

THE MAINTENANCE OF THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES

BIBLE TEXT : Numbers 18:1-32

LESSON 98 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Give, and It shall be given unto you" (Luke 6:38).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Numbers 18:1-32 (KJV)

¹ And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood.

² And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee *shall minister* before the tabernacle of witness.

³ And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die.

⁴ And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you.

⁵ And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel.

⁶ And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you *they are given as* a gift for the LORD, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.

⁷ Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the veil; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office *unto you* as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

⁸ And the LORD spake unto Aaron,

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Duties of the Levites

The Levites had consecrated themselves for special service to God, and He had made a place for them to minister at the House of God. Their duties were to help the priests in the tabernacle worship, besides moving the Tabernacle every time the Israelites journeyed. In later years, after the Children of Israel came into the Promised Land, some families of the tribe of Levi were set apart for the musical service of worship. The sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun became musicians and singers, in great choruses and orchestras, trained by skilled teachers (**1 Chronicles 25:1 (KJV)**)¹ Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals: and the number of the workmen according to their service was: **1 Chronicles 15:16-22 (KJV)** ¹⁶ And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren *to be* the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy. ¹⁷ So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel; and of his brethren, Asaph the son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari their brethren, Ethan the son of Kushaiah; ¹⁸ And with them their brethren of the second *degree*, Zechariah, Ben, and Jaaziel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Unni, Eliab, and Benaiah, and Maaseiah, and Mattithiah, and Elipheleh, and Mikneiah, and Obededom, and Jeiel, the porters. ¹⁹ So the singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, *were appointed* to sound with cymbals of brass; ²⁰ And Zechariah, and Aziel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Unni, and Eliab, and Maaseiah, and Benaiah, with psalteries on Alamoth; ²¹ And Mattithiah, and Elipheleh, and Mikneiah, and Obededom, and Jeiel, and Azaziah, with harps on the Sheminith to excel. ²² And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, *was* for song: he instructed about the song, because he *was* skilful. **2 Chronicles 5:13 (KJV)** ¹³ It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers *were* as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up *their* voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, *saying*, For *he* is good; for his mercy *endureth* for ever: that *then* the house was filled with a cloud, *even* the house of the LORD).

Music was an important part of the Israelites' worship of God. We read: "And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished" (**2 Chronicles 29:27-28 (KJV)**) ²⁷ And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the

Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever.

⁹ This shall be thine of the most holy things, *reserved* from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, *shall be* most holy for thee and for thy sons.

¹⁰ In the most holy *place* shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee.

¹¹ And this *is* thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it.

¹² All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee.

¹³ *And* whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the LORD, shall be thine; every one that is clean in thine house shall eat *of* it.

¹⁴ Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine.

¹⁵ Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, *whether it be* of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem.

¹⁶ And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five

burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began *also* with the trumpets, and with the instruments *ordained* by David king of Israel. ²⁸ And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: *and all this continued* until the burnt offering was finished). We notice, too, that many of the Psalms were written by these Levite musicians, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun.

No Inheritance in Canaan

The Levites were so much set apart for holy service that they did not receive an inheritance with their brothers in Canaan. They were given cities in which to live, with enough land to take care of their cattle, but they had no way to earn a living, nor did they have any political rights in the nation. All their attention was to be given to the service of God.

God took good care of His consecrated people. He said He would be their inheritance. They gave their time and attention to His service, and deserved to be fed by His hand.

The Apostle Paul spoke of the support of the ministers when he said, "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel shall live of the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:13, 14).

Between the Living and the Dead

God expects those ministers to bring the words of life to the people - to "feed the flock." They must have the love of God in their hearts, and have the Spirit upon their lives to teach the people the way to Heaven. There is a great responsibility upon the minister to stand between the living and the dead and warn people to flee from the judgment that is to come.

God told Ezekiel that if the watchman saw the sword coming and did not warn the people, their blood would be required at his hand. God has set His ministers as watchmen, and they must have the Spirit of God on their lives to warn the sinners to repent of their sins and prepare to meet the Lord.

Spared by Faithfulness of Priests

Aaron and his sons, the priests, offered sacrifices for the Israelites when they sinned, or God would have destroyed them, In many cases physical death came upon the sinner almost instantly. One time when the Israelites murmured against Moses and said they were sorry they had left Egypt, God sent serpents to bite the people. Many who were bitten, died. Moses prayed for the smitten people, and God had mercy and told Moses what to do that they might be spared from death (**Numbers 21:4 (KJV)** ⁴ And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which *is* twenty gerahs.

¹⁷ But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they *are* holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat *for* an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the LORD.

¹⁸ And the flesh of them shall be thine, as the wave breast and as the right shoulder are thine.

¹⁹ All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it *is* a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee.

²⁰ And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I *am* thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.

²¹ And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, *even* the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.

²² Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die.

²³ But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: *it shall be* a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance.

²⁴ But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer *as* an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto

Numbers 21:9 (KJV) ⁹ And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived).

Another time the Children of Israel murmured because God had destroyed some wicked men for their sins. God wanted to destroy the whole camp of Israel for that sin, but again Moses and Aaron prayed earnestly that God would forgive them. Moses told Aaron to take fire in a censer and go quickly unto the congregation and make atonement for the people because judgment was already falling upon the Israelites in the form of a plague. Aaron ran hurriedly as Moses commanded him - but already 14,700 had died. The entire congregation would have died if the priest had not "stood between the dead and the living" (**Numbers 16:41 (KJV)** ⁴¹ But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD. **Numbers 16:50 (KJV)** ⁰ And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed).

How grateful we should be for true ministers who are willing to give up their own ways and their personal desires to take care of God's children! "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (I Thessalonians 5:12, 13).

Those Levites who were in a lower position than the priests also had duties, the neglect of which would let people die. God warned that no strangers must come near the Tabernacle, because they were unclean and He was holy. If any came near they would die. So the Levites camped around the Tabernacle to protect the stranger from death.

The Tithe of the Israelites

God wanted the Israelites to appreciate the service of the priests and other Levites; and to show their appreciation they were to bring a tithe of all their crops and of all their flocks and herds to the Levites. Many of these offerings were used as sacrifices; and after they were presented to the Lord, what remained was to be eaten. One tenth of all the increase of the Israelites, the firstfruits and the first-born - that which was best - was to be the inheritance of the Levites.

From the tithe which the Levites received they were to select the best for the tithe for the priests. Thus all the Levites and the priests were well taken care of by the portion which God had provided for them.

Never were the Levites to be forgotten. God appointed certain feasts and always reminded the Israelites not to forget the Levites and the poor, that they might eat with them and rejoice. "Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth"

them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

²⁵ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

²⁶ Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, *even* a tenth *part* of the tithe.

²⁷ And *this* your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though *it were* the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress.

²⁸ Thus ye also shall offer an heave offering unto the LORD of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof the LORD'S heave offering to Aaron the priest.

²⁹ Out of all your gifts ye shall offer every heave offering of the LORD, of all the best thereof, *even* the hallowed part thereof out of it.

³⁰ Therefore thou shalt say unto them, When ye have heaved the best thereof from it, then it shall be counted unto the Levites as the increase of the threshingfloor, and as the increase of the winepress.

³¹ And ye shall eat it in every place, ye and your households: for it *is* your reward for your service in the tabernacle of the congregation.

³² And ye shall bear no sin by reason of it, when ye have heaved from it the best of it: neither shall ye pollute the holy things of the children of Israel, lest ye die.

(Deuteronomy 12:19).

However, in later years the Israelites did forget the Levites, and drought came upon their land. Because they failed to pay the tithes which belonged to God, great trouble came upon them. God has promised: "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9, 10). When we obey God's Word, we are sure of His blessing.

God told the prophet Malachi to tell the people why their nation was cursed and they were hungry and sick. "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." How had they robbed Him? "In tithes and offerings." But they did not need to stay in their pitiful state. God showed them how they could again enjoy great prosperity: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the 'LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:8-10). God made that promise to the Israelites, but we can claim it too, because by faith we are the children of Abraham.

God's Plan for His Church

When we look through the Scriptures we see that tithing is God's plan for financing His Church. Some people believe that the law of giving a tenth was only for the Israelites, but we read that more than 600 years before the giving of the Law, Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec, the priest of the most high God (**Hebrews 7:1-6 (KJV)**) ¹ For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; ² To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; ³ Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually. ⁴ Now consider how great this man *was*, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. ⁵ And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: ⁶ But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises).

Jacob, the father of the Israelites, promised God at Bethel, at the time he dreamed he saw the ladder reaching to Heaven, that he would pay tithes unto the Lord. "And of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (Genesis 28:22).

The plan of tithing was later emphasized to Moses: "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD" (Leviticus 27:30). We notice that the tithe "is the LORD'S." It is not yours or mine, but belongs to God If we

QUESTIONS

- 1 What were the duties of the Levites?
- 2 What was to be their inheritance?
- 3 What more than food did the Levites receive?
- 4 How did the Israelites in later years rob God?
- 5 What is a tithe?
- 6 Who paid tithes before the time of the Israelites? Name two men.
- 7 Did Jesus say people should pay tithes?

do not give Him what belongs to Him, He will not bless our lives. In fact, God called it robbing to withhold tithes from Him. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Malachi 3:8).

The Jews were paying tithes when Jesus was on earth, and He told them to continue doing so. But He wanted more from them. They were not serving God because there was any love in their hearts for Him; and Jesus called them hypocrites. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matthew 23:23).

Tithing, or giving the tenth of what we earn, is fair and just, because those who have more can give more; and those who have only a little, give what they can. "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee" (Deuteronomy 16:17). The poor woman who cast in two mites was blessed more by Jesus than the rich men who would probably never miss the larger amount they had given (**Mark 12:42 (KJV)** ⁴² And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. **Mark 12:44 (KJV)** ⁴⁴ For all *they* did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, *even* all her living).

With a Willing Mind

God wants us to give, not because we have to, but out of the abundance of the heart, because we love Him. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (II Corinthians 8:12).

When we appreciate the love of God to us we will want to give all we can to help others find it, too - tithes of love and willing service, tithes of silver and of gold. We will want to spread the news of salvation into all the world - by special revival campaigns, by the printed literature, by advertising, by personal visits to the sick and shut-ins, the unfortunates who have no other way of hearing the Story. We will want to help the missionaries in foreign lands. In paying our tithes we can help all these activities; and then when we consecrate our lives and pray earnestly that God will bless the seed that is sown, we will win precious souls for Christ's Kingdom.