

200129-4 Nu 3, 4, Census of the Firstborn & of Levi's Son's Duties—CThurman

In chapter 1 the Lord commanded Moses to take a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. He appoints a prince of every tribe to help him and Aaron to take this census. The census counts every male that was 20 years of age and higher and able to go to war. Then in chapter 2 the LORD makes of the twelve tribes four camps. Each camp is then positioned afar off around the tabernacle to the east, south, west and north. The Levites were exempted from this census and camp arrangement. Now chapters 3 & 4 give the census, camp arrangement, and duties of the Levites.

Chapter 3

1 ¶ These also are the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day that the LORD spake with Moses in mount Sinai.

Aaron given first as the eldest son of his father, Amram. Aaron is three years older than Moses.

Ex 7:7 And Moses was fourscore years old, and Aaron fourscore and three years old, when they spake unto Pharaoh.

These have a sister that is older than both of them, whose name is Miriam. (cf. Ex.4.4-7)

Just a note about Moses and his two sons Gershom and Eliezer, born of Zipporah. (Ex.2.21, 22; 18.2-4) The LORD appointed Moses to the easternmost part of the camp with Aaron and his sons, Eleazar and Ithamar. However his sons, Gershom and Eliezar, are appointed to the southern Levitical camp because they are of the sons of Kohath. (1Chr.23.12, 14-17)

2 And these are the names of the sons of Aaron; Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

We read this first in the book of Exodus. Their names are very likely given in birth order.

Ex 6:23 And Aaron took him Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Naashon, to wife; and she bare him Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

3 These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests which were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office.

4 And 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: and Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest's office in the sight of (עַל-פְּנֵי, presence, face) Aaron their father.

The occasion for deaths of Nadab and Abihu are recorded in Leviticus. (cf. Lev.10.1-6) This was recent, since the rearing up of the tabernacle which was one month ago. Eleazar is now the eldest, living son. He will be appointed as chief over the chiefs of the Levites. (cf. Nu.4.32)

Nadab & Abihu died because they dared to burn incense before the Lord which was not kindled with the coals which came from the brazen altar. Properly offered this type would have pointed to the intercessions of Jesus Christ in behalf of His people to God. But they violated that type. What they had done was an abomination to the LORD,

Pr 28:9 He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.

By this type we know that prayer, apart from the intercessory work of Jesus Christ, is an abomination to God.

Pr 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

God not only didn't hear and receive their prayers, but He punished them for presuming to approach to Him in any other way than what He had ordained for them. Christians should seek the Lord according to the appointed means. (1Chr.15.12, 13) And let us also remember that part of the contributing factor to Nadab and Abihu's sin was the use of wine and

strong drink. There should be no question in our minds that *drink* affects our ability to make good judgments. (cf. Lev.10.8-11)

The Tribe of Levi alone is appointed to serve the priesthood (vss.6-10)

5 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

6 Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.

7 And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.

8 And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.

9 And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel.

10 And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

A remark about this last clause. David remarks about 'touching the LORD's anointed in 1Sa.24.6; 2Sa.1.14, 15.

1Sa.24.6 And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.

2Sa.1.14 And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?

15 And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died.

The interpretation of the text of Nu.3.10 certainly says that anyone that presumes to enter into the priesthood, not being of the family of Aaron should die. But the words '*cometh nigh*' are more broadly understood than this. Notice the Septuagint rendering of this same clause.

Nu.3.10b ... and the stranger that touches them shall die.

Undoubted David understood this text to include this idea, and certainly applied to against the Amalekite that dared to touch the king of Israel, who also was anointed of the LORD to serve in this office.

1Sa 16:6 And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed is before him.

Moses was to publically dedicate the tribe of Levi to help the priesthood, which is constituted of Aaron and his sons, in the service of the tabernacle.

In the following verses, the LORD had sanctified all of the firstborn of Israel to Himself when the Passover lamb was slain in Egypt. The Levites will stand as representative in their service for the children of Israel.

Levi stands representatively for the firstborn of Israel (vss. 11-13)

11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

12 And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine;

13 Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD.

The Israelites are reminded that the LORD claimed their firstborn as His own.

Ex 13:2 Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.

The Census of Levi's firstborn, vss.14-39

14 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,

15 Number the children of Levi after the house of their fathers, by their families: every male from a month old and upward shalt thou number them.

