

Numbers 3 Commentary

NUMBERS 2

[NUMBERS 4](#)

Numbers: Journey to God's Rest-Land by Irving Jensen- used by permission

Source: Ryrie Study Bible

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS "Wilderness Wandering"								
WALKING Numbers 1-12			WANDERING Numbers 13-25			WAITING Numbers 26-36		
Counting & Camping Nu 1-4	Cleansing & Congregation Nu 5-8	Carping & Complaining Nu 9-12	12 Spies & Death in Desert Nu 13-16	Aaron & Levites in Wilderness Nu 17-18	Serpent of Brass & Story of Balaam Nu 21-25	Second Census 7 Laws of Israel Nu 26-30	Last Days of Moses as Leader Nu 31-33	Sections, Sanctuaries & Settlements Nu 34-36
Law & Order			Rebellion & Disorder			New Laws for the New Order		
Old Generation			Tragic Transition			New Generation		
Preparation for the Journey: Moving Out			Participation in the Journey: Moving On			Prize at end of the Journey: Moving In		
At Sinai Mt Sinai			To Moab Mt Hor			At Moab Mt Nebo		
En Route to Kadesh (Mt Sinai)			En Route to Nowhere (Wilderness)			En Route to Canaan (Plains of Moab)		
A Few Weeks to 2 Months			38 years, 3 months, 10 days			A Few Months		
Christ in Numbers = Our "Lifted-up One" (Nu 21:9, cp Jn 3:14-15)								
Author: Moses								

Numbers 3:1 Now these are the records of the generations of Aaron and Moses at the time when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai.

- **generations:** Ge 2:4 5:1 10:1 Ex 6:16,20 Mt 1:1
- **spoke:** Nu 1:1 Lev 25:1 27:34
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

Numbers 3 focuses on the Levites, the priesthood and the role of the Levites as "substitutionary" firstborn males which were dedicated to God.

'All priests are Levites, but not all Levites are priests.

Brian Bell points out that "Chapters 1-4 God deals with the **outward** conditions of the camp(set up; layout). Chapters 5-10 God deals with the **inward** conditions."

Now these are the records of the generations- **Now these are the generations** is a standard formula for introducing a genealogy (9x in 9v - Ge 6:9; Ge 10:1; Ge 11:10; Ge 11:27; Ge 25:12; Ge 25:19; Ge 36:1; Ge 37:2; Nu 3:1). "The term "records" (toledot, Heb.), sometimes translated "history," "generations," or "genealogy," is used to divide the Book of Genesis into 11 sections (cf. Gen. 2:4, note). Its use again here is an indication of the unity of the Pentateuch. Cf. Ex. 6:14-25." (BSB)

Of Aaron and Moses at the time when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai- Note Aaron mentioned before Moses here which sets the stage for Aaron's lineage (Moses' descendents are not mentioned), although this may be because he was in

fact he was born before his brother Moses and was the "firstborn." **Barnes** adds "The personal dignity of Moses, though it gave him rank as at the head of his tribe, was not hereditary. He had, and desired to have Numbers 14:12; Exodus 32:10, no successor in his office but the distant prophet like unto himself Deuteronomy 18:18. Aaron was the ancestor of a regular succession of priests."

NET Note - The construction is וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת (vé'elleh tolédot), which was traditionally translated "now these are the generations," much as it was translated throughout the book of Genesis. The noun can refer to records, stories, genealogies, names, and accounts of people. Here it is the recorded genealogical list with assigned posts included. Like Genesis, it is a heading of a section, and not a colophon as some have suggested.

HCSB note - Within the cultural framework of the ancient Near East, genealogical records (Hb toledoth; see note at Gen 5:1) served several purposes: (1) to provide historical connection to a pivotal point in the past; (2) to preserve familial community and organization within the larger societal structure; (3) to justify one's position within the societal structure by providing a historical precedent from within one's family line; and (4) to provide future generations with a source of pride. Moses used his records of the census to substantiate his and Aaron's authority.

Numbers 3:2 These then are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

- Nu 26:60 Ex 6:23 28:1 1Ch 6:3 24:1
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

AARON'S ORIGINAL GENEALOGY

These then are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar- So here we find 5 men who were qualified to function as priests in a nation of some 2 million Israelites!

KJVS note on Aaron's line - They alone could handle the sacrificial blood, touch the altar, and enter the tent of meeting. They were the authoritative teachers in Israel (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 24:8), and the official mediators between God and Israel. Along with such a great privilege came an immense responsibility, one that Nadab and Abihu did not meet.

Firstborn (01060)(bekor) means an offspring who came first in the order of birth (animals Ge 4:4) or persons (Ge 25:13). Swanson adds that **bekor** means "firstborn, usually, the first male offspring, the oldest son, with the associative meaning of prominence in the clan and privileges pertaining to clan and inheritance (Ge 43:33; Ne 10:37)." The firstborn of clean animals were sacrificed to the Lord (Dt. 12:6, 17), but the firstborn males of unclean animals could be redeemed (Nu 18:15)

Currid - Yahweh calls Israel his 'first-born son'. He uses the language of a family relationship.

Related Resource:

- [Who was Eleazar in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Who was Ithamar in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Who were Nadab and Abihu? | GotQuestions.org](#)

Numbers 3:3 These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests.

- the priests): Ex 28:41 40:13,15 Lev 8:2,12,30
- whom he consecrated): Heb. whose hand he filled, Ex 29:1-37 Lev 8:1-9:24 Heb 7:28
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests **Ordained** literally means "to have one's hand filled." (Ex 28:41; 29:9, 33, 35; Lev. 8:33; 16:32)

How did "fill one's hands" come to mean to be ordained? -**Currid** suggests "It probably developed from the act of placing a sign or symbol of office into the person's hands. Less likely is Noth's suggestion that it derives from money being placed into a priest's hands as payment for his duties. It seems to have more to do with authority in office than with payment for services."

Anointed (04886)(masah/maschah) is a verb which basically means to smear something on, to rub with oil,

to anoint (as in setting one apart for office or function - Elisha as prophet = 1Ki 19:16, kings for office = 1Sa 9:16 = Saul, 1Sa 16:12 = David, 1Ki 1:39 = Solomon) and by implication to sanctify (set aside for sacred purpose) or consecrate (dedicate for a sacred purpose) (altar = Nu 7:10; vessels for worship - Ex 29:36 = "you shall anoint it to consecrate it;" Ex 30:26, 40:9-10). In the first OT use, Jacob **"anointed** a pillar" and made a vow to God (Ge 31:13; Lxx = aleipho = to anoint by applying a liquid - Jesus' feet were anointed with perfume - Lk 7:38, 46). **Baker** adds that "The anointing was done with oil to symbolize the elevation of the person to a new position such as priest or king (2Sa 5:3)."

Ordained (04390)(male) means to fill or to be full, to complete, to fulfill, to finish, to satisfy. In Lev 16:33 (also in Lev 21:10) **male** (Lxx = teleioo) is again used with the Hebrew word for hand (yad) in the phrase "*male + yad*" which as noted above is literally "fill one's hand" and in most versions is translated **ordained** (NJB = "installed").

NET Note - In this verse the expression is in a relative clause: "who he filled their hand" means "whose hands he filled," or "whom he consecrated." The idiomatic expression used here is from Lev 8; it literally is "he filled their hand" (מָלֵא יָדָם, mille' yadam). In the ordination service Moses placed some of the meat from the sacrifice in the hand of the ordinand, and this signified what he was going to be about—having his hand full, or being consecrated to the priesthood. There is some evidence that this practice or expression was also known in Mesopotamia. In modern ordination services a NT or a Bible may be placed in the ordinand's hand—it is what the ministry will be about.

Numbers 3:4 But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

- Nadab: Nu 26:61 Lev 10:1,2
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Leviticus 10:1; 2+ Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. 2 And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD



Strange Fire

STRANGE FIRE CALLS DOWN WRATH OF GOD

But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered ("when they brought near," "when they offered" - see [qarab](#) below) **strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children-** These two priests were next in line after Aaron, but were killed without any offspring to pass on their lineage (this information is not given in the Lev 10:1-7+ account). Children were normally considered a blessing from God, but the fact that they did not have any adds to the shame of what they did

NET Note on no children - The two young priests had been cut down before they had children; the ranks of the family of Aaron

were thereby cut in half in one judgment from God. The significance of the act of judgment was to show that the priests had to sanctify the LORD before the people—they were to be examples that the sanctuary and its contents were distinct.

Currid has an interesting comment on why the **strange fire** episode is mentioned - One purpose of the inclusion of this comment by the biblical writer was probably to anticipate the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16. The act of fire being placed in censers for false worship is central to both episodes.(EPSC-Nu)

Brian Bell on **strange** (profane) **fire** - **Censer**(firepan) - (Show Picture) The priest filled the censer with live coals from the sacred fire on the altar of burnt-offering, and having carried it into the sanctuary, there threw upon the burning coals the sweet incense, which sent up a cloud of smoke, filling the apartment with fragrance. **Incense** - a fragrant composition prepared by the "art of the apothecary." It consisted of 4 ingredients "beaten small". That which was not thus prepared was called "strange incense" (Ex 30:9). It was offered along with every meat-offering; and besides was daily offered on the golden altar in the holy place, and on the great day of atonement was burnt by the high priest in the holy of holies. Profane Fire (strange fire; wrong kind of fire; unauthorized fire) In Leviticus 8,9 the priest had just been made holy. Fire just fell from heaven in a positive way (read Lev 9:22-24). Fire's about to fall in a bad way! William's said, Man always & immediately fails when placed in any position of responsibility & glory. Adam, Noah, Moses, Solomon, the Apostles, the Hebrew & Christian churches are all sad proofs of this fact. It sure didn't take long for sin to enter the priesthood! Here Nadab & Abihu did what the lord had not commanded! Ex.19:22+ "Also let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them....Interesting - They were "devoured" by the fire; but their priestly tunics were not burnt (like the tabernacle was not burnt) (2,5)....Those who have access to God have responsibility as well as privilege.

David Thompson - There is an important principle to see here. It is a very serious thing to make up your own idea of worship. It is true that usually God does not strike down a minister today with a lightning bolt, but there will be serious judgment that God will give to the minister (James 3:1). You do not want to do your own thing when it comes to worship. We must be very careful to take God's Word and work very seriously. It is no light matter to God to be a leader when it comes to worship.

