

The Gershonites

First Chronicles 23: 7-11

David started making the arrangements for Temple services several years before the end of his life

Gershon was the firstborn of Levi's three sons (Exodus 6:16; Numbers 3:17; First Chronicles 6:1, 16 and 23:6). The Levites fulfilled the priestly roles in Israel and bore the responsibility of caring for the Tabernacle. The Gershonites, Kohathites and Merarites each had specific roles within the Levitical culture. The Gershonites were charged with the carrying of the curtains, coverings, screens, hangings, cords and instruments of the Tabernacle and the tent of meeting (see the commentary on Exodus 6:16 - Moses and the Tent of Meeting) on the journeys in the wilderness, under the supervision of Ithamar the son of Aaron. The Gershonites were given two wagons with four oxen-half to help them transport their items (Numbers 7:7).

Among the Gershonites who achieved distinction in later biblical times was the family of Asaph, the singers from the time of David to the days of the Second Temple (First Chronicles 6:31-47, 9:15, 25:1-7; Second Chronicles 25:15; Ezra 2:41; Nehemiah 11:17, 12:35). Other Gershonites named, are the heads of the fathers' houses in the days of David in connection with the dividing of the Levites into divisions (First Chronicles 23:7-11); the superintendents of the treasuries of the house of the LORD of the same time (First Chronicles 26:21-22, 29:8); and finally, Gershonites are mentioned among those who cleansed the Temple in the days of Hezekiah (Second Chronicles 29:12-13).

As Levites, the Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites did not receive a specific territory in the Promised Land. Rather, they were given cities and pasturelands from among the territories of the other tribes by the command of ADONAI. The Gershonites received thirteen cities from Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh. The distribution of the cities was decided by the drawing of lots (Joshua 21:1-8), and six of the Levitical cities were designated as cities of refuge.

The list of the Gershonites began with the sons of Gershon, Libni, also known as Ladan (First Chronicles 23:7 and 26:21), and Shim'i (Exodus 6:17; Numbers 3:18; First Chronicles 6:17 and 20). Therefore, there were two groups, the descendants of Ladan and the descendants of Shim'i, enumerated in the census taken in the wilderness of Sinai (Numbers 3:21) and in the plains of Mo'ab (Numbers 26:57).

The names that follow were not the immediate children of **Gershon**, but men in David's day who came from these two branches and became leaders of **the Gershonites**. The descendants of Ladan were **Jehiel, Zetham and Joel - three in all**. And the sons of **Shim'i** (not the same **Shim'i** as below) were **Shelomoth, Haziell and Haran - three in all**. These were the leaders of the families of Ladan. The line of Ladan, then, produced a total of six leaders. **Jehiel, Zetham and Joel** were traced directly to Ladan, and **Shelomoth, Haziell and Haran** were traced through a descendant of Ladan, **Shim'i**.

Shim'i, son of **Gershon**, produced four descendants who became Levitical leaders, **Jahath, Ziza, (Jeush and Beriah)**. But because **(Jeush and Beriah)** did not have many sons they were counted as one family with one ministry assignment. The line of **Shim'i**, then, produced a total of four leaders. **Thus, David secured ten Levitical divisions organized out of the clan of Gershon, six from Ladan and four from Shim'i.**