

# "The Price of Redemption"

## Numbers 3

I think we're beginning to appreciate the Book of Numbers as we start to see how organized and structured things were. While it may not be exciting reading, we have to appreciate that God had given Moses the immense task of organizing 2-3 million slaves into their family clans, into their tribal units, into an army camped specifically in north, south, east and west divisions, but all visually focusing on God in the middle. All of us at one time have had to plan a large gathering or event, so we know how much work is involved and not everyone cooperates!

In organizing the people in army divisions, God has already told us don't count the Levites; they have a special role. And now in Ch.'s 3 and 4 we'll see what God has in mind. Already we know God is holy and you don't just come anyway you feel like it, there is order for everyone's protection and that's part of the Levites responsibility. They are to oversee the daily functioning of worshipping God.

Once again God speaks to Moses in 3:1,

**3:1** *This is the account of the family of Aaron and Moses at the time the Lord talked with Moses on Mount Sinai. <sup>2</sup> The names of the sons of Aaron were Nadab the firstborn and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. <sup>3</sup> Those were the names of Aaron's sons, the anointed priests, who were ordained to serve as priests. <sup>4</sup> Nadab and Abihu, however, fell dead before the Lord when they made an offering with unauthorized fire before him in the Desert of Sinai. They had no sons; so only Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests during the lifetime of their father Aaron. <sup>5</sup> The Lord said to Moses, <sup>6</sup> "Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him*

God decides who gets what role because He's God. When Job and his friends debated why God does what He does, God finally answered Job and essentially saying to them all, 'I am a God, you're not and I am free to choose what I choose, but I also do it for your ultimate good.' So when we grumble about our lot in life we essential grumble at God's choosing. Yet here's a good reminder to which we should be thankful:

## **God Chooses His Servants Totally by His Grace** **(3:1-6)**

God chose Moses to lead the people of Egypt. He chose his brother Aaron to be the High priest and his sons the priests who got to serve the closest to God in the Holy Place. And then he chose one of the 12 tribes to help the priests, namely the Levites. And even among the 3 sons of Levi, God will divide the responsibilities of handling the Tabernacle. God decided who would do what role. Based on qualifications? No, this was all new. Based on grace and grace alone. We can't know the mind of God nor be privy to the Holy Council He and Jesus and the Spirit and angels are part of. But whatever gifts He blesses us with or assignments He has for us they are simply by His grace. We know that we aren't given them based on qualifications because if they were, then we shouldn't have gotten them. So while we have all sinned we don't have to

***Don't let your past sins define us***

Think about Moses. Egyptian upbringing in Pharaoh's court would have given him educational advantages for sure. That always looks good on a resume. There was also something else on Moses' resume – murderer! Remember Ex. 2:11-15?

<sup>11</sup> One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. <sup>12</sup> Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. <sup>13</sup> The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?" <sup>14</sup> The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known."

Moses ends up running away and plans to spend the rest of his life herding sheep in the wilderness – until God shows up 40 years later, well after the Pharaoh who wanted Moses dead is gone. Moses, who once felt the urge to help his people out of slavery (his own way) learns humility and repentance over 40 years and then God calls him to lead Israel out of Egypt.

What about Aaron? On his resume is better speaking skills than my brother and goldsmith. Goldsmith? He must have been skilled because we read this in Ex. 32:!

**32** When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." <sup>2</sup> Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." <sup>3</sup> So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup> He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

<sup>5</sup> When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." <sup>6</sup> So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

<sup>7</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. <sup>8</sup> They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

So Aaron made a golden calf for Israel to worship, as if it was God [Aaron's perspective] but the people end up worshipping the idol. All this after he had seen the miracles in Egypt. Yet God still chooses Aaron to lead the priesthood.

What about the Levites? Their father Levi was a murderer too. When Shechem son of Hamor, raped Levi's sister Dinah, Levi and his brothers coerced the Shechemites to get circumcised in order to accept Shechem marrying Dinah. They agreed but then this happened in Gen. 34:25

<sup>25</sup> Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. <sup>26</sup> They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. <sup>27</sup> The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. <sup>28</sup> They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. <sup>29</sup> They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.

