

מקראות גדולות

*The*

COMMENTATORS'  
BIBLE

THE JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

LEVITICUS ויקרא

*With the 1917 and 1985 English translations of  
The Jewish Publication Society TANAKH, the questions of Abarbanel,  
the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides,  
and selections from the Masorah and from the commentaries of  
Bekhor Shor, Kimhi, Hizkuni, Gersonides, Abarbanel, and Sforno*

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2009 • 5770

**NJPS** into smoke on the altar, <sup>21</sup>and elevated the breasts and the right thighs as an elevation offering before the LORD—as Moses had commanded.

<sup>22</sup>Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he stepped down after offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the offering of well-being. <sup>23</sup>Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Presence of the LORD appeared to all the people. <sup>24</sup>Fire came forth from before the LORD

**RASHI** 22 Aaron ... blessed them. With the priestly blessing of Num. 6:24-26. **He stepped down.** From atop the altar.

**23 Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting.** Why did they go into the Tent? I have found the following in the special section in the Sifra describing the ordination: Why did Moses go in with Aaron? To teach him the incense ritual. — Or perhaps he went in for some other reason? —

Since they blessed the people again when they came out, I deduce that they must have performed some ritual inside, just as Aaron blessed the people outside (in v. 22) after the completion of the ritual of the sacrifices. Thus Moses must have gone in with Aaron to teach him about the incense ritual. Another reading: When Aaron saw that all the sacrifices had been offered and all the other rituals performed, but the Shekhinah had not descended upon Israel, he was upset, thinking, "I know that the Holy One is angry with me, and that I am the reason the Shekhinah has not descended upon Israel." He said to Moses, "Moses, my brother, I have done as you asked, and you have embarrassed me." Immediately Moses went into the Tent with him, begged for mercy, and the Shekhinah descended upon Israel.

**When they came out, they blessed the people.** The Sages understand them to have recited Ps. 90:17, "May the favor of the LORD, our God, be upon us!" [E] as if to say, "May it be God's will that the Shekhinah rest upon the Tabernacle you have made." For all during the first seven days of the ordination procedure, when Moses set up the Tabernacle, served there, and then disassembled it each day, the Shekhinah did not rest upon it. The people were depressed, saying, "Our master Moses! All this trouble we took was so that the Shekhinah would settle among us and we would know that we were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf." That is why he replied to them, "'This is what the LORD has commanded that you do, that the Presence of the LORD may appear to you' (v. 6). You must understand that my brother Aaron is more worthy than I. For it is by means of his offerings and his service that the Shekhinah will settle on you, so that you may know that God has chosen him."

**24 The people ... shouted.** Rather, as Onkelos has it, they "sang songs of praise" to God.

[E] The heading of Psalm 90 identifies it as "a prayer of Moses."

**OJPS** upon the altar. <sup>21</sup>And the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved for a wave-offering before the LORD; as Moses commanded.

הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: 21 וְאֵת הַחֻזוֹת וְאֵת שׁוֹק הַיְמִינִי הַיָּהוָה תְּנוּפָה לְפָנָי יִהְיֶה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה:

22 וַיִּשָּׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת-יָדָיו וַיְבָרֶכֶם וַיֵּרֶד מֵעֲשֹׂת הַחֻטָּאת וְהַעֲלָה וְהוֹשִׁילְמִים: 23 וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּצְאוּ וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת-הָעָם וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד-יְהוָה אֶל-בְּלִיְהָעָם: 24 וַתִּצֵּא אֵשׁ

**ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS** † Why does it appear that the people are blessed twice, in vv. 22 and 23? † Why does divine sanctification take the form of fire, as in v. 24, and not water or something else? The same thing happens at the dedication of Solomon's Temple in 2 Chronicles 7, and Elijah says explicitly in 1 Kings 18:24 that "the god who responds with fire, that one is God."

<sup>22</sup>And Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people, and blessed them; and he came down from offering the sin-offering, and the burnt-offering, and the peace-offerings.

<sup>23</sup>And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and came out, and blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people. <sup>24</sup>And there came forth

**RASHBAM** 23 Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting. To pray that the fire would come down. **The Presence of the LORD appeared to all the people.** How did it do so? "Fire came forth ..." (v. 24).

**24 Fire came forth from before the LORD.** From inside the Holy of Holies, via

**IBN EZRA** 22 Aaron lifted his hands toward the people. Based on this verse, our predecessors have passed on the tradition that the priests must lift their hands high when they offer the Priestly Blessing. **He stepped down.** From the altar, which was three cubits high. But (as I have already explained many times) this Hebrew syntax can mean, as it does here, that he *had already* stepped down **after offering the sin offering** (and so forth) before he lifted his hands to bless the people.

**23 Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting.** "Then" is not literally in the Hebrew (see OJPS), but NJPS understands correctly. Perhaps they went inside the Tent to pray for the fire to come forth. Then, **when they came out**, the two of them **blessed the people**.

