

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

Numbers 4: 17-28

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 are going to read Numbers Chapter 4 and today we will read verses 17 to 28.

Whenever the Tabernacle set out, Aaron and his sons were first required to carefully cover and wrap the most holy objects of the Tabernacle according to God's instructions. They began with the Ark of the Covenant, followed in order by the table of the showbread, the golden lampstand, the golden altar of incense, and finally the bronze altar in the outer court. Only after these sacred objects had been properly covered and wrapped were the descendants of Kohath permitted to carry them. The Kohathites were not allowed to touch the holy objects directly. They had to transport them under the supervision of the priest Eleazar and in complete obedience to the priests' instructions, lest they die. In addition to these responsibilities, the valuable materials required for the ministry of the sanctuary—such as the anointing oil, the incense, the grain offering, and the oil for the lamps—were all placed under Eleazar's personal care and supervision.

Verse 17-18: “Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: “Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites.”

We know that the priesthood came from the family of Aaron, and Aaron himself belonged to the clan of Kohath. Therefore, it was entirely fitting for the descendants of Kohath to work together with the priests from Aaron's family in transporting the most holy objects of the Tabernacle. Because the Kohathites fulfilled such a vital role in carrying the holy furnishings, God gave this solemn command: the Kohathites were not to be cut off from among the Levites.

On the one hand, God gave this careful instruction so that the Israelites under the Old Covenant would faithfully carry out His ordained order, ultimately preparing the way for the coming of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, this command also provides great encouragement and protection for those who serve in the church today.

We must recognize that the healthy functioning of every church depends not only on spiritual ministries but also on faithful practical service. Preparing the bread and the cup for Communion, preparing meals, serving in audio and visual ministries, maintaining the cleanliness of the facilities, and many other forms of practical service are all indispensable. Although these ministries often go unnoticed by people, they are always remembered by God. The church is not sustained by spiritual ministry alone. It also requires healthy, faithful practical service working alongside it. Only through this partnership can the church effectively bear witness to Jesus Christ wherever it is established.

Verse 19: “But do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task.”

God once again reminded Moses and Aaron that they must warn the descendants of Kohath to be careful in their service. They were not to act carelessly or according to their own judgment. Whatever they were to do and whatever they were to carry had to be done strictly according to the instructions of Aaron and his sons. Only the priests were permitted to handle the holy objects directly. After the priests had covered and wrapped the sacred furnishings, they would instruct the Kohathites what they were to do, and the Kohathites were to do exactly as they were told. The priests followed this procedure so that the Kohathites might live and not die. To be entrusted with carrying the holy objects was a great honor, but it also involved great danger. There could be no carelessness or deviation from God's instructions; otherwise, death would immediately result.

Dear brothers and sisters, we should have the same attitude in our service within the church today. When brothers serve the bread and the cup at the Lord's Table,

they should do so with a reverent fear of God and with sincere self-examination, asking whether there is any unconfessed sin that must first be dealt with before serving. Only those who come before God with clean hands and a pure heart can serve Him in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. If we become careless in our service or neglect to examine ourselves, it will result in spiritual death—that is, our spiritual life will cease to grow and become stagnant.

Verse 20: “But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die.”

Here we see that the descendants of Kohath were not only forbidden to handle the holy objects themselves and required to obey the priests' instructions; they were not even permitted to enter the Holy Place to watch while the priests were covering the sacred objects. God's command here is remarkably specific. They were not allowed to look, not even for a moment. The warning is vivid and unmistakable: they were not to take even a single glance. When it comes to holy and spiritual matters, we are often curious. We want to look, to touch, and to explore. But God warns us here not to be driven by curiosity. Instead, we are to obey His Word. As for the things we do not yet understand, when the proper time comes, God Himself will reveal them to us.

Along the spiritual journey, the things we are permitted to see, touch, and experience are only those for which God has prepared us. When we are ready, He will reveal them to us and entrust us with greater responsibility. Before that time, however, curiosity is dangerous. If we see spiritual realities before our spiritual life is mature enough to bear them, it does us no good; instead, it can lead to spiritual death. Therefore, what we should devote ourselves to is preparing our hearts. By feeding daily on the Lord's Word, our spiritual life grows. By learning to serve in the church, our spiritual gifts are developed and refined. When we are fully prepared, God's call will come. Then we will be able to see, touch, and experience these spiritual realities because we are ready to bear the responsibility that comes with them.

After instructing the descendants of Kohath concerning their duties, God then turned to the responsibilities of the descendants of Gershon, as recorded in Numbers 4:21–28.

Verse 21-23: “Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “Also take a census of the sons of Gershon, by their fathers’ house, by their families. From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, all who enter to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.”

God instructed Moses to take a census of the descendants of Gershon. Every man between thirty and fifty years of age who was qualified to serve in the work of the Tabernacle was to be counted according to his clan and family. Each man's name was to be recorded individually, and the total number carefully calculated—not one more and not one less. As recorded in Numbers 3:21–26, when the Israelites were encamped, the descendants of Gershon were assigned responsibility for specific parts of the Tabernacle. These were the very same items that the Gershonites were entrusted to carry whenever the Tabernacle was moved.

Verse 24-25: “This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and carrying: They shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tabernacle of meeting with its covering, the covering of badger skins that is on it, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting.”

