

# Numbers 3:5-10

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*The LORD now described the role of the Levites outside of Aaron's line. They were to minister for the people outside the tabernacle, as well as maintain the components of the tabernacle itself and its furnishings.*

After describing the role of Aaron and his descendants, *the Lord spoke to Moses* concerning the next topic. The LORD commanded Moses to *bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him*. The Levites not directly in Aaron's lineage were to serve Aaron and his sons who ministered inside the tabernacle.

Verses 7 – 8 specify the two ways that the Levites were to serve the priests. First, they were to *perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle*. To “perform the duties” (lit. “keep the keepings”) meant that the Levites were to do whatever Aaron needed them to do. These “duties” referred to tasks to be done when the Israelites were camped. Also, the word “keep” (Heb. “shamar”) can also be translated “guard,” and because they surrounded the tabernacle, it can be thought that they were charged with guarding the tabernacle from any unauthorized access.

Second, the Levites were to *keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle*. As seen in the following verses, each family of the Levites was assigned to maintain a part of the tabernacle. This included carrying it when they traveled and setting it up when they camped.

The result of this was that Moses was to *give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons*. They had been exempted from military service earlier (see Numbers 2:33) in order to serve the Aaronic priests. Thus, *they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel*. They had no other tasks but to meet the needs of the priests “Aaron and his sons.” They were not part of the force serving God and the nation through military service. Rather they were to serve God and the nation through serving the priests.

Verse 10 sums up this section. Moses was to *appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood*. The word “keep”, as in v. 7 above, could include that idea of “guarding” the priesthood from anything that might pollute the pure worship of the LORD. Then a warning follows—*the layman who comes near shall be put to death*. The word for “layman” is literally “stranger.” It referred to any unauthorized person who approached the tabernacle. Such a person was to be “put to death.” Thus the Levites were to serve a policing, rather than a military, function for the nation.

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>5</sup>Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>6</sup>“Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. <sup>7</sup>They shall perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle. <sup>8</sup>They shall also keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. <sup>9</sup>You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel. <sup>10</sup>So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman who comes near shall be put to death.”**