NUMBERS

Chapter 4

*The Kohathites*

**The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: 2 “Take a census of the Kohathite branch of the Levites by their clans and families. 3 Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work in the Tent of Meeting. 4 “This is the work of the Kohathites in the Tent of Meeting: the care of the most holy things. 5 When the camp is to move, Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. 6 Then they are to cover this with hides of sea cows, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place. 7 “Over the table of the Presence they are to spread a blue cloth and put on it the plates, dishes and bowls, and the jars for drink offerings; the bread that is continually there is to remain on it. 8 Over these they are to spread a scarlet cloth, cover that with hides of sea cows and put its poles in place. 9 “They are to take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand that is for light, together with its lamps, its wick trimmers and trays, and all its jars for the oil used to supply it. 10 Then they are to wrap it and all its accessories in a covering of hides of sea cows and put it on a carrying frame. 11 “Over the gold altar they are to spread a blue cloth and cover that with hides of sea cows and put its poles in place. 12 “They are to take all the articles used for ministering in the sanctuary, wrap them in a blue cloth, cover that with hides of sea cows and put them on a carrying frame. 13 “They are to remove the ashes from the bronze altar and spread a purple cloth over it. 14 Then they are to place on it all the utensils used for ministering at the altar, including the firepans, meat forks, shovels and sprinkling bowls. Over it they are to spread a covering of hides of sea cows and put its poles in place. 15 “After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But they must not touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting. 16 “Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, is to have charge of the oil for the light, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering and the anointing oil. He is to be in charge of the entire tabernacle and everything in it, including its holy furnishings and articles.” 17 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 18 “See that the Kohathite tribal clans are not cut off from the Levites. 19 So that they may live and not die when they come near the most holy things, do this for them: Aaron and his sons are to go into the sanctuary and assign to each man his work and what he is to carry. 20 But the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die.”**

**4:2** *Kohath*. Clan of Moses and Aaron (cf Ex 6:16). (TLSB)

**4:3** *thirty to fifty years.* Ch. 3 listed all males over the age of one month (3:15). Ch. 4 lists those Levites who were of age to serve in the tabernacle. Of the 22,000 Levite males (3:39), 8,580 were of age for service (v. 48). From 8:24 we learn that the beginning age for service was 25; perhaps the first 5 years were something of an apprenticeship. (CSB)

Levites were eligible for “work in the tent of meeting” at age 25. They provided a different kind of service than those who had reached age 30. (TLSB)

**4:4–15** Precise descriptions of priestly and Levitical duties ensure good order and safety. Cf Lv 10:1–3. (TLSB)

**4:4** *most holy things.* Despite the fact that the primary care of these holy things was given to the Kohathites, they were forbidden to touch them (v. 15) or even to look at them (v. 20), on pain of death. All the work of the Kohathites was to be strictly supervised by Aaron and his sons, and only the priests were able to touch and look at the unveiled holy things. (CSB)

Kohathites had the most sacred assignment: carry “the sanctuary and all the furnishings” after Aaron and his sons “have finished covering” them (v 15). They were not to touch or even “to look on the holy things … lest they die” (v 20). (TLSB)

**4:6** *sea cows.* See NIV text note. (CSB)

**4:11** *golden altar*. The golden altar of incense (cf v 13). (TLSB)

**4:15** *not touch*. Objects were carefully wrapped; touch was regarded as the chief means of transferring uncleanness . (TLSB)

**4:16** *Eleazar … the priest, is to have charge.* The high priest could draw near to the most holy things on behalf of the people. If he had not been able to do so, there could have been no worship by the community. (CSB)

Eleazar would act as head of the Levites in caring for the most sacred vessels. This leadership role is confirmed for all of Aaron’s sons in vv 17–20. (TLSB)

**4:18** *Kohathites*. Directly supervised by “Eleazar the son of Aaron” (v 16). (TLSB)

*The Gershonites*

**21 The Lord said to Moses, 22 “Take a census also of the Gershonites by their families and clans. 23 Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting. 24 “This is the service of the Gershonite clans as they work and carry burdens: 25 They are to carry the curtains of the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, its covering and the outer covering of hides of sea cows, the curtains for the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, 26 the curtains of the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, the curtain for the entrance, the ropes and all the equipment used in its service. The Gershonites are to do all that needs to be done with these things. 27 All their service, whether carrying or doing other work, is to be done under the direction of Aaron and his sons. You shall assign to them as their responsibility all they are to carry. 28 This is the service of the Gershonite clans at the Tent of Meeting. Their duties are to be under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest.**

**4:22–28** Earlier, the Levites were exempt from the military census, but now they undergo a census for service at the tabernacle. (TLSB)

**4:28** *Ithamar*. Gershonites and sons of Merari were “under the direction of Ithamar,” another son of Aaron (v 33). (TLSB)

*The Merarites*

**29 “Count the Merarites by their clans and families. 30 Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting. 31 This is their duty as they perform service at the Tent of Meeting: to carry the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts and bases, 32 as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs, ropes, all their equipment and everything related to their use. Assign to each man the specific things he is to carry. 33 This is the service of the Merarite clans as they work at the Tent of Meeting under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest.”**

**4:29–33** Sons of Merari would carry the outer portions of the tent. (TLSB)

*The Numbering of the Levite Clans*

**34 Moses, Aaron and the leaders of the community counted the Kohathites by their clans and families. 35 All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work in the Tent of Meeting, 36 counted by clans, were 2,750. 37 This was the total of all those in the Kohathite clans who served in the Tent of Meeting. Moses and Aaron counted them according to the Lord’s command through Moses. 38 The Gershonites were counted by their clans and families. 39 All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting, 40 counted by their clans and families, were 2,630. 41 This was the total of those in the Gershonite clans who served at the Tent of Meeting. Moses and Aaron counted them according to the Lord’s command. 42 The Merarites were counted by their clans and families. 43 All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting, 44 counted by their clans, were 3,200. 45 This was the total of those in the Merarite clans. Moses and Aaron counted them according to the Lord’s command through Moses. 46 So Moses, Aaron and the leaders of Israel counted all the Levites by their clans and families. 47 All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to do the work of serving and carrying the Tent of Meeting 48 numbered 8,580. 49 At the Lord’s command through Moses, each was assigned his work and told what to carry. Thus they were counted, as the Lord commanded Moses.**

**4:34–49** Summary of the census data. (TLSB)

**Ch 4** The Lord calls the Levites to complete specific tasks. Great care is taken to protect items used in worship within the tent of meeting. Failure to respect items God had declared holy would result in immediate death (v 15). Today, God entrusts us with His Gospel message of reconciliation through His Son, Jesus Christ. That message must be kept undefiled (Gal 1:8) by proper training for ordained ministers of the Gospel (2Tm 2:2) and for all believers. Those whom the Lord calls, He also equips by grace. • Lord, send us Your Holy Spirit, that Your Word may always be preached in purity and truth among us. Amen. (TLSB)