

time and a single circumstance. What regulations were given for consecration of the firstborn of the people and animals later?

77. Who paid the ransom money to the priests?

VI. MARCHING DUTIES ASSIGNED TO THE LEVITE FAMILIES (4:1-49)

A. THE KOHATHITES vv. 1-20

TEXT

Chapter 4:1. And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron, saying, 2. Take the sum of the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers, 3. From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation. 4. This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things.

5. And when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering veil, and cover the ark of testimony with it: 6. And shall put thereon the covering of badgers' skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof. 7. And upon the table of showbread they shall spread a cloth of blue, and put thereon the dishes, and the spoons, and the bowls, and covers to cover withal: and the continual bread shall be thereon: 8. And they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet, and cover the same with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put in the staves thereof. 9. And they shall take a cloth of blue, and cover the candlestick of the light, and his lamps, and his tongs, and his snuffdishes, and all the oil vessels thereof, wherewith they minister unto it: 10. And they shall put it and all the vessels thereof within a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put it upon a bar. 11. And upon the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof: 12. And they shall take all the instruments of ministry, wherewith they minister in the

sanctuary, and put them in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put them on a bar. 13. And they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon: 14. And they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, even the censers, the fleshhooks, and the shovels, and the basins, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it. 15. And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation.

16. And to the office of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest pertaineth the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, and the daily meat offering, and the anointing oil, and the oversight of all the tabernacle, and of all that thereon is, in the sanctuary, and in the vessels thereof.

17. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying, 18. Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites: 19. But thus do unto them, that they may live, and not die, when they approach unto the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and appoint them every one to his service and to his burden: 20. But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 4:1. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2. "Count the descendants of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' houses, 3. from thirty years of age, all who enter into the service to do the duties of the Tent of Meeting. 4. This shall be the service of the descendants of Kohath in the Tent of Meeting among the holy things:

5. When the camp moves out, Aaron and his sons shall enter

in and take down the veil of the screen, and cover the ark of the covenant with it; 6. and they shall lay a covering of goatskin on it, and shall spread a cloth of pure blue over it, and insert its poles. 7. "And they shall spread a cloth of blue over the table of showbread, and put on it the dishes, the spoons, the bowls and the jars for pouring; and the continual bread shall be upon it. 8. And they shall spread over them a cloth of scarlet, and cover the same with a covering of goatskin, and insert its poles. 9. Then they shall take a cloth of blue, and cover the lampstand of light, along with its lamps, its snuffers and its pans, and all its oil vessels used in serving it: 10. and they shall put it and all its vessels inside a cover of goatskin, and they shall put it upon the carrying staves. 11. And they shall spread a blue cloth over the golden altar and cover it with a covering of goatskin, and insert its poles. 12. And they shall take all the utensils of service, with which they serve in the sanctuary, and put them in a blue cloth, and cover them with a covering of dolphin skin, and put them on the carrying staves. 13. Then they shall remove the ashes from the altar and spread a purple cloth upon it. 14. They also shall put on it all the vessels by which they serve, the pans, the forks, the shovels and the basins, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of goatskin, and insert the poles. 15. And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all of the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to move out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry it; but they must not touch any holy things, lest they should die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the Tent of Meeting. And the duty of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, is the oil of the light, the sweet incense, the daily meal offering, the anointing oil—the responsibility for all the Tabernacle and everything in it, along with the sanctuary and its vessels."

17. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 18. "Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites, 19. but do this to them that they may live and not die when they come unto the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall enter, and designate each man to his duty and

his burden; 20. but they must not enter in to see when the holy things are covered lest they die.

COMMENTARY

To the Kohathites was given the most responsible chores. The family included Moses, Aaron and his sons; that is, the priests. Their service is said to have begun at age 30 here (v. 3), whereas 8:24 gives the age as 25, the LXX adopts the lower age in this verse. It has been suggested that the age might have been first established at the earlier figure, then lowered, as more men were to be served, due to the population growth.

The Kohathites have been referred to as the *militia sacra*, or sacred army. A military term is used to describe their "service", (v. 3). Their obligations are as clear and regimented as those of an army; and their commitments are total, demanding unquestioning allegiance to their Commander. To them is assigned the most holy things in the Tabernacle: the ark of the covenant, the table of showbread, the lampstand (candlestick), the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offerings, as well as all the articles pertaining to them.

