

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Pinchas5784

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Hashem, again, wants to count Bnei Yisroel.

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַמַּגֵּפָה {פ} וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן לֵאמֹר:

“And it was after The Plague. And Hashem said to Moshe and to Elazar, son of Aharon, the [high] kohen, saying:” (Bamidbar 26:1).

Why is there a break in this pasuk? What “plague” is this referring to? Hashem then spoke about the census. When did this take place and why is it connected to the plague? Also, why is Elazar again referred to Aharon’s son?

The term “plague” refers to a sudden taking of lives, but it also makes those who survive it take stock of their spiritual inventory. The “plagues” in Mitzrayim were actually “makos” strikes. The mako of barad / hail, though, was referred to as a plague. This was the first mako in Mitzrayim that certain Egyptians actually started to fear Hashem. They listened to Moshe’s call and took their slaves and animals inside for the duration of mako – believing it would happen and its severity.

Hashem cast several plagues upon Bnei Yisroel in the midbar to punish them, but also to strengthen their faith and correct their wayward direction. There was death after the Molten Calf rebellion (Shmos 32:35) and more by way of deadly serpents’ bite when they grumbled about the manna (Bamidbar 21:6). Then there was the fire (ibid 11:1 and 16:35), the death of the scouts and their followers (ibid 14:37), and the ground opening up (16:32) all in retaliation for the scouts’ evil report and the Korach rebellion.

Yet, the Torah refers to this incident, the one initiated by Bilaam and the Moavim regarding the Baal Peor, as a plague five times. Moshe even reminded them of the plague when the soldiers who went on the military campaign against Midian spared the women. (Ibid 31:16). The Torah is teaching that they did not learn their lesson. The plague was devastating, twenty-four thousand were killed. The lesson was supposed to be faith in Hashem’s power and to listen to Hashem’s battle strategy. The plague was caused by Bnei Yisroel being seduced by a foreign nation and foreign idol. If they would have gone to war listening strictly to the Word of Hashem, then that would be the success. Instead, the plague did not fully correct their behavior. Moshe had to scold them for it. Was this the plague?

There are similarities between this census and the one taken thirty-eight years prior. שָׂאוּ אֶת-רֹאשׁ כָּל-עַדְתְּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אָבוֹתָם. “Raise up every head of the entire congregation of Bnei Yisroel, for their families and the father’s households.” (Ibid 1:2). This census was taken by “lifting up” their heads. The census was to give the nation calm and resolve. The purpose of the census was to count the males, twenty and older, who were would make up their armies. Knowing that they were 603,000 strong would give

confidence to the people. It would help lift them up. The new census also says, "Raise up." (Ibid 26:2).

Knowing their numbers should have been a good thing to secure their confidence in victory. Even though this census was to raise up their confidence, Bnei Yisroel soon sinned after this. The scouts returned with their evil report that tore away all confidence. 603,000 people would not be enough when facing giants and Amalekies. A plague and a promise followed. אָנִי הַ דְּבַרְתִּי אִם-לֹא | זֹאת אֲעֲשֶׂה לְכָל-הָעֵדָה הַרְעֵה הַזֹּאת הַנוֹעְדִים עָלַי בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה יָתֵמוּ וְשָׂם: יְיָ: "I, Hashem, have spoken thus: 'See if I will not do this to the entire evil congregation that have sought to know me (rebel against me), in this wilderness they shall all surely die.'" (Ibid 14:35). This promise was fulfilled. After forty years of wandering, the entire generation died out, except for Yehoshua and Calev. (Ibid 26:65). This leads to the major difference in the censuses.

The first census that was meant to inspire ended in a plague. The second census, taken four decades later, was meant to inspire after a plague. The plagues connect to each other in that way. A plague ended the hopes of entering Eretz Canaan immediately, and a plague was the final correction for the nation – their final lesson – before they would enter Eretz Canaan.

The shevatim are named in the same order, except for the sons of Yosef. Here, Menashe is counted first, because Menashe has more people (52,700 to 32,500) and also, Menashe gained more people since the first census while Ephraim had less people in the second census. Some shevatim had less numbers since the first census (Reuven, Shimon, Gad, Ephraim, and Naftali) and some had more (Yehuda, Yissaschar, Zevulun, Menashe, Benyamin, Dan, and Asher). The nation total was less. (603,550 to only 601,730). Every single one of these soldiers (save for Yehoshua and Calev) were not part of the original census. Which plague does our pasuk refer to, though?

"It was after The Plague." It may not have been directly after the plague of Baal Peor; it could have been some weeks after. However, it was after the lesson, after the correction, then the census could be taken. Their numbers would not be seen as a weakness. The first census was seen as irrelevant because the people found a way to make Eretz Yisroel seem impenetrable despite their numbers and Hashem's powers. Now, after solidifying their faith, the numbers make Bnei Yisroel seem invulnerable. With this, they were ready to change leaders and enter Eretz Yisroel.

"The Plague." This census was not only after the plague with Baal Peor, but the Torah connects it after the plague at the time of Korach and the scouts. "Because Hashem said to them [at that time], 'You shall surely die in the wilderness, and not a man will remain from that generation, except for Calev son of Yefuneh and Yehoshua Bin Nun.'" (Ibid 26:65). The Torah is suggesting this census is after that plague. Read the pasuk like this: "After The Plague," in which the entire generation had to die out over the next four decades, "Hashem said... take a census." The plague, then, is referring to the forty-year wandering and the death of that entire generation. That is why there is a break. It hints at the forty-year time lapse. The mention of Aharon is that Aharon was there by the first census, and Elazar is undertaking the second, creating a connection. The second census remedied the first. Faith and confidence were restored.