

Numbers 4-5

Bible Study

Review

Chapter 2

The Israelite camp is being organized to march to Canaan

There will be four groups—with three tribes in each group....making a four square arrangement around the tabernacle—which is in the middle of the camp

The four camps of 3 around the tabernacle will be led by one tribe with their “standard” (flag)

- The tribes will keep this formation as they camp...and as they march

Chapter 3

Describes the position of the Levites around the tabernacle



Camp of the tribes and how they move out

N

Dan
Asher
Naphtali

Levites-Merari

W

Ephraim
Manasseh
Benjamin

Levites-
Gershon

Tabernacle

Aaron
Moses
Aaron's
sons

Judah
Issachar
Zebulun

E

Levites-
Kohath

Reuben
Gad
Simeon

S

Review continued

Chapter 3: Order and duty of the Levites

- Review of the priestly line—only the priests could enter the tabernacle
- Moses, Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar camp to the east of the tabernacle

The tribe of Levi is set apart to serve in other religious responsibilities short of the priestly ministry—they replace the firstborn of Israel who had previously been set aside for service

- A census was conducted of the tribe of Levi
- Levi had three sons: Gershon, Merari and Kohath

Duties of the descendents of Levi in tabernacle movement:

Gershonites—tabernacle fabric materials: tent covering; screen doors; hangings of the courtyard

Merarites—framework: boards; pillars; sockets; bars, pegs and cords

Kohathites—ark of covenant; veil; altars; lamp stand; table of showbread

Numbers 4

v. 1-15
Census of the Kohathites

¹Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:
²“Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their families, by their fathers’ house,
³from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.

A census of males 30-50 years old from the sons of Kohath who come to serve in the work of the tabernacle

- Purpose: to organize the work of dismantling, erecting and transporting of the tabernacle between the Levites

v. 3 “from thirty years old and above”

- The beginning of the designated age for a priest
[Luke 3: 23] “And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age...”

v. 30—50 years of age

Probably because at 30 one had experience and maturity, beyond fifty physical limitations set in

⁴“This *is* the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, *relating to* the most holy things:

The Kohathite tribe was responsible for guarding, maintaining, and transporting the sacred furniture of the tabernacle...the **most holy things**

(Parallel Com.) “Kohath was the second son of Levi, but his descendents are mentioned first here. They were given the most important task in the tabernacle, that of caring for the sacred furniture and vessels.
They may have been chosen for this because both Moses and Aaron were Kohathites.”

⁵When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it.

⁶Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over *that* a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles.

The priests take down the veil and cover the ark...next they cover it with a layer of skins, followed by a covering of blue (violet) cloth: to identify it as the most sacred object

(NIV Application Com) “Coverings on the pieces of sanctuary furniture in transit are color-coded according to whether these items belong in the most holy place, the holy place, or the court.”

“blue” (Heb. *tekelet*)= violet

(TWOT) *tekelet* “denotes colors that spanned the spectrum from brilliant red through deep purple, and ‘blue’ is simply a conventional translation of *tekelet*....”

The best and costliest ancient dyes were the blues, and violets and purples that were made from the secretions of various mollusks.”

⁷“On the **table of showbread** they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and the showbread^f shall be on it.

⁸They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles

v. 7 (last part) “and the showbread shall be on it”

- The bread was to be always on the table in God’s presence



Exodus 25:30

“And you shall set the showbread on the table before Me always”

v.7 A blue (violet) cloth was put on the table first...followed by a scarlet cloth and then the protective badger skins

This was the only furniture item to have a scarlet cloth—making it clearly marked

⁹And they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lamp stand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-trimmers, its trays, and all its oil vessels, with which they service it.

¹⁰Then they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of badger skins, and put *it* on a carrying beam.

v. 10 “a carrying beam”

(JFB) “formed of two poles fastened by two cross pieces, and borne by two men, after the fashion of a sedan chair”

¹¹“Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles.