**24 The burnt offering.** Which consisted of three separate sacrifices—that of

**NAHMANIDES** 22 Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. If this was indeed the Priestly Blessing of Num. 6:24-26, as Rashi thinks, then Num. 6:23, "Speak to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel," must also have preceded our passage. And perhaps it did, since the Numbers passage seems to be describing "the day that Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle" (Num. 7:1). But it might also be possible simply to understand Aaron doing the same here as did Solomon at the inauguration of the Temple, when "he spread the palms of his hands toward heaven ... and in a loud voice blessed the whole congregation of Israel" (1 Kings 8:22, 55). That would explain why the text does not record that Moses commanded Aaron to do so. In the Sifra I have seen our passage explained as follows: "Aaron blessed the people, but you do not know what he said. Later the text comes and states explicitly, 'The LORD bless you and protect you! The LORD deal kindly and graciously with you! The LORD bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace!'" But I still say that this is what they meant: The text was silent about the blessing that Aaron gave the people, on his own initiative, but did state explicitly, later, the blessing that all the priests would offer ever afterward. Or perhaps they thought that Moses had commanded him to offer the Priestly Blessing on this specific occasion, and that only later was the command given that this should be the Priestly Blessing throughout the generations.

**24 Fire came forth from before the LORD.** More literally, "from with the face of the Lord." The enlightened person will comprehend this, as I have already explained it. [E]

[E] See Nahmanides' comment to Exod. 30:1.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** 21 As Moses had commanded. This phrase appears six times in the Bible; our verse is one of three (also Exod. 16:24 and 1 Chron. 15:15) that do not add a description of Moses as "the servant of the LORD," as do the three other occurrences, all in Joshua (Masorah).

**23 They blessed the people.** That they should be found acceptable through their offering (Bekhor Shor).

**24 Fire came forth from before the LORD.** The fire that came forth in Moses' day was not extinguished from the copper altar until

**NJPS** and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces.

**IO** Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the LORD alien fire, which He had

**NAHMANIDES 10:1** They offered before the LORD alien fire. This phrase is the key if you wish to understand what the sin of Nadab and Abihu was. It does not say, "They offered before the LORD incense that He had not enjoined upon them." They

put incense "on the fire." As Deut. 33:10 says, "They shall offer You incense to Your anger." [F] They focused their attention only on the fiery divine attribute of justice. This was not "an offering by fire of pleasing odor." Notice that the verse says that they laid incense "on it." In the case of Korah and his rebels, Moses instructed them, "Do this: You, Korah and all your band, take fire pans, and tomorrow put fire in them and lay incense on them before the LORD" (Num. 16:6-7, and see also Num. 16:16-17). Here, however, the text explicitly says "on it," implying that they put the incense directly "on the fire." [G] So "fire came forth from the LORD and consumed them" (v. 2). It may be that this alludes to "you shall not offer alien incense on it" (Exod. 30:9)—that they should not do it in a way that alienated the incense from any aspect of God. This is what 16:1 means when it explains that they "died when they drew too close to the presence of the LORD"—literally, to the "face" of the Lord. It was in restricting their offering to "the face" [H] that they died.

[F] A literal reading of the Hebrew permits this translation. [G] The commentators on Nahmanides understand him to be explaining that Nadab and Abihu offered incense only to God in His aspect of divine justice, and not to the complete Unity of God. But this was a mistake: the divine justice, unmitigated by any other aspect of God, is a dangerous force. [H] See Nahmanides' comment to 9:24.

to bring ordinary fire. For they were expecting fire to descend from on high, and it would not be right to bring other fire on this day. The whole point was to sanctify the heavenly name, letting everyone witness that the fire had come from heaven. Elijah did the very same thing when he said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull and prepare it first, for you are the majority; invoke your god by name, but apply no fire" (1 Kings 18:25), and for the same purpose—he wanted to sanctify the heavenly name by having them witness the descent of fire from above.

**IBN EZRA** Aaron, that of the people, and the regular daily offering. As Num. 28:23 shows us, the regular morning offering goes without saying. **The fat parts.** Of Aaron's calf and ram, and of the people's he-goat, ox, and ram. **Shouted.** This is indeed the correct translation. Compare "a shout went through the army" (1 Kings 22:36).

**10:1 Each took his fire pan.** In my opinion, this too took place "on the eighth day" of Nisan (9:1). The proof is that Aaron tells Moses in v. 19, "See, this day they brought their sin offering and their burnt offering." **Put fire in it.** Not from the fire that came forth (9:24); that is what made it alien fire. **Which He had not enjoined upon them.** They had not been commanded to use fire and burn incense, but did it on their own. [C]

[C] See Ibn Ezra's comment to 16:1.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** they got to the time of the Temple, and that which came down in Solomon's day was not extinguished until the time of King Manasseh (Hizkuni). **All the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces.** They had no fear, but raised their voices in supplication and prostrated themselves to the God who was answering them and accepting their sacrifices (Abarbanel).

