

## LESSON 2. THE LEVITES

Numbers 3 and 4

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him” (Numbers 3:6).

A recent lesson told how God changed Jacob’s name to Israel. Thus, Jacob’s descendants were called Israelites and it was from him that the nation of Israel was born. Jacob had twelve sons. Each son had a tribe named after him except Joseph. However, tribes were named after Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Each tribe received an inheritance in the land of promise except the Levites. The Levites (descendants of Levi) were the spiritual leaders of Israel and all the other tribes were required to give a “heave offering” to the Lord of a tithe (tenth part) of their produce (Numbers 18:21-24). The Lord gave this heave offering to the Levites so they could carry out their spiritual duties without worrying about how to make a living.

While Moses was on the mountain receiving the ten commandments from God, the Israelites became impatient and had Aaron make them a golden calf to worship. This made God very angry. Only the pleading of Moses on behalf of the children of Israel kept God from destroying the whole nation and starting over with the children of Moses. But, Moses also became angry with Aaron and the people for disobeying God and worshiping an idol. Moses challenged the people by saying, “Who is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me” (Exodus 32:26). The Levites immediately came to his side. Moses had the Levites slay those who were leaders of the rebellion. About 3000 were killed. The remainder of those who worshiped the idol suffered a plague as a punishment for their sins.



### AARON AND HIS SONS WERE PRIESTS

All of the Levites were chosen to be dedicated to God’s service. Moses and Aaron were descendants of Levi, so they were both Levites. Moses was God’s chosen leader of the nation. Aaron and his sons (Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar) were anointed to serve as priests (Numbers 3:10). All the rest of the Levites were to serve under Aaron and his sons. “And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him” (Numbers 3:9). Lesson Three will cover the work and the duties of priests.

### THE LEVITES

The Levites were to do as Aaron told them and “the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle ... to do the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle ... and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle” (Numbers 3:7, 8). The Levites were responsible for caring for the contents in the tabernacle, and carrying the tabernacle and furniture to the new site when they moved camp.

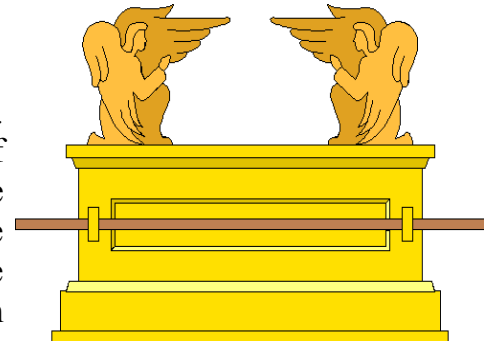
Levi had three sons, Gershon, Kohath and Merari (Genesis 46:11). Each of their families was given specific responsibilities in serving under Aaron and his sons.

## THE FAMILY OF GERSHON

The Gershonites were to camp on the west side of the tabernacle and were given the task of caring for the tabernacle, the coverings, the doors and curtains and the hangings of the court. Eliasaph was made chief of the Gershonites.

## THE FAMILY OF KOHATH

Elizaphan was the appointed chief of the family of Kohath. They were responsible for caring for the ark, the table (of shewbread), the candlestick, the altars and the vessels of the sanctuary. This included carrying these items each time the tabernacle was moved as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness. They were to pitch their tents (live) on the south side of the tabernacle.



The Ark of the Covenant had staves placed in rings so it could be carried.

## THE FAMILY OF MERARI

The Merarites were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. Their job was to care for and move the boards, bars, pillows, sockets, pins, cords and other things that pertained to the walls of the tabernacle and the court. The chief of the Merarites was Zuriel.

## FAMILIES OF MOSES AND AARON

The families of Moses and Aaron were to camp on the east side of the tabernacle. No one else was allowed in their encampment. Aaron and his sons were given charge of all the tabernacle and the responsibility to see that the Israelites did all that God commanded. Aaron's son, Eleazar, was placed in charge of the chiefs of the three families to oversee all the work they were given.

God instructed Moses to make a census of the three families of all the males aged one month and up. There were 7500 Gershonites, 8600 Kohathites and 6200 Merarites. So the encampment of the Levites on each side of the tabernacle was rather large and involved much space and many tents. The rest of the Israelites were to encamp outside the area of the Levites.

Only Aaron and his sons were allowed to take down the tabernacle and to cover its contents as God instructed. Once this was done, the Kohathites had the responsibility of carrying them to the next site. However, they were not allowed to see or touch any of the tabernacle furniture when it was uncovered. The penalty for doing so was death (Numbers 4:15, 20).

## CONCLUSION

It is not difficult to see that the law of Moses was very strict and a burden to follow. God wanted the Israelites to know that He is God of heaven and earth and that they had to obey and serve Him. He blessed them when they listened and obeyed. He punished them (often severely) when they sinned. We are not burdened with such a rigorous law today, but live under the law of liberty of Jesus Christ. However, God still demands our obedience to His Word. The land of Canaan that was promised to the Israelites was theirs only if they obeyed. Our promise of the blessing of eternal life through Christ also depends upon our obedience (Matthew 7:21).

### TRUE OR FALSE

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The Levites were all descendants of Jacob's son, Levi.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. All of the Levites were priests.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Moses' son, Eleazar, was made overseer of the chiefs of the families.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The Levites went to Moses' side when he asked, "Who is on the Lord's side?"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Only Aaron and his sons were allowed to cover the ark and other tabernacle contents when the tabernacle was to be moved.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Punishment for disobedience under the law of Moses was often severe.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. God does not require us to obey today but will save us even if we disobey.

### COMPLETE THE STATEMENTS

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| _____ 1. The Merarites camped                    | a. sons of Levi.                        |
| _____ 2. The Kohathites camped                   | b. on the west side of the tabernacle.  |
| _____ 3. The Gershonites camped                  | c. on the north side of the tabernacle. |
| _____ 4. Moses, Aaron and their families camped  | d. sons of Aaron.                       |
| _____ 5. The Levites who were to carry the ark   | e. were the Kohathites.                 |
| _____ 6. Those responsible for moving the boards | f. were the Merarites.                  |
| _____ 7. Gershon, Kohath and Merari were         | g. on the east side of the tabernacle.  |
| _____ 8. Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar were  | h. on the south side of the tabernacle. |

### SCRIPTURE SEARCH

- 1. "And thou shalt give the \_\_\_\_\_ unto Aaron and to his \_\_\_\_\_" (Numbers 3:9).
- 2. "And \_\_\_\_\_ the son of Aaron the priest shall be \_\_\_\_\_ over the chief of the Levites" (Numbers 3:32).
- 3. "[A]fter that, the sons of Kohath shall come to \_\_\_\_\_ it: but they shall not touch any \_\_\_\_\_ thing, lest they die" (Numbers 4:15).
- 4. "And the children of Israel \_\_\_\_\_ according to \_\_\_\_\_ that the Lord \_\_\_\_\_ Moses" (Numbers 1:54; 2:34).

### POINTS TO PONDER

- 1. The Levites did not get the same kind of inheritance in the promised land as the other tribes. How did God provide for their food and other needs? (Numbers 18:21-32).
- 2. Why do you think the laws regarding the tabernacle service were so strict?
- 3. Who was allowed to be present when the tabernacle was being taken down and put back up? (Numbers 1:51).
- 4. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before reaching the promised land. What kind of housing did they have during this time? (Numbers 1:52).