

NUMBERS 18:1 The LORD said to Aaron, "You and your sons and your fathers' house with you shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood."

The priests are to bear the iniquity of the sanctuary, Num 18:1. The Levites to minister to the priests, and have charge of the tabernacle, Num 18:2-4. The priests alone to have the charge of the sanctuary, etc., no stranger to come nigh on pain of death, Num 18:5-7 The portion allowed for their maintenance, Num 18:8. They shall have every meat-offering; and they shall eat them in the holy place, Num 18:9, Num 18:10. The wave-offerings, Num 18:11. The first-fruits of the oil, wine, and wheat, and whatever is first ripe, and every devoted thing, Num 18:12-14; also, all the first-born of men and beasts, Num 18:15-18; and heave-offerings, Num 18:19. The priests shall have no inheritance, Num 18:20. The Levites shall have no inheritance, but shall have the tenth of the produce in Israel, Num 18:21-24, of which they are to give a tenth to the priests, taken from the best parts, Num 18:25-30.

Verse 1

Thou and thy sons - shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary, etc. - That is, They must be answerable for its legal pollutions, and must make the necessary atonements and expiations. By this they must feel that though they had got a high and important office confirmed to them by a miraculous interference, yet it was a place of the highest responsibility; and that they must not be high-minded, but fear.

NUMBERS 18:2 Bring your brothers also, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, near with you, that they may be joined to you, and minister to you; but you and your sons with you shall be before the tent of the testimony.

Verse 2

Thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi - may be joined unto thee - There is a fine paronomasia, or play upon words, in the original. לוי Levi comes from the root לוה lavah, to join to, couple, associate: hence Moses says, the Levites, יללו yillavu, shall be joined, or associated with the priests; they shall conjointly perform the whole of the sacred office, but the priests shall be principal, the Levites only their associates or assistants.

NUMBERS 18:3 They shall keep your commands, and the duty of all the Tent; only they shall not come near to the vessels of the sanctuary and to the altar, that they not die, neither they, nor you.

NUMBERS 18:4 They shall be joined to you, and keep the responsibility of the Tent of Meeting, for all the service of the Tent. A stranger shall not come near to you.

NUMBERS 18:5 "You shall perform the duty of the sanctuary and the duty of the altar, that there be no more wrath on the children of Israel."

NUMBERS 18:6 Behold, I myself have taken your brothers the Levites from among the children of Israel. They are a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD, to do the service of the Tent of Meeting.

NUMBERS 18:7 You and your sons with you shall keep your priesthood for everything of the altar, and for that within the veil. You shall serve. I give you the service of the priesthood as a gift. The stranger who comes near shall be put to death."

NUMBERS 18:8 The LORD spoke to Aaron, "Behold, I myself have given you the command of my wave offerings, even all the holy things of the children of Israel. I have given them to you by reason of the anointing, and to your sons, as a portion forever.

NUMBERS 18:9 This shall be yours of the most holy things from the fire: every offering of theirs, even every meal offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render to me, shall be most holy for you and for your sons.

NUMBERS 18:10 You shall eat of it like the most holy things. Every male shall eat of it. It shall be holy to you.

NUMBERS 18:11 "This is yours, too: the wave offering of their gift, even all the wave offerings of the children of Israel. I have given them to you, and to your sons and to your daughters with you, as a portion forever. Everyone who is clean in your house shall eat of it.

NUMBERS 18:12 "I have given to you all the best of the oil, and all the best of the vintage, and of the grain, the first fruits of them which they give to the LORD.

NUMBERS 18:13 The first-ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house shall eat of it.

NUMBERS 18:14 "Everything devoted in Israel shall be yours.

NUMBERS 18:15 Everything that opens the womb, of all flesh which they offer to the LORD, both of man and animal shall be yours. Nevertheless, you shall surely redeem the firstborn of man, and you shall redeem the firstborn of unclean animals.

Verse 15

The first-born of man - and the firstling of unclean beasts - Thus vain man is ranked with the beasts that perish; and with the worst kinds of them too, those deemed unclean.

