

Tribal & Clan Validation of Military & Political Authority

One of the most confusing things for those who chant Parashat Bemidbar from the Torah scrolls is the repetition in Chapters 1 and 2 of almost exactly the same census of the warriors of each tribe with their respective leaders, in different orders and with the slightest variations in phrasings. This leads to hard-to-distinguish variations in cantillations which throws the Reader off. The very first Rashi on the Book of Numbers picks up on this redundancy, giving the homiletical answer that God's love of Israel was so great that He [tirelessly] desired to count their number at every hour [i.e., at every opportunity – so much does Israel “count” to Him].

What are we to make of the repeated censuses according to their literal contexts? Well, the first census lists the tribes in an order which, commentators suggest, is at least based upon the birth-order of Jacob's sons, leaving out the Levites for afterwards (since they were not warriors) and putting in Ephraim and Menashe in the Joseph spot. But the second chapter's census groups the twelve tribes and their leaders according to the groups of three tribes on each of the four sides of the center (east, west, north, and south) on which they and their families encamped. A similar order, based upon the same four groupings of three tribes each, was also used when their warriors would march in formation under their tribal banners. And indeed, those same four groupings seem to be associated with neighboring tribes according to the geographical layout of the settlement of the tribes in the Holy Land. The Second Chapter's census, then, seems the more crucial for the rest of the book, explaining how the troops should march and encamp during their journey through the Wilderness. The encampment groupings provide the basis and setting for the rebellions as well as later decisions made about conquest and settlement.

Chapter One's census, then, as Rashi's answer implies, seems the more unnecessary and redundant. Perhaps the point is to connect the Book of Numbers to previous books by counting the Tribes in the birth order by which we had originally gotten acquainted with them, before speaking of them according to the encampments which would shape their subsequent destiny. Chapter One's census also uses the terms “toledotam le-mishpehotam lebeit abotam,” meaning the tribal “birth-records according to their families by their father's houses,” terms not used in Chapter 2. This supports this explanation: Chapter 1 comes to serve as a genealogical and historical link between the narratives about the tribes' leaving Egypt to the preparation of a military-like organization prepared to march, defend, and conquer. The commanding leaders of the tribes in their march have to be shown as descended and derived from the earlier tribal genealogy and draw authority from that.

Of course, the most literal reason Chapter One states for listing the leaders of each tribe would seem to be understood from verse 4 and 5, that these tribal leaders were in some way to help with taking the census; that one leader from each tribe should “stand with” Moses and Aaron in taking the census. Likely Moses and Aaron assigned the task of getting an accurate count and taking the census of each tribe to these tribal leaders themselves. At the very least, the tribal leaders “stood with them,” confirming Moses' and Aaron's authority to collect information and propose organization into troops of men, witness the count, as well as validate Moses' and Aaron's authority to draft their able-bodied menfolk into military service. In Chap. 1 the tribal leaders were to verify and ratify the count, giving it their stamp of approval. I actually have always thought that the term used here for “thousand” originally did not mean a number, but rather a military contingent led by a commander or general. Thus, Chapter One's census, co-officiated by an officer derived from each tribe, served to ratify and validate the legitimacy of Moses' and Aaron's reorganization of Israel's tribal clans into contingent units of a fighting force, gaining legitimacy through their commanders' tribe-based authority.



Shabbat Bemidbar

May 15-16, 2026 | 29 Iyar, 5786

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 567 | Haftarah: 948
Kaplan: Parasha: 654 | Haftarah: 1262

Candle Lighting | 7:47 pm

Evening Services | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat & Youth 5+ | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush | following services | Levy Auditorium

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 7:05 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Teen Shiur | 7:05 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 7:50 pm

Habdala | 8:47 pm

Rosh Hodesh Sivan begins on Saturday night.

Shabuot begins on Thursday night. See inside for full Shabuot schedule.

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Thursday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday-Wednesday (Minha & Arbit): 6:30 pm

SHABUOT AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Learn more at shearithisrael.org/shabuot5786

- Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabuot Late Night Lecture
- Young Professionals Shabuot Dinner
- CSI Youth's Shabuot Ice Cream Bash
- Girls' and Young Women's Book of Ruth Reading

Shabuot Schedule

Ereb Shabuot – Thursday Evening, May 21

Ereb Tabshilin Preparation* | by sunset, 8:11 pm
Candle Lighting | 7:53 pm / Evening Services | 7:45 pm
Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabuot Lecture | 11:15 pm

* **Erub Tabshilin:** When the festival begins on Thursday evening, food for the Sabbath is set aside prior to the festival.

Shabuot I – Friday, May 22 — Consecration Anniversary, Crosby St Synagogue (1834)

Zemirot | 8:15 am / Shahrit & Hallel | 9:00 am
Tot Shabbat & Youth 5+ | 10:00 am / Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am
Kiddush | following services
Men's Ruth Reading & Azharot Part I | 7:00 pm
Minha/Arbit Services | 7:45 pm
Day 2 Candle Lighting | before 7:54 pm

Shabuot II – Shabbat, May 23

Zemirot | 8:15 am / Shahrit | 9:00 am
Tot Shabbat & Youth 5+ | 10:00 am / Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am
Girls' Book of Ruth Reading | following services
Kiddush in honor of our Ruth Readers | following the reading
CSI Youth Shabuot Ice Cream Bash | following Kiddush
Men's Ruth Reading & Azharot Part II | 7:15 pm
Minha/Arbit Services | 8:00 pm
Habdala: 8:54 pm

COMING UP

THIS SUNDAY: Jewish History Tour of Central Park
Presented by the Shearith Israel League | Sunday, May 17 | 5:00 pm

Register at shearithisrael.org.

Graduation Shabbat: Kiddush & Scroll of Honor
Shabbat, June 13 | Following Morning Services

Submit graduate info and/or sponsor kiddush at shearithisrael.org/graduation5786.

KIDS KORNER

To win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find Dalya & Jake with the answer to this riddle:

*In the wilderness, by tribe they came,
Moshe counted every name.
From camp to camp, the totals immense—
What was this counting called? The...*

COMING UP: SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL PROGRAMS

Annual Chatham Square Memorial

Memorial Day, Monday, May 25 | 10:30 am | Chatham Square Cemetery
Special Guest Speaker: Joshua Obstfeld, FBI Counterintelligence
With remarks from: Mikhail G. Smits, Captain, US Army

Faith, Freedom, and the First Amendment:

A Symposium on Religious Liberty

Monday, June 8 | 11:00 am-12:30 pm | Touro Synagogue, Newport, RI
Emcee & Keynote Speaker: Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Additional Confirmed Speakers: Rabbi Dr. Stuart Halpern & Dr. Tevi Troy
Registration & details at shearithisrael.org/faith-freedom-symposium.

GET YOUR TICKETS!

2026 Spring Gala: *Night at the Museum*

Tuesday Evening, June 16

Start your evening with Rabbi Soloveichik **after closing hours** at The New York Historical's new Tang Wing for American Democracy, for an exclusive preview **before it opens to the public** of its forthcoming exhibit on the story of American liberty. Followed by a gala reception at Shearith Israel.
For details, tickets, and sponsorships, go to shearithisrael.org/gala2026.



20 Spring
26 GALA

Tuesday, June 16



NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Rabbi Meir Soloveichik**, upon receiving the Bradley Prize, which he will be awarded tonight. This award honors individuals whose extraordinary talents have influenced American scholarship and ideas.

Mazal tob to PTTs Tutor, **Yehudit Robinson**, and her husband, Sam Daitch, for being honored at The Jewish Center of Teaneck annual dinner on Sunday.