

Exegetical Notes, Numbers 3:5-51

“MINE!”

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Numbers 3:5-51

Verse 5-10

YHWH said to Moses, “Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him. They are to perform duties for him and for the whole community at the Tent of Meeting, by doing the work of the tabernacle. They are to take care of all the furnishing of the Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle. Give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to him. Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests; anyone else who approaches the sanctuary must be put to death.”

- Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, had three sons, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. Kohath had four sons, Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Amram had two son, Aron, his first born, and Moses. Thus Moses is of the tribe of Levi. This is the story of his family.
- Aaron, Moses' elder brother, was appointed as Israel's first High Priest. His four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar, were appointed to serve as priests under their father. Nadab and Abihu were removed from office by death because they displeased YHWH. (See notes for Numbers 3:1-4).
- By God's specific command, the entire tribe of Levi is set aside to assist Aaron and his sons. They are given the care of the Tent of Meeting. Their job is to serve God and their fellow Israelites by caring for the house of God.

Verse 11-14

YHWH also said to Moses, "I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman.

THE LEVITES ARE MINE, for all the firstborn are mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for myself every firstborn in Israel, whether man or animal. They are to be mine. I am YHWH."

- See Exodus 13:2. At the time God took all the firstborn of Egypt he claimed all the firstborn of Israel as his own. Salvation always comes with a high cost. Jesus had to die so that we could be saved. The firstborn of Egypt had to die so that the Israelites could be saved. The cost of Israel's salvation is that every firstborn male among them must be given to the Lord. It is the cost of their salvation.
- Because the cost is so high, God accepts a substitutionary offering. The tribe of Levi will stand in the place of the firstborn of Israel. God claims the descendants of Levi as his own in place of all the firstborn, just as he allows Jesus to become the offering for our sins.
- Thus the tribe of Levi belongs to God. They are his. This is a high honor which carries with it great responsibility.

Verse 14-20

YHWH said to Moses in the Desert of Sinai, "Count the Levites by their families and clans. Count every male a month old or more." So Moses counted them, as he was commanded by the word of YHWH. These were the names of the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. These were the names of the Gershonite clans: Libni and Shimei. The Kohathite clans: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The Merarite clans: Mahli and Mushi. These were the Levite clans, according to their families.

- The tribe of Levi was not counted in the first census. See Numbers 1. This count was to determine the size of Israel's army. As the tribe of Levi was eliminated from military service, they were not counted.
- God is now about to order the work of the priestly family. He begins by counting them.

Verse 21-26

To Gershon belonged the clans of the Libnites and Shimeites; these were the Gershonite clans. The number of all the males a month old or more who were counted was 7,500. The Gershonite clans were to camp on the west, behind the tabernacle. The leader of the families of the Gershonites was Eliasaph son of Lael. At the Tent of Meeting the Gershonites were responsible for the care of the tabernacle and tent, its coverings, the

curtain at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the curtains of the courtyard, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, and the ropes -- and everything related to their use.

- The Gershonites numbered 7,500 men and boys. Their specific assignment regarded the care of the outside stuff of the Tent of Meeting. They were to take it down and set it up whenever the nation moved.

Verse 27-32

To Kohath belonged the clans of the Amramites, Izharites, Hebronites, and Uzzielites; these were the Kohathite clans. The number of all the males a month old or more was 8,600. The Kohathites were responsible for the care of the sanctuary. The Kohathite clans were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. The leader of the families of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering, the curtain, and everything related to their use. The chief leader of the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest. He was appointed over those who were responsible for the care of the sanctuary.

- The Kohathites numbered 8,600 men and boys. Their specific task was to care for the furnishings on the inside of the tabernacle. Because many of these items, like the ark, were considered especially holy and could only be handled by the priests, a priest, one of Aaron's sons, was appointed to oversee this work.

Verse 33-37

To Merari belonged the clans of the Mahlites and the Mushites; these were the Merarite clans. The number of all the males a month old or more who were counted was 6,200. The leader of the families of the Merarite clans was Zuriel son of Abihail; they were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. The Merarites were appointed to take care of the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts, bases, all its equipment, and everything related to their use, as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs and ropes.

- The Merarites numbered about 6,200 men and boys. The language indicates that there may have been some members of this group who were not counted. This is also true with the Gershonites. See verse 21.) Their specific assignment was to

care for the structural posts and the equipment necessary to support the tent and curtains.

Verse 38

Moses and Aaron and his sons were to camp to the east of the tabernacle, toward the sunrise, in front of the Tent of Meeting. They were responsible for the care of the sanctuary on behalf of the Israelites. Anyone else who approached the sanctuary was to be put to death.

- Moses and the priests camped at the front door of the tabernacle. They stood at the gate to be the go-between for God with his people and the people with God. No one could come to God except through the priests, God's prescribed method, just as no one can come to the Father now except through Jesus Christ, the Son.
- The priestly families surrounded the tabernacle to protect the people from improper access to God.

Verse 39-51

The total number of the Levites counted at YHWH's command by Moses and Aaron according to their clans, including every male a month old or more, was 22,000. YHWH said to Moses, "Count all the firstborn Israelite males who are a month old or more and make a list of their names. Take the Levites for me in place of all the firstborn of the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites in place of all the firstborn of the livestock of the Israelites. I am YHWH." So Moses counted all the firstborn of the Israelites, as YHWH commanded him. The total number of firstborn males a month old or more, listed by name, was 22,273. YHWH also said to Moses, "Take the Levites in place of all the firstborn of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites in place of their livestock. THE LEVITES ARE TO BE MINE. I am YHWH. To redeem the 273 firstborn Israelites who exceed the number of Levites, collect five shekels for each one, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. Give the money for the redemption of the additional Israelites to Aaron and his sons." So Moses collected the redemption money from those who exceeded the number redeemed by the Levites. From the firstborn of the Israelites he collected silver weighing 1,365 shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel. Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons, as he was commanded by the word of YHWH.

- There were not enough Levites to cover the redemption of all of Israel's firstborn. There were 273 firstborn who were not covered.

They were bought by a special offering of silver as commanded by God. In God's account there is always provision and nothing is ever overlooked.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *MINE!* They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)