

# NUMBERS

## Chapter 8

### *The Seven Lamps*

**Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to Aaron and say to him, When you set up the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand.” 3 And Aaron did so: he set up its lamps in front of the lampstand, as the LORD commanded Moses. 4 And this was the workmanship of the lampstand, hammered work of gold. From its base to its flowers, it was hammered work; according to the pattern that the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.**

**8:2** *in front of the lampstand.* The Holy Place in the tabernacle (see Ex 25:37; 26:33; 27:21). (CSB)

Last detail of tabernacle construction; more specific direction provided in Ex 25:31–40. Light was directed toward the table for the bread of the Presence (Ex 25:37). All provisions for the tabernacle’s proper use are completed, and Israel is now ready to move. (TLSB)

**8:1–4** No windows shed light into the Lord’s sanctuary, so these lampstands are truly a light shining in the darkness. For the priests serving in the Most Holy Place, the luminescence provides a poignant symbol that true light comes from the Lord alone. Today, we light candles to symbolize the Lord’s presence among us through His Word and Sacraments. God’s light is Jesus Christ (Jn 1:4), who conquers death and grants eternal life (Rm 6:23b). • Lord of heaven and earth, in the lampstand You provide a precious symbol of Your grace: salvation’s true light. Your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Cleansing of the Levites*

**5 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 6 “Take the Levites from among the people of Israel and cleanse them. 7 Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: sprinkle the water of purification upon them, and let them go with a razor over all their body, and wash their clothes and cleanse themselves. 8 Then let them take a bull from the herd and its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another bull from the herd for a sin offering. 9 And you shall bring the Levites before the tent of meeting and assemble the whole congregation of the people of Israel. 10 When you bring the Levites before the LORD, the people of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites, 11 and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the people of Israel, that they may do the service of the LORD. 12 Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, and you shall offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the LORD to make atonement for the Levites. 13 And you shall set the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and shall offer them as a wave offering to the LORD.**

**14 “Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the people of Israel, and the Levites shall be mine. 15 And after that the Levites shall go in to serve at the tent of meeting, when you have cleansed them and offered them as a wave offering. 16 For they are wholly given to me from among the people of Israel. Instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken them for myself. 17 For all the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, both of man and of beast. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated them for myself, 18 and I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel. 19 And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the people of Israel, to do the service for the people of Israel at the tent of meeting and to make atonement for the**

people of Israel, that there may be no plague among the people of Israel when the people of Israel come near the sanctuary.” 20 Thus did Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the people of Israel to the Levites. According to all that the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, the people of Israel did to them. 21 And the Levites purified themselves from sin and washed their clothes, and Aaron offered them as a wave offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them. 22 And after that the Levites went in to do their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron and his sons; as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.

**8:5–26** Describes the cleansing of the Levites and may be compared with the account of the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (Lev 8). The Levites are helpers to the priests, and the language describing their consecration is somewhat different from that of the priests. The priests were made holy, the Levites clean; the priests were anointed and washed, the Levites sprinkled; the priests were given new garments, the Levites washed theirs; blood was applied to the priests, it was waved over the Levites. (CSB)

**8:6** *from among the people.* Before the Levites began to carry out their assignments (chs 3–4), they were formally inducted into office (vv 5–19). The rites included ceremonial and physical purification (vv 7–8), the transfer of the people’s guilt to the Levites and from them to the sacrificial animals (vv 8–12), the dedication of the Levites as a “wave offering” (v 11). (TLSB)

**8:7** *go with a eazor over all their body.* Symbolic of the completeness of their cleansing, as in the case of the ritual cleansing of one cured of skin disease (Lev 14:8). (CSB)

Cleansing from parasites. (TLSB)

**8:10** *Israel shall lay their hands on them.* The Levites were substitutes for the nation; by laying hands on them, the other people of the nation were acknowledging this substitutionary act (see vv. 16–18). (CSB)

