

Numbers 2-6 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

I. First Census & Ordering the Camp Of Israel Chs. 1-9:14

A. First Census Ch. 1

B. Organizing the Camp by Tribes Ch. 2

¹And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ²“Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father’s house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting.

Now that the census has been taken of the population of the tribes, God gives directions on how they’re to arrange themselves when they camped.

As we saw last week, there were some 2.5 million people.

Imagine what a nightmare it would be when it came time to move if there was no order, no plan to follow.

When it came time to camp, imagine the chaos if there was no plan for laying out the camp.

The population of all Ventura County right now is about 800,000 – so triple that and you have Israel at this point!

Obviously, they needed some organization for their camp and how they would march when it was time to set out.

God said each tribe was to make a standard, like a flag pole, some identifying emblem which could be seen at a distance. That way, people of that tribe would know where they ought to be.

³On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp according to their armies; and Nahshon the son of Amminadab shall be the leader of the children of Judah.” ⁴And his army was numbered at 74,600.

This is speaking of the arrangement of the camp of Israel when they were at rest.

The tabernacle was in the center, and on the eastern side would be the tribe of Judah.

We’re getting a repeat here of the census in Ch. 1; the number of men, 20 and older who were ready for battle.

⁵“Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar, and Nethanel the son of Zuar shall be the leader of the children of Issachar.”

⁶And his army was numbered at 54,400.

When it says in v. 5 that the tribe of Issachar was to camp “next to” Judah, it means in the next location east.

If it was to the side of them as relative to the tabernacle then they would be running into the other tribes.

⁷“Then comes the tribe of Zebulun, and Eliab the son of Helon shall be the leader of the children of Zebulun.” ⁸And his army was numbered at 57,400. ⁹“All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Judah, 186,400—these shall break camp first.

Finishing out the tribes camped east of the tabernacle was Zebulun.

When it came time to move on, these 3 eastern tribes were the first to move out.

In vs. 10-16 we get the tribes camped on the southern side of the tabernacle: Reuben, Simeon, & Gad.

These were the second group to move out.

17“And the tabernacle of meeting shall move out with the camp of the Levites in the middle of the camps; as they camp, so they shall move out, everyone in his place, by their standards.

The 3rd group to set out would be the Levites carrying all the tabernacle fixtures.

In vs. 18-24 we have the western tribes – Ephraim, Manasseh, & Benjamin.

In vs. 25-31 are the tribes camped on the north – Dan, Asher, & Naphtali

These 3 provided the rearguard.

32These are the ones who were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers’ houses. All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces were 603,550. 33But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

34Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards and so they broke camp, each one by his family, according to their fathers’ houses.

There are some interesting things in play in this chapter that could be easily missed unless you take a little time to picture the arrangement that’s being presented here.

First of all – while each tribe had its own standard to help people find their place, the only standards that are mentioned in ch. 2 are the *standards* of the lead tribe in each compass direction.

3 - On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp according to their armies . . .

9 - All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Judah, 186,400—these shall break camp first.

10 - On the south side shall be the standard of the forces with Reuben according to their armies . . .

16 - All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Reuben, 151,450—they shall be the second to break camp.

And so it goes for the other two groups.

The lead tribes were Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, & Dan.

Each of these lead a contingent of the army, similar to an army division, and each division had its own standard or emblem.

Jewish tradition tells us . . .

The Judah division was a lion.

The Reuben division was a man.

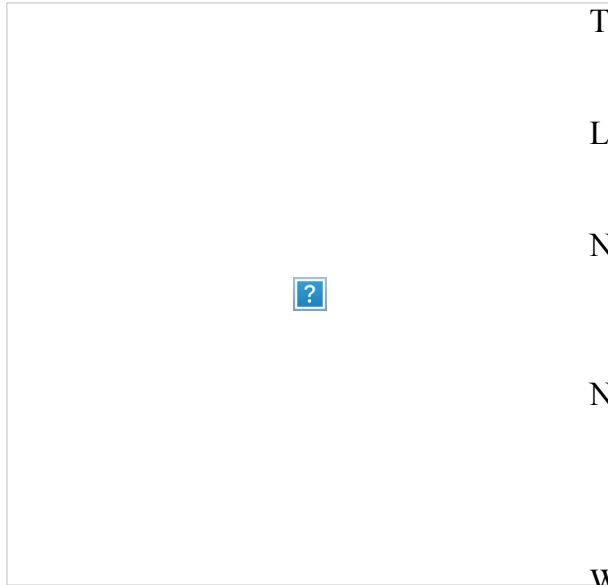
The Ephraim division was a calf.

