
NUMBERS 3:1 Now this is the history of the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day that the LORD spoke with Moses in Mount Sinai.

The generations of Aaron and Moses, Num 3:1-4. The tribe of Levi to minister to the Lord under Aaron and his sons, Num 3:5-10. They are taken in the place of the first-born, Num 3:11-13. Moses is commanded to number them, Num 3:14-16. Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, the names of the three heads of families of the Levites, Num 3:17. Of Gershon and his family, Num 3:18-21. Their number, 7,500, Num 3:22. Their place behind the tabernacle, westward, Num 3:23. Their chief, Eliasaph, Num 3:24. Their charge, Num 3:25, Num 3:26. Of Kohath and his family, Num 3:27. Their number, 8,600, Num 3:28. Their place, beside the tabernacle, southward, Num 3:29. Their chief, Elizaphan, Num 3:30. Their charge, Num 3:31. The chief of the Levites, Eleazar, son of Aaron, Num 3:32. Of Merari and his family, Num 3:33. Their number, 6,200, Num 3:34. Their chief, Zuriel, they shall pitch beside the tabernacle, northward, Num 3:35. Their charge, Num 3:35-37. Moses and Aaron to encamp before the tabernacle, eastward, Num 3:38. The amount of all the males among the Levites from a month old and upwards, 22,000, Num 3:39. Moses is commanded to number the first-born, Num 3:40; and to take the Levites and their cattle, instead of the first-born of man and beast among the Israelites, Num 3:41. Moses numbers the first-born, who amount to 22,273, Num 3:43. As the first-born were 273 more than the Levites, Moses is commanded to take from the people five shekels apiece for them, Num 3:44-47, which is to be given to Aaron and his sons, Num 3:48. Moses does accordingly, and finds the amount of the money to be 1,365 shekels, Num 3:49, Num 3:50, which is given to Aaron and his sons, Num 3:51.

Verse 1

The generations of Aaron and Moses - Though Aaron and Moses are both mentioned here, yet the family of Aaron alone appears in the list: hence some have thought that the word Moses was not originally in the text. Others think that the words *וְאֵלֶּה תְּלִדּוֹת* *veelleh toledoth*, these are the generations, should be rendered these are the acts, or transactions, or the history of the lives, as the same phrase may be understood in Gen 2:4; Gen 6:9. However this may be, it is evident that in this genealogy the family of Aaron are alone mentioned, probably because these belonged to the priesthood. Moses passes by his own family, or immediate descendants; he gave no rank or privilege to them during his life, and left nothing to them at his death. They became incorporated with the Levites, from or amongst whom they are never distinguished. What a strong proof is this of the celestial origin of his religion! Had it been of man, it must have had the gratification of some impure passion for its object; lust, ambition, or avarice: but none of these ever appear during the whole of his administration amongst the Israelites, though he had it constantly in his power to have gratified each. What an essential difference between the religion of the Pentateuch and that of the Koran! The former is God's workmanship; the latter is a motley mixture of all bad crafts, with here and there a portion of heavenly fire, stolen from the Divine altar in the Old and New Testaments, to give some vitality to the otherwise inert mass.

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

NUMBERS 3:3 These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests who were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office.

NUMBERS 3:4 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. Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest's office in the presence of Aaron their father.

Verse 4

Nadab and Abihu died - See the notes on Leviticus 10 (note).

NUMBERS 3:5 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

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

Verse 6

Bring the tribe of Levi near - The original word **הַקְרִיב** hakreb is properly a sacrificial word, and signifies the presenting of a sacrifice or offering to the Lord. As an offering, the tribe of Levi was given up entirely to the service of the sanctuary, to be no longer their own, but the Lord's property.

NUMBERS 3:7 They shall keep his requirements, and the requirements of the whole congregation before the Tent of Meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle.

Verse 7

The charge of the whole congregation - They shall work for the whole congregation; and instead of the first-born.

NUMBERS 3:8 They shall keep all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, and the obligations of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.

Verse 8

All the instruments - The tabernacle itself and all its contents: see all described, Num 3:25, Num 3:26, Num 3:31, Num 3:36, Num 3:37. The Levites were to perform the most common and laborious offices. It was their business to take down, put up, and carry the tabernacle and its utensils; for it was the object of their peculiar care. In a word, they were the servants of the priests.

NUMBERS 3:9 You shall give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons. They are wholly given to him on the behalf of the children of Israel.

NUMBERS 3:10 You shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall keep their priesthood. The stranger who comes near shall be put to death.”

Verse 10

Aaron and his sons - shall wait on their priest's office - It was the business of the priests to offer the different sacrifices to God; to consecrate the shew-bread, pour out the libations, burn the incense, sprinkle the blood of the victims, and bless the people. In a word, they were the servants of God alone.

NUMBERS 3:11 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

NUMBERS 3:12 “Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn who open the womb among the children of Israel; and the Levites shall be mine:

Verse 12

I have taken the Levites - instead of all the first-born - The Levites are taken for the service of the sanctuary in place of the first-born. The first-born were dedicated to God in commemoration of his slaying the first-born of the Egyptians, and preserving those of the Israelites. Even the cattle of the Levites were taken in place of the first-born of the cattle of the rest of the tribes. See Num 3:45. Several reasons have been assigned why God should give this honor to the tribe of Levi in preference to all the others, but they do not seem to me to be conclusive. Their zeal in destroying those who had corrupted the worship of God in the business of the golden calf, Exo 32:28, has been thought a sufficient reason. A better reason is, that this was the smallest tribe, and they were quite enough for the service. To have had a more numerous tribe at this time would have been very inconvenient. Aaron, says Mr. Ainsworth, being in his priesthood a type of Christ, all these rites are fulfilled in him. For unto Christ God gave children, Heb 2:13. And they are a congregation of first-born, whose names are written in heaven, Heb 12:23, being of God's own will begotten by the word of truth, that they should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures, Jam 1:18, to whom he also gives the first-fruits of his Spirit, Rom 8:23. These wait on and follow the Lamb, being first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb, Rev 14:4; and Christ hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, that we may serve him day and night in his temple, Rev 1:6; Rev 7:15.

NUMBERS 3:13 for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I made holy to me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and animal. They shall be mine. I am the LORD.”

NUMBERS 3:14 The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,

NUMBERS 3:15 “Count the children of Levi by their fathers’ houses, by their families. You shall count every male from a month old and upward.”

Verse 15

A month old and upward - The males of all the other tribes were numbered, from twenty years and upward; had the Levites been numbered in this way, they would not have been nearly equal in number to the firstborn of the twelve tribes. Add to this, that as there must have been first-born of all ages in the other tribes, it was necessary that the Levites, who were to be their substitutes, should be also of all ages; and it appears to have been on this ground, at least partly, that the Levites were numbered from four weeks old and upward.

NUMBERS 3:16 Moses numbered them according to the LORD's word, as he was commanded.

Verse 16

Moses numbered them - Though Moses and Aaron conjointly numbered the twelve tribes, yet Moses alone numbered the Levites; "for as the money with which the first-born of Israel, who exceeded the number of Levites, were redeemed, was to be paid to Aaron and his sons, Num 3:48, it was decent that he, whose advantage it was that the number of the first-born of Israel should exceed, should not be authorized to take that number himself." - Dodd, from Bishop Kidder.

NUMBERS 3:17 These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari.

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

NUMBERS 3:19 The sons of Kohath by their families: Amram, and Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

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

NUMBERS 3:21 Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimeites: these are the families of the Gershonites.

NUMBERS 3:22 Those who were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, even those who were numbered of them were seven thousand five hundred.

Verse 22

Seven thousand and five hundred - Perhaps originally 7 resh, 200, instead of 7 caph, 500; see the following note Num 3:39 (note).

NUMBERS 3:23 The families of the Gershonites shall encamp behind the tabernacle westward.

NUMBERS 3:24 The prince of the fathers' house of the Gershonites shall be Eliasaph the son of Lael.

NUMBERS 3:25 The duty of the sons of Gershon in the Tent of Meeting shall be the tabernacle, and the tent, its covering, and the screen for the door of the Tent of Meeting,

NUMBERS 3:26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and around the altar, and its cords for all of its service.

NUMBERS 3:27 Of Kohath was the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these are the families of the Kohathites.

NUMBERS 3:28 According to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, there were eight thousand six hundred, keeping the requirements of the sanctuary.

NUMBERS 3:29 The families of the sons of Kohath shall encamp on the south side of the tabernacle.

NUMBERS 3:30 The prince of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites shall be Elizaphan the son of Uzziel.

NUMBERS 3:31 Their duty shall be the ark, the table, the lamp stand, the altars, the vessels of the sanctuary with which they minister, and the screen, and all its service.

NUMBERS 3:32 Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be prince of the princes of the Levites, with the oversight of those who keep the requirements of the sanctuary.

NUMBERS 3:33 Of Merari was the family of the Mahlites, and the family of the Mushites. These are the families of Merari.

NUMBERS 3:34 Those who were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were six thousand two hundred.

NUMBERS 3:35 The prince of the fathers' house of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail. They shall encamp on the north side of the tabernacle.

NUMBERS 3:36 The appointed duty of the sons of Merari shall be the tabernacle's boards, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, all its instruments, all its service,

NUMBERS 3:37 the pillars of the court around it, their sockets, their pins, and their cords.

NUMBERS 3:38 Those who encamp before the tabernacle eastward, in front of the Tent of Meeting toward the sunrise, shall be Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the requirements of the sanctuary for the duty of the children of Israel. The stranger who comes near shall be put to death.

NUMBERS 3:39 All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, by their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were twenty-two thousand.

Verse 39

Which Moses and Aaron numbered - The word וַאֲהָרֹן veaharon, "and Aaron." has a point over each of its letters, probably designed as a mark of spuriousness. The word is wanting in the Samaritan, Syriac, and Coptic; it is wanting also in eight of Dr. Kennicott's MSS., and in four of De Rossi's. Moses alone, as Houbigant observes, is commanded to take the number of the Levites; see Num 3:5, Num 3:11, Num 3:40, Num 3:44, and Num 3:51.

All the males - were twenty and two thousand - This total does not agree with the particulars; for the Gershonites were 7,500, the Kohathites 8,600, the Merarites 6,200, total 22,300. Several methods of solving this difficulty have been proposed by learned men; Dr. Kennicott's is the most simple. Formerly the numbers in the Hebrew Bible were expressed by letters, and not by words at full length; and if two nearly similar letters were mistaken for each other, many errors in the numbers must be the consequence. Now it is probable that an error has crept into the number of

the Gershonites, Num 3:22, where, instead of 7,500, we should read 7,200, as ך caph, 500, might have been easily mistaken for ך resh, 200, especially if the down stroke of the caph had been a little shorter than ordinary, which is often the case in MSS. The extra 300 being taken off, the total is just 22,000, as mentioned in the 39th verse.

NUMBERS 3:40 The LORD said to Moses, "Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names.

NUMBERS 3:41 You shall take the Levites for me (I am the LORD) instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel."

NUMBERS 3:42 Moses numbered, as the LORD commanded him, all the firstborn among the children of Israel.

NUMBERS 3:43 All the firstborn males according to the number of names, from a month old and upward, of those who were numbered of them, were twenty-two thousand two hundred seventy-three.

Verse 43

All the first-born males - were twenty and two thousand two hundred and threescore and thirteen - Thus we find there were 273 first-born beyond the number of the Levites. These are ordered, Num 3:46, to be redeemed; and the redemption price is to be five shekels each, Num 3:47, about 15s. And this money, amounting to 1,365 shekels, equal to 204 15s. English, he took of the first-born of Israel, Num 3:50. But how was this collected among 22,273 persons? Rabbi Solomon Jarchi says, "to prevent contention, Moses took 22,000 slips of parchment, and wrote on each a son of Levi, and 273 others, on which he wrote five shekels; then he mixed them in a basket, and each man took out one; those who drew the slips on which five shekels were written, paid the money; the others went free." This is a most stupid and silly tale, for such a mode of settlement never could have been resorted to by an intelligent people. It would have been much more simple to have paid it out of a general fund; and it is very likely that in this way the expense was defrayed. This species of redeeming of men is referred to by St. Peter, 1Pet 1:18, 1Pet 1:19 : "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious (τιμω αἱματι, valuable) blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," etc. And it is not the first-born only which are thus redeemed, for he, by the grace of God, tasted death for Every man; Heb 2:9. Reader, give glory to God that such a ransom has been paid for thy soul, and see that, redeemed from thy vain conversation, thy empty, fruitless, and graceless observances, on which thou hast built thy hopes of salvation, thou walk in newness of life, giving thy whole soul with thankfulness unto the Father who hath translated thee from darkness, and placed thee in the kingdom of his beloved Son. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever! Amen.

NUMBERS 3:44 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

NUMBERS 3:45 "Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock; and the Levites shall be mine. I am the LORD.

NUMBERS 3:46 For the redemption of the two hundred seventy-three of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who exceed the number of the Levites,

NUMBERS 3:47 you shall take five shekels apiece for each one; after the shekel of the sanctuary you shall take them (the shekel is twenty gerahs):

NUMBERS 3:48 and you shall give the money, with which their remainder is redeemed, to Aaron and to his sons.”

NUMBERS 3:49 Moses took the redemption money from those who exceeded the number of those who were redeemed by the Levites;

NUMBERS 3:50 from the firstborn of the children of Israel he took the money, one thousand three hundred sixty-five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary:

NUMBERS 3:51 and Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and to his sons, according to the LORD's word, as the LORD commanded Moses.
