

that an error of one letter has occurred in the course of copying the manuscripts. He points out that the insertion of one letter in verse 28 of our text would change 8,600 to 8,300, since there is only a difference of one letter in the consonantal text between shish, 'six,' and shalosh, 'three.'

c. The Levites taken by the Lord in place of the firstborn of Israel (iii.40-51)

The Lord commands that the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel be numbered (40). The result is given as 22,273 (43). This could hardly represent all living Israelite men who were firstborn in their families, since 22,273 out of 603,550 (cf. ii.32) would be a ratio of about one out of twenty-seven, and the total number given is, after all, limited to males of twenty and upward, able to go to war. The full total would be far greater. Since the firstborn who were living at the departure from Egypt had been passed over by the destroying angel when he killed all the firstborn Egyptians (Ex.xiii.13-15), the principle had been established that the firstborn belong to God (Nu.iii.13). Our present numbering probably included only those firstborn males who were born subsequent to the departure from Egypt.

The Levites and their cattle were taken by the Lord in place of 22,000 of the Israelite firstborn (45) and the remaining 273 were redeemed with money (46-51). It is to be noted that the Lord took all the cattle of the Levites in place of the firstborn of the cattle of Israel (41 and 45; cf. Ex.xii.29).

d. The mature Levites numbered and their service described in detail (iv.1-33)

The numbering already described was for the purpose of setting the entire tribe of Levi apart for the service of the tabernacle. Now the Lord commands another numbering, this time limited to those individuals who are ready for actual service. Each of the three divisions of the tribe is taken in turn, but not in the same order as in chapter iii. Instead, the sons of Kohath, the division from which Moses and Aaron came, are placed first. This is logical, since the Kohathites are to have charge of the most important things in the tabernacle.