

Message #5**Numbers 4:1-49**

When we were having this Sanctuary built, one time secular music was being played through the system that made some of us cringe. In fact, we confronted the issue. We informed the builders that this was a sacred church being built, not a room for a night club or a barn dance. We put a stop to that real fast because the place where God is worshipped is to be a special, sacred, reverent place, even when it is being built. Never is that idea more clear than when you go through a book like Numbers.

Most people have no idea how Holy God actually is. Most people have no clue as to how sacred the place is supposed to be where people worship God. Why should they? Look at what most churches today permit in their meeting rooms.

There should be careful, prayerful, thoughtful prayer and preparation for everything. Nothing should be done in a loose way. Everything should be carefully calculated. Everything should be reverent.

When Israel constructed the sacred Tabernacle, it was anything but a free-for-all, feel good place. In fact, if you went to this place and did the wrong thing, you could literally die (Numbers 4:15, 19, 20). If you did not take Tabernacle matters seriously, you could end up dead.

Now most people don't like to think in terms of a God who would kill people or cause people to die. But when you look into the Scriptures, both the O.T. and the N.T., God makes it clear that He is a God who does do just that. For example, John says in I John 5:16 that there is a sin that leads to death for a believer. In Revelation 2:23, Jesus Christ warned the church of Thyatira that He would kill people if they did not repent of their sin. In fact, Jesus Christ specifically said that He has the keys of death in His own hands (Rev. 1:18).

Now this worship matter was so serious that God actually broke down Levitical assignments. There were things God gave specific Levitical groups to do and you did not want to cross lines and try to do something you were not sanctioned to do. You had your job and you better do your job right. In fact, when you went to that Tabernacle you needed to be focused on your own responsibility and not someone else's.

GOD GAVE SPECIFIC SACRED ASSIGNMENTS TO SPECIFIC LEVITES FOR SPECIFIC TABERNACLE SERVICE AND EACH GROUP NEEDED TO CARRY OUT THEIR OWN MINISTRY RESPONSIBILITIES SERIOUSLY AND SYSTEMATICALLY.

What we saw last time was that the Levite males were to be counted starting with the age of one month and older (3:39-41). **The purpose of that numbering was for redemption purposes of the firstborn of Israel. The purpose of this numbering is for service purposes.** As we come to **Numbers 4**, the purpose of this numbering is to count Levites between the ages of 30-50 (**4:3, 23, 30, 39, 43, 47**). This was the age priestly service was required. Apparently the Levites could begin training at age 25 (8:24), but the actual service required was between the ages of 30-50.

This chapter breaks down into five main parts:

PART #1 – The details of the Kohathite Service Responsibilities. 4:1-20

There are three different Hebrew words that describe the type of service these priests would offer:

- 1) They would offer skilled work (melaka). v. 3
- 2) They would offer physical work (abed). v. 4, 23
- 3) They would offer assistant service (soret). v. 12, 14

The arrangement of the Levitical families by their responsibilities is not in the order of the age of their founders; it is in the order of the holiness of the articles that they manage.

The Levitical Kohathites start off the list and they are responsible to take care of the most holy things (4:4, 19). The Kohathites or sons of Kohath that included Moses, Aaron and the priests had the responsibility to see to it that these sacred things were carefully guarded. The word “service” (v. 3) specifically does have to do with physical labor, in a skilled way.

It was the job of the sons of Kohath to physically transport the sacred things and they could only do that after Aaron and his sons had wrapped each object in its God-sanctioned covering (4:5-15). Aaron and his sons had a very serious and sacred and awesome responsibility. That ark was to be well-covered and well-protected. They had to lower the veil of the Holy of Holies and cover everything with hides and cloth so that no one could even see these holy objects (v. 20).

The only ones who saw the items in the Holy of Holy place were Aaron and his sons.

The covering process was very specific:

- 1) They were to cover the Ark with the Veil of the Tabernacle and then cover that with porpoise skin and blue cloth (4:6).

These coverings would waterproof this and protect it from scratches and dings. It would also protect it from physical sight or touch. You did not want to touch a holy piece of furniture or even look on it or you could die (4:15, 20).

- 2) They were to cover the table with a blue cloth and then set the bowls, jars, jugs and utensils and bread on it and then they were to cover that with a scarlet cloth and then with the porpoise skin (4:7-8).

So these items here had three coverings on them. Showing how sacred this was. That number three cannot be a coincidence as God is a Holy Trinity.

- 3) They were to cover the lampstand and all utensils connected to it with porpoise skin (4:9-10).