NET Note on **strange fire** - The expression אֵשׁ זָרָה ('esh zarah, "strange fire") seems imprecise and has been interpreted numerous ways (see the helpful summary in J. E. Hartley, Leviticus [WBC 4], 132–33). The infraction may have involved any of the following or a combination thereof: (1) using coals from some place other than the burnt offering altar (i.e., "unauthorized coals" according to J. Milgrom, Leviticus [AB], 1:598; cf. Lev 16:12 and cf. "unauthorized person" [אִישׁ זָר, 'ish zar] in Num 16:40 [17:5 HT], NASB "layman"), (2) using the wrong kind of incense (cf. the Exod 30:9 regulation against "strange incense" [קִטְרֵת זָרָה, qétoret zarah] on the incense altar and the possible connection to Exod 30:34–38), (3) performing an incense offering at an unprescribed time (B. A. Levine, Leviticus [JPSTC], 59), or (4) entering the Holy of Holies at an inappropriate time (Lev 16:1–2).

So Eleazar ('God has helped') **and Ithamar** ('land of palms') **served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron**- All future (legitimate) priests would come from the families of these two sons of Aaron. **Eleazar** ('God has helped') would succeed Aaron as the high priest after Aaron's death in the region of Moab across the Jordan River from the promised land (Nu 20:23-29; Nu 33:38-39).

Thompson - "Now according to verse 4, we learn that the two sons of Aaron who were left, Eleazar and Ithamar, could not possibly carry out all tabernacle ministry matters on their own. So what God did, according to verses 5-6, was to speak to Moses and assign the entire tribe of Levi with the responsibility of helping Aaron and his two sons in regard to worship matters."

Rayburn - At the outset we are warned that carelessness or indifference in the service of a holy God can be fatal. (ED: If we really had this sober minded approach what would it do to our work for God, our worship for God?)

In the lifetime is literally "in the presence of Aaron their father" or "before the face of Aaron." **NET Note** adds "The expression "in the presence of" can also mean "during the lifetime of" (see Ge 11:28).

Served as priests (03547)(kahan from kohen = priest) occurs as a plural verb and means to act or function as a priest. Gilbrant - Derived from the noun kōhfin , "priest," this verb occurs twenty-three times in the Bible with the meaning "to minister as a priest." It occurs only in the Piel stem. The verb has cognates in several Semitic languages. Mostly, it occurs in Middle Hebrew and later Aramaic dialects in the same semantic range as what is found in the Hebrew Bible. Also, the verb appears in Arabic with the meaning "to prophesy," a function which rarely accompanies priestly actions in the Hebrew Bible, especially after David centralized worship in Jerusalem. Usually the verb refers to ministering as a priest of the Lord in Israel, so of Aaron and his sons (Ex 28:1, 3, 4, 41; 29:1, 44; 30:30; 31:10; 35:19; 39:41; 40:13, 15; Lev. 7:35; Num. 3:3f; Deut. 10:6; 1 Chr. 24:2) or of Aaron's descendants who succeeded him (Lev. 16:32; 1 Chr. 6:10). **NIDOTTE** - Perhaps the central concept of priesthood is mediation between the sphere of the divine and the ordinary world. A priest through his ritual actions and his words facilitates communication across the boundary separating the holy from the profane. The priests represented God to the people in the splendor of their clothing, in their behavior,

and in oracles and instruction, while in sacrifice and intercession they represented the people to God (TDOT 7:70).

Question - [What is the meaning of the strange fire in Leviticus 10:1?](#)

Answer - In order to understand the phrase “strange fire,” we must review the story in Leviticus in which it appears. The first tabernacle had been erected, and Aaron was doing a lot of sacrificing per God’s instructions (Leviticus 8—9). One day, two of Aaron’s sons, [Nadab and Abihu](#), came along and offered incense with “strange fire.” The Hebrew word translated “strange” means “unauthorized, foreign, or profane.” God not only rejected their sacrifice; He found it so offensive that He consumed the two men with fire.

After Nadab and Abihu were killed, Moses explained to Aaron why God had done such a harsh thing: “This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: ‘Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored’” (Leviticus 10:3). The exact nature of the profane fire isn’t known, but, since it was the fire that was unauthorized, it could be that Nadab and Abihu were burning the incense with fire of their own making rather than taking fire from the altar, as specified in Leviticus 16:12. Or it could have been that the two men came into the tabernacle drunk and therefore could not remember what was a violation and what was not (Leviticus 10:8–9). Whatever it was the men did to render the offering profane, it was a sign of their disregard for the utter holiness of God and the need to honor and obey Him in solemn and holy fear. Their carelessness and irreverence were their downfall.

In judging Nadab and Abihu for their strange fire, God was making a point to all the other priests who would serve in His tabernacle—and later, in His temple—and to us, as well. Since this was the first time sacrifices were being offered on the altar and Israel was getting to know the living God better, when Aaron’s sons were disobedient and profane, God displayed His displeasure in no uncertain terms. God was not going to allow the disobedience of Aaron’s sons to set a precedent for future disregard of His Law. A similar story occurs in Acts 5:1–11, during the time of the early church. A husband and wife lie to Peter about some land given to the church, and they are judged with physical death because of their lie. As Peter puts it, “You have not lied just to human beings but to God” (Acts 5:4).

God knows our hearts. He knows what we truly believe and our attitude toward Him. We cannot offer to Him proud “sacrifices” that are unworthy of Him. He seeks those who come to Him in humility, ready to sacrifice their pride and lay before Him humble and contrite hearts grieving for sin (Psalm 51:17). Certainly, there is grace and forgiveness and plenty of “second chances” for those who belong to Him. But God wants us to know that He is serious when it comes to His honor and glory. If there is willful disobedience in the life of a believer, then God disciplines us out of His great love for us (Hebrews 12:7–11). If such disobedience continues, God will take harsher measures until we understand how we are disappointing Him. If we continue in our disobedience even after that, then God has every right to remove us from this earth (see 1 Corinthians 11:29–30 (Source [GotQuestions.org](#)))

Numbers 3:5 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

- Nu 1:49-53 2:17,33 8:6-15,22-26 16:9-11 18:2-6 Ex 32:26-29 De 33:8,9 Mal 2:4
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying - 4x in Numbers 3 - Nu 3:5, 11, 14, 44.

Numbers 3:6 "Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him.

BGT Numbers 3:6 λαβὲ τὴν φυλὴν Λευὶ καὶ στῆσαι αὐτοὺς ἐναντὶν Ἀαρὼν τοῦ ἐργαζομένου σου αὐτὸν

NET Numbers 3:6 "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him.

NLT Numbers 3:6 "Call forward the tribe of Levi, and present them to Aaron the priest to serve as his assistants.

ESV Numbers 3:6 "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him.

NIV Numbers 3:6 "Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him.

- **keep:** Nu 3:32 8:26 31:30 1Ch 23:28-32 26:20,22,26
- **to do the:** Nu 1:50 8:11,15,24-26
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Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him - This passage makes the point that not all the Levites were priests but only the members of the family of Aaron. In this context **bring near** is a sacrificial word, and signifies the presenting of an offering to the Lord, in this case the "offering" being the tribe of Levi which was entirely given up to the service of the sanctuary, to be no longer their own, but the Lord's (cf NT believers in 1 Cor 6:19-20+).

THOUGHT - Now believers are to **"bring** (themselves) **near"** (so to speak) as a sacrificial offering. Paul describes this in Romans 12:1-2+ "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present () [paristemi](#) = stand near) your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable (pleasing) to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And **do not be conformed** ([present imperative with a negative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) to this world, but **be transformed** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

HCSB adds regarding **bring near** that this is "The language of God's instruction to Moses is that of an animal sacrifice formally brought before a priest. Hence the Levites were brought and set apart before the high priest Aaron to serve God's people."

NET translates **bring near** as "present them" and notes - This refers to the ceremonial presentation in which the tribe would take its place before Aaron, that is, stand before him and await their assignments. The Levites will function more like a sacred guard than anything else, for they had to protect and care for the sanctuary when it was erected and when it was transported

Brian Bell - Aaron & his sons were given the duties of the priesthood, the rest of the tribe formed the more monotonous, really repetitive, dull duties of ministry & transport.

BSB - The functions of **the tribe of Levi** were to assist the priests in serving at the tabernacle (Nu 16:8-11), to guard the tabernacle from defilement (Nu 1:53; 3:10), to redeem the firstborn of Israel (Nu 3:12, 13, 40-43; 8:14-19), and to teach the Law (Mal 2:4-9).

Bring near (offer) ([07126](#))([qarab](#)) means to come near or approach. It is a verb which basically indicates coming physically close. Of bringing or presenting an offering ("bringing near one's sacrifice") to the LORD and thus often translated "offer" (Lev 2:1, 4, 8, Nu 26:61, 31:50, et al).

NET Note - The use of the verb קָרַב (*qarav*) forms an interesting wordplay in the passage. The act of making an offering is described by this verb, as was the reference to the priests' offering of strange fire. Now the ceremonial presentation of the priests is expressed by the same word—they are being offered to God.

Numbers 3:7 "They shall perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle."

BGT Numbers 3:7 κα φυλ ξουσιν τς φυλακς ατο κα τς φυλακς τν υν Ισραηλ ναντι τς σκηνς το μαρτυρου ργ ζεσθαι τ ργα τς σκηνς

NET Numbers 3:7 They are responsible for his needs and the needs of the whole community before the tent of meeting, by attending to the service of the tabernacle.

NLT Numbers 3:7 They will serve Aaron and the whole community, performing their sacred duties in and around the Tabernacle.

ESV Numbers 3:7 They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle.

NIV Numbers 3:7 They are to perform duties for him and for the whole community at the Tent of Meeting by doing the work of the tabernacle.

- Nu 4:15,28,33 10:17,21 1Ch 26:20-28 Ezra 8:24-30 Isa 52:11
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

LEVITES RESPONSIBLE

FOR NEEDS OF AARON

They shall perform ([shamar](#)) the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle - In other words, the tribe of Levi would service the Tabernacle to help Aaron in his priestly function. Think about this for a moment. There were upwards to 2 million Israelites and after losing his eldest two sons, there were a very small number of actual Levitical priests (Aaron and his two remaining sons)! They needed help!

