

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Bamidbar 5786

D. Mordechai Schlachter

The prince of each tribe is designated.

וּמֹשֶׁה גָּד וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי גָד אֱלִיָּאֵף בֶּן־רְעוּאֵל:

“And the tribe of Gad, and the leader for the children of Gad, Eliyasaf son of Reuel.” (Bamidbar 2:14).

The Torah has no coincidences, and this includes names. When the Torah first provides the names of the tribal leaders to aid with the census, it calls this person Eliyasaf son of Deuel. (Bamidbar 1:14). Is that the same person?

The Torah repeats the names of these princes. When the princes are named as they offered their inauguration gift to the Mishkan, it says, Eliyasaf of Gad is son of Deuel. (Ibid 7:42). The Torah also calls him son of Deuel when it names him as tribal troop leader. (Ibid 10:20). This name change of Deuel to Reuel for this one time cannot be a mere typo.

Out of 304,805 letters in the Torah, every single sefer Torah around the world is exact letter for letter. The only exception is the Yemeni sifrei Torah copied from the Aleppo Codex which have nine vowelized variants (alefs and vavs) but no translation variants. The name Reuel and Deuel is not one of the textual variants. The name change is accurate and specific.

The name Reuel is found other places in the Torah. Reuel is a son of Eisav. (Bereishis 36:4). He was born to the wife Eisav took from Yishmael. (Ibid 36:3). Reuel is also the name of Yisro. (Shmos 2:18). The third instance is as father of this Eliyasaf. Deuel is only associated with this Eliyasaf. Since the Torah calls him son of Deuel four times and only one time son of Reuel--and that is in the middle chronologically—it does not make sense to think that the leader for the census, armed forces, and giver of the inauguration korban was son of Deuel but the leader of the tribal formation was a different person named Eliyasaf son of Reuel. What is the lesson of the name change?

Deuel means knowledge of the Lord. Reuel means friend of the Lord. The name Gad means fortune. Gad is the eldest son of Zilpah, the maidservant and co-wife of Leah. Leah had four children—Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and Yehuda. Then Rochel gave Bilah, her maidservant, to Yaakov to build her up. (Bereishis 30:3). Bilah bore two children, Dan and Naftali. “When Leah saw that because she was stood up from having more children, and she then took Zilpah her maidservant, and she gave her to Yaakov for a wife.” (Ibid 30:9). When Zilpah had a son, Leah called him Gad, “Because fortune has come.” (Ibid 30:11). Leah already had four children. At this point, there was no competing for wife status with Yaakov. She already gave Yaakov him his first four children. At that point, too, Rochel did not even have any children of her own. She was only built up through a maidservant. It was humiliating for Rochel to go on this way. Despite this, Leah felt the urge to match Rochel. She even called this son a sign of being fortunate.

This, perhaps, was a detriment to Leah. There was no good reason for her to compete with Rochel or to find it fortunate that she was able to match Rochel through their maidservants. There was a stigma on Gad. He was the son of a maidservant, but named fortunate because of sister competition. Dan and Naftali did not carry this stigma because they were building up Rochel. Even Asher did not carry this stigma as he only followed his older brother in this competition. Accordingly, Gad and his tribe carried this stigma.

The Torah is now removing the stigma. Eliyasaf means the Lord has increased. Gad did not dwell with the other maidservant wives' children. Dan, Naftali, and Asher encamped to the north. (Bamidbar 2:25). Gad encamped with Reuven and Shimon in the south. (Ibid 2:12). When naming the leaders, the order was Leah's children, then Rochel's, then the maidservant's children. (Ibid 1:12). However, Gad is listed even after Asher, his younger brother. (Ibid 1:14). However, all this changed when the census was taken. Gad is listed third, directly after Reueven and Shimon. (Ibid 1:25). It seems that Gad took the place of Levi. Levi was not counted with the other tribes and did not encamp with them. (Ibid 1:47). The count and the encampment would have been Reuven, Shimon, and Levi, but now it was with Gad instead.

Note, the scout from Gad (who is listed last) is Geuel son of Machi. (Ibid 13:15). Geuel means the Lord redeems. When Yaakov blessed Gad, he predicted he will be attacked and will prevail upon retaliation. (Bereishis 49:19). When Moshe blessed Gad, he predicted he will attack first, expand his territory, and prevail like a lion. (Devarim 33:20). Gad joins Reuven on the Transjordan. They expanded and protected Eretz Yisroel's western border. Their wilderness encampment on the south corresponds to the Menorah, which was on the Mishkan's southern wall.

Dalet and resh are two very different letters. However, they look similar in both ksav Asihri (Assyrian font, the one familiar today) and ksav Ivri (paleo-Hebrew, the original font when writing was still done by carving). In the former, there is a mere little dot that sticks out of the back of a dalet that differentiates it from the smooth curved resh. The ksav Ivri dalet is a perfect triangle and the resh is a pennant – a triangle with a stick.

Dalet means door. Resh means head. A door opens to one's home. It is there to be a gateway to select who you keep as company. A head is a leader, meant to inspire but to be apart. It is on top and it stands out. Further, the Torah uses a large resh in the word "other" of "You shall not bow to other gods." (Shmos 34:14). You shall have one rosh, that is Hashem. There can be no other leaders.

The Torah also enlarges the dalet in the word "one" in "Hashem is one." (Devarim 6:4). A dalet is the doorway to selectively include others. In this instance, there is only one to include. Only One gets into your house, only One's Torah is what you live by. This is what the Torah is hinting at with the son of Reuel mixed in with the son of Deuels. The stigma is now removed because Hashem has added to the tribe of Dan. It is now added to be an equal brother like Reuven and Shimon. Gad is a friend of Hashem's. Gad was not responsible for how he was born. However, he is responsible for what he does with himself. Gad knew Hashem. Like Yaakov predicted, he reacted to his situation and he fought back. He made himself something greater.