

HIGHLIGHTS FROM NUMBERS
"Priestly/Levitical Duties/Dues"
Numbers 18:1-32

GET THE BACKGROUND

1. All that has taken place in Israel's history is purposeful. Nothing is ever recorded in the Word for naught.
2. Look at the context here: the problems of Korah give rise to the instruction furnished by Aaron's rod. So the closing lines of chapter 17, i.e. the frightened cries of Israel (vv. 12-13) call forth the elaborate statement about the functions of Aaron's priesthood and the Levitical responsibilities. All is purposeful in Scripture!
3. There are four sections to the chapter.
 - a. vv. 1-7 Workers duties
 - b. vv. 8-20 Priestly dues
 - c. vv. 21-24 Levitical dues
 - d. vv. 25-32 Levitical/Priestly tithe.
4. Check out the significant lessons to be learned. They give evidence of God's providential care for His work, workers, and worship.

1. DUTIES DETERMINED vv. 1-7

a. Priests

It is noteworthy that Aaron is addressed directly (Lev. 10:8). Elsewhere Moses is God's intermediary to Aaron (6:23; 8:2). The main thrust is that priests have two responsibilities: the sanctuary and priesthood (v. 1). Any negligence or profanation of these would be their problem.

Further, this is a charge from God (v. 5). They were responsible to keep God's wrath from being poured out on the people (v. 5).

Two specifics are mentioned: everything of the altar and that within the veil. This is the priestly gift/service unto God.

N.B. Trespassers against the assignment to the priests were to be executed (v. 7).

b. Levites

The Levites are indicated to be a "gift" from the Lord to the priests "for the service of the tabernacle" (v. 6). They were chosen for special work.

It is clear that Levites are to be "joined" to the priests and they are "to minister" unto them (v. 2).

Specifically, the Levites did guard duty for the tabernacle, but did not enter the tent or officiate at

the altar. Any confusion of duties meant death (v. 3). Strangers were kept away from the tabernacle (v. 4).

N.B. Priests and Levites were spiritual conductors to hold off God's judgment. This is God's answer to the cry of 17:12, 13. It is the logical sequel to the vindication of the Aaronic priesthood (chap. 17).

2. DUES DETAILED vv. 8-32

a. For Priests vv. 8-20

1) The detailed list is given after the general statement (v. 8). But look, all the grain, sin, and trespass offerings were the priests except that required to be burned on the altar (v. 9 cf Lev. 6:14-7:36; 27:6-33). The heave and wave offerings were also the priests (v. 11). Added are the best of the oil, wine, and wheat, and first fruit offerings of whatsoever sort (v. 12, 13). Everything devoted or dedicated to the Lord belonged to the priests as well (v. 14). The firstborn child or unclean animal was to be paid for in cash. The fixed rate was five shekels or about six months pay (vv. 15, 16). All other animals and offerings etc. must be sacrificed to God (vv. 17-19).

2) The directions for eating and the reasons are given for all these dues to be the priests: their anointing (v. 8) males only for some things (v. 10) while females with others (v. 11). Legal cleanness was required (vv. 11, 13). All was perpetual (v. 8, 19) as the "covenant of salt" denotes (v. 19). All done because they had no other income nor property (v. 20).

b. For Levites vv. 21-32

It appears that the priestly dues are a systematization of rules previously given in the Pentateuch. But here is something new. The Levites are to get a tithe from the general public of Israel. Tithing was practiced early on (Gen. 14:20; 28:22). There was possibility of redemption of tithes (Lev. 27:30-33).

The reasons for the Levitical tithe are given: in return for service rendered (vv. 21, 31), in recognition of dangers of occupation (vv. 22, 23), and finally, in compensation for their lack of inheritance (v. 24).

The Levites were to tithe their tithe (v. 26). They were to give the best (v. 29). Once they had done that, they could eat the rest of the tithe when and where they pleased without blame (vv. 31, 32).

NOW WHAT? There would have been a huge income from tithes, firstlings, and sacrificial offerings. Sad to report, Israel was unfaithful to pay. It is one of the major causes of failure in Israel (Haggai 1; Mal. 3). Let's learn the lesson!