

Deuteronomy 18:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance.

Analysis

The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel—(לא־יִהְיֶה לְכָנִים פְּלִימָן כָּל־שָׁבֵט לְיִ חָלֵק נִנְחָלָה עִם־יְשָׁרָאֵל) God Himself is their nachalah (inheritance). Unlike the other tribes who received land territories, the Levites' portion was sacred service and divine provision through **the offerings of the LORD made by fire** (isheh YHWH).

The phrase isheh refers specifically to burnt offerings consumed on the altar, while **his inheritance** (nachalato) means God's own portion. The Levites ate what was offered to God—a profound intimacy. This establishes a radical principle: those devoted to God's service depend entirely on His provision through His people's obedience. Numbers 18:20 makes this explicit: "I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel."

Paul applies this principle in 1 Corinthians 9:13-14—"they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple"—establishing that gospel ministers deserve material support. The Levitical model foreshadows the New Covenant reality that God Himself is the believer's true inheritance (Psalm 16:5, Ephesians 1:18).

Historical Context

This law was given on the plains of Moab (circa 1406 BC) just before Israel entered Canaan, where land distribution would occur. The tribe of Levi descended from Jacob's third son but was set apart for priesthood after the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:26-29). Instead of territorial inheritance, the Levites received 48 cities scattered throughout Israel's tribal territories (Numbers 35:1-8, Joshua 21), allowing them to teach the law and serve in worship centers while depending on tithes and offerings for sustenance.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the Levitical model of God as inheritance challenge modern materialism and security-seeking?
2. What does it mean practically for believers today to say 'God is my portion' when we still need food, shelter, and income?

Interlinear Text

לֹא יְהִי לְקֹהֵן יְמִינֵי כָּל בָּلָיִם כָּל שֵׁבֶט
H3808 H1961 The priests the Levites H3605 and all the tribe of Levi
H3548 H3881 H7626 H3878

יְהִי אָשֶׁר כִּי לֹא יְמִינָה וְעַמְּךָ שְׁבָרָא לְעַמְּךָ
shall have no part and his inheritance with Israel made by fire of the LORD
H2506 H5159 H5973 H3478 H801 H3068

וְעַמְּךָ יְאַכְלָה וְעַמְּךָ
and his inheritance they shall eat
H5159 H398

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 10:9 (References Lord): Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him.

Deuteronomy 12:19 (Parallel theme): Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth.

Joshua 13:14 (Creation): Only unto the tribe of Levi he gave none inheritance; the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire are their inheritance, as he said unto them.

Numbers 18:20 (References Lord): And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.