

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Nahum, Book of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Nahum?

Approximate date: mid 600s B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate, some Left); 400s-200s B.C.E. (some Left)

Author(s): Nahum (Right, some conservative-moderate); Nahum and/or anonymous other(s) (some conservative moderate); Nahum and anonymous redactors (Left)

Location of prophet/author(s): somewhere in Judah (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Target audience and their location: Southern Kingdom Israelites and Ninevites

The Book of Nahum (Heb. *Nachum*, נַחֻם) is a text containing this prophet's vision (1:1), and primarily concerns the fall of Nineveh which occurred in 612 B.C.E. The name of the prophet means "comfort" (3:7). Nahum appears seventh among the Twelve Prophets of the Tanach, but is listed after the Book of Jonah in the Greek LXX (Harrison, 926). We know little about Nahum himself, other than that he came from the (unknown) village of Elkosh (1:1), and there are various proposals offered as to where this place was located in antiquity (Harrison, 926; Dillard and Longman, 404).

Nahum is a brief, yet difficult book to consider, as its principal focus is God's judgment upon Nineveh. It is a text rooted in Biblical history, as the author attests to the fall of the Egyptian city of Thebes or *No Amon* (3:8-10), something that occurred in 663 B.C.E. With Nahum prophesying the fall of Nineveh/Assyria, the period portrayed by the text thus falls somewhere between 663-612 B.C.E. Nahum was likely a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah (NBCR, 762).

Often asserted by conservatives is that Nahum was actually a "writing prophet" (Harrison, 928; *EXP*, 7:452; Dillard and Longman, 404). It is suggested that Nahum was a writing prophet because of the eloquent composition of his prophecies, which are considered more eloquent than just oral accounts of a prophet written down. Conservatives widely accept that Nahum is predicting future events regarding the defeat of Nineveh, *not* reflecting back on events that have already happened. Some propose a composition of around 625 B.C.E., about ten years before the fall of Nineveh (*ABD*, 4:999).

Because of the detailed description of the fall of Nineveh, liberals often assert that the Book of Nahum was written very close to the event, possibly immediately after it. Some liberals adhere to a post-exilic composition of Nahum (*ABD*, 4:999), and may simply argue that "Nineveh is viewed as paradigmatic of evil" (*EDB*, 943; cf. *ECB*, 708). A common criticism of Nahum is that it only depicts a vengeful God with no mercy or compassion, and that the Prophet Nahum is a nationalistic, perhaps even false prophet, with no interest in anything but Israel (*EDB*, 943). However, one cannot overlook the fact that in Nahum God is depicted as merciful (1:3; cf. Exodus 34:6) and that Nahum quotes Isaiah's promise of peace for His people (1:15; cf. Isaiah 52:7).

There are no significant differences between the DSS and LXX versions of Nahum. However, because of the unique poetry of Nahum, studies in Ugaritic and of Neo-Assyrian literature can aid in one's examination of the Hebrew of the text (*ABD*, 4:998).

The historical backdrop of Nahum can aid one significantly in examining the text. Assyria, represented by Nineveh, had already conquered the Northern Kingdom and posed a significant threat to the Southern Kingdom. The Assyrians were extremely brutal and ruthless (*EXP*, 7:449-451; Dillard and Longman, 405), yet the judgment upon Nineveh had been temporarily averted per the work of Jonah (Jonah 3:4). However, following the death of Ashurbanipal the Babylonians began approaching upon Assyria (Harrison, 927), by this time a waning power. The Prophet Nahum cheered the fall of Nineveh as part of the Divine justice of God. Notable parallels exist between the Books of Nahum and Isaiah (*EXP*, 7:454-456).

Nahum includes words directed to both the Southern Kingdom Israelites (1:12-13) as the Temple is mentioned (1:15), but more are directed to the Ninevites (1:1, 14; 2:1, 13; 3:5-17,19). The

judgment oracles issued include vocabulary with varied moods present. The Book of Nahum depicts God as being “slow to anger” (1:3) and “a refuge in times of trouble” (1:7, NIV), but also one “who will by no means clear the guilty” (1:3, RSV). Difficult questions are often asked of the interpreter, as Nahum does depict a God who will judge the nations of the world. An underlying theme seen in Nahum is that while God will judge Nineveh for its sin, God will also judge Judah should it fall into a similar state. It is not impossible that Judah was in its own tenuous political and spiritual condition at the time of Nahum prophesying (*NIDB*, 689).

The message of Nahum for us today is very clear: if we lose trust in God then we are in severe danger. God is against those who oppose Him (2:13; 3:5). The setting of Nahum's prophecies regarded the defeat of Nineveh and the comfort of Judah (*NBCR*, 763). Appropriating this, “The Qumran community saw these theological issues and took comfort because they believed God would destroy their enemies” (*ISBE*, 3:479; cf. Harrison, 930). Both conservative and liberal interpreters should be united around the fact that “the book contains magnificent imagery as it contrasts the awesome majesty of God with the ultimate nothingness of some of the highest achievements of human civilization” (*ECB*, 708).

The tone of the Book of Nahum is harsh and it is very bloody, sadly keeping many Christians away from examining it (Dillard and Longman, 403, 408). From a typeological standpoint, though, Nahum helps us to understand Yeshua the Messiah as a warrior who will fight a future battle against Satan and his armies. At present, there is no significant Messianic engagement with the Book of Nahum.

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Nazarenes, Nazarene Israel: What do you think about the movement known as “Nazarene Israel” or “Nazarene Yisrael”?

While the groups invariably known as “Nazarene Israel” or “Nazarene Yisrael” or even “Nazarene Judaism” claim to have a Biblical basis for their beliefs, we believe that most of what they claim is poorly founded. The only Biblical reference to the “Nazarenes” (Heb. *Netzarim* or *Natzarim*, נְצָרִים UBSHNT) is found in Acts 24:5, where it is attested that Paul is a member of a sect of those believing in the Messiah Yeshua. The problem with attesting that the “Nazarene belief” is the original First Century faith expression is the same problem with attesting that this belief is the same as “the Way” (Acts 9:2). There is no one designation for Biblical faith in Scripture, as Biblical faith is a practice and outworking of one's belief in the Messiah—not a name like “Nazarene Israel,” or even “Christianity.”

One of the most serious problems with calling oneself a “Nazarene” in a Messianic context is the fact that there is a Christian denomination called the Church of the Nazarene (an offshoot of the varied Wesleyan and holiness traditions), so if one calls himself a “Nazarene” in the context of being a Torah observant follower of Yeshua, one runs the risk of being associated with the Nazarene Church.

The groups known as “Nazarene Israel” often base their beliefs on quotations from various figures from Church history who criticized Jewish Believers who continued to follow the Torah.

While it is true that there was a group of Jewish Believers that called themselves the “Nazarenes,” it is also true that they had varied beliefs over Yeshua’s Divinity and Messiahship and the canon of Scripture, just as the Second and Third Century Church did. The groups known as “Nazarene Israel” often fail to recognize this, and build a mythos around the fact that the “Nazarene belief” is the one true faith. We believe this goes beyond the scope of what we should be aiming for as the modern Messianic movement which has a shared spiritual heritage in both Judaism *and* Christianity.

updated 14 November, 2006

Nazarene, Yeshua Called: What specific verse in the Tanach says that Yeshua will be called a “Nazarene”? I could not find any.

Matthew 2:23 records that Yeshua the Messiah “came and lived in a city called Nazareth. *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’” The challenge for some interpreters is the fact that no specific text is being quoted. This is not unusual to see in the Apostolic Scriptures by any means. Yeshua Himself says in Matthew 26:54, “How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, *which say* that it must happen this way?” Here, the Messiah is speaking of the general sense or meaning of the Tanach, not necessarily a specific verse. James 4:5 also says, for example, “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?’” Here, James appeals to the general sense of Scripture from the Tanach, rather than a specific verse or prophecy.

We see the same thing in Matthew’s Gospel in Matthew 2:23, as it is important for us to keep in mind that Matthew references the “prophets,” indicating that he is appealing to a theological concept evidenced in several places in the Tanach. What is actually being communicated by the statement, “He will be called a Nazorean” (NRSV) has been a cause of great discussion and some debate among Bible interpreters and commentators.

What is likely being communicated by Matthew is some kind of word play on the terms *nazir* (נָזִיר), primarily meaning “(s)one dedicated, consecrated” (CHALOT, 232), by extension “a nazirite,” and the word “Nazarene” (Grk. *Nazōraios*, Ναζωραῖος), meaning someone from the city of Nazareth. An adequate description of a nazirite is given to us in Judges 13:7, where Samson’s mother is told how her son is to live:

“But he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’”

The Hebrew *ki nezir Elohim yihyeh* (כִּי־נָזִיר אֱלֹהִים יִהְיֶה) was rendered two different ways in the Greek Septuagint, both of which would have been extant in the First Century. The LXX(a) version has *naziraion Theou* (ναζιραῖον θεοῦ) or “nazirite of God,” whereas the LXX(b) version has *hagion Theou* (ἅγιον θεοῦ), “holy to God” (LXE). As Tim Hegg notes, “This tells us that from a very early period, well before the 1st Century, the idea of ‘holy one of God’ and ‘Nazirite of God’ were linked through the concurrent translations of Judges into Greek” (*The Gospel of Matthew*, pp 69-70). One did not necessarily have to take a “nazirite vow” to be considered a holy person, which there is no record of Yeshua ever doing. In Mark 1:23-24 we see Yeshua being *Nazarēne* (Ναζαρηηνέ, adjective) or “of Nazareth” connected to His holiness:

“Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, ‘What business do we have with each other, Yeshua of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’”

Matthew, seeing this concept referred to in Mark’s Gospel, whose audience was largely Roman and would have overlooked any connection between “Nazareth” and “Holy One,” is likely expounding upon this for his Jewish audience, possibly using additional source material (probably from what most scholars call “Q”). His Jewish audience would have been familiar with the terms *nazir*, or the Septuagint renderings of *naziraion Theou* or *hagion Theou*. Matthew’s emphasis, more than anything else, is to connect the concept of Yeshua being a Nazarene to His holiness. Notably,

one does not necessarily have to take a “nazirite vow” to be considered holy, though as Hegg notes, “Yeshua’s words at the last Pesach [Passover], that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He came into His kingdom, are reminiscent of the Nazirite prohibition against eating or drinking anything from the vine. The same may be said of Yeshua’s refusal to accept the wine while on the cross” (*The Gospel of Matthew*, p 70).

A second, and more commonly proposed view espoused by many Messianics is that Matthew is making some kind of word play on *netzer* (נֶזֶר), meaning “sprout, shoot (of plant)” (*CHALOT*, 244), or by extension “branch.” This would have probably been a commonly known Hebrew word in the First Century among both Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, and *does not* require that Matthew would have had to compose his Gospel in Hebrew. It is commonly connected to prophecies such as Isaiah 11:1:

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch [*netzer*] from his roots will bear fruit.”

