

מקראות גדולות

The

COMMENTATORS'
BIBLE

THE JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

NUMBERS במדבר

*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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NJPS On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt, the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, saying:

²Take a census of the whole Israelite

OJPS And the LORD spoke unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying:

²"Take ye the sum of all the congregation

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי בְּאֶהֱל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בִשְׁנַת הַשְּׁנִי לְצֵאתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר: שְׂאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ כָּל־עֵדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל

RASHI 1 On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus. Because of God's love for them, He is continually counting them. He counted them at the time of the Exodus; again after so many died at the time of the Golden Calf incident He counted them to find out how many were left; and now when He was going to rest His Shekhinah upon them He counted them again. "In the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the Tabernacle was set up" (Exod. 40:17)—the 1st of Nisan—and now, on the 1st of Iyar, He counted them.

NAHMANIDES Having explained the instructions for the sacrifices in the third book of the Torah, this book begins by setting forth the things commanded with regard to the Tent of Meeting. The permanent instructions concerning uncleanness have previously been issued; now boundaries are set around the Tabernacle as it travels the wilderness, just as they were set around Mount Sinai while the Presence was there. The warning that "any outsider who encroaches shall be put to death" (v. 51) matches that in Exod. 19:12, "Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death." "Let not the Kohathites go inside and witness the dismantling of the sanctuary, lest they die" (4:20, and see my comment there) parallels "Warn the people not to break through to the LORD to gaze, lest many of them perish" (Exod. 19:21). Similarly 18:4-5 matches Exod. 19:22 and 24. Our text further commands how the Tabernacle and its furnishings are to be protected and how the Israelites are to be encamped around it at a safe distance, while the priests who do approach the Lord are similarly instructed how to behave, both while the Tabernacle is encamped and while it is being transported, and how to discharge their duties. All of this is a mark of high respect for the Tabernacle. As the Sages said, "There is no comparison between a palace with a guard and a palace without a guard."

Now this book is made up entirely of commandments that were relevant specifically to the Israelites' situation while they were traveling through the wilderness and of the miracles that were performed for them there, to recount all the marvelous deeds of the Lord who dealt so wondrously with them. It tells further how He began to put their enemies in their power, and commands how the land is to be apportioned among them. There are no commandments in this book that apply outside the wilderness situation except for a few of the commandments about sacrifices that were begun in Leviticus but not fully explained there; these are completed in Numbers.

1 In the wilderness of Sinai. The Israelites did not leave the vicinity of Mount Sinai until after the census. (The second census, in ch. 26, took place on the steppes of Moab.) But the actual utterance did not take place "in the wilderness" but in the Tent. **In the Tent of Meeting.** Having interrupted the chronological flow of the text with the commandments regarding the sabbatical year and the jubilee, which were spoken on Mount Sinai, the text now indicates that it is returning to an utterance spoken in the Tent of Meeting, like those in the first 24 chapters of Leviticus. From here on, all of the divine utterances are those that occurred in the Tent of Meeting. For from the moment when the Tabernacle was erected and "the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting" (Lev. 1:1), He spoke with him nowhere but there.

2 Take a census. When Rashi explains the idiom of taking a census by "lifting up the head" as the equivalent of "lifting off the

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 1 **On the first day of the second month.** Exactly one month after the Tabernacle was set up, when everything had been arranged and all the necessary instructions given (Bekhor Shor). **In the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt.** Years "following the exodus" were counted from Nisan, but for all other purposes the year was understood to begin in Tishrei (Hizkuni). Thus for the better part of a year they remained in the wilderness of Sinai, just where they were camped when they received the Torah (Abarbanel). **In the wilderness of Sinai.** The Shekhinah did not depart from the day the Ten Commandments were given until the day the Tabernacle was set up (Hizkuni). **In the Tent of Meeting.** Some or all of the commandments spoken to the people from the Tent of Meeting must have been given to Moses when he was on Mount Sinai. The text does not present them in the order in which they were spoken to Moses, but in the order it was necessary to use to teach them to the people (Abarbanel).

2 Take a census. This census—the same as that of Exod. 38:26—was the first time they were counted; "about six hundred thousand

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why are we told that this section was spoken "on the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt" (v. 1)? Lev. 1:1 is not dated! ♦ If this section was spoken at Sinai, like the other commandments, why are we told that it was spoken "in the Tent of Meeting"? But if it was spoken in the tent, why must we be told that it was spoken "in the wilderness of Sinai"? (Which is obvious.) ♦ More basically, why weren't all the commandments given at Sinai written in the Torah before those given in the Tent of Meeting? ♦ Doesn't "take a census of the whole Israelite community" (v. 2) contradict the warning in Exod. 30:12, "When you take a census of the Israelite people according to their enrollment, each shall pay the LORD a ransom for himself" to prevent a plague breaking out? As Rashi explains, the whole point of that commandment is to count the ransom coins, not the people themselves.

RASHBAM 1 On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus ... in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting. All of the divine utterances that were spoken during the first year, before the Tabernacle was set up, are labeled as having been spoken "on Mount Sinai." But once the Tabernacle was set up, on the 1st of Nisan of the second year, we find not "on Mount Sinai" but "in the wilderness of Sinai in the Tent of Meeting." This is quite clear from the fact that "the line of Aaron ... at the time that the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai" (3:1)—before the Tabernacle was set up—lists Aaron as having four sons, "Nadab, the first-born, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar" (3:2). But in the second year, after the Tabernacle had been set up, he had only two. For "Nadab and Abihu died by the will of the LORD ... in the wilderness of Sinai" (3:4). Nadab and Abihu died on the very day that the Tabernacle was set up.

2 Take a census of the whole Israelite community. For now they would have to

IBN EZRA 1 On the first day of the second month ... the LORD spoke to Moses. To arrange the divisions—how they would travel and how they would camp relative to the Tabernacle. For they would set out on the 20th of the month. **In the wilderness of Sinai.** This informs us that Moses did not go back up on the mountain once the Presence was in the Tent of Meeting.

2 Take a census. Literally, "raise the

NJPS 3 This is the line of Aaron and Moses at the time that the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. ²These were the names of Aaron's sons: Nadab, the first-born, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar; ³those were the names of Aaron's sons, the anointed priests who were ordained for priesthood. ⁴But 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.

OJPS 3 Now these are the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day that the LORD spoke with Moses in mount Sinai. ²And these are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the first-born, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ³These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests that were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office. ⁴And 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
 ג וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי אַהֲרֹן וּמֹשֶׁה בְּיוֹם דִּבְרֵי
 יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי: ² וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת
 בְּנֵי־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן: ¹ נָדָב וְאַבְיָהוּא אֱלֶעָזֶר
 וְאִיתָמָר: ³ אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן
 הַכֹּהֲנִים הַמְשֻׁחִים אֲשֶׁר־מִלֵּא יָדָם לְכַהֵן:
⁴ וַיָּמָת נָדָב וְאַבְיָהוּא לְפָנֵי יְהוָה בְּהִקְרָבָם
 אֲשֶׁר זָוְהָ לְפָנָי יְהוָה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי וּבָנִים
 לֹא־הָיוּ לָהֶם וַיְכַהֵן אֱלֶעָזֶר וְאִיתָמָר
 עַל־פְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן אֲבִיהֶם: פ

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.

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?

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

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

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).