Extracts from

JOURNEY OF FAITH
From Sinai to Eretz Yisrael

A Sample Booklet Containing the
Outlines, Chronologies
and an amazingly clear and accurate
Translation of the Chumash

Interwoven with Brief Explanations and
Divided According to Topics

by Rabbi Yonason David Arenias

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At the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people had a vision of Hashem surrounded by legions of angels. Seeing their longing to be His faithful legions on earth, Hashem told them — as related at the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar — to form four camps around the Mishkan. But would they live up to their roles and be a nation dedicated to fulfilling His will?

The hardships of the journey tested the people’s resolve. They struggled to fulfill Hashem’s will, but faltered and had to remain in the desert to strengthen their faith. When they resumed their journey to the land, more tests awaited them. They prayed with all their heart and fought battle after battle. In the end, the nation did live up to the vision and emerged strong and faithful.

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Sample of Overviews and Running Commentary at end

A Note about the Translation  The translation of the verses is based on Rashi’s interpretation. Wherever Rashi does not explain the text, the translation follows the other commentators. In addition, to ensure that the translation accurately conveys the ideas of the Chumash yet remains readable, additional words — also based on Rashi and the commentators — have been inserted to aid in understanding the text. To contrast between the verse text and the explanatory insertions, the verse text is presented in bold. Occasionally pronouns have been identified for clarity. These appear in brackets and in bold to indicate that the pronoun is part of the text.

May this work be an eternal merit for my beloved wife

Yehudis Arenias

— with love from Dr. David Arenias

— May 2021

רבי דוד ארייאס
נָלָבֶּעַ כָּרָד תַּשָ’ל ה'
From the readers...

"Once I started reading Rabbi Yonason Arenias' book, Journey of Faith, I could not put it down and used it consistently through Sefer Bamidbar. It enhanced my own understanding of Bamidbar tremendously. The organization is outstanding and the presentation stunning. Anyone who wants to really understand the Chumash through the eyes of the major classical commentators would certainly benefit from this book."

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"When I finish reading the parsha I feel I can say, 'I know what this parsha is about and what the major meforshim say on it.'"

Rabbi Dovid Levine, Mashgiach, Yeshiva Gedolah of Midwood, New York

"I have been learning through 'Journey of Faith' consistently throughout the last weeks and I would like to tell you that it is fantastic. On the surface it initially appears like just another parsha book, but it is not. You superbly and clearly draw out the themes and patterns successfully giving an excellent overall view of Sefer Bamidbar, linking apparently unrelated sections and explaining the order both conceptually and chronologically. In addition you pepper your commentary with nuggets of gold in the deeper insights. I have not seen any similar work and very much hope that you have the opportunity to employ a similar style to the other sifrei Chumash which also at times lack a clear narrative structure."

Rabbi Richard Jacobs
Executive Director, Ohr Lagolah Hertz Institute for International Teacher Training

"I was shown your book by my Chumash teacher at Midreshet Tehilah Seminary and immediately got my own copy. I just wanted to say thank you so so much for writing it! I just can't even tell you how much I love it! I show it to anyone I'm with when I have your book with me! I just can't get over the work, effort and detail in it! ... So thank you so much for making my Shabbat mornings so much to look forward to and helping me really understand the Chumash so much more!"

N. M., London

BOOK REVIEW by Shlomo Greenwald
"The Jewish Press" – May 8, 2014

Vortelach have taken over. They have proliferated to the point where, for many of us, our understanding and reading of the Chumash is filtered through our favorite vortelach. We are so enraptured by the latest and newest vort that we seldom leave time or regard for seeing the bigger picture. The bigger picture — of both the entire Sefer Bamidbar and each parshah therein — is what Journey of Faith is all about. Clearly a labor of love, Journey of Faith was written by Rabbi Yonasan Arenias, and it is a grand achievement. In Journey of Faith, Rabbi Arenias, a writer and educator, has done much. He’s collated the classical commentaries, placing them together, but also letting each breathe on its own so the reader can follow a particular peirush’s approach. (Primarily, the views are presented in a running commentary, which, in the narrative sections of the Chumash, reads in a smooth and engaging style).

Before each parshah, he’s written an outline of the parshah, a detailed overview, and summaries of the parshah’s chronology and themes... Though it contains all these pieces, the book is laid out clearly; one element does not hobble another. Plus Rabbi Arenias has a gift for clear and engaging writing.

BOOK REVIEW by Rabbi Gil Student
“Jewish Action” – Summer 2014

Journey of Faith takes readers through Bamidbar as a teacher would... This is a reader-friendly commentary, specially designed for maximum pedagogical impact.

"The Sefer was really excellent. I felt I really understood Parshas Bamidbar for the first time; as opposed to it being just a repetitive listing of numbers, locations, and family trees. I read the portion about the significance of the Machanos (camp positions of the tribes) to my high school kids at the Shabbos Table and they were amazed at the depth and significance of something they otherwise would have glossed over. Thank you very much."

Dr J. L. T. MD, Community physician, Brooklyn
An Overview of Sefer Bamidbar

SEFER BAMIDBAR divides into four parts, each covering a distinct period of time: (1) the period the nation spent by Mount Sinai, from when they erected the Mishkan about a year after the Exodus until their departure from the mountain seven weeks later; (2) their journey from Sinai to the border of Eretz Yisrael (known until then as the land of Canaan) and their subsequent thirty-eight-year sojourn in the desert; (3) their journey in the fortieth year from Kadeish to the plains of Moav, by the Jordan River; and (4) their preparations to enter Eretz Yisrael while they were encamped on the plains of Moav.

1. The nation’s sojourn by the mountain

The sefer begins with the nation encamped by Mount Sinai, one month after they erected the Mishkan. To show His love for them, Hashem ordered a census of His precious people and commanded them to form four camps surrounding the Mishkan, the place where His Presence dwelled on earth with the greatest intensity. This arrangement paralleled the way Hashem is surrounded by heavenly legions of angels and demonstrated unequivocally that the Jewish people had become Hashem’s representatives on earth — His earthly legions charged with revealing His glory in this world. Here we have a picture of the ideal structure of the nation and its close relationship with Hashem.

Every male from the age of twenty to sixty years old was counted and allocated a position in the camp, creating the impression of an army organized for military service. Although the nation was indeed readying itself for the conquest of Eretz Yisrael, they were not counted merely for military duty. They were counted in order to allocate to each person his special role in Hashem’s service and to form them into a community dedicated to performing Hashem’s will. Not only were the Kohanim and Levi’im to be dedicated to Hashem’s service, but the entire nation were expected to serve Him, each according to his assigned role. Together they would fulfill the national mission of bringing Hashem’s Presence into the world. Each person was important and the entire camp was sanctified by His Presence. Naturally this demanded that the people make themselves worthy of His Presence and sanctify all aspects of their personal lives, and Hashem explained how they were to do this.

The first two parshiyos of Sefer Bamidbar, Bamidbar and Nasso, describe this restructuring of Bnei Yisrael and the formation of this dedicated, holy community. The beginning of Parashas Beha’aloscha goes on to describe how the people willingly accepted the new national structure and served Hashem with true dedication while encamped at Mount Sinai, most notably in the bringing of the pesach offering.

2. The journeys and trials of the dor hamidbar

When the people left Sinai and embarked on the journey to Eretz Yisrael, a series of tragic incidents took place. The difficulties and challenges of life in the desert exposed weaknesses in the people’s faith and revealed that the nation had not yet reached the high levels of devotion Hashem expected of them. This was confirmed in the incident of the spies described in Parashas Shelach. When the people finally arrived at the border of Eretz Yisrael, they sent spies to explore the land and to see if it could be conquered. This showed that they lacked faith in Hashem’s promises about the land and His ability to give it to them. Because of this lack of faith, the men between the ages of twenty and sixty — those counted in the census at Sinai — were subsequently denied entry into the land and condemned to die in the desert.

The people naturally felt discontented by the decree. In Parashas Korach, the Torah recounts how Korach exploited their bitter feelings to mount a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon. The restructuring of the nation that took place at Mount Sinai depended on the willingness of the people to forgo their own interests in favor of the tribal and national interests. Instead, driven by a desire to be Kohen Gadol, Korach rallied the people and challenged the statuses of the national groups, in particular those of the Kohanim and Levi’im, and demanded a return to the old order. There followed a series of miracles affirming the divine origin of Moshe’s teachings and the rights and statuses of the Kohanim and Levi’im. The new national structure was consolidated.

Although He had condemned Bnei Yisrael to live for forty years in the desert, Hashem never abandoned His beloved people. They continued to eat the manna, drink from the rock’s water, and live

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under the protection of the Clouds of Glory. Isolated from the influences of all the other nations, they lived as a single community in close proximity to each other and the Mishkan and under the powerful influence of Moshe. It was a time of growth and preparation. Keenly aware that their entire existence depended on Hashem, they learned to trust in Him in every aspect of their lives. Hashem was readying them for life in Eretz Yisrael.2

3. The journeys and trials of the second generation

With the arrival of the fortieth year, the last members of the dor hamidbar died. It was now time for their children, the new generation of Jews, to begin their journey to Eretz Yisrael. They had learned to trust in Hashem while living isolated lives in the desert with all their needs provided for. Now they would have to solidify their trust on their journey to Eretz Yisrael.

Parashas Chukas describes how Hashem tested this generation on their journey: their water ran out in Kadeish; their leaders, Miriam and Aharon, died; Edom and Moav refused them passage, forcing them to take a long, circuitous route to Eretz Yisrael; they were attacked by Amalek and by snakes; and they had to fight major battles against the Amorites and their fearsome kings, Sichon and Og. They did not always pass the tests, but through their experiences they built up their faith and gradually learned to put their trust soley in Hashem.

Bnei Yisrael learned that if they would truly trust in Hashem, they had nothing to worry about; He would take care of all their needs. They discovered that Hashem had thwarted an attempt by the Amorite nation to ambush them. Later they heard about how Hashem prevented Balak and Bilam’s attempts to curse them, as recorded in Parashas Balak. However, though the people had finally reached the border of Eretz Yisrael with Hashem’s aid, their trials were not over.

When Balak and Bilam saw they could neither harm Bnei Yisrael through battle nor through curses, they sought to harm them in another way — by enticing them to sin and stray from the Torah so that Hashem Himself would punish them. There followed the tragic incident at Shittim in which the women of Moav and Midian successfully enticed the Jewish men to sin with them and even commit idolatry. Hashem’s anger was aroused, and a plague struck the people, threatening to destroy the entire nation at the border of Eretz Yisrael. The plague was brought to an end when Pinchas risked his life to kill the tribal head Zimri, one of the sinners, and sanctified Hashem’s Name. As we learn in Parashas Pinchas, Hashem rewarded him greatly for his selfless act.

Despite their having attained elevated levels of faith, Bnei Yisrael were clearly still vulnerable to the negative influences of the other nations. They needed to once more strengthen their commitment to Hashem, uproot any lingering improper desires from their hearts, and prove that they were worthy of being His chosen nation, His representatives on earth. This was achieved in the war against Midian. After taking another census of His precious people — of the new generation who would enter Eretz Yisrael and inherit a portion in the land, as also recorded in Parashas Pinchas — Hashem gave the order to wipe out the evil nation of Midian. Through the preparations for the battle, and the battle itself, in which the soldiers all acted with total righteousness — as described in Parashas Mattos — the nation showed that they were truly dedicated to performing Hashem’s will. The nation had come of age and was ready to enter Eretz Yisrael.

4. Preparing to enter Eretz Yisrael.

The last parashah in Sefer Bamidbar, Parashas Masei, begins by recalling all the places in which Bnei Yisrael camped on their journey from Mitzrayim until the border of Eretz Yisrael. It was a recollection not just of the physical journey, but also of the people’s spiritual journey, their development into a nation devoted to Hashem. The parashah then looks forward to the conquest and settlement of the land. Hashem ordered the people to expel the land’s idolatrous inhabitants and taught them the laws related to the land’s division and inheritance.

2. See R’ Avigdor Miller, Sefer Dor De’ah, pp. 11, 29.
Parashah Outline

Part 1. The Count of Bnei Yisrael and Their Camp Arrangement
- Bnei Yisrael were counted according to their tribes — all except the tribe of Levi.
- Hashem instructed the people to camp around the Mishkan in four camps (degalim).

Part 2. The Count of the Tribe of Levi, Their Duties, and Their Camp Arrangement
- Hashem listed the Kohanim by name and assigned the Levi'im to help them.
- The tribe of Levi was counted and instructed to camp around the Mishkan in four groups.
- The firstborn of Yisrael were counted and "redeemed" (i.e., replaced) by the Levi'im.

Part 3. The Count of the Descendants of Kehas and Their Duties as Carriers of the Mishkan’s Holy Objects
- Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to count the descendants of Kehas who would carry the Mishkan’s holy objects.
- Hashem explained how the Kohanim would prepare the Mishkan’s holy objects before the descendants of Kehas would carry them.

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Summary of Chronology is on page 13

Part 1. The Count of Bnei Yisrael and Their Camp Arrangement
(Verses 1:1–2:34)

The Command to Count Bnei Yisrael

Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon to count all Bnei Yisrael [to know each person’s lineage and the number of each tribe]

1 1Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the second month [Iyar], in the second year from [Bnei Yisrael’s] exodus from the land of Egypt, saying, 2 “[T]ake [pl.] a head count of the entire community of Bnei Yisrael, counting them according to their families following their paternal line [i.e., father’s tribe; lit., “father’s house”], by a count of names of every male, one by one [lit., “by their heads”], from twenty years old and up, that is, everyone in Yisrael who goes out to war with the army — count them according to their tribal groupings, you and Aharon [in order to know each tribe’s number].”

Hashem named the tribal leaders who would be with them during the count

4Hashem continued, “There shall be with you [pl.] assisting you with the count a man from each tribe, each one the head of his father’s house [i.e., the tribal leader]. 5 And these are the names of the men who will stand with you: for the tribe of Reuven, Eli’tzur son of Shede’ur; 4for the tribe of Shimon, Shelumiel son of Tzurishaddai; 6for the tribe of Yehudah, Nachshon son of Amminadav; 7for the tribe of Yissachar, Nesa’el son of Tsu’ar; 8for the tribe of Zevulun, Eliav son of Cheilon; 9for the tribes from Yosef’s sons, for the tribe of Efraim, Eli’shama son of Ammihud, and for the tribe of Menasheh, Gamliel son of Pedahtzur; 10for the tribe of Binyamin, Avidan son of Gidoni; 11for the tribe of Dan, Achiezer son of Ammi’shaddai; 12for the tribe of Asher, Pegiel son of Achran; 13for the tribe of Gad, El’yasaf son of De’uel; 14for the tribe of Naftali, Achira son of Einan. 15These are the ones called on by the community to be their representatives, the leaders of their fathers’ tribes; they are the heads of Yisrael’s thousands.”
**The Count**

Moshe and Aharon gathered the community and counted them.

17 Moshe and Aharon took these twelve men who were designated here by their names, and then assembled the entire community on the first day of the second month, and everyone verified their lineage [lit., "bore themselves into their families"] according to their paternal line, by a count of names of every male from twenty years of age and up, one by one. Just as Hashem had commanded Moshe, so he, Aharon and the leaders counted them in the Sinai Desert.

The results of the count for each tribe:

20 These were the descendants of Reuven, Yisrael’s firstborn — the recorded number of their families’ offspring following their paternal line, in a count of names, one by one, of every male from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Reuven were forty-six thousand five hundred [46,500].

22 For the descendants of Shimon: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — those counted in a count of names, one by one, of every male from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Shimon were fifty-nine thousand three hundred [59,300].

24 For the descendants of Gad: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Gad were forty-five thousand six hundred and fifty [45,650].

26 For the descendants of Yehudah: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Yehudah were seventy-four thousand six hundred [74,600].

28 For the descendants of Yissachar: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Yissachar were fifty-four thousand four hundred [54,400].

30 For the descendants of Zevulun: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Zevulun were fifty-seven thousand four hundred [57,400].

32 For the two tribes from Yosef’s sons, [1] for the descendants of Efraim: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Efraim were forty thousand five hundred [40,500].

34 [2] For the descendants of Menasheh: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Menasheh were thirty-two thousand two hundred [32,200].

36 For the descendants of Binyamin: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Binyamin were thirty-five thousand four hundred [35,400].

38 For the descendants of Dan: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Dan were sixty-two thousand seven hundred [62,700].

40 For the descendants of Asher: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Asher were forty-one thousand five hundred [41,500].

42 The descendants of Naftali: the recorded number of the offspring of their families following their paternal line — in a count of names of males from twenty years old and up, everyone who would go out to war with the army — those counted in the tribe of Naftali were fifty-three thousand four hundred [53,400].

The total count of Bnei Yisrael:

44 These are the totals of those counted [sing.] by...
Moshe, Aharon, and the leaders of Yisrael; there were twelve men, one man from each tribe [lit., “for his father’s house”]. 45 All those counted in Bnei Yisrael according to their paternal lineage — from twenty years old and up, that is, everyone who would go out to war with the army in Yisrael — all those counted were in total six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty [603,550]. 46 But the Levi'im, according to their fathers’ tribe, were not counted among [Bnei Yisrael]. 47

The Levi'im’s Special Status

Hashem told Moshe not to count the Levi'im among Bnei Yisrael and to appoint them over the Mishkan.

48 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 49 “But do not count the tribe of Levi, and do not take their head count among Bnei Yisrael. 50 For you are to appoint the Levi'im as guardians over the Mishkan of Testimony [i.e., the Tabernacle for the Tablets of Testimony], over all its utensils and over everything that belongs to it. They will carry the parts of the Mishkan and all its utensils; they will look after it and all its requirements; and they will camp around the Mishkan. 51 When the Mishkan is about to journey [i.e., be transported], the Levi'im will dismantle it, and when the Mishkan is to encamp, the Levi'im will assemble and erect it. Any outsider [i.e., non-Levi] who approaches to dismantle or erect it will be put to death by Hashem. 52 Bnei Yisrael shall camp, with each one by his camp and by his camp’s flag, according to their tribal groupings [as will be explained]. 53 But the Levi'im shall camp closer in around the Mishkan of Testimony. If you do all this, then there will be no divine wrath on anyone in the community of Bnei Yisrael; the Levi'im are to look after the charge of the Mishkan of Testimony.” 54

The Four Camps

Hashem commanded everyone to camp by his tribe around the Mishkan.

2 1 Hashem spoke to Moshe, that he speak to Aharon and the people, saying, 2 “Bnei Yisrael shall encamp, each person by his camp’s unique flag, all with emblems [or signs] according to their fathers’ tribe [lit., “house”]; at a certain distance around the Tent of Meeting they shall encamp.” The tribes would form four camps and journey in a set order

(1) Yehudah’s camp (degel)

3 Hashem said, “Those who are to encamp in the front, that is to the east, shall be the three tribes of the flag of the camp of Yehudah, according to their tribal groupings; and the leader of Yehudah’s descendants is Nachshon son of Amminadav. 4 His group — those who were counted in his tribe — is seventy-four thousand six hundred [74,600]. 5 Those who are to encamp next to him and his tribe are [1] the tribe of Yissachar; and the leader of Yissachar’s descendants is Nesan’el son of Tzuar. 6 His group — those who were counted — is fifty-four thousand four hundred [54,400]. 7 The tribe of Zevulun; and the leader of Zevulun’s descendants is Eliyav son of Cheilon. 8 His group — those who were counted — is fifty-seven thousand, four hundred [57,400]. 9 All those counted for the camp of Yehudah are one hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred [186,400], in their three tribal groupings. When the nation journeys, they shall journey forth first.” 10

(2) Reuven’s camp (degel)

10 Hashem said, “The three tribes of the flag of the camp of Reuven shall be to the south, according to their tribal groupings; and the leader of Reuven’s descendants is El’itzur son of Shedei’ur. 11 His group — those who were counted in his tribe — is forty-six thousand five hundred [46,500]. 12 Those who are to encamp next to him and his tribe are [1] the tribe of Shimon; and the leader of Shimon’s descendants is Shelumiel son of Tzuri’shaddai. 13 His group — those who were counted — is fifty-nine thousand three hundred [59,300]. 14 And [2] the tribe of Gad; and the leader of Gad’s descendants is El’yasaf son of Re’uel. 15 His group — those who were counted — is forty-five thousand, six hundred and fifty [45,650]. 16 All those counted for the camp of Reuven are one hundred and fifty-one thousand four hundred and fifty [151,450], in their three tribal groupings. When the nation journeys, they shall journey forth second. 17

“Then the Tent of Meeting and the camp of the Levi'im shall journey forth in the midst of the camps of Yisrael. Just as [the camps] encamp so they shall journey, each man in his place, according to their camp flags.”

(3) Efraim’s camp (degel)

18 Hashem said, “The three tribes of the flag of the camp of Efraim, according to their tribal groupings, shall be to the west; and the leader of Efraim’s descendants is Eli’shama son of Ammihud. 19 His group — those who were counted in his tribe — is forty thousand five hundred [40,500] males. 20 And next to him and his tribe shall be [1] the tribe of
Menasheh; and the leader of Menasheh’s descendants is Gamliel son of Pedaiatzur. 21 His group — those who were counted — is thirty-two thousand two hundred [32,200]. 22 And [2] the tribe of Binyamin; and the leader of Binyamin’s descendants is Avidan son of Gidoni. 23 His group — those who were counted — is thirty-five thousand four hundred [35,400]. 24 All those counted for the camp of Efraim are one hundred and eight thousand one hundred [108,100], in their three tribal groupings. When the nation journeys, they shall journey forth third.”

(4) Dan’s camp (degel)

25 Hashem said, “The three tribes of the flag of the camp of Dan shall be to the north, according to their tribal groupings; and the leader of Dan’s descendants is Achiezer son of Ammi’shaddai. 26 His group — those who were counted — is sixty-two thousand seven hundred [62,700]. 27 Those who are to encamp next to him and his tribe shall be [1] the tribe of Asher; and the leader of Asher’s descendants is Pagiel son of Achran. 28 His group — those who were counted — is forty-one thousand five hundred [41,500]. 29 And [2] the tribe of Naftali; and the leader of Naftali’s descendants is Achira son of Einan. 30 His group — those who were counted — is fifty-three thousand four hundred [53,400]. 31 All those counted for the camp of Dan are one hundred and fifty-seven thousand six hundred [157,600]. When the nation journeys, they shall journey forth last, according to their camp flags.”

The Total Count

32 These mentioned above are the ones who were counted in Bnei Yisrael according to their paternal lineage — all those counted in the four camps according to their tribal groupings were six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty [603,550]. 33 The Levi’im were not counted among the rest of Bnei Yisrael, just as Hashem had commanded Moshe.

34 Bnei Yisrael did according to everything that Hashem had commanded Moshe; so they encamped according to the location of their flags and so they journeyed, each man in his assigned camp according to his family following his paternal line.

Part 2. The Count of the Tribe of Levi, Their Duties, and Their Camp Arrangement

(Verses 3:1 to 44)

The Kohanim, the Leaders of the Tribe of Levi

The Torah names the Kohanim and recalls that two of Aharon’s sons had died.

3: Those who follow were the offspring of Aharon and Moshe on the day that Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai. 2 These are the names of Aharon’s sons: Nadav, the firstborn, and Avihu, Elazar, and Isamar. 3 These are the names of Aharon’s sons, the anointed Kohanim who were inaugurated to serve as Kohanim. 4 But Nadav and Avihu died in the Mishkan before Hashem when they offered a strange [i.e., unauthorized] fire offering before Hashem in the Sinai Desert, and they had no children. Therefore, only Elazar and Isamar served as Kohanim in the lifetime of [lit., “before”] Aharon, their father.

The Roles of the Kohanim and Levi’im

The Levi’im would help the Kohanim perform the Mishkan’s service.

5 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Bring the tribe of Levi near and stand [them] before Aharon the Kohen, to serve him and the Kohanim, as follows: 6 They shall help look after his charge and the charge of the entire community in the Tent of Meeting, by helping to carry out the Mishkan’s service. 7 They shall look after all the utensils of the Tent of Meeting and the charge of Bnei Yisrael to carry out the Mishkan’s service. 8 You shall give over the Levi’im to Aharon and his sons; by My decree they are permanently given over to him for this work from among Bnei Yisrael. 9 And appoint Aharon and his sons to look after their duties of priesthood; any outsider [i.e., non-Kohen] who draws near to perform their duties will be put to death by Me.”

The Levi’im would replace the firstborns.

11 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Look, I have taken [i.e., drawn close] the Levi’im from among Bnei Yisrael in place of every firstborn of Bnei Yisrael who issued first from [lit., “opens”] the womb; the Levi’im will be Mine to serve Me. 12 For every firstborn is Mine, since on the day I struck down every firstborn non-Jew and animal in the

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land of Egypt, I sanctified every firstborn in Yisrael for Myself, both people and animals, and they will be Mine [until redeemed, as explained below]; I am Hashem.”

The Count of the Levi’im and their Camp Arrangement

Hashem told Moshe to count the Levi’im from one month old and up

14Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert, saying, 15“Count Levi’s descendants according to their paternal lineage, by their families; count every male from one month old and up.” Moshe counted them at Hashem’s order, just as he was commanded.

The Torah lists the names of all eight families of Levi’im

17These were Levi’s sons, by name: Gershon, Kehas, and Merari. 18And these were the names of Gershon’s sons according to their families [i.e., each one headed a family]: Livni and Shimi. 19And these were the names of Kehas’s sons according to their families: Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron, and Uziel. 20And these were the names of Merari’s sons according to their families: Machli and Mushli. These were the eight Levi families according to their paternal line.

The results of the count according to the three groups of Levi’im, and details of their camp locations and charges, as well of Moshe and the Kohanim

(1) Gershon

21As for the totals, for Gershon there were the Livni family and the Shimi family; these were the families of Gershon. 22Those counted in a count of every male from one month old and up, their count was seven thousand five hundred [7,500]. 23Hashem told Moshe: “The families of Gershon shall all encamp behind the Mishkan, that is, to the west. 24The leader of the patriarchal house of Gershon is El’yasaf son of La’el, 25and the charge of the descendants of Gershon for the Tent of Meeting is: the cover referred to as the Mishkan, the cover referred to as the Tent, the [Tent’s] cover, the curtain screen for the Tent of Meeting’s entrance, 26the hangings of the Courtyard and the curtain screen for the entrance of the Courtyard, which are all around for enclosing and protecting the Mishkan and the Outer Altar, and their ropes [for the covers], and anything that is needed for all its work [i.e., setting up the Mishkan].”

(2) Kehas

27For Kehas there were the Amram family, the Yitzhar family, the Chevron family, and the Uziel family; these were the families of Kehas. 28In a count of every male from one month old and up there were eight thousand six hundred [8,600]; they were the guardians in charge of the holy objects.

29Hashem told Moshe: “The families of the descendants of Kehas shall encamp by the side of the Mishkan, to the south. 30The leader of the patriarchal house of the families of Kehas is Eli’tzafan son of Uziel, 31and their charge is: the Ark, the Table, the Menorah [candelabra], the two Altars, and the holy utensils with which the service of the Table, Menorah and Altars [see chap. 4] would be performed, and the curtain screen [i.e., the paroches (partition curtain) at the entrance of the Holy of Holies], and all that is needed for its work [i.e., setting up the Mishkan].”

