

Message Three

**The Service of the Priests and the Levites
for God's Move**

Scripture Reading: Num. 3:1-39; 4:1-33

I. Numbers is a book of service, and chapters 3 and 4 cover the holy service:

- A. In Numbers we have a full type of the church service; the service in Numbers is a picture of the church service—3:1-39; 4:1-33; Rom. 12:5-8, 11.
- B. The service is holy because it takes care of the Tabernacle of the Testimony of God—Num. 3:7-8; 4:4-16.
- C. The basic principle of the holy service is that it is without confusion because it is based on life; everything in the holy service is under the divine administration, and thus it is in good order—3:7.

II. The holy service was carried out by the priests and the Levites—vv. 3, 6, 9-10:

- A. The priests were the anointed ones who served God directly—v. 3:
 - 1. The priests were to camp before the tabernacle, on the east, toward the sunrise; they guarded the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and anyone who wanted to serve God had to pass through the priests—v. 38.
 - 2. The priests were to keep the charge of the sanctuary, the tabernacle with the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies—vv. 32, 38:
 - a. The word *charge* refers to responsibility—vv. 7, 32, 38.
 - b. For the priests to keep the charge of the sanctuary meant that they were responsible for the entire sanctuary and everything related to it.
- B. The Levites were not priests directly but were the serving ones of the priesthood—vv. 9, 12, 17:
 - 1. In the priesthood, the ministry of the priests, there were many business affairs that required the service of the Levites—vv. 25-37.
 - 2. The service of the Levites was to take care of the Tent of Meeting—the Tabernacle of the Testimony—which is a type of Christ and the church—18:1-4, 6:

CRYSTALLIZATION-STUDY OUTLINES

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- a. In taking care of the tabernacle and its contents, the Levites did not serve God directly; rather, they served the priesthood and the priests, who served God directly—3:9, 12, 17.
- b. The priests were to keep the charge of the sanctuary and the altar, and the Levites served under the priests in caring for the sanctuary and the altar—18:5-6.
- C. The Tabernacle of the Testimony with all its furnishings and the altar, to which the priests ministered, are types of Christ in all His rich aspects, whom the New Testament believers minister to others—3:25-26, 31, 36-37; Eph. 3:8; 2 Cor. 3:3; 1 Tim. 4:6:
 1. The altar, signifying the cross (Heb. 13:10), refers to Christ's redemption, and the tabernacle refers to Christ as the embodiment of God (Col. 2:9), through whom God dwells among men (John 1:14) and through whom men can enter into God to enjoy all that He is (14:2, 6, 20).
 2. The ministry of the priests and the Levites always supplies people with the riches of Christ—Eph. 3:8:
 - a. To minister is to serve, and to serve is to supply people by ministering to them—2 Cor. 4:1; 3:3, 6, 8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11.
 - b. The New Testament believers serve others the cross of Christ for redemption (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2) and the riches of Christ for the life supply (Eph. 3:8; Col. 1:27-28).

III. The holy service portrayed in Numbers is not for a Christ who is inactive but for a Christ who is very active; in His activity, in His move, we must match Him—4:1-33:

- A. The priests and the Levites had certain duties in the tabernacle's setting out, in its going forward:
 1. The priests appointed the Levites to do their service—vv. 19, 27-28, 33:
 - a. The Levites did their service not according to their way but under the direction of the anointed priests.
 - b. This indicates that we, the New Testament priests serving God, should not act according to our own idea but under the direction of the anointed view, that is, under the direction of the Spirit who anoints us—3:3; Exo. 28:41.

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2. The priests took care of the primary things, the important things, and the Kohathites (Levites) took care of some of the secondary things—Num. 4:5-14:
 - a. To take care of the furnishings of the sanctuary is to take care of the primary things.
 - b. The priests took care of the Ark; this is to take care of Christ directly and to minister Christ—vv. 5-6.
 - c. The Kohathites carried the furnishings of the sanctuary (vv. 2-4, 15, 17-20, 34-37); to do this today is to speak concerning the church as the expansion of Christ.
 - B. In order to see how Christ moves on earth, we should look at the move of the tabernacle—vv. 5, 25, 31-32:
 1. The tabernacle moved on the shoulders of the descendants of the three sons of Levi—Josh. 3:11, 13-15, 17.
 2. The Lord moves through our bearing the Ark, the furnishings of the sanctuary, and the Tent of Meeting—vv. 3, 11, 13-15.
 - C. The principle in God's New Testament economy is that God needs man to match Him in His move on earth—Matt. 28:18-20:
 1. Without man, God can do nothing; in His New Testament economy, God does nothing without man—Acts 1:8; 13:1-3.
 2. God must have man to match Him, to be one with Him, to coordinate with Him; this is the basic principle of God's New Testament economy—Ezek. 1:15-21; 1 Cor. 6:17.
 3. Christ is moving today throughout the earth, and He is moving with those who are one with Him—Acts 1:8; John 15:4-5, 16:
 - a. We are today's sons of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.
 - b. Christ, the embodiment of God for His expansion, moves through those who love Him—S. S. 7:11-12; Rev. 2:4-5.
- IV. In the Old Testament there was a distinction between the priests and the Levites; in the New Testament there is only one class, that of the priests—Rom. 15:16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10:**
- A. In addition to carrying out their own duties in the setting out of the tabernacle, the priests appointed the Levites to do their service—Num. 4:5-14, 19, 27-28, 33.

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- B. What the Levites did in the Old Testament in type, the believers as the New Testament priests should also do in reality—1 Pet. 2:5, 9:
 - 1. The fact that the service of the Levites was under the supervision of the priests indicates that when the New Testament priests do the outward Levitical work, they must do it under the supervision of the inward, spiritual view of the New Testament priesthood—Rev. 1:6; 5:10.
 - 2. The Levitical service should never be separated from the priestly view; the outward service must become a spiritual activity that ministers life to others—Rom. 12:4-13; 15:16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; 4:10-11.
 - 3. We need to learn to do outward things under the inward view of the priesthood.
 - 4. While we are taking care of outward, practical matters, we should be ministering life to others; if we do this, our Levitical service is under the view and supervision of the priesthood—1 John 1:2-3; 2:25; 5:11-16.
 - C. When a person serves God, there needs to be both the priestly work and the Levitical work—Rom. 1:9; 15:16:
 - 1. On the one hand, we partake of the spiritual service; on the other hand, we should also take care of the practical affairs.
 - 2. Before any kind of service, we must first serve as priests in the Lord's presence; all service must be priestly.
- V. In Hebrew the word *service* in Numbers 4:3, 23, 30, 35, 39, and 43 is *warfare*, indicating military service:**
- A. The holy service of the priests and the Levites involved warfare.
 - B. As priests of the gospel of God, we should consider ourselves warriors—Rom. 15:16:
 - 1. While we are preaching, teaching, edifying others, and building up the Body of Christ, we are fighting—Eph. 3:8; 4:12, 16; 6:10-12.
 - 2. The New Testament priests are warriors, and our priestly service is a fighting—Rev. 5:10; 19:11-14.
 - C. All the spiritual work that we are doing for God, whatever form it may take, as long as it touches the things of the spiritual realm, is in nature a warfare—2 Cor. 10:3-5:

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1. Preaching the gospel, edifying the saints, administrating the church, and praying are all a kind of warfare—Eph. 1:17-18; 3:8, 14-19; 4:12; 6:10-12.
2. If our eyes have been opened by the Lord, we will see that the nature of our work in serving the Lord is that of warfare.

VI. A reward, or compensation, was given to Aaron and his sons as the priests and to the serving Levites—Num. 18:8-32:

- A. The priests and the Levites had no portion other than Christ; Christ was their house, inheritance, land, clothing, food, and everything—v. 31.
- B. Today, in the New Testament, the Levitical service is combined with the priesthood—1 Pet. 2:5, 9:
 1. There is no difference between the priests and the servants of the priests; the believers in Christ are both the priests and the serving Levites.
 2. The only reward, the only compensation, for our priestly and Levitical service is Christ—Matt. 25:23; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 3:20-21.