God doesn't choose people to be saved or serve Him based on their deeds, good or bad. He chooses based on grace and mercy. Our faith in Christ is a gift from God. Our talents and spiritual gifts are grace gifts from God to use to serve Him. Any responsibilities we have should be humbly accepted because we didn't earn them, God gave them to us in spite of our sinful tendencies. However, our sins

### **Can affect how God blesses us**

While God forgave Moses and Aaron their sins and put them in positions of responsibility over His people, there was a future incident that results in both Moses and Aaron losing out on the blessing of entering the promised land. We'll look at it in more detail later but in Num. 20 the Israelites complain once again about a lack of water. God tells Moses to speak to a rock and the water will come. However, Moses got angry with the people and said this:

*<sup>9</sup> So Moses took the staff from the Lord's presence, just as he commanded him. <sup>10</sup> He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" <sup>11</sup> Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. <sup>12</sup> But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."*

Both Aaron and Moses would die before they reached the land of promise. A lost blessing because of their own rebellion against God's words.

And when Levi's father Jacob was blessing his sons before they died, he said this to Levi:

*<sup>5</sup> "Simeon and Levi are brothers— their swords are weapons of violence. <sup>6</sup> Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. <sup>7</sup> Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel."*

Levi would not get any land. They would serve God as priests but lost out on the blessing of their own piece of land. Before we get very far in this chapter we are reminded of the grace and sovereignty of God. He saves us, gifts us and uses us based on His choosing not our great character. While our salvation is not in jeopardy, the enjoyment of the benefits of salvation, can be lessened because of our own moments of rebellion. Stay humble and thankful.

The major portion of the rest of Ch.3 has to do with dividing the ministry responsibilities among the sons of Aaron who serve as priests and the three sons of Levi; Gershon, Kohath and Merari, who serve as helpers to the priests. Like the army, they too are counted because God needs everyone to be available to serve Him. Everyone has a ministry and is important in their perspective roles. And this will become an issue later on in Ch. 16. So with Ch. 16 looming ahead its important for us to remember ourselves that

## **Ministry Responsibilities and Abilities are to be Appreciated Not Envied (3:7-38)**

Because Ch. 4 goes into more detail about their ministries, for now we will summarize what each of the three sons families were responsible for. Note again that the 3 Levites sons families camped between the Tabernacle and the people. Why? To keep the people from coming to the

Tabernacle lest they die and because they will serve God there and so they camp close. The Levites camp around the north, south and west of the Tabernacle while Moses, Aaron and their families camp at the east, where the entrance to the Tabernacle was.

The Gershonites were responsible for the actual tent and curtains that surrounded the tent of meeting and the courtyard along with ropes and everything involved with that (vv.21-26).

The Merarites (vv.33-37) were responsible for the frame of the tent of meeting, its posts and crossbars that would need to be in place first before the Gershonites could cover it all with the appropriate tents. Then the Kohathites (vv.27-32) were responsible for the ark, the menorah, the table of showbread and the altar, all the furniture that went inside and the curtain that divided the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place when the sacrificial system was functioning. They all had responsibilities that were essential to the working of the Tabernacle. Which reminds us about ministry,

### ***No effective ministry happens without preparation (vv.21-35)***

The sacrifices couldn't happen if the tent frames and coverings hadn't all been in place. The Merarites had to do their job first before anyone else could do theirs. Yet how many of us are totally oblivious to the preparation for ministry? People study the Bible on their own before they come to teach a bible study, a Jr church class or preach a sermon. The worship team picks songs and practices before they come. People clean the church or move chairs and tables or shovel snow or cut grass or prepare a bulletin or change a light bulb or sharpen pencil crayons or, or, or ... all before any of us come. We just assume these things will happen before we come. But if they didn't happen first, our meeting together would be very disorganized and not glorify God because we would be distracted by the lack of preparations. All ministries are important because they pre-prepare us to have as little a distracting worship service as possible at least that which is under our control.

