



## Numbers - Chapter Eight

### I Numbers 1:1-10:10 - Israel Prepares to Enter the Land (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Eight

The chapter commences with an instruction to Aaron to set up the golden lampstand inside the tent of meeting. The consecration of the Levites is then described in detail. This involves both the washing of each person and a series of sacrificial offerings in order to separate the Levites from the people for their service to God. The ages of the men range from 25-50 years old.

#### I.f Numbers 8:1-4 - The Seven Lamps

The golden lampstand, the design of which was first given to Moses in Exodus 25:31-40, was made of pure gold, hammered out of one solid piece.

Resting on a base, the central stem had six branches, three on either side, together carrying seven lamps.

The lampstand with its branches was modelled on a flowering almond tree. This section gives instructions for its operation.



**The Golden Lampstand**

<sup>1</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you set up the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand. <sup>3</sup> Aaron did so; he set up its lamps to give light in front of the lampstand, as the Lord had commanded Moses. <sup>4</sup> Now this was how the lampstand was made, out of hammered work of gold. From its

base to its flowers, it was hammered work; according to the pattern that the Lord had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.

### Numbers 8:1-4

When you set up the lamps. The lampstand by itself could give no light. It had to have lamps placed upon it that gave light. All the lampstand could do was make the light more visible. The lamps were fuelled by oil; and would need to be continually filled with oil to provide constant light. There was no natural light inside the tabernacle.

The important point is that the seven lamps give light in front of the lampstand, that is, that their light shines on the table opposite it in the tabernacle on which are twelve unleavened loaves of bread symbolising the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 25:23-30). Light reflects the glorious presence of God, so this arrangement of the furniture in the tabernacle is a reminder of God's ongoing intention to bless the people of Israel; refer to the comments made on John 1:4-5 and 8:12 as Jesus being the source of that light today.

**Revelation 1:20** <<As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches>> **makes lampstands a picture of the church; the church itself does not light the world, but it does provide a 'platform' for Jesus' light to be seen.**

### I.g Numbers 8:5-26 - Consecration and Service of the Levites

The main focus of this section is on the process of cleansing the Levites in preparation for their service of assisting the priests in their duties. Only Levites aged between 25 and 50 years of age could serve.

### I.g.i Numbers 8:5-22 - The Dedication of the Levites

Like the previous paragraph, this section tidies up points partially covered earlier. The duties of the Levites in transporting and guarding the tabernacle have already been covered in Chapters 3-4. Now these verses explain how the Levites were inducted into these roles.

The rites are not as elaborate as the ordination of the priests in Leviticus Chapters 8-9, probably because the Levites had lower status than the priests. Nevertheless, as this ceremony declares, the Levites had an important role to play. As explained earlier in Numbers 3:40-43, the Levites substituted for the firstborn Israelites, and this point is repeated in vv.16-18. By the Levites taking on this role, they are removing the risk of plague breaking out on the whole people, which would happen if an Israelite approached the sanctuary incorrectly (v.19).

<sup>5</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>6</sup> Take the Levites from among the Israelites and cleanse them. <sup>7</sup> Thus you shall do to them, to cleanse them: sprinkle the water of purification on them, have them shave their whole body with a razor and wash their clothes, and so cleanse themselves. <sup>8</sup> Then let them take a young bull and its grain-offering of choice flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull for a sin-offering.

### Numbers 8:5-8

Take the Levites from among the Israelites and cleanse them. The priests had their dedication back in Leviticus Chapters 8 and 9. This was the dedication of the Levites and they needed to be ceremonially clean before God: <<*Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of it, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord*>> (Isaiah 52:11). The priests seemed to have a more spiritually oriented service, but the Levites needed to be dedicated unto the Lord also. Even practical service needs a heart of dedication and consecration to the Lord.

The ceremony involved several elements designed to cleanse the Levites: sprinkling them with the water of purification, which was probably the liquid described in Chapter 19, shaving the whole body, and washing their clothes. This cleansing process made them fit to be offered to God.

Sprinkle the water of purification on them. This ceremonial cleansing pictured a cleansing of sin. It was part of the new covenant as described in: <<*I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you*>> (Ezekiel 36:25).

Have them shave their whole body with a razor and wash their clothes. This was also commanded in the ceremony for the purification of a leper: <<*On the seventh day he shall shave all his hair: of head, beard, eyebrows; he shall shave all his hair. Then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean*>> (Leviticus 14:9). The idea was of a new start, of being made like a baby all over again, as in being born again: <<*Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God"*>> (John 3:3 NLT).

