

Deuteronomy 18:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw.

Analysis

This shall be the priest's due from the people (וְזֹה יְהִי מִשְׁפָט הַכְּנִים מִאת בָּשָׂר)—the word mishpat means ordained right, legal due, not optional generosity. God establishes mandatory provision so priests wouldn't depend on human whims. The specific portions—**the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw** (hazero'a vehallechayayim veqaevah)—designated choice meat cuts.

The shoulder (zero'a) symbolizes strength and service; the cheeks (lechayim) the seat of speech and proclamation; the maw (qevah, stomach) the digestive organ. Some rabbinical tradition sees symbolic significance: strength to serve, speech to teach, and sustenance to live. These weren't leftover scraps but quality portions from every sacrifice, ensuring priests shared in the people's worship materially.

Leviticus 7:28-34 provides parallel legislation, adding the breast and right thigh for wave and heave offerings. The cumulative effect: priests received substantial portions from multiple types of sacrifices, making their material support abundant when the people worshiped faithfully. When Israel neglected offerings, priests starved—as happened in Malachi's day (Malachi 3:8-10).

Historical Context

This legislation governed Israel's sacrificial system from wilderness wanderings through the monarchy until the temple's destruction (586 BC, then AD 70). The detailed anatomy reflects ancient Near Eastern butchering practices. Archaeological evidence from Iron Age Israel shows priestly cities received significant agricultural support. When Israel fell into apostasy, priests often suffered materially (Nehemiah 13:10-11), demonstrating the link between spiritual faithfulness and ministerial provision.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How should churches ensure adequate provision for pastors and ministry leaders based on biblical principles?
2. What does the mandatory (mishpat) nature of priestly support teach about giving being obligation, not just generosity?

Interlinear Text

בְּעֵד מֵאַת מִשְׁפֵּט יְהוָה | לְפָה | מִשְׁפֵּט מֵאַת
H2088 H1961 due And this shall be the priest's H853 from the people
H4941 H3548

מֵאַת זְבַח ' מֵאַת שׂוֹר שׂוֹר אֶם
H853 from them that offer a sacrifice H518 whether it be ox H518 or sheep
H2076 H2077 H7794 H7716

וְלֹא־יִמְלֹא | לְפָה | בְּזִרְעָם בְּזִרְעָם
and they shall give And this shall be the priest's the shoulder and the two cheeks
H5414 H3548 H2220 H3895

וְלֹא־יִמְלֹא
and the maw
H6896

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