

**Reformation Fellowship Notes • August 19, 2018**  
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**Handout #2**  
**Numbers 3 & 4**

**I. Introduction**

- A. Last week, we saw how the Israelites were organized for the march and camp.
  - 1. Whereas before there had been no organization, now with Yahweh in their midst, they are all arrayed around the Tabernacle.
  - 2. They are organized like an army on an expedition with God as king.
  - 3. A census was taken for the purpose of organizing their men into an army.
- B. This week, we will have two censuses to get the Levites organized as a priestly clan to take care of the Tabernacle and its rituals.
- C. There is an allusion to an incident in Leviticus.
  - a) I will spend some time at the end talking about that incident.
  - b) It raises some issues that will be important in preparation for next week.

**II. Numbers 3:1-4**

- A. This section lays out the genealogy of the priests.
  - 1. The priests serve in the Tabernacle.
  - 2. They were from the tribe of Levi but were a clan within that tribe.
  - 3. The priests were descendants of Aaron (who was from the tribe of Levi and the clan of Kohath).
- B. Whenever Moses and Aaron are mentioned, Moses comes first except in the context of genealogy.
  - 1. That is why Aaron comes first here.
- C. The sons of Aaron
  - 1. Full list at the time of God's appearance at Sinai
    - a) Nadab
    - b) Abihu
    - c) Eleazar
    - d) Ithamar
- D. The children of Moses are conspicuous by their absence.
  - 1. Nadab and Abihu died soon after.
    - a) The story of their death is referenced here but not recounted.
      - (1) A fuller account is in Leviticus 10:1-7.
        - (a) We will look at that account at the end.

**III. Numbers 3:5-10**

## A. Origin of the Levites

1. They are to serve the priests.
  - a) Provide help for priests in service at tent of meeting
  - b) Take care of furnishings of tabernacle
  - c) Provide help for people of Israel in service at tent of meeting
2. They are in the exclusive service of the priests.
  - a) So the priests serve in the Tabernacle.
  - b) The Levites are authorized to help them with these duties.
  - c) No one else may come near.
    - (1) Anyone who does should be killed.

**IV. Numbers 3:11-13**

## A. God has a right to every first-born son.

1. Apparently, this is by virtue of having saved them during the tenth plague in Egypt.
2. By all rights, the first-born should be dedicated to the service of God.

## B. God will take the Levites instead of the first-born.

1. A census of the Levites needs to be taken to make sure there is a Levite for every first-born.

**V. Numbers 3:14-20**

## A. A census of just the Levites

1. Males, one month old and older
  - a) Age at which one could be redeemed (Milgrom)
2. Three main branches of tribe of Levi
  - a) Gershon
  - b) Kohath
  - c) Merari
  - d) This is the genealogical order.

**VI. Numbers 3:21-39**

## A. Each family is placed in the camp.

1. Gershon
  - a) Camp location: west of the Tabernacle
  - b) Duties: transport tent and screens
2. Kohath
  - a) Camp location: south of Tabernacle
    - (1) Pride of place

- b) Duties: transport the furniture and utensils
    - c) Eleazar oversaw their work.
  - 3. Merari
    - a) Camp location: north side of Tabernacle
    - b) Duties: transport frames, bars, pillar, pegs
  - 4. Priests (descendants of Aaron, who was of the Kohath family)
    - a) Camp location: east side of Tabernacle
    - b) Perform the duties of the sanctuary
    - c) Keep laymen out of the sanctuary district
      - (1) This phrase is repeated four times in Numbers.
        - (a) “Encroacher”
        - (b) Encroacher was to be killed.
          - (i) Not a punishment, but a means of prevention
      - (2) So that the wrath of God would not come upon the community
- B. The total number of males when census completed was 22,000.
  - 1. This number is not the total of the above numbers.
    - a) Total of all the numbers in MT is 22,300.
    - b) LXX has 22,150.
  - 2. I think some numbers have become corrupted.

## VII. Numbers 3:40-51

- A. Then God told Moses to count all the first-born males one month and older.
  - 1. Make a list of them.
  - 2. They numbered 22,273.
- B. God took the Levites in exchange for the first-born.
  - 1. The Levites’ cattle were taken in exchange for the cattle of the rest of Israel.
  - 2. There were 273 more first-born Israelites than Levites.
    - a) Israel was to pay 5 shekels each for these.
      - (1) This was the price of a young slave (an adult was 50 shekels).
      - (2) 5 shekels was about 6 months’ wages.
    - b) This money was given to Aaron.

## VIII. Numbers 4:1-20

- A. Moses was instructed to take a second census of the Levites.
  - 1. This census is for the purpose of determining manpower.
    - a) Males 30-50 years old
    - b) Assign who will do what
  - 2. This goes through the clans in order of importance rather than genealogical order.
- B. Fuller description of the work of Kohath family
  - 1. Most holy things

2. Dismantle the Tabernacle
    - a) Prepare ark for transport
      - (1) Take down veil for holy of holies
      - (2) Cover this with porpoise skin
      - (3) Cover this with blue cloth
      - (4) Insert poles
    - b) Prepare table of the bread of presence for transport
      - (1) Cover with blue cloth
        - (a) Including dishes, pans, and bread
      - (2) Cover with scarlet cloth
      - (3) Cover with porpoise skin
      - (4) Insert poles
    - c) Prepare lampstand
      - (1) Cover with blue cloth
        - (a) Including snuffers and trays
      - (2) Cover with porpoise skin
      - (3) Put on carrying poles
    - d) Prepare altar of incense
      - (1) Cover with blue cloth
      - (2) Cover with porpoise skin
      - (3) Put on carrying poles
    - e) Prepare the bronze altar
      - (1) Remove ashes
      - (2) Cover with purple cloth
        - (a) Including utensils
      - (3) Cover with porpoise skin
      - (4) Insert poles
  3. Now the furniture can be carried by the Kohathites.
  4. Eleazar will oversee.
    - a) oil
    - b) incense
- C. Ends with a warning to the Kohathites:
1. Do not allow yourselves to look at the furniture.
    - a) You would die.

