU
AND GIVE YOU PEACE**

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About the Author:

Hannah Nesher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching Christians about the Jewish roots of their faith.

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