Elazar was appointed leader of the Levi’im’s leaders

32The leader of the three leaders in the tribe of Levi was Elazar son of Aharon the Kohan; the appointment of the guardians in charge of the holy objects [i.e., Kehas’ family] was under him.

(3) Merari

33For Merari there were the Machli family and the Mushli family; these were the Merari families. 34Those counted in a count of every male from one month old and up were six thousand two hundred [6,200].

35Hashem told Moshe: “The leader of the patriarchal house of the families of Merari is Tzuriel son of Avichayil. They shall all encamp by the side of the Mishkan, to the north. 36The appointed charge of the descendants of Merari is: the Mishkan’s boards, its bars, pillars, sockets [i.e., bases to hold the boards], and all its tools needed for all its work [i.e., for setting it up], 37the Courtyard’s pillars that are all around it, and their sockets, pegs, and ropes.”

(4) Moshe and the Kohanim

38Hashem told Moshe: “Those who are to encamp before the Mishkan, to the front, before the Tent of Meeting, to the east, are Moshe and Aharon and his sons, the guardians in charge of the Sanctuary [i.e., Mishkan], for [i.e., in fulfillment of] the charge of Bnei Yisrael; an outsider [i.e., Yisrael] who comes near to perform these duties will be put to death by Me.”
The total count
39 All those counted of the Levi'im — whom Moshe and Aharon counted [sing. at Hashem's order, according to their families — every male from one month old and up were twenty-two thousand [22,000].

The Redemption of the Firstborn
Hashem told Moshe to count Bnei Yisrael's firstborn sons from one month old and up
40 Hashem said to Moshe, “Count every male firstborn of Bnei Yisrael from one month old and up, and take [lit., “lift up”] the number of their names. 41 Then you shall take the Levi'im to Me — I am Hashem — in place of every firstborn among Bnei Yisrael, and you shall take the Levi'im's animals in place of every firstborn among the animals of Bnei Yisrael.”
42 Moshe counted every firstborn among Bnei Yisrael, just as Hashem commanded him. 43 All the male firstborns — those counted in a count of names of those from one month old and up — were twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three [22,273].

Hashem told Moshe to take the Levi'im in place of the firstborn, and the Levi'im’s animals in place of Bnei Yisrael's firstborn animals
44 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 45 “Bring near to Me [lit., “take”] the Levi'im in place of every firstborn among Bnei Yisrael, and take the Levi'im's animals in place of [Bnei Yisrael's] animals, and the Levi'im will be Mine — I am Hashem.”

Hashem also told Moshe to redeem the excess firstborns by taking from them five shekels
46 Hashem continued: "And as for the redemption of the two hundred and seventy-three [273] firstborn of Bnei Yisrael who exceed the Levi'im in number, 47 take from them five shekel coins per head; take sacred shekels [i.e., heavier shekels used for sacred purposes], where the shekel is twenty geirah coins. 48 Then give all the money to Aharon and his sons, as redemption of the excess among [the firstborn].” 49 Moshe took the redemption money from those firstborn in excess of those firstborn who had been redeemed by the Levi'im; 50 he took from the firstborns of Bnei Yisrael the money: one thousand three hundred and sixty-five [1,365] shekels in holy shekels. 51 Moshe gave the money of those redeemed to Aharon and his sons at Hashem's order, just as Hashem had commanded Moshe.

Part 3. The Count of the Descendants of Kehas and Their Duties as Carriers of the Mishkan's Holy Objects
(Verses 4:1–20)
The Command to Count the Group of Kehas
Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to count the members of Kehas between the ages of 30 and 50 years; they were to carry all the holy objects when the nation journeyed
4 1 Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying, 4 2 “Take a head count of Kehas's descendants from among Levi's descendants, according to their families following their paternal line, 3 from thirty years old and up, until fifty years old, everyone who enters [i.e., is eligible for] the group who are to carry out work for the Tent of Meeting.”

The Kohanim Prepared the Holy Objects for Carrying
Hashem explained how the Kohanim would cover the holiest objects
4 3 Hashem continued: “This is to be the service of the descendants of Kehas for the Tent of Meeting: to carry the holiest [lit., “holy of holies”] of the Mishkan's parts. 4 4 But first Aharon and his sons shall come into the Tent of Meeting after the Cloud departs, when the camp is about to journey, and take down the partition curtain, and cover with it the Ark of Testimony [i.e., the Ark containing the Tablets of Testimony]. 4 5 They shall place upon the covered Ark a covering of tachash hide, and spread a completely blue woolen cloth on top of that, and then adjust the Ark's poles.”
4 6 "Upon the Showbread Table [lit., "Table of Faces"] they shall spread a blue woolen cloth, then place upon it the dishes [i.e., bread molds], the small incense bowls, the supporting frames, and the hollow half-tubes that cover the bread underneath them while supporting the bread above; and the continually present bread shall be [i.e., remain] on the Table when it is covered with the blue cloth. 4 7 They shall spread over the utensils and Table a red woolen cloth, and then cover it with a covering of tachash hide, and insert the Table's carrying poles into its rings.
4 8 "They shall take a blue woolen cloth and cover the Menorah [candelabra] of light, together with its lamps, its tongs [used for the wicks], its scoops
On the first of Nissan (the first month of the year), almost one year after the Exodus from Mitzrayim, the Mishkan was erected.

After a seven-day inauguration ceremony, on the eighth of Nissan, the Levi’im began working in the Mishkan.

On the first of Iyar (the second month), Hashem told Moshe to count Bnei Yisrael (excluding the Levi’im) and ordered them to form four degalim around the Mishkan.

He then told Moshe to count the Levi’im and, together with Moshe and the Kohanim, they camped in four groups around the Mishkan (closer to it than the degalim).

Next, the firstborn were counted and then redeemed by the Levi’im.

Finally, Hashem ordered a second count of the Levi’im to determine which of them would engage in active service. Moshe had to count the sons of Kehas first.

Elazar was put in charge of the oils, spices and continual flour offering, and every holy object in the Mishkan.

Hashem told Moshe, “The charge of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohanim is the lighting oil for the Menorah, the incense spices, the continual [i.e., daily] flour offering, and the anointment oil; and in addition the charge of the entire Mishkan and every holy object that is within it and its utensils.”

The Kohanim’s Responsibility for the Levi’im

Hashem told Moshe and Aharon not to cause the members of Kehas to die; the Kohanim would assign them objects to carry.

Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, saying, “Do not cause the tribe of the families of Kehas to be cut off from [i.e., to die] among the Levi’im. Do this for them that they will live and not die when they approach the holy objects to carry them: Aharon and his sons shall first come and assign each man his service and his burden, so that they will not come in to see when the holy objects are wrapped [lit, “swallowed”] in their covers and die as a result.”

Summary of Chronology

- On the first of Nissan (the first month of the year), almost one year after the Exodus from Mitzrayim, the Mishkan was erected.
- After a seven-day inauguration ceremony, on the eighth of Nissan, the Levi’im began working in the Mishkan.
- On the first of Iyar (the second month), Hashem told Moshe to count Bnei Yisrael (excluding the Levi’im) and ordered them to form four degalim around the Mishkan.
- He then told Moshe to count the Levi’im and, together with Moshe and the Kohanim, they camped in four groups around the Mishkan (closer to it than the degalim).
- Next, the firstborn were counted and then redeemed by the Levi’im.
- Finally, Hashem ordered a second count of the Levi’im to determine which of them would engage in active service. Moshe had to count the sons of Kehas first.
Part 1. The Count of the Levi’im (to Carry the Mishkan’s Parts)

(Verses 4:21–49)

The Command to Count the Groups of Gershon and Merari

Hashem told Moshe to count the members of Gershon and Merari who were between thirty and fifty years old; He also detailed their charges.

1. Gershon

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, "Take a head count of Gershon’s descendants — them, too — according to their paternal lineage, by their families. Count them from thirty years old and up, until fifty years old — everyone who comes [i.e., is eligible] to join the group selected to perform work at the Tent of Meeting. This is to be the work of the families of Gershon: to work and carry. They shall carry the tapestries of the cover referred to as the Mishkan, the cover referred to as the Tent of Meeting, its cover, and the tachash-hide cover that is on top of it, the curtain screen for the Tent of Meeting’s entrance, the hangings of the Courtyard and the curtain screen for the encirclement of the Courtyard which are all around for enclosing and protecting the Mishkan and the Outer Altar, and their ropes [for the covers], and all the tools for their work, and everything that will be given to [Gershon’s descendants] so they can work."

2. Merari

Hashem continued: "As for Merari’s descendants — count them according to their families following their paternal line. Count them from thirty years old and up, until fifty years old — everyone who enters [i.e., is eligible for] the group selected to..."
perform the work of the Tent of Meeting. This is their charge of carrying regarding all their work at the Tent of Meeting: the Mishkan’s boards, its bars, pillars, and sockets [i.e., bases to hold the boards]; the Court-yard’s pillars that are all around it, and their sockets, pegs, ropes, and all their tools needed for all their work. [Aharon and his sons] shall assign to Merari’s descendants by name the objects to be in their charge for carrying. This is the work of the families of Merari’s descendants, all their work at the Tent of Meeting, and it will be under the control of Isamar, son of Aharon the Kohain.

The Counts and Their Results

(1) Kehas

Moshe and Aharon and the leaders of the community counted (sing.) Kehas’s descendants according to their families following their paternal line — from thirty years old and up, until fifty years old, everyone who would enter [i.e., was eligible for] the group selected for the work of the Tent of Meeting — those counted according to their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty [2,750].

These are the ones counted from the families of Kehas, everyone who would work at the Tent of Meeting, whom Moshe and Aharon counted at Hashem’s order through Moshe.

(2) Gershon

And as for those counted of Gershon’s descendants, according to their families following their paternal line — from thirty years old and up, until fifty years old, everyone who would enter [i.e., was eligible for] the group selected for the work of the Tent of Meeting — those counted according to their families following their paternal line, were two thousand six hundred and thirty [2,630].

These are the ones counted from the families of Gershon’s descendants, everyone who would work at the Tent of Meeting, whom Moshe and Aharon counted at Hashem’s order.

(3) Merari

And as for those counted of the families of Merari’s descendants, according to their families following their paternal line — from thirty years old and up, until fifty years old, everyone who would enter the group selected for the work of the Tent of Meeting — those counted according to their families were three thousand two hundred [3,200]. These are the ones who were counted from the families of Merari’s descendants, whom Moshe and Aharon counted at Hashem’s order through Moshe.

The total count of all the Levi’im aged 30–50

The total of all those counted — whom Moshe, Aharon, and the leaders of Yisrael counted according to their families following their paternal line, from thirty years old and up, until fifty years old, everyone who would come [i.e., was eligible] to perform the service of sing that would accompany the sacrificial service and the work of carrying for the Tent of Meeting — those counted were eight thousand five hundred and eighty [8,580]. At Hashem’s order through Moshe, [he] counted them, to appoint each man to his work and to his carrying: the ones counted were only those who Hashem had commanded Moshe to count, i.e., between thirty and fifty.

Part 2. The Sanctity of the Camp

(Partes 5:1–6:27)

Purifying the Camp from Tumah

Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to send out from the camp everyone who was tamei

5:1 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Command Bnei Yisrael to send out from the camp every metzora [i.e., one afflicted with tzara’as], every zav [i.e., one who had discharges], and everyone impure from contact with a corpse [lit., “soul”]. Send out males and females — send them to a place outside of the camp so that they will not make impure their camps where I dwell among them.” Bnei Yisrael did this and sent them outside the camp; just as Hashem had spoken to Moshe, so Bnei Yisrael did.

Laws of Theft

(Sanctifying the social-communal realm)

Hashem taught how to repent for stealing and then swearing falsely about it

5:1 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Tell Bnei Yisrael: When a man or woman will commit any of the sins of man, thereby acting treacherously against Hashem, that person will have become guilty. They shall confess their sin that they did and then each must return the object of his guilt, the principal [lit., “it’s head,” i.e., the amount stolen], and also add a fifth to it, and give the money to the one to whom he was guilty. But if the man from whom he stole died and has no heir [lit., “redeemer”] to whom to return the object of his guilt, the object of...
his guilt [i.e., the principal and additional fifth] that is being returned belongs to Hashem and is given to the Kohen. This law is besides the ram of atonement of the sinner with which [the Kohen] will make atonement for him.”

Gifts to the Kohanim and the Laws of Theft

Terumah brought to a Kohen belongs to him

"Hashem continued: "Every elevated portion that was separated and sanctified — all the holy offerings that Bnei Yisrael will bring to the Kohen will belong to [the Kohen]." 7 But until given, the man’s holy offerings will belong to him [i.e., he can decide to which Kohen/ Levi to give them]; only offerings that a man will give to the Kohen will belong to [the Kohen]."

Laws of the Sotah

(Sanctifying the Family-Moral Realm)

Becoming a sotah — if a woman secluded herself with another man, the husband should take her to a Kohen to be tested

8Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 9"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: If any man’s wife strays from the ways of modesty and acts treacherously against him, and he suspects 10that another man lay with her intimately, but it was hidden from her husband’s eyes, for she was secluded and either: [1] she became impure [i.e., committed adultery] but there is no witness against her, and she acted willingly and was not seized forcibly; 11and moreover a spirit of jealousy had passed over him beforehand, and he had warned his wife not to be secluded with another man, but she was and became impure; or [2] a spirit of jealousy had passed over him beforehand and he warned his wife, and though she secluded herself with the man, she did not become impure. 12Then the man must bring his wife to the Kohen and also bring her offering on her behalf: a tenth of an ephah of barley flour. He shall not pour oil on it, nor put frankincense on it, for it is a flour offering of jealousies, a remembrance flour offering recalling her suspected sin.

Testing the sotah — the Kohen makes her take an oath, writes it on a scroll which he dissolves in holy water, and offers up her minchah offering

13Hashem continued: “The Kohen shall bring [the woman] near the Mishkan’s Courtyard and stand her before Hashem at the Courtyard’s gateway. 14The Kohen shall take holy water [i.e., it was sanctified in the Washstand] and put it in an earthenware bowl, and the Kohen shall take some of the dry earth that will be on the Mishkan’s floor and put it in the water. 15The Kohen shall stand the woman before Hashem and uncover and unbraided the woman’s hair on her head and place upon her hands the remembrance flour offering — it is a flour offering of jealousies — while in the Kohen’s hand shall be the bowl containing the holy waters that are bitter to her and bring out on her a curse.

16"The Kohen shall make her take an oath, saying to the woman, ‘If no other man lay with you and you have not strayed and acted with impurity with a man other than your husband, you shall be freed from harm when you drink these waters that are bitter and bring out a curse. But if you did stray by sinning with a man other than your husband, and if you became impure and a man other than your husband lay with you... [then you will die].’ 17Then the Kohen shall make the woman swear the part of the oath that contains the curse, and the Kohen shall say to the woman: ‘May Hashem make you into an expression of curse and oath among your people, when Hashem makes your thigh fall away and your stomach swell. These waters that bring out a curse will enter your inwards and make the stomach of your adulterer swell and the thigh of your adulterer fall away!’ And the woman shall say in response, ‘Amen [I accept], Amen.’

18 “The Kohen shall write these curses on a scroll and then erase the writing in the bitter waters in the earthenware bowl. 19He shall bring her offering [see 5:25-26] and then have the woman drink the waters that are bitter to her and bring out on her a curse, and the waters that bring out a curse shall enter her to be bitter and bad for her. 20Before this the Kohen shall take from the woman’s hand the flour offering of jealousies, wave the flour offering in the prescribed manner before Hashem, and bring and touch it to the Altar. 21The Kohen shall scoop out by hand exactly three fingers’ worth from the flour offering for its remembrance portion and burn it on the Outer Altar. Only afterward shall he have the woman drink the water.

Drinking the water — the Kohen makes her drink the water

22Hashem continued: “He shall make her drink the water, and it will be that if she became impure and acted treacherously against her husband, the waters that bring out a curse will enter her to be bitter; first her stomach will swell and then her thigh will fall away, and the woman will become an expression of curse among her people. 23But if the woman did not become impure, and she is totally
pure, she will be proven innocent and will be unharmed by the waters and will bear offspring. 
29“[This is the law of jealousies when a woman will stray by sinning with a man other than her husband and become impure. 30]If the husband is a man over whom a spirit of jealousy will pass, and he will warn his wife and make the woman stand before Hashem at the Mishkan, then the Kohen shall do to her this entire law. 31]The man will be innocent of sin; but that woman will bear the consequences of her sin.”

Laws of the Nazir
(Sanctifying the Individual-Spiritual Realm)

One who vows to be a nazir cannot consume wine, cut his hair, or become tamei through contact with a corpse.

6]Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: When a man or woman will express verbally that he is taking a vow to be a nazir, to separate himself from wine for Hashem’s sake, 7]then from both new wine and aged, intoxicating wine he must separate [lit., abstain]. In addition, he must not drink vinegar made from new wine or vinegar made from aged, intoxicating wine; he must not drink any liquid in which grapes were soaked; and he must not eat fresh and dried grapes [lit., raisins]. 8]All the days of his separation he must not eat anything made from the grapevine, from the seeds to the skin.

9]“All the days of his vow of separation a razor must not pass over his head to cut any hair; until the completion of the days that he vowed for Hashem’s sake [his hair] shall be holy — he must leave the hair of his head to grow a long growth. 10]All the days of his separating himself for Hashem’s sake he must not come near a dead person [lit., “soul”]. 11]Even for his father or mother, for his brother or sister — he must not become impure for them on their deaths, because the crown of his God [lit., his uncut hair] is on his head. 12]All the days of his separation he shall be holy to Hashem through avoiding contact with the dead.”

A nazir who became tamei counts seven days and then purifies himself, shaves his hair and brings offerings; he begins counting anew the days he vowed.

9]Hashem continued: “If someone near him in a roofed area will die suddenly or unexpectedly, and the corpse will make him and also his nazirite head [lit., the hair that he did not cut due to his vow] impure, he shall count seven days and shave the hair on his head on the day of his purification with the purification waters; that is, on the seventh day he shall shave it after being purified. 10]And on the eighth day, he shall bring two turtledoves or two young doves to the Kohen, to the area facing the Tent of Meeting’s entrance. 11]The Kohen shall prepare and offer one as a sin offering and the other one as a burnt offering and provide atonement for him for having sinned by coming in contact with the dead person; and he shall sanctify his head anew on that day, 12]and once more separate himself from wine for Hashem’s sake for the entire period of his vow of separation, and he shall bring a he-lamb in its first year as a guilt offering. The first days that he already counted will fall away [lit., be disregarded] because his period of separation was interrupted when he became impure.”

On completing his term, the nazir brings offerings and shaves his hair and burns it.

13]Hashem continued: “This is the law of the nazir: On the day that the days of his vowed separation are completed, he shall bring himself to the Courtyard’s gate facing the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, 14]and he shall bring with him his offering to Hashem: one unblemished [lit., “perfect”] he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering, one unblemished she-lamb in its first year as a sin offering, one unblemished ram as a peace offering, 15]and a basket of matzos [lit., unleavened bread]; unleavened loaves of fine flour mixed with oil, and flat matzos smeared on top with oil. And the burnt and peace offerings must be accompanied by their prescribed flour offerings and their wine libations.

16]“The Kohen shall bring the offering before Hashem and offer [lit., “make”] the nazir’s sin offering and then his burnt offering. 17]He shall offer the ram as a peace sacrifice for Hashem with intent when sacrificing it to sanctify the basket of matzos, and the Kohen shall offer [the ram’s] flour offering and its libation. 18]Then the nazir shall shave his nazirite head after the ram’s slaughter which was at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and he shall take the hair of his nazirite head and put it on the fire that is under the pot cooking the peace sacrifice. 19]The Kohen shall take the cooked upper right foreleg of the ram, and one unleavened loaf from the basket with one flat matzah, and place them on the hands of the nazir after he has shaved his nazirite head. 20]The Kohen shall wave them in the prescribed way as a wave offering before Hashem; it [lit., the set of waved offerings] is a holy gift for the Kohen, aside from the ram’s breast which is waved, and aside from the ram’s thigh [lit.,
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right upper hind leg] which is raised which are standard gifts from a peace sacrifice to a Kohen. Afterward the nazir may drink wine. This [stated above] is the law of the nazir who will vow to be a nazir. He must bring his offering to Hashem for his vow of separation, aside from whatever extra offerings he will vow according to what his means allow; according to the vow that he takes to bring extra offerings, so shall he fulfill it, on top of the basic law of his vow of separation.

The Kohanim’s Blessings

Hashem commanded the Kohanim to bless Bnei Yisrael

21Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying: Like this you shall bless Bnei Yisrael, saying to them:
24‘May Hashem bless you and guard you.
25May Hashem illuminate His Countenance and show it to you and grant you favor.
26May Hashem turn His Countenance toward you in compassion and grant you peace.
27‘[The Kohanim] shall bestow the blessings on Bnei Yisrael in My Name, and I will bless them.’

Part 3. The Leaders’ Offerings

(Verses 7:1–89)

The Leaders’ Donation of Wagon and Oxen

The tribal leaders offered six wagons and twelve oxen to help transport the Mishkan

7 It was on the day that Moshe finished setting up the Mishkan that he anointed it with the special anointing oil and sanctified it and all its utensils, and also after setting up the Outer Altar and all its utensils, he anointed them and sanctified them.
8 On that day the leaders of Yisrael, the heads of their fathers’ houses, came forward with an offering. They were the original leaders of the tribes in Egypt, and the ones who would later stand with Moshe and Aharon at the countings. They brought their offering before Hashem: six covered wagons and twelve oxen — a wagon for every two leaders and an ox for each one — and they brought them in front of the Mishkan.

Hashem told Moshe to accept the wagons and oxen and give them to the groups of Gershon and Merari

9Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Take the wagons and oxen from them; they will be used to perform the work of transporting the parts of the Tent of Meeting. Give them to the Levi'im, to each man according to his work.” So Moshe took the wagons and oxen and gave them to the Levi'im.

The Leaders’ Inauguration Offerings

The leaders brought offerings to inaugurate the Altar

10Then the leaders brought offerings for the dedication of the Outer Altar on the day it was anointed; and the leaders brought their offering in front of the Altar. 11Hashem said to Moshe, “One leader each day, only one leader each day for twelve days, shall they bring their offerings for the Altar’s dedication.”

The Torah details the offerings of each leader

Day 1 – the leader of Yehudah

12The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nachshon son of Amminadav of the tribe of Yehudah. His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel [i.e., a heavier shekel used for sacred purposes], both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; one he-goat as a sin offering; and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Nachshon son of Amminadav.

Day 2 – the leader of Yissachar

13On the second day, Nesan’el son of Tzu’ar, the leader of the tribe of Yissachar brought an offering. He brought as his offering: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a...
burnt offering: 22 one he-goat as a sin offering; 23 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Nesan’el son of Tzu’ar. 24

Day 3 – the leader of Zevulun

24 On the third day was the leader of Zevulun’s descendants, Eliav son of Cheilon. 25 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 26 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 27 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 28 one he-goat as a sin offering; 29 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Eliav son of Cheilon. 30

Day 4 – the leader of Reuven

30 On the fourth day was the leader of Reuven’s descendants, Eli’tzur son of Shedel’ur. 31 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 32 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 33 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 34 one he-goat as a sin offering; 35 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Eli’tzur son of Shedel’ur. 36

Day 5 – the leader of Shimon

36 On the fifth day was the leader of Shimon’s descendants, Shelumi’el son of Tzuri’shadai. 37 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 38 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 39 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 40 one he-goat as a sin offering; 41 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Shelumi’el son of Tzuri’shadai. 42

Day 6 – the leader of Gad

42 On the sixth day was the leader of Gad’s descendants, Elyasaf son of De’uel. 43 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel coin, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 44 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 45 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 46 one he-goat as a sin offering; 47 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Elyasaf son of De’uel. 48

Day 7 – the leader of Efraim

48 On the seventh day was the leader of Efraim’s descendants, Elishama son of Ammihud. 49 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 50 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 51 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 52 one he-goat as a sin offering; 53 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Elishama son of Ammihud. 54

Day 8 – the leader of Menasheh

54 On the eighth day was the leader of Menasheh’s descendants, Gamli’el son of Pedahztur. 55 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 56 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 57 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 58 one he-goat as a sin offering; 59 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Gamli’el son of Pedahztur. 60

Day 9 – the leader of Binyamin

60 On the ninth day was the leader of Binyamin’s descendants, Avidan son of Gidoni. 61 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 62 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 63 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 64 one he-goat as a sin offering; 65 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Avidan son of Gidoni. 66

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Day 10 – the leader of Dan

66 On the tenth day was the leader of Dan’s descendants, Achiezer son of Ammi’shaddai. 67 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 68 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 69 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 70 one he-goat as a sin offering; 71 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Achiezer son of Ammi’shaddai.

Day 11 – the leader of Asher

72 On the eleventh day was the leader of the children of Asher, Paggi’el son of Achran. 73 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels of the sacred shekel, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 74 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 75 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 76 one he-goat as a sin offering; 77 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Paggi’el son of Achran.

Day 12 – the leader of Naftali

78 On the twelfth day was the leader of Naftali’s descendants, Achira son of Einan. 79 His offering was: one large silver bowl, its weight one hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin, its weight seventy shekels, in the holy shekel coin, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a flour offering; 80 one small gold dish weighing ten shekels full of incense; 81 one young bull, one ram, and one he-lamb in its first year as a burnt offering; 82 one he-goat as a sin offering; 83 and for the peace sacrifice: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs in their first year. This was the offering of Achira son of Einan.

The totals

84 This was the dedication offering of the Altar, the total amounts that Moshe accepted from the twelve leaders of Yisrael on the day that it was anointed: twelve large silver bowls, twelve silver basins, and twelve small gold dishes. 85 Each bowl weighed a hundred and thirty silver shekels and each basin seventy silver shekels, thus all the silver of the vessels was two thousand four hundred [2,400] shekels of the sacred shekel. 86 In addition, twelve gold dishes full of incense, each dish weighing ten shekels of the sacred shekel, thus all the gold of the dishes was one hundred and twenty [120] shekels. 87 All the cattle and sheep for the burnt offerings were twelve young bulls, twelve rams, and twelve he-lambs in their first year, with their flour offerings; and twelve he-goats were for sin offerings. 88 All the cattle and sheep for the peace sacrifices were twenty-four young bulls, sixty rams, sixty he-goats, and sixty lambs in their first year. This was the dedication offering of the Altar after it was anointed.

Hashem’s Response

89 When Moshe came into the Tent of Meeting to speak with [Hashem], he heard the Voice of Hashem speaking and the Voice came to him from above the cover that was upon the Ark of Testimony, from between the two Keruvim — and He spoke only to him.

Summary of Chronology

- On the first of Nissan (the first month of the year), the Mishkan was set up. On that day — or perhaps a month later — Hashem told Moshe to send out the spiritually impure people from the camp. He also taught the laws of how a thief who swore falsely should repent, the laws of a sotah, the laws of a nazir, and the way in which the Kohanim should bless Yisrael.
- Also on the first of Nissan, after the Mishkan and Altar were anointed by Moshe, the leaders donated wagons and oxen to help transport the Mishkan from place to place. They also brought offerings to inaugurate the Altar. These offerings were offered up over twelve days, from the first to the twelfth of Nissan.
- On the first of Iyar (the second month), Hashem told Moshe to count the entire nation (see Parashas Bamidbar). Presumably it was at this time that He commanded him to count the Levi’im who were between thirty and fifty years old and to assign them their charges to carry the various parts of the Mishkan.
Part 1. At Mount Sinai

(Verses 8:1–9:14)

Kindling the Menorah

(A commandment for the Kohanim)

Hashem explained how Aharon was to kindle the lamps.

