

Numbers 4 Commentary

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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 4:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,

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Duties of Three Groups

The division of Numbers 4

- Nu 4:1–15 Service of Kohathites
- Nu 4:16-20 Office of Eleazar
- Nu 4:21–28 Service of Gershonites
- Nu 4:29–33 Service of the Merarites
- Nu 4:34–37 Numbering of Kohathites
- Nu 4:38-41 Numbering of Gershonites
- Nu 4:42-45 Numbering of Merarites
- Nu 4:46–49 Summary of Numbering

Matthew Henry - In the former chapter an account was taken of the whole tribe of Levi, in this we have an account of those of that tribe who were in the prime of their time for service, between thirty and fifty years old.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying - The Word of the LORD was to both in Nu 4:1, 17 but only to Moses in Nu 4:21

James Smith - Handfuls of Purpose - THREE CLASSES OF WORKERS Numbers 4

In the transporting of the tabernacle and all its belongings from place to place there was great division of labour. As we would think, the work of the Gershonites, looking after the curtains, &c., could have easily been done by a score of men, but for this task alone 2630 were set apart. This teaches us that no work done for God is small or trifling. The packing up of the holy vessels was done by Aaron and his sons (vs. 5–15). Consecrated hands must set in order holy things. The bearers of the tabernacle and its furniture were three families of the Levites, the sons of Kohath, of Gershon, and of Merari. Their work was—

1. Varied.

1. The sons of Merari had charge of the FOUNDATION THINGS. "Sockets, pillars, boards, bars, and pins" (vs. 31, 32). In setting up the tabernacle the sockets and pillars would be needed first. Foundation truths should always go first. This is the work of the evangelist. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, Jesus Christ." The silver sockets speak of redemption, because they were made of the ransom price given for the souls of the people (Exod. 30:15). Yes, the redeeming Blood first.

2. The sons of Gershon had charge of the UNITING THINGS. "Coverings, curtains, and hangings" (vs. 24–27). The sockets and pillars may be strong, but they are naked and bare without the coverings and curtains, in fact, it was no tabernacle without the coverings. These may represent the work of the pastor, binding all together and beautifying with the coverings and hangings of order and doctrine. The coverings, &c., brought every pillar and board into union with one another. This is the work of the pastor making manifest the truth. "All one in Christ Jesus."

3. The sons of Kohath had charge of the APPROACH THINGS. "All the vessels of the sanctuary" (v. 15). The vessels placed in position indicate the way to God. No service could be done in the tabernacle without them. All was powerless till the work of the Kohathites was finished. This is the office of the teacher. These three gifts belong to the Church just as really as they belonged to the tabernacle. "He gave some evangelists, some pastors, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11, 12). The office of a teacher is not only to expound the truth, but to do it in such a way as to lead into the very presence of God, and to maintain a holy life. Imparting the knowledge that puffeth up is not fulfilling the work of a teacher. The true spiritual teacher not only points the way, but by the power of the Holy Ghost, through the truth and a holy example, leads into it.

2. Appointed them by the Lord (vs. 1–4). No man taketh this work upon him, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. Could you imagine others making other sockets, coverings, and vessels, and setting up another tabernacle. The whole thing could only be a sham and a mockery. Why? Because they would not be God's sockets, coverings, and vessels, and servants. What better are the evangelists, pastors, and teachers who run without being sent, and who lay other foundations, and add to themselves teachers having itching ears, who will not endure sound doctrine? From such turn away. It is to His own servants the Lord delivers His goods (Matt. 25:14). Those occupying till He come, trade with His pound (Luke 19).

3. United. The Gershonites had no jealousy at all, although the sons of Merari commenced work before them, and took possession of the spot before they came. They all wrought under one guiding will, and for the honour and glory of one Lord. Their burdens were different, but their aim was one. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit, it is the same God which worketh in all" (1 Cor. 12:4–6). They sought the good of the Lord's house always. By each one using the gift entrusted to them as stewards we show the manifold grace of God (1 Peter. 4:10).

4. Rewarded. The Lord became to them their portion and inheritance (Deut. 18:1, 2). "I am their possession" saith the Lord (Ezek. 44:28). Those who consecrate themselves to the work of the Lord will find their all in Him. "They that wait at the altar are partakers with the altar" (1 Cor. 9:13). They that wait on the Lord are partakers with the Lord of His grace, mercy, and strength. "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Partakers of His life, of His work, then of His joy.

Matthew Henry - Verses 1-3. The middle-aged men of the tribe of Levi, all from thirty years old to fifty, were to be employed in the service of the tabernacle. The service of God requires the best of our strength, and the prime portion of our time, which cannot be better spent than to the honour of Him who is the First and Best. And the service of God should be done when we are most lively and active. Those do not consider this who put off repentance to old age, and so leave the best work to be done in the worst time.

THOUGHT I would add that every day of our conscious life is the prime time to **redeem the time**. I am age 74 in 2020 and by His Spirit actively seeking to redeem the time for His honor and glory so that I might one day be able to say like Paul "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." (2 Ti 4:7+). Old saints do not [should not] **retire** but just "**re-tire**." In Psalm 103:5 God promises that He "satisfies your years with good things, so that **your youth is renewed like the eagle**." I can testify to the truth of that "soaring" promise dear older brother or sister in Christ. Run with endurance for you have only one race to run! Heb 12:1+).

Numbers 4:2 "Take a census of the descendants of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' households,

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TAKE A HEAD COUNT

Take a census of the descendants of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' households-

Take a census is not the [paqad](#) (appoint) but is a phrase which is literally "lift up the head," which still implies counting like our "counting noses." (churches who count "nickels and noses!") Though Gershon was the eldest, yet Kohath has the precedence by reason of the sanctity of his function in carrying the holiest things.

Spurgeon - First, they were to be numbered. "The Lord knoweth them that are his," and he takes count of all his people.

NET Note - The census of chapter 3 was to register all male Levites from a month old and up. It arranged the general duties of each of the tribes. The second census of Levites now will focus on those between 30 and 50 years of age, those who were actually in service. These are the working Levites. The duties here will be more specific for each of the families. The Kohathites, although part of the ordinary ministry of Levites, were a special group chosen to handle the most holy furnishings. J. Milgrom shows three aspects of their service: (1) skilled labor (מְלָכָה, méla'khah) or "work," (2) physical labor (עֲבֹדָה, avodah) or "service," and (3) assisting the priests (שָׂרֵת, sharet) or "ministering" (see his Studies in Levitical Terminology, 1:60–70).

Wenham (from [Third Millennium Study Bible](#)) - The different vessels of the tabernacle were wrapped in different coloured cloths marking their different degrees of holiness. The most holy ark, the very throne of God, was wrapped first in the veil, then in a covering of goatskin (AV 'badgers' skins', NEB 'porpoise-hide'), and finally in a blue cloth. The vessels from the next most holy part of the tabernacle were wrapped in a blue cloth, then in an outer goatskin covering (Num 4:7-12). The altar for burnt offering that stood in the court of the tabernacle was wrapped first in a purple cloth, and then in a goatskin cover. Thus, when the camp was on the move, the ark was distinguished from all the other pieces of furniture by its blue outer cover.

The same set of colours was used in the tabernacle. Deep blue curtains were used in the holy of holies, purple in the holy place, and the outer cover was again of goatskin. Undoubtedly these colours had significance, but discovering what they signified is difficult. Evidently blue marked out the holiest objects, those most closely associated with the presence of God, perhaps because blue is the colour of heaven, God's real dwelling-place (cf. Exod. 24:10; 1 Kings 8:27), and the tabernacle was built on the pattern of God's heavenly house (Exod. 25:9, 40; Heb. 8:5). Elsewhere blue and purple hangings adorned royal tents (Esther 1:6). Similarly, kings and nobles wore blue and purple garments (e.g. Ezek. 23:6; Judges 8:26). The use of the same colours here reminded Israel that the tabernacle was the palace of their divine king and that the ark was his throne.

The Kohathites carried their items on poles or a carrying frame (Num 4:6, 8, 11, 12, 14), but did not actually pack them up. The Gershonites and Merarites on the other hand packed and unpacked their parts of the tabernacle themselves, under priestly supervision (Num 4:28, 33), but did not carry these parts. They were transported on ox-carts. The curtains which were the Gershonites' responsibility required two carts, while the poles and tent pegs, for which the Merarites were responsible, needed four carts. Because their items were small and numerous, each Merarite was responsible for one particular item, so that none of them would be lost (Num 4:32).

Running through these censuses are two important biblical principles. First, that every member of the people of God has his part to play. The priests offered sacrifice, the Merarites carried the tent pegs, the other tribes fought in the army. Each was indispensable to the smooth functioning of the whole body. Without full mutual cooperation the people would not reach the promised land. Similarly, in Christ's body every member has been endowed with spiritual gifts which contribute to the welfare of the whole church. But as in ancient Israel 'there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one' (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Paul devotes the rest of the chapter to working out these principles in more detail.

The second great principle that is clearly enunciated in these chapters is that Israel was a hierarchy or, more precisely, a theocracy. God spoke to Moses and Aaron, and they passed on God's words to the people. The priests, Aaron's sons, obeyed their father. The Levites were subordinate to the priests, while in their turn the Levites served as religious policemen preventing the ordinary Israelite falling into deadly sin.

