

The Responsibilities and the Support of the Priests and Levites

Numbers 18

Numbers 18- *“Then the LORD said to Aaron: “You and your sons and your father’s house with you shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood. ² Also bring with you your brethren of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you while you and your sons are with you before the tabernacle of witness. ³ They shall attend to your needs and all the needs of the tabernacle; but they shall not come near the articles of the sanctuary and the altar, lest they die—they and you also. ⁴ They shall be joined with you and attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, for all the work of the tabernacle; but an outsider shall not come near you. ⁵ And you shall attend to the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, that there may be no more wrath on the children of Israel. ⁶ Behold, I Myself have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel; they are a gift to you, given by the LORD, to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting. ⁷ Therefore you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything at the altar and behind the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood to you as a gift for service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”*

⁸ *And the LORD spoke to Aaron: “Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings, all the holy gifts of the children of Israel; I have given them as a portion to you and your sons, as an ordinance forever. ⁹ This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, shall be most holy for you and your sons. ¹⁰ In a most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you.*

¹¹ *“This also is yours: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and your sons and daughters with you, as an ordinance forever. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.*

¹² *“All the best of the oil, all the best of the new wine and the grain, their firstfruits which they offer to the LORD, I have given them to you. ¹³ Whatever first ripe fruit 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 first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to the LORD, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. ¹⁶ And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. ¹⁷ But the firstborn of a cow, 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 burn their fat as an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD. ¹⁸ And their flesh shall be yours, just as the wave breast and the right thigh are yours.*

¹⁹ *“All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the LORD, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever; it is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD with you and your descendants with you.”*

²⁰ Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel. ²¹ "Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting. ²² Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. ²³ But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. ²⁴ For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.'"

²⁵ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁶ "Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: 'When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the LORD, a tenth of the tithe. ²⁷ And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress. ²⁸ Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the LORD from all your tithes that you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the LORD's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest. ²⁹ Of all your gifts you shall offer up every heave offering due to the LORD, from all the best of them, the consecrated part of them.' ³⁰ Therefore you shall say to them: 'When you have lifted up the best of it, then the rest shall be accounted to the Levites as the produce of the threshing floor and as the produce of the winepress. ³¹ You may eat it in any place, you and your households, for it is your reward for your work in the tabernacle of meeting. ³² And you shall bear no sin because of it, when you have lifted up the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy gifts of the children of Israel, lest you die.'"

Background Notes

In Numbers 17 the Lord confirmed in no uncertain terms that Aaron was the High Priest, and that all priests in Israel were to be descendants from Aaron's family line. The people of Israel realized that all of them had questioned God's ways and had not respected and revered the Lord, so their lives were in danger! At this point God responded to the frightened cries of the people by speaking directly to Aaron and emphasizing that he, as the High Priest, and his sons as priests, and the rest of the Levites had the awesome responsibility of protecting the Tabernacle and the holy things from defilement. "And you shall attend to the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, that there may be no more wrath on the children of Israel" (v5).

The people would be protected from God's wrath by the buffer of the priest, who would make sure that the furnishings of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, God's dwelling place in the midst of His people, were not profaned. It was the awesome responsibility of the priests and Levites to make sure that the holy things of God were revered and protected.

What a lesson for us! As God's priests and servants today, we have a serious responsibility to honor and promote reverence for the Lord, to protect His holy Word, and the sacred things of God. How important it is for mature believers to do this, and thus be models for the younger generation of believers!

Doctrinal Points

1. God provides for the needs of His priests.

Although the priests were not property owners, God provided for all their needs. All the offerings and portions of offerings that were not consumed by fire on the altar were given to the priests (v8-20), including the "wave" offerings that were lifted up and presented to the Lord. The offerings of the first fruits were also given as food for the priests.

Besides these offerings, the priests were entitled to the items called "devoted things," or items that people gave (or "devoted") to the Lord. The person could give a wagon or a plow to the Lord, just as people give various items for the service of the Lord today. The priest also received the money from any item that was "redeemed." For example, if you gave your cart to the Lord, you could keep the cart and use it if you "redeemed" it by giving the market value, plus twenty percent of value, to the work of the Lord (Leviticus 27). All first-born, whether people or animals, belonged to the Lord, and these were also given to the priests (v15). The firstborn of clean animals were sacrificed to the Lord, but the firstborn of people and the firstborn of unclean animals were redeemed, and the money was given to the priests.

So the priests and their families were well cared for. This arrangement was considered a "covenant of salt" (v19); that is, it was an everlasting covenant and was never to be changed.

God provides for the needs of His priests – then and today. Who are God's priests today? Are they a special classification of Christians, or a special group called "clergy"? No! **All believers are God's priests today!** 1 Peter 2:5 says that all believers are a holy priesthood, and we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As priests, our most important needs are our spiritual needs – and all our spiritual needs are met in Christ. This is emphasized in the spiritual picture that emerges in Numbers 18. The needs of the priests were met in the offerings brought to the Lord – and remember, all of these offerings and gifts in some way picture Jesus Christ. **All** our spiritual needs are met in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. God provides for the needs of His priests.

2. God provides for the needs of His servants.

We've seen that the Lord provided for the needs of the priests with the offerings. What about the needs of the Levites? The Lord provided for the Levites with the tithes of the people. Under the Law, the people of Israel were obligated to tithe, www.growingchristians.org 3

or give 10% of all their income – and that 10% was to be calculated from their **gross** income, not just their **net** income! These tithes were used to provide for the needs of the Lord's servants, the Levites.

God takes care of the needs of His servants today. How? He does it in many different ways, but a primary way is through the tithes and gifts of the Lord's people. Galatians 6:6 says, *“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.”* God provides for the needs of His servants.

Practical Applications

1. Don't forget the tithe of the tithe.

Verse 26: *“Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: ‘When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the LORD, a tenth of the tithe.’”*

Even though the Levites were in ministry full time, they too were required to tithe from their income! They were to give *“a tithe of the tithe”!* And the same is true today. The fact that some folks are full time servants of the Lord and are supported by the gifts of Lord's people doesn't relieve them from the obligation of giving the proper portion of their income to the Lord's work. So any of you who are receiving income for your Christian service - don't forget to *“tithe your tithe”!*

2. Use all your money for the glory of God!

Verse 32: *“And you shall bear no sin because of it, when you have lifted up the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy gifts of the children of Israel, lest you die.”*

After the Levites had given their tithe of the tithes to the Lord, they could use the rest of the tithe they received (whether grain or animals or money) for themselves, for their own needs and the needs of their families. It was not a sin to use these gifts in whatever way they chose. It was their wages, or the compensation or reward for their services. However, in using these gifts for themselves, they were not to *“profane”* them. All their money should be used for the glory of God.

This is still true today. After tithing and giving the Lord His proper portion of our income, we can use our money in whatever way we choose. However, it should never be used in a profane way! It should never be used, for example, to purchase literature or movies that are immoral, nor should it be used to go to places where the name of the Lord is profaned. Use all your money for the glory of God!