

-Save This Page as a PDF-

The Duties of the Priests and the Levites

18: 1-7

The duties of the priests and the Levites DIG: Without the priests, the people couldn't approach God. Why not? What are the commonalities and differences between the priest/Levite distinction and the elder/deacon distinction in the B'rit Chadashah? How were the priests and Levites cared for? Why was it important that the LORD confirm Aaron and the Levites in their calling?

REFLECT: How easy is it for you to think of God as someone dangerous to approach the wrong way? Explain. What do you think is the believer's responsibility in the area of giving? Explain. How can and should we care for our Messianic synagogue and church leaders? ADONAI provided for the needs of His servants through His people. Are the needs of your spiritual needs cared for?

Basically, the Levites worked under the supervision of the priesthood.

Numbers 18 begins with the words: **ADONAI said to Aaron (18:1)**. The phrase occurs again twice in **18:8** and **18:20**. In every other case in the Torah except in (**Leviticus 10:8**), **God** never spoke to **Aaron** directly, but always through **Moses**. In this case, **YHVH** gives **Aaron** the benefit of personal communication as a further sign of **His** special relationship to **God**. This, and the other events of preceding chapters, confirms **Aaron's** status as **high priest**, a status that was under question ever since **Miryam** and **Aaron's rebellion** (**to see link click Bu - The Rebellion of Miryam and Aaron**) and the challenges of **the people** in **Chapter 16**.³⁴⁷



Duties of the priests (18:1-2): The children of Isra'el had cried out in dismay, “**Must everyone who comes near, who comes near to the Tabernacle of ADONAI die?**” It is, in essence, the same question we asked at the outset of **Leviticus**. It was a fearful thing for an unauthorized person to approach **Ha'Shem**. To act foolishly or carelessly when approaching **Him** was to invite disaster. How, then, did one draw near to **God**? The answer to **their** question came immediately as **YHVH** spoke directly to **Aaron**, reaffirming the role and function of **the priests** and **Levites**. It is interesting that **the Lord** spoke directly to **Aaron**, not to **Moshe**. It must be that **He** meant to further confirm **His** choice of **Aaron** as **high priest**.³⁴⁸ He tells him, “**You, your sons and your father's household shall bear the guilt in connection with the Sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the guilt in connection with your priesthood.**” Therefore, if, through **their** negligence, an unauthorized person approached **the Sanctuary** to perform holy functions (see **Cn - Korah's Rebellion**), **the priests** would **bear the sin** committed by that person. **You will take charge of all the holy furnishings and the bronze altar, so that there will no longer be anger against the people of Isra'el (18:5).** Neither **the Israelites** nor **the Levites** could draw near to **God**, only **the priests**; and only **the high priest** could enter the Most Holy Place once a year on **Yom Kippur** (see **Leviticus Co - Yom Kippur: The Removal of All Sin**).

Numbers 18 clearly defines the line between **priest** and **Levite** (see **Ezra-Nehemiah An - Priests, Levites and Temple Servants Who Returned with Zerubbabel**). **The Levites helped the priests** perform **their** ministry to **YHVH**. **But you are to bring your kinsmen, the tribe of Levi, along with yourselves, to work together with you and help you — you and your sons with you — when you are there before the Tabernacle.**

Everything rises or falls with leadership, and **Aaron** was the leader of the **priestly** family. **He** was accountable to **God** for what happened at **the Tabernacle**. **God** doesn't **dwell in Temples made with human hands (Acts 7:48)**, but our **bodies are a temple for the Ruach Ha'Kodesh who lives inside of us, whom we received from God (First Corinthians 6:19)**.

We must be careful how we treat our bodies and what we do to the Church of **Yeshua Messiah**. **If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple (First Corinthians 3:17).**³⁴⁹

Duties of the Levites (18:3): They were to be at **ADONAI's disposal to perform all kinds of tasks related to the Tabernacle; only they are not to come near the holy furnishings or the bronze altar, so they would not die (18:3)**. They could only minister in the courtyard of **the Tabernacle** (see the commentary on **Exodus Ex - The Courtyard and Gate of the Tabernacle**), not in **the Sanctuary**. Even **the Levitical Kohathites** (see **At - The Clan of Kohath**), who transported **the holy furnishings of the Tabernacle** when on the move, could not touch **them** until **they** had been properly covered. Violation of that mitzvah was punishable by death, as was the consequence for anyone who was not divinely ordained to serve in **the priesthood**.³⁵⁰

Basically, then, **the Levites** worked under the supervision of **the priesthood (Aaron's sons Eleazar and Ithamar)**, and that the work of **the priests** and **Levites** was different. **The priests** functioned primarily inside **the Sanctuary** with **the holy furnishings** and **the bronze altar**; while **the Levites** assisted **the priests**, guarded/protected the outside of **the Tabernacle** from any encroachment by any **Israelite** in the camp, carried **the holy furnishings** on the march, taught the people the Torah, were gatekeepers, singers when the Temple was built, and served as judges in cities of refuge. **God** knew that **the priests** would need reliable **helpers** who could assist **them** in **their** duties.

Working together (18:4-7): They will work together with you in your duties related to the Tabernacle, whatever the service in the Tabernacle may be; but an **unauthorized person is not to come near you**. On **their** shoulders rested the protection of **the nation** before **God**. The weight of that responsibility must have been enormous.³⁵¹ **You will take charge of all the holy furnishings and the bronze altar, so that there will no longer be anger against the people of Isra'el (18:4-5)**. Because unauthorized people in the Tabernacle courtyard or Sanctuary would bring on the wrath of **YHVH**.

I myself have taken your kinsmen the Levites from among the people of Isra'el; they have been given as a gift to ADONAI for you, so that you can perform the

service in the Tabernacle (18:6). The priesthood was God's gift to Isra'el, for without priests the people couldn't approach YHVH. The Levites were God's gift to the priests, relieving them of menial tasks so they would devote themselves fully to serving the LORD and the people. The seven men appointed in Acts 6, usually called deacon, had a similar relationship to the apostles. There's nothing demeaning about serving tables, but the apostles had more important work to do.³⁵² You and your sons with you will exercise your prerogatives and duties as priests in regard to everything having to do with the bronze altar and within the outer veil (see the commentary on Exodus Fj - The Outer Veil of the Sanctuary). I entrust the service required of the priesthood to you. It was a privileged position, so any unauthorized person who tried to perform as a Levite was to be put to death (18:7).

It's easy to see how **Messiah** performs this aspect of **the priesthood** in the eternal sense (see the commentary on **Hebrews Ay - Messiah's Qualifications as our Great High Priest**). **The Aaronic priesthood** was only able to bear **the guilt of the people** as long as **the Tabernacle** stood, because **it** was limited to the present world. But **the** earthly **Tabernacle** was merely a reflection of **the** heavenly **Tabernacle** where **Messiah** has carried out the same **priestly** function on our behalf (see **Hebrews Bz - The Better Tabernacle Purified with Better Blood**). **His priesthood** is a better **priesthood** than **Aaron's priesthood** (see **Hebrews Aw - Messiah is a Better Priest Than Aaron**).³⁵³

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** great love that willingly suffered shame and great pain to offer **the gift** of salvation to those who love **You** as their **Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9-10)**. Have this attitude in yourselves, which also was in **Messiah Yeshua**, Who, though existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be grasped. But He emptied Himself - taking on the form of a slave, becoming the likeness of men and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled Himself - becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua every knee should bow, in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue profess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord - to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:6-11).*

*It is so gracious of **You** to forgive those who love **You**! **You** add a huge blessing by **the gift** of **Messiah's** righteousness! **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21)**. Since **You** say **You** will reward those who serve **You** with loving attitudes, **Your** promises are always true. I praise and bless **You** for being so very*

loving and wonderful! **For no one can lay any other foundation than what is already laid - which is Yeshua the Messiah. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear. For the Day will show it, because it is to be revealed by fire; and the fire itself will test each one's work - what sort it is. If anyone's work built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward (First Corinthians 3:11-14).** I rejoice in serving **You**, not for the heavenly reward, but to say thank **You** with my life. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen