

Numbers Chapter 3 Continued

Verses 33-37: "Merari": The Merarites numbered 6200 males and were responsible for the wooden framework of the tabernacle. They were to camp north of the tabernacle.

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

So called from his two sons Mahli and Mushi (Num. 3:20).

"These are the families of Merari": The youngest son of Levi (Num. 3:17).

In the last lesson, we had begun the genealogy of the Levites. This is a continuation of that.

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."

Of the above two families.

"According to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were six thousand and two hundred. 6,200 men; the least number of them all.

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."

I think it should rather be rendered, "and the chief of the house", that is, of the Merarites, "the father to the families of Merari". The common father to them all, having the chief authority and power over them, and so in (Num. 3:24).

"Was Zuriel the son of Abihail": Of whom we read nowhere else, nor is it certain of which family he was, whether of the Mahlites or Mushites.

"These shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle northward": To the left of it, between that and the camp of Dan.

This again is speaking just north of the tabernacle, and between the tabernacle and the tribe of Dan. Only the Levites were allowed to camp near the tabernacle.

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,"

Both of the Holy and the most Holy Place, which were the walls of the tabernacle, and which were covered with curtains. These when taken down for journeying were committed to the care of the Merarites. And because these, with what follow, were a heavy carriage, they were allowed

wagons to carry them. And who on this account had more wagons given them than to the Gershonites, for the Kohathites had none (Num. 7:6).

"And the bars thereof": Which kept the boards tight and close (see Exodus 26:26).

"And the pillars thereof": The pillars on which the vail was hung, that divided between the Holy and most Holy Place. And, on which the hanging was put for the door of the vail (Exodus 26:32).

"And the sockets thereof": In which both the boards and pillars were put (Exodus 26:19).

These were the boards that were used with the curtains. This tribe of Merari had nothing to do with the curtains. It was their duty to carry the boards. They also were in charge of the sockets, which held the curtains together. They not only carried the boards, but were responsible for them being erected, when they stopped and set up the tabernacle.

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

Of the great court which went round the tabernacle, on which pillars the hangings were hung.

"And their sockets": Into which the pillars were put. Of both (see Exodus 27:9).

"And their pins, and their cords": The pins were fixed in the ground, and the cords fastened the hangings of the court to them. Whereby they were kept tight and unmoved by the winds (see Exodus 27:19).

This is speaking of the smaller items; they were responsible for. The tabernacle could not be put together without these items that connected them.

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": Moses and Aaron and his sons were given the place of honor on the east of the tabernacle and gave overall supervision to the Levites. Eleazar oversaw the Kohathites (3:32), and Ithamar oversaw the Gershonites and Merarites (4:28, 33).

The eastern gate was a place of prominence. This is where the entrance to the tabernacle was located. Moses, Aaron, and their families were responsible for the tabernacle and the people. Since Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons would be in the tabernacle often, it was necessary for them to be on this side. The tabernacle is like our church today. Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons are like the ministerial staff. This would even include the board of directors. Notice however, you could not have a church without those who took care of the physical preparation of the church for services.

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."

Whence it appears, that Moses was not alone, but Aaron with him, in numbering the Levites, and that by the appointment of the Lord. The word "Aaron", in the Hebrew text, has a dot on every letter, for what reason it is not certain. The word itself is left out in the Samaritan and Syriac versions.

"All the males, from a month old and upward, were twenty and two thousand": 22,000 men. But by putting the sums together they amount to three hundred more. For of the Gershonites there were 7,500, and of the Kohathites 8,600, and of the Merarites 6,200; in all 22,300. Which difficulty some endeavor to remove by saying, as Aben Ezra observes, that the Scripture takes a short way, mentioning the thousands, and leaving out the hundreds.

We can easily see from the 22,000 males from 1 month old and upward, that the Levites were by far the smallest of the tribes. If we added the three groups together of the Levites who were counted, we would have 22,300. This is not a serious discrepancy. This is just an error in addition by someone. It is a possibility that the 300 were firstborn of the ministering staff, and were not counted.