¹²Then they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in the sanctuary, put *them* in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of badger skins, and put *them* on a carrying beam.

v. 11 ‘golden altar’—incense altar in the holy place

v. 12 The utensils of service associated with the incense altar carried on a frame like they did with the lampstand

¹³Also they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it.

¹⁴They shall put on it all its implements with which they minister there—the fire pans, the forks, the shovels, the basins, and all the utensils of the altar—and they shall spread on it a covering of badger skins, and insert its poles.

v. 13-14 the altar in the courtyard—

After the ashes are taken away...then a purple cloth covers it....put on top of it are the accessories with a leather covering and then the poles inserted

¹⁵And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, 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.

These *are* the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.

The Kohathites carried the “furnishings of the sanctuary” such as the ark, lamp stand, and golden incense altar. But the Kohathites were not allowed to pack and unpack these items. Aaron and his sons, the priests had to do this

(New Int. Com. OT) “Only after Aaron and his sons finished dismantling and covering all the holy things are the sons of Kohath permitted to enter to carry these things.

They are allowed to touch the carrying poles but not the holy things themselves on pain of death”

v. 5 (last part) “the sons of Kohath are to carry”

(Parallel) “The sacred furniture in the tabernacle was to be carried on the shoulders of the Kohathites. Later, heavy wagons drawn by oxen were given to both the Gershonites and Merarites to help them with their labor, but not to the Kohathites [7: 6-9].

Some four centuries later King David would transgress this law with dire consequences when he attempted to bring the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem on a cart.” [II Sam.

¹⁶“The appointed duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *is* the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the daily grain offering, the anointing oil, the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that *is* in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.”

(New Int. Com. OT) “Eleazar, Aaron’s oldest surviving son, is given oversight of four holy things not previously mentioned as well as administrative oversight of the tabernacle and its furnishings....

it is possible that Eleazar himself was responsible for carrying the four holy things since all of them were holy and thus had to be handled only by a priest.”

¹⁷Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

¹⁸“Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites;

¹⁹but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task.

²⁰But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die.”

Aaron and his sons are to take utmost care in packing and unpacking the holy items
...they must be properly prepared before any Levite can even catch a glimpse of them

²¹Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

²²“Also take a census of the sons of Gershon, by their fathers’ house, by their families.

²³From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, all who enter to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.

²⁴This *is* the service of the families of the **Gershonites**, in serving and carrying:

²⁵They shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tabernacle of meeting *with* its covering, the covering of badger skins that *is* on it, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting,

²⁶the screen for the door of the gate of the court, the hangings of the court which *are* around the tabernacle and altar, and their cords, all the furnishings for their service and all that is made for these things: so shall they serve.

Gershonites– “in serving and carrying”: the cloth, fabric and skin items that cover and enclose the tabernacle..they dismantle, load them on wagons and reassemble

²⁷“Aaron and his sons shall assign all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, all their tasks and all their service. And you shall appoint to them all their tasks as their duty.

²⁸This *is* the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting. And their duties *shall be* under the [£]authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

(Tyndale) “The Gershonites and Merarites packed and un packed their parts of the tabernacle themselves, under priestly supervision [v.28,33]

²⁹“As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families and by their fathers’ house.

³⁰From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting.

³¹And this *is* what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets,

³²and the pillars around the court with their sockets, pegs, and cords, with all their furnishings and all their service; and you shall assign *to each man* by name the items he must carry.

³³This *is* the service of the families of the sons of Merari, as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting, under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.”

The duty of the Merarites involved the framework of the tabernacle and the court

(New Int. Com. OT) v. 33 “Ithamar the priest is to oversee each item the Merarites are to load and unload. In Numbers 7: 1-11, which relates events that had taken place on month before, four wagons and eight oxen were given to the Merarites to transport these materials.

Their work consisted in dismantling the framework, etc, packing it on the carts, guarding in on the journey, and reassembling it upon arrival at the destination.”

³⁴And Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers' house,
³⁵from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting;
³⁶and those who were numbered by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty.

