

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS 8

In this chapter orders are given for the lighting the seven lamps of the candlestick, (⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾Numbers 8:1-4); and for the consecration of the Levites to their office, by a purification of them, (⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾Numbers 8:5-8); by a separation of them from the children of Israel, and the imposition of their hands on them, and of the hands of the Levites on the offerings offered for them, (⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾Numbers 8:9-15); and being thus given to the Lord, and claimed as his, instead of the firstborn of Israel, they are given to Aaron and his sons to do service in the tabernacle, (⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾Numbers 8:16-22); and their age at which they were to enter into service and cease from it is fixed, (⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾Numbers 8:23-26).

Ver. 1. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] Whether immediately after the offerings of the princes, or at another time, is not certain; Aben Ezra thinks it was in the night God spake unto him, because then the lamps were lighted and burning:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 2. *Speak unto Aaron, and say unto him*, etc.] It being his work to light the lamps, though, as Ben Gersom observes, it was not incumbent on an high priest alone to do this, for it also belonged to the sons of Aaron, who were common priests, (⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾Exodus 27:21); though it is probable that as this was the first time of lighting them, it might be done by Aaron himself, his sons attending and assisting him; in which he was an eminent type of Christ, the great High Priest, who lights the lamps in all his golden candlesticks, the churches, (⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾Revelation 1:20), and from whom they have all their light and all the supplies of it:

when thou lightest the lamps; which was done at evening, (⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾Exodus 30:8); pointing at the great light set up by Christ, the light of the world, in the evening of it, in the last days:

the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick; the Targum of Jonathan is,

“at the same time of thy lighting the lamps over against the candlestick, there shall be seven lamps giving light: three on the west side and three on the east side, and the seventh in the middle:”

and in the like order Jarchi places them, who observes, that the three eastward looked over against the middlemost, the wicks that were in them; and so the three westward, the tops of the wicks were over against the middlemost: and he also observes, that the middlemost lamp was no other than the body of the candlestick, and so all the rest of the lamps were over against and looked to that; and this is the sense of Maimonides ^{f80}, and other Jewish writers; but the truer meaning of the phrase is, that the seven lamps gave light, as they were to do, to that part of the holy place that was opposite to the candlestick, the north part of it, where stood the shewbread table, the candlestick being in the south, (^{<0102>}Exodus 40:22,24); that the table of the Lord might have light, as it was proper it should; and the priests might see to set on and take off the bread, which otherwise they could not, there being no window in the place; (see Gill on “^{<0253>}Exodus 25:37”).

Ver. 3. *And Aaron did so, he lighted the lamps thereof over against the candlestick*, etc.] As God had taken up his residence in the most holy place, as appears by the voice speaking from off the mercy seat, (^{<0189>}Numbers 7:89); and sacrifices were begun to be offered in the outward court on the altar of burnt offering, it was proper that the service of God in the holy place should also be set on foot; as placing of the shewbread on the shewbread table, and burning incense on the golden altar of incense; which could not well be done until the lamps were lighted, and therefore orders were given for the lighting them, which was accordingly done by Aaron:

as the Lord commanded Moses; (^{<0257>}Exodus 25:37).

Ver. 4. *And this work of the candlestick [was] of beaten gold*, etc.] As it is also said to be; (see Gill on “^{<0251>}Exodus 25:31”); and (see Gill on “^{<0256>}Exodus 25:36”):

unto the shalt thereof, unto the flowers thereof, [was] beaten work; of which, (see ^{<0251>}Exodus 25:31);

according unto the pattern which the Lord had showed Moses; when on Mount Sinai with him:

so he made the candlestick; that is, ordered it to be made, and took care that it was made exactly to the pattern he had of it; otherwise Bezaleel was the artificer; and so the Targum of Jonathan here expresses him by name.

