

## The Claims of God's Sovereignty and Holiness

Numbers 1 - 4.

Christian Friend 1895 p. 260.

These chapters have been just awakening in my mind some meditations of interest, at least, in connection with other scriptures. I perceive in them an expression of God's jealousy of His *sovereignty*, and of His *holiness*, of His rights as *Lord of the people*, and as *the God of their Sanctuary*.

They open with His commandment to Moses to take the number of the tribes, and this is done with great exactness and care. The number of each tribe, except Levi, is again and again set down in Numbers 1 and Numbers 2, and that of Levi in like manner in Numbers 3 and Numbers 4. This was an expression of His rights as *Lord of Israel*. He had title to take their number, for they were all His own. Had He not had a right to them, had He not prospects in them, He would not have counted their sum, as is said of His divine title in another part of His dominions, "He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names." This is the expression of His sovereignty amid the heavenly hosts. (Psalm 147: 4.) So the Lord says of His saints, "They shall be Mine . . . in that day when I make up My jewels." (Mal. 3) He may *make up*; *i.e.*, number, and hide, and secure them, because they are His own.

He was careful thus to assert His title, and survey His possessions. He would have the number of Israel exactly brought to Him, for they were all His own. He called them by their names, and knew their numbers.

It was an offence against this peculiar right of the Lord that David was guilty of. He affected something of the divine glory, when he sought to number Israel, as though they had been his own people. It savoured of the old attempt of Adam, and was done under the influence of the same spirit. It was a trespass on the divine rights, and an affront to the majesty of Him who was Lord and King of Israel, who might number Israel because they were His peculiar treasure. But this care and jealousy respecting His rights as Sovereign of Israel, is accompanied in those chapters with the same jealousy respecting His holiness in the sanctuary of Israel.

The Levites are separated from the midst of the people, to be the peculiar servants of the sanctuary, and from their midst the house of Aaron is, in like manner, separated, to be the only priesthood of that sanctuary. Israel was not to affect the services of the Levites, nor were the Levites to affect the priesthood of the family of Aaron. God was to be sanctified in them that drew near to Him, and to be approached in His holiness in the due and ordained order.

But even more than this. Aaron himself had not to trespass, or to advance too far, even in his own appointed place. He was not to eye the sanctuary anxiously. When the camp moved onward, the sacred vessels of the house of God were to be duly and reverently hid from the eyes of even the bearers of them, and the Ark itself from the eye of even Aaron. All this order of the house, in its servants and priesthood, and the deep reverence to be paid to those mysteries which it contained, tell out the sensitiveness of the holiness of Him, whose house, and servants, and priesthood, it all was. The nearest possible place He would take to His people, dwelling in their very midst, and going before them, as long as they continued their journey in the chariot of the cloudy, fiery pillar, by night and by day, whether their way lay right onward, or whether it were back again by the sea and the mountain, being the willing and serviceable Companion of their travels. But still, He was God. He was the Sanctifier, and they but the sanctified. And this could never be foregone, nor allowed to want its abiding and most jealous witness, for a single hour. Whether moving, or at rest, this must be had in remembrance. He

will declare both His sovereign power, and His unapproachable holiness; He will testify His rights both as *Lord*, and as *God* of Israel, though His blessing and His service, and His land of desire, shall be theirs.

Such are the truths brightly reflected in these chapters — in the commandment to take the number of the people, and in the watchfulness to guard all the avenues of the sanctuary. As the vengeance taken upon David, for the intrusion upon the rights of the King of Israel, is a witness to us of the divine jealousy over those rights, not allowing, for a moment, another to assume them, so the vengeance upon the men of Beth-shemesh, for looking into the ark, is a kindred witness of the same divine jealousy, touching the place and holiness of the *God* of Israel.

How all this commends itself to our souls! We bow with delight to these claims of the Lord. We rejoice to know that He dwells in light, that no man can approach unto, and that Him no man has seen, though He, who is in His bosom, has declared Him. All that is just as our souls would have it, and as this scripture displays before us! J. G. B.