

### The Consecration of the Levites

#### Numbers 8

Numbers 8 - *“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> “Speak to Aaron, and say to him, ‘When you arrange the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lamp stand.’” <sup>3</sup> And Aaron did so; he arranged the lamps to face toward the front of the lamp stand, as the LORD commanded Moses. <sup>4</sup> Now this workmanship of the lamp stand was hammered gold; from its shaft to its flowers it was hammered work. According to the pattern that the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lamp stand.*

<sup>5</sup> *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>6</sup> “Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially. <sup>7</sup> Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean. <sup>8</sup> Then let them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull as a sin offering. <sup>9</sup> And you shall bring the Levites before the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall gather together the whole congregation of the children of Israel. <sup>10</sup> So you shall bring the Levites before the LORD, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites; <sup>11</sup> and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD like a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of the LORD. <sup>12</sup> Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, and you shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites.*

<sup>13</sup> *“And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them like a wave offering to the LORD. <sup>14</sup> Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. <sup>15</sup> After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting. So you shall cleanse them and offer them like a wave offering. <sup>16</sup> For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. <sup>17</sup> For all the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself. <sup>18</sup> I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel. <sup>19</sup> And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary.”*

<sup>20</sup> *Thus Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel did to the Levites; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so the children of Israel did to them. <sup>21</sup> And the Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes; then Aaron presented them like a wave offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them. <sup>22</sup> After that the Levites went in to do their work in the tabernacle of meeting before Aaron and his sons; as the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.*

<sup>23</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>24</sup> “This is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; <sup>25</sup> and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more. <sup>26</sup> They may minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs, but they themselves shall do no work. Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties.”

## Background Notes

Numbers 7 is the record of the gifts and offerings that were given by the twelve tribes at the time of the dedication of the Tabernacle and the altar. From verse 5 on, Numbers 8 is the record of the consecration of the Levites - setting the Levites apart for service to the Lord. Between the time of the dedication of the Tabernacle in Numbers 7, and the consecration of the Levites in Numbers 8, we have the record of Aaron, the high priest, setting up and lighting the seven lamps on the golden lamp stand, or menorah, that was in the Tabernacle. Remember, there were no windows in the Tabernacle. All light in the Holy Place came from the seven lamps on the menorah.

The fact that the lighting of the lamps took place right before the consecration of the Levites symbolically emphasized that the Levites were to represent the whole nation as a **light to the nations** around them. Israel, of course, failed in her responsibility to be a light to the Gentiles. In contrast to Israel’s failure, however, the Messiah, the future perfect servant of the Lord, would be a light to the whole world. Isaiah 42:6 says, “*I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles...*”

Even though Israel had failed to be a light to the surrounding nations, the coming Servant, the Messiah, would be a “*light to the Gentiles.*” So the lamp stand in the Tabernacle is a spiritual picture of Christ as the true Light. As all light in the Tabernacle came from the menorah, so all spiritual light in the Church and in our lives as believers comes from our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Servants of the Lord should be fully committed to the Lord.

The Levites were the Tabernacle servants. They helped the priests with all the work associated with the Tabernacle, and were responsible for the transportation and protection of the Tabernacle and the holy objects. Everything about the consecration of the Levites speaks of **total commitment to the Lord**. It typifies or pictures the commitment of the Lord’s servants today - and that should include every believer!

A number of features in this consecration procedure emphasize total commitment to the Lord. First, the Levites were to be sprinkled with purifying water (v7). The water probably came from the bronze laver in the Tabernacle courtyard, the container that held the water for cleansing or washing. The purifying water pictures our cleansing from the defiling effects of sin. Committed servants of the Lord must be clean, to represent their Master well! They must be cleansed from the defiling effects of sin.

How do we cleanse ourselves from the defiling effects of the sin that constantly surrounds us in this world? Answer: A steady diet of God's Word! Ephesians 5:25-26 says, "...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word..." To "sanctify" means "to set apart for God's holy use," and that is what commitment is all about. If we're going to be committed servants, the cleansing effects of the Word of God must be applied to our lives.

The Levites were also to wash their clothes and shave their whole bodies (v7). This emphasized both cleanliness and purity. Committed servants must be determined to practice purity in their thought lives and in their lifestyle. The sharp knife or razor of self-judgment must be applied to the flesh and its sinful desires! Shaving all the hair off your head and body may also emphasize that there is no place for human pride in the life of committed servants of the Lord. In that day, shaving one's head would have been a humbling experience.

The sacrifices were part of the consecration procedure for the Levites (v8-12). The sacrifices emphasize the different aspects of the work of Christ on the cross, His great sacrifice for sin. The Lord's committed servants must appreciate and apply the work of Christ on the cross. His cross is the basis of our invitation to be His servants in the first place. The fact that the Levites themselves were presented as a "wave offering" to the Lord also emphasizes total commitment. In a "wave offering, the offering (in this case, the Levites) was waved back and forth toward the Lord. This gesture emphasized that the offering was given **totally** to the Lord.

Notice the word "wholly" in verse 16. There is certainly an emphasis on **full** commitment to the Lord in this chapter. Are you fully committed to the Lord?

Servants of the Lord should be fully committed to the Lord.

## 2. Servants of the Lord should move on for the Lord!

It sounds like the Levites had a pretty good deal (v23-26), doesn't it? They worked for twenty-five years, from age 25 to age 50. I'd be retired already if I were a Levite! Well, the Levites worked hard for those 25 years, especially if the people were bringing all the required sacrifices. But any way you look at it, serving the Lord is a very "good deal," both then and today. And that applies to all of us, because we are all servants of the Lord!

Numbers 4 says that the Levites worked from age **30** to age 50, but Numbers 8 says that they worked from age **25** to age 50. Is this a contradiction in the Bible? No! Most likely there was a five-year apprenticeship, when the young Levites would observe and learn all the important aspects of the Tabernacle work – both when Israel camped and when Israel

marched. Then the young Levites moved on to the actual work of carrying and setting up the Tabernacle, and assisting the priests with all the sacrifices. At 50 years of age, the Levites were expected to move on to retirement. Verse 26 says that Levites over 50 years of age could continue to help as advisors and counselors, even though they were retired from active service, but they were to leave the heavy work to the younger Levites.

There are spiritual lessons here for servants of the Lord today. 1 Timothy 3 says that church leaders should not be thrust into the work without some spiritual maturity. They should gain some experience as an “apprentice” before moving on to leadership roles. In addition, older church leaders need to step aside and turn over the work of the Lord to younger servants, although they may continue to be very helpful as advisors and counselors. Older leaders who refuse to move on, or refuse to release control, or refuse to let younger leaders take on responsibilities, need to read Numbers 8!

Servants of the Lord should move on for the Lord.

## **Practical Application**

### **Let’s keep the lamps lit!**

The lamp stand in the Tabernacle was a spiritual picture (or *type*) of Christ as the Light. In John 8:12, Jesus said, “*I am the Light of the world.*” In Matthew 5:14, the Lord said to His followers, “*You are the light of the world.*” So the lamps of the menorah represent the light of Christ that is present in the lives of believers and in the life of the church -- and that Light should be seen in our lives and in our fellowships!

Just as Aaron and his sons had to maintain the lamps and keep them lit, so we must keep our lamps lit. We must not allow the light of Christ to become dim or diminished by sin or by worldly distractions – in our personal lives, or in the testimony of our churches!

Let’s keep the lamps lit!