

Bamidbar Chapter 26 - Transcript

Shiur Overview

Summary: Bamidbar Chapter 26 — The Second Census (Parshas Pinchas)

Context and Purpose of the Census

Bamidbar Chapter 26 presents the second census of the tribes in preparation for entering Eretz Yisrael. This census serves three purposes: organizing for the war of conquest, preparing the military, and — most importantly, as stated explicitly at the chapter's end ("to these the land shall be divided") — dividing the land according to tribal counts.

The entire Sefer Bamidbar, called Chumash Hapikudim (Book of Numbers), revolves around these two censuses. The first census at the book's opening counted the generation leaving Egypt, who planned to march directly to Eretz Canaan. That plan failed. Now the generation has changed, the leadership has changed — Miriam and Aharon have died, Elazar has replaced Aharon in the census role — and the people themselves are organized differently. Some families grew, some shrank, some groups shifted. A new census was necessary to match the new reality.

Placement Within the Narrative

The census is located in Arvos Moav, the final staging ground before entering the land. Its placement after the Bnos Moav tragedy and the Zimri/Pinchas incident creates a narrative disconnect. Several explanations are offered: (1) organizing an army for the commanded revenge against Midyan requires a census; (2) this marks the transition of military leadership — Moshe led the wars against Sichon and Og personally, but the upcoming war against Midyan will be led by Elazar and Pinchas, representing an intermediate stage before full transfer to Yehoshua; (3) there may be literary reasons to break away from dwelling on the tragedy and move to something different.

The census also triggers several subsequent narratives: the daughters of Tzelafchad, the mitzvah of musafim for moadim, and Moshe's transfer of leadership to Yehoshua.

The Supplementary Nature of Bamidbar

Sefer Bamidbar is supplementary to Sefer Vayikra and Sefer Shemos, adding detail and connecting threads into overarching structures. One of the Torah's primary organizational tools is genealogy — the toledot order of who begat whom and who belongs to whom. Sefer Shemos gave fragmentary reports of 600,000 people, but never a full accounting. The first census in Parshas Bamidbar provided more detail, but this second census in Chapter 26 is the most complete census of the people ever given. It adds not just tribal names and numbers but **families** (mishpachot) — a

level of social structure and organization not previously detailed. The notation "Lemishpachotam" represents real clan structures that determined how people were organized in the land.

Additionally, whenever someone mentioned in the census played a role in a previous or future story, the text inserts a note identifying them, and these notes carry genealogical significance.

The Census Begins (26:1–11)

The chapter opens with "**Vayehi Acharei Hamageifa**" — after the plague. Hashem commands Moshe and Elazar to count the congregation from age 20 and up, organized by clans, counting all who can go to the army (kol yotzei tzava), confirming this as primarily a military census. The location is specified as Arvos Moav al Yarden Yericho — on the threshold of the Land of Israel — paralleling the first census: just as they were counted then when planning to enter directly, now they are counted again as they finally prepare to do so.

Reuven is listed first with the note that he is the **bechor** (firstborn) of Yisrael. This is significant because elsewhere his bechorah is said to be lost, yet here he retains primacy of position — he is counted first.

The four families of Reuven are listed. An important distinction: listing "Chanoch, Mishpachat HaChanochi" is not redundant repetition. It means Chanoch's descendants formed an actual clan with its own territory and social identity. A son who didn't produce a viable clan would simply be absorbed into a brother's family (as Divrei Hayamim explicitly records). Great-grandchildren are mentioned when they too established their own sub-clans.

Reuven's count: **43,730**.

The Genealogical Note on Dathan and Aviram (26:8–11)

A genealogical note identifies **Dathan and Aviram**, grandsons of Reuven through Palu and Eliav, as those who rebelled with Korach — the earth opened and swallowed them. This note serves dual purposes: it connects them to the Korach narrative, and it explains genealogically why no family is ascribed to Dathan and Aviram. They had enough power and standing to potentially have founded their own sub-clan, but because they perished — "vayovdu mitoch hakahal" — that line was cut off and no descendants carry their name.

Critically, the text adds: "**U'vnei Korach lo meisu**" — the sons of Korach did not die. This note clarifies that while Korach himself was swallowed, his children survived and continued as a recognized family, eventually producing the Psalms attributed to Bnei Korach.