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."

After he had taken the number of the Levites.

"Number all the firstborn of the children of Israel, from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names". That they might be compared with the number of the Levites, and the difference between them observed.

We remember the firstborn belong to God. They must be purchased back from God. This counting was to determine the tax of the silver shekel as redemption money.

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."

For his service, to minister to his priests, and serve in his tabernacle.

"I am the Lord": Who has a right to all, and can claim who he pleases for himself in a special manner, and therefore could and did take the Levites to himself.

"Instead of the firstborn among the children of Israel": These he had taken to him before, and ordered to be sanctified unto him. And for whom a redemption price was paid to his priests for the support of them, and the tabernacle service. And now it was his will to make an exchange of these for the Levites.

“And the cattle of the Levites, instead of all the firstling among the cattle of the children of Israel”: Every firstling of clean cattle was the Lord's, and given to his priests. And the firstlings of unclean cattle were redeemed with a lamb, and which were given to the same. And now instead of these he requires the cattle of the Levites. Not that they should be deprived of their use of them, or that they should be taken and sacrificed, but that they should be with them devoted to him, and they should possess them in his right.

The Levites were not just in the service to the Lord, but belonged to Him in the fullest sense. Even their cattle were taken for the tabernacle instead of being their own private property. This paid for the firstborn cattle of the twelve tribes.

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

No doubt assisted by others, though not mentioned.

"All the firstborn among the children of Israel": Which some think was only those that were born since they came out of Egypt, as Bonfrerius, Bishop Patrick, and others.

Since this was a matter of the tabernacle, Moses took care of the counting.

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."

“Twenty and two thousand two hundred and threescore and thirteen”: This was the total number of Gershonite, Kohathite, and Merarite males born in the 12-1/2 months since the Exodus. The Levites took the place of the first 22,000 firstborns, and the rest (273), were redeemed with 1,365 silver shekels.

This is the firstborn of all of the tribes, and not just of the Levites. Those numbered were 22,273. This is a terribly short number for the firstborn of so large a group of people. Either this was for the babies who were firstborn, or there should be a larger number. If this were all the firstborn of all the Israelites, they would have to have an average of 70 people in one family. Possibly, this is speaking of the young males who are not fathers themselves. This is one of those mysteries of the Bible, that we will not know absolutely.

Numbers 3:44 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

After the number was taken, and gave him directions what to do upon it.

"Saying": As follows.

We see again, that The LORD is still speaking to Aaron and the people through Moses at this point.

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."

The Lord had declared before that he had taken them, and now he bids Moses take them. Who had numbered them, and give them to Aaron, instead of the firstborn. Whose numbers were also taken for this purpose.

"And the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle": But not to be given to Aaron and his sons, or to the priests for their use, but to remain with the Levites for their use. Who were now separated from the other tribes, and taken into the service of God. And as they were dedicated to God, so their cattle likewise for their support as his ministers.

"And the Levites shall be mine": In a special manner his, being devoted to his service.

"I am the Lord": Who had a right to do this, and expected to be obeyed in it.

This is the law of substitution. Jesus became our substitute on the cross. We deserved the penalty of the cross, and Jesus paid the penalty in full for us. The Levites here, are the substitute for the firstborn males of Israel.

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;"

With money, there being not Levites enough to answer to them, and exchange for them.

"Of the two hundred and threescore and thirteen of the firstborn of the children of Israel, which are more than the Levites": For the sum total of the Levites, as given, was but 22,000 (Num. 3:39). Whereas the sum total of the firstborn of Israel were 22,273 (Num. 3:43). So that there were, two hundred seventy-three more of the latter than of the former. And what was to be done with these next follows.

