

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

8-18-21

Numbers 3

THE CENSUS OF THE LEVITES

The Priests: The Family Of Aaron The Levites - Verses 1-4

¹ This is the account of the family of Aaron and Moses at the time the LORD spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai. ² The names of the sons of Aaron were Nadab the firstborn and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ³ Those were the names of Aaron's sons, the anointed priests, who were ordained to serve as priests. ⁴ Nadab and Abihu, however, died before the LORD when they made an offering with unauthorized fire before him in the Desert of Sinai. They had no sons, so Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests during the lifetime of their father Aaron.

3:2 Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu: Nadab and Abihu were the two oldest children of Aaron, and the two ranking priests behind him - yet they were struck down by the LORD for offering profane fire before the LORD (Leviticus 10:1-7).

3:4 The sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests: It is important to realize that the priests were only one small family among the Levites; to be a priest and a Levite were not the same thing at all. Only those who were descendants of Aaron could be priests.

The Levites: Their Role In Relation To Aaron - Verses 5-10

⁵ The LORD said to Moses, ⁶ "Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him. ⁷ They are to perform duties for him and for the whole community at the tent of meeting by doing the work of the tabernacle. ⁸ They are to take care of all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle. ⁹ Give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to him. ¹⁰ Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests; anyone else who approaches the sanctuary is to be put to death."

3:5-10 At the time of the first Passover, God instructed every Israelite family to dedicate its firstborn son to him (Exodus 13:2). They were set apart to assist Moses and Aaron in ministering to the people. This was only a temporary measure, however. Here God chose all the men from the tribe of Levi to replace the firstborn sons from every Israelite tribe (3:40-51 and 8:16). These men, called Levites, were set apart to care for the tabernacle and minister to the people. All the priests had to belong to the tribe of Levi, but not all Levites were priests. The Levites were to be 25 years old before entering service. They probably received five years of on-the-job training before being admitted to full service at age 30.

3:10 Aaron and his descendants were appointed to the priesthood. There is a tremendous contrast between the priesthood of Aaron in the Old Testament and the priesthood of Christ in

the New Testament. Aaron and his descendants were the only ones who could carry out the duties of the priests and approach God's dwelling place. Now that Christ is our High Priest—our intermediary with God—anyone who follows him is also called a priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

Now all Christians may come into God's presence without fear because God's own Son encourages his followers to do so. We can put guilt behind us and experience forgiveness when we have a special relationship with God based on what Christ has done for us.

The Levites Are A Special Possession To God - Verses 11-13

¹¹ The LORD also said to Moses, ¹² "I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are mine, ¹³ for all the firstborn are mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for myself every firstborn in Israel, whether human or animal. They are to be mine. I am the LORD."

3:11-13 I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn: The firstborn belonged to God; a firstborn lamb from a ewe would be given to the LORD. God didn't want human sacrifice, so He took the tribe of Levi as Israel's firstborn.

The Command To Number The Tribe Of Levi - Verses 14-20

¹⁴ The LORD said to Moses in the Desert of Sinai, ¹⁵ "Count the Levites by their families and clans. Count every male a month old or more." ¹⁶ So Moses counted them, as he was commanded by the word of the LORD. ¹⁷ These were the names of the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. ¹⁸ These were the names of the Gershonite clans: Libni and Shimei. ¹⁹ The Kohathite clans: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. ²⁰ The Merarite clans: Mahli and Mushi. These were the Levite clans, according to their families.

3:14-20 Number the children of Levi: Though they were not counted among the available soldiers, the Levites were still to be counted, and counted by the males from a month old and above.

By their fathers' houses: They were to be categorized by the families, with the main grouping according to Levi's three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

The Census And Duties Of The Family Of Gershon - Verses 21-26

²¹ To Gershon belonged the clans of the Libnites and Shimeites; these were the Gershonite clans. ²² The number of all the males a month old or more who were counted was 7,500. ²³ The Gershonite clans were to camp on the west, behind the tabernacle. ²⁴ The leader of the families of the Gershonites was Eliasaph son of Lael. ²⁵ At the tent of meeting the Gershonites were responsible for the care of the tabernacle and tent, its coverings, the curtain at the entrance to the tent of meeting, ²⁶ the curtains of the courtyard, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, and the ropes—and everything related to their use.

3:21-26 The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward: The Gershonites (7,500 males) were to camp westward to the tabernacle (in between Judah and the tabernacle itself).