8 1 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 2 "Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lamps [lit., "raise up" the flames], arrange their wicks so that the seven lamps shall shine toward the middle lamp at the center of the Menorah." 3 Aharon did so; he kindled its lamps toward the center of the Menorah, just as Hashem had commanded Moshe.

The Menorah was made from one piece of gold.

This is the account of the making of the Menorah: beaten out of one block of gold, from its base to its flower ornamentation it was beaten out; like the image that Hashem had showed Moshe, so he made the Menorah.

The Inauguration of the Levi'im

(A commandment for the Levi'im)

Hashem told Moshe how to purify the Levi'im.

8 1 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 6 "Persuade [lit., "take"] the Levi'im to serve Me from among Bnei Yisrael and purify them to serve in the Mishkan. To purify them do to them like this: Sprinkle on them the purification waters, have them pass a razor over their entire body, and then they shall wash their garments and purify [i.e., immerse] themselves and their garments in a mikveh.

8 Afterward they shall take a young bull for a burnt offering with its flour offering of fine flour mixed with oil. You shall take a second young bull for a sin offering.

8 "You shall bring the Levi'im in front of the Tent of Meeting and assemble there the entire community of Bnei Yisrael. 10 You shall bring the Levi'im before Hashem by the Mishkan's entrance, and Bnei Yisrael shall rest their hands upon the heads of the Levi'im. 11 Then Aharon shall wave all the Levi'im in the prescribed manner as a wave offering before Hashem from Bnei Yisrael, and, after offering up the offerings, they will thereby be consecrated to per-
The Levi'im’s Working Years

The Levi'im had to join the legion working in the Ohel Mo’ed at age 25, [train for five years till age 30,] and stop working at age 50.

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “This is the law regarding the charges of the Levi'im: Any Levi from the age of twenty-five years and up shall come [i.e., be eligible] to join the group engaged in the work of the Tent of Meeting. From the age of fifty years he shall retire from the work group and no longer do heavy work. But he shall still serve with his brothers at the Tent of Meeting, keeping his charge; but he shall not do heavy work. Thus you shall do for the Levi'im regarding their charges.”

Pesach in the Desert

(A commandment for all Bnei Yisrael)

Hashem told Bnei Yisrael to bring the pesach offering, and they did

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert, in the second year from [Bnei Yisrael’s] exodus from the land of Egypt, in the first month [Nisan], saying, “Bnei Yisrael shall prepare and offer the pesach offering in its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, in the afternoon [lit, “between the evenings”], you [pl] shall offer it in its appointed time; according to all its decrees and according to all its laws you shall offer it.”

Moshe told Bnei Yisrael to prepare and offer the pesach offering. They offered the pesach offering in the first month on the fourteenth day of the month, in the afternoon, in the Sinai Desert; according to everything that Hashem had commanded Moshe, so Bnei Yisrael did.

Pesach Sheini

Some men who were tamei asked Moshe why they could not bring the pesach offering

“It happened that there were men who were impure through having had contact with a dead person and therefore could not offer the pesach offering on that day. So they came before Moshe and Aharon on that day.

These men said to [Moshe], “We are impure through having had contact with a dead person. Why should we be precluded and not bring Hashem’s offering in its appointed time among the rest of Bnei Yisrael?” Moshe said to them, “Wait and I shall go and hear what Hashem will command regarding you.”

The Levi'im

Moshe, Aharon, and the entire community of Bnei Yisrael did [sing.] to the Levi'im everything stated above; according to everything that Hashem had commanded Moshe regarding the Levi'im, so Bnei Yisrael did to them. The Levi'im purified themselves with the purification waters and washed their garments and immersed, and Aharon waved them as a wave offering before Hashem. Then Aharon provided atonement for them with the offerings, to fully purify them. Afterward, the Levi'im came to perform their service at the Tent of Meeting, to serve before Aharon and before his sons; just as Hashem had commanded Moshe regarding the Levi'im, so [Bnei Yisrael] did to them.

The Levi'im were purified exactly as Hashem commanded.

Hashem explained that the Levi'im would work in the Mishkan in place of the firstborn

Hashem continued: “For [the Levi'im] are completely given over to Me from among Bnei Yisrael; in place of every male who issued first from the womb [lit, “those who open every womb”] — every firstborn of Bnei Yisrael — I have taken them to Me. For all the firstborn of Bnei Yisrael are Mine, of both people and animals; on the day I struck down every firstborn non-Jew and animal in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself. But because the firstborns subsequently sinned I took the Levi'im in place of every firstborn of Bnei Yisrael; and I have completely given over the Levi'im to Aharon and his sons from among Bnei Yisrael, to perform the work of the firstborn of Bnei Yisrael at the Tent of Meeting and to provide atonement for Bnei Yisrael, so that now there will not be a plague among Bnei Yisrael when anyone in Bnei Yisrael approaches the Holy Sanctuary, since they no longer need to approach it.”

form Hashem’s service. The Levi'im shall rest their hands upon the head of each of the bulls, and [Aharon] shall offer one as a sin offering and the other one as a burnt offering to Hashem, to provide atonement for the Levi'im. Then you shall have the Levi'im stand before Aharon and before his sons and wave them as a wave offering for Hashem. And thus you shall separate the Levi'im from among Bnei Yisrael, and the Levi'im will be Mine. Afterward, the Levi'im shall come to perform the work of the Tent of Meeting — after you purify them and wave them as a wave offering.”

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Hashem said that anyone who was tamei or far away from the Mishkan at the time of the pesach offering should bring the offering a month later.  

9 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael, saying: If any man will be impure from contact with a corpse, or he will be on a road far away from the Mishkan — whether this happens to you now or throughout your future generations — he shall still offer a pesach offering to Hashem, though as follows: They shall offer it in the second month [Iyar], on the fourteenth day, in the afternoon; and they shall eat it with matzos and bitter herbs. They must not leave any of it over until morning, nor break any bone in it; according to all the decrees of the pesach offering of the first month they shall prepare and offer it.  

But a man who was pure and not on a faraway road, yet he refrained from offering the pesach offering in the first month — that man’s soul will be cut off from its people, for he did not bring Hashem’s offering in its appointed time; that man will bear the consequences of his sin.”

Hashem commanded converts to keep all the laws of the pesach offering [and all the other laws of the Torah]

14 Hashem continued: “If a convert will dwell with you and, at Pesach, offer a pesach offering to Hashem, according to all the decrees of the pesach offering and according to its laws, so he shall offer it; there will be a single decree for you [pl], both for the convert and for the native Jew of the land.”

Part 2. The Journey from Mount Sinai to Eretz Yisrael  
(Verses 9:15–12:16)

The Signs for the Nation to Journey

Bnei Yisrael journeyed according to the movements of the Cloud (the first of three signs to journey)

15 On the day the Mishkan was set up, the Cloud covered the Mishkan that served as a shelter for the Tablets of Testimony; it would cover it by day and in the evening would be upon the Mishkan as an appearance of fire until morning. So it would always be: the Cloud would cover it by day and take on an appearance of fire by night.

17 Then when it was time to journey, according to when the Cloud departed from above the Tent, only after that Bnei Yisrael would journey; and in the place where the Cloud would rest, there Bnei Yisrael would encamp. By Hashem’s order as signaled by the Cloud, Bnei Yisrael would journey forth, and by Hashem’s order as signaled by the Cloud they would encamp; and they would continue to encamp all the days that the Cloud would rest upon the Mishkan.

18 When the Cloud would prolong its stay upon the Mishkan for many days, Bnei Yisrael would observe Hashem’s charge and would not journey, and in contrast it occurred sometimes that the Cloud would be upon the Mishkan for just a few days, but still by Hashem’s order they would encamp and by Hashem’s order they would journey forth. It occurred sometimes that the Cloud would be upon the Mishkan only from evening until morning and when the Cloud would depart in the morning, they would journey; or sometimes it would rest for a day and a night, and when the Cloud would depart they would journey. Or it would rest for two days, or a month, or a year; when the Cloud would prolong its period of resting upon the Mishkan, Bnei Yisrael would encamp and not journey, and when it would depart they would journey. By Hashem’s order they would encamp and by Hashem’s order they would journey forth; the charge of Hashem they observed — by Hashem’s order through Moshe.

Hashem told Moshe to make trumpets, to signal the community to assemble and the camps to journey (the second of three signs to journey).

19 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Make for yourself two silver trumpets — beaten out of one block of silver you shall make them — and they will be yours to use for calling the community to assemble and for making the camps journey forth.

When [the Kohanim] will blow a long blast with both of them, the entire community shall assemble before you at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

When they will blow a long blast with one trumpet, the leaders — the heads of Yisrael’s thousands — shall assemble before you. And when you [pl] shall blow a long blast followed by ‘short blasts’ [i.e., a terah], the camps that encamp to the Mishkan’s east shall journey forth. Then, when you shall blow a long blast followed by ‘short blasts’ a second time, the camps that encamp to the south shall journey forth; they will blow a long blast with ‘short blasts’ for all their journeyings forth of all the camps [including those in the west and north].

But when assembling the congregation, you [pl] shall blow a long blast and not blow ‘short blasts.’ Aharon’s sons, the Kohanim, shall be the ones to
blow the trumpets. These laws of blowing (below, in 10:9-10) will be for you [pl.] an eternal decree throughout your generations.”

The trumpets would also be sounded on going to war, as well as on Shabbos, festivals, and Rosh Chodesh.

9 Hashem continued: “When you will [pl.] go to war in your land, against an oppressor who oppresses you, blow ‘short blasts’ on the trumpets. You will then be remembered favorably before Hashem, your God, and you will be saved from your enemies. 10 And on the day of your happiness [i.e., Shabbos], on your festivals, and at the beginnings of your months [i.e., Rosh Chodesh], [the Kohanim] shall blow on the trumpets on bringing your public burnt offerings and your peace sacrifices, so that [the offerings] be a favorable remembrance for you before your God. I am Hashem your God.”

The Departure from Mount Sinai

Bnei Yisrael departed from Mount Sinai and journeyed according to a set order.

11 It was in the second year after the Exodus, in the second month [Iyar], on the twentieth day of the month, that the Cloud departed from its resting place on top of the Mishkan of Testimony. 12 Bnei Yisrael journeyed forth from the Sinai Desert according to their newly established order of journeying, and the Cloud eventually rested in the Paran Desert.

(1) Degel Yehudah journeyed first.

13 They journeyed forth like this for the first time, by Hashem’s order through Moshe. 14 Members of Yehudah’s camp flag [lit., “The flag of Yehudah’s descendants’ camp”] journeyed forth first in their three tribal groups; and the leader appointed over [Yehudah’s] group was Nachshon son of Amminadav; 15 the leader over the group of the tribe of Yissachar’s descendants was Nesan’el son of Tzuv’ar; 16 and the leader over the group of the tribe of Zevulun’s descendants was Eliav son of Cheilon.

17 Meanwhile, the Mishkan was taken down [i.e., dismantled] and Gershon’s descendants and Merari’s descendants, the carriers of the Mishkan, journeyed forth after Yehudah’s camp.

(2) Degel Reuven journeyed.

18 Then members of Reuven’s camp flag journeyed forth in their three tribal groups; and the leader appointed over [Reuven’s] group was Eli’tzur son of Shdei’ur; 19 the leader over the group of the tribe of Shimon’s descendants was Shelumi’el son of Tzuri’shaddai; 20 and the leader over the group of the tribe of Gad’s descendants was Eliyasaf son of De’uel.

21 Then the members of Kehas, the carriers of the sanctified objects [lit., “Sanctuary”] journeyed forth; and [the descendants of Gershon and Merari] would set up the Mishkan before they arrived.

(3) Degel Efraim journeyed.

22 Then members of Efraim’s camp flag journeyed forth in their three tribal groups; and the leader appointed over [Efraim’s] group was Eli’shama son of Ammihud; 23 the leader over the group of the tribe of Menasheh’s descendants was Gamli’el son of Pedahzur; 24 and the leader over the group of the tribe of Binyamin’s descendants was Avidan son of Gidoni.

(4) Degel Dan journeyed.

25 Then members of Dan’s camp flag, those appointed gatherer of the forgotten articles [for all the camps, journeyed forth in their] three tribal groups; and the leader appointed over [Dan’s] group was Achiezer son of Ammi’shaddai; 26 the leader over the group of the tribe of Asher’s descendants was Pagi’el son of Achran; 27 and the leader over the group of the tribe of Naftali’s descendants was Achira son of Einan. 28 This was Bnei Yisrael’s order of journeying according to their tribal groupings — and they journeyed.

Moshe asked Chovav [his father-in-law, Yisro] to go with them to the land.

29 Moshe said to Chovav son of Re’uel, the Midianite, Moshe’s father-in-law, “We are now journeying to the place about which Hashem said, ‘I will give it to you [pl.].’ Come with us and we will do good to you, for Hashem has promised to bestow good on Yisrael.” 30 But [Chovav] said to him, “I will not go with you, but rather I will go back to my land and to my birthplace.” 31 So [Moshe] said, “Please do not leave us, for you have known of our encampments in the desert and you saw all the miracles that were done for us with your own eyes. 32 And it will be that if you go with us, then from that good with which Hashem will do good with us, we will do good to you.”

On their first journey, Bnei Yisrael traveled a three-day distance [in one day], led by the Aron.

31 [Bnei Yisrael] journeyed from the mountain of Hashem a way of three days, and the Ark of Hashem’s covenant was journeying in front of them by a way of three days to search out and
prepare for them a resting place in which to camp.  

And Hashem’s Cloud was over them by day when they journeyed forth from the camp at Mount Sinai.

Moshe prayed to Hashem both when the Aron journeyed and when it came to rest (The third sign to journey)

Whenever the Ark would be about to journey forth, Moshe would say [i.e., pray], “Arise, reveal Yourself Hashem, yet wait and do not go too far from us! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee from before You.” And whenever [the Ark] would come to rest at a new encampment, he would say, “Rest peacefully, Hashem, among the ten thousands and thousands of Yisrael.”

Taveirah (The first sin of speech)

When the people complained about the journey, Hashem sent a fire to punish them

On the journey from Mount Sinai the wicked people were speaking like those seeking a pretext that was evil in Hashem’s ears in order to stop serving Him. Hashem heard and His anger flared up, and Hashem’s fire descended and blazed among [the people] in the camp and consumed those at the edge of the camp.

When Moshe prayed, the fire sank into the ground

So the people cried out to Moshe to pray for them, and when Moshe prayed to Hashem, the fire sank into the ground. [Moshe] named that place Taveirah [Blaze], because there a fire from Hashem had blazed among them.

Kivros HaTa’avah (The second sin of speech)

The complaint – the eirev rav, and then Bnei Yisrael, desired meat instead of manna

The “ones gathered in from the nations” [i.e., eirev rav] who were among [Bnei Yisrael] stimulated in themselves a strong desire for meat, and Bnei Yisrael also turned away from Hashem and desired meat and cried with them over it, and they said, “Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we would eat in Egypt for free, as well as the cucumber, melons, leek, onions and garlic. But now our spirits are dried up, for there is nothing but the manna before our eyes, morning and evening!”

The Torah describes the qualities of the manna [showing that the complaint was a pretext to rebel]

Now, the manna was spherical like coriander seed, and its appearance similar to the appearance of crystal. The people would simply stroll around and gather it, and it tasted as if they had ground it in a mill or crushed it in a mortar, or as if they had cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes, and its taste was like the taste of dough with the moistness of oil. And when the dew would fall upon the camp at night, the manna would fall upon it.

Hashem became angry and Moshe despaired; he told Hashem that he could neither lead the people alone nor provide enough meat for them

Moshe heard the people crying with their families, each man at the entrance of his tent; and Hashem’s anger flared greatly, and in Moshe’s eyes it was evil.

Moshe said to Hashem, “Why have you done evil to me, Your servant? Why have I not found favor in Your eyes that You chose to place the burden of this entire people on me alone? Was I pregnant with this entire people, carrying them like a mother in my belly, or did I give birth to [them], that You say to me, ‘Carry [them] in your bosom, as a nurse carries an infant, until they arrive in the land that You swore to [their] forefathers? From where do I have enough meat to give to all this people? For they cry before me, saying, ‘Give us meat so that we may eat!’ I am unable to bear by myself the burden of all this people, for it is too heavy for me. But if You [fem.] make me like this, weak like a female since I see their punishment, please kill me first — if I have found favor in Your eyes — so that I will not see my [i.e., their] misfortune.”

Hashem responded, telling Moshe to gather seventy elders, and to tell the people to prepare to eat meat for a month

Hashem said to Moshe, “Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Yisrael whom you know to be the nation’s elders and that they were once its officers in Egypt, and take them to the Tent of Meeting and they will stand there with you.

Then I will descend in a cloud and speak with you there, and I will elevate them and take from the spirit of prophecy that is on you and place it on them, and they will bear the burden of the nation with you, so that you will not have to bear it by yourself.”
18 “Say to the people: Prepare yourselves for tomorrow for you are going to eat meat, because you have cried in Hashem’s ears, saying, ‘Who will feed us meat? For it was better for us in Egypt!’ Hashem will give you meat and you will have to eat it. 19 Not for only one day will you eat it, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days. 20 You will eat it up until a full month, till it will be detestable and feel like it is coming out of your noses, and it will be repellent to you. You deserve this because you became arrogant and detested Hashem now that He is among you, and you cried before Him, saying, ‘Why is it that we left Egypt?’”

Moshe said there would not be sufficient meat for them, but Hashem refuted him

21 Moshe said to Hashem, “The people that I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot, yet You said, ‘I will give them meat and they will eat it for a full month!’ 22 Even if all the sheep and cattle would be slaughtered for them, would that suffice for them? Or if all the sea’s fish would be gathered for them, would that suffice for them?”

Hashem said to Moshe, “Is Hashem’s hand [i.e., ability] limited? Now you will see whether what I said [lit., “My Word”] will happen to you or not!”

New elders – Moshe gathered seventy elders and they prophesied

24 Moshe left the Tent of Meeting and told Hashem’s words to the people. He then gathered seventy men from the nation’s elders and had them stand around the Tent of Meeting. 25 Hashem descended in a cloud and spoke to [Moshe], and He elevated the elders and took from the spirit of prophecy that was on [Moshe] and bestowed it on the seventy men, the elders. And when the spirit rested on them, they prophesied, though they did not continue to prophesy after that.

 Eldad and Meidad prophesied in the camp

26 Two men who were chosen to be elders had remained behind in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the second one was Meidad. The spirit of prophecy rested on them. They were among those who had been chosen and written down to be elders, but they did not go out from the camp to the Tent of Meeting, and so they prophesied in the camp instead.

27 The youth ran and told Moshe. He said, “Eldad and Meidad are prophesying in the camp!”

28 Yehoshua son of Nun, who had been Moshe’s attendant since his youth, cried out and said, “My master, Moshe, put an end to them!” 29 Moshe said to him, “Are you being zealous for my sake? If only it would be that all of Hashem’s people were prophets, that Hashem will bestow His spirit of prophecy on them!”

The punishment – Hashem sent the people quails, but after they gathered them, He struck them down

30 Moshe left the Tent of Meeting’s entrance and entered into the camp — he and the elders of Yisrael. 31 After each one had entered his tent, a wind went forth from Hashem and made a flock of quails fly in from the sea, and it spread them out next to the camp, a distance of a day’s journey here on one side and a day’s journey here on the other side around the camp, and they were flying at about two cubits above the ground’s surface. 32 The people were up that entire day and all the following night and all the next day and gathered the quails — the one who collected the least gathered ten chomers — and they spread them out for themselves in many layers to dry around the camp.

33 The meat was still between their teeth, not yet finished [i.e., swallowed], when Hashem’s anger flared up against the people, and Hashem struck the wicked people with a very great blow. 34 [Moshe] named that place Kivros HaTa’avah [Graves of Desire], because there they buried the people who desired meat.

The nation journeyed to Chatzeiros

35 From Kivros HaTa’avah the people journeyed to Chatzeiros, and they were in Chatzeiros for some time due to the next incident.

Chatzeiros (The third sin of speech)

Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe about his [separation from his] wife, Tzipporah

12 Miriam and then Aharon spoke [sing.] harshly about Moshe regarding his separation from the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. 2 They further said, “Has Hashem only and solely spoken with Moshe? Look! He has also spoken with us.” And Hashem heard them. 3 Now, the man Moshe was very humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth.

Hashem reprimanded Aharon and Miriam and described to them Moshe’s unique level of prophecy

4 Hashem suddenly called each of them and said to Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam, “Go out, the three of
you, to the Tent of Meeting!” So the three of them went out, 5 and Hashem descended in a pillar of cloud and stood at the Tent’s entrance. He called Aharon and Miriam, so the two of them went out the Tent toward the cloud. 6 He said, “Please listen to My words. If there will be a prophet among you, I, Hashem, will reveal Myself to him only in a vision; in a dream I will speak to him. 7 It is not so regarding My servant, Moshe; he is trusted in My entire house. 8 Face to face [lit., “mouth to mouth”] I speak with him, in a clear worded communication [lit., “vision”] and not with riddles, and he gazes at the likeness of Hashem. So why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moshe?”

Hashem then afflicted Miriam with tzara’as 9 Hashem’s anger flared up against [Miriam and Aharon], and He left. 10 The Cloud moved away from over the Tent, and then — lo and behold! — Miriam was afflicted with tzara’as that was white like snow. Aharon turned to Miriam and — lo and behold! — she was afflicted with tzara’as.

Aharon asked Moshe to forgive them, so Moshe cried out to Hashem to heal her 11 Aharon said to Moshe, “Please, my master, do not attribute to us now a willful sin, for this that we acted foolishly and sinned unintentionally. 12 Please do not let [Miriam] remain a metzora and thus be like a corpse, for since [she] came out of [our] mother’s womb it is as if half [our] flesh has been consumed!” 13 Moshe cried out to Hashem, saying, “O God of compassion! Please! Heal her now.”

Hashem ordered that she be quarantined outside the camp for seven days; the people waited before journeying on 14 Hashem said to Moshe, “If her father would have spat before her in anger, would she not be ashamed to see him for seven days? Therefore, since she has angered Me she should be quarantined for seven days outside the camp. Afterward, she shall be brought back in.” 15 So Miriam was quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought back in. 16 Afterward, the people journeyed from Chatzeiros and camped in the Paran Desert.

Summary of Chronology

- On the first of Nissan, the Mishkan was set up and the tribal leaders brought offerings (see end of Parashas Nasso).
  - That same day, Hashem commanded Aharon to light the Menorah. He also told Moshe to purify the Levi’im and have them inaugurated, and He commanded Bnei Yisrael to prepare the pesach offering and bring it on the fourteenth of the month.
  - A group of men who had become tamei and could not offer the pesach offering came before Moshe on the fourteenth of Nissan. Hashem commanded them to offer it one month later, on the fourteenth of Iyar.
  - Just before Bnei Yisrael left Mount Sinai in Iyar (the second month), Moshe asked his father-in-law, Chovav (also known as Yisro), to go with them to Eretz Yisrael.
  - Bnei Yisrael left Mount Sinai on the twelfth of Iyar. After a three-day journey, some evil people sought pretexts to complain in Taveirah. The people later complained about the man in Kivos HaTa’avah. Hashem sent quail on the twenty-third of Iyar, and the people remained there for thirty days eating quail, before journeying on to Chatzeiros. There, Hashem punished Miriam with tzara’as for speaking to Aharon about Moshe, and she was sent out of the camp for seven days. The nation waited for her, then journeyed on to Kadeish Barnei’a, on the border of Eretz Yisrael. Thus it took the nation forty days to reach the land after leaving Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the twenty-ninth of Sivan.
Parashah Outline

Part 1. The Sin of the Spies

- Hashem told Bnei Yisrael that they could send spies to explore Eretz Yisrael.
- Moshe Rabbeinu chose twelve spies and told them what to observe in the land.
- When they returned, all but two — Yehoshua and Kalev — said that it would be impossible to conquer the land.
- The people cried and complained, ignoring all reassurances.

Part 2. The Punishments

- Hashem was angry and wanted to annihilate the people, but Moshe prayed on their behalf and He forgave them.
- However, He decreed that the men of that generation would roam in the desert over the next forty years and die there.
- Ten of the twelve spies died immediately in a plague. Only Yehoshua and Kalev were allowed to live and enter the land.
- The people mourned grievously. Some of them tried to enter the land anyway, but were struck down by the nations of Amalek and Canaan.

Part 3. Mitzvos to Strengthen the People’s Faith

- Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to bring libations with certain offerings and to separate challah (a portion of their daily bread).
- He explained what is required to atone for idolatry.
- He revealed the exact punishment for desecrating Shabbos after a man was found gathering sticks on Shabbos.
- He commanded Bnei Yisrael to attach tzitzis (fringes) to their garments.

Summary of Chronology is on page 33

Part 1. The Sin of the Spies

(verses 13:1–14:45)

The Decision to Send Spies

Hashem told Moshe to send men to spy out the land — one leader from each tribe.

13 "Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, "Send forth for yourself, if that is what you want, important men who will explore the land of Canaan which I am now giving to Bnei Yisrael; send [pl.] one man for each patriarchal tribe [lit., "for his fathers’ tribe], each one being a leader among [Bnei Yisrael]."

The names of the men who were selected for the spying mission

- Moshe sent them from the Paran Desert at Hashem’s order. All of them were important men; they were the heads of Bnei Yisrael. And these were their names: For the tribe of Reuven, Shammuel son of Zakkur. For the tribe of Shimon, Shafat son of Chori. For the tribe of Yehudah, Kalev son of Yefuneh. For the tribe of Yissachar, Yigal son of Yosef. For the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun. For the tribe of Binyamin, Palti son of Rafu. For the tribe of Zevulun, Gaddiel son of Sodi. For the tribe of Yosef: for the tribe of Menasheh, Gaddi son of Susi. For the tribe of Dan, Ammi’el son of Gemalli. For the tribe of Asher, Sesur son of Micha’el. For the tribe of Naftali, Nachbi son of Vofsi. For the tribe of Gad, Ge’uel son of Machi.

Moshe renamed Hoshea son of Nun, “Yehoshua”

- These are the names of the men whom Moshe sent to explore the land, but Moshe called [i.e., renamed] Hoshea son of Nun “Yehoshua.”

The Spying Mission

Moshe instructed the spies to look closely at the nature of the land and its people and to bring back fruit

Moshe sent [the spies] to explore the land of Canaan and said to them, “Go from here north [lit., “ascend”] along this way that is in the south of Canaan, and ascend the mountain country on its border. Look at the land — what is it like? Determine this by looking at the people who dwell on it: Are [they] strong or weak? Are [they] few in
number or numerous? 19 And how is the land in which [they] dwell — is it full of good springs or bad? And see if the people are afraid: how are the cities in which [they] dwell — are they in open [i.e., unwalled] cities or in fortified cities? 20 And the land — is it fertile [lit., “fat”] or lean? Is there in it a righteous man whose merit protects others like a ‘tree,’ or not? Be courageous and take some of the land’s fruit.” It was the season of [lit., “the days were the days of”] the ripening of the first grapes.