We see from this, that there was not an error in counting the firstborn. We just did not understand what age group were counted. The Levites were almost the same number as the firstborn of all Israel. This is saying there were 273 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:)"

Or head; every firstborn, or his parent for him, was bound to pay five shekels. And which was afterwards settled as the price of such a redemption (Num. 18:16).

"After the shekel of the sanctuary shall thou take them": Being full weight according to the standard there kept.

"The shekel is twenty gerahs" (see notes on Lev. 27:25).

A shekel is 10 dwt (a pennyweight, abbreviated dwt). In this case, this is silver. Five shekels would be 50 dwt. of silver. The price of redemption of one male would be 50 dwt of silver. "Silver" means redemption. The number 50 is the number of jubilee, or set the captives free. You can see the spiritual significance of this. Each person redeemed had to pay 5 shekels of silver.

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."

Or the superfluous number, the number of them that exceeded the Levites, namely, two hundred seventy three. The price of their redemption is ordered to be given.

"Unto Aaron, and to his sons": Since the Levites were taken in lieu of the firstborn, whose redemption money belonged to the priests. And seeing the Levites were given to Aaron and his sons on that consideration, and there being a deficiency of them to answer to the firstborn, it was but right and just that the redemption price of the superfluous number should be paid to them.

This appears that the 50 dwt. of silver for each firstborn over the number of the Levites (273), should be given to Moses and Aaron personally.

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

Of five shekels per head.

"Of them that were over and above redeemed by the Levites": Or were more than those redeemed by them. A Levite redeemed a firstborn, or freed him from the redemption price, being taken in lieu of him. 22,000 Levites were answerable to 22,000 firstborn of Israel. But as there were no more Levites than the above number, there remained two hundred seventy three firstborn to be redeemed by money, and it was the redemption money of these Moses took.

This amounted to 13,650 dwt. of silver that was given to Moses and Aaron personally.

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:"

This was paid in silver coins called shekels. They received 1,365 shekels for the redemption money.

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."

That were redeemed this way, and not by Levites, as in (Num. 3:49), but by money, paying five shekels a head.

"Unto Aaron and his sons": To whom the Levites were given. And this money, as a recompense for the deficiency of the number of them, to answer to the firstborn exchanged for them.

"According to the word of the Lord (Num. 3:48).

"As the Lord commanded Moses": So did he, being a faithful servant in all things in the house of God. He did not convert it to his own use, or to any other use than to what God had appointed it.

This again, does not specifically say what they did with this money they received from Moses. We can possibly safely assume this money was used in the service in the sanctuary. Moses we know, did not keep any for his own personal use out of this specific money. We do know, there were expenses incurred in operating the tabernacle. The families of the Levites were compensated by God for their service to Him. Aaron and his family lived off the offerings made in the tabernacle.

Numbers Chapter 3 Continued Questions

1. How many were numbered of the tribe of Merari?
2. Who was chief of the tribe of Merari?
3. Where was the tribe of Merari to camp?
4. What were they in charge of?
5. Who encamped at the east of the tabernacle?
6. How is the tabernacle like our church today?
7. What was the total number of Levites numbered?
8. The firstborn of Israel was to be numbered from what age?
9. Why were they numbering the firstborn?
10. The Levites were not just in the service of the LORD, but in fact, _____ to Him.
11. Why did Moses do the counting?
12. How many firstborn were counted?
13. What size family would the Israelites have to have, for this to be an accurate accounting of all the firstborn of Israel?
14. What law is verse 45 speaking of?
15. What is the very best example of this law in the Bible?
16. How many more of the firstborn were there, than the Levites?

17. What was the price of redemption?
18. The shekel is _____.
19. A shekel is _____ dwt.
20. How many dwt. of silver was the price of redemption?
21. "Silver" means _____.
22. Who got the silver for the extra firstborn?
23. How many dwt. of silver was given to Moses and Aaron?
24. What did Moses do with the silver?
25. What can we safely assume the silver was used for?