

Bamidbar

34th sedra of 54;
first of 10 in Bamidbar



Written on 263 lines, ranks 3rd

30 parshiyot; 23 open, 7 closed, 4th

159 p'sukim - rank 3 (3rd in Bamidbar)

1823 words - rank 13 (4th in Bamidbar)

7393 letters - rank 9 (3rd in Bamidbar)

Notice the difference in rank from p'sukim to words. BaMidbar's p'sukim are among the shortest in the Torah - average: 11.5 words/pasuk. Compare - Vayelech: 18.4 (longest p'sukim), Book of Bamidbar: 12.7, the Torah: 13.7

MITZVOT

None of Taryag in Bamidbar - it is the largest of the 17 sedras without mitzvot

The Book of Bamidbar has 52 mitzvot

Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[P>] and [S>] indicate start of a parsha p'tucha or s'tuma. X:Y is Perek:Pasuk of the beginning of the parsha; (Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha.

Kohen - First Aliya - 19 p'sukim - 1:1-19

[P> 1:1 (19)] The command from G-d is

to count the people, specifically the males from 20 years and up. 20 is the Torah's age for military service. Assisting in the census are Aharon and a representative of each tribe. The command came a year and a fortnight out of Egypt, on Rosh Chodesh Iyar 2449. The census was carried out as commanded.

SDT: Commentaries point out that the command to count the people was given to Moshe and Aharon (as opposed to just Moshe) because the census was done by collecting half-shekels from the people. Since money was involved, it is not proper to have only one person dealing with the matter - even if that person is Moshe Rabeinu! This became the ethical standard of dealing with public funds.

On the other hand... Another commentator suggests that this census was not done with shekels, but rather with a direct head count. Although we learn that it is improper, and even potentially dangerous, to count people directly, in this case there was a direct command from G-d to count the people. Hence, no harm would befall them during the carrying out of these Divine orders. This, in contrast to Ki Tisa, where the Torah says, "When YOU count, then you MUST collect the half-shekel, etc. There, the language in the Torah implies that the counting was optional or practical, but not obligatory. Therefore, the indirect method was necessary.

K'RU'EI HA'EIDA, a term for leaders of the people, is written with a YUD in place of the VAV as in the word's pronunciation. Baal HaTurim says that we can look at the YUD as a chopped VAV, to tell us that among the leaders was a "not so worthy" individual. He says that Shlumiel b. Tzuri-shadai, the leader of Shimon, was Zimri b. Salu, who caused G-d's anger to kill many thousands of people, until Pinchas's act put an end to Zimri (and to the plague). Having G-d's name in his name didn't help him. Note that there is a broken VAV in the Pinchas story, the VAV of BRITI SHALOM. Could be a REMEZ-level connection.

Here is the list of the leaders of the tribes as presented in the opening p'sukim of the book and sedra of Bamidbar. Note the order of the tribes. They are not always listed in the same order, and not always in birth order or "mother" order. No attempt is here made to explain the order; just a suggestion to note it. After some of the names are comments from Midrashim. *(culled from the book ISHEI HATANACH)*

Reuven: Elitzur b. Sh'dei'ur
One of the leaders of Korach's gang

Shim'on: Sh'lumi'el b. Tzurishadai
a.k.a. ZIMRI b. SALU and
SHA'UL ben HaK'naanit

Yehuda: Nachshon b. Aminadav
credited as jumping into Yam Suf first,
before it split - an act that G-d acknowl-
edged as a Kiddush HaShem... ancestor

of Naomi... died in the second year after
the Exodus

Yissachar: N'tan-el b. Tzu'ar
a Torah scholar unmatched in his tribe

Z'vulun: Eli'av b. Cheilon

Yosef...

Efrayim: Elishama b. Amihud
offered his gift to the dedication of the
Mizbei'ach on the seventh day, which
was Shabbat. How can this be?
Individual offerings do not push aside
Shabbat? In this case, G-d decreed that
one Nasi should offer his gifts each day
(incl. Shabbat)

Menashe: Gamli'el b. P'datzur
[a note on pronunciation. The HEI in the
name P'datzur is unvoeled. Such a HEI
is totally silent, as is a HEI at the end of a
word, unless it has a MAPIK in it.

In contrast, the tribal leader of Naftali in
Parshat Mas'ei is P'DAHH-EIL b. Amihud.
In his name, the HEI has a SH'VA under
it. The SH'VA under a HEI is ALWAYS
NACH and gives a sound to the HEI, in
the same way that a MAPIK gives a
sound to a final HEI.]

Binyamin: Avidan b. Gid'oni

Dan: Achi'ezer b. Amishadai

Asher: Pag-i-eil b. Achran

Gad: El-yasaf b. D'u-eil

Naftali: Achira b. Einan

Levi - Second Aliya - 35 p'sukim - 1:20-54

[S> 1:20 (2)] The Torah lovingly records the census results for each Tribe, beginning with Reuven, identified as Israel's firstborn.

