

## NUMBERS 8:1-26 (ACCEPTABLE TO SERVE)

Today's passage speaks of the purification of the Levites, readying them for service. There are several things they were required to do, and we will go through them as we go along. However, if you noticed, they were all externals. Sprinkling of water, shaving of hair, and washing of clothes. We'll see how these point to spiritual truths, but it is obvious, even before we start, that none of those things could make a person pure in the truest sense.

Monks of all religions do things like this. Muslims wash themselves in certain ways before praying. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find any religion that doesn't perform some type of external ritual that doesn't really do anything to change the person internally. Were it not for the truths which point to Christ, it almost seems like it's all just an outward show without any real significance.

We're told later, in Hebrews, that the sacrifices of the Old Covenant didn't actually do what they were intended to do. After all, it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. But the people were not left without warnings that the externals needed to be met with internal conviction.

Further, as the Bible goes on, it is explicitly stated that things like circumcision of the body needed to be matched by circumcision of the heart. That is found as early as Deuteronomy 10. Eventually, the prophets started to really call out that things like rote sacrifices without holy living were useless, and even an abomination to the Lord. Were those things written just for Israel? Or are they written for us as well?

**Text Verse:** "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that

the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16, 17

Paul says that “All Scripture” is given to us as he then describes. But what was he writing about? There was no New Testament at that time. The only New Testament consisted of the letters of the apostles that had been written, but other than Peter elevating Paul’s letters to the same level of authority as the rest of Scripture, the only Scripture that actually existed at the time is the body of writings we now call the Old Testament.

Numerous times the New Testament says, “It is written,” or something comparable to that, when speaking of the Old Testament. Everything found there was to lead us to understand how we are to conduct ourselves now. That includes the idea of purification and holiness as is outlined there.

If we go through the motions of living an externally pious life, but don’t match that up with a life that is morally pleasing to the Lord, we are far worse off than a person who lives a rather rugged life, but who desperately loves the Lord and mourns when he falls short. The difference between King David and the high priest Caiaphas is obvious.

The Levites were purified for service, and that service continued on for 1500 years, but during that time, they fell into the same error as everyone else. If you don’t believe it, take time to read Ezekiel 44. What we need to do is to constantly evaluate ourselves in relation to that internal call for holiness that the Lord has given us. And we need to not assume that because someone is behind a pulpit, or wears a fancy set of garments, that they are holy. As soon as you start idolizing such a person, they will let you down.

Keep all things in their proper perspective, hold fast to what is sound, and understand that things, like we will see today, do nothing in making a person holy unless they have an internal change to accompany the rite through which they pass. In fact, as we read and look into these verses,

keep reminding yourself that some of the same people who are being set apart for the ministry will be rebelling against Moses and Aaron, and thus against the Lord within the span of just a few weeks. Remember these things as we go on. It's all to be found in His superior word. And so let's turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

### **I. Arrangement of the Lamps (verses 1-4)**

#### **<sup>1</sup> And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:**

The census has been conducted, the camp has been laid out, the offerings have been presented, and now a new direction is forthcoming as evidenced by these words of verse 1. When the words of this section were actually spoken is unknown.

It could even be at the same time as verse 7:1 which spoke of the day when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle and had anointed it and everything in it. However, the placement of the words here has purpose. The gift offerings of the tribes have been made for the priest's use, and what follows will be the actual purification and dedication of the Levites. In between these two events, the Lord places the instructions concerning Aaron's duties in relation to the menorah...

#### **<sup>2</sup> "Speak to Aaron, and say to him, 'When you arrange the lamps,**

Moses is told to speak to Aaron. It is he who is to arrange the lamps. Aaron is the high priest, and the high priest was to be a type of Christ to come. The description for making the menorah is found in Exodus 25. The instructions for its care are found in Exodus 27. The first lighting of it was accomplished by Moses in Exodus 40:25. It could be that these instructions now were given to Moses prior to that. Or maybe they came later. Either way, the

instruction that Aaron was to tend the lamps has already been given, but now come these directions concerning the lamp's arrangement. As this is so, one must ask, "Why place it here?"

An obvious answer would be that the camp is only now laid out in the shape of the cross. Thus it would be a reference to the light having been in the world, but that it was only seen for what it was at a specific time. If so, then that is what John is referring to concerning the Light, meaning Christ, coming into the world in John 1. The light had always shone in the darkness, but there is a time when the light came forth for all to see. Christ Jesus is our High Priest, and His work of illumination to even the darkest parts is being pictured by the instructions now presented to Aaron.

<sup>2</sup> (con't) **the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand."**

*b'ha-alotekha eth hanerot* – the words say, "In causing the lamps to rise." The meaning is that when the lamps are lit and the light shines, then they are to shine *el mul pene ha'menorah yairu shivat hanerot* – over-against face the menorah shall shine seven the lamps. The Hebrew is complicated and translations vary.

Exodus specified that the menorah was to be on the south side of the tabernacle, across from the table of showbread. Further, they were to give light in front of it, meaning towards the north. These instructions are not just a repetition, but they are more specific in how they are to be arranged. They are to cast light towards the north where the table of showbread was.

However, being in the south, it would illuminate from east to west as well as to the north. But facing the north where the table was, there would be no darkness there, it would be fully illuminated. Christ is the Bread of life. It is through His death that we partake of Him. Thus, the layout of the camp as a cross, showing how Christ died, is the sign. The menorah, lighting up the north then pictures the seven-fold illumination of Christ, meaning the seven

Spirits of God, shining even in the darkest places, even to death itself, and which the darkness cannot overcome, as stated in John 1:5.

**<sup>3</sup> And Aaron did so; he arranged the lamps to face toward the front of the lampstand, as the Lord commanded Moses.**

Some scholars say that this actually goes back to the initial lighting and care of the lamp in Exodus 40. However, Aaron was not yet ordained to conduct those duties. It was Moses who originally lit them. After his ordination, Aaron assumed this responsibility. But again, regardless as to when Moses instructed Aaron, this is noted now because of the logical progression of thought which has been seen in the layout of the camp, the purification of it, the acceptance of the offerings, and so on. Each step, whether chronological or not, is purposeful as to where it is placed in the narrative. Aaron, as the high priest, is typical of Christ who performs all of these things.

**<sup>4</sup> Now this workmanship of the lampstand *was* hammered gold; from its shaft to its flowers it *was* hammered work. According to the pattern which the Lord had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.**

The details of this were given in Exodus 25. The pictures of Christ which it reveals are many. The repetition of what has already been stated there is to remind us of that, and to consider it in light of what Israel represents. They were to be a light to the world. They are being prepared for their journey to the land of promise. Almost everything is set. And so now, prior to the purification of the Levites – those who minister between the high priest and the people – the description of the menorah is once again given. The light of Christ, given by God's High Priest, is to illuminate even the darkest places. It is reflective of what is quoted by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:47 -

“I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,  
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.” Acts 13:47

*The purest of gold, fit for a King  
Was used to make a seven-branch lampstand  
Seeing its beauty makes my heart sing  
The workmanship marvelous; stunning and grand  
Every detail is so beautiful, each knob and flower  
The glistening of the branches as they catch the light  
It shines in the dark for hour after hour  
Illuminating the holy place throughout the night  
The glory of God is seen in each detail  
Every branch speaks out a marvelous story  
And in what it pictures, nothing will fail  
As the Lord reveals to us His unending glory*

## **II. The Purification of the Levites (verses 5-26)**

**<sup>5</sup> Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:**

With the matter of verses 1-4 established, the narrative returns to the Levites. In Chapters 3-5, they were called, their genealogies were recorded, they were dedicated in place of the first born, they were counted, and they had their duties assigned. Now they are to be purified and ordained for their service. There is a difference here and in that of Leviticus 8. The priests were consecrated for their service. Here, the Levites are purified, but they are not consecrated.

If we were to look at the reason for this following the previous passage about the menorah, it is to show that Christ is the One who is the Light, and through Him, the Spirit of God is given, just as the job of lighting the lamp belonged to Aaron. However, the Levites are given to accomplish the other,

non-priestly duties. This is similar to how ministers in the church stand before the Lord and are to do those duties as He commands them in His word.

**<sup>6</sup>“Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially.**

In Exodus 29:1, the term used was *qadash*, or consecrate, the priests. Here the word *taher*, or purify, is used of the Levites. The law of the firstborn being dedicated to the Lord was traded for the calling of the Levites to be so dedicated.

**<sup>7</sup>Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean.**

There are three things which were to be accomplished in the purification of the Levites. The first is to sprinkle the *me khatat*, or “sin water,” on them. The speculation on what this water is, or where it comes from is long and detailed. It is probably not the *me nidah khatat*, or water of separation, described in Numbers 19. That water was specifically intended to purify the sin of those who had been defiled by a dead body. This water symbolically purifies the Levites from sin, and so it was probably taken from the bronze laver. But this is also only speculation. As the Bible doesn’t explain its source, we cannot be dogmatic about it.

Secondly, the Levites were to “shave all their body.” They were to use a razor over *kal basar*, or “all the flesh.” Hair in the Bible signifies awareness. Also, the flesh is that which is opposed to the spirit. As this is a cleansing from sin, it is symbolic of removing all awareness of sin from oneself in order to live in the Spirit.

And thirdly, they were to wash their clothes. It is an external act, signifying purification. These rites picture the work of Christ. One example of this is recorded in the book of Hebrews where it says –

“...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful.” Hebrews 10:22, 23

The washing of the garments is an emblem of the internal conversion of a person. It symbolizes a sinless nature because of the work of Christ. On the last page of the Bible we read –

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.” Revelation 22:14

This symbolic purification of the Levites will be more perfectly realized in the millennial reign when there will again be offerings in Judah and Jerusalem. This more perfect purification is prophesied in Malachi 3 –

“But who can endure the day of His coming?  
And who can stand when He appears?  
For He *is* like a refiner’s fire  
And like launderers’ soap.  
<sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;  
He will purify the sons of Levi,  
And purge them as gold and silver,  
That they may offer to the Lord  
An offering in righteousness.  
<sup>4</sup> “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem  
Will be pleasant to the Lord,  
As in the days of old,  
As in former years.” Malachi 3:2-4

**<sup>8</sup> Then let them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull as a sin offering.**

This is the same offering that was required for various sacrifices in Leviticus, a *par ben baqar*, or “bull, son of oxen.” *Par* comes from *parar*, meaning to defeat. *Baqar* means to inquire or seek out. It pictures Christ who defeated the devil, seeking out those He would redeem. Along with that was to be a grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil. This pictures the purity of Christ being completely filled with the Spirit. These would be for a burnt offering. A second young bull would be brought forward for a sin offering. It is the same sin offering required for the whole congregation in Leviticus 4:14. As the Levites stand in the stead of the firstborn, and as the firstborn represents the family, the same sin offering is made as for that of sin by the whole congregation.

**<sup>9</sup> And you shall bring the Levites before the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall gather together the whole congregation of the children of Israel.**

It would be impossible for 22,300 Levites to stand within the confines of the sanctuary. The size of the sanctuary is about 1,250 square yards. Five people per square yard, which would be hugely cramped, would be 6,250 people. And that doesn't even take into consideration the tent of meeting or any other articles in the courtyard. At best, you could get maybe 1,000 in there, and that would still be cramped. It would further be impossible for all 2-3 million of the people to gather at the area immediately in front of it. Therefore, it must be assumed that all of the Levites are standing outside of the sanctuary with their leaders representing them inside, and the leaders of the tribes of Israel also standing in there as the representatives of the whole congregation. From there...

**<sup>10</sup> So you shall bring the Levites before the Lord, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites;**

With those designated to represent the others, there is then the laying on of the hands. In this act, the representatives of the people are symbolically transferring the congregation's obligation of dedicating their firstborn to the Levites. From this time on, the Levites would be so dedicated to the service of the Lord. They are given over wholly to the priests as the people's representatives. They are, in essence, a living sacrifice to the Lord.

**<sup>11</sup> and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord *like* a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of the Lord.**

Obviously, Aaron didn't pick up the Levites and wave them, and based on the numbers, it is obvious this was not done to every Levite individually. As there are 1.440 minutes in a day, if you were to wave 5 in a minute, it would take over 3 days, night and day without bathroom breaks, to do them all. What most likely happened, is that he pointed at those representing the whole, and then he made the motion that would be made in a wave offering. The waving is "before," or "in the face of," the Lord. It was an acknowledgment of the omnipresence of His vision. In this waving, the Levites are symbolically shaken loose from the congregation, and henceforth devoted to the service of the Lord, under Aaron.

**<sup>12</sup> Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, and you shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the Lord, to make atonement for the Levites.**

Now, with the Levites detached from the congregation, and attached to the service of the Lord, their first act is to offer their offerings for atonement. This is accomplished now by their own laying on of hands. The sin offering acknowledges and pleads for atonement of their sin, making them acceptable for service. The burnt offering pictures the giving of their lives and their abilities wholly over to the Lord. By going verse by verse, the logical and orderly procession of thoughts becomes clear. One thing needs to be done before the next, and one thing then follows after another.

**<sup>13</sup> “And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them *like* a wave offering to the Lord.**

This is not a second waving, but it describes more fully what is occurring. The Levites are first stood before Aaron and his sons when they are offered to the Lord. In other words, they are being separated from the people, taken in place of the firstborn, and offered to the Lord, but as servants to the priesthood. The lessor in position is stood before the greater. The reason for all of this is...

**<sup>14</sup> Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine.**

The whole purpose of the rite is that of separation and attachment. The Levites are to be separated from the greater body of the congregation, and they are to be attached to the Lord. If one were to translate this verse using the meaning of Levi, which is “Attached,” its intent actually comes through – “Thus you shall separate the Attached from among the children of Israel, and the Attached shall be Mine; they shall be attached to Me.”

**<sup>15</sup> After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting.**

In saying, “go in to serve the tent of meeting,” it means for the service of the tent of meeting. The Levites were not authorized to go into either the holy place or the most holy place, but were to remain in the courtyard and assist the priests as needed. They were also responsible for taking down, and setting up, the entire sanctuary, including the tent of meeting and tabernacle. And, they were designated to carry the most holy objects once they were covered by the priests.

**<sup>15 (con’t)</sup> So you shall cleanse them and offer them *like* a wave offering.**

The words are to be taken in the past tense. In other words, they are to do their service after they have been cleansed and waved.

**<sup>16</sup> For they *are* wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel.**

If the whole purpose of the rites is explained in verse 14, the explanation for that is given in this verse. The firstborn was claimed by the Lord in Exodus 13:2, and the exchange for the Levites was stated in Numbers 3:12. The emphatic words of verse 3:9, *netunim netunim hemah lo*, or “given, given to him” (meaning Aaron) are repeated here as *netumin netunim hemah li*, or “given, given wholly to Me.” The claim on the firstborn is released for the males of Israel, and an absolute claim on the Levites is now enacted by the Lord. That is further explained with...

**<sup>17</sup> For all the firstborn among the children of Israel *are* Mine, *both* man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself.**

The words here are exceedingly similar to Numbers 3:13. The Lord is repeating that the firstborn of both man and beast were claimed by Him. The plague upon the firstborn came upon Egypt. The only thing that saved the firstborn was the sign of the blood. Because the Lord spared them, they were claimed as His from that time on. The firstborn of Levi was then exchanged for the firstborn of Israel, both man and beast.

However, the firstborn of Levi was a permanent release. The firstborn of the beasts was a one time release to level the playing field. After that initial granting of the exchange of firstborn animals, each new firstborn was still to be offered to the Lord. What will happen to the firstborn of the animals is first explained Numbers 18, and then that is further defined in Deuteronomy, but in short, they were to be redeemed, if a man or an

unclean animal. Or, they were to be set apart as holy if a clean animal. When set apart as holy, they were to be eaten by the people at their annual feasts. Yes, like the first and second year tithes, the people ate their firstborn in celebration to the Lord.

**18 I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel.**

He has given up the claim on the firstborn, and made a permanent claim on the Levites. However, as noted in the previous verse, the firstborn of Israel would still need to be redeemed. That was by payment of five shekels of silver, because all firstborn clean animals were considered holy to the Lord.

**19 And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel,**

The words, “as a gift,” are not right. It is a plural verb. It should say something like, “And I have given the Levites – assignments to Aaron and to his sons...” He has made a claim on them, and they are His. However, He has given them to Aaron and his sons for assisting in their work.

This is similar to the land of Israel, of which the Lord says “the land is Mine” (Leviticus 25:23, etc). It is His. However, He gave it to Israel for use. It is not a gift, as if they have a right to do whatever they want with it. When they are obedient, they may live there and use it. When they are not, they may not live there or use it. Similarly, the duties of the Levites are for assistance of the priesthood and the people, but they are ultimately for the Lord.

**19 (con’t) to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting,**

This means that they are to do the work instead of the children of Israel. Without having called the Levites to service, the duties they would do would have gone to the people, especially the firstborn of each family. In calling the Levites to service, the people would no longer be under this obligation. And there was a benefit to this...

**19 (con't) and to make atonement for the children of Israel,**

The idea of atonement here is not of sacrificial offerings. That was the priests' duty. Rather, the type of atonement being spoken of here is the turning away of wrath in the performance of one's duties. It is seen in a marvelous parallel passage later in Numbers –

““Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>11</sup> “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. <sup>12</sup> Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; <sup>13</sup> and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.””

Phinehas defended the honor of the Lord when he ran a spear through a man and a woman who were doing what they shouldn't be doing. In that, he turned back the wrath of the Lord, covering over that which was not right. The Levites were authorized to come near the sanctuary and assist the priest. No other person could come near unless they came with an offering. The Levites thus turned back the wrath of the Lord in the sense that they performed services which would incur wrath for any non-authorized commoner. This continues to be explained with...

**19 (con't) that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary.”**

This word used here, *negeph*, or plague, is only used seven times in the Bible and all are in relation to the people of Israel. The first was in relation to the blood of the lamb saving the firstborn. The second was in relation to the redemption money for the firstborn. Now it is used in relation to the Levites in place of the firstborn. They had replaced them and are considered purified for the tasks of service. If the people approached unlawfully or incorrectly, the plague would result. The final time *negeph* is used is in Isaiah 8 where it is ascribed directly to the Lord in relation to the people of Israel –

“He will be as a sanctuary,  
But a stone of **stumbling** and a rock of offense  
To both the houses of Israel,  
As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” Isaiah 8:14

That verse from Isaiah is then used by Paul when speaking of Christ in Romans 9, and by Peter – also speaking of Christ – in 1 Peter 2. In essence, Christ became the very plague upon Israel that the blood of the lamb, the ransom money, and the Levite was to protect them from. In their rejection of Him, they rejected what these types and shadows only pictured. It is a terrible mistake to underestimate and thus reject God’s provision in Christ.

If you have noticed, the term “children of Israel” has been used five times in this single verse. Five, being the number of grace, is surely used here to show that what God has done in the selection and appointment of the Levites is intended as an act of grace among the people. Its very intent is to atone for them and spare them from inevitable plague.

**<sup>20</sup> Thus Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel did to the Levites; according to all that the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so the children of Israel did to them.**

Moses and Aaron performed what they were told to perform, but the children of Israel likewise did what they were asked to do. Again, this certainly must mean the leaders of the tribes. The impossibility of the entire congregation gathering in front of the tent of meeting, and all of the Levites being inside the sanctuary for ordination, necessitates that certain designated representatives were chosen as emblematic of the whole. Understanding this, what was said to be done was, in fact, accomplished.

**<sup>21</sup> And the Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes;**

This was in accord with verses 6 & 7. As instructed, so they did. The symbolism was explained there and with all of the information you've gotten in the subsequent verses up till now, it is best that you go home and reread the entire sermon. In this, the parts that have leaked out will return in clarity as to why they were specified.

**<sup>21 (con't)</sup> then Aaron presented them *like* a wave offering before the Lord,**

This is in obedience to verses 11 and 13. As instructed, so it was accomplished.

**<sup>21 (con't)</sup> and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them.**

This is in accord with verse 12. As instructed, so Aaron performed. It is rather amazing to think that after all of the details concerning the Levites so far in the book of Numbers, and especially in several chapters which dealt almost solely with them, that they still needed atonement apart from the regular atonement of the people. It should tell all of us that we may be the most qualified people in the world, we may be of the most noble lineage of all, we may perform rituals of purification greater than anyone else on the planet, and yet without atonement, we are wholly unacceptable to enter

into the presence and service of the Lord. However, for the Levites these things are now all completed, and so something new begins...

**<sup>22</sup> After that the Levites went in to do their work in the tabernacle of meeting before Aaron and his sons;**

Again as before, the Levites could not enter the tent of meeting. However, the brazen altar, of which they would assist at, is directly connected to the tabernacle. The performance of their duties there would be considered as part of the duties of the tent of meeting. Further, they were assigned to the duties of taking it down, transporting it, and then putting it up again. From this time on, they are now set apart to the Lord and for the service of the priesthood.

**<sup>22</sup> (con't) as the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.**

This is a standard note of obedience. Directives are given, the action is taken, and then a note of completion of the work, as it was commanded, is then provided. It is given time and again to show that nothing required of the Lord was allowed to fall. As John Gill says, [he] “exactly observed every punctilio of it and complied with it.” A+ for Moses.

**<sup>23</sup> Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,**

Now a supplementary, but new, section is introduced. It is supplementary to that concerning the Levites, but it is new in what it specifies concerning the ages authorized to serve and what they could do in that service.

<sup>24</sup> **“This is what *pertains* to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting;**

This verse does cause a perceived conflict with verse 4:3 which said, “from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.” However, there is no conflict between the two. First, the census was for the set purpose of determining the *tsava*, or hosts, prepared for war. In other words, those who would perform the function of the honor guard of the Lord. Secondly, they were tasked with the *melakah*, or work of the tent of meeting. That would certainly include the honor of the movement of the sanctuary.

Here in this verse, those 25 and above would enter into the *tsavah ba'avodah*, or ‘warfare in the service’ of the tent of meeting. What is probably being said then is that this pertains to the time when Israel arrives in Canaan. It was actually anticipated to be in less than a couple of months. Until they arrived, the census was for those who were to perform functions including the transport of the sanctuary. Once in Canaan, that would only happen under rare circumstances. In such a case, those twenty-five and above could serve in the lighter service duties until thirty when they would join into the full labors required of Levites.

Later in 1 Chronicles, David will assign Levites for service at the temple at twenty years of age. That was probably because the Levites were spread out throughout Israel, and there was a need for more Levites to assist with the increasing wealth and numbers of people in the kingdom. The age assigned by David continued from that point on, and even after the exile. Sergio while looking at the numbers of these three instances noted that they form a numeric chiasm –

Start at age 30 = serve 20 (4:3)

Start at age 25 = serve 25 (8:24)

Start at age 20 = serve 30 (1 Chronicles 23:24)

**<sup>25</sup> and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more.**

Regardless of the age of starting the duties, the service of the Levites was to end at fifty. There are commentaries, some from Jewish sources, that state that this meant only in the service concerning breaking down, moving, and putting back up the tent of meeting. This doesn't agree with that. It clearly says that they are to turn from serving in the *tsavah*, or Lord's guard, and they were to no longer to serve. Regardless of what Israel actually did, the law is clear – work until fifty and then cease performing work any longer. However...

**\*<sup>26</sup> (fin) They may minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs, but they *themselves* shall do no work. Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties."**

Here is a clear distinction between the heavy work of the service and the *mishmeret*, or charge of the tent of meeting. They could perform the watch of the Lord, ensuring all went well and ministering in this capacity with their brothers, but they were to no longer perform any of the heavier, burdensome tasks.

EW Bullinger defines the number fifty as that of "deliverance and rest following on as the result of the perfect consummation of time." That suits quite well with the concept of Levites retiring at that age. As I explained in a previous sermon, everything relating to the temple and the service, including the temple itself, the sacrificial system at the temple, the duties within the temple, the person of Moses and all he did, Aaron the High Priest and His sons, and also the Levites, all of it pictures the Person and work of Christ. As standing in place of the firstborn, the Levites performed the functions of the firstborn, just as Christ does in reality.

In the New Testament, the term “firstborn” is used nine times. Seven of those are in relation to Christ in one way or another. In this capacity, Christ is the One who performs all of the duties that would have been accomplished by the Levites who were taken in place of the firstborn.

It is true that in some ways, they tended to things between the people and the priests in somewhat of a fashion as a minister does today, and scholars often point that fact out. But even those duties are given as gifts of ministry by the Lord. Our ability to accomplish those things is only because He has enabled us to do so.

In the end, and despite the complexity of passages like today’s, if we just keep telling ourselves that what we are seeing here is merely a snapshot of how God tends to us through Christ, it all makes much more sense. But it also should alert us to the fact that God is holy and He expects us to be holy. The Levites were set apart to, as we saw, make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among them. God is holy. To fail in treating Him as such, consequences were sure to come. The people could go so far, but no further. The Levites could go so far and no further. The priests below Aaron could go so far and no further. And even Aaron was limited in his duties. Holiness is something we must be on guard to maintain.

As Hebrews 12:14 says, “Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” Verses like that shouldn’t scare you though. The Lord calls us to holiness because He has made us holy. We are holy *because* of Christ, and therefore we will see the Lord. However, it is our responsibility to pursue that which we possess. To squander that is to squander the joy we can possess in this life as we live in the presence of God, and in anticipation of a more perfect life in the presence of God.

In your calling, whatever it is, do it in love always, in peace towards all, and with a sense of holiness that you are the Lord’s, and He has called you to such. In this, you will prosper in the work of your hands, and in the walk set before you.

**Closing Verse:** Bless the Lord, O house of Israel!

Bless the Lord, O house of Aaron!

<sup>20</sup> Bless the Lord, O house of Levi!

You who fear the Lord, bless the Lord!

<sup>21</sup> Blessed be the Lord out of Zion,

Who dwells in Jerusalem!

