

# Adult Bible Class

## The Book of Numbers

### Lesson #3, Chapters 4 & 5

#### Numbers Chapter 4

Numbers 4 is an in depth look at the responsibilities of the three groups of Levites - the Kohathites, the Gershonites, and the Merarites. God said that the Levite men age 30 to 50 were to serve as assistants to the priests. These were men in the prime of life in both wisdom and physical strength. It is interesting to note that the age for eligibility as a soldier in Israel was twenty and older. But a Levite had to be thirty years of age before he was qualified to assist the priests.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministry at the age of thirty. We learn from this that ministers of God must not be novices. They must have enough of life's experiences and the wisdom that comes from it - to be able to handle the holy things of God. Childish and youthful ways must be in their past. They must learn before they can teach, serve before they can lead, and they must be proven. Time is needed to accomplish this.

As was stated in chapter 3, the Kohathites were responsible for the Tabernacle furniture. However, only Aaron and his sons were to actually cover it when it was time for the camp to move forward:

**Numbers 4:1 (NKJV)** Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: **2** "Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi... **3** 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.

**4** "This *is* the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, *relating to* the most holy things: **5** When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. <sup>6</sup> Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over *that* a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles. <sup>7</sup> "On the table of showbread they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and the showbread shall be on it. <sup>8</sup> They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles. <sup>9</sup> And they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-trimmers, its trays, and all its oil vessels, with which they service it. <sup>10</sup> Then they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of badger skins, and put *it* on a carrying beam.

Aaron and his sons continued to cover all of the furniture of the Tabernacle and put the carrying poles into place (verses 11-14). Then Scripture says:

**Numbers 4:15** And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry *them*; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die.

"These *are* the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry... <sup>20</sup> But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die."

Only those authorized to cover the Tabernacle furniture could do so. The different articles of furniture had to be covered with cloths and fitted with carrying poles as God directed before the Kohathites were allowed to carry them (which they *were* authorized to do). This shows us the darkness of that dispensation of time when the ways of God were mysterious and not plain. Hebrews says:

**Hebrews 10:1** For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never...make those who approach perfect.

These ceremonies that were done in Numbers and the other books of Moses were a shadow of the person and work of Jesus Christ and New Testament salvation. These ceremonies were the picture of the reality that would come through Jesus Christ. Yet, God demanded strict attention and care.

Later in Israel's history during the time of David, ignorance for the proper way to carry the Ark of the Covenant resulted in one man's death (read 1 Chronicles 13:1-4 and 15:1-13, 11-15).

The Ark of the Covenant, which was the presence of God for the people of Israel, had been captured in battle by the Philistines after the Israelites had taken it into battle with them. The Philistines had sent it back to Israel, and it stayed in a certain place for quite some time. Now, David wanted to bring it back to Jerusalem.

**1 Chronicles 13:7** They placed the Ark of God on a new cart...<sup>8</sup> David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments...

<sup>9</sup> But when they arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the Ark. <sup>10</sup> Then the Lord's anger was aroused against Uzzah, and he struck him dead because he had laid his hand on the Ark. So Uzzah died there in the presence of God.

Though David's intentions were commendable, the Israelites did not carry the Ark of God as God had instructed in Numbers 4.

<sup>11</sup> David was angry because the Lord's anger had burst out against Uzzah...

<sup>12</sup> David was now afraid of God, and he asked, "How can I ever bring the Ark of God back into my care?"

When people lack knowledge of God's ways, they can shrink back from Him instead of approaching Him - but finally, David learned what needed to be done.

**1 Chronicles 15:1 (NLT)** David... <sup>2</sup> ...commanded, "No one except the Levites may carry the Ark of God. The Lord has chosen them to carry the Ark of the Lord and to serve him forever."

<sup>3</sup> Then David summoned all Israel to Jerusalem to bring the Ark of the Lord to the place he had prepared for it...

<sup>11</sup> Then David summoned the priests...and...Levite leaders... <sup>12</sup> He said to them... <sup>13</sup> Because you Levites did not carry the Ark the first time, the anger of the Lord our God burst out against us. We failed to ask God how to move it properly. <sup>14</sup> So the priests and the Levites purified themselves in order to bring the Ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> Then the Levites carried the Ark of God on their shoulders with its carrying poles, just as the Lord had instructed Moses.

In every age, God has always had a specific plan, indicated in His Word. Mankind tends toward doing things his way.