This prophecy was viewed in a Messianic context by the Jewish Sages, and is appealed to various times by the Apostles (Romans 15:12; 1 Peter 4:14; Revelation 5:5). One of the challenges with holding *exclusively* to this view, though, is the fact that other Messianic prophecies applying to Yeshua employ the Hebrew term *tzemach* (צֶמַח) for “branch”:

“Behold, *the days are coming*,” declares the LORD, ‘When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch [*tzemach*]; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land” (Jeremiah 23:5).

“In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch [*tzemach*] of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth” (Jeremiah 33:15).

“Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch [*tzemach*]” (Zechariah 3:8).

“Then say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Behold, a man whose name is Branch [*tzemach*], for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD” (Zechariah 6:12).

We can certainly consider the words *netzer* and *tzemach* to be synonyms, as the latter likewise means “growth, what sprouts,” “shoot, bud” (*CHALOT*, 307). This would account for Matthew’s reference to “the prophets,” as opposed to a singular prophet (cf. Isaiah 11:1). Matthew, more than anything else, relies on his audience’s knowledge of knowing that the terms *nazir*, *naziraion*, and “holy one” are all connected with Yeshua being a “Nazarene.” The major point that Matthew is emphasizing is that Yeshua has been separated out as the Father’s appointed servant and is the ideal of holiness. Hegg validly states, “Yeshua, in all of His life lived out the quintessential meaning of the Nazirite vow, for He was the Holy One of God in every way” (*The Gospel of Matthew*, p 71). One need not go very far to understand this connection and how it makes Yeshua a “Nazarene.”

For a further discussion of this issue, we recommend you consult Tim Hegg’s Bible study on the Gospel of Matthew, available at www.torahresource.com. Also consult TNN Online’s FAQ entry on composition data of the Gospel of Matthew.

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Nephilim: Who do you believe that the Nephilim of Genesis 6 were? Do you believe that these were fallen angels who had sexual relations with human females?

There is a wide variety of interpretations of Genesis 6:4, “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore *children* to them. Those were the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown.” Both Jewish and Christian theologians have struggled over what the phrase “sons of God” means, debating over whether it means righteous men joining ungodly women, or “divine beings” (NJPS), meaning angels, having sexual relations with human females. If the latter is the case, then this sin would

have been one of the reasons why God destroyed the inhabited Earth with the Flood. This interpretation is actually reflected in the writings of the First Century historian Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.73:

“[F]or many angels of God accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence that they had in their own strength; for the tradition is, That these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Grecians call giants.”

There are some allusions in the Apostolic Scriptures to these fallen angels and what God has done with them. Jude 6 says speaks of “angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode,” telling us that “He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” If this can be applied to the Nephilim, it would mean that God has reserved them in a special place until the final judgment. 2 Peter 2:4 parallels this, indicating, that God “cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.” The Greek source text actually says “Tartarus” (YLT), which would be a specific part of Hell for judgment.

It is unlikely that there will be a definite position established in the Messianic community pertaining to who the Nephilim actually were. Some, adhering to the belief that the Nephilim of Genesis 6 were fallen angels cohabitating with human women, and coupling this with Yeshua’s words of Matthew 24 that the Last Days will be like the “days of Noah,” believe that so-called alien and UFO sightings are modern-day manifestations of the appearance of Nephilim, making them demonic. There is no specific reference of the appearance of “aliens” in any of the prophetic texts which relate to the Last Days, but certainly if so-called extra-terrestrials appear as a part of the end-time scenario, we can certainly consider them to be “Nephilim” and demonic in origin.

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New Moon, *Rosh Chodesh*: Do you believe that Messianic Believers should keep the New Moon?

The New Moon or *Rosh Chodesh* is not listed as one of the Lord’s appointed times of Leviticus 23. However, because the Hebrew *rosh chodesh* (רֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ) means the same as “new month,” determining the *rosh chodesh* is important as it relates to the timing of the Biblical festivals. Prophetically, in the Millennial Reign of Yeshua, *Rosh Chodesh* is to be a time of great rejoicing and festivity: “And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,’ says the LORD” (Isaiah 66:23).

The problem with “keeping” the New Moon is that the Bible itself is by-and-large mute on how we are to keep it. Numbers 29:6 describes “the burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering.” Psalm 81:3 says, “Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day.” And the New Moon is mentioned in Colossians 2:16, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.” Because of the lack of information in the written Scriptures themselves about what do about the New Moon, we are forced to turn to Jewish custom and tradition. *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* states the following concerning *Rosh Chodesh*:

“Rosh Hodesh (lit., ‘head of the month’) is the first day of the month, which correlates with the sighting crescent of the new moon. In a lunar calendar, each month has a little more than 29 days...Originally it was the Sanhedrin’s task to determine whether a particular month had 29 or 30 days, based on the visual observation of witnesses. The members of the Sanhedrin gathered on the 30th of each month and awaited testimony. If witnesses appeared, Rosh Hodesh was celebrated, and that day was counted as the first day of the next month. If no witnesses appeared, the next day was celebrated as Rosh Hodesh. To spread word that the new month had begun, fires were lit on the Mount of Olives and then successively throughout Israel. Jews living far from Jerusalem always celebrated Rosh Hodesh on the 30th day of the month. When informed that it had been postponed to the next day, they also celebrated that day.