Matthew Henry writes "There was much work belonging to the priests' office, and there were now only Aaron and his two sons to do it; God appoints the Levites to attend them. **Those whom God finds work for, He will find help for.** The Levites were taken instead of the first-born. When He that made us, saves us, as the first-born of Israel were saved, we are laid under further obligations to serve him faithfully. God's right to us by redemption, confirms the right He has to us by creation.

NET NOTE on **perform ([shamar](#))** - The Hebrew text uses the perfect tense of שָׁמַר([shamar](#)) with a vav (ו) consecutive to continue the instruction of the preceding verse. It may be translated "and they shall keep" or "they must/are to keep," but in this context it refers to their appointed duties. The verb is followed by its cognate accusative—"they are to keep his keeping," or as it is often translated, "his charge." This would mean whatever Aaron needed them to do. But the noun is also used for the people in the next phrase, and so "charge" cannot be the meaning here. The verse is explaining that the Levites will have duties to perform to meet the needs of Aaron and the congregation.

Numbers 3:8 "They shall also keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle."

BGT Numbers 3:8 καὶ φυλάξουσιν πάντα τὰ σκεῆτα ὅς τε σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου καὶ ὅς τε φυλάκας τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ πάντα τὰ ῥαγὰς τῆς σκηνῆς

NET Numbers 3:8 And they are responsible for all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and for the needs of the Israelites, as they serve in the tabernacle.

NLT Numbers 3:8 They will also maintain all the furnishings of the sacred tent, serving in the Tabernacle on behalf of all the Israelites.

ESV Numbers 3:8 They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle.

NIV Numbers 3:8 They are to take care of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle.

- Nu 4:15,28,33 10:17,21 1Ch 26:20-28 Ezra 8:24-30 Isa 52:11
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

They shall also keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle - The phrase shall keep is the verb [shamar](#) which means to watch over (Lxx = phulasso = to guard), to keep watch, preserve, to guard, to be careful,, to watch carefully over, to be on one's guard. What's the point? They would ensure the ceremonial purity of the sacrificial implements and curtains of the tabernacle furnishings that only they were allowed to touch.

Thompson - The job of the Levites was to "serve" Aaron and perform duties for him and for the whole congregation in regard to tabernacle matters (verses 6-7). According to verse 8, their job was to take care of all of the furnishings of the "tent of meeting" and to do all the service of the tabernacle. They would be responsible to see to it that God's Word was followed in regard to all Temple matters, including various sacrifices and cleanliness matters.

NET Note on **to do service** - It would convey "to serve the service of the tabernacle," but more simply it may be rendered as "serving." Their spiritual and practical service is to serve. The Levites had the duty of taking care of all the tabernacle and its furnishings, especially in times when it was to be moved. But they were also appointed to be gate-keepers (2 Kgs 22:4; 1 Chr 9:19) in order to safeguard the purity of the place and the activities that went on there. Their offices seem to have then become hereditary in time (1 Sam 1:3); they even took on more priestly functions, such as pronouncing the benediction (Deut 10:8).

Numbers 3:9 "You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel."

BGT Numbers 3:9 καὶ δώσεις τοὺς Λευίτας Ἀαρὼν καὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτοῦ τοὺς ἐρεσὶν ὅμας δεδομένοι οὗτο μοῖ εἰσὶν πᾶν τὸ Ἰσραὴλ

NET Numbers 3:9 You are to assign the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they will be assigned exclusively to him out of all the Israelites.

NLT Numbers 3:9 Assign the Levites to Aaron and his sons. They have been given from among all the people of Israel to serve as their assistants.

ESV Numbers 3:9 And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel.

NIV Numbers 3:9 Give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to him.

KJV Numbers 3:9 And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel.

YLT Numbers 3:9 and thou hast given the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are surely given to him out of the sons of Israel.

LXE Numbers 3:9 And thou shalt give the Levites to Aaron, and to his sons the priests; they are given for a gift to me of the children of Israel.

- Nu 8:19 18:6,7 Eph 4:8,11
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

LEVITES A GIFT OF GOD TO AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given (literally "given, given") **to him from among the sons of Israel** - Note the repetition of **give...wholly given** (actually "given, given") for emphasis. The point is that the Levites are wholly given to the service of the Tabernacle under the direction of Aaron and his sons.

NET NOTE on shall give - The verb **וָנָתַתְּהָ** (*vénatattah*) is normally "give." Here, though, the context refers to the assignment of the Levites to the priests for their duties.

Numbers 3:10 "So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman who comes near shall be put to death."

BGT Numbers 3:10 καὶ Ἀαρὼν καὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτοῦ καταστήσεις πᾶσι σκηνῶν μαρτυροῦ καὶ φυλάξουσιν τὴν ἐρατὴν αὐτῶν καὶ πᾶσι κατὰ τὸ βωμὸν καὶ σωτὸς καταπέτσματος καὶ ἄλλοι γενεῶν πτῶμενος ποθάνεται

NET Numbers 3:10 So you are to appoint Aaron and his sons, and they will be responsible for their priesthood; but the unauthorized person who comes near must be put to death."

NLT Numbers 3:10 Appoint Aaron and his sons to carry out the duties of the priesthood. But any unauthorized person who goes too near the sanctuary must be put to death."

ESV Numbers 3:10 And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death."

NIV Numbers 3:10 Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests; anyone else who approaches the sanctuary must be put to death."

KJV Numbers 3:10 And thou shalt appoint <06485> (08799) Aaron <0175> and his sons <01121>, and they shall wait on <08104> (08804) their priest's office <03550>: and the stranger <02114> (08801) that cometh nigh <07131> shall be put to death <04191> (08714).

YLT Numbers 3:10 'And Aaron and his sons thou dost appoint, and they have kept their priesthood, and the stranger who cometh near is put to death.'

LXE Numbers 3:10 And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons over the tabernacle of witness; and they shall keep their charge of priesthood, **and all things belonging to the altar**, and within the veil; and the stranger that touches them shall die.

ASV Numbers 3:10 And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall keep their priesthood: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

- they shall: Nu 18:7 1Ch 6:32 Eze 44:8 Ac 6:3,4 Ro 12:7 1Ti 4:15,16
- and the stranger): Nu 3:38 1:51 16:35,40 18:3 1Sa 6:19 2Sa 6:7 2Ch 26:16-21 Eph 2:19 Heb 8:4 10:19-22
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

WARNING ABOUT DRAWING NEAR

So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman who comes near shall be put to death - Levites were to be the executioners of any unauthorized person (non-Levite, not a priest) who drew near to the Tabernacle. "The presence of God was symbolized by the ark of the covenant within the holy of holies. This area was protected by the priests on one level and by the Levites on the next. The Levites functioned as a lightning rod for the fiery wrath of God against potential encroachment of the holy place. Improper service by priests or their assistants was punishable by death." (HCSB note)

Allen - If the sons of Aaron were put to death at the commencement of their duties, how dare an unauthorized person even think to trespass (see Nu 3:38; Nu 18:7)!

Wenham suggests that the Levites are those who are authorized to carry out the death penalty, to keep the wrath of God against untoward offenders of his majesty and holiness from breaking out against the entire camp. (see Phinehas in Nu 25:7-8+).

NET Note - The LXX (see "LXE" - English translation of LXX above) includes the following words here: "and all things pertaining to the altar and within the veil." Cf. Num 18:7.

Layman (stranger, estranger, adulteress, outsider) ([02114](#))(**zur**) is a verb which means to be a stranger. Things described as strange (in this sense the verb seems to be used as an adjective) - **strange fire** in Lev 10:1), gods (Dt 32:16, Ps 44:20), waters (2Ki 19:24 = water in foreign lands), children ("illegitimate" - NAS, "alien" - ESV) **Zur** frequently refers to a **layman** (anyone not a priest. Lxx = allotrios = belonging to another, strange, foreign) could not eat the meat apportioned to the priests (Ex 29:33, KJV = "stranger", cp Ex 30:33, Lev 22:10, 12, 13, Nu 1:51, 3:10, 3:38, 16:40). NAS translates zur as outsider (Lxx = allogenes) in Nu 18:4,7. In (Ex 30:9) the priests were not to offer incense that was "**strange**" (zur; Lxx = heteros = another of a different kind) incense.

NET Note - The word is זָר (zar), usually rendered "stranger, foreigner, pagan." But in this context it simply refers to anyone who is not a Levite or a priest, an unauthorized person or intruder in the tabernacle. That person would be put to death.

Appoint is actually the same word translated "**numbered**" ([paqad](#)) conveys the root idea of something that is attended to or set in order "Most often, the word means accounting and refers to a time of accounting when God attended to people's actions, usually to call them to account for their sins (Num. 16:29; Jer. 48:44)." (Baker)

Numbers 3:11 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

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Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying - 4x in Numbers 3 - Nu 3:5, 11, 14, 44.

Numbers 3:12 "Now, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of every firstborn, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall be Mine.

- Nu 3:41,45 8:16,18 18:6

LEVITES WERE LIVING SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICES!

Now, behold ([hinneh](#)) - This word calling attention to the fact that is being declared, in this context underscoring the fact that the LORD Himself choose the Levites to serve as a substitute for the **firstborn** and they belong to Him.

I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of(in place of) **every firstborn, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall be Mine** - As explained in the next verse, when God destroyed the firstborn males in Egypt, He set aside (sanctified) the firstborn males of Israel to belong to Him because He delivered them from destruction (Ex 13:11-16+) . Thereafter every firstborn male born was dedicated to God. "That meant the cattle were sacrificed and the boys should have served God in the sanctuary (Ex. 11:4–13:15+). But after the golden calf incident, the Levites took the place of the firstborn boys (Ex. 32:25–29+)." (ESV note)

Note the words **instead of** (in place of) are a clear example of substitution and point to the substitutionary death of Christ. (cf. Ge 22:13: "offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son"; cf. also Mk 10:45 = "Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many [as a substitute payment].").

ESV Study Bible - The Levites as a holy substitute prefigure Christ as priest, representative, and substitute (Heb. 7:23–28⁺).

HCSB Note - The **firstborn** males of the Israelite families were to be presented to God through the agency of the priests (Ex 13:2,11-16; 22:29-30; 34:19-20). The firstborn were God's sole possession based on the redemption-of-the-firstborn principle. "Redemption" finds a parallel in the Babylonian term padu, a form of monetary payment to transfer property from one party to another. An indentured servant could gain his freedom through monetary or property transfer, performance of a period of servitude, or a general cancellation of the debt by the owner.

Norman Geisler - NUMBERS 3:12—If God commanded that firstborn sons from all the tribes be given Him, why was the tribe of Levi given instead?

PROBLEM: God had commanded Moses that "all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem" (Ex. 13:13; cf. 22:29). However, this was never done. Instead, one whole tribe was set apart to God for the work of the priesthood (Num. 3:12).

SOLUTION: The reason for the substitution is given in Numbers 3:12. The Lord declared: "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." Since they belonged to Him, God had the right to make the substitution. (When Critics Ask)

G Campbell Morgan - In this, and the following chapters, the service of the Levites is dealt with in detail. In the taking of the census for the men of war, the Levites were exempted from military service. This was a clear indication of the mind of God as to the true value of directly religious and spiritual work in national service. A fact which is sometimes overlooked in our thinking of the Levitical order is brought out in the words we have selected from this chapter. It is that the Levites were representatives. The first Divine arrangement was that the firstborn male in every family was to be consecrated to the service of God in the priesthood. Now, in all probability for the sake of cohesion and order, one tribe was set apart to represent the firstborn sons of the nation. In this first carrying out of the arrangement, the number of the tribe of Levi available was 22,000, while there were 22,273 firstborn sons. This company of 273 unrepresented by Levites had to pay a redemption price of five shekels each, which was devoted to the service of the sanctuary. In the light of these things it is interesting to remember that our Lord was the First-born, and so was a Priest according to the original Divine arrangement, and not according to the Levitical order. All those who are redeemed by Him, exercise a priesthood which results from their birthright in Him, and so have no need of any order of men to represent them in priestly work. In this way also the order of Levitical priesthood is done away in Christ.

Numbers 3:13 "For all the firstborn are Mine; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, from man to beast. They shall be Mine; I am the LORD."

BGT Numbers 3:13 μ ο γ ρ π ν π ρ ω τ τοκον ν μ ρ π ταξα π ν π ρ ω τ τοκον ν γ Α γ π του γ ασα μ ο π ν π ρ ω τ τοκον ν Ισραηλ π ν θ ρ που ω ς κ τ ν ο υ ς μ ο σ ο ν τ α γ κ ρ ι ο ς

NET Numbers 3:13 because all the firstborn are mine. When I destroyed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I

set apart for myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They belong to me. I am the LORD."

NLT Numbers 3:13 for all the firstborn males are mine. On the day I struck down all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, I set apart for myself all the firstborn in Israel, both of people and of animals. They are mine; I am the LORD."

ESV Numbers 3:13 for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD."

NIV Numbers 3:13 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 the LORD."

KJV Numbers 3:13 Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD.

YLT Numbers 3:13 for Mine is every first-born, in the day of My smiting every first-born in the land of Egypt I have sanctified to Myself every first-born in Israel, from man unto beast; Mine they are; I am Jehovah.'

- **For** : Nu 8:16,17 18:15 Ex 13:2,12 22:29 34:19 Lev 27:26 Eze 44:30 Lu 2:23 Heb 12:23
- **on the day that I struck down** : Ex 12:29,30 Ex 13:15
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Related Passages:

Exodus 12:29; 30+ Now it came about at midnight that the LORD **struck all the firstborn** in the land of Egypt, from the **firstborn** of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the **firstborn** of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the **firstborn** of cattle. 30 Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead.

Exodus 13:15+ 'It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that **the LORD killed every firstborn** in the land of Egypt, both the **firstborn** of man and the **firstborn** of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

For all the firstborn are Mine; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt- Firstborn included humans and animals. The Lxx uses [prototokos](#) for firstborn, this same word used of Jesus Christ, as the unique preexistent Son of the heavenly Father (Heb 1.6); as the one existing before all creation (Col 1.15); as the first to be resurrected from the dead (Col 1.18); as the head of a spiritual family of "many siblings" (Ro 8.29).

I sanctified ([qadash](#) = set apart) to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, from man to beast. They shall be Mine- Compare the command from Yahweh in Ex 13:2+. Note MINE is used 4 times in vv 12-13 for emphasis. This repeats for emphasis that the Levites belong to Yahweh and therefore in the context of this section it is His right to give them to Aaron for the work of the Tabernacle (Nu 3:6-8).

I am the LORD - This declaration seals the sanctification of the firstborn, the Levites. This same divine affirmation was declared by Yahweh when He carried out the destruction of the firstborn in Egypt in Ex 12:12+. Here the affirmation affirms the firstborn "substitutes" are His. This affirmation is repeated in Nu 3:41+ and Nu 3:45+ both also in the context of Yahweh's declaration that the Levites are His "firstborn."

Allen adds "The last phrase of this section, "I am Yahweh," is a characteristic punctuation in the legislative portions of the Torah. These words add authority, significance, and weight to the text. "I am the LORD" is a reminder of both what has been revealed about his blessed person and work as well as what he has shown himself to be in relation to his people. The phrase points to him and to his people in relationship to him, but it does so as a divine punctuation of the text." (EBC)

I am the LORD - 164 in 161v - Gen. 15:7; Gen. 28:13; Exod. 6:2; Exod. 6:6; Exod. 6:7; Exod. 6:8; Exod. 6:29; Exod. 7:5; Exod. 7:17; Exod. 10:2; Exod. 12:12; Exod. 14:4; Exod. 14:18; Exod. 16:12; Exod. 20:2; Exod. 29:46; Exod. 31:13; Lev. 11:44; Lev. 11:45; Lev. 18:2; Lev. 18:4; Lev. 18:5; Lev. 18:6; Lev. 18:21; Lev. 18:30; Lev. 19:3; Lev. 19:4; Lev. 19:10; Lev. 19:12; Lev. 19:14; Lev. 19:16; Lev. 19:18; Lev. 19:25; Lev. 19:28; Lev. 19:30; Lev. 19:31; Lev. 19:32; Lev. 19:34; Lev. 19:36; Lev. 19:37; Lev. 20:7; Lev. 20:8; Lev. 20:24; Lev. 21:12; Lev. 21:15; Lev. 21:23; Lev. 22:2; Lev. 22:3; Lev. 22:8; Lev. 22:9; Lev. 22:16; Lev. 22:30; Lev. 22:31; Lev. 22:32; Lev. 22:33; Lev. 23:22; Lev. 23:43; Lev. 24:22; Lev. 25:17; Lev. 25:38; Lev. 25:55; Lev. 26:1; Lev. 26:2; Lev. 26:13; Lev. 26:44; Lev. 26:45; Num. 3:13; Num. 3:41; Num. 3:45; Num. 10:10; Num. 15:41; Deut. 5:6; Deut. 29:6; Jdg. 6:10; 1 Ki. 20:13; 1 Ki. 20:28; Isa. 41:13; Isa. 42:6; Isa. 42:8; Isa. 43:3; Isa. 43:11; Isa. 43:15; Isa. 45:5; Isa. 45:6; Isa. 45:7; Isa. 45:18; Isa. 48:17; Isa. 49:23; Isa. 51:15; Jer. 9:24; Jer. 24:7; Jer. 32:27; Ezek. 6:7; Ezek. 6:10; Ezek. 6:13; Ezek. 6:14; Ezek. 7:4; Ezek. 7:27; Ezek. 11:10; Ezek. 11:12; Ezek. 12:15; Ezek. 12:16; Ezek. 12:20; Ezek. 13:9; Ezek. 13:14; Ezek. 13:21; Ezek. 13:23; Ezek. 14:8; Ezek. 15:7; Ezek. 16:62; Ezek. 17:24; Ezek. 20:5; Ezek. 20:7; Ezek. 20:12; Ezek. 20:19; Ezek. 20:20; Ezek. 20:26; Ezek. 20:38; Ezek. 20:42; Ezek. 20:44; Ezek. 22:16; Ezek. 23:49; Ezek. 24:24; Ezek. 24:27; Ezek. 25:5; Ezek. 25:7; Ezek. 25:11; Ezek. 25:17; Ezek. 26:6; Ezek. 28:22; Ezek. 28:23; Ezek. 28:24; Ezek. 28:26; Ezek. 29:6; Ezek. 29:9; Ezek. 29:16; Ezek. 29:21; Ezek. 30:8; Ezek. 30:19; Ezek. 30:25; Ezek. 30:26; Ezek. 32:15; Ezek. 33:29; Ezek. 34:27; Ezek. 35:4; Ezek. 35:9; Ezek. 35:15; Ezek. 36:11; Ezek. 36:23; Ezek. 36:38; Ezek. 37:6; Ezek. 37:13; Ezek. 37:28; Ezek. 38:23; Ezek. 39:6; Ezek. 39:7; Ezek. 39:22; Ezek. 39:28; Joel 2:27; Joel 3:17; Zech. 10:6

NET Note - In the Exodus event of the Passover night the principle of substitution was presented. The firstborn child was redeemed

by the blood of the Lamb and so belonged to God, but then God chose the Levites to serve in the place of the firstborn. The ritual of consecrating the firstborn son to the LORD was nevertheless carried out, even with Jesus, the firstborn son of Mary (Luke 2:22–23+).

Thompson - In verses 11-13, God reiterates that the Levites have been chosen by Him to do this work. Not the **firstborn** son anymore. This is significant. When God first called Israel, every **firstborn** son and even every **firstborn** animal was set apart unto Him (Ex. 13:2). The **firstborn** sons were to be given to the Lord for His service and use (Ex. 22:29-30; Ex 34:19-20). All **firstborn** sons had to perform sanctuary service and all **firstborn** animals were the sacrifices. Here God implements a new structure that really begins to develop the **idea of substitution**. The Levites would now become the **firstborn** substitute. The substitutionary concept of a relationship with God is seen in Numbers 3:12-13—God would have a **substitute firstborn priest** (v. 12) and God would have a **substitute first born sacrifice** (v. 13). The **firstborn** all belong to God, but now there is a substitutionary priesthood. **God selected the Levites and their animals to take the place of the entire nation's firstborn** There are five very important principles to see from this text: 1) True leaders of God do not appoint themselves; they are chosen by God, called by God and gifted by God. 2) Those who are true leaders in ministry have a responsibility to submit to those over them. The Levites were to submit to Aaron and his sons. 3) Those who have been truly called by God have different ministries and different assignments. 4) It is a very serious and dangerous thing to attempt to minister when not chosen to minister. 5) Any relationship with God will be based on the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ.

Sanctified (Consecrated, made holy) (06942) (**qadash**) means to set apart for a specific use. Removed from common use. To be holy. To show one's self to be holy. To consecrate or dedicate. To set apart a person or thing from all common or secular purposes to some religious use. Everything consecrated to God was separated from all profane use. **Webster's Dictionary** definition #2 for consecrate is convicting - "make or declare sacred; esp **devote irrevocably to worship of God** by a solemn ceremony." Qadash in Numbers - Num. 3:13; Num. 6:11; Num. 7:1; Num. 8:17; Num. 11:18; Num. 16:37; Num. 16:38; Num. 20:12; Num. 20:13; Num. 27:14

THOUGHT - Although there are many types of service, even the most menial labour for God is of great value. The Levites were to perform the most common and laborious tasks; they set up, they took down and they carried! Yet they were to be dedicated to their work for God because God had set them apart to that work. Oh, that we would have that attitude in the church today! (John Currid)

Numbers 3:14 Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,

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Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying - 4x in Numbers 3 - Nu 3:5, 11, 14, 44. This is not just a saying but a command (Nu 3:16). Note that Israel is no longer at Mt Sinai but is now traveling **in the wilderness** (cf Nu 1:1).

In the Wilderness - 159x in 154v - Gen. 16:7; Gen. 21:14; Gen. 21:20; Gen. 21:21; Gen. 36:24; Gen. 37:22; Exod. 4:27; Exod. 5:1; Exod. 7:16; Exod. 8:28; Exod. 14:11; Exod. 14:12; Exod. 15:22; Exod. 16:2; Exod. 16:32; Exod. 18:5; Exod. 19:2; Lev. 7:38; Lev. 16:22; Num. 1:1; Num. 1:19; Num. 3:4; Num. 3:14; Num. 9:1; Num. 9:5; Num. 10:12; Num. 10:31; Num. 12:16; Num. 13:26; Num. 14:16; Num. 14:22; Num. 14:33; Num. 15:32; Num. 16:13; Num. 21:5; Num. 21:11; Num. 21:13; Num. 21:23; Num. 26:64; Num. 26:65; Num. 27:3; Num. 27:14; Num. 32:13; Num. 32:15; Num. 33:8; Num. 33:11; Num. 33:15; Num. 33:36; Deut. 1:1; Deut. 1:31; Deut. 4:43; Deut. 8:2; Deut. 8:16; Deut. 9:7; Deut. 9:28; Deut. 11:5; Deut. 29:5; Deut. 32:51; Jos. 5:4; Jos. 5:5; Jos. 5:6; Jos. 8:24; Jos. 12:8; Jos. 14:10; Jos. 15:61; Jos. 20:8; Jos. 20:17; 1 Sam. 4:8; 1 Sam. 17:28; 1 Sam. 23:14; 1 Sam. 23:15; 1 Sam. 23:24; 1 Sam. 23:25; 1 Sam. 24:1; 1 Sam. 25:4; 1 Sam. 25:21; 1 Sam. 26:2; 1 Sam. 26:3; 2 Sam. 16:2; 2 Sam. 16:29; 1 Ki. 2:34; 1 Ki. 9:18; 1 Chr. 6:78; 1 Chr. 12:8; 1 Chr. 21:29; 2 Chr. 1:3; 2 Chr. 8:4; 2 Chr. 24:9; 2 Chr. 26:10; Neh. 9:19; Neh. 9:21; Job 24:5; Ps. 55:7; Ps. 63:1; Ps. 78:15; Ps. 78:19; Ps. 78:40; Ps. 78:52; Ps. 95:8; Ps. 106:14; Ps. 106:26; Ps. 107:4; Isa. 32:16; Isa. 35:6; Isa. 40:3; Isa. 41:19; Isa. 43:19; Isa. 43:20; Isa. 63:13; Jer. 2:2; Jer. 4:11; Jer. 12:12; Jer. 17:6; Jer. 31:2; Jer. 48:6; Lam. 4:3; Lam. 4:19; Lam. 5:9; Ezek. 19:13; Ezek. 20:13; Ezek. 20:15; Ezek. 20:17; Ezek. 20:18; Ezek. 20:21; Ezek. 20:23; Ezek. 20:36; Ezek. 34:25; Hos. 9:10; Hos. 13:5; Amos 2:10; Amos 5:25; Matt. 3:1; Matt. 3:3; Matt. 24:26; Mk. 1:3; Mk. 1:4; Mk. 1:13; Lk. 3:2; Lk. 3:4; Lk. 4:1; Jn. 1:23; Jn. 3:14; Jn. 6:31; Jn. 6:49; Acts 7:30; Acts 7:36; Acts 7:38; Acts 7:42; Acts 7:44; Acts 13:18; 1 Co. 10:5; 2 Co. 11:26; Heb. 3:8; Heb. 3:17

Numbers 3:15 "Number the sons of Levi by their fathers' households, by their families; every male from a month old and upward you shall number."

- Nu 3:22,28,34,39,40,43 18:15,16 26:62 Pr 8:17 Jer 2:2 31:3 Mk 10:14 2Ti 3:15
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NUMBERS, POSITIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Number the sons of Levi by their fathers' households (Heb = "the house of their fathers."), **by their families** ("their clans");

every male from a month old and upward you shall number - This was every Levite, including even Moses and Aaron. The unique role of the Levites is here accentuated by the fact that they are to have their own census (for one month old and up) separate from all 12 tribes, which was for military purposes (for 20 yo and up) (Nu 1:3+).

Thompson - Now the numbering and naming of the sons of Levi was to be done from sons who were one month old and upward. We may recall that the minimum age for military service was 20. This lower age would allow for larger number of Levites that would coincide with the number of first born from Israel. Now in verse 15, God commanded Moses to number the sons of Levi and verse 16 says that Moses did exactly what he was commanded to do.

Number (06485)([pequddah/pāqadh/paqad](#)) conveys the root idea of something that is attended to or set in order -- fighting men under an officer (2 Chr. 17:14), priests in an order (1 Chr. 23:11; 24:19); arrangement of Tabernacle (Nu 4:16[2x]). Usually padah means accounting when God attended to people's actions, usually to call them to account for their sins (Nu 16:29; Jer. 48:44). "The basic meaning is to exercise oversight over a subordinate, either in the form of inspecting or of taking action to cause a considerable change in the circumstances of the subordinate either for the better or for the worse." (TWOT) "Most often, the word means accounting and refers to a time of accounting when God attended to people's actions, usually to call them to account for their sins (Num. 16:29; Jer. 48:44)." (Baker) **Paqad** is used 103x in 90v in Numbers out of about 297x in OT.

Numbers 3:16 So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, just as he had been commanded.

- **word:** Heb. mouth, Nu 3:39,51 4:27,37,41,45,49 Ge 45:21 De 21:5
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MOSES OBEYED GOD'S COMMAND

So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, just as he had been commanded - Moses takes a census of the Levites from one month old and up.

Allen - The obedience of Moses to the commands of God in these early texts of Numbers is explicit and total. These records of his obedience will serve to display the incongruity of his terrible lapse as described in Nu 20:1–13+. Also in these verses we have one of many texts in Numbers that speak of the revelation of the word of God to his servant Moses. Those who minimize the role of Moses do so in the face of abundant direct textual assertions to the contrary. (EBC)

Numbered (06485) see above on [paqad](#)

Numbers 3:17 These then are the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon and Kohath and Merari.

- Nu 26:57,58 Ge 46:11 Ex 6:16-19 Jos 21:1-45 1Ch 6:1,2,16-19
- **Gershon:** Nu 15:5-23 23:6-23 24:1-26:65 Ne 11:1-12:47
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

THE SONS OF LEVI

These then are the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon and Kohath and Merari([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle) What follows is a division of Levites into three categories giving their numbers, their location in the camp and their duties in the Tabernacle. The genealogy is the same as the one that appears in Exodus 6:16–19+.

Question - [Who were the Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites?](#)

Answer: The Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites were three clans of the [Levite tribe](#) in Israel (Numbers 26:57). Each clan was comprised of descendants of the man from whom the clan received its name. Kohath was the father of the Kohathites, Gershon the father of the Gershonites, and Merari the father of the Merarites. Kohath, Gershon, and Merari were the three sons of Levi and grandsons of Jacob (Genesis 46:11). Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were Kohathites (1 Chronicles 6:2–3).

The Levites filled the [priestly roles](#) in Israel and bore the responsibility of caring for the tabernacle. The Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites had specific roles within the Levite culture. The Kohathites, for example, had charge of caring for the objects associated with the sanctuary: “This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting: the most holy things” (Numbers 4:4–14). The Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Showbread, and other holy items were the responsibility of the Kohathites (Numbers 10:21; 1 Chronicles 9:32). The Gershonites took care of the decorations in the sanctuary—curtains, ropes, and coverings (Numbers 4:24–26). The Merarites had the task of maintaining and carrying from place to place the pillars, bases, frames, pegs, and cords that created the structure of the tent of meeting. Since the Israelites were often on the move, the tent of meeting often had to be taken up and moved. Each clan had its responsibility to the sanctuary of God.

The sanctuary objects that the Kohathites transported were to be carried on their shoulders with poles made for that purpose (Numbers 7:9; cf. Exodus 25:26–28). The Gershonites and Merarites, however, were given ox carts to help with the transport of their items; the Gershonites received two carts and four oxen, and the Merarites received four carts and eight oxen (Numbers 7:6–8).

As Levites, the Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites did not receive a specific territory in the Promised Land. Rather, they were given cities and pasturelands from among the territories of the other tribes by the command of the Lord (Joshua 21:2). The Kohathites received thirteen cities from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon and ten cities from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Dan. The Gershonites received thirteen cities from Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh. The Merarites got twelve cities from Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. The distribution of the cities was decided by the drawing of lots (Joshua 21:1–8), and six of the Levites’ cities were designated as [cities of refuge](#). (Source - [GotQuestions.org](#))

Numbers 3:18 These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei;

- Nu 3:21 Ex 6:17-19 1Ch 6:17,20,21 23:7-11 25:4 26:1-32 Ne 12:1-26
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Exodus 2:22+ Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.”

Exodus 6:17-19+ The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, according to their families. 18 The sons of Kohath: Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel; and the length of Kohath’s life was one hundred and thirty-three years. 19 The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations.

THE SONS OF GERSHON

These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle). The sons and grandsons of Levi are specified.

Numbers 3:19 and the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel;

- Nu 3:27 Ex 6:18,20 1Ch 6:18,38 15:5,8-10,17-21 23:12,13,18-20 1Ch 25:4 26:1-32 Ne 12:1-26
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Exodus 6:18; 20+ The sons of Kohath: Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel; and the length of Kohath’s life was one hundred and thirty-three years. 20 Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses; and the length of Amram’s life was one hundred and thirty-seven years.

THE SONS OF KOHATH

And the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle) The sons and grandsons of Levi are specified. Do not confuse Amram with the name of Moses' father.

Numbers 3:20 and the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their fathers' households.

- Nu 3:33 Ex 6:19 1Ch 6:19,29,44-47 15:6 23:21-23 24:27-30 25:3
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Exodus 6:19+ The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations.

THE SONS
OF MERARI

and the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle)

These are the families of the Levites according to their fathers' households.They were responsible to take care of and transport the Tabernacle. They were not numbered for war, but they were for service. Everyone had a job to do.

Numbers 3:21 Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimeites; these were the families of the Gershonites.

- Nu 3:18
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

GERSHONITES
VV 21-26

Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimeites; these were the families of the Gershonites

SCHEMATIC LAYOUT OF THE SONS OF LEVI AROUND THE TABERNACLE OF MEETING		
	Males of families of MERARI (Mahli and Mushi) 6,200 led by Zuriel responsible for the structural components of the tabernacle,	NORTH

Males of the families of GERSHON (Libni and Shemei) 7,500 led by Eliasaph; responsible for coverings, hangings, and screens of tent and courtyard	Tabernacle of Meeting	PRIESTS (Moses, Aaron and Aaron's sons) Guarding the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel (Eleazer, the son of Aaron, was chief over Eliasaph, Elizaphan and Zuriel.) EAST
	Males of families of KOHATH (Amram, Izehar, Hebron and Uzziel) 8,600 led by Elizaphan; responsible for ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary	

Numbers 3:22 Their numbered men, in the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, even their numbered men were 7,500.

- Nu 4:38-40
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

NUMBER OF GERSHONITES

Their numbered men, in the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, even their numbered men were 7,500. ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle)

Numbered ([06485](#)) see above on [paqad](#)

Numbers 3:23 The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward,

- Nu 1:53 2:17
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

LOCATION OF GERSHONITES

The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward, ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle). Behind or at the rear of the Tabernacle opposite Moses and Aaron. Remember their function in this location was to serve as guardians of the Tabernacle to prevent anyone from coming near its confines.

Numbers 3:24 and the leader of the fathers' households of the Gershonites was Eliasaph the son of Lael.

- Lael: i.e. unto, by, because of God, Nu 3:24

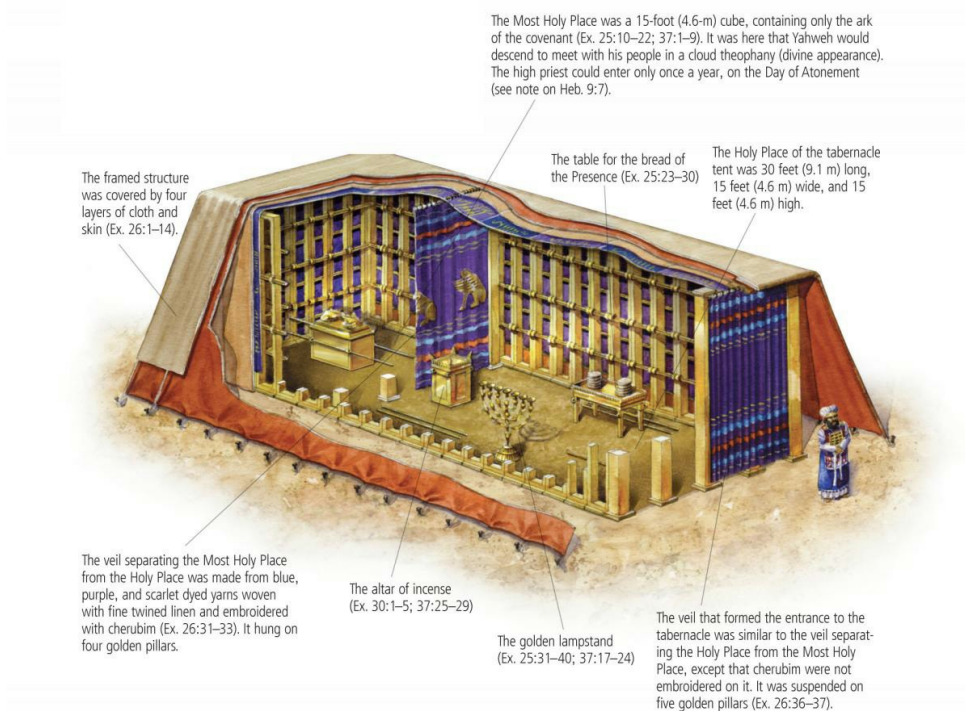
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

LEADER OF GERSHONITES

and the leader of the fathers' households of the Gershonites was Eliasaph ('God has added,') the son of Lael ("Belonging to God"). ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle)

Numbers 3:25 Now the duties of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting involved the tabernacle and the tent, its covering, and the screen for the doorway of the tent of meeting,

- Nu 3:7 4:24-28 7:7 10:17 1Ch 9:14-33 23:32 26:21,22 2Ch 31:2,11-18 Ezr 8:28-30 Mk 13:34 Ro 12:6-8 Col 4:17 1Ti 1:18
- **the tabernacle and:** Ex 25:9 Ex 26:1-14 Ex 36:8-19 Ex 40:19
- **and the screen:** Ex 26:36,37 36:37,38 40:28
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries



The Tabernacle
Click Picture to Enlarge
(Source: [ESV.org](#))

DUTIES OF GERSHONITES

Now the duties of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting involved the tabernacle and the tent, its covering, and the screen for the doorway (Ex 26:36+) of the tent of meeting ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle) - Ex 25:9+ Ex 26:1-14+ (describes the four layers shown in schematic above) Ex 36:8-19+ Ex 40:19 give details of the various coverings that are in the care of the Gershonites "We could say it was their job to take care of all of the software items made of soft material." (Thompson)

NET Note - The disjunctive vav (ו) here introduces a new section, listing the various duties of the clan in the sanctuary. The Gershonites had a long tradition of service here. In the days of David Asaph and his family were prominent as musicians. Others in the clan controlled the Temple treasuries. But in the wilderness they had specific oversight concerning the tent structure, which included the holy place and the holy of holies.

HCSB note - The tabernacle was composed of 10 curtains of finely twisted blue, purple, and scarlet linen, each 42 ft. x 6 ft., with cherubim symbols woven into them (Ex 26:1-6). The tent was made from 11 curtains of goat hair, 45 ft. x 6 ft., with additional coverings of dyed red ram skins and hides of manatees (Ex 26:7-14).

Numbers 3:26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway of the court which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and its cords, according to all the service concerning them.

- **the hangings:** Ex 27:9-16 38:9-16
- **the cords:** Ex 35:18
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway of the court which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and its cords, according to all the service concerning them - All the service means these objects are completely their responsibility.

Numbers 3:27 Of Kohath was the family of the Amramites and the family of the Izharites and the family of the Hebronites and the family of the Uzzielites; these were the families of the Kohathites.

- Nu 3:19 1Ch 23:12 26:23
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

KOHATHITES

Of Kohath was the family of the Amramites and the family of the Izharites and the family of the Hebronites and the family of the Uzzielites; these were the families of the Kohathites ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle) - This was the privileged clan for they transported the holy furniture within the sanctuary, including the Ark of the Covenant.

NET Note - Both Moses and Aaron came from this line (Nu 6:16–20). During the Hebrew monarchy this branch of the line of Levi was exemplary in music (1 Chr 6:33–48). They were also helpful to Hezekiah in his reforms (1 Chr 29:12–14).

Numbers 3:28 In the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, there were 8,600, performing the duties of the sanctuary.

- eight thousand): Nu 4:35,36
- keeping): Nu 3:7,31
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

NUMBER OF KOHATHITES

In the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, there were 8,600, performing the duties of the sanctuary. ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle)

Note that here that the Greek Septuagint reads 8,300, which is most likely the correct number. The Hebrew copyist probably made an error in transcribing the Hebrew as 8600 because the numeral for 6 and 3 are very similar in Hebrew.

NET Note - The construction here is a little different. The Hebrew text uses the participle in construct plural: שֹׁמְרֵי (shomérey, literally “keepers of”). The form specifies the duties of the 8,600 Kohathites. The genitive that follows this participle is the cognate מִשְׁמֶרֶת (mishmeret) that has been used before. So the expression indicates that they were responsible for the care of this part of the cult center. There is no reason to delete one of the forms (as does J. A. Paterson, Numbers, 42), for the repetition stresses the central importance of their work.

Numbers 3:29 The families of the sons of Kohath were to camp on the southward side of the tabernacle,

- Nu 3:23 1:53 2:10
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

LOCATION OF KOHATHITES

The families of the sons of Kohath were to camp on the southward side of the tabernacle,([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle)

Numbers 3:30 and the leader of the fathers' households of the Kohathite families was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel .

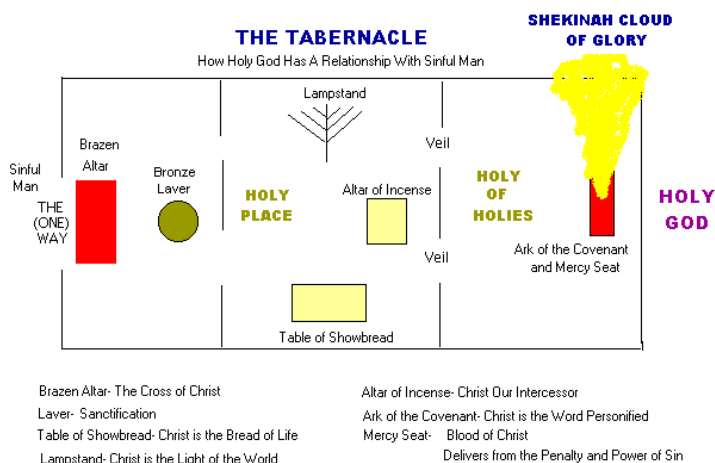
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

LEADER OF KOHATHITES

and the leader of the fathers' households of the Kohathite families was Elizaphan(“[My] God Has Protected”) the son of Uzziel (“My Strength Is God”).

Numbers 3:31 Now their duties involved the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the utensils of the sanctuary with which they minister, and the screen, and all the service concerning them;

- **the ark:** Nu 4:4-16 Ex 25:10-40 31:1-35:29 37:1-24 39:33-42 40:2-16,30
- **the altars:** Ex 27:1-8 30:1-10 37:25-29 38:1-7
- **and the screen:** Ex 26:31-33 36:35,36
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries



Tabernacle Furniture Assigned to Kohathites

DUTIES OF KOHATHITES

Now their duties involved the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the utensils of the sanctuary with which they minister, and the screen, and all the service concerning them ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle) - Their job was to take care of all the furniture and utensils.

Currid - These holy objects are described in detail in Exodus 25:10–22+ (the ark); Ex 25:23–30+ (the table of shewbread); Ex 25:31–40+ (the menorah); Ex 27:1–8+ (the bronze altar) and Ex 30:1–10+ (the altar of incense). Since the screen for the entrance to the tent has already been assigned to the care of the Gershonites (Nu 3:25), this ‘screen’ probably refers to the curtain that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Ex. 26:31–33+). The only object not mentioned here is the laver that stands in the courtyard; the reason for its omission is uncertain. The Septuagint and other early manuscripts add it to the items listed in this passage.

HCSB note on the **ark, et al** - The Kohathites did not actually handle these items; this was done by the priests, who wrapped the implements and then handed them over to the Kohathites for transport.

Numbers 3:32 and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest was the chief of the leaders of Levi, and had the oversight of those who perform the duties of the sanctuary.

- Nu 4:16,27 20:25-28 2Ki 25:18 1Ch 9:14-20 26:20-24
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest was the chief of the leaders of Levi, and had the oversight of those who perform the duties of the sanctuary - "Aaron's son Eleazar, "the chief leader" (lit., "the leader of the leaders," v.32), was placed over this group of Levites, probably because of the inordinately sensitive nature of their work." (Allen)

Related Resource:

- [Who was Eleazar in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)

Numbers 3:33 Of Merari was the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites; these were the families of Merari.

- Nu 3:20 1Ch 6:19 23:21
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

MERARITES

Of Merari was the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites; these were the families of Merari.

Numbers 3:34 Their numbered men in the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, were 6,200.

- Nu 1:21 2:9 2:11
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

NUMBER OF MERARITES

Their numbered men in the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, were 6,200.

Numbered (06485) see above on [paqad](#)

Numbers 3:35 The leader of the fathers' households of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail. They were to camp on the northward side of the tabernacle.

- shall: Nu 3:28,29 1:53
- northward): Nu 2:25
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

LEADER OF MERARITES

The leader of the fathers' households of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail. They were to camp on the northward side of the tabernacle ([see schematic](#) of their position around the Tabernacle) -

Numbers 3:36 Now the appointed duties of the sons of Merari involved the frames of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, all its equipment, and the service concerning them,

- under the custody and charge): Heb. the office of the charge, the boards. Nu 4:29-33 7:8 Ex 26:15-29,32,37 27:9-19 35:11,18 36:20-34,36 Ex 38:17-20 39:33
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

DUTIES OF MERARITES

Now the appointed duties of the sons of Merari involved the frames of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, all its equipment, and the service concerning them - They were to maintain the physical structure of the tabernacle, erecting and dismantling the structure. They took care of the hardware necessary to the tabernacle structure.

HCSB - By the time of the Davidic monarchy, the three clans of Levites also served as musicians for the sanctuary service (1Ch 6:31-48).

Brian Bell - It was enough to know that his place & charge were God-appointed. Even to carry a peg became honorable, when God had allotted that to a man as his share (37). Each person is vital to the work of the Lord, no matter what task God assigns. No task is trivial. Some Levites had heavier burdens than others, but God had given the the assignments & He would enable them. Grace entrusted the Levites with the Tabernacle & its vessels; Love apportioned to each the load suited to his strength. Can you be content with 1 peg, or the heaviest piece? Knowing that Grace honors you & Love thought of you. Better to carry a peg of the tabernacle than wield the scepter of Egypt!

Numbers 3:37 and the pillars around the court with their sockets and their pegs and their cords.

- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

and the pillars around the court with their sockets and their pegs and their cords.

Numbers 3:38 Now those who were to camp before the tabernacle eastward, before the tent of meeting toward the sunrise, are Moses and Aaron and his sons, performing the duties of the sanctuary for the obligation of the sons of Israel; but the layman coming near was to be put to death.

- toward): Nu 3:23,29,35 1:53 2:3
- keeping): Nu 3:10 18:1-5 1Ch 6:48,49
- for the charge): Nu 3:7,8,10
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

PRIESTS ON THE EAST

Now those who were to camp before the tabernacle eastward, before the tent of meeting toward the sunrise, are Moses and Aaron and his sons, performing the duties of the sanctuary for the obligation of the sons of Israel; but the layman coming near was to be put to death (warning found 4x in Numbers 1:51; 3:10, 38; 18:7) - This is the position of prominence. These were the guardians of the entrance into the sanctuary. This side also is first when Israel is on the march. Here Moses, Aaron and the priests are to have their encampment

Currid - They are to distinguish between the sacred and the profane, the holy and the unholy, the clean and the unclean (see Lev. 10:10+).

ESV note - The location of the priests at the east side of the tabernacle guarding its entrance (v. 38) may anticipate the role of Jesus as High Priest, (Heb 4:14+), giving His people access to God's presence in heaven (Hebrews 9-10+, Ro 5:1-2+).

Allen - They guarded the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and they did so facing the sun. There is a sense in which the opening of

the tent best faces the east, for this is the direction of the encampment of the people. Later on Solomon was to build the holy temple in Jerusalem. Its entrance also would face east. The morning sun would shine first on the entrance of the Holy Place, as a symbol of the life-giving light of God that illumines the place of his presence. Moses and Aaron were not placed in the posture of arrogance on the east side of the tabernacle; they were placed there for a representational ministry ("on behalf of the Israelites"). Theirs was an exclusive work but beneficent to the community. Service in the tabernacle was an act of mercy, a means for the people to come before God. Yet it was marked by severity—it had to be done in God's way! Worship to God is acceptable only because of his mercy(EBC)

Numbers 3:39 All the numbered men of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the command of the LORD by their families, every male from a month old and upward, were 22,000.

- Nu 4:47,48 26:62 Mt 7:14
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

All the numbered men of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the command of the LORD by their families, every male from a month old and upward, were 22,000

Thompson - Now if you add 7,500 plus 8,600 plus 6,200, the total is 22,300. Many believe there is a scribal issue in the Hebrew text because when the Lucian Greek copy of the Septuagint says 8,300, the exact number turns out to be 22,000. We believe that 22,000 is the accurate number. Some Hebrew manuscripts and the Peshitta and Latin Vulgate read 8,300. Also verse 43 says that the number of the firstborn of all the tribes was 22,273 and he specifically said in verse 46 that this was 273 more than the total number of Levites.

NET Note - The total is a rounded off number; it does not duplicate the precise total of 22,300. Some modern scholars try to explain it by positing an error in v. 28, suggesting that "six" should be read as "three" (שש [shesh] as שלש [shalosh]).

Numbered (06485) see above on [paqad](#)

Summary of numbers

- Gershon 7,500
- Kohath *8,600
- Merari 6,200
- Total 22,000

*Note that the Septuagint has the number of the Kohathites at 8,300; which gives a total of 22,000.

- Firstborn Males 22,273
- Redeemed above the number of Levites 273

John Currid applies this section - What we read here is so foreign to our culture and our ways in the church that we may ask, 'What, indeed, can such things teach us today?' In reality, the teaching about God that lay behind this passage is as relevant today as it was so many centuries ago when Israel was in the wilderness. The main theological point of the passage is to teach us about the holiness of God: 'The practical details of the camp's layout ensured that every Hebrew man, woman and child was aware of that appropriate distance that lay between their holy God and his morally, physically and spiritually needy people.' Because of their sinfulness, the Hebrew people did not have direct access to God, but they had to approach him reverently through a priesthood and a tabernacle. The layout of the camp demonstrated the gulf that existed between an unholy people and a holy God.

We, of course, no longer need a priesthood or a tabernacle because of the redemptive sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. He is the high priest and he is the temple. And, indeed, we now have access to God through him and his labours on our behalf. Yet, we do approach the throne of grace with humility and a sense of our unworthiness, for, apart from the work of Christ, we are an unholy people. And he remains a holy God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Numbers 3:40 Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Number every firstborn male of the sons of Israel from a month old and upward, and make a list of their names.

- Nu 3:12,15,45 Ex 32:26-29 Ps 87:6 Isa 4:3 Lu 10:20 Php 4:3 2Ti 2:19 Heb 12:23 Rev 3:5 14:4

- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

NUMBERING FIRSTBORN MALES OF ISRAEL

Then the LORD said to Moses, "**Number** every firstborn male of the sons of Israel from a month old and upward, and make a list of their names - This number probably represents the number of firstborn males born since the exodus. Other interpreters understand this figure as the total of all firstborn in Israel, which would then indicate a much smaller total population. (ESVSB Note)

Numbered (06485) see above on [paqad](#)

Numbers 3:41 "You shall take the Levites for Me, I am the LORD, instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the sons of Israel."

- Nu 3:12,45 8:16 18:15 Ex 24:5,6 32:26-29 Mt 20:28 1Ti 2:6
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

You shall take the Levites for Me, I am the LORD, instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel- "The Levites must be reserved for me as substitutes for the firstborn sons of Israel." (Nu 3:41NLT)

NET Note on "**take**" - The verb is the perfect tense with vav (w) consecutive; it carries forward the instructions from the preceding verse. The verb "take" now has the sense of appointing or designating the Levites.

And the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the sons of Israel- "And the Levites' livestock must be reserved for me as substitutes for the firstborn livestock" (Nu 3:41NLT)

Brian Bell - The substitute for the **firstborn**. The Levites were taken, instead of the firstborn son of Israel (the original provision), to perform the service of the Tabernacle. There were nearly as many Levites as firstborn, & the difference was made good by the payment of redemption money on the part of the surplus (Nu 3:45-48).

Allen - The firstborn of animals were to be sacrificed to the Lord; but God never countenanced the sacrifice of persons on his altars. Hence a substitution was done. A male Levite was regarded as a substitution for the firstborn member of a secular tribe. Notice that the firstborn of the livestock were also included in the substitutionary arrangement; Levite for firstborn of Israel and Levite's livestock for firstborn livestock of Israel. (EBC)

Numbers 3:42 So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded him;

- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded him- He did not question why, but simply obeyed.

Numbered (06485) see above on [paqad](#)

Numbers 3:43 and all the firstborn males by the number of names from a month old and upward, for their numbered men were 22,273.

- Nu 3:39
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

and all the firstborn males by the number of names from a month old and upward, for their numbered men were 22,273- This is 273 more than the number of Levites (see Nu 3:39 [above](#)).

Numbered (06485) see above on [paqad](#)

HCSB - The census figure of 22,273 presents a practical problem. If there were only that many firstborn among the 603,550 males,

then each firstborn had an average of 26 brothers—an incredible birthrate not substantiated in the Bible or elsewhere. R. B. Allen attempts to solve the problem by contending that the author employed hyperbolic language, exaggerating the actual number of 60,355 by a factor of ten, yielding 603,550. Such tactics were common in ancient literature and were considered a meaningful use of symbolic or sacred numbers (e.g., seven, ten, etc.). Another solution is to identify the 22,273 as only those firstborn males who were born during the year and a half between the exodus and the census since the total number of firstborn among the 603,550 would have been much higher.

Numbers 3:44 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying - 4x in Numbers 3 - Nu 3:5, 11, 14, 44.

Numbers 3:45 "Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel and the cattle of the Levites. And the Levites shall be Mine; I am the LORD.

- Nu 3:12,40,41
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel and the cattle of the Levites- So the Levites substituted not only for men but also for the firstborn of the cattle. "Although all the firstborn of Israel belong to God, he has now determined that the firstborn of all Israel will be redeemed—that is, delivered for a price. That price is substitutionary; in the present verses the Levites and their cattle are designated to serve as the substitutes for all the firstborn of man and beast in Israel. The Levites and their cattle, therefore, release the firstborn of Israel from sacred status and from the duty of the service of the sanctuary. The Levites and their possessions have now been set apart for sacred duty in place of Israel's firstborn" (Currid)

And the Levites shall be Mine; I am the LORD - The Levites belonged to God.

THOUGHT - This reminds us of believer-priests today who belong to God. 1 Peter 2:9- "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal **PRIESTHOOD**, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR **God's OWN POSSESSION**, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Are you living as His possession or for YOUR passion?

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily - Numbers 3:45 Take the Levites instead.

Each firstborn son was God's. On the day of the Exodus, as the firstborn of Egypt were stricken, so the firstborn of Israel were hallowed. God claimed the right of their service in his Temple, to serve there as priests and attendants. But instead of them, He accepted the whole tribe of Levi; and for the overplus of firstborn sons above the number of Levites, He accepted redemption money, which went to maintain Aaron and his family. Thus, each firstborn son was represented, either by a substitute, or by a money payment.

An Appeal to Parents. — Would it not be a blessed custom if, in all our churches, the firstborn child was, in a special sense, regarded as God's, and trained for some branch of his holy service in the home and foreign field? What a blessing would rest on our homes if this were the custom! It would lead to very definite prayer, that the young soul might be truly converted and led to realize the parents' ideal.

An Appeal to firstborn Children. — Either go yourself into the service of God, at home or abroad, or send a substitute. Consider yourself under obligation to do some special work for Christ and his Church. And if you cannot, earn money to support your representative. This is laying up treasure in heaven.

An Appeal to Families. — Why should not each Christian family become a missionary society, sending one of its members forth in the name of the rest, who should bind themselves solemnly to "hold the ropes;" and thus obey the Master's parting commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"?

Numbers 3:46 "For the ransom of the 273 of the firstborn of the sons of Israel who are in excess beyond the Levites,

- redeemed): Nu 18:15 Ex 13:13
- which are): Nu 3:39-43
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

For the ransom of the 273 of the firstborn of the sons of Israel who are in excess beyond the Levites-

Thompson - What God commanded Moses to do here was to total the number of firstborn from all the tribes of Israel, who were one month and older. The total number was 22,273. So there was an excess of 273 unredeemed firstborn males over the number of Levites. There was to be some form of substitutionary surplus redemption payment made as a ransom price.

Numbers 3:47 you shall take five shekels apiece, per head; you shall take them in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs),

- five shekels): Nu 18:16 Lev 27:6
- the shekel): Nu 3:50 Ex 30:13 Lev 27:25 Eze 45:12
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

you shall take five shekels apiece, per head; you shall take them in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs) - The price of redemption was 5 shekels which was the valuation of boys up to age 5 in Lev 27:6 and amounted to about a year's salary "for a herdsman." (ESV Note)

Thompson - The price was to be "five shekels" (v. 47) per head. It has been estimated that this would be about two ounces of silver for each person and the total for all 273 would be about 35 pounds. Now an ounce of silver is worth \$16.68 and there are 12 troy ounces to a pound. So one pound of silver is worth \$200.16. Thirty-five pounds of silver is worth \$7,005.60.

Currid - Our present passage speaks of 'the shekel of the sanctuary' in order to differentiate it from the economic currency. The latter has one weight for purchasing and another weight for selling.

HCSB - The substitutionary aspect of the ransom price theme in the Pentateuch has its ultimate fulfillment in the work of Jesus Christ as the paschal lamb and the final sacrifice for sin—a lamb without blemish (1Pe 1:18-19+).

knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

William Coker -When the Israelites were numbered at Mount Sinai, it was ordained by divine direction that the Levites should be exempted from enrollment and separated unto the Lord in place of the **firstborn** of the people and their cattle in the place of the cattle of the people (Numbers 3:44ff.). The number of **firstborn** in excess of the number of the Levites were then redeemed at the price of five shekels apiece, and the money was given to Aaron and his sons. According. (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament)

NET Note - The sanctuary shekel was first mentioned in Exod 30:13. The half-shekel of Exod 38:26 would then be 10 gerahs. Consequently, the calculations would indicate that five shekels was about two ounces of silver for each person. See R. B. Y. Scott, "Weights and Measures of the Bible," BA 22 (1951): 22–40, and "The Scale-Weights from Ophel, 1963–1964," PEQ 97 (1965): 128–39.

Numbers 3:48 and give the money, the ransom of those who are in excess among them, to Aaron and to his sons."

- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

and give the money, the ransom of those who are in excess among them, to Aaron and to his sons

Ransom (06302)(**peduyim** from padah = to ransom) "The basic meaning of the Hebrew root is to achieve the transfer of ownership from one to another through payment of a price or an equivalent substitute. The root occurs in Assyrian with the meaning "to spare," and in Ugaritic it is used in the sense "to ransom (UT 19: no. 2013).....peddûim, pidyôm. **Ransom**. The former is a plural abstract form of the passive participle (which is

used substantively in Numbers 3:49; Isaiah 35:10 and Isaiah 51:11 with the meaning "the redeemed"), occurring only in Numbers 3:46, 48. The latter is found only in Numbers 3:49, 51." (TWOT)

Allen - The redemption of the firstborn is a marvelous expression of the grace of God. Never since the story of the binding of Isaac (Gen 22) has God demanded the firstborn son of any of his people as a sacrifice to his majesty. Nor does God demand that his people enslave themselves to him (cf. Rom 12:1–2). Nevertheless, the firstborn sons are the special possession of the Lord. God does not demand the life of these sons; such would be abhorrent to the Hebrew faith. God does not demand their enslavement; such would be a slight on his mercy. But he does demand their redemption—and provides the means for bringing that to pass.

Numbers 3:49 So Moses took the ransom money from those who were in excess, beyond those ransomed by the Levites;

- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

So Moses took the ransom money from those who were in excess, beyond those ransomed by the Levites- NET Note on "money" - The word used is "silver." Coins were not in existence until after 700 B.C. (starting with Lydia).

Currid applies this section - God claims not only the Christian, but all that the Christian has. God is the owner of all that the Christian is and all that he has; the Christian is merely a steward of those things that belong to the Creator. A major duty of the Christian is not to withhold anything from him. But does the Christian give over all things to Christ? There is a Christian company in the States that studies many of the larger companies trading on the stock market, and it looks primarily at the stance of those companies on moral issues. Based upon whether a company supports abortion, same-sex benefits, or other such immoral causes, it may be flagged as one that a Christian should not support, or own stock in. But the reality is that most Christians are not interested in knowing these things. When it comes to money, often Christians put their head in the sand. The attitude is: 'When it comes to my money, leave me alone!' Yet the truth is that a Christian cannot serve God and mammon! All things are to be brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ for, in fact, all things belong to him. (EPSC-Nu)

Numbers 3:50 from the firstborn of the sons of Israel he took the money in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary, 1,365.

- Nu 3:46,47 Mt 20:28 1Ti 2:5,6 Tit 2:14 Heb 9:12 1Pe 1:18 3:18

from the firstborn of the sons of Israel he took the money in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary, 1,365

Numbers 3:51 Then Moses gave the ransom money to Aaron and to his sons, at the command of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

- Moses): Nu 3:48 16:15 1Sa 12:3,4 Ac 20:33 1Co 9:12 1Pe 5:2
- as the Lord): Mal 4:4
- **Numbers 3 Resources** - Multiples Sermons and Commentaries

Then Moses gave the ransom money to Aaron and to his sons, at the command of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.