

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Numbers 4:1-8

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we're going to read Numbers chapter 4. Today we'll read verses 1-8.

The Israelites followed the guidance of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire throughout their journey in the wilderness. Whenever the pillar of cloud or the pillar of fire came to rest, the Israelites would set up camp. Numbers 3 reveals the camping arrangement of the three major clans within the tribe of Levi, their positions around the tabernacle, and the specific responsibilities assigned to each clan in serving within the tabernacle. Whenever the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire moved forward, the Israelites would break camp and follow.

This chapter reveals how the Levites were to divide their responsibilities in taking down and transporting the tabernacle. In particular, it describes the sacred furnishings and utensils that the priests had to handle during their ministry of worship. These holy objects typified God's holiness, righteousness, and glory. Ordinary Israelites were not only forbidden to touch them—they were not even permitted to look upon them. Therefore, God established many detailed regulations through Moses. The Levites were required to observe them with the utmost care; otherwise, if they violated God's glory, holiness, or righteousness, they would be struck dead.

What do these detailed regulations have to do with us as the New Testament church? The church also has its times of "encamping" and its times of "setting out." Following the practice of the early church, every Lord's Day we break bread and drink the cup in worship and remembrance of the Lord. This is our encamping. At the same time, we obey the Great Commission entrusted to us by Christ by preaching the gospel to those around us and bringing people into the church life.

As the number of believers increases, we must begin to establish new congregations. This is our setting out.

How should we divide our responsibilities, fulfill our ministries, and uphold God's requirements of holiness, righteousness, and glory as we set out? We must learn from this chapter. Too often, when the church moves forward, it is filled with human considerations and plans, while forgetting that God's testimony is the very purpose and value of the church's existence. As a result, the church loses God's blessing. May we all learn from this chapter how to move forward according to God's heart.

Verses 1–3: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 'Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.'"

Whenever Israel set out in the wilderness, the tabernacle first had to be dismantled, covered, and then transported. The tribe of Levi had been set apart to serve God. As they ministered in the tabernacle, each clan was entrusted with the care of specific furnishings. When it was time to journey, each clan was responsible for carrying the items committed to its care.

God first instructed Moses and Aaron to begin with the clan of Kohath. They were to number the men of this clan, according to their families, from thirty to fifty years of age—those who were qualified to serve in the work of the tabernacle.

Notice that whenever God establishes a ministry, He always begins with the people who will carry it out. Without workers, there can be no work. This is a principle we must remember. The same is true in the church today. Whenever a new ministry is to be launched, the first question should be: Who will take responsibility for it?

Therefore, one of the church's most important responsibilities is to help the saints grow in life and, through participation in service, discover the spiritual gifts God has

given them. As these gifts are developed and perfected, they become able to rise up and take responsibility for the work.

Among the Kohathites, only those between thirty and fifty years of age were permitted to serve in the tabernacle. In Numbers 3, when the Levites were numbered according to their camping arrangement, every male from one month old and above was counted, with no upper age limit. Every Levite was included, showing that those who serve God remain under His care and protection throughout their entire lives.

However, in order to minister within the tabernacle, a Levite had to reach the age of thirty. This signifies that a certain measure of spiritual maturity is required before one can bear responsibility in God's service. Both priests and Levites began their ministry at thirty years of age. In the New Testament, John the Baptist also began his ministry at the age of thirty. Even the Son of God, Jesus Christ, began His public ministry when He was about thirty years old, in order to fulfill all righteous requirements under the law.

The Levites who served in the tabernacle also had an upper age limit of fifty. During these years of greatest physical strength, they were able to carry out the demanding work of dismantling and transporting the tabernacle. After the age of fifty, they were to retire from these duties. Since the Levites served under the supervision of the priests and performed labor-intensive tasks involving the disassembly and transportation of the tabernacle, God graciously allowed them to rest as they grew older. The priesthood, however, had no such age limit.

This stands in contrast to Numbers 1 and 2, where the men of the twelve tribes who were numbered for military service had to be at least twenty years old, but there was no upper age limit. Caleb was still able to fight courageously at eighty-five years of age, declaring: "As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me... just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in." (Joshua 14:11)

This distinction also reminds us that service in the tabernacle demanded an even greater degree of reverence and carefulness, especially lest anyone violate God's

righteousness, holiness, or glory. May we likewise learn that whatever we do in the church—whether preparing meals, cleaning the meeting place, or arranging tables and chairs—we should perform every task with a heart that fears God.

