

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

8-25-21

Numbers 4

DUTIES OF THE PRIESTS

The Duty Of The Kohathites...Those Fit For Service - Verses 1-3

¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ² "Take a census of the Kohathite branch of the Levites by their clans and families. ³ Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work at the tent of meeting.

4:1-3 The Kohathites, Gershonites (4:21-22), and Merarites (4:29) were families of Levites who were assigned special tasks in Israel's worship. For the jobs described in this chapter, a Levite had to be between 30 and 50 years old. They were expected to carry out their duties as described here in every detail. In fact, failure to do so would mean death (4:20). This contrasted greatly from the religious practices of the Egyptians who could purchase amulets and potions. Their idols could be handled. The God of the Hebrews was not to be handled or reduced to common elements. He is greater than anything in his creation. Worshiping our holy God must not be taken lightly.

The Packing Of The Furniture And Utensils Of The Tabernacle - Verses 4-14

⁴ "This is the work of the Kohathites at the tent of meeting: the care of the most holy things. ⁵ When the camp is to move, Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and put it over the ark of the covenant law. ⁶ Then they are to cover the curtain with a durable leather, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place. ⁷ "Over the table of the Presence they are to spread a blue cloth and put on it the plates, dishes and bowls, and the jars for drink offerings; the bread that is continually there is to remain on it. ⁸ They are to spread a scarlet cloth over them, cover that with the durable leather and put the poles in place. ⁹ "They are to take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand that is for light, together with its lamps, its wick trimmers and trays, and all its jars for the olive oil used to supply it. ¹⁰ Then they are to wrap it and all its accessories in a covering of the durable leather and put it on a carrying frame. ¹¹ "Over the gold altar they are to spread a blue cloth and cover that with the durable leather and put the poles in place. ¹² "They are to take all the articles used for ministering in the sanctuary, wrap them in a blue cloth, cover that with the durable leather and put them on a carrying frame. ¹³ "They are to remove the ashes from the bronze altar and spread a purple cloth over it. ¹⁴ Then they are to place on it all the utensils used for ministering at the altar, including the firepans, meat forks, shovels and sprinkling bowls. Over it they are to spread a covering of the durable leather and put the poles in place.

4:4-14 When the camp prepares to journey: On the way to the Promised Land, the tabernacle furniture would have to travel and be carried great distances. But first, it must be packed properly to ensure its safe travel. Since the furniture itself was holy, it had to be covered and packed by Aaron and the priests before the sons of Kohath could get to it.

The Moving Of The Furniture And Utensils Of The Tabernacle - Verses 15-20

¹⁵ "After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, only then are the Kohathites to come and do the carrying. But they must not touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the tent of meeting. ¹⁶ "Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, is to have charge of the oil for the light, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering and the anointing oil. He is to be in charge of the entire tabernacle and everything in it, including its holy furnishings and articles." ¹⁷ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ¹⁸ "See that the Kohathite tribal clans are not destroyed from among the Levites. ¹⁹ So that they may live and not die when they come near the most holy things, do this for them: Aaron and his sons are to go into the sanctuary and assign to each man his work and what he is to carry. ²⁰ But the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die."

4:15-20 When the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die: The Kohathites were forbidden to touch any of the tabernacle furniture; it was made with poles that one could use to carry the furniture without touching the item itself.

The appointed duty of Eleazar: Eleazar, the eldest surviving son of Aaron the high priest, supervised the work of the Kohathites.

The Duties Of The Gershonites - Verses 21-28

²¹ The LORD said to Moses, ²² "Take a census also of the Gershonites by their families and clans. ²³ Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work at the tent of meeting. ²⁴ "This is the service of the Gershonite clans in their carrying and their other work: ²⁵ They are to carry the curtains of the tabernacle, that is, the tent of meeting, its covering and its outer covering of durable leather, the curtains for the entrance to the tent of meeting, ²⁶ the curtains of the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, the curtain for the entrance to the courtyard, the ropes and all the equipment used in the service of the tent. The Gershonites are to do all that needs to be done with these things. ²⁷ All their service, whether carrying or doing other work, is to be done under the direction of Aaron and his sons. You shall assign to them as their responsibility all they are to carry. ²⁸ This is the service of the Gershonite clans at the tent of meeting. Their duties are to be under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest.

4:27-28 The Gershonites could receive directions from any of Aaron's sons, but they were directly responsible to Ithamar only. The lines of authority and accountability were clearly communicated to all. As you function with others in service to God, make sure the lines of authority between you and those you work with are clearly understood. Good communication builds good relationships.

The Merarites: The Duty Of The Family - Verses 29-33

²⁹ "Count the Merarites by their clans and families. ³⁰ Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work at the tent of meeting. ³¹ As part of all their service at the tent, they are to carry the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts and bases, ³² as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs, ropes, all their equipment and everything related to their use. Assign to each man the specific things he is to carry. ³³ This is the service of the Merarite clans as they work at the tent of meeting under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest."

4:29-33 This is what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting: They had the job of packing and transporting the boards and pillars of the tabernacle; this was important work, because of all the precious metals used, the weight of the tabernacle was some 19,000 pounds.

You shall assign to each man by name the items he must carry: This wasn't "volunteer" work. Moses and Aaron assigned to each man by name the items he must carry. With such valuable cargo, and such a long distance, it was an important job to do.

Summary Of The Census Of The Levites: The Final Count According To The Families - Verses 34-48

³⁴ Moses, Aaron and the leaders of the community counted the Kohathites by their clans and families. ³⁵ All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work at the tent of meeting, ³⁶ counted by clans, were 2,750. ³⁷ This was the total of all those in the Kohathite clans who served at the tent of meeting. Moses and Aaron counted them according to the LORD's command through Moses. ³⁸ The Gershonites were counted by their clans and families. ³⁹ All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work at the tent of meeting, ⁴⁰ counted by their clans and families, were 2,630. ⁴¹ This was the total of those in the Gershonite clans who served at the tent of meeting. Moses and Aaron counted them according to the LORD's command. ⁴² The Merarites were counted by their clans and families. ⁴³ All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work at the tent of meeting, ⁴⁴ counted by their clans, were 3,200. ⁴⁵ This was the total of those in the Merarite clans. Moses and Aaron counted them according to the LORD's command through Moses. ⁴⁶ So Moses, Aaron and the leaders of Israel counted all the Levites by their clans and families. ⁴⁷ All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to do the work of serving and carrying the tent of meeting ⁴⁸ numbered 8,580. ⁴⁹ At the LORD's command through Moses, each was assigned his work and told what to carry. Thus they were counted, as the LORD commanded Moses.

4:34-49 According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered: We remember that this census was commanded by God and had a definite purpose in His plan. Each according to his service and according to his task: Each of these had a role to play in doing the work of tabernacle, and God made them all dependent on each other to do that work.

"It is worthy of note that these Levites, although they were all equally consecrated to God, had not all exactly the same work to perform. God is not the God of all uniformity. There is a wondrous unity of plan and design in all that he does, but there is also an equally marvelous variety."

Paul says the church is to work like a body - many parts, looking different, doing different jobs, meeting different needs, some more visible, some less, but all essential - and all with the same DNA code.

Much trouble is caused in the service of the LORD by those who desire a different calling than they have, or who are jealous of those who have a different calling, or by those who exalt one calling and abase another. Everyone has a place and a job, and all can set themselves to do it.