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The Clan of Merari

4: 29-49

The clan of Merari DIG: What were the duties of the Merarites. How did they compare to the Kohathites? The Gershonites? Given the mobile nature of the Tabernacle, how important would the work of the Merarites be in the religious life of the Israelites? What order did the different clans work when going on the march? What was the order when the Levites assembled the Tabernacle?

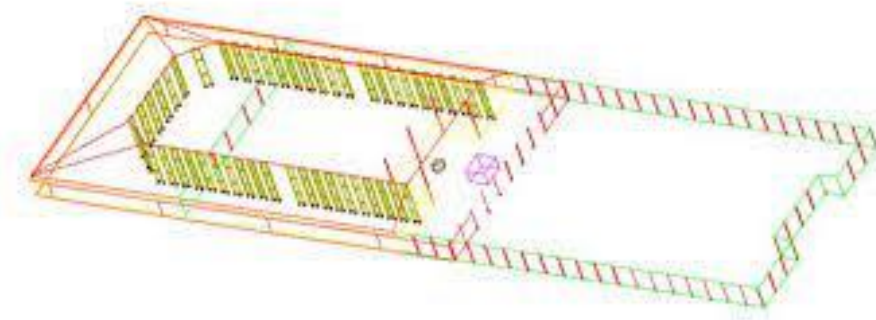
REFLECT: What does this passage teach us about how God has given us each different responsibilities and called us to work together for His glory? What part does He want you to play? Who takes care of the physical aspects of worship in your church or Messianic congregation. How can you show your appreciation to them this week?

The Merarites were responsible for transporting the framework of the Tabernacle.

Similar phrasing to the other two-family units can be seen in this section, with instructions that the family of **Merari** was to have **their** principle ministry with **the frames, crossbars, sockets, cords**, and other equipment. **Their** ministry was important as that of any other family group; for without it the more desirable, prestigious work of **the Tabernacle** couldn't have been done. Hence, **the Merarites** could take an interest even in the placing of **a post, a peg, or a socket**. Not that each of these items was a distinct, suitable "type of **Messiah**," but because the worship of **ADONAI** could not proceed - nor could the camp move out or be set up - unless **the Merarites** were doing **their** holy work.⁷³

The clan of Merari (4:29-33): As for the descendants of Merari, take a census by clans and families of all those between thirty and fifty years old, all who will be assigned the work of serving in the Tabernacle. The **Kohathites** had already removed the holiest items, which **they themselves** were solely responsible (**to see link click At - The Clan of Kohath**). Then, **the Gershomites** removed the coverings, exposing the framework. **The Merarites** entered next, doing the heaviest work of dismantling, packing, and unpacking **the frameworks for the Tabernacle and outer court**. Although **Gershon** was **Levi's** firstborn, **Kohath** received the honor of caring for **the holiest things**.

Gershom, however, is still honored by placement at the head of this new parashah Nasso (see [Au - The Clan of Gershom](#)). When going on the march, **the Kohathites** would first remove **the holiest things**, which **they themselves** shouldered. Then **the Gershomites** would remove the coverings, exposing the framework. Only then would **the Merarites**, doing the heaviest work, dismantle the framework for **the Tabernacle** and outer court. When **they** reached their destination, this process would be reversed.⁷⁴



Their service for the Tabernacle was to carry the frames, crossbars, posts and sockets of the Tabernacle; also the posts for the surrounding courtyard, with their sockets, pegs, cords and other accessories, and everything having to do with their service. The cords fastened the posts to the pegs. No **pegs** are mentioned in connection with the Sanctuary curtains; nor were **they** needed since the Sanctuary **frame** gave the curtains sufficient stability. **You are to assign particular loads to specific persons by name.** It was essential to label the numerous objects under their care, **frames, sockets, pegs, crossbars, and posts.**⁷⁵ Their ministry consisted in dismantling the framework, etc., packing it on the carts, guarding it on the journey, and reassembling it upon the arrival at the destination. **Four wagons and eight oxen** were needed to transport **them** all (7:8a). **This is how the Merari families are to serve the Tabernacle** when moving from one location to another. **They were directed by Ithamar the son of Aaron the high priest.** (4:31-34).

