

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Naso 5784

D. Mordechai Schlachter

The tribes brought six wagons. Moshe gave them to the Leviim.

קח מאתם והיו לעבד את עבדת אהל מועד ונתתה אותם אל-הלוים איש כפי עבדתו:

“Take from these and they shall be to serve in the service of the Ohel Moed. And give them to the Leviim, a man according to his service.” (Bamidbar 7:5).

This pasuk is referring to the wagons that the heads of the twelve shevatim brought as gifts for the inauguration of the Mishkan. When did the Leviim take over for the firstborns? How did the twelve tribes know that they would be twelve – without Levi but Yosef having Ephraim and Menashe to fill the gap?

Originally, Hashem took the firstborns upon Himself for service. (Shmos 13:13). When looking at those pesukim they only say that Hashem wanted every firstborn to be redeemed. (Ibid 13:2). Those pesukim do not say it was for conscription in service. The redemption was because Hashem slayed the firstborn of the Egyptians. (Ibid 13:15). The Torah clarifies it later when it says, “I hereby take unto Me the Leviim in lieu of the firstborn of Israel.” (Bamidbar 3:12). Hashem took the Leviim for service instead of the firstborn that were originally sanctified for that purpose. When did Hashem do this?

Also, there are two ways to count the twelve tribes. There are the literal sons of Yaakov. This includes Levi as a shevet. There is a count excluding Levi and then counting Ephraim and Menashe, the sons of Yosef, to fill the spot for Yosef and for Levi. How did Bnei Yisroel know to do this by the inauguration of the Mishkan? Each shevet – including Ephraim and Menashe – stepped forward with a gift. Levi did not.

Yaakov designated an extra portion of Eretz Yisroel to his son Yosef. (Bereishis 48:22). Yaakov also blessed Yosef saying, “Now, your two sons – who were born to you in the Country of Egypt – before I came to you in Egypt, they shall be mine. Ephraim and Menashe shall be tribes equal to Reuven and Shimon.” (Ibid 48:5). Before Yaakov died he already made Ephraim and Menashe tribes and he gave them each a portion of the Land of Yisroel. At that time, what was Levi’s status? He was still a tribe and he was not barred from a portion of the Land. It seems implied from here, that the plan was for Hashem to take the firstborn of each shevet to serve in the Mishkan or Beis HaMikdash. They, then, would not own land. Instead, they would be redeemed through service. When the Torah originally stated Hashem’s claim to the firstborn, it did not say they should be redeemed with coins and at thirty days old. Instead, it just said, “they shall be redeemed.” They would be redeemed through the serviced in the Mishkan. Further, Levi would get a land bequest in Eretz Yisroel, too. Each tribe would be short their firstborn – who would not get land, but instead, they would be the servants for Hashem. Therefore, there would be land to give to shevet Levi. This changed. But when and why Levi?

“And an important man from the house of Levi went...” (Shmos 2:1). The Torah introduces Amram as “an important man from Levi.” Further, the Torah calls Aharon the “Levite.” וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא אֶהְיֶה הַלְוִי “And He said, ‘isn’t your brother, Aharon the Levite?’” (Ibid 4:14). Clearly, if Aharon was Moshe’s brother, and Moshe was from “the important man of the House of Levi” then Aharon was also a Levi. Why did Hashem use that term? Clearly, there was something special about being a Levi.

The Torah also does something interesting when it comes to shevet Levi. The Torah interrupts the narrative of Moshe coming to advocate for Bnei Yisroel to give the lineage of the heads of each shevet. “These are the heads of the clans, the heads of their patriarchal houses: The sons of Reuven...” (Ibid 6:14). It gives the clan leaders for Reuven and Shimon (ibid 6:15) and then for Levi (ibid 6:16). It then goes into the children of the three main clan heads for Levi (ibid 6:17-25)—something it did not do for Shimon and Levi. This is possibly to introduce Moshe and Aharon. However, then, after it finishes with Levi, the Torah continues the narrative. (Ibid 6:26). The Torah does not give the clan leaders for the rest of the shevatim. Clearly, the Torah got distracted by Moshe and Aharon because they were essential to the narrative about the *geula*. However, there must be something important about Levi that the Torah mentioned them (and incidentally gave respect to Levi’s elders by mentioning Reuven and Shimon first).

The Torah tells Moshe to count the Leviim and then Bechorim so that the Leviim can take over for the firstborns. (Bamidbar 3:40). This was recorded immediately after the census of Bnei Yisroel. (Ibid 1:2). The census took place in the second month of the second year. (Ibid 1:1). The inauguration took place on the first day of the first month of the second year. (Shmos 40:17). Yet, everyone already, on inauguration day, that Levi would serve the Mishkan and the twelve tribes offering gifts would exclude Levi and include Ephraim and Menashe. Therefore, it cannot be that Hashem tasked Moshe to count the Leviim and the firstborns a month later when Moshe took the census. The Torah only shares that count there because it is the same topic of the census. It took place earlier.

It was already prophesized by his name. עֲתָהּ הַפְּעֵם יִלְוֶה אִישִׁי אֵלַי כִּי־יִלְדֶתִי לוֹ שְׁלִשָּׁה בָנִים “Now, my husband shall come attached to me because I birthed to him a third son. Therefore, she named him Levi.” (Bereishis 29:34). Yaakov’s relationship with her would improve because she now had one more than her other three co-wives (who each would only have two). The “extra” child evokes the same word עֲדִיפִים “in excess.” (Bamidbar 3:46). The firstborns were 273 in excess to the Leviim. Levi was an “extra.” He would serve the same purpose: service in the Mishkan. Yaakov does not set Levi apart; he groups him with Shimon. (Bereishis 49:5). Yet, Levi redeems himself. First, Amram “goes out” to marry despite the evil decree of death to the sons, showing his faith in Hashem. Second, at the Molten Calf, Moshe calls out, “Who is for Hashem come to me,” and every man of Levi rallied to him. (Shmos 32:26). Levi turned the weapons of anger and revenge into glory for Hashem. Levi is not fleshed out only because of Moshe. Levi always had it in them to be in the service of Hashem. He was a *kannoi* for their sister, and his children showed allegiance to Hashem; and Pinchas was the ultimate *kannoi*. That is why it is no coincidence that it was a man and woman from Levi who were able to produce Moshe and Aharon—the saviors, leaders, and teachers.