The spies explored the entire land, visiting Chevron, where three giants lived, and Nachal Eshkol, where they picked fruit.

21 [The spies] went north [lit., “ascended”] and explored the land from the Tzin Desert in the southeast until Rechov, which is in the northwest on the way to Chamas. 22 First they went north through the south of the land and Kalev came [sing.] to Chevron, where there dwelled Achiman, Sheishai and Talmi, the children of the giant; Chevron had been built up with seven times more goodness than [lit., “built seven years before”] Tzo’an in Egypt. 23 Then they came to the Eshkol [Cluster] Valley and cut down from there a grapevine branch with one bunch of grapes hanging from it and carried it on two poles, and they also took from the pomegranates and from the figs. 24 He had called that place the Eshkol Valley on account of the grape cluster that Bnei Yisrael cut down from there. 25 They returned from exploring the land at the end of forty days.

The Spies’ Report

Ten of the spies returned saying that it would be impossible to conquer the land.

26 They went and came to Moshe, Aharon, and the entire community of Bnei Yisrael, to the Paran Desert, to Kadeish, and they brought back a report to [Moshe and Aharon] and to the entire community, and they showed them the land’s fruit.

27 They related to [Moshe] and said in front of the community, “We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is even flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 But it is impossible to conquer, for the people inhabiting the land are mighty, and the cities well fortified and very large, and we also saw the giant’s children there. 29 Moreover, the people of Amalek inhabit the southern land bordering Eretz Yisrael; the Chitti people [Hittites], the Yevusi people [Jebusites], and the Emori people [Amorites] inhabit the mountain area; and the Canaani people [Canaanites] dwell by the Mediterranean Sea and next to the Jordan River.”

Kalev said that Bnei Yisrael could conquer the land.

30 Then Kalev made all the people silent so that they would listen to what he would say toward Moshe, and he also said, “We will surely go up and over the walls of the fortified cities and possess [the land], for we will surely be able to overcome [the people].”

The ten spies countered that they could not since the land consumed its inhabitants and there were giants there.

31 But the men who had gone up to the land with [Kalev] said, “We will not be able to possess the land or even to go north across the border to the people, for [they] are stronger than us.” 32 They then spoke out falsely [lit., “brought out speech”] to Bnei Yisrael about the land that they had explored, saying, “The land through which we passed in order to explore it, it is a land that consumes its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw within it were men of huge dimensions. 33 There we saw the nefilim [i.e., giants; lit., “fallen ones”], the sons of the giant who was descended from the original nefilim who fell from Heaven; we were in our eyes like grasshoppers compared to the land’s inhabitants, and so we were in [the people’s] eyes.”

The People’s Reaction and the Leaders’ Pleas

The people cried all that night and complained to Moshe and Aharon.

14 1 The entire community raised their voices and shouted; and the people wept that night. 2 Then in the morning all of Bnei Yisrael complained against Moshe and Aharon, and the entire community said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt or in this desert — if only we had died! 3 Why is Hashem bringing us to this land to fall in battle by the sword? Our wives and children will become captives [lit., “spoils”] for the Canaaniites! Look! It is better for us to return to Egypt to be slaves.” 4 So they said to each other, “Let us appoint a new leader and return to Egypt.”

Moshe and Aharon prostrated themselves before the people.

5 Moshe and Aharon fell [sing.] on their faces and prostrated in front of the entire assembly of the community of Bnei Yisrael.
Yehoshaua and Kalev said the land was very good and told the people not to rebel. But, in response, the people wanted to stone them.

Then Yehoshaua son of Nun and Kalev son of Yefuneh — of those who had explored the land — rent their garments in grief. They spoke to the entire community of Bnei Yisrael, saying, "Regarding the land through which we passed in order to explore it — the land is very, very good.

As for its conquest — if Hashem favors [lit., "desires"] us because we are worthy, He will bring us to this land and give it to us; it alone is a land that is flowing with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against Hashem, and then you need not fear the land's people, for they are like our bread and we will consume them easily. Their 'shade' of protection [i.e., the righteous] has left them; Hashem is with us — do not fear them."

But in response the entire community spoke about stoning them to death with stones, so to prevent this Hashem's Glory descended in a cloud and appeared in the Tent of Meeting to all of Bnei Yisrael.

Part 2. The Punishments
(Verses 14:11–45)

Hashem's Response

Hashem said He would destroy the people for angering Him and not trusting in Him.

Hashem said to Moshe, "For how long will this people anger Me, and for how long will they not trust in Me as they should in consequence of all the miraculous signs that I have performed among [them]? I will strike [them] down with a plague and drive [them] out of existence, and in their place I will make you into a greater and stronger nation than [they]."

Moshe's Prayer

Moshe prayed on behalf of the people, arguing that killing the people would desecrate His Name.

Moshe said to Hashem, "But the people of Egypt will hear that You killed Your nation — those people who saw that You lifted this people out from among them with Your great power. They will consequently say about the inhabitants of this land of Canaan — since they heard that You, Hashem, are among this people, and that You, Hashem, appear to them eye to eye, and Your cloud stands over [i.e., covers] them, and in a pillar of cloud You go before them by day leading them, and in a pillar of fire by night, thereby showing Your love for them, and yet now You will kill this entire people like a single man [i.e., suddenly] — and all the nations (not just the Egyptians) who have heard of Your reputation will speak about the Canaanites' strength, saying, 'Because of Hashem's inability to bring this people into the land that He swore to give them, He slaughtered them in the desert.'"

Moshe pleaded with Hashem to show compassion and forgive the people's sin.

"So now, please expand Your power of compassion, my Master, and do as You once spoke, saying that Hashem, the Compassionate One, is slow to anger for everyone and abundant in kindness, He bears and forgives sin and rebellion, He cleanses of sin those who repent but does not cleanse those who do not, and eventually He recalls the sins of the unrepentant fathers on the children, and on the third and fourth generations [i.e., the grandchildren and great grandchildren] if they repeat their father's sins."

The Decree

Hashem forgave the people, but swore that they would not see the land.

Hashem said to Moshe, "I have forgiven them in accordance with your words (about what the nations will say). However, I swear that as surely as I am alive, the glory of Hashem will still fill the entire earth, for all the men who saw My glory and My miraculous signs that I performed in Egypt and in the desert, yet tested Me these ten times and did not listen to My voice, they will not see the land that I swore to give their forefathers. In addition, all those who anger Me will not see it."

Hashem promised to give Chevron to Kalev.

Hashem continued: "But My servant Kalev, because there was another spirit with him and he filled his heart with devotion to follow after Me, I will bring him to the area of land to which he came [i.e., Chevron], and he and his offspring will drive out [its inhabitants]."

Hashem commanded the people to turn back to the desert.

Hashem continued: "Tell the people: 'The Amalekites and Canaanites dwell in the valley and mountain country on the land's border, so do not try to enter. Instead, tomorrow, turn back and journey toward the desert, in the direction of the Sea of Reeds.'"
Hashem decreed that all the men over 20 would die in the desert over forty years (except Yehoshua and Kalev), but their children would enter the land [and the women and Levi'im too].

26 Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, saying, “For how long will I let this evil community of spies live, considering that they are making Bnei Yisrael complain against Me? For I have heard Bnei Yisrael’s complaints, whom [the spies] are making complain against Me. Therefore, say to [Bnei Yisrael] that Hashem declared: ‘I swear that as surely as I am alive, if I will not do to you as you spoke in My ears [saying, ‘If only we had died in this desert’] then it’s as if I am not alive!’ Thus in this desert your corpses will fall — all those counted in all your various counts; that is, all the men from the age of twenty years and up who complained against Me. You will not enter the land regarding which I raised my hand [i.e., took an oath], swearing to settle you in it [see Shemos 6:8], except for Kalev son of Yefuneh and Yehoshua son of Nun. But your children — about whom you said, ‘They will become spoils!’ — I will bring them there, and they will know the land that you detested. In contrast you will die — your corpses will fall in this desert.

29 Your children will have to roam [lit., “pasture”] in the desert for forty years and bear the consequences of your sins [lit., “immoral strayings”] until your corpses have met their end in the desert.”

Part 3. Mitzvos to Strengthen the People’s Faith
(Verses 15:1–41)

Mitzvos Related to the Land: Libations
Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to bring a minchah (flour offering) and nesech (libation) with every olah and shelamim — for a lamb, ram and ox.

15 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: When in the end you come to your homeland [lit., “land of your dwellings”] that I am giving you, and you offer a fire offering to Hashem — a burnt offering or a peace sacrifice — for the fulfillment of the utterance of a vow or as a donation, or as an obligatory offering on your festivals, to make a pleasing aroma for Hashem, and [1] the offering is from cattle or sheep/goats, then the one bringing his offering for Hashem shall also bring a flour offering consisting of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil. In addition, you shall offer a quarter of a hin of wine for a libation with the burnt offering or the peace sacrifice — so shall you do for each lamb offered. [2] For a fire offering of a ram you shall prepare a flour offering consisting of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a third of a hin of oil, and in addition one-third of a hin of wine for a libation — you shall bring these as...
a pleasing aroma for Hashem. 8 And [3] when you offer a young bull as a burnt offering or a peace sacrifice, for the fulfillment of the utterance of a vow or as a voluntary peace offering to Hashem, then he shall bring with the young bull a flour offering consisting of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil. 9 In addition, you shall bring half a hin of wine for a libation; the flour offering is a fire offering, a pleasing aroma for Hashem. 10 So shall be done for each ox, for each ram, or for each lamb/kid from among the lambs or goats. 11 According to the number of offerings that you offer, so shall you offer flour offerings and libations for each one, so that the number of flour offerings and libations will be according to their number.”

A convert must bring the same minchah and nesech offerings
13 Hashem continued: “Every native Jew shall offer these flour offerings and libations in this way, in order to bring a fire offering that will be a pleasing aroma for Hashem. 14 And if a convert will come to live with you, or he is among you now or throughout your generations, and he will offer a fire offering, a pleasing aroma for Hashem, just like you also offer flour offerings and libations, so shall he offer them. 15 Regarding the entire congregation — there shall be a single decree for you and for the convert who dwells with you. This is an eternal decree throughout your future generations; the convert shall be like you before Hashem. 16 There shall be one Torah [i.e., teaching] and one law for you and for the convert who dwells with you.”

Mitzvos Related to the Land: Challah
Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to separate a portion of their dough for Hashem
17 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 18 “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: Upon your coming into the land to which I am bringing you, when you eat from the land’s bread [made from its grain] you shall separate a sacred [lit., “elevated”] portion for Hashem, as follows: Before eating the bread you shall separate as a sacred portion a challah [lit., “a small loaf”], the first portion of each of your standard sized doughs [lit., “kneadings”]; just as the sacred portion from the granary is separated, so shall you separate it. 19 You shall give to Hashem as a sacred portion from only part of each dough, the first portion of each of your doughs, and so you will do throughout your future generations.”

Idolatry
Hashem explained how the community should atone for inadvertently committing idolatry
20 Hashem continued: “If you [pl] act inadvertently and commit idolatry, it is considered as if you do not fulfill all these commandments that Hashem told Moshe — all that Hashem commanded you through Moshe from the day that Hashem first commanded you and even what He will command onward throughout your future generations — and if this sin was done inadvertently because of [lit, “from”] a mistaken ruling of the ‘eyes’ of the community [i.e., the Sanhedrin], then the entire community shall offer one young bull as a burnt offering, for a pleasing aroma for Hashem, along with its flour offering and libation according to the prescribed law [in 15:4-11], and one he-goat as a sin offering. 21 The Kohen shall make atonement for the entire community of Bnei Yisrael, and they will be forgiven, for [the sin] was inadvertent and they brought for their inadvertent act their burnt offering — a fire offering to Hashem — and they brought their sin offering before Hashem. 22 The entire community of Bnei Yisrael and the convert who dwells among them will be forgiven, for it happened to all the people inadvertently.”

Hashem explained how an individual should atone for inadvertently committing idolatry
23 “If a single person [lit., “soul”] will sin and commit idolatry inadvertently, he shall bring a she-goat in its first year as a sin offering. 24 The Kohen shall make atonement for the person who erred when he sinned inadvertently before Hashem, to make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven. 25 There will be one Torah [i.e., teaching] for you [pl] — the native Jew within Bnei Yisrael and the convert who dwells among them — for anyone who acts inadvertently.”

Hashem explained the punishment and atonement for committing idolatry intentionally
26 “But the person [lit., “soul”] who will act defiantly [lit., “with an upraised hand”; i.e., intentionally] — whether of the natives or of the converts — he is blaspheming [i.e., scorning] Hashem; that person’s soul will be cut off from among his people, for he scorned the word of Hashem and nullified His commandment; that person’s soul will be completely cut off, when his sin is within him and he has not repented.”
Shabbos: The Incident of the Wood Gatherer

Bnei Yisrael found a man gathering sticks on Shabbos

32 While Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, they found a man gathering sticks on the day of Shabbos.

33 Those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moshe, Aharon, and the entire community.

34 They put him in a guarded place, since it had not been specified what kind of death sentence had to be done to him. ☒

At Hashem’s command, the people stoned him to death

35 Hashem said to Moshe, “The man must be put to death; the entire community shall stone him unremittingly with stone after stone [lit., “stones”] outside the camp until he dies.” 36 So the entire community took him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died, just as Hashem had commanded Moshe. ☒

Tzitzis

Hashem told Bnei Yisrael to attach tzitzis to their garments, to remind them to perform the mitzvos and not stray after their desires

37 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 38 “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them that they should make for themselves tzitzis [a fringe made up of distinct threads] to hang on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and they should put with the tzitzis of each corner an additional thread of blue wool. 39 And it [i.e., the group of threads altogether] will be for you the mitzvah of tzitzis, and you will see it and thereby remember all of Hashem’s commandments and perform them, and you [pl.] shall not stray [lit., “explore”] after the desires of your hearts and your eyes which you tend to stray after. 40 This is so that you will always remember and perform all My commandments, and you will become holy to your God. 41 I am Hashem, your God. Who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be for you God on condition you accept My commandments; I am Hashem, your God.” ☒

Summary of Chronology

- On the twenty-ninth of Sivan (the third month of the year) Bnei Yisrael arrived at Kadeish Barnei’a and sent spies to explore Eretz Yisrael.

- The spies took forty days to explore the land. They returned on the eighth of Av (the fifth month) and gave their report to the people.

- On hearing the report, the people cried all night — on Tishah B’Av, the ninth of Av — and complained to Moshe in the morning.

- In response, Hashem decreed that all the men aged between twenty and sixty years would die in the desert, over a period of forty years. However, the spies died immediately. Some say they became sick and did not die until about a month later.

- Immediately afterward, Hashem commanded the mitzvos of libations and challah, and the laws of atonement for idolatry.

- The episode of the man who desecrated Shabbos by gathering wood might have occurred shortly after the incident of the spies, or at an earlier time — perhaps shortly after the Jews crossed the Yam Suf (Reed Sea), or after the giving of the Torah, or sometime after the tribes formed degalim (camps).

- Hashem taught the mitzvah of tzitzis after the incident of the spies, or at an earlier time (after the incident of the wood gatherer, if it took place earlier).
Parashas
Korach

Part 1. Korach’s Rebellion
(Verses 16:1–17:5)

Korach’s Accusation
Korach, together with Dasan, Aviram, On, and 250 leaders of Yisrael, challenged Moshe and Aharon

16Korach son of Yitzhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi, took himself to one side to quarrel, and Dasan and Aviram sons of Eliav, and On son of Peles, all three being descendants of Reuven, joined him.

2They defiantly rose up in public before Moshe, together with two hundred and fifty important men from Bnei Yisrael who were leaders of the community, the ones called on at times of assembly to represent the nation, men of renown.

Korach and his followers sought to discredit Moshe, and accused him and Aharon of taking too much greatness for themselves

3They all gathered against Moshe and Aharon and said to them, “You two have taken too much greatness for yourselves, for the entire community — all of them — are holy, and Hashem is in their midst. So why do you elevate yourselves over Hashem’s assembly?”

Moshe’s Response
Moshe fell on his face in anguish; he announced a divine test: Korach’s people would bring fire pans with incense and Hashem would choose who would serve Him in the Mishkan

4Moshe heard their claims and fell on his face in despair. 4Then he spoke to Korach and his entire community of supporters, saying, “Tomorrow morning Hashem will make known who is His to carry out the Levi’im’s work and who is holy for the priesthood, and He will bring them near to Him, and the one whom He will choose, He will bring him and his descendants near to Him to serve before Him.

6This is what you [pl.] shall do: Tomorrow you shall take for yourselves fire pans — Korach and his entire community of supporters — and put in them fire [i.e., burning coals], and then at the Tent of Meeting, before Hashem, you shall place on [the fire pans] incense. It will be that the man whom Hashem will choose by accepting his incense, he

Parashah Outline

Part 1. Korach’s Rebellion
- Korach and his followers challenged Moshe Rabbenu and Aharon, the Kohanim Gadol, disputing the rights of the Kohanim and Levi’im.
- Moshe proposed a test: they would bring incense on fire pans to see whom Hashem would choose.
- Hashem punished the rebels; they were swallowed up by the earth or consumed by fire.
- The fire pans were attached to the Altar for all to see as a remembrance sign.

Part 2. The People’s Rebellion
- The people remained doubtful and complained about the deaths of Korach’s followers.
- Hashem punished the people with a plague, which Aharon was able to stop by burning incense.
- Hashem made Aharon’s staff miraculously blossom as a sign that he and the Levi’im had been divinely chosen.
- Finally acknowledging they had been wrong, the people were afraid they would die on approaching the Mishkan. Hashem said the Kohanim and Levi’im were responsible for guarding it.

Part 3. Gifts to the Kohanim and Levi’im
- Hashem made a covenant confirming that Bnei Yisrael had to give gifts from the holy offerings to the Kohanim.
- Bnei Yisrael also had to give the Levi’im tithes.
- The Levi’im had to give a portion of their tithes to the Kohanim.

Summary of Chronology is on page 39
alone will survive for he is the holy one to offer incense. Descendants of Levi, I have told you a great thing, and it is a great and serious matter you have taken upon yourselves to argue against Hashem!"

Moshe triedappeasing Korach, as well as the Levi'im

"Then Moshe said to Korach and the Levi'im, "Please listen, descendants of Levi. Is it a small matter to you that the God of Yisrael separated you from the rest of the community of Yisrael in order to bring you near to Him, to perform the work of Hashem's Mishkan and to stand before the community and serve them? [6] From all the tribes he has brought you [sing., i.e., Korach] near to this service, along with all your brothers, the descendants of Levi, yet now you [pl.] also demand the priesthood? [7] Because of this demand, you [sing.] and all your community who assemble with you, are really against Hashem — and as for Aharon, I made him Kohen at Hashem's bidding, so what is he that you complain against him?"

Moshe also sent for Dasan and Aviram [to appease them], but they refused to come

"Then Moshe sent messengers to call Dasan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, but they said, "We will not go up to you! [8] Is it a small matter that you brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to cause us to die in the desert, that you also rule over us and also made others rule over us! [9] You have not even brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us any hereditary fields and vineyards! Even if you would threaten to gouge out the eyes of these men [i.e., us], we will not go up to you!"

Korach and his followers refused to make peace, so Moshe asked Hashem not to accept their [incense] offering, and he told Korach to be ready for the test

"Moshe was very distressed. He said to Hashem, "Do not accept [lit., "turn to"] their offering [lit., "flour offering"]). I did not take a donkey from any one of them even when I had the right to, nor did I wrong any one of them."

Moshe said to Korach, "You and your entire community of supporters should be ready for the test at the Tent of Meeting before Hashem tomorrow — you, they, and Aharon. [11] Each one of you shall take his fire pan and you shall put incense on them. Then the 250 men among you shall each bring his fire pan before Hashem, two hundred and fifty fire pans in all, and you Korach and Aharon as well, each one bringing his fire pan."

Divine Punishments

Korach incited the entire community against Moshe and Aharon

"The next day each one of Korach's followers took his fire pan, and they put fire on them and placed incense on them and stood at the Tent of Meeting's entrance, and Moshe and Aharon also stood there. [12] Korach gathered the entire community of Bnei Yisrael against [Moshe and Aharon] at the Tent of Meeting's entrance, but Hashem's glory suddenly appeared to the entire community in a cloud."

Hashem declared He would annihilate the community immediately, but Moshe and Aharon prayed for them

"Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying, [13] "Separate yourselves from amidst this community, and I will annihilate them in an instant! [14] But they fell upon their faces and said, "God of compassion! God Who Knows of the thoughts [lit., "souls"] of all people [lit., "flesh"]! Can it be that just one man sins — and You know who he is — yet You will send Your wrath on the entire community?"

[Hashem accepted the pleas.] He told the people to move away from the tents of Korach, Dasan, and Aviram; Moshe tried again to appease Dasan and Aviram

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, [15] "Speak to the community, saying: Depart from the area around the dwellings of Korach, Dasan, and Aviram." [16] Moshe arose and went to speak to Dasan and Aviram, and the elders of Yisrael followed him. [17] But Dasan and Aviram did not emerge so he spoke to the community, saying, "Move away now from the area next to the tents of these evil men, and do not touch anything that is theirs, lest you be destroyed because of their many sins." [18] [The people] departed from the area next to the dwellings of Korach, Dasan, and Aviram, and from all around. Then Dasan and Aviram emerged, standing upright and defiant at the entrances of their tents, with their wives, children, and infants.

Moshe announced a Divine sign

"Moshe said to the people, "With this event that is about to happen you will know that Hashem sent me to perform all these acts of appointing others, and that the decisions did not come from the wishes of my heart. [19] If these men will die in a way that is like the death of all other people, and a usual happening of death of all other people will be visited upon them, then Hashem did not send me."
Part 2. The People’s Rebellion  
(Verses 17:6–18:7)

The Complaint

The people accused Moshe and Aharon of killing the 250 men [by telling them to offer incense].

“On the following day, the entire community of Bnei Yisrael complained against Moshe and Aharon, saying, “You made Hashem’s people [i.e., the two hundred and fifty leaders] die!” 7 As the community was gathering against Moshe and Aharon, they turned toward the Tent of Meeting, and, lo and behold, the Cloud was covering it, and Hashem’s glory appeared there, so Moshe and Aharon came [sing.] to the front [i.e., entrance] of the Tent of Meeting.

The Plague

Hashem sent a plague to ravage the people; Aharon stopped it with incense.

“Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Remove [lit., “lift”] yourselves from amidst this community, and I will annihilate them in an instant.” But [Moshe and Aharon] fell on their faces in prayer.

Then Moshe said to Aharon, “Take the fire pan, put on it fire [i.e., coals] from atop the Altar, place it in incense, and go quickly with it to the community and provide atonement for them, for the divine wrath has gone forth from before Hashem — the plague has begun!” 12 So Aharon took the fire pan as Moshe had spoken and ran into the midst of the congregation, and indeed the plague had begun killing among the people. He put the incense on the fire pan and provided atonement for the people.

He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped. 14 The number of dead in the plague was fourteen thousand, seven hundred [14,700], besides the number of dead who had died due to the matter of Korach. 15 Aharon returned to Moshe, to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and the plague was finally stopped.

A New Remembrance Sign: Aharon’s staff

Hashem told Moshe to take a staff from each tribal leader and place the staffs before the Aron.

“Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and take from them a staff for each tribe [lit., “paternal house”]; from all the leaders of their tribes take twelve staffs altogether. Inscribe each one’s name on his staff, and on the staff of the tribe of Levi inscribe Aharon’s name, for there shall...”
be just one staff for the head of their tribe [lit., “paternal houses”] of Kohanim and Levi’im. 20 Then place [the staffs] in the Tent of Meeting, in front of the Ark of Testimony where I meet with you [pl.] 21 It will be that the one whom I will choose to serve me, his staff will blossom, and I will thereby still and remove Me the complaints of Bnei Yisrael which they are complaining about against you [pl.].” 22 Moshe told Hashem’s words to Bnei Yisrael, and all their tribal leaders gave him a staff for their tribes [lit., “paternal houses”], one staff for each leader — twelve staffs altogether — and he positioned Aharon’s staff in the middle of their staffs. 23 Moshe put the staffs before Hashem in the Tent of the Testimony [i.e., in the Holy of Holies]. Aharon’s staff blossomed and grew almonds; Hashem told Moshe to place it in front of the Aron 24 On the following day Moshe entered the Tent of the Testimony and, lo and behold, Aharon’s staff of the House of Levi had blossomed, and it had also already produced blossoms that fell and it had sprouted buds and had grown almonds. 24 Moshe brought out all the staffs from before Hashem in the Tent of Meeting to all of Bnei Yisrael, and each one of the leaders recognized [lit., “saw”] and took his staff.

Guarding the Mishkan from Unauthorized Entry

Bnei Yisrael thought they would die if they came too near the Mishkan [since they could not serve in it]

27 Then Bnei Yisrael spoke to Moshe, saying, “Look! Many of us died, many of us were lost from the nation — all of us are already considered lost! 28 For anyone who approaches and enters the Courtyard, as is permitted, but then approaches and enters Hashem’s Mishkan will die! Will we ever have finished dying?!”

Hashem said that the Kohanim were responsible for guarding the Mishkan from strangers; the Levi’im would help them

18 Hashem said to Moshe to say to Aharon, “You, along with your sons and your paternal family [lit., “house”], the family of Kehas, will bear the punishments for the sin of unlawfully touching the sanctified objects [lit., “Sanctuary”]; and you, along with your sons, the Kohanim, will bear the punishments for the sin of Levi’im unlawfully assuming your priesthood duties. 2 Also your brothers, the families of Gershon and Merari, the tribe of Levi, your father’s tribe — bring them near to Hashem to be with you, and they shall join you in warning others and serve you by helping you look after the Mishkan; but only you along with your sons shall stand guard in the Mishkan before the Tent of the Testimony [i.e., the Holy of Holies]. 3 [The Levi’im] shall help you keep your charge and the charge of the entire Tent, but they shall not approach the holy objects and the Altar to perform the priesthood duties, so that they will not die, neither they nor you. 4 They shall join you and help keep the charge of the Tent of Meeting concerning everything required for the Tent’s service; an outsider shall not approach you to perform the priesthood duties. 5 You [pl.] shall guard the charge of the Holy Sanctuary and its objects and the charge of the Altar, so that there will not again be divine wrath against Bnei Yisrael.”

Hashem continued: “Look, I have gladly taken [i.e., drawn close] your [pl.] brothers, the Levi’im, from among Bnei Yisrael; they are given over to you as a gift for the service of Hashem, to perform the work required for the Tent of Meeting. 6 You, along with your sons, shall keep charge of your priesthood duties regarding every matter of the Altar and in the Tent and even within the partition curtain [i.e., in the Holy of Holies], and you shall perform your duties. I am giving your priesthood duties to you as a gift [lit., “service that is a gift”]; any outsider [i.e., non-Kohen] who approaches to serve will be put to death by Hashem.”

Part 3. Gifts to the Kohanim and Levi’im (Verses 18:8–32) Gifts to the Kohanim

Hashem made a covenant giving the Kohanim portions of the offerings that Bnei Yisrael dedicate to Him 6 Hashem spoke to Aharon: “Look, I have gladly given over to you the charge of safeguarding My sacred [lit., “separated and raised up”] portions and
all the holy sacrificial offerings of Bnei Yisrael; I have given all of them to you as a sign of greatness, and to your descendants, as an eternal decree.

