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The Levites

3: 1-4

The Levites DIG: Why is it so important to know so much about the ministry of the Levites? Where did the Levites first distinguish themselves? What does the story of Nadab and Abihu illustrate? What were some of the many ministries of the Levites?

REFLECT: What is your spiritual gift? What ministry are you involved in? How are you a Levite for your High Priest Yeshua? How do you feel about that? Joyful? Burdened? How do you feel about being the guardian of holiness? How can you uphold that standard?

Messiah is the living Temple; as His disciples, we are His Levites.

In this anticipatory passage (**to see link click [Ac](#) - Numbers from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Anticipatory Passages**) the naming of **Aaron's sons** and **their** fate is strange in its context. However, it removes the need to include **them** in the **Levitical** census that follows (see **[Aq](#) - The First Numbering the Levites**). But other than that, this information needed to be inserted into the second census itself (**26:59-61**).³⁸

It is not uncommon for people to confuse the roles of **the priests** and **the Levites** (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah [An](#) - Priests, Levites and Temple Servants**). Priests could only arise from among **the sons of Aaron**, and **Aaron's** house was just one clan among **the tribe of Levi**. Therefore, every **priest** was automatically **a Levite**, but not every **Levite** was **a priest**. **The priests** had the duty of officiating over the sacrificial services and carrying out the ministry inside the Sanctuary, in the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place. **The Levites** were charged with serving **the priests** by doing the physical, practical and logistical elements of the worship service. **They** were also the ones who disassembled **the Tabernacle**, carried it through the wilderness, and reassembled it at the next encampment.

The book of **Numbers** is unique in its presentation of **the Levites** as necessary to the life and protection of **Isra'el** as **she** struggled in the wilderness to find **her** way back toward the land of Canaan, and the promises given to **her** ancestors. **These are the descendants of Aaron and Moshe as of the day when ADONAI spoke with Moshe on Mount Sinai.**

The names of the sons of Aaron are: Nadab the firstborn, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. These were the names of the sons of Aaron the High Priest, whom he anointed and ordained as priests. But Nadab and Abihu died in the presence of ADONAI when they offered unauthorized fire before God in the Sinai Desert, and they had no children (see the commentary on Leviticus [Bh](#) - The Death of Nadab and Abihu); Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the presence of Aaron their father (3:1-4).

The Levites first distinguished themselves in the incident of **the golden calf**. When **Moshe** sought those who remained faithful to **ADONAI**, the men of **the tribe of Levi** stepped forward. **The Levites** were the ones who executed the idolaters among the tribes (see the commentary on **Exodus [Gv](#) - And All the Levites Rallied to Moses**). Ever after, they were the tribe accorded the highest holiness. Therefore, **the Levites** served in a stand-in function in **the Tabernacle**. **They** were to minister on **Isra'el's** behalf, carrying out the labor of **the Tabernacle** for all **Isra'el**. We learn later that **they** were invested with the identity of all **Isra'el** through **the laying on of hands**. **So you shall present the Levites before the Tabernacle. You shall also assemble the whole congregation of the sons of Isra'el, and present the Levites before ADONAI; and the sons of Isra'el shall lay their hands on the Levites (see [Bh](#) - The Separation of the Levites).**



Their participation in **the Tabernacle** was not limited to merely carrying things around. **First Chronicles Chapters 23-27** show us that **the Levites** were involved in almost every aspect of **the Tabernacle** service. **They** were primarily responsible for facilitating worship. **They** made up the **Levitical** choir, musicians, lyricists, poets and worship leaders of the

worship service. Several psalms are attributed to **Levite** writers, and the **psalm** collection (**Psalm 50** and **73** through **83**) is certainly **Levitical** in origin. **Their** music and poetry led **Isra'el** into the worship of **the Almighty**. **The Levites** were the guardians of holiness, and the keepers of the sacred. **They** served as gatekeepers and Temple guards and had the duty of killing trespassers. **They** protected the holy furniture in **the Tabernacle** from defilement, be it inadvertent or intentional. **Levites** were also given posts as officials, judges, craftsmen, and treasurers.