The Dan division was an eagle.

These standards were placed at the head of the tribe as they faced the tabernacle, marking the 4 compass points.

So, they stood between the camp of the 4 lead tribes, and the camp of the Levites, facing the tabernacle.

Quiz Time: Where else do we see these 4 figures – a lion, a man, a calf, and an eagle?



They are the faces on the cherubim which surround God's throne.

Look now at a model of the camp.

Notice how the tabernacle lies at the heart of the camp, in the very center of the life of Israel.

Now notice the shape of the camp. The population figures that are given for the 4 division means the camp would look like a cross.

What else is of interest in this is

that there are 12 tribes who constitute the whole army.

Each tribe has its own leader and standard.

Yet the 12 are arranged into 4, and these unite under One who leads them – God. In the same way, the One True Church is lead by One head, One Commander In Chief, Jesus.

But there are many major sects within Christianity – Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Coptic.

These sects are further divided into denominations and movements with different leaders and different styles and standards – but the fact of the matter is – we are all one in Christ if we hold fast to the true faith.

In Revelation 2 & 3, Jesus is seen in the midst of the churches, just as God's presence was in the midst of Israel.

C. The Levites Counted & Organized Chs. 3-4

1. Sons of Aaron 3:1-4

¹Now these are the records of Aaron and Moses when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. ²And these are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ³These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests. ⁴Nadab and Abihu had died before the LORD when they offered profane fire before the LORD in the Wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests in the presence of Aaron their father.

2. The Levites to serve as priests 3:5-13

⁵And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ⁶“Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him.

⁷And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole

congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. ⁸Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. ⁹And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel. ¹⁰So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”

The tribe of Levi, of which Moses was a part, was to be solely responsible for the duties of the priesthood.

They would serve in all the sacrifices, in taking care of the details of the tabernacle service, and in dismantling, transporting, and setting up the tabernacle when they moved.

No one outside the tribe of Levi would be permitted to engage in the service entrusted to them as the priests.

¹¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ¹²“Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, ¹³because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the LORD.”

3. Levites Enumerated 3:14-39

In the Passover, when God struck the Egyptians with the 10th plague and slew the firstborn of every house not protected by the blood of the Passover lamb, God said that all those firstborn children that were *saved* belonged to Him; He had a *claim* on them.

Now God is making a trade – He’s redeeming His right of possession of the firstborn of every family and taking the entire tribe of Levi instead.

This is why the tribe of Levi is not counted among the tribes of Israel – God is claiming them as His own.

¹⁴Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying:

¹⁵“Number the children of Levi by their fathers’ houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above.”

¹⁶So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded. ¹⁷These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

These 3 were the 3 main clans of the tribe of Levi.

¹⁸And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families:

Libni and Shimei. ¹⁹And the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram, Izeah, Hebron, and Uzziel. ²⁰And the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their fathers’ houses.

The 3 clans of Levi were further broken down into these 8 families.

In vs. 21-26 we're told that the Gershonites numbered 7,500, camped on the western side of the tabernacle, and were responsible for moving and taking care of the curtains that marked off the tabernacle grounds, along with the tabernacle coverings themselves.

In vs. 27-31 we read about the Kohathites. They numbered 8,600 and camped on the south side of the tabernacle.

They were charged with taking care of & moving all the furniture & fixtures used inside the tabernacle, including the most sacred pieces; the ark, the table of showbread, the golden lampstand, and the incense altar.

In v. 28, the number of Kohathites is given as 8,600 in our text.

There's been much discussion over this number since some manuscripts are ambiguous about the numeral "6". (Hebrew 'ss')

Some scholars believe it should be the numeral "3". (Hebrew 'sls') ^[1]

Why that is will be made clear in a moment.

³²And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest was to be chief over the leaders of the Levites, with oversight of those who kept charge of the sanctuary.

Eleazar was the captain of the Levites & the interface between the high priesthood of his father Aaron and the rest of the under priests.

In vs. 33-37 we have the Merarites who numbered 6,200.

They camped on the north side of the tabernacle and were given the responsibility of taking care of the boards and bases that framed the walls of the courtyard and the tabernacle.

The Gershonites took care of the curtains, the *software*; the Merarites handled the wood & metal fixtures, the *hardware*.

³⁸Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death. ³⁹All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, by their families, all the males from a month old and above, were 22,000.

By placing just Moses' & Aaron's families on the eastern side of the tabernacle, this would provide a large open space before the entrance into the tabernacle grounds as would be needed for all the traffic coming there.

If you total the 3 clans of the Levites, you get 22,300 – yet v. 39 says there were 22,000.

This is why the total of Kohathites ought to be 8,300.

4. Levites substituted for the first born 3:40-51

⁴⁰Then the LORD said to Moses: "Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and above, and take the number of their names. ⁴¹And you shall take the Levites for Me—I am the LORD—instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock

of the children of Israel.” ⁴²So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the children of Israel, as the LORD commanded him. ⁴³And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names from a month old and above, of those who were numbered of them, were 22,273.

This number for firstborn sons for the whole nation of some 2.5 million is way too low.

This would mean that only 1 in 112 people would be firstborn sons – not very likely.

It’s more likely that the total here are only those born since the Exodus.

⁴⁴Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ⁴⁵“Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. The Levites shall be Mine: I *am* the LORD. ⁴⁶And for the redemption of the 273 of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites, ⁴⁷you shall take 5 shekels for each one individually; you shall take *them* in the currency of the shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of 20 gerahs. ⁴⁸And you shall give the money, with which the excess number of them is redeemed, to Aaron and his sons.”

⁴⁹So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those who were redeemed by the Levites. ⁵⁰From the firstborn of the children of Israel he took the money, 1,365 *shekels*, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. ⁵¹And Moses gave their redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

We might think that with such vast numbers of people, God would let a little thing like 273 extra firstborn sons just go by – but He doesn’t.

His redemption of the firstborn with the Levites is something that is utterly precise.

And He ensures that a *fair trade* has been made so that the firstborn can be redeemed.

Our God is not just a God of the Big Picture and the Grand themes.

He is also intimately concerned with the details.

The redemption He has provided for us isn’t some last minute, thrown together, sloppy thing.

It’s precise and complete down to the last detail.

Not a shekel is left unpaid in the cost of our redemption.

Jesus has fully satisfied the righteous requirements for our salvation.

5. Duties of the Kohathites 4:1-20

¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ²“Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their families, by their fathers’ house, ³from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.

The age of service for a priest was between 30-50.

This was thought to be the age of the greatest balance of both wisdom & strength; the prime of life.

4“This *is* the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, *relating to* the most holy things: **5**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. **6**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.

While the Kohathites were charged with moving the furniture of the holy places, they were not allowed to see it.

Aaron and his sons had to go in first and cover them with the special wraps.

It was only after they'd been properly covered and prepared that the Kohathites were allowed to go in and collect them.

7“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. **8**They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles. **9**And they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-trimmers, its trays, and all its oil vessels, with which they service it. **10**Then they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of badger skins, and put *it* on a carrying beam.

11“Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles. **12**Then they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in the sanctuary, put *them* in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of badger skins, and put *them* on a carrying beam. **13**Also they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it. **14**They shall put on it all its implements with which they minister there—the firepans, the forks, the shovels, the basins, and all the utensils of the altar—and they shall spread on it a covering of badger skins, and insert its poles. **15**And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry *them*; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. “These *are* the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.

The sacred furniture was carried by poles so that the items themselves were never touched by anyone other than Aaron and his sons.

16“The appointed duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *is* the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the daily grain offering, the anointing oil, the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that *is* in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.”

Eleazar was given the task of making sure the consumables like the holy oil and incense were kept supplied and then were properly stowed when it was time to move.

17Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: **18**“Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites; **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. **20**But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die.”

There was great danger in coming so close to the holy things, so God gave instructions to Aaron that he was to assign the task of carrying the sacred fixtures to specific priests.

This would mean these guys were *assigned* their duty, rather than *assuming* it themselves.

This removed *ambition* as a motivation for carrying the holy things.

In the same way the Kohathites were assigned to their roles, God assigns those to the role of pastor in the Church today.

Being a pastor is a *calling* that comes from God, not man.

No one can *assume* the role of being a shepherd of God’s flock – he must be appointed to it.

Seminaries & Bible schools don’t make pastors. No course can produce a pastor. God makes pastors by ordaining them, calling them into that office.

While some men entered the ministry driven by ambition that does not make them a pastor. It’s not a job, it’s a divine office.

God, and no one else, makes pastors.

6. Duties of the Gershonites 4:21-28

Just as had been for the Kohathites, the Gershonites have their duties assigned to them as they transported the curtains and hangings of the tabernacle.

In v. 28 we read

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.

Eleazar and Ithamar were the sons of Aaron the high priest.

In v. 16 we’re told that Eleazar had the duty of making sure the consumables were taken care of and that he was the one who would make sure the furniture of the inner sanctuary was properly covered in preparation to be carried by the Kohathites.

His brother Ithamar was responsible for overseeing the work of the Gershonites and the Merarites, who we read about in the next section . . .

7. Duties of the Merarites 4:29-33

The Merarites, as we saw earlier, carried the boards and all the hardware for the walls of the courtyard and sanctuary.

They too were assigned by Ithamar to their specific tasks.

8. Levitical census taken 4:34-49

In Vs. 34-49 the census of Levites between 30-50 is . . .

<i>Levitical Clan</i>	<i>Total Males 30-50 years old</i>
Kohathites	2,750

Gershonites	2,630
Merarites	3,200
Total	8,580

All of the priests were assigned a function & place in the work of the tabernacle.

While some tasks were esteemed by them as maybe being more important and prestigious as others, *every* task was crucial.

Those who carried the ark were probably the most likely to be envied.

Those who carried the ropes and tent pegs that held fast the curtained walls of the courtyard were seemingly the low men on the prestige ladder of priestly duties.

But what if even one of them decided to shirk his duty to carry the load or decided not to go with the nation when it moved from one place to another?

It would mean the entire tabernacle would be marred and could not be erected.

In order for the tabernacle to go up, *everyone* had to play his part – **EVERYONE!**

And so it is in the body of Christ – everyone has a crucial role to play.

Paul uses the analogy of the human body in describing the Church as the Body of Christ.

He says that while some members are more visible and receive more attention and respect, the fact of the matter is, unless every part does its job, the whole cannot function as it ought.

The Body of Christ is only as strong as its *weakest* link and only as effective as its *least* effective member.

What task has God assigned you? What is your duty in the Kingdom? What is your member-definition in the Body of Christ?

Are you being faithful to it?

Calvary Chapel of Oxnard has a pretty strong reputation in the community and God is using this church in some really great ways.

How much more effective and significant would our impact be if **EVERYONE** was faithful to his/her assignment by God?

D. Various Rules for the Camp Chs. 5-8

1. Dealing with the unclean 5:1-4

¹And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²“Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. ³You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell.” ⁴And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the LORD spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did.

We had an extensive list of people who were ceremonially unclean in Leviticus, as well as the ritual by which they could be made clean once again.

It's at this point that the laws regarding the unclean are put into play.

2. Confession & restitution 5:5-10

⁵Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁶“Speak to the children of Israel: ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in

unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty, ⁷then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give *it* to the one he has wronged.

The fact that restitution is to be paid means these are sins in which some kind of loss or damage is suffered by another person.

Whatever the nature of the loss, the value of the thing damaged has to be repaid, plus a fee of 20%.

This whole provision was meant to get across the idea to the people of Israel that there is a principle of the sanctity of personal property that must be honored by them as the people of God.

This principle flies in the face of some well-known economic philosophies, most notably - socialism & communism.

⁸But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for the wrong *must go to the LORD for the priest, in addition to the ram of the atonement with which atonement is made for him.* ⁹Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his. ¹⁰And every man's holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives the priest shall be his.'"

When damages are due and there is no one to pay them to because the person owed has died & has left no survivors, then the restitution is to be paid to the Lord by bringing it to the priests.

3. Dealing with jealousy 5:11-31

¹¹And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹²“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘If any man's wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him, ¹³and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself, and *there was no witness against her, nor was she caught—*¹⁴*if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself—*¹⁵*then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it is a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance.*”

Here's the situation – unknown to her husband, a woman has committed adultery.

But because of the subtle changes in her behavior, he became suspicious.

He has no proof, but intuitively he knows something is wrong.

God provided a test as a way to either verify her indiscretion, or clear her of suspicion.

Jealousy can be a pernicious & incredibly damaging thing.

I have known cases of people, both men & women, who were consumed by the belief their mate was cheating on them, when they weren't.

This jealousy has driven such rage that it led to physical abuse and verbal assaults

that were terrifying.

God wanted to protect the sanctity of the Jewish marriage bed and the intimacy of the marital union, so he graciously gave a test to either confirm adultery or clear the innocent.

16‘And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD.

17The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put *it* into the water.

18Then the priest shall stand the woman before the LORD, uncover the woman’s head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which *is* the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse. **19**And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, “If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness *while* under your husband’s *authority*, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse. **20**But if you have gone astray *while* under your husband’s *authority*, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you”—**21**then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman—“the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the LORD makes your thigh rot and your belly swell; **22**and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make *your* belly swell and *your* thigh rot.”
‘Then the woman shall say, “Amen, so be it.”

23‘Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape *them* off into the bitter water. **24**And he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her *to become* bitter. **25**Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman’s hand, shall wave the offering before the LORD, and bring it to the altar; **26**and the priest shall take a handful of the offering, as its memorial portion, burn *it* on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water.

Okay – here’s another passage which seems pretty strange. What is going on here?

First, let’s make sure we understand the procedure.

An accused woman is brought to the tabernacle by her husband, along with some barley bread.

The priest who’s officiating takes the woman into the courtyard of the tabernacle and has her face the sanctuary with her head uncovered.

A woman wore a covering as a way to show she was under the authority of her husband.

By uncovering her head, it meant she was being accused of having placed herself under another man.

In her hands she held the barley loaf, symbolic of her life in her husband’s home. This is meant to be a picture of someone who is being accused of living a double life – a hidden sin which only God can reveal.

The priest takes a clay bowl with some of the water from the laver and a pinch of dust from the holy ground inside the courtyard.

Into this water made “bitter” by the dust, he would scrape the dried ink of the

written judgment he would read over the woman.

In effect, the judgment said, “If adultery has been committed, then let her womb rot and her stomach swell. If she stands falsely accused and is innocent of the charge against her by her husband, then let this not happen.”

To this the woman would have to give the assent and agreement – “Yes, let it be so!”

Then the priest would take the barley loaf and offer it on the altar of burnt offering and would come back to the woman and have her drink the bitter water.

27When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her and become bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh [womb] will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people. 28But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children.

In other words, her husband is not allowed to bring this up again nor may her put her away in divorce, She shall become the mother of his children.

29‘This is the law of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband’s authority, goes astray and defiles herself, 30or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her. 31Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt.’”

If of course she’s committed adultery. If not, then the man will bear a terrible stigma for being a harsh and jealous man among his peers.

Now, how are we to understand this concoction of bitter water? Did it really make a sinful woman’s belly swell and womb rot?

Unless there’s something about the original ingredients mentioned here in the ancient Hebrews we don’t know about, No!

Each of the ingredients and parts of this ritual have symbolic meaning for the woman’s marriage, the holiness of God, and the sin of adultery.

It isn’t the elements used that would cause the symptoms but the divine judgment of God.

God gave all the parts of the ritual as a way to graphically portray to the people the terrible sin adultery is.

He wanted to draw a picture of how their straying from Him to the worship of idols was *spiritual adultery*.

And He, as her heavenly husband would know for a certainty when she strayed.

No matter how secret she thought she could keep her visits to the idols of Baal, Asherah, and Molech, He would see.

Israel needed to know that her God was jealous and that she could hide from Him.

No doubt, any guilty woman, when taken before the priest and made to drink the bitter water would confess rather than call down a curse on herself and risk this hideous way of revealing what she’d done.

The innocent woman would go through the procedure with a clear conscience knowing nothing would happen to her.

4. The Nazirite vow 6:1-21

¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, ³he shall separate himself from wine and *similar* drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from *similar* drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. ⁴All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.

After all the instructions for the priests in chs. 3 & 4, and the prohibition that no one but Levites might serve as priest, the Lord gave provision for those who wanted to consecrate themselves to the Lord in a special way.

It was known as *the vow of the Nazirite*.

Our word “Nazirite” is a transliteration of the Hebrew word “nazar” - “to dedicate.”^[2]

This vow was usually made by adults but we do find it made by parents on behalf of their infant child. Samuel & Samson are the 2 most obvious examples.

Other notable Nazirites were John the Baptist & Paul.

John’s vow appears to have been life-long while Paul’s was just for a period of time – as was typical for most Nazirite vows.

When the person took the vow, they would specify up front how much time they were dedicating – and as any vow made to the Lord, it was considered binding.

There were 3 elements to a Nazirite vow.

These 3 things spoke of the dedication, identification and separation of the Nazirite.

The 1st is seen here in vs. 3&4 – no fermented beverage & nothing from the grapevine.

The 2nd was a commitment to not cut the hair, and the 3rd was a zealous & careful distance from a human corpse or animal carcass.

⁵All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. *Then* he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. ⁶All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body. ⁷He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God *is* on his head. ⁸All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the LORD.

Grapes, raisins, & wine were staples of the Jewish diet.

By fasting from these things for the length of the vow, it meant a real **DEDICATION** of the Nazirite to maintain lifestyle that was *different* from others.

As one who was dedicating himself completely to the Lord, the ban from all wine meant a commitment to stay clear headed and free from the effects of alcohol.

Remember how after the death of Nadab & Abihu God told Aaron and his sons to

make sure when they served the Lord in their priestly duties they did not drink? God wants clear-headed ministers.

The Nazirite was someone who was dedicating Himself to the Lord 100% of the time – so he had to stay away from wine always. And as a precaution against wine, the line was drawn all the way back to the vine the wine came from.

Jewish men didn't butch cut their hair but they did keep it pretty short.

The person who'd taken the Nazirite vow was easy to **IDENTIFY** because his hair hung down on his shoulders. And that's the idea behind the requirement to not cut the hair – **IDENTIFICATION** in their dedication.

The commitment to stay away from contact with anything dead was for **SEPARATION** from anything that reflected sin, for sin brings death.

As a model of **dedication** to God, the Nazirite vow is enlightening for us.

Just as the Nazirite cut any contact with the vine from his life, we too ought take care to cut anything out of our lives that might influence our thinking in a adverse way.

Alcohol, drugs, lust, pride, anger.

And not just the things themselves but as for the Nazirite, anything that was even close to them.

The best way to avoid falling off a cliff is to not go near the edge.

Draw the line with sin well back from it!

Don't go into the bar.

Don't go to the party where they're snorting coke.

Don't look through the Victoria Secret catalog.

Just as the Nazirite **identified** himself by his long hair, take a stand for Christ that marks you as one of His.

Some people don't put a Calvary Chapel of Oxnard bumper sticker on their car because they don't want to besmirch the church when they sail down the highway at 85.

Maybe the sticker will help keep you within the speed limit!

Just as the Nazirite **separated** himself by a zealous distance from anything that spoke of death, so we ought to maintain a guarded distance from all of that in the world that is a reflection of the corruption and spiritual death of sin.

Even if it means having to distance ourselves from our closest relatives.

Jesus said that following Him would mean a division among family members when some believed & others didn't. [Matthew 10:34-37]

⁹And if anyone dies very suddenly beside him, and he defiles his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it. ¹⁰Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting; ¹¹and the priest shall offer one as a sin offering and *the* other as a burnt offering, and make atonement for him, because he sinned in regard to the corpse; and he shall sanctify his head that same day. ¹²He shall consecrate to the LORD the days of his separation, and bring a male lamb in its first year as a trespass offering; but the former days shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

If a Nazirite was inadvertently defiled by a dead body, say someone keeled over next

to him – then all the previous days of the vow were considered as lost.
After the appropriate offerings, he could begin again.

To end the period of the vow, a special offering was made.

13‘Now this *is* the law of the Nazirite: When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. **14**And he shall present his offering to the LORD: one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering, **15**a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their grain offering with their drink offerings.

16‘Then the priest shall bring *them* before the LORD and offer his sin offering and his burnt offering; **17**and he shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of a peace offering to the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest shall also offer its grain offering and its drink offering.

18Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put *it* on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.

19‘And the priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, one unleavened cake from the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and put *them* upon the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his consecrated *hair*, **20**and the priest shall wave them as a wave offering before the LORD; *they are* holy for the priest, together with the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering. After that the Nazirite may drink wine.’

21“This is the law of the Nazirite who vows to the LORD the offering for his separation, and besides that, whatever else his hand is able to provide; according to the vow which he takes, so he must do according to the law of his separation.”

In a public ceremony at the door to the tabernacle courtyard, the Nazirite would offer 3 animals, a basket of bread drinks offerings.

This was no meager offering – the cost would have been substantial.

In Acts 21, when Paul returned to Jerusalem, he was invited by the Church

leaders to pay the cost for the Nazirite vow taken by some Christians.

There was a vicious rumor going round that Paul was teaching against the law of Moses.

They reasoned that the Nazirite vow was about as close to the heart of the Mosaic law as anything.

If Paul would pay for the offerings for these guys to end their vow, then it would go a long way to answer any questions about his belief in the law.

Paul consented and paid for the offerings, which seems to me rather pointless when we read that Paul *himself* ended *his* own Nazirite vow at this time!

While the 3 elements of the Nazirite vow have much to say to us about what it means to live a dedicated life as a follower of Christ, it also opens a door for us to think about setting aside a special time in which we consecrate ourselves to seek the

Lord in a special way.

I encourage you to look at your calendar and mark off some time to get alone with the Lord for a season of special attention to Him.

I know for several of you, You're saying, "Yeah – right! I have 3 kids under 5 at home. When am I going to do that?"

"I work 70 hours a week then come home to all the chores there. Give me a break! You – pastor, you! All you do all day is sit in your office and talk to God. It's easy for you to suggest I 'get alone with God'. You have no idea what my life and world are like."

Yes I do! And I know that while you may not be able right now to get away for a day or two to sit on a hillside somewhere, there are moments during the week when after the kids are in bed, you could turn off the tube and sit in silence before the Lord and just say – "Lord – here I am. I am just going to sit like Mary at Your feet and wait. If You say nothing, that's fine. As I wait on You, You promise to renew my strength. But it sure would be good to hear Your Spirit speaking to mine."

5. The priestly blessing 6:22-27

²²And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²³"Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

²⁴ "The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;

²⁶ The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."

²⁷"So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

This will be my text for an upcoming sermon, so I'll leave further comment till then.

^[1] Guzik, David, *Online Commentary Numbers 3*

^[2] Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.