

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

Numbers 4: 38-49

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 38 to verse 49.

God spoke to Moses, instructing the three major families of the tribe of Levi—Kohath, Gershon, and Merari—about the items they were responsible for carrying when the tabernacle was to move. Moses, according to God's command, began to number the males between thirty and fifty years old from these three families.

Yesterday we already read that the Kohathite clan had 2,750. Comparing this with Numbers 3:28, the Kohathites had 8,600 males one month old and above. This means the proportion of Kohathite males who could serve in the tabernacle was 32%. This proportion is relatively low, because the Kohathites bore the responsibility of carrying the most holy objects. This was not merely physical labor, but required even greater spiritual understanding and alertness, lest through ignorance or carelessness they offend God's holiness and cause death.

32% of the males served in the tabernacle, which means the other 68%—those under thirty—were receiving training, while those over fifty were training these young males and passing on their experience.

Verses 38-41: “And those who were numbered of the sons of Gershon, by their families and by their fathers' houses, from thirty years old and above even to fifty years old, everyone everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting—those who were numbered by their families, by their fathers' house, were two thousand six hundred and thirty. These are the ones who were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all who might serve in the

tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the Lord.”

Here we read that among the Gershonites, according to their families and fathers’ houses, the males between thirty and fifty years old who could serve in the tabernacle numbered 2,630. In Numbers 3:22, the total number of Gershonite males one month old and above was 7,500. Therefore, the proportion of males who could serve in the tabernacle was 35% of the total, which is somewhat higher than that of the Kohathites.

In the service of the Gershonites, there was no danger of being struck down directly because of error. They carried the softer items of the tabernacle. When these items were worn, they needed repair, and the skills of weaving, embroidering, sewing, and mending required a period of training. Therefore, 65% of the males were engaged in training or being trained, in order to prepare the younger males so that when they reached thirty years old, they could enter the tabernacle and bear the work they were supposed to do.

Verses 42-45: “Those of the families of the sons of Merari who were numbered, by their families, 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—those who were numbered by their families were three thousand two hundred. These are the ones who were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.”

Among the Merarites, according to their families and fathers’ houses, the males between thirty and fifty years old who could serve in the tabernacle numbered 3,200.

Purely from the numbers, the Merarites had the largest number of people serving in the tabernacle, far exceeding the 2,750 of the Kohathites and the 2,630 of the Gershonites. This is truly God’s special mercy and grace, because the items the

Merarites were responsible for were the most complicated and the heaviest, requiring a great deal of physical strength. Therefore, God specially prepared more strong males for them so they could share the heavy workload.

In Numbers 3:34 it is recorded that the total number of Merarite males one month old and above was 6,200, the smallest number among the three families. Therefore, among the Merarites, the proportion of males serving in the tabernacle was 52%. That is to say, more than half of the males were serving in the tabernacle. This proportion was much higher than that of the Kohathites and Gershonites. We cannot help but thank and praise God! God assigned the most laborious service to the Merarites, and God blessed the Merarites with the highest proportion of strong males.

Dear brothers and sisters, there is an important spiritual principle here: If God assigns a mission and task, God will surely give the ability and blessing so that those who are called can fulfill God's entrustment. Therefore, we do not need to worry about whether we have enough ability, resources, or funding. As long as it is God's calling, God will give us the ability to complete it. As long as it is a burden from God, God Himself will accomplish it.

Verses 46-48: "All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers' houses, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who came to do the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle of meeting—those who were numbered were eight thousand five hundred and eighty."

These three verses are the summary of the numbering of the Levites. Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel together numbered the Levites, counting them one by one according to their families and fathers' houses.

Perhaps you may ask why the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel were needed. Do not forget that the tribe of Levi was set apart to substitute for all the firstborn

of the houses of Israel to serve God. At the same time, the tribe of Levi camped between the army camps and the tabernacle, lest the Israelites trespass into the tabernacle and be put to death. When the Israelites had some understanding of the duties of the Levites, it could better help them coordinate with one another, so that each could fulfill his own role and become the army of the LORD, walking through the wilderness toward the land of God's promise. This is truly an example for the church today as it marches through the wilderness of the world.

Summing up the three major families of the Levites that were numbered earlier, the number of Levite males between thirty and fifty years old who could serve in the tabernacle was 8,580. Comparing this with the 22,000 Levite males one month old and above recorded in Numbers 3:39, in proportion, 39% of the Levite males were serving in the tabernacle, while 61% were in training or being trained.

This also describes the condition that saints serving in the church today should have: Every saint must learn to serve, and the mature saints should help the younger saints, stir up their heart to serve, give them opportunities to learn to serve, and perfect the saints in their gifts. This should occupy 60% of the activities in the church. Only those saints whose spiritual life is mature and whose gifts have been perfected can rise up to bear the entrustment God has given to the church. The history of the Israelites in the Old Testament is a type of the New Testament church. There were times when Israel prospered, but more often there were times of decline, weakness, and offending God. These should become warnings to us.

When the Israelites were organized into an army in Numbers, the priests came from Aaron's family and their number should not have been large, but the Levites who helped the priests serve numbered as high as 8,580. Because the tabernacle at that time was movable and had to move forward in the wilderness, involving dismantling, carrying, and re-setting it up, which consumed enormous manpower, the number of Levites was far greater than the number of priests.

Later, when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, under God's leading, in the time of King David, the kingdom of Israel reached its peak of prosperity. In 1 Chronicles 23:2-6, "David gathered all the leaders of Israel, together with the

priests and the Levites. Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and above; and the number of individual males was thirty-eight thousand. Of these, twenty-four thousand were to look after the work of the house of the Lord, six thousand were officers and judges, five thousand were gatekeepers, and four thousand praised the Lord with musical instruments, “which I made,” said David, “for giving praise.” Also David separated them into divisions among the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.”

Here we see that in the time of King David, the number of serving Levites increased to 38,000, four times more than in Numbers. Among them, 24,000 were to manage the affairs of the house of the LORD, similar to what is recorded in Numbers. But the scope of the Levites’ service expanded: there were those who served as officials and judges (these were the management level), gatekeepers, and those who praised God with various musical instruments (this is somewhat like the choir in the church today).

Regarding the priests, it is recorded in 1 Chronicles 24:3-4, “Then David with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to the schedule of their service. There were more leaders found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar, and thus they were divided. Among the sons of Eleazar were sixteen heads of their fathers’ houses, and eight heads of their fathers’ houses among the sons of Ithamar.”

Aaron’s two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, were also passed down from generation to generation. By the time of David, the descendants of Eleazar produced sixteen family heads, and the descendants of Ithamar produced eight family heads. David then arranged the priests into twenty-four divisions, taking turns, one week at a time, serving twice a year. During Israel’s three major feasts—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles—the priests had to attend in full. Because all Israelites came to the temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to God, and the priests had to help all the Israelites offer their sacrifices.

Looking at the entire history of Israel, the rise and fall of the kingdom of Israel had an absolute relationship with the service of the priests and Levites. When the

service system operated healthily and God's name was exalted, the kingdom of Israel prospered. When the service system declined, the kingdom of Israel fell and eventually came to the point of national destruction. Because the Israelites had never kept the commandment of the Sabbath year, God decreed that Jerusalem should lie desolate for seventy years. The Israelites had not kept the Sabbath year for 490 years, and God required it all at once.

In the time of the Persian Empire, King Cyrus was stirred by God and allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The first group of returning Israelites is recorded in Ezra 2:36-39: "The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three; the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two; the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven; the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen."

Here four priestly families are recorded as returning, with a total as high as 4,289, probably one-tenth of all the returning Israelites. This shows that the priestly families, although taken captive, had fairly good continuity. When God's time came, they were willing to return to Jerusalem.

Let us look again at the returning Levites. Ezra 2:40-42, "The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, seventy-four. The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight. The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-nine in all."

The total number of returning Levites was only 341, less than 10% of the number of priests. In the time of King David, the total number of Levites was as high as 38,000, yet now less than 1% returned. Why? There may be three reasons:

First, the Levites had always been in an assisting role, and their status was not prominent. Second, what they were involved in was practical service, and they felt it was unimportant. Third, and possibly the most important reason: the Levites had no inheritance among the Israelites because they were set apart to serve God. After they were taken captive to Babylon, they began to do business according to the

customs of the world. They had their own businesses and properties, and were unwilling to return to Jerusalem.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is a very important reminder to us. Today when we learn to serve in the church, we mostly start with practical service. We must have the correct concept: no matter how big or small a matter is, it is done before God, and God will surely remember it. God specially commanded Moses to number them one by one; therefore we must not belittle ourselves. In God's house there is no unimportant matter. When we learn to be faithful in small things, God can entrust greater things to us.

Verse 49: "According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered by the hand of Moses, each according to his service and according to his task; thus were they numbered by him, as the LORD commanded Moses."

This sentence seems to appear repeatedly in this chapter. Moses numbered them one by one and recorded the service they performed and the items they carried. Moses did this because God commanded him to do it; Moses simply followed faithfully.

Today it is still the same. In the church there are many practical services that require saints who are willing to take up responsibility. Each of us must ask ourselves: When I come to church on the Lord's Day to attend worship, what should I do? These things are assigned by the responsible brothers, but they are also what God has commanded. And everything we do is done before God.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! Through the very detailed instructions in Numbers about what the Levites should do, we see God's wisdom and God's powerful provision. If God calls us, He will surely give us the ability to fulfill God's entrustment. Therefore, we ask God to give us a faithful heart, not looking at the size or importance of the matter, but being willing to faithfully do well the things that have been assigned into our hands. Through this process of practice, perfect our gifts.

Bless the church I belong to. May all the ministries in the church have perfect coordination, and every saint be able to find his or her suitable position. In God's house there are no idle people; everyone has his or her own function. In this way, the church can become a living body and testify for Christ in the place where we are. Bless the church I belong to. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.