Parsha Questions

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
4. What is the difference between an os and a degel?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed ‘techum Shabbos’ — the prohibition against traveling more than 2000 amos on Shabbos?
6. What was the signal for the camp to travel?
7. What was the sum total of the counting of the 12 tribes?
8. Why are Aharon’s sons called “sons of Aharon and Moshe?”
9. Who was Nadav’s oldest son?
10. Which two people from Megillas Esther does Rashi mention in this week’s Parsha?
11. Why did the Levi’im receive ma’aser rishon?
12. Which groups of people were counted from the age of one month?
13. Name the first descendant of Levi in history to be counted as an infant.
14. Who assisted Moshe in counting the Levi’im?
15. Why did so many people from the tribe of Reuven support Korach in his campaign against Moshe?
16. Why did so many people from the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar, and Zevulun become great Torah scholars?
17. In verse 3:39 the Torah states that the total number of Levi’im was 22,000. The actual number of Levi’im was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 Levi’im?
18. The firstborn males of the Jewish People were redeemed for five shekalim. Why five shekalim?
19. During what age-span is a man considered at his full strength?
20. As the camp was readying itself for travel, who was in charge of covering the vessels of the Mishkan in preparation for transport?

I Did Not Know That!

When Yaakov blessed his sons at the end of his life, he hinted that the tribes of Reuven, Yehuda, Yosef and Dan would lead the four flag-camps. Anyone whom Yaakov addressed in the second person — “you” — became the head of a flag-camp. Reuven: “You are my firstborn”; Yehuda: “You, will your brothers acknowledge”; Yosef: “From the G-d of your father”; Dan: “For your salvation I long.”

Recommended Reading List

Ramban
Introduction to Bamidbar
1:3 The Draft Age
1:45 The Reason for Counting
2:2 The Organization of the Camp
3:14 The Levi’im
4:16 The Role of Elazar ben Aharon
Ibn Ezra
1:19 Organization of the Camp
Sforno
Introduction to Bamidbar
Answers to this Week’s Questions

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary, unless otherwise stated

1. 1:1 - They are very dear to Hashem.
2. 1:18 - They brought birth records proving their tribal lineage.
3. 2:2 - Each tribe’s flag was the color of that tribe’s stone in the breastplate of the kohen gadol.
4. 2:2 - An os is a flag, i.e., a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A degel is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - Hashem commanded them to camp no more than 2000 amos from the Ohel Mo’ed. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the Ohel Mo’ed on Shabbos.
6. 2:9 - The cloud over the Ohel Mo’ed departed and the kohanim sounded the trumpets.
8. 3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, it’s as if he gave birth to them.
9. 3:4 - Nadav had no children.
10. 3:7 - Bigsan and Seresh.
11. 3:8 - Since the levi’im served in the Mishkan in place of everyone else, they received tithes as “payment.”
12. 3:15, 40 - The levi’im, and the firstborn of B’nei Yisrael.
13. 3:15 - Levi’s daughter Yocheved was born while the Jewish People were entering Egypt. She is counted as one of the 70 people who entered Egypt.
14. 3:16 - Hashem
15. 3:29 - The tribe of Reuven was encamped near Korach, and were therefore influenced for the worse. This teaches that one should avoid living near the wicked.
16. 3:38 - The tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar, and Zevulun were encamped near Moshe, and were therefore influenced for the good. This teaches that one should seek to live near the righteous.
17. 3:39 - Each levi served to redeem a first born of the Jewish People. Since 300 levi’im were themselves first born, they themselves needed to be redeemed, and could therefore not redeem others.
18. 3:46 - To atone for the sale of Yosef, Rachel’s firstborn, who was sold by his brothers for five shekalim (20 pieces of silver.)
19. 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50.
20. 4:5 - The kohanim.