“In ancient times, Rosh Hodesh was considered an important holiday, observed with great seriousness. Work was suspended, special sacrifices were offered in the Temple, the shofar was blown, and it was customary to visit the prophet....

“After the destruction of the Temple, the power to declare the day of the New Moon passed to the head of the court at Yavneh. During the fourth century C.E., however, the Christian authorities in the Land of Israel prohibited the dissemination of information regarding the day of the New Moon. Consequently, in about 360, Hillel II published a fixed calendar based on astronomical calculations...thus freeing Jewish communities from having to rely on the declaration by the high court in the Land of Israel.

“...Although the importance of Rosh Hodesh as a religious festival has declined and it retains only a shadow of its former prominence, the Rosh Hodesh service contains three liturgic elements that raise it to the level of the intermediate days of the major festivals. *Ya'aleh v'Yavo*...is included in the morning *Amidah*..., the half *Hallel* is recited..., and there is a *Musaf* service that recounts the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple on that day. As a joyous, though minor, festival, *Tachanun*...is not recited, fasting is forbidden, any funeral service is abbreviated, and it is tradition to partake in a festive meal” (pp 166-167).

Many of those in the independent Messianic community who attempt to observe *Rosh Chodesh* do not tend to observe it as described above. While the New Moon is to be observed to determine when a New Month begins, in Biblical times it was to be validated by the Sanhedrin. Today, the closest thing we have to the Sanhedrin are the Rabbinical Jewish authorities who publish the Jewish calendars that are used today. If we are to observe *Rosh Chodesh*, it must be with this in mind, as Yeshua did validate us taking the lead of the Pharisees, recognizing that they sat in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:1-3). The Pharisees today would be represented in the Jewish authorities, and any future Sanhedrin that may be established to determine when the New Moon is and when the dates are for us to celebrate the appointed times or *moedim*. We should observe *Rosh Chodesh* the same way as the Jewish community.

updated 06 February, 2006

New Testament, Written in Hebrew: Do you believe that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew?

There has been a great deal of misinformation circulating throughout the Messianic movement that relates to the composition of the Bible, particularly the Apostolic Scriptures or the New Testament. Asserting that the Apostolic Scriptures were written in Hebrew, when no extant documents in Hebrew of these texts exist from the ancient period, has caused the credibility of the Messianic movement as a whole to suffer with evangelical Christianity—even if a ministry does not espouse this teaching. In extreme cases, it has also caused many people to doubt or even deny the Divinity and Messiahship or Yeshua, when no “original Hebrew New Testament” can be found.

As a ministry, we **do not believe** that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew. We do fully believe, however, that to understand the New Testament you must understand the Old Testament. For example, when Paul talks about “the Law,” you should have a foundation in what the Torah actually says. But we would never suggest that the Greek text cannot be trusted or has resulted in “gross misinterpretation” for centuries as extremists might suggest. Those who make this conclusion often do so from English translations alone, not the Greek source text, and frequently fail to incorporate sound hermeneutical skills in their exegesis of God's Word. When one has available scholarly Greek lexicons, dictionaries, and Bible background tools at hand, you can easily see how some seemingly anti-Torah passages have been transmitted into English with a bias, and the Greek source text is not in error. A great deal of misunderstanding or misinterpretation of a Biblical text can be remedied by having the right background tools available at one's disposal.

We believe in the existence of an oral Hebraic archetype behind much of the text of the Gospels, and proper comparison with the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Tanach or Old Testament, validates the Hebraic understanding and vocabulary definitions behind the written Greek text. R. Timothy McLay explains, “what might be explained as a *Semitism* in the NT, whether an *Aramaism* or a *Hebraism*, might just as easily be due to the prior influence of the Greek Jewish Scriptures on the style and language of the writer (*Septuagintism*)” (*The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research*, p 32). He further states, “An appreciation for the ways in which the LXX translators rendered the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language is also necessary for our exegesis of the NT because of the NT writers’ use of the Scriptures” (p 44).

We seriously question the motives of those who seek to deny the inspiration of the message of our Lord and Savior in favor of a so-called “Hebrew New Testament,” which has never proven to have existed, nor is supported by conservative Biblical scholars or Biblical history. The so-called Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, for example, is a Fourteenth Century anti-missionary document and not an original text. It uses the word *Kristo* (קריסטו) or “Christ” in 16:18, and *antichristos* (אנטיקריסטוש) in 24:15, pointing to the fact that it is a Hebrew translation from Medieval Greek and Latin sources. The Aramaic Peshitta dates from the Fifth Century C.E., and while a valuable supplementary tool like the Latin Vulgate, does not include the entire New Testament Canon (excluding 1&2 Peter, 2&3 John, Jude, and Revelation) and reads too close to the Greek Textus Receptus as opposed to the critical and more accurate texts used today. It is an Aramaic translation from the Textus Receptus family, as opposed to the Alexandrian texts that are used in most modern translations today.

It is a sad pattern that many who are looking for “Hebrew originals” of the Apostolic Writings, who never find them, often deny Yeshua as the Messiah. This is because they deny our Creator’s ability to communicate His message in languages other than Hebrew. Their issue, sadly, is ideological more than anything else because in their minds God is monolingual and only able to communicate in Hebrew.

It also must be said that most of those who believe that the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew have often never studied Hebrew or Greek, and their knowledge of documentable First Century history is nominal and undeniably skewed. Understanding the context and time periods of when each of the books of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) alone shows why they were originally written in Greek, but not the Greek of the philosophers, but rather Hebraist Septuagint Greek, the Greek used in the transmission of the ancient translation of the Hebrew Bible, known by the Jewish congregations of the Diaspora. Ironically, when challenging the composition and/or inspiration of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, the status of the Hebrew Tanach often goes unchallenged as though it has been “perfectly preserved” since antiquity.

Let us also clarify that simply because we believe in the inspiration of the Greek New Testament, it *does not* mean that we are Hellenists. We do not encourage study or practice of Greek philosophy to study the Scriptures. We encourage Hebrew language study and Tanach analysis every bit as much as Greek language study. We are a conservative Messianic website that looks favorably on the Torah, and practices such as honoring the Sabbath, the appointed times, kosher eating, circumcision, etc. But we are also realistic when it comes to Biblical history and the composition of *all* the Scriptures.

For a further study of these issues, consult the publications *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic* and *Scripture Under Scrutiny: Was the New Testament Really Written In Hebrew?* by TNN Press

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Niddah, laws of: Can you tell me anything about the laws of *niddah*?

The laws of *niddah* (נִדְהָ) in the Torah relate to a person's sexual purity and proper cleanness, and among the commandments relating to sexuality, the bulk of them relate to women.

This is an area that for obvious reasons, can be embarrassing to many, and as such often goes unaddressed in the Messianic community. But, if there is anything that is absolutely imperative for Believers to understand in today's world, it is proper sexuality according to the Bible, as Satan has done his best to pervert something that God gave to a husband and wife.

One of the commandments related to *niddah* is in Leviticus 12:2-4: "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: 'When a woman gives birth and bears a male *child*, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall remain in the blood of *her* purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed.'"

During a period of uncleanness for a woman, which specified here would include the time after a woman has given birth, or during her menstrual cycle, no sexual contact with a man is to take place. When a woman is not pregnant, after her menstrual cycle she must wait seven days before she can have sexual contact with her husband.

One thing we should note about the laws of ritual purity, relating to both men and women, is that they pertain to one entering the Sanctuary or Temple. There is no Temple presently to go to in Jerusalem, so there should be no worry about being unclean in this regard. However, simply because those who were ritually unclean were not permitted to go into the Temple complex, does not all of a sudden mean that a ritually unclean person cannot go anywhere, contrary to what some in Orthodox Judaism may teach. It is notable that there many other things given in the Scriptures that can make a person unclean. If a man and a woman have sex in the confines of marriage, they are considered unclean (Leviticus 15:18). All this means is that until they bathe in water they are not permitted to go to the Tabernacle or Temple. There is no Temple to go to today, so there is nothing we can do about entering it. We do the best that we can to stay clean and proper in regard to our sexuality. This includes unmarried people as well, as they can also make themselves ritually unclean (Leviticus 15:16-18).

Many of the commandments relating to sexual purity and uncleanness have to do with proper bathing. During the Middle Ages in Europe, bathing was considered something to be looked down upon and unnecessary. It is said that Queen Elizabeth I of England only took three baths in her entire lifetime. It is no surprise why disease was rampant in many parts of Europe. The Jews of Europe, in contrast, maintained basic cleanliness and did not have many of the diseases of their non-Jewish neighbors.

In traditional Judaism, the belief is that because there is no Temple, and that no one can be fully cleansed, has resulted in the premise that by default all are unclean. Just by touching something that was touched by a ritually unclean person you are unclean. This means that if a person boards an airplane and a woman going through her menstrual cycle had previously sat down in your seat, you become unclean by sitting there. Orthodox Judaism has made the laws of *niddah* very complicated when you read the Mishnah and the Talmud, which adds many things to the basic Scriptural instructions, and then among those extra-Biblical regulations there are differing and contradicting opinions. One thing that we need to understand as Believers is that Yeshua's sacrifice indeed covers us from any ritual uncleanness, which prior to His sacrifice could have limited individuals' contacts with God in the Temple. Most of the basic instructions on ritual uncleanness that can be followed in the Diaspora pertain to married men and women, appropriate sexuality, and bathing.

Obviously, as the Messianic movement grows and refines its *halachic* orthopraxy, so will our knowledge, understanding, and application of these commandments (and the whole subject of sexuality) be improved.

updated 14 November, 2006

Non-profit organizations: What can you tell me about what a non-profit organization is?

A non-profit organization in the United States is some kind of an institution, group, or society that is legally registered as being a “business” that is not incorporated for making profit. The most common forms of non-profit organizations that we see are churches or synagogues, charities, orphanages, social missions, and various schools and educational groups. Being made a registered non-profit organization means that an institution is exempted from various forms of taxes and can allow contributions to be tax-deductible, as the organization is presumably offering a “social service” for human betterment. Most, if not all of what the non-profit organization offers must be provided without charge. This is unlike a for-profit business which will often never offer its clients any kind of special benefits or free services.

Contrary to popular opinion, non-profit organizations do have to file tax returns, report their earnings, and their financial records are available for public scrutiny. This does not mean that there are not abuses among non-profit organizations that function as though they are for-profit businesses. One watchdog organization, www.guidestar.org, provides access to the filed tax returns of various non-profit organizations for you to consider how they use funds and contributions they are given.

posted 30 April, 2007

Numbers, Book of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Numbers?

Approximate date: 1440-1400 B.C.E. (Right); 1300-1200 B.C.E. (conservative-moderate); 500s B.C.E. (Left)

Author: Moses exclusively (Right); Moses, Joshua, and later editors (conservative-moderate); compiled traditions and mythologies (Left)

Location of author: wilderness journey after the Exodus (Right, conservative-moderate); Babylon and/or Land of Israel (Left)

Target audience and their location: people of Israel wandering in the desert (Right, conservative-moderate); Jewish exiles returning from Babylon (Left)

The Hebrew title for the fourth book of the Torah is *Bamidbar* (בְּמִדְבָּר), meaning either “in the wilderness” or “in the desert” (1:1). Another Jewish designation in antiquity derived from 1:1 was *V’yadaber* (וַיְדַבֵּר) or “and He spoke,” known to early Church figures such as Jerome and Epiphanaus (*IDB*, 3:567; *EXP*, 2:662). Other titles included *omesh happikkudim* or “the ‘fifth’ of the census,” indicating that this text composed one-fifth of the Torah (Harrison, 614; *IDBSup*, 631; *ABD*, 4:1146). The Septuagint translations applied the Greek name *Arithmoi* (ΑΡΙΘΜΟΙ) to the text, derived from “according to the number of their names” (1:26, LXE) “This Greek name reflects an earlier Hebrew name for the book, well-attested in classical rabbinic sources, from a period when books of the Torah were named thematically rather than after one of their initial words” (*Jewish Study Bible*, p 281), and was followed as *Numeri* in the Latin Vulgate. Many evangelical Christians have suggested that *Bamidbar* is a better title, as it avoids the controversy of the debates surrounding Biblical numbering and instead focuses on the events that took place (*NBCR*, 168; *ISBE*, 3:561).

The Book of Numbers may be easily divided into three broad sections: (1) Israel at Sinai, preparing to depart for the Promised Land (1:1-10:10); (2) Israel at Kadesh, delayed because of their rebellion (13:1-20:13); (3) Israel at the plains of Moab, anticipating conquest of the Promised Land (22:2-32:42). Numbers probably covers the broadest scope of the Torah, as it completes the 38-year journey of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness.

Important features appearing in Numbers include God delivering the instructions on how the Tabernacle was to be transported (chs. 1-10). Within this selection appears specific regulations for the Levites (chs. 3-4, 7-8), the banishment of those who are extremely impure (5:1-4), and how to deal with a defiled Nazirite (6:1-21). Further features detail the rebellion of the Israelites and their refusal to fully take the Land of Canaan (ch. 14), and the condemnation of those who would have to die in the wilderness because of their disbelief. Some of the most important chapters in

Numbers are ch. 6, which includes the giving of the Aaronic Benediction, and ch. 11, the instructions concerning how Israel was to keep Passover.

Throughout Numbers, we see that God demonstrates a strong willingness to live with the Israelites, communicating to them through Moses (7:89). The Lord is a guide for the people (9:15-23), but Israel rebels against Him (ch. 15), and God shows a desire not to judge them all at first (16:20-22). God demonstrates a great deal of patience toward Israel, but ultimately in the defining part of the text (chs. 13-14) He must raise up a new generation of Israelites to replace the rebellious old generation.

There is a renewed interest today in both Judaism and Christianity to examine Numbers for encouraging a strong faith in God. We see the failure of Ancient Israel to obey or trust in Him, yet God is not remiss in punishing His own people, including Moses (ch. 20). God tests His people with false prophets such as Balaam (chs. 22-24), yet is able to issue a blessing through him (chs. 23-24). The Lord hates idolatry and sexual immorality (ch. 25). Many evangelical Christians are keen to admit that there has been a lack of interest among ministers to appropriate these important themes in preaching from Numbers, and desire to see this change (*EXP*, 2:660). Ultimately, we may consider Numbers to be a prime example of God's ongoing *Heilsgeschichte* or salvation history (*Ibid.*, 2:657).

Some substantial historical issues are presented in Numbers with the census of Israel's population, particularly in 1:46: "all the numbered men were 603,550." Many conservative scholars take this number at face value, and extrapolate that there were as many as 2-3 million involved in the Exodus. Other conservatives have suggested that the Pentateuch uses terms such as "thousands" or "hundreds" more loosely than it would be used today, and offer some alternative views. They suggest that "a total population of two to three million...hardly seems appropriate" (*ISBE*, 3:565). While reducing Israel's population, a lesser view still asserts that God's promises to Abraham to multiply his seed were being fulfilled. The default position regarding Numbers 1:46 adhered to by many seems to be that the 600,000 mentioned in the Exodus was more or less the exact population (*EXP*, 2:686-691).

Those who believe that the numbering of 603,550 in Numbers 1:46 is something else will claim that the Hebrew term *elef* (אֶלֶף) or "thousand," can also mean "squad" when considering its Ugaritic and other Semitic cognates (Harrison, 632-633). This would possibly mean that what is being referred to is 60 squads of 550, placing Israel's fighting force at around 33,000 (*NIDB*, 713; *EXP*, 2:682-683). If this were to refer to the entire population, it could have difficulties as 22,273 firstborn males are specifically described in 3:43. Another alternative to consider is that the term *elef* was easily confused with *alluf* (אַלּוּף) or "captain" in ancient times, so the 62,700 fighting men of Dan mentioned (1:39) would really equate to being 60 captains and 2,700 men (*NBCR*, 169).

