

# ***Priesthood Order***

## **Part 4**

Part Three of our series ended by saying that Part four would begin on the South Side of the Tabernacle, which doesn't pose a problem for the reader but is causing somewhat of a dilemma for me as we continue. It may be totally irrelevant but the choice of which side to consider in our progression through the study seems "important" because of the placement of Sons. Do we consider the order of their natural birth, their order of appointment, their establishment in the encampment, or their order of travel?

The East Side seemed appropriate as the "first" Side to explore because it is where the "First Order" of Priesthood was established in the camp. The South Side seemed like the "logical" place to continue because it is where the remaining three sons of Kohath; Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel were to camp and these were the brothers of Amram. (Amram is the father of Miriam, Aaron, and Moses \_\_\_\_ who camped on the East Side.) These remaining sons of Kohath are the ones who had the responsibility for carrying the Holy and Most Holy elements upon their shoulders as they traveled from place to place.

Since the "Levites," who were not of the "First Order" of priests, are represented by all of the sons of Levi; Gershon, Kohath, and Merari and each have their appointed placement as sons, it appears that God does not "regard" man from the perspective of the "natural" order of birth. In this instance, it was the second son of Levi, Amram, "exalted people," whom God predestined to fulfill His purpose for the high calling to which Moses, Aaron and his sons, were called. This is the Order we began with, in order to help us to have a clearer **vision for the High Calling** we have received under the New Covenant. Other instances could be cited to establish this throughout scripture, i.e., Jacob/Esau, Joseph, or David, who were all sons "appointed" and "exalted" above their elder brothers \_\_\_\_ according to "Predestination" and God's Sovereign Choice.

## **II. The North Side**

- A. Merari = "bitter" Third and youngest son of Levi
  - 1. Mahli = "weak/sick" also; "to grieve, to be tired, to be wounded"
  - 2. Mushi = "yielding" also; "to feel, to be sensitive"

The choice to share the Northward Side "**next**" in our order, takes into consideration the "reality" that we, in our PROCESSING and PREPARATION to experience the "glory" of the High Calling are not going to begin our journey by being placed as "exalted/honored" sons in a position of responsibility where we "bear" the names of "Spiritual Israel," as a memorial before God, upon our shoulders, (as Aaron did for Israel of old), when he entered the Sanctuary, neither are we going to start by bearing the Holy and Most Holy elements upon our shoulders as did those sons of Kohath who camped on the Southward side.

We are going to continue our study according to the "order" in which the "Levitical Order," (Levites who were dedicated at Sinai and subsequently offered as a wave offering and given as a "gift" to Aaron and his sons and "ministered" under their supervision), traveled on their journey to the "Promised Land;" and their inheritance.

## B. Order of Travel

1. Those who camped on the Eastward Side set out First.
  - a. Moses, Aaron and his sons, Miriam
  - b. Judah, Issachar, Zebulun
2. Gershon and Merari, carrying the loads they were responsible followed

There seems to be some question as to whether the first order of priests, along with those Levites who carried the Ark, set out at the head of the “marching order” as they traveled from place to place. On one occasion, at least, it is definite: “Thus they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD journeying in front of them for the three days, to seek out a resting place for them. The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp. Then it came about when the ark set out that Moses said, "Rise up, O LORD! And let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You." When it came to rest, he said, "Return, O LORD, *To* the myriad thousands of Israel.” (Num 10:33-36)

This was the first of their journeys which began at Sinai but in subsequent moves it doesn't specify this as standard procedure. It may well have been the standard throughout their migration because we see the Ark being carried ahead of Israel at a distance of two-thousand cubits when they were about to cross over Jordan: “Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and he and all the sons of Israel set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan, and they lodged there before they crossed. At the end of three days the officers went through the midst of the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it." However, there shall be between you and it a distance of about 2,000 cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before.” (Jos 3:1-4) Since their migration began and ended with the ark going before them it seems reasonable that this was the order throughout their travels.

There is no question however, that the sons of Gershon and Merari, who bore the principal structure and elements of the Outer Court, followed after the tribes who camped on the Eastern Side so that they would arrive at their destination in enough time \_\_\_ ahead of the Kohathites who carried the Holy and Most Holy articles \_\_\_ to set the whole structure up in readiness for their arrival.

C. The sons of Merari were responsible for all of the “framework” of the Tabernacle, both the Outer Court and Sanctuary. They set the sockets, inserted the pillars/posts and set the pegs for the courtyard and the sanctuary. They also erected the boards/walls and secured the bars of the sanctuary in preparation for the Gershonites, who carried all of the “soft” coverings except for those which were used as coverings for each article that was holy or most holy and could not be looked upon, lest they die.

