

David's Organization of the Priests and Levites

1 Chronicles 24-25

1 Chronicles 24 - *"Now these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ² And Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children; therefore Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests. ³ Then David, with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to the schedule of their service.*

⁴ *There were more leaders found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar, and thus they were divided. Among the sons of Eleazar were sixteen heads of their fathers' houses, and eight heads of their fathers' houses among the sons of Ithamar. ⁵ Thus they were divided by lot, one group as another, for there were officials of the sanctuary and officials of the house of God, from the sons of Eleazar and from the sons of Ithamar. ⁶ And the scribe, Shemaiah the son of Nethanel, one of the Levites, wrote them down before the king, the leaders, Zadok the priest, Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the priests and Levites: one father's house taken for Eleazar and one for Ithamar.*

⁷ *Now the first lot fell to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, ⁸ the third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, ⁹ the fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin, ¹⁰ the seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, ¹¹ the ninth to Jeshua, the tenth to Shecaniah, ¹² the eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim, ¹³ the thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth to Jeshebeab, ¹⁴ the fifteenth to Bilgah, the sixteenth to Immer, ¹⁵ the seventeenth to Hezir, the eighteenth to Happizez, ¹⁶ the nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to Jehezkel, ¹⁷ the twenty-first to Jachin, the twenty-second to Gamul, ¹⁸ the twenty-third to Delaiah, the twenty-fourth to Maaziah. ¹⁹ This was the schedule of their service for coming into the house of the LORD according to their ordinance by the hand of Aaron their father, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him.*

²⁰ *And the rest of the sons of Levi: of the sons of Amram, Shubael; of the sons of Shubael, Jehdeiah. ²¹ Concerning Rehabiah, of the sons of Rehabiah, the first was Isshiah. ²² Of the Izharites, Shelomoth; ²³ of the sons of Shelomoth, Jahath. ²³ Of the sons of Hebron, ²⁴ Jeriah was the first, ²⁵ Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, and Jekameam the fourth. ²⁴ Of the sons of Uzziel, Michah; of the sons of Michah, Shamir. ²⁵ The brother of Michah, Isshiah; of the sons of Isshiah, Zechariah. ²⁶ The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi; the son of Jaaziah, Beno. ²⁷ The sons of Merari by Jaaziah were Beno, Shoham, Zaccur, and Ibri. ²⁸ Of Mahli: Eleazar, who had no sons. ²⁹ Of Kish: the son of Kish, Jerahmeel. ³⁰ Also the sons of Mushi were Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth. These were the sons of the Levites according to their fathers' houses.*

³¹ *These also cast lots just as their brothers the sons of Aaron did, in the presence of King David, Zadok, Ahimelech, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the priests and Levites. The chief fathers did just as their younger brethren."*

Background Notes

In 1 Chronicles 23, as David made preparations for the building of the Temple, he took a census of the Levites to see how many priests and Levites were available for service. There were 38,000 male Levites thirty years of age and older (23:3). But it seems that more men were needed for all the work that needed to be done, so David lowered the age requirement for Levites from thirty years to twenty years of age, so more Levites would be available for service (23:24).

In chapter 24, David further organized the priests and Levites into twenty-four divisions to serve at the Temple in rotation. Each division would serve in the Temple for two weeks of the year. This arrangement of twenty-four divisions continued throughout Israel's history as a kingdom, and was reinstated when the Jewish people came back from their seventy-year captivity in Babylon. Remember John the Baptist's father, Zechariah? *"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah" (Luke 1:5).* John the Baptist's father was a priest in the division of Abijah (1 Chronicles 24:10.)

Remember - all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. Only the descendants of Aaron were eligible to be priests. 1 Chronicles 24:1 says that Aaron had four sons – Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Nadab and Abihu were removed because they offered strange fire before the Lord (Leviticus 10:1-2). Thus Aaron's other sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, served as priests. At the time of David, Zadok the priest was in the family line of Eleazar, and Ahimelech the priest was in the line of Ithamar. Of the twenty-four divisions of priests, sixteen divisions were in the line of Eleazar, and eight divisions were in the line of Ithamar (v4).

Doctrinal Points

1. Organization of the ministry of priests and Levites is important.

Arranging the priests and Levites into twenty-four divisions was well organized, and it was very important as well. All the details recorded, and the arrangement was done before the king and the leaders of the nation (v6). The dividing of the priests and Levites was by households and families. The particular groups of Levites who worked with a particular divisions of priests, and what time of the year they would serve, was chosen by lot (v5 & 31).

All these priests and Levites would have come from 24,000 men (23:4). There were 38,000 Levites numbered in the census, and 24,000 of these were to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. So the twenty-four divisions of priests and Levites would have come from these 24,000 men as well as the additional men from twenty years of age who were made eligible.

By the way, don't get the idea that the priests and Levites worked only two weeks out of the year! No way! They were on duty at the Temple in Jerusalem two weeks of the year, but the rest of the year they were busy back in the Levitical cities where they lived. They were the official interpreters of Scripture, and therefore the lawyers in the theocracy of Israel. These 24,000 Levites certainly would have formed a solid scriptural and legal foundation for the other 6,000 Levites who

were specifically designated as the officers and judges for the Land. *“Of these twenty four thousand were to look after the work of the house of the Lord, six thousand were officers and judges” (23:4).*

The lesson for us is found in 1 Corinthians 14:40. In the church, *“let all things be done decently and in order.”*

Disorganization is not godly, and disorder does not please God. As the priests and the Levites were organized for their worship and service for the Lord, so our worship and service to the Lord should be done in an orderly manner. Structure to our worship and service does not necessarily limit the movement of the Holy Spirit. Organization of the ministry of priests and Levites is important.

2. Organization of the ministry of music is important.

1 Chronicles 25 - *“Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, for the ministry of prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. And the number of the skilled men performing their service was: ² Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asharelah; the sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied according to the order of the king. ³ Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the direction of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the LORD. ⁴ Of Heman, the sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-Ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir and Mahazioth. ⁵ All these were the sons of Heman the king’s seer in the words of God, to exalt his horn. For God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters.*

⁶ All these were under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the authority of the king. ⁷ So the number of them, with their brethren who were instructed in the songs of the LORD, all who were skillful, was two hundred and eighty-eight.

⁸ And they cast lots for their duty, the small as well as the great, the teacher with the student. ⁹ Now the first lot for Asaph came out for Joseph; the second for Gedaliah, him with his brethren and sons, twelve; ¹⁰ the third for Zaccur, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹¹ the fourth for Jizri, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹² the fifth for Nethaniah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹³ the sixth for Bukkiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁴ the seventh for Jesharelah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁵ the eighth for Jeshaiiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁶ the ninth for Mattaniah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁷ the tenth for Shimei, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁸ the eleventh for Azarel, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁹ the twelfth for Hashabiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁰ the thirteenth for Shubael, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²¹ the fourteenth for Mattithiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²² the fifteenth for Jeremoth, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²³ the sixteenth for Hananiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁴ the seventeenth for Joshbekashah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁵ the eighteenth for Hanani, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁶ the nineteenth for Mallothi, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁷ the twentieth for Eliathah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁸ the twenty-first for Hothir, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁹ the twenty-second for Giddalti, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ³⁰ the twenty-third for Mahazioth, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ³¹ the twenty-fourth for Romamti-Ezer, his sons and his brethren, twelve.”

In 1 Chronicles 3:25 we learned that of the 38,000 Levites, 4,000 were designated for the ministry of music. So the twenty-four divisions of singers would be supported by Levites who played musical instruments (v1 & 6). The fact that the commanders of the army were involved in the selection of the musical talent (v1) may indicate that Israel used music when they went into battle during the times of the kings.

The main point of doctrine for us today is that praising the Lord with music important - but it is also important that the ministry of music be organized. Notice that the 288 singers who were selected were **trained** and **skillful** (v7). Everyone may and should sing praises to the Lord, but only some are called to a ministry of music. I'm sure you can give examples of folks you know who are **not** called to a ministry of music, even though they may think they are!

Psalm 100:1 says, *"Make a joyful noise to the Lord,"* but Psalm 33:3 qualifies the "noise" by saying, *"Sing to Him with a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy."* Organization of the ministry of music is important.

Practical Application

Put **content** high on your priority list for Christian music!

There's a lot of Christian music on the market these days. How do we decide what Christian music is best? The singer? The style? Traditional? Contemporary? Or is it the content?

Notice - singing with instruments was **considered to be a ministry of prophecy or teaching**— in other words, they were **singing a message from the Lord** (25:1&3)! That says a lot about the content of songs and hymns in the house of the Lord in David's day. And the titles in the book of Psalms reveal that Asaph, Ethan, and Heman wrote several psalms. They are included in Scripture! This is another indication that their music in the House of the Lord had **valuable content**.

A lot of Christian music today has very little theological content. You may have a favorite Christian singer and style, but let's put **valuable content** high on our priority list when we're selecting Christian music – especially for the times when we're gathered to worship the Lord!