

THE SERVICE OF THE LEVITES

BIBLE TEXT : Numbers 3:5-17, 21-51; 4:1-33

LESSON 90 **Senior Course**

MEMORY VERSE: "I delight to do thy wail, O my God: yea. thy law Is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Numbers 3:5-17 (KJV)

⁵ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
⁶ Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.
⁷ 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.
⁸ 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.
⁹ And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they *are* wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel.
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.
¹¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
¹² 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;
¹³ 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.
¹⁴ And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,
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.
¹⁶ And Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded.
¹⁷ And these were the sons of Levi by their names; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari.

Numbers 3:21-51 (KJV)

²¹ Of Gershon *was* the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimites: these *are* the families of the Gershonites.
²² Those that were numbered of them,

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Levites: Israel's Offering to the Lord

1 The Levites were *set* aside. by God's commandment, to a consecrated service, Numbers 3:5-10;

Numbers 8:5-22 (KJV)

⁵ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
⁶ Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them.
⁷ And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and *so* make themselves clean.
⁸ Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering, *even* fine flour mingled with oil, and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering.
⁹ And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together:
¹⁰ And thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites:
¹¹ And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD *for* an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the LORD.
¹² And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one *for* a sin offering, and the other *for* a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites.
¹³ And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them *for* an offering unto the LORD.
¹⁴ Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine.
¹⁵ And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them *for* an offering.
¹⁶ For they *are* wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, *even instead* of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me.
¹⁷ For all the firstborn of the children of Israel *are* mine, *both* man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself.
¹⁸ And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel.
¹⁹ And I have given the Levites *as* a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary.
²⁰ And Moses, and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel, did to the Levites according unto all that the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did the children of Israel unto them.
²¹ And the Levites were purified, and they washed their clothes; and Aaron offered them *as* an offering before the LORD; and Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them.
²² And after that went the Levites in to do their service in the tabernacle of the congregation before Aaron, and before his sons: as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did they unto them.

Deuteronomy 10:8-9 (KJV)

⁸ At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day.
⁹ Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD *is* his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him.

according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, *even* those that were numbered of them *were* seven thousand and five hundred.

²³ The families of the Gershonites shall pitch behind the tabernacle westward.

²⁴ And the chief of the house of the father of the Gershonites *shall be* Eliasaph the son of Lael.

²⁵ And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation *shall be* the tabernacle, and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,

²⁶ And the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which *is* by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about, and the cords of it for all the service thereof.

²⁷ And of Kohath *was* the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izecharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these *are* the families of the Kohathites.

²⁸ In the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, *were* eight thousand and six hundred, keeping the charge of the sanctuary.

²⁹ The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward.

³⁰ And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites *shall be* Elizaphan the son of Uzziel.

³¹ And their charge *shall be* the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof.

³² And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *shall be* chief over the chief of the Levites, *and have* the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary.

³³ Of Merari *was* the family of the Mahlites, and the family of the Mushites: these *are* the families of Merari.

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.

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.

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

Deuteronomy 33:8-11 (KJV)

⁸ And of Levi he said, *Let* thy Thummim and thy Urim *be* with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, *and with* whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah;

⁹ Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.

¹⁰ They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.

¹¹ Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.

- 2 This commandment revealed the opportunity, lost by the Israelites, for all to share in God's service and fulfill God's desire that the nation be one entirely dedicated to Him, Numbers 3:11-13;

Exodus 13:1-2 (KJV)

¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

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.

Exodus 13:11-13 (KJV)

¹¹ And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he sware unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee,

¹² That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males *shall be* the LORD'S.

¹³ And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.

Exodus 19:5-6 (KJV)

⁵ Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

⁶ And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

1 Peter 2:5 (KJV)

⁵ Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:6 (KJV)

⁶ And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 20:6 (KJV)

⁶ Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

- 3 Moses was instructed by God to number — or set aside — all the male children and adults of the Levites from one month old and upward, Numbers 3:14-17, 39;

Numbers 4:46-49 (KJV)

⁴⁶ All those that were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the chief of Israel numbered, after their families, and after the house of their fathers,

⁴⁷ From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that came to do the service of the ministry, and the service of the burden in the tabernacle of the congregation,

⁴⁸ Even those that were numbered of them, were eight thousand and five hundred and fourscore.

⁴⁹ According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered by the hand of Moses, every one according to his service, and according to his burden: thus were they numbered of him, as the LORD commanded Moses.

- 4 The first-born sons of Israel, having lost their privilege of serving in the Lord's worship, were replaced by Levites. a Levite for each first-born son of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites for the first-born of Israel's cattle, Numbers 3:40-45;

Numbers 18:15-16 (KJV)

¹⁵ Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, *whether it be* of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely

all that serveth thereto,

³⁷ And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

⁴⁴ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

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.

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;

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:)

⁴⁸ And thou shalt give the money, wherewith the odd number of them is to be redeemed, unto Aaron and to his sons.

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

⁵⁰ Of the firstborn of the children of Israel took he the money; a thousand three hundred and threescore and five *shekels*,

redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem.

¹⁶ And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which *is* twenty gerahs.

Exodus 34:20 (KJV)

²⁰ But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem *him* not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty.

5 The 273 remaining first-born of Israel are redeemed by a set price of *five* shekels each, Numbers 3:46-51

II The Prescribed Duties of the Levites

1 All Levites were to be under the supervision of Moses and Aaron, Numbers 3:38

2 The Gershonites, descendants of Levi's eldest son, Gershon: Had 7,500 males, one month of age or older, 2,630 able to work for the Lord, Numbers 3:21, 22;

Numbers 4:38-41 (KJV)

³⁸ And those that were numbered of the sons of Gershon, throughout their families, and by the house of their fathers, ³⁹ From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation,

⁴⁰ Even those that were numbered of them, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers, were two thousand and six hundred and thirty.

⁴¹ These *are* they that were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, whom Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the LORD.

Encamped on the west side of the Tabernacle, Numbers 3:23, 24
Were superintended by Ithamar, Aaron's youngest son, a priest, Numbers 4:28

Were placed in charge of the Tabernacle tent, covering, and door hangings hangings and cords of the court, and curtain for the court entrance, Numbers 3:25, 26; 4:21-28

3 The Kohathites, descendants of Levi's second son. Kohath: Had 8,600 males, one month of age or older, 2,750 able to work for the Lord, Numbers 3:27, 28;

Numbers 4:34-37 (KJV)

³⁴ And Moses and Aaron and the chief of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites after their families, and after the house of their fathers,

³⁵ From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation:

³⁶ And those that were numbered of them by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty.

³⁷ These *were* they that were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, which Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Encamped on the south side of the Tabernacle, Numbers 3:29, 30

Were superintended by Eleazar, Aaron's eldest living son, a priest, Numbers 3:32; 4:16

Were placed in charge of the Ark, table of shewbread, candlestick, altars. the vail, and all sacred vessels, Numbers 3:31

Followed a routine organized by God Himself, Numbers 4:1-4

Received minute directions for the handling of each article, Numbers 4:5-15, 32

Were protected from untimely death, due to any error of the priests, by extra precautions imposed upon Moses and Aaron, Numbers 4:17-20

4 The Merarites, descendants of Levi's youngest son Merari:

Had 6,200 males, one month of age or older 3,200 able to work for the Lord, Numbers 3:33, 34;

Numbers 4:42-45 (KJV)

⁴² And those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers,

after the shekel of the sanctuary:

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.

Numbers 4:1-33 (KJV)

¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

² Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers, ³ From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.

⁴ This *shall be* the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, *about* the most holy things:

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:

⁶ And shall put thereon the covering of badgers' skins, and shall spread over *it* a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof.

⁷ And upon the table of shewbread they shall spread a cloth of blue, and put thereon the dishes, and the spoons, and the bowls, and covers to cover withal: and the continual bread shall be thereon: ⁸ And they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet, and cover the same with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put in the staves thereof.

⁹ And they shall take a cloth of blue, and cover the candlestick of the light, and his lamps, and his tongs, and his snuffdishes, and all the oil vessels thereof, wherewith they minister unto it:

¹⁰ And they shall put it and all the vessels thereof within a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put *it* upon a bar.

¹¹ And upon the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof:

¹² And they shall take all the instruments of ministry, wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, and put *them* in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put *them* on a bar:

¹³ And they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon:

¹⁴ And they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, *even* the censers, the fleshhooks, and the shovels, and the

⁴³ From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation,

⁴⁴ Even those that were numbered of them after their families, were three thousand and two hundred.

⁴⁵ These *be* those that 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.

