

# B'MIDBAR {בְּמִדְבָּר} (In the Desert)

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

A Messianic Jewish Commentary  
By Hannah Neshet [www.voiceforisrael.net](http://www.voiceforisrael.net)

**“And the Lord spoke unto Moses in the wilderness (B’midbar) of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, ” (Numbers 1:1)**

This week’s Torah study begins the fourth of the five books of Moses, ‘B’midbar’ בְּמִדְבָּר, a Hebrew word meaning, ‘*in the desert or wilderness*’. It consists primarily of a geographic chronology of the Israelites’ travels through the wilderness (or desert) of Sinai.

This term, “*b’midbar Sinai*” is used seven times in the Torah. Some Jewish scholars suggest that it is because the number seven represents ‘completion, perfection, or wholeness’. For example: in six days, God created the heavens and the earth; but on the seventh day, all His work was completed and He rested. It is in the wilderness seasons of our lives that God brings us to wholeness, completing the good work He has started in us.<sup>1</sup>

The desert (midbar) is a land of stinging scorpions, snakes and spiders - a dry and thirsty land where water is scarce and the scorching sun beats down mercilessly upon the endless sand and all its inhabitants.

The Psalmist, David, experienced this when he was in the Desert of Judah:

**“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.” (Psalm 63:1)**



Hills in the Judaeen Desert.

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 1:6

Although the desert seems (on the surface) to be a place that is hostile to life, the Hebrew language shows us that the spiritual wilderness experience can be a very valuable time of growing in our relationship with the Lord. The word ‘midbar’ (desert), **מדבר** contains the exact same letters as ‘medaber’ **מדבר** which is the Hebrew word for ‘speak or talk’.



View of Judean Desert from Mount Yair, Ein Gedi.

It is in the wilderness times of our lives that God can speak a ‘Word in due season’ to our hearts, just as He did with Gomer, the adulterous wife of Hosea, whom God led into the wilderness. It was here, in the midbar, that God spoke to this sinful woman of hope and restoration in Him. **“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.”** (Hosea 2:14-15)

It was in the wilderness that an angel found Hagar and gave her a ‘Word from the Lord’:

**“The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur... The angel of the LORD said to her, ‘Return to your mistress and submit to her.’”** (Genesis 16:7-9)



The angel of the Lord also told Hagar that she would have a son called Ishmael because God had heard her affliction.

Hagar and the Angel in the Wilderness, by [Francesco Cozza](#)

The ‘Word of the Lord’ also came to John the Baptist (Yochanan the Immerser) in the silence and solitude of the wilderness.<sup>2</sup> Even Moses spent many lonely years in the wilderness tending his father-in-law’s sheep; but he was being prepared for the moment when God spoke to him. He called to Moses from out of a burning bush, sending him on a Divine mission to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt.

Therefore, our seasons of wandering in the wilderness, far from being simply ‘wasted time’ can be times of great transformation where we are being prepared, molded, and shaped to fulfill our God-given destiny.

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 3:2

The wilderness (midbar) is also a place of being broken, humbled, and tested by God to see what is in our hearts: **“And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.”** (Deuteronomy 8:2)

It is in the ‘midbar’, that we learn to depend upon God for His faithful guidance and supernatural provision. We are refined of selfish ambition, pride, and the illusion of self sufficiency.

**“And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”**  
(Deuteronomy 8:3)

Yes, the wilderness is a very important (if not essential) time in our lives; but also one filled with ever present dangers and enemies – like the venomous serpents and scorpions that inhabit the desert lands. And yet God never leaves us there - He always points us to the better land where He wants to take us – a land of beauty and abundance – flowing with milk and honey.



Negev: Vineyards at Karmei Avdat Photo: [www.goisrael.com](http://www.goisrael.com)

**“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing,”** (Deuteronomy 8:7-9)

The only way to the Promised Land, however, is through the wilderness. The prophet Isaiah poetically called the desert “the highway for God” and promised that the sun-scorched land would become a pool of refreshment.

“The scorched land will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.... A highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, but it will be for him who walks that way.” (Isaiah 35:7-8)

Israel has done an amazing job of transforming their deserts into beautiful, blooming, flowering places that resemble the Garden of Eden, just as the ancient Hebrew prophets promised would one day happen. And this has taken place in our very generation!

**“The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.”** (Isaiah 51:3)



Ein Gedi Botanical Garden  
[www.goisrael.com](http://www.goisrael.com)

Ben Gurion, who made his home in the Negev (desert region) of Israel, was quoted as saying to the Jews of California, “*I envy you your deserts, not just because they are deserts, but because you can afford to keep them deserts!*”

As someone who has lived in the Negev region of Israel, ‘*schvitzing*’<sup>3</sup> in the sweltering summer heat while six months pregnant with my youngest son, Avi-ad, I can honestly say, “*Been there; done that!*” (And, may I add, “...*wouldn't want to do that again!*”) ☺ Although many people make it their home, it was in the Negev that I very nearly lost my life and that of my precious son. It was also from here that our family was evicted from the Land of Israel. <sup>4</sup> The wilderness can be a very challenging place to live!

Have you ever felt yourself to be walking through a ‘wilderness season’? Are you perhaps there right now? Spiritually, this is the place where we feel dry - devoid of the living waters of the Spirit of God. It can be a boring, dull, and monotonous time of ‘*same old same old*’...

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<sup>3</sup> Schvitzing is a Yiddish expression for profuse sweating

<sup>4</sup> See the author’s story in [Journey to Jerusalem](http://www.voiceforisrael.net) available through website: [www.voiceforisrael.net](http://www.voiceforisrael.net)

We may find ourselves wondering, ‘*When am I ever going to get out of here?!*’ as we trudge through day after weary day. We look for an oasis in the desert but each time we get our hopes up, it turns out to be an illusion.

Can anyone relate? Take heart my friends. Being somewhat of a ‘Wandering Jew’ myself, I have gained some experience in ‘*wilderness wanderings*’ and have recorded a message on this very subject, Walking Through the Wilderness, which gives insight and revelation on what we can learn in these difficult seasons of our lives and – more importantly – how to get out of them as quickly as possible! <sup>5</sup>

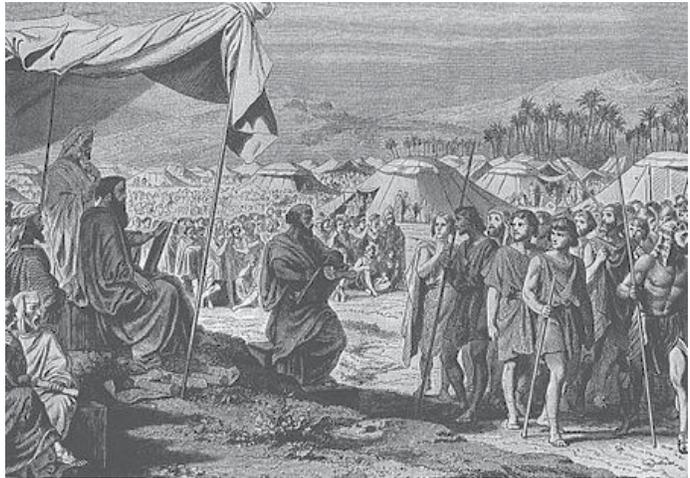


A camel in the Negev of Israel with a Bedouin tent in the background

## Numbering the Israelites

In English, the book of B’Midbar is called ‘*Numbers*’, because God called Moses to number or count the children of Israel in a census: “**Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by clans, by fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male, head by head.**” (Numbers 1:2)

It was in the Sinai desert, in the second month of the second year since the Exodus, in the tent of meeting (ohel mo’ed), that the Lord spoke to Moses about taking up a census of all Israelite males from ages twenty and up, who were able to bear arms.



The Numbering of the Israelites  
(engraving by [Henri Félix Emmanuel Philippoteaux](#))

“**And so he counted them in the Desert of Sinai.**” (Numbers 1:19)

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<sup>5</sup> DVD Walking Through the Wilderness Recorded at Polish Gospel Church, Edmonton, AB Canada [www.voiceforisrael.net/shop](http://www.voiceforisrael.net/shop) or by mail.

## What's in a Name? El Shaddai

Moses was commanded to take a census of all adult males ages twenty and up. They were numbered according to family, by their father's houses, according to name. I love the Hebrew 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 carry significant meanings. For example 'Eli-tzur' אליצור means 'My God (Eli) is a rock (Tzur)'. Of the twenty-four proper names here given, nine contain the Divine name, 'El' אל (God), three the name 'Tzur' צור (Rock), frequently used for God as in 'Tzur Yisrael' צור ישראל (Rock of Israel) or 'Rock of Ages'.

Also 'Shaddai' appears three times in the names listed. Shaddai is a very interesting word study. 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 root 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. If we read the Word carefully in its Hebraic context 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, שדי 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. The letters can also be an acronym for the Hebrew words, "Shomer D'latot Yisrael" (Guardian of the doors of Israel).



Hebrew4christians.com

Photo: Ebay.com

'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!"** (Ephesians 2:14-16) Yeshua has made a way that we may be reconciled one to another and also to Himself. All this from one name - Shaddai!

The following are the results of the census with population listed by tribe, totaling 603,550 men:

- Reuben: 46,500
- Simeon: 59,300
- Gad: 45,650
- Judah: 74,600
- Issachar: 54,400
- Zebulun: 57,400
- Ephraim: 40,500
- Manasseh: 32,200
- Benjamin: 35,400
- Dan: 62,700
- Asher: 41,500
- Naphtali: 53,400

The Levites were not to be counted in the census to be conscripted into military duties but instead were to be placed in charge of everything pertaining to the tabernacle: carrying it, setting it up and taking it down. This was such a holy assignment that only the Levites were allowed to approach the tabernacle. Any unauthorized person coming near would be punished with death.

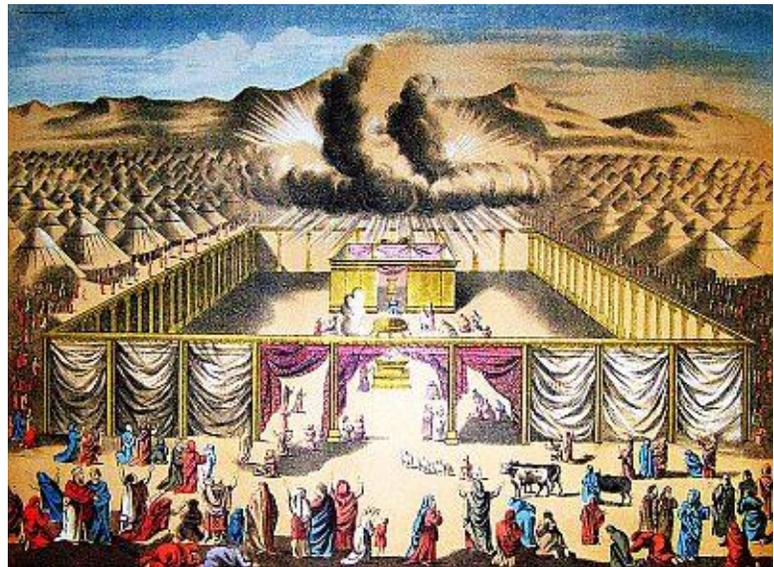


Priest, Levite, and furnishings of the Tabernacle

**“You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites. Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the covenant law—over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it. Whenever the tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall do it. Anyone else who approaches it is to be put to death.”** (Numbers 1:49-51)

The Levites were also required to set up their tents in such a way as to encamp around the tabernacle, lest the wrath of God fall upon the Israelite camp. All the Israelites were to camp at a specified distance from the tent of meeting; which was to be far enough away to protect the holiness of the tabernacle and yet close enough for the Israelites to come for the meetings by foot.

Many Orthodox Jews, who will not drive a vehicle on the Sabbath, take this to mean that there is a certain maximum distance that they may live from the nearest synagogue in order that they may walk there for Sabbath services.



*12 Tribes of Israel Encamped Around the Tabernacle*

**“The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: “The Israelites are to camp around the tent of meeting some distance from it, each of them under their standard and holding the banners of their family.”** (Numbers 2:1-2)

The twelve tribes of Israel camped beyond the Levite circle in four groups of three tribes each: Judah, Issachar and Zebulun to the East; Reuben, Simeon and Gad to the South; Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin to the West; and finally Dan, Asher and Naphtali to the North. Because light comes from the East, that is where Moses, Aaron and his sons camped, since they were great, holy men who carried the light of God.



Mosaic of the 12 Tribes of Israel, from a synagogue wall in Jerusalem



Ceramic replica of Priest's breastplate

Each tribe had its own nassi (prince or leader), and distinctive flag or banner (דגל, *degel*) with its own particular tribal emblem and color which was said to correspond to the precious stones on the breastplate of the High Priest (Cohen Hagadol).

This was considered to be a sign of God's great love for each tribe of Israel, citing the verse in Song of Songs 2:4, **"His banner (degel) over me is love."**

Even while travelling, the Israelites kept to this particular formation, which - according to Rabbinic commentary (Midrash) - accounted for the fact that Korah, Datan and Aviram (as well as On) all conspired together in a mutiny against the leadership of Moses (Numbers 16:1). It was because they lived in close proximity on the South side of the Tabernacle that they joined together in the rebellion.

The Bible teaches us that we must be careful who we 'walk with' as companions; for bad company corrupts good character (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Haftarat Bamidbar - Look up!

The corresponding prophetic Scripture reading for this week is from the book of Hosea, a man who definitely did not choose a wife on the basis of good character. The connection between the haftarah and parashah is clear in the opening line which also speaks of the numbering of the children of Israel:

**"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered..."** (Hosea 1:10)<sup>6</sup>



God made a similar promise to Abram; even though at the time, Abram did not as yet have any offspring, God took him outside and said, **"Look up toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He added, "So shall your offspring be."** (Genesis 15:5)

So great was Abram's faith that He just took God at His word and believed His promise. **"Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."** (Genesis 15:6)

This is what we also must do – instead of looking down at our circumstances (at the condition of our body or the lack of what we so desperately desire) we must look up unto the Lord; and believe in His promises.

God gave Abram a picture to focus on – to give a visual reminder of His promise. We must also receive a vision of the promise that God has placed in our hearts; and gaze upon it often in order to keep our dreams alive.

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<sup>6</sup> This is the Scripture reference from the English translation of the Bible. The corresponding Scripture reference in the Hebrew Bible is Hosea 2:6

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 the story of Hosea.



## God of All Comfort

God instructed the Prophet Hosea to take for himself 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.

[Hosea](#) (painting from [Siena's](#) [Duomo](#))

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 truly minister to a suffering, lost, broken, despairing, hopeless, confused, depressed, sick, poor, trapped, hurting humanity unless we have personally gone through these same painful states of being?

I remember a pastor's wife once trying to give me marital advice (before my husband and I divorced). 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<sup>7</sup>; 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.<sup>8</sup>

God promises not to give us more than we can bear. One morning, I felt so grieved, so broken in heart and spirit - so lost, alone and confused – that I despaired even of life itself. And then I read a devotion written by a woman who had also been through the fire and had not been burned; passed through deep waters and had not drowned. Through the Holy Spirit, I was comforted and now can offer this same comfort to others with my story, just as this woman offered it to me.

