

Parashah 34

B'midbar

במדבר

“In the wilderness”

Numbers 1:1 – 4:20

Torah Together



This portion contains details on the first census taken by the Israelites after they left Egypt. At first glance, it may seem boring and tedious. However, a closer look can reveal some interesting insights into God's sense of justice.

1. The Census - 1:1-54

a) When did this census of Israel take place? Specifically who was counted? Why do you think God ordered this census?

b) What tribe was omitted from this census? Why? Why do you think the tribes of Ephraim & Manasseh were included instead of the tribe of Joseph?

c) What job did the tribe of Levi have? Were members of other tribes allowed to help? When the Israelites were encamped, where were the Levites to set up their tents?

A Year at the Mountain

As we begin the book of **Numbers**, the Israelites were still encamped at Mt. Sinai, as they were at the end of **Exodus**. They spent more than a year at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

An Army of Slaves?

In ancient times, a census was usually taken to number the men available for war. Do you think this played a role in God's command to Moses?

Scripture Link:

Genesis 48:1–6 may help explain why the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are included but not the tribe of Joseph.

d) The table below lists the results of the census for the 12 tribes. Do you notice anything interesting?

Tribe	Leader	Men
Rueben	Elizur son of Shedeur	46,500
Simeon	Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai	59,300
Gad	Eliasaph son of Deuel	45,650
Judah	Nahshon son of Amminadab	74,600
Issachar	Nethanel son of Zuar	54,400
Zubulun	Eliab son of Helon	57,400
Ephraim	Elishama son of Ammihud	40,500
Manasseh	Gamaliel son of Pedahzur	32,200
Benjamin	Abidan son of Gideoni	35,400
Dan	Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai	62,700
Asher	Pagiel son of Ocran	41,500
Naphtali	Ahira son of Enan	53,400
TOTAL:		603,550

Scripture Link:

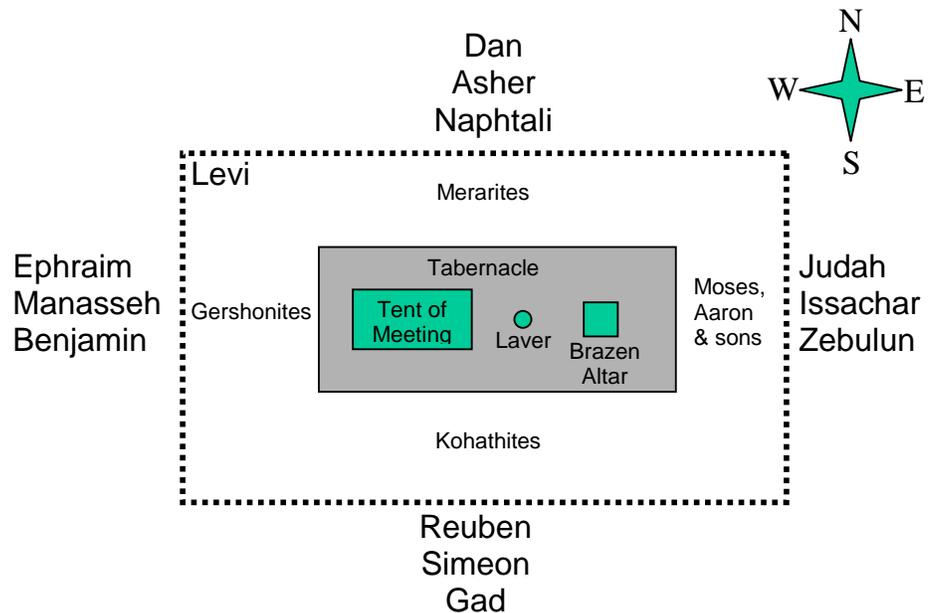
Exodus 6:23 reveals that Elisheba, the wife of Aaron, was of the tribe of Judah, the sister of Nahshon and daughter of Amminadab.

2. The Arrangement of the Tribal Camps - 2:1-34

a) Describe the layout of the tribes as they encamp around the tabernacle. Can you draw a diagram of the layout? Which tribe was closest to the tabernacle?

Guarding the Camp

It may seem somewhat surprising that God would specify the precise location where each tribe was to encamp. It certainly implies that God is a God of order. Do you find anything interesting about where God told each tribe to encamp?



b) Describe the order when the Israelites were travelling.

3. The Levites - 3:1-51

a) Name Aaron's sons. What happened to the two older sons? Who carried out the duties of the priest during their father's lifetime? Who carried out these duties from then on?

b) Who was to be the leader of the tribe of Levi? What was the role of the other Levites and how was it different than the role of Aaron's sons?

c) How were God's instructions for counting the Levites different than for counting the rest of the Israelites? Why do you suppose this was so?

d) What were the names of the 3 sons of Levi, the 3 Levite "clans"? From which clan did Moses and Aaron come?

e) List each clan, their numbers, their leader, their responsibilities and where they were to encamp. Do you notice anything interesting?

Clan	Gershon	Kohath	Merari
Leader	Eliasaph	Elizaphan	Zuriel
Responsibility	Tent and curtains	Tabernacle Furnishings	Frames, poles and hardware
Position	West	South	North
Number	7500	8600	6200

TOTAL: 22,300

Scripture Link:

Leviticus chapter **10** tells the story of Aaron's eldest sons. This story helps make us aware of the power of God's holiness and the importance of worshipping Him in the way He has instructed us in the *Torah*.

A Math Error?

There is a discrepancy between **Numbers 3:39** which states that there are 22,000 Levites and the sum of the clans which equals 22,300. Perhaps the 300 extra Levites were the firstborn Levite sons and so would not have been included as possible substitutes for redemption.

In **Numbers 3:11-13**, God stakes His claim to “every firstborn in Israel.” When does He say He did this? Does this give you insight into God’s sense of fairness? Also, God allowed the Levites to **take the place of** every firstborn Israelite male. This introduces us to the concept of *substitution* or *redemption*: allowing one person or thing to take the place of another, a key role for the Messiah.

f) From God’s perspective, why were the Levites “set apart” for Himself? How many firstborn Israelite males were counted? How many Levites were counted? What was done about the difference? Does this reveal anything about God’s character?

“I have taken the Levites . . . in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are mine.”

Numbers 3:12

4. The Kohathites - 4:1-20

a) When God instructed Moses and Aaron to count the Kohathites, which ones were counted? Why just these?

b) Specifically, what was the work of Aaron and his sons when the tent of meeting was to be moved? What specific role did Aaron’s son, Eleazar have?

c) What was the role of the rest of the Kohathites when the tent of meeting was to be moved?

d) Could Aaron’s sons and the other Kohathites exchange responsibilities from time to time? According to verses 19-20, what would be the result of this?

Digging deeper

1. According to **Numbers 3:11-13**, when did God set apart for himself every firstborn male in Israel? Who is substituted for these firstborn males? Explain the process described in verses 3:44-51. Where else do you see this idea of redemption in God's word?

2. Analyze the various responsibilities of the Levites. Why do you suppose God prescribed this detailed division of labor? What insights does it give you into God's character?

For each *Torah* portion (*Parashah*), the ancient Hebrew scribes defined a corresponding reading from the prophets, called the *Haftarah* (conclusion). These passages are tied to the *Torah* portion by a key idea or theme. Also, after the New Testament (*Brit Hadashah*) was formalized, Bible scholars chose from it passages that also complement the *Torah* portion. These often provide additional insight into God's character and can lead to a better understanding of the unity and consistency of God's word.

For further study, see
Haftarah : Hosea 2:1-22
Brit Hadashah : Luke 2:1-7; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31