

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

Numbers 4: 29-37

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 4. Today we read from verse 29 to verse 37.

God instructed Moses very carefully and explicitly concerning how the Levites were to perform the work of the tabernacle. The three families within the tribe of Levi each had a clearly defined division of labor: the Kohathites carried the most holy objects. These objects first had to be covered and wrapped by the priests, and then the priests would instruct the Kohathites to carry them. The Kohathites had to carry these objects personally; they could not use animals to transport them. During the process of carrying them, they had to be careful and cautious. They could neither look at nor touch these holy objects, lest they offend God's holiness and be struck dead. Therefore, the Kohathites had to carry these holy objects under the supervision of Eleazar the priest.

If the objects carried by the Kohathites were the most central objects, like the human heart, then the Gershonites carried the exterior of the tabernacle, like human skin. These were objects made of soft materials, including the four layers of coverings over the tabernacle, the screen for the entrance, the hangings of the outer court, the screen for the entrance of the outer court, and so forth. These objects were large in volume and were also not light in weight. They could not be carried by human strength and had to be transported with two carts and four oxen. The Israelites ordinarily could see these objects, so they did not require the priests to cover and wrap them specially. Nevertheless, they still had to be under the supervision and management of Ithamar the priest and act according to Ithamar's instructions.

Today we will read about the tasks assigned to the sons of Merari. If the Gershonites were responsible for the outer skin, then the Merarites were

responsible for the inner framework—the structural objects that supported the tabernacle. They were solid and heavy, yet unseen, hidden beneath the exterior.

Verses 29–30: “As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families and by their fathers’ house. From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting.”

The method of numbering here was the same as before. The sons of Merari were also registered by name and numbered one by one according to their fathers’ houses and families—all the males from thirty to fifty years old who were able to enter the service and perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting.

Verse 31: “And this is what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets,”

The exterior of the tabernacle consisted of the four layers of coverings and the entrance screen, but what supported the tabernacle were forty-eight upright boards and four pillars, all made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. These upright boards and pillars were to be set in one hundred silver sockets. Each silver socket weighed one talent, or seventy-five pounds, so these objects were all extremely heavy. In addition, five horizontal bars were to be made for each of the south, west, and north sides of the tabernacle. These also were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold and were used to secure the upright boards in position. At the entrance on the east side of the tabernacle, there were also to be five pillars set in five bronze sockets. Therefore, the structural objects supporting the tabernacle itself were very numerous, and each object was extremely heavy. During dismantling, they had to be taken apart one by one; during assembly, not a single one could be missing. Every object was closely interconnected with the others.

Verse 32: “and the pillars around the court with their sockets, pegs, and cords, with all their furnishings and all their service. And you shall assign to each man by name the items he must carry.”

The surface of the outer court consisted of hangings of fine linen, but these hangings were supported by sixty bronze pillars. Each bronze pillar had to be set in a bronze socket, and it also had to be secured with bronze pegs and cords, together with other rods used to fasten the hangings, and so forth. These structural objects were numerous and extremely heavy, and every item was closely interconnected with the others; not one could be missing. It was impossible to transport them by human strength. Therefore, Numbers 7:8 specifically instructed that four carts and eight oxen were to be assigned to the sons of Merari to help transport these heavy objects.

Something very special is also recorded here: God instructed Moses to assign by name the object that each person was to carry. In other words, when each son of Merari served in the tabernacle, he was to be responsible for a particular object, such as an upright board or a silver socket. Perhaps Moses numbered every board and every socket. Each number had a specific person responsible for it. During dismantling, the objects were taken apart according to their order; when the tabernacle was erected again at a new location, they were also assembled according to that order. God gave such careful instructions that every object was to have a particular person responsible for it, most likely because these objects were so numerous, extremely heavy, and indispensable. Therefore, every object had to have someone responsible for it.

Dear brothers and sisters, I wonder whether you have seen God’s wisdom and His detailed arrangement. The Kohathites carried the most holy objects. Everyone could see this, and it would cause people to develop a heart of reverence and admiration. The Kohathites themselves also felt that their task was very important, so they served with great enthusiasm. Although the objects carried by the Gershonites were not as holy as those carried by the Kohathites, these objects were very large and were often visible to the Israelites. People could recognize them even from a distance. The Gershonites had to work together with all their strength

before they could move these enormous objects onto the carts. Therefore, they also often attracted attention while transporting them. Only the items served by the Merarites were numerous, miscellaneous, and trivial, yet heavy. These objects were normally hidden, and when others saw them, they did not even know what they were. Although others paid little attention to them, God remembered them one by one and instructed Moses to assign them by name. If even one structural component of a building is missing, the structure will become unstable and will collapse when subjected to an external force.

Dear brothers and sisters, every saint is a structural component that constitutes the church; not one can be missing. Jesus also calls each sheep who belongs to Him by name and promises that no one can snatch this sheep out of His hand. May each of us be full of assurance concerning our own salvation, have a deep understanding of our position in the church, and be willing to exert all our strength in fulfilling the responsibilities we should bear and carrying the objects we should carry. In the church, every one of us is a son of Merari; not one can be missing.

Verse 33: “This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting, under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.”

The work performed by the sons of Merari in the tabernacle had to be under the supervision and management of Ithamar the priest. In God’s sovereign arrangement, Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s sons camped at the entrance on the east side of the tabernacle. When the Israelites set out, Moses had God’s detailed instructions: Aaron, as the high priest, was to bear full responsibility for dismantling, transporting, and re-erecting the tabernacle.

Aaron’s two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, also had a careful division of responsibility. Eleazar was responsible for supervising the family of the Kohathites, while Ithamar was responsible for supervising the families of the Gershonites and the Merarites. This enabled the sons of Levi to dismantle everything in sequence and divide the responsibility for transporting it. When they reached the next stopping place, they

would erect it again. The entire process was orderly, displaying the beautiful testimony of God's people.

Today, as the church sets out through the wilderness of the world, it should also be this way. The detailed division of labor and the proper coordination of the saints display the testimony that God's people should have.

Next, verses 34–49 record that Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the tribes, according to God's command, numbered those among these three families of the tribe of Levi who were able to serve in the tabernacle. Today we will first read about the number of the Kohathites.

Verses 34–35: “And Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers’ house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting;”

Here Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the twelve tribes are mentioned very carefully. Together they were to number those in the tribe of Levi who were able to enter the service and perform the work of the tabernacle. According to their families and fathers’ houses, they recorded each name one by one and finally calculated the total. They began with the family of the Kohathites, recording the names of the males between thirty and fifty years old who were able to serve in the tabernacle.

Verses 36–37: “and those who were numbered by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty. These were the ones who were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.”

According to God's command, Moses and Aaron numbered the men of the family of the Kohathites who were between thirty and fifty years old. There were 2,750 in total. Numbers 3:28 records that there were altogether 8,600 males among the Kohathites who were one month old and above. Therefore, approximately thirty-two percent of them were able to serve in the tabernacle. The rest were divided into two groups. One group consisted of those under thirty years old. They were still in the period of training, waiting until their measure of growth was complete so that they could rise up to serve. The other group consisted of those over fifty years old. They retired from their duties of service in the tabernacle and began to bear the responsibility of training others.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, thank You for leading us through the responsibilities that the sons of Merari were to bear in the tabernacle, as recorded in Numbers. Their responsibilities were the most complicated, their items were the most numerous, and their loads were the heaviest. Others might not have seen their laborious service, but Lord, You personally remembered each one, and not one was dispensable. Lord, help us to see that every saint is a part of the structure of the church, and every one is indispensable. Help us not to despise ourselves or the brothers and sisters around us, but to learn to be coordinated together and to support the testimony of the church together. Bless the church in which I am and my church life. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.