Old Testament ceremony was a picture of the reality that is in Christ. In the Old Testament Jesus is veiled, but in the New Testament Jesus can be touched and seen:

**1 John 1:1 (NKJV)** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—<sup>2</sup> the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life...

Jesus Christ has torn the veil that has separated us from the presence of God. In the Old Testament, unauthorized people were told to stay away from the Tabernacle and the presence of God. But because Jesus Christ has become our High Priest, our sacrifice, our substitute - we are now authorized. Hebrews 4:16 says, *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace.*

Numbers chapter 4 continues with the duties of the sons of Gershon. They are to carry loads including the curtains and coverings for the Tabernacle, the courtyard curtains, and the accessories to hang the Tabernacle curtains and the outer curtains (4:21-28). The Sons of Merari are to carry loads including the framework and bases of the Tabernacle and the posts and bases for the courtyard curtain walls along with the accessories (4:29-33).

A census is taken of all of the Levites in their groups (4:34-45). The chapter ends:

**Numbers 4:46** All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers' houses, <sup>47</sup> from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who came to do the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle of meeting—<sup>48</sup> those who were numbered were eight thousand five hundred and eighty [8580].

<sup>49</sup> According to the commandment of the Lord they were numbered by the hand of Moses, each according to his service and according to his task; thus were they numbered by him, as the Lord commanded Moses.

The Levites were all called by God and consecrated to God, but each had his own particular service to perform as prescribed by the Lord. Each job was important and necessary, but each job was different.

Paul said that we are all part of the body, but we are particular members (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Each member has a job to do that has been appointed by God. Trouble can come to the church when a member wants to do a job that is not his calling. God equips each person to do *his* job. When we seek the Lord for His will and we accept His callings in our lives, then we will find contentment and the Kingdom of God will see great blessing and gain.

## Numbers Chapter 5 - Right with God

**Numbers 5:1 (NLT)** The Lord gave these instructions to Moses: <sup>2</sup> "Command the people of Israel to remove from the camp anyone who has a skin disease or a discharge, or who has become ceremonially

unclean by touching a dead person. <sup>3</sup> This command applies to men and women alike. Remove them so they will not defile the camp in which I live among them." <sup>4</sup> So the Israelites did as the Lord had commanded Moses and removed such people from the camp.

In the above Scripture passage, those with skin disease ("every leper" - NKJV), a discharge, or those who have touched a dead body were to be removed from the camp. This command was also given in Leviticus. The reason given is that the Lord lives among the people in the camp, and such people would defile the camp.

This outward "filthiness of the flesh" is a picture to us of the defilement of sin. Sin can be obvious and horrible (like leprosy), or not so noticeable or even secret (like a discharge), or its taint can pollute just by living in this world and rubbing shoulders with it (the end result of sin is death). No matter the level, no matter the source, sin will "*defile the camp.*" This command of God in Scripture is made before Israel travels forward, leaving Mount Sinai, following the presence of God. Forward motion in Israel cannot be achieved when sin is allowed to remain "in the camp."

When a person was removed from the Israelite camp they were not banished forever. They were separated from the camp until they were clean (until they no longer had the skin disease or discharge, or until the proper number of days passed after they had touched a dead body, etc.). They were separated, and they were not fit to be in the camp, but they would actually travel with the camp when the camp was ready to move, but they would be separated from them. There would be the camp in their proper order led by the Spirit of God, then there would be those who were separated because of these reasons, traveling separately.

A basic Bible principle is that sin separates. Jesus Christ came to save us *from* our sins. He has not come to save us *in* our sins allowing us to keep practicing them and live in them. Jesus Christ came to *cleanse* us (just as lepers were cleansed by Jesus) and make us fit to follow His presence. In the New Testament, we see Jesus touching the leper (Mark 1:41), touching the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:27-30), and touching Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:41). All of these actions were forbidden by Old Testament law, so why did Jesus do it? He was showing the world that he had power over sin! Not only did he touch all of these people, but he remedied their unclean situations! Lepers were cleansed, the woman with the issue was healed, and the dead were not dead anymore! What a powerful Savior who could reverse the problem and the effects of the problem!

## Right with Man

**Numbers 5:5 (NLT)** Then the Lord said to Moses, <sup>6</sup> "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel: If any of the people—men or women—betray the Lord by doing wrong to another person, they are guilty. <sup>7</sup> They must confess their sin and make full restitution for what they have done, adding an additional 20 percent and returning it to the person who was wronged. <sup>8</sup> But if the person who was wronged is dead, and there are no near relatives to whom restitution can be made, the payment belongs to the Lord and must be given to the priest. Those who are guilty must also bring a ram as a sacrifice, and they will be purified and made right with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> All the sacred offerings that the Israelites bring to a priest will belong to him. <sup>10</sup> Each priest may keep all the sacred donations that he receives."