³⁷These *were* the ones who were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

v. 36 2,750 Kohathites from 30-50 years of age were numbered for service

(Understanding the Bible Com. Series) “There is a progression of holiness from the Kohathites, who deal with the most holy things central to the tabernacle, and to the Gershonites, and then the Merarites, who have the most external and less holy items.

The degree of holiness for a group is not, however correlated with divine favor. The correlation is more with responsibility and risk.

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

³⁹from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting—

⁴⁰those who were numbered by their families, by their fathers' house, were two thousand six hundred and thirty.

⁴¹These *are* the ones who were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the Lord.

v. 40 The total number of Gershonites for service was 2,630

⁴²Those of the families of the sons of Merari who were numbered, by their families, by their fathers' house,
⁴³from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting—
⁴⁴those who were numbered by their families were three thousand two hundred.

⁴⁵These *are* the ones who 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.

v. 44 The total number of Merarites for service available was 3,200

⁴⁶All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers' houses,
⁴⁷from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who came to do the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle of meeting—
⁴⁸those who were numbered were eight thousand five hundred and eighty.

⁴⁹According to the commandment of the Lord they were numbered by the hand of Moses, each according to his service and according to his task; thus were they numbered by him, as the Lord commanded Moses.

v. 48 The total number of Levities available for service was 8,580

(Und. Bible Com. Series) “The tabernacle and its personnel are now in place and prepared for their tasks.

These instructions seem archaic to modern readers, but the search for ways to order life as God's people has been an issue throughout the history of Judaism and Christianity.”

Chapter 5

Cleansing of the camp—must be kept
from defilement

¹And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

²“Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse.

³You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps **in the midst of which I dwell.**”

⁴And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the Lord spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did.

These verses are an extension of Leviticus 11-15

(Holman) “The Lord reminded Moses to comply with the prohibitions and regulations governing infectious skin disease or other contaminating defilement that threatened the purity of the camp. [v.2]

Once reminded that they need to quarantine those infected from the community [v.3], the Israelites did this—they obeyed [v.4]”

⁵Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
⁶“Speak to the children of Israel: ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in **unfaithfulness** against the Lord, and that person is guilty,
⁷then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give *it* to the one he has wronged.

v. 6 (NIV) “Say to the Israelites: When a man or a woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord, that person is guilty...”

This is another issue leading to impurity in the camp—unresolved personal injury

A situation where when person wrongs another and more of a secret nature not known to the community

v. 5-7 (Holman) “The Lord reintroduced a summary of the laws of restitution he had given in **Leviticus 6:1-7** that deal with offenses resulting in loss. The laws linked such offenses to another with one’s faithfulness to the Lord...

The scope of such truths brings us back to the law of love to one’s neighbor [Lev. 19:18]”

⁸But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for the wrong *must go* to the Lord for the priest, in addition to the ram of the atonement with which atonement is made for him.

⁹Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his.

¹⁰And every man's holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives the priest shall be his.'

“restitution”

(Zondervan Bib. Backgrounds Com.) “The sanctity of the community applies to economic relationships, whereby monetary compensation for fraud or extortion between individuals provides stability and justice in society.”

(Holman) “A new feature [not given in Lev.] to his law in case the wronged party had died...if the victim died without leaving a close relative to realize the benefit of the required restitution, the perpetrator might walk away unpunished.

The new supplemental law left the amount of the loss plus the required 20 per cent to the priest. The offender must also offer the prescribed ram of atonement as a guilt offering. The gifts contributed to the maintenance of the tabernacle and priestly families.”

v. 11-31—Case of a wife suspected of adultery

Important points to understand in this case:

- 1) Dealing with the ancient world—different customs than today's world
- 2) A male dominated society—men controlled legal matters
- 3) Punishment for adultery was death [Lev. 20: 10]

The text:

- A husband suspects adultery
- Whether it was committed or not, he is “jealous” [suspicious]
- Witnesses or evidence is lacking

¹¹And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
¹²“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘If any man’s wife goes astray and behaves **unfaithfully** toward him,
¹³and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself, and *there was* no witness against her, nor was she caught—
¹⁴if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself—

(NSB) “This text can be read as an exceptionally harsh judgment on an unfaithful wife. But there is a sense in which this law ameliorated the harsh realities for a woman in this time period.