The Yisraelim and Levi’im would give the Kohanim gifts [twenty-four matenos kehunah]

Hashem continued: “This will be yours from the holy holies [i.e., the holiest offerings], from when the parts of the offerings that must be put on the Altar fire have been offered: all [Bnei Yisrael’s] holiest offerings, all their flour offerings, all their sin offerings, and all their guilt offerings, and you also get all stolen items that they return to Me [see 5:5-8]; [each offering] is holy of holies for you and your descendants. 10 In a place that is the holy of holies [i.e., the Courtyard] you shall eat it; every male Kohan may eat it — it shall be holy to you.

11 “This shall also be yours: their separated gift portions [e.g., from peace offerings], that is, all the gifts that are wave offerings of Bnei Yisrael; I have given them to you, along with your male and female descendants, as an eternal decree; anyone pure in your household may eat [them].

12 “Also, when Bnei Yisrael enter the land and take tithes, all the best portions of oil and all the best portions of wine and grain, that is, the first tithes of [the crops] that they shall separate and present to Hashem [the terumah gedolah], I have given them to you. 13 The first ripe fruits of everything that is in their land, which they shall bring to the House of Hashem, will be yours; anyone pure in your household may eat [them]. 14 Everything consecrated in Yisrael through a vow will be yours.

15 “Every male that issues first from [lit., “opens”] the womb of any creature [i.e., firstborns] that [Bnei Yisrael] shall bring to Hashem — among people and animals — will be yours; however, you shall surely redeem the firstborn of people [i.e., by taking the redemption money from the Yisrael], and you shall redeem the firstborn of the impure animal [i.e., donkey, by taking a lamb]. 16 As for [a person’s] redemption — you shall redeem the firstborn from when he is a month old according to a fixed assessment of five silver shekels of the sacred shekel coin; [that shekel] is equivalent to twenty geirah coins.

17 “But you shall not redeem firstborns of kosher animals: the firstborn of an ox or the firstborn of a sheep or the firstborn of a goat, for they are holy. You shall throw their blood on the Altar and burn their fats as a fire offering, for a pleasing aroma for Hashem. 18 Their flesh, however, will be yours; like your portions from peace offerings, that is, the breast that is waved and the right thigh [i.e., upper hind leg] that is raised, they will be yours.

19 “Every sacred [lit., “separated and raised up”] portion of the holy offerings that Bnei Yisrael will separate for Hashem, I have given to you, along with your sons and daughters, as an eternal decree; it is an eternal salt-like covenant [i.e., unspoilable and irrevocable] before Hashem, for you along with your descendants.

The gifts were the Kohanim’s as an eternal decree

20 Hashem then said to Aharon, “You will not have an inheritance like the other tribes of Bnei Yisrael in their land, nor will you have a portion among them in the spoils of war; I am your portion and your inheritance among Bnei Yisrael.”

Tithes to the Levi’im

The Levi’im would receive tithes (ma’aser rishon) from Bnei Yisrael in return for working in the Mishkan

21 Hashem continued: “And to the descendants of Levi — look! — I have given to them every tithe from the produce in Yisrael [the ma’aser rishon] as an inheritance, in return for their work, that they perform the service of the Tent of Meeting. 22 For the rest of Bnei Yisrael must no longer approach the Tent of Meeting to perform the Levi’im’s duties, since it would cause them to bear a sin and to die. 23 Rather, the Levi’im [themselves] shall perform the service of the Tent of Meeting, and they will bear [Bnei Yisrael’s] sin for failing to warn them; it is an eternal decree throughout your generations. Among Bnei Yisrael they will not, however, inherit an inheritance in the land, 24 for the tithe of Bnei Yisrael which [Bnei Yisrael] shall separate to Hashem as a sacred portion [ma’aser rishon], I have given to the Levi’im as an inheritance. Therefore, I said to them that among the rest of Bnei Yisrael they shall not inherit an inheritance.”

A Tithe from the Levi’im to the Kohanim

The Levi’im had to give a “tithe of the tithe” (terumas ma’aser) to the Kohanim

25 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying. 26 “Speak to the Levi’im and say to them: When you take from Bnei Yisrael the tithe [ma’aser rishon] that I have given to you from them as your inheritance, you must separate from it Hashem’s sacred portion [terumas ma’aser], a tithe [i.e., a tenth] from the tithe. 27 Your sacred portion [terumas ma’aser] will be forbidden to non-Kohanim since it will be considered by you like
the sacred portion [terumah gedolah] of grain that Bnei Yisrael separate from the granary and like the sacred portion [terumah gedolah] of wine or oil made from the fully ripe produce from the pit of the winepress or olive press. 28Just as Bnei Yisrael take tithes so shall you, too, separate Hashem’s sacred portion [terumas ma’aser] from all your tithes that you shall take from Bnei Yisrael, and you must give from [them] Hashem’s sacred portion to Aharon the Kohanim. 29From all your gifts of tithes from Bnei Yisrael separate all of Hashem’s required sacred portion [terumas ma’aser and, if the Yisrael did not take it, terumah gedolah]; from all the best of it separate from it its sanctified portion [the terumah].

30Also say to [the Levi'im]: When you have separated its best part from it [the terumas ma’aser], then the rest shall be considered to the Levi'im devoid of any sanctity like the ordinary grain of the granary and the ordinary produce of the pit of grapes or olives of a Yisrael. 31Thus, you may eat it in any place whatsoever, you and your household, for it is a remuneration from Bnei Yisrael to you in return for your work in the Tent of Meeting. 32When you have separated its best part from it for the Kohanim [as terumas ma’aser], you will not bear a sin because of it; do not profane the holy offerings of Bnei Yisrael and you will not die.”

Summary of Chronology

- Korach rebelled against Moshe and Aharon immediately after the decree condemning those over the age of twenty to die in the desert.
- The rest of the events of the parashah followed one after the other.
Part 1. The Parah Adumah
(Verses 19:1–22)

A Means to Purify

Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to make ashes from a red cow, in order to purify someone tamei from contact with a corpse.

19: Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying, “This is the decree of the Torah that Hashem commanded, saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and tell them that they shall bring [lit., “take”] to you [sing.] a completely red cow that has no blemish and that has never had a yoke put [lit., “go up”] on it.”

Hashem continued: “You shall give it to Elazar the Kohen, and he shall have someone take it to a place outside the camp and someone shall slaughter it in front of him. Then Elazar the Kohen shall take some of its blood with his right forefinger, and sprinkle some of its blood seven times while facing toward the front [i.e., entrance] of the Tent of Meeting. Then a Kohen shall burn the cow before [Elazar’s] eyes; he shall burn its hide, its flesh, and its blood, along with its waste matter in its intestines. Then the Kohen shall take a piece of cedar wood, some hyssop, and scarlet-dyed wool and cast them into the fire burning the cow. The Kohen who does this shall wash [i.e., immerse] his garments of priesthood and bathe [i.e., immerse] his body in the water of a mikveh; the Kohen will be impure until evening and afterward he may enter the camp of the Shechinah [i.e., Courtyard]. The one who burns [the cow] shall wash [i.e., immerse] his garments in water and bathe [i.e., immerse] his body in water, and he will be impure until evening. A ritually pure man shall gather the cow’s ashes and place them outside the camp in a pure place; [they] shall be for safekeeping for the community of Bnei Yisrael, for use as sprinkling water; [the cow] is used for purification. The one who gathers the cow’s ashes shall wash [i.e., immerse] his garments and will be impure until evening. The laws of the red cow will be an eternal decree throughout their generations for Bnei Yisrael and for the convert who lives among them.”

Part 2. The Sanctity of the Camp

In their fortieth year in the desert, the nation arrived in Kadesh, at the border of Edom.

Miriam died in Kadesh, and then there was no water for the people to drink.

Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to speak to the rock so that it would bring forth water.

Moshe hit it instead. Although water still came forth, Hashem decreed that he and Aharon would die in the desert.

Part 3. Bnei Yisrael’s Journey to Eretz Yisrael

Bnei Yisrael asked Edom for permission to cross their land but were refused.

Aharon died while Bnei Yisrael were still at the border of Edom. The Clouds of Glory then disappeared and Amalek attacked. Bnei Yisrael eventually defeated them.

Bnei Yisrael journeyed around Edom and Moav to reach Eretz Yisrael. When they complained, Hashem sent snakes to smite them, but then told Moshe to make an image of a snake to heal them.

After crossing the Arnon Valley and seeing the miraculous death of the Amorites, they sang praises to Hashem and sang about the miraculous well.

Bnei Yisrael conquered the lands of kings Sichon and Og.

Summary of Chronology is on page 45
The Tumah of Touching a Corpse

One who touches a dead body becomes tamei for seven days and must purify himself with the ashes

11 Hashem continued: “One who touches the corpse of any human being [lit., “soul”] will be impure for a period of seven days. 12 He shall purify himself with [the cow’s ashes] on the third day and on the seventh day, and then he will become pure after immersing; but if he will not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not become pure. 13 Anyone who touches a corpse, specifically a human being who died and not an animal, and he does not purify himself with the ashes — if he then entered the Mishkan’s Courtyard he has defiled Hashem’s Mishkan [i.e., treated it as profane]. That person [lit., “soul”] will be spiritually cut off from Yisrael, for the sprinkling water was not thrown on him. He remains [lit., “will be”] impure; his impurity continues to be within him even if he immersed.”

If someone dies in a tent, anything in the tent is tamei for seven days

14 Hashem continued: “This is the law: when a man dies in a tent [i.e., covered area], anyone or anything that comes into the tent while the corpse is there and anything that is in the tent when the man dies will be impure for a period of seven days; 15 and any open clay container that has no tight fitting lid on it is impure. 16 Also, anyone or anything in an open field [i.e., uncovered area] that touches someone slain by a sword, or any other corpse, or even a human bone, or a person’s grave, will be impure for a period of seven days.”

The Purifying Waters

The ashes of the red cow were added to spring water, and the water sprinkled on whoever and whatever was tamei

17 Hashem continued: “They shall take for the impure person or object some of the ashes from the burnt cow of purification, and [someone] shall put on [the ashes] spring [lit., “living”] water that was added directly to a vessel [i.e., he shall stir the ashes into the water until they are covered]. 18 Then a pure man (a Kohen) shall take some hyssop and dip it in the water and sprinkle the water on the tent, and on all the objects and people who were there inside it, and on anyone who touched while in an open field the bone of a corpse or a slain person or any other corpse or a grave. 19 The pure person shall sprinkle the water on the impure person or object on the third day and on the seventh day, and he must purify him on the seventh day to complete the purification, and [the person] shall wash [i.e., immerse] his garments and bathe [i.e., immerse] his body in the water of a mikveh, and he will become pure in the evening. 20 But a man who becomes impure and does not purify himself — if he then entered the Courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash, that person [lit., “soul”] will be spiritually cut off from among the congregation of Yisrael, for he has defiled Hashem’s Sanctuary; the sprinkling water was not thrown on him, so he is still impure.”

The law of carrying or touching the purifying waters

21 Hashem continued: “All this will be for [Bnei Yisrael] an eternal decree. Moreover, one who carries or sprinkles the sprinkling water not for purifying will be impure for seven days and shall wash [i.e., immerse] himself and his garments on the seventh day; but one who merely touches the sprinkling water shall immerse and will only be impure until the evening.”

Part 2. The Waters of Merivah

(M Verses 20:1–20:13)

Miriam’s Death and the Disappearance of the Well

Bnei Yisrael arrived at Kadeish in the first month [of their fortieth year in the desert]. [Most of the first generation had now died.] Miriam died there; the rock that provided the people with water disappeared; and, afraid they would die of thirst, they quarreled with Moshe

20 In the first month of their fortieth year in the desert, Bnei Yisrael — the entire community — entered the Tzin Desert, and the people settled in Kadeish. There Miriam died, and there she was buried. Then, suddenly, there was no water for the community to drink, so they gathered against Moshe and Aharon. The people quarreled with Moshe and said, saying to him to respond, “If only we had died already by the same death as that of
our brothers who died before Hashem! 4 Why did you [pl.] bring Hashem’s congregation to this barren desert, to die here [lit., “there”] from thirst, both we and our animals? 5 And why did you [pl.] bring us up from Egypt only to bring us to this terrible place? It is not a place suitable for the planting of seeds, fig trees, grapevines, or pomegranate trees, and even worse there’s no water to drink!” 6 Moshe and Aharon came quickly to the Tent of Meeting’s entrance because of the angry congregation, and they fell on their faces in prayer. The glory of Hashem appeared to them alone.

The Miracle at the Rock

Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to speak to the rock and it would again give water

7 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Take the staff and assemble the community, you and your brother, Aharon, and speak [pl.] to the rock in front of them [lit., “before their eyes”], and then it will give forth its water. Thus you [sing.] will bring forth water for them from the rock, and give the community and their animals to drink.”

Moshe struck the rock twice with his staff, and abundant water came forth

8 Moshe took the staff from its place before the Ark of Hashem, as He had commanded him, 9 and then Moshe and Aharon assembled the congregation in front of the rock. On being provoked [Moshe] said to them, “Listen now, obstinate ones! Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock about which we have not been commanded?!"

10 Then Moshe raised his hand and struck the rock of his choice twice with his staff. Abundant water came forth, and the community and their animals drank.

Moshe and Aharon would not bring Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael because they did not sanctify Hashem’s Name

11 Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon, “Because you [pl.] did not trust in Me enough to sanctify Me in front of Bnei Yisrael by speaking to the rock, therefore you will not bring this congregation into the land that I have given them.” 12 These are the waters of strife, where Bnei Yisrael quarreled about the lack of water with Hashem, and where in the end He was sanctified through [the waters].

Part 3. Bnei Yisrael’s Journey to Eretz Yisrael

(Verses 20:14–22:1)

The Request to Cross Edom

Moshe sent messengers to Edom’s king, asking to cross his land, but was refused

14 Moshe sent messengers from Kadeish to the king of Edom, saying: “So said your brother Yisrael: You know about all the hardship that has befallen us — how our forefathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelled in Egypt for many years, and the people of Egypt did much evil to us and to our forefathers.

15 We then cried out to Hashem, and He heard our voice and sent an angel [i.e., Moshe] who took us out of Egypt. Look! We are now in Kadeish, a city at the edge of your territory. 16 Please help a little and let us pass through your land. We will not, however, pass through any field or vineyard, and we will not drink the well’s water that we possess, but will purchase from you food and water instead. We will go along the king’s highway and not turn aside to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory.”

17 But the king of Edom said to [Moshe], “You shall not pass through [my territory] lest I go out to greet you with the sword!”

Bnei Yisrael made a second request, but Edom refused and went out to confront them

18 Then Bnei Yisrael said to [the king of Edom], “We shall go up along the beaten path in the mountains, and if we drink any of your water — whether I or my livestock — I shall give you [its] full price. There is nothing at all to harm you; I will simply pass through on foot.” 19 But he said in response, “You will not pass through!” And Edom went out to the border to confront [Bnei Yisrael] with a huge army [lit., “people”] and with a strong show of force [lit., “strong hand”]. 20 Thus Edom refused to allow Yisrael to pass through its territory, and Bnei Yisrael turned away from [its border].

Aharon’s Death

At Mount Hor, Hashem told Moshe that Aharon would die. He was to take him and Elazar up the mountain and appoint Elazar the Kohen Gadol

21 After they journeyed from Kadeish, Bnei Yisrael — the entire community — came to Mount Hor.

22 Hashem said to Moshe to say to Aharon at Mount Hor, on the border of the land of Edom, saying,
24 “Aharon will now die and his soul will be brought in to the Next World where his ancestors [lit., "people"] reside, for he will not come into the land that I have given to Bnei Yisrael, because you [pl.] both rebelled against My word [i.e., disobeyed My order to speak to the rock] on account of the waters of strife. 25 With consoling words take Aharon and Elazar his son, and bring them up Mount Hor. 26 There disrobe Aharon of his Kohen Gadol garments and put them on Elazar his son; the soul of Aharon will then be brought in to the Next World and he will die there.”

Moshe did so, Aharon died, and all of Bnei Yisrael mourned him for thirty days

27 Moshe did just as Hashem commanded and the three of them ascended Mount Hor in front [lit., “before the eyes”] of the entire community of Yisrael. 28 Moshe disrobed Aharon of his garments and put them on [Aharon’s] son Elazar, and Aharon died there on top of the mountain. Then Moshe and Elazar descended from the mountain, and the entire community saw that Aharon had passed away. The entire House of Yisrael wept for Aharon for thirty days.

Amalek’s Attack

The “Canaanite” [i.e., Amalek] attacked Bnei Yisrael. Bnei Yisrael made a vow to Hashem, then annihilated them

21 1 The Canaanite, the king of Arad who dwelled in the south of Canaan, heard that the nation of Yisrael was coming along the southern route on which the twelve spies had once traversed, and he battled against Yisrael and captured from [them] a captive. 2 So Yisrael made a vow to Hashem and said, “If You give this people into my hands, I will consecrate the plunder from their cities to the Mishkan’s treasury.” 3 Hashem heard Yisrael’s voice and gave the Canaanite people into their hands; and [Yisrael] killed them and consecrated their cities and named the place Chormah [lit., “Consecrated”].

The Journey around Edom and Moav (and the Trials Along the Way)

The people complained about the journey around Edom and about the man. Hashem sent fiery snakes to smite them

4 [Bnei Yisrael] had journeyed back from Mount Hor seven encampments on the way to the Yam Suf [Sea of Reeds] and had to go around the land of Edom. The people’s spirit could not bear [lit., “grew short with”] the difficulties of the way. 5 So the people spoke against God and Moshe: “Why did You [pl.] bring us up from Egypt to die in the desert? For there is no food [lit., “bread”] and no water here, and our spirits are fed up and disgusted with this very light [i.e., insubstantial] bread [i.e., manna].”

In response Hashem sent the fiery snakes against the people. They bit the people and many people from Bnei Yisrael died.

The people asked Moshe to pray for them. Hashem told him to place the image of a snake on a high pole, to heal them

7 The people then came to Moshe and said, “We have sinned, for we spoke against Hashem and against you. Pray to Hashem that He remove the snakes from us.” So Moshe prayed for the people.

8 Hashem said to Moshe, “Make for yourself the likeness of a fiery snake and place it on a high pole, and it will be that anyone who has been bitten shall look at it and live.” 9 Moshe made a copper snake and placed it on the high pole. So it was that whenever a snake bit a man, he would gaze intently at the copper snake and live.

After journeying around Edom and Moav, Bnei Yisrael camped on the other side of the Arnon Valley

10 Bnei Yisrael journeyed on and camped in Ovos.
11 They journeyed from Ovos and camped in Iyei HaAvarim [The Barren Passes], in the desert that faces Moav, on its eastern side [lit., “where the sun shines”]. 12 From there they journeyed on and camped by the Zered River. 13 From there they journeyed on and camped in a place on the other side of the Arnon Valley that is in the strip of desert extending from and part of the border of the Amorites; for the Arnon Valley is the border of Moav, between Moav and the Amorites.

The Torah poetically recounts the miraculous deaths of the Amorites in the Arnon Valley

14 Concerning this encampment and the miracles performed there it will be said in the story [lit., “book”] of Hashem’s wars, when people recount the miracles done for our forefathers, that He gave [i.e., did for] them miracles at the Sea of Sufah [Reeds], and also in the valleys of Arnon. These are the miracles: 15 There was a spillage of streams of Amorite blood in the valleys that occurred when the Amorite mountain stretched out and moved toward the Moavite settlement of Ar and leaned on the mountain on Moav’s border, crushing Amorites hiding there. 16 And from there the blood came to the
well which brought it to Yisrael’s camp; it is the well about which Hashem said to Moshe, “Gather the people and I will give them water.”

Bnei Yisrael sang in praise of the well

17 Then when they saw the miracle, Yisrael were moved to sing [lit., “will sing”] this song: “Arise, O well, from the Arnon valley. Let us call out to it in praise! 18 This is the well that the princes once “dug” it, nobles of the people “bored” it, by cutting the stone with their staff of God. From the barren desert it was given to Bnei Yisrael as a gift. 19 And from when it was given as a gift it accompanied them, descending with them to the valleys, and from the valleys ascending with them to the heights, 20 and from the heights it went with them to the depression that is in the field of Moav, at the top of the peak that overlooks the surface of the desert known as Yeshimon [Wasteland].”

The Conquest of Sichon and Og

Bnei Yisrael sent messengers to Sichon, king of the Amorites, offering to cross his land in peace

21 Moshe, on behalf of Yisrael, sent messengers to Sichon, king of the Amorites, saying, 22 “Let [us] pass through your land. We will not turn aside to enter any field or vineyard. We will not drink the well’s water that we possess, but will purchase food and water instead. We will go along the king’s highway until we will have passed through your territory.”

Sichon refused and went out to wage war, so Bnei Yisrael smote him and took possession of his land

23 But Sichon did not let Yisrael pass through his territory. Instead, Sichon gathered all his people [i.e., fighting men] and went out to the desert to confront Yisrael. He came to Yahatz and there he battled against Yisrael. 24 Yisrael struck him and his people down with the edge of the sword and took possession of his land, from the Arnon Valley to the Yabbok River bordering Ammon, that is as far as the land of the descendants of Ammon — for the border of the descendants of Ammon was powerful in that Hashem had prohibited attacking them.

Bnei Yisrael settled in the Amorite cities, also those which Sichon had taken them from Moav

25 Yisrael took all these cities; and later on Yisrael dwelled in all the cities of the Amorites — in Cheshbon and all its nearby villages [lit., “daughters”]. 26 For Cheshbon [had become] the city of Sichon, king of the Amorites; he had fought against the former king of Moav and took from his control all his land including Cheshbon as far as the Arnon Valley.

The Torah recounts a parable describing the war between Sichon and Moav [proving Bnei Yisrael’s right to dwell in what was once Moav]

27 About that war between Sichon and Moav the parable tellers said to Sichon: “Enter Cheshbon with your soldiers! Let it be built anew and reestablished as Sichon’s city. 28 From there he would go on to conquer other areas of Moav. Hence: For a fire [i.e., Sichon and his soldiers] has gone out from Cheshbon, a flame from the city of Sichon; it consumed the inhabitants of the region of Ar of Moav as well as the priests [lit., “masters”] of Arnon’s city. 29 Woe to you, people of Moav — you are cursed! You are lost, people of the idol Kemosh! [Kemosh] has given over [Moav’s] sons to be fugitives from the sword, and its daughters [i.e., the women] into captivity to Sichon, king of the Amorites. 30 [Moav’s] sovereignty over Cheshbon has been lost; it has been removed from Divon. We laid waste Moav’s people as far as Nofach, which is near Meidva.”

31 Yisrael settled in the land of the Amorites.

Moshe sent spies to Yazer; the spies conquered it by themselves

32 Moshe later sent men to spy out Yazer, and they captured its nearby villages and drove out the Amorites who were there.

Og, king of Bashan, went out to wage war against Bnei Yisrael. They smote him and took possession of his land

33 [Bnei Yisrael] turned and went north [lit., “ascended”] on the way to the Bashan district. Og, king of Bashan — he and all his people [i.e., fighting men] — went out to confront them, to make war at Edrei. 34 Hashem said to Moshe, “Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand, along with all his people and his land, and you will do to him as you did to Sichon, king of the Amorites, who dwelled in Cheshbon.”

35 [Bnei Yisrael] struck down [Og], his sons, and all his people, leaving him not a single survivor, and they took possession of his land.

Bnei Yisrael journeyed on and camped opposite Yericho

22 Bnei Yisrael journeyed on and camped on the plains of Moav, on the other side of the Jordan River in the region of Jericho.
Summary of Chronology

- On the **first of Nissan**, the day the Mishkan was set up, almost **one year after Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim**, Hashem commanded Moshe the laws of the **parah adumah**.
- The rest of the events recorded in the parashah took place in the **fortieth year** of Bnei Yisrael’s sojourn in the desert.
- Bnei Yisrael arrived in Kadeish on the **tenth of Nissan** (the first month). Miriam died that same day, and the incident with the rock followed.
- Four months later, after the unsuccessful request to cross Edom’s land, Bnei Yisrael arrived at Mount Hor. There Aharon died on the **first of Av** (the fifth month).
- Amalek attacked right afterward, and Bnei Yisrael retreated. After mourning Aharon anew, they fought back against Amalek.
- The people then journeyed around Moav and Edom to reach the land of the Amorites.
- In **Elul** (the sixth month), they fought Sichon, king of the Amorites; in **Tishrei** (the seventh month) they captured Yazeir; and right after, on the **23rd of Tishrei**, they battled Og, king of Bashan. They arrived at the plains of Moav shortly afterward and camped there by the Jordan River.
Part 1. Moav’s Conspiracy to Harm Bnei Yisrael

(Verses 22:2–40)

Moav’s Fear

Moav was very afraid of Bnei Yisrael so consulted with the elders of Midian.

22: When Balak son of Tzippor saw [i.e., comprehended] everything that Yisrael had done to the Amorite king, Sichon, as well as Og. 2 the people of Moav became very afraid of the people of Yisrael on hearing this for [Bnei Yisrael] were also numerous; and the people of Moav abhorred their lives because of their fear of Bnei Yisrael. 3 So Moav sought advice and said to the elders of Midian, “Now the congregation of Yisrael will lick up and destroy all our surroundings, like an ox licks up and uproots all of a field’s vegetation.” Balak son of Tzippor had just become king of Moav at that time.

Balak Summoned Bilam

Balak sent nobles from Moav and Midian to Bilam calling him to come and curse Bnei Yisrael.

5 [Balak] sent messengers to Bil’am son of Beor, to Pesor, which is by the Euphrates River in the land of [Balak’s] native people, to call him to come for his own benefit, saying: “A nation has come out of Mitzrayim! [They] killed [lit., “covered”] the ‘eye’ of the land [i.e., Sichon and Og who watched over our land] and are now residing near me, ready to destroy me [i.e., my people]! So now, please come and curse this people for me, for [they are] mightier than I. Perhaps then I will be able together with my people to strike [pl.] [them] and I will drive [them] from the land of Moav. For I know that whomever you bless is blessed and whomever you curse is cursed.” 6 The elders of Moav and the elders of Midian went to Balak with all kinds of magic instruments in their possession [lit., “hand”], and they came to Bilam and told him Balak’s words.

Hashem appeared to Bilam and told him not to go with them.

6 [Bilam] said to them, “Lodge here tonight, and I will return you an answer [lit., “word”] tomorrow in accordance with what Hashem will tell me.” So the
nobilis [i.e., elders] of Moav stayed with Bilam. 9That night God came to Bilam in a vision and said, "Who are these men with you? 10Bilam said to God, "Balak son of Tzippor, king of Moav, sent messengers to me saying: 11The nation that went out of Egypt has killed [lit., “covered”] the ‘eye’ of the land [i.e., Sichon and Og]! Now, come and curse [them] strongly for me; maybe then I will be able to battle against [them] and drive [them] out of existence."

12God said to Bilam, "Do not go with them. Do not even curse the nation from here, for it is blessed." 13Bilam arose in the morning and said to Balak’s nobles, "Go back to your land, for Hashem refuses to let me go with you, only with more important nobles." 14Moav’s nobles arose and came to Balak and said, "Bilam refuses to go with us."

Balak sent more messengers and said he would honor Bilam greatly if he would agree to curse Bnei Yisrael.

15So Balak persisted and tried again, this time sending more nobles and more distinguished ones than those first ones. 16They came to Bilam and said to him, "So said Balak son of Tzippor: Please do not hold back from coming to me. 17For I will honor you greatly, giving more money than ever, and everything that you say to me I will do. So please come and curse for me this nation." 18But Bilam answered and said to Balak’s servants, "Even if Balak would give me his house filled with silver and gold, I am unable to transgress the command of Hashem, my God, whether to do something small or large. 19So now you, too, please stay in this place tonight, and then I will know what more Hashem will tell me on this matter."

Hashem told Bilam he could go, but he could only do as He would tell him.

20God came to Bilam in a vision at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you for your benefit, arise and go with them, but only that which I tell you, that is what you will do, even against your will.”

**Bilam’s Journey to Moav**

When Bilam went with Moav’s nobles, Hashem was angry and sent an angel to obstruct his path three times; only Bilam’s donkey could see it.

[1] 21Bilam arose early in the morning and saddled his she-donkey. He then went with Moav’s nobles, hoping to harm the Jewish people. 22God’s anger was kindled because [Bilam] was going with this intent, so Hashem’s angel stood on the path to oppose him; [Bilam] was riding on his she-donkey and he had his two youths with him to serve him. 23The she-donkey but not Bilam saw Hashem’s angel standing on the path with its drawn sword in its hand, so the she-donkey turned aside from the beaten path and went into the open field. Bilam struck the she-donkey to turn it back to the path.

[2] 24Hashem’s angel then stood on a narrow vineyard path which had a stone fence on this side and a stone fence on that side. 25The she-donkey saw Hashem’s angel and pressed itself against the stone wall in order to pass by and in doing so pressed Bilam’s leg against the wall. So [Bilam] struck it again.

[3] 26Hashem’s angel continued to go ahead of [lit., “pass”] Bilam and this time stood in a narrow place where there was no passage to turn aside to the right or left. 27The she-donkey saw Hashem’s angel and stopped and crouched under Bilam. Bilam’s anger was kindled, and he struck the she-donkey with a stick to punish it.

Hashem opened the donkey’s mouth so it could speak and rebuke Bilam.

28Hashem opened up the she-donkey’s mouth, giving it the ability to speak, and it said to Bilam, “What have I done to you that you struck me these three times?” 29Bilam said to the she-donkey, “Because you have ridiculed me! If only I had a sword in my hand — for then I would have killed you right now.” 30The she-donkey said to Bilam, “But why? Am I not your faithful she-donkey upon which you have ridden ever since your beginning to ride until this day, yet in all that time have I been accustomed to do such a thing to you?” He said, “No.”

Hashem revealed the angel to Bilam; it rebuked him but let him go on with Balak’s nobles, telling him that he would have to say what Hashem would tell him.

31Suddenly Hashem opened [lit., “uncovered”] Bilam’s eyes and he saw Hashem’s angel standing on the path with its drawn sword in its hand, so he bowed his head and prostrated himself on his face. 32Hashem’s angel said to him, “For what reason did you strike your she-donkey these three times? It was I who went out to oppose you because [you] were hurrying along the path to act against me [i.e., against Hashem’s will, thereby angering Him]. 33The she-donkey saw me and turned away when it was before me these three times. Had it not turned away from me, then I would have not only delayed you but also killed you now while keeping it alive.”
Bilam said to Hashem’s angel, “I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing on the path facing me. Now, if it is evil in your eyes to go to Moav, I will turn back.” 36Hashem’s angel said to Bilam, “Go with the men, but know that only the message that I [i.e., Hashem] will declare to you, that alone is what you will declare.” Even so, Bilam went with Balak’s nobles hoping to harm Yisrael.

Balak and Bilam’s Meeting

Balak met Bilam in a city on Moav’s border. Bilam admitted that he could only say what Hashem would tell him.

36Balak heard that Bilam was coming, and went out to meet him at Moav’s most important city that was on the northern border formed by the Arnon Valley, at the very edge of Moav’s territory. 37Balak said to Bilam, “Did I not have to keep sending messengers to you to call you to come? Why did you not come to me right away? Is it true, as you thought, that I am not able to honor you?” 38Bilam said to Balak, “I have come to you now but it will not help you, for am I really able to declare anything I want? Only the message that God will place in my mouth, that alone I will declare.” 39Bilam went with Balak, and they came to the city of Chutzos [“Outside markets”].

Balak then slaughtered an ox and a sheep [or: goat] and sent them to Bilam and to the nobles who were with him.

Part 2. Bilam’s Blessings

(Verses 22:41–24:25)

The First Blessing

Balak brought Bilam to the high place of Baal. They brought offerings. Hashem appeared to Bilam, and told him to return to Balak and bless Yisrael

41In the morning, Balak took Bilam and brought him up to the high place where the idol of Baal was worshipped, so that from there [ Bilam] saw the edge of the people of Yisrael’s camp. 23Bilam said to Balak, “Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams.” 2Balak did just as Bilam said. Then Balak and Bilam offered up [sing.] a bull and a ram on each altar. 3Bilam said to Balak, “Stand yourself by your burnt offering to watch over it and I will go nearby. Perhaps Hashem will happen to visit me in a vision, and the matter that He will show me, I will relate to you.” He then went away to be alone.

4Though abominable, God happened to appear to Bilam. [Bilam] said to Him, “I have set up for You the seven altars and I have offered up a bull and a ram on each altar.” 4Unimpressed, Hashem placed a message in Bilam’s mouth and said to him, “Return to Balak, and this message you will declare.” 4He returned to him, and he was still standing watch by his burnt-offering, he and all the nobles of Moav.

Bilam blessed Bnei Yisrael

7[Bilam] raised his voice to declare his parable and said, “Bilak, the king of Moav, led me from the land of Aram, from the mountains of the east, saying, ‘Come curse for me the descendants of Yaakov. Come bring Hashem’s wrath upon Yisrael.’ How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? And how can I bring wrath on them if Hashem is and has not been wrathful? For from its origin I see [the nation] was firmly established like these mountains [lit., “rocks”], and I perceive it was strongly founded like these hills. This is why the nation will dwell alone in the end of days and will not be counted among the nations that will be destroyed then. 9Who can count the dust [i.e., young children] of Yaakov, or the number of even a quarter of Yisrael [i.e., one of their four camps]? May I [lit., “my soul”] die the death of the upright ones among Yisrael, and may my end be like [theirs]!”

8Bilam said to Bilam, “What have you done to me? I brought [lit., “took”] you from Aram to curse my enemies, but instead you have really blessed them!” 9Bilam answered and said, “Is it not as I told you: whatever message Hashem will put in my mouth, I must be careful to speak just that?”

The Second Blessing

Balak took Bilam to the field of lookouts. They again brought offerings and Hashem appeared to Bilam, telling him to return to Balak and bless Yisrael

8Balak said to [Bilam], “Come now with me to another place from where you will see [Yisrael’s camp] — but you will see only its edge, you will not see all of it — and curse [them] for me from there.” 9So he took him to the field of the lookouts at the top of the peak, and built seven altars there and offered up a bull and a ram on each altar. 11[Bilam] said to Balak, “Stand yourself by your burnt offering to watch over it while I shall prepare myself to be appeared to [lit., “happened upon”] by Hashem in a vision here, close by.”

12Hashem happened to appear to Bilam and He put a message in his mouth. He then said, “Return to
Balak, and this message you will declare,” 17[Bilam] came to him, and he was standing watch by his burnt offering along with some of Moav’s nobles. Balak said to him derisively, “What did Hashem declare?”

Bilam blessed Bnei Yisrael

18Bilam raised his voice to declare his parable and said, “Arise, Balak, and hear with full attention! Listen to my words, son of Tzippor! God is not like a person that He should betray His word, nor like a human that He should change His mind. Shall He say something and not do it, or speak and not fulfill [His word]? 19I received an order from Him to bless Yisrael; He blessed them, and I cannot reverse [the blessing]. 20[Hashem] does not perceive any sin in the House of Yaakov, and He does not see any transgression [lit., “toil”] in Yisrael. Even when they sin, Hashem, [their] God, is with [Yisrael], and the King’s friendship, as evidenced by His Divine Presence, remains among [them]. 21God brought them out of Egypt with His towering might [lit., “His high flying”] and great miracles. 22They are worthy of all this for there is no divination being practiced in Yaakov and no soothsaying in Yisrael. There will be a time like this in the future when they will be closer to Hashem than the angels, and it will be said by the angels to Yaakov and Yisrael, “How has Hashem acted?” 23“Yes! The nation will arise like a powerful lion, and it will lift itself up like a lion to conquer Eretz Yisrael. It will not lie down and rest from waging war until it will consume its prey, killing the land’s inhabitants, and drink the blood of the slain, acquiring their property.

24Balak said to Bilam, “Better that you neither curse them at all nor bless them at all!” 25Bilam answered and said to Balak, “Did I not tell you, saying, ‘Everything that Hashem will tell me, that alone I shall do?’”

The Third Blessing

Balak took Bilam to the summit of Pe’or. They again brought offerings and this time Bilam desired to bless Bnei Yisrael.

26Balak said to Bilam, “Come now, I shall take you to another place. Perhaps it will be proper in God’s eyes that you will curse [the nation] for me from there.” 27So Balak took Bilam to the summit where the idol of Pe’or was worshipped, which overlooks the surface of the desert known as Yeshimon [Wasteland]. 28Bilam said to Balak, “Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams.” 29Bilam did as Bilam said, and he offered up a bull and a ram on each altar.

24Bilam saw that it was good in Hashem’s eyes to bless Yisrael, so he did not go and seek out divinations to see if Hashem would let him curse them as he had before time after time. Instead, he set his face [i.e., gaze] toward the desert hoping to mention Bnei Yisrael’s sin with the golden calf. 30However, when Bilam lifted his eyes and saw the people of Yisrael dwelling in holiness according to [their] tribes, there came on him a new Godly spirit and he no longer wished to curse them.

Bilam blessed Bnei Yisrael

31He raised his voice to declare his parable and said, “The prophetic declaration of Bilam son of Beor, the declaration of the man with the hollowed out [i.e., missing] eye, the declaration of the one who hears God’s words, who clearly perceives a vision of Shad-dai [the Almighty] — he falls [i.e., lies] down to sleep and it is revealed to his eyes:

32How good and holy are your tents, O Yaakov, and your encampments, O Yisrael. 33Their kingdom will be like streams stretching out to faraway, their land like lush gardens by a river, their fame like fragrant aloes that Hashem planted, their kings like tall cedars by water. 34Water will flow plentifully from the wells where they fill [their] buckets, and [their] seed shall be planted by abundant waters. 35Their first king will be superior to Agag, the king of Amalek, and [their] kingdom will become more and more exalted. 36Their greatness is from God Who brought [them] out of Egypt with His towering might. He will consume the nations that are His enemies and will make their bones bare of flesh, and He will strike them with His arrows. 37Yisrael will kneel [i.e., rest] and lie down [i.e., settle] in their land like a strong lion, and like a sleeping mighty lioness — who would dare rouse it? Those who bless you [i.e., Yisrael] will be blessed, while those who curse you will be cursed.”

Balak was incensed and told Bilam to flee to his home. Bilam advised Balak [how to entice the Jewish people to sin]

38Balak’s anger was kindled against Bilam, and he clapped his hands together in anguish. Balak told Bilam, “I called you to curse my enemies, but now you have truly blessed them these three times. 39So now flee to your home [lit., “place”]! I said I would greatly honor you, but Hashem has prevented you from receiving honor!” 40Bilam said to Balak, “Did I not even tell your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, 41Even if Balak would give me his house filled with silver and gold, I am unable to
transgress Hashem’s command to do something good or bad according to my wish [lit., “heart’] — what Hashem will speak, that alone is what I will speak? 14 Now I am returning to my people. Nonetheless, come and I will advise you how you can harm Yisrael, and I will also tell you what this people will do to your people at the end of days.”

The Fourth Blessing

Bilam blessed Bnei Yisrael a fourth and final time

15 He raised his voice to declare his parable and said,”The prophetic declaration of Bilam son of Beor, the declaration of the man with the hollowed out eye, the declaration of the one who hears God’s words and knows the mind of the Highest One. He clearly perceives a vision of Shad-dai [the Almighty]; he falls [i.e., lies] down to sleep and it is revealed to his eyes:

16 I see [Yisrael's greatness], but it is not now; I perceive it, but it is not close in time. I saw in my vision that a star shot forth [i.e., a king arose] from the House of Yaakov, and a staff [i.e., powerful king] arose from Yisrael and smote the princes and people of Moav and pierced all the nations of the world, who are the descendants of Sheis [Adam HaRishon’s son]. 17 Edom will be an inheritance [i.e., conquered], and Se’ir, too, will be an inheritance for Yisrael, [their] enemy [lit., “enemies”], and then Yisrael will acquire their possessions. 18 Then the Mashiach who will be from the House of Yaakov will dominate the world and destroy the remnant who survived from the most important city of Edom.”

20 [Bilam] then saw the final punishment of Amalek and raised his voice to declare his parable and said,”Amalek was the first of the nations to war against Yisrael, and thus its end will be to be destroyed forever by Yisrael.” 21 Then he saw the greatness of the Kenites, Yisro’s descendants, and raised his voice to declare his parable and said,”Your dwelling place will be strong; you placed your nest [i.e., dwelling] in the rock [i.e., Yisrael],

22 For even when you, the Kenites, will be removed from your dwelling places and exiled by Ashur (Assyria) with the ten tribes of Yisrael, till what place will Ashur take you captive? In the end you will return.” 23 [Bilam] raised his voice to declare his parable and said,”Woe! Who will be able to do something to live through and prevent Hashem from His placing on him these decrees?! 24 For Ashur will displace the nations and then armies in large ships will come from the region of Kittim [i.e., Rome] and afflict Ashur and then afflict the peoples who live on the other side of the Euphrates River. But in the end of days [Kittim] will also be destroyed forever.”

Bilam and Balak parted

25 Bilam got up and immediately went from Moav and returned to his native region, and Balak also went on his way. 9

Part 3. The Incident in Shittim

(verses 25:1–9)

The Sin

[Balak followed Bilam’s advice to entice Bnei Yisrael to sin.] The people sinned with the women of Moav and prostrated themselves before Baal Pe’or

25 When Yisrael were settled in Shittim, the people began to behave immorally with the daughters [i.e., women] of Moav. 2 [These women] called the people to the feasts from the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and prostrated themselves to their gods [i.e., idols]. 3 Yisrael attached itself to the worship of the idol Baal Pe’or, and thus Hashem’s anger was kindled against Yisrael and He sent a plague.

A Plague

Hashem was angry at Bnei Yisrael [and sent a plague]. He told Moshe to hang [the idolaters] 4 Hashem said to Moshe, “Take all the people’s leaders to judge the people, and, for Hashem’s sake, hang [the idolaters] in full view of everyone [lit., “before the sun”]. Hashem’s anger will then withdraw from Yisrael.” 5 Moshe said to Yisrael’s judges, ”Let each one of you slay [i.e., hang] those of his men [i.e., those he judged] who are guilty of being attached to the worship of Baal Pe’or.”

Zimri and Pinchas

A man [Zimri, the leader of the tribe of Shimon] challenged Moshe and sinned in the midst of the camp

6 But then a man from Bnei Yisrael came forward and brought the Midianite woman (a princess) to his brothers for immorality, right in front of Moshe and in front of the entire community of Bnei Yisrael. Moshe was unsure what to do, so [everyone] began weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.
Pinchas killed the man and woman with a spear, and the plague stopped.

The incident with the women of Moav and Midian occurred shortly afterward.

Pinchas, son of Elazar who was son of Aharon the Kohen, saw this incident and knew what to do. He arose from amid the community, took a spear in his hand, and went after the man of Yisrael into the tent and pierced both of them, the man of Yisrael and the woman, right through her stomach area. With that the plague was stopped from raging among Bnei Yisrael. The number of dead in the plague was twenty-four thousand.
Parashah Outline

Part 1. Pinchas’s Reward and Midian’s Punishment

- Hashem made a covenant of eternal priesthood with Pinchas in return for acting zealously for His sake and killing Zimri.
- Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to treat the Midianites like enemies and to smite them.

Part 2. The National Census and the Inheritance of the Land

- Bnei Yisrael were counted according to their tribes.
- Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu that Eretz Yisrael would be divided up among those who had been counted.
- The tribe of Levi were counted separately from the rest of the nation since they would not be receiving a portion in the land.
- Hashem awarded Tzelafchad’s daughters their father’s portion in the land and taught the laws of inheritance to Bnei Yisrael.

Part 3. Moshe’s Successor: Yehoshua

- Hashem told Moshe to ascend Mount HaAvarim and see the land before he would die.
- He told Moshe to appoint Yehoshua as the next leader.

Part 4. The Laws of the Tamid and Mussafim

- Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to offer up the tamid (daily) offering and, on Shabbos and the festivals, mussafim (additional offerings).

Summary of Chronology is on page 58

Part 1. Pinchas’s Reward and Midian’s Punishment

(Verses 25:10–18)

Pinchas’s Reward

Hashem made a covenant with Pinchas

25  10Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 11”Pinchas son of Elazar, who is the son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back My anger from Bnei Yisrael when he zealously avenged My vengeance — the anger I should have displayed — among them by killing Zimri, and thus I did not annihilate Bnei Yisrael in My vengeance. 12Therefore, say to Pinchas that I am hereby giving him My covenant that it will be for him a covenant of peace, 13and it will be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of eternal priesthood [i.e., the covenant will bestow peace and priesthood], in return for this that he zealously took vengeance for the sake of his God and thereby atoned for Bnei Yisrael, saving them from the plague.”

Hashem identified the slain man and woman

14“The name of the slain man of Yisrael, who was slain together with the Midianite woman, was Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a patriarchal house of Shimon and also of the tribe. 15And the name of the slain Midianite woman was Kozbi daughter of Tzur, who was the head of the nations of Midian, being head of the most important patriarchal house in Midian.”

Midian’s Punishment

Bnei Yisrael had to be hostile to the Midianites and to smite them [at a later time]

16Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 17“Be continually hostile to the Midianites and then, later, smite them, 18for they are hostile to you with their evil plots to bring you to idol worship, which they plotted against you in the matter of the idol Pe’or in Shittim and also in the matter of Kozbi, daughter of Midian’s leader, their sister, who was slain on the day of the plague that Hashem sent because of the matter of Pe’or.”
Part 2. The National Census and the Inheritance of the Land
(Verses 26:1–27:11)

The Count of Bnei Yisrael

Hashem told Moshe and Elazar to count Bnei Yisrael

26 It was after the plague and Hashem said to Moshe and through Moshe to Elazar son of Aharon the Kohan, saying, Take [pl.] a head count of the entire community of Bnei Yisrael, counting them according to their paternal lineage [lit., “father’s house”; i.e., tribe], from twenty years old and up, that is, everyone in Yisrael who goes out to war with the army.” Moshe and Elazar the Kohan spoke about the census with [Bnei Yisrael] on the plains of Moav, by the Jordan River in the region of Yericho, saying, You must be counted from twenty years old and up, just as earlier Hashem commanded Moshe and those of Bnei Yisrael who went out of the land of Egypt that their count be from twenty years.

The results of the counts of the tribes (including the family names)

First was the tribe of Reuven, the firstborn of Yisrael: the sons of Reuven were, according to their families, from Chanoch, the Chanochite family; from Pallu, the Palluite family; from Chetzron, the Chetzronite family; and from Karmi, the Karmitic family. These were the families of the Reuvenites; those counted from them were forty-three thousand seven hundred and thirty (43,730). The son of Pallu was Elav; and the sons of Eliav were Nemuel, Dasan, and Aviram. This is the Dasan and Aviram, the community leaders [lit., “those called on by the community (to represent them)"], who, together with the community of Korach’s followers, provoked Bnei Yisrael to argue against Moshe and Aharon and dispute the Kohanim’s status, for the sake of their true goal of provoking the people to argue against Hashem.

And so the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and Korach when the community died and when the divine fire consumed the two hundred and fifty men; and they themselves, through their deaths, became a sign and remembrance for Bnei Yisrael not to dispute the Kohanim’s status. But Korach’s sons did not die. The sons of Shimon were, according to their families, from Nemuel, the Nemuelite family; from Yamin, the Yaminite family; from Yachin, the Yachinite family; from Zerach, the Zarchite family; and from Shaul, the Shaulite family. These were the families of the Shimonites—two thousand two hundred (22,200) in total.

The sons of Gad were, according to their families, from Tzefon, the Tzefonite family; from Chagi, the Chagite family; from Shuni, the Shunitite family; from Ozni, the Oznite family; from Ari, the Arite family; from Arod, the Arodite family; and from Arel, the Arelite family. These were the families of the Gadites according to their count—forty thousand five hundred (40,500) in total.

The sons of Yehudah were Er and Onan, but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan without offspring. The other sons of Yehudah were, according to their families, from Shelah, the Shelanite family; from Peretz, the Partzite family; and from Zerah, the Zarchite family. And the sons of Peretz were, according to their families, from Chetzron, the Chetzronite family, and from Chamul, the Chamocumentary family. These were the families of Yehudah according to their count—seventy-six thousand five hundred (76,500) in total.

The sons of Yissachar were, according to their families, from Tola, the Tolaite family; from Puvah, the Punite family; from Yashuv, the Yashuvite family; and from Shimron, the Shimronite family. These were the families of Yissachar according to their count—sixty-four thousand three hundred (64,300) in total.

The sons of Zevulun were, according to their families, from Sare, the Sardite family; from Elon, the Elonite family; from Yacheleel, the Yachleelite family. These were the families of the Zevulunites according to their count—sixty thousand five hundred (60,500) in total.

The sons of Joseph were, according to their families, Menasheh and Efraim. The sons of Menasheh were, according to their families, from Machir, the Machrite family, and Machir fathered Gilad; and from Gilad, the Giladite family. These were the sons of Gilad: from L’ezreel, the L’ezrinite family; from Cheleek, the Chelekit family; from Asriel, the Asrielite family; from Shechem, the Shchemite family; from Shemida, the Shemidait family; and from Chefer, the Chefrite family. And Tzelafchad son of Chefer did not have any sons, only daughters; and the names of Tzelafchad’s daughters were Machlah, Noah, Chaglah, Milkah, and Tirtzah. These were the families of Menasheh, and those counted were fifty-four thousand seven hundred (52,700) in total.  

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These were the sons of Efraim according to their families: from Shuselach, the Shusalchite family; from Becher, the Bachrite family; and from Tachan, the Tachanite family. These were the sons of Shuselach: from Eran, the Eranite family. These were the families of Efraim according to their count — thirty-two thousand five hundred [32,500] in total. These were the sons of Yosef according to their families.

The sons of Binyamin were, according to their families, from Bela, the Balite family; from Ashbel, the Ashbelite family; from Achiram, the Achiramite family; from Shefum, the Shufamite family; and from Chufam, the Chufamite family. And the sons of Bela were Ard and Na'aman: from Ard, the Ardite family, and from Na'aman, the Na'amite family. These were the sons of Binyamin according to their families, and those counted were forty-five thousand six hundred [45,600] in total.

These were the sons of Dan according to their families: from Shucham, the Shuchamite family. These were the families of Dan according to their families. All the Shuchamite families were, according to their count, forty-six thousand four hundred [46,400] in total.

The sons of Asher were, according to their families, from Yimmah, the Yimnah family; from Yishvi, the Yishvite family; and from Briah, the Bri'ite family. From the sons of Briah: from Chever, the Chevrite family, and from Malki'el, the Malkielite family. And the name of Asher's daughter was Serach. These were the sons of Asher according to their count — fifty-three thousand four hundred [53,400] in total.

The sons of Naftali were, according to their families, from Yachzeel, the Yachzeelite family; from Guni, the Günite family; from Yetzer, the Yitzrite family; and from Shilem, the Shilemite family. These were the families of the Naftali according to their families, and those counted were forty-five thousand four hundred [45,400] in total.

The total count

These were the counted ones of Bnei Yisrael: six hundred and one thousand, seven hundred and thirty [601,730].

The Division of the Land

The land was to be divided up (by a Divine lottery) among the tribes according to those who were counted

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, To these who were counted the land shall be divided as an inheritance, by the number of names in each tribe. For the tribe that has many people you shall increase the portion of its inheritance, and for the tribe that has few people you shall reduce its inheritance; each tribe according to its count shall be given its inheritance. However, the land shall be divided by a lottery; according to the names of their fathers’ tribes — those who left Mitzrayim — [the people] shall inherit. By the miraculous command of the drawn lot shall [the tribe’s] portion be divided out, whether the tribe is large or small.

The Count of Bnei Levi

The Torah lists the families of Levi and their count

These were the counted ones of the sons of Levi according to their families: from Gershon, the Gershonite family; from Kehas, the Kehasite family; and from Merari, the Merarite family. These were the families of Levi: the Livnite family, the Chevronite family, the Machlite family, the Mushite family, and the Korchite family. And Kehas fathered Amram. The name of Amram’s wife was Yocheved, the daughter of Levi — whom Levi’s wife bore her to Levi in Mitzrayim — and she bore to Amram: Aharon, Moshe, and Miriam, their sister. To Aharon were born Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Isamar, but Nadav and Avihu died [sing.] when they brought a strange [i.e., unauthorized] fire before Hashem. Those counted from Levi were twenty-three thousand [23,000], every male from one month old and up; for they were not counted among the rest of Bnei Yisrael from twenty years old because an inheritance in the land was not given to them among Bnei Yisrael.

All the men who were counted at Sinai had now died — except for Yehoshua and Kaleb

These are the counts of Moshe and Elazar the Kohen who counted Bnei Yisrael on the plains of Moav by the Jordan River in the region of Yericho. There was not among these counts a single man from the previous counts of Moshe and Aharon the Kohen who counted Bnei Yisrael in the Sinai Desert. For after the incident of the spies Hashem had declared about them (see 14:35) that they would surely die in the desert, and now not a single man remained from them except Kaleb son of Yefuneh and Yehoshua son of Nun.
The Daughters of Tzelafchad and the Laws of Inheritance

Tzelafchad’s daughters asked Moshe to give them their father’s portion in the land

27:1 The daughters of Tzelafchad son of Chefer, son of Giland, son of Machir, son of Menashe, of the families of Menashe son of Yosef, came forward with a petition; and these are the names of his daughters: Machlah, Noah, Chaglah, Milkah, and Tirtzah. They stood before Moshe, before Elazar the Kohen Gadol, and before the tribal leaders and the entire community at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, saying, “Our father died in the desert, but he was not among the community who gathered against Hashem to complain, nor in Korach’s community, for he died because of his own sin without causing others to sin, and he had no sons. Why then should our father’s name be precluded from being remembered among his family just because he had no son? Rather, give us a heritage among our father’s brothers.” Moshe brought their case before Hashem.

Hashem told Moshe to give them their father’s portion, and to teach Bnei Yisrael the laws of inheritance

4Hashem said to Moshe, saying, “The daughters of Tzelafchad speak [i.e., petitioned] correctly. You shall surely give them [masc. a hereditary possession in the land among their [masc.] father’s brothers, and thus you shall pass on their father’s inheritance to them.

“Speak to Bnei Yisrael about this, saying: If a man dies and has no son, pass on his inheritance to his daughter. If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. If his father has no brothers, give his inheritance to his nearest relative from his father’s family, so that he will inherit it. This will be an eternal decreed law for Bnei Yisrael, just as Hashem commanded Moshe.”