If the census in Numbers is not as "exact" as we may want it to be, then the obvious conclusion drawn is that there may have not been "millions" of Israelites involved in the Exodus from Egypt. Many conservatives do adhere to an exact literal numbering, concluding, "if they fanned out with their flocks over a wide area, they could sustain themselves as did the large Nabatean kingdom in the same area in Roman times" (*NIDB*, 714; cf. *EXP*, 2:680-681). In response to this, other conservative theologians may assert, "It is hard to imagine the difficulties attendant upon sustaining two to three million people living in the wilderness for forty years: food, sanitation, living space, morale" (*ISBE*, 3:565).

If we do see some kind of representative census in Numbers, then it would suggest that rather than there being 2-3 million Israelites involved in the Exodus, that there were likely only several hundred thousand, but no less than 100,000. Harrison makes the imperative point, "An understanding of the contemporary situation with reference to the population of Canaan is instructive in this respect, for it is evident from sources such as the Tell el-Amarna tablets, as well as from the excavation of Canaanite cities of the thirteenth century B.C., that the overall population of the Promised Land was itself well below three million people" (Harrison, 632). Considering that the Torah indicates that the population of the Israelites was less than that of the Canaanites (Exodus 23:29; Deuteronomy 7:7, 17, 22), then we can safely assume that a different

numbering system was used in Numbers than how we would conduct a census in the Twenty-First Century.

The Book of Numbers and its various accountings divide theologians among three distinct groups: (1) those who think that the number totals cannot be trusted and are over exaggerated; (2) those who think that the numbers are not as exact as they would have to be today, and are possibly representative in some places, but are certainly not as low as one thousand representing “one”; (3) those who think that the numbers are exact, with no exception. Admittedly, many get confused and prefer to assert that we cannot know for certain how the Israelites took a tally of their population groups (*Archaeological Study Bible*, p 197).

If one falls into a conservative handling of the text, then the options that we have at our disposal are #2 and #3, as we would choose to consider the Israelites at the very least to number in the several hundred thousands. But ultimately, there may be no satisfactory answer to these questions with the current extant data we have on the Ancient Near East. It should not cause us to think that a miniscule amount of people were involved in the Exodus. These views do, however, challenge many Messianics who have been taught that there are only “exact numbers” in Scripture, and things may not be as “exact” as they may want them to be considering their ancient context.

Regarding the composition of Numbers, conservatives do assert principal Mosaic authorship, based on statements that indicate Moses’ writing activity (33:1-2), also based on the strong assumption of the literary unity of the Torah (*ISBE*, 3:562; *EXP*, 2:663-668). In this, we see that there are varied commandments given to Moses and Aaron (1:1; 3:44; 6:1; 8:1, et. al.). “According to the book the original impetus for the recording of much of the material was from Moses. It indicates numerous times that Moses received instructions from God” (*ISBE*, 3:562). However, we should not conclude exclusive Mosaic authorship of Numbers. While Moses recorded the names of the various places Israel journeyed (33:2), Numbers is likely some combination of Mosaic and scribal writing (Harrison, 617).

There are some signs of redaction in Numbers and additions by Israel’s historians. Conservatives will often assert that Numbers “is essentially Mosaic but includes source material and glosses” (Dillard and Longman, 84). Perhaps the most significant example of a post-Mosaic addition to the Torah appears in 12:3, “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.” Conservatives have always pointed out that if Moses were indeed the most humble human being who ever lived—he could have never written this about himself! Harrison summarizes,

“In light of what is known about processes of scribal revision in Egypt and certain other areas of the ancient Near East, there appears to be no difficulty whether in assuming that the reference in Numbers 12:3 concerning the modesty of Moses constitutes an addition by a later hand, quite possibly either that of Joshua or Samuel” (Harrison, 616).

Another redaction may include the mention of the “Book of the Wars of the LORD” (21:14), “a genuine Pentateuchal source” (*Ibid.*), or a later source that a scribe added information from. Even though all conservatives strongly assert principal Mosaic involvement in the composition of Numbers, other textual additions would have included the census lists (*Ibid.*, 618-619), or possibly other slight additions during the time of the Israelite monarchy or under the authorization of Ezra the Priest after the Babylonian exile (*NBCR*, 168; *ISBE*, 3:562). The general dating of Numbers would be tied to one’s timing of the Exodus, which for conservatives would fall between the Fifteenth or Thirteenth Centuries B.C.E. (see **Exodus** FAQ for a summary of the dating issues). Admittedly, thinking that anybody but Moses was involved in the composition of Numbers is difficult for many Messianics to acknowledge, even though it seems quite certain.

Affirming the antiquity of the Book of Numbers, conservative scholars such as Harrison and Kitchen point out that the arrangement of the Israelites around the Tabernacle in Numbers 2:2 confirms to the strategic layout of the Egyptian army during the reign of Ramses II (Harrison, 622-623). Certainly, if Moses had been a member of the Egyptian royal house, and as Stephen attests, “a man of power in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22), he could have learned Egyptian military

strategy and incorporated it in his leading Israel. Furthermore, we see that the use of silver trumpets (10:1) was common in Egyptian ceremonies of the Thirteenth Century (Ibid., 623).

In stark contrast to conservative theologians that affirm prime Mosaic involvement in the composition of Numbers, liberal theologians would argue for the final form of the text existing only after the Jewish exile to Babylon in 587 B.C.E., and possibly even that it foreshadows the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel in 539 B.C.E. Liberals commonly argue that the story depicted in Numbers would have strong significance for the exiles returning from Babylon, but strongly doubt its historicity. *IDB* indicates, “It is the large amount of purely statistical material incorporated in Numbers which makes much of it seem tedious to the modern reader...Some of it seems purely idealistic and unhistorical” (3:570). Liberals will frequently claim that the events in Numbers seem too strange to have actually occurred, such as Balaam’s donkey talking (ch. 22), and instead frequently suggest that all that is necessary is some kind of literary explanation for the journeys of Israel. Any kind of unity in Numbers is regarded as being entirely “artificial” (Ibid., 3:568).

In the liberal scheme of Numbers’ composition, the bulk of the material is attributed to the P or so-called Priestly writer, with incorporated additions by J and E (*IDB*, 3:568; *NBCR*, pp 168-169; *IDBSup*, 631-632; *ISBE*, 3:562-563; *ABD*, 4:1148-1150; *Jewish Study Bible*, p 281), and likely also D (*IDB*, 3:567; see *Genesis FAQ* entry for a summarization of the JEDP documentary hypothesis). While conservatives frequently respond to liberal critiques with literary explanations of Numbers’ supposed discrepancies, liberals are right to point out that there are source materials present in the text. The Book of Numbers cannot be read with any naiveté (*EXP*, 2:663), and even a conservative reading requires a fair bit of critical examination. Even though we might disagree with liberal presuppositions surrounding Numbers, liberals will validly point out that its “OT story is intended to be read as history and not as myth. The ancient Hebrew mind was not mythopoeic” (*IDB*, 3:571), affirming some kind of theological integrity for the book.

From a textual point of view, the Hebrew Masoretic Text of Numbers is fairly secure, with few disputations or major variances from the Samaritan Pentateuch or Greek Septuagint. This does not mean that the SP and LXX do not reflect some interpretations of commandments, but these are relatively minor. The text of Numbers has not been preserved as well as Leviticus (Harrison, 634), likely because of the large accountings of people. But if there are any major differences in the accountings of people, they are ancient problems that go back too far in history to fix, and answers to these problems must be reconciled historically. “The very large numbers in the two census lists (Num 1-4; 26) do not betray corruption of numbers. Thus those who resort to the solution of the problem of the large numbers by suggesting textual corruption have to assume that such problems are very ancient” (*EXP*, 2:661).

The message that Numbers communicates to us today is primarily that God is merciful, yet He is also just. “Of all of God’s attributes, it is on his *hesed* that Moses bases his plea that God not destroy Israel (14:18-20). The word *hesed* stands for God’s constancy, his fidelity to his covenant with Israel” (*ABD*, 4:1151). The Lord does not leave Israel in the wilderness, but does wait for a proper generation to be raised up that can accomplish His tasks. He provides food for His people with the manna (ch. 11), but also strikes Miriam, Moses’ sister, with leprosy (ch. 12), and punishes Moses for striking the rock (ch. 20).

Throughout Numbers, we see God demonstrating His presence, discipline, and holiness (*NBCR*, 170). The Book of Numbers “forms an essential link in that forward-directedness from Adam to Jesus” (*EXP*, 2:657). A challenge that anyone who really wants to study Numbers often faces is that he or she must have great patience. Allen points out, “In a day marked by pop art, quick fixes, and fast foods, the Book of Numbers is particularly troublesome. It simply does not appeal to the person who is unwilling to invest time and energy in the study of Scripture” (Ibid., 2:658), and we certainly see the lack of patience in the Israelites’ behavior in Numbers. At the end of Numbers, the people of Israel are ready and prepared to enter into the Promised Land. “It is on this note of expectant hope that the book ends. Note that the hope never turns into certainty. That is, the hope of the second generation is an untried hope. This generation too will face severe

threats to its faith (see Joshua), and it remains to be seen how they will respond” (Dillard and Longman, 89). To an extent, every generation of Believers should place themselves into the situation of Numbers (Ibid., 90).

The current Messianic handling of Numbers is not that dissimilar from its handling of Leviticus. Like Leviticus, many of the commandments in Numbers cannot be presently observed without a working Tabernacle or Temple. But whereas Leviticus comprises mostly a code of conduct, Numbers does ask us some serious questions about the relationship to God and His people. When we see Moses strike the rock against God’s explicit command, there are consequences that he must face (20:11-12). A few Messianics, who may have made Moses into some kind of demagogue, are confronted with the reality that he was human and that he did sin.

Perhaps more significant for the emerging Messianic movement is the fact that the Book of Numbers challenges us to become a self-critical movement that is not afraid to admit some of its problems. Certainly if we cannot identify with some of the grumbling attitudes of the Ancient Israelites, then are we to admit that we are instead “perfect”? Surely not. Furthermore, when we consider the numerical accounts in the text, we need to be willing to admit that there are things in the Torah that are not as “black and white” as we may want them, such as knowing how many people were exactly involved in the Exodus. We have to remember that there was probably a different numbering system in place in 1400-1200 B.C.E. that is largely foreign to our Twenty-First Century computer mindset.

With these things said, there is a large need for today’s Messianic community to engage more with conservative-critical scholarship of Numbers that considers the historical framework of the Ancient Near East. Unfortunately, as with too much of the Tanach, sectors of the Messianic movement often give credence to ultra Orthodox and Chassidic Jewish views of Numbers, at the expense of its legitimate historicity. With the message of Numbers in view, will it take a long time for a generation of Messianic Believers to be raised up to be used effectively for the Lord? We may not know. But it does teach us that we are to endure through whatever trials may take place. As it concerns our studies of Numbers, it should include how we react properly to criticisms of the text, and whether or not we can involve ourselves with the larger theological conversations going on.

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