Now the appointed duties of the sons of Merari *involved* the frames of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, all its equipment, and the service concerning them, and the pillars around the court with their sockets and their pegs and their cords. (Num 3:36-37)

It may be easier to understand their placement as sons and their appointed duties/responsibilities by sharing an overview beginning at Sinai and continuing to our present thought.

The following review applies to ALL of the Levites who are not of the first order of consecrated priests so this is something we can also refer to when we consider the Gershonites and Kohathites.

The Merarites were among the sons of Levi who stood for the LORD at Sinai when the sons of Israel corrupted themselves and Aaron provided a golden calf from out of the fire. Moses had called for

those who would separate themselves to go among their kinfolk, i.e., neighbors, brothers, sons, friends, etc., and take the sword to them. It was at this time the Levites **dedicated themselves** to the LORD. "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, *come* to me!" And **all the sons of Levi** gathered together to him. He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Every man *of you* put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.'" So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, "Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD--for every man has been against his son and against his brother--in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today." (Exo 32:26-29)

In the days that followed, the Tabernacle was erected and the first order of Priests, Aaron and his sons were established in their "ministry." There were many offerings given for the dedication/consecration of the tabernacle and all of the articles used in the service of the tabernacle for the sons of Israel. When the altar of sacrifice was dedicated/consecrated it was considered Most Holy, (*qodesh qodesh*), which required twelve days and a whole lot of sacrifices and offerings. AFTER the altar was consecrated the Lampstand was set in place. Only after the Lampstand was set in place were Aaron and his sons consecrated and the Levites brought before the doorway to the tent of meeting and dedicated wholly to the LORD, by presenting them as a wave offering, which was what qualified them **to enter and serve the tent of meeting** in the service of the LORD.

"**Aaron then shall present the Levites before the LORD** as a wave offering from the sons of Israel, **that they may qualify** to perform the service of the LORD. "Now the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls; then offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. "You shall have the **Levites stand before Aaron and before his sons** so as to present them as a wave offering to the LORD. "Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. "Then after that the Levites may go in to serve the tent of meeting. But you shall cleanse them and present them as a wave offering; for they are wholly given to Me from among the sons of Israel. I have taken them for Myself instead of every first issue of the womb, the firstborn of all the sons of Israel. "For every firstborn among the sons of Israel is Mine, among the men and among the animals; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself. "But **I have taken the Levites instead of every firstborn among the sons of Israel. "I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the sons of Israel, to perform the service of the sons of Israel at the tent of meeting and to make atonement on behalf of the sons of Israel, so that there will be no plague among the sons of Israel by their coming near to the sanctuary.**" Thus did Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the sons of Israel to the Levites; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so the sons of Israel did to them. The Levites, too, purified themselves from sin and washed their clothes; and Aaron presented them as a wave offering before the LORD. Aaron also made atonement for them to cleanse them. Then after that the Levites went in to perform their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron and before his sons; just as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them. Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "This is what *applies* to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward **they shall enter to perform service in the work of the tent of meeting**. (Num 8:11-24)

For all practical purposes this brings us back to our consideration of the sons of Merari. A summarization of some things we've already covered may help to keep their calling and appointment in proper perspective, although there may be some expanded thoughts, and probably some embellishment to help us identify with their experiences.

C. Merari = “bitter” Third and youngest son of Levi

1. Mahli = “weak/sick” also; “to grieve, to be tired, to be wounded”
2. Mushi = “yielding” also; “to feel; to be sensitive”
3. Ithamar was the overseer responsible for the service of the sons of Merari
4. The Merarites were counted by their clans and families. All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting, counted by their clans, were 3,200. (Num 4:42-44)
5. The Merarites were given four ox carts and eight oxen to convey their loads
6. The sons of Merari according to their families received twelve cities from the tribe of Reuben and from the tribe of Gad and from the tribe of Zebulun. (Jos 21:7)
7. They numbered 6,200 from one month old and upward

When we consider the attributes associated with the meaning of the name/nature of Merari and his sons we get a glimpse into the processing consistent with their calling. We remember how Jesus spoke to those who would come to him and stand for the LORD; “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. “For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? “Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,” (Luk 14:26-29)

As we’ve already noted, the sons of Merari were among the Levites who took their swords and went among the congregation at Sinai and slew about three thousand of their friends, neighbors, brothers, sons, etc., to atone for the corruption that had degenerated to the worship of “another” god.