Part 3. Moshe’s Successor: Yehoshua

(Verses 27:12–23)

Moshe Would Not Enter the Land

Hashem told Moshe to ascend Mount HaAvarim [Mount of the Crossings] and see the land that I have given to Bnei Yisrael. You will see it and then your soul will be brought in to the place where your ancestors [lit., “people”] reside in the Next World — you too, just as Aharon’s soul, your brother, was brought in. This is because you both rebelled against My order to sanctify Me through the water by speaking to the rock before their eyes in the Tzin Desert during the community’s strife over the lack of water. Those were the waters of strife of Kadeish in the Tzin Desert.”

Yehoshua

Moshe asked Hashem to appoint a fitting leader to succeed him

55 Moshe spoke to Hashem, saying to Him to reply, “May Hashem, God of the spirits of all flesh and blood [i.e., He Who knows people’s minds], appoint a wise man over the community who can guide all types of people, and who will go out to battle before them and who will come in from battle before them, who will take [i.e., lead] them out and, through his merits, bring them in, so that the community of Hashem will not be like straying sheep that do not have a shepherd to guide them.”

Hashem told him to appoint Yehoshua bin Nun on the last day of his life

56 Hashem said to Moshe, “Persuade to be leader [lit., “take”] Yehoshua son of Nun, who is known to you and who is a man who has in him, as you requested, a spirit to guide all types of people, and place your hand upon him, giving him permission to rule and teach. Have him stand before Elazar the Kohen and the entire community, and before their eyes charge him on behalf of the nation, and transmit and place upon him some of your rays of splendor that radiate from your face so that the entire community of Bnei Yisrael will listen to him with respect. But before going out to battle he shall stand before Elazar the Kohen and ask of him before Hashem about the judgment of the Urim VTumim. By [Elazar’s] order they shall go out to battle and by his order they shall come in — [Yehoshua] and all of Bnei Yisrael with him, and the entire community of elders [i.e., Sanhedrin] shall follow Elazar’s order.”

Moshe appointed Yehoshua [on the last day of his life]

57 Moshe did everything just as Hashem had commanded him. On the last day of his life he persuaded [lit., “took”] Yehoshua to be the next leader and had him stand before Elazar the Kohen and before the
entire community. He placed both his hands on him and charged him on behalf of the nation, just as Hashem had spoken through Moshe.

Part 4. The Laws of the Tamid and Mussafim
(Verses 28:1–30:1)

The Tamid
Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to offer a daily burnt offering (olah) morning and afternoon.

28:1 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: “Command Bnei Yisrael and say to them: Be careful to offer up to Me in its appointed time [i.e., daily] the blood of My burnt fire offering and My food [i.e., the animal’s parts] that is designated for My fire on the Altar as a pleasing aroma for Me. 3 And also say to them: This is the service of the fire offering that you shall offer up to Hashem: unblemished [lit., “perfect”] male lambs in their first year, two a day, as a continual burnt offering. 4 You [sing.] shall offer one lamb in the morning, and offer the second lamb in the afternoon [lit., “between the evenings”]. 5 And you shall bring with each lamb a tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a flour offering, mixed with a quarter hin of pressed-out olive oil. 6 This will be a continual burnt offering like that offered at Mount Sinai, for the sake of being a pleasing aroma, an atoning fire offering for Hashem. 7 Its libation is a quarter hin of wine for each lamb; to be poured in a holy place [i.e., on the Altar], an intoxicating wine libation for Hashem. 8 You shall offer the second lamb in the afternoon; offer its flour offering and libation like the morning flour offering and its libation. It is a fire offering, a pleasing aroma for Hashem that His will was carried out.”

The Mussafim
Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to offer up mussafim (additional offerings)

(1) Shabbos
4 Hashem told Moshe: “On Shabbos day you shall bring an additional offering of two unblemished male lambs in their first year and two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a flour offering, and its wine libation. 5 The Shabbos burnt offering can only be brought on its Shabbos, and is in addition to the continual burnt offering and its libation and flour offering.”

(2) Rosh Chodesh
11 Hashem told Moshe: “Bring at the beginnings [i.e., first day] of your months a burnt offering to Hashem consisting of: two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs in their first year — all unblemished. 12 Bring with them three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a flour offering for each [lit., “the one”] bull; two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a flour offering for the one ram; 13 and a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a flour offering for each lamb. Each animal is a burnt offering that is a pleasing aroma, a fire offering for Hashem. 14 And bring their libations: There shall be half a hin of wine for each bull, a third of a hin for the ram, and a quarter of a hin for each lamb. This is the monthly burnt offering that can be brought only in its particular month, for all the months of the year. 15 And also bring one male kid from the goats for a sin offering for Hashem. All these shall be offered in addition to the continual burnt offering and its libation and flour offering.”

(3) The Festivals

Pesach
16 Hashem told Moshe: “In the first month [Nissan], on the fourteenth day of the month, there shall be offered the pesach offering for Hashem, 17 and on the fifteenth day of this month is a festival; for seven days unleavened bread [matzos] shall be eaten. 18 The first day you shall designate for holiness [for prayer, fine food and dress; lit., “On the first day a proclaiming of holiness”], and you shall not do on it any productive work at all. 19 You shall bring a fire offering, a burnt offering for Hashem consisting of: two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs in their first year; it shall be for you to ensure that they shall all be unblemished. 20 Their flour offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil — you shall offer three-tenths of an ephah for each bull and two-tenths of an ephah for the ram. 21 You shall offer one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour for each lamb, for all the seven lambs. 22 And you shall bring one male kid goat as a sin offering to atone for you. 23 Offer up these besides the morning burnt offering of a lamb that is offered as the continual burnt offering. 24 Offer up offerings exactly like these each day for the seven days of Pesach — they are My food, a fire offering, a pleasing aroma for Hashem. [These] shall be offered in addition to the continual burnt offering and its libation and flour offering. 25 And the seventh day shall also be for you a holiday to designate for holiness [lit., “on the seventh day there shall be for you a proclaiming of holiness”], and you shall not do on it any productive work.”
Shavuos

29: Hashem told Moshe: “The day of the offering of the first fruits [Shavuos], when you bring from the new crop a new flour offering to Hashem on the completion of your counting seven weeks, shall be for you a holiday to designate for holiness, and you shall not do on it any productive work. 29 You shall bring a burnt offering as a pleasing aroma for Hashem: two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs in their first year. 30 Their flour offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil — three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths of an ephah for the one ram, and one-tenth of an ephah for each lamb, for all the seven lambs. 31 And you shall bring one male kid from the goats to atone for you. 32 Offer up these besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering; it shall be for you to ensure that they shall all be unblemished, and their libations, too.”

Rosh Hashanah

29: Hashem told Moshe: “In the seventh month, the first day of the month [Rosh Hashanah] shall be for you a holiday to designate for holiness, and you shall not do on it any productive work. It shall be for you a day of shofar-sounding. 2 You shall offer a burnt offering as a pleasing aroma for Hashem: one young bull, one ram, and seven male lambs in their first year, all unblemished. 3 Their flour offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil — three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths of an ephah for the ram, and one-tenth of an ephah for each lamb, for all the seven lambs. 4 And you shall bring one kid from the goats as a sin offering to atone for you. 5 Offer up these besides the burnt offering that is brought at the beginning of the month and its flour offering, and besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering, and their libations according to their laws, as a pleasing aroma, a fire offering for Hashem.”

Yom Kippur

7 Hashem told Moshe: “The tenth day of this seventh month [Yom Kippur] shall be for you a day to designate for holiness, and you shall afflict yourselves [lit., “your souls”] and not do on it any work. 8 You shall bring a burnt offering to Hashem as a pleasing aroma: one young bull, one ram, and seven male lambs in their first year; it shall be for you to ensure that they shall all be unblemished. 9 Their flour offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil — three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths of an ephah for each lamb, for all the seven lambs. 10 And you shall bring one kid from the goats for a sin offering. Offer up these and their libations besides the sin offering of atonement, and besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering and its libation.”

Sukkos — a different offering for each of its seven days

12: Hashem told Moshe: “The fifteenth day of the seventh month shall be for you a holiday to designate for holiness [Sukkos], and you shall not do on it any productive work. You shall celebrate a festival to Hashem for seven days. 12 On the first day you shall bring a burnt offering, a fire offering as a pleasing aroma for Hashem, consisting of: thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs in their first year — all shall be unblemished. 13 Their flour offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil — three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, for all thirteen bulls; two-tenths of an ephah for each ram, for the two rams; and one-tenth of an ephah for each lamb, for all fourteen lambs. 14 And you shall bring one kid from the goats as a sin offering. All this is besides the continual burnt offering, its flour offering, and its libation.

15 “On the second day you shall bring twelve young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs in their first year, all unblemished. 16 Their flour offering and libations, for the bulls, rams, and lambs, shall be in their appropriate amounts as the law requires. 17 And you shall bring one kid from the goats as a sin offering. All this is besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering and its libations.

18 “On the third day you shall bring eleven young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs in their first year, all unblemished. 19 Their flour offering and libations, for the bulls, rams, and lambs, shall be in their appropriate amounts as the law requires. 20 And you shall bring one kid from the goats as a sin offering. All this is besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering and libation.

21 “On the fourth day you shall bring ten young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs in their first year, all unblemished. 22 Their flour offering and libations, for the bulls, rams, and lambs, shall be in their appropriate amounts as the law requires. 23 And you shall bring one kid from the goats as a sin offering. All this is besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering and libation.
26. “On the fifth day you shall bring nine young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs in their first year, all unblemished. Their flour offering and libations, for the bulls, rams, and lambs, shall be in their appropriate amounts as the law requires.

27. And you shall bring one kid from the goats as a sin offering. All this is besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering and libation.

28. “On the sixth day you shall bring eight young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs in their first year, all unblemished. Their flour offering and libations, for the bulls, rams, and lambs, shall be in their appropriate amounts as the law requires.

29. And you shall bring one kid from the goats as a sin offering. All this is besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering and libation.

30. “On the seventh day you shall bring seven young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs in their first year, all unblemished. Their flour offering and libations, for the bulls, rams, and lambs, shall be in their appropriate amounts as the law requires.

31. And you shall bring one kid from the goats as a sin offering. All this is besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering and libation.”

Shemini Atzeres

32. Hashem told Moshe: “On the eighth day there will be for you a day of restriction from labor; you shall not do on it any productive work. You shall bring a burnt offering, a fire offering as a pleasing aroma for Hashem consisting of: one bull, one ram, and seven male lambs in their first year, all unblemished. Their flour offering and libations, for the bull, ram, and lambs, shall be in their appropriate amounts as the law requires. And you shall bring one kid from the goats as a sin offering. All this is besides the continual burnt offering and its flour offering and libation.”

Vows and dedications

33. Hashem told Moshe: “All these obligatory offerings you shall offer up to Hashem on your festivals [lit., appointed times], besides bringing on them your voluntary vows and donations of your burnt offerings, flour offerings, libations, and peace offerings.”

34. Moshe said all these laws to Bnei Yisrael, according to everything that Hashem had commanded [him] [lit., “Moshe”].

Summary of Chronology

- Hashem made a covenant of eternal priesthood with Pinchas right after the incident in Shittim. This occurred while Bnei Yisrael were encamped in the plains of Moav in the fortieth year of their sojourn in the desert. After what happened in Shittim, Hashem also commanded the Jewish people to be hostile to the Midianites for their evil deeds.
- Hashem then told Moshe and Elazar to count the people and explained how Eretz Yisrael would be divided up among those counted.
- Tzelafchad’s daughters approached Moshe while he was teaching the laws of dividing up the land. Hashem told Moshe to give them their father’s portion in the land and to teach Bnei Yisrael the laws of inheritance.
- Hashem then told Moshe that he would ascend Mount HaAravim on the day he would die. He was also to appoint Yehoshua as his successor on that day.
- Right afterward, Hashem taught the laws of the tamid and mussafim.
Part 1. The Laws of Vows and Oaths

(Verses 30:2–17)

The General Law

Moshe told the tribal leaders that one cannot violate a vow (neder) or oath (shevuah) prohibiting something permitted.

30: Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael, saying, “This is the word [i.e., Torah law] that Hashem commanded: ‘If a man takes a vow to Hashem to prohibit an item or swears an oath to take [lit., “bind”] a prohibition upon himself not to do something, he shall not profane his word by violating it; rather, according to everything that his mouth utters he shall do.’

The Annulment of Vows and Oaths Made by Women

(1) A single daughter

Moshe continued: “If a woman in her youth takes a vow to Hashem or takes a prohibition upon herself with an oath while living in her father’s house [i.e., under his jurisdiction], and her father hears about her vow or her oath of prohibition that she took upon herself, and her father remains silent toward her in this matter, then all her vows will stand [be in effect], and any oath of prohibition that she took upon herself will stand. But if her father held her back from keeping her vow or oath by annulling it on the day he heard [lit. “hears”] about it, then all her vows and prohibitions [oaths] that she took upon herself will not stand; and Hashem will forgive her for any subsequent “breaches” of the vow or oath that was annulled without her knowledge, for her father held her back from keeping it.”

(2) An engaged daughter

Moshe continued: “If [a woman] is betrothed to a man and took vows or oaths before her betrothal and her vows are still upon her [though never approved or annulled by her father], or the pronouncements of her lips [i.e., oaths] which she took upon herself are still upon her, and her husband [i.e., fiancé] or father hears about them but remains silent toward her in this matter on the day he hears about [them], then her vows will stand, and her prohibitions [oaths]
that she took upon herself will stand. But if on the
day her husband hears about her vow or oath he
holds her back from keeping it and annuls her vow
that is upon her [or] the pronunciations of her lips
that she took upon herself, and her father also holds
her back, it will be annulled and Hashem will forgive
her if she “breaches” the vow or oath, not knowing it
was annulled.”

(3) A widow and divorcée

Moshe continued: “As for the vow of a widow or of
a divorcée, every oath which she took upon herself
will stand for her.”

(4) A married woman

Moshe continued: “But if [a woman] took a vow
while in her husband’s house [i.e., married to him] or
she took a prohibition upon herself with an oath,
and her husband hears about it and remains silent toward her in this matter — he did not hold
her back from keeping it — then all her vows will
stand, and every prohibition which she took upon
herself will stand. But if her husband annuls them
on the day he hears about [them], everything verbalized by her [lit., “coming out of her lips”] concerning her vows and personal prohibitions
will not stand; her husband annulled them and
Hashem will forgive her for any subsequent
“breaches.” Any vow or oath of prohibition that a
woman takes to afflict her person, the husband can
let it stand [i.e., confirm it] or annul it. But if her
husband remains silent toward her about them,
from the day he hears about them until the next day
begins, then he will in effect have let stand all her
vows or all her prohibitions that are upon her; he
in effect let them stand because he remained silent
toward her on the day he heard about [them]. But
if he annuls them after he heard about [them] and
confirmed them without her knowledge, he will bear
her sin if she subsequently violates them.”

These are the decrees that Hashem commanded
Moshe that apply between a man and his wife and
between a father and his daughter who is in her
youth in her father’s house.

Part 2. The War with Midian
(Verses 31:1–54)

The War

Hashem commanded Moshe to take revenge on
the Midianites — for Bnei Yisrael’s sake

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Take

revenge [sing.] on the Midianites for Bnei Yisrael;
afterward you will die and your soul will be brought
in to the Next World where your ancestors [lit.,
“people”] reside.”

Moshe prepared for battle, telling the people to
exact vengeance on the Midianites — for
Hashem’s sake

Moshe spoke to the people, saying, “Arm righteous
men from among you for the army; they shall be
fighters against the nation of Midian, to inflict venge-
ance for Hashem on Midian. You shall send to the
army a thousand men from each tribe, from all the
tribes of Yisrael.” A thousand men from each
tribe, from Yisrael’s thousands, were handed
over to Moshe — altogether twelve thousand army
soldiers. Moshe sent them to form the army, a
thousand soldiers from each tribe; he sent them and
Pinchas son of Elazar the Kohen to the army, and
also the holy objects and the trumpets used for
sounding signals under [Pinchas’s] charge.

Bnei Yisrael killed all the Midianite men, their
kings, and also Bilam; they brought the captives
and plunder back to the camp

[The soldiers] gathered against Midian just as
Hashem had commanded Moshe, and they killed
every adult male. They killed Midian’s kings
causing them to fall on top of their slain — Evi,
Rekem, Tzur, Chur, and Reva, the five kings
of Midian; and also Bilam son of Be’or they killed
by the sword. Bnei Yisrael captured the women
of Midian and their young children, and they
plundered all their domestic animals, all their
herds, and all their possessions. Then they
burned with fire all their inhabited cities and all
their priests’ residences, and they took all the
inanimate booty and all the captives, both the
people and the animals. They brought the
human captives, the captured animals, and the
inanimate booty to Moshe, Elazar the Kohen Gadol, and the
community of Bnei Yisrael; they brought it all to the
camp, to the plains of Moav which are by the
Jordan River in the region of Yericho.

The Captives and Plunder

Moshe was angry at the officers for not killing
the women; he ordered them to kill all the adult
women and male children

Moshe, Elazar the Kohen, and all the community’s
leaders went out to meet [the soldiers], outside the
camp. Moshe was angry with those in charge of
the army, both the officers of the units of thousands

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and the officers of the units of hundreds who were coming back from leading the army that fought the war. 15Moshe said to them, “You kept alive every female Midianite? 16But it is they who were the cause of sin for Bnei Yisrael, and who, on Bilam’s advice, brought them to act treacherously against Hashem in the matter of Baal Pe’or, and as a result there was a deadly plague among Hashem’s community. 17So now, kill every male among the young children, and also kill every female capable of knowing a man intimately. 18But all the young children among the females who have not known a man intimately, being too young, keep alive for yourselves.”

Moshe ordered the soldiers to purify themselves and their clothes and vessels which had come into contact with the slain

19Moshe told the soldiers, “As for you, encamp outside the camp of the Shechinah for seven days; anyone who has killed a person with a weapon and anyone who has touched a slain person — you shall purify yourselves on the third day and on the seventh day with the purifying waters made from the ashes of the red heifer, both you and your captives [i.e., any of them who became impure after conversion]. 20You must also purify every garment, every leather article, everything made out of the hair, horns, or hooves of goats, and every wooden article that touched a corpse.”

Elazar told the soldiers to [kasher and] immerse the metal utensils

21Elazar the Kohen Gadol then said to the army men, who came back from [lit. “go to”] war, “This is the decree of the Torah that Hashem commanded Moshe: 22But as for all the gold, silver, copper, iron, tin, and lead cooking utensils — 23any such object that comes into contact with fire when touching food, put it into fire to purge non-kosher absorptions and it will be pure. But it must also be purified with the purifying waters. Any metal utensil that does not come into contact with fire when touching food, put in a mikveh of water. 24And you shall immerse yourselves and wash [i.e., “immerse”] your clothes on the seventh day and you will then be pure, and afterward you may come into the camp of the Shechinah.”

The Division of the Plunder

Hashem told Moshe to count the captured animals and humans and divide them between the soldiers and the rest of the nation

25Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 26“Take a head count of the plundered captives, both the humans and the animals — you, Elazar the Kohen Gadol and the tribal leaders [lit., “heads of the fathers”] of the community. 27Then divide the captives between all those who took part in the war, who went out to war with the army, and the entire community.”

Hashem told the soldiers and people to give a percent (or “tax”) of the spoils to Him

28Hashem continued, “You shall separate a tax for Hashem from the men who took part in the war, who went out to war with the army: one being from every five hundred, from the humans, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep and goats. 29Take the tax from their half of the captives and give it to Elazar the Kohen as Hashem’s sacred [lit., “separated and raised up”] portion. 30And from Bnei Yisrael’s half, take one part out of every fifty [i.e., one-fiftieth; lit., “one taken from fifty”], from the humans, the cattle, the donkeys, the sheep and goats, and from all the other animals, and give them to the Levi’im, the guardians in charge of the safeguarding of Hashem’s Mishkan.”

The totals

31Moshe and Elazar the Kohen did just as Hashem had commanded Moshe. 32The numbers of the captives that had to be divided, which were in addition to the inanimate booty that the army people had plundered for themselves, were: sheep, six hundred and seventy-five thousand [675,000]; 33cattle, seventy-two thousand [72,000]; 34donkeys, sixty-one thousand [61,000]; 35and human beings, of the females who had not known a man intimately, being too young, all the human beings came to thirty-two thousand [32,000].

The amounts of the soldier’s portion and tax to Hashem

36Therefore, the half given as the portion of those who went out to war with the army was: the number of sheep and goats, three hundred and thirty-seven thousand five hundred [337,500], 37and thus the tax for Hashem from the sheep and goats was six hundred and seventy-five [675]; 38the cattle numbered thirty-six thousand [36,000], and their tax for Hashem was seventy-two [72]; 39the donkeys numbered thirty thousand five hundred [30,500], and their tax for Hashem was sixty-one [61]; 40and the human beings numbered sixteen thousand [16,000], and their tax for Hashem was thirty-two human beings [32]. 41Moshe gave the tax,
Hashem’s sacred portion, to Elazar the Kohen, just as Hashem had commanded Moshe.

The amounts of the people’s portion and tax to Hashem

42 And as for the tax from Bnei Yisrael’s half of the captives that Moshe had divided off for the community from those brought back by the men who went to war — 43 the community’s half being: from the sheep, three hundred and thirty-seven thousand five hundred [337,500]; 44 cattle, thirty-six thousand [36,000]; 45 donkeys, thirty thousand five hundred [30,500]; 46 and human beings, sixteen thousand [16,000] — 47 Moshe took from Bnei Yisrael’s half the tax of one part out of every fifty [i.e., one-fiftieth], from the humans and animals, and he gave them to the Levi’im, the guardians in charge of safeguarding Hashem’s Mishkan, just as Hashem had commanded Moshe.

The Officers’ Offering

The officers brought jewelry to Hashem as an atonement, and in gratitude for the miraculous battle

48 Those in charge of the thousands of soldiers in the army, both the officers of the units of thousands and the officers of the units of hundreds, approached Moshe. 49 They said to Moshe, “Your servants have taken a head count of the fighting men who are in our charge, and not a single man is missing from among us. 50 We have therefore brought an offering to Hashem from every gold article that each man found — whether an anklet, bracelet, ring, earring, or chastity plate — to atone for our souls before Hashem.”

The offering was weighed and became a remembrance sign

51 Moshe and Elazar the Kohen took [sing.] the gold from [the officers], every finished article, and weighed it. 52 All the gold of the sacred portion that they separated for Hashem weighed sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty [16,750] shekels, from both the officers of the units of thousands and the officers of the units of hundreds. 53 This is aside from what the army men had plundered, each man for himself to keep. 54 Moshe and Elazar the Kohen took [sing.] the gold from the officers of the units of thousands and units of hundreds and brought [pl.] it to the Tent of Meeting as a sign of remembrance for Bnei Yisrael before Hashem.

Part 3. The Inheritance of Gad and Reuven
(Verses 32:1–42)

Gad and Reuven’s Request

The tribes of Reuven and Gad asked to inherit the lands of Yazeir and Gilad (formerly of Sichon and Og) and not to cross the Jordan River

32 The descendants of Reuven and the descendants of Gad had abundant livestock, very enormous amounts. They saw the land of Yazeir and the land of Gilad of the conquered territories of Sichon and Og, and saw that the region was a region suitable for livestock. 2 So the descendants of Gad and the descendants of Reuven came to the Tent of Meeting and spoke to Moshe, Elazar the Kohen Gadol, and the community leaders, saying, 3 “The cities of Ataros, Divon, Yazeir, Nimrah, Cheshbon, Elaleh, Sevam, Nevo, and Be’on, 4 in the land whose inhabitants Hashem smote before the community of Yisrael — it is a land suitable for livestock, and your servants have abundant livestock.” 5 They said further, “If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage; do not make us cross the Jordan River.”

Moshe Rabbeinu’s Rebuke

Moshe rebuked the two tribes: if they would not cross, they would deter the others from crossing and arouse Hashem’s anger

6 Moshe said to the descendants of Gad and the descendants of Reuven, “Should your brothers go to war while you dwell here in peace?! 7 And why do you ask this and there- by discourage [lit., “deter the heart of”] Bnei Yisrael from crossing the Jordan River to the land that Hashem has given them? 8 Your fathers [i.e., the ten spies] did this when I sent them from Kadeish Barnei’a to see [i.e., explore] the land. 9 They went north [lit., “ascended”] until the Eshkol Valley and saw the land, and on their return discouraged [lit., “deterred the heart of”] Bnei Yisrael and caused them to not want to enter the land that Hashem had given them. 10 Hashem’s anger flared up on that day, and He took an oath, saying, 11 The men from age twenty years old and up who came out of [lit., “ascended [north] from”] Mitzrayim will not see the ground that I swore to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, because they did not fill their hearts with devotion to follow after Me wholeheartedly, 12 except for Kalev son of Yefuneh, the Kenizite [i.e., the stepson of Kenaz], and Yehoshua
son of Nun, because they filled their hearts with devotion to follow after Hashem. 13 Hashem’s anger then flared up at Bnei Yisrael, and He made them roam in the desert for forty years, until the entire generation that did the deeds that were evil in Hashem’s eyes came to an end [i.e., died]. 14 And now you have arisen in place of your fathers with a way of life like that of these sinful men, to add further to Hashem’s anger against Yisrael. 15 For because you will turn back from following after Him wholeheartedly, He will add further to the decree to leave [the people] in the desert, and thus you will destroy this entire people.”

Gad and Reuven made a new offer: they would build sheep pens and cities for their children, before leading Bnei Yisrael’s armies and only return after the land’s division.

16 The descendants of Gad and Reuven approached [Moshe] and said, “We shall build here sheep pens for our livestock, and cities for our young children. 17 But then we shall swiftly arm ourselves to battle before the armies of Bnei Yisrael until we will have brought them to their promised land [lit., “place”]; meanwhile, our young children will dwell in the fortified cities that we will build now because of the land’s hostile inhabitants. 18 Moreover, we will not return to our homes until Bnei Yisrael have apportioned the land, giving each man his inheritance. 19 For we shall not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan River, to the west and beyond, since our inheritance has already come to us on the eastern side of the Jordan River.”

Moshe told them to build cities for their children and [then] sheep pens, and then to cross the Jordan River [and fight for Hashem’s sake].

20 Moshe said to them, “If you will do this thing that you said, if you arm yourselves for war knowing that you are before Hashem [i.e., fighting for His sake], and every soldier of yours will cross the Jordan River knowing he is before Hashem and remain there until He has driven out His enemies from before Him, then the land will be conquered before Hashem [i.e., with His might], and afterward you will all return home safely and will be free of any obligation to Hashem and to Yisrael, and this land of Sichon and Og will become yours, as a permanent possession before Hashem. 22 But if you will not do this — then your present improper intentions will be revealed and you have right now sinned to Hashem. If so, know that the punishment for your sin will be forthcoming and will befall [lit., “find”] you. 24 So build yourselves cities for your young children and afterward construct pens for your sheep, and do [i.e., fulfill] what your mouths have uttered.”

The Agreement

Gad and Reuven agreed to do as Moshe requested.

25 The descendants of Gad and the descendants of Reuven spoke [sing.] to Moshe, saying, “Your servants will do just as my master commands. 26 Our young children, our wives, our livestock, and all our animals will stay [lit., “be”] there in the cities of the land of Gilad, while your servants will cross the River Jordan for war, every army soldier knowing he is before Hashem, just as my master spoke.”

Moshe charged Elazar, Yehoshua, and the tribal heads to give the two tribes the land if they went to war.

28 Moshe charged and appointed over them and this matter Elazar the Kohan, Yehoshua son of Nun, and the paternal heads [lit., “heads of the fathers”] of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael. 29 He said to them, “If every soldier of the descendants of Gad and the descendants of Reuven will cross the Jordan River with you for war knowing they are before Hashem, and the land is conquered before you, then give them the land of Gilad as a permanent possession. 30 But if they do not cross over with you armed for war, then they shall have to take possession of their assigned portion among you in the land of Canaan.”

31 The descendants of Gad and the descendants of Reuven responded, saying, “That which Hashem has spoken to your servants through you, Moshe, so we will do. 32 We will cross over armed for war before Hashem to the land of Canaan, and there shall be with us then, under our control, the permanent possession of our inheritance which is here on the east side of the Jordan River.”

The Division of the Lands of Sichon and Og

Moshe gave Gad, Reuven, and part of the tribe of Menasheh the lands of Sichon and Og.

35 So Moshe gave to them — to the descendants of Gad, the descendants of Reuven, and part [lit., “half”] of the tribe of Menasheh son of Yosef — the kingdom of Sichon, the deceased king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og, the deceased king of the Bashan; he gave them the land and divided it according to its cities and their boundaries [lit., “with the boundaries of the land’s cities”] all around.
Summary of Chronology

- All the events of this parashah took place in the fortieth year of the Exodus, in the order they are recounted — after teaching the laws of the communal offerings (as recounted in Parshas Mattos), Moshe taught the laws of vows and oaths, then the nation fought with Midian and divided the spoils, and finally Gad and Reuven asked to inherit the lands of Sichon and Og and Moshe apportioned these lands to Reuven, Gad, and part of Menasheh.
- One opinion suggests that Moshe taught the laws of vows and oaths when Gad and Reuven made their request and vowed to remain in Eretz Yisrael until it would be divided up.
Part 1. Remembering Bnei Yisrael’s Journey to Eretz Yisrael
(Verses 33:1–49)

From Mitzrayim until the Plains of Moav
Moshe recorded all the encampments
33. These are all the encampments of Bnei Yisrael who went out of the land of Egypt in their groups under the command of Moshe and Aharon. Moshe recorded the places from where they set out, whereas “their goings out” to go on their journeys, at Hashem’s order; and these are their encampments according to where they set out:

(1) The encampments in the first and second year – from Mitzrayim until Rismah (Kadeish)

3. They journeyed from Ramses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; the day after bringing the pesach offering Bnei Yisrael went out with an upraised hand [i.e., openly, with might] before the eyes of all the people of Egypt, for the people of Egypt were occupied burying those among them whom Hashem had struck down, that is, every firstborn; and Hashem had also carried out acts of judgment on their gods.

Bnei Yisrael journeyed from Ramses and encamped in Sukkos. They then journeyed from Sukkos and encamped in Eisam, which is at the edge of the desert. They then journeyed from Eisam and turned back [sing.] to Pi HaChiros [Mouth of Freedom], which was in front of the idol Baal Tzefon [Master of the North], and encamped before Migmol. They then journeyed from Pnei HaChiros and passed through the midst of the Reed Sea toward the desert. They went a way of three days in the Eisam Desert and encamped in Marah. They then journeyed from Marah and came to Eilim; in Eilim there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they encamped there.

They then journeyed from Eilim and encamped by the Reed Sea. They then journeyed from the Reed Sea and encamped in the Sin Desert. They then journeyed from the Sin Desert and encamped in Dafkah. They then journeyed from Dafkah and encamped in Alush. They then journeyed from Alush and encamped in Refidim, and there was no water there for the people to drink.
journeyed from Refidim and encamped in the Sinai Desert. 20 They then journeyed from the Sinai Desert and encamped in Kivros HaTa’avah. 21 They then journeyed from Kivros HaTa’avah and encamped in Chatzeiros. 22 They then journeyed from Chatzeiros and encamped in Rismah.

(2) The encampments during the thirty-eight years of wandering in the desert
23 They then journeyed from Rismah and encamped in Rimmon Paretz. 24 They then journeyed from Rimmon Paretz and encamped in Livnah. 25 They then journeyed from Livnah and encamped in Rissah. 26 They then journeyed from Rissah and encamped in Keheilasah. 27 They then journeyed from Keheilasah and encamped by Mount Shafer.
28 They then journeyed from Mount Shafer and encamped in Charadah. 29 They then journeyed from Charadah and encamped in Makheilos. 30 They then journeyed from Makheilos and encamped in Tachas. 31 They then journeyed from Tachas and encamped in Tarach. 32 They then journeyed from Tarach and encamped in Miskah. 33 They then journeyed from Miskah and encamped in Chashmonah. 34 They then journeyed from Chashmonah and encamped in Moseiros. 35 They then journeyed from Moseiros and encamped in Bnei Ya’akon. 36 They then journeyed from Bnei Ya’akon and encamped in Chor HaGidgad. 37 They then journeyed from Chor HaGidgad and encamped in Yatvasah. 38 They then journeyed from Yatvasah and encamped in Avronah. 39 They then journeyed from Avronah and encamped in Etzyon Gaver. 40 They then journeyed from Etzyon Gaver and encamped in the Tzin Desert, which is where Kadeish is. 41 They then journeyed from Kadeish and encamped by Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom. 42 Aharon, the Kohen Gadol, ascended Mount Hor at Hashem’s command and died there in the fortieth year from Bnei Yisrael’s exodus from the land of Egypt, in the fifth month [Av], on the first of the month. 43 Aharon was one hundred and twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor.

(3) The encampments in the fortieth year, from Mount Hor until the plains of Moav
44 The Canaanite, the king of Arad who dwelled in the south of the land of Canaan, heard that Bnei Yisrael were coming and went to war with them. 45 They then journeyed from Mount Hor and encamped in Tzalmonah. 46 They then journeyed from Tzalmonah and encamped in Punon. 47 They then journeyed from Punon and encamped in Ovos. 48 They then journeyed from Ovos and encamped in Iyei HaAvarim [the Barren Passes] on the border of Moav. 49 They then journeyed from Iyim and encamped in Divon Gad. 50 They then journeyed from Divon Gad and encamped in Almon Divlaisaim. 51 They then journeyed from Almon Divlaisaim and encamped by the Avarim Mountains, before Mount Nevo. 52 They then journeyed from the Avarim Mountains and encamped on the plains of Moav by the Jordan River in the region of Yericho.

Part 2. The Possession of Eretz Yisrael
(Verses 33:50–36:13)

Driving Out the Idolatrous Inhabitants
Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to drive out the land’s idolatrous inhabitants and destroy their places of worship
53 Hashem spoke there to Moshe, on the plains of Moav by the Jordan River in the region of Yericho, saying, 54 “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: When you cross the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, you shall drive out from before you all the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, and you shall destroy all their temples [lit., “paved” for bowing], and you shall destroy all their cast-metal idolatrous images as well, and you shall demolish all their altars. 55 If you will drive out the inhabitants of the land then, and only then, you will be able to dwell in it, for I have given the land to you to take possession of it. 56 Then you shall apportion the land to your tribes [lit., “families”] by means of a lottery; for the tribe that has many people you shall increase the size of its hereditary portion, and for the tribe that has few people you shall decrease its hereditary portion. Wherever the lot falls for [the tribe], that place will belong to [the tribe]; according to your fathers’ tribes you shall apportion the land. 57 But if you will not drive out from before you all the inhabitants of the land, then those whom you leave from them will become to you a source of harm, like pegs thrust in your eyes and like a hedge of thorns at your sides [i.e., confining you], and they will harass you on the land in which you dwell. 58 And it will be that what I had intended to do to them, I will do to you.”

66
The Borders of the Land and Its Division

The four borders of the land of Canaan / Eretz Yisrael

34: “Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, ‘Command Bnei Yisrael and say to them: When you come into the land of Canaan, this is the land, as defined below, that by a divine lottery will fall to you as hereditary property: the land of Canaan according to its four borders —

[1] “Your land’s southern side [i.e., border] will begin from the Tzin Desert, next to Edom. Specifically, your southern border will begin from the lower eastern edge of the Salt Sea [i.e., Dead Sea]. The border will then turn southward for you, passing south of the city of Ma’aleh Akrabim, and it will then pass westward to the city of Tzin, and the endpoint of this section of the border will be south of Kadeish Barnei’a. It will then extend southward to Chatzar Adar and pass westward to Atzmon. The border will turn northward from Atzmon to the river of Egypt, and will then follow the river so that its endpoint will be to the west, where the river meets the sea and the western border begins.

[2] “And as for your western border, it will be the Great Sea [i.e., the Mediterranean] and its territory [i.e., the islands; lit. “border”]; this will be your western border.

[3] “And this will be your northern border: from the Great Sea have the border turn [lit., “slope for you”] to Mount Hor. From Mount Hor have it turn eastward to the road leading to Chamas; the endpoint of this section of the border will be Tzedad. The border will then extend to Zifron, and its endpoint will be at Chatzar Einan; this will be your northern border.

[4] “Then have the border turn to the eastern border, going from Chatzar Einan in the northeast to Shefam on the eastern border. The border will then descend southward from Shefam to Rivlah, to the east of Ayin, and the border will descend further and strike [i.e., reach] the eastern bank [lit., “shoulder”] of the Kinneret Sea [Sea of Galilee]. The border will then descend to the Jordan River and follow it, and its endpoint will be the southeast shore of the Salt Sea; this will be for you the land according to its borders all around.”

The land would be apportioned to nine and a half tribes, for Reuven, Gad, and part of Menasheh had already taken their portions east of the Jordan River

13 Moshe commanded Bnei Yisrael, saying, “This is the land that you shall apportion by a divine lottery, that Hashem commanded to give to the nine tribes and to part [lit., “half”] of the tribe of Menasheh, who have not yet received their portions.

14 For the tribe of Reuven’s descendants, according to their fathers’ lineage [lit., “house”], and the tribe of Gad’s descendants, according to their fathers’ lineage, have already taken [i.e., received] their portions, and also part of the tribe of Menasheh have taken their portion [lit., “hereditary property”] — the two tribes and part of the tribe of Menasheh have all taken their portions on the side of the Jordan River opposite Yericho, to the front, that is, to the east.”

Hashem named the leaders who would apportion the land: Elazar, Yehoshua, and the twelve tribal leaders

15 Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “These are the names of the men who will take possession of the land on your [pl., i.e., Bnei Yisrael’s] behalf and then divide it among their tribes: Elazar, the Kohen Gadol, and Yehoshua bin Nun will be in charge, and take one leader from each tribe to take possession of the land and apportion it.

16 These are the names of [these] men: for the tribe of Yehudah, Kalev son of Yefuneh; for the tribe of Shimon’s descendants, Shmuel son of Ammihud; for the tribe of Binyamin, Eligad son of Kislon; for the tribe of Dan’s descendants, the leader Buki son of Yogli; for Yosef’s descendants: for the tribe of Menasheh’s descendants, the leader Chani’el son of Eifod, and for the tribe of Efraim’s descendants, the leader Kemu’el son of Shiftan; for the tribe of Zevulun’s descendants, the leader Elitzafan son of Parnach; for the tribe of Yissachar’s descendants, the leader Palti’el son of Azzan; for the tribe of Asher’s descendants, the leader Achihud son of Shelomi; for the tribe of Naftali’s descendants, the leader Pedah’el son of Ammihud.” These are the ones whom Hashem commanded to apportion the land to Bnei Yisrael in the land of Canaan.

The Cities of the Levi’im

Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to give the Levi’im forty-eight cities with open spaces around them, including six cities of refuge

35: Hashem spoke to Moshe on the plains of Moav, by the Jordan River in the region of Yericho, saying, “Command Bnei Yisrael that they should give to the Levi’im from their hereditary possessions in
the land cities in which to dwell, and, in addition, they should give to the Levi'im open areas for those cities all around them. 7The cities will be for them to dwell in, and their open areas will be for their animals, their possessions, and all their living needs. 8The open areas of the cities that you shall give to the Levi'im shall extend from the city wall outward one thousand cubits all around the city. 9You shall measure outside the city two thousand cubits on the eastern side [i.e., 2000 cubits from the city wall eastward], two thousand cubits on the southern side, two thousand cubits on the western side, and two thousand cubits on the northern side, with the city in the center; this will be the extent of [the Levi'im’s] open areas of the cities.”

“As for the cities that you [pl.] shall give to the Levi'im: give them the six cities of refuge [lit., “absorption”] that you shall provide [i.e., establish and maintain] as places to where a murderer will be able to flee from the avenger, and, in addition to them, you shall give the Levi'im another forty-two cities. Thus, all the cities that you shall give the Levi'im comes to forty-eight cities — comprising them and their open spaces. 5In allocating [these] cities that you shall give from Bnei Yisrael’s hereditary possessions: from the tribe that has many people [and thus a larger portion], you shall increase the number of cities they give, and from the tribe who has few people, you shall decrease the number; each one shall give from its cities to the Levi'im in proportion to the size of its hereditary property that [it] will receive [lit., “inherit”].”

The Refuge Cities and the Laws of Murder

Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to prepare six cities of refuge, to which unintentional murderers would be able to flee from the victim’s avenger.

8Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 9“Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: When you cross over the Jordan River to the land of Canaan, 10you must prepare for yourselves cities that will be for you cities of refuge, to where a murderer who fatally smites a person unintentionally shall flee. 11The cities will be for any murderer among you a place of refuge from the victim’s avenger [lit., “redeemer”], so that the murderer will not die before he stands before the court [lit., “the community”] for judgment.

12As for the cities that you shall provide, there shall be six cities of refuge for you. 13Three of the cities you shall provide on the other side of the Jordan River from the land of Canaan, and three of the cities you shall provide in the land of Canaan; they shall all be cities of refuge. 14These six cities will be for refuge for Bnei Yisrael, as well as for a convert and a resident gentile among them; anyone who smites a person unintentionally shall be able to flee there.”

A murderer who killed intentionally must be put to death

16Hashem continued, “If [someone] struck [his victim] with an iron implement and he died, he is an intentional murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. 17If he struck him with a stone that filled his hand and by which he could die and he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. 18Or if he struck him with a wooden implement that filled his hand and by which he could die and he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death.

19“The avenger of blood shall kill the murderer; wherever he meets him he shall kill him. 20If [the murderer] pushed him out of hatred, or he threw himself or an object on him in ambush and he died, 21or he hit him with his hand in enmity and he died, the attacker must be put to death — he is a murderer; the avenger of blood shall kill the murderer wherever he meets him.”

A murderer who killed unintentionally must dwell in his refuge city until the death of the Kohen Gadol

22Hashem continued, “But if with unforeseen suddenness [i.e., accidently], without enmity and not in ambush, he pushed [the victim] or he threw on him any implement 23or, without seeing him, he caused any stone by which [the victim] could die to fall on him, and he died, and he was not his enemy nor did he seek his harm, 24then the court [lit., “the community”] shall judge between the one who fatally smites and the avenger of blood concerning these laws. 25The court [lit., “the community”] must save the unintentional murderer from the hand of the ‘avenger of blood,’ and thus the court shall return him to his refuge city, to where he initially fled; he shall dwell there until the death of the Kohen Gadol, whom the anointer anointed with the holy oil.

26“If the unintentional murderer goes out on purpose beyond the border of his refuge city to where he fled [lit., “will flee”] or was exiled, 27and the avenger of blood finds him outside the border of his refuge city, and the avenger of blood kills the murderer, it
was permissible since it's considered as if [the murderer] was a dead man who [had] no blood.
28*For he must dwell within his refuge city until the death of the Kohen Gadol, and only after the Kohen Gadol’s death may the murderer return to the ancestral land in his possession."

A murderer can be executed only on the testimony of witnesses

29*Hashem continued, "These laws — just stated and those that follow — will be considered eternal decreed laws for you throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. 30*Anyone who kills a person, only by the testimony of two witnesses will [the executor] be allowed to kill the murderer; but just one witness may not testify against a person to cause him to die.

It is forbidden to take ransom for someone condemned to death or exile

31*Hashem continued, "Do not take ransom [lit., "atonement money"] for the purpose of saving the life of a murderer who is guilty and deserves to die, for he must be put to death. 32*And do not take ransom for the purpose of permitting someone who fled to his refuge city to leave it and return to dwell in the land before the death of the Kohen Gadol."

Hashem warned the people not to make the land guilty or tamei through failing to punish murderers

33*Hashem continued, "Do not bring guilt on the land [Eretz Yisrael] in which you are to live, for it is the shedding of innocent blood that brings guilt on the land, and there shall be no atonement for the land for the blood that was spilled within it except through the blood of the one who spilled it. 34*And do not bring impurity on the land in which you will dwell and in the midst of which I [i.e., My Presence] will reside, for I, Hashem, reside among Bnei Yisrael." 35

Laws of Marriage and the Case of Tzelafchad’s Daughters

The leaders of the tribe of Menasheh told Moshe that if Tzelafchad’s daughters would marry into other tribes, their tribe’s portion would be reduced

36*The paternal heads [lit., heads of the fathers] of the family of the sons of Gilad son of Machir, son of Menasheh, one of the families of Yosef’s descendants, approached and spoke before Moshe and before the tribal leaders, the paternal heads of Bnei Yisrael. 37*They said, “Hashem commanded my lord to give the land by a divine lottery to Bnei Yisrael as hereditary property, and my lord was commanded by Hashem to give the inheritance of our brother Tzelafchad to his daughters. 38*But now when they will become wives to any one of the descendants of the other tribes of Bnei Yisrael, then their hereditary property will be taken off from the hereditary property of our fathers and added to the hereditary property of the tribe into which they will be married, and thus [the property] will be taken off from the divinely apportioned lot of our hereditary property thereafter. 39*And even if Bnei Yisrael will have the Jubilee year, their hereditary property will remain added on to the hereditary property of the tribe into which they will be married, and from the hereditary property of our fathers’ tribe their hereditary property will remain taken off.”

Hashem commanded single women who would inherit property to marry within their tribe; only Tzelafchad’s daughters could marry whoever they wished

40*At Hashem’s order Moshe commanded Bnei Yisrael, saying, "The representatives of the tribe of Yosef’s descendants speak correctly! 41*This is the word that Hashem commanded regarding the daughters of Tzelafchad, saying: They may become wives to whomever is good in their eyes. However, they should become wives to someone of the family of their father’s tribe, so that the hereditary property of Bnei Yisrael will not go around [i.e., be transferred] from one tribe to another tribe, for each member of Bnei Yisrael should cleave to the hereditary property of his father’s tribe.

42*And as regards every other daughter of any of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael who inherits a hereditary property, she should become a wife to someone from the family of her father’s tribe, so that each member of Bnei Yisrael inherits his father’s hereditary property, and thus hereditary property will not go around from one tribe to another tribe, for each of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael shall cleave to its own hereditary property.”

Tzelafchad’s daughters married cousins within their tribe

43*Just as Hashem commanded Moshe, so Tzelafchad’s daughters did. 44*Machlah, Tirtzah, Chaglah, Milkah, and No’ah, Tzelafchad’s daughters, became wives of their cousins [lit., “uncles’ sons”]. 45*To men from the families of the des-
cendants of Menasheh son of Yosef they became wives, and thus their hereditary property remained [lit., “was”] with the tribe of their father’s family.

Summary of Chronology

- After apportioning the lands of Sichon and Og to Reuven, Gad, and part of Menasheh (as recounted in Parshas Mattos), Moshe recorded the encampments the nation made on their journey from Mitzrayim to the plains of Moav.
- Then Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to expel the idolatrous inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael and taught the laws related to the land’s division and inheritance.
- Finally, the leaders of Menasheh came before Moshe with their petition.

13 These are the commandments and laws that Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael through Moshe, on the plains of Moav by the Jordan River in the region of Yericho.
Affirming the Divine Origin of the Torah and the Rights of the Kohanim and Levi'im

When Korach and the people rebelled against Moshe and Aharon, Hashem performed miracles affirming the divine origin of Moshe’s teachings and the rights of the Kohanim and Levi'im.

Part 1. Korach's Rebellion

Korach’s jealousy. Korach was a Levi of great distinction. He was very wise, very wealthy, and, as we will see, he had prophetic powers. He was even one of those honored with carrying the Aron. Unfortunately, his riches made him proud and hungry for honor. When Moshe Rabbeinu appointed Elitzafan to lead the group of Kehas (one of the three groups of Levi'im), Korach fumed with jealousy. According to his swollen self-image, there was no one more fitting for the position than himself. He became convinced that Moshe was making decisions by himself, without Hashem’s express command. Since he was also jealous of Aharon for being Kohen Gadol, foolishly thinking that he was Aharon’s equal, he decided to challenge Moshe’s authority with the goal of becoming nothing less than the new Kohen Gadol.

Korach gathered support. Korach wisely refrained from challenging Moshe when Aharon and Elitzafan were appointed to their respective positions. At that time the nation was encamped at Mount Sinai, and Moshe enjoyed the people’s complete support. After the tragic spying mission to Eretz Yisrael, and the decree that those between twenty and sixty years old would die in the desert (see Parasha Shelach), the situation changed. Many of the people felt bitter, and they resented Moshe for not pleasing with Hashem to overturn the decree (as he had after the sin with the golden calf). Seeing the people’s discontent, Korach saw that the time had come for him to mount his rebellion.

First Korach drew Dasan and Aviram into his dispute. These two men had a long history of hostility toward Moshe. Among other incidents, they were the ones who forced Moshe to flee Mitzrayim when they revealed to Pharaoh that he had killed an Egyptian (even though he had done so to save a Jew’s life). Korach also won over to his cause two hundred and fifty leaders of the community (16:1-2). They were all firstborn who had lost their right to perform the avodah (sacrificial service) after the

Overview

Korach’s claim. Korach did not openly seek the position of Elitzafan or of Aharon. He presented himself as the people’s champion and, supported by his distinguished group of followers, publicly accused Moshe and Aharon of holding too much power (16:3). He claimed that Moshe had decided to appoint his brother Kohen Gadol by himself. Really, Korach argued, all the people were holy and worthy of approaching Hashem; they had no need for an Aharon to be their intermediary. He consequently demanded — as a means of gaining public support — that the rights of the Kohanim and Levi'im be returned to the firstborn. And if Hashem deemed it necessary to appoint a Kohen Gadol, then someone other than Aharon should be appointed.

Moshe’s response: a divine test. Korach’s claim was in essence a denial of the divine origin of Moshe’s teachings and thereby endangered the entire Torah — if one of Moshe’s teachings was open to question, they were all open to question. Moshe realized that the only way to conclusively prove Korach wrong was to place the matter before Hashem. He proposed a divine test: Korach and his followers would take fire pans and offer Hashem incense — just like Kohanim — together with Aharon. Hashem would accept the incense of the one chosen for the kohenah (priesthood), but, Moshe warned, everyone else would die (16:4–7).

Korach was not afraid. He foresaw that a succession of great people would descend from him, including the great judge and prophet, Shmuel HaNavi. He assumed that the idea that Hashem would choose him to be Kohen Gadol instead of Aharon, so he ignored Moshe’s warnings, as well as Moshe’s attempts to appease him. Dasan and Aviram also refused Moshe’s peace offers. There was nothing left to do but wait for the test. Moshe fixed it for the next morning in the hope that the rebels would have time to come to their senses. But Korach used the time to arouse the entire nation against Moshe and Aharon through flattery, lies, and mockery (16:8–17).

Hashem’s anger. Korach and his followers came with their fire pans to the entrance of the Otel Moted. Incited by Korach, the people also gathered there, eager to see what would happen. Suddenly Hashem’s Presence appeared in a pillar of cloud, and He told Moshe that He intended to annihilate the people immediately. The fact that they had even entertained the possibility that He agreed with Korach and would take away the rights of the Kohanim and Levi'im revealed that they doubted the words of their teacher and prophet, Moshe. This was tantamount to doubting Hashem’s words, and for this they deserved death (16:18–21).

Moshe and Aharon immediately fell on their faces, pleading on behalf of the people that only Korach be judged since only he was really to blame for rebelling (16:22). Hashem relented and instructed Moshe to tell the people to dissociate themselves from the rebels by moving away from the tents of Korach, Dathan, and Aviram. This

Korach's motives. How could such a great man rebel against Hashem’s chosen leader? Several factors led to Korach’s rebellion:

1. Wealth. Korach was fabulously wealthy. He acquired his wealth back in Mitzrayim. When Yosef HaTzaddik, the son of Yaakov Avinu, was in charge of Mitzrayim, there was a world famine. Nations from all over the world, including Yaakov and his family, were forced to descend to Mitzrayim to buy grain (which, on Yosef’s advice, the Egyptians had stockpiled during the previous years of plenty). Mitzrayim became the recipient of the world’s riches, which Yosef stored in three enormous treasure houses. Korach discovered one of them, and he became so rich that just carrying the keys to his treasure chest required countless donkeys (Pesachim 119a; Maharsha, Sanhedrin 11b).

Unfortunately, this wealth proved to be Korach’s undoing. It made him proud and arrogant, and this led to his eventual downfall (Pesachim 119a and Rabbah b’vei Rabbah; see Be’al HaTaurim).

2. The pursuit of honor. After the Mishkan was set up, Moshe took a census of the Levi’im (see 3:14–39) and appointed leaders for each of its three groups (Gershon, Kehas, and Merari). For the group of Kehas, he chose Elitzafan son of Uzi’el (see 3:30). Although Moshe had done this at Hashem’s command, Korach reasoned that the position was rightfully his. “My father was one of four brothers,” Korach said to himself.2 “Since Amram was the firstborn, it is understandable that his two sons, Moshe and Aharon, took the highest positions — Moshe became king [i.e., the national leader] and Aharon the Cohen Gadol. But surely I should have taken the next highest position. After all, I am Yitzhar’s firstborn [Kehas’s second son]. So why did Moshe appoint Elitzafan son of Uzi’el, the youngest of the four brothers, to be the leader of the group of Kehas? [It must be that he is making decisions by himself, without consulting Hashem] (Sifrei, Oachomim; R’ Beshaya; see 16:28). Therefore,” Korach concluded “I will challenge him and invalidate all his teachings.” Although Korach thought his reasoning was sound, he was swayed by jealousy and the desire for honor (Rashi, Lekvat Tanchuma 1).3

3. Jealousy of Aharon. Korach was also jealous of Aharon (Ramban).4 These feelings began burning inside him soon after the Mishkan was set up. The Midrash relates that Korach was humiliated at the inauguration of the Levi’im [on the seventh of Nissan] when he was the first Levi to be shaved of all his hair and waved around (see comment on

2. As explained in the commentary on 3:44–51, this census either took place right after the Mishkan was erected or a month later, when the other tribes were counted.
3. From oldest to youngest, the four brothers were Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron, and Uzi’el. See Shemos 6:18.
4. Korach’s argument was, of course, fallacious. The new hierarchy that came into existence with the rearrangement of the camp was based on merit (individual and tribal), not lineage. See the Overview to Parashat Book.
5. As proof of this, Ramban cites Moshe’s rebuke to Korach: “You also demand the priesthood” (16:10).