

**January 20, 2019 - Num 3:1 – 4:16 - Numbering the Levites**  
**Torah Reading: Numbers 3:1 – 4:16 - Numbering the Levites**  
**Psalm 92**  
**Haftarah: Isaiah 45:19 – 46:2, 13**  
**Micah 6:4-11 + 7:14-15**  
**Jeremiah 30:21 – 31:4, 13**  
**Zechariah 10:3-12**  
**Isaiah 66:7-12, 20-23**

### **Numbering the Levites**

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

Rashi - Yet only the sons of Aaron are mentioned. However, they are considered descendants of Moses because he taught them Torah. This teaches us that whoever teaches Torah to the son of his fellow man, Scripture regards it as if he had begotten him - [Sanh. 19b]

Compare Paul in **1 Corinthians 4:15** - "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

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

The Targum of Jonathan adds "disciples of Moses, the master of the Israelites"; none of the posterity of Moses being expressly named.

**Numbers 3:6-8** - "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. 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. 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."

Rashi - "the charge of the children of Israel" - All of them were bound [to take care of] the needs of the Sanctuary, but the Levites were in their stead, as their agents. Thus, in reward, they [the Levites] take tithes from them [the Israelites], as it says, "for it is your reward, in exchange for your service" (Numbers 18: 31). Aaron the High Priest and his sons the priests were in charge of all the Levites, on behalf of the whole people.

**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."

The Levites - given wholly over to Aaron and his sons - were not paid. They received tithes from the people, and in turn, gave tithes of their own to the priests.

## Who are Levites in the Church?

Christ is called "a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" (**Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 7:13-17**) See **Genesis 14:18**

The Tabernacle and its ministries reflect the sacrifice of Christ and the atonement He completed. The Levitical priests carrying out these Tabernacle offerings and other ministries are analogous to the members of the Body of Christ ministering in the church.

All believers now are "a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom" (**1 Peter 2:9**).  
"Through your blood you have made us into priests and kings" (**Revelation 5:10**).

Our ministry is to guard, preserve and present the truths of how Christ has fulfilled the sacrifices and offerings described in the Law once and for all, through our various ministries making use of the gifts and offices of the church listed in the New Testament.

i.e. every believer is a Priest/Levite/minister in one way or another:

Examples of that ministry: Declaring the sufficiency of the blood of Christ's sacrifice, interceding through prayer/incense, giving light through the Lampstand/oil, providing the sustenance of the shewbread, being living sacrifices ourselves on the altar/cross, exhortation to guard Israel's holiness, leading the people in worship and song, etc.

## Ministry

The Levites were primarily "ministers" - in the sense that they carried out the service required for the Tabernacle offerings and services. They were employed in everything from inspecting the wood used in the fire on the altar to carrying water, preparing and cleaning, while the priests (who were also Levites) killed and cut up the sacrifices and manually burned the incense, baked and set out the loaves of the shewbread and lit the Lampstand.

These are mirrored in the offices, ministries and gifts listed in the New Testament. The difference is that we ALL are ministers, and the tasks and gifts are distributed as the Holy Spirit decides.

It includes everything from teaching the scriptures to distributing aid for the poor, hospitality and even serving food. Each job is necessary. Each member of the body is there for a reason.

The greek word for ministry is *diakonia* - where we get the word "deacon."

God has ordained our priestly and Levitical work, the gifts and offices of the church...

- **Ephesians 4:12-13** - "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the

knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"

### **Levites Substituted for the Firstborn**

**Numbers 3:12-13** - "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; 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."

- **Exodus 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."

In the times of the Patriarchs, the firstborn always acted as the priest of the family to offer burnt offerings to God.

Rashi - For [originally] the service was performed by the firstborns, but when they sinned by [worshipping] the [golden] calf, they became disqualified. The Levites, who had not committed idolatry, were chosen in their stead. [Midrash Aggadah]

**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."

Rashi - "From the age of one month and upward": When he is no longer in the category of [possible] premature birth, he is counted among those called, "keepers of the holy charge." R. Judah the son of R. Shalom said: That tribe is accustomed to being counted from the womb, as it says, "whom she bore to Levi in Egypt" ; as she entered the gate of Egypt, she bore her [Jochebed], yet she [Jochebed] was counted as one of the seventy souls. For if you count their total, you find only sixty-nine, but she completed the number. [Mid. Tanchuma , Bamidbar 16]

- **Numbers 26:59** - "And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt: and she bare unto Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister."

**Numbers 3:16** - "And Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded."

Rashi - "according to God's word": Moses said to the Holy One, blessed is He, "How can I enter their tents to know the number of their sucklings?" The Holy One, blessed is He, replied to him, "You do yours, and I will do Mine." Moses went and stood at the entrance to the tent, and the Divine Presence preceded him. A heavenly voice then emanated from the tent, saying, "There are this many babies in this tent." That is why it says, "according to God's word." [Num. Rabbah 3:9]

Interesting insight into God's mercy and the importance of these babies, who despite

their inability to serve, were counted among the Levites. These did not die in the wilderness. Whereas of the generation that died, only the males were counted from 20 years upward.

**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."

These also were from a month old and upward.

The numbers didn't exactly equal. There were 273 children of Israel who required redemption, in excess of the number of Levites.

### **Redemption Money**

**Numbers 3:46-48** - "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; 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:) And thou shalt give the money, wherewith the odd number of them is to be redeemed, unto Aaron and to his sons."

Rashi - "The firstborn among them who require redemption" - these are the two hundred and seventy-three in excess of the Levites; from them you shall take five shekels per head. Such was the sale [price] of Joseph, the firstborn of Rachel, [for the price was] twenty silver pieces [i.e., twenty dinarim, four of which equal a sela]. [Gen. Rabbah 84:18]

A Levite redeemed a firstborn, or freed him from the redemption price, being taken in lieu of him.

But since there were more firstborn than Levites, how was this solved? Who should give the 5 shekels?

Rashi - He [Moses] said, "How shall I do it? If I tell a firstborn to give five shekels, he will tell me, 'I am one of those redeemed by the Levites.'" What did he do? He brought twenty-two thousand slips [of paper] and wrote on them, "Levite." [Then] two hundred and seventy-three slips and wrote on them, "five shekels." He jumbled them and put them into an urn and told them, "Come and take your slips according to lot." [Sanh. 17a]

### **A New Census of the Levites for Service - Numbers 4:1-16**

Here the Levites are numbered from 30 years and up, which was a census for war. Though the Levites were exempted from going forth to war, yet their service was a sort of warfare:

- **1 Timothy 1:18** - "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare"

The Levites set up the tabernacle and took it down, loaded the wagons and carried on their shoulders from 30 years and upwards (Bartenora in Pirke Abot, c. 5. sect. 21.) They actively served only from age 30 to 50. Both John the Baptist and Christ began their ministry at age 30.

This was a numbering to ascertain how many were available to do to actual ministry in caring for the Tabernacle and its furniture.

The order in which this is described is the order of the taking down the Tabernacle for travel - first the Ark, the Veil, the Table of Shewbread and Incense Altar, etc. then the Brazen Altar outside in the courtyard.

**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:"

They could go into the Holy Place without danger because the Shekinah glory in the cloud had left and was on the move. But could actually take down the Veil and cover the Ark without ever seeing it.

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

"ashes" may mean the embers. They were to collect the living embers before the altar was removed, in order to keep alive the sacred fire. Tradition says the fire was to be continually burning.

Rashi - This was the brazen altar. The fire that descended from heaven (Leviticus 9:24) crouched under the cloth like a lion during their travels, but it did not burn it because they covered it with a large copper pot.

Aaron and his sons covered up the Ark and all the furniture, then the Kohathites came to carry them on the journey.

No mention is made of the Laver. The Septuagint does, though, and adds "and they shall take a purple cloth and cover the laver, and its base, and shall put it into a covering of skin of a blue color, and put it upon bearers."

Perhaps the reason why this is not mentioned is because the Laver was carried uncovered to serve as a visible, ever springing fountain available for Israel's cleansing. God's purifying word is always available - *Gill's Exposition*

Interestingly, no dimensions were ever prescribed for the Laver, nor are we told the quantity of water it contained, indicting an unlimited provision.

