

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS 3

In this chapter an account is given of the genealogy of the priests and Levites, and of the gift of the Levites to the priests, of the numbering of them, and the service they were to perform; and first of the priests, the sons of Aaron, (^{<04B1>}Numbers 3:1-4); and then of the Levites, as given unto them, to wait upon them, and assist them, (^{<04B5>}Numbers 3:5-10); and these were taken instead of the firstborn, (^{<04B11>}Numbers 3:11-13); and ordered to be numbered, which was done accordingly by their families, (^{<04B14>}Numbers 3:14-20); and the sum of each is given, and the particular work assigned to them; of the Gershonites, (^{<04B21>}Numbers 3:21-26); of the Kohathites, (^{<04B27>}Numbers 3:27-32); of the Merarites, (^{<04B33>}Numbers 3:33-38); the sum total of them is given, (^{<04B39>}Numbers 3:39); then the firstborn of the children of Israel, from a month old are ordered to be numbered, and were, (^{<04B40>}Numbers 3:40-43); and these appearing to be more in number than the Levites, by two hundred seventy three a direction is given that the two hundred seventy three should be redeemed at the rate of five, shekels apiece, and the money paid to Aaron and his sons, (^{<04B44>}Numbers 3:44-48); which was accordingly done, (^{<04B49>}Numbers 3:49-51).

Ver. 1. *These also [are] the generations of Aaron and Moses,* etc.] The descendants of them, those of the former, who is named first, because the eldest, were priests, and those of the latter Levites, and who are not very plainly pointed at, but are included among the Amramites, (^{<04B27>}Numbers 3:27); the posterity of Moses being very obscure, only Levites, and these not particularly named but swallowed up among the Kohathites: find the following account was as it stood,

in the day [that] the Lord spoke with Moses in mount Sinai; and not, altogether as it then, was when he spoke to him in the wilderness, of Sinai, for then Aaron had four sons, but now two of them were dead as is after observed; and it seems to be for the sake of this circumstance chiefly that this clause is so put.

Ver. 2. *And these [are] the names of the sons of Aaron*, etc.] The Targum of Jonathan adds, disciples of Moses, the master of the Israelites; none of the posterity of Moses being expressly, named; Jarchi observes, that the sons of Aaron are called the generations of Moses, because he taught them the law; for whoever, he says, teaches his neighbour's son, the law, the Scripture accounts of him as if he begat him, (see ^{<4045>}1 Corinthians 4:15);

Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar; as in (^{<4023>}Exodus 6:23).

Ver. 3. *These [are] the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests that were anointed*, etc.] With the holy, anointing oil, with which they were anointed when, Aaron was and they only, (see ^{<4230>}Exodus 30:30);

whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office; that is, whom Moses consecrated, by anointing them, putting the priest's garments on them, offering sacrifice for them, and filling their hands with sacrifices which is the phrase here used for consecration: (see ^{<4295>}Exodus 29:15-24).

Ver. 4. *And Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord*, etc.], By flaming fire, as the Targum of Jonathan adds, (see ^{<6102>}Leviticus 10:2); and so were not alive at this time when the account of the priests and Levites was taken:

when they offered strange fire before the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai; after the tabernacle was set up, and the service of it begun, and quickly after their unction and consecration: of this strange fire, (see Gill on ^{<4400>}Numbers 10:1");

and they had no children; which is observed, partly to show the punishment of them, and the reproach upon their names, that they died childless, and had none to succeed them in the priesthood; for as the Jewish writers ^{f13} observe if they had left any behind them, those would have come into the office before Eleazar and Ithamar; and partly to show that all the priests in succeeding ages sprung from those next mentioned:

and Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest's office, in the sight of Aaron their father; in his presence, under his inspection, and by his direction, he seeing and observing that they did everything according to the laws delivered by Moses, relating to, the office of the priesthood; or while he was yet alive, as Aben Ezra, they were concerned with him, and acted under him in the priestly office; and so the Septuagint version renders it, "with Aaron their father" ^{f14}; but a Jewish writer ^{f15} interprets it in a

different manner, “in the room of Aaron their father”; as if it respected not any conjunction with him in the then present exercise of their office in his lifetime, but their succession in it after his death; but the former seems most correct.

Ver. 5. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] After he had given him the order for the numbering the children of Israel, and for the manner of their encampment and journeying:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 6. *Bring the tribe of Levi near*, etc.] Separate them from the rest, set them apart for special service about, the sanctuary, let them have a place nearer to it than the other tribes, or offer them, that is, to the Lord, as in (^(-ORBI)Numbers 8:11); as well as bring them near to Aaron; so it follows:

and present them before Aaron the priest; that he may receive them as a gift unto him, as servants to wait upon him; and! that he may appoint and declare unto them their work, and set them about it:

that they may minister unto him; in guarding the tabernacle taking care of the vessels of it, taking it down, carrying it, from place to place, and setting it up as there was occasion for it.

Ver. 7. *And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation*, etc.] The charge of Aaron and of all the people of Israel, which was to secure the sanctuary from being polluted or plundered: this the Levites were to be employed about, and thereby ease the high priest and the other priests, and the people, of what otherwise would have been incumbent on them:

before the tabernacle of the congregation; not within it, neither in the holy place, nor in the most holy place, where they might not enter, to do any service peculiar thereunto, but at the door of the tabernacle, and in the court of it, and in the rooms and chambers in it: and do the service of the tabernacle; not to offer sacrifices on the altar of the burnt offering, which stood in the court, and much less to burn incense on the altar of incense, and to him the lamps, and set on the shewbread in the holy place; and still less to enter into the most holy place, and do there what was to be done on the day of atonement; but to do all that is before observed, and to bring the people’s offerings to the priest, and to assist in slaying them; and to keep all profane and polluted persons out of it, the tabernacle, as we find in later

times; they were porters at it, and some of them were singers in it, and had the care of various things belonging to it: (see ^{<1394>}1 Chronicles 9:14,26-29 23:3-5,28-30).

Ver. 8. *And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation,* etc.] Take care of them that none be lost or come to any damage, especially while it was moving, and carried from place to place; then the several parts of it, as well as the vessels in it, were committed to their care and charge, the particulars of which see in (^{<0485>}Numbers 3:25,26,31,36,37);

and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle; (see Gill on "^{<0485>}Numbers 3:7").

Ver. 9. *And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons,* etc.] To be their ministers and servants:

they [are] wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel: even all of them entirely, none excepted; the whole tribe which were not in the priestly office; those were separated from the rest of the tribes of Israel, and appointed for the service of the priests: or they were "given, given"^{f16}; which is repeated not only to show that they were wholly given, as we render it, but to denote the certainty of it, that they were really given; and especially to declare the freeness of the gift; the priests had them as free gifts, nor did they pay them any thing for, their service; they were maintained another way, namely, by the tithes of the people; and indeed the priests received a tithe out of the tithe of the Levites; so far were they from contributing any thing to their support, or in consideration of the service they did them.

Ver. 10. *And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons,* etc.] To the priestly office; this was done before, but is renewed for the confirmation of it, and repeated to put them in mind of it, that they be careful to execute it, as follows:

and they shall wait on their priest's office, to do what was peculiar to it, both in the holy and in the most holy place, at the altar, and within, the vail, where the Levites had nothing to do; and this is observed that the priests might take notice, that by the gift of the Levites to them, they were not excused from doing any part of service which was proper to them as priests; for they were given them that they might more readily attend their office, and be wholly employed in it; just as, under the Gospel dispensation,

deacons were appointed to take care of the secular affairs of the church, that the apostles might give up themselves to the word of God and prayer, (~~4th~~ Acts 6:2-4);

and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death; that comes nigh to perform any part of the priest's office peculiar to him as to offer sacrifice, burn incense, etc. whether he be a common Israelite, or even a Levite, as Korah was; any that was not a priest was reckoned a stranger, and so to be put to death for intruding into the office, as the above mentioned person was: so Aben Ezra interprets it of anyone that came nigh to a priest, to be with him or join with him in the execution of his office, whether an Israelite or a Levite, he shall die: the Targum of Jonathan adds, by flaming fire before the Lord.

