

## Numbers 3 - Thursday, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010

- Tonight we'll be in Numbers chapter 3 as we study about both the descendants of Aaron and the Levites who were not yet numbered.
- Lord willing, at the conclusion of our time tonight, we'll look at some real practical application as it relates to our serving the Lord.

1 Now these are the records of Aaron and Moses when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai.<sup>2</sup> And these are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.<sup>3</sup> These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests.<sup>4</sup> Nadab and Abihu had died before the LORD when they offered profane fire before the LORD in the Wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests in the presence of Aaron their father.

- We learned about Nadab and Abihu back in our study of Leviticus chapter 10 and now see the two remaining brothers take their place.
- It's important to know that only Aaron's descendants were to be the priests who served in the Tabernacle which is why they take over.

5 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 6 "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him.<sup>7</sup> And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. 8 Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle.

- This is where we see the distinction between the descendants of Aaron and the Levites. Aaron's family was priests but not the Levites.
- In other words, every priest was a Levite but not every Levite was a priest. The priest served in the Tabernacle, and the Levite assisted.

9 And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel.<sup>10</sup> So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."

- This seems to indicate that one would be put to death if they were jealous of Aaron and his sons as the ones serving in the Tabernacle.
- It's important to know that to be a Levite priest was a very high honor and privilege however it was also an enormous amount of work.
- In other words, to the outsider it may have looked glamorous outwardly, but to the priest it was serious responsibility to them inwardly.

- One commentator said; "In some ways, being a priest was far more visible and perhaps 'glamorous' than being a Levite. But the service of the Levites made the work of the priests possible, and was seen by God as having equal value. [However] if a Levite grew jealous, and decided they wanted to the work of a priest, it was strictly forbidden – it was an affront to God's order and organization."

11 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:<sup>12</sup> "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine,<sup>13</sup> because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the LORD."

- It's interesting to note that God says He is choosing the Levites from the children of Israel instead of every firstborn of every tribe.
- In other words, it was God's original intention to have the firstborn be the ones whom he would have serve as priests in the Tabernacle.
- It's believed that God chose the Levites instead because they were the only tribe that did as Moses commanded when Israel sinned.

**Exodus 32:25-29** 25 Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. 26 So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him. 27 Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" 28 The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. 29 Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

14 Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying:<sup>15</sup> "Number the children of Levi by their fathers' houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above." 16 So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded.<sup>17</sup> These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.<sup>18</sup> And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei.<sup>19</sup> And the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram, Izeah, Hebron, and Uzziel.<sup>20</sup> And the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their fathers' houses.

- Now it's the tribe of Levi's turn to be numbered, and we're told that they are basically divided into three groups according to Levi's sons.

21 From Gershon came the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimites; these were the families of the Gershonites. 22 Those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above -- of those who were numbered there were seven thousand five hundred. 23 The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward. 24 And the leader of the father's house of the Gershonites was Eliasaph the son of Lael. 25 The duties of the children of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting included the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, 26 the screen for the door of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords, according to all the work relating to them.

- Here we see a specific duty of caring for the skins that covered the Tabernacle given to the Gershonites who numbered 7,500.

- I love this about God's word, even the seemingly insignificant duties are important enough for God to have included in the scriptures.

27 From Kohath came the family of the Amramites, the family of the Izharites, the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites; these were the families of the Kohathites. 28 According to the number of all the males, from a month old and above, there were eight thousand six hundred keeping charge of the sanctuary. 29 The families of the children of Kohath were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. 30 And the leader of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. 31 Their duty included the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the screen, and all the work relating to them. 32 And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest was to be chief over the leaders of the Levites, with oversight of those who kept charge of the sanctuary.

- Now we see the duties of caring for the furniture in the Tabernacle given to the Kohathites who numbered 8,600.

33 From Merari came the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites; these were the families of Merari. 34 And those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above, were six thousand two hundred. 35 The leader of the fathers' house of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail. These were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. 36 And the appointed duty of the children of Merari included the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, its utensils, all the work relating to them, 37 and the pillars of the court all around, with their sockets, their pegs, and their cords.

- The duties of the boards, bars, pillars and sockets of the Tabernacle are given to the family of Merari who numbered 6,200.

38 Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death. 39 All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, by their families, all the males from a month old and above, were twenty-two thousand.

- Moses, Aaron and his sons were to camp on the east of the Tabernacle and again, they were to put to death any outsider who came in.

- Notice that the totals in verse 39 don't reconcile with the totals in verses 22, 28, and 34. There's a discrepancy of 300. (22,000-22,300)

- This is easily explained as a textual error in verse 28; it is likely that the number of the Kohathites may have actually been 8,300.

- As one scholar wrote: "3 (Hebrew s/s) could quite easily have been written as a 6 (ss)."

40 Then the LORD said to Moses: "Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and above, and take the number of their names. 41 And you shall take the Levites for Me -- I am the LORD -- instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel." 42 So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the children of Israel, as the LORD commanded him. 43 And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names from a month old and above, of those who were numbered of them, were twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three.

- This is interesting because if the total number of Levites was 22,000, that would make it very close to the 22,273 firstborns they replace.

44 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 45 "Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. The Levites shall be Mine: I am the LORD. 46 And for the redemption of the two hundred and seventy-three of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites, 47 you shall take five shekels for each one individually; you shall take them in the currency of the shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of twenty gerahs. 48 And you shall give the money, with which the excess number of them is redeemed, to Aaron and his sons." 49 So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those who were redeemed by the Levites. 50 From the firstborn of the children of Israel he took the money, one thousand three hundred and sixty-five shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. 51 And Moses gave their redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

- God is accounting for the 273 firstborn sons of Israel that the Levites don't replace by having a monetary value placed on each one.

- The thought here is that this was establishing the principle of redemption in that there was a price that needed to be paid.

- Life lessons from Numbers chapter 3:

- Like with Nadab and Abihu being replaced by Eleazar and Ithamar, so too is every one of us replaceable in our areas of ministry.

**Esther 4:12-14** 12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" NIV

**1 Kings 19:14-18** 14 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." 15 The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. 17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."

- Like with the distinction between Levites and Aaron's descendants, so too is there a distinction between serving in and assisting with.

Romaine, who has since gone home to be with the Lord, after serving as Pastor Chuck Smith's assistant pastor for over 30 years, wrote a book titled; "Second." It's the story of what it takes to be an assistant. Not first, but second. He writes; "Has God called you to help another, to hold up their arms as did Aaron and Hur for Moses? This call can be in any realm of service, not just as an assistant pastor. It is the role of a servant."

- Like with the death penalty for one promoting themselves into priestly service, so too is self-promotion costly and perhaps even deadly.

**Psalms 75:6-7** 6 For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. 7 But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another. KJV

**2 Chronicles 26:16-20** 16 But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. 17 Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. 18 They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God." 19 Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. 20 When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him. NIV

- Like with the Levites being chosen for priestly service, so too will God choose those of us who obey Him when it's unspeakably difficult.

**Proverbs 27:6** Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. NIV

- Like with the Gershonites, Kohathites and the sons of Merari, so too does God deem important what many may deem insignificant.

**Psalms 84:10** Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. NIV

- Like with the numbers of Levites replacing the numbers of the firstborns, so too will the Lord restore and replace what has been lost.

**Joel 2:25** 'I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten- the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm- my great army that I sent among you. NIV

- Like with the firstborn sons having price for redemption, so too did Jesus as the firstborn Son of God pay the price for our redemption.