

“The Great Exchange: Numbering Levi for the Firstborn”

Numbers Chapter 3

It has been 2 years and one month since the Children of Israel left Egypt.
The last two chapters God had Moses

- 1) appoint leaders over the families of Israel
- 2) number the men in Israel (except Levi) that were available for war
- 3) assign a position for camping and moving all in relationship to the presence of God

Num 3:1 1) The Priests and the Levites vs 1-3

Now these are *the records of the generations of Aaron and Moses at the time when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai.*

- These were spoken to Moses while he was on Mount Sinai
 - Exodus 19 Moses was going up and down, up and down and up and down Mount Sinai receiving instructions from the Lord.
 - Exodus 28 was a time of receiving instructions from the Lord concerning the Priests.

Num 3:2 These then are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

Num 3:3 These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests.

Num 3:4 But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

- The Family of Priests - The Levites and the Priests were 2 different groups.
 - Levi was the larger family where the priest come from (The Tribe belongs to God)
 - Aaron's line is separated out to serve as priests
- The first born Nadab and Abihu were the first two anointed to serve with Aaron as priest.
 - These two offered strange fire before the Lord and perished. Leviticus 10

Num 3:5 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 3:6 "Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him.

Num 3:7 "They shall perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle.

Num 3:8 "They shall also keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.

Num 3:9 "You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel.

Num 3:10 "So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman who comes near shall be put to death."

- God separates the duties of the Levites from the duties of the Priests.
 - **Why Levi? Why not Gad? Or Benjamin? Perhaps...**
 - Exodus 32:26 when Moses came down from Sinai and saw Israel defiling themselves
"Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him"
- The Levites
 - Serve (under the direction of) Aaron
 - They do the service of the tabernacle (not priestly duties, but the logistical set up, tear down, storage and maintenance of the tabernacle)
 - Wholly given to Aaron
- The Priest
 - Keep the Priesthood
 - Duties revealed in Leviticus 1-10 (Sacrifices, Prayers, Teaching)
- "but the layman who comes near shall be put to death" God is a God of order. He assigns the tasks and expects the assignments to be followed. These are His decisions. We cannot assume or simply put ourselves into an assignment to which we were not called.

- Hebrews 5:1-4 "For every high priest taken from among men r on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was."

Num 3:11 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 3:12 "Now, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of every firstborn, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall be Mine.

Num 3:13 "For all the firstborn are Mine; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, from man to beast. They shall be Mine; I am the LORD."

- This is a very unique transaction. (Also see verses 40-51)
 - God struck down the firstborn in Egypt to purchase Israel's freedom (Exodus 12)
 - This cost Israel their firstborn. They belonged to God. (Exodus 13)
 - God said instead of the firstborn of every man and beast, He decided that the tribe of Levi would settle that requirement.
- The tribe of Levi is a special position of God's

Num 3:14 **2) Census of the Sons of Levi** vs 14-39

Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,

Num 3:15 "Number the sons of Levi by their fathers' households, by their families; every male from a month old and upward you shall number."

Num 3:16 So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, just as he had been commanded.

Num 3:17 These then are the sons of Levi by their names: **Gershon** and **Kohath** and **Merari**.

Num 3:18 These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei;

Num 3:19 and the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel;

Num 3:20 and the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their fathers' households.

- The Levites were not numbered as Moses and Aaron numbered the army. (Men 20 years and Older)
- They were numbered every male one month and older.
- They were also grouped by particular families within Levi Gershon, Kohath and Merari

Num 3:21 Of Gershon *was* the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimeites; these *were* the families of the Gershonites.

Num 3:22 Their numbered men, in the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, *even* their numbered men *were* 7,500.

Num 3:23 The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward,

Num 3:24 and the leader of the fathers' households of the Gershonites *was* Eliasaph the son of Lael.

Num 3:25 Now the duties of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting *involved* the tabernacle and the tent, its covering, and the screen for the doorway of the tent of meeting,

Num 3:26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway of the court which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and its cords, according to all the service concerning them.

- The males one month and older of Gershon numbered 7500
- They were to camp on the west side of the tabernacle
- Their duties were to manage and maintain the Tent Coverings, Screen, Hangings of the Court, and the Cords.
- **Numbers 7:7** Moses will give them 2 wagons with 4 oxen to carry the skins of the Tabernacle.