## IX. Numbers 4:21-28

- A. Count the Gershonite families to determine manpower
- B. Work they have to do
  1. Carry the curtains for courtyard and sanctuary
  2. Ithmar will oversee this work.

**X. Numbers 4:29-33**

- A. Count the Merarites
- B. Work they have to do
  - 1. Carry the boards, bars, pillars, sockets and pegs
- C. Give each individual his assignment
  - 1. Ithmar will oversee this work.

**XI. Numbers 4:34-49**

- A. Summary of the census results
  - 1. Total of adult men 30-50 in Kohathites
    - a) 2,750
    - b) I assume this includes the priests.
      - (1) There were probably only about a dozen.
  - 2. Total of adult men 30-50 in Gershon
    - a) 2,630
  - 3. Total of adult men 30-50 in Merari
    - a) 3,200
  - 4. Total of adult men 30-50 in all of Levi
    - a) 8,580

**XII. Leviticus 10:1-20**

- A. Background
  - 1. The Israelites were at Mount Sinai.
    - a) They had made the covenant with God.
    - b) They had built the Tabernacle.
    - c) They had received God's instructions with respect to offerings and the duties of the priests.
  - 2. Priests were consecrated.
    - a) They were washed.
    - b) They were clothed in priestly garments.
    - c) Furniture in the Tabernacle was anointed.
    - d) Priests were anointed.
    - e) Moses presented an ordination offering.
  - 3. Priests stayed in the Tabernacle for seven days.
  - 4. On the eighth day, Aaron offered some sacrifices.
    - a) For themselves
    - b) Then for the people
  - 5. Moses and Aaron went into the Tabernacle and then came out and blessed the people.

- a) The glory of God appeared to all the people.
- b) “Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of the fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.”
  - (1) The people shouted.

#### B. The sin of Nadab and Abihu

1. On that same day, Nadab and Abihu offered “strange fire.”
  - a) Fire came out from before the LORD and killed them.
  - b) God said those who are privileged to come near to God (as priests) have a higher degree of accountability.
  - c) Aaron was quiet.
2. What did they do wrong?

“Clearly, Nadab and Abihu’s heresy (and hence the heresy of those who followed their example) was deliberately equated in the mind of the Priestly writer with the heresy of Israel at Sinai.” (Milgrom, p. 98)

- a) Fire from the wrong place?
  - b) Wrong incense?
  - c) Verses 8-11 implies that alcohol played a role.
    - (1) The fundamental problem was that they had consumed alcohol and their judgment had been impaired.
    - (2) Their impaired judgment caused them to act inappropriately.
      - (a) They could no longer make proper distinctions.
      - (b) They could not “make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean.”
    - (3) Because of this, they did something improper with respect to burning incense.
      - (a) They must have gotten coals from someplace they were not authorized to do.
        - (i) Did they take coals from the fire that came out of the Tabernacle?
        - (ii) Did they take this unusual circumstance as an opportunity to innovate?
      - (b) A pure fire punished impure fire.
3. Moses gives instructions with respect to sacrifices that need to be done.
    - a) He was shocked to see that they had not followed his instructions.
      - (1) Sin offerings were sometimes supposed to be eaten and sometimes burned up.
        - (a) Burned when more serious sin
        - (b) Eaten when less serious
      - (2) They were supposed to eat the goat—sin offering for the people.
      - (3) They had burned it instead.

- b) Aaron responds
    - (1) Today is unusual, God killed two of my sons, priests, because they sinned.
    - (2) It would not be appropriate, for me and my sons today to eat the sacrifice as a way of eliminating the sin that the sacrifice represents.
  - c) Moses agrees with Aaron's reasoning.
- C. Significance of this event
1. Two examples of innovation by priests
    - a) One innovation was in response to the first time fire came out of the Tabernacle
      - (1) Nadab and Abihu innovated but used the ritual to say something that should not have been said.
    - b) The other innovation, by Aaron, was in response to the second time fire came out of the Tabernacle.
      - (1) Aaron judged that it would be inappropriate for the father and brothers of priests who were just struck dead by God for their presumption to represent holiness swallowing sin and death.
  2. Two examples of God's assessment of the innovations
    - a) The first innovation was judged evil.
      - (1) Presumption and arrogance
    - b) The second innovation was judged good.
      - (1) Aaron did not go in the direction of avoiding even the slightest innovation.
      - (2) He acted with humility and realism.

### XIII. Conclusion

- A. This incident is alluded to in Numbers to make a very important point with respect to the priests.
  1. God WILL be taken seriously.
    - a) God wanted to establish from the very beginning that he was going to assure that people, and priests in particular, would treat Him with the utmost respect.
- B. But this incident is important for an understanding of God's laws and religious ritual.
  1. Priests had to be mentally engaged with the process and thinking about what they were doing.
    - a) They were not mechanically following a recipe book.
    - b) They were communicating using the language of religious ritual.
      - (1) They had to be conscious of what they were saying by the ritual and ready to adjust it to unusual circumstances.
    - c) They had to have two qualifications:
      - (1) Fluent in the cultural language of religious ritual
      - (2) Mentally sharp
        - (a) Able to tell what is holy and profane, unclean and clean