

The Kohathites

First Chronicles 23: 12-20

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

Kohath was the second of **Levi's** three sons and ancestor of **Moshe** and **Aaron** (**Genesis 46:11; Exodus 6:16-20; Numbers 3:17; First Chronicles 6:1**). Few personal details are recorded about him. Being invariably listed between his brothers **Gershon** and **Merari**, he lived for 133 years and had **four sons**. The information about his **descendants** is more detailed, since **the Kohathites** were among the most important **Levitical** clans. **The Gershonites, Kohathites** and **Merarites** each had specific roles within the **Levitical** culture. **The Kohathites** were charged with carrying for the objects associated with the **Sanctuary** (see the commentary on **Exodus Fi - The Sanctuary of the Tabernacle**). They carried the holy things, the ark of the **Covenant**, the mercy seat, the lampstand, the altars, the table for the bread of the **Presence**, and all the other sacred utensils of the **Sanctuary** (**Numbers 4:4-14, 10:21; First Chronicles 9:32**). The **Sanctuary** objects that **the Kohathites** transported were to be carried on their shoulders with poles made for that purpose (**Numbers 7:9; Exodus 25:26-28**).

In the **Chronicler's** account of the period of the monarchy, **the Kohathites** are mentioned in connection with four kings: **David**, **Hezekiah**, **Jehoshaphat**, and **Josiah**, always in relation to service in the **Tabernacle** or **Temple**. According to **Chronicles**, it was during **David's** reign, that the family of **Herman the Kohathite** was among the **Levites** assigned to direct the singing in the **Tabernacle** (**First Chronicles 6:16-23; Psalm 88:1**). Led by **Uriel, the leader**, and 120 **Kohathites** participated in the installation of the **Ark** in **Jerusalem** (**First Chronicles 15:5**), and the family is again listed in their courses (**First Chronicles 23:1-6, 12**). Another tradition in **Chronicles** reports that in the days of King **Jehoshaphat**, during the invasion of **Judah** by the **Moabites** and **Ammonites**, it was **the Kohathites** who led the congregation in praise of **God** at the service of intercession (**Second Chronicles 20:19**), and two of their men supervise the work of renovation the **Temple** undertaken by King **Josiah** (**Second Chronicles 34:12**). In the era of the return to **Yerushalayim**, the time of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**, when functions were being decided for ministry in the **Temple**, several of the sons of **Kohath** were put in charge of the changing of the bread of the **Presence** (**First Chronicles 9:32**). The only negative episode in the Bible relating to **the Kohathites** was the rebellion of **Korah**, grandson of **Kohath**, against the leadership of **Moses** and **Aaron** (see the commentary on **Jude Aq - They Have Taken the Way of Cain, Rushed into Balaam's Error, and have been Destroyed by Korah's Rebellion**).

As Levites, Gershonites, the 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 Kohathites received thirteen cities from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon and ten cities from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Dan. The distribution of the cities was decided by the drawing of lots (Joshua 21:1-8), and six of the Levites' cities were designated as cities of refuge.

The descendants of Kohath were Amaram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel - four in all. So the Kohathites consisted of four families, the Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites. Their place in the wilderness was on the southern side of the Tabernacle (see the commentary on Exodus Ep - The Camp of the Twelve Tribes of Isra'el). One of Kohath's descendants, Amram, fathered Aaron and Moshe (Numbers 27:57-65). The role of these verses is to make clear the differentiation, within the tribe of Levi, between the lines of Aaron's two sons. Aaron, of course, was set apart, he and his descendants forever, to consecrate the most holy things, to offer sacrifices before the LORD, to minister before Him and to pronounce blessings in His name forever. But the descendants of Moses were limited to lesser Levitical duties even though they were counted as part of the tribe of Levi. Through Moshe's two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, there arose descendants who were leaders such as Shubael and Rehabiah.

Although it is not explicitly stated, the whole tribe of Levi is considered as holy, while the priests are considered most holy. This is a unique phrase. For although the Most Holy Place is descriptive of several holy instruments, the ark of the Covenant (see the commentary on Exodus Fr - The Mercy Seat in the Most Holy Place: Christ at the Throne of Grace), and the mercy seat (see the commentary on Exodus Fs - The Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place: Christ at the Throne of Grace), it is never applied to humans. In Exodus, YHVH instructed Moshe to prepare a sacred anointing oil with which to anoint the Tabernacle and all its vessels on the one hand, and Aaron and his sons, on the other (see the commentary on Exodus Gf - Dedicate Aaron and His Sons So They May Serve Me as Priests). Therefore, just as the Tabernacle and its sacred utensils became most holy through the anointing of oil, so also Aaron and his descendants are most holy.⁵¹⁹

A second descendant of Kohath, Izhar, was the source of the line that produced the leader Shelomith.

A third descendant of Kohath, Hebron, was the father of four Levitical leaders: Jeriah, Amariah, Jahaziel, and Jekameam.

Kohath's last descendant, Uzziel, fathered the line of Micah and Isaiah. Thus, with the descendants of Kohath, ten more divisions are derived for a total of nineteen.