Not only does God want us to be right with Him, but God wants us to be right with our fellow man. This can be done through confession and restitution. In Leviticus 6:1-7 we learned that the ancient Israelite was commanded to make restitution to someone for wrongs done against that person. For instance, if someone took something from his neighbor, he was to return the value of what was stolen plus another 20% to make it right with his neighbor - *and* he had to make it right with God as well by bringing a trespass offering to the Tabernacle. He had to be made right with both God and man because he had wronged both God and man.

**Matthew 5:23 (NKJV)** Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

But in the above Scripture passage from Numbers, the person who was wronged is dead and there is no living relative to whom restitution can be made. What should be done in this case? The Lord instructs that there is still a responsibility to God. By bringing the restitution to God (the value plus 20%), God will accept it on behalf of the person who is no longer living.

### **The Waters of Jealousy**

The following passage describes the jealousy or suspicion of a husband toward his wife. The sin of adultery is one for which no real restitution can be made. This Old Testament ceremony is strange to our ears - and requires a supernatural move of God.

**Numbers 5:11 (NLT)** And the Lord said to Moses, <sup>12</sup>“Give the following instructions to the people of Israel.

“Suppose a man’s wife goes astray, and she is unfaithful to her husband <sup>13</sup> ...but neither her husband nor anyone else knows about it. She has defiled herself, even though there was no witness and she was not caught in the act. <sup>14</sup> If her husband becomes jealous and is suspicious of his wife and needs to know whether or not she has defiled herself, <sup>15</sup> the husband must bring his wife to the priest. He must also bring an offering of two quarts of barley flour to be presented on her behalf. Do not mix it with olive oil or frankincense, for it is a jealousy offering—an offering to prove whether or not she is guilty.

One would presume that the husband has cause to believe that his wife was unfaithful - this is not done on a whim. Adultery is a sin that is committed in secret. Great care is given to cover up this sin. Job 24:15 says, *“The adulterer waits for the twilight, saying, ‘No one will see me then.’ He hides his face so no one will know him.”* Proverbs 7:4-27 tells of the immoral woman who leads men into her trap. In this passage the woman says, *“for my husband is not home. He’s away on a long trip.”*

**Numbers 5:16** “The priest will then present her to stand trial before the Lord. <sup>17</sup> He must take some holy water in a clay jar and pour into it dust he has taken from the Tabernacle floor. <sup>18</sup> When the priest has presented the woman before the Lord, he must unbind her hair and place in her hands the offering of proof—the jealousy offering to determine whether her husband’s suspicions are justified. The priest will stand before her, holding the jar of bitter water that brings a curse to those who are guilty. <sup>19</sup> The priest will then put the woman under oath and say to her, ‘If...you have not gone astray and defiled

yourself while under your husband's authority, may you be immune from the effects of this bitter water that brings on the curse. <sup>20</sup> But if you have gone astray by being unfaithful to your husband...—'

<sup>21</sup> "At this point the priest must put the woman under oath by saying '... <sup>22</sup> Now may this water that brings the curse enter your body and cause your abdomen to swell and your womb to shrivel.' And the woman will be required to say, 'Yes, let it be so.' <sup>23</sup> And the priest will write these curses on a piece of leather and wash them off into the bitter water. <sup>24</sup> He will make the woman drink the bitter water that brings on the curse. When the water enters her body, it will cause bitter suffering if she is guilty.

There is nothing poisonous about water with dust from the Tabernacle floor added to it. But even the dust of God's house is powerful, and we see a picture of God's virtue being added to the water! And to this was added the ink from the writing of the curses which came from washing the leather in the water with the dust. So now we have pure water with God's virtue and God's promised curse waiting to judge the matter! This strange ceremony is truly a means whereby God, who knows all the secrets of the heart, can direct the outcome. And - this highly symbolic ceremony was done to put the fear of God in the woman to cause her to confess if she was guilty.

It is interesting to note that when Jesus was teaching in the temple, the scribes and Pharisees brought the woman caught in the act of adultery to Jesus - and he stooped down and wrote in the temple dust (John 8:2-11). Here we see the writing and the dust that are a part of this Old Testament ceremony!