Full Transcript

Bamidbar Chapter 26: The Second Census in Preparation for Entering Eretz Yisrael

The Purpose and Context of the Second Census

We're reading Bamidbar chapter 26. This chapter is the census, the Pekudim [countings], of all the tribes, all the

Shvatim [tribes], in preparation for going to Eretz Yisrael, for the war to conquer Eretz Yisrael, and for dividing the land of Eretz Yisrael, as is explicit in the end of this chapter, that Hashem says to these the land should be divided. So we understand that the main point of this census was to divide the land according to this census.

As we've discussed, the whole of Sefer Bamidbar, called Chumash HaPekudim [the Book of Numbers], in some sense surrounds this census. There was a census already mentioned in the beginning of the book, right? And the main point of this census happening again, as is explained explicitly here, is that the plan changed in between, as we've discussed in Parshas Shlach, Korach, and so on.

The Changed Generation and Leadership

The first census was of the Bnei Yisrael, the Yotzei Eretz Mitzrayim [those who left Egypt], as is mentioned here in the beginning — these were the tribes, the counts of the people going out of Mitzrayim, whose plan was to march through the desert directly to Eretz Canaan and get there. That plan didn't work out, the generation changed, even the leaders changed, right?

Moshe is still doing this census, as we've been noticing in the third part of Sefer Bamidbar, a certain part of the preparation for conquering the land was done through Moshe himself. In the next chapters, we're going to have him giving over this leadership to Yehoshua, but still a major part of the preparations are done. But the leadership besides him — Miriam already died, Aharon already died, and it was changed here. Aharon, for his son Elazar, is doing his part in the census. Aharon also apparently had a big part in organizing the people, and here it's already not Aharon, it's Elazar doing it.

The makeup of the people changed — these are different people, and they're even organized slightly differently, they're not all the same families, they're not all the same. Some families became bigger, some families became smaller, some groups became different, so they had to redo the census in order to match the situation in the new generation that is going to go to Eretz Yisrael. So that's the main point of this census.

The Placement of the Census in the Narrative

Location and Timing

The location of it sort of makes sense to be in this last part of the book, which is already in Arvos Moav [the plains of Moav], as we saw in Parshas Chukas, we already arrived to Arvos Moav, that's where the whole story of Balak happened, and apparently that's also where the whole tragedy of Bnos Moav happened. So in some sense, this is the right location for it to be, although particularly within the stories there is some disconnect.

The Narrative Interruption

We've had in the previous chapter the story of Bnos Moav, which was some kind of tragedy, something happened badly, and we even had Hashem telling Moshe to take revenge on Moav, on Midyan — which seems to have something to do, might be the same people, or might have been some kind of coalition where everyone played their part and didn't entirely say who they were — and then the story stops and goes to this Pekudim [census].

Of course, one understanding of this would be that since they have to organize an army to do that, of course, there were some wars already. Moshe already did in Parshas Chukas wars, and those maybe were not as organized, or maybe were done somehow with Moshe directly with his charisma leading it, but now we have to do it in an organized way.

The Transition of Military Leadership

Moshe won't do it, as we'll see in Parshas Matos when we actually get to the war. Moshe didn't go to that war at all, he sent Elazar, Elazar and Pinchas to do it, so we see very clearly this is already Moshe handing over the leadership, the military leadership of the people to the next generation. Therefore, before that, we need to have some kind of census to find out who's going and how is it going to work.

But also there might be other reasons for deliberately cutting up the story with this census in the middle. I don't have a clear explanation for it, but right now this is what I'm thinking, that this is the meaning. And as we'll see there's some stories that happened because of the census — we have the story of Bnos Tzela'fchad, then there's some, there's other mitzvos that are somehow coming here, the whole story of the mitzvah of musafim [additional offerings] in the next chapters, but also very importantly the Moshe giving over his leadership to Yehoshua, and that seems to be part of this story.

Like I'm saying, the next wars that are going to happen are not even going to be directly done through Moshe, so there's like an intermediate stage. The previous wars with Sichon and Og and all of that Moshe himself led, in the same way that he led the wars with Amalek — Amalek already had Yehoshua in some sense, but anyways — and now he's going to give it over. So there's this new census going to the next generation, and this is where the census is put.

There might be also like literary reasons that cut up the story of the war, you know, we have a nice, we have this tragic loss of Zimri and Pinchas and all of that, so maybe we don't want to continue to dwell on that, so we move on to something different, something more happy. But that's the basic point.