God instructed Moses that the descendants of Gershon were responsible for serving in the Tabernacle by handling and transporting all of its fabric and flexible components. The description begins with the Tabernacle itself, specifically its four layers of coverings: the innermost beautifully woven layer, followed by the layer made of goat's hair, then the layer of ram skins dyed red, and finally the outer layer of durable badger skins, together with the entrance curtain to the Holy Place. We know that the Tabernacle measured 30 cubits long, 10 cubits wide, and 10 cubits high, so these coverings and curtains were all of considerable size.

For example, according to Exodus 26:7–9, the layer woven from goat's hair measured 30 cubits by 44 cubits. In today's measurements, that is approximately 45 feet by 66 feet, making it an enormous piece of fabric. Covering it were the ram skins dyed red and the outer layer of badger skins, which made the overall coverings even larger. Altogether, these four layers were both bulky and heavy, making them difficult to transport.

Therefore, Numbers 7:7 records, "Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service." In other words, the descendants of Gershon were provided with two carts and four oxen to carry these heavy materials. The outer two coverings, made from animal skins, were rugged and durable. They could withstand repeated dismantling, transportation, and reassembly without wearing out easily. The innermost curtain, however, was exquisitely crafted and highly decorative. Because it was repeatedly taken down and set up, it was much more susceptible to wear and tear. The descendants of Gershon were therefore also responsible for repairing and maintaining it. Skilled craftsmen had to arise from among them—men proficient in sewing and mending—so that they could faithfully fulfill the ministry entrusted to the Gershonites.

Verse 26: “The screen for the door of the gate of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and altar, and their cords, all the furnishings for their service and all that is made for these things: so shall they serve.”

God also assigned the curtains surrounding the outer courtyard and the entrance screen to the descendants of Gershon, since these too were made of fine linen and were soft materials. The curtains on the south and north sides were each 100 cubits long and 5 cubits high. In modern measurements, this is approximately 150 feet by 7.5 feet, making them enormous linen curtains. As a result, these items were not only heavy but also easily subject to wear and tear, requiring frequent repairs.

The entrance screen was 20 cubits wide and 5 cubits high. It was beautifully woven with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, together with fine linen, and embroidered with

exquisite craftsmanship. Since this screen hung at the entrance to the courtyard, it was constantly exposed to the sun, wind, and rain, making regular repairs likely necessary. Therefore, among the descendants of Gershon there also had to be highly skilled embroiderers and tailors in order to faithfully carry out their responsibilities. Thus, within the Gershonites, some had to undertake the demanding work of transporting these heavy materials, while others needed to be skilled craftsmen capable of repairing and preserving these beautifully made furnishings.

Verse 27: “Aaron and his sons shall assign all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, all their tasks and all their service. And you shall appoint to them all their tasks as their duty.”

If we compare this with the sacred objects carried by the descendants of Kohath, we see that God did not repeatedly emphasize the warnings not to look at or touch these items, nor did He require the priests to cover them before the Gershonites handled them. Instead, the descendants of Gershon were to directly dismantle, transport, and care for these furnishings under the direction and supervision of the priests. Because of their weight, the Gershonites were permitted to transport these items on ox carts. This was unlike the descendants of Kohath, whose assigned objects could never be carried on carts but had to be borne on their shoulders. Nor did the Gershonites have to serve with the same constant sense of fear and trembling as the Kohathites, who had to be continually on guard lest a moment of carelessness violate God's holiness and bring about their immediate death. In comparison, the service entrusted to the Gershonites allowed for a greater degree of freedom.

Verse 28: “This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting. And their duties shall be under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.”

Here we see how carefully and precisely God assigned the work. The service of the Levites was to be carried out under the oversight of the priests. The responsibilities of the Gershonites were placed under the supervision of Ithamar, Aaron's youngest son.

Dear brothers and sisters, this reveals an important spiritual principle. When we serve in the church, we must know who our spiritual covering is. Many forms of practical service require specialized expertise. For example, those serving in the church's financial ministry must comply with the laws and regulations of the local government. Therefore, the brothers and sisters involved in this ministry need the appropriate professional knowledge in order to carry out their responsibilities faithfully.

However, beyond professional competence, they also need spiritual covering. The ultimate purpose of financial ministry is to edify the saints and help the church become a testimony of Jesus Christ, and that testimony is entrusted to the priests. In the same way that the service of the Gershonites was overseen by Ithamar, every ministry in the church should be under the spiritual covering of the elders who fulfill the priestly function.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You for leading us through the Book of Numbers. Through it, You have shown us that there is the service of the Kohathites and the service of the Gershonites, and that all the ministries of the Levites must be carried out under the covering of the priests. Those responsibilities that directly involve Your righteousness, holiness, and glory must first be entrusted to the priests before being carried out by the Levites. We should not be curious about matters that You have not entrusted to us, nor should we cross the spiritual boundaries that You have established. Even when we are engaged in the service of the Gershonites, we still need the covering of the priest Ithamar.

Help us to see that every ministry in the church has one purpose: to build up the church so that it may become a beautiful testimony of Christ. Therefore, keep us from serving carelessly. Teach us to seek the spiritual covering You have provided, lest our ignorance or negligence lead to spiritual death. Bless every area of my

service in the church, that it may be in accordance with Your holiness, righteousness, and glory, and that it may be pleasing in Your sight. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!