16 And Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded.

17 *And these were the sons of Levi by their names; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari.*

18 *And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families; Libni, and Shimei.*

19 *And the sons of Kohath by their families; Amram, and Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel.*

20 *And the sons of Merari by their families; Mahli, and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to the house of their fathers.*

Verses 21-31, 33-37 tells that the names of the camps shall bear the names of the three sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari; the number of firstborn in each camp; where each camp is positioned with respect to the tabernacle; who the chief of each camp is; and their duties.

Verse 32 tells of the chief of the chiefs over the Levites, which is Eleazar.

Camp of Gershon, vss. 21-26

21 *Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimites: these are the families of the **Gershonites**.*

22 *Those that were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, even those that were numbered of them were **seven thousand and five hundred**.*

23 *The families of the Gershonites shall pitch behind the tabernacle **westward**.*

24 *And the chief of the house of the father of the Gershonites shall be **Eliasaph** the son of Lael.*

25 *And **the charge** of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation shall be the tabernacle, and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,*

26 *And the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about, and the cords of it for all the service thereof.*

Camp of Kohath, vss. 27-31

27 *And of Kohath was the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izeharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these are the families of the **Kohathites**.*

28 *In the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were **eight thousand and six hundred**, keeping the charge of the sanctuary.*

29 *The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle **southward**.*

30 *And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites shall be **Elizaphan** the son of Uzziel.*

31 *And **their charge** shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof.*

Eleazar office chief over the chiefs of the Levites

32 *And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be chief over the chief of the Levites,*

Which chiefs are three: Eliasaph, Elizaphan, and Zuriel.

With the deaths of Aaron's two elder sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar is now the eldest living son.

and have the oversight (v.36, custody; 4.16, office) of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary.

the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary I think refers the camp of Kohath, whose responsibility as stated in v.31, concerns the furniture, the vail, and all of the vessels in the sanctuary.

Camp of Merari, vss. 33-37

33 *Of Merari was the family of the Mahlites, and the family of the Mushites: these are the families of **Merari**.*

34 *And those that were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were **six thousand and two hundred**.*

35 *And the chief of the house of the father of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail: these shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle **northward**.*

36 *And under **the custody** (tss. oversight, v.32; 4.16, office) **and charge** of the sons of Merari shall be the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and the sockets thereof, and all the vessels thereof, and all that serveth thereto,*

37 And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords.

Camp of Aaron, eastward

38 But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the **east**, even before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward, shall be Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the **charge** of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

Levi's firstborn census totals

39 All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were **twenty and two thousand**.

Camp: Gershon	– Number: 7,500	– Placement: Westward	– Chief: Eliasaph, of Lael
Kohath	8,600	South	Elizaphan, of Uzziel
Merari	6,200	North	Zuriel, of Abihail
Aaron	–	East	
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22,300, but counted as 22,000			

The difference could be in tallying numbers before & after Korah's rebellion. Notice the wording in the text of Nu.3.28, *in the number*, which has to do with the census of the Levitical tribe of Kohath, compared to that of Gershon in Nu.3.22, and Merari in Nu.3.34. At least 250 died of the of the tribe of Kohath then.

Gershonites have the charge of the tabernacle coverings, the door hangings, the court hangings surrounding the entire courtyard, the court hanging for the door, and the cords. (NOT THE VAIL that divides the sanctuary from the most holy place) (Nu.3.25, 26)

Kohathites have the charge of all of the furniture and vessels, and the vail dividing the sanctuary from the most holy place. (Nu.3.31)

Merarites have the charge of the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, and its vessels, the court pillars, sockets, pins, and cords. (Nu.3.36, 37)

The Census of Israel's firstborn, vss. 40-43

40 ¶ And the LORD said unto Moses, Number all the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names.

take, נָשָׂא, Qal imper. pl. masc. of נָשָׂא; the imperative [1.2, **take ye**; 3.40, **and take**; 11.12, **carry them**; 26.2, **take**; 31.26, **take**] is tss. to lift up, take, forgive, carry, bring, suffer, set up, bear

41 And thou shalt take the Levites for me (I am the LORD) instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstlings among the cattle of the children of Israel.

instead of, תַּחַת, ta-chath, tss. Ge. 4.25, instead of, Ge.30.15, for, Ex.21.26, for ... sake, Lev.14.42, the place of, etc.

