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The Priests and Levites

18: 1-8

The priests and Levites DIG: Are all Levites priests? What was the difference between priests and Levites? What was the inheritance of the priests? Is their freedom from property and dependence on others a good thing? Why or why not? How would you characterize the offerings they live on: (a) left-overs? (b) luxuries? (c) just dues? What was the special provision made to Levites who went to serve at the Sanctuary in Jerusalem?

REFLECT: Should your Messianic rabbi or pastor put the congregation first, or vice versa? Why? How so? Are your tithes today going to support your Messianic rabbi or pastor? Why? Why not? What has God given you as an “inheritance?” How are you to share it with others? Paul restated the principle of supporting your Messianic rabbi or pastor in the B’rit Chadashah (First Corinthians 9:14; First Timothy 5:17-18). How are you doing with that?

All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests; however, every member of the tribe of Levi had a right to share in the “proceeds” of the offering made at the bronze altar.



The tribe of Levi was divided into three families (see the commentary on **Exodus**, to see

link click Bh - These Were the Heads of the Families of Moses and Aaron). Each division originally had different responsibilities regarding the Tabernacle (**Numbers 3-4**). **The Kohathites** were further divided into those who were descendants of **Aaron** and those who were not (**Joshua 21:1-7**).

Only the descendants of **Aaron**, the first high priest (see the commentary on **Exodus Fv - The Selection of Aaron and His Sons as Priests**), were permitted to serve as **priests**, to offer the sacrifices, care for the lamps and the bread of the Presence, and burn incense on the golden altar (**Numbers 10**). When you think **priests** - think **Exodus**. They are generally referred to as **the sons of Aaron (Numbers 10:8)**. The rest of **the tribe of Levi**, those not serving at the Tabernacle or Temple, were designated as **Levites**. When you think **Levites** - think **Genesis**. Thus, **the priests** were in the minority in **the tribe of Levi**.

The Levites served as ministers to **the priests (Numbers 18:1-7; First Chronicles 23:28-32)**, and in general as teachers of **the Torah in Isra'el (Deuteronomy 33:10a; Second Chronicles 17:8-9)**. **The priests** officiated at the Tabernacle, and later at the Temple, and also had other duties. They served as **judges (Deuteronomy 17:8-9;** guardians of **the Torah (17:18 and 31:9)**, teachers of the regulations concerning skin diseases (**Deuteronomy 24:8**), and assistants to **Moses in the covenant renewal ceremony (Deuteronomy 27:9)**.³⁹⁸

A. All Levites (18:1-2): Unlike the other eleven tribes, none of **the Levites**, including **the priests**, were given a **portion** of land. However, **forty-eight cities** were set aside for **the Levites (Numbers 35:1-8; Joshua 21:1-42)**. And since **the Levites** did not own a **portion** of land, **they** relied on **YHVH** alone, for **He** was **their inheritance**. This allowed **them** to focus more fully on **their God-given ministry**. **The priests, who are Levites - indeed the whole tribe of Levi - are to have no portion or inheritance in Isra'el (18:1 NIV)**. **They are to eat the offerings made to ADONAI by fire as His inheritance**. Select parts of animals and agricultural produce brought to the Tabernacle or Temple as offerings would be given to **the priests and Levites** who assisted **them**. **They will have no inheritance among their brothers for ADONAI is their inheritance, just as He promised them (18:2)**. **The Levites** who did not assist at the Tabernacle or Temple were to be sustained by the generosity of the people, who had already been urged not to forget or **neglect them (Deuteronomy 12:18-19)**.

In the time of **Nehemiah**, **the people** didn't faithfully bring **their** tithes and offerings to the Temple, and some of **the Levites** had to return to **their lands** in order to live (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah Cr - Nehemiah's Final Reforms: Financial support for**

the Temple had declined). **Nehemiah** had to urge **the people** to obey the Word and support **their** spiritual leaders, and **they** brought **their** tithes and offerings to be distributed to **the Levites**. It's tragic the way professing believers fail to support their spiritual leaders by faithfully bringing their tithes and offerings, yet expect their Messianic congregations and churches to support them when they have needs.³⁹⁹

B. The priests (18:3-5): **The people** were responsible for supporting **the priests** who officiated at the Tabernacle or Temple. **So, this will be the share due to the cohanim from the people - from those who offer a sacrifice, whether a bull or sheep, they are to give the cohen the shoulders, two cheeks ("jowls"), and the stomach of the sacrificed animal. The firstfruits of your grain, of your new wine, of your oil, and the first wool of your sheep, you are to give to the members of the priestly tribe. Their distinctive position among their fellow Israelites derives from the fact that YHVH has chosen them for this role (Numbers 3:11-13, 8:12-26). For ADONAI your God has chosen him from all your tribes to stand and serve in the Name of ADONAI - him and his sons forever (18:3-5).**

The B'rit Chadashah broadened **the priesthood** to include all believers: **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession (First Peter 2:9)**. The reason for this is that **Yeshua Messiah**, by virtue of **His** ministry, death, and resurrection, superseded the Aaronic priesthood of the Dispensation of Torah, and became **the High Priest** of the Dispensation of Grace (see the commentary on **Hebrews Aw - Messiah is a Better Priest Than Aaron**). Every believer has been adopted into the family of **Yeshua (Hebrews 2:10-13)**, and is then grafted into **Messiah's** priestly line.⁴⁰⁰

*Dear Holy Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for grafting those who love and follow **Messiah** as their **Lord** and **Savior**, into **Yeshua's** priestly line, making them - **a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Messiah Yeshua (First Peter 2:5c)**. What a privilege to offer sacrifices to our great **God** who sacrificed so much for us. **He** is our wonderful **Father** who was willing to endure shame and great pain as the sacrifice for our sins. **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)**. We love to offer sacrifices to **You**: our time, our money, and our hearts of praise. **Through Yeshua then, let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15)**. It is a joy to praise **You** - at all times, even in the midst of trials - **You** are more than worthy of great praise! **For I consider the***

sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). In Yeshua's Holy name and power of His resurrection. Amen

A. Levites in the Sanctuary (18:6-8): The Levites were scattered throughout all the tribes in the land of Isra'el, where they taught God's people the Torah and facilitated their worship. But if a Levite wanted to go to Jerusalem and minister in the Sanctuary there, he was permitted to do so. **Suppose a Levite comes from one of your towns, wherever he is living in all of Isra'el, and he comes whenever his soul desires to the place ADONAI chooses, and serves in the Name of ADONAI his God like all his fellow Levites who stand there before ADONAI.** They were not considered priests, but went there to assist the priests (First Chronicles 23:28-32). However, since they were performing the same duty as those normally ministering in the Sanctuary, **they were to eat equal portions.** The phrase: **regardless of their fathers' goods, refers** to income derived from the sale of family possessions (Leviticus 25:32-34) before moving to Jerusalem (18:6-8).