

PARASHAT B'MIDBAR

(IN THE DESERT)

NUMBERS 1:1-4:20

ETZ CHAYEEM HOO (HE IS A TREE OF LIFE)

Yeshua is a tree of life to those who take hold of Him, and those who support Him are praiseworthy. His ways are ways of pleasantness and all of His paths are shalom. Bring us back YHVH to You, and we shall come, renew our days as of old.

As we begin to study the Torah let us never forget that YESHUA THE MESSIAH is the Living Torah, the Torah-Word of Elohim made flesh. He is the way, the truth and the life — the Living Manna sent from heaven. Without Him living in our lives through the indwelling Presence of his Set-Apart/Kadosh Spirit (Who leads us into all truth and revelation) the Written Torah can become the dead letter of the law!

Haftorah Reading

Hosea 1:10[2:1]-20[22]

B'rit Chadashah

On the twelve tribes of Israel: **Luke 22:30; Revelation 7:1-8; 21:12**

On the spiritual priesthood of believers: **1 Peter 2:9**

On YHVH's "throne room" in heaven (a prototype of the Tabernacle): **Revelation 4:1-11**

The qualifications for spiritual leadership: **1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9**

Outline of This Week's Parashah (Torah Portion):

- 1:1 A Census Taken of the Children of Israel
- 1:4 The Leaders of the Twelve Tribes; The Census Totals
- 1:47 The Levites Not to Be Counted; Their Responsibilities and the Placement of Their Camp
- 2:2 The Formation of the Tribal Encampments Around the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*)
- 2:32 The Total Numbers of the Children of Israel
- 3:1 Aaron's Sons
- 3:5 Appointment of the Levites to the Service of the Tabernacle
- 3:11 The Levites Replace the Firstborn as the Priests in Israel
- 3:14 The Census of the Levites and Each Clan Is Given a Responsibility Over a Part of the Tabernacle
- 3:40 The Israelite Firstborn Are Redeemed
- 4:1 The Kohathites Are Organized and Given Responsibilities in the Tabernacle
- 4:17 The Special Precautions for the Kohathites to Preserve the Sanctity of the Tabernacle So That They Do Not Die

General Overview of the Book of Numbers (*B'midbar*)

The English name *Numbers* derives from the fact that in this book the Israelites are counted or numbered on several occasions (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 26). Leviticus ends with YHVH instructing his people to count their flocks for tithe purposes, while Numbers begins with YHVH, as the ultimate Good Shepherd (or in Hebrew, YHVH *Rohee*), counting the Israelites themselves, who are the sheep of his pasture (Pss 74:1; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3). The fact that this counting took place in the wilderness proves that it was not for political or national economic reasons, but was in fulfillment of YHVH's Torah instructions. Each Israelite was to give a half-shekel of silver toward the maintenance of the Tabernacle. The shekels then counted would give the exact number of Israelites (Exod 30:12–16).

The Hebrew name *B'midbar* meaning “in the wilderness” originates from the fact that this book chronicles Israel's wandering in the wilderness. The Book of Exodus, on the other hand, records the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, its establishment as a nation, its covenantal relationship with YHVH and the construction of the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*), which was the symbol of YHVH dwelling or tabernacling in the midst of his chosen people. The Book of Leviticus deals with the inner workings of that Tabernacle and the mechanics of how sinful man could maintain a right spiritual relationship with a righteous Elohim. This was accomplished through the agency of the Levitical priesthood that would function within the Tabernacle as a human intermediary between man and his Creator.

The Book of Numbers covers much of Israel's forty years wandering in the wilderness and recounts the early years of this nation under YHVH's theocratic rule. Recorded are Israel's triumphs and defeats, its obedience and disobedience to YHVH's rule of law and the resulting consequences whether blessing or cursings.

In this book, we see several main subdivisions. Chapters 1:1–10:10 cover instructions from YHVH to Israel while still at Mount Sinai. Chapters 10:11–36:13 cover the Israelite's actual wilderness journey. The second section dealing with the wilderness journey has two main parts: the perishing in the wilderness of the older generation (10:11–25:18), and the preparation of the second generation of Israelites to enter the Promised Land (chapters 26–36).

Reoccurring themes in the Book of Numbers include the continual murmuring of Israelites and the divine punishment on them as a result. YHVH made promises to care for them and lead them into the Promised Land. Instead of having faith and trust in him, with few exceptions, the Israelites exhibited doubt and unbelief in YHVH. As a result, the entire older generation, with the exception of faithful Joshua and Caleb, perished in the wilderness never to realize the promises YHVH had made to them concerning the Promised Land. This is a poignant lesson for all believers in their faith walk. The spiritual application of this lesson is not missed by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews in chapter four of that book. When YHVH makes promises, his people need to embrace those promises with enthusiastic and optimistic faith and never let them go. After all, if we cannot trust our Creator, then who or what can we trust?

In this book, we see revealed the grace of YHVH, that he is longsuffering and slow to anger (14:20–38), but that he is also just, and as a father, he disciplines those he loves. His judgments are measured and progressive. The more his children refuse to obey him and resist him, the stronger the judgments. Eventually, the older generation of Israelites died off in the wilderness. This teaches us that death is the final judgment against the sin of rebellion and unbelief. There are no eternal rewards or spiritual inheritance for those who refuse to take hold of YHVH's promises and to go forward in faith and faithful obedience to him.

We see the work and person of the future Yeshua the Messiah in the Book of Numbers, as well. As Provider, he meets all of Israel's needs both physical and spiritual. Paul reveals that Yeshua was the spiritual Rock that gave them water in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:4). Twice, Israel received water from the rock (Exod 17:1–7 and Num 20:1–13). Additionally, the secular prophet, Balaam, prophesied about the Messiah who was to rise out of Israel like a star (Num 24:17). Leading rabbinic Jews, like Rabbi Akiba of the early modern era, mistakenly applied this verse to the Jewish zealot, Bar Kokhba, when he endeavored to throw off the yoke of Roman rule over the Jewish people during the Second Jewish Revolt of A.D. 133–135.

Study Questions for This Week's Midrash (Torah Discussion):

- 1 Compare Leviticus 27:34 with Numbers 1:1. Medieval Jewish Torah commentator Baal HaTurim notes that the Torah juxtaposes the two phrases: "These are the commandments ..." with "in the wilderness" showing that if a person does not make himself like a wilderness he will not be able to acquire the wisdom of Torah. What does this mean? (See Matt 18:3; John 12:24–25; 2 Cor 12:9–11.)
- 2 1:2, This Torah portion deals with the numbering of the Children of Israel, the arrangement of the tribes around the Tabernacle and the organization of the Levites with regard to their service in the Tabernacle. YHVH is an Elohim of order, not confusion. Each member of the spiritual body of Yeshua (the congregation of redeemed believers) has a position, responsibility and a role to play in the proper and orderly functioning of the "camp." What is your role in the body of Messiah? Are you functioning in your gifting and calling? How are you serving and how are you helping to advance YHVH's kingdom? (Read Rom 12:5–8 and 1 Cor 12.) Are you a spectator or a participating member in the congregation? To do this you must be in fellowship with other believers and not practicing your religious faith in isolation.
- 3 1:3, The census was taken in order to determine the number of fighting men among the Israelites. The congregation of believers is a spiritual army that has the purpose of advancing the kingdom of heaven. It is an offensive organism that cannot invade the enemy's territory without the enemy resisting. Do you view yourself as a spiritual warrior? We must be advancing against the enemy's strongholds (the world, flesh and the devil) wherever and whenever possible. What are you doing in this regard? Or are you "burying your talent," living in complacency, apathy and spiritual stagnation? (Read Luke 9:1; 10:19; 2 Cor 10:3–6; Eph 6:10–18; Jas 4:7; 1 John 2:14; Rev 12:11.)
- 4 1:47, YHVH distinguished the tribe of Levi for a special position of service because of their faithfulness to him at the golden calf incident. YHVH honors those who serve him. For their zeal in defending Israel from idolatry they were given charge over the Tabernacle and its treasures. Though they were thusly honored, they were the least tribe in that they were not given a land inheritance, and thus did not have the means to become wealthy. Furthermore, they were pressed into YHVH's ministerial service with little recompense. This is the price one has to pay to be close to the set-apart things of YHVH. Yeshua said that whoever would be greatest among you would be the servant of all (Matt 23:11). Are you willing to walk this difficult path, if called to do so? Are you willing to lose your life for YHVH's sake? (Matt 10:39)
- 5 2:1, 9, 16, 24, 31, Please diagram out on paper the arrangement of the tribal camps around the Tabernacle—by their numbers—on the north, south, east and west. What shape do we see made with the Tabernacle in the center (which is a picture of Messiah Yeshua)? For help, see the diagram on page five of this study. What shape do you see outlined in the tribal encampments? What is the significance of this?
- 6 YHVH's glorious manifest Presence located in the Tabernacle, which was in the very center of the camp, is a shadow-picture of Yeshua hanging on the cross. Is Yeshua the focal point of *everything* in your life as well?
- 7 2:2, 34, Each tribe had its own distinctiveness characterized by its own unique banner. YHVH encourages pageantry and (cultural) uniqueness among his children. Joseph's coat had many colors in it. We do not all have to be carbon copies of one another to be members of the body of Messiah. Some of us are hands, feet, noses, mouths, etc. What are you?
- 8 Notice Revelation 4:7 where the four heavenly creatures around Elohim's throne are described to be like a lion, a calf, a man and an eagle. Some Bible commentators see this as symbolizing the four lead tribes and as pictured by the emblems on their corresponding banners? If this is so, then what can we learn from the example of the four creatures around the Elohim's throne who are constantly praising him?
- 9 With regard to the placement of the tribes around the Tabernacle *The ArtScroll Stone Edition Chumash* comments:

God patterned the formations of Israel after that of his own heavenly throne of glory: The throne is in the center and is surrounded by four animals, as it were. On earth, the Tabernacle represents the throne, surrounded by the four formations. Judah, as the leader of the tribes, was assigned to the east,

the direction from which light comes to the world. With him were Issachar, the tribe of Torah, and Zebulun, the tribe of wealth. Thus the finest combination is leadership coupled with sanctity of Torah study and those who extend themselves to support Torah scholars (p. 733).

YHVH combined the other tribes around the Tabernacle in a similarly thoughtful manner. This reminds us of the statement in Psalms 127, “Except YHVH build the house, the builders labor in vain ...” If you have a ministry or are a congregational leader are you using fleshly means to build (promote?) your ministry or using spiritual means (prayer, giving, laying your life down in service) so that YHVH can build or organize it in *his* way and timing?

10 **4:1**, Rashi, the medieval Jewish Torah commentator, notes that the sons of Aaron are called Moses’ offspring in this verse showing that when we teach Torah to someone we become their spiritual father. Who are you discipling? The more we pour of ourselves into someone else the more we will be replenished from above.

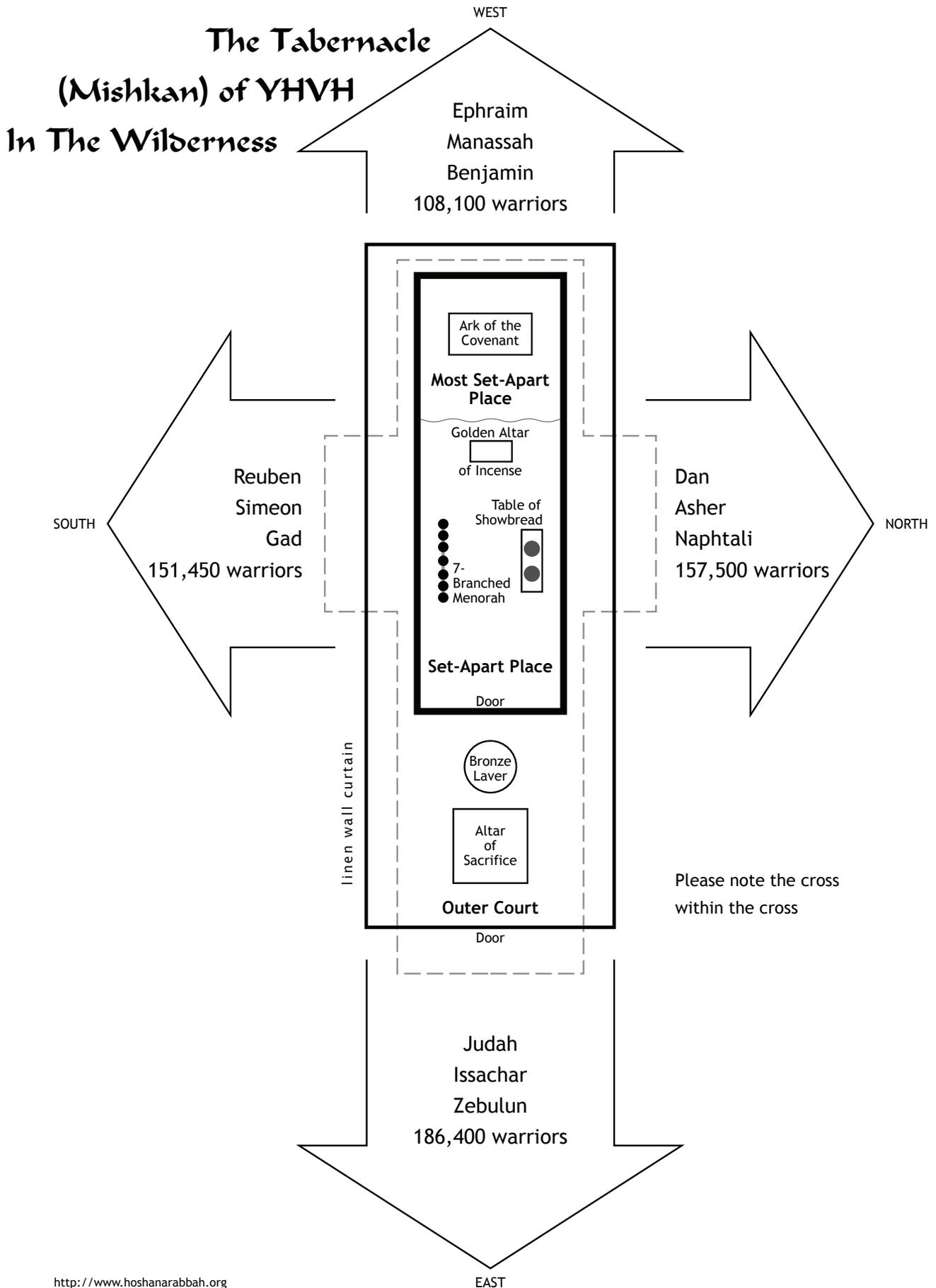
11 **4:3**, YHVH demanded the best years (ages 30–50) of the Levites to be employed as servants in the Tabernacle. Are you giving YHVH the best years of your life, or are you giving him the leftovers? Are you pursuing your own interests now and planning to serve him in the waning years of your life? What if you die first? How will that affect your heavenly rewards?

12 **4:6**, When being transported, the Ark of the Covenant was covered with a *tachash* skin, which, according to rabbinic tradition was an unusually beautiful color of turquoise blue made from the hide of a now extinct animal. According to *The ArtScroll Stone Edition Chumash*, this striking color of blue invited one to keep YHVH’s Torah-commandments by clothing them in physical beauty thus showing that obedience to them would be enjoyable (p. 745). Is obeying YHVH, keeping his commands, inviting and enjoyable, or is it a burden? In 1 John 5:1–3 we read:

Whosoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah is born of Elohim, and every one that loves him that begot loves him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of Elohim, when we love Elohim, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of Elohim, that we keep his commandments: **and his commandments are not grievous [burdensome, severe, cruel, heavy]**.

The Apostle John clearly states that obedience to Torah is centered on love—a love relationship between man and his Creator. John, in his Gospel, records Yeshua, the Living Torah-Word of Elohim, saying,

If you love me, keep my Torah-commandments (John 14:15).



HAFTORAH READING—HOSEA 1:10[2:1]-20[22]

Hosea: The Story of YHVH's Unfailing Love for His People

The opening words of this Haftorah compare the future numbers of the nation of Israel to the sand of the sea, and thus connect with Parashah B'midbar, which gives the numbers of the Israelites in the wilderness (*Soncino Pentateuch*, p. 581).

The prophet Hosea, a native of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, ministered to that nation (called Ephraim or the House of Israel, as opposed to the Southern Kingdom, called Judah or the House of Judah) for about 38 years during the middle part of the eighth century B.C. (from about 770–725 B.C.). He lived in the final tragic days of the House of Israel and prophesied that Israel's enemy, the Assyrians, would be instruments in YHVH's hands to bring judgment against Israel if that nation did not repent and cease its spiritual harlotry and idolatry. That the book contains references to the Kingdom of Judah is probably due to the fact that the Northern Kingdom fell in 721–722 B.C. while Hosea was still ministering and that he most likely transplanted to Judah where he may have finished writing his book (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1312).

The theme of the Book of Hosea revolves around the prophet's personal family life. YHVH's prophets were often required to act out in their personal life something that would serve as a prophetic allegory of what would happen to the people of Israel if they failed to repent of their sin and return to YHVH. In Hosea's case, YHVH required him to act out what *had already* happened to the Northern Kingdom. Because they had turned from YHVH, their spiritual husband, and taken to consorting with foreign spiritual lovers characterized by their forsaking the Torah, turning to serve pagan gods, and succumbing to heathen religious rituals and lifestyles, YHVH instructed the prophet to marry a harlot. In this way, the family life of Hosea would become a spiritual mirror that could be held up in front of the nation so that it could see itself as YHVH saw it. Furthermore, being married to an unfaithful wife gave Hosea direct insight into the emotional turmoil a husband endures when married to an adulterous woman that would provide the passion and impetus when defending YHVH in writing about the spiritual plight of adulterous Israel.

Hosea's life must have been a sad one, for his adulterous wife bore him three children. From the text, it cannot be determined whether they were his children, or another man's. Despite this, Hosea accepted his wife and children with an unconditional love representing YHVH's love for Israel, despite her refusal to be faithful to him. The nation of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) did not heed the prophet's warnings resulting in her falling to her Assyrian enemies. *The Soncino Pentateuch* aptly summarizes Hosea's life this way,

A heavy domestic sorrow darkened Hosea's life. He had married a woman called Gomer; and she rendered him deeply unhappy. He found that he had wasted his love on a profligate woman. She fled from the Prophet's house, and sank lower and lower until she became the slave-concubine of another. But Hosea's love was proof even against faithlessness and dishonour. He, the deeply aggrieved husband, buys her back from slavery, and brings her into his house—as a ward, pitied and sheltered, but subjected to a period of probation that shall show whether her better self can be awakened. (p. 581)

The terms *House of Israel* and *House of Judah* are initially used (in chapter one) in this book followed by the simplified terms *Ephraim* and *Judah* used throughout the remainder of the Book of Hosea. So that the reader can understand the context of the Haftorah passage, let's define these terms:

- ☞ **House of Israel:** This term is used 146 times in Scripture. Prior to the division of the united kingdom after the death of Solomon, this phrase referred to all twelve tribes of Israel. Afterwards (during the time of the prophets), it was used in contradistinction to the phrase "House of Judah" in reference to the Northern Kingdom. In the Apostolic Scriptures, Yeshua makes reference to the "lost sheep of the House of Israel" (Matt 10:6; 15:24). Elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures this term refers to all twelve tribes of Israel (Acts 2:36; 7:42; Heb 8:10), and in some references it refers to just the Northern Kingdom (Heb 8:8). The context of the passage of Scripture surrounding this phrase determines its meaning.
- ☞ **Ephraim:** This name is used 180 times in the Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures) and is referring to this specific Israelite tribe or as a metaphor for the Northern Kingdom of which the tribe of Ephraim was the leading and largest tribe (Isa 7:9,17; 9:9; 11:13; Ezek 37:19; Hos 4:17; 5:12,13,14; 6:4; 7:1; 10:11;

Zech 9:13). When blessing the two sons of Joseph, Jacob placed his right hand of power and strength upon the head of Ephraim signifying the position of primogeniture for him and his descendants (Gen 48:17–19).