NUMBERS 18:16 You shall redeem those who are to be redeemed of them from a month old, according to your estimation, for five shekels of money, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which weighs twenty gerahs.

Verse 16

Shalt thou redeem - for the money of five shekels - Redemption of the first-born is one of the rites which is still practiced among the Jews. According to Leo of Modena, it is performed in the following manner: -

When the child is thirty days old, the father sends for one of the descendants of Aaron: several persons being assembled on the occasion, the father brings a cup containing several pieces of gold and silver coin. The priest then takes the child into his arms, and addressing himself to the mother, says: Is this thy son?

Mother. Yes.

Priest. Hast thou never had another child, male or female, a miscarriage or untimely birth?

Mother. No.

Priest. This being the case, this child, as first-born, belongs to me.

Then, turning to the father, he says: If it be thy desire to have this child, thou must redeem it.

Father. I present thee with this gold and silver for this purpose.

Priest. Thou dost wish, therefore, to redeem the child?

Father. I do wish so to do.

The priest then, turning himself to the assembly, says: Very well; this child, as first-born, is mine, as it is written in Bemidbar, (Num 18:16), Thou shalt redeem the first-born of a month old for five shekels, but I shall content myself with this in exchange. He then takes two gold crowns, or thereabouts, and returns the child to his parents.

NUMBERS 18:17 "But you shall not redeem the firstborn of a cow, or the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat. They are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and shall burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a pleasant aroma to the LORD.

NUMBERS 18:18 Their flesh shall be yours, as the wave offering breast and as the right thigh, it shall be yours.

NUMBERS 18:19 All the wave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the LORD, have I given you, and your sons and your daughters with you, as a portion forever. It is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD to you and to your seed with you."

Verse 19

It is a covenant of salt - That is, an incorruptible, everlasting covenant. As salt was added to different kinds of viands, not only to give them a relish, but to preserve them from putrefaction and decay, it became the emblem of incorruptibility and permanence. Hence, a covenant of salt signified an everlasting covenant. We have already seen that, among the Asiatics, eating together was deemed a bond of perpetual friendship; and as salt was a common article in all their repasts, it may be in reference to this circumstance that a perpetual covenant is termed a covenant of salt; because the parties ate together of the sacrifice offered on the occasion, and the whole transaction was considered as a league of endless friendship. See the note on Lev 2:13.

NUMBERS 18:20 The LORD said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.

Verse 20

I am thy part and thine inheritance - The principal part of what was offered to God was the portion of the priests, therefore they had no inheritance of land in Israel; independently of that they had a very ample provision for their support. The rabbins say twenty-four gifts were given to the priests, and they are all expressed in the law. Eight of those gifts the priests ate nowhere but in the sanctuary: these eight are the following: -

1. The flesh of the Sin-Offering, whether of beasts or fowls, Lev 6:25, Lev 6:26.
2. The flesh of the Trespass-Offering, Lev 7:1, Lev 7:6.
3. The Peace-Offerings of the congregation, Lev 23:19, Lev 23:20.
4. The remainder of the Omer or Sheaf, Lev 23:10, etc.
5. The remnants of the Meat-Offerings of the Israelites, Lev 6:16.
6. The two Loaves, Lev 23:17.
7. The Shew-Bread, Lev 24:9.
8. The Log of oil offered by the leper, Lev 14:10, etc.

Five of those gifts they ate only in Jerusalem: -

1. The breast and shoulder of the Peace-Offerings, Lev 7:31, Lev 7:34.
2. The Heave-Offering of the sacrifice of confession, Lev 7:12-14.
3. The Heave-Offering of the Nazarite's ram, Lev 6:17-20.
4. The Firstling of the clean beast, Num 18:15; Deu 15:19, Deu 15:20.
5. The First-Fruits, Num 18:13.

Five gifts were not due unto them by the law, but in the land of Israel only: -

1. The heave-offering or First-Fruits, Num 18:12.
2. The heave-offering of the Tithe, Num 18:28.
3. The Cake, Num 15:20.

These three were holy.