Are you burdened and grieved seemingly beyond your ability to bear 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?

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:8

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:4

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 Yeshua? Asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat!

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 the Lord is asleep; so we begin to 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.



[The Storm on the Sea of Galilee](#) by [Rembrandt](#) 1632

What was Yeshua's answer? “Have faith. Believe. Do not doubt.” I had to sit myself down one day and say out loud,

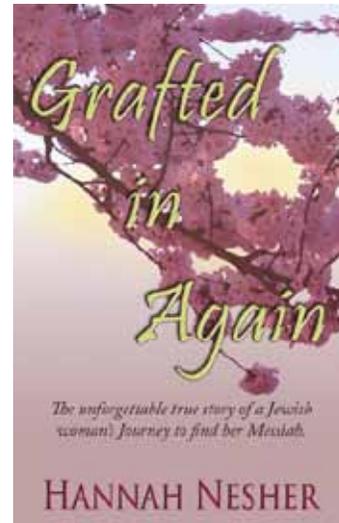
*“I may feel like I'm drowning; I may feel like God doesn't care about my situation, but by faith, I know that He is with me, for He has promised, I will never leave you nor forsake you. And so, by faith, I choose to believe that Yeshua is in this sinking boat with me and He has power over the winds 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, this is my own personal story. I have written my testimony in a book, Grafted in Again, and recorded it in Israel on a DVD, Because He Lives.<sup>9</sup>



My story is a testimony of a great fall but an even greater redemption through God's mercy in Yeshua. The name, **gomer**, in Hebrew 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.



Jezreel Valley in Israel

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'<sup>10</sup> and will eat unclean food that God has declared unfit for His holy people.<sup>11</sup>

We need to understand the historical background of Israel in order to fully comprehend these Scriptures. Hosea was the prophet of the decline and fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. At

<sup>9</sup> Hannah's personal testimony in book and DVD are available through website: [www.voiceforisrael.net](http://www.voiceforisrael.net)

<sup>10</sup> Hosea 8:12

<sup>11</sup> Hosea 9:3

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. A portion of the Christian Church as well as rabbinic Judaism walk in a great deal of human precept – man-made rules, laws and regulations, rather than Biblical commands.

Like Hosea who could not give up on his wife, Gomer, God says that He - like the maternal El Shaddai - cannot give up on Ephraim. Look at the beautiful, gentle, merciful, long-suffering, and 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, having been 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. <sup>12</sup> Yeshua says “I AM THE WAY....”

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:13

If we look at the Christian Church, we see a people from every nation who considers themselves ‘Gentiles’, and for the most part consider the Torah a ‘strange thing’. These people walk by many human precepts and eat foods the Word of God calls unclean; but yet have (to a certain extent) 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 Feasts of the Lord, the Sabbath, Passover, and Biblical Dietary Laws? Is this why more and more ‘Gentile believers’ want not only to visit Israel but to actually stay and serve here? 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 about the glorious future promised to Israel. It cannot happen without the re-unification of the two houses of Judah and Israel. Perhaps what we are seeing is the beginning of this wonderful reconciliation between the Jewish people and the Christian Church.



All nations gathering in Jerusalem for Sukkot (Tabernacles)

## 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 terrible names 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 is 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 Yizrael! 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.

“The word of the LORD came again to me saying, “And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, ‘For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.’ Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one (echad) in your hand.” (Ezekiel 37:15-17)

**“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.”** (Ezekiel 37:23)

The New Testament portion refers to these prophecies and explains how God has made known the riches of His glory to both Jews and also the nations as He says in Hosea.

**“I will call them Ami (My people), who were Loh Ami (not My People), and her ruhamah (mercy) who were loh-ruhamah (no mercy - referring to the children of Gomer). There they shall be called sons (and daughters) of the living God.”** (Romans 9:25-26)

Peter, the New Covenant apostle, 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 2:9-10) Halleluyah!

