

Numbers 3:1 ¶ These also *are* the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day *that* the LORD spake with Moses in mount Sinai.

Numbers 3:2 And these *are* the names of the sons of Aaron; Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

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

Numbers 3:4 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 Aaron their father.

This chapter focuses on the Levites. Note is made that the record begins with the status of Aaron's family when Moses went up Mt. Sinai to meet with God and receive the commandments.

At that time, Aaron had four sons—Nadab (the firstborn), Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. Aaron, Nadab and Abihu were the first to be anointed to serve in the office of priest. Sadly, Nadab and Abihu, did not see fit to follow the Lord's commands concerning how they were to serve. They chose to offer "strange fire" before the Lord. They had been instructed to use the consecrated altar as the source of fire when offering incense. Evidently, they considered that a minor detail that God would overlook—but they were dead wrong.

That event reveals an important truth; every detail in the word of God is there for a reason. God is very aware of our obedience and/or disobedience—even in what may seem to us to be minor things.

Evidently, when Nadab and Abihu died, Eleazar and Ithamar replaced them. Only the descendants of Aaron were to serve as priests; the rest of the Levites were privileged to serve the priests by taking care of the tabernacle.

Moses notes that Nadab and Abihu had no children.

Numbers 3:5 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Numbers 3:6 Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.

Numbers 3:7 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.

Numbers 3:8 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.

Numbers 3:9 And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they *are* wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel.

Numbers 3:10 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.

It is very clear throughout this record that the source of information flows from the LORD to Moses to the people. Moses was directed to gather together the

tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron as his servants. In other words, for the Levites to serve God in obedience and faithfulness, they were to serve the priests. JFB offered further insight: "The *Hebrew* word 'bring near' is a sacrificial term, denoting the presentation of an offering to God; and the use of the word, therefore, in connection with the Levites, signifies that they were devoted as an offering to the sanctuary, no longer to be employed in any common offices."

Aaron, as the high priest, was the highest authority concerning everything associated with the worship, offerings and sacrifices at the tabernacle. The Levites were to take care of all the furnishings of the tabernacle and serve as directed by Aaron as needed.

As noted previously, only Aaron and his descendants were to serve as priests.

Exodus 30:30 "And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office."

The tribe of Levi is known as the priestly tribe since all priests and those that assisted the priests at the tabernacle (and future temple) were to be from that tribe.

Numbers 3:11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
Numbers 3:12 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;
Numbers 3:13 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.

Again the LORD spoke to Moses declaring that He had taken the tribe of Levi as his portion in place of all the firstborn of Israel that had been spared during the tenth plague that had resulted in the death of all the firstborn Egyptians.

JFB reminds us that the Levites had distinguished themselves when Moses returned from the mountain to find the people worshipping the golden calf.

Exodus 32:26–28 "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men."

Important truth and declaration: I AM THE LORD, the self-existent eternal One.

In other words, I am THE authority in heaven and earth, the only One with the authority and power to command your obedience.

Numbers 3:14 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,
Numbers 3:15 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.
Numbers 3:16 And Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded.

The LORD spoke again to Moses and told him to number the male children ages one month and older of the tribe of Levi. Each individual was to be counted by house and by family.

Numbers 3:17 And these were the sons of Levi by their names; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari.

Numbers 3:18 And these *are* the names of the sons of Gershon by their families; Libni, and Shimei.

Numbers 3:19 And the sons of Kohath by their families; Amram, and Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

Numbers 3:20 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.

This section provides a summary of who was to be included in this census.

Levi's sons: Gershon, Kohath, Merari

Gershon's sons: Libni, Shimei

Libni's family were called Libnites; Shimei's family were called Shimites

Kothath's sons: Amram, Izehar, Hebron, Uzziel

Merari's sons: Mahli, Mushi

Note: Amram was the father of Moses and Aaron.

Numbers 3:21 Of Gershon *was* the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimites: these *are* the families of the Gershonites.

Numbers 3:22 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.

Numbers 3:23 The families of the Gershonites shall pitch behind the tabernacle westward.

Numbers 3:24 And the chief of the house of the father of the Gershonites *shall be* Eliasaph the son of Lael.

Numbers 3:25 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,

Numbers 3:26 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.

The Gershonites numbered 7,500 and were to make camp on the west side of the tabernacle. This was on the same side as the camp of Ephraim.

The recognized leader of the Gershonites was Eliasaph, son of Lael. This family was to take care of the tabernacle tent, the covering, and the hanging for the door. This included the hangings of the court, the curtain for the door of the court and the associated cords.

Numbers 3:27 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.

Numbers 3:28 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.

Numbers 3:29 The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward.

Numbers 3:30 And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites *shall be* Elizaphan the son of Uzziel.

Numbers 3:31 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.

The Kohathites numbered 8,600 and were to make camp on the south side of the tabernacle. This was on the same side as the camp of Reuben.

The recognized leader of the Kohathites was Elizaphan, son of Uzziel. This family was responsible for taking care of the ark, the table of showbread, the candlestick, the altars, the vessels in the sanctuary, the sanctuary hanging, and everything needed to maintain these items.

Numbers 3:32 And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *shall be* chief over the chief of the Levites, *and have* the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary.

It seems that the leaders of the three Levite families were under the direct supervision of Eleazar, son of Aaron, the high priest. It also seems that the sensitive work of the Kohathites required most of his attention.

Numbers 3:33 Of Merari *was* the family of the Mahlites, and the family of the Mushites: these *are* the families of Merari.

Numbers 3:34 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.

Numbers 3:35 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.

Numbers 3:36 And *under* the custody 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,

Numbers 3:37 And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords.

The families of Merari numbered 6,200 and were to make camp on the north side

of the tabernacle. This was on the same side as the camp of Dan.

The recognized leader of this group was Zuriel, son of Abihail. They were responsible for the boards of the tabernacle, as well as its bars, pillars, sockets, vessels and other associated items. This also included the pillars of the court and associated sockets, pins and cords.

Numbers 3:38 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.

Moses, Aaron and his sons (and their families) were to make camp on the east side of the tabernacle. They were directly responsible to the LORD for oversight of the tabernacle and the people. The camp of Judah was also located on the east side of the tabernacle.

Interesting note: The sons of Moses were not singled out for special service.

Once again it is noted that anyone that approached the tabernacle outside of the parameters established by the LORD would be put to death.

Numbers 3:39 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.

The total number of Levite males from one month old upward was 22,000.

One will note that this is 300 off the total obtained when adding the previous totals of the families: 7500 Gershonites + 8600 Kohathites + 6200 from Merari. Once again, this is a minor item that could be accounted for in several ways; and if we are still interested, we can find out why in heaven.

Numbers 3:40 ¶ 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.

Numbers 3:41 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.

Numbers 3:42 And Moses numbered, as the LORD commanded him, all the firstborn among the children of Israel.

Numbers 3:43 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.

The LORD next directs Moses to number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel by name that were one month old and upward. Point is made again that the LORD is going to take the Levites—their sons and cattle—as His own in the place of the firstborn—sons and cattle—from the rest of the tribes.

The total number of names recorded was 22,273. This is obviously a specific total that was not rounded off.

**Numbers 3:44 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
Numbers 3:45 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.**

Numbers 3:46 And for those that are to be redeemed of the two hundred and threescore and thirteen of the firstborn of the children of Israel, which are more than the Levites;

Numbers 3:47 Thou shalt even take five shekels apiece by the poll, after the shekel of the sanctuary shalt thou take *them*: (the shekel is twenty gerahs:)

Numbers 3:48 And thou shalt give the money, wherewith the odd number of them is to be redeemed, unto Aaron and to his sons.

Again, it is reiterated that the LORD is taking the Levites as His for specific service before Him on behalf of the people. The Levites served to redeem the firstborn sons of the rest of the tribes of Israel.

The 273 males that exceeded the recorded total of Levites were to be redeemed at five shekels each according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel = twenty gerahs). The money collected was to be given to Aaron and his sons.

Application: Redemption is necessary for each individual.

Numbers 3:49 And Moses took the redemption money of them that were over and above them that were redeemed by the Levites:

Numbers 3:50 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:

Numbers 3:51 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.

Moses collected the redemption money as instructed, a total of 1,365 sanctuary shekels, and gave it to Aaron and his sons as the LORD had commanded.

Several commentaries make note of the very small number of firstborn sons in relation to the total population as suggested by the numbers reported in the previous chapters. Once again, I am not concerned by such a discrepancy and am certain that if we still care to know in heaven, we can find out. David Guzik suggested the following possibility: "It is more probable that the 22,273 firstborn sons were those born in the thirteen months of the Exodus."