<sup>9</sup> You shall bring the Levites before the tent of meeting, and assemble the whole congregation of the Israelites. <sup>10</sup> When you bring the Levites before the Lord, the Israelites shall lay their hands on the Levites, <sup>11</sup> and Aaron shall present the Levites before the Lord as an elevation-offering from the Israelites, that they may perform the service of the

Lord. <sup>12</sup> The Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, and he shall offer one for a sin-offering and the other for a burnt-offering to the Lord, to make atonement for the Levites. <sup>13</sup> Then you shall have the Levites stand before Aaron and his sons, and you shall present them as an elevation-offering to the Lord.

#### Numbers 8:9-13

The Israelites shall lay their hands on the Levites. The leaders of the congregation then laid hands on the Levites, symbolising that the Levites are the representatives of the congregation. This was the case when Paul and Barnabas were sent out to represent the church: <<*Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manæen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'*>> (Acts 13:1-3). Then, like parts of a sacrifice, they are offered as an elevation-offering.

<sup>14</sup> Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the other Israelites, and the Levites shall be mine. <sup>15</sup> Thereafter the Levites may go in to perform service at the tent of meeting, once you have cleansed them and presented them as an elevation-offering. <sup>16</sup> For they are unreservedly given to me from among the Israelites; I have taken them for myself, in place of all that open the womb, the firstborn of all the Israelites. <sup>17</sup> For all the firstborn among the Israelites are mine, both human and animal. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated them for myself, <sup>18</sup> but I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn among the Israelites. <sup>19</sup> Moreover, I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the Israelites, to do the service for the Israelites at the tent of meeting, and to make atonement for the Israelites, in order that there may be no plague among the Israelites for coming too close to the sanctuary.

#### Numbers 8:14-19

The Levites shall be mine, in place of all that open the womb. God had declared that all firstborn males, human or animal, belonged to him: <<*I hereby accept the Levites from among the Israelites as substitutes for all the firstborn that open the womb among the Israelites. The Levites shall be mine*>> (Numbers 3:12). He later substituted the Levites for all the firstborn as described in Numbers 3:40-51.

### Thereafter the Levites may go in to perform service at the tent of meeting.

Real ministry is not all about dedication ceremonies; it is about doing the work. After the dedication, it was time to start the work for which they had been called.

<sup>20</sup> Moses and Aaron and the whole congregation of the Israelites did with the Levites accordingly; the Israelites did with the Levites just as the Lord had commanded Moses concerning them. <sup>21</sup> The Levites purified themselves from sin and washed their clothes; then Aaron presented them as an elevation-offering before the Lord, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them. <sup>22</sup> Thereafter the Levites went in to perform their service in the tent of meeting in attendance on Aaron and his sons. As the Lord had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they dealt with them.

### Numbers 8:20-22

Aaron presented them as an elevation-offering before the Lord. Parts of the peace offering were waved and then given to the priest; refer to Leviticus 7:28-34. Sacrificial elevation, also known as waving, is usually supposed to be a side-to-side movement, but just how the Levites were elevated or waved is unclear. The ceremony was completed by offering two sacrifices, i.e. the burnt and sin-offering, using bulls, the most valuable of sacrificial animals; refer to Leviticus 1:3-9 and 4:1-21.

### I.g.ii      Numbers 8:23-26 - The Retirement of the Levites

At the age of fifty Levites were to retire from the duty of the service, i.e. from the work involved in transporting the tabernacle, because carrying the tabernacle was too hard for older men. However, they were allowed to continue to act as guards (vv.25-26). In 4:23 it is said that Levites start their labour of carrying the tabernacle when they are 30 years old, but here they start at age 25. The reason for the difference is unclear: maybe from the ages of 25 to 30 they were viewed as apprentices as suggested in the following comments.

<sup>23</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>24</sup> This applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upwards they shall begin to do duty in the service of the tent of meeting; <sup>25</sup> and from the age of fifty years they shall retire from the duty of the service and serve no more. <sup>26</sup> They may assist their brothers in the tent of meeting in carrying out their duties, but they shall perform no service. Thus you shall deal with the Levites in assigning their duties.

This applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upwards. A Levite's time of active service was to begin at age thirty and last until fifty according to Numbers 4:3, 4:23, and 4:30. Yet their formal training began at age twenty-five, possibly indicating a five year apprenticeship. King David would later lower the starting age: <<*And so the Levites no longer need to carry the tabernacle or any of the things for its service' – for according to the last words of David these were the number of the Levites from twenty years old and upwards*>> (1 Chronicles 23:26-27).

Thus you shall deal with the Levites in assigning their duties. This chapter shows that the people whom God has chosen to serve him must be cleansed, dedicated, and doing the work they have been called to undertake.