

# B'ha'alotkha

## בהעלתך

“When you set up”

Numbers 8:1 – 12:16

Torah Together



In this portion, we find the Israelites celebrating the first Passover, one year after they left Egypt. A short time later, they leave Mt. Sinai and begin their journey to the land God had promised to their forefathers. At this time, they had no idea how long the journey would take them.

### 1. Setting up the Lamps - 8:1-4

a) How were the seven lamps on the lampstand to be positioned? On what would their light shine? Do you find any symbolic significance in this?

b) Who gave this instruction? Why do you suppose God cared how the lamps were positioned?

### 2. The Setting Apart of the Levites - 8:5-26

a) Why was it necessary to purify the Levites? How was this done? By whom was it done? How was this different than what was done for Aaron and his sons?

b) Why were the Levites set apart (or sanctified) for God? What did this have to do with final plague God sent upon the Egyptians?

**Patterns and Plans**  
**Leviticus 8:4** reads, “The lampstand was made exactly like the pattern YHWH had shown Moses.” Can you remember when and where God showed Moses the pattern for the lampstand and other parts of the Tabernacle?

**Scripture Link:**  
**Leviticus 8** describes the ordination of Aaron and his sons as **priests**. The process was similar to the one described here for the rest of the Levites. While the entire tribe of Levi was set apart (or sanctified) for use by God, those of Aaron’s family were assigned tasks involving more responsibility.

### **Levite Working Careers**

The work that a Levite had to do was physically strenuous, breaking down, moving, and setting up the Tabernacle whenever God instructed the Israelites to move. It was more efficient and safer to assign the heavy work to those best able to handle it. In addition to this, the work always had to be done precisely and with care, requiring a period of training and apprenticeship.

### **The First Passover**

This Passover marks the first anniversary of the Israelite's departure from Egypt. Note how God made provision for everyone to celebrate this event. This included those who, for whatever reason, might be unable to celebrate it at the proper time as well as those foreigners who wished to celebrate it. It is probable that Passover has been continuously celebrated somewhere in the world in every year since this first one.

c) According to verse 19, what work was to be done by the Levites? At what age did the Levites begin this work? How was retirement handled?

### **3. The Passover - 9:1-14**

a) When and where was the first Passover celebrated by the Israelites? Review the events that had occurred in the lives of the Israelites during the past year.

b) What special provision did God establish for those unable to celebrate Passover? For what reasons might one not be able to participate in the *Pesach Seder*?

c) What were the consequences for one who was able but chose not to celebrate the Passover? Why do you think God commanded this? Under what conditions was an alien living among the Israelites allowed to participate in the Passover celebration?

### **4. The Cloud above the Tabernacle - 9:15-23**

a) Describe the cloud that covered the Tent of the Testimony or the Tabernacle. Was it visible at night? (This cloud is often referred to as the "*Shekinah*" glory of God.)

b) How did the Israelites get their “marching orders” from God? When they set out, did they know where they were going or how long they would be traveling? How did they know where to stop and make camp?

c) Can you find any lessons for your own life in how God led the Israelites?

### 5. The Silver Trumpets - 10:1-10

a) How many silver trumpets did God instruct Moses to make? What was their purpose? Describe the various ways in which they were to be used.

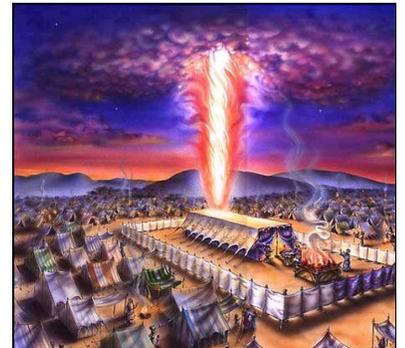
b) Who was to blow these trumpets? In verse 9, what does God say He will do when he hears the trumpet blast? Do you think this is literally true?

c) Do you think these trumpets serve the same purpose as the *shofar*?

### 6. The Israelites Leave Sinai - 10:11-36

a) When did the Israelites set out from Mount Sinai? Where did they stop? How long do you think it took them to get there?

b) If you were standing beside the road when the nation of Israel passed by, describe what you would see.

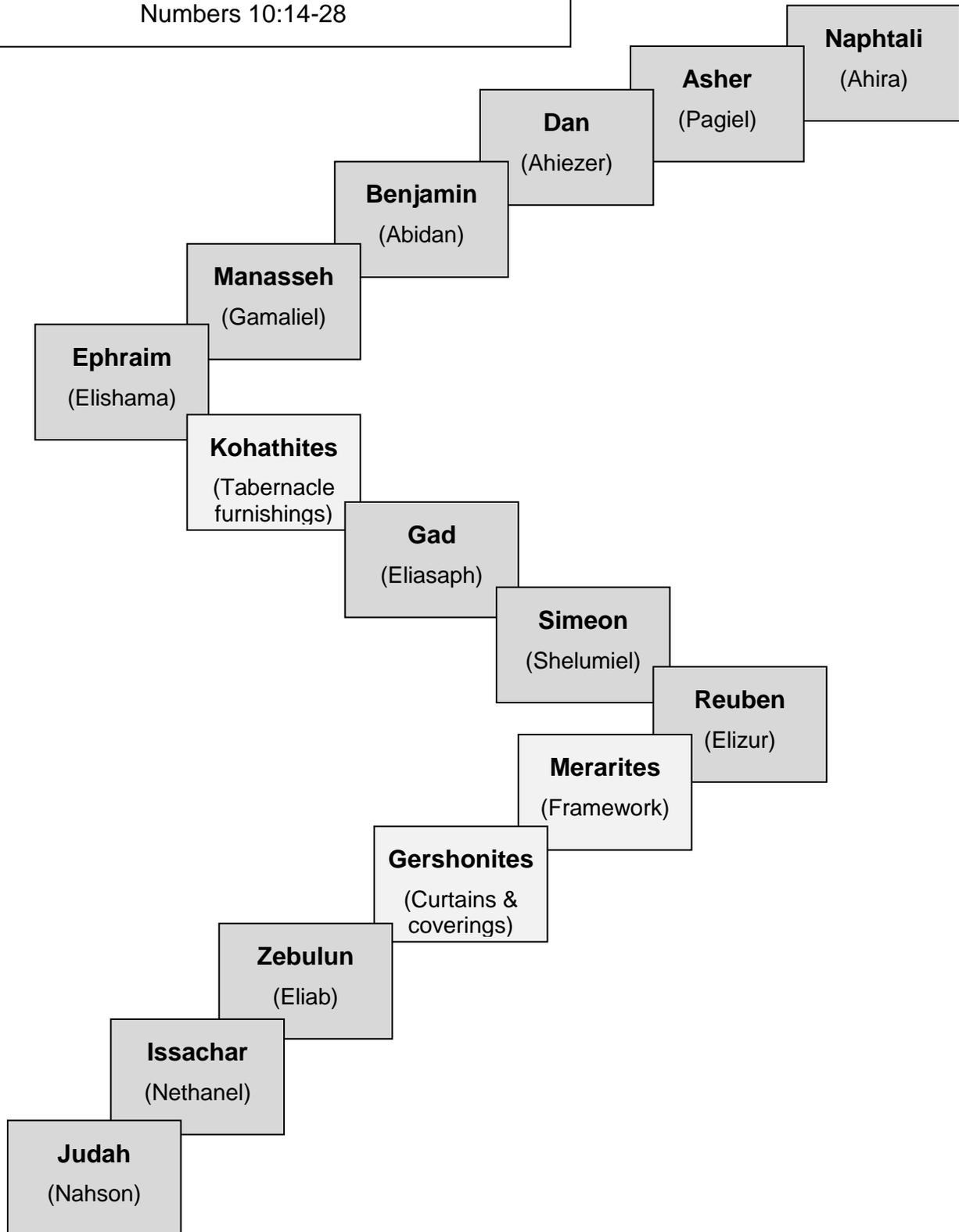


#### Scripture Links:

**Numbers 9:15** describes the first time the glory of God descended on the Tabernacle. This same event is also described in **Leviticus 9:23-24** and **Exodus 40:34-38**. This cloud that looked like a pillar of fire at night was God Himself dwelling with His people. And He personally directed them, when and where they would move, each day.

## Israelites on the March

Numbers 10:14-28



c) Verses 29-32 describe an exchange between Moses & Hobab. Who was Hobab? Was he an Israelite? Why did Moses want him to accompany them? Do you think he did? (Hint: see Judges 1:16)

d) What did Moses say whenever the Ark of the Covenant set out? What did he say whenever the Ark came to rest? What effect do you think this might have had on the Israelites who heard him?

### 7. Fire from the Lord - 11:1-3

a) What caused God's anger to be aroused in this passage? In what way was His anger manifested? What happened? What name did they give this place?

b) What kinds of complaints do you suppose reached God's ears?

### 8. Quail from the Lord - 11:4-35

a) In this passage, who first started complaining? What was the nature of their complaint? Is this the first time we have encountered this type of complaining?

b) When Moses went to God with the people's complaint, what did he say? Does this seem typical of Moses? Why do you think he was so demoralized? Do you think God acted mercifully toward Moses?

#### **A God of Order**

Sometimes the detail in the *Torah* is surprising. To specify the order in which the tribes were to travel illustrates the thoroughness of God's teaching and instruction. Notice that when the Israelites arrived at a new location, those carrying the Tabernacle structure (the Gershonites and the Merarites) arrived before those carrying the holy objects that were to go inside the Tabernacle. In this way, the Tabernacle structure could already be set up so that the Kohathites could immediately place the objects inside.

#### **Arousing God's Anger**

At this point, the Israelites had been out of Egypt for barely a year. They had witnessed their miraculous escape from Pharaoh through the Red Sea, they had heard God at Mount Sinai, and they had seen God come to dwell with them when they completed the Tabernacle. One wonders how they could complain to Him about anything. Before we fault the Israelites too much, however, we might do well to recall when and how we have complained to God for our hardships.

### **Complaining to God**

Carefully analyze Moses' complaint to God in **Numbers 11:10-15**. How was Moses' complaint different than the complaints of the rest of the Israelites? It would appear that Moses was truly frustrated with the lack of thankfulness and lack of faith of the people. He seemed to feel that it was his responsibility to provide for and take care of the people. God was able to look into Moses' heart and see that Moses was truly committed to doing the work that God had given him but that the burden seemed too heavy to him. Recognizing that his attitude was right, God moved to provide the help Moses needed to accomplish his work. It's important to carefully examine one's heart before complaining to God.

c) What did God first do to address the issue? Why was this an appropriate first response for Moses' problem?

d) What was God's second step in addressing the issue (verses 18-20)? Was he pleased with the Israelites? What was Moses' response to God's words? Again, does this seem typical of Moses? How did God respond to Moses?

e) What happened when the seventy elders were assembled at the Tent of Meeting? What was special about Eldad & Medad? Analyze the exchange between Joshua and Moses about this situation. Can you learn any lessons from this?

f) How did the Israelites get the meat they craved? Did they get enough? What else did God do? Why was the name given to the place appropriate?

### **9. Miriam and Aaron Oppose Moses - 12:1-16**

a) About what specifically did Miriam & Aaron complain concerning Moses? Given their words in verse 2, what do you think their real complaint was? What sin was in their heart that motivated this complaining behavior? (*lashon ha-ra*)

b) Do you think Moses wrote the parenthetical phrase in verse 3?

c) How quickly did God respond when He “heard” Miriam and Aaron? What did He do?

d) Analyze God’s words to Miriam and Aaron in verses 6-8. What was God’s view of Moses? What question did He ask Miriam & Aaron?

e) When the cloud of God’s presence lifted from above the tent, what was the condition of Miriam and Aaron? Why do you think one was affected and not the other?

f) To whom did Aaron respond and what did he say? What does this indicate about his role in this affair? What do you think his attitude was at this time?

g) What did Moses do? How did God respond? Do you think this experience had a lasting effect on Miriam?

h) Can you find any lessons for your own life in this story?

### The Evil Tongue

The Hebrew term *lashon ha-ra* means “the evil tongue” or “tongue of the evil one.” It’s clear that God takes a dim view of spreading gossip and sowing seeds of discontent. Notice how long God waited before addressing the problem of Miriam and Aaron’s rebellious talk. Also, God’s words of correction to Miriam and Aaron were very direct as was His punishment. **James 3:3-6** makes clear the power of the tongue to do evil.

## Digging deeper . . . .

1. How long had it been after the Israelites had left Mount Sinai that they began to complain? While we often feel that the Israelites suffered from a severe lack of faith, can you be sure that you would not have fallen to the same temptation? How often do we complain about the good things God has given us?

2. What lessons can you learn from Miriam and Aaron's experience with *lashon ha-ra*? Two elements were at work in this story: one was the jealousy and evil in their hearts and the other was the words that came forth from this heart attitude. Which do you think is worse? How can you guard against *lashon ha-ra*?

For further study, see

**Haftarah** : Zechariah 2:14 - 4:7

**Brit Hadashah** : John 19:31-37; Hebrews 3:1-6