Ver. 11. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] Continued to speak unto him, and give him the reason of his appointing the Levites to minister to the priests and serve the tabernacle:

saying: as follows.

Ver. 12. *And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel*, etc.] Separated them from others, and set them apart for the service of the sanctuary; this was his own act and deed, and which he did of his own will and pleasure, who is a sovereign Being, and might and would do whatsoever he pleased, nor should any object unto him, or contradict him: and this he did,

instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel; he made an exchange of those for the Levites; upon the destruction of the firstborn of Egypt, and saving the firstborn of Israel, he claimed the latter as his own in a special sense, and now he gave up his right to them, and instead thereof took the Levites; nor could the people of Israel reasonably object to this, nor be uneasy at it, but rather be pleased with it; since hereby they were not only freed from the charge of redeeming their firstborn, but since they were the Lord's, he might have appointed them to be servants to the priests; and every Israelite would choose rather, no doubt, to part with a tribe for this service than to have their firstborn sons employed in it; and there were none so fit as the tribe of Levi, not only because it was a small tribe, but because the priests were of this tribe, to whom they were to minister; and therefore as there was a connection between them, the Levites would readily serve them: it is a notion that has

obtained both among Jews and Christians, that the firstborn before this time were priests in the family, but now the Levites were taken in their room; and Jarchi particularly observes, that when the firstborn sinned in the business of the calf, they were rejected, and the Levites, who did not commit idolatry, were chosen in their room; but it does not appear, before the fixing the priesthood in Aaron's family, that the firstborn in a family were priests, and officiated as such, but rather the father and head of the family for the whole, or everyone for himself, as in Adam's family, he and his two sons; and moreover, it was a recent thing, and only among the Hebrews, that the firstborn were in a peculiar manner the Lord's, not as priests, only to be redeemed, and now the Levites were redeemed in their room; it was not to be priests, but the servants of the priests^{f17}:

therefore the Levites shall be mine; whom he gave to the priests to assist them in their work, which was for him and his glory.

Ver. 13. *Because all the firstborn [are] mine*, etc.] Not merely in a general way, as all creatures are his, but in a special manner as his own, and that for the following reason:

[for] on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast; that is, sanctified or set them apart as his own special property, or ordered the people of Israel so to do, (^{<D17D>}Exodus 13:2); for as when he destroyed the firstborn of the Egyptians, he saved the firstborn of Israel, he had a special claim upon them as his; and though it was in the night when he destroyed the firstborn of Egypt, yet it was the night which preceded that day, and was a part of that day, even the fifteenth of Nisan, when the instructions were given to sanctify all the firstborn; though, as Aben Ezra observes, "day" signifies "time", so that it was at or about the same time that the one and the other were done:

mine they shall be; this was declared when they were ordered to be sanctified to him, but now they were to be exchanged for the Levites:

I [am] the Lord; who have sovereign power to do as he would in claiming the firstborn, and then in exchanging them for the Levites, and appointing the Levites to minister to the priests, and serve in the tabernacle.

Ver. 14. *And the Lord spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai*, etc.] At the same time he gave the order, and made the declaration before

mentioned, and in the place where now the children of Israel were, and from whence they shortly removed:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 15. *Number the children of Levi*, etc.] Who were left out of the general muster of the children of Israel, but now were to be numbered alone, and in a different manner, and for, a different purpose, the Lord having a special regard unto, them, and special service for them:

after the house of their fathers, by their families; into which the tribe was divided; house seems to be put for “houses”, which were principal ones; and these were divided into families, which branched from them, and according to these, denominated from their fathers, and not their, mothers, were they to be numbered; for as the Jewish writers often say, a mother’s family is no family; wherefore, if a Levite woman married into any other tribe, as she might, her, descendants were not taken into this accounts only such whose fathers were Levites, (see ^{<04002>}Numbers 1:2);

every male from a month old and upwards shalt thou number them; the reason of this was, because the firstborn, for whom they were to be exchanged, were at a month old claimed by the Lord as his, and to be redeemed; and as this numbering was on, another account than, that of the children of Israel, who were numbered from twenty years of age and upwards, that they might on occasion be called out to war, from which the Levites were exempted, and the numbering of them was for the service of the sanctuary; so from their youth they were to be brought up and trained for this, that they might be fit for it, and enter upon it at a proper age.

