

## 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 Aaron and Moses when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai.

2 These 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 consecrated to minister as priests.

4 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 ministered as priests in the presence of Aaron their father.

#### The Levites are Given in Service to the Priesthood

5 The LORD spoke to Moses:

6 “Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him.

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

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

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

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

#### The Purpose Behind the Levitical Census

11 Then the LORD spoke to Moses:

12 “Look, I myself have taken the Levites from among the Israelites instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the Israelites. So the Levites belong to me,

13 because all the firstborn are mine. When I destroyed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I set apart for myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They belong to me. I am the LORD.”

#### Levitical Census for Firstborn Redemption

14 Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai:

15 “Number the Levites by their clans and their families; every male from a month old and upward you are to number.”

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

17 These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

18 These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei.

19 The sons of Kohath by their families were: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

20 The sons of Merari by their families were Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their clans.

#### Clan of Gershon

21 From Gershon came the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimeites; these were the families of the Gershonites.

22 Those of them who were numbered, counting every male from a month old and upward, were 7,500.

23 The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle toward the west.

24 Now the leader of the clan of the Gershonites was Eliasaph son of Lael.

25 And the responsibilities of the Gershonites in the tent of meeting included the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the curtain at the entrance of the tent of meeting,

26 the hangings of the courtyard, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard that surrounded the tabernacle and the altar, and their ropes, plus all the service connected with these things.

#### Clan of Kohath

27 From Kohath came the family of the Amramites, the family of the Izharites, the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites; these were the families of the Kohathites.

28 Counting every male from a month old and upward, there were 8,600. They were responsible for the care of the sanctuary.

29 The families of the Kohathites were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle.

30 Now the leader of the clan of the families of the Kohathites was Elizaphan son of Uzziel.

31 Their responsibilities included the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the curtain, and all their service.

32 Now the head of all the Levitical leaders was Eleazar son of Aaron the priest. He was appointed over those who were responsible for the sanctuary.

**Clan of Merari**

33 From Merari came the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites; these were the families of Merari.

34 Those of them who were numbered, counting every male from a month old and upward, were 6,200.

35 Now the leader of the clan of the families of Merari was Zuriel son of Abihail. These were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle.

36 The appointed responsibilities of the Merarites included the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, its posts, its sockets, its utensils, plus all the service connected with these things,

37 and the pillars of the courtyard all around, with their sockets, their pegs, and their ropes.

38 But those who were to camp in front of the tabernacle on the east, in front of the tent of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons. They were responsible for the needs of the sanctuary and for the needs of the Israelites, but the unauthorized person who approached was to be put to death.

**Census Total**

39 All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered by the word of the LORD, according to 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 all the firstborn males of the Israelites from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names.

41 And take the Levites for me—I am the LORD—instead of all the firstborn males among the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the livestock of the Israelites."

42 So Moses numbered all the firstborn males among the Israelites, as the LORD had commanded him.

43 And all the firstborn males, by the number of the names from a month old and upward, totaled 22,273.

44 Then the LORD spoke to Moses:

45 "Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn males among the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. And the Levites will be mine. I am the LORD.

**Excess Israelites Redeemed With Money**

46 And for the redemption of the 273 firstborn males of the Israelites who exceed the number of the Levites,

47 collect five shekels for each one individually; you are to collect this amount in the currency of the sanctuary shekel (this shekel is twenty gerahs).

48 And give the money for the redemption of the excess number of them to Aaron and his sons."

49 So Moses took the redemption money from those who were in excess of those redeemed by the Levites.

50 From the firstborn males of the Israelites he collected the money, 1,365 shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel.

51 Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

**Census and Duties of Kohath Clan**

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

2 "Take a census of the Kohathites from among the Levites, by their families and by their clans,

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.

4 This is the service of the Kohathites in the tent of meeting, relating to the most holy things.

5 When it is time for the camp to journey, Aaron and his sons must come and take down the screening curtain and cover the ark of the testimony with it.

6 Then they must put over it a covering of fine leather and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue, and then they must insert its poles.

7 "On the table of the presence they must spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring, and the Bread of the Presence must be on it continually.

8 They must spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of fine leather; and they must insert its poles.

9 "They must take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-trimmers, its trays, and all its oil vessels, with which they service it.

10 Then they must put it with all its utensils in a covering of fine leather, and put it on a carrying beam.

11 "They must spread a blue cloth on the gold altar, and cover it with a covering of fine leather; and they must insert its poles.

12 Then they must take all the utensils of the service, with which they serve in the sanctuary, put them in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of fine leather, and put them on a carrying beam.

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

14 Then they must place on it all its implements with which they serve there—the trays, the meat forks, the shovels, the basins, and all the utensils of the altar—and they must spread on it a covering of fine leather, and then insert its poles.

15 “When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is ready to journey, then the Kohathites will come to carry them; but they must not touch any holy thing, or they will die. These are the responsibilities of the Kohathites with the tent of meeting.

16 “The appointed responsibility of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest is for the oil for the light, and the spiced incense, and the daily grain offering, and the anointing oil; he also has the appointed responsibility over all the tabernacle with all that is in it, over the sanctuary and over all its furnishings.”

17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron:

18 “Do not allow the tribe of the families of the Kohathites to be cut off from among the Levites;

19 but in order that they will live and not die when they approach the most holy things, do this for them: Aaron and his sons will go in and appoint each man to his service and his responsibility.

20 But the Kohathites are not to go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, or they will die.”

#### **Census and Duties of Gershon Clan**

21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses:

22 “Also take a census of the Gershonites, by their clans and by their families.

23 You must number them from thirty years old and upward to fifty years old, all who enter the company to do the work of the tent of meeting.

24 This is the service of the families of Gershonites, as they serve and carry it.

25 They must carry the curtains for the tabernacle and the tent of meeting with its covering, the covering of fine leather that is over it, the curtains for the entrance of the tent of meeting,

26 the hangings for the courtyard, the curtain for the entrance of the gate of the court, which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and their ropes, along with all the furnishings for their service and everything that is made for them. So they are to serve.

27 “All the service of the Gershonites, whether carrying loads or for any of their work, will be at the direction of Aaron and his sons. You will assign them all their tasks as their responsibility.

28 This is the service of the families of the Gershonites concerning the tent of meeting. Their responsibilities will be under the authority of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest.

#### **Census and Duties of Merari Clan**

29 “As for the sons of Merari, you are to number them by their families and by their clans.

30 You must number them from thirty years old and upward to fifty years old, all who enter the company to do the work of the tent of meeting.

31 This is what they are responsible to carry as their entire service in the tent of meeting: the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, its posts, its sockets,

32 and the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their sockets, tent pegs, and ropes, along with all their furnishings and everything for their service. You are to assign by names the items that each man is responsible to carry.

33 This is the service of the families of the Merarites, their entire service concerning the tent of meeting, under the authority of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest.”

#### **Census Totals—Kohathites**

34 So Moses and Aaron and the leaders of the community numbered the Kohathites by their families and by clans,

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

36 and those of them numbered by their families were 2,750.

37 These were those numbered from the families of the Kohathites, everyone who served in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the LORD by the authority of Moses.

#### **Census Totals—Gershonites**

38 Those numbered from the Gershonites, by their families and by their clans,

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

40 those of them numbered by their families, by their clans, were 2,630.

41 These were those numbered from the families of the Gershonites, everyone who served in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the LORD.

#### **Census Totals—Merarites**

42 Those numbered from the families of the Merarites, by their families, by their clans,

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

44 those of them numbered by their families were 3,200.

45 These are those numbered from the families of the Merarites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the LORD by the authority of Moses.

**Summary**

46 All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel numbered by their families and by their clans,

47 from thirty years old and upward to fifty years old, everyone who entered to do the work of service and the work of carrying relating to the tent of meeting—

48 those of them numbered were 8,580.

49 According to the word of the LORD they were numbered, by the authority of Moses, each according to his service and according to what he was to carry. Thus were they numbered by him, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

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