

**January 27, 2019 - Num. 4:17 – 5:10 - Responsibilities for Tabernacle Travel**  
**Torah Reading: Numbers 4:17 – 5:10 - Responsibilities for Tabernacle Travel**  
**Psalm 93**

**Haftarah: Zephaniah 3:7-15, 20**

**Isaiah 56:5-**

**Malachi 2:3-10 + 3:3-4**

**Isaiah 52:1-10**

**1 Kings 8:31-39 +58**

## **The Kohathites**

**Numbers 4:17-20** - "And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites: 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: But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die."

Targum of Jonathan: "give no occasion, or be not the cause of their cutting off..."

### **What was the danger?**

1. If the Kohathites saw the Tabernacle vessels and furniture in their transition from sacred objects to simply burdens to be carried, they might lose the awe of God and consider the sacrifices and rituals of the Tabernacle service as simply liturgical and without spiritual meaning, as did the later generation that went into exile. The spirit of the Law would be lost in obeying only the letter.
2. If their intimate handling of the sacred objects induced them to feel equal or superior to their Levitical brethren the sons of Aaron, they might - even through innocent spiritual longing for closeness to God - want to make themselves priests as well.

They would be in danger of "rising above the cloud" like the angels who fell, and seeking things higher than their place.

- **Psalm 115:16** - "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men."

The terrible awe and fear of the Lord was essential to preserving the true meaning of the Tabernacle itself - containing a picture of the grace of the Messiah, although it was hidden to most until Jesus came to explain that the Law prophesied of Him.

- **Ephesians 3:4-5** - "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit"

Both these dangers were probably in play at the rebellion of Korah, who was leader of

the Kohathites (**Numbers 16**). This passage is a foreshadowing of that disaster.

Genuine spiritual aspirations can easily lead right into prideful jealousy:

See **Mark 9:33-35** - "And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed (dialegomai) among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."

The rabbis said that Aaron, like the Ark itself, was designated "most holy."

- **1 Chronicles 23:13** - "The sons of Amram; Aaron and Moses: and Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons for ever, to burn incense before the Lord, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name for ever."

The Jewish translation has "he was separated, that he should be sanctified as most holy."

To see or touch the Ark would mean you were in the presence of God, but as a sinner, defiling holy ground. The priests could only enter with the blood of the sacrifice:

- **Hebrews 9:7** - "But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people"

Only the priests - Aaron's sons - could go into the Holy Place. Only the High Priest was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies, and that only one time at Yom Kippur.

So how did they pack everything up?

Either the rules were relaxed for travel, or more likely, the priests took the veil off its hooks and enveloped the Ark without looking at it - thereby simply reducing the dimensions of the Holy of Holies to only the size of the Ark itself. The actual dimensions of the Holy of Holies, remember, were never given, probably for this reason.

Recall that it was forbidden to touch or look into the Ark.

**1 Samuel 6:19-20** - "God struck down some of the people of Beth-shemesh because they looked inside the ark of the LORD. He struck down seventy men, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck them with a great slaughter. The men of Beth-shemesh asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God?"

See also Uzzah, who reached out to steady the Ark and was killed: in **2 Samuel 6:1-7** and **1 Chronicles 13:9-12**. The ark had stayed for a period of time at Abinadab's house (**2 Samuel 6:3**), where his sons, Uzzah and Ahio, may well have become accustomed to its presence. Sometimes "familiarity breeds contempt."

Even when the Kohathites were carrying the Ark, everyone else had to stay about 1,000 yards away from it:

- **Joshua 3:4** - "Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore."

### **Numbers 4:21-28 - The Service of the Gershonites**

Aben Ezra interprets their charge to be the setting up the tabernacle, making the bread (the shewbread), slaying (the sacrifices), and keeping, that is, watching and guarding, the tabernacle; and when journeying, bearing and carrying the things assigned to them - 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, 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...

Note - badger's skins = *tachash* - LXX has "hyacinth" or blue color. According to Josephus, these were goatskins dyed blue: "Great was the surprise of those who viewed these curtains from a distance, for they seemed not at all to differ from the color of the sky."

### **Numbers 4:29-34 - The Service of the Sons of Merari**

**Numbers 4:31-32** - "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, 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."