Ver. 16. *And Moses numbered them according to the word of the Lord*, etc.] Took the account of all of a month old in the several houses and families of the tribe of Levi; though Moses is only here mentioned, yet it seems from (^{<04039>}Numbers 3:39); that Aaron was concerned with him in it; yea, in an after numbering of the Levites who were fit for business from thirty to fifty years of age, the chief of the children of Israel were assisting to him and Aaron, (^{<04046>}Numbers 4:46);

as he commanded; he was obedient to the divine will in all things, and so in this, though it was his own tribe and his own posterity, which in all successive ages were to be no other than ministering servants to the priests, and to have no inheritance in the land of Israel.

Ver. 17. *And these were the sons of Levi, by their names,* etc.] The immediate offspring and descendants of that patriarch:

Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari; these went down with him into Egypt, (^{<0461>}Genesis 46:11).

Ver. 18. *And these [are] the names of the sons of Gershon, by their families,* etc.] Or to Gershon belonged two families, called after the names of his sons, who were now numbered, namely,

Libni and Shimei; and who are elsewhere mentioned as his sons, (^{<0167>}Exodus 6:17); and from hence were the families of the Libnites and Shimites, as in (^{<0421>}Numbers 3:21).

Ver. 19. *And the sons of Kohath, by their families,* etc.] Who was the second son of Levi:

Amram, and Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel; so in (^{<0168>}Exodus 6:18); and from whom were named the family of the Amramites, to which Moses and Aaron belonged; and the families of the Izeharites, Hebronites, and Uzzielites, as they are called, (^{<0427>}Numbers 3:27).

Ver. 20. *And the sons, of Merari, by their families,* etc.] The third son of Levi;

Mahli and Mushi; the same as in (^{<0169>}Exodus 6:19); from whom were denominated the families of the Mahlites and Mushites, who, as the preceding families, were numbered at this time: these

[are] the families of the Levites, according to the house of their fathers; in all eight families.

Ver. 21. *Of Gershon [was] the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimites,* etc.] The first son of Levi:

these [are] the family of the Gershonites; that were now, numbered.

Ver. 22. *Those that were numbered of them,* etc.] Of the two families that sprung from Gershon:

according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upwards: in the said families;

[even] those that were numbered of them, [were] seven thousand and five hundred; 7,500 men, which was neither the least nor the largest number of the sons of Levi.

Ver. 23. *The families of the Gershonites*, etc.] The two before mentioned, the Libnites and Shimites:

shall pitch behind the tabernacle westward; this was their situation when encamped; they were placed in the rear of the camp of the Levites, between the tabernacle and the camp of Ephraim, which was westward also, (^{<0018>}Numbers 1:18).

Ver. 24. *And the chief of the house of the fathers of the Gershonites*, etc.] Who had the chief authority over them, and the chief direction of them in what they were to do:

[shall be] Eliasaph the son of Lael; but who he was, or of which family of the Gershonites, whether of the Libnites or Shimites, is not said here or elsewhere; nor do the Jewish writers, who affect to know every thing, pretend to tell us.

Ver. 25. *And the charge of the sons of Gershom*, etc.] The Libnites and Shimites:

in the tabernacle of the congregation; or with respect to the things of it, when it was taken down and committed to them; for otherwise they had no place in it, nor might they enter into it, or do any service therein:

[shall be] the tabernacle and the tent; the former intends not the boards of it, which were the charge of the Merarites, (^{<0135>}Numbers 3:36); but the curtains, as Aben Ezra, or the under curtains, as Jarchi calls them, which were made of fine twined linen, (^{<0201>}Exodus 26:1); and the latter is to be understood of the eleven curtains, as Aben Ezra, the curtains of goats hair, which were made for the roof of the tabernacle, as Jarchi observes, (see ^{<0207>}Exodus 26:7);

the covering thereof: made of rams' skins, and badgers' skins, which were thrown over the tent, (^{<0234>}Exodus 26:14);

and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; the vail, as Jarchi calls it; not what divided the holy and most holy places, for that fell to the charge of the Kohathites, (^{<0131>}Numbers 3:31); but the vail or

hanging which was at the door of the tent, or which led into the holy place, (^{<0236>}Exodus 26:36).