Encamped on the north side of the Tabernacle, Numbers 3:35

Were superintended by Ithamar, Aaron's youngest son, Numbers 4:33

Were placed in charge of the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, and cords of the Tabernacle and court and all secondary vessels or implements, Numbers 3:36. 37; 4:29-33

NOTES:

A Little Flock

While Moses was on Mt. Sinai, receiving the Law from God, Aaron and Hur were left in charge of the Israelites, who are thought to have numbered in excess of 3,000,000 men, women, and children. In a previous lesson we saw that some of the leaders and people had failed God miserably and had made a golden calf to worship in place of the God of Abraham. Then they made their sin all the worse by the statement that these gods of gold were the ones who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.

God told Moses what was happening in the camp and sent him to deal with the situation. We saw how Moses interposed himself between God and the rebellious nation, striving always to see that God's name was honored in all things — and above all things — and how he successfully interceded for them.

At the time the wrong was pointed out to the Israelites, Moses challenged them with the stirring question, "Who is on the LORD'S side?" The smallest tribe of the whole nation, the Levites, responded by separating themselves from the whole body of people. It must have been a discouraging sight to godly Moses to see so few declare themselves, but he probably had been previously prepared for just such an eventuality by the God whom he loved. It has not been large numbers or vast armies of loyal soldiers that have carried out God's work on earth at any time in history. Jesus reminded His followers when He was upon earth that there would be but a "little flock" for whom a place would be reserved in Heaven.

A Lost Opportunity

The nation was severely punished that day; for before the shadows of night came, 3,000 who saw the sun arise in the morning lay dead. No doubt great sorrow swept through the camp in the days following because of this personal loss of loved ones; but as the words of their faithful leader burned into their hearts the Israelites were forced to concede that their loss was greater than that which they *first* felt. There was now a need for reconciliation between them and an angry and offended God, and for this purpose Moses went to God to plead their seemingly lost cause. Days passed and a merciful reconciliation was effected and now their sojourn at Mt. Sinai was about to come to a close.

Some phases of the newly received L' still had to be unfolded to them and until this was done they could not know exactly all that their rebellion had cost them. Neither could the Levites know, as yet, all that their courageous stand would reward them. But the details were not long withheld, for soon the Lord spoke to Moses and told him to bring near the tribe of Levi and present them before Aaron the priest. The account of the formal consecration of the Levites to their work. (**Numbers 8:5-22 (KJV)**) ⁵ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ⁶ Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. ⁷ And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean. ⁸ Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering, *even* fine flour mingled with oil, and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering. And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together: ¹⁰ And thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites: ¹¹ And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD *for* an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the LORD. ¹²

basons, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it.

¹⁵ And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear *it*: but they shall not touch *any* holy thing, lest they die. These *things are* the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation.

¹⁶ And to the office of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *pertaineth* the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, and the daily meat offering, and the anointing oil, *and* the oversight of all the tabernacle, and of all that therein *is*, in the sanctuary, and in the vessels thereof.

¹⁷ And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

¹⁸ Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites:

¹⁹ 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:

²⁰ But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.

²¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

²² Take also the sum of the sons of Gershon, throughout the houses of their fathers, by their families;

²³ From thirty years old and upward until fifty years old shalt thou number them; all that enter in to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.

²⁴ This *is* the service of the families of the Gershonites, to serve, and for burdens:

²⁵ And they shall bear 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,

²⁶ 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: so shall they serve.

²⁷ At the appointment of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their burdens, and in all their service: and ye shall appoint

And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one *for* a sin offering, and the other *for* a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites. ¹³ And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them *for* an offering unto the LORD. ¹⁴ Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine. ¹⁵ And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them *for* an offering. ¹⁶ For they *are* wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, *even instead of* the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me. ¹⁷ For all the firstborn of the children of Israel *are* mine, *both* man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself. ¹⁸ And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel. ¹⁹ And I have given the Levites *as* a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary. ²⁰ And Moses, and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel, did to the Levites according unto all that the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did the children of Israel unto them. ²¹ And the Levites were purified, and they washed their clothes; and Aaron offered them *as* an offering before the LORD; and Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them. ²² And after that went the Levites in to do their service in the tabernacle of the congregation before Aaron, and before his sons: as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did they unto them) tells us that this bringing near was a presentation of them to the Lord, in the manner of an offering, by the whole nation of Israel. The Levites were given as a "living sacrifice" to God (**Romans 12:1 (KJV)** ¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service).

The plan of God, in the beginning, was that the Israelites should all be workers in the service of God, a personal service in which each family was represented. There was not to be any service rendered by representation, or through another person, but the whole nation was to be a kingdom of priests (**Exodus 19:5-6 (KJV)** ⁵ Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: ⁶ And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel). In the patriarchal times the work was carried on by different family heads, or their representatives. But when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and spared their first-born He decreed that these delivered first-born should be the dedicated ones to do His service (**Exodus 13:1-2 (KJV)** ¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 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. **Exodus 22:29 (KJV)** ²⁹ Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me).