It is a “bitter” experience when we begin to assimilate the word that reveals the path we must follow to become a “disciple” of our Lord Jesus Christ. It isn’t long before we begin to recognize our weakness and the sick feeling that comes with yielding to our cross. It causes us tremendous grief when our “enemies” become those from our own household and we become weary/tired and wounded.

To “forsake,” or put the sword to those near and dear to us can be a very bitter experience but we must all embrace the grace and truth that comes through Christ and grow to his stature. A time came in the life of Jesus when he separated himself to take his stand with the LORD. A large crowd had gathered to hear him preach the kingdom of God and, “While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mat 12:46-50)

The sons of Merari had the responsibility to “set” the foundation for the tabernacle every time the cloud and fire caused them to move closer to the promised land and they needed the assurance that they had all the provisions necessary to complete the purpose for which God had predestined them. Isn’t it interesting that those who laid the foundation, (set the sockets), and set up the framework were camped on the Northward Side?

“Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, *in* the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation/elevation, the joy of the whole earth, *is* mount Zion, *on* the sides of the north, the city of the great King.” (Psa 48:1-2 from KJV, NASB)

“His foundation is in the holy mountains. The LORD loves the gates of Zion More than all the *other* dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. Selah. "I shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me; Behold, Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia: 'This one was born there.'" But of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in her"; And the Most High Himself will establish her. The LORD will count when He registers the peoples, "This one was born there." Selah. Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes *shall say*, "All my springs *of joy* are in you." (Psa 87:1-7)

**Note:** It's difficult to write about a specific “Son” when considering the Levitical Order. The lives of these “brothers” are so interwoven and so much a part of a “Corporate Expression” you can't separate some of the experiences that appear to be the “lot” of one particular son and make the determination that they do not affect the whole “body” of sons. The two Psalms inserted above are, “of the sons of Korah,” who we know did not remain faithful in his placement as a son and was “swallowed up” by the earth. As we progress we'll see how they, and other descendants of “fathers” who failed in their generation were able to yield/surrender to God's purpose for them and how some became accomplished musicians, (playing various stringed instruments and flutes), and became gatekeepers who served as sons in the temple service during the reign of Kings who sat on David's throne.

### III. The West Side

A. Gershon = “Exile” Firstborn son of Levi. Born before the famine in the land drove them into Egypt for help

1. Libni = “White” Gershon's firstborn
2. Shimei = “Renowned”
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 of Meeting, the curtains of the courtyard, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, and the ropes—and everything related to their use..... (Num 3:25-27)

4. “This is the service of the Gershonite clans as they work and carry burdens: They are to carry the curtains of the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, its covering and the outer covering of hides of sea cows, the curtains for the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the curtains of the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, the curtain for the entrance, the ropes and all the equipment used in its service. The Gershonites are to do all that needs to be done with these things. All their service, whether carrying or doing other work, is to be done under the direction of Aaron and his sons. You shall assign to them as their responsibility all they are to carry. This is the service of the Gershonite clans at the Tent of Meeting. Their duties are to be under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest.” (Num 4:24-28 NIV)

5. The Gershonites were counted by their clans and families. All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to serve in the work at the Tent of Meeting, (Num 4:38-39)

6. The Gershonites were given two ox carts and four oxen to convey their loads.

7. The Gershonites were allotted thirteen cities from the families of the tribe of Issachar and from the tribe of Asher and from the tribe of Naphtali and from the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan.

As we have seen how “East” was significant in the placement of the first order of priests, who were “exalted/honored,” and functioned according to the purpose and provision God gave them, so also the Gershonites, who camped at the opposite West end, and were by their name/nature, “men of

renown.”

The placement of each of the sons of Levi is also significant in relation to those “Israelites” who camped on the East, South, West, and North. This may be discussed in more detail when we begin to consider the placement of the sons of Israel but, to bring this part of our study to an end, suffice it to say, “Those who camped at the West End, behind the Gershonites, were all considered to be “sons of Jacob and Rachel. Benjamin was the youngest son of Jacob, and Rachel died giving birth to him. Ephraim and Manassah, although sons of Joseph, who was Rachel’s firstborn, were placed as sons of Rachel, in Joseph’s stead. Since the Levites were not “numbered” among the tribes, this arrangement allowed for there to continue being twelve tribes or sons of Israel.”

(to be continued...)