

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Numbers

Lesson #2, Chapter 3

Review of Chapters 1 and 2

The book of Numbers is so named because of the numbering of the Israelite men age twenty and older who were eligible to serve in the army (chapters 1 and 26) and the numbering of the Levites who represented the firstborn of Israel and served the priests in the tabernacle (chapter 3). Not only were these men *numbered*, but *their names* were written down in a census. God knew those that were His by name.

Numbering God's people for military service was a touchy thing. God commanded in Exodus:

Exodus 30:12 (NLT) ¹² "Whenever you take a census of the people of Israel, each man who is counted must pay a ransom for himself to the Lord. Then no plague will strike the people as you count them.

Numbering the people was to be done at God's command. The people were not to number themselves to see if they were strong enough to win the battle. Even when God commanded them to number themselves, they were to "*pay a ransom*" so the anger of the Lord would not be upon them. This ransom was "atonement money" and it was for their lives.

Jesus Christ paid the ransom for us so that we could be numbered with the saints of God.

Revelation 21:23 (NKJV) The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light...²⁷ But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Because of Jesus' great sacrifice and our obedience to the gospel, our names are written in Heaven's book. We are a part of that great number.

Numbers Chapter 3 - AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY!

Levites Appointed for Service

Numbers 3:1 (NLT) This is the family line of Aaron and Moses as it was recorded when the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: ² The names of Aaron's sons were Nadab (the oldest), Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ³ These sons of Aaron were anointed and ordained to minister as priests. ⁴ But Nadab and Abihu died in the Lord's presence in the wilderness of Sinai when they burned before the Lord the wrong kind of fire, different than he had commanded. Since they had no sons, this left only Eleazar and Ithamar to serve as priests with their father, Aaron.

Nadab and Abihu offered "*the wrong kind of fire,*" or "*profane fire*" (NKJV), or "*strange fire*" (KJV) in the Tabernacle. Before that, Aaron had just completed offering the sin offerings, the burnt offering, the grain offering and the peace offerings for the first time in the new Tabernacle. Fire actually came from the Lord's presence and consumed the offerings on the altar! It was this fire from the Lord that

God commanded the priests, “...*the fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must never go out*” (Lev. 6:12a). Apparently, Nadab and Abihu decided to fill a censer with incense and use another source of fire to burn incense to the Lord. God judged them for it - severely.

Leviticus 10:1 (NKJV) Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. **2** So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.

Using unauthorized fire kindled the anger of God. God's fire was to be kept going, it was to be kept burning, and only God's fire was to be used in the Tabernacle worship.

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, fire sat upon each one of the 120 who were obediently waiting for the “promise of the Father.” This fire was *authorized fire* and it kindled the New Testament way of worship and approaching God. Instead of fire falling on dead sacrifices on the brazen altar, this fire came down on *living sacrifices* - people who were hungry for God and obedient to His command. This Pentecostal fire was to be kept burning - it should never go out. The same Spirit (fire) that fell on Pentecost is available today.

Let's continue in Numbers:

Numbers 3:5 (NLT) Then the Lord said to Moses, ⁶“Call forward the tribe of Levi, and present them to Aaron the priest to serve as his assistants. ⁷They will serve Aaron and the whole community, performing their sacred duties in and around the Tabernacle. ⁸They will also maintain all the furnishings of the sacred tent, serving in the Tabernacle on behalf of all the Israelites. ⁹Assign the Levites to Aaron and his sons. They have been given from among all the people of Israel to serve as their assistants.

There was much work to do in the Tabernacle, and only three people to do it - Aaron and his two remaining sons. Only Aaron and his descendants were priests, and only the priests were allowed to sprinkle the blood, or to enter the Holy Place and offer incense - among other duties. God gave the Levites (the other descendants of Levi) to Aaron as assistants and to help the priests. There were certain things that only Aaron and his descendants could do, but there were certain things that the Levites could do to help.

Remember this - all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. However, the Levites were allowed to go in part of the tabernacle complex so that they could be a help to the priests. Also, they were authorized to carry the furniture and tabernacle parts when the camp was traveling; however, the furniture had to be covered when they approached it. Only the priests covered the Ark of the Covenant, and only the Kohathites carried the covered ark.