What a glorious plan! How wonderful it would have been—and would be today—if every family feared God and were willing to dedicate the firstborn member to God! How quickly the Gospel would have been spread to the whole world—and would be spread in our day—if each Christian family dedicated one member to God's service! How rich would be the rewards of all the Christian peoples when the Judge of all calls us before Him! And how pleasant and filled to the brim with lasting joy and happiness each life would be here on earth, knowing that they all have a tangible part in God's service! But, sadly, it is only the "Levites"—the "little flock"—upon whom God must depend for the carrying out of His work on earth. God give us more "Levites" and increase the size of the faithful "little flock"!

It has been said that there are no drafted soldiers in God's army. That truth is strikingly demonstrated in this incident when the Levites were chosen instead of the first-born of Israel. The Levites volunteered, dramatically taking their stand for God before the hundreds of thousands of Israelites. Because they were willing to do so, God gave them the preferred place in His service (**Matthew 10:32 (KJV)** ³² Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father *which is* in heaven). The ones who were to have filled these offices according to the original plan were not used because they did not

unto them in charge all their burdens.

²⁸ This *is* the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation: and their charge *shall be* under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

²⁹ As for the sons of Merari, thou shalt number them after their families, by the house of their fathers;

³⁰ From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old shalt thou number them, every one that entereth into the service, to do the work of the tabernacle of the congregation.

³¹ 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,

³² 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.

³³ This *is* the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service, in the tabernacle of the congregation, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

respond when the invitation was given to come over on the Lord's side. There are many today who have felt the call to some specific service for God who are not doing that service because they, too, have not thus stepped out "on the LORD'S side." They can be sure that there is a member of the "little flock" somewhere who will receive the reward instead, because he has responded and is faithfully doing the work of his Lord and Master.

God's Orderly Administration

In no other place in the Bible can we see the carefully planned and executed detail of God's workings with His people, and the world at large, as it is displayed in the Levitical Law. Nothing was left to chance operation or to be casually carried out. Every item was mentioned and its place shown in the over-all scheme, it mattered not how small or apparently insignificant it might appear to be.

God is not the author of, nor is He pleased with, confusion, disorder, or disunity in any phase of His work among or for men. The Holy Spirit, in His operations in the heart of the believer, or in His work in the direction of the worship and service of the Lord, works only with unity and oneness of effort. He has no other way. That which is done in division or strife, disorder or carelessness, is most assuredly not the result of the direction of the Holy Spirit but of a false spirit instead.

The tribe-family of Kohath was selected to carry the most sacred of all the tabernacle furnishings, the Ark of the Covenant, the table of shewbread, the candlestick, the altars, and the sacred vessels. These were all covered for them before their entrance into the Tabernacle, by the high priest and his assisting priests, so no one would die because they saw the holy things which they were prohibited from seeing.

The Gershonites were descendants of the first-born son of Levi, but were not given the most privileged place in the service of God. The plans of God do not necessarily follow the customs of man, and many times He sets these aside to work out His will in and for man. Moses and Aaron were descendants of the family of Kohath, and it is possible that the Kohathites were given the privileged position among the Levites because of the faithfulness of these two men of God, especially in reference to their faithfulness during the days when God dealt with the nation of Egypt through the judgment-plagues.

God gave the responsibility of the Tabernacle itself and all its hangings and curtains, as well as those of the court, to the Gershonites. There was, in this, a considerable amount of material to transport from place to place, and from camp site to camp site, for which they used two covered wagons drawn by four oxen. These wagons and oxen were given as a freewill offering to the Lord by the princes of Israel, who represented the first-born replaced by the Levites. Here is a wonderful exhibition of the love and esteem that even the replaced first-born had in their hearts for those who would separate themselves for the service of God, and who would gladly give up their inheritance rights and privileges to do God's bidding! (**1 Timothy 5:17 (KJV)** *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine*)

The remaining tribal-family, the Merarites, had the heaviest and most burdensome duties of all three groups. For this reason Moses gave them four of the wagons and eight yoke of the oxen brought by the princes of Israel. Their responsibility was the transportation of the boards, bars, foundation blocks of silver, pillars, pins, and cords, with the tools necessary to set up the building upon any terrain that the Lord might select in the wilderness. The perfection of God's plan is further illustrated here, in that while the tribal-family of the Merarites was the smallest in numbers — when all the males over one month of age were considered — yet they had the largest percentage of those who were able to work, giving them the largest group of workmen in the tribe.