Similarly, the New Testament pictures the church as well organized with a hierarchical order among its office-bearers. This organization goes back to our Lord himself who appointed twelve apostles in evident imitation of the twelve-tribe organization of Israel. Under Christ the apostles are the supreme authority in the church. Beneath them are the other office-holders such as prophets, teachers and elders (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28ff.; Eph. 4:11f.). The ordinary Christian is urged: 'Obey your leaders and submit to them' (Heb. 13:17; cf. 1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Thess. 5:12ff.; 1 Pet. 5:5); and the leaders are encouraged to 'command' and 'reprove with all authority', for by holding to scriptural teaching 'you will save both yourself and your hearers' (1 Tim. 4:11-16; Titus 2:15).

Numbers 4:3 from thirty years and upward, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tent of meeting.

NET Numbers 4:3 from thirty years old and upward to fifty years old, all who enter the company to do the work in the tent of meeting.

NLT Numbers 4:3 List all the men between the ages of thirty and fifty who are eligible to serve in the Tabernacle.

ESV Numbers 4:3 from thirty years old up to fifty years old, all who can come on duty, to do the work in the tent of meeting.

NIV Numbers 4:3 Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work in the Tent of Meeting.

- **thirty years:** Nu 8:24-26 Ge 41:46 1Ch 23:3,24-27 28:12,13 Lu 3:23 1Ti 3:6
- **enter:** 2Ki 11:4-12 2Ch 23:1-11 2Co 10:3,4 Eph 6:10-18 1Ti 1:18
- **to do:** Nu 3:7,8 16:9 1Ch 6:48 23:4,5,28-32 1Ti 3:1
- **[Numbers 4 Resources](#)** - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

from thirty years and upward, even to fifty years old - Gilbrantsays "The age limit is different in 8:24 where it is twenty-five to fifty, and in 1 Chr. 23:24 where David specifies twenty to fifty. However, in Num. 8:24 the case is different and the wording is different. There is an allowance for those over fifty to "assist" in the work, but not to do it. It is possible that also the younger men, twenty-five to thirty, could serve as assistants of some kind, but not do the work on their own responsibility."

Eugene Merrill - The purpose of counting Levite males from the age of one month and older (Nu 3:39-41), then, was purely for the sake of the redemption of the firstborn of Israel. The age of 30 for the minimum age of priestly service was still the custom centuries later. However, the Levites could and did serve in various capacities at younger ages (Num. 8:24). What was involved in this account was the heavy work of transporting the tabernacle and all its accoutrements. (BKC)

George Bush on even to fifty years old - At this period of life the strength and vigor of manhood begins somewhat to decay, and it was therefore ordered that they should be henceforth exempted from the harder kinds of service, but they still retained a lighter species of ministry about the tabernacle, of which see ch. 8:24, 26.

all who enter the service - All that enter into the host. Heb. kol bo letzâbâ every one that cometh to the army. "All that are meet for the war."—Cov. "All that were able to war."—Mat. "All that are able to go forth to the war."—Cran. The term is military, but as it is spoken of the Levites, the import is spiritual, denoting that kind of ministry or service which the priesthood was expected to perform, for which reason the Greek renders it *pas eisporeuomenos leitourgein*, every one that entereth in to liturgize, i. e. to officiate sacerdotally In v. 23, the original phrase embracing this word is rendered "to war the warfare," and this probably gave rise to the N.T. diction, in which the work of the ministry is called, 1 Tim. 1:18, "warring a good warfare," and where we find mention also of "fighting a good fight of faith," of "the weapons of our warfare," of "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," etc.; all which speak of the Christian life as a spiritual warfare. (George Bush)

Service (army/armies, war, service, army, conflict) (06635) (**tsaba** from **tsaba** = to go forth to war, to wage war, to serve) is a masculine **noun** meaning troops or army (2Ki 5:1) and so has to do with war or warfare in many of the OT passages. The TWOT says the root verb **tsaba** "has to do with fighting, e.g. Israel warring against Midian (Nu 31:7). It has also a wider use in the sense of rendering service." And so in a group of uses in Numbers (Nu 4:3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 8:24-25) tsaba has to do with service related to the Tent of Meeting (or Tabernacle). So one might say **tsaba** is used in contexts of warfare or worship!

Spurgeon - They were to take up this work as a warfare; for, though it was a peaceful work, yet it is described as being a warfare: and he who serves the Lord, though that service be perfect peace, will not serve him without finding it to be also a warfare. (**ED:** I would add that since Tsaba is used repeatedly in the "warfare" Name of Jehovah, [Jehovah Sabaoth, LORD of hosts \(of armies\)](#), when we are in warfare/service in His will we are NOT alone!)

Ryrie on thirty - In Nu 8:24+, the age for entering service is given as 25. Possibly there was a five-year apprenticeship before a Levite was fully and officially prepared. the service. From the same Hebrew word used of military service in Nu 1:3, suggesting that the work of the Levites for the Lord was as carefully organized as a militia.

to do the work in the tent of meeting- [See below](#) on **tent of meeting**.

Norman Geisler - NUMBERS 4:3—How can the age for Levitical service be 30, when Numbers 8:24 says 25, and Ezra 3:8 says 20?

PROBLEM:

According to Numbers 4:3, at 30 years of age a Levite would “enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.” However, Numbers 8:24 states, “this is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting,” and Ezra 3:8 says that Levites “from twenty years old and above” were appointed to oversee the work of rebuilding the house of the Lord. Is there a contradiction between these passages?

SOLUTION:

First, there is a distinction made in the text between the type of service which is rendered in each case. In Numbers 4:3 the passage talks about anyone entering into the service to perform the business (melakah, business or occupation) of the tabernacle. Numbers 8:24 is referring to those who come “to perform service in the work (baabodath, meaning work or labor) of the tabernacle.” The difference indicates that the younger men, referred to in Numbers 8:24, were probably apprentices who engaged in the manual labor while in training. Later they were admitted to the official service of the tabernacle business at age 30 according to Numbers 4:3.

Second, Ezra 3:8 specifically states that these Levites were appointed “to oversee the work of the house of the Lord.” This was not the official service of the tabernacle. Rather, this was the work of overseeing the rebuilding of the temple. Also, due to the fact that the number of Levites who had returned from the captivity was, according to Ezra 2:40 and Nehemiah 7:43, only 74, it was necessary to employ them at a younger age to have a sufficient number to oversee the work. Also, David employed the Levites from age twenty, and he did so because, “They [the Levites] shall no longer carry the tabernacle, or any of the articles for its service” (1 Chron. 23:26). Apparently the work of transporting the tabernacle from place to place in the wilderness journeys required a more mature and stronger person. This practice, apparently begun by David, was followed down to Ezra’s time. (When Critics Ask)

Numbers 4:4 "This is the work of the descendants of Kohath in the tent of meeting, concerning the most holy things.

- Nu 4:15,19,24,30 3:30,31 Mk 13:34
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Summary of Duties - Source: Wenham (TOTC-Numbers)

A PRESTIGIOUS POSITION

This is the work of the descendants of Kohath in the tent of meeting, concerning the most holy things- The most holy things (קֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים, qodesh haqqodashim) describes the most holy place in Ex 26:34, the section within the veil of separation (pārōket hammāsāk), but here the term is used for the furnishings in the sanctuary. In a sense the work of the Kohathites is what they are not to do with the holy things - touch or even see them!

THOUGHT - While this position is "prestigious," it is NO MORE important than the other "positions." There is a

secular saying that the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Beloved, God may have called you to a position of less prestige before men but it is NOT less prestigious in the eyes of God Who shows no partiality! One is reminded of Paul's metaphorical description of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:16-25

And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, **giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked**, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

Illustration - The story is told of an elderly missionary couple who were returning home on a ship after many years of sacrificial service in Africa. On the same ship was Theodore Roosevelt, who had just completed a highly successful big game hunt. As the ship docked in New York harbor, thousands of well-wishers and dozens of reporters lined the pier to welcome Roosevelt home. But not a single person was there to welcome the missionaries. As the couple rode to a hotel in a taxi, the man complained to his wife, "It just doesn't seem right. We give forty years of our lives to Jesus Christ to win souls in Africa, and nobody knows or cares when we return. Yet the president goes over there for a few weeks to kill some animals and the whole world takes notice." But as they prayed together that night before retiring, the Lord seemed to say to them, **"Do you know why you haven't received your reward yet, My children? It is because you are not home yet."**

Currid - One may wonder why there is such detail given to the work of the Levites in the tabernacle. The description seems to go on ad infinitum. Why is this the case? Why is every Levite assigned his work and told what to carry? Brown discerningly comments, 'There was no place for ambitious scheming, a competitive spirit or quarrelsome rivalry about their duties. All were to work in harmonious relationships with one another and in dutiful submission to their colleagues, the priests.' Thus there was to be no room for personal caprice when it came to the work of the tabernacle: it was to be done according to God's word and in a proper, prescribed and holy way. Brown then projects this idea into the era of the New Testament. He says: It anticipated the interdependent and mutually supportive relationships that were meant to characterize the early Christian churches. Sadly, this noble and enriching ideal was not always evident in the subsequent history of either Israel or the church. Indeed, in the church God has appointed his people to many different positions (see 1 Cor. 12:28–31), and each is to act according to the gift that has been given to him.

Most holy things - Num. 4:4; 2 Chr. 31:14; Ezr. 2:63; Neh. 7:65; Ezek. 42:13

[See below](#) on **tent of meeting**.