Ver. 5. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] the same time the order about lighting the lamps was given; and this section is joined to the former, Aben Ezra thinks, to show that Aaron employed himself in lighting the lamps, but in the rest of the services the Levites helped him, and stood before him to do what he commanded them: they were ordered to be taken and given to Aaron before; and they were numbered, and their services appointed to each division of them; and now they are ordered to be ordained and consecrated to their office:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 6. *Take the Levites from among the children of Israel*, etc.] Among whom they were mixed, as were all the tribes mixed together as Aben Ezra says, before they took their journey from Mount Sinai; however, from hence forward, they were distinguished from Israelites, as they are both in Scripture and in Jewish writings; (see ^{<B30D>}1 Chronicles 9:2); though this seems to design no other but their appointment and separation to their work and service, as ministers to the priests of the Lord; and so as Aaron did not assume the honour of priesthood to himself but was called of God, the Levites did not take the honour of their office to themselves but had it by the appointment and call of God:

and cleanse them; with water, by sprinkling the water of purification on them, and by washing their bodies and clothes with water; which outward washing was a sign of moral purity, which was necessary to their employment in the service of the sanctuary; for though there was no particular uncleanness on them, either ceremonial or moral, but what was common to men; yet it was proper, by such outward rites, to put them and others in mind, that they which are employed about holy things should be eminently pure and holy; and as their business was to carry holy things, to bear the sacred vessels of the sanctuary from place to place when needful, they ought of all men to be clean, (^{<2521B>}Isaiah 52:11): and in this they were emblems of the ministers of the word, who ought to be pure, as in heart, so in life and conversation, and be examples of purity to others, (^{<406B>}2 Corinthians 6:6 ^{<544D>}1 Timothy 4:12).

Ver. 7. *And thus shall thou do unto them, to cleanse them,* etc.] Or order Aaron to do unto them; the cleansing of the Levites was the work of Aaron, either by himself or by his order; in which he was a type of Christ, who is the refiner and purifier of the sons of Levi, (~~308B~~ Malachi 3:3);

sprinkle water of purifying upon them; or “water of sin”^{f81}; water which purifies from sin, in a ceremonial sense; and this was water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer, which was the purification of persons defiled by the dead, as Jarchi observes; and though the law concerning the red heifer, and of making the water of purification, is not made mention of till afterwards, (~~409B~~ Numbers 19:1-22): yet it was very probably given before; and the Jews say^{f82}, it was on the second of Nisan, or the first month, which was the day after the tabernacle was erected, that Eleazar the priest burnt the red heifer and sprinkled all Israel; this only “sanctified to the purifying of the flesh”, (~~509B~~ Hebrews 9:13), in a ceremonial sense, but was typical of the blood of Christ, which “purges the conscience from dead works”; that so men may be fitted and qualified, as the Levites were, “to serve the living God”, (~~509B~~ Hebrews 9:14);

and let them shave all their flesh; the hair of their bodies, in all parts thereof; even the beard, as Aben Ezra notes, some say; yet not the corners of it; but the whole hair of the body, everywhere, was to be shaved off; to denote the most perfect purity, and a removal of all superfluity of haughtiness and excrescences of the flesh from them: so the Egyptian priests used to shave their whole body every third day, lest there should be anything filthy in those that served the gods^{f83}: this cleansing of the Levites was after the same manner as lepers were cleansed: and Jarchi observes, from one of their writers, that because the Levites gave an atonement for the firstborn, who committed idolatry, which is called the sacrifices of the dead, and the leper is called a dead man, they were obliged to shaving as the lepers; but Ben Gersom gives a better reason for the shaving of them; that it was to put them in mind that they should forsake material (or corporeal) things, and employ themselves in the service of God; (see ~~409B~~ Acts 6:2,4) (~~509B~~ 2 Timothy 2:4);

and let them wash their clothes; and much more their bodies, as Chaskuni, after the manner of those who were polluted by touching a dead body; typical of the saints having their bodies washed with pure water, and their garments washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb, (~~580B~~ Hebrews 10:22 ~~607A~~ Revelation 7:14);

and [so] make themselves clean; the Targum of Jonathan adds, in forty seahs of water; and according to the sense of that paraphrase, both the bodies and clothes of the Levites were dipped in water.