The Supplementary Nature of Sefer Bamidbar

Now, this Sefer, as we said, the whole book is called Book of Numbers after these two censuses mentioned in the beginning and at the end of the book in some sense, and we've been discussing that the whole book of Bamidbar is in some way supplementary to the Sefer Vayikra, supplementary to the Sefer Shemos, and these censuses also have something supplementary in them.

Adding Detail and Structure

In other words they're adding a lot of detail and a lot of sort of putting things in place, connecting different threads of the story into one structure. One of the main structures which the Torah uses when it tries to give an overarching structure of everything is these genealogies, these censuses, these lists. Just like there's a chronological order, there's also like a toledos [genealogical] order, the order of who begat who and who is the child of who and who belongs to — that's just one of the main ways in which the world is organized in the Torah, how the Torah organizes the world.

And just like in the rest of Bamidbar, it's adding all kinds of details and putting them in the right place — we'll see a very nice example of this in the Parsha of the musafim, of the musafim in the next chapters. Here also, the census — firstly in Sefer Shemos, we already had numbers of people, right, 600,000 people and so on, but we had some fragmentary reports of exactly how there were 600,000 and so on, but there was never a full accounting of it. Here's where we get the full accounting.

The Most Complete Census

And the most full accounting we ever get is in the second census, the census of Parshas Pinchas, the census of chapter 26, is the most full census of the people. It gives us not only the exact name of each of the tribes and their amount of people that they had, but also the families. These families were mentioned already in Sefer Shemos, and in some of them, and also in Parshas Bamidbar, but they didn't say **lemishpachotam** [according to their families], they didn't have the amount of detail.

Although in some sense it's just adding a word — it's okay, **lemishpachotam**, this family, **mishpachas** [the family of], has such and such, as we'll see inside — that means that this is a level of organization, this is a level of social structure. It doesn't just mean it's not just adding a word. And that's something that of course the people in the land were organized in these clans, in these families, in these groups, so that's some information that we didn't have before.

Genealogical Notes

And as we'll see also, part of the supplementary nature is, it gives us these notes on every time there's someone mentioned who played a part in a previous story, or in a future story, it gives us a note, okay this is that person. And those notes I think also have some genealogical meaning as we'll see when we go through them.

Reading Through the Census Text

So that's enough for a preface to the story, we're going to read it, or go through it quickly, it's a long chapter, a lot of pesukim [verses].

The Opening: After the Plague

It starts, **Vayehi acharei hamageifa** [And it was after the plague] — of course there's an interestingly split, the parasha splits here in the middle of a pasuk, but in some sense this belongs to the earlier story, but it's for sure the beginning of this pasuk.

Vayehi acharei hamageifa [And it was after the plague], and Hashem tells Moshe and Elazar, count, take up the heads, count the heads of the congregation, of the people, again from 20 years old, **kol yotzei tzava** [all who go out to the army] of each family, each clan, who will go to the army. As we said that shows us that this is mainly a military census.

The Command and Its Parallel to the First Census

And they do that, they speak — Moshe and Elazar, they speak to the people in this place, to show us that this is the census of the land of Israel, they're going to be counted from the 20 years and up, as Hashem told Moshe and the people who were going out of Egypt. So this is parallelism, just like then they were counted because they were planning to go directly to Eretz Canaan, now they're being counted again when they're finally doing it again.

The Tribe of Reuven

And here we have the report of the actual census, starting with Reuven, who gets a note that he is the **bechor** [firstborn], he is the firstborn of Israel, and that probably means that in some sense Reuven, the Shevet [tribe] of Reuven was still the bechor. In other places we know it says that his bechorah [birthright] was lost, here it doesn't seem to say that, seems like he still has some bechorah, he's counted first.

The Four Families of Reuven

And it gives us the four families who are children of Reuven. So this is not just a list of how many children the person Reuven had, but the four families that of course did ascribe themselves to these four children of Reuven. But it's something new — there could be a child of Reuven that didn't make a family, and then he would just be part of another brother that had a family, as it says explicitly in Divrei Hayamim [Chronicles] and other places about certain families that that happened to.

So when it says and so on for all four families, it's not just repeating the same information twice. What it's saying is that Chanoch had a family called HaChanochi, and there's this family which had a certain plot in a place where they live, and so on. So that's the point of this.

Great-Grandchildren and Sub-Clans

And also the grandchildren — these are grandchildren of Yaakov, Chanoch the son of Reuven, the son of Yaakov. Some of the great-grandchildren are mentioned also, and that's also probably because those great-grandchildren had some kind of power, some kind of clan, some kind of family for themselves.