- ☞ **House of Judah:** This term is found 41 times in Scripture and is always referring specifically to the tribe of Judah (e.g., 2 Sam 2:4,7,10) or to the Southern Kingdom, which included the tribes of Benjamin and Levi (1 Kgs 12:21,23; 2 Chr 11:1). In addition, this term can refer to a remnant of Israelites from the northern ten tribes who refused to submit to the spiritual apostasy of Jeroboam and defected to the Southern Kingdom (2 Chr 11:16). The phrase “House of Judah” is used in contradistinction to the phrase “House of Israel” eleven times in Scripture including once in the Apostolic Scriptures (1 Kgs 12:21; Jer 3:18; 5:11; 11:10,17; 13:11; 31:27,31; 33:14; Zech 8:14; Heb 8:8).
- ☞ **Judah:** This name refers to both the tribe of Judah and to the Southern Kingdom. Scriptural context will determine which is meant.

Listed below are other prophetic allegorical terms found in this passage of Scripture with their accompanying definitions. Review these terms and their definitions, and then notice how the authors of the Apostolic Scriptures employ these terms applying them to the “Gentile” believers of the first century.

- ☞ **No Compassion or Mercy (*Lo-ruhamah*):** This is the name of one of Hosea’s three children and is a prophetic reference to the House of Israel who, because of their apostasy, would be rejected by YHVH (Hos 1:6).
- ☞ **Not a People/Not My People (*Lo-ami*):** This is the name of one of Hosea’s three children and is a prophetic reference to both the Houses of Israel and Judah (Hos 1:9). This same phrase is echoed prophetically elsewhere in Scripture, as well (Deut 32:21; Isa 7:8; Rom 9:25; 1 Pet 2:9–10).
- ☞ **Sand of the Sea:** A metaphor used to describe the number of the descendants of Abraham as a whole (including both Houses of Israel) (Gen 32:12; Isa 10:22; Jer 33:22; Hos 1:10–11; Rom 9:27).
- ☞ **Scattered or Sown (literally *Jezreel* or *YHVH Scatters or Sows*):** This is the name of one of Hosea’s three children and a prophetic reference to the House of Israel who because of their apostasy YHVH sowed or scattered them throughout the nations of the world. In this case, Hosea is specifically addressing the House of Israel (Northern Kingdom) as opposed to the House of Judah (Southern Kingdom) (Hos 1:4–7 compared with Jas 1:1 and 1 Pet 1:1; see also Deut 28:64).
- ☞ **Beasts of the Field:** In Deuteronomy 7:22, we see that the term beasts of the field represent the nations of the earth from which Israel was to stay separate (also Jer 12:9; 27:6; Dan 7:3). The Children of Israel were scattered or exiled and became meat for or were given over to all the beasts of the field (Isa 56:9; Ezek 34:5; Hos 2:12). Scripture likens exiled Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom), who fell into idolatry and mixed with the beast (Gentile) nations, to beasts of the field themselves (Hos 2:16–19; Acts 10:12). In the future, YHVH will make a covenant (a marriage betrothal agreement or ketubah) with the beasts of the field (Hos 2:18; see also Jer 31:31–33; cp. Rom 1:23, 18–25).

In Romans 11:13–24, note Paul’s discussion about the Gentiles whom he likens to “a wild olive branch.” Scripture likens the nation of Israel to an olive tree (Jer 11:10,16), which was split into two branches (Zech 4:3,11–14), but which will be joined back together to become one nation or a single olive tree again in the future (Ezek 37:15–28). Scripture is clear that both houses of Israel broke their covenants with YHVH (Jer 11:10) and both had their branches broken off from YHVH’s spiritual olive tree (Jer 11:16).