Ver. 8. *Then let them take a young bullock*, etc.] Of two years old, as the Jewish writers gather from the other in the next clause, being called the second; though the wise men say one of three years old is fit for such a sacrifice; nay, others say, if four or five years old; but the decision is according to the wise men ^{f84}

with his meat offering, [even] fine flour mingled with oil: which always went along with a burnt offering, and consisted of three tenth deals of line flour, and half an hin of oil, (^{Q82}Numbers 28:12,14);

and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering; which was the offering for the sin of the whole congregation of Israel, through ignorance; and this being for all the Levites, and they being instead of the firstborn of Israel, such an offering was required; and though there was no particular sin charged upon them, but it became necessary for their perfect cleansing and expiation.

Ver. 9. *And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation*, etc.] Not without it, but within it, in the court of the tabernacle, at least at the door of it, where stood the altar of burnt offering, on which sacrifices for them were now to be offered:

and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together; the heads of the tribes, and elders of the people, as Aben Ezra interprets this phrase in (^{Q83}Leviticus 8:3); where the whole congregation is said to be assembled at the consecration of the priests, as here at the consecration of the Levites, having a concern therein, as well as to be spectators and witnesses of this solemn affair; and no doubt as many of them as could conveniently assemble at the door of the tabernacle did, though every individual of that large body of people could not possibly do it.

Ver. 10. *And thou shalt bring the Levites before the Lord*, etc.] From the door of the tabernacle, to the altar of burnt offering, where the Lord was in some sense present to accept the sacrifices offered to him:

and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites; as were used to be put upon sacrifices, for the Levites were themselves offered for

an offering of the children of Israel, as is expressed in (⁴⁰⁸¹Numbers 8:11); by which rite they signified that they voluntarily parted with them, and gave them up to the Lord, and transferred their service to them, in which they were to serve in their room and stead; these, according to some Jewish writers, were the firstborn of Israel that laid their hands on the Levites, a type of the general assembly and church of the firstborn; or rather the princes and heads of the tribes, who represented the whole body. Some think by this rite is signified the consent of the people in the designation and appointment of the ministers of the word to their work and office; but what in the New Testament seems to answer to this is, the laying of the hands of the presbytery on ministers of the word, (~~5044~~¹ Timothy 4:14).

Ver. 11. *And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord*, etc.] Or “wave”^{f85} them, as a wave offering, which was moved to and fro, backwards and forwards; not that they were actually so waved and moved to and fro by Aaron, which could not be done by him; though it is possible he might make such a motion himself, and they might do the like after him, thereby signifying that they belonged unto the Lord of the whole earth; and some think this testified their readiness to serve the Lord; to which may be added their constant employment in his service, being always in motion, doing one piece of service or another continually; as the people of God, and especially the ministers of the word, should be always abounding: in the work of the Lord. Ainsworth supposes that the troubles and afflictions of the ministers of God are figured hereby:

[for] an offering of the children of Israel; to the Lord, hereby devoting them to his service:

that they may execute the service of the Lord; for them, in their room and stead, do what otherwise they must have done; (see ⁴⁰⁸²Numbers 3:7,8); with this compare (²⁸⁶⁰Isaiah 66:20,21).

Ver. 12. *And the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bullocks*, etc.] Or “on the head”^{f86}; on the head of everyone of them, as Aben Ezra, thereby, as it were, transferring their sins to them, for these were to make atonement for them, as the latter part of the verse shows; and this was a figure of the imputation of sin to Christ, and taught that doctrine, and led the faith of the offerers to the sin bearing and sin atoning Saviour:

and thou shalt offer the one [for] a sin offering, and the other [for] a burnt offering, unto the Lord; that is, shall order to be offered; for not Moses, but Aaron, offered these offerings, as Aben Ezra observes, of which this is a proof, that Aaron is said to make the atonement for them, (^(-HRE)Numbers 8:21), for which purpose these sacrifices were offered, particularly the first; and the latter by way of thanksgiving for atonement made by the former: so it follows,

to make an atonement for the Levites; who could not be admitted to service until their sins were expiated; as no man is worthy to be employed in the work of God, but such for whom reconciliation for their sins is made by the blood and sacrifice of Christ, by which they are purged from dead works to serve the living God.

Ver. 13. *And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons,* etc.] After atonement was made for them, as Aben Ezra observes; then they were presented to Aaron and his sons, to whom they were given to be their ministers, and assistants to them:

and offer them [for] an offering unto the Lord: or, and “waved them”, etc. as before, that is, order them to be waved; for not Moses, but Aaron, did this, and indeed was done already; and therefore should rather be rendered, as by Bishop Patrick, after thou hast offered, or waved them.