So we get their count, 43,730.

The Note About Dathan and Aviram

And now we get some grandchildren. Palu had a son, Eliav, Eliav had these three children, Nemuel, Dathan and Aviram. Now we get a note, but I think that this note is not only — so we got to Dathan and Aviram because we've heard of Dathan and Aviram in Parshas Korach, it said over there who they were, and Dathan and Aviram, the children of Reuven. But here we get exactly who they were.

The Genealogical Significance

But I think also probably means that they had some power, they had some role, these Dathan and Aviram, because sometimes the next generation of the family also creates its own family or its own subgroup within the family.

So we get this note that these are Dathan and Aviram who fought with Moshe and Aharon in Korach, and they were lost, the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and Korach. So in other words, although for a time Dathan and Aviram had their own power, their own family, now that they were swallowed out, and therefore they had no descendants, they had no families, and so now there's nobody that ascribes themselves to the family of Dathan and Aviram, which they could have been if not for that. And at the same time 250 [people perished]...

The Tribe of Yehuda

Now for Yehuda, we also get this note. Yehuda is an important family — of course we'll know later Yehuda is the family from which we have Malchus [kingship], Beis David [the House of David], and so on. So this is actually a story of Yehuda's two sons, but also of the potential families that were not to be.

Yehuda's two sons, Er and Onan, who died in Eretz Canaan before this whole story happened — so there's no families from them. Then after, Yehuda had turned out to have three families: Shelah, Peretz, and Zerach. We know the stories of their births specifically in Parshas Bereishis, in Parshas Vayeshev. And then two of Peretz's children — so great-grandchildren of Yaakov — also created families: Chetzron and Chamul. As we saw, sometimes the next generation also creates a family, and that's why Yehuda was in the shivtei

Yehuda [tribes of Yehuda], one of the bigger tribes, and that's why the next generation also gets split into more families.

In total: 76,500 people.

The Tribe of Yissachar

Then we have Yissachar with four families: Tola, Puvah, Yashiv, Shimron.

In total: 64,300 people.

The Tribe of Zevulun

We have Zevulun with three families: Sered, Elon, and Yachlel.

In total: 60,500 people.

The Tribe of Yosef: Menashe and Ephraim

We have Yosef divided into two tribes: Menashe and Ephraim. So again, Yosef was bigger, so he divided into two tribes already in the first generation, and each one of those had children.

Menashe

Menashe had Machir, and even his son had another family — Gilad. And then the family of Gilad — so there's the family of Machir and the family of Gilad, which are not the same. In other words, Gilad is him and his children, and everyone else would be belonging to the family of Machir. And Gilad himself divides into a bunch of families: Iezer, Chelek, Asriel, Shechem, Shemida, and Chefer.

And here we have one more note of one of the children of Chefer, who maybe made — some of them, maybe even his children, his daughters — made families for themselves. Tzelophehad, the son of Chefer, the son of Gilad, the son of Machir, the son of Menashe, had no boys, only girls, and they all had their names here: Machlah, Noah, Choglah, Milcah, and Tirtzah. There are five names, and we'll see later in the next chapter what happened. And obviously these daughters were important in the sense of not just specific individuals who inherited some land, but apparently they created families also.

So these are the families of Menashe. In total there's 52,700 people.

Ephraim

Ephraim — we have their families also. Some of their grandchildren became families. This is Shutelach, Becher, and Tachan. And Shutelach himself had a son or a family after him, Eran.

In total there's 32,500 people in Ephraim.

The Tribe of Binyamin

Then we have Binyamin with his families: Bela, Ashbel, Achiram, Shephupham, Chupham. And Bela himself had two families divided into Ard and Naaman.

In total: 45,600 people — people meaning warriors, right? Yes, that's right.

The Tribe of Dan

Then we have Dan with one family, Shucham.

In total: 64,400 people.

It's interesting that Dan had so many people but only one family. It's one of the interesting things Hashem had done in general. We could calculate like which ones, how many people there is per family — some of them have bigger families, some are smaller.

The Tribe of Asher

Okay, Asher with his children: Imnah, Ishvah, Beriah. And Beriah himself, his two children: Chever and Malchiel. Malchiel divided into families. And Asher's daughter Serach — apparently she's mentioned here not just to tell us that Asher had a daughter. Probably many of the children of Yaakov had daughters. The point is that this Serach apparently created some kind of family separately or had some name for herself. A name always usually means like you leave a family, you leave some inheritance that belongs to you.

Total of Asher is 53,400.

The Tribe of Naftali

Then we have Naftali with families: Yachtze'el, Guni, Yetzer, and Shillem.

In total: 45,400 people.

Total Count and the Mitzvah of Land Division

And we have the total count of all the people: 600,000 — 601,730.

And we have the point of all of this. The point of all of this is La'eleh techalek ha'aretz — **לאלה תחלק הארץ**: another mitzvah You should divide, you .[To these you should divide the land b'shemos — by] **בשמות** should separate the land. The mitzvah Shemos I think means the named people, .[the count of names as we have anshei shem [people of renown]. Anshei shem means people who have a family who's named after them. So mitzvah shemos means each family — like Shechem, Asriel, and so on — they get some inheritance, some nachalah .[portion]

And then it says you should give the greater one a greater nachalah and the smaller one a smaller nachalah .**איש לפי פקודיו** .[Ish lefi pekudav — Each according to his count]

Now there's a question here asked usually: Is it according to people or according to families? And if it's just according to people, then what's the point of the families? But of course the family is a kind of like governmental or organizational unit, and therefore a bigger family who has more people gets a bigger part in the land. But that doesn't mean that it's given to the individuals — it's given still to the shevet [tribe], to the family.

And then one more part of the way how to divide it **בגורל**: Which would be divided by a goral .[b'goral — by lot] **אל משפחותם בין רב למעט** .[El mishpechotam bein rav lim'at — To] .[their families, between the many and the few]

And there's some people that think that there's a contradiction here, because if it's a goral, then it means that sometimes the larger people would get the smaller land or so on, if it's just a goral, a lot that divides it. But I think what it literally means is that the goral only decides where you should get. Of course there's — in some sense, and sometimes these things are probably very complicated because in our land, the carrying capacity of a land is not entirely like — it doesn't work entirely with square feet or square kilometers. It depends on many variables. So some of these variables, since there's no other fair way to divide, then would be by lots. So that's what it's saying. And some in the end, and therefore you can't complain like it was a goral and that's who won. But that doesn't mean that there isn't some logic to before you make the goral to how you divide it and so on. And probably the details are not discussed here, but I think that's the logical solution for this problem.

The Census of Levi

And now after we have the census of all the people, we have the census of Levi and his families. And it's very nice that here the division of the land was had before that, as we'll say in the end of the story of Levi, because Levi did not inherit in the land. He had his own cities, as we'll learn, but Levi does not take a part in the land, and therefore his census is separate and said after.

And Levi of course had three main families: Gershon, Kehas, and Merari. And these families themselves had families to themselves, right? So Levi has — so first the person describes all the total families of Levi. In other words, the total, the lowest level families in total are five families: Livni, Chevrani, Machli, Mushi, and Korchi. So there's some missing here, as Rashi notes. There's some unclarity what happened. Like I said, things change sometimes.

And then it goes back to describe specific genealogies within Levi. So it talks about the Kehas having Amram with his wife Yocheved and their three children: Aharon, Moshe, and Miriam. Aharon having four children: Nadav, Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar. And of course Nadav and Avihu died, as we've learned in Parshas Shemini — they brought foreign fire, strange fire for Hashem, therefore they died. And therefore, otherwise obviously Nadav and Avihu don't leave families. Elazar and Itamar have families.

In total in Levi there is — sorry, 23,000 people. And these are counted not from 20, as the people that go in the army are counted, but from 30 years old, because they are not counted the lowest part. They are not counted, and also they didn't go to conquer. They're not part of the army because they did not have inheritance. So you know, it goes both ways — you don't fight, you don't get the land. They have their other jobs, as we've discussed in the beginning of this book. That's a big part.

And of course that's why this — the note here, I think that's why — that's the basic reason why Levi is shorter here. It doesn't give a lot of the details because we already know that this book talks about that at length already.

Conclusion: The New Generation

And here we have the final, the ending of this census, of this chapter. These are the census who counted the people, as we've already said in the beginning. And there was not one man in this from the first census of Moshe and Aharon, which was the Midbar Sinai [Wilderness of Sinai], as they went out of Mitzrayim [Egypt]. So in a different location.

And why? As Hashem told them that they will die in the desert, as He told them in Parashas Shlach. So all of them died. So that's where two — of course Moshe himself also will die in the desert, so he is not in the list. And we'll see in the next chapters what happened because Moshe died.

So that's the end of this chapter.