42 And Moses numbered, as the LORD commanded him, all the firstborn among the children of Israel.

43 And all the firstborn males by the number of names, from a month old and upward, of those that were numbered of them, were **twenty and two thousand two hundred and threescore and thirteen**. (22,273)

Levites firstborn stand in the place of Israel's firstborn

44 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

45 Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD.

46 And for those that are to be redeemed of the two hundred and threescore and thirteen (**273**) of the firstborn of the children of Israel, which are more than the Levites;

47 Thou shalt even take five shekels apiece by the poll (skull), after the shekel of the sanctuary shalt thou take them: (the shekel is twenty gerahs:)

by their polls, of גְּלִילָת, tss. for every man, [by, or to, לְ] their polls, scull, head; from this we have Golgotha, interpreted in Scripture, the place of a scull (Mk.15.22); cf. **1.2, 18, 20, 22, 3.47**

48 And thou shalt give the money, wherewith the odd number of them is to be redeemed, unto Aaron and to his sons.

49 And Moses took the redemption money of them that were over and above them that were redeemed by the Levites:

50 Of the firstborn of the children of Israel took he the money; a thousand three hundred and threescore and five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary:

51 And Moses gave the money of them that were redeemed unto Aaron and to his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Israel's firstborn 22,273

Levi's firstborn 22,000 why not 22,300?

273 times 5 shekels = 1,365 shekels or 27,300 gerah's

Chapter 4

The census of the Levites from 30-50 yrs. of age, and the procedure of their service

Kohath's census & duties under Eleazar's supervision (vss.1-4, 15, 17-20)

- 1 ¶ *And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,*
- 2 *Take (Lift) the sum (heads) of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers,*
- 3 *From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.*
- 4 *This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things:*

The priesthood's preparatory work (vss. 5-14, 16):

The Ark

- 5 *And when the camp setteth forward, **Aaron shall come, and his sons**, and they shall take down the covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it:*
- 6 *And shall put thereon the covering of badgers' skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof.*

The Mercy Seat was the lid of the Ark. *Ex.25.21 And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee.*

A note about inserting the staves

In Ex.25.15 Israel was commanded that the staves were not to be removed. The meaning seems to be that as long as the ark of the covenant was in transit the staves must remain in place, because we read here (Nu.4.6) that when the Israelites began to break camp to begin another leg of their 40-yr. sojourn they were to insert the staves. Finally, when once the ark of the covenant reaches its final destination, the staves are permanently removed. (cf. 1Ki.8.8)

Table of Shewbread

- 7 *And upon the table of shewbread they shall spread a cloth of blue, and put thereon the dishes, and the spoons, and the bowls, and covers to cover withal: and the continual bread shall be thereon:*

8 And they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet, and cover the same with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put in the staves thereof.

Candlestick

9 And they shall take a cloth of blue, and cover the candlestick of the light, and his lamps, and his tongs, and his snuffdishes, and all the oil vessels thereof, wherewith they minister unto it:

10 And they shall put it and all the vessels thereof within a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put it upon a bar.

I think that this means that once these things are put into the badgers' skins that the skins are then slipped onto (*upon*) the bar so that the bar is used to carry the goods.

Altar of Incense

11 And upon the golden altar (of incense) they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof:

Other instruments used in the Sanctuary

12 And they shall take all the instruments (at least other censers, He.9.4) of ministry, wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put them on a bar:

Brazen Altar

13 And they shall take away the ashes from the [brazen] altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon:

14 And they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, even the censers, the fleshhooks, and the shovels, and the basons, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it.

No mention is made of the laver. Perhaps it was transported with the brazen altar.

