

Numbers Chapter 3

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[0 : 00] or at least during the next hymn. So, verse 1 of Numbers and chapter 1. Numbers chapter 3, verse 1, sorry.

This is the account of the family of Aaron and Moses at the time the Lord spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai. The names of the sons of Aaron were Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Those were the names of Aaron's sons, the anointed priests who were ordained to serve as priests. Nadab and Abihu, however, died before the Lord. When they made an offering with unauthorized fire before him in the desert of Sinai, they had no sons.

So, Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests during the lifetime of their father Aaron. The Lord said to Moses, Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him.

They are to perform duties for him and for the whole community at the tent of meeting by doing the work of the tabernacle. They are to take care of all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle.

[1 : 19] Give the Levites to Aaron and his sons. They are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to him, or another translation, wholly to me. Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests.

Anyone else who approaches a sanctuary is to be put to death. The Lord also said to Moses, I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman.

The Levites are mine, for all the firstborn are mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for myself every firstborn in Israel, whether human or animal.

They are to be mine. I am the Lord. The Lord said to Moses in the desert of Sinai, Count the Levites by their families and clans. Count every male a month old or more.

So Moses counted them as he was commanded by the word of the Lord. Then if you'd turn over to verse 39. Verse 39. The total number of Levites counted at the Lord's command by Moses and Aaron according to their clans, including every male a month old or more, was 22,000.

[2 : 32] The Lord said to Moses, Count all the firstborn Israelite males who are a month old or more and make a list of their names. Take the Levites from me in place of all the firstborn of the Israelites and the livestock of the Levites in place of all the firstborn of the livestock of the Israelites.

I am the Lord. So Moses counted all the firstborn of the Israelites as the Lord commanded him. The total number of firstborn males a month old or more listed by name was 22,273.

The Lord also said to Moses, Take the Levites in place of all the firstborn of Israel and the livestock of the Levites in place of their livestock. The Levites are to be mine.

I am the Lord. To redeem the 273 firstborn Israelites who exceed the number of the Levites collect five shekels for each one according to the sanctuary shekel which weighs 20 giras.

Give the money for the redemption of the additional Israelites to Aaron and his sons. So by the Levites, from the firstborn of the Israelites he collected silver weighing 1,365 shekels according to the sanctuary shekel.

[3 : 51] Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons as he was commanded by the word of the Lord. Well what do you make of all of that? Something of a repetition of those bits I missed out in chapter 3 which is describing the duties of each of the different parts of the Levite clan.

The Gershonite, Kohath, Mereri clans. They were all to do separate things, different things, and take care of various parts of the tabernacle and that goes into more detail in chapter 4.

But we're going to be mainly in chapter 5. What do you give to the person who has everything? It's a big problem isn't it? Christmas, wedding anniversaries and birthdays.

Imagine how hard it must be to buy the right gift for the Queen. What would the Queen need? What would the Queen want? Well during her reign Her Majesty has received many different gifts. Lacrosse sticks and sunglasses, sandals and pineapples, eggs and snail shells, maple trees and tins of tuna and in fact seven kilos of prawns.

[5 : 07] What she did with them I don't know. Probably the most unusual gifts that were given to Her Majesty were the animals that she has been given throughout her reign usually by visiting dignitaries but not always so.

Several horses have been given to her by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They're the ones that she rode on when she did the Trooping of the Colour particularly between 1969 and 86. But other exotic animals have been given to her as well. A canary from Germany, jaguars and sloths from Brazil, two black beavers from Canada, two young giant turtles from the Seychelles, an elephant called Jumbo from the Cameroon.

Now she doesn't keep them in Buckingham Palace but nearly all of those I think if not all of them were given to the London Zoo and they cared for them and looked after them. Now of course all these gifts were carefully thought about.

They were meant to represent the country that the dignitary or the head of state came from. They were given to impress her, hopefully to please her and no doubt being the queen that she is she would almost certainly very graciously and gratefully receive those gifts and thank the giver whether or not she liked them or not, whether or not she thought they were suitable or not.

[6 : 32] But here's the question. What do we give to the King of Kings? What do we give to the Lord God Almighty? Can we just give him anything that we choose?

Can we just give him those things that we think will somehow impress him or please him? Can we just give him those things that well we're maybe a bit tired of ourselves and don't need anymore? Will God just receive whatever gifts we give him in the same way the Queen does? even if they're not suitable? Even if he doesn't like them? Even if they're displeasing to him?

Well there's an answer to that throughout God's word and perhaps part of the answer comes up here in these chapters that we're looking at. Chapters 3 particularly and 4.

Much to say on what it is that pleases God. The thing that we need to recognize and the thing that we need to understand from the very start when we look at this passage when we look at the whole of God's word is this imperative we can only give God what God commands.

[7 : 40] We can only give God what God commands. We can't just give him what we want willy nilly even if we think it's nice or acceptable or pleasing we must give to God that which he requires.

Now we've looked in numbers so far and seen that the Israelites the people belong to God. God made that very clear as he was leading them through the wilderness to the promised land.

He counts them at that sign and mark that they are his and he of course sets his tabernacle his presence in the very midst of them declaring that they belong to him and that he is theirs.

Last week we thought particularly about this when God told each one of the tribes where they had to camp around the tabernacle where their place was he puts them in specific places and we recognize that again that in Israel that there was a theocracy not a democracy in other words a theocracy is where God is the ruler God is the governor God is the king that is just the same with the church of Jesus Christ.

The church here is not ruled by its members or its elders or its pastor the church is ruled by Christ he is the one head and lord of the church and so when we come to numbers that's the reason why we're looking in it and hopefully as we go through we'll see more and more of this reality we see that there are principles in the way that God dealt with his people in the Old Testament which apply to us today there are truths which are the same because God is the same he doesn't change he doesn't prevaricate he doesn't sway from side to side and have one view of things and then later another view he is always the same and how we approach him and how we worship him and how we give to him and how we relate to him though in some senses there are differences yet it is the same because he is the same we saw as well didn't we that there is this wonderful similarity particularly which is what numbers is all about

[9 : 54] I think for us is that God's people were on a journey they were on a journey from Egypt to the promised land they were on this pilgrimage they were on this way to the place which would be their settled home just like we are ourselves our lives are a journey from beginning to end but more than that for the Christian we are headed to our eternal home we are headed somewhere we are looking forward to a wonderful place where we shall be forever with the Lord much better than

Israel much better than Canaan a land which in which the Lord and the people dwell together in a fellowship unsurpassed so what can we learn here what is it that we need to see here just in this little part there's two simple things and then something else that I want us to elaborate on the first simple thing is this that we see particularly in the first few verses of Numbers 3 is that we are to worship God as he requires or rather we are to give him our worship or our praise in the way that he has commanded and we see that because of the mistake that these two sons of Aaron made

Nadab and Abihu Aaron had four sons the oldest was Abihu and he and sorry beg your pardon Nadab was the first born and then Abihu these two older brothers these two older sons died we are told when they made an offering with unauthorized fire before God in the desert of Sinia it doesn't say much about it it's referring to an episode in Leviticus and in chapter 10 there where we are told that these two men decided they were going to bring incense to God God had spoken about the way that he used to be worshipped and approached how we can come to him and know him and they decided that they were going to do it their way they didn't pay attention to what God had said through Moses and they offered this wrong worship to God God had given very clear detail about how he was to be praised how he was to be worshipped how we could approach him and that included what was to go in the incense that was to be burnt before the Lord a symbol of prayers Nadab and Abihu ignored that instruction offered their own incense and we found that God was not only displeased with that but he struck them down that was the seriousness of the matter the seriousness of the situation and again the clarity is this God gives us commands to be obeyed not ignored in the worship of God in the Old Testament there was a great many different laws and commands which had to be adhered to perfectly and spotlessly we touched on this just a little bit this morning when Jesus was there on the Mount of Transfiguration and Moses and Elijah were there and I said Moses was a representative of the law the giver of the law and all of those laws about worship all those laws about what incense were to be given and what worship what offerings what sacrifices were pleasing to God were all ultimately just a shadow they were just all pointing forward to Jesus the perfect offering the perfect sacrifice the perfect incense bearer as it were the perfect high priest through whom we can come and worship God he obeyed all of God's commandments on our behalf so we don't have to come with a particular type of incense we don't have to come with we don't have an altar here on the front of church where we sacrifice various animals we come with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he is the way to God the only way we can't come to God any other way many people have this hope don't they

I was chatting to a dear man yesterday who had the same hope that he was going to get to heaven because he was generally quite a good man and he lived a good life and God wasn't going to have a problem with him and God was going to let him in I wonder if that's perhaps how you think as well I had to say to him I said David I'm sorry but you're not you're not going to go to heaven he's not going to accept you you've got to have go God's way not your way and that's through Jesus' obedience Jesus' death on the cross for us Jesus' faithfulness it's not about us being good enough but Jesus our representative is good enough what does that mean for us well first of all it means that simply as we've put it that we can only come to God on his terms we can't come to God on our own terms with our own righteousness or goodness what about our worship though our praise can we just bring to God anything that we want in our praise and worship can we do anything we like again I think we have to say that God has laid out for us in his word how we are to worship him and praise him and Jesus speaks of it particularly in the gospel of John in chapter 4 he says God is spirit and his worshippers will worship the father in spirit and in truth see God is to be worshipped in keeping with his character in keeping with who he is so Jesus said we are to worship the Lord in spirit spirit that means that our worship of God cannot just simply be outward external it may be part of that but it can't just be that it must be from the heart from the spirit it must be more than the lips it must be from the soul and it means also as well and if you have the new international version it will have where it says in John 4 24 God is spirit we're to worship in the spirit has a capital S speaking of the Holy Spirit we can only come to God by the Holy Spirit by his help by the faith that he gives us to draw near to God with the Holy Spirit's ability our worship is only acceptable because by the spirit we are united with Christ and be at the overflowing of the spirit in our hearts we worship him but we're also to worship him in truth that means we can't worship

[16 : 55] God with falsehood we can't worship God as we think he is we've got to worship him for who he truly is not as we imagine him to be and the great deceptions is of course as we know throughout the world there are those people who say well we all worship the same God and some

of us worship him through a tree and some of us will worship him through a rock and some of us will worship him through a statue and some of us will worship him through this well we can't that's not worshipping God in truth God has truly revealed himself to us in the Lord Jesus Christ that's who he is that's what he's like and we're to worship him as he is and for who he's like not for what we'd like him to be or think he should be worship him worship the Lord in spirit and in truth that's how we're to bring our worship and that's how God has directed us but secondly we see as well just in this chapter that not only are we to give to God the worship he deserves or the worship he commands or the worship he requires but we're also to give to him the service he requires this particularly goes on from verse 5 when God talks about the Levites and their ministry around the tabernacle serving and supporting

Aaron the high priest and as I've said as we've got those those blocks of teaching there about the particular roles and jobs they had to do Aaron and his sons they were the priests they were the ones who were to enter the holy of holies they were the ones who were to offer the sacrifices they were the ones who were to sprinkle the blood upon the upon the the ark of the covenant they had a very very unique and special role but they needed support they needed others to do work as well and so we have these three different clans of Kohath and Gershonites and Mererites and they had special jobs as well just glance very briefly if you would there to verse 25 of chapter 3 at the tent of meeting the Gershonites were responsible for the care of the tabernacle and tent its coverings the curtain at the entrance to the tent and so on then go down to verse 31 speaking of the Kohathites they were responsible for the care of the ark the table the lampstand the altars and so on then go down again to verse 36 the Mererites were appointed to take care of the frames of the tabernacle its crossbars posts bases and so on as I said that's expanded upon in chapter 4 and repeated as well each person had their particular niche each person had their particular job each person was allocated a particular service to perform for the Lord and that would be break the whole thing together you can't have a tent if you haven't got the poles for the tent you've been camping I don't know if you've ever been camping and you've got there and you've got everything out the car and you've got all the tent out the car and then have you found you've forgotten the poles to the tent well it's not going to be a very good tent is it the poles aren't there you've forgotten them and of course then the husband blames the wife and the wife blames the husband and the husband then blames the children and then somebody kicks the dog so it's not it's got to be all there everybody has to play their part everybody has to bring along the bits that's needed well again we see that don't we through the eyes of the New

Testament we see that this tabernacle which is a picture of the church the place in which God dwells and those who are to perform their service there speaks of us the church Paul likens the church in the New Testament to a body each part of the body is necessary for the service of the whole that it may function as it should 1 Corinthians 12 particularly talks about this in verse 27 you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it and earlier on in chapter 12 as well he says there are different kinds of gifts but the same spirit distributes them different kinds of service but the same Lord different kinds of working but all of them but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God who is at work it's vitally important that in the local church we all play our parts we stress that again and again we all have a role to play we all are vital we all are important we all have been gifted by

God to use those gifts for the whole body of Christ to bring service to him honour to him praise to him worship to him none of not one of us is unimportant you may think well I'm just a tent peg you could be a very important tent peg holding in that corner there you might say well I'm just a bit of an old piece of rope well you're a very important old piece of rope holding down the tent and so on Paul uses the picture of an eye and an ear and a nose and a foot and a hand what does God want you to be doing dear friends in the local church what is your role what has he given you the gifts to do and you may say well I don't feel like I've got anything I don't feel like I'm important well the reality is that each of us is and if we haven't found in one sense our niche our place then we need to ask the Lord look for opportunities to do that there's many many ways that we can and the very best of those things that we can do in the life of any church is pray if we can do nothing else but pray then we've done the most that we can do everything else is superfluous ultimately to that there's one thing else that comes out here in chapter three and it's really the main part isn't it do you notice there after God has given a after God has given teaching and a call for a census of all the people if you remember we saw that that great number of people was pretty large it was 603 1550 people in

that census the Levites weren't counted but now they are to be counted

[23 : 06] God tells Aaron and Moses to do that count the Levites he says in verse 15 by their families and clans count every male a month old or more and then there's this almost this weighing up isn't there where God then says count all the Levite boys who were the firstborn one month old and you find there's 22,000 boys as it were of the Levites one month older and then there's 22,763 sorry 273 of the Israelites what's going on there what's that all about all this counting of bodies and almost this sort of exchange isn't there a substitution the Levites are to take the place of the firstborn children of the Israelites well if you look there in verses 12 and following you see hopefully what's going on the second part of verse 12 the Levites are mine for all the firstborn are mine when I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt

I set apart for myself every firstborn in Israel whether animal or human they are to be mine I am the Lord they're being caused to think back to that great salvation at the Passover remember Moses was called by God to go back to Egypt where God's people had been in slavery for 400 years and God had determined to save them to rescue them and so he sent Moses back and Moses went to the king to the Pharaoh and he said God says let my people go and Pharaoh says I'm not going to let these people go they're useful they're my slaves I'm not going to give up on them and so Moses was commanded by God to warn Pharaoh if you do not let my people go then basically you're going to come off the worst for it and so we have these plagues don't we first of all there's the blood in the river Nile that the water in the river Nile that changed to blood and then we have the frogs and then we have the flies and then we have the gnats and then we have the locusts and then we have the blackness and we have the hail and all these things and every time after one of these plagues came about

Moses would go to Pharaoh Pharaoh would call Moses please please make it stop I will let the people go just make this plague stop and so as soon as Moses prayed to the Lord and the plague was stopped Pharaoh would change his mind well after all now the trouble's over now things are better again I won't bother letting the people go Pharaoh was so intent on his own will that came to the point where God could only do one more thing and God said if you don't let my people go then the firstborn of every person in Egypt the firstborn son will die but God said to the Israelites to spare you to make sure that you do not lose your firstborn child so that they can be saved I want you to take a lamb and to put that lamb to death and then to eat it and take the blood of the lamb and paint the lintel as it were over your doorway and when the angel of death comes to put to death the firstborn he'll see the blood and he'll pass over and you'll be spared and you'll be saved and that's exactly what happened wasn't it the Israelites the firstborn even in

Pharaoh's household were told were killed and then of course at last Pharaoh eventually gave in to God there's a lesson there you can't beat God you can't fight against God you can't resist God no matter how much you think that you can be strong willed enough to say God no I'm going to have it my way not yours there are severe consequences for living that life terrible consequences far better if Pharaoh had done what he did at the end at the beginning say God yes I will obey your word and I will let these people go and so this service that God's people were to bring this worship that God's people were to bring it was to be born brought as it were in the light of God's salvation it was to be brought in the light of what God had done for them in rescuing them from Egypt and sparing the firstborn and so God had spared all the firstborn of Israel then on the

Passover and now he says because I spared them they belong to me because I once then purchased them bought them rescued them they are mine to serve me and live for me and so there's this exchange that takes place the firstborn sorry all the Levites become the in place of the firstborn of Israel there's a substitution there's a giving of a life for a life and surely again dear friends we can't help but find our minds being turned to the reality of the cross the Lord Jesus Christ he because he is God the son because he is divine he has infinite merit we might say he is worth the life of all the people of the world there's no limit to his worth and so when he gave himself freely to God an offering for us to purchase to redeem us that language is there isn't it to redeem give the money for the redemption the Lord

[28 : 51] Jesus Christ paid the price that we might be set free that we might be spared that we might be redeemed that we might be rescued dear friends surely that's the reason why we're to serve the Lord surely that's the reason we're to worship him in spirit and in truth surely that's the thing that matters more than the doing is it really important the doing of worship what songs we sing what musical instruments we play how we stand or sit or kneel is that the important thing or is it the

heart that says Lord Jesus I am yours and you've purchased me and you've died for me and you've taken my place and I want to worship you from that heart and surely when we serve again it's not about having the important job or the recognized position or being able to look good before others or feeling useful surely the very motivation for why we serve must flow from this heart that says

Lord Jesus Christ I was in slavery to sin I was I was bound and lost in darkness and you came and gave your life for me to I might be brought out into the freedom and the liberty of the sons of God it's not service to be born from absolute thankfulness and gratitude not to seek to buy back or to seek to earn God's favor but rather to be able to say Lord Jesus I am yours because you've purchased me at a very very high price and I want to live to serve you it seems to me that's what the New Testament teaches us again and again poor Peter as he writes to the Christians in his first letter in chapter 2 says to them he reminds them of their privilege he says you are a chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation God's special possession just like the Old Testament people were a holy nation that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light that's why God has saved us that we might tell others that he's called me out of darkness into his light we might proclaim this wonderful good news in the way we serve in the way that we worship in all that we do it's an honour when we counted an honour and a privilege perhaps you were a blacksmith or perhaps you were a baker or perhaps you were some other trade and the queen called for you to bake her some bread or the royal head or the prime minister called for you to come and look after their horses say well

I work I'm a servant of the queen what an honour I must be the best of the best for them to want me to do this work well dear friends isn't this the amazing thing you and I have been called by God to serve the king of kings and the lord of lords what privilege what honour there is that he wants you and calls you to be part of his church and to serve his world to serve his purposes to serve for his glory what do you want what's higher than that as a church as individuals to that that we've been called to that we've been set apart just as God's people of old in the people of the Levites were let's do it from a heart of thankfulness let's serve from a heart that overflows with gratefulness and appreciation that

Jesus has given himself for me does only one respond to that I must give myself to him let's sing our final hymn together that scripture it collaboration dollar