Philip - The truth is that all work in the kingdom of God is royal service, however unostentatious and, from the human standpoint, lowly and insignificant. ([The Preacher's Commentary](#))

Ronald Allen - "The sense of order and organization already observed in this book comes to its finest point in this chapter. Again, we observe that the standard pattern in Hebrew prose is a movement from the general to the specific, from the broad to the particular. Chapters 1–4 follow this concept nicely. . . . The chapters have moved from the nation as a whole to the particular families of the one tribe that has responsibility to maintain the symbols of Israel's worship of the Lord. Each chapter gets more specific, more narrow in focus, with the central emphasis on the worship of the Lord at the Tent of Meeting." (EBC)

Numbers 4:5 "When the camp sets out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and they shall take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it;

- **when:** Nu 2:16,17 10:14
- **Aaron:** Nu 4:15 3:27-32
- **they shall:** Ex 26:31-33 36:35 40:3 Isa 25:7 Mt 27:51 Heb 9:3 10:20

- **and cover:** Ex 25:10-22 37:1-9 2Sa 6:2-9
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passage:

Exodus 26:31+ "You shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman.



Ark of the Testimony

When the camp sets out - Hebrew. nasa, "in the breaking or pulling up." The signal for setting forward was the removal of the pillar of cloud.

Aaron and his sons shall go in and they shall take down (Heb. horidu, shall cause to descend.) **the veil of the screen** (Ex 26:31+) **and cover the ark of the testimony with it** - The Ark of the Testimony was to be covered with the veil that hung between the holy place and the most holy place. Note that Aaron and his sons are "Kohathites" but are separated from others in this group. Therefore when the tabernacle was moved, the Aaronic priests were to go in and cover the tabernacle furniture and the tabernacle vessels and prepare these things for transportation. Only after this was done could the non-priestly Kohathites go in and handle the holy things, such as lifting them to carry them upon their shoulders (See poles above in Ark of the Testimony) to the next camping place.

TSK has an interesting note regarding access of the priest to the Holy of Holies - The law prohibiting any person, except the high priest on one day in the year (Day of Atonement), to enter into the most holy place (Holy of Holies), must have admitted an exception while the Israelites were in the wilderness: that exception, therefore, is here expressly made; and the directions given respecting it must be religiously observed, or the service could not be safely performed. While the cloud rested on the tabernacle, the general rule was in force; but when it was removed, then the priests might enter to prepare the sacred vessels for removal.

Bush agrees writing on **Aaron and his sons shall go in** that "The express law prohibiting any one except the high-priest once a year, entering into the most holy place, which held good while the cloud rested on the tabernacle, must have admitted an exception when it was about to be taken up. Then the inferior priests might enter to prepare the sacred vessels for removal."

Wenham - The different vessels of the tabernacle were wrapped in different coloured cloths marking their different degrees of holiness. The most holy ark, the very throne of God, was wrapped first in the veil, then in a covering of goatskin (AV 'badgers' skins', NEB 'porpoise-hide'), and finally in a blue cloth. The vessels from the next most holy part of the tabernacle were wrapped in a blue cloth, then in an outer goatskin covering (Num 4:7-12). The altar for burnt offering that stood in the court of the tabernacle was wrapped first in a purple cloth, and then in a goatskin cover. Thus, when the camp was on the move, the ark was distinguished from all the other pieces of furniture by its blue outer cover. The same set of colours was used in the tabernacle. Deep blue curtains were used in the holy of holies, purple in the holy place, and the outer cover was again of goatskin. Undoubtedly these colours had significance, but discovering what they signified is difficult. (TOTC-Nu)

Numbers 4:6 and they shall lay a covering of porpoise skin on it, and shall spread over it a cloth of pure blue, and shall insert its poles.

- **a cloth:** Nu 4:7,8,11-13 Ex 35:19 39:1,41
- **the poles:** Ex 25:13-15 1Ki 8:7,8
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Exodus 25:14; 15+ "You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them.
15 "The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it.

PROTECTIVE COVERING

ON ARK AND VEIL

and they shall lay a covering of porpoise skin on it- Remember that **they** refers to **Aaron and his sons** and not the Kohathites who were to carry these items. This was not the covering of skins made for the tabernacle, which was carried by the Gershonites, (Nu 4:24, 25,) but one made for the purpose of concealing and sheltering the ark when it was to be carried. It was like the upper layer of the Tabernacle covering, and was to be added to shield it from the weather.

NET Note on porpoise skin - The exact meaning of the Hebrew word here is difficult to determine. The term **שָׁחַל** (takhsh) has been translated “badgers’ [skins]” by KJV. ASV has “sealskin” while RSV uses “goatskin”; NEB and NASB have “porpoise skin,” and NIV has “hides of sea cows.” This is close to “porpoise,” and seems influenced by the Arabic. The evidence is not strong for any of these meanings, and some of the suggestions would be problematic. It is possible the word is simply used for “fine leather,” based on the Egyptian ths. This has been followed by NRSV (“fine leather”) and NLT (“fine goatskin leather”) along with the present translation. See further HALOT 1720–21 s.v. **שָׁחַל**.

and shall spread over it a cloth of pure blue, and shall insert its poles- The poles were in place (see Ex 25:15) Note that covering of **pure blue** over the ark was not covered with anything else as were the other articles in the Tabernacle, which would make it clearly visible when they marched out.

Spurgeon on pure blue - Blue was the token of holiness, — of separation. Hence, every Israelite wore a border of blue upon his garment, but this, which was the symbol of the divine presence, was “all of blue.” It is all holiness. We wear, alas! but a border of blue, but this holy thing was “all of blue.”

THOUGHT - Just as the **pure blue** covering made God's presence with Israel ever visible, so too God is "visible" to us in our wilderness journey, as we gaze on His the pure milk of His Word. Are you gazing daily or just glancing occasionally (cf Mt 4:4+, Lk 4:4+).

Summary of the coverings and colors:

- Porpoise skin - Nu 4:6
- Blue cloth -Nu 4:6 for ark and only outside
- Purple cloth - Nu 4:13 - alone had purple cloth
- Scarlet cloth - Nu 4:8 - Table of Shewbread

Norman Geisler - NUMBERS 4:6—Were the staves to remain in the Ark or to be removed?

PROBLEM: According to Exodus 25:15, “The poles shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it.” But, in the Numbers passage it says that when the ark was moved by the Levites “they shall insert its poles.” This seems to be conflicting instructions.

SOLUTION: The Hebrew word for “insert” (sum or sim) has a wide range of meanings, including, leave, put, place, set, and turn. Hence, it may mean no more than the priests were to fasten or adjust the poles when they moved the ark so that it did not slip when being moved. This would make sense in view of the command not to remove the poles from the ark. (When Critics Ask)

Numbers 4:7 "Over the table of the bread of the Presence they shall also spread a cloth of blue and put on it the dishes and the pans and the sacrificial bowls and the jars for the drink offering, and the continual bread shall be on it.

- **the table:** Ex 25:23-30 37:10-16 Lev 24:5-8
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Exodus 25:23-30+ “You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long and one cubit wide and one and a half cubits high. 24 “You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a gold border around it. 25 “You shall make for it a rim of a handbreadth around it; and you shall make a gold border for the rim around it. 26 “You shall make four gold rings for it and put rings on the four corners which are on its four feet. 27 “The rings shall be close to the rim as holders for the poles to carry the table. 28 “You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, so that with them the table may be carried. 29 “You shall make its dishes and its pans and its jars and its bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. 30 “You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times.

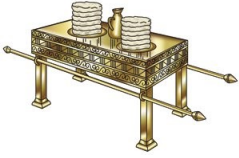


Table of Bread of the Presence

THE TABLE OF FACES TRANSPORTATION

Over the table of the bread of the Presence (literally "table of faces") (7x - Ex 25:30; 35:13; 39:36; Nu 4:7; 1 Sa 21:6; 1 Ki 7:48; 2 Chr 4:19) **they shall also spread a cloth of** - They again refers to **Aaron and his sons**. The Kohathites carried the furniture on their shoulders with the carrying poles. They had no carts assigned to them as did the other Levites.

Spurgeon - When they moved the sacred table, the bread was always there; twelve cakes for the twelve tribes, for the bread of God's house is never lacking.

Numbers 4:8 "They shall spread over them a cloth of scarlet material, and cover the same with a covering of porpoise skin, and they shall insert its poles.

- Nu 4:6,7,9,11-13
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

They (Aaron and his sons) **shall spread over them a cloth of scarlet material, and cover the same with a covering of porpoise skin, and they shall insert its poles** - See depiction above for poles inserted.

Currid suggests that "the table appears to rank higher than the other sacred objects (OTHER THAN THE ARK) because it has three layers of covering like the ark—the other holy pieces only have two coverings....Directions for the preparation of this bread and how it is to be used in the ritual of the tabernacle are found in Leviticus 24:5–9+. (EPSC-Nu)

Numbers 4:9 "Then they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand for the light, along with its lamps and its snuffers, and its trays and all its oil vessels, by which they serve it;

- Ex 25:31-39 37:17-24 Ps 119:105 Rev 1:20 2:1
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries



The Lampstand

Then they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand for the light, along with its lamps and its snuffers, and its trays and all its oil vessels, by which they serve it - Note that last phrase **by which they serve it** which simply reiterates that this covering of holy items was by Aaron and his sons for they were the only ones who could **serve it** (the lampstand).

Note that every item of the Tabernacle was covered before moving (Nu 4:5, 7, 9, etc).

Numbers 4:10 and they shall put it and all its utensils in a covering of porpoise skin, and shall put it on the carrying bars.

- Nu 4:6,12
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

and they (Aaron and his sons) **shall put it and all its utensils in a covering of porpoise skin, and shall put it on the carrying bar** - The **carrying bar** is "one word in Hebrew, and it is used in Numbers 13:23 of two men carrying a cluster of grapes suspended from a pole. The NEB translates the term as 'slung from a pole'. Precisely how the menorah is attached in suspension is a mystery." (Currid)

NET Note - The "pole" or "**bar**" (מוט, mot) is of a different style than the poles used for transporting the ark. It seems to be a flexible bar carried by two men with the implements being transported tied to the bar. The NEB suggests the items were put in a bag and slung over the bar, but there is no indication of the manner.