Ver. 14. *Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel,* etc.] By sprinkling the water of purification upon them; by offering sacrifices for them; by presenting them before the Lord, with the hands of the people of Israel put upon them; by offering and waving them before the Lord, and by setting them before Aaron and his sons, as their ministers:

and the Levites shall be mine: in a special and peculiar manner devoted to his service, and by him given to his priests for that purpose; so the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan,

“and the Levites shall minister before me.”

Ver. 15. *And after that shall the Levites go in,* etc.] Not into the sanctuary, where only the priests entered, much less into the most holy place, where only the high priest went, and that but once a year, in neither of which places the Levites had anything to do, but into the court of the tabernacle:

to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: to watch there, and to assist the priests at the altar of burnt offering, to take down the tabernacle and bear the vessels of it, and set it up, as occasion required:

and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them [for] an offering; cleanse them by sprinkling the water of purifying on them, and offer them by waving them as before; and indeed this is no new thing which is here observed, but what was already done, and therefore should be rendered, “when thou shalt have cleansed them”, or “after thou hast cleansed them”, etc. and so the particle “vau” is sometimes used ^{f87}.

Ver. 16. *For they [are] wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel,* etc.] All of them, entirely, and most certainly; or, “given, given” ^{f88}, which is repeated for the confirmation of it; or because of their being twice given, first to the Lord by the children of Israel, and then by the Lord to Aaron and his sons, as Chaskuni; though Jarchi interprets it of the different parts of their service they were devoted to, given for bearing and carrying the vessels of the sanctuary, and given for the song, or to be singers in the temple:

instead of such as open, every womb, [even instead of] the firstborn of all the children of Israel have I taken them unto me; (see Gill on “^{<04B12>}Numbers 3:12-13”)

Ver. 17. *For all the firstborn of the children of Israel [are] mine, [both] men and beasts,* etc.] Not only in common with other of his creatures, but in a special respect on account of his signal deliverance of them; they were his, as Jarchi expresses it, by the line of judgment, or rule of justice and equity, because he protected them among the firstborn of the Egyptians, saved them when he slew theirs, as follows:

in the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt; both of men and beasts:

I sanctified them for myself; claimed them as his own, and set them apart for his own use, or ordered them to be set apart: (see ^{<04B12>}Exodus 13:2).

Ver. 18. *And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel.*] Gave up his right in the firstborn, and instead of them took the Levites for his use and service: (see ^{<04B12>}Numbers 3:12).

Ver. 19. *And I have given the Levites [as] a gift to Aaron and his sons, from among the children of Israel,* etc.] Or I have given the Levites that were given; that is, the Lord gave to Aaron and his sons the Levites, that were first given to him; as they were, when brought before him, and the children of Israel laid hands on them, and they were offered before the Lord, (⁽⁰⁴⁸¹⁰⁾Numbers 8:10,11);

to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation; to do what otherwise they must have done, watch and guard the tabernacle, carry the sacrifices to the priests, assist them at the altar, take down and set up the tabernacle, and carry it, and the vessels of it, from place to place:

and to make an atonement for the children of Israel; not by offering sacrifices for them, which was the work of the priests, but by being now offered themselves, (⁽⁰⁴⁸¹⁰⁾Numbers 8:10,11,13); that they themselves might be the atonement of their souls as Aben Ezra expresses it, as well as they were by their service hereafter a means of preserving the Israelites from death; which may be interpreted of making an atonement, which Phinehas is said to do by his deed, though no sacrifice was offered, (⁽⁰⁴⁸¹⁰⁾Numbers 25:7,8,13); which sense seems to be confirmed by what follows:

that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh to the sanctuary; by approaching nearer than they should, touching what they ought not, intruding themselves into service they were not called to, or doing it amiss, not being instructed in it, or inured to it as the Levites were. The phrase, “the children of Israel”, is five times used in this verse, to denote the love of God to them, as Jarchi observes.