For all practical purposes, **the Levites** belonged to **the priesthood**. **They** were the official property of **the Tabernacle/Temple** and **the priesthood**. **They** carried out the duties and functions assigned by **the priests**, essentially working as servants of **the Holy One**. **In the psalms and liturgies of traditional Judaism, Isra'el is divided into three ranks of people. There are priests, Levites and Israelites. When the Torah is read in the traditional synagogue, the first reading is given to a priest. The second reading is offered to a Levite. And any Jew may read the third through seventh readings.**³⁹

Messiah's Levites: Among the Jewish people, the descendants of **Levi** are still with us today. There are many families that have preserved the tradition of the **Levitical** status from generation to generation. These are **the literal Levites**. Yet, on a more metaphorical level, we are all **Levites** for **Messiah**. As **His** disciples, our passion and zeal for **Him** should set us apart from others in the same way that the **Levites'** zeal set them apart for **ADONAI**. The Levites were the servants of **the Tabernacle/Temple** and of **the priesthood**. **Messiah** is the living **Temple**. **He** is our **Great High Priest** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Bl - Yeshua the Melchizedek Priest**). As **His** disciples, we are **His Levites**.

In the same sense that the Levites were the property of **the priesthood** and **the Tabernacle**, we are the property of **Yeshua**. Our diligence in the Kingdom falls along the same lines as much of the **Levitical** work. Like **the Levites**, we are to be facilitators for those seeking to worship **God**. We point the way, carry the burden, assemble the institutions and build the congregations that facilitate people encountering **YHVH**. Like **the Levites**, we are to provide people with teaching. We are entrusted with the words of **the Master** and the teaching of **the Torah**.

Like **the Levites**, we are the guardian of holiness. The Hebrew word for guard is *shamar*, the same word often translated as "observe." We are the ones entrusted to observe (*shamar*) the Holy Sabbath and the appointed times (see the commentary on **Leviticus Dw - God's Appointed Times**), just as **the Levites** were entrusted to guard (*shamar*) the Tabernacle. Like **the Levites**, disciples have no share in this world, but are called to renounce property

and wealth for the sake of **Yeshua**. Like **the Levites**, we are scattered among the people of **God**, and our ministry is to be a light in their midst. Just as **the Levites** were the hands and feet of **the priesthood**, carrying out assigned duties on **their** behalf, we are to function as the hands and feet of our **High Priest**. As **His** disciples, we are **His** servants, **His Levites**.⁴⁰

Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being so wonderful! As **Your priests**, it brings great joy to offer up to **You** a sacrifice - a sacrifice 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)**. How wonderful to spend time meditating on how wonderful you are and to praise you. It is especially helpful before sleeping and when waking to **focus your mind on things above, not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:2)**. Then sleep is more restful and allows **God's** greatness to fill our minds. **Praise** you for being Almighty (**Genesis 17:1, Revelation 4:8**), the Bread of Life (**John 6:35**), Caring (**1 Peter 5:7**), our Deliverer (**Psalms 144:2**) - Defender (**Psalms 68:5**), Everlasting King (**Jeremiah 10:10**), Faithful (**Deuteronomy 7:9**), Good Shepherd (**John 10:11**), Holy (**Isaiah 9:6**), Immanuel (**Isaiah 7:14**), Jehovah Jireh (**Genesis 22:14**), King of Kings (**Revelation 19:16**), Living God (**Joshua 3:10, 1 Samuel 17:26, Daniel 6:26, Hebrews 4:12**) - Light of the World (**John 8:12**), Miracle worker (**Matthew 11:5**), always near (**Hebrews 13:5**), Omniscient/all-knowing (**1 John 3:20**), Omnipotent/All powerful (**Revelation 19:6**), the Prince of Peace (**Isaiah 9:6**) the Passover Lamb (**First Corinthians 5:7**) - **Promise Keeper (Second Corinthians 1:20)**, Quiets you with his love (**Zephaniah 3:17**) - Quite wonderful (**Isaiah 9:6**), Redeemer (**Ephesians 1:7, Isaiah 48:17**) - Resurrection and Life (**John 11:25**), Savior (**Luke 2:11**), Trustworthy (**Psalms 19:8**), Unchanging (**James 1:17**) - Universe Maker (**Colossians 1:16**), Victor (**Colossians 2:15, Deuteronomy 20:4**) - Vine (**John 15:1,5**), Way Maker (**John 14:6**) Wonderful Counselor (**Isaiah 9:6**) - Worthy (**Revelation 5:12**), excellent (**Psalms 8:1**) - exactly what I need (**Jude 24-25**), Yahweh Rapha/God who heals (**Exodus 15:26**), Zealous for His people (**Isaiah 26:11**). In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen