

# HAAMEK DAVAR

- Dr Jacob Solomon

## Bamidbar

The opening chapters of Sefer Bamidbar give the details of the counting of the Israelites:

*G-d spoke to Moshe... Take a census of the Israelites... include every military-eligible male from age 20 and up (1:1-3).*

The Rabbis refer to Sefer Bamidbar as CHUMASH HAPIKUDIM, the Chumash of Counting (Yoma 68b, see Rashi to Sh'mot 30:15). True, Moshe counted the Israelites twice at G-d's bidding; once here soon after Giving of the Torah, and then, some 40 years later, after the plague following Baal Peor and their preparing to enter the Land. Yet this fourth book of the Torah is crammed with much other material and events: first coming to mind being the Spies and 40 years wandering in the wilderness, Moshe's striking the rock instead of speaking to it, Bilam's failure to curse Israel, and Pinchas's stepping forward to kill Zimri at the critical moment. Yet the theme that gives the Book its name is Chumash HaPikudim, the counting of the B'nei Yisrael.

Ha'amek Davar, in his introduction to Bamidbar, suggests that each of the two censuses were important occasions that marked change in

G-d's relationship with Am Yisrael, and the challenges that faced them.

The first, the subject of this week's, Parsha, heralded the time that they would be totally in G-d's care. It was the time for learning, understanding, and coming to terms with observing the Torah that they had just received. Moshe held the Staff of G-d in his hand which he put to use when fighting Amalek, and in prompting water to come out of the rock. G-d made sure that all their physical needs would be taken care of: water supply, quails, manna, and the other constant daily miracles (D'varim 8:3-4), as well as protection from their enemies. It was a time of getting to know G-d: in preparation for the ultimate goals of living in Eretz HaKodesh as a MAMLECHET KOHANIM V'GOI KADOSH, as an epitome of His Values.

The second, in Parshat Pinchas, was nearly 40 years later. The great practical life changes involving conquering and settling the Land as a nation were coming into sight. Am Yisrael's over-arching task was ultimately to settle down to normal living with G-d present, but, as ever since including today, deep in the background. There would be no Staff of Moshe and no daily magic. Moshe did not use his staff when he started the conquest of the Land by

overcoming Sichon and Og on the east bank of the Jordan. He used military tactics. Indeed, the Ramban in his introduction to D'varim stresses that Moshe's final address that comprises the bulk of D'varim's content emphasizes focus on normalization: the day-to-day mitzvot that were to characterize conquering and then permanently settling the Land.

So according to this explanation, Chumash HaPikudim's claim to naming the Book is not merely because it deals in numbers, but because the census procedures were grounded in ushering change, the two very distinct phases in the development of Am Yisrael. What needs to be stressed in an earlier phase is very different to what needs to be stressed in later, and in present phases of Jewish life. ❁