

# PARASHAT BEMIDBAR

## *Numbers 1:1–4:20*

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The second book of the Torah, Exodus, concludes with a description for setting up the sanctuary on the first day of the first month of the second year after the Israelites leave Egypt. The fourth book of the Torah, known in Hebrew as *Bemidbar*, or “in the desert,” or in English as Numbers, begins with God commanding Moses to take a census of the entire Israelite community. The commandment is given on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites’ departure from Egypt. All males over the age of twenty are counted, and it is reported that there is a total of 603,550. This number excludes 22,000 Levites, who are exclusively responsible for all services of the sanctuary and are to camp around the sanctuary at all times. After counting all firstborn Israelite males over the age of one month, Moses is instructed to compare their number of 22,273 with the total of 22,000 Levites and to charge a redemption tax for the additional 273. It is to be paid to Aaron and his sons for service to the sanctuary. Moses also lists and counts the Kohathites separately from the Levites since the Kohathites are responsible for lifting and carrying the sacred objects of the sanctuary. They are not to be present when the sanctuary is either dismantled or set up.

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