In light of all the "problems" that Reuven had, and the fact that Yehuda, Yosef, and Levi each ended up with an element of that which might have been Reuven's, it is interesting that Reuven retains the title B'CHOR YISRAEL - and not just here.

Rank in population among the 12 tribes indicated by the number in parentheses - it is not in the text.

Reuven's count was 46,500 (7)

[P> 1:22 (2)] Shimon, 59,300 (3)

[P> 1:24 (2)] Gad, 45,650 (8)

[P> 1:26 (2)] Yehuda, 74,600 (1)

[P> 1:28 (2)] Yissachar, 54,400 (5)

[P> 1:30 (2)] Zevulun, 57,400 (4)

[P> 1:32 (2)] Yosef-Efrayim, 40,500 (10)

[P> 1:34 (2)] Menashe, 32,200 (12, smallest tribe at this counting)

Note that by combining Efrayim and Menashe, Yosef's total would be 72,700 - and move it into 2nd place.

[P> 1:36 (2)] Binyamin, 35,400 (11)

[P> 1:38 (2)] Dan, 62,700 (2)

[P> 1:40 (2)] Asher, 41,500 (9)

[P> 1:42 (2)] Naftali, 53,400 (6)

[P> 1:44 (4)] After the count of each Tribe, the Torah gives the grand total as 603,550.

The figure that is generally used to describe the multitude that left Egypt is 600,000. It is obviously rounded from the actual total. And with women and children, the number of people who left Egypt is probably somewhere between 2 and 3 million.

[P> 1:48 (7)] The Leviyim were not to be counted together with the rest of the Nation, but were to be counted separately. It was the Leviyim who were charged with carrying the components of the Mishkan and with dismantling and erecting the Mishkan each time the People traveled and camped anew. Non-Leviyim were not to anger G-d by approaching the Mishkan in an improper manner. This applied to the encampment as well; the Leviyim were camped around the Mishkan and the Tribes kept their distance in their camps.

SDT: LIVNEI YEHUDA... for all the tribes the term LIVNEI is used, except for B'NEI NAFTALI. Baal HaTurim says that they had more women than men. In the later census, B'NEI is used for all the tribes since the men died out - all had more women.

Shlishi - Third Aliya - 34 p'sukim - 2:1-34

[P> 2:1 (9)] The next command deals with the position of the Tribes during encampment and the traveling order of the units. Three Tribes each formed a "camp" under one banner at one of the compass-points around the Levite camp. The leader of each "banner camp" is the leader of the "main" Tribe of the three, as indicated by the name of the camp.

The camp of Yehuda was to the east and was to be the first to travel. Under the leadership of Nachshon b. Aminadav, the group included Yissachar and Zevulun, in addition to Yehuda. Totals for each tribe are repeated when the four flag-groups are described. Total for Machane Yehuda was 186,400.

[S> 2:10 (7)] Reuven Camp on the south followed them. Joining Reuven were Shimon and Gad. Total for Machane Reuven was 151,450.

[S> 2:17 (1)] Then the Leviyim with the Mishkan were to follow, so that they and it would be within the people, not at its periphery.

[S> 2:18 (7)] Then came Efrayim Camp from the west. Menashe and Binyamin were part of Machane Efrayim. This camp was all from Rachel Imeinu. Total 108,100.

[S> 2:25 (7)] And the last to travel was the Dan Camp, from the north. Joining

Dan were Asher and Naftali. Their total was 157,600.

[P> 2:25 (7)] The Torah next gives the total again, 603,550, and then reiterates that Levi was not counted among the Tribes, and that the People did as commanded.

SDT: The lead tribe of each camp was based on OTOT, signs, transmitted by Yaakov Avinu. Baal HaTurim points out a correspondence between Yaakov's blessings to his sons and these camp-heads. Each son that Yaakov addressed in second person was to be a leader of a camp. "Reuven, YOU are my firstborn", "Yehuda, YOU your brothers will acknowledge", "Dan... YOUR salvation", "Yosef... the G-d of YOUR father... blesses YOU". The other sons are referred to in third person.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 13 p'sukim - 3:1-13

[P> 3:1 (4)] The Torah proceeds to name the sons of Aharon and Moshe.

Actually, Moshe's biological sons are not mentioned. Commentaries point out that Aharon's sons are considered to be Moshe's as well, because he (Moshe) taught them Torah. This explains only why Aharon's sons are also Moshe's. It does not explain why Moshe's own sons are not mentioned. One reason given is that they were "protected" from the Egyptian experience by their maternal grandfather Yitro and as a result were

never really part of Klal Yisrael. Remember that Moshe went out to see what was happening with his brothers...

[P> 3:5 (6)] The Tribe of Levi is to be assigned the tasks of assisting the kohanim in their work and in safeguarding the Mishkan and its vessels.

