

NUMBERS

Chapter 18

Duties of Priests and Levites

18 So the LORD said to Aaron, “You and your sons and your father's house with you shall bear iniquity connected with the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear iniquity connected with your priesthood. 2 And with you bring your brothers also, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may join you and minister to you while you and your sons with you are before the tent of the testimony. 3 They shall keep guard over you and over the whole tent, but shall not come near to the vessels of the sanctuary or to the altar lest they, and you, die. 4 They shall join you and keep guard over the tent of meeting for all the service of the tent, and no outsider shall come near you. 5 And you shall keep guard over the sanctuary and over the altar, that there may never again be wrath on the people of Israel. 6 And behold, I have taken your brothers the Levites from among the people of Israel. They are a gift to you, given to the LORD, to do the service of the tent of meeting. 7 And you and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood for all that concerns the altar and that is within the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood as a gift, and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death.” 8 Then the LORD spoke to Aaron, “Behold, I have given you charge of the contributions made to me, all the consecrated things of the people of Israel. I have given them to you as a portion and to your sons as a perpetual due. 9 This shall be yours of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering of theirs and every sin offering of theirs and every guilt offering of theirs, which they render to me, shall be most holy to you and to your sons. 10 In a most holy place shall you eat it. Every male may eat it; it is holy to you. 11 This also is yours: the contribution of their gift, all the wave offerings of the people of Israel. I have given them to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it. 12 All the best of the oil and all the best of the wine and of the grain, the firstfruits of what they give to the LORD, I give to you. 13 The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it. 14 Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. 15 Everything that opens the womb of all flesh, whether man or beast, which they offer to the LORD, shall be yours. Nevertheless, the firstborn of man you shall redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. 16 And their redemption price (at a month old you shall redeem them) you shall fix at five shekels[h] in silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. 17 But the firstborn of a cow, or the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat, you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar and shall burn their fat as a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. 18 But their flesh shall be yours, as the breast that is waved and as the right thigh are yours. 19 All the holy contributions that the people of Israel present to the LORD I give to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due. It is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD for you and for your offspring with you.” 20 And the LORD said to Aaron, “You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel. 21 “To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting, 22 so that the people of Israel do not come near the tent of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. 23 But the Levites shall do the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the people of Israel they shall have no inheritance. 24 For the tithe of the people of Israel, which they present as a contribution to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance. Therefore I have said of them that they shall have no inheritance among the people of Israel.”

25 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 26 “Moreover, you shall speak and say to the Levites, ‘When you take from the people of Israel the tithes that I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present a contribution from it to the LORD, a tithes of the tithes. 27 And your contribution shall be counted to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor, and as the fullness of the winepress. 28 So you shall also present a contribution to the LORD from all your tithes, which you receive from the people of Israel. And from it you shall give the LORD’s contribution to Aaron the priest. 29 Out of all the gifts to you, you shall present every contribution due to the LORD; from each its best part is to be dedicated.’ 30 Therefore you shall say to them, ‘When you have offered from it the best of it, then the rest shall be counted to the Levites as produce of the threshing floor, and as produce of the winepress. 31 And you may eat it in any place, you and your households, for it is your reward in return for your service in the tent of meeting. 32 And you shall bear no sin by reason of it, when you have contributed the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy things of the people of Israel, lest you die.”

Ch 18 In vv 1–24, God spoke to Aaron, dealing with the priests and Levites and assigning them a unique position. Vv 25–32 were spoken to Moses, who is charged with the supervision of the priests and the Levites and their relationship with one another. (TLSB)

18:1–7 Aaron and his family, chosen by the Lord to be the true priests of holy worship, faced a burdensome task. The lament of the people in 17:12–13 was real; grievous sins against the holy meeting place of the Lord and his people would be judged by death. The Lord’s mercy in providing a legitimate priesthood was actually an aspect of his grace (cf. Ps 99:6–8), because it was the people’s only hope for deliverance from judgment. (CSB)

18:1 *bear iniquity.* God assures His people that not everyone “who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, shall die” (17:13). Aaron and his sons were privileged to “keep guard over the sanctuary and over the altar” (v 5). They bore responsibility for any failure to perform their sacred duties. (TLSB)

