

RED ALERT!

BAMIDBAR

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DIVREI TORAH

- The census taken at the beginning is uniquely established to give numbers for each tribe in accordance with the paternal household. The Netziv (19th century Volozhin) stated that this labeled the Jewish people as unique in the world. No other country kept the paternal lineage as a sacred trust. The sanctity of the people was in knowing who their parents were. When the Torah lists for us the lineage, for example of the descendants of Eisav, our Sages tell us that there were a tremendous amount of extramarital affairs and incest that resulted in offspring that could not state that they had accurate records of paternity.

The blessing of this census for the Jewish people was that each family member knew his own pedigree; his Yichus was sacred. The S'fat Emet says that the statement “the house of his fathers” was also inspirational for each person to think and feel that he had to emulate the righteous actions of his ancestors. When will I be able to equal the productivity of my ancestors? All of us should be so

inspired by our family tree that we can do the same or even exceed what our ancestors did.

- “These are the names of the children of Aharon, the firstborn... Nadav” (Chapter 3). Nadav was Aharon’s firstborn but the experience of his birthright was extremely short-lived with no results. The Baal HaTurim wrote that the reference here is to Aharon who was a firstborn and the older brother to Moshe. And as far as the sons were concerned he therefore had the right to the birthright. To me this is not a satisfactory suggestion. All it does is validate the question. The question really revolves around the P'SIK, a vertical line between the word “firstborn” and “Nadav”. It is called a P'SIK and it is a pause in the reading between the two words as if the word firstborn does not apply to Nadav. The truth is that once Nadav died the rights of the firstborn fell upon Nadav’s younger brother Elazar. Maybe the lesson involved here is that the birthright and the privileges of the firstborn are not permanent. In fact, more often than not, we see the biblical narrative that the firstborn male is not the one who assumes family leadership. This was true throughout the stories of the Patriarchs in B'reishit. It is not that way here either. So maybe that is why there is a pause after the word “firstborn”.

- Why was the tribe of Levi so small? The Ramban states that since the tribe of Levi was not subjected to the oppressive servitude, they did not receive the special blessing of having large families and reproducing at a greater rate. That was a reserved bracha for those who suffered. The tribe of Levi did not suffer.

The Kli Yakar wrote that many Levitical fathers acted as Amram did and separated from their wives to avoid Pharaoh's harsh decree and see their sons be put to death. As such, the Kli Yakar states, they separated for a long period of time causing the tribe of Levi to have small numbers in their families.

A different and quite unique approach to this question is recorded in the name of the Brisker Rav, Rav Soloveitchik's grandfather, who stated that the small number in the tribe of Levi was by divine design as a blessing to the Jewish people. The nation was basically supporting the tribe of Levi who were totally dedicated to the religious leadership of the nation. As such they did not have large tribal lands from which to produce in an agricultural based society. Their decreased numbers lessened the burden on Bnei Yisrael to financially support them.

Questions by RED

From the Text

1. On what calendar date did Hashem command this census? (1:1)
2. What tribe was the largest and how many male adults were there? (1:27)
3. Which three tribes camped east of the Mishkan? (2:3-8)
4. From what age did the Torah count the tribe of Levi? (3:15)
5. How many Leviyim were there? (3:43)

From Rashi

6. How many censuses did Hashem command and when were they?
7. What established your tribal identity? (1:2) [And what established your Jewish identity?]
8. The Torah introduces chapter three with the statement "These are the offspring of Moshe and Aharon" and only mentions Aharon's sons. How does this make sense? (3:1)
9. How did Moshe count the Levitical babies? (3:16)
10. Why was the value of each male firstborn designated as five Shekels? (3:46)

From the Rabbis

11. The minimum age to be counted in the census was twenty years of age. What was the maximum age? (Bava Batra 121b)

12. Who was alive at the time of the anointing of the Kohanim but was not a Kohen even though he was a member of the Kohanic family? (Malbim)

13. Kehat was Levi's second son. Why were they counted first and given the more prestigious job? (Kli Yakar)

From the Midrash

14. What color was Reuven's flag and was depicted on it?

From the Haftara (Shmuel Alef)

15. Who said to whom: Tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh?

Relationships

- a) Eltzafan - Uziel
- b) Machli - Mushi
- c) Moshe - Pinchas
- d) Nadav - Itamar
- e) Nachshon - Elazar

ANSWERS

1. On the first of Iyar in the second year after the Exodus.

2. Yehuda with 74,600.

3. Yehuda, Yissachar, and Zevulun.

4. From one month of age.

5. 22,273.

6. When they left Egypt; when they served the Golden Calf; when Hashem was with them; when they finished erecting the Mishkan; and now.

7. Your father established your tribal identity. Your mother established your Jewish identity.

8. The sons of Aharon were also considered Moshe's sons, since Moshe taught them Torah.

9. Hashem would tell Moshe how many babies were in the tent while Moshe stood outside that tent.

10. Five Shekels was the price the brothers received when they sold Yosef.

11. 60.

12. Pinchas.

13. Because Moshe and Aharon came from Kehat.

14. It was red, and it featured the Duda'im, the flowers Reuven brought for his mother.

15. Yehonatan to David.

16.

a) Son - father

b) Brothers

c) Great uncle (Or regular uncle through Moshe's wife)

d) Brothers

e) Uncle - nephew