

Finally there is a general description of the duties of each division. Gershon has charge of the externals of the tabernacle (25-26), Kohath of the sacred vessels (31), and Merari of the boards, pillars, sockets, etc. (36-37). In connection with the Kohathites it is stated that one from this division, Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, is to be over all the chiefs of the Levites (32)./

The area near the tabernacle on three sides having been allocated to the three great divisions of the Levites (23, 29, 35b), Moses and the Aaronic priests are directed to encamp east of the tabernacle (38), since they have charge of the sanctuary.

Verse 39 concludes this section by giving the total number of Levites as 22,000. At first sight this appears to be a round number, since <sup>the</sup> three divisions, 7,500, 8,600, and 6,200, give a total of 22,300. It is clear, however, that 22,000 is not a round number, but the exact number, since verse 46 states that the total number of firstborn, namely 22,273 (given in 43), is 273 more than the total number of the Levites. This presents a serious problem. Probably the best solution is that of Keil, who suggests that an error 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 (3:40-51)

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. 2:32) would be a ratio of about one out of twenty-seven, and the total number given is,