When the Pillar of Cloud Moved

The orderliness of God's operations was further illustrated in the way the Levites were to carry out their designated work. Each tribal-family had its assigned work. We are told that "by name" they reckoned the charge of their burdens. They were all given a specified place in the marching column which moved with the precision of a vast military operation, where delay in any detail might have cost many lives. It is all a picture of God's perfection and of the way He wants His work conducted

⁴⁹ According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered by the hand of Moses, every one according to his service, and according to his burden: thus were they numbered of him, as the LORD commanded Moses).

Perhaps it was often in the early morning, when the Israelites first came out of their individual tents, that the Pillar of Cloud lifted and moved toward Canaan. Perhaps more often it was at the time of the morning sacrifice when their eyes were turned toward the Tabernacle where the death of the coming Perfect Sacrifice was being typically shown. Whenever it was, morning or evening, day or night, there was no confusion. There was no hurried drafting of the necessary personnel to move the Tabernacle and the sacred treasures kept there. There was no bickering or contention between different ones as to what made up their assigned duties. It was all done as God planned it, in decency and in order.

Each family took care of its own tents and personal equipment, but the chosen, privileged members of the Levite families moved to the Tabernacle instead. Their personal needs were taken care of by others of the Levites who thereby shared in God's rewards for faithful service. All the Levites had a part, and all could earn a reward in Heaven.

By the time these men arrived at the Tabernacle, Aaron and his sons had no doubt completed the covering and wrapping of the sacred treasures. In an orderly procession each of the Kohathites took up his assigned responsibility. There were no wagons for these. God had decreed that His Ark, candlestick, table, altars, and sacred vessels were to be carried on the shoulders of the appointed ones.

Then the Gershonites came in, took down the hangings and fabrics of the Tabernacle and court and loaded their wagons. They were followed by the Merarites, who took their assigned burdens and packed them with the greatest of care in their wagons. The Gershonites and Merarites were given places in the marching column ahead of the Kohathites.

When the day's march was ended the Pillar of Cloud rested and the Israelites then knew that they were at the place God had chosen for their encampment. Each family set up its tent in the place God had previously appointed for it, in relation to the location of the Tabernacle. The work of the Levites at this stage was just as orderly as when the camp was broken and the march begun. The Merarites, with their loads of metallic and wooden portions of the Tabernacle and court (estimated by some as weighing in excess of 21,000 pounds) came and set up each piece in its proper place. The Gershonites came next with the hangings, beautifully woven and embroidered tabernacle cloth, dyed and natural-color coverings, and cords, which were all in their places when the Kohathites came with the sacred vessels and furnishings. There was no delay, confusion, or disorder of any kind.

In almost unbelievable time after the Pillar of Cloud showed the leaders, and Israel, the location of their camping place the Tabernacle was ready for use. No doubt many times this was at the time of the evening sacrifice. Again the congregation of the Israelites stood in their tent doors, or gathered around the outside of the Tabernacle perimeter, and prayed while the coming Lamb of Calvary was typically sacrificed upon the brazen altar.

The Lord's service is the most wonderful occupation that a person can have, and when the call is given it should be treasured as the great privilege that it is. Opportunities lost are objects of regret and remorse which time often cannot heal. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29).

We are also reminded of the fact that our God must have His own way because no man's way could ever equal it. He fixes each man's rank in His service; He appoints His own servants; He designates the work of each one and sets each in the Church as He desires. But that is not all. God provides for the needs of His workers now, and rewards them later; and in addition, is Himself their inheritance, their hope, their joy, and their consolation!

QUESTIONS

- 1 Name the three divisions of the tribe of Levi.
- 2 To what tribal-family did Moses and Aaron belong?
- 3 Why was the tribe of Levi taken instead of the first-born of the Israelites?
- 4 How did this differ from God's original plan for the Israelites?
- 5 Compare the number of first-born sons in Israel with the number of Levites from one month of age and upward.
- 6 Who had the over-all supervision of the Levites?
- 7 Who directly superintended each division?
- 8 What were the duties of each division?
- 9 What lesson can we learn regarding the method of carrying out God's work today from the manner in which they were instructed to do their work?
- 10 If we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us as we should, there will be no confusion or disunity in our service for God. Tell why.