4. The first-fruits of the Fleece, Deu 18:4.
5. The Field of Possession, Numbers 35.

These two were common.

Five gifts were due unto them both within and without the land: -

1. The gifts of the Beasts Slain, Deu 18:3.
2. The redemption of the First-Born Son, Num 18:15.
3. The Lamb for the firstling of an ass, Exo 4:20; Numbers 18.
4. The restitution of that taken by violence from a stranger, Num 5:8.
5. All Devoted things, Num 18:14.

One gift was due unto them from the sanctuary: -

1. The skins of the burnt-offering, and all the skins of the other most holy things, Lev 7:8.

In all 24. See Ainsworth.

The gifts which the females of the priests' families had a part in were these: -

1. The heave-offering, or first-fruits.
2. The heave-offering of the tithe.
3. The cake.
4. The gifts of the beast, Deu 18:3.
5. The first of the fleece. - See Mishna, Tract. Bicurim, and Ainsworth on the Pentateuch.

Besides all this the priests had the tribute money mentioned Num 31:28, Num 31:29.

NUMBERS 18:21 "To the children of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, even the service of the Tent of Meeting.

Verse 21

Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth -

1. The Levites had the tenth of all the productions of the land.
2. They had forty-eight cities, each forming a square of 4,000 cubits.
3. They had 2,000 cubits of ground round each city. Total of the land they possessed, 53,000 acres.
4. They had the first-fruits and certain parts of all the animals killed in the land.

Canaan contained about 11,264,000 acres; therefore the portion possessed by the Levites was rather less than as one to two hundred and twelve; for 11,264,000 divided by 53,000, quotes only 212 28/53 - See Lowman, Dodd, etc. But though this was a very small proportion for a whole tribe that had consented to annihilate its political existence, that it might wait upon the service of God, and labor for the people's souls; yet let it be considered that what they possessed was the best of the land: and while it was a slender remuneration for their services, yet their portion was such as rendered them independent, and kept them comfortable; so that they could wait on the Lord's work without distraction. This is a proper pattern for the maintenance of the ministers of God: let them have a sufficiency for themselves and families, that there may be no distracting cares; and let them

not be encumbered with riches or worldly possessions, that they may not be prevented from taking care of souls.

NUMBERS 18:22 Henceforth the children of Israel shall not come near the Tent of Meeting, lest they bear sin, and die.

NUMBERS 18:23 But the Levites shall do the service of the Tent of Meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. Among the children of Israel, they shall have no inheritance.

NUMBERS 18:24 For the tithe of the children of Israel, which they offer as a wave offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance. Therefore I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.'

NUMBERS 18:25 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

NUMBERS 18:26 "Moreover you shall speak to the Levites, and tell them, 'When you take of the children of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall offer up a wave offering of it for the LORD, a tithe of the tithe.

NUMBERS 18:27 Your wave offering shall be reckoned to you, as though it were the grain of the threshing floor, and as the fullness of the wine press.

NUMBERS 18:28 Thus you also shall offer a wave offering to the LORD of all your tithes, which you receive of the children of Israel; and of it you shall give the LORD's wave offering to Aaron the priest.

Verse 28

Thus ye also shall offer a heave-offering - As the Levites had the tithe of the whole land, they themselves were obliged to give the tithe of this tithe to the priests, so that this considerably lessened their revenue. And this tithe or tenth they were obliged to select from the best part of the substance they had received, Num 18:29, etc. A portion of all must be given to God, as an evidence of his goodness, and their dependence on him. See the end at Num 20:28.

NUMBERS 18:29 Out of all your gifts, you shall offer every wave offering of the LORD, of all its best, even the holy part of it out of it.'

NUMBERS 18:30 "Therefore you shall tell them, 'When you heave its best from it, then it shall be reckoned to the Levites as the increase of the threshing floor, and as the increase of the wine press.

NUMBERS 18:31 You may eat it anywhere, you and your households, for it is your reward in return for your service in the Tent of Meeting.

NUMBERS 18:32 You shall bear no sin by reason of it, when you have heaved from it its best. You shall not profane the holy things of the children of Israel, that you not die.'