A woman could be divorced in the ancient world on the mere suspicion of unfaithfulness. Without limitations of laws such as this, a woman might even have been murdered by a jealous husband just on the suspicion of unfaithfulness.

Here at least there was an opportunity for the woman to prove her innocence before an enraged husband.”



Instead of being brought to the court [with male judges] she will be brought before God for her guilt or innocence to be judged

¹⁵then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it *is* a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance.

¹⁶And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord.

¹⁷The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put *it* into the water.

¹⁸Then the priest shall stand the woman before the Lord, uncover the woman's head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which *is* the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse.

v. 15 “the man shall bring his wife to the priest” ...v. 16 “set her before the Lord”—in the courtyard—for God to judge

v. 15 (last part) (TEV) “an offering from a suspicious husband, made to bring the truth to light”

v. 17 “holy water”= water kept in the holy precincts of the tabernacle (laver)

▪ “dust from the floor of the tabernacle”—enhances the potency of the water

v. 18 “uncover the woman's head”= hair loosened, a sign of mourning

▪ “bitter water that brings a curse”—if guilty

“put her under oath”—two outcomes: guilty or innocent

¹⁹And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, “If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness *while* under your husband’s *authority*, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse.

²⁰But if you have gone astray *while* under your husband’s *authority*, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you” —

²¹then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman—“the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the Lord makes your thigh rot and your belly swell;

²²and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make *your* belly swell and *your* thigh rot.” ‘Then the woman shall say, “Amen, so be it.”

v. 21 “your thigh rot and your belly swell”

(NSB) “symbolically speaks of a miscarriage (of an illicit child) if the woman was pregnant, and an inability to conceive subsequently [v. 28].

In the biblical world, a woman who was unable to bear children was regarded as being under a curse; in this case it would have been true.”

v. 22 “Amen”

(NSB) “is the woman’s strong agreement to the terms of the ritual. If she were innocent, this ritual was the means of her protection. If she were guilty, she would be bringing judgment upon herself.”

²³Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape *them* off into the bitter water.

²⁴And he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her *to become* bitter.

²⁵Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, shall wave the offering before the Lord, and bring it to the altar;

²⁶and the priest shall take a handful of the offering, as its memorial portion, burn *it* on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water.

v. 23 "bitter water"—refers most likely to the effect and not the taste

(NSB) "Bitter water that brings a curse was not a 'magic potion' nor was there some hidden ingredient in the water. The addition of dust from the floor of the tabernacle to a vessel of holy water and the scrapings from the bill of indictment [v.23] were signs of a spiritual reality.

Holy water and dust from the holy place symbolized that **God was the One** who determined the innocence or guilt of the woman who had come before the priest."

²⁷When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her *and become* bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people.

²⁸But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children.

v. 27 “the woman will become a curse among her people”

An adulteress would be childless which was a catastrophe in the ancient world

²⁹'This *is* the law of jealousy, when a wife, *while* under her husband's *authority*, goes astray and defiles herself,

³⁰or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the Lord, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her.

³¹Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt.'"

v. 31 "her guilt"

(NSB) "The gravity of the ritual demonstrates that marital infidelity was regarded as a serious matter in Israel. However, the burden was largely on the woman, probably due to the possible conception of an illegitimate child.

Yet the very provision of this law was a means of limiting unjust accusations made against a faithful wife."

Lessons

God's instructions for packing and transporting the holy items was with care and responsibility

God wants us to treat his sacred items with respect and reverence
The Sabbath and Holy Days
His word of truth

God included a summary of laws of restitution dealing with offenses resulting in loss—to make it right for someone who was wronged

Brings us to the principle of love to one's neighbor [Lev. 19:18]