

May 26, 2019 - Num 18:1 – 18:32 - Authority of the Priests and Levites
Torah Reading: Numbers 18:1 – 18:32 - Authority of the Priests and Levites
Psalm 103 (repeat)
Haftarah: Isaiah 62:8 – 63:3, 7-9

The Privileges & Responsibilities of the Priests and Levites

This is the culmination of the series of events regarding the authority of the Priests and Levites that began with Nadab and Abihu approaching the Holy Place with "strange incense" not touched by the blood of the altar, Korah and the 250 princes with their censers, and the budding of Aaron's rod as a sign against the rebels.

The exclusive right to ministry in the Tabernacle for the Priests and Levites, with the rituals, sacred boundaries and requirement of holiness, had to be clear for the typology of Christ to be seen. Nothing could be allowed to blur the lines or muddy the picture.

Numbers 18:1 - "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."

To "bear the iniquity of the sanctuary" and "bear the iniquity of your priesthood" simply means Aaron and his sons were accountable for anything that went wrong in the Tabernacle or with their performance of ministry.

Rashi - I impose upon you the punishment of the outsiders who sin regarding the sacred objects entrusted to you; the Tent, the ark, the table, and the sacred vessels. You shall sit and warn any unauthorized person who attempts to touch [the sacred objects]. For it is not given over to the Levites. You shall warn the Levites who might inadvertently err, that they may not touch you during your [performance of the] service.

Later (**Numbers 18:23**), the Levites are also said to "bear their iniquity" to keep others away from the Tabernacle.

"that neither they, nor ye also, die." **verse 3** - See also "the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death" in **verse 8**.

Numbers 18:2 - "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."

"that they may be joined unto thee" - The very name Levi means "joined"

- **Genesis 29:34** - "And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi."

"Levi" = attached, joined to, adhesion

The Levites were not allowed to do what the priests did. In the same way, the New Testament says we are all different "parts" of the body, each with particular gifts and callings (**1 Corinthians 12:4-7**). But they are still "joined together" toward one purpose.

Here, the priesthood is said to be a "gift" to Aaron and his sons, and the Levites are given as a "gift" to the Priests. In the New Testament, the offices and gifts of the Spirit are given to the Body of Christ

Numbers 18:5 - "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."

This would be the end of God's wrath because of intrusions into the priest's office, as had been upon Korah and his company, **Numbers 16:32**, and as afterwards came on Uzziah, **2 Chronicles 26:19**.

Henceforward, priests and the Kohathites will be liable for Israelite violation of sacred space (18:1a), priests for any priestly violations (18:1b), priests and Levites for any Levitical encroachments (18:3), and Levites for violations of the Tent itself (8:22-23).

Tithes and Gifts to Support the Priests and Levites

Portions of the sacrifices were given to the priests alone to eat in the Holy Place.

Portions from the Peace and Thank Offerings and heave offerings were given to the priests and their families to eat in their own dwellings.

Five different tithes or contributions were required.

The Great Contribution was granted to the priests from the year's produce (based on Numbers 18:12). The Torah states no specific amount for this gift, but the Sages set it as between one sixtieth and one fortieth of the year's yield.

The First Fruit Offering is given to God, and God in turn gives it to the Levites (**Numbers 18:21**).

The "contribution from the tithe" is the requirement for the Levites to separate out a tenth of their tithe (i.e., a tithe of the tithe) to give to the priests (**Numbers 18:26, 32**).

Deuteronomy adds further tithes:

The Second Tithe is a requirement to use ten percent of one's produce or the equivalent monetary value in Jerusalem over the pilgrimage festivals (**Deuteronomy 14:22-23**). This is less a tax and more a mandatory festival expenditure, and applies during the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of every seven-year Year of Release or Sabbatical

Year.

The tithe for the poor is a requirement to give ten percent of one's produce to the poor (**Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12**). It applies during the third and sixth years of every seven-year Year of Release or Sabbatical Year. Each of those years was called "The Year of the Tithe."

(But by the Second Temple period, there were many priests but not many Levites. At that time tithes were given to the priests rather than the Levites, overturning the procedure legislated in this passage).

Paul uses these instructions for the support of the Priests and Levites to explain the right of New Testament apostles and ministers to be supported by the church.

- **1 Corinthians 9:13-15** - "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 should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things..."

A Covenant of Salt

Numbers 18:19 - "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."

The heave offerings were brought to God as part of the peace offering (**Exodus 29:28, Leviticus 7:14**), a Nazirite's consecration offering (Numbers 6:20), and for thanksgiving (**Numbers 15:19-21**). In the heave offering, a choice portion of the animal (the breast or the thigh) was heaved or waved before the LORD.

"it is a covenant of salt for ever" - Salt is a preservative and thus implies an eternal, unbreakable covenant.

God said the same to King David and his descendants. Nathan the Prophet assured David in God's name that the kingship would never depart from his house (**2 Samuel 7:16**). This was later referred to as having been forged with a covenant of salt in **2 Chronicles 13:5**:

- **2 Chronicles 13:5** - "Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?"

Targum: Just as the sea can never be changed from salty to sweet, so too it is impossible that the monarchy would ever depart from David's descendants.

Every sacrifice offered in the Tabernacle and Temple would be salted (**Leviticus 2:13**), stating that “the salt of the covenant” would never cease from the offerings. Each sacrifice therefore had a component of eternity.

- **Ezekiel 43:24** - "And thou shalt offer them before the LORD, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering unto the LORD."

The Midrash explains that when God originally divided the “upper waters” and the “lower waters” on the second day of creation (**Genesis 1:6-8**), the lower waters complained that they were doomed to the lower spheres, farther from God and the heavens. God therefore made a covenant with them that they would be offered in the Temple – in the form of sea salt which would be placed on every sacrifice (as well as in the water libations offered on Sukkot) (Rashi on **Leviticus 2:13**).