**10:1 Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan.** My understanding is that they did what they did while Moses and Aaron were blessing the people (Abarbanel). **They offered before the LORD alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them.** More precisely, "which He had enjoined upon them not" to do—"You shall not offer alien incense on it" (Exod. 30:9)—and had not in the interim permitted for some special purpose (Bekhor Shor). What made the fire they "took" alien was that it was not taken from the right place on the outer altar, but from elsewhere (Gersonides). The problem was that, though the High Priest may offer incense whenever he wishes, ordinary priests only do so when chosen for it by lot; and no priest does so twice in his lifetime. On this inaugural day of all days, the High Priest was supposed to perform each part of the ritual, and especially the incense ritual, which was the most spiritual. Perhaps they considered themselves like the High Priest, having been personally anointed with the same oil as he. But in any case it was a criminal offense for two priests to offer incense simultaneously (Abarbanel). Nadab and Abihu understood from Exod. 29:38-30:8 that incense was to be offered every day after the regular sacrifice, because the Shekhinah would rest upon it. Since the Shekhinah had appeared now, they assumed that they were supposed to offer incense now too (Sforno). **And laid incense on it.** All incense offerings involve fire; it was in fact the incense, not the fire, that was "alien," meaning that it was private rather than public (Hizkuni).

**OJPS** fire from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering and the fat; and when all the people saw it, they shouted, and fell on their faces.

מִלְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה וְהֵאֵכַל עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֶת-  
הָעֹלָה וְאֶת-הַחֲלָבִים וַיֵּרָא כָּל-הָעָם  
וַיִּרְגְּזוּ וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל-פְּנֵיהֶם:

וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי-אֶהֱרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אִישׁ  
מִחֲתָתוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ  
קִטְרֶת וַיִּקְרְבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר

**IO** And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire therein, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them.

**RASHBAM** the golden altar inside the Tabernacle—in order to turn the incense into smoke (which, according to B. Yoma 33b, must precede the regular daily offering). But there, next to the golden altar, the fire encountered the sons of Aaron and burned them. Then it came forth to the outside altar and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts.

**10:1 Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan.** They had already done so (before the fire came forth from before the Lord), in order to turn the incense into smoke inside, on the golden altar—for the incense offered in the morning must precede the burning of the sacrificial parts. But they put in their fire pans alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them. Rather, fire that he, Moses, had not enjoined upon them to offer on that day. For even though (as we are told in 1:7) on all other days "the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar," Moses neither commanded them nor wanted them

**NJPS** not enjoined upon them. <sup>2</sup>And fire came forth from the LORD and consumed them; thus they died at the instance of the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD meant when He said:

Through those near to Me I show Myself holy,  
And gain glory before all the people."  
And Aaron was silent.

**OJPS** <sup>2</sup>And there came forth fire from before the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said unto Aaron: "This is it that the LORD spoke, saying:

Through them that are nigh unto Me I will be sanctified,  
and before all the people I will be glorified."  
And Aaron held his peace.

לֹא צִוָּה אֶתְּמֶם: <sup>2</sup> וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלְּפָנֵי יְהוָה  
וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לְפָנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>3</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר  
מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הִנֵּה הוּא אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה  
לֵאמֹר

בְּקִרְבֵי אֲקֹדֵשׁ  
וְעַל-פָּנֵי כָל-הָעָם אֲבָבֵד  
וַיִּדַם אַהֲרֹן:

**ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS** + Why did Nadab and Abihu—two apparently healthy and wholesome individuals—die when and where they did (v. 2)? Since the Sages have propounded so many contradictory and unsatisfactory explanations, there is nothing improper in our questioning them.

**RASHI 10:2 Fire came forth.** R. Eliezer says, "The only reason Aaron's sons died is that they issued legal rulings in the presence of their teacher, Moses." R. Ishmael says, "They went into the sanctuary drunk." (Note that, after their death, the remaining priests are warned not to do this.) Leviticus Rabbah explains R. Ishmael's reasoning with the following parable: A king found a member of his retinue loitering at the entrance to a shop. Without saying a word, he chopped off his head and appointed another in his place. We do not know why the king killed the original one except from what he told the new one: "Don't go into that shop!"

**3 This is what the LORD meant when He said.** Where did he say this? "There I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Glory [kevodil]" (Exod. 29:43). Do not read it as *kevodi* but as *kevudai*, "those through whom I am glorified." [F] Moses said to Aaron, "Aaron, my brother, I knew in advance that the Tabernacle would be consecrated by the death of those with whom God was most intimate. I presumed it would be me or you. Now I see that they were greater than you or I." **And Aaron was silent.** He received a reward for this silence. And what was it? That a divine utterance came to him privately. For the prohibition of wine in vv. 9-11 was spoken to him alone. **Those near to Me.** Those whom I have chosen to serve Me. I ∴ **gain glory before all the people.** When the Holy One metes out justice to the righteous, He makes Himself awesome and

[F] In most of our texts this word reads *mekubbadat*, a different form of the word but with similar meaning. Most likely this was just a clearer way to indicate the suggested rereading of the biblical word.