It was very important that everyone knew their responsibilities. The high priest was authorized to enter the Holy of Holies one day each year (on the Day of Atonement). Priests were authorized to enter the Holy Place to offer incense on the incense altar, take care of the bread on the table of showbread, and sprinkle the blood of certain sacrifices - but what they did in the Holy Place had to be done correctly and specifically on God's terms. Levites were authorized to help the

priests, but what they did had to be done correctly on God's terms - they could only do so much and go so far. Anyone who acted presumptuously could suffer death.

The general population of the Israelites could only approach the Tabernacle from a distance. The area was restricted. Why all of this? The answer is - the presence of God is holy. The presence of sinful man is unholy. For man to approach God, it must take place on God's terms only.

Numbers 3:10 Appoint Aaron and his sons to carry out the duties of the priesthood. But any unauthorized person who goes too near the sanctuary must be put to death."

Five times in the Book of Numbers, God warns unauthorized people:

Numbers 1:51b But any unauthorized person who goes too near the Tabernacle must be put to death.

Numbers 3:10b But any unauthorized person who goes too near the sanctuary must be put to death.

Numbers 16:40a This would warn the Israelites that no unauthorized person—no one who was not a descendant of Aaron—should ever enter the Lord's presence to burn incense.

Numbers 18:4 The Levites must join you in fulfilling their responsibilities for the care and maintenance of the Tabernacle, but no unauthorized person may assist you.

Numbers 18:7c Any unauthorized person who comes too near the sanctuary will be put to death.

God gave the priesthood to Aaron and his descendants. God gave the Levites to help the priests. Anyone else would be an *"unauthorized person"* because they were not born in the tribe of Levi. Anyone who was *"unauthorized"* must be kept away so they would not profane the holy things of the Tabernacle. In a previous lesson we read about the ancient stone artifact that was discovered near the Temple Mount in 1871 that says, *"No foreigner is to go beyond the balustrade and the plaza of the Temple zone. Whoever is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his death which will follow."* This stone is known as the Temple Warning Inscription and once hung along the balustrade outside the sanctuary of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem.

This warning sounds strange to our modern ears since we invite all people to attend the house of God. However, in the Old Testament, the duties of the Tabernacle service were to be performed only by the priests (descendants of Aaron) with the Levites assisting as permitted.

In this country and in this day and age, we tend to think that everyone has a right to privilege or reward through hard work, talent, or maybe a lucky break - not simply because of his family lineage. However, this concept of privilege or authority given to a family bloodline is a great part of Scripture. God made promises to Abraham and his descendants. God promised King David that his throne would be established, and one of his descendants would always sit on the throne. We know that according to the flesh, Jesus Christ is a descendant of King David, and His throne will be forever.

Even in the New Testament, we see that a person must be born to authority. Jesus said:

John 3:3 (NKJV) . . . “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

The privilege of entering the kingdom of God goes only to those of a certain lineage, those who are born to this privilege, or those who are authorized through the new birth. Jesus called it being “*born of water and the Spirit.*” Jesus drew a line in the sand, and He didn’t back up from it. “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*”

This would not seem fair or reasonable except for the fact that being born into this lineage is possible for every person in this New Testament age. After all, this is not a fleshly lineage, where no one has the choice or ability to be born into it. This is a spiritual lineage with Jesus Christ being our High Priest. Being “*born of the water*” refers to water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and being “*born of the Spirit*” refers to receiving the Spirit of Jesus Christ (the baptism of the Holy Ghost). Anyone who desires to obey God can be born into this kingdom. This is what puts us in the family of Jesus Christ and gives us the right to approach His presence. We are no longer “*unauthorized,*” but we are now “*kings and priests to...God*” (Revelation 1:6).

1 Peter 2:9 (NKJV) But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light

Among the Israelites, only the high priest and his family were allowed to approach the presence of God in the Holy Place in the Tabernacle. However, under the New Covenant, *Jesus Christ is our High Priest* and we are of His family when we are “*born again.*” This change in the priesthood allows us not only to enter the Holy Place near to the presence of God, but to enter into the Holy of Holies itself and boldly approach God’s presence (as part of the family of the High Priest, Jesus Christ, in this New Covenant).

Jesus Is the High Priest of the New Covenant

Read these verses taken from the book of Hebrews that explain this:

Hebrews 5:1 (NLT) Every high priest is a man chosen to represent other people in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers sacrifices for their sins...

⁴ And no one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He must be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was...⁸ Even though Jesus was God’s Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. ⁹ In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the

source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. ¹⁰ And God designated him to be a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:1 This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of God Most High...

³ There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God...

¹¹ So if the priesthood of Levi, on which the law was based, could have achieved the perfection God intended, why did God need to establish a different priesthood, with a priest in the order of Melchizedek instead of the order of Levi and Aaron?...

Jesus Is like Melchizedek

...¹⁶ Jesus became a priest, not by meeting the physical requirement of belonging to the tribe of Levi, but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. ¹⁷ And the psalmist pointed this out when he prophesied,

"You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek..."

²³ There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office.

²⁴ But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. ²⁵ Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

²⁶ He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. ²⁷ Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people's sins...

Hebrews 9:11 (NLT) So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. ¹² With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever...

²⁷ And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.

In the New Testament it says:

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

Because Jesus is the High Priest of the New Testament and because those who have been "*born again*" are of His lineage, we are "*authorized*" to approach the very presence of God. In fact, we are commanded by Scripture:

Hebrews 4:16 (NKJV) Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Now let's continue in Numbers:

Numbers 3:11 And the Lord said to Moses, ¹² "Look, I have chosen the Levites from among the Israelites to serve as substitutes for all the firstborn sons of the people of Israel. The Levites belong to me, ¹³ for all the firstborn males are mine. On the day I struck down all the firstborn sons of the

Egyptians, I set apart for myself all the firstborn in Israel, both of people and of animals. They are mine; I am the Lord."

The doctrine of substitution is a great theme throughout the Bible. God began this principle in the Garden of Eden when he killed an animal for its skin to make clothes to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve - nakedness was a picture of their sin and shame (Genesis 3:21). The animal died in the place of Adam and Eve. This theme continues in Exodus, Leviticus, and beyond in the tabernacle as the sin offering or the trespass offering is sacrificed as a substitute for the sinner.

God continued the theme of substitution into the New Testament with the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus died as a substitute for the whole world. However, only through faith and obedience can His death and resurrection be applied to each person. Just as an Israelite had to bring a sin offering to the priests and be obedient to God's plan in that day, today we must be obedient to God's plan of salvation for this present age.

God said that all the firstborn in Israel belonged to Him. However, instead of requiring the firstborn of each family to go assist the priests, He commanded that the whole tribe of Levi would serve as a substitute for the firstborn of each Israelite family.

Jesus is called the "*firstborn*" in Scripture:

Colossians 1:15 (NKJV) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

A firstborn son wasn't just the oldest son. He had rights and authority because he was the firstborn. Jesus was the "*firstborn*," because He was the first to conquer death - He lives forever. Scripture says of us:

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Let's continue Numbers 3:

Registration of the Levites

Numbers 3:14 The Lord spoke again to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai. He said, ¹⁵ "Record the names of the members of the tribe of Levi by their families and clans. List every male who is one month old or older." ¹⁶ So Moses listed them, just as the Lord had commanded.