When the call came for the Israelites to move, the priests first carefully followed a set procedure. Aaron and his sons took down the curtain between the holy place and the holy of holies, using it to wrap up the ark of the covenant (vv. 5, 6); and they covered the entire bundle with skins variously identified as those of the badger or sea-cow. The Hebrew word *tachash* is currently translated "goatskins" in the RSV. It is a very probable correction, since the quantity of badgerskins required for the coverings would have been excessive. Furthermore, the availability of either the badgers or the sea-cows in sufficient quantity is subject to reasonable question. Finally, staves were inserted into the rings of the ark, and it was ready for carrying.

Preparations for the other items was somewhat less complicated. The table of showbread was wrapped inside a blue cloth (vv. 7, 8), and on this were placed all the dishes, spoons, bowls, pitchers, and the bread itself. Great care must be taken

in the process to see that none of these things were touched directly, under pain of death (v. 15), even while wrapping them with the cloths of covering. The lampstand was wrapped with blue cloth, together with its small pots, its snuffers, trays, and oil vessels. Again, it was carried by means of a pole inserted through the covering, vv. 9, 10.

Similarly, the altar of incense should be wrapped, with its many utensils, and carried upon poles. The cloth encompassing the golden altar was blue, v. 11

The large altar of sacrifice, or burnt-offering, was wrapped in purple, after its ashes had been carefully removed, v. 13, along with the numerous items required for its use—firepans, forks, shovels, basins, and miscellaneous articles. The removal of the ashes was not done to clean the altar: it was hollow, with a filling of earth or stones. Rather, the ashes were most carefully tended as living embers. The sacred fire was never permitted to go out.

There is a surprising omission here, the great laver. Both the Septuagint and the Samaritan text add, after v. 14, "And they shall take a purple cloth, and cover the laver and its foot, and they shall put it into a hyacinthine cover of skin, and put it on bars." Although this is a spurious interpolation, it is certain that the Kohathites were required to carry the laver. The suggestion in *PC* (p. 25) is unsatisfactory—that the laver was "not regarded as of equal sanctity with the rest" will not suffice to explain the omission; there simply is no satisfactory explanation.

Upon completion of the wrapping of all articles, the Kohathites came to carry them. It is evident from the order in which the account is related that the Kohathites and their burdens marched at the forefront of the nation when on the move.

Special tribute, along with special duty, fell upon Eleazar. His responsibility included oversight of the oil for the lampstand, incense for the golden altar, the continual meal-offering, the anointing oil, and the vessels for their care. He further directed the entire process of gathering and preparing the

Tabernacle and all the sacred objects for transportation. We may infer that the Kohathites worked directly under his supervision. The Kohathites are recognized to be especially significant among the tribes. Lest they be guilty of any degree of negligence or carelessness which others might prevent, Moses and Aaron are strictly admonished to supervise their duties most carefully. Should they fail, they are to be held accountable directly to God. Any carelessness or irreverence in the conduct of the priests' functions would induce similar attitudes and serious mistakes among the Levites; death then must be the inevitable consequence. Every phase of the service of Jehovah is of gravest importance, and God's instructions are to be carried out to the letter.

The final note of caution (v. 20) summarizes all that has been said. Wrapping the furnishings is the task of the priests; the Kohathites must be cautious not even so much as to look upon the vessels for an instant, under pain of death.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

78. How do you reconcile the differences given for the time of the priestly service, as stated in Num. 4:3 and 8:24?
79. In what sense might the Kohathites be called the "militia sacra"?
80. Give in full detail the step-by-step measure which must be followed when the Tabernacle and its various articles were to be moved.
81. Why is it more likely that "goatskins" is the proper word in this passage, rather than "porpoises" or "sea-cows"?
82. Why should there be such a severe penalty for the unauthorized sight of the various items of furniture before they are completely wrapped?
83. Why was it unnecessary to clean ashes from the altar of sacrifice?
84. What possible explanations are offered for the omission of the laver from the list of the Tabernacle's furniture?
85. Why was Eleazar given special responsibility over the

process of packing and moving all the articles of the Tabernacle?

86. In what manner might clumsiness, carelessness or indifference in performing their duties as priests affect the general attitude of the Levites? of the people as a whole?