**NAHMANIDES 3 This is what the LORD meant when He said.** Rashi's comment is taken from a midrash. If this interpretation is correct, then "it shall be sanctified by My Glory" (Exod. 29:43) means "It [the sanctuary] shall be holy in the eyes of all the people, and by the death of those through whom I am glorified they shall know that I am dwelling in it." Ibn Ezra too understands that Moses is indeed referring to a divine utterance to him, not recorded in the Torah, in which He explained this aspect of His ways to him. In my opinion the text can be explained straightforwardly without recourse to this assumption. OJPS translates more literally: "This is it that the LORD spoke." "Spoke" is different from "said"; Moses did not mean that God had said a specific thing, but that He had *decided*—spoken His decrees, decided His thoughts, resolved upon His ways. "Spoke" can mean all these things in Biblical Hebrew. When Ecclesiastes says, "I spoke to myself" (Eccles. 1:16), he means, "I had the following thought." Like the verb *dibber*, "speak," the related noun *davar* can also mean—in addition to "word"—a "thing," a "matter": "This is the reason why Joshua had the circumcision performed" (Josh. 5:4); "It must be because of the incident of the money replaced in our bags the first time that we have been brought inside, as a pretext to attack us" (Gen. 43:18). With the verb, as in our verse, we find "Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the LORD has spoken" (Gen. 24:51)—that is, "as the Lord has decreed." More to the point of our story, we find 1 Kings 16:34, "Hiel the Bethelite fortified Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of Abiram his first-born, and set its gates in place at the cost of Segub his youngest, in accordance with the words that the LORD had decreed

**RASHBAM 2 Fire came forth from the LORD and consumed them.** This is the event previously described in 9:24. The burning of the offering and of Aaron's sons took place as part of a single event in which "fire came forth from before the LORD." Just when Aaron's sons took this unwanted fire to the inner altar, fire came forth from before the Lord to burn the incense there. It struck Aaron's sons and they died. Then the fire came forth from the Tent to the outer altar, where it consumed the offering. See my comment to Exod. 19:8 for other examples of a single event being narrated in two different verses.

**3 Then Moses said to Aaron.** As soon as Aaron heard what had happened, he immediately wanted to drop the sacrificial service and mourn over his sons. But Moses told him, "Do not mourn, do not weep, and do not stop the service. For what I am telling you is **what the LORD meant when He said: 'Through those near to Me I show Myself holy'**—'through the High Priests, who come near to Me to serve Me, I wish to be sanctified. I do not want them to profane My name and My service.' For the Holy One told me, 'The priest who is exalted above his fellows, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been ordained to wear the vestments, shall not bare his head or rend his vestments. He shall not go in where there is any dead body; he shall not defile himself even for his father or mother. He shall not go outside the sanctuary and profane the sanctuary of his God' [21:10-12]." (Remember that the Torah is not

**IBN EZRA 2 They died at the instance of the LORD.** Literally, "before the Lord." They had thought they were doing something that would be acceptable before Him.

**3 This is what the LORD meant when He said.** More literally, "This is what the Lord spoke" (see OJPS). "He told me long ago that He would demonstrate His holiness through those closest to Him." The logic is

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 2 Fire came forth from the LORD and consumed them.** Measure for measure—they sinned with fire and were punished by fire (Hizkuni). The Exalted One inflicted this miraculous punishment upon them for treating such an important ritual so casually, preventing it from having its desired effect and, what is worse, influencing all who would follow after them to treat this ritual with equal disrespect (Gersonides).

**3 This is what the LORD meant when He said.** No one has yet explained this phrase correctly. I believe Moses was referring to Exod. 19:24, "let not the priests or the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them." This is the precise command violated by Nadab and Abihu (Abarbanel). **Through those near to Me.** Through those who try to draw near to Me intellectually and spiritually in such a way as to be able to convey to the rest of the people the ineffable quality of My reality. When the

**NJPS 16** The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of the LORD. <sup>2</sup>The LORD said to Moses:

Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine behind the

**RASHI 16:1** The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron. What is the purpose of this expression? R. Eleazar b. Azariah used to explain it by means of a parable: Imagine a sick person who is visited by a physician. The physician tells him, "Don't eat cold food and don't sleep where it is damp." Another physician arrives and tells him, "Don't eat cold food and don't sleep where it is damp, or you will die as So-and-So did." He is more likely to follow the advice given this way than the way the first physician put it. In just such a fashion, Aaron is told "not to come at will into the Shrine" (v. 2) lest he die as did his sons.

