

Numbers 3

Election, Substitution, and Redemption of a Precious People

Friday, March 1, 2024 • Read Numbers 3

Questions from the Scripture text: Whose generations are listed here (v1)? From what time? Whose sons are listed in v2? What was special to them (v3)? But what happened to which of them (v4)? Why? Where? What didn't they have? Who remained to do what? Who speaks to whom in v5? Whom is he to bring near (v6)? To present to whom? To do what? What, specifically, would they do for Aaron (v7)? And for whom else? Where? To what objects were they to attend (v8)? And to what needs? To whom were they given (v9)? How much? Who were to do what in v10? What if someone else came near? Who spoke to whom in v11? Whom has He taken from among whom (v12)? In whose place? Whose are the Levites? Why (v13)? When had He made this claim (cf. Ex 13:1–2, 11–15)? Who spoke to whom in v14? Where? What did He tell him to do (v15)? In what manner? From what ages? What did Moses do in v16? Into what three clans were they divided (v17)? Which families belonged to Gershon (v18)? Which to Kohath (v19)? Which to Merari (v20)? How many were the Gershonites (v21–22)? Where did they camp (v23)? Led by whom (v24)? What were their responsibilities (v25–26)? How many were the Kohathites (v27–28)? Where did they camp (v29)? Led by whom (v30)? What were their responsibilities (v31)? Who kept charge over them, in which specific duty (v32)? How many were the Merarites (v33–34)? Led by whom (v35)? Where did they camp? What were their responsibilities (v36–37)? Who camped where (v38)? To keep charge of what? What if someone else came into this area? How many Levites were there altogether (v39)? Who spoke to whom in v40? What did He tell him to do? From what ages? Who were to be taken in their place (v41)? Besides men, what else were to be substituted in this way? What did Moses do (v43)? What did the number come to? Who spoke to whom in v44? What did He tell him to do (v45)? Why? What still had to be addressed (v46)? How were they redeemed (v47, cf. Lev 27:6)? To whom was the money to be given (v48)? From whom did Moses take this money (v49–50)? How much of it (v50)? To whom did he give it (v51)? Why?

Why did the priests have to be numbered twice? Numbers 3 prepares us for the evening sermon on the Lord's Day. In these fifty-one verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **the first numbering of the priests was to teach us especially about how the Lord redeems His people through a Substitute.**

A matter of survival, v1–10. As the Spirit moves to the census of the Levites, He reminds us of a grievous gap in the families: "Nadab and Abihu had died before YHWH when they offered profane fire before YHWH in the Wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children" (v4). Half of the priestly line never made it out of Sinai. Their attendance to their priestly duties would be for their own safety and Israel's. So the Levites are given to them to help attend to those duties (v5–9), lest an outsider come near and forfeit his life (v10).

Praise God that our High Priest is holy, harmless, and undefiled. He brings us, safely, all the way to God Himself. And if we wish to come through Him, to come in a safe manner, two things must be true. First, we must come only in the actions that He has commanded, trusting that this is to come through Him and with Him. Second, we must not come trusting in the manner that we worship but upon the merits and continued work of Christ as He intercedes/mediates in our behalf. Even the layout of their camp, with the particular clans of Levi that were the buffer on their side, would be a reminder when it was time to worship: apart from God's provision of atonement for our sins and of the acceptable way of worshipping Him, wrath would be consuming us like fire for this.

Claim by redemption, v11–20. This first numbering of the Levites is from one year old and upward. It is a reminder that YHWH has actually taken all of Israel for Himself as holy. He shows this in a covenantal way by claiming the firstborn (the beginning of a new generation) as His own. Here, there is a great initiation of this claim, with God taking an actual tribe of people, and then establishing a redemption price for the firstborn, which would then continue.

We no longer have a redeeming of the firstborn. Christ is the firstborn and heir of all. But the covenant sign of baptism, in the Name of the triune God, is also a baptism into the Name of Jesus. It is a reminder that we have been bought at the price of His blood and that this gives us not only the privilege of being joint-heirs with Christ, but also the responsibility of devoting our whole lives to the Lord as purchased persons.

