

Deuteronomy 18:1-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-18/deuteronomy-181-8/>

Having dealt with the principles concerning a king, Moses then turns to another source of authority in the Promised Land when he instructs the Israelites on how the Levitical priests were to be supported. Since the Levitical priests would minister before the LORD at the central sanctuary, they were not supposed to do any secular job. They were to depend upon the dues and offerings of the other tribes.

Moses began this chapter by instructing the people of Israel on how the *Levitical priests* were to be supported. The Hebrew reads “the priests, the Levites.” The *Levitical priests* were from the tribe of Levi. They were to serve as ministers before the LORD. Their responsibilities included carrying “the ark of the covenant of the LORD” whenever the Israelites traveled or when they needed to move the ark for some other purpose ([Deuteronomy 10:8](#); [Deuteronomy 31:9](#)). The *Levitical priests* were also to “stand before the LORD to serve Him,” that is, to offer sacrifices to Him ([Deuteronomy 10:8](#); [2 Chron. 29:11](#); [Ezekiel 44:15](#)). They were the ones who would pronounce the priestly benediction upon the people ([Numbers 6:24-26](#); [Deuteronomy 10:8](#)).

Because of such a priestly role and function, the *Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi*, were not to have any *portion or inheritance with Israel*. The term *inheritance* (Heb. “naḥālā”) refers here to territory in the Promised Land. Unlike all the other tribes who received a share of territory in the land of Canaan, the *whole tribe of Levi* was not allowed to claim any territory at all. The practical impact of their priestly role was that the Levites would have no land to farm or livestock to raise. Rather than raise their own food, they were to *eat the LORD’s offering by fire and His portion*. This means that a portion of the offerings given by the people was to go to support the Levites’ livelihood. This in turn would free the Levites to spend their time on the religious services proscribed by God, since they did not have to spend time farming and ranching.

Because of this dependence upon the offerings and dues of the other tribes, *the LORD was their inheritance, as He promised them* ([Numbers 18:21-24](#)). Thus, as the priestly tribe, the Levites had the greatest responsibility for serving God and leading all the other tribes in all righteousness and truth. The Levites will not receive land as an inheritance

([Joshua 18:7](#)) but *the LORD was their inheritance*. They will receive a portion of the tithes and offerings presented by the people, as directed by God. This will fulfill the promise God made the Levites when they received no allotment of land ([Num 18:21-24](#)).

In vv. 3-5, Moses spelled out the dues the *Levitical priests* were to receive from the other tribes. He declared to them that *Now this shall be the priests' due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice*. The word translated as *due* (Heb. "mishpāt") basically means "judgment." This likely suggests that the offerings from the other tribes were the ones required by the law. The other tribes were commanded to provide for the *Levitical priests* so that they might be free to perform their religious functions.

As the other tribes brought their sacrifices to the central sanctuary, they could bring *either an ox or a sheep*. The *ox* was a large domesticated animal used essentially in Israel for farm work such as plowing, as indicated by [Deuteronomy 22:10](#). It was also used to transport burdens. The *sheep* was a domestic animal as well. In ancient times, the sheep represented a source of wealth and livelihood of farmers, providing food to eat and milk to drink.

When they offered *an ox or a sheep*, they were to *give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach*. The *two cheeks* refer to the jowls or the jaw of the animal. The *stomach* refers to the internal organs of the animals. With some exceptions, the people would then celebrate by consuming the rest of the sacrifice along with their families and neighbors. But they were to set aside the prescribed parts as provision for the priests, to support their livelihood.

The Israelites were also commanded to give to *the priest the first fruits* of their *grain*, their *new wine*, and their *oil*. *Grain, new wine, and oil* were three essential agricultural products in ancient Israel ([Deuteronomy 7:13](#); [14:23](#)). These agricultural products, along with the *first shearing of the sheep*, were to be included as part of the priests' due. The *first shearing of the sheep* refers to the wool, the textile fiber one can obtain from the hair of sheep. It was used specially to make warm clothes ([Proverbs 31:13](#)). That it was the *first shearing* was designed to show the people that supporting the Levites was to be a priority.

The reason that the Israelites were to give the items listed in vv. 3 – 4 was that *the LORD your God has chosen him and his sons from all your tribes, to stand and serve in the name of the LORD forever*. The pronoun *him* is used in a collective sense to refer to all the Levitical priests. Since the Levites were

not allowed to work outside the service of the priests and the tabernacle, they needed to receive the necessities of life (food and clothing) from the other tribes. So, Moses here spelled out the reason why the *Levitical priests* were to be supported by the other tribes.

Therefore, the *Levitical priests* and their descendants were elected or chosen by the Suzerain (Ruler) God out of all the tribes of Israel to be His ministers. They were to minister to the LORD at the place of worship. Because the *Levitical priests* were ministering before the Suzerain God on behalf of the people, the other tribes were to care for them. This would give the priests freedom from having to spend time raising crops and livestock in order to take care of their families, and would free them to work on behalf of the LORD's service.

Moreover, this law applied to *a Levite who comes from any of your towns throughout Israel where he resides, and comes whenever he desires to the place which the LORD chooses*. Levites that lived in other cities and towns were permitted to come to the central sanctuary (*to the place which the LORD chooses*) *whenever he desires*. When a Levite came to the central sanctuary, the LORD stated that *he shall serve*.

Since the whole tribe of Levi was chosen by the Suzerain God to minister before Him, any Levite not serving permanently at the central sanctuary could go there and serve for a while as priest *in the name of the LORD his God*. The Levite would have equal rights to be involved in the worship services *like all his fellow Levites standing there before the LORD*. He could do so *whenever he desired*.

The Levites who desired to join the priesthood at the central sanctuary had the right *to eat equal portions, except what they received from the sale of their fathers' estates*. That means they were to receive the same amount of food as the other priests. However, consistent with the establishment of private property as one of the founding pillars of self-governance, the Levites were not required to share with other Levites what they might have inherited from their *father's estates*.

Biblical Text:

¹The Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the Lord's offerings by fire and His portion.²They shall have no inheritance among their countrymen; the Lord is their inheritance, as He promised them.

³“Now this shall be the priests’ due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, either an ox or a sheep, of which they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach.⁴ You shall give him the first fruits of your grain, your new wine, and your oil, and the first shearing of your sheep.⁵ For the Lord your God has chosen him and his sons from all your tribes, to stand and serve in the name of the Lord forever.

⁶“Now if a Levite comes from any of your towns throughout Israel where he resides, and comes whenever he desires to the place which the Lord chooses,⁷ then he shall serve in the name of the Lord his God, like all his fellow Levites who stand there before the Lord.⁸ They shall eat equal portions, except *what they receive* from the sale of their fathers’ *estates*.