

NUMBERS

Chapter 8

Setting up the Lamps

The LORD said to Moses, ² “Speak to Aaron and say to him, ‘When you set up the seven lamps, they are to light the area in front of the lampstand.’ ” ³ Aaron did so; he set up the lamps so that they faced forward on the lampstand, just as the LORD commanded Moses. ⁴ This is how the lampstand was made: It was made of hammered gold—from its base to its blossoms. The lampstand was made exactly like the pattern the LORD had shown Moses.

8:2 *area 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)

The Setting Apart of the Levites

⁵ The LORD said to Moses: ⁶ “Take the Levites from among the other Israelites and make them ceremonially clean. ⁷ To purify them, do this: Sprinkle the water of cleansing on them; then have them shave their whole bodies and wash their clothes, and so purify themselves. ⁸ Have them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil; then you are to take a second young bull for a sin offering. ⁹ Bring the Levites to the front of the Tent of Meeting and assemble the whole Israelite community. ¹⁰ You are to bring the Levites before the LORD, and the Israelites are to lay their hands on them. ¹¹ Aaron is to present the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the Israelites, so that they may be ready to do the work of the LORD. ¹² “After the Levites lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, use the one for a sin offering to the LORD and the other for a burnt offering, to make atonement for the Levites. ¹³ Have the Levites stand in front of Aaron and his sons and then present them as a wave offering to the LORD. ¹⁴ In this way you are to set the Levites apart from the other Israelites, and the Levites will be mine. ¹⁵ “After you have purified the Levites and presented them as a wave offering, they are to come to do their work at the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁶ They are the

Israelites who are to be given wholly to me. I have taken them as my own in place of the firstborn, the first male offspring from every Israelite woman. ¹⁷ Every firstborn male in Israel, whether man or animal, is mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set them apart for myself. ¹⁸ And I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn sons in Israel. ¹⁹ Of all the Israelites, I have given the Levites as gifts to Aaron and his sons to do the work at the Tent of Meeting on behalf of the Israelites and to make atonement for them so that no plague will strike the Israelites when they go near the sanctuary.” ²⁰ Moses, Aaron and the whole Israelite community did with the Levites just as the LORD commanded Moses. ²¹ The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes. Then Aaron presented them as a wave offering before the LORD and made atonement for them to purify them. ²² After that, the Levites came to do their work at the Tent of Meeting under the supervision of Aaron and his sons. They did with the Levites just as the LORD commanded Moses. ²³ The LORD said to Moses, ²⁴ “This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the Tent of Meeting, ²⁵ but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. ²⁶ They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the Tent of Meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites.”

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 *shave their whole bodies.* 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 *Israelites are to 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)

8:16 *to me*. See note on 3:9. (CSB)

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 *as 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)

8:24 *twenty-five years old*. See note on 4:3. 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 may assist*. 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)