
NUMBERS 4:1 The LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,

Moses is commanded to take the sum of the sons of Kohath from thirty years old and upward, Num 4:1-4. The service which they had to perform, Num 4:5-15. The office of Eleazar, Num 4:16. The family of Kohath to be continued among the Levites, Num 4:17-19. They are not to go into the holy of holies, Num 4:20. The sum of the sons of Gershon, Num 4:21-23. The service they had to perform, Num 4:24-27. They are to be under Ithamar, Num 4:28. The sum of the sons of Merari, Num 4:29, Num 4:30. The service they had to perform, Num 4:31-33. The sum of all the families of Kohath, 2,750, Num 4:34-37. The sum of the families of Gershon, 2,630, Num 4:38-41. The sum of the families of Merari, 3,200, Num 4:42-45. The sum total of the families of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, 8,580, Num 4:46-49.

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

NUMBERS 4:3 from thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all who enter into the service, to do the work in the Tent of Meeting.

Verse 3

From thirty years old - In Num 8:24, the Levites are ordered to enter on the service of the tabernacle at the age of twenty-five years; and in 1Chr 23:24, they were ordered to commence that work at twenty years of age. How can these different times be reconciled?

1. At the time of which Moses speaks here, the Levitical service was exceedingly severe, and consequently required men full grown, strong, and stout, to perform it; the age therefore of thirty years was appointed as the period for commencing this service, the weightier part of which is probably here intended.
2. In Num 8:24, Moses seems to speak of the service in a general way; the severe, which was to be performed by the full-grown Levites, and the less laborious work which younger men might assist in: hence the age of twenty-five is fixed.
3. In David's time and afterwards, in the fixed tabernacle and temple, the laboriousness of the service no longer existed, and hence twenty years was the age fixed on for all Levites to enter into the work of the sanctuary. The rabbins say that the Levites began to learn to do the service at twenty-five, and that having been instructed five years, they began the public service at thirty, and thus they reconcile the two periods referred to above. We may well suppose that the sons of the prophets continued a considerable time under instructions before they were called fully to exercise themselves in the prophetic office.

Until fifty years old - This was allowing twenty years for public severe service; a very considerate and merciful ordinance. A preacher who devotes his whole time and strength to the service of the Church of God from twenty to fifty or sixty years of age, should be then excused from his severer labor, and maintained at the charge of the sanctuary. This would not only be a great comfort to a worn-out servant of God, but also of great use to the work of the ministry, which, to be faithfully and

effectually performed, requires all the powers of the body and mind of man. Old faithful ministers are to be highly respected for their work's sake, and to be supplied with all the necessaries and comforts of life; but how little can they do in the public ministry of the word, however willing to work, when their eye waxes dim and their bodily strength fails! See Num 8:25. Both for their own sakes, and for the good of the Church, they should be excused from a labor to which they must be almost every way inadequate. But notwithstanding this comparative inactivity, their counsels, advice, and experience will always be considered as a treasure to the Church of Christ

NUMBERS 4:4 "This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the Tent of Meeting, the most holy things.

NUMBERS 4:5 When the camp moves forward, Aaron shall go in, and his sons, and they shall take down the veil of the screen, and cover the ark of the Testimony with it,

NUMBERS 4:6 and shall put a covering of sealskin on it, and shall spread over it a cloth all of blue, and shall put in its poles.

NUMBERS 4:7 "On the table of show bread they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the spoons, the bowls, and the cups with which to pour out; and the continual bread shall be on it.

NUMBERS 4:8 They shall spread on them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of sealskin, and shall put in its poles.

NUMBERS 4:9 "They shall take a blue cloth, and cover the lamp stand of the light, and its lamps, and its snuffers, and its snuff dishes, and all its oil vessels, with which they minister to it.

NUMBERS 4:10 They shall put it and all its vessels within a covering of sealskin, and shall put it on the frame.

NUMBERS 4:11 "On the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of sealskin, and shall put in its poles.

NUMBERS 4:12 "They shall take all the vessels of ministry, with which they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a blue cloth, and cover them with a covering of sealskin, and shall put them on the frame.

NUMBERS 4:13 "They shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth on it.

NUMBERS 4:14 They shall put on it all its vessels, with which they minister about it, the fire pans, the flesh hooks, the shovels, and the basins; all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread on it a covering of sealskin, and put in its poles.

NUMBERS 4:15 "When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary, and all the furniture of the sanctuary, as the camp moves forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to carry it: but they shall not touch the sanctuary, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the Tent of Meeting.

NUMBERS 4:16 "The duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the continual meal offering, and the anointing oil, the requirements of all the tabernacle, and of all that is in it, the sanctuary, and its furnishings."

NUMBERS 4:17 The LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,

NUMBERS 4:18 "Don't cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites;

NUMBERS 4:19 but thus do to them, that they may live, and not die, when they approach to the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and appoint them everyone to his service and to his burden;

NUMBERS 4:20 but they shall not go in to see the sanctuary even for a moment, lest they die.”

Verse 20

When the holy things are covered - Literally, כַּבֵּלָה, keballa, when they are swallowed down; which shows the promptitude with which every thing belonging to the holy of holies was put out of sight, for these mysteries must ever be treated with the deepest reverence; and indeed without this they could not have been to them the representatives of heavenly realities. See the concluding note Num 4:36 (note).

NUMBERS 4:21 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

NUMBERS 4:22 “Take a census of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers’ houses, by their families;

NUMBERS 4:23 you shall count them from thirty years old and upward until fifty years old; all who enter in to wait on the service, to do the work in the Tent of Meeting.

NUMBERS 4:24 “This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and in bearing burdens:

NUMBERS 4:25 they shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle, and the Tent of Meeting, its covering, and the covering of sealskin that is above on it, and the screen for the door of the Tent of Meeting,

NUMBERS 4:26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the door of the gate of the court, which is by the tabernacle and around the altar, and their cords, and all the instruments of their service, and whatever shall be done with them. Therein shall they serve.

NUMBERS 4:27 At the commandment of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their burden, and in all their service; and you shall appoint their duty to them in all their responsibilities.

NUMBERS 4:28 This is the service of the families of the sons of the Gershonites in the Tent of Meeting: and their duty shall be under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

NUMBERS 4:29 “As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families, by their fathers’ houses;

NUMBERS 4:30 you shall count them from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who enters on the service, to do the work of the Tent of Meeting.

NUMBERS 4:31 This is the duty of their burden, according to all their service in the Tent of Meeting: the tabernacle’s boards, its bars, its pillars, its sockets,

NUMBERS 4:32 and the pillars of the court around it, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords, with all their instruments, and with all their service: and by name you shall appoint the instruments of the duty of their burden.

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 hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."

NUMBERS 4:34 Moses and Aaron and the princes of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families, and by their fathers' houses,

NUMBERS 4:35 from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered into the service, for work in the Tent of Meeting.

NUMBERS 4:36 Those who were numbered of them by their families were two thousand seven hundred fifty.

Verse 36

Those that were numbered - In Num 3:27, etc., we have an account of the whole number of the Levites, and here of those only who were able to serve the Lord in the sanctuary. By comparing the two places we find the numbers to stand thus: -

LeviteFamily	AbleMen	UnableMen	Total	Kohathites	2,750	5,850	8,600	Gershonites	2,630	4,870
7,500	Merarites	3,200	3,000	6,200						

Thus we find that the whole number of the Levites amounted to 22,300, of whom 3,580 were fit for service, and 13,720 unfit, being either too old or too young. What an astonishing number of men, all properly ecclesiastics; all performing some service by which God was glorified, and the congregation at large benefited! See Ainsworth.

From this and the preceding chapter we see the very severe labor which the Levites were obliged to perform while the journeyings of the Israelites lasted. When we consider that there was not less than 10 tons 13 cwt. 24 lb. 14 oz., i. e., almost ten tons and fourteen hundred pounds' weight of metal employed in the tabernacle, (see the notes on Exodus 38 (note)), besides the immense weight of the skins, hangings, cords, boards, and posts, we shall find it was no very easy matter to transport this movable temple from place to place.

The Gershonites, who were 7,500 men in the service, had to carry the tent, coverings, veils, hangings of the court, etc., etc., Num 3:25, Num 3:26.

The Kohathites, who were 8,600 men, had to carry the ark, table, candlestick, altars, and instruments of the sanctuary, Num 3:31.

The Merarites, who were 6,200 men, had to carry the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, and all matters connected with these belonging to the tabernacle, with the pillars of the court, their sockets, pins, and cords, Num 3:36, Num 3:37.

The tabernacle was an epitome of the temple: the temple and tabernacle were representatives of the Church of the living God, and of the humanity of our blessed Lord. As God dwelt in the tabernacle and temple, so his fullness dwelt in the man Christ Jesus. These again were types of the Christian Church, which is termed the body of Christ, Eph 1:23, where he dwells in the plenitude of the graces of his Spirit.

Mr. Ainsworth has a very useful note on the Num 4:20 verse of this chapter, the most edifying part of which I shall here lay before the reader. He considers the tabernacle and temple, not only as pointing out the old dispensation, the annulling of which was typified by their destruction, but he

considers also the former as emblematical of the body of man. "The apostle," says he, "treating of the death of the saints, uses this similitude: 'If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For we that are in This Tabernacle do groan, being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life;' 2Cor 5:1-4. So Peter calls his death the putting off of his Tabernacle, 2Pet 1:14. And this similitude is very fit; for, as here, in the tabernacle of Moses,

1. The holy things were first covered and taken away, (see Num 4:20), so the soul and its powers are first withdrawn from the body by death.
2. As the curtains and coverings were taken off and folded up, so the skin and flesh of our bodies are pulled off and consumed.
3. As the boards of the tabernacle were disjointed and pulled asunder, so shall our bones and sinews: compare Job's description of the formation of man, Num 10:8-12; and Solomon's account of his dissolution, Ecc 12:3, Ecc 12:4.
4. As the disjointed and dissolved tabernacle was afterwards set up again, Num 10:21, so shall our bodies in the day of the resurrection; see 1Cor 15:51-54.

NUMBERS 4:37 These are those who were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all who served in the Tent of Meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD by Moses.

NUMBERS 4:38 Those who were numbered of the sons of Gershon, their families, and by their fathers' houses,

NUMBERS 4:39 from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered into the service, for work in the Tent of Meeting,

NUMBERS 4:40 even those who were numbered of them, by their families, by their fathers' houses, were two thousand six hundred thirty.

NUMBERS 4:41 These are those who were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, all who served in the Tent of Meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD.

NUMBERS 4:42 Those who were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, by their families, by their fathers' houses,

NUMBERS 4:43 from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered into the service, for work in the Tent of Meeting,

NUMBERS 4:44 even those who were numbered of them by their families, were three thousand two hundred.

NUMBERS 4:45 These are those who were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD by Moses.

NUMBERS 4:46 All those who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the princes of Israel numbered, by their families, and by their fathers' houses,

NUMBERS 4:47 from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered in to do the work of service, and the work of bearing burdens in the Tent of Meeting,

NUMBERS 4:48 even those who were numbered of them, were eight thousand five hundred eighty.

NUMBERS 4:49 According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered by Moses, everyone according to his service, and according to his burden. Thus were they numbered by him, as the LORD commanded Moses.
