

Numbers 4 - Thursday, May 20th, 2010

- Tonight we'll be in chapter four as we make our way through the book of Numbers, and again, it's rich in its application to our lives.

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2 "Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' house, 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.

- Notice that only the men between the ages of thirty to fifty years old were allowed to do perform these specific duties in the Tabernacle.
- In other words, if you were in your twenties or younger, or if you were in your sixty's or older, you would not be doing any of the work.
- One thought as to why this is, is that if you're younger than 30 you're not wise enough, and if you're over fifty you're not strong enough.
- One commentator suggests it was because at 30 years of age David became King of Israel, and at 30 Jesus began His public ministry.

- Well, this may explain the why they couldn't start until they were 30 years of age, but why couldn't they continue after 50 years of age?
- There is a possible explanation for this, and it's actually a very intriguing one, because of what we'll see when we get to chapter eight.

Numbers 8:23-26 23 The LORD said to Moses, 24 "This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the Tent of Meeting, 25 but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. 26 They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the Tent of Meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites." NIV

- This would seem to indicate that when they reached fifty years of age, they would retire and train and teach the twenty-five year olds.
- As you might imagine, this is rich in its application to our lives because I will retire in two years so I can teach the twenty-five year olds :)
- Actually, here are a couple of thoughts as it relates to our serving in the ministry from the perspective of both the young and old alike.
- We can actually set young people up for a failure and a fall when we put them in positions prematurely without the needed training.

1 Timothy 5:22 Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure. KJV

1 Timothy 3:6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. KJV

Titus 2:1-5 1 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. 2 Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. 3 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. NIV

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. 6 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.

- Here the Kohathites were given instructions regarding the tearing down, and packing up of the Tabernacle coverings when moving it.
- It's important to understand the Tabernacle had to be portable until it was replaced by the Temple which would become permanent.

7 "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. 8 They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles. 9 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. 10 Then they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of badger skins, and put it on a carrying beam.

- To us, this may seem like monotonous and even nebulous detail however to them it was critical that everything be done in order.

11 "Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles. 12 Then they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in the sanctuary, put them in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of badger skins, and put them on a carrying beam. 13 Also they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it. 14 They shall put on it all its implements with which they minister there -- the firepans, the forks, the shovels, the basins, and all the utensils of the altar -- and they shall spread on it a covering of badger skins, and insert its poles. 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.

- Woven ever so beautifully into the fabric of all this detail, we see both the practical and the principle working together in harmony.
- In other words, the poles were practical in that they would enable the transportation of the Tabernacle without touching the holy things.
- Therein lies the principle; unholy man could not come into contact with a Holy God unless it was vis-à-vis the High Priests atonement.
- There is an account in first Chronicles where Uzzah touches the ark and dies on the spot, and it's all because there were no poles.

1 Chronicles 13:7-11 7 They moved the ark of God from Abinadab's house on a new cart, with Uzzah and Ahio guiding it. 8 David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets. 9 When they came to the threshing floor of Kidon, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, because the oxen stumbled. 10 The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he died there before God. 11 Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah. NIV

1 Chronicles 15:11-15 11 Then David summoned Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab the Levites. 12 He said to them, "You are the heads of the Levitical families; you and your fellow Levites are to consecrate yourselves and bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. 13 It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the LORD our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way." 14 So the priests and Levites consecrated themselves in order to bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel. 15 And the Levites carried the ark of God with the poles on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded in accordance with the word of the LORD. NIV

- The principle is clear here; "we can be doing the right thing, but in the wrong way, when we need to do the right thing in the right way."
- Furthermore, the Ark was to be carried by man not on a cart just as we are to carry the presence of God as temples of the Holy Spirit.

16 "The appointed duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the daily grain offering, the anointing oil, the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings."

- Now we move from the duties of the Kohathites to the appointed duty of Aaron's oldest son Eleazar who would oversee the Kohathites.

17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:18 "Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites;19 but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task.20 But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die."

- This is interesting because the Lord tells Moses to warn Aaron not to cut off the families of the Kohathites among the tribe of Levi.
- They would die if they approached the holy things, or even watched while Aaron and his sons performed the duty of covering them.
- We see what happens when this warning isn't heeded in 1 Samuel chapter 6 when they remove the mercy seat and look into the ark.

1 Samuel 6:19-20 19 But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the LORD had dealt them, NIV

21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:22 "Also take a census of the sons of Gershon, by their fathers' house, by their families.23 From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, all who enter to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.

- Now for the Gershonites. Here again they are numbered according to the men who were between the ages of thirty and fifty years old.
- This is what I love about the Word of God. Not only is everything done decently and orderly, but there's also uniformity and variety.

"It is worthy of note that these Levites, although they were all equally consecrated to God, had not all exactly the same work to perform. God is not the God of all uniformity. There is a wondrous unity of plan and design in all that he does, but there is also an equally marvelous variety."

Charles Spurgeon

24 This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and carrying:25 They shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tabernacle of meeting with its covering, the covering of badger skins that is on it, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting,26 the screen for the door of the gate of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and altar, and their cords, all the furnishings for their service and all that is made for these things: so shall they serve. 27 "Aaron and his sons shall assign all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, all their tasks and all their service. And you shall appoint to them all their tasks as their duty.28 This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting. And their duties shall be under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

- Just as Aaron's oldest son Eleazar who supervised the Kohathites, Aaron's younger son Ithamar would supervise the Gershonites.
- Here again we see God's order in how he has those in positions of oversight, and those in positions of assisting the leaders over them.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. NIV

2 Corinthians 8:5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. NKJV

29 "As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families and by their fathers' house.³⁰ From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting.³¹ And this is what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets,³² and the pillars around the court with their sockets, pegs, and cords, with all their furnishings and all their service; and you shall assign to each man by name the items he must carry.³³ This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting, under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."

- This is interesting because in addition to supervising the Gershnoties, Ithamar is also given the oversight of the family of Merari as well.
- What makes this so interesting is if Nadab and Abihu hadn't sinned against the Lord, Ithamar wouldn't have had this burden on him.
- In other words, our sin has an impact on those who are closest to us. We do err when we think that our actions won't affect others.

34 And Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers' house,³⁵ from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting;³⁶ and those who were numbered by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty.³⁷ These were the ones who were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses. 38 And those who were numbered of the sons of Gershon, by their families and by their fathers' house,³⁹ from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting --⁴⁰ those who were numbered by their families, by their fathers' house, were two thousand six hundred and thirty.⁴¹ These are the ones who were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD. 42 Those of the families of the sons of Merari who were numbered, by their families, by their fathers' house,⁴³ from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting --⁴⁴ those who were numbered by their families were three thousand two hundred.⁴⁵ These are the ones who 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. 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,⁴⁷ 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 --⁴⁸ those who were numbered were eight thousand five hundred and eighty. 49 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.

- It's important that we understand how everyone was interdependent on everyone else in order for any work to be accomplished.
- They all had different roles and responsibilities but they had to be tuned to the same fork as it were and be of one mind and one accord.

One commentator said it best when he wrote; "Paul says the church is to work like a body - many parts, looking different, doing different jobs, meeting different needs, some more visible, some less, but all essential - and all with the same DNA code! Much trouble is caused in the service of the Lord by those who desire a different calling than they have, or who are jealous of those who have a different calling, or by those who exalt one calling and abase another. Everyone has a place and a job, and all can be about doing it!"

- One final thought before we close. It's estimated that the Tabernacle may have weighed in excess of ten tons, and it had to be moved.
- Here's what I'm thinking; this was not an easy do, this was a lot of work and God knows it because he assigns the largest group to do it.

One commentator wrote; "God's wisdom is seen in placing the Merarites – the largest group – in charge of the transporting of the structure of the Tabernacle. And yet, taken as a whole, the tribe of Levi numbered only one-fourth of the least of the other tribes, for those wholly devoted to the service of God are always few in number. Oh, that we might number ourselves among them."