Praise the Lord! Psalm 135:19-21

**Next Week:** Numbers 9:1-14 If you miss it the first time, there are provisions for you as a holdover... (The Lord's Passover) (16<sup>th</sup> Numbers Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. It may seem at times as if you are lost in a desert, wandering aimlessly. But the Lord is there, carefully leading you to the Land of Promise. So follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

### **Acceptable to Serve**

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

These are the words He was then relaying

“Speak to Aaron, and say to him

‘When you arrange the lamps, so you shall do

The seven lamps shall give light

In front of the lampstand, as I am instructing you

And Aaron did so

He arranged the lamps to face

Toward the front of the lampstand

As the Lord commanded Moses, in that very place

Now this workmanship of the lampstand was hammered gold  
From its shaft to its flowers it was hammered work  
According to the pattern which the Lord had shown Moses  
So he made the lampstand; no detail did he shirk  
Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:  
“Take the Levites from among the children of Israel  
And cleanse them ceremonially  
Do these as to you I now tell

Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them:  
Sprinkle on them water of purification, so I mean  
And let them shave all their body  
And let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean  
Then let them take a young bull  
So you shall do this thing  
With its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil  
And you shall take another young bull as a sin offering  
And you shall bring the Levites  
Before the tabernacle of meeting, so to you I tell  
And you shall gather together the whole congregation  
Of the children of Israel  
So you shall bring the Levites before the Lord  
And the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites  
-----according to My word  
And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord  
Like a wave offering from the children of Israel

That they may perform the work of the Lord  
Do this things as to you I now tell  
Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls  
And you shall offer one as a sin offering  
And the other as a burnt offering to the Lord  
To make atonement for the Levites, so you shall do this thing

“And you shall stand the Levites  
According to this word  
Before Aaron and his sons  
And then offer them like a wave offering to the Lord  
Thus you shall separate the Levites  
From among the children of Israel  
And the Levites shall be Mine  
To tend to their duties in this sanctuary in which I dwell  
After that the Levites shall go in  
To service the tabernacle of meeting  
So you shall cleanse them and offer them like a wave offering  
These tasks I have assigned you shall be completing

For they are wholly given to Me  
From among the children of Israel as to you I now tell  
I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb  
The firstborn of all the children of Israel

*(These four lines were accidentally left out of the spoken sermon)*

For all the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine  
Both man and beast, as to you I have described  
On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt  
I them to Myself sanctified  
I have taken the Levites, this group of personnel  
Instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel

And I have given the Levites as a gift  
To Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel  
To do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting  
And to make atonement for the children of Israel; so to you I tell  
That there be no plague among the children of Israel  
-----such shall not be  
When the children of Israel come near the sanctuary

Thus Moses and Aaron and all the congregation  
Of the children of Israel did to the Levites, as the Lord bid  
According to all that the Lord commanded Moses  
Concerning the Levites, so the children of Israel to them did

And the Levites purified themselves  
And washed their clothes, through and through  
Then Aaron presented them like a wave offering before the Lord  
And Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them  
-----as he was told to do

After that the Levites went in to do their work  
In the tabernacle of meeting before Aaron and his sons, so they did  
As the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites  
So they did to them, according to what the Lord to them bid  
Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying  
These words He was then relaying

“This is what pertains to the Levites:  
From twenty-five years old and above, as directed by Me  
One may enter to perform service  
In the work of the tabernacle of meeting, so shall it be  
And at the age of fifty years  
They must cease this work from performing  
And shall work no more  
To this directive they shall be conforming

They may minister with their brethren  
In the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs as to you I say  
But they themselves shall do no work  
Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties  
-----as I instruct you today  
Lord God, we are even now in a wilderness  
And we are wanting to be led by You  
Without You to direct, our lives would be a mess  
And so be our guide, O God; You who are faithful and true

We long for the water in this barren land  
May it flow forth from the Rock, our souls to satisfy  
Give us this refreshing, spiritual hand  
And may we take it, and to our lives daily it apply

And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone  
We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise  
Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown  
Hallelujah we shall sing to you for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...

What do you think is the significance of 25 years of Levi service in the temple? (**Chap 8**)

Funny enough the verse is also numbered 25! (Maybe coincidence??)

Chap 4 says 30 to 50... here it says 25 to 50... then David changes it to 20 to 50.

I thought about it and the whole concept here is in fact a numerical chiasm:

Start at age 20 = serve 30

Start at age 25 = serve 25

Start at age 30 = serve 20