The duties of the children of Gershon: The Gershonites were to take care of the skins that covered the tabernacle itself.

The Census And Duties Of The Family Of Kohath - Verses 27-32

²⁷ To Kohath belonged the clans of the Amramites, Izharites, Hebronites and Uzzielites; these were the Kohathite clans. ²⁸ The number of all the males a month old or more was 8,600. The Kohathites were responsible for the care of the sanctuary. ²⁹ The Kohathite clans were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. ³⁰ The leader of the families of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. ³¹ They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering, the curtain, and everything related to their use. ³² The chief leader of the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest. He was appointed over those who were responsible for the care of the sanctuary.

3:27-32 These were the families of the Kohathites: The Kohathites (8,600 males) were to camp southward to the tabernacle (in between Reuben and the tabernacle itself).

Their duty included the ark: The Kohathites were to take care of the furniture of the tabernacle: The ark of the covenant, the table of showbread, and so forth, under the direction of Eleazar the priest, son of Aaron.

The Census And Duties Of The Family Of Merari - Verses 33-37

³³ To Merari belonged the clans of the Mahlites and the Mushites; these were the Merarite clans. ³⁴ The number of all the males a month old or more who were counted was 6,200. ³⁵ The leader of the families of the Merarite clans was Zuriel son of Abihail; they were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. ³⁶ The Merarites were appointed to take care of the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts, bases, all its equipment, and everything related to their use, ³⁷ as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs and ropes.

3:33-37 These were the families of Merari: The family of Merari (6,200 males) were to camp northward to the tabernacle (in between Dan and the tabernacle itself).

The appointed duty of the children of Merari included the boards of the tabernacle: The family of Merari was to take care of the structural aspects of the tabernacle: The pillars, the boards, and so forth.

The Camp Of The Priests - Verses 38-39

³⁸ Moses and Aaron and his sons were to camp to the east of the tabernacle, toward the sunrise, in front of the tent of meeting. They were responsible for the care of the

sanctuary on behalf of the Israelites. Anyone else who approached the sanctuary was to be put to death. ³⁹ The total number of Levites counted at the LORD's command by Moses and Aaron according to their clans, including every male a month old or more, was 22,000.

3:38-39 Those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east: The family of Aaron, and Moses, were to camp on the east side of the tabernacle - closest to the entrance, which was on the east.

Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary: God's order and organization extends to certain jobs for certain people to do. The families of the Levites had certain callings they were to fulfill. There was no one man or family to do everything; God made them dependent on one another to accomplish the work.

The Exchange Of The Firstborn - Verses 40-51

⁴⁰ The LORD said to Moses, "Count all the firstborn Israelite males who are a month old or more and make a list of their names. ⁴¹ Take the Levites for me in place of all the firstborn of the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites in place of all the firstborn of the livestock of the Israelites. I am the LORD." ⁴² So Moses counted all the firstborn of the Israelites, as the LORD commanded him. ⁴³ The total number of firstborn males a month old or more, listed by name, was 22,273. ⁴⁴ The LORD also said to Moses, ⁴⁵ "Take the Levites in place of all the firstborn of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites in place of their livestock. The Levites are to be mine. I am the LORD. ⁴⁶ To redeem the 273 firstborn Israelites who exceed the number of the Levites, ⁴⁷ collect five shekels for each one, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. ⁴⁸ Give the money for the redemption of the additional Israelites to Aaron and his sons." ⁴⁹ So Moses collected the redemption money from those who exceeded the number redeemed by the Levites. ⁵⁰ From the firstborn of the Israelites he collected silver weighing 1,365 shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel. ⁵¹ Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons, as he was commanded by the word of the LORD.

3:40 Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel: The firstborn - which was always thought to be the best and the favored - always belongs to God; so instead of giving the firstborn of Israel to God in sacrifice, the tribe of Levi was "given" to God as in place of each of the firstborn sons of Israel.

3:43 All the firstborn males, according to the number of names: However, there were 22,273 firstborn sons in Israel; and there were only 22,000 Levite males (Leviticus 3:39). The extra 273 were given a monetary value (five shekels for each one individually), and the money was given to the tabernacle as redemption money.

The number of firstborn sons is low if accounted for all the nation; it would mean that only one in 27 sons were firstborns - an unlikely percentage. It is more probable that the 22,273 firstborn sons were those born in the thirteen months of the Exodus.