Now let’s notice how Scripture defines the word *gentile* seeing how it can apply to non-Israelites, as well as to Israelites who have turned from YHVH and mingled with the nations.

- ☞ **Gentiles:** (Hebrew: *goyim*, *Strong’s* G1471; Greek: *ethnos*, *Strong’s* G1484) This word is translated in the Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures) as *nation* 374 times, as *heathen* 143 times, as *Gentiles* 30 times, and *people* 11 times. Whenever the word *gentile* is used in the kjv it is the word *goy*. According to *Strong’s Concordance*, the meaning of *goy* is: “a foreign nation; hence a Gentile; also (fig.) a troop of animals, or a flight of locusts.” According to *Gesenius Hebrew–Chaldee Lexicon*, the word *goy* means “a people, a confluence of men,” and “contextually in holy Scripture it is used to refer to the other nations besides Israel, the foes of Israel, and strangers to the true religion of Israel.” There are times when this word refers spe-

cifically to Israel (e.g., the descendants of Joseph in general: Gen 48:19; of the Southern Kingdom of Judah when it forsook Elohim and its covenant with him and became like the surrounding heathen nations: Isa. 1:4; of the Southern Kingdom: Isa 9:1; of Israel in general: Isa 26:2; 49:7; Ps 33:12; Gen 12:2; 35:11). There are numerous other instances in Scripture where the words *goy* or *goyim* (the plural of *goy*) are applied to the descendants of Abraham. Scripture's use of the term is unbiased and lacks any of the pejorative implications that have been applied to the term subsequently (e.g., Gen 17:4,5,6,16; 18:18; 25:23; 46:3; Exod 19:6; 33:13; Deut 4:6,7,8,34; Ezek 37:22). As already noted, *goy* simply means *people group*. The Greek word *ethnos* as found in the Apostolic Scriptures is equivalent in meaning to the Hebrew word *goyim*.

After reading Romans 11:13–25 and understanding how Scripture defines some of the terms Paul uses, let us now look at Romans 9:25. Here he is quoting Hosea 2:23, which is a specific reference to *both* the “lost” ten tribes of the House of Israel *and* to the House of Judah from whom the modern Jews are descended (*The ArtScroll Stone Edition Chumash*, commentary on Deut 32:26, pp. 1105–1106). With whom does Paul equate the “Gentiles” of his day who were receiving the good news of Messiah Yeshua? Paul makes a one-to-one correlation between the apostate Israelites of Hosea’s prophecy and to the very Gentiles to whom he was preaching the gospel in the first century. In Ephesians 2:11–19, he states that these Gentiles upon receiving the gospel and turning to the Messiah of Israel would cease to be Gentiles and would once again become part of the nation of Israel. Elsewhere Paul calls these grafted-in Israelites the seed or descendants of Abraham (Rom 4:16; 9:8–11; Gal 3:7,9,14,28–29).

Some Bible teachers and students may attempt to allegorize or spiritualize away Paul’s equating the Gentiles of his day with the Israelites of Hosea’s day. To do so, however, violates one of the fundamental rules of biblical interpretation: unless the author of a scriptural passage specifically states that what he is saying is allegorical (e.g. Gal 4:24), uses a literary device such as a simile (words like *as* or *like*, e.g., Pss 83:13; 88:5; 89:46; Luke 13:34), or unless common sense dictates that a literal interpretation would be absolutely impossible (e.g., Matt 5:13–14; John 10:9; Ps 91:4), the honest Bible student has to assume that the passage is to be understood at a literal level.

Often Bible teachers and students will spiritualize difficult biblical passages away because a literal interpretation does not fit with their theology, religious tradition or what *they* think the Bible should say. The honest, truth-seeking Bible student must avoid these pitfalls, which only lead to false teachings and false doctrines.

YHVH’s Word demands that humans conform their lives and thoughts to his Word, not conform his Word to their lifestyles and thoughts. To do so is to succumb to the lies of the devil, which is the spirit of humanism. Satan and his philosophies combine to become the arch foe of YHVH’s truth, plans and purposes. This same spirit originated at the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden when the serpent twisted the Word of Elohim and tricked man into believing the lie!