See <https://www.aish.com/atr/Covenant-of-Salt.html>

No Inheritance in the Land

Numbers 18:20 - "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."

As spiritual priests (**1 Peter 2:5**) our only portion and inheritance in this world is God.

Forseen here:

- **Psalms 73:26** - "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

A Note on Numbers 18:16 and Abortion

Numbers 18:16 - “And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs."

Why "from a month old?"

In Rabbinical thinking, a fetus, although a living being, legally becomes a person (a *nefesh* - living soul) at birth.

Prior to 40 days of gestation, the fetus has a limited legal status, with one Talmudic authority (Yevamot 69b) asserting that prior to 40 days the fetus is “mere water” with the status of “potential life.” Elsewhere, the Talmud indicates that the ancient rabbis regarded a fetus as part of its mother throughout the pregnancy, dependent fully on her for its life.

Psalm 139:16 - “Thine eyes did see my ‘substance, yet being unperfect’ (*golem*); and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as

yet there was none of them.

The word *golem* = “a wrapped (and unformed mass, i.e. as the embryo)” occurs only once here. It can also mean “my light form,” “raw” material, connoting the unfinished human being before God's eyes. The Golem later designated a figure in Jewish tales formed from mud or clay and then magically brought to life. The Hebrew word for “truth” - *emet* - was written on his forehead. By erasing the first letter, the word *met* - “death” - remains, and the Golem would return to merely mud.

Rabban Simeon ben Gamliel said: Any human being who lives 30 days is not a *nephef* [abortus] because it is stated: ‘And those that are to be redeemed of them from a month old shalt thou redeem (**Numbers 18:16**),’ since prior to thirty days it is not certain that he will survive.”

Maimonides - Whether one kills an adult or a day-old child, a male or a female, he must be put to death if he kills deliberately...provided that the child is born after a full-term pregnancy. But, if it is born before the end of nine months, it is regarded as an abortion until it has lived for thirty days, and if one kills it during these thirty days, one is not put to death on its account.

Maimonides explains that the fetus has the law of a *rodef*, one who is pursuing another with intent to kill, whose life may be taken in order to save the would-be victim. It is thus permitted to abort the fetus, surgically or through medication, since the fetus is seen as an active threat to the mother's life

Thus, although the newborn infant reaches the status of a person or *nefesh*, which it didn't have prior to birth, it still does not enjoy all the legal rights of an adult until it has survived for thirty days postpartum.

Where the mother's life is imperiled by her pregnancy, the Mishnah allows abortion. But once the baby's head has emerged from the mother (some authorities say the majority of its body, some say merely any limb), termination is no longer allowed, since Jewish law does not permit sacrificing one life to save another.

At the same time, feticide is prohibited by Jewish law, though there is disagreement over the exact source of this prohibition and how serious an infraction it is. Some consider it biblical in origin based on a verse (**Genesis 9.6**) that prohibits shedding the “blood of man within man” — a phrase understood to refer to a fetus. Moreover, Judaism teaches that the body is ultimately the property of God and is merely on loan to human beings. Multiple prohibitions in Jewish law— including prohibitions on suicide, getting tattoos and wounding oneself— collectively serve to reject the idea that individuals enjoy an unfettered right to make choices regarding their own bodies.

Fetal personhood seems to be in doubt in Mishnah Arakhin 1 - "If a woman is about to be executed, they do not wait for her until she gives birth. But if she had already sat on the birthstool, they wait for her until she gives birth."

Yet neither is it simply a mass of flesh without a soul:

“A lamp is lit for the unborn child above its head, and with it the child peers and sees from one end of the world to the other. . . . There are no days in which a person experiences more bliss than during the days in the mother’s womb . . . while there, the child is taught the entire Torah . . . but as soon as he emerges, an angel strikes him on the mouth, causing the child to forget the entire Torah . . .” (Talmud, Niddah 30b.)

The noncanonical Jewish wisdom literature clarifies first-century Judaism’s view of abortion. For example, the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides 184–186 (c. 50 B.C.–A.D. 50) says that “a woman should not destroy the unborn in her belly, nor after its birth throw it before the dogs and vultures as a prey.” Included among those who do evil in the apocalyptic Sibylline Oracles were women who “aborted what they carried in the womb” (2.281–282). Similarly, the apocryphal book 1 Enoch (2nd or 1st century B.C.) declares that an evil angel taught humans how to “smash the embryo in the womb” (69.12). Finally, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote that “the law orders all the offspring to be brought up, and forbids women either to cause abortion or to make away with the fetus” (Against Apion 2.202).

Luke (a physician) points to fetal personhood when he observes that the unborn John the Baptist “leaped for joy” in his mother’s womb when Elizabeth came into the presence of Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus at the time (**Luke 1:44**).

Soon after the New Testament was written, early Christian documents universally condemn abortion:

One of the earliest documents of Christianity after the New Testament is the Didache, dated to around A.D. 80-120. The teaching describes two ways: the way of life and the way of death. The way of life demands that Christians "shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, ... you shall not murder a child by abortion nor commit infanticide."

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) made clear the sin of women who "in order to hide their immorality, use abortive drugs which expel the matter completely dead, abort at the same time their human feelings." Tertullian (A.D. 160-240) taught even more comprehensively: "For us, we may not destroy even the fetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is just a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter when you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to birth. That is a man which is going to be one; you have the fruit already in the seed."

See <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-beginning-of-life-in-judaism/>
and <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/abortion-in-jewish-thought/>
https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/529077/jewish/What-Is-the-Jewish-View-on-Abortion.htm

Also <https://albertmohler.com/2017/05/15/abortion>
and <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/abortion-and-early-church/>