Because what is one of the most successful strategies of the enemy? Distractions. Perhaps one of the ways he distracts us on Sunday mornings is our lack of prayer preparation for ourselves. If James 4 says "we don't have because we don't ask God", and we left this morning saying to ourselves 'I didn't get anything out of that', did you prepare beforehand by asking God to help you to be open to how He wants to speak to you? Perhaps we have things we're worried about and we let our mind focus on those things and not about God. So preparation is crucial for ministry to happen.

We have to keep a balanced perspective that all ministry is relevant and essential to allow God to minister to us. What sometimes happens however, is we can get envious of people doing "more visible" ministry. This will happen to a Kohathite named Korah and he convinces many others to grumble against Moses and Aaron in Ch. 16 because they are not satisfied with their ministry; they feel they have every right to be priests, which was Aaron's family's job. Without getting into Ch. 16 yet let's remember to

### ***Look up and be thankful and not across and grumble (vv.5-13; 27-32; Num. 16)***

The Levites were sovereignly chosen by God to help the priests and work in the Tabernacle. Many times we read they were to guard it, to keep people from coming too close or at the wrong time or in an inappropriate manner. It was a privileged responsibility. But the Kohathites would grumble because they weren't thanking God for what He gave them. They were unappreciative of being the only ones to handle the Ark and the menorah and all the furnishings of the Holy Place.

We deserve nothing yet God gives us life, saves us and now gives us the privilege of serving Him with Spiritual gifts. What kind of people ought we to be?

*Col. 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

We are called to be at peace, to minister to one another and glorify God by being thankful. The more thankful we are the less envious we will be.

There was another reason why God chose the Levites to be act as priests. Because

## **The Priesthood Reminds Us of the Cost Of Redemption (3:39-51)**

God explained why He chose the Levites to be the priests because everyone needed to appreciate what it cost God to redeem them from the Egyptians. The 10<sup>th</sup> plague was the death of all firstborn people and cattle in Egypt unless they had sacrificed a lamb and spread its blood on the doorframe of their house. The shedding of blood paid the ransom price God required.

So now, God said, instead of demanding that all the firstborn Israelites belonged to Him, He sovereignly chose a tribe to be the reminder of the redemption price. So when they counted the Levites there were 22,000 of them. God had Moses count all the firstborn Israelites and it came to 22,273 (v.43). So God declared there needed to be a ransom price paid of 5 shekels each to cover the difference in numbers. This way everyone was properly ransomed.

The priesthood was a visible reminder that the privilege of being in God's presence and having access to God through a blood sacrifice had a cost. There is a cost to have a relationship with God but God paid the price Himself. The sacrificial system was temporal because the blood of bulls and goats cannot pay the price for human sin. There needed to be a perfect human sacrifice and we're not perfect. But Jesus was and is. So just as the first-born Egyptians died instead of the first-born Israelites, now Jesus God's "first-born" dies as our substitute. The only way we can have access to God is if we believe the blood of Jesus paid for our sins individually, confessing we are sinners and accept His sacrifice on our behalf which is enough to ransom us for God.

And now all of us are spiritual priests offering spiritual sacrifices to God as our worship and thankfulness.

*<sup>1</sup> Pet. 2:4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—<sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

When we set our lives apart for Christ, choosing to serve Him with praise and thanksgiving we are the visible reminder that redemption is available through Jesus alone by faith alone. We don't earn our salvation by serving Him, we serve Him out of a thankful heart because He has bought us for Himself by sending Jesus to die in our place.

We will show people who Jesus is by how thankful we are to Him for saving us and equipping us to serve Him. When we are being

*Like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do[ing] nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility considering others better than ourselves. Looking not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others.*

Let's be thankful for God saving us and giving us ministries to help each other grow in Jesus. Let's be thankful for the role we play in God's church and let's work together for God's glory with our differing gifts. And as we work together and practice thankfulness and humility, let's pray a watching world sees we have something they don't, and they ask questions and we tell them how Jesus died as their substitute so that they too could find joy and freedom through forgiveness of their sins.

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