Ver. 26. *And the hangings of the court*, etc.] Which formed the great open court that encompassed the tabernacle, and was an hundred cubits long and fifty broad; (^{<0270>}Exodus 27:9-13);

and the curtain for the door of the court: which was an hanging of twenty cubits, of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen, (^{<0276>}Exodus 27:16);

which [is] by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about: this refers to the court, the hangings, and curtains of the door of it, which are spoken of; and this court surrounded the tabernacle, and the altar which was without the tabernacle, as Aben Ezra observes, and which was the altar of burnt offering that stood within this court; for the particle **l** [sometimes signifies “about”^{f18}, and the word **bybs**, “around”, being joined with it, requires this sense:

and the cords of it; which seem to be the cords of the court, which fastened the hangings and curtains to brass pins, or stakes fixed in the ground to keep them tight, that the wind might not move them to and fro; but Jarchi says, these were the cords of the tabernacle and tent, and not of the court; and indeed the tabernacle had its cords as well as the court, (^{<0388>}Exodus 38:18); the cords of the court were in the charge of the Merarites, (^{<0437>}Numbers 3:37);

for all the service thereof: for that part of the tabernacle and court which the Gershonites had in their care and custody.

Ver. 27. *And of Kohath [was] the family of the Amramites*, etc.] So called from Amram, the first son of Kohath, and father of Aaron and Moses; so that Moses and Aaron, and their children, are included in this family:

and the family of Izeharites; of which family was Korah, (^{<0461>}Numbers 16:1);

and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites; which four families had their names from Kohath’s four sons, (^{<0469>}Numbers 3:19);

these are the families of the Kohathites; which were as many as both the other sons of Levi.

Ver. 28. *In the number of all the males, from a month old and upwards, [were] eight thousand and six hundred,* etc.] 8,600 men, which was the largest number of any of the houses of the Levites; but considering it had double the number of families in it, the increase was not so large in proportion, at least to Gershon, whose two families wanted but 1,100 of these four:

keeping the charge of the sanctuary; of the holy and most holy places, and the vessels and instruments belonging thereunto; not that the males of a month old were keeping them, but when they were grown up and were capable of it, they had the charge thereof, in which they were instructed and trained up from their youth.

Ver. 29. *The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward.*] Or to the right, which was the more honourable place, excepting the east or front, which was reserved for Moses and Aaron, and his sons, and who were one of these families; and is the reason why this honour was conferred upon them, as well as they had the more honourable charge, having the holy places and holy things committed to their care; and one from among them was appointed over all the Levites, and the chief of them, as they had also, when they came into the land of Canaan, almost as many cities of refuge as both their other brethren had: their situation about the tabernacle was between that and the camp of Reuben, and this accounts for it, how Korah who was of one of the families of the Kohathites, became so intimately acquainted with, and joined in a conspiracy with Dathan and Abiram, who were of the tribe of Reuben, (^{<BIBL>}Numbers 16:1).

Ver. 30. *And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites [shall be] Elizaphan the son of Uzziel.*] The same man, who, with his brother Mishael, carried Nadab and Abihu out of the camp, and buried them, (^{<BIBL>}Leviticus 10:4,5); he descended from the last and youngest of the families of the Kohathites; and some think this was one reason at least of Korah's dissatisfaction, and of his entering into a conspiracy against Moses and Aaron, because one of a younger family of his house was preferred to this dignity before him.

Ver. 31. *And their charge [shall be] the ark,* etc.] That is, when the tabernacle was taken down, and carried from place to place, this, and the following things, were committed to their care and custody, the ark with

the mercy seat, and all appertaining thereunto, which were in the holy of holies:

and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars; the table of shewbread, and the candlestick of pure gold, with its lamps, and the altar of incense, all which stood in the holy place, and the altar of burnt offering, which was in the court, for both altars were their charge:

and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister; all the vessels which belonged to the above things; for the table, candlestick, and altars, all had vessels appertaining to them:

and the hanging; that is, the vail, as Jarchi interprets it, which divided between the, holy and the most holy place; all the other hangings for the court, and the door of it, and for the door of the tabernacle, were the charge of the Gershonites, (^{<0425>}Numbers 3:25,26):

and all the service thereof; what belonged to the things in this part of the tabernacle.

Ver. 32. *And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest*, etc.] Who was of the first of these families, the Amramites:

[shall be] chief over the chief of the Levites; over the three chiefs of the three houses of the Levites, who were Eliasaph the son of Lael, the chief of the Gershonites; and Elizaphan the son of Uzziel, the chief of the Kohathites; and Zuriel the son of Abihail, the chief of the Merarites:

[and have] the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary; the Kohathites, who had the care of the things belonging to the holy and most holy places; and these were particularly under the inspection of Eleazar, because they were things the priests had a, special concern in; (see ^{<0432>}Numbers 4:32).

Ver. 33. *Of Merari [were] the family of the Mahlites, and the family of the Mushites*, etc.] So called from his two sons Mahli and Mushi, (^{<0420>}Numbers 3:20);

these [are] the families of Merari; the youngest son of Levi, (^{<0417>}Numbers 3:17).

Ver. 34. *And those that were numbered of them*, etc.] Of the above two families:

according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, [were] six thousand and two hundred; 6,200 men; the least number of them all.

Ver. 35. *And the chief of the house of the father of the families of Merari,* etc.] I think it should rather be rendered, “and the chief of the house”, that is, of the Merarites, “the father to the families of Merari”; the common father to them all, having the chief authority and power over them, and so in (^{4013b}Numbers 3:24,30);

[shall be] Zuriel the son of Abihail; of whom we read nowhere else, nor is it certain of which family he was, whether of the Mahlites or Mushites:

[these] shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle northward; to the left of it, between that and the camp of Dan.

Ver. 36. *And [under] the custody and charge of the sons of Merari [shall be] the boards of the tabernacle,* etc.] Both of the holy and the most holy place, which were the walls of the tabernacle, and which were covered with curtains; these when taken down for journeying were committed to the care of the Merarites; and because these, with what, follow, were a heavy carriage, they were allowed wagons to carry them; and who on this account had more wagons given them than to the Gershonites, for the Kohathites had none, (^{4016b}Numbers 7:6-9);

and the bars thereof; which kept the boards tight and close, (see ^{4026b}Exodus 26:26);

and the pillars thereof; the pillars on which the veil was hung, that divided between the holy and most holy place, and, on which the hanging was put for the door of the veil, (^{4026c}Exodus 26:32,37);

and the sockets thereof; in which both the boards and pillars were put, (^{4026d}Exodus 26:19,32,37).

Ver. 37. *And the pillars of the court round about,* etc.] Of the great court which went round the tabernacle, on which pillars the hangings were hung:

and their sockets; into which the, pillars were put; of both which (see ^{4027b}Exodus 27:9-17);

and their pins, and their cords, the pins were fixed in the ground, and the cords fastened the hangings of the court to them, whereby they were kept tight and unmoved by the winds; (see ⁽¹²⁷⁾Exodus 27:19).

Ver. 38. *And those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the east,* etc.] At which was the entrance into the tabernacle:

[even] before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward; that is, before the court of the tabernacle, where the people assembled together:

[shall be] Moses, Aaron, and his sons; Moses the chief ruler, and Aaron the high priest, and his sons priests under him; these had the most honourable place of all, beings at the front of the tabernacle, between that and the camp of Judah. There is an extraordinary prick on the word Aaron, to show, as Jarchi says, that he was not in the number of Levites, though of the tribe of Levi, being high priest:

keeping the charge of the sanctuary, for the charge of the children of Israel; either in their room and stead, which otherwise they must have kept; or rather for their safety and security, keeping out all persons from entering into the sanctuary, who had no business there, that they died not, as it follows:

and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death; that is, whoever came nigh to enter into the holy place, and did, who was no priest, though an Israelite, and even a Levite, or into the most holy place, excepting the high priest, it was death unto him, either by the civil magistrate, or by the hand of heaven; so the Targum of Jonathan.