18:2 *Bring your brothers also.* The Aaronic priests were to be assisted by the others in the tribe of Levi, but the assistants were not to go beyond their serving role. If they did so, not only would they die, but so would the priests who were responsible (v. 3). (CSB)

Levites’ status remained unchanged. They alone were to assist the priest in all the duties of the tent (cf chs 3–4), but were excluded from priestly functions in the sanctuary or at the altar. If these regulations were followed, no one would die (vv 3, 7). (TLSB)

18:3 *lest they, and you, die.* Cf Lv 10:1–3. (TLSB)

18:6 *They are a gift to you, given to the LORD.* In giving the Levites, the Lord chooses them for Himself. (TLSB)

18:7 *I give your priesthood as a gift.* Of all men, the priests were privileged to approach the Holy Place and minister before the Lord. The priesthood was a gift of God’s grace to both priests and people. (CSB)

18:8 *I given them to you as a portion and to your sons.* The priests were to be supported in their work of ministry (see Lev 6:14–7:36). Since the Levites as a whole and the priests in particular had no part in the land that God was going to give them, it was necessary that the means for their provision be spelled out fully. They were not to have a part in the land; their share was the Lord himself (v. 20). (CSB)

Heave offerings that were not designated as belonging to the Lord. Given to the priests as part of their benefits. (TLSB)

18:11 *your sons and daughters.* Provision was made not only for the priests, but for their families as well. Only family members who were ceremonially unclean were forbidden to eat the gifts and offerings of the people (see v. 13). Provisions for cleansing were stated in Lev 22:4–8. (CSB)

Unlike the offerings of vv 9–10, the whole family could partake of the wave offerings. (TLSB)

18:12 *best of the oil ... best of of the wine and grain.* Since the best items of produce were to be given to the Lord, these became the special foods of the priests and their families. The NT writers similarly argue that those who minister the word of God in the present period should also be paid suitably for their work. (CSB)

18:19 *a covenant of salt forever.* A permanent provision for the priests. The phrase “covenant of salt” (see 2Ch 13:5) remains obscure. In Lev 2:13 the salt that must accompany grain offerings is called the “salt of the covenant.” According to Eze 43:24, salt is also to be sprinkled on burnt offerings, and Ex 30:35 specifies salt as one of the ingredients in the special incense compounded for the sanctuary. A “covenant of salt” is perhaps an allusion to the salt used in the sacrificial meal that commonly accompanied the making of a covenant (see Ge 31:54; Ex 24:5–11; Ps 50:5). (CSB)

18:21 *every tithe.* God required a tenth of every Israelite’s income to support the Levites, who, like the priests, had no inheritance in Canaan. Their livelihood was to come from “their service in the tent of meeting.” They received whatever part of the tithe was not designated for an offering to the Lord on the altar. (TLSB)

18:26–32 Although the Levites were the recipients of the tithe given to the Lord, they were not themselves exempt from worshiping God by tithing. They in turn were to give a tenth of their income to Aaron (v. 28) and were to be sure that the best part was given as the Lord’s portion (v. 29). By obedient compliance the Levites would escape judicial death (v. 32). (CSB)

18:28 *give the LORD’s contribution to Aaron the priest.* Israel gave 10 percent to the Levites. They gave 10 percent to Aaron as high priest, who managed the offering for the whole priesthood. (TLSB)

18:30 *the best.* Reserved for the priests as leaders.(TLSB)

18:32 *bear no sin by reason of it.* Levites could handle the offering but could not corrupt the process. (TLSB)

Ch 18 Although the latest rebellion against the Lord comes from the Levites through Korah, God does not dismiss the Levites but reaffirms them in their calling. He provides for their forgiveness and their inheritance. Today, those who serve the Lord as church workers are to receive mercy and payment from the churches. Exercise diligent care for the church workers called to your congregation or school. Rejoice that the Lord distributes His life-giving Word to you through them. • “You, O Lord, Yourself have called him For Your precious lambs to care; But to prosper in his calling, He the Spirit’s gifts must share. Give him wisdom from above, Fill his heart with holy love; In his weakness, Lord, be near him, In his prayers, Good Shepherd, hear him.” Amen. (LSB 681:2) (TLSB)