

Bamidbar Aliyah Summary

General Overview: This week's reading, *Bamidbar*, begins the Book of Numbers, the fourth of the Five Books of Moses. This book of the Torah opens on the first of Iyar, one month after the inauguration of the Tabernacle, and several weeks before the Jews will depart from Mount Sinai and begin their journey to the Holy Land. In this week's portion the Israelites and the Tribe of Levi are counted separately. G-d instructs the Israelites on how to camp in the desert, surrounding the [Tabernacle](#). The Levites are informed the procedure for dismantling the Tabernacle before traveling.

First Aliyah: [G-d](#) commands Moses to count all Jewish men of military age. G-d names one member of each tribe as the *nasi*, leader, of the tribe. Each [nasi](#) will assist Moses and Aaron in taking a census of his tribe. An additional objective of this census was to establish the tribal lineage of every Jew.

Second Aliyah: And now the census results. After giving us the numbers for each tribe, the [Torah](#) gives us the grand total: 603,550. This number, however, does not include the Levites. Moses was commanded by G-d not to include the holy tribe in the general census. Instead, the Levites are assigned the following holy tasks: dismantling, carrying, and re-erecting the Tabernacle whenever the Jews traveled, and camping around the Sanctuary, keeping guard over it and its vessels.

Third Aliyah: The Jews are instructed regarding their camping formation. The Tabernacle was at the center of the encampment, surrounded by the "Flag of Judah" — which included the Tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun — to the east; the "Flag of Reuben" — Reuben, Shimon, Gad — to the south; the "Flag of Ephraim" — Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin — to the west; and the "Flag of Dan" — Dan, Asher, Naftali — to the north.

[Fourth Aliyah](#): The Levites are appointed to serve in the Tabernacle, guard its vessels and assist the priests with their Tabernacle duties. This honor originally belonged to the Israelite firstborns, who were "acquired" by G-d when He spared them during the Plague of the Firstborn. This privilege was taken away from them when they participated in the sin of the Golden Calf — and given to the Levites.

[Fifth Aliyah](#): Moses is now commanded to separately count all Levite males from the age of one month and older. The three [Levite](#) families are counted, and a leader is appointed for each of the families. The total of all (non-firstborn) Levites eligible for this census: 22,000. The family of Gershon camped due west of the Tabernacle, and was put in charge of transporting the tapestries and curtains of the Tabernacle and their accessories. The Kehot family camped directly south of the Tabernacle, and was in charge of transporting all the holy vessels. The Merari family camped to the north of the Tabernacle, and they were in charge of carrying the Tabernacle beams, panels, and sockets. Moses, Aaron, and their immediate families camped to the east of the Tabernacle.

[Sixth Aliyah](#): G-d then tells Moses to count all the firstborn Israelites — because the holiness of each Israelite firstborn was now to be "transferred" to a Levite. The census revealed that there were 273 more firstborn than Levites. Each of these "extra" firstborns (as determined by a lottery) gave five shekel to the priests, and was thus "redeemed."

[Seventh Aliyah](#): Moses is commanded to take a census of the Levites of the family of Kehot, but only those eligible to transport the Tabernacle and its vessels — those between the ages of thirty and fifty. The results of this census are given in next week's reading. This section then describes the duties of the Kehot family. When the Tabernacle was to be dismantled, the priests would cover all the holy vessels with specially designated sacks. The Kehot family would then take the covered vessels and carry them to their destination.