Ver. 39. *All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron, numbered at the commandment of the Lord, throughout their families,* etc.] Whence it appears, that Moses was not alone, but Aaron with him, in numbering the Levites, and that by the appointment of the Lord. The word "Aaron", in the Hebrew text, has a dot on every letter, for what reason it is not certain; the word itself is left out in the Samaritan and Syriac versions:

all the males, from a month old and upward, [were] twenty and two thousand; 22,000 men; but by putting the sums together they amount to three hundred more; for of the Gershonites there were 7,500, and of the Kohathites 8,600, and of the Merarites 6,200, in all 22,300; which difficulty some endeavour to remove by saying, as Aben Ezra observes, that the Scripture takes a short way, mentioning the thousands, and leaving

out the hundreds but this, he says, is not right, nor is it the way of the Scripture in this chapter: and in an after account of the firstborn of the Israelites, not only the hundreds are mentioned, but the broken number of seventy three. Others think there is a corruption crept into the text somewhere in the particular numbers, through the inadvertency of some copyist; and suppose it to be in the number of the Kohathites, where they fancy $\zeta\zeta$, six, is put instead of $\zeta\text{I}\zeta$, three: but there is no occasion to suppose either of these, for which there is no foundation, since the reason why three hundred are left out in the sum total may be, because there were so many firstborn among the Levites, and these could not be exchanged for the firstborn of the other tribes; they, as such, being the Lord's, and one firstborn could not redeem another; and so it is said in the Talmud^{f19}, these three hundred were firstborn, and there is no firstborn redeems a firstborn, or frees from the redemption price of five shekels.

Ver. 40. *And the Lord said unto Moses*, etc.] After he had taken the number of the Levites:

number all the firstborn of the children of Israel, from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names; that they might be compared with the number of the Levites, and the difference between them observed.

Ver. 41. *And thou shall take the Levites for me*, etc.] For his service, to minister to his priests, and serve in his tabernacle:

I [am] the Lord; who has a right to all, and can claim who he pleases for himself in a special manner, and therefore could and did take the Levites to himself:

instead of the firstborn among the children of Israel; these he had taken to him before, and ordered to be sanctified unto him, and for whom a redemption price was paid to his priests for the support of them, and the tabernacle service, and now it was his will to make an exchange of these for the Levites:

and the cattle of the Levites, instead of all the firstling among the cattle of the children of Israel: every firstling of clean cattle was the Lord's, and given to his priests, and the firstlings of unclean cattle were redeemed with a lamb, and which were given to the same; and now instead of these he requires the cattle of the Levites; not that they should be deprived of their use of them, or that they should be taken and sacrificed, but that they

should be with them devoted to him, and they should possess them in his right.

Ver. 42. *And Moses numbered, as the Lord commanded him,* etc.] No doubt assisted by others, though not mentioned:

all the firstborn among the children of Israel; which some think were only those that were born since they came out of Egypt, as Bonfrerius, Bishop Patrick, and others.

Ver. 43. *And all the firstborn males,* etc.] For such only were ordered to be numbered, and not firstborn females:

by the number of names; which were particularly taken:

from a month old and upward; for before that time they were not sanctified to the Lord, nor subject to the redemption price:

of those that were numbered of them [were] twenty and two thousand two hundred and threescore and thirteen; 22,273 men; so that there were two hundred seventy three more than the Levites, (^{CHB}Numbers 3:39).

Ver. 44. *And the Lord spake unto Moses,* etc.] After the number was taken, and gave him directions what to do upon it:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 45. *Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel,* etc.] The Lord had declared before that he had taken them, and now he bids Moses take them, who had numbered them, and give them to Aaron, instead of the firstborn, whose numbers were also taken for this purpose:

and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; but not to be given to Aaron and his sons, or to the priests for their use, but to remain with the Levites for their use, who were now separated from the other tribes, and taken into the service of God; and as they were dedicated to God, so their cattle likewise for their support as his ministers:

and the Levites shall be mine; in a special manner his, being devoted to his service:

I [am] the Lord; who had a right to do this, and expected to be obeyed in it.

Ver. 46. *And for those that are to be redeemed*, etc. With money, there being not Levites enough to answer to them, and exchange for them:

of the two hundred and threescore and thirteen of the firstborn of the children of Israel, which are more than the Levites; for the sum total of the Levites, as given, was but 22,000, (^{<0183>}Numbers 3:39), whereas the sum total of the firstborn of Israel were 22,273, (^{<0183>}Numbers 3:43), so that there were, two hundred seventy three more of the latter than of the former; and what was to be done with these next follows.

Ver. 47. *Thou shalt even take five shekels apiece the poll*, etc.] Or head; every firstborn, or his parent for him, was bound to pay five shekels, which were about eleven or twelve shillings of our money, and which was afterwards settled as the price of such a redemption, (^{<0186>}Numbers 18:16);

after the shekel of the sanctuary shall thou take [them]; being full weight according to the standard there kept:

the shekel [is] twenty gerahs; (see Gill on "^{<0175>}Leviticus 27:25").

Ver. 48. *And thou shalt give the money, wherewith the odd number of them is to be redeemed*, etc.] Or the superfluous number, the number of them that exceeded the Levites, namely, two hundred seventy three; the price of their redemption is ordered to be given

unto Aaron, and to his sons; since the Levites were taken in lieu of the firstborn, whose redemption money belonged to the priests; and seeing the Levites were given to Aaron and his sons on that consideration, and there being a deficiency of them to answer to the firstborn, it was but right and just that the redemption price of the superfluous number should be paid to them.

Ver. 49. *And Moses took the redemption money*, etc.] Of five shekels per head:

of them that were over and above redeemed by the Levites; or were more than those redeemed by them. A Levite redeemed a firstborn, or freed him from the redemption price, being taken in lieu of him: 22,000 Levites were answerable to 22,000 firstborn of Israel; but as there were no more Levites than the above number, there remained two hundred seventy three firstborn to be redeemed by money, and it was the redemption money of these Moses took.

Ver. 50. *Of the firstborn of the children of Israel took he the money, etc.]* Or “for the firstborn”, as the Vulgate Latin version renders it, and so the Hebrew particle **tam** is sometimes used^{f20}; for children of a month old or little more could not pay the money, but their parents for them, which was paid by them, and Moses received it for the superfluous number of two hundred seventy three; but it is a matter of doubt of whom this was exacted, and by whom paid, and who could be reckoned as this superfluous number, unless they were the last two hundred seventy three that were numbered: some have thought this was paid out of the public stock, which was a ready way of doing it, but whether reasonable is not so manifest, since these firstborn were the properties of particular persons; the more commonly received method of doing it with the Jewish writers was, according to Jarchi and Abarbinel, and so in the Talmud^{f21} by lot; the former of which describes the manner of doing it thus, 22,000 pieces (of paper or parchment) were brought, and on them written, “a son of Levi”, or “a Levite”, and two hundred seventy three other pieces, and on them were written, “five shekels”; these were mixed together and put into an urn or box, and then they were bid to come and take out the pieces, and according as the lot was, they were allowed as redeemed by the Levites, or paid the redemption money: and as this was a method much in use with the Hebrews, it is not improbable:

a thousand three hundred and threescore and five [shekels], after the shekel of the sanctuary; 1,365 shekels, which is exactly the number of shekels that two hundred seventy three should pay, reckoning five shekels per head; which Jarchi counts thus, for two hundred firstborn, a thousand shekels; for seventy firstborn, three hundred fifty; and for three firstborn fifteen, shekels, which in all amounted to about an hundred seventy pounds of our money.

Ver. 51. *And Moses gave the money of them that were redeemed, etc.]*

That were redeemed this way, and not by Levites, as in (^{-01BB}Numbers 3:49), but by money, paying five shekels a head:

unto Aaron and his sons; to whom the Levites were given; and this money, as a recompence for the deficiency of the number of them, to answer to the firstborn exchanged for them:

according to the word of the Lord; (^{-01BB}Numbers 3:48);

as the Lord commanded Moses; so did he, being a faithful servant in all things in the house of God; he did not convert it to his own use, or to any other use than to what God had appointed it.