Numbers 4:11 "Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth and cover it with a covering of porpoise skin, and shall insert its poles;

- Ex 30:1-19 37:25-28 39:38 40:5,26,27
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Over the golden altar they (Aaron and his sons) **shall spread a blue cloth and cover it with a covering of porpoise skin, and shall insert its poles**

Numbers 4:12 and they shall take all the utensils of service, with which they serve in the sanctuary, and put them in a blue cloth and cover them with a covering of porpoise skin, and put them on the carrying bars.

- Nu 4:7,9 3:8 Ex 25:9 31:10 2Ki 25:14,15 1Ch 9:29 2Ch 4:11,16,19,22
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

And they (Aaron and his sons) **shall take all the utensils of service, with which they serve in the sanctuary, and put them in a blue cloth and cover them with a covering of porpoise skin, and put them on the carrying bars** - Note again the phrase **with which they serve** referring to Aaron and his sons.

Numbers 4:13 "Then they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it.

- Nu 4:6-9,11,12 Ex 27:3-5 39:1,41 Lev 6:12,13
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

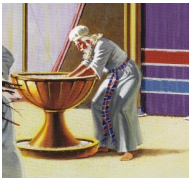


Altar of Burnt Offering

Then they (Aaron and his sons) **shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it**- This is the bronze altar in the courtyard of the Tabernacle.

Numbers 4:14 "They shall also put on it all its utensils by which they serve in connection with it: the firepans, the forks and shovels and the basins, all the utensils of the altar; and they shall spread a cover of porpoise skin over it and insert its poles.

- all the vessels thereof: Ex 38:1-7 2Ch 4:19
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries



Laver of Bronze Before
Entrance to Tent of Meeting

They (Aaron and his sons) **shall also put on it all its utensils by which they serve in connection with it: the firepans, the forks and shovels and the basins, all the utensils of the altar; and they shall spread a cover of porpoise skin over it and insert its poles**

Currid - The **laver** is not included in the description of the furnishings to be packaged by the priests and carried by the Kohathites. The reason for this omission is uncertain. Both the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch recognized the problem and therefore added to the text: 'And they shall take a purple cloth and they shall cover the laver and its base. And they shall set over them a covering of porpoise skin. Then they shall set it upon the carrying frame.'

Numbers 4:15 "When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy objects and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them, so that they will not touch the holy objects and die. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.

- Nu 7:9 10:21 De 31:9 Jos 4:10 2Sa 6:13 1Ch 15:2,15
- Nu 3:38 Ex 19:12 1Sa 6:19 2Sa 6:6,7 1Ch 13:9,10 Heb 12:18-29
- **These things:** Nu 3:30,31
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

HOLY THINGS UNTOUCHABLE

When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy objects and all the furnishings of the sanctuary- This would have been quite a job for just 3 men Aaron and his sons.

when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them, so that they will not touch the holy objects and die. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry - Only Aaron and his sons was allowed to see or touch the sacred implements within the sanctuary (Nu 4:15, 19, 20) lest that person touch (or see) them and die. Service to Yahweh was serious business! And it still is beloved!

Related Passage:

Nu 18:3+ And they shall thus attend to your obligation and the obligation of all the tent, but they shall not come near to the furnishings of the sanctuary and the altar, or both they and you will die.

Wiersbe - The sacred furniture of the tabernacle had to be borne on the shoulders of the sanctified servants of God. When David had the ark brought into Jerusalem, he didn't obey this rule, and it led to the death of Uzzah (2 Sam. 6). The Kohathites were burden-bearers, but their burdens were precious, very important to the people, and appointed by the Lord. Certainly they considered it a privilege to carry the sacred furnishings of the sanctuary on their shoulders through the wilderness.

[See below](#) on **tent of meeting**.

Carry (KJV = burden) (04853)(**massa'** from **nasa'** = to lift, bear, carry) is a masculine noun meaning a burden or load; by extension, a burden in the form of a prophetic utterance or oracle. When used to express a burden or load, it is commonly used to describe that which is placed on the backs of pack animals, like donkeys (Ex. 23:5); mules (2 Ki. 5:17); or camels (2 Ki. 8:9). Another common usage is in designating what parts of the Tabernacle the sons of Kohath, Gershon, and Merari were to carry (Num. 4:15, 19, 24, 27, 31, 32, 47, 49).

Massa' is a **key word** in Numbers 4 (10/33 OT uses!) - Nu 4:15; Nu 4:19; Nu 4:24; Nu 4:27; Nu 4:31; Nu 4:32; Nu 4:47; Nu 4:49; Nu 11:11; Nu 11:17

NET Note - The word מַסָּא (massa') is normally rendered "burden," especially in prophetic literature. It indicates the load that one must carry, whether an oracle, or here the physical responsibility.

THOUGHT - There are 3 **key words** in Numbers 4 - **work** (Nu 4:3; Nu 4:4; Nu 4:19; Nu 4:23; Nu 4:27; Nu 4:30; Nu 4:35; Nu 4:39; Nu 4:43; Nu. 4:47), **service** (Nu 4:3; Nu 4:12; Nu 4:23; Nu 4:24; Nu 4:26; Nu 4:27; Nu 4:28; Nu 4:30; Nu 4:31; Nu 4:32; Nu 4:33; Nu 4:35; Nu 4:39; Nu 4:43; Nu 4:47) and **carry** (KJV - burden). All aspects are important and all require exertion of energy but we do so in the spirit of Mt 11:28-30+ "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." And remember this was what they were to do for 40 years in the wilderness (not in an air conditioned building)! So we need to remember Paul's exhortation in Galatians 6:9-10 "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

Related Resource:

- [Why did God strike Uzzah dead for touching the Ark of the Covenant? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

Numbers 4:16 "The responsibility of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is the oil for the light and the fragrant incense and the continual grain offering and the anointing oil--the responsibility of all the tabernacle and of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings."

- **responsibility of Eleazar** Nu 3:32
- **the oil:** Ex 25:6 27:20,21 Lev 24:2
- **incense** Ex 30:34-38 37:29
- **continual:** Ex 29:39-41
- **the anointing:** Ex 30:23-33
- **responsibility:** Lu 4:18 Ac 20:28 1Co 4:1 1Ti 2:5 Heb 3:1,6 1Pe 2:25 5:2
- [The Eleazar Priesthood](#) - E A Stuart
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passage:

Exodus 30:23-25+ "Take also for yourself the finest of spices: of flowing myrrh five hundred shekels, and of fragrant cinnamon half as much, two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant cane two hundred and fifty, 24 and of cassia five hundred, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin. 25 "You shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil.

ELEAZAR THE SUPERVISOR OF THE ENTIRE TABERNACLE

The responsibility of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is the oil for the light (cf Ex 27:20-21+) and the fragrant incense (cf Ex 30:34-38+) and the continual grain offering (cf Ex 29:38-46+) and the anointing oil--the responsibility of all the tabernacle and of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings

Currid - It has been argued that perhaps this directive means that Eleazar is to care for and carry these objects himself. But this does not seem to be the sense of the passage; rather he is in sole charge of seeing that these items are packed and properly carried by the Kohathites. In addition, Eleazar is to oversee all the work of the tabernacle. He is in charge of the entire Levitical workforce, which includes the Kohathites, Gershonites and Merarites

NET Note agrees - One would assume that he would prepare and wrap these items, but that the Kohathites would carry them to the next place.

Numbers 4:17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying

Numbers 4:18 "Do not let the tribe of the families of the Kohathites be cut off from among the Levites.

- Nu 16:32 17:10 18:5 Ex 19:21 Lev 10:1,2 1Sa 6:19 2Sa 6:6,7 Jer 38:23
- [The Lord is to be Served with Fear](#) W. Binnie
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Do not let the tribe of the families of the Kohathites be cut off from among the Levites How would they be cut off. By touching or even seeing the holy things as explained in next verses.

Remember that 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, Nu 26:58, 59). What's the point? All Kohathites, **except the descendants of Aaron**, were forbidden direct access to the holy things.

NET Note adds "It was a difficult task to be handling the holy things correctly; Moses and Aaron were to see to it that they did it right and did not handle the objects, that is, Moses and Aaron were to safeguard their lives by making certain that proper procedures were followed.

Numbers 4:19 "But do this to them that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy objects: Aaron and his sons shall go in and assign each of them to his work and to his load;

- **most holy:** Nu 4:4
- [The Perils of Distinguished Service](#) - E.S. Prout
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

But do this to them that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy objects: Aaron and his sons shall go in and assign each of them to his work and to his load - **Gilbrant** writes that "The implication of this passage is that the priests must protect the Kohathites from the danger of profanation of the holy things by closely supervising their work, lest the Kohathites be killed. The danger was real, as Korah was to discover when he challenged Moses' authority (Num. 16:1-40)."

The assignments were given to the Levites by Aaron and Moses but only as mediators of God's Word (Nu 4:19, 37, 41, 45, 49). The Levites were not allowed to do as they pleased or what benefited them but were to submit to the priests (Nu 4:28, 33). And note that all the instructions the priests gave were from the LORD, and nothing was left to guess.

Currid - When the Kohathites draw near to handle the sacred objects, the priests must have concluded their work properly, or the Kohathites may pay the price. The latter have one duty: transporting the sacred objects.

