

# 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, Haziel 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, Haziel 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.**