- Num 3:27 **Kohath** Of Kohath *was* the family of the Amramites and the family of the Izharites and the family of the Hebronites and the family of the Uzzielites; these were the families of the Kohathites.
- Num 3:28 In the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, *there were* 8,600, performing the duties of the sanctuary.
- Num 3:29 The families of the sons of Kohath were to camp on the southward side of the tabernacle,
 Num 3:30 and the leader of the fathers' households of the Kohathite families was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel.
- Num 3:31 Now their duties *involved* the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the utensils of the sanctuary with which they minister, and the screen, and all the service them;
 Num 3:32 and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *was* the chief of the leaders of Levi, *and had* the oversight of those who perform the duties of the sanctuary.
- The males one month and older of Kohath numbered 8600
 - They were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle.
 - Their duties were to manage and maintain the Ark, Table of Incense, The Table of Showbread, The Golden Lampstand and the utensils used by the priests.
 - **Numbers 7:9** Moses gave NO wagons or oxen to carry the Tabernacle furniture. It was to be born on their shoulders.
 - **Numbers 4:4-15** The Kohathites were not allowed in the Tabernacle to get the furniture until after Aaron and the priest covered the articles with either purple or badger skins. Also only after the priests has put the poles through the rings so they could be carried.
 - The Kohathites could not see or touch the furnishings.
- Num 3:33 **Merari** Of Merari *was* the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites; these *were* the families of Merari.
- Num 3:34 Their numbered men in the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, *were* 6,200.
- Num 3:35 The leader of the fathers' households of the families of Merari *was* Zuriel the son of Abihail. They *were* to camp on the northward side of the tabernacle.
- Num 3:36 Now the appointed duties of the sons of Merari *involved* the frames of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, all its equipment, and the service concerning them,
 Num 3:37 and the pillars around the court with their sockets and their pegs and their cords.
- The males one month and older of Merari numbered 6200
 - They were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle.
 - Their duties were to manage and maintain the Frame, Pillars, sockets, pegs and rings.
 - **Numbers 7:8** Moses will give them 4 wagons and 8 oxen to carry the frames and pillars.
- Num 3:38 **Priests** Now those who were to camp before the tabernacle eastward, before the tent of meeting toward the sunrise, are Moses and Aaron and his sons, performing the duties of the sanctuary for the obligation of the sons of Israel; but the layman coming near was to be put to death.
- Moses, Aaron and the Priest will be to the east of the tabernacle. (this is the side with the entry)
- Num 3:39 All the numbered men of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the command of the LORD by their families, every male from a month old and upward, *were* 22,000.
- The Total of Males on month old and upward numbered 22,000
 - Twenty and two thousand, this total does not agree with the particulars; for the Gershonites were 7500, the Kohathites 8600, and the Merarites 6200, which make a total of 22,300. Several methods

of solving this difficulty have been proposed by learned men. Houbigant supposes there is an error in the enumeration of the Kohathites in ver. 28; the numeral shesh, 'six,' being written instead of shalosh, 'three,' before 'hundred.' Dr. Kennicott's mode of reconciling the discrepancy, however, is the most simple. He supposes that an error has crept into the number of the Gershonites in ver. 22, where instead of 7500 we should read 7200, as caph final, which stands for 500, might have been easily mistaken for resh, 200. (*Dr. Kennicott on the Hebrew Text, vol. 11, p.212.*)

Num 3:40 **3) Census of the Firstborn in Israel** vs 40-43

Firstborn in Israel Then the LORD said to Moses, "Number every firstborn male of the sons of Israel from a month old and upward, and make a list of their names.

Num 3:41 "You shall take the Levites for Me, I am the LORD, instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the sons of Israel."

Num 3:42 So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded him;

Num 3:43 and all the firstborn males by the number of names from a month old and upward, for their numbered men were 22,273.

- The Firstborn in Israel numbered 22,273. The males of the Sons of Levi numbered 22,000.
- The difference of 273.
- Side Note: the ratio of 22,273 first born to the number of the census in Chapter 1 would come to 1 out of every 27 was a firstborn. It seems very low. It may more likely be a count of first born from the time of the Exodus to Sinai rather than all the firstborn.

Num 3:44 **4) Ransom the Difference** vs 44-51

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 3:45 "Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel and the cattle of the Levites. And the Levites shall be Mine; I am the LORD.

Num 3:46 "For the ransom of the 273 of the firstborn of the sons of Israel who are in excess beyond the Levites,

Num 3:47 you shall take five shekels apiece, per head; you shall take *them* in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs),

Num 3:48 and give the money, the ransom of those who are in excess among them, to Aaron and to his sons."

Num 3:49 So Moses took the ransom money from those who were in excess, beyond those ransomed by the Levites;

Num 3:50 from the firstborn of the sons of Israel he took the money in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary, 1,365.

Num 3:51 Then Moses gave the ransom money to Aaron and to his sons, at the command of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

- God demands exact accounting.
- The discrepancy of 273 is in the favor of the Sons of Israel.
- God tells them that it is fine, but you owe a ransom of 5 shekels per head and that must be paid to Moses and then ultimately given to Aaron and the priests.

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