**2 Lest he die.** If he does come in at will, he will die. **For I appear in the cloud.** I am *always* apparent there, in My pillar of

**NAHMANIDES 16:1** After the death of the two sons of Aaron. Immediately after their death, Aaron is warned against drinking "wine or other intoxicant" (10:9), and Moses is further told to warn him to be careful when he approaches the Lord, "lest he die" (v. 2). Presumably both these commandments were given on the day after their deaths. For on that day itself Aaron was in the most severe stage of mourning, and the Holy Spirit does not manifest itself in a situation of sadness. On the next day, the commandment about wine was given to Aaron, and this commandment was given to Moses. The text, however, first puts the Israelites as a whole "on guard against their uncleanness, lest they die through their uncleanness by defiling My Tabernacle which is among them" (15:31), and only then gives this commandment, which pertains to Aaron alone.

In my opinion, everything in the Torah occurred in the order in which it is written. All the places where something that had previously occurred is not recounted until later—25:1, Num. 7:1, and so forth—are explicitly identified as such. Here too, "after the death" means immediately after. But our Sages understand these words to have been part of what the Lord said to Moses, as if to say: "Now that the two sons of Aaron have died by drawing too close to the Presence of the Lord, tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine."

Ibn Ezra thinks this passage demonstrates that Aaron's sons brought incense inside the curtain of the Shrine, but in my opinion it is not so. First, both other places that mention this transgression [A] tell us explicitly that the reason Nadab and Abihu died was because they offered "alien fire" before the Lord. Second, if what Aaron is warned here not to do is supposed to demonstrate what his sons *did* do, the same argument would demonstrate even more strongly that what they did was to enter the Shrine while drunk, which is what Aaron is warned immediately after their deaths not to do. Third, how could they have imagined—on this day of all days—that they should bring their own incense into the Shrine even before their father did so? **When they drew too close.** I have already alluded to their real sin, which the precise wording of the text teaches us. [B] The straightforward sense, however, is that given by the translations; compare "when they approach the altar to serve" (Exod. 30:20). (That verse uses a different Hebrew verb, but you will find our verb in, e.g., Exod. 40:32.) [C] The point is that they died while serving the Lord. Now Aaron will be told that he must only serve the Lord *when* and *where* he is commanded to do so. It may also be that (as the Sages point out in the Mekilta) the Israelites considered the incense nothing but a means of punishment, for it had killed Nadab and Abihu. The point of our text would then be to assure Aaron that he *should* draw close to the Lord, even closer than had his sons, and *with* incense. In fact, v. 13 emphasizes that if he enters *without* incense he will die.

**2 Your brother.** You must warn him about this as a brother. For even though the commandment not to come at will into the Shrine

[A] Num. 3:4 and Num. 26:61. [B] See Nahmanides' comment to 10:1. [C] Our texts of Nahmanides have a quotation that combines Exod. 30:20 and Exod. 40:32.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 16:1** The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron. The text does not tell us what the Lord said when He spoke to Moses. It may be what He "said" in v. 2, or perhaps what He "spoke" (in 10:8–11) immediately after the death of Aaron's sons. What intervenes between these two speeches are the details about uncleanness, which the service of the Day of Atonement, given in our chapter, will cleanse (Gersonides). The parable of R. Eleazar b. Azariah does not really sit well with the text, since the first verse does not include a command of any kind. Rather, God spoke to Moses to indicate that it was still the divine will that Moses, unlike his brother, *should* "come at will into the Shrine behind the curtain" (v. 2) to receive prophecy (Abarbanel). One ordinarily expects to see "The Lord spoke to Moses and said," for "spoke" is the general term and "said" gives the information about what was spoken. Here, because the intervening explanatory phrase is so long, the subject is repeated: "The LORD spoke" and, in v. 2, "The LORD said" (Sforno).

**2 Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine.** Though this passage discusses the Day of Atonement, it was told to Moses on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nisan, the day the Tabernacle was set up (Hizkuni). Do not feel embarrassed and refrain from telling him

**OJPS 16** And the LORD spoke unto Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD, and died; <sup>2</sup>and the LORD said unto Moses:

"Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place

טז וידבר יהוה אל־מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְדַבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ וְאֵל־יְבָא בְכָל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבֵּית לַפָּרֹכֶת אֶל־פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת

**ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS** ♦ Why does the text say "The LORD spoke to Moses" (v. 1)—without saying what He spoke—and then repeat "The LORD said to Moses" (v. 2)? ♦ Why the redundancy of "after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died"? ♦ What do the instructions in this chapter have to do with the death of Aaron's sons? ♦ Elsewhere Moses is simply told "speak to Aaron"; why here (see OJPS) is it "speak to Aaron *your brother*"? ♦ Why is Aaron, the Lord's chosen one, warned "not to come at will" into the Shrine?

**RASHBAM 16:1** After the death of the two sons of Aaron. Aaron is warned so that he should not die, as did his sons, for entering the sanctuary without authorization.