Verse 4: "This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things."

Among the three major clans of the tribe of Levi, the Kohathites bore the greatest responsibility because they were entrusted with transporting the most holy things. These included the Ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place, the Table of the Showbread, the Golden Lampstand, the Golden Incense Altar in the Holy Place, and the bronze altar in the outer court.

These most holy objects symbolized God's righteousness, holiness, and glory. They could tolerate no defilement whatsoever. Anyone who violated God's command concerning them would be struck dead immediately. For this reason, Aaron and his sons were required to supervise the entire process with the greatest care and to cover these sacred objects before they were moved.

The priests themselves were descendants of Amram, a family within the clan of Kohath. Therefore, it was most fitting that the sons of Kohath should be the ones entrusted with carrying these most holy things.

From verses 5 through 14, God gave Moses and Aaron detailed instructions regarding the handling of these sacred objects. Although the commands were spoken to Moses and Aaron, they were actually directed to the priests. Aaron and his sons first had to wrap and cover each of the most holy furnishings before the sons of Kohath could begin transporting them.

The same principle applies in the church today. There is both the ministry of the priests and the ministry of the Levites. Priestly ministry is directly related to God Himself, while the ministry of the Levites is largely concerned with practical service. The service of the Levites must always be carried out under the oversight of the

priests. This is because the church is centered on God. Worshiping God is far more important than any other activity. Practical service must never overshadow spiritual ministry; rather, it must always remain under the guidance and administration of the priestly ministry.

Verses 5–6: "When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles."

The Ark in the Most Holy Place is also called the Ark of the Testimony. According to the Hebrew text, this is the most literal rendering of its name. It reveals that the very essence of the Ark is God's testimony. The Ark was the holiest object in the entire tabernacle. Under the Old Testament, the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to come before the Ark and meet with God at the mercy seat.

Therefore, before the camp set out, the handling of this most holy Ark was the most critical task. God's instructions were exceedingly precise. Aaron and his sons were first to remove the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place and use it to cover the Ark. Standing behind the veil, they were to carry it forward and place it directly over the Ark. The cherubim above the Ark represented God's glory. No one was permitted either to gaze upon them directly or to touch them.

We know that the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place measured ten cubits by ten cubits. The Ark itself measured two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. Even including the height of the cherubim, it would likely have been no more than five cubits high. Therefore, covering the Ark with the veil would not have been especially difficult. The veil itself, woven of fine linen with blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and embroidered with cherubim, must have been remarkably beautiful.

After the veil had been placed over the Ark, it was to be covered with badger skins. These skins were coarse, dark gray in appearance, and durable enough to withstand the harsh conditions of the wilderness—scorching sun, fierce winds, and rain. Over the badger skins, the priests were then to spread a cloth entirely of blue. Blue signifies that which is heavenly. Among all the furnishings of the tabernacle, the Ark alone had a colored outer covering during transportation. Every other item had the functional covering of badger skins on the outside. Only the Ark displayed the heavenly blue cloth as its outermost layer.

Consequently, whenever Israel journeyed through the wilderness, the Ark was the most conspicuous object. On the one hand, it warned the Israelites not to approach too closely, lest they violate God's righteousness, holiness, and glory. On the other hand, it could be seen from afar, serving as the center of Israel's movement and the focus of their hope.

Typologically, Christ is God's Testimony. This testimony is concealed beneath three coverings. The innermost covering, the veil, represents Christ's perfect humanity. The second covering, the badger skins, represents Christ's outward appearance, which possessed "no form or comeliness" in the eyes of men. During His earthly ministry, Christ was the sinless Lamb of God. Though His humanity was perfect within, His outward appearance was ordinary and unassuming. This was all according to God's plan of redemption. The outermost covering, the blue cloth, represents the resurrected and ascended Christ. He is now heavenly, seated at the right hand of the Father's throne.

After the Ark had been covered with these three layers, its poles were to be inserted so that the sons of Kohath could carry it. In Exodus 25:13–15, God commanded: "And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them. The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it." God's command was that the poles were to remain permanently in the rings of the Ark and were never to be removed.