[P> 3:11 (3)] In essence, the Levi is to replace the B'chor who was sanctified from the day of the Exodus (even before). The b'chor was originally meant to perform the sacred tasks of the Leviyim-Kohanim but lost the privilege in the wake of the Golden Calf fiasco.

Chamishi - 5th Aliya - 26 p'sukim - 3:14-39

[P> 3:14 (13)] Moshe is commanded to count the Leviyim - males from the age of one month. The three main families of Levi are Gei-r'shon, (the proper way to pronounce the name in Hebrew, not Ger-shon), K'hat, and M'rari. Gei-r'shon subdivides into Livni and Shim'i. K'hat divides into the families of Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron, and Uziel. M'rari's family groups are Machli and Mushi.

Gershon's count is 7500. They camp on the west of the Mishkan. Their leader is Elyasaf b. La'eil. They are to be in charge of the curtain material of the Mishkan, including the coverings and the courtyard enclosure.

[S> 3:27 (13)] K'hat's total is 8600.

They will camp to the south of the Mishkan. Elitzafan b. Uziel is their leader. (One of the things that angered Korach... or made him jealous and resentful.) They are in charge of the main holy furnishings of the Mishkan, including the Aron, Shulchan, Menora, and Mizbachot (Altars). Elazar b. Aharon HaKohen is in charge of all the Leviyim.

M'rari numbers 6200. Their leader is Tzuriel b. Avichayil, and they camp to the north of the Mishkan. They are in charge of the structural materials: the wall-boards, support rods, foundation sockets, pillars.

Moshe, Aharon and sons camp to the east of the Mishkan.

In all, 22,000 Leviyim are counted.

Clarification... If you add up the numbers of the three families of Levi, you get 22,300 - not 22,000 - the number used in the exchange with the firstborns. Rashi explains that the 300 "missing" Leviyim were themselves B'chorim, and were not part of the official exchange...

SDT: Choose your neighbors well. Rashi points out that the proximity of the Yehuda camp to the encampment of Moshe and Aharon and family, had a positive influence on the three tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar, and Zevulun - the three tribes famed for their Torah scholarship. On the other hand, Reuven's closeness to Korach and his (Korach's)

to Datan and Aviram, produces disaster.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 12 p'sukim - 3:40-51

[S> 3:40 (4)] G-d next tells Moshe to count the firstborns of the Tribes, from one month of age and older, so that there can be an official exchange ceremony of Leviyim for B'chorim. Moshe counts and finds that there are 22,273 b'chorim.

[P> 3:44 (8)] A mass "redemption of the firstborns" is conducted by an exchange of 22,000 (non-b'chor) Leviyim for 22,000 first-borns (non-Leviyim) and a payment of five silver sheqels each for the remaining 273 firstborns to Aharon and his sons.

The exchange of firstborn animals mentioned in 3:45 refers to first-born donkeys and NOT to kosher domesticated animals, which may not be redeemed. Rashi further says that one sheep of a Levi can exchange more than one donkey-b'chor (since there is no mention of a surplus).

Sh'VII - Seventh Aliya - 20 p'sukim - 4:1-20

[P> 4:1 (16)] A second census of Leviyim is begun with the counting of the family K'hat - males between the ages of 30 and 50. This was the work-force in the Mishkan. The people of K'hat first waited for Aharon to enter the Mishkan, remove the

Parochet and cover the vessels with special cloths. Only then could vessels be handled by the Leviyim. Elazar, the son of Aharon, was personally responsible for the special oils and incense of the Mishkan.

[P> 4:17 (4)] The Torah warns the kohanim not to endanger the people of K'hat by not properly preparing for their handling of the most sacred vessels.

This parsha of 4 p'sukim is reread for the Maftir.

Haftara - 22 p'sukim - Hoshei'a 2:1-22

The prophet foresees the day when a united and prosperous people will return to Zion. However, he now brings the message of the people's unfaithfulness, their embracing of Ba'al and the punishment of exile that they will suffer because of it. But just as G-d led the people in the wilderness when they (we) came out of Egypt, He will take the people back, having abandoned idolatry, as G-d's bride, in righteousness, loving kindness, faithfulness.

The main connection between sedra and haftara, Rabbi Jacobs z"l points out, is the contrast between the counted, numbered people in the sedra, and the innumerable people of Israel referred to by Hoshei'a. Midbar is a theme that occurs in both sedra and haftara.

The last two p'sukim of the haftara beautifully describe the betrothal, so to speak, of G-d with Bnei Yisrael. How appropriate to usually read of this on our Aufruf Shabbat - the Shabbat before the "wedding" at Sinai, the occasion on which we took mutual oaths with G-d.

And, we might tie the idea with Yom Yerushalayim, because we can definitely see the obvious love that G-d has for His people and His special holy city.

These last two p'sukim are said when the strap of the T'filin of the hand is wound around the middle finger three times; T'filin wearers relive this betrothal scene between G-d and the people of Israel on a daily basis.