- 4) They were to cover the golden altar with blue cloth and porpoise skin **(4:11)**.
- 5) They were to cover all the utensils connected to the altar with blue cloth and porpoise skin **(4:12)**.
- 6) They were to remove the ashes of the sacrifices and cover the bronze altar with purple cloth **(4:13)**.

This is janitorial work of making sure the bronze altar is clean. It was important work.

- 7) They were to put all altar utensils on purple cloth and cover with porpoise skin **(4:14)**.

Now according to **verse 15**, when Aaron and his sons had covered everything, then the Kohathites could come to move the objects by the poles and they were not to touch the object itself or they would die.

We may recall they lived on the south side of the tabernacle and they were responsible for taking care of the sacred furniture items and the utensils **(Numbers 3:29-31)**.

It is a deadly serious sin to regard something that is closely connected to God as common or ordinary. There is a distinction that is to be made between that which is holy and sacred and that which is not (Lev. 10:10; I Corinthians 11:22). There is a distinction between the church and your home.

PART #2 – The details of the Eleazar Service Responsibility. 4:16-20

Eleazer, the priest, the son of Aaron, was to supervise this and see to it that everything was properly handled. He had two primary responsibilities:

- 1) It was his job to make sure they had the ingredients connected to the sacred objects. **4:16a**

His job was to make certain they took care of the oil, the incense and the grains the right way.

- 2) It was his job to oversee everything within the Tabernacle complex. **4:16b**

In **verses 17-19**, God warns do not let the Kohathites die because you get loose with these restrictions. The rules must be followed and protected. God told Moses and Aaron that no one was to do anything without specific approval of Aaron and his sons **(4:19)**. It was their job to give assignments and if the Kohathites even looked in places they shouldn't, they would die **(4:20)**.

Now we who live in the Grace Age may think this is no real threat to us. According to Paul, if someone partakes of the Communion service in a loose way, they can die (I Cor. 11:28-30).

PART #3 – The details of the Gershonite Service Responsibilities. **4:21-28**

Now the responsibilities of the Gershonites are not as intense, but that does not mean they are not as important. Adult males were to be counted who were 30 years old to 50 years old (v. 23). The Gershonites lived on the west side of the Tabernacle, opposite the entrance and their job was to take care of the tent coverings and curtains (3:23-26). They were the software priests responsible for taking care of the various items made out of soft cloth.

The specific service responsibility of the Gershonites was to dismantle and transport and reassemble various curtains of the tabernacle and the tent (**4:24-26**). Verse 24 makes it clear that they not only served, they carried the items. The Merarites were responsible for the tent frame and its supports and the Gershonites were responsible for the curtains.

Verses 27-28 clearly shows that their service was conducted under the authority of Aaron and his sons. Ithamar was specifically the priest in charge of this.

Never do you find someone being approved by God who tries to go behind the leaders' back. Things are to be approved by those God has appointed to be in charge. This idea that we just let anyone do what they want is not in the Bible.

PART #4 – The details of the Merarite Service Responsibilities. **4:29-33**

The Merarites also were to be numbered from age 30-50. We may recall that they were to camp on the north side of the Tabernacle and their job was to take care of the hardware items (3:35-37). Their job was to take down the frame, boards, bars, pillars and sockets, the entire frame of the Tabernacle after the curtains and coverings had been removed.

Items were to be specifically identified and assigned for carry purposes. Each man was to be assigned with the responsibility to pack, carry and reassemble the physical frame of the Tabernacle.

Now this does not seem to be a very glamorous job. But think about it for a moment. If a man was assigned to take care of one tent peg and he did not do it right, the tabernacle could potentially collapse and expose the ark for all to see, which would mean instant death. Even the one with the tent peg had a serious job to do.

This was to be done at the direction of Aaron, specifically Ithamar, who was in charge of this (v. 33).

PART #5 – The details of the Levite Summary Census. **4:34-49**

Moses and Aaron got busy to number the men 30-50.

From Kohath, the number was 2,750. **4:36**

From Gershom, the number was 2,630. **4:40**

From Merari, the number was 3,200. **4:44**

To the total Levitical men who would be involved in this matter, was 8,580.

Every person who was connected to this work was known and numbered.

Every one of these jobs required systematic effort. Every one of these jobs required order and organization and submission to authority. Not every person had the same responsibility, but all did have a responsibility. Those who use the prime of their lives ages 30-50 to serve God will never regret it.

According to **verse 49**, everything was being done in accordance with the Word and will of God. Things are going well to this point, but it will not end that way.

This book of Numbers says that you can start off with a reverence for God and His Word. You can start out viewing church as a sacred place of worship and end up far removed from that.

Each person has a sacred job to do and what appears to be insignificant is not insignificant if it is for God. Each believer is a sacred temple indwelt by the Spirit of God. That is very serious and very sacred.