Therefore, when Numbers says that they were to "insert its poles," it most likely means that openings were intentionally left in the badger-skin covering and the blue cloth so that the poles could pass through. Logically, after all the coverings had been arranged, they would also have been secured with cords to prevent the wind from uncovering them during the journey and exposing the glory concealed within.

Verses 7–8: "On the table of showbread they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and the showbread shall be on it. They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles."

Within the Holy Place were three sacred furnishings. The first one mentioned here is the Table of the Showbread, together with the various utensils used in preparing and presenting the bread, including the dishes, pans, bowls, and pitchers for the drink offerings. The priests were first to spread a blue cloth over the table and then place all these utensils upon it.

One particularly remarkable detail is that the twelve loaves of the showbread were to remain on the table. In Exodus 25:30, God commanded: "And you shall set the showbread on the table before Me always." God required that the twelve loaves continually remain before Him on the table. Even while the table was being transported, the bread was not to be removed.

The regulations concerning the showbread are given in Leviticus 24:5–9. Twelve unleavened loaves were to be baked from fine flour. Every Sabbath they were to be arranged in two rows, six loaves in each row, with pure frankincense placed upon them. On the following Sabbath, the old bread was to be replaced with fresh bread, and the frankincense was to be burned as an offering made by fire to the LORD. The old bread, being most holy, was to be eaten by the priests in the holy place. This was to be a perpetual statute. Even during the transportation of the tabernacle, this ordinance remained unchanged.

Typologically, the showbread represents the Word of God, the bread of life that God supplies to His people. By feeding upon the Lord's Word, believers grow in life and maintain fellowship with God. The Lord Jesus said in John 6:51, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." Later He also declared in John 6:63, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." As we enjoy the Lord through His Word, our spiritual life grows and our fellowship with God is sustained. This intimate relationship must never be interrupted—not even during periods of transition, symbolized by the moving of the tabernacle.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must develop the habit of reading the Scriptures every day, just as faithfully as we eat our daily meals. No matter how busy we become or what unusual circumstances we face, we still make time to eat. In the same way, let us never forget that in addition to physical food, we also need spiritual nourishment. This is an essential requirement for living a sanctified life.

When the camp prepared to journey, Aaron and his sons first spread the blue cloth over the table. They placed the showbread and all the utensils upon it, and then covered them with a scarlet cloth. Thus, the showbread and the utensils were enclosed between the blue cloth beneath and the scarlet cloth above. Blue signifies the heavenly nature, while scarlet points to redemption.

Typologically, in order for Christ to become the Bread of Life to us, He had to pass through death and resurrection. The scarlet covering reminds us of His redeeming blood, while the heavenly blue signifies the divine life within. Under the covering of His precious blood, we are able to partake of His life.

As the Lord Jesus said in John 7:39, "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." This points to the necessity of Christ's death, resurrection, and glorification before we could receive the Holy Spirit and partake of the heavenly Bread of Life.

Outside the scarlet cloth, the priests were to place a covering of badger skins so that the table would be protected from the blazing sun, the wind, and the rain

during the wilderness journey. Finally, the poles were inserted so that the sons of Kohath could carry the Table of the Showbread.

Dear brothers and sisters, whenever the tabernacle set out, the priests themselves had to handle its most important furnishings. We have now considered the Ark of the Testimony and the Table of the Showbread. God gave very careful instructions concerning how these sacred objects were to be handled because His righteousness, holiness, and glory had to be preserved.

What a privilege it is for us to serve in the church today! Yet we must always remember to serve with a heart that fears God. We must never allow God's righteousness, holiness, or glory to be dishonored, for such failure brings loss to the church. The church is God's testimony, just as the Ark was. The church is also the place where heavenly bread is supplied, just as the Table of the Showbread continually provided bread before the Lord.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You for giving us such a precious portion of Your Word. The tabernacle is a type of the church today, and at the very center of the church is Your testimony. The church's most fundamental responsibility is to supply the Bread of Life so that the saints may grow in life and express Your testimony in their daily living. We pray that You would bless the church to which we belong. Keep us from departing from Your central purpose, and lead us to remain faithful to Your will in all that we do. We pray in the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ.