

**Numbers 4:1** ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,  
**Numbers 4:2** Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers,  
**Numbers 4:3** 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.

In this chapter the focus turns to determining the number of men eligible for active service in the tabernacle. It also gets more specific regarding the responsibilities of Aaron and his sons regarding preparation to move the tabernacle.

Moses and Aaron are to make yet another accounting of the descendants of Levi through Kohath by each family to determine the number of males that are 30-50 years old, the age designated as eligible for active service in the tabernacle.

**Numbers 4:4** This *shall be* the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, *about* the most holy things:

**Numbers 4:5** 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:

**Numbers 4:6** 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.

**Numbers 4:7** 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:

**Numbers 4:8** 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.

**Numbers 4:9** 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:

**Numbers 4:10** And they shall put it and all the vessels thereof within a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put *it* upon a bar.

**Numbers 4:11** And upon the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof:

**Numbers 4:12** And they shall take all the instruments 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:

**Numbers 4:13** And they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon:

**Numbers 4:14** 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.

**Numbers 4:15** 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.

The main thing that stands out to me as I read this section is how carefully the items that are set apart as holy before the LORD are to be handled. When it was time for the camp to travel, Aaron and his sons were to cover all the items in the sanctuary in a specific way in preparation for their transport by the Kohathites. The Kohathites were not to touch any of these items except through their coverings.

This made me think about how little we understand today about the importance of reverence and holiness before the LORD. Yes, God is our Father and we can come boldly before Him covered by the blood of Jesus—a very important truth. Sometimes, however, when I sit and meditate on just what that means and who my Father is, I am overwhelmed. At those times I experience a special sense of awe that Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of all my reality and beyond, loves me unconditionally. I really relate to Mercy Me through the lyrics to their song “I Can Only Imagine.”

I can only imagine what my eyes will see  
When your face is before me...  
Surrounded by your glory  
What will my heart feel  
Will I dance for you Jesus  
Or in awe of you be still  
Will I stand in your presence  
Or to my knees will I fall  
Will I sing hallelujah  
Will I be able to speak at all

One of the reasons I am looking forward to heaven is that I will get to experience worship, reverence and obedience without the distractions of this world. I will finally fully understand and experience God’s holiness in the light of His love.

**Numbers 4:16 And to the office 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.**

Aaron’s son Eleazar was given the specific responsibility of taking care of the oil for the light (the candlestick), the sweet incense, the daily meat offering, and the anointing oil as well as maintaining direct supervision of the sanctuary and its associated items.

**Numbers 4:17 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Numbers 4:18 Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites:**

**Numbers 4:19 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:**

**Numbers 4:20 But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.**

These verses seem to be telling Moses and Aaron to be diligent to protect the Kohathites. Carelessness on their part could result in death for one of these servants. Their duties were the most dangerous; they could die for just looking at or touching any of the holy items associated with the sanctuary. To help guard against accidents, Aaron and his sons were to go in and assign the men to specific items. Once again, they were not even to enter the sanctuary until they were sure the items were covered or they would die.

**Numbers 4:21** ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

**Numbers 4:22** Take also the sum of the sons of Gershon, throughout the houses of their fathers, by their families;

**Numbers 4:23** 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.

**Numbers 4:24** This *is* the service of the families of the Gershonites, to serve, and for burdens:

**Numbers 4:25** 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,

**Numbers 4:26** 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.

Moses was instructed to number the descendants of Gershon in the same manner as Kohathites. Their work was easier since they were allowed to touch the things for which they were responsible.

**Numbers 4:27** 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.

**Numbers 4:28** 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.

As with the Kohathites, Aaron and his sons specified the responsibilities of each man. The Gershonites were under the direct supervision of Aaron's son Ithamar.

**Numbers 4:29** As for the sons of Merari, thou shalt number them after their families, by the house of their fathers;

**Numbers 4:30** 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.

**Numbers 4:31** 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,

**Numbers 4:32** 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.**

**Numbers 4:33 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 descendants of Merari were to be numbered in the same manner to determine those eligible for service. These men were also under the direct supervision of Ithamar.

**Numbers 4:34 ¶ 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,**

**Numbers 4:35 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:**

**Numbers 4:36 And those that were numbered of them by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty.**

**Numbers 4:37 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.**

The results of the numbering revealed that there were 2,750 Kohathites eligible to serve in the tabernacle.

**Numbers 4:38 And those that were numbered of the sons of Gershon, throughout their families, and by the house of their fathers,**

**Numbers 4:39 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,**

**Numbers 4:40 Even those that were numbered of them, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers, were two thousand and six hundred and thirty.**

**Numbers 4:41 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.**

There were 2,630 men eligible to serve from the Gershonites.

**Numbers 4:42 And those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers,**

**Numbers 4:43 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,**

**Numbers 4:44 Even those that were numbered of them after their families, were three thousand and two hundred.**

**Numbers 4:45 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.**

The descendants of Merari eligible for service numbered 3,200. I liked this comment from the NIV Commentary concerning the responsibilities of these men, which most would consider grunt work.

“Their work was as important as that of any other family group; for without it the more desirable, prestigious work of the tabernacle could not be done. Hence the Merarites could take an interest even in the placing of a post, a peg, or a rope, not because each of these items is a distinct, suitable “type of Christ,” but because the worship of God could not proceed—nor could the camp move out—unless these people were doing their holy work.”

No work done by one who is serving according to the will of God is unimportant.

**Numbers 4:46 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,**

**Numbers 4:47 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,**

**Numbers 4:48 Even those that were numbered of them, were eight thousand and five hundred and fourscore.**

**Numbers 4:49 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.**

The number of Levites eligible to serve in the tabernacle totaled 8,580.