This is all wonderful theology – but where does that leave poor Hosea and where does that leave us in the middle of our storms of life? It may be exciting to find out that we may actually be part of Ephraim, the House of Israel; but how do we deal with our own personal ‘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.

### Husband – Lord or Lover? (Ba'al' or Ishi?)

I believe that in this haftarah 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."** (Hosea 2:16)

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' בעל. 'Baal Zebub' (Hebrew Baal Zvoov בעל זבוב) means 'Lord of the Flies' and is the name of the Philistine god of [Ekron](#).



"But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, [Is it] not because [there is] not a God in Israel, [that] ye go to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?" (2 Kings 1:2–6)

Beelzebub as depicted in [Collin de Plancy's Dictionnaire Infernal](#) (Paris, 1825).

We can make even our husbands (or wives) into a kind of false god (Ba'al) by putting expectations on them that only God can meet.

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 'ishi' is more of an intimate term of endearment - 'my man'.

The bond between God and Israel, between God and us, and between husband and wife is ideally meant to be one of enduring love and devotion. God wants an intimate relationship with us, as is written in Hosea,

**"I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the LORD."** (Hosea 2:19-20)

In this beautiful relationship with God 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’ (ba’al), and 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).<sup>13</sup>



An Orthodox Jewish Wedding (photo: goisrael.com)

Perhaps God wants us to stop looking to man to meet our deepest needs (or even our surface ones) - to stop making him into a ‘ba’al’ - and instead turn to God to be our ‘ishi’, the true lover of our souls.<sup>14</sup>

God, speaking through the Prophet Hosea, said that He would bring His bride into the wilderness (the midbar) not to harm her; but rather to “**speak tenderly to her in the midbar.. and turn the valley of Achor (trouble) into a door of hope**”<sup>15</sup> (Petah Tikvah).” (Hosea 2:14-15)

There are times when God must, by necessity, hedge our way with thorns, cause all of our merriment and partying 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.<sup>16</sup>

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

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 5:22 - 28

<sup>14</sup> See article [I will Change Your Name](http://www.voiceforisrael.net/articles) www.voiceforisrael.net/articles

<sup>15</sup> See article [Valley of Achor](http://www.voiceforisrael.net/articles) www.voiceforisrael.net/articles

<sup>16</sup> Hosea 2:19

## B'Midbar Study Questions

1. What is the meaning of the Hebrew word 'midbar'? What other Hebrew word has the same letters and what is the connection? Give some biblical examples
2. What does the wilderness represent in a spiritual sense? What are some of its characteristics? Why is it a difficult place?
3. What does God say is the purpose of the wilderness experience?
4. Have you ever been (or are you now) in what seems to be a 'wilderness season' in your life? Share and discuss.
5. How do we ensure (from the example of the Israelites) that we do not die in the wilderness; but instead make it to the 'Promised Land'. Share and discuss.
6. Do you know the meaning of your name? Why were you given this name? Share. If you don't already have one, would you like to choose a Hebrew name for yourself? What would it be and what is its meaning?
7. What is the meaning of one of the names of God, El Shaddai?
8. What promise did God make about the numbers of the children of Israel (descendants of Abram)? How is this possible if the Jewish people are still so few in number?
9. How can we (in a practical sense) keep God's promises to us in mind?
10. How can we use our pain and suffering to help others?
11. How is the relationship between Hosea and his wife Gomer a picture of God's relationship with Israel?
12. Do you believe that the lost tribes of Ephraim could be hidden within the church as Christians who consider themselves Gentiles? Discuss the 'Two House Theory'.
13. If you are married, would you call your spouse 'baali' or 'ishi'? Discuss (perhaps privately). If single, which model of a husband-wife relationship do you desire?

About the Author:

Hannah Neshar 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 the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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Edmonton, Ab. T5K 0K6 Canada

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