



Numbering

In this chapter, the families of the sons of Levi are counted again for the second time. In chapter 3, all the males were counted from one month old and upward, but in this chapter 4, they are counted from 30 years old to 50 years old.

Descendants of Kohath, males from 1 month upward were 8600, but between 30 and 50 were 2750.

Descendants of Gershon, males from 1 month upward were 7500, but between 30 and 50 were 2630.

Descendants of Merari, males from 1 month upward were 6200, but between 30 and 50 were 3200.

This is the generation that came out of Egypt. These figures are a little surprising— take for example the family of Merari. It means that

there were only 3000 males up to the age of thirty, and over the age of 50. Assuming that there would be around 1000 at least, of men over the age of 50, it means that there would be just 2000 under the age of 30. This is not the normal proportions one would expect. In a rapidly growing population, there would be many more under the age of 30 than over. But in this case it shows that many men must have been single still over the age of 30, or married with no sons. This can be understood, when we realise the terrible time they had in Egypt, as bondmen, slaving away making bricks, and despite having faithful Hebrew midwives, people would have been terrified to start a family, even if they had time to meet a suitable spouse, as the slave masters ruled over them with rigour.

However God promised them Leviticus 26:3-13 *If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;...I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you... And I set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people. I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.*

As the families of the sons of Levi, these families were to set the example. They would soon become fruitful, as instead of serving Pharaoh, now they were to serve God. Israel as a nation was God's firstborn. Exodus 4:22, but the tribe of Levi was chosen to represent them, and so must be first in setting an example in service to God.

Ages

The order of the camp had been described, and organised as an army, the census of all men of fighting age had been taken, the tribes encampment allocated around their standards, but now the order of worship was dictated. First the census of all male Levites was taken,

as all were to be taken as a tribe as God's firstborn, sanctified to be the priestly tribe, but in this chapter only those of the age suitable to minister were counted. Why 30? When soldiers were counted from 20 years old and upward. Because as ministers for the spiritual well being of the nation, physical maturity was not just required, but mental maturity also required. It ensured that the Levites and priests would have had family and domestic experience behind them, thus able to advise and represent their nation better. There would be less muscle and brawn required for the work of ministry, but more dignity, pragmatism and gravitas, aspects which do not come naturally to younger men. King David began his reign at 30, it is highly likely that John the Baptist began preaching then, and certainly (Luke 3:23) Jesus began his ministry at thirty. The age this service would stop would be 50. The work as we saw from the book of Leviticus, and also in this chapter would require hard physical graft, as well as teaching and caring for the other tribes. Carting carcasses outside of the camp, refuse such as dung and skins, carrying water, and being busy porters supporting the work of the priests, as well as dismantling, carrying and loading the furniture and structure of the tabernacle and its coverings from place to place, and then re-erecting again. It would be a strain on the older men over 50, and accidents, and injuries would be a great distraction from the importance of the work being done.

Kohathites

The appointments begin with the selection of the sons of Kohath. These were to carry the furniture of the tabernacle. One would have expected the sons of Gershon to be given this work to do, seeing he was the eldest, but as we see very many times in scripture, God confounds the wise of this world, and ensures that it is His will that is done, *That no flesh should glory in his presence.* 1 Corinthians 1:29.

The work that this order of Levites had to do, was of the utmost importance and very special, and so required the corresponding

amount of care. Their work in the respect of being royal removal men would begin when the order would come for the camp to set to, to relocate to another place. To begin the striking of camp, first the tabernacle would be dismantled, packed up and start the journey, and then the rest of the tribes would all fall into their respective places after striking camp, and all would position themselves in the correct order of march, and off they would go.

Work of High Priest & Sons

The very first action that took place, would be the High Priest – Aaron and his sons would enter into the Most Holy Place, take down the separated veil, and then cover the ark with it. This ensured no casual viewing of the things which were most precious. This would maintain the highest symbolic significance upon what the Ark of the Covenant represented, and the sanctified status of the Most Holy Place and what it also represented – a sanctified and glorified ecclesia redeemed and cleansed by the precious blood of the atoning work of the Lamb manifesting the Holy Name and Will of God. It was vital then that this most hallowed vision would never be disturbed or diminished. We note that when it was disrespected– paraded around as some kind of idol – in the time of Eli the high priest, it was captured by the Philistines, and represented the absolute degradation of the nation.

After the veil was draped over the ark of the covenant a waterproof leather cover made from antelope skins (described as badgers skins which were unclean under the law so would not have been used) was then put over and then a blue cloth placed over the whole piece. The staves were always left in place, in position, as the place where God had chosen to place His Name – where the ark would rest for ever, was not yet on the horizon of God's purpose.

From there, they turned to the furniture in the Holy Place, the Table of Showbread. The tools and pots and plates associated with it were

carefully placed upon the table alongside the bread, and over the whole was placed a blue cloth, then a scarlet cloth, and then the waterproof leather covering.

The lampstand was then covered with a blue cloth, and all its accessories were gathered and wrapped in the waterproof leather covering and the whole lot was fastened to a carrying frame, - the Hebrew word means a yoke.

The altar of incense with its associated tools was also covered with a blue cloth, then the waterproof leather covering.

Whereas when they went outside the tabernacle to the altar of burnt offering they were to collect the shovels and other butchery tools and after clearing away all the old ashes were to cover the whole with a purple cloth. The purple was then covered by the waterproof leather. There is no mention of the laver at this point, although the Septuagint does add it in.

Blue, red and purple coverings used to cover over these holy items. In fact the population in general would not see these coverings, as all they would see would be the dark brown waterproof leather – a common enough commodity, used throughout the camp for protecting their own belongings from windblown sand, and heavy downpours. The significance of the coverings would be witnessed only by these Levites and the priests in attendance of course, but they would relate this to the people in time, and they in turn would then appreciate the continuity being applied. Each piece of furniture was being constructed like a mini tabernacle. Each item in their own way all signified the same thing, all pointed forward to the atoning work of the Messiah to come. Each aspect equally important, and holy, so that even in transportation, apparently packed away, and out of sight, each was specially handled and revered with the same pattern the tabernacle was set up with. The same theme still there, blue, scarlet, purple, deerskins. This thread, this pattern should be

the same in our lives, always there - no matter what we do, where we are. Whether in the resting place of worship and service, or whether travelling. May be out of sight to the ignorant, but within, - God will know that our hearts are wrapped with the cherubic glory.

Back to the Kohathites

Once Aaron and his sons were done with this work of covering the furniture, then the Levites of Kohath stepped forward. They didn't all just charge and grab the nearest or most important things. Each knew his place. In fact, we can read in verse 16 how the son of the High Priest – Eleazar was given the job to supervise, and ensure that the utmost care was given – not just for the sanctity of the sanctuary, but that the Kohathites were in danger of losing their lives. Careless trespass or neglect, even having a tiny peek under one of the corners of the hanging coverings would result in immediate death. An example of where carelessness costs lives, we only need to think of the example of Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6:6. Despite showing the greatest disrespect to the approach and worship of God, many are shocked when they find themselves cut loose, and lost from the Hope of Israel. It is a warning. And some people in the past make a fuss over wearing a tie to the meetings, how long would such attitudes last, if they had to follow the precise, repetitive and laborious transport detail of the tabernacle to the letter, every time, without fail.

Many of the lessons, the principles of approach applied to the remaining two families of the Levites- Gershon and Merari.

Gershonites

The Gershonites are next mentioned, and their job was to *serve, and for burdens.(v24)* In the context it is referring to the carrying role in this the transportation of the tabernacle. Nevertheless, all the Levites were servants and burden-bearers to the nation. The spiritual is also true. The Sons of Zadok – the Just One, the Royal Priesthood, are expected to also be burden-bearers - *Brothers, if a*

man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore him in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. – (Galatians 6: 1-5)

So the Gershonites - were to carry the curtains of the tabernacle, its coverings, as well as the curtains of the courtyard. All the ropes, pegs, loops, fillets, taches and other equipment was all to be carefully lifted, folded, wrapped and stacked. Again, there was to be nothing haphazard. After a while each man would know his place and role, that another son of Aaron was assigned the job of overseer of their work. He would give directions, and ensure that everything was done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:40)

Merarites

The work of the Levites the descendants of Merari are described next, and are last in the order of dismantling. But of course would be the first in assembling. There is always a positive to every negative.

Although the smallest body of men, they had the toughest assignment. Their job was really heavy work. It was to carefully lay down all of the tabernacle boards, and decouple from their posts and bases. They had to do the same with all the posts of the surrounding courtyard. Every tent peg, rope, every crossbar had to be collected counted in, and checked, double checked. Each board had to be noted of where it had come from and so that it would be returned to its rightful place. Every item that made up the tabernacle was as it were matched with a person. Each had a special purpose, no matter how small, without that man, without that tent peg, the work was imperfect and incomplete. No matter how menial, no matter how seemingly insignificant, repetitive or yes – boring – the task may

seem – if it is for the Lord, it is sacred, it is of the highest and noblest cause. That is how the sons of Merari would have regarded it as they collected the heaviest items and put their shoulders together and heaved the pillars off the ground. It is how we must always regard the work of the Lord, - knowing that the yoke given to us is easy, and the burden given to us is light. (Matthew 11:30)

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