



## Bamidbar

*Bamidbar* (Numbers) 1:1 - 4:20

*Bamidbar*, the fourth Book of the Torah, begins 13 months after the Exodus from Egypt. G-d commanded Moses and Aaron to carry out a census of all the men of Israel, aged 20 years and older, who were capable of bearing arms. The census found that there were 603,550 male Israelites eligible for military service. The *Levites* were excluded from this number because of their special duties connected with the tabernacle of the testimony. They would have a special census of their own.

The families of the twelve tribes were allocated positions around the sanctuary, for when they were encamped and for while they were on the march. The sons of Aaron and the Levitical families of Gershon, Kohath and Merari were stationed on the four sides of the sanctuary. Judah, Issachar and Zebulun were stationed to the east, Reuben, Simeon and Gad to the south, Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin to the west, and Dan, Asher and Naphtali to the north. (You can see the diagram on page 572 of the *Chumash* for an illustration of this.)

There were three Levitical clans, and each was given specific tasks for the maintenance and care of the *Mishkan*, especially as the people traveled to the Land of Israel. The Gershonites were to transport the tapestry, the Kohathites the ark, table, candlesticks and altar, and the Merarites were to assemble the heavier instruments, such as the boards, bars, pillars and sockets.

Aaron and his sons were told how to dismantle and cover up the effects of the sanctuary each time the Israelites were ready to march; it was the duty of the Kohathites to carry the covered sacred objects without actually touching them or, indeed, even looking at them. Aaron's son Eleazar had general charge over the tabernacle, with particular responsibility for the oil, the incense, the meal offering and the anointing oil.



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