Ver. 20. *And Moses and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel,* etc.] The several parties concerned in the consecration of the Levites: these

did to the Levites according unto all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel unto them: which, as Jarchi notes, is said to the praise of them that did it, and of what was done by them; everything was done that was ordered, and in the manner in which it was prescribed; Moses sprinkled, or ordered to be sprinkled, the water of purification on them, and set them before the tabernacle, and before the Lord; the children of Israel laid their hands on them, and Aaron waved them, offered the sacrifices for them.

Ver. 21. *And the Levites were purified*, etc.] From sin, by the sprinkling of the sin water, or water of purification on them, (^{<048D>}Numbers 8:7);

and they washed their clothes; that they might have no defilement about them, neither in their bodies, nor in their garments:

and Aaron offered them [as] an offering before the Lord; a wave offering, as in (^{<048E>}Numbers 8:11);

and Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them; by offering the sacrifices for them, (^{<048F>}Numbers 8:12).

Ver. 22. *And after that went the Levites in*, etc.] Into the court of the tabernacle, being at the door of it when the above rites and ceremonies of their consecration were performed:

to do their service in the tabernacle of the congregation, before Aaron and his sons; in their presence, and by their order, as they should direct them:

as the Lord had commanded Moses, so did they unto them; Aaron and his sons did to the then present Levites according to the command of God by Moses; they exactly observed every punctilio of it, and complied with it; and this the sons of Aaron did continually to the sons of the Levites, as Aben Ezra remarks, in all succeeding ages; when the Levites were consecrated to their service, the same things were done unto them that are here ordered.

Ver. 23. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] At the same time he gave the instructions about the consecration of the Levites, the time of their entrance on their service, and of leaving it, was fixed:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 24. *This [is it] that [belongeth] unto the Levites*, etc.] The fixed and settled time for their service, as is after related:

from twenty and five years old and upward, they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; in (^{<049A>}Numbers 4:3); the time for the Levites entering on the work of the tabernacle is fixed to thirty years and upward, which Jarchi reconciles thus; at twenty five years old the Levite goes in to learn the rites of service, and he learns five years, and when thirty years of age he services; the same is observed by others^{f89}; but

what Aben Ezra proposes seems much better; at thirty years of age a Levite entered into the service of bearing and carrying burdens; and at twenty five years of age he entered into the service of the tent or tabernacle, where he was employed in lighter service, such as opening and shutting the doors of the sanctuary, keeping out strangers and unclean persons, and singing the songs of the sanctuary; but was not concerned till thirty years of age in carrying the vessels of the sanctuary on the shoulders, as the Kohathites; or in taking down and setting up the tabernacle, loading and unloading the wagons, as the Gershonites and Merarites; which is the business assigned unto them, and spoken of in (⁰⁰²²Numbers 4:22-35), where the age of thirty years, and upward, is mentioned, as the time of their entrance on it, (⁰⁰²³Numbers 4:23,30).

Ver. 25. *And from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting upon the service [thereof],* etc.] The heavy service of it:

and shall serve no more; by bearing and carrying the vessels of the sanctuary upon their shoulders, as Jarchi interprets it; this, according to the Jewish writers, was only in force while the tabernacle was in the wilderness, and was moved from place to place: but when it had a fixed habitation, and that laborious service of bearing and carrying the vessels of it ceased, years made no difference in the Levites, or disqualified them for service; for it is said ^{f90}, that the Levites were not bound by this law, but in the time of the tabernacle; but when it was at Shiloh, and at Jerusalem, where there was no bearing and carrying upon the shoulder, the Levites were not rejected on account of years, only for their voice, when they had lost that, and could not sing.

Ver. 26. *But shall minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation,* etc.] By giving advice, instructing younger Levites, and doing lighter service. Jarchi says, they shall return to shutting of doors, singing and loading wagons; but the last especially seems too burdensome: the ministry of such is explained by the next clause,

to keep the charge; of the tabernacle, to watch and observe that no stranger or unclean person enter into it; and this they were capable of when at the age of fifty, and upwards:

and shall do no service; heavy and laborious:

thus thou shall do unto the Levites touching their charge; dismiss them from service when at such an age, or however make their service easier; for

this respects ancient men, as Aben Ezra notes; though it may include both their entrance on their work, and their cessation from it.