Spurgeon - This is a very awful (**ED**: In sense of "commanding awe") thing; I mean, something which should produce a great awe and solemnity in our hearts. These men were chosen to carry the vessels of the most holy place, yet they must never see them. They must be covered up by the hands of the priest, and they must never touch them. They must bear them by their staves, or upon the bar upon which they were placed. Oh, how terrible a thing it is to draw near to God. The Lord our God is a jealous God. He will be served with holy reverence; or not at all. Hence he says to Moses and Aaron, "Take care that you do not lead these men into any mistake. You go in first, and point out to each man what he is to carry. See that all is covered up, for if you do not, they may die in their work. Do not be accessories to their act, and bring upon them this terrible judgment." I often wish that God's people would be careful not to cause sin in any of his servants when they are engaged in the divine ministry. Perhaps in preaching, or otherwise, there may be something done which vexes the Holy Spirit, and causes trouble and sin. And, oh! he who stands in the holy place, and bears the holiest of the vessels, needs to fear and tremble before God; and he needs to ask his brethren to see that they do nothing which might inadvertently cause him to sin.

Load ([04853](#)) see note on [massa'](#)

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily - Numbers 4:19 Every one to his service and to his burden.

Is this what the Apostle referred to when he said that every man should bear his own burden? There are burdens which we cannot share or depute, to bear which we need special grace, and must continually seek the aid of the Divine Spirit.

The burden of our own existence. — Each of us must give an account of himself to God. We were created for a specific purpose;

and our failure to fulfil it cannot be settled on another. God will require each man's soul of himself. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). You have a charge to keep, a soul to save, and a God to glorify.

The burden of our life-work. — What makest thou in the world? The Maker of all waits for thee to enter his great workshop and become his apprentice and co-worker. To be an idler, or an absentee, will land thee in inevitable disgrace. The appointed place cannot be left vacant, and thy tools untouched, save at thy grave peril.

The burden of the souls of others. — We are our brothers' keepers, liable at any moment to be called upon to give an account of how they fare; and we cannot rid ourselves of this responsibility by annual donations or subscriptions to charitable or missionary institutions.

The burden of daily intercession. — Jesus bears the burdens of his people as He intercedes for them in heaven; and there is a sense in which we are called to bear up his hands in this holy service. We must consider the work of daily prayer for his Church, for sufferers, and for the world, as part of the burden of the Lord, allotted to us because we are members of his body.

Numbers 4:20 but they shall not go in to see the holy objects even for a moment, or they will die."

- **they shall:** Nu 4:15,19 Ex 19:21 Lev 10:2 1Sa 6:19 Heb 10:19,20 Rev 11:19
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

EVEN SEEING BRINGS DEATH!

but they shall not go in to see the holy objects even for a moment, or they will die- The Hebrew word translated "**for a moment**" is *keballa* which basically refers to swallowing. The idea apparently is as quick as it takes to swallow something is all the time one would need to look to be killed! Just one look and one would be instantly destroyed just like the seen in the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark!" If you have forgotten the scene, [watch this incredible clip of what transpired when the German looked into the Ark of the Covenant!](#) The point is that God is holy and unholy people cannot look at Him! The Septuagint renders the phrase as 'to look suddenly on the holy things'.

THOUGHT - How easy it is for us to take for granted that we one day will be allowed to see Jesus face to face with no fear of dying, all because He died in each of our places as the substitutionary Lamb of God (Jn 1:29+). O, that God might grant us grace that we might by His Spirit be enabled to meditate more on this eternal life-transforming truth about Jesus. Amen. And indeed, because of His Spirit and grace, even today we have the privilege of being allowed/enabled to fix "our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb 12:2+).

Currid - Those who have been entrusted with the rituals of the worship of God are here directed to take great care and manifest due diligence in the performance of their duties. These truths are no different in the church from what they were in Israel. Much of the language of these early chapters of Numbers is military language, and the Levites are, in a sense, compared to soldiers who are called to do their duty, and to do it well. The same can be expected of the minister of the gospel. Burkitt says: "Every faithful minister is a spiritual soldier, warring under Jesus Christ, his captain and chief commander: must the soldier be called and do all by commission? So must the minister. Must the soldier be armed, trained up, and disciplined, and made fit for service? So must the minister. Must the soldier shun no dangers, stick at no difficulties, pass through thick and thin? Must he use allowed weapons, approved armour of his general's directing, not of his own inventing? All this must the minister be and do."

Numbers 4:21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Matthew Henry - Verses 21-33. We have here the charge of the other two families of the Levites, which, though not so honourable as the first, yet was necessary, and to be done regularly. All the things were delivered them by name. It intimates the care God takes of his church and every member of it. The death of the saints is represented as the taking down of the tabernacle, 2 Corinthians

5:1+, and the putting it off, 2 Peter 1:14+. All shall be raised up in the great day, when these vile bodies shall be made like the glorious body of Jesus Christ, and so shall be for ever with the Lord.

Numbers 4:22 "Take a census of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers' households, by their families;

- Nu 3:18,21,24
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

NUMBERING OF THE GERSHONITES

Take a census of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers' households, by their families- **Take a census** is same Hebrew phrase as in Nu 4:2 (cf Nu 1:2, 49, 26:2, 31:26, 49) literally "lift up the head," or in essence "take a head count." The purpose is to determine the size of the labor force.

Numbers 4:23 from thirty years and upward to fifty years old, you shall number them; all who enter to perform the service to do the work in the tent of meeting.

- **thirty years:** Nu 4:3
- **to perform the service:** Heb. to war the warfare, Nu 4:3 Isa 63:1-4 Ro 7:14-24 1Co 9:7 2Co 6:7 10:3-5 Eph 6:10-19 Ga 5:17,24 1Ti 1:18 2Ti 2:3,4 4:7
- [The Warfare of Christian Service](#) - Alexander Maclaren
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SERVING GOD IN THE TENT OF MEETING

from thirty years and upward to fifty years old, you shall number them; all who enter to perform the service to do the work in the tent of meeting -

Question - [What was the tent of meeting?](#)

Answer - The phrase *tent of meeting* is used in the Old Testament, specifically in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, as the name of a place where God would meet with His people, Israel. Usually, the "tent of meeting" was used as another name for the [Tabernacle of Moses](#). However, before the tabernacle was constructed, God met with Moses in a temporary tent of meeting: "Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the 'tent of meeting.' Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. . . . As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses" (Exodus 33:7, 9). The fact that Moses set up the tent of meeting *outside of* the camp underscored that the people had broken fellowship with God at Sinai when they had made the golden calf (see Exodus 33:3). After the tabernacle was built, Moses no longer needed his temporary tent, and the term *tent of meeting* began to be applied to the tabernacle.

In the Law that God gave Moses, God provided specific instructions to build a place of worship (Exodus 25-27). This "tent of meeting" or tabernacle could be taken up and moved each time they changed locations while wandering in the wilderness. The word *tabernacle* is an English rendition of the Hebrew word *miskan*, or "dwelling place." The tabernacle was a temporary dwelling place for the [Ark of the Covenant](#) and the other holy items that the Israelites were instructed to use in the worship of and sacrifice to Yahweh.

Interestingly, the word *tent* or *tabernacle* is also used in the New Testament to draw profound spiritual conclusions about salvation. Both Paul and the writer of Hebrews make a distinction between a heavenly tent and an earthly tent, between what was "built by human hands" and what is "not part of this creation" (2 Corinthians 5:1; Hebrews 9:11). Hebrews 9:1-10 describes the earthly tabernacle, or "tent of meeting," as a place into which the priests would go to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. Then, in verse 11, Christ is shown to be a better "high priest" who entered once through the "greater and more perfect tent," referring to His body, to offer a sacrifice that would satisfy the wrath of God completely, for all time. This refers to His blood shed on the cross. The point of the passage is to show how, if the blood of animals could temporarily cleanse worshipers of the guilt of sin, the perfect blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, would cleanse His followers perfectly—that is, eternally—of their sins.

In Hebrews 10:14, the writer says that Jesus has “perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” This verse expresses a spiritual paradox. By entering the “tent of meeting,” which was His own body, and offering up His own blood, Christ “perfected forever” those who have faith in Him. And the result of belief in Christ is sanctification, a continual upward spiral of holiness and closeness to God, as the Holy Spirit performs His work within Christ’s followers. In this way, we are eternally “perfect” because of the preciousness of Christ’s blood applied to our lives, yet at the same time we are “being sanctified” by the Holy Spirit who indwells us and changes us into the image of Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9; Romans 8:29).

Paul also mentions the “tent of meeting” or the tabernacle, comparing it to the earthly human body: “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 5:1–5).

When Paul says, “The tent that is our earthly home,” he is referring to our earthly body, our temporary dwelling place. Just as the Israelites moved the tent of meeting from place to place waiting for entrance to the Promised Land, believers in Christ are wanderers on the earth—people who are not “at home” in the world and who “seek a city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14). Paul says that those who belong to God will be “further clothed” with immortality upon their deaths and that their earthly tent (their body) will be replaced with a “heavenly dwelling.” God does the work of preparing us for that day of glorification by the process of sanctification by the Spirit, and that work happening within us is a “guarantee” that our inheritance and our heavenly dwelling are real. “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13–15). (Source -) GotQuestions.org

Numbers 4:24 "This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and in carrying:

- **carriage**, Nu 4:15,19,27,31,32,47,49
- [Numbers 4:24-26 Lowly Service](#) - C H Spurgeon
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and in carrying

NET Note - - The two forms are the infinitive construct and then the noun: “to serve and for the burden (CARRYING).” They are to serve and they are to take the responsibility. The infinitive is explaining the verb.

Carrying (04853) see note on [massa](#)

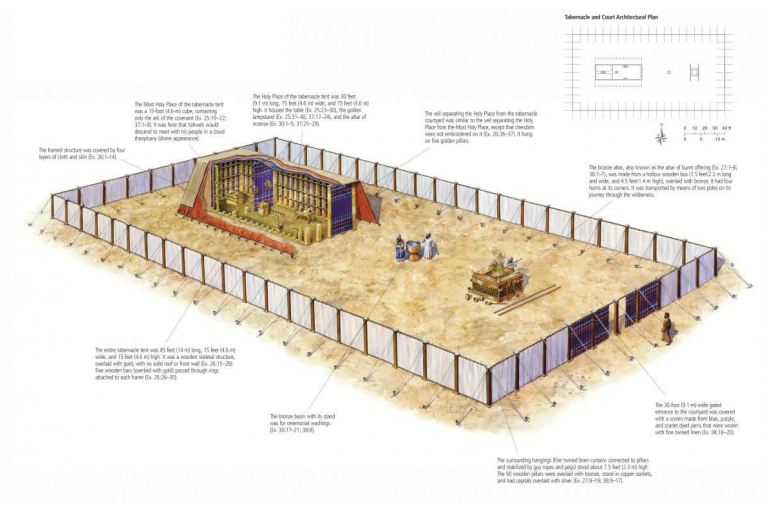
Numbers 4:25 they shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting with its covering and the covering of porpoise skin that is on top of it, and the screen for the doorway of the tent of meeting,

- **the curtains**: Nu 3:25,26 Nu 7:5-7
- **the covering**: Ex 26:14
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Exodus 36:8+ All the skillful men among those who were performing the work made the tabernacle with ten curtains; of fine twisted linen and blue and purple and scarlet material, with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman, Bezalel made them.

Exodus 26:14+ “You shall make a covering for the tent of rams’ skins dyed red and a covering of porpoise skins above.



Curtains of the Tabernacle and Tent of Meeting

they shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting with its covering and the covering of porpoise skin that is on top of it, and the screen for the doorway of the tent of meeting - "The work of these people would have been very demanding, since the size and weight of the various curtains and courtyard hangings would have been great." (NET Note) They were transported on two carts, compared to the four carts (Nu 7:7) used by the Merarites (Nu 7:8).

Numbers 4:26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway of the gate of the court which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords and all the equipment for their service; and all that is to be done, they shall perform.

- the hangings: Ex 27:9
- and their cords: Ex 35:18
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway of the gate of the court which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords and all the equipment for their service; and all that is to be done, they shall perform

Numbers 4:27 "All the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their loads and in all their work, shall be performed at the command of Aaron and his sons; and you shall assign to them as a duty all their loads.

- Lu 1:70 1Co 11:2
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

All the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their loads and in all their work, shall be performed at the command of Aaron and his sons; and you shall assign to them as a duty all their loads

Spurgeon - There was a wise decision of labour. I wish we had the same kind of thing in every church, and that every member occupied himself in that to which God has appointed him. But there are some who want to do what they cannot do, and who do not care to do what they can do.

Loads (04853) see note on [massa'](#)

Numbers 4:28 "This is the service of the families of the sons of the Gershonites in the tent of meeting, and their duties shall be under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

- Nu 4:33 1Co 12:5,6
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ITHAMAR TO SUPERVISE

THE WORK OF GERSHONITES

This is the service of the families of the sons of the Gershonites in the tent of meeting, and their duties shall be under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest - Aaron's only other living son, Eleazar supervised the tabernacles holiest things so was clearly given a position above Ithamar. Eleazar would eventually take Aaron's place when he died.

THOUGHT - The lines of authority and accountability were clearly communicated to all. As you function with others in service to God, make sure the lines of authority between you and those you work with are clearly understood. Good communication builds good relationships. (LASB)

[See above](#) on tent of meeting.

Numbers 4:29 "As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families, by their fathers' households;

- Nu 3:33-35
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

NUMBERING OF THE MERARITES

As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families, by their fathers' households

Numbers 4:30 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tent of meeting.

- **service:** Heb. warfare, Nu 4:3,23 Ps 110:1-7 1Ti 6:11,12 2Ti 2:4 4:7,8
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tent of meeting [See above](#) on tent of meeting.

Numbers 4:31 "Now this is the duty of their loads, for all their service in the tent of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its sockets,

- **duty:** Nu 3:36,37 7:8,9
- **the boards:** Ex 26:15
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Now this is the duty of their loads, for all their service in the tent of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its sockets - The Merarites are to carry the tabernacle boards, bars, pillars, and sockets (Nu 4:31, 32) on four wagons drawn by eight oxen, for Nu 7:8+ tells us "four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."

Guzik writes "They had the job of packing and transporting the boards and pillars of the tabernacle; this was important work, because of all the precious metals used, the weight of the tabernacle was some 19,000 pounds."

Loads (04853) see note on [massa'](#)

[See above](#) on tent of meeting.

Numbers 4:32 and the pillars around the court and their sockets and their pegs and their cords, with all their equipment and with all their service; and you shall assign each man by name the items he is to carry.

- the instruments: Nu 3:8 7:1 Ex 25:9 38:17,21 1Ch 9:29

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

and the pillars around the court and their sockets and their pegs and their cords, with all their equipment and with all their service; and you shall assign each man by name the items he is to carry

Spurgeon - They had the heaviest load to carry, but they were the more numerous. They carried the solid columns upon which the covering of the tabernacle rested. And notice that they had also to carry the pins. Sometimes, God's servants dislike carrying pins. They feel themselves too big, but blessed is that servant who, in his place, can be content to carry "their sockets, and their pins, and their cords, with all their instruments."

Jensen - The Lord knew the details of the objects used in the worship service, and He provided for their care by the ministry of the Levites. They must have been impressed by the meticulous care which He wanted them to exercise in His work. They must have learned the lesson that each service is as important as the next. For instance, what would be the point of the coverings and enclosures (Gershonites' responsibility) without the contents, such as ark or laver (Kohathites' responsibility)? Or how could there be a tabernacle without the boards and bars (Merarites' responsibility)?

THOUGHT - "Who would ever think of calling fleshhooks, shovels, basins (Nu 4:14), pins, cords, sockets, pillars (Nu 4:32), dishes, spoons, bowls (Nu 4:7) something spiritual? Only God! Who would work with pins for 25 years and be happy? Only Levites! Why? They were told by God to do this work, service, burden. Now....what has God saved you to do in His body, the Church? Then "just do it!" ([Raymond Saxe](#)).

Carry (04853) see note on [massa](#)'

Numbers 4:33 "This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service in the tent of meeting, under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."

- under the hand: Nu 4:28 Jos 3:6 Isa 3:6
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ITHAMAR TO SUPERVISE THE WORK OF MERARITES

This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service in the tent of meeting, under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest [See above](#) on tent of meeting.

Currid applies this section on Merari - In the chiastic structure of verse 29, God impresses upon Moses that he is certainly to take a census of the Merarites. Although that clan's duties are not as important or set apart as those of the other clans of the Levites, the fact is that even their work is to be done properly, at the right time and in good order. And it is to be done strictly according to God's word. There is a good lesson here for the church. As we labour for Christ, no matter what our individual calling as Christians—whether it be as a pastor, or a lawyer, or a housewife, or whatever—we are to do it in the right manner, and that is according to the Word of God and to his glory. As Paul so wonderfully says, 'So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Cor. 10:31). And, thus, whether our labours are menial or not, we are to bring all things under the lordship of Jesus Christ. (EPSC Nu)

Numbers 4:34 So Moses and Aaron and the leaders of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers' households,

- Nu 4:2
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

So Moses and Aaron and the leaders of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers' households

Matthew Henry on Nu 4:34-39 - Observe —

1. That the Kohathites were in all eight thousand and six hundred, from a month old and upward: but of those there were but two thousand seven hundred and fifty serviceable men, not a third part. The Gershonites in all seven thousand and five hundred: and of

them but two thousand six hundred and thirty serviceable men, little more than a third part. Note — Of the many that add to the numbers of the Church, there are comparatively but few that contribute to the service of it. So it has been, and so it is; many have a place in the tabernacle, that do but little of the work of the tabernacle (Philippians 2:20, 21).

2. That the Merarites were but six thousand and two hundred in all; and yet of these there were three thousand and two hundred serviceable men, which were a good deal above half. The greatest burden lay upon that family, the boards, and pillars, and sockets. And God so ordered it, that though they were the fewest in number, yet they should have the most able men among them; for whatever service God calls men to, He will furnish them for it, and give strength in proportion to the work, grace sufficient.

3. The whole number of the able men of the tribe of Levi, which entered into God's host to war His warfare, was but eight thousand five hundred and eighty; whereas the able men of the other tribes that entered into the host of Israel to war their warfare were many more. The least of the tribes had almost four times as many able men as the Levites, and some of them more than eight times as many. For those that are engaged in the service of this world, and war after the flesh, are many more than those that are devoted to the service of God, and fight the good fight of faith.

Numbers 4:35 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tent of meeting.

- Nu 4:3,23,30,39,43,47 8:24-26 1Ch 23:3,24,26,27 28:13 Lu 3:23 1Ti 3:6
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tent of meeting[See above](#) on **tent of meeting**.

Power running to waste - We are told sometimes of the vast power unutilised as the waters leap over the Falls of Niagara; in fact, statisticians have given us calculations of the marvellous saving of steam, which means coal, which means money, that might thus be saved. We are not sure but that it has been proved that there is power enough, if it could be communicated, to give electric light to the whole continent, and no one who has walked along the banks of the Niagara River for two or three miles above the Falls, and studied the tremendous force of the current, will hesitate to doubt such statements. Is there not in this a parable? There is a whole Niagara of Christian power running to waste in our land — power that if utilised would flash the light of salvation over the world, and bring in the perfect day of Christ's kingdom on earth. Take any of our churches, what are a large portion of the members doing? Absolutely nothing — they are in their places on the Sabbath, and just possibly at the weekly prayer-meeting; beyond that what? But, "I can do so little." Oh, my friend, pug your little and a thousand littles of your brethren together, and it would make a power that by the grace of God would be irresistible. Niagara is but the united power of a thousand streams far, far away.

Numbers 4:36 Their numbered men by their families were 2,750.

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Their numbered men by their families were 2,750

C H Spurgeon - The Numbered People - I. Here is AUTHORITY FOR THE MUSTER-ROLL — "According to the commandment of the Lord they were numbered." It was not left to Moses to number the people without Divine sanction, else the deed might have been as evil in the sight of the Lord as that of David when he made a census of the nation: neither may any man at this day summon the saints of the Lord at his own discretion to enterprises for which they were never set apart. The armies of Israel are none of ours to lead whither we will, nor even to reckon up that the number may be told to our own honour.

1. Believers in Christ Jesus, you are now called forth to do suit and service, because like the tribe of Levi you are the Lord's. He views you as the church of the firstborn, as the redeemed from among men, and as His peculiar inheritance, and therefore above all other men you are under His special rule and governance.

2. You are further called because this is a charge laid upon you of the Lord, to whom you specially belong. The Levites were not numbered with the rest of the nation, for their vocation was altogether different, and their whole business was "about holy things." Ye see in this your calling, for hereunto are ye also ordained that ye may live unto the Lord alone.

3. The Lord may well call you to this service, seeing He has given you to His Son, even as He gave the Levites to Aaron, as it is written (Numbers 3:9), "They are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel." Because ye belong to Christ, therefore hide not yourselves from His service, but come forward with alacrity.

4. The Lord has constituted you the servants of all His people, even as He said of the Levites that they were to "do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation." We are debtors to all our brethren, and we are their servants to the full extent of our power.

II. Notice THE APPOINTMENT OF THE INDIVIDUALS — "Every one according to his service, and according to his burden." By our varied gifts, positions, offices, and opportunities, we are as much set apart to special services as were the sons of Kohath, &c. Great evils arise out of persons mistaking their calling, and undertaking things of which they are not capable; and, on the other hand, the success of Christian work in a large measure arises out of places of usefulness being filled by the right men.

III. Our text is the summary of the chapter in which we have an ACCOUNT OF THE ACTUAL FULFILMENT OF THE LORD'S COMMAND BY MOSES. He numbered each family, and cast up the total of the tribe, at the same time mentioning in detail the peculiar service of each. We would imitate him at this important moment, and take the census of those who are consecrated to the Lord's own service.

1. Where are you, then, who can bear the heavier service of the sanctuary, carrying its pillars, and the boards, and the sockets thereof? You are now needed to speak in the meetings, to lead the people in prayer, to order the assemblies, and to take the heavier work of this holy business. The Lord Jesus should have able men to speak for Him; He deserves the best of the best. Now is the hour, where is the man? Let no diffidence or love of ease keep one back who might make known the gospel and win a soul for Jesus.

2. But where are you who can only carry the pins and the cords? Your burden is lighter, but probably your strength is also less, and lighter though your load may be, the matters which you carry are quite as essential as the pillars and the boards. Where are you? You who can say a few words to lonely inquiring ones; you who can do no more than pray, where are you? At your posts, or idling? Answer quickly, for time and need are pressing. If the load which you can carry be so very small, be all the more ready to bear it.

3. Are you a lover of the Lord Jesus and do you wish to be omitted from the roll-call? If so, let it be known to yourself, and stated plainly to your conscience. Do not pretend to be a labourer and remain a loiterer, but openly avow to your own soul that you stand all the day idle, and feel fully justified in so doing.

Numbers 4:37 These are the numbered men of the Kohathite families, everyone who was serving in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD through Moses.

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

These are the numbered men of the Kohathite families, everyone who was serving in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD through Moses [See above](#) on tent of meeting.

Numbers 4:38 The numbered men of the sons of Gershon by their families and by their fathers' households,

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The numbered men of the sons of Gershon by their families and by their fathers' households

Numbers 4:39 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tent of meeting.

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tent of meeting [See above](#) on tent of meeting.

Numbers 4:40 Their numbered men by their families, by their fathers' households, were 2,630.

- Nu 3:32
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Their numbered men by their families, by their fathers' households, were 2,630

Numbers 4:41 These are the numbered men of the families of the sons of Gershon, everyone who was serving in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD.

- Nu 4:22
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

OBEDIENCE TO COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD

These are the numbered men of the families of the sons of Gershon, everyone who was serving in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD [See above](#) on tent of meeting.

Numbers 4:42 The numbered men of the families of the sons of Merari by their families, by their fathers' households,

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The numbered men of the families of the sons of Merari by their families, by their fathers' households

Numbers 4:43 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tent of meeting.

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tent of meeting [See above](#) on tent of meeting.

Numbers 4:44 Their numbered men by their families were 3,200.

- Nu 3:34 De 33:25 1Co 10:13 12:8-12 2Co 12:9,10
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Their numbered men by their families were 3,200.

Currid has an interesting application - The fact that the Merarites, the clan with the smallest number of males of one month old and higher, have an unusually large proportion of the total number of males in the service of the tabernacle is worthy of consideration. Matthew Henry comments on this point: *The Merarites were but 6,200 in all, and yet of these there were 3,200 serviceable men, that is, more than half. The greatest burden lay upon that family, the boards and pillars and sockets; and God so ordered it that, though they were the fewest in number, yet they should have the most able men among them; for whatever service God calls men to He will furnish them for it, and give strength in proportion to the work, grace sufficient.* This is truly illustrative of the

wisdom of God. This wisdom is demonstrated in the church as well. In the words of Charnock: *All men are like vessels, and parts in the body, designed for distinct offices and functions for the good of the whole. As the variety of gifts in the Church is a fruit of the wisdom of God for the preservation and increase of the Church, so the variety of inclinations and employments in the world is a fruit of the wisdom of God for the preservation and subsistence of the world by mutual commerce.*

Numbers 4:45 These are the numbered men of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD through Moses.

- Nu 4:29
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

These are the numbered men of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD through Moses

Numbers 4:46 All the numbered men of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers' households,

- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

All the numbered men of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers' households - Verses 46-49 give a summary of the working Levites.

Numbers 4:47 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who could enter to do the work of service and the work of carrying in the tent of meeting.

- **From thirty:** Nu 4:3,23,30 1Ch 23:3,27
- **everyone:** Nu 4:15,24,37 Ro 12:6-8 1Co 12:4-31
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who could enter to do the work of service and the work of carrying in the tent of meeting [See above](#) on **tent of meeting**.

Carrying (04853) see note on [massa'](#)

Numbers 4:48 Their numbered men were 8,580.

- Nu 3:39 Mt 7:14 20:16 22:15
- [Numbers 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Their numbered men were 8,580 - This is the total of all the 30–50 year-old Levites, so that only 8,580 of the total number of Levites (22,000 Levites Nu 3:39) were eligible for service in the Tabernacle.

Jensen - We are not told every detail of their duties, but the wilderness environment most certainly created a multitude of tasks. And for this work there was a multitude of workers. The Lord was not short of workers in that day!

Wenham - Running through these censuses are two important biblical principles. First, that every member of the people of God has his part to play. The priests offered sacrifice, the Merarites carried the tent pegs, the other tribes fought in the army. Each was indispensable to the smooth functioning of the whole body. Without full mutual cooperation the people would not reach the promised land. Similarly, in Christ's body every member has been endowed with spiritual gifts which contribute to the welfare of the whole church. But as in ancient Israel 'there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one' (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Paul devotes the rest of

the chapter to working out these principles in more detail.

The second great principle that is clearly enunciated in these chapters is that Israel was a hierarchy or, more precisely, a theocracy. God spoke to Moses and Aaron, and they passed on God's words to the people. The priests, Aaron's sons, obeyed their father. The Levites were subordinate to the priests, while in their turn the Levites served as religious policemen preventing the ordinary Israelite falling into deadly sin.

Similarly, the New Testament pictures the church as well organized with a hierarchical order among its office-bearers. This organization goes back to our Lord himself who appointed twelve apostles in evident imitation of the twelve-tribe organization of Israel. Under Christ the apostles are the supreme authority in the church. Beneath them are the other office-holders such as prophets, teachers and elders (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28ff.; Eph. 4:11f.). The ordinary Christian is urged: 'Obey your leaders and submit to them' (Heb. 13:17; cf. 1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Thess. 5:12ff.; 1 Pet. 5:5); and the leaders are encouraged to 'command' and 'reprove with all authority', for by holding to scriptural teaching 'you will save both yourself and your hearers' (1 Tim. 4:11-16; Titus 2:15). (TOTC-Numbers)

Numbers 4:49 According to the commandment of the LORD through Moses, they were numbered, everyone by his serving or carrying; thus these were his numbered men, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

- **According to the:** Nu 4:37,41,45 1:54 2:33 3:51
- **everyone:** Nu 4:15,24,31 Isa 11:2-4 42:1-7 49:1-8 Ro 12:4-8
- **as the Lord:** Nu 4:1,21
- **[Numbers 4 Resources](#)** - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES OBEYS TO LAST NUMBER

According to the commandment of the LORD through Moses, they were numbered, everyone by his serving or carrying; thus these were his numbered men, just as the LORD had commanded Moses - We see Moses' obedience in Nu 1:54; Nu 3:33-34; Nu 4:42. **Faith** and **obedience** go together. If you say you believe God, you will obey Him (not speaking of perfection, but in your general "direction"). And so we read "Now Moses was **faithful** in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later." (Heb. 3:5+).

Jensen - In the concluding verses of chapter 4 a vital association is made, that of "service" with "burden"—"every one according to his service, and according to his burden" (4:49). The Levites were to serve faithfully in days of encampment, and they were also to be willing to carry the burdens whenever on the march. To serve and carry burdens—this is the task of the bondsman of the Lord.

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

Gilbrant - Here ends Moses' work of organizing the army and the Levitical assistants to the tabernacle worship. Now Israel is prepared to follow God to the Promised Land.

Guzik - Paul says the church is to work like a body—many parts, looking different, doing different jobs, meeting different needs, some more visible, some less, but all essential—and all with the same DNA code.. Much trouble is caused in the service of the LORD by those who desire a different calling than they have, or who are jealous of those who have a different calling, or by those who exalt one calling and abase another. Everyone has a place and a job, and all can set themselves to do it.

Carrying ([04853](#)) see note on [massa'](#)

Warren Wiersbe - All this information about the ministry of the Levites reminds us that our God is concerned with details and wants His work to be done by the people He has chosen and in the way He has appointed. Nothing in the camp of Israel was left to chance or human contrivance. Each Levite and priest knew his responsibilities and was expected to "serve God with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28). Caring for the tabernacle was serious work, a matter of life and death. The chapters also remind us that not everybody has the same burdens to bear. The Gershonites and Merarites could put their burdens on wagons, but the Kohathites had to carry their burdens on their shoulders. There are some burdens we can share (Gal. 6:2), but there are other burdens that only we can bear (v. 5).

Finally, we must note that our God believes in organization, but the organization is a means to an end and not an end in itself. One of my coworkers at Moody Church liked to say, "Remember, the church is an organism, not an organization." But I would remind him that if an organism isn't organized, it will die! Yes, the church is a living spiritual organism, but it's also an organization. If an army isn't organized, it can't fight the enemy successfully; if a family isn't organized, it will experience nothing but chaos and confusion.

God was preparing His people to engage enemy nations and defeat them. It was important that the camp be orderly and the work of the tabernacle be organized. Otherwise, the worship would not please God and the warfare would lead to defeat.

We live in an age not unlike that described in the Book of Judges, when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). But God's word to His people is just the opposite: "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" (Heb. 8:5, NKJV; see Ex. 25:40).

When God's work is done God's way, in obedience to God's truth, it will never lack God's blessing. (Be Counted)

G Campbell Morgan - Every one according to his service, and according to his burden.-Num. 4.49.

In this chapter we have a continuation of the instructions concerning the Levites. It gives a minute account of their work in connection with the marching of the people. The duty of carrying all the holy furniture was that of the Kohathites. This furniture, however, they were not permitted to look upon, or touch. Aaron and his sons first entered the Holy Place and covered each sacred piece, affixing the staves which were to rest upon the shoulders of the Levites. On the march these holy vessels were in charge of Eleazar, who carried also the anointing oil and the sweet incense. The curtains and the tents which constituted the Tabernacle itself were carried by the Gershonites. They were under the charge of Ithamar. To the Merarites were committed the boards and bars and pillars, and other things which formed the foundations upon which the sacred hangings rested. These also were under the charge of Ithamar. All this is instructive, as it reveals the Divine thought and care for every detail of the life and worship of His people. It is of particular value, too, as it teaches us that in the thought of God every detail is sacred. These men were in this regard the "caretakers" of the House of God. How often we are prone to think meanly of "caretakers" in these modern times! Such thinking is utterly wrong. The men and women who have charge of the houses of our worship are rendering holy service.

J Vernon McGee - I'd like for you to get a picture of what happened when they moved. When Moses and Aaron would come out of the tabernacle in the morning, they didn't need to talk things over. Moses didn't say, "Well, let's have a meeting of the board of elders or the board of deacons, and let's find out whether or not we should march today." They didn't depend on that type of thing. They watched to see if the pillar of cloud lifted from off the tabernacle. If it lifted, it meant that they were to march. If it did not lift, it meant that they were to stay in camp that day. Moses and Aaron simply had to watch and follow the leading that the Spirit of God gave them, for that pillar of cloud represented the Spirit of God.

The child of God should be led like that today. Not that we see a visible pillar of cloud, but we should be led by the same Spirit of God. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). The Spirit of God wants to lead the sons of God.

When the pillar of cloud lifted, immediately Aaron and his sons went into the Holy Place, and they went first to the veil. You will remember that on the other side of the veil, in the Holy of Holies, was the ark and the mercy seat. I believe that the ark and the mercy seat were put up against the veil, not against the back wall. This means that when the high priest went into the Holy of Holies, he turned around and faced east as he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat. The high priest did that on one day of the year only. On this day of moving they did not go inside the veil. The veil was held up by rings and the high priest would let it down, and then drop the veil down over the mercy seat and the ark. Then they would put the linen cloth around it and its other coverings, and finally they would put around it the outside cover of the tabernacle. When that was concluded, and all the vessels were wrapped, the Kohathites were permitted to come in. There were staves that fit into the rings on all of these articles of furniture. The Kohathites would come in and pick up the furniture by these staves and carry it out. The priests who carried the ark would lead the way out to the front and would wait for the pillar of cloud to guide them.

We will see their marching order in a later chapter.

In the evening, it must have been a thrilling sight to see them set up a new camp. Every man knew what he was to do. Every man was carrying his particular part of the tabernacle and had been carrying it during the day's march. When they set up camp, the very first thing that was put down was the ark. The whole camp was arranged according to that. The Kohathites carrying the other articles of furniture would put them down in their relation to the ark, and then the boards and the curtains were set up around them. In other words, the furniture was put in first. Now that's not the way we build a house today, but remember this was designed for a march and it had to be mobile.

Each man had his assignment. I'm of the opinion that the camp went up in a hurry, and I mean in a hurry. I think that within about thirty minutes of the time they came to rest and the ark was put down, the tabernacle was ready to be used.

Let me illustrate this. In my first pastorate in Nashville, Tennessee, I was single and I spent a lot of time with the young people.

When the circus would come to town, we would go out to the railroad yards to be there when the circus arrived at two o'clock in the morning. You could hear the animals cry, but there was no other sound. They would put the cars on the side track, and the minute those cars came to a standstill, a whole army of men would come out of those cars. The train would not have been stopped more than five minutes before the wagons were rolling off the flat cars; the circus was unloaded and moving out to the circus grounds.

A cook tent would be erected and many of the roustabouts would have coffee and breakfast while another crew would put up the big tent, the big top; then this crew would come in for breakfast while the other workers would go out to put in the seats and circus rings and hang the trapezes. I tell you, every man knew his job and it was interesting to watch. By ten o'clock in the morning everything was in order and ready for business. By noon the big circus parade would be on the street.

This was most interesting to me. We would spend the whole night watching the circus when it came to town. I would tell my young folk, "I'm of the opinion that this is the way it was done when the children of Israel came into camp."

When Israel came into camp, the Kohathites would put down the articles of furniture. Then Merari would come in with the boards and the bars and put up his part. Then Gershon would put on the coverings. Finally, the high priest would remove the veil and hang that. What a thrill it must have been to watch Israel come into camp. After forty years of practice they must have been pretty good at it.

As each Levite had his assignment, just so, every Christian has a gift and a job God wants him to do. I believe God will reward you for doing what He wants you to do. We are not to do what we choose to do, but we are to exercise the gifts that He has given us.

Suppose there was a fellow who carried that tent pin for the northwest corner of the tabernacle, and he got weary of his job. One day as he was driving in his pin, he said, "I'm tired of this. For twenty years now I've been carrying that tent pin. I come here in the morning, and loosen it and pull it out of the ground, put it on my shoulder, and take it over on the wagon with my family. Nobody seems to recognize how hard I work. Nobody rewards me for what I do. Moses never has called me up and given me a medal. I'm tired of this job and I'm going to quit carrying this pin." One morning when they were taking down the tabernacle, his pin was hard to loosen from the ground and he got disgusted and left it there. He thought, "Nobody will pay any attention anyway. My job is not very important. All I do is carry a tent pin; so I think I'll just leave it today."

Can you imagine the problem that next evening? They would try to set up the tabernacle but the northwest corner pin would not be there. The men would report it to Moses, and they would look up this man who was to carry that pin. Moses would ask, "Where is the tent pin?" and the man would answer, "I left it back there where we camped last night." Then Moses would ask him why he left it, and the man would answer, "I don't think that my job is really important." Moses would say, "Not important! We can't put up the tabernacle without it. You will have to sit there all night holding that cord yourself because you are responsible for that tent pin!"

My friend, who is to determine who does the most important thing in God's service today? That man had been faithful for twenty years; then all of a sudden he just went haywire, and notice what it did to the setting up of the tabernacle. How many children of God today think their service is unimportant? God is not going to reward you for the amount of work you have done, but for your faithfulness in doing that which He has called you to do. If you are carrying that tent pin from the northwest corner, don't forget to carry it today. The job the Lord has given you to do is very important to Him.