

Census and Duties of Levite Clans (c. 2 Iyyar [April/May] 1445 BC)

Numbers 3–4

Introduction—The Aaronic Priesthood

3:1 Now these are *the records of* the generations of Aaron and Moses at the time when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai.
 2 These then are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.
 3 These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests.
 4 But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

The Levites are Given in Service to the Priesthood

5 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
 6 “Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him.
 7 They shall perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle.
 8 They shall also keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.
 9 You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel.
 10 So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman who comes near shall be put to death.”

The Purpose Behind the Levitical Census

11 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
 12 “Now, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of every firstborn, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall be Mine.
 13 For all the firstborn are Mine; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, from man to beast. They shall be Mine; I am the LORD.”

Levitical Census for Firstborn Redemption

14 Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,
 15 “Number the sons of Levi by their fathers’ households, by their families; every male from a month old and upward you shall number.”
 16 So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, just as he had been commanded.
 17 These then are the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon and Kohath and Merari.
 18 These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei;
 19 and the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel;
 20 and the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their fathers’ households.

Clan of Gershon

21 Of Gershon *was* the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimeites; these *were* the families of the Gershonites.
 22 Their numbered men, in the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, *even* their numbered men *were* 7,500.
 23 The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward,
 24 and the leader of the fathers’ households of the Gershonites *was* Eliasaph the son of Lael.
 25 Now the duties of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting *involved* the tabernacle and the tent, its covering, and the screen for the doorway of the tent of meeting,
 26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway of the court which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and its cords, according to all the service concerning them.

Clan of Kohath

27 Of Kohath *was* the family of the Amramites and the family of the Izharites and the family of the Hebronites and the family of the Uzzielites; these were the families of the Kohathites.
 28 In the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, *there were* 8,600, performing the duties of the sanctuary.
 29 The families of the sons of Kohath were to camp on the southward side of the tabernacle,
 30 and the leader of the fathers’ households of the Kohathite families *was* Elizaphan the son of Uzziel.
 31 Now their duties *involved* the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the utensils of the sanctuary with which they minister, and the screen, and all the service concerning them;
 32 and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *was* the chief of the leaders of Levi, *and had* the oversight of those who perform the duties of the sanctuary.

Clan of Merari

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

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

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

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

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

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

Census Total

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

Firstborn Israelites Redeemed With Levites

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

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

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

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

44 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

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

Excess Israelites Redeemed With Money

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

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

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

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

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

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

Census and Duties of Kohath Clan

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

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

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.

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

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;

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.

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.

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.

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;

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

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;

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.

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

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.

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.

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.”

17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,

18 “Do not let the tribe of the families of the Kohathites be cut off from among the Levites.

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;

20 but they shall not go in to see the holy *objects* even for a moment, or they will die.”

Census and Duties of Gershon Clan

21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

22 “Take a census of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers’ households, by their families;

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.

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

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,

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.

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.

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.

Census and Duties of Merari Clan

29 “*As for* the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families, by their fathers’ households;

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.

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,

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.

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.”

Census Totals—Kohathites

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,

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

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

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.

Census Totals—Gershonites

38 The numbered men of the sons of Gershon by their families and by their fathers’ households,

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

40 Their numbered men by their families, by their fathers’ households, were 2,630.

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.

Census Totals—Merarites

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

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

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

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.

Summary

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,
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.
48 Their numbered men were 8,580.
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.

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