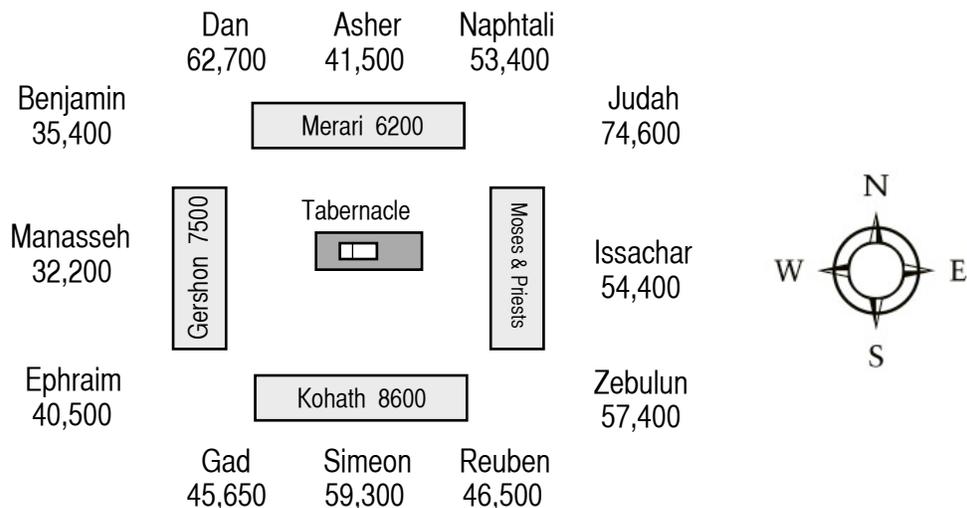
¹⁷ Levi had three sons, whose names were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari . . . ²² There were 7,500 males one month old or older among these Gershonite clans. ²³ They were assigned the area to the west of the Tabernacle for their camp . . . were responsible to care for the Tabernacle, including the sacred tent with its layers of coverings, the curtain at its entrance, ²⁶ the curtains of the courtyard that surrounded the Tabernacle and altar, the curtain at the courtyard entrance, the ropes, and all the equipment related to their use.

²⁷ The descendants of Kohath . . . ²⁸ There were 8,600 males one month old or older among these Kohathite clans. They were responsible for the care of the sanctuary, ²⁹ and they were assigned the area south of the Tabernacle for their camp . . . were responsible for the care of the Ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the various articles used in the sanctuary, the inner curtain, and all the equipment related to their use. ³² Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, was the chief administrator over all the Levites, with special responsibility for the oversight of the sanctuary.

³³ The descendants of Merari . . . ³⁴ There were 6,200 males one month old or older among these Merarite clans. ³⁵ They were assigned the area north of the Tabernacle for their camp . . . were responsible for the care of the frames supporting the Tabernacle, the crossbars, the pillars, the bases, and all the equipment related to their use. ³⁷ They were also responsible for the posts of the courtyard and all their bases, pegs, and ropes.

³⁸ The area in front of the Tabernacle, in the east toward the sunrise, was reserved for the tents of Moses and of Aaron and his sons, who had the final responsibility for the sanctuary on behalf of the people of Israel. Anyone other than a priest or Levite who went too near the sanctuary was to be put to death.

³⁹ When Moses and Aaron counted the Levite clans at the Lord's command, the total number was 22,000 males one month old or older.



Redeeming the Firstborn Sons

⁴⁰ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now count all the firstborn sons in Israel who are one month old or older, and make a list of their names. ⁴¹ The Levites must be reserved for me as substitutes for the firstborn sons of Israel; I am the Lord. And the Levites' livestock must be reserved for me as substitutes for the firstborn livestock of the whole nation of Israel."

⁴² So Moses counted the firstborn sons of the people of Israel, just as the Lord had commanded. ⁴³ The number of firstborn sons who were one month old or older was 22,273.

⁴⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, ⁴⁵ "Take the Levites as substitutes for the firstborn sons of the people of Israel. And take the livestock of the Levites as substitutes for the firstborn livestock of the people of Israel. The Levites belong to me; I am the Lord. ⁴⁶ There are 273 more firstborn sons of Israel than there are Levites. To redeem these extra firstborn sons, ⁴⁷ collect five pieces of silver for each of them ... ⁴⁸ Give the silver to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for the extra firstborn sons."

⁴⁹ So Moses collected the silver for redeeming the firstborn sons of Israel who exceeded the number of Levites. ⁵⁰ He collected 1,365 pieces of silver on behalf of these firstborn sons of Israel... ⁵¹ And Moses gave the silver for the redemption to Aaron and his sons, just as the Lord had commanded.