

NUMBERS

Chapter 18

Duties of Priests and Levites

The LORD said to Aaron, “You, your sons and your father’s family are to bear the responsibility for offenses against the sanctuary, and you and your sons alone are to bear the responsibility for offenses against the priesthood. ² Bring your fellow Levites from your ancestral tribe to join you and assist you when you and your sons minister before the Tent of the Testimony. ³ They are to be responsible to you and are to perform all the duties of the Tent, but they must not go near the furnishings of the sanctuary or the altar, or both they and you will die. ⁴ They are to join you and be responsible for the care of the Tent of Meeting—all the work at the Tent—and no one else may come near where you are. ⁵ “You are to be responsible for the care of the sanctuary and the altar, so that wrath will not fall on the Israelites again. ⁶ I myself have selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD to do the work at the Tent of Meeting. ⁷ But only you and your sons may serve as priests in connection with everything at the altar and inside the curtain. I am giving you the service of the priesthood as a gift. Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary must be put to death.”

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 fellow Levites*. 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 *the service of the 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)

Offerings for Priests and Levites

8 Then the LORD said to Aaron, "I myself have put you in charge of the offerings presented to me; all the holy offerings the Israelites give me I give to you and your sons as your portion and regular share. **9** You are to have the part of the most holy offerings that is kept from the fire. From all the gifts they bring me as most holy offerings, whether grain or sin or guilt offerings, that part belongs to you and your sons. **10** Eat it as something most holy; every male shall eat it. You must regard it as holy. **11** "This also is yours: whatever is set aside from the gifts of all the wave offerings of the Israelites. I give this to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it. **12** "I give you all the finest olive oil and all the finest new wine and grain they give the LORD as the firstfruits of their harvest. **13** All the land's firstfruits that they bring to the LORD will be yours. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it. **14** "Everything in Israel that is devoted to the LORD is yours. **15** The first offspring of every womb, both man and animal, that is offered to the LORD is yours. But you must redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals. **16** When they are a month old, you must redeem them at the redemption price set at five shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. **17** "But you must not redeem the firstborn of an ox, a sheep or a goat; they are holy. Sprinkle their blood on the altar and burn their fat as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. **18** Their meat is to be yours, just as the breast of the wave offering and the right thigh are yours. **19** Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the LORD I give to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for both you and your offspring." **20** The LORD said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites. **21** "I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting. **22** From now on the Israelites must not go near the Tent of Meeting, or they will bear the consequences of their sin and will die. **23** It is the Levites who are to do the work at the Tent of Meeting and bear the responsibility for offenses against it. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. They will receive no inheritance among the Israelites. **24** Instead, I give to the

Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to the LORD. That is why I said concerning them: 'They will have no inheritance among the Israelites.' ”²⁵ The LORD said to Moses,²⁶ “Speak to the Levites and say to them: ‘When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the LORD’s offering.²⁷ Your offering will be reckoned to you as grain from the threshing floor or juice from the winepress.²⁸ In this way you also will present an offering to the LORD from all the tithes you receive from the Israelites. From these tithes you must give the LORD’s portion to Aaron the priest.²⁹ You must present as the LORD’s portion the best and holiest part of everything given to you.’³⁰ “Say to the Levites: ‘When you present the best part, it will be reckoned to you as the product of the threshing floor or the winepress.³¹ You and your households may eat the rest of it anywhere, for it is your wages for your work at the Tent of Meeting.³² By presenting the best part of it you will not be guilty in this matter; then you will not defile the holy offerings of the Israelites, and you will not die.’ ”

18:8 *your portion and regular share.* 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 *finest olive oil ... finest new 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 (see, e.g., 1Co 9:3–10 and notes). (CSB)

18:19 *everlasting covenant of salt.* 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)