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These Were the Heads of the Families of Moses and Aaron

6: 14-27

These were the heads of the families of Moses and Aaron DIG: Why do you think Moses included this genealogy into the action of the story? How would this help the Israelites when it was time to leave Egypt?

REFLECT: What would your genealogy reveal about the role each person plays in your household? What story of your roots defined the expectations for those growing up in your household? What would a family tree indicate about your extended family and your responsibility *to* them or *for* them?



The placement of a genealogy at this point strikes modern readers as somewhat odd. It does not fit the overall stream of the narrative. However, this is not an uncommon literary digression in ancient Near-Eastern literature. There has been great dramatic tension in the exodus story thus far, leading up to the installation of **Moses and Aaron** as the intercessors on behalf of **Isra'el**. A natural question for the reader is, "What was their genealogical status? What place did they occupy among the sons of **Isra'el**?"⁹⁶

These are the heads of their families: The clans of **Reuben** and **Simeon** are mentioned first in order to get to **Levi**, **Jacob's** third son and **Moses'** and **Aaron's** ancestor. Extended families united as blood relatives comprise a clan. **The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, were Hanoth and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi. These were the clans of Reuben (6:14). The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul, the**

son of a Canaanite woman. Intermarriage with pagans was taboo in Jewish society. Its inclusion here was possibly a subtle warning to the Jews coming out of Egypt not to do the same thing. These were **the clans of Simeon (6:15)**.

These were the names of the sons of Levi according to their records: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Levi lived 137 years (16:16). The three **sons** mentioned here were the ancestors of **the clans** that were later to serve in the Tabernacle. In **Numbers 3:25-37**, the specific duty of each clan is described in the same order of the names given here.

The death date is not given for everyone, only those whose names are significant for this particular genealogy. The author does not give us the ages of the other two **sons** when they died. Only **Levi's** longevity is recorded because **his** is the family through which **Moses**, the deliverer, comes. Both **Simeon** and **Levi** were under a curse because of the slaughter of the men of Shechem (**Genesis 34:25-30** and **49:5-7**). So the fact that **God** would select the deliverer of **the Jewish people** from **Levi** shows **His** incredible grace.

The genealogy of **the sons of Jacob** stop here because the purpose was to show where **Moses** and **Aaron** fit. Since **Moses** and **Aaron** were descendants of **Jacob's** third **son Levi**, there was no point to go any further. **Levi's** three sons were **Gershon, Kohath** and **Merari**.

The sons of Gershon, by clans, were Libni and Shimei (6:17). The specific duties of **the Gershonite clan** of Levites at the Tabernacle could be divided into three main categories. First, they **were responsible for the care of the Tabernacle and tent, its coverings, the curtain at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.** Secondly, **the curtains of the courtyard, and the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the Tabernacle** were under their care. And, finally, **the Gershonites** were to keep watch over **the altar, the ropes and everything related to their use (Numbers 3:25-26).**

The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. Kohath lived 133 years (6:18). We are told how long **Kohath lived** because he was the important one as far as **Moses and Aaron** were concerned. **Kohath** had a **son** named **Amram**, who eventually became the father of **Moses and Aaron**. The clan of **the Kohathites** had other duties in **the Tabernacle. They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering, the curtain and everything related to their use (Numbers 31-32).**

The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi (6:19). The Merarites were appointed to take care of the frames of the Tabernacle, its crossbars, posts, bases, all its equipment, and everything related to their use, as well as the surrounding

courtyard with their bases, tent pegs and ropes (Numbers 3:36-37). After reviewing all three sons, **Gershon, Kohath and Merari**, the author returns to the most important line that which would bear **Aaron and Moses**.

Amram the first son of **Kohath**, the son of **Levi**, married his father's sister **Jochebed**, which means *the Lord is my glory* (Numbers 26:59), who bore him **Aaron and Moses**. In actuality, **Amram** married his own **aunt**. This was something that would later be prohibited by the Torah, but at this point it was acceptable. And because **he** was significant, we are told that **Amram lived 137 years (6:20)**. The question has been asked, "Why wasn't the life of **Aaron** in as much danger as the life of **Moses** when the command to kill **the Hebrew** baby boys was given by Pharaoh (1:16)? The answer is simply that **Aaron** was older than **Moses**, and the decree had not been made yet. It was not until Pharaoh saw how quickly **the Jews** were increasing in number that he issued the orders to kill **them**.⁹⁷ Muslims teach that **Moses** was a Muslim and not a **Jew** because **he** was of the tribe of **Levi**, not **Judah**; but all twelve sons of **Jacob** are considered **Jews**, not just those from the tribe of **Judah**.

The sons of Izhar, the second son of **Kohath**, were **Korah, Nepheg and Zicri (6:21)**. Although it is **Amram's** line that the author is most interested in, he also records the descent of **Amram's** nephew **Korah** who was later to become a thorn in **Moses' flesh**. In **Numbers 16**, **Korah** led a rebellion against the authority of **Moses and Aaron**.⁹⁸

Hebron, the third son of **Kohath**, is not mentioned.

The sons of Uzziel, the fourth son of **Kohath**, were **Mishael, Elzaphan and Sithri (6:22)**. **Mishael and Elzaphan** later appear in **Leviticus 10**. In that episode, **Aaron's** two sons **Nadab and Abihu** offered unauthorized fire before God, and were consumed by fire because of their sin. It was **Mishael and Elzaphan** who carried their cousin's bodies outside the camp of Isra'el, just as **Moses ordered (Leviticus 10:1-4)**.

Aaron married Elisheba, which means *the oath of God*, and the English name Elizabeth comes from this name. She was from the tribe of **Judah (Numbers 2:3)**, and the daughter of **Amminadab** and sister of **Nahshon**, and she bore him four sons: **Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar (6:23)**. Because the father determines the nationality and tribal origin, the four sons of **Aaron** are considered fully **Levites**, and not half **Levite** and half **Judean**. **Aaron's sons** are probably mentioned because they played such an important and, in the case of **Nadab and Abihu**, infamous role in the early priesthood of **Isra'el**. They were the priests who offered unauthorized fire before God. The fact that **Aaron's** wife **Elisheba** was the daughter of **Amminadab** and the sister of **Nahshon** was important

because those two men were ancestors of King David (**Ruth 4:20**). That tied the royal and priestly leaders of the nation of **Isra'el** together from the very beginning.

The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. These were the Korahite clans (6:24). The family line of Korah is specifically mentioned here because they did not take part in their father's rebellion (Numbers 16:31-33, 26:11). In their service at the Tabernacle, **the Korahites** were gatekeepers who were responsible for guarding the thresholds of the Temple, just as their fathers had been responsible for guarding the entrance to the dwelling of God (**First Chronicles 9:19**). They even played a part in the official singing of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple (**Second Chronicles 20:19**), and were also Temple musicians who wrote several of the Psalms (**Psalms 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 84, 85, 87 and 88**).

Eleazar son of Aaron married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas (6:25a). After recording the infamous children of Aaron in verse 23, the author now refers to one of his most famous descendants, **Phinehas**. During the later wilderness wanderings, **Phinehas** proved to be faithful in the midst of a severe crisis of idolatry and harlotry among the Hebrews (**Numbers 25:1-13**). Because of this courageous act, he was rewarded and made a leader of the Israelite army (**Numbers 31:6**). **Phinehas** went on to enter the Promised Land (**Joshua 20:28**) and served as high priest before the Tabernacle (**Judges 20:28**). One of the greatest Hebrew leaders, **Ezra**, was a descendant of **Phinehas** (**First Chronicles 9:20**). Thus, the genealogy ends on a high and positive note. **These were the heads of the Levite families, clan by clan (6:25b).**

Although Aaron's family is traced through his sons and grandson **Phinehas**, no lineage is provided for **Moses**. The reason for this may be that **Moses'** second son **Gershom** had already been mentioned (**2:22**). On the other hand, the silence may have later protected the reputation of **Moses** because his descendants apparently became involved with idolatry. In **Judges 18:30** we learn that **Jonathan (the son of Gershom and the grandson of Moses)**, along with other members of the tribe of **Dan**, set up idols for themselves.

It was this same Moses and Aaron to whom ADONAI said: Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions. This had military overtones. Frequently, during the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites were organized by their divisions. **They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. It was the same Moses and Aaron (6:26-27).** This time **Moses'** name precedes **Aaron's** because the major responsibility of the **Exodus** was on his shoulders.

Moses was discouraged in **Exodus 6:12**. Neither the circumcised nor the un-circumcised

would accept him. At that time **YHVH** stepped in and gave us the background of who **Moses** was. **Moses** had to live up to **God's** claims before he could deliver **the children of Isra'el**.

There are those today who say that it is not essential to believe the virgin birth of **Christ**. I say that it is absolutely essential to believe it. It is part of the credentials of **Messiah**. You must trust in **His** death and resurrection to be saved. When you are saved, you will come to know **Him**. And when you know **Him**, you will find out that He was born of a virgin. If not, then you made a mistake in trusting in **Him** because **He** is not who **He** claims to be. No one who is truly saved will deny the virgin birth of **Yeshua Messiah**.

It is also essential that **Moses and Aaron** are who they claim to be. It had been forty years since **Moses** left **Egypt**. In the meantime **he** had married the daughter of the priest of Midian. Now **he** is back in **Egypt**. Who is he anyway? This genealogy tells who **he** is. **He** belongs to the tribe of **Levi**, and his **father** and **mother** are **Amram and Jochebed**.⁹⁹ This genealogy legitimizes **Moses and Aaron** as official representatives, who were authorized to speak **God's** word to **Pharaoh**.¹⁰⁰