### **God's Provision is Always Perfect**

Though the service of the Kohathites and Gershonites were the lightest, and what was committed to them the easiest to carry, they had the fewer hands of able men to be employed, though their numbers of individuals were the greatest; and the Merarites, who had the smallest number of males, yet having the heaviest work to do in carrying burdens, loading and unloading wagons, were superior to the rest in their number of able bodied men; and thus God makes good his promise, that as the day of his people is, their strength shall be; whatever work and service God calls men to, he will fit them for it.

### **Numbers 5:1-10 - The Holiness of the Camp**

This passage repeats some of the rules stated earlier in Leviticus.

There were three camps, according to Rashi: between the curtains was the camp of the Shechinah, or the divine Majesty; the encampment of the Levites round about that; and from there to the end was the "camp of the standards," to the four winds, which was the camp of Israel; and the leper was to be put out of them all. Everyone that had an issue could be in the camp of Israel, but was to be put out of the other two camps. Whoever is defiled by the dead might go into the camp of the Levites, according to Rashi; and was to be put out of only the camp of the Shechinah.

But this goes against the plain meaning. The whole camp is meant.

The type was that these were pictures of different aspects of sin afflicting humanity, and that without cleansing and sacrifice, they could not remain in the presence of God.

Aben Ezra observes, that this was done immediately before they journeyed, and that those that were defiled journeyed between the standard of Ephraim and the standard of Dan; but this, he says, was by way of conjecture.

### **Confession of Sin**

**Numbers 5:7** - "Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed."

Traditionally the confession was: "O Lord, I am guilty of death, I have deserved to be stoned for this sin, or to be strangled for this trespass, or to be burnt for this crime, etc."

This is not an apology, or a justification, or simply admitting something or saying "if I have offended anyone...", or "my actions were a distraction from our main concerns..." Confession names the trespass and those it has harmed, and what the deserved punishment should be.

- **Psalm 32:3** - "I kept my sin in and my bones wasted away".

- **Proverbs 28:13** - "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

In Christ, confession leads to forgiveness.

- **1 John 1:9** - "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

— **1 John 2:2** - "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

- **James 5:16** - "Confess your sins to one another ... that you may be healed."

David left us a pattern for full confession about his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah:

- **Psalm 51:1-5** - "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

### **Recompense of Trespass**

The rabbis said if there are witnesses of it he must add two fifths, and some say a fifth of a fifth.

**Numbers 5:8** - "But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the LORD, even to the priest; beside the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him."

The rabbis said could only really apply to a proselyte, who had no other family members within Israel. If he dies, then the recompense goes to the priest.

**Numbers 5:10** - "And every man's hallowed things shall be his: whatsoever any man giveth the priest, it shall be his."

Targum of Jonathan: "his personally, who officiates, or to whom the gift is given, and is not to be divided among the other priests in the course."

### **Jesus Between the Cherubim**

See <https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/52/52-4/JETS%2052-4%20731-746%20Lunn.pdf>

**John 20:12** - "[Mary] saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and one at the feet."

Like the priests who wrapped the Ark in its covering veil, and then the Kohathites carried it (**Numbers 4:5**) - Jesus body was taken down from the cross, and wrapped in grave clothes (**John 19:40**) and then carried to the tomb.

Although only the priests could see or touch the Ark or the other Tabernacle objects in the Holy Place, Peter and John "went in and saw" using Greek words used by the LXX to translate the same actions prohibited to the Kohathites. Peter and John (and all believers) were considered to have the privileges of the priesthood.

Just as the glory of God appeared between the Cherubim, Mary "looked back" and saw

Jesus framed at the tomb's entrance between the two Angels.

The Kohathites were warned "they are not to touch the holy things or they will die." When Mary encountered the risen Lord, He said to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (**John 20:17**). The Greek suggests that Mary was already touching Him when He said this - more like "stop touching me."

Recall that Jesus referred to his body as the Temple (**John 2:21**).

The Ark is then seen in Heaven by John in **Revelation 11:19**.

Jesus also refers to His disciples: "they were yours but you gave them to me" (**John 17:6**) and "those whom you have given me." This corresponds to God taking the Levites for Himself, and then giving them to Aaron

"You shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel." (**Numbers 3:9**)

Judas - the "son of perdition" who perished, would have been recognized by the disciples as corresponding to Korah, the Kohathite who rebelled against Moses and Aaron.

Jesus tells Mary to "Go to my brothers." (**John 20:17**) just as God tells Aaron "Bring with you also your brothers, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined to you and serve you." (**Numbers 18:2**)

Christ's ascension uses the word for ascending that is also used for the burnt offering - whose smoke ascends to God in acceptance.