

Numbers 18:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.

Analysis

I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance (נָתַתִּי natatti, I have given)—The Levitical tithe (מָעֵשֶׂר ma'aser, tenth) was not charity but covenant compensation. Since Levi received no territorial nachalah (inheritance) in the land distribution, God Himself became their portion (18:20), sustained through Israel's tithes.

For their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle (עֲבוֹדָה avodah, service/worship)—This word encompasses both labor and liturgy. The Levites' full-time devotion to sacred duties freed the other tribes for agriculture and warfare, making the tithe a practical necessity for theocratic function. Paul applies this principle to gospel ministers: "Those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14).

Historical Context

Written during Israel's wilderness period (1445-1405 BC), this establishes the economic framework for the Levitical priesthood that would function for 1,500 years until the temple's destruction in AD 70. The tithe system ensured the priests could focus entirely on maintaining Israel's worship and teaching God's law without concern for subsistence farming.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does God's provision for Levites through tithes challenge modern assumptions about "voluntary" giving versus covenantal obligation?
2. In what ways does "the LORD is my inheritance" (18:20) offer greater security than land ownership?
3. How should the principle of supporting full-time ministry workers inform church budget priorities today?

Interlinear Text

מְעַשֵּׂר רַכְבָּנִים לְבָנֵי לֵבִי הַנֶּה הַנְּתָנָתְנִי נְתָנָתְנִי כָּל מְעַשֵּׂר
the children of Levi H2009 And behold I have given H5414 H3605 all the tenth H4643

בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִתְּחִלָּה הַלְּבָנִים עֲבָדָת הַתְּבִנָּה אֲשֶׁר כִּי
in Israel for an inheritance for even the service H834 H1992

מִזְעֵד אֶל עֲבָדָת אֲתָא עֲבָדָת יִם
which they serve H853 even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation H168 H4150

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 10:37 (Parallel theme): And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.

Nehemiah 12:44 (Parallel theme): And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the firstfruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited.

Hebrews 7:5 (Parallel theme): And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham:

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