Census completed (4:34-45): The first census of **the Levites** was to determine the number of **Levite males a month old and older (3:39)** to **redeem the firstborn of Isra'el** (see [As - The Census and Redemption of the Firstborn](#)). The second counting of **the Levites**, seen here, was to determine those from age **thirty to fifty** who were eligible to assume **their Levitical** duties.

Moshe, Aaron and the community leaders took a census of the descendants of

Kohath by their clans and families, all those between thirty and fifty years old who were part of the corps serving in the tent of meeting. Registered by their families, they numbered **2,750**. These are the ones counted from the Kohath families of all those serving in the Tabernacle, whom Moshe and Aaron enumerated, in keeping with the order given by ADONAI through Moshe.

The census of the descendants of **Gershon**, by their clans and families, all those between thirty and fifty years old who were part of the corps serving in the Tabernacle, yielded **2,630**, registered by their clans and families. These are the ones counted from the families of the descendants of Gershon of all those serving in the tent of meeting, whom Moshe and Aaron enumerated, in keeping with the order given by ADONAI.

The census of the families of the descendants of **Merari**, by their clans and families, all those between thirty and fifty years old who were part of the corps serving in the Tabernacle, yielded **3,200**, registered by their families. These are the ones counted from the families of the descendants of Merari, whom Moshe and Aaron enumerated, in keeping with the order given by ADONAI through Moshe.

Summary (4:46-49): The summary gives us a sense of completion to the unit. The Hebrew style seems to allow the reader to enjoy a sense of “going full circle.” When the summary of actions of obedience is given as seen here, there is a sense in which the reader may derive some satisfaction.⁷⁶ **The census of the Levites, whom Moshe, Aaron and the leaders of Isra’el enumerated by their clans and families, all those between thirty and fifty years old who were part of those working to serve and working to carry loads in the tent of meeting, yielded a total of 8,580 persons (4:46-48).** The reader will discern a careful progression from **the Kohathites**, who deal with the most holy things inside **the Sanctuary**, to **the Gershonites** and **Merarites**, who care for the progressively less holy and exterior parts of **the Tabernacle**. This is in line with the concentric circles of holiness and danger that were a part of the **Israelites** camping arrangement. Just as there were concentric circles of holiness within the Tabernacle itself (moving from the Most Holy Place, to the Holy Place, to the courtyard), so there were concentric circles of relative holiness within the whole camp. **The Tabernacle** was at the center and was most holy, the circle of **Levites** and **Aaronic priests** which immediately surrounded **it** were next in the order of holiness, while **the twelve tribes** were all equidistant in signifying the least holy part of the camp.

But the Bible nowhere suggests that these degrees of holiness correspond to different levels

of divine favor or value. These concentric circles of holiness didn't have anything to do with divine esteem or favor; rather, it had to do so with danger. The one boundary that could not be crossed is sinful human encroachment into **God's** holy space and prerogative. Every **Israelite**, whether **priest, Levite**, or common person, was subject to the danger of death which occurred when they violated sacred boundaries (see the commentary on **Leviticus Bh - The Death of Nadab and Abihu**). However, it was only with **YHVH** in **their** midst that **Isra'el** had a future. Without **Him**, **they** were lost (without **Him**, we are lost). That lesson would be learned more than once in the struggles of **Isra'el's** wilderness wanderings.

In the meantime, **Numbers 4** ends with a sweeping note of reassurance. **According to ADONAI's order they were appointed by Moshe, each one to his specific service or work. They were also enumerated, as ADONAI had ordered Moshe (4:49).** The picture seemed rosy indeed as **the Tabernacle** and **the people** appear well instructed and in place.⁷⁷

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, What an Awesome **God** and **Father You** are! How wonderful it is that **You** call those who love **You** to be **Your** children. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).** How fantastic that **You** come to live within **me**. **You** do not leave me, but you abide with me and in me. **The Spirit of truth . . . You know Him, because He abides with you and will be in you. . . Yeshua answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him (John 14:17, 23).** Just like with **Isra'el**, it is only **Your** abiding presence in me that gives me a future. I love **You**! In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*