**2 For I appear in the cloud over the cover.** The straightforward sense of the

**IBN EZRA 16:1** The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron. Having warned the Israelites not to defile the Tabernacle while unclean lest they die, the Lord now told Moses to caution Aaron as well, lest he die as had his sons. In fact, this section is our indication that Aaron's sons brought incense inside the curtain of the Shrine. **When they drew too close.** The phrase "drew too close" is grammatically in the infinitive construct form. It is not a noun, as Jeshua b. Judah mistakenly thought.

**2 Into the Shrine.** Literally, "the holy place" (OJPS). It refers to the Holy of Holies,

**NJPS** **3** This is the line of Aaron and Moses at the time that the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. <sup>2</sup>These were the names of Aaron's sons: Nadab, the first-born, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar; <sup>3</sup>those were the names of Aaron's sons, the anointed priests who were ordained for priesthood. <sup>4</sup>But Nadab and Abihu died by the will of the LORD, when they offered alien fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they left no sons. So it was Eleazar and Ithamar who served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

**RASHI** 3:1 This is the line of Aaron and Moses. It lists only the sons of Aaron, but calls them "the line" of Moses—because he taught them Torah. This teaches that the text considers teaching your friend's son Torah to be the equivalent of fathering him. At the time that the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. They became his "line" at that time because he taught them what he had learned from the mouth of the Almighty.

**4 In the lifetime of their father Aaron.** OJPS translates more literally, but NJPS has the sense.

**NAHMANIDES** 3:1 This is the line of Aaron and Moses ... at the time that the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. See Rashi's comments. But the verse is, indeed, literally saying that this was the line of Moses and Aaron on "the day" (OJPS) that the Lord spoke with Moses on Sinai, for it goes on to explain that Nadab and Abihu had died, so that now Moses and Aaron had no line but Eleazar and Ithamar. But on the day the Lord spoke with Moses at Sinai, all four of Aaron's sons had been chosen for anointment, and to have that anointment "serve them for everlasting priesthood" (Exod. 40:15). The rest of the tribe, though, was not chosen for its sacred role until now. The "line" of Moses and Aaron comes up at this point because the "lines" of the clans of each ancestral house of the other tribes were outlined in ch. 1; the text now wanted to do the same for the line of the tribe of Levi, beginning with the heads of that tribe. (NJPS translates the word as "registration" where it is used in ch. 1 [vv. 20, 22, and so forth], but the same Hebrew word is used there as here, as you can see from OJPS "generations" in both places.) The straightforward sense of the verse is simply to say that Aaron's sons were "anointed priests" (v. 3), distinguished from the rest of the tribe by being at the highest level of holiness. The line of Moses was "the clan of the Amramites" (v. 27), for with the sons of Aaron separated as priests, only Moses' sons remained as "Amramites": "The sons of Amram: Aaron and Moses. Aaron was set apart, he and his sons, forever, to be consecrated as most holy ... As for Moses, the man of God, his sons were named after the tribe of Levi" (1 Chron. 23:13–14). The midrash was based on the fact that the text does not say, "These were the names of Moses' sons," as it does of Aaron's in v. 2. This is indeed meant to allude to Aaron's sons being considered part of Moses' line because he taught them Torah. For the Torah says some things explicitly and others by allusion.

**4 In the lifetime of their father Aaron.** NJPS follows Rashi's explanation of the

been on Mount Sinai, except for the lack of two of Aaron's sons. [F] This is why I said in my comment to Exod. 38:25 that the Levites paid no ransom for themselves. The ransom was paid only for those who were "entered in the records" (Exod. 30:13) of the military ranks. Some say that Moses did not count any of the Israelites before the Tabernacle was made but nonetheless knew prophetically how many of them there were. But Exod. 30:12–14, where Moses is told *before* the construction of the Tabernacle to take a census, categorically refutes them.

**3 The anointed priests.** They were anointed with the anointing oil, for they were High Priests. [G]

**4 In the lifetime of their father Aaron.** Literally "to his face" (compare OJPS). I have already explained in my comment to

[F] See v. 4. [G] They did not inherit their status by descent, as later priests would do, but were directly anointed, as High Priests are.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** 3:1 This is the line of Aaron and Moses. That is, of the priests and the Levites (Bekhor Shor). Moses' sons are simply counted with the rest of the Levites; unlike Aaron's sons, they were nothing special. Or it could simply be that neither of them was yet 20 years old (Abarbanel).

**4 They left no sons.** If they had, their sons would have inherited their fathers' status (Sforno).

**OJPS** **3** Now these are the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day that the LORD spoke with Moses in mount Sinai. <sup>2</sup>And these are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the first-born, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. <sup>3</sup>These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests that were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office. <sup>4</sup>And Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD, when they offered strange fire before the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children; and Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest's office in the presence of Aaron their father.