B. THE GERSHONITES vv. 21-28

TEXT

Chapter 4:21. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 22. Take also the sum of the sons of Gershon, throughout the houses of their fathers, by their families; 23. From thirty years old and upward until fifty years old shalt thou number them; all that enter in to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation. 24. This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, to serve, and for burdens: 25. And they shall bear the curtains of the tabernacle, and the tabernacle of the congregation, his covering, and the covering of the badgers' skins that is above upon it, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 26. And the hangings of the court, and the hanging for the door of the gate of the court, which is by the tabernacle and by the altar round about, and their cords, and all the instruments of their service, and all that is made for them; so shall they serve. 27. At the appointment of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their burdens, and in all their service: and ye shall appoint unto them in charge all their burdens. 28. This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation: and their charge shall be under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 4:21. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 22. "Count the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers' houses, by their families, 23. from thirty years old and up to fifty years old you shall count them: all who enter to perform the service, to

do the work in the Tent of Meeting. 24. This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in both serving and carrying: 25. they shall carry the curtains of the Tabernacle and the Tent of Meeting, its covering, and the covering of the goatskin on top of it, and the screen for the door of the Tent of Meeting, and the curtain for the court, 26. and the screen for the door of the gate of the court surrounding the Tabernacle and the altar, and their cords and all the equipment for their service, and everything that is made for them; in this manner they shall serve. 27. All the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their duties and all their work, shall be done by the order of Aaron and his sons: you shall appoint all their duty to those in charge. 28. This is the service of the families of the sons of the Gershonites in the Tent of Meeting; and their duties shall be under the hand of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest.

COMMENTARY

Much less complex than the work of the Kohathites were the duties of the second family, the Gershonites. They are tallied for service on the same basis as are the others; from ages thirty to fifty. On the march, they are responsible for the many curtains of the Tabernacle, the Tent itself, and the many coverings they required; they carry also all the screen which filled the door at the eastern Door of the Tent, as well as the bulky hangings which surrounded the outer court and the screen which closed the only opening by which access might be gained into the court. With these, they carried the cords which were used specifically for the erection and solidity of the Tabernacle. In order that there might be no misunderstanding whatever, they are instructed in detail by Aaron and his sons.

Ithamar, who had had a primary assignment during the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex. 38:21), now is placed in oversight of both the Gershonites and the Merarites, although he himself is a Kohathite. We are informed in 7:7, 8 that wagons were assigned for transporting the articles.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

87. Compare this passage with Ex. 27, and see more clearly the duty of the Gershonites.
88. Why did they not carry the "veil"?
89. Distinguish between the cords carried by the Gershonites and those for which the Merarites were responsible.

C. THE MERARITES vv. 29-33

TEXT

Chapter 4:29. As for the sons of Merari, thou shalt number them after their families, by the house of their fathers; 30. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old shalt thou number them, every one that entereth into the service, to do the work of the tabernacle of the congregation. 31. And this is the charge of their burden, according to all their service in the tabernacle of the congregation; the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and sockets thereof, 32. And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords, with all their instruments, and with all their service: and by name ye shall reckon the instruments of the charge of their burden. 33. This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service, in the tabernacle of the congregation, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 4:29. "Regarding the sons of Merari, you shall count them by their families, by their fathers' houses; you shall count them from thirty years of age and up to fifty: everyone who enters the service, to do the duties of the Tent of Meeting. 31. And this is the responsibility for their loads, for all their duties in the Tent of Meeting: the boards of the Tabernacle and its bars, its pillars and its sockets, 32. as well as the pillars of the surrounding court, their sockets, pegs and cords, with all their utensils, and all their service; and you shall assign to each man by name the articles he is to carry. 33. This is the service of the

families of the sons of Merari, according to their duties, in the Tent of Meeting, under the supervision of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest."

COMMENTARY

Unto the Merarites fell the heaviest of all the burdens of transport. It was a fitting assignment, since the tribe had a larger number of men in the 30-50 age bracket than did the Gershonites or the Kohathites—51% of their total count.

<u>Tribe</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Age 30-50</u>	<u>% of Tribe</u>
Kohath	8600	2750	32
Gershon	7500	2630	35
Merari	<u>6200</u>	<u>3200</u>	<u>51</u>
	22,300	8560	38

The Merarites were the nation's carpenters, and, under Ithamar's direction, they are to care for the structural framework of the Tent and the court. As with the Gershonites, the Merarites were provided with wagons to handle their burdens, (7:8).

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

- Review the instructions for making the boards of the Tabernacle and the court (Ex. 26:15-25); it will help you appreciate the extent of the Merarites' duties in moving to compute the running feet of lumber required!
- Study Ex. 27:19, with the ten preceding verses, to understand how the many pegs, cords and other accessories were used in the Tabernacle.

D. THE CENSUS OF THE PRIESTLY FAMILIES vv. 34-49

TEXT

Chapter 4:34. And Moses and Aaron and the chief of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites after their families, and after the house of their fathers, 35. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the

congregation: 36. And those that were numbered of them by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty. 37. These were they that were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, which Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses. 38. And those that were numbered of the sons of Gershon, throughout their families, and by the house of their fathers, 30. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation, 40. even those that were numbered of them, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers, were two thousand and six hundred and thirty. 41. These are they that were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, whom Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the Lord.

42. And those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers, 43. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation, 44. Even those that were numbered of them after their families, were three thousand and two hundred. 45. These be those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses. 46. All those that were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the chief of Israel numbered, after their families, and after the house of their fathers, 47. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that came to do the service of the ministry, and the service of the burden in the tabernacle of the congregation, 48. Even those that were numbered of them, were eight thousand and five hundred and fourscore. 49. According to the commandment of the Lord they were numbered by the hand of Moses, every one according to his service, and according to his burden: thus were they numbered of him, as the Lord commanded Moses.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 4:34. And Moses and Aaron and the princes of the congregation counted the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers' houses, 35. from thirty years of age up to fifty, everyone who entered the service for work in the Tent of Meeting. 36. And those who were counted of them by their families were 2,750. 37. These were the men counted from the Kohathite families, all who were serving in the Tent of Meeting, whom Moses and Aaron counted according to the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses. 38. And those who were counted of the sons of Gershon, by their families, and by the house of their fathers, from thirty years of age and up to fifty, everyone who enters into the service for work in the Tent of Meeting. 40. And those who were counted by them, by families, by their fathers' houses, were 2,630. 41. These are the men counted of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all who might do service in the Tent of Meeting, whom Moses and Aaron counted according to the commandment of the Lord.

42. And those who were counted of the families of the sons of Merari, by their families, by their fathers' houses, from thirty years old up to fifty, everyone who enters into the service, for work in the Tent of Meeting, even those who were counted of them by their families, were 3,200. 45. These are the men counted of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron counted, according to the word of the Lord, by the hand of Moses. 46. All of the men counted of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the princes of Israel counted, by their families and by their fathers' houses, from thirty years of age and up to fifty, everyone who came to do the work of serving and the work of carrying in the Tent of Meeting—48. those who were counted of them were 8,500. 49. They were counted by the hand of Moses according to the commandment of the Lord, everyone according to his service, and according to his burden; thus they were counted, as the Lord commanded Moses.

COMMENTARY

PC proposes that the numbering in this census is rounded out by tens rather than to show each individual. Further, it is said, the task of carrying all the items of the Tabernacle as listed would not have required such a large number of people; hence, the duties were also assigned by units of ten. It is also suggested that something has disturbed the relative numbers between the Merarites and the other families, with such an abnormally high percentage of those counted being between thirty and fifty years of age. In the ordinary situation, we might expect the age bracket to account for about one-fourth of the total population; the Merarites double this figure. We are given no explanation of the fact. The same source advances the possible thoughts that an abnormally high number of children of this tribe might have been slaughtered as infants in Egypt, or that they may suddenly have reduced the number of marriages. We can only speculate on the actual solution.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

92. Is the suggestion that the census here is computed by tens out of harmony with the totals from the other tribes?
93. What advantage would there be to tallying in this fashion?
94. What explanations might be offered for the unusually high percentage of Merarites between the ages of thirty and fifty?

VII. ASSORTED LAWS (5:1-6:27)

A. EJECTION OF THE UNCLEAN vv. 1-4

TEXT

Chapter 5:1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead: 3. Both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them: that they defile not their