As Egypt learned (and teaches us), to all of humanity, God is Judge of them and their children. To Him belongs even those beasts that are ours in our households. And God killed firstborn men and beasts of the Egyptians. But as the first Passover showed (and teaches us), to His church on the earth, God is deliverer of them and their children. Each generation of the church must embrace this and teach their children this, as they hope in God to give that eternally saving faith that corresponds to this lesson that He has built into our lives.

Mundane service for heavenly worship, v21–37. There was much that had to be done, and we will focus on that more in the next chapter, with the "30 and over" census. But already the families listed in this chapter have their various duties included (v25–26, 31, 36–37). To have it repeated, and expanded upon in detail, drives home how earthy/mundane so much of this is. But it was necessary for the worship of God.

In this, we are reminded that Christian worship is even less earthy. There are earthy things to be attended to: arranging a suitable place, communicating the time, making sure that there is water for baptism or bread and wine for the supper. But our Great High Priest has done the bulk of the earthly work so that we might have more heavenly worship under the administration of His priesthood. The trend to spruce up the sights, sounds, and smells of public worship is fleshly, sensual, and does not do justice to what God has taught us about the priesthood of the Levites, let alone the priesthood of Christ. More on this in chapter 4.

Separation, v38–39. The principle of separation runs through the chapter, even as the passage tracks the western (Gershonite, v21–26), southern (Kohathite, v27–31), and northern (Merarite, v32–37) buffer zones. But it is when we get to the east side, toward Judah, where Moses and Aaron's families camp (v38), that the Lord reminds us again that they are attending to the needs of the children of Israel, because if an outside came near, he was to be put to death.

"Elect" rather than "firstborn", v40–43. It is remarkable that the Lord does not take the firstborn for Himself. Levi himself had not been the firstborn. Isaac was not Abraham's firstborn. Jacob was not the firstborn. Repeatedly, the Lord makes clear that both for eternal salvation and for role/usefulness in the church, He operates upon a principle of free, divine election. Here, He elects Levi for Himself.

Substitution, v40–45. In addition to the biblical/spiritual principle of election, this passage also teaches the biblical principle of substitution. Rather than take the price of redemption from our hand, the Lord is willing to take a suitable substitute in our place. In this case, the price of redemption for a tabernacle laborer is five shekels. But the price of redemption from guilt and wrath is incalculable (cf. Ps 49:6–9). Yet, our God was willing that His Son would become man in order to be our suitable substitute!

Precision and preciousness, v46–51. The number is very close, just 1.2% different! But, we belong to a precise God. He will not overlook the redemption of any individual of His people, just as He will not overlook the full atonement for any one of our sins. In this passage, 1,365 shekels testify to the fact that His precision communicates the preciousness of His people and their redemption.

How can you safely draw near to God? When, especially do you do so? At those times, how do you remember that/how you are safe? In what ways does the Lord have a claim upon your life? How are you responding to that claim? What are some "earthy" things that you can do in order to attend well upon the public worship? But where/how does this worship especially take place? How does "who gets saved" get decided? How was the price for your sin paid? When do you feel like you are unnoticed or uncared about? How does this passage give you 273 reasons not to feel like this?

Sample prayer: Lord, we thank You that You have given us a safe way to draw near to You. Grant that we would offer You heavenly worship through Jesus. And glorify Yourself in Him, by Whom You have paid the full price of our ransom. For, we ask this through His glorious Name, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP116B "I Still Believed" or TPH61B "O Hear My Urgent Cry"

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Numbers Chapter 3. These are God's words. Now, these are the records of Aaron and Moses when you always spoke and Moses of Mount Sinai, These are the names of the sons of Aaron. And adapt. The first point that be who Lasr and deathmar. These were the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests whom he consecrated to ministers priests.

Who died had died before Yahweh when they offered profane fire? Before y'all play in the wilderness to Sinai, and they had no children. So, oh yeah. It's R and death of our Minister just priests. In the presence of her and their father.

Oh no. And Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, bring the tribe of Levi near and present them before Aaron, the priest that they may serve him. And they shall attempt to his needs, and the needs of the whole congregation. Before the Tabernacle of meeting to do the work of the Tabernacle.

Also, they shall attend to all the Furnishings of the Tabernacle of meeting and to the needs of the children of Israel to do the work of the Tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons, and they are entirely given to him. Given entirely to him from among the children of Israel.

So you saw a point Aaron and his sons and they shall attend their priesthood but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death. Then you always spoke to Moses saying. Now behold I myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel.

Therefore, the Levites shall be mine because all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. I Sanctified to myself all the firstborn in Israel. Both man and Beast. They shall be mine. I am y'all. Then you always spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai.

Saying number the children of Levi by their fathers hazards, by their families. Use a number every male from a month old and above So, Moses numbered them according to the word of Yahweh, as he was commanded. These were the sons of Levi, by their names. Gershon kohat and murari.

And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families libny and chame. And the sons of cohet by their families. I'm Ram. Izahar Hebron anduzio. And the sons of morari by their families, Motley and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their father's houses.

From Gershon came, the family of the libnites and the family of the shemites. These were the families of the garshanites. Those who are numbered according to the number of all the males from a month old, and above of those who are numbered. There were 7 500. The families of the Gershmites were to Camp behind the Tabernacle Westward.

And the leader of the father's house of the Garcia. Knights was early asthath son of Lyell. The duties the children of Gershon and the Tabernacular meeting included. The Tabernacle the tent with its covering the screen for the door of the Tabernacle of meeting the screen, for the door of the court, the hangings of the Court, which are around the Tabernacle and the altar.

Their chords according to all the work relating to them. From kohat came, the family of the amramites, the family of the Israits, the family of the heberites, the family of the uzilights. Families of the cohetites. According to the number of all the males from a month old and above.

There were 8 600, keeping charge of the sanctuary. The families are the children of kohat were to camp on the south side of the Tabernacle. And the leader of the fathers has, is the father's house or the families of the covetites was Eliza fan the son of izio. Their duty included the arc, the table, the lamp stand, the altars.

The utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered the screen, and all the work related relating to them. And so yeah, it's our son of Aaron. The priest was And Elliott are some of the Aaron. The priest was to be Chief over the leaders of the Levites. With oversight of those who kept charge of the sanctuary.

From murari came, the family of them hallites and the family of the mushites. These were the families of mirari. And those were numbered according to the number of all the males, From a month old and above or 6200. The leader of the fathers has of the families of morori was zuriel the son of abihail.

These were to camp on the north side of the Tabernacle. And the appointed duty of the children of Morari included, the boards of the Tabernacle, its bars, its pillars. Its sockets. Its utensils. All the work relating to them. And the pillars of the Court all around. With their sockets.

Their pegs and their courts. Moreover, those who were to Camp. Before the Tabernacle on the East before the Tabernacle of meeting where Moses Aaron and his sons Keeping charge of the sanctuary to meet the needs of the children of Israel. But the outsider who came near. Was to be put to death.

All who are numbered of the Levites and Moses. Never numbered by the at the Commandment of Yahweh by their families. All the males from a month old and up and above were 22 000. Always said to Moses. Number all, the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month, old and above and take the number of their names.

And you shall take the Levites for me. I am Yahweh. Instead of all the firstborn, among the children of Israel and the livestock of the Levites, instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel, So, Moses numbered all the firstborn among the children of Israel is.

Yahweh commanded him. And all the firstborn males according to the number of names from a month old and above of those who are numbered of them were 22 273. Then you always spoke to Moses saying. Take the Levites, instead of all the firstborn, among the children of Israel on the livestock of the Levites, instead of their livestock.

The Levites shall be mine. I am Yahweh. And for the Redemption of the 273 of the firstborn of the children of Israel who are more than the number of the Levites, you shall take five shekels for each one individually, you shall take them in the currency of the shekel sanctuary, the shekel of 20 garas.

And you shall give the money with which the excess number of them is redeemed to Aaron and to his sons, So, Moses took the Redemption money from those who were over and above those who were Redeemed by the Levites. From the firstborn of the children of Israel. He took the money.

1 365 shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. And and Moses gave their Redemption money to Aaron and his sons. According to the word of Yahweh. As Yahweh. Had commanded Moses. Let's sends this reading of gods. Inspired and inner worked. Following. The Lord's plan for the Lord's pattern even For the arrangement of his people and especially for how they are to draw near to him, the way we are to be in proximity to him.

Which for us of course now we draw near to him only by faith only in Christ only in Union with him. And he's also, of course, prescribed, the actions. By which we do that in the public workshop. But the arrangement of the Lord's people towards him is a matter of life and death.

Coming to God, only in Jesus is a matter of life and death. And we ought to be deadly serious. Even about the public portion. And come only in those things that God himself has said are the ones that come to him through the Lord? Jesus Christ. This is underlined the beginning of the chapter as he starts The census of the Levites by reminding us.

That nadab and abayou are not included in the census. Not only because they were executed but also because God. Knowing god knowing their disposition towards himself. had providentially prevented them from having any children even before the time. That they were executed. And so the first two, the eldest, two strands, of the Priestly line of the four strands, half the priesthood and the Elder half of the priesthood.

Have been wiped out. before they ever came to be. And so he underlines to us. Just how serious this is. And and he describes then the purpose. Of. The the rest of the camp. As so that no Outsider comes near and dies as we see again?

In verse 10. The Outsider. who comes near shall be put to death and then it's repeated. when you have Aaron and his sons and that would have been at first you'd have 22 000 Basically, in the camps, on the Northwest and South and then just Moses Aaron and his sons on the east side.

but you still had this about a kilometer distance. So you'd have that big open space on the east side, between Moses and Aaron's camp, and the camp of Judah who and the two tribes that were with him, that were on that side and that big open space would also remind them.

This is a matter of survival. God is saving our lives. By. God is saving Our Lives by the regular principle. And the second place you see that God has claimed Those whom he redeems. Of course, we all belong to him because he's created us. This was one of the reasons that the Egyptians were executed And yet.

God adds to his claim upon the Israelites precisely by not executing them. He redeems them the firstborn of the Israelites do not die. The firstborn of the Israelites cattle. Do not die and so, God places a special claim. Upon them and he says, they are mine. And within the, the people of Israel, then he made a particular claim to the firstborn Showing that every household is his The firstborn is the one who is the beginning of a new household.

and so not just that we as individuals are his but that he views his church in household units. and You know, there are different, Households are different sizes but there's one firstborn in each house. And he lays claim to us individually as he redeems us everlastingly.

But he also lays claim to us by household as he redeems us into gathers us into his Covenant to people in the visible church and this of course continues still. The children of Believers are called holy in First Corinthians 7. the question of whether or probably more likely, how many infants were in the various households in the household, baptisms of the New Testament are next to the point, they're beside the point, their household baptisms.

And so the Lord lays claim, of course to everyone, every individual whom he redeems and you feel that in your heart when you rest upon Jesus and are rejoicing in him and realize that you have been bought with a price and you belong to God. You know, as a person from your heart, but also the household covenantally is set apart to God within the church.

And that the Lord displays here. By the claim, made upon the firstborn. And the necessity, then of redeeming the Levites. For the particular work of the Tabernacle in the Church of God. As representatives, then of the whole nation of Israel. Each household in its firstborn. being involved then, in the Tabernacle work, We also see and we'll get into this a lot more next next chapter because the the duties of each of the Levitical tribes is going to be.

Much more specifically detailed, but there is mundane service that is necessary. For the Heavenly worship. There's a lot of setting up and taking down and spices and Fire wood. And animals grain oils and there's just a lot that needs to be done there. And praise God. The great part of the Earthly work and our worship is completed already 2000 years ago just done once so perfectly and so effectually that it never has to be done again.

The Lord Jesus has done. The great part of the great Earthly part necessary. For our Heavenly worship. And indeed our worship is the more Heavenly by being the less Earthly. Which is why if we try to add that which is earthy. And Earthly. we are denying the difference that Christ has made and we are putting ourselves in just the danger.

That we were hearing about earlier in the chapter. But there are some things that have to be done on Earth. We have to gather, it's good for us to think about the place and take good care of the place that we gather. Someone needs to take care of the bread and wine in order that we may partake well of the Lord's supper.

If it's good, that there be the water available to pour for baptism. There is. There are things that need to be done but they should be done with a view towards the heavenliness that they serve. When there's just, there's this principle. That Those whom the Lord put around the Tabernacle in the particular particular camps had duties that corresponded to where they were the principle of Separation, we already.

Covered with the threat of death. finally when we get to this exchange of taking, The fir the Levites instead of the firstborn you see that? God God. teaching us again. The principal. Of his election. The ordinary thing about men is to choose the firstborn God repeatedly stubbornly chooses, someone other than the firstborn.

So, Abraham instead of nahor and Isaac instead of Ishmael and Jacob, instead of Esau And now, The Levites instead of all of the firstborn of Israel. And so there's this principle that God will choose whom he chooses because he is pleased to choose. And it's not based upon.

something. And this is, this is true in election unto life. And it's also true in God's election God's providentially selecting and being pleased to select Those whom he is going to make officers in in his church. And so he gifts them and Grace says them in the ways that are recognizable.

As in first Timothy 3 and Titus 1. And so forth, but there's this principle of election and then there's this principle of substitution We see that the 22 000 are given in place of the 22. and there's also the principle of redemption. 273. further also need to be redeemed so you have substitution and Redemption.

And this is, The service of God in the church. It's not like a levite. was valuable enough that he could be a substitute for someone from the other tribes. and it's not like five shekels is valuable enough. That it could be a substitute percent. This is a substitute for service in the church but it has the principle of substitution to which Psalm 49 verses 6 through 9 say even the richest man is unable to redeem, a single life with his money.

That that life would not go down to the pit. And so we see the principle of substitution. We see the principle of redemption, but we see that only Jesus is valuable enough to be the substitute for everlasting life. And only Jesus is valuable enough to be the purchase price.

For everlasting life. And finally, we see A Precision of God that communicates the preciousness of his people. 22,000 sounds like around number to us. Until the other

number comes out to be. 22. is it 237? I've lost track 273. Sorry 22 273. God is not losing track.

Every last one of those. will be redeemed and so there's there's a meticulous Precision. To what he does here. And it communicates, the preciousness of each individual firstborn, the preciousness of each individual household in his people, even in the visible, God is keenly interested. And pays attention to every single one.

You matter, your household matters to God. He is paying attention to you and he has arranged things specifically. With each of his people in mind and if so, in the visible Church, how much more those elect? At whom he has redeemed, not only, for service in the, in the visible.

But Those whom use everlastingly redeemed for adoption and Glory. In his son. Our Lord Jesus Christ. So again. We camped chapters of the Bible. boring or untheological or impractical at our Peril. There is there are the riches of many of the great truths of the Bible. just in the census of the Levites.

And much application for our lives. And so, the Lord give us. To Rejoice that he has saved us by Christ. And to take our part. in his church, especially Very seriously. As we and our household are a part of Let's pray.

Thank you, Father for Numbers chapter 3. Pray that you would help us. As we meditate in these things, and get ready to hear it. Preached on the Lord's Day evening. We pray that your spirit would be softening our hearts now. And that he would come in power and help us and your whole church.

Your whole congregation in this place when we come to hear it. Preach to be glorified, o God. By what you do in our house and what you do in our congregation. We ask in Jesus name, Amen.