People’s sins were laid symbolically on the Levites as a substitutionary oblation (cf Lv 3:12–13). Levites in turn laid their hands on the heads of the bulls that were slain “to make atonement” (TLSB)

**8:11** *wave offering.* To perform this ritual, Aaron likely led them to the altar and then drew them back. Cf Lv 8:27. (TLSB)

**8:19** *I have given the Levites as gifts to Aaron and his sons.* The Levites were given to the Lord for his exclusive use (see v. 14). Now the Lord gives his Levites to the priests as their aides for the work of ministry in the tabernacle worship. (CSB)

*so that no plague will strike the Israelites.* The Levites were a protective hedge for the community against trespassing in the sacred precincts of the tabernacle (see note on 1:53). (CSB)

**8:20** *according to all that the LORD commanded Moses.* See vv. 4, 22; 1:54; 2:34; 3:16, 51; 4:49; 5:4; 9:5, 23. The implicit obedience of Moses and the Israelites to God’s commands in the areas of ritual and regimen stands in sharp contrast to the people’s complaints against the Lord’s loving character and to their breaches of faith that begin in ch. 11. (CSB)

*people of Israel did to them.* The Israelites apparently learned to follow the ritual laws, though they continued to offend the Lord in other ways. (TLSB)

**8:5–22** Israel’s sin is transferred to the Levites, who transfer this sin to sacrificial animals. Only by the blood of sacrificial animals are the Levites cleansed of their sin and allowed to serve the priests of the Most High God. “It is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Lv 17:11). At Calvary, Jesus redeemed all humans from sin (Heb 9:15) as foreshadowed in the OT sacrifices. Rejoice, for Christ’s sacrifice sets you free! • “Lamb of God, pure and holy, Who on the cross didst suffer, Ever patient and lowly, Thyself to scorn didst offer. All sins Thou borest for us, Else had despair reigned o’er us: Have mercy on us, O Jesus! O Jesus!” Amen. (LSB 434:1) (TLSB)

#### *Retirement of the Levites*

**23** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **24** “This applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall come to do duty in the service of the tent of meeting. **25** And from the age of fifty years they shall withdraw from the duty of the service and serve no more. **26** They minister to their brothers in the tent of meeting by keeping guard, but they shall do no service. Thus shall you do to the Levites in assigning their duties.”

**8:24** *twenty-five years old.* The age at which the Levites entered service was reduced to 20 by David (see 1Ch 23:24, 27), as the circumstances of their work had greatly changed by the time of the monarchy (see 1Ch 23:26). It is difficult to imagine a change in circumstances between 4:3 and this verse, however. Therefore the rabbinical suggestion that these two verses indicate a five-year period of apprenticeship seems reasonable. (CSB)

Scholars believe that older Levites taught the men from ages 25 to 30 as apprentices until they learned their tasks. (TLSB)

**8:25** *fifty years they shall withdraw.* Retirement, due to the physical labor of caring for and moving the parts of the tabernacle. Priests could serve longer (e.g., Zechariah, Lk 1:5–7). (TLSB)

**8:26** *They minister to their brothers.* After a Levite had reached the mandatory retirement age of 50 (see v. 25), he was still free to assist his younger co-workers (perhaps at festivals), but he was no longer to do the difficult work he had done in his prime. (CSB)

**8:23–26** Our God is a God of order. He gives an age requirement for performing the work in His tabernacle. A Levite could begin service at age 25. Once a Levite reached 50, he could assist younger Levites, but he could no longer do the work required at the tabernacle. Just as the Lord provided the Sabbath for His people’s rest, He provided for the Levites’ retirement in good health. Today, the Church should show appropriate care for the health of faithful church workers, for the Lord bears the burdens of us all and carries us through life unto life everlasting. • “Entrust your days and burdens To God’s most loving hand; He cares for you while ruling The sky, the sea, the land. For He who guides the tempests Along their thund’rous ways Will find for you a pathway And guide you all your days.” Amen. (LSB754:1) (TLSB)