

## Priests and Levites

Following Korah's rebellion, it was necessary for everyone to be clear on who did what at the Tent of Meeting. In this chapter, God briefly recaps the work of the priests and the work of the other Levites. He stresses that only the *priests* (descendants of Aaron) can work in the tabernacle itself while the others are responsible for the external care of the structure.

### Duties at the Tabernacle (18:1-7)

**Priests** Responsible for the furnishings of the sanctuary and the altar. Everything at the altar and inside the curtain was the sole domain of the priests.

**Levites** The other Levites were to help do other work at the Tent.

! How does God show His mercy to the Levites in this section?

! Why were Aaron and his descendants chosen to be priests?

! In light of all this talk about the priesthood, what does 1 Peter 2:9 mean to you?

### Supporting the Priests (18:8-32)

We have previously studied how the priests were allowed to keep part of the offerings that were given at the Tent and therefore were able to provide food for their families. God arranged it this way so that the priests could devote all their energies to the work of the house of the LORD.

In a similar way, the other Levites received tithes from the people. So the LORD provided for the priests and Levites through offerings rather than through an inheritance of land (Kuske, 151).

! Notice how the offerings were to be the "best parts" (vv30-32)

! What principle illustrated in this chapter is echoed in 1 Timothy 5:18?

## The Water of Cleansing

An entire generation of Israelites would die in the wilderness because they had refused to enter Canaan when the LORD had told them to enter. To prepare them for the inevitable, God reviewed for them the laws concerning death.

Remember that death was not part of God's original creation. It came into the world only as a result of sin. It was not something "natural." Therefore, whenever an Israelite would come into contact with death, he would become ceremonially unclean for a period of seven days. During that time, he would have to undergo ritual "cleansings" before he could participate again in the religious activities of the nation.

***To Prepare the Water of Cleansing*** A red heifer was burned in its entirety. To the burning animal were to be added cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool. The ashes were then to be set aside and mixed with pure water to create the water of purification as noted below.

### *If an Israelite . . .*

Had contact with a dead body –

Unclean for seven days; on the third and seventh days, the water of purification was poured over the person. On the seventh day, clothes and body were completely washed.

Sprinkled the water of cleansing –

He would be unclean until evening.

Because death caused ceremonial uncleanness among the Jews, customs arose among them to minimize contact with dead bodies. Consider how the Jewish leaders did not want Jesus hanging on the cross on Saturday (the Passover Sabbath). Read Matthew 23:27. Tombs and burial markers were often whitewashed so that others wouldn't accidentally become ceremonially unclean by venturing too near.

### *In Christ, death is conquered*

How different the situation is in the New Testament era as we hear the glorious news that through the death and resurrection of Christ death is swallowed up in victory for believers. Because of our victory in Christ, death no longer defeats or defiles us. Instead, in Christ, death becomes the gateway to heaven (Kuske, 156).

! See Hebrews 9:13-14; 10:19-22