רביעי  
 וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי אַהֲרֹן וּמֹשֶׁה בְּיוֹם דִּבְרַת  
 יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי: <sup>2</sup>וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת  
 בְּנֵי־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן: נָדָב וְאַבְיָהוּא אֲלֶעָזָר  
 וְאִיתָמָר: <sup>3</sup>אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן  
 הַכֹּהֲנִים הַמְשֻׁחִים אֲשֶׁר־מִלֵּא יָדָם לְכַהֵן:  
<sup>4</sup>וַיָּמָת נָדָב וְאַבְיָהוּא לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּהֶקְרָבָם  
 אֲשֶׁר נָזָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי וּבָנָיִם  
 לֹא־הָיוּ לָהֶם וַיִּכְהֵן אֲלֶעָזָר וְאִיתָמָר  
 עַל־פְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן אֲבִיהֶם: פ

**ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS** + Why does "the line of Aaron and Moses" (v. 1) intervene between the counts of the other tribes and those of the Levites? + Doesn't their lineage belong in the section describing the rest of the Levites' lineage, later in the chapter? + What does their lineage have to do with "the day" (OJPS) that the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai? + "Aaron's sons" (v. 2) are listed here—where are Moses' sons? + Why must v. 3 repeat, "those were the names of Aaron's sons"? + What does the death of Nadab and Abihu (v. 4) have to do with the counting of the Levites?

**RASHBAM** 3:1 This is the line of Aaron and Moses. The text first lists the line of Israel in general, then that of the priests, next that of the Levites, and now that of Aaron. Moses and his sons are included as "the Amramites" in v. 27. For Amram had but two sons, Moses and Aaron; "Aaron was set apart, he and his sons, forever, to be consecrated as most holy ... As for Moses, the man of God, his sons were named after the tribe of Levi" (1 Chron. 23:13–14). At the time that the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. Which was before the Tabernacle was set up, when Aaron still had four sons. But in the second year, after the Tabernacle had been set up "in the wilderness of Sinai," only Eleazar and Ithamar remained, as I explained in my comment to 1:1. "On Mount Sinai" (v. 1) always indicates a time before the Tabernacle was set up. Once the Tent of Meeting was built, it only says "in the wilderness of Sinai."

**IBN EZRA** 3:1 This is the line of Aaron and Moses. This section demonstrates that their sons fathered no children during the almost 10 months since the Lord had spoken to Moses on Mount Sinai, when he went up to seek expiation for the Golden Calf incident, at which time the tribe of Levi had been chosen: "Advance the tribe of Levi" (v. 6); "I hereby take the Levites" (v. 12). Later, when the Tabernacle was set up, "the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying: Record the Levites by ancestral house" (vv. 14–15). Since the Shekhinah was already in the Tabernacle at this point, this utterance is reported as being given "in the wilderness of Sinai." We see, therefore, that "the line of Aaron and Moses" was the same at that point, "in the wilderness of Sinai," as it had



**NJPS** The clan of the Libnites, the clan of the Hebronites, the clan of the Mahlites, the clan of the Mushites, the clan of the Korahites.—Kohath begot Amram. <sup>59</sup>The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; she bore to Amram Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam. <sup>60</sup>To Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. <sup>61</sup>Nadab and Abihu died when they offered alien fire before the LORD.—<sup>62</sup>Their enrollment of 23,000 comprised all males from a month up. They were not part of the regular enrollment of the Israelites, since no share was assigned to them among the Israelites.

**RASHI** 59 Who was born to Levi in Egypt. She was born in Egypt, but she was not conceived there. She was born just after they passed the gates, making up the final total of 70. For if you count the names listed in Genesis 46, you find only 69.

62 They were not part of the regular enrollment of the Israelites. To be counted from the age of 20 up. And why not? Because no share was assigned to them among the Israelites. Only those counted from 20 up were to get a share in the land: "Each is to be assigned its share according to its enrollment" (v. 54).

**NAHMANIDES** case should the text have listed the three Levite clans in v. 57 and then go on and call the clans in our verse, named after Levi's grandsons, "the clans of Levi"? In fact, these are "the clans of Levi," but his three sons were so important that all the clans that were descended from them (and named after their sons) were grouped into larger clans named after them directly, in their honor. (See also 3:17, where they are specially mentioned.) Only afterward are the clans listed as with every other tribe. **The clan of the Korahites.** Originally (see 3:27) this was called "the clan of the Izharites" after Korah's father, for Korah's brothers Nepheg and Zichri also had sons when that count was made. But by now only the sons of Korah were left, so the clan was named after him. In my opinion, though, the name "Izharite" should not have been omitted just because the lines of two of his sons had died out. But since our chapter goes out of its way to say that "the sons of Korah ... did not die" (v. 11), the clan was actually named after their father (since they alone remained to Izhar)—but in their honor. For Korah's sons were better and more righteous than he. What Rashi says (in his comment to v. 36, quoting Moses ha-Darshan) about there being eight Levite families is not right; there were only five, as we have said. The three groupings named after Levi's sons were strictly honorary.

59 **The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed daughter of Levi.** Amram and Jochebed are named here because Levi's descendants account for two groups, the priests and the Levites; Aaron and his sons certainly deserve their own category and not to be lumped in with the other Levites. Notice that v. 58 does not list them together as "the Amramites." But Aaron is not specifically called a priest here out of respect for Moses. **Who was born to Levi in Egypt.** The straightforward explanation for why this is mentioned is that all of Jacob's sons came down to Egypt with their sons and daughters; none had any more children once they arrived in Egypt but for Levi, to whom was born Jochebed. The Lord delayed her birth, for (as I have explained in my comment to Gen. 46:15) the moment for the Israelites' redemption from Egypt had not yet come.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** 62 23,000. Even being counted from the age of one month up, they gained only 1,000, while the other Israelites, of whom everyone over 20 in the first census had died, nonetheless had almost the same population as in the first census. This proves that their proximity to the Ark took a toll on them (Hizkuni). The fact that the Levites (who were not the targets of God's decree) increased in number so little shows us that most of the others did not die before their time. The decree was not that they should die, but that their deaths would still find them in the wilderness; see v. 65 (Gersonides). The Levites were certainly targeted by the decree just like everyone else; that is why they too are counted here. The text would have told us if an exception was being made for the Levites (as it did in Exod. 32:26). Here (see v. 65) only Caleb and Joshua were exempted. With regard to their slight population gain, the Holy One realized that if the Levites increased beyond the rate of increase of the other Israelites, the tithes would not be sufficient to feed them (Abarbanel)

**OJPS** of the Libnites, the family of the Hebronites, the family of the Mahlites, the family of the Mushites, the family of the Korahites. And Kohath begot Amram. <sup>59</sup>And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and she bore unto Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister. <sup>60</sup>And unto Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. <sup>61</sup>And Nadab and Abihu died, when they offered strange fire before the LORD. <sup>62</sup>And they that were numbered of them were twenty and three thousand, every male from a month old and upward; for they were not numbered among the children of Israel, because there was no inheritance given them among the children of Israel.

הַחֲבֵרֹנִי מִשְׁפַּחַת הַמַּהֲלִי מִשְׁפַּחַת  
הַמּוֹשִׁי מִשְׁפַּחַת הַקֹּרְחִי וְקַחַת הוֹלֵד  
אֶת-עַמְרָם: 59 וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ עִמְרָם יוֹכֶבֶד  
בֵּת-לֵוִי אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה אֵתָהּ לְלֵוִי בְּמִצְרַיִם  
וַתֵּלֶד לְעַמְרָם אֶת-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת  
מִרְיָם אֲחֹתָם: 60 וַיּוֹלֵד לְאַהֲרֹן אֶת-נָדָב  
וְאֶת-אֲבִיהוּא אֶת-אֱלֶעָזָר וְאֶת-אִיתָמָר:  
61 וַיָּמָת נָדָב וְאֲבִיהוּא בְּהַקְרִיבָם אֲשֶׁר-נָדָה  
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: 62 וַיְהִי פְקֻדֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה  
וְעֶשְׂרִים אָלֶף כֹּל-זָכָר מִבֶּן-חֹדֶשׁ וּמַעֲלָה  
כִּי לֹא הִתְפַּקְדוּ בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי  
לֹא-נָתַן לָהֶם נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

**ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS** + How is it that the Levites' enrollment of 23,000 (v. 62) is only 1,000 greater than in the original census 40 years earlier, when none of them died in the plagues and such that killed off thousands of the other Israelites? + For that matter, since the Levites are not among those to whom the land was to be apportioned, why are they counted here at all?

**IBN EZRA** 58 **The clan of the Libnites.** But "the clan of the Shimeites" (3:21) is not mentioned. Perhaps Shimei had no sons, or his sons died without leaving sons themselves. **The clan of the Hebronites.** He was the son of Kohath; but Kohath's son Uzziel is not mentioned. **The clan of the Mahlites, the clan of the Mushites.** These were the sons of Merari. **The clan of the Korahites.** Here the text returns to the sons of Izhar, who was another son of Kohath. **Amram.** Postponing the mention of all the sons of Kohath permits the text to end with Amram so that it can continue with the story of what happened to Amram's descendants.

59 **The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt.** Literally, "whom 'she' [unidentified] bore to Levi." Jochebed's name is mentioned out of respect for her sons. But her own mother's name is not mentioned because the text is terse. Compare "The sons of Manasseh: Asriel, whom his Aramean concubine bore; she bore Machir the father of Gilead" (1 Chron. 7:14), where the concubine's name is not mentioned.

62 **Their enrollment.** "They" being the Levites. 23,000. This is an increase of 700 over the Sinai total of 22,300. [C] The surprise is that the increase was so small. The Israelites, of whom everyone in the Sinai census over 20 had by now died, nonetheless had almost exactly the same number of people now as then. (Remember that the Levites were counted separately from the rest of the Israelites, as we know from v. 63.) [D]

[C] See Ibn Ezra's comment to 3:39. [D] Eleazar was already old enough to be a priest at the time of the first census, and is still alive for the second one.