There is a blue cloth involved with every piece except for the brazen altar. It has a purple cloth. The table of shewbread had also a scarlet cloth. But every piece is covered with badgers' skins.

blue, the heavenly (man) – purple, royalty – scarlet, worthy – badgers’ skins, humanity
 1Co.15.47 Jo.19.2, 3 Nah.2.3 1Pe.4.1; 1Jn.4.2, 3; 2Jn. 7

Ark	the veil			badgers’ skins	blue cloth	insert staves	Nu.4.5, 6
Shewbread Table	blue cloth	Put on dishes, etc	scarlet cloth	badgers’ skins		insert staves	Nu.4.7, 8
Candlestick	blue cloth			in badgers’ skins		put on bar	Nu.4.9-10
Incense Altar	blue cloth			badgers’ skins		insert staves	Nu.4.11
Sanct. Instrumts	in cloth of blue			badgers’ skins		put on bar	Nu.4.12
Brazen Altar	purple cloth	Put on all vessels		badgers’ skins		insert staves	Nu.4.13, 14

Kohath may now perform their duties

15 And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation.

Eleazar, or eldest son of the High Priest’s Duties

16 And to the office (Nu. 3.32, oversight; 3.36, custody) of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest pertaineth the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, and the daily meat offering, and the anointing oil, and the oversight of all the tabernacle, and of all that therein is, in the sanctuary, and in the vessels thereof.

17 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

18 Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites:

19 But thus do unto them, that they may live, and not die, when they approach unto the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and appoint them every one to his service and to his burden:

20 But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.

Cut ye not off, In other words, particularly Aaron & his sons need to be sure to obey the LORD’s commandments about these procedures so that they are not the cause of the death’s of the family of Kohath. This is a most serious issue.

Gershon’s census & duties, under Ithamar’s supervision

21 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

22 Take also the sum of the sons of Gershon, throughout the houses of their fathers, by their families;

23 From thirty years old and upward until fifty years old shalt thou number them; all that enter in to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.

24 This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, to serve, and for burdens:

25 And they shall bear the curtains of the tabernacle, and the tabernacle of the congregation, his covering, and the covering of the badgers' skins that is above upon it, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,

26 And the hangings of the court, and the hanging for the door of the gate of the court, which is by the tabernacle and by the altar round about, and their cords, and all the instruments of their service, and all that is made for them: so shall they serve.

27 At the appointment of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their burdens, and in all their service: and ye shall appoint unto them in charge all their burdens.

28 This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation: and their charge shall be under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

Merari's census & duties under Ithamar's supervision (vss.29-33)

29 As for the sons of Merari, thou shalt number them after their families, by the house of their fathers;

30 From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old shalt thou number them, every one that entereth into the service, to do the work of the tabernacle of the congregation.

31 And this is the charge of their burden, according to all their service in the tabernacle of the congregation; the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and sockets thereof,

32 And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords, with all their instruments, and with all their service: and by name ye shall reckon the instruments of the charge of their burden. (an inventory)

33 This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service, in the tabernacle of the congregation, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

The census totals of each Levitical camp

Kohath (2,750)

34 ¶ And Moses and Aaron and the chief of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites after their families, and after the house of their fathers,

35 From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation:

36 And those that were numbered of them by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty.

37 These were they that were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, which Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Gershon (2,630)

38 And those that were numbered of the sons of Gershon, throughout their families, and by the house of their fathers,

39 From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation,

40 Even those that were numbered of them, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers, were two thousand and six hundred and thirty.

41 These are they that were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, whom Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the LORD.

Merari (3,200)

42 And those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers,

43 From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation,

44 Even those that were numbered of them after their families, were three thousand and two hundred.

45 These be those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Census Grand total (8,580)

46 All those that were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the chief of Israel numbered, after their families, and after the house of their fathers,

47 From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that came to do the service of the ministry, and the service of the burden in the tabernacle of the congregation,

48 Even those that were numbered of them, were eight thousand and five hundred and fourscore.

49 According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered by the hand of Moses, every one according to his service, and according to his burden: thus were they numbered of him, as the LORD commanded Moses.

All of this was in preparation for Israel bearing witness of the LORD their God before others. The tabernacle was witness that He was among them.

Ex 25:8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.

And not as they chose, but in the way the LORD ordered them they were to bear witness of Him before the nations of the earth: Kohath with his furniture; Gershon with his coverings, curtains and hangings; and, Merari with his boards, bars, pillars, sockets, pins, & cords. This all began with the Levites. They were the tribe near to the tabernacle. In this type Christ came first to Israel. And then they which believed among them bore witness of Him to those of His people which were afar off, the Gentiles.

Ac 2:39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children (Israel), and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.