

The Divisions of Priests

First Chronicles 24: 1-19

DIG: In the family line of Aaron, what courses are evident? On the basis what moral, inherited, and impartial grounds? What is the story behind the two sons who were executed on moral grounds? Who is given the lion's share of the ministerial appointments in verses 3-4? On what grounds? By what means are the further courses made, so as to balance out the natural advantage enjoyed by the more fruitful Eleazar? What might be the purpose of 24 evenly divided divisions? What rotation of duty would that allow them to follow? What petty jealousies or party politics might this strategy avert? What might someone chosen first, second or last or second to last feel? What authorities stood behind this appointment process? How might that authority assure its credibility? How might that authority assure its precision, control rumors and squelch any rebellion against these priestly divisions?

REFLECT: How do you try to achieve fairness in distributing recognition within your own domain? Whether you were elected, appointed, or inherited your present position what difference does it make in your job security? In your incentive to excel at your position? What difference does it make knowing God was in that selection process? Once on the job, whom do you work for (Colossians 3:23)?

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

The Levites' principle tasks were to assist the priests (Aaron's descendants) in the maintenance of the Temple grounds, to sing the Psalms during Temple services, to prepare the bread of the Presence and grain offerings, and to thank and praise God at times of burnt offerings. They also served as judges and maintaining cities of refuge. The scroll of Ezra reports that the Levites were responsible for the construction of the Second Temple, and also translated and explained the Torah when it was read publically.

These were the divisions of Levites, the sons of Aaron: The sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abidu, Eleazar and Ithamar. But Nadab and Abidu died before their father did (Lev 10:1-3), and they had no sons, so Eleazar and Ithamar served as the high priests in David's day. With the help of Zadok (a descendant of Aaron through Eleazar) and Ahimelek (the son of Abiathar, who was a descendant of Ithamar), David separated the priests into 24 divisions for their scheduled time of service for ministering (First Chron 24:1-3). The rest of the time they would be in the priestly cities instructing the people.

A larger number of leaders were found among Eleazar's descendants and eight heads of families from Ithamar's descendants. They divided them impartially by casting lots (see the commentary on **Exodus 6b - The Urim and Thummim: The Means of Making Decisions**), and they were called officials of the sanctuary and officials of God (to distinguish them from civil officials) from among the descendants of both Eleazar and Ithamar (**First Chronicles 24:4-5**). Since there were more descendants of Eleazar than of Ithamar, the result of the apportionment was 16 divisions of Eleazar and 8 of Ithamar. By having 24 divisions, each would serve about two weeks a year. Gradually, then, their service would move around the calendar.

The scribe Shemaiah, a Levite, recorded their names in the presence of King David and his officials: Zadok the priest, Ahimelek son of Abiathar and the heads of families of the priests and of the Levites - one family being alternately taken from Eleazar and then one from Ithamar (**1 Chronicles 24:6**). Some of the names deserve special attention.

The first lot fell to Jehoiarib, headed the division that later produced the Maccabees (**First Maccabees 2:1 and 14:29**).

The second to Jedaiah, was from an ancient priestly family. The sons of Jedaiah are mentioned as the first priestly family in the list of returnees from Babylon (**Ezra 2:36 and Nehemiah 7:39**). His name appears in all the relevant lists in **Ezra-Nehemiah** except those who set their seal to the **binding agreement (Nehemiah 9:38)**. This omission could reflect a political stance rather than translation error.

The third to Harim, both **Harim** and **Immer** (the sixteenth division) were among the four priestly families of the returnees (**Ezra 2:37 and 39**). They may be regarded as the founders of the priesthood in Jerusalem. The two names are repeated in all the relevant lists in **Nehemiah**.⁵²³

The fourth to Seorim,

The fifth to Malkijah,

The sixth to Mijamin,

The seventh to Hakkoz, his family is referred to as the descendants of Hakkoz who searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean (**Ezra 2:62**), but they were still considered Levites. Among those who participated in the building of the wall of Jerusalem and repaired another section, was Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz (**Nehemiah 3: 4 and 21**), and the priest who received and weighed the money brought by Ezra from Babylon is called

Meremoth son of Uriah (Ezra 8:33), very likely the same man. Therefore, in spite of its uncertain beginnings, the family of **Hakkoz** had gradually assumed recognition and power.⁵²⁴

The eighth to Abijah, was the one which Zechariah the father of John the Baptist performed his priestly ministry (**Luke 1:5**).

The ninth to Jeshua, which is a similar name to **Joshua** (**Ezra 2:2; Nehemiah 8:17; Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 3:1**), and to the Greek name **Jesus**, which means *YHVH is salvation*. Joshua and Eliashib were two distinguished priest of the period: **Joshua** was the son of **Jehozadak**, the high priest carried into exile by the hand of **Nebuchadnezzar** (**First Chronicles 6:15**) and the grandson of **Seraiah**, the high priest put to death by **Nebuchadnezzar** (**Second Kings 25:18-21**).⁵²⁵

The tenth to Shekaniah,

The eleventh to Eliashib, served as high priest during the time of **Nehemiah** (**Nehemiah 3:1**).

The twelfth to Jakim,

The thirteenth to Huppah,

The fourteenth to Jeshebeab,

The fifteenth to Bilgah,

The sixteenth to Immer, both **Immer** and **Harim** (the sixteenth division) were among the four priestly families of the returnees (**Ezra 2:37 and 39**). They may be regarded as the founders of the priesthood in Jerusalem. The two names are repeated in all the relevant lists in **Nehemiah**.⁵²⁶

The seventeenth to Hezir, is found only once in the Bible (**Nehemiah 10:20**) as one of the leaders of the people, but is also familiar from the inscription of the "tomb of the sons of Hezir" found in the Valley of the Kidron.⁵²⁷

The eighteenth to Happizzes,

The nineteenth to Pethahiah,

The twentieth to Jehezkel,

The twenty-first to Jakin,

The twenty-second to Gamul,

The twenty-third to Delaiah,

The twenty-fourth to Maaziah (First Chronicles 24:7-18).

This was their appointed order of ministering when they entered the Temple of the LORD, according to the regulations prescribed for them by their ancestor Aaron, and ADONAI, the God of Isra'el, had commanded him (First Chronicles 24:19).

With the passage of time, however, some of the priestly divisions that were created by David, Zadok and Ahimelek died out or had to be consolidated with others, and new ones were formed to take their places during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.⁵²⁸