

## Parashot Bamidbar No. 34 In the desert

By Rabbi Haim Levi

### Numbers 1:1-4:20 Hosea 2:1-22

This Parashot deals with the census of the Israelis. The Lord commanded Moses to take all young men from age 20 years and older, once the Tabernacle was installed in the desert. Rashi explains that the Lord did it in order to show His love for the children of Israel. Although He naturally knew their number, He wanted Moses to know them as well.

He ordered it only after the sin of the Golden calf, where so many had been killed for their own doing. Now it was time for Israel to acquire a different status. The Divine Presence would be traveling with them, requiring a certain behavior as His nation, a heavenly nation on earth. From this point on, they will be instructed in their duties as witnesses and as servants of the Most High God of the Universe. For this reason He now calls them His army, an army whose barracks form a spiritual fortress with ranks and positions according to God's instructions.

Once the Israeli are counted, the Lord assigns captains for each tribe according to birth right except for the case of the eldest son, Reuben, who committed incest with one of Israel's wives. The next step is to assign each tribe to a set geographical position that will later determine their land grant.

### The Kohanim (or Priests) and the Levites

As taught before in a preceding Parashot, Moses had already commanded Moses to set apart the tribe of Levi, as his exclusive position. At the very beginning, all Levites were anointed for life as belonging to Him exclusively as shown in:

#### **Exodus: 40:12-15**

“ And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the Tabernacle of the congregation and wash them with water [immerse them with water, equivalent to Greek baptism] and thou shalt put on Aaron the holy garments and anoint him [Mashach him] and sanctify him, that he may minister unto Me in the priest's office and thou shalt bring his sons and clothe them as thou didst unto their father, that they minister unto me in the priest office for the anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.”

#### **Deuteronomy 33:8-10**

And of Levi he said, let your Thumim and your Urim be with your Holy one whom you did prove at Massah and with whom you did strive at the waters of Maribah, who said to his father and mother, 'I do not know them; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his children for he observed your word and kept the covenant. They shall teach Jacob your judgments and Israel your law. They shall put incense before you and whole burnt sacrifices upon your altar.”

### See our [chart showing the encampment of the tribes around the Tabernacle. \(pdf\)](#)

The tabernacle was in the form of a rectangle containing the 12 tribes arranged in groups of four machanot or encampments and the three rasheh, principal machanot, were Judah, Reuben, and Ephraim.

1. The Holy of Holies or Kadosh Kadoshim was the Holy Arc made of acacia wood and lined in and out with pure gold, containing the 10 commandments, Aaron's rod, and the pot of manna.
2. The Holy Place with the Altar of Incense in front of the Kadosh Kadoshim.
3. On the south side were the Holy Menorah of pure gold and the Table of Showbread.
4. The Laver and the Altar of Sacrifice or Misbeach ha Olah made of copper.

Now the tribes were to stand as follows:

The Levites were assigned to encamp as permanent guards directly around the entire precinct of the tabernacle.

### **On the east side, three tribes:**

Three tribes, Zebulon (Dwelling), Judah (Praise) and Issachar (He has been hired).  
The heads of these three tribes were for Judah, Nashon (foretells); for Zebulon, Eliab (God is father); and for Isachar, Nathaniel (God has given).

### **On the west side, three tribes:**

Ephraim (fruitful)  
The head is Elishama (God hears) for Manasseh (Making to forget). The head is Gamaliel (Also my God).  
On the north side, three tribes  
Three tribes: Dan (Judge), the head for it is Eliezer (My father helps); Asher (happy), the head, Pagiel (God meets); and Naphtali (wrestling). The head for it is Ahirah (My brother is evil).

### **On the south side, three tribes:**

Gad (troop) with its head Eliasaph (God has added). Reuben (I see a son) with its head Elizur (My father is a rock).

The Levites were to be ready, the moment the Lord moved and the camp had to be dismantled and be ready to move on.

The office of the Kohanim, or priests, was to cover every Holy article with a blue cover and handed down to the Levites to carry. No other member of the tribe was allowed to look or touch any Holy article.

This is how the Blessed One brought the idea of discipline, order, and holiness to our people in the desolation of the wilderness of Sinai.