The sin of adultery was one of the capital sins of the Old Testament (see Leviticus 20:10 - others were premeditated murder, kidnapping, striking or cursing parents, incorrigible rebelliousness, sacrificing to false gods, violating the Sabbath, blasphemy or cursing God, false prophets, human sacrifice, divination, bestiality, incest, homosexuality, premarital sex, and rape). If it was proven that a man and woman had committed adultery, they were to be put to death. However, if it was not certain, then this "jealousy ceremony" could take place.

Not only did the woman who committed adultery sin against God and herself, but she sinned against her husband, robbing him of his honor and dignity, possibly adding to the family a child that was not her husband's who could inherit wealth along with the rightful children. The covenant of marriage was defiled. Adultery was considered one of the worst sins.

**Proverbs 6:30 (NLT)** Excuses might be found for a thief  
who steals because he is starving...

<sup>32</sup> But the man who commits adultery is an utter fool,  
for he destroys himself.

<sup>33</sup> He will be wounded and disgraced.  
His shame will never be erased.

<sup>34</sup> For the woman's jealous husband will be furious,  
and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge.

<sup>35</sup> He will accept no compensation,  
nor be satisfied with a payoff of any size.

When God taught the Israelites how he felt when they worshipped idol gods, He compared what they had done to committing whoredom or adultery. Worshiping

idol gods was a betrayal, and God felt betrayed like a man would feel if his wife committed adultery.

**Ezekiel 6:8 (NKJV)** "Yet I will leave a remnant... <sup>9</sup> Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols...

The Jews say in their tradition that in this jealousy ceremony, the priests gave the woman the opportunity to confess. If she said that she was pure, then the ceremony would continue to determine the truth.

The nature of the ceremony was supernatural - God stepped in if the woman was guilty. In the setting of this passage from Numbers the children of Israel were supernaturally fed each day with manna from heaven. The Lord provided water in the desert as well as shade from the sun. Therefore, at this period of time, a supernatural intervention in determining guilt was not so foreign.

**Numbers 5:25 (NLT)** "The priest will take the jealousy offering from the woman's hand, lift it up before the Lord, and carry it to the altar. <sup>26</sup> He will take a handful of the flour as a token portion and burn it on the altar, and he will require the woman to drink the water. <sup>27</sup> If she has defiled herself by being unfaithful to her husband, the water that brings on the curse will cause bitter suffering. Her abdomen will swell and her womb will shrink, and her name will become a curse among her people. <sup>28</sup> But if she has not defiled herself and is pure, then she will be unharmed and will still be able to have children.

<sup>29</sup> "This is the ritual law for dealing with suspicion. If a woman goes astray and defiles herself while under her husband's authority, <sup>30</sup> or if a man becomes jealous and is suspicious that his wife has been unfaithful, the husband must present his wife before the Lord, and the priest will apply this entire ritual law to her. <sup>31</sup> The husband will be innocent of any guilt in this matter, but his wife will be held accountable for her sin."

<sup>29</sup> "This *is* the law of jealousy, when a wife, *while* under her husband's *authority*, goes astray and defiles herself, <sup>30</sup> or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the Lord, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her. <sup>31</sup> Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt."

This passage of Scripture, though it seems strange to our ears, is a picture of the church (the bride, the wife) who is being held accountable to God. The severity of this whole scenario and the severity of the punishment (she will be infertile, her abdomen will swell and her womb will shrink...) shows *the greatness of the woman's honor*. A great woman should *never* lower herself to this level of defilement. This woman pictures the church of the living God, a great woman, and her betrayal to God is a serious matter. The husband in the ceremony is pictured as an honorable man (no suspicion of him). The husband pictures the Lord Jesus Christ who is honorable and good. He would do anything for this great woman if only she would be faithful to Him.

The woman, if she is found guilty, pictures the backslider who has left the Lord to "go a whoring" (KJV) after idols, whatever they may be. She was humbled when the priest unbound her hair as she stood before the altar.

A backslidden church is a pitiful sight. Those who have exchanged the God of heaven for someone or something else have betrayed the One who gave Himself as a ransom for sin and who would stand by His church through every situation - if only she would be faithful. When Jesus first saved us from our sins, he told us, *“Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more”* (John 8:11). To seek out secret sins after we have been redeemed is a betrayal.

**Romans 2:16 (NLT)** And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone’s secret life.

**Romans 3:4 (NLT)** ...Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true. As the Scriptures say about him,

“You will be proved right in what you say,  
and you will win your case in court.”

It is the Christian way to cover sins:

**1 Peter 4:7 (NLT)** The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. <sup>8</sup> Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.