

Numbers 8:23-26

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-8/numbers-823-26/>

In verses 23 – 26, the LORD added another requirement concerning the service of the Levites. They were to serve in the tabernacle from age 25 to age 50. Then they were to retire from active service. They were, however, allowed to help in certain situations, but they were not supposed to do any work in the tabernacle.

Again, *the Lord spoke to Moses* (v. 23). It was another topic that *applies to the Levites*. The LORD specified that *from twenty-five years old and upward they shall enter to perform service in the work of the tent of meeting* (v. 24). So, a Levite could not work in the tabernacle until age 25. It was at that point that they entered active service.

This starting age was different than the one given in Numbers 4:3, where the Levites would begin their service at age 30. The five-year difference is resolved in Jewish tradition, which holds that between ages 25 and 30 the Levite would be an apprentice, learning well how to follow all the orders of service. This means that a Levite would enter an apprenticeship at age 25, and then he would begin active service at age 30.

Then, the LORD required that *at the age of fifty years they shall retire from service in the work and not work any more* (v. 25). Thus, a Levite had to retire from active work at the age of 50. The reason for this forced retirement might have been that, since the Levites were going to carry the pieces of the tabernacle across the desert, they had to be in peak physical condition.

In spite of their retirement, *they may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting* (v. 26). This assistance was limited to helping others *keep an obligation*. An *obligation* (Hebrew “meshmeret”) was a service assigned to someone on active duty. The retiree could assist in the *obligation* of another Levite *but they themselves shall do no work*.

In summary of this section, the LORD told Moses and Aaron that this was how they were to *deal with the Levites concerning their obligations*.

Biblical Text

²³ Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ “This is what *applies* to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall enter to perform service in the work of the tent of meeting. ²⁵ But at the age of fifty years they shall retire from service in the work and not work any more. ²⁶ They may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep an obligation, but they *themselves* shall do no work. Thus you shall deal with the Levites concerning their obligations.”