

Exegetical Notes, Numbers 8:1-26

“The Levites UnSinned!”

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Numbers 8:1-26

Verse 1-4

¹The Lord said to Moses, ²“Speak to Aaron and say to him, ‘When you set up the lamps, see that all seven light up the area in front of the lampstand.’”³ Aaron did so; he set up the lamps so that they faced forward on the lampstand, just as the Lord commanded Moses. ⁴This is how the lampstand was made: It was made of hammered gold—from its base to its blossoms. The lampstand was made exactly like the pattern the Lord had shown Moses.

- Practically speaking, the lampstand's purpose was to provide light inside the Tent of Meeting for the priests as they performed their duties there. Thus, it was important that the light from the stand be directed so as to best serve this function.
- More importantly, however, is the symbolic meaning of the lampstand. It represented Christ, the coming Messiah, the Light of the World.

Verse 5-14

⁵The Lord said to Moses: ⁶“Take the Levites from among all the Israelites and make them ceremonially clean. ⁷To purify them, do this: Sprinkle the water of cleansing on them; then have them shave their whole bodies and wash their clothes. And so they will purify themselves. ⁸Have them take a young bull with its grain offering of the finest flour mixed with olive oil; then you are to take a second young bull for a sin offering. ⁹Bring the Levites to the front of the tent of meeting and assemble the whole Israelite community. ¹⁰You are to bring the Levites before the Lord, and the Israelites are to lay their hands on them. ¹¹Aaron is to present the Levites

before the Lord as a wave offering from the Israelites, so that they may be ready to do the work of the Lord.

¹² *“Then the Levites are to lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, using one for a sin offering to the Lord and the other for a burnt offering, to make atonement for the Levites. ¹³ Have the Levites stand in front of Aaron and his sons and then present them as a wave offering to the Lord.*

¹⁴ *In this way you are to set the Levites apart from the other Israelites, and the Levites will be mine.*

- The Hebrew word translated, "ceremonially clean," literally means to "unsin." The Levites are human. Therefore, they have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Before they can stand before God to do what God has asked them to do something must be done about their sinful state. What is described in these verses is the ritual act by which the Levites are unsinned.
- First, they are sprinkled with water. Although there is a clear relationship to this and baptism, the first concern is their outward appearance. They must first be physically clean. So this act is a symbolic washing of their bodies.
- Second, they must shave off all of their body hair. This would be from the top of their heads to the soles of their feet. All body hair must be removed. This would have been a humiliating act for the men of that time. In this way they humbled themselves before God and the entire Israelite community.
- Third, they had to wash all of their clothing. Nothing containing dirt was to be allowed on them on this day. They were to be perfectly, physically clean. That which is apparent on the outside reflects what cannot be seen inside.
- Fourth, the Levites, properly prepared on the outside are brought before the Tent of Meeting where God sat enthroned. They were to bring with them the proper offerings. And there, before God, the people, most likely through the elders, laid their hands on the Levites. This act symbolically declared the Levites to be the people's gift to God.
- Fifth, Aaron, the High Priest, offered the Levites to God on behalf of the people as a wave offering. In this way, he was asking God to accept the gift which the people were presenting to him.
- Sixth, The Levites lay their hands on the bulls which they are offering to God as a sin offering and a burnt offering. These offerings are made according to God's instructions to atone for the sins of the Levites.

- In this way the Levites' sins were forgiven by God who accepted them as a gift from the people to serve him.

Verse 15-19

¹⁵ *“After you have purified the Levites and presented them as a wave offering, they are to come to do their work at the tent of meeting. ¹⁶ They are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to me. I have taken them as my own in place of the firstborn, the first male offspring from every Israelite woman. ¹⁷ Every firstborn male in Israel, whether human or animal, is mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set them apart for myself. ¹⁸ And I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn sons in Israel. ¹⁹ From among all the Israelites, I have given the Levites as gifts to Aaron and his sons to do the work at the tent of meeting on behalf of the Israelites and to make atonement for them so that no plague will strike the Israelites when they go near the sanctuary.”*

- These verses explain the gift issue raised in verses 5-14. When God struck down the firstborn in Egypt as the cost of Israel's freedom, he claimed every first born son of the Israelites as his. This was the high cost of Israel's freedom. It foreshadows the day when God would give up his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to buy our freedom from sin and death.
- God is being kind to Israel. He is accepting the tribe of Levi in payment for the firstborn. The tribe of Levi is honored for it has been singled out by God as the gift of the people to pay for their freedom. The Levites will serve in the house of God.

Verse 20-22

²⁰ *Moses, Aaron and the whole Israelite community did with the Levites just as the Lord commanded Moses. ²¹ The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes. Then Aaron presented them as a wave offering before the Lord and made atonement for them to purify them. ²² After that, the Levites came to do their work at the tent of meeting under the supervision of Aaron and his sons. They did with the Levites just as the Lord commanded Moses.*

- After all of this had taken place just as was commanded, the Levites assumed their duties in the Tabernacle.

Verse 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.”

- As an expression of his favor, God gave the Levites a short work span. They worked actively from the age of 25 until they were 50. At age 50 they retired from active service although they could still volunteer to help if they were so inclined.

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