

Numbers 18:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance.

Analysis

The Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle, and they shall bear their iniquity (יָוֹן avon, iniquity/guilt)—Levites absorbed the liability for Israel's inadvertent violations of sacred space. Their physical placement between the tabernacle and the twelve tribes (ch. 1-2) symbolized their function as a protective buffer against holy contagion.

A statute for ever throughout your generations (חֻקֵּי עוֹלָם chuqqat olam)—Yet this "eternal" statute ended with Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. The paradox resolves when we see Levitical service as eternally valid typology, not eternally required ritual. Hebrews 7-10 explains how Christ fulfilled what Aaron foreshadowed. **They have no inheritance**—Landlessness marked their unique consecration; possession of God surpassed possession of Canaan.

Historical Context

The Levites descended from Jacob's third son Levi, set apart after the golden calf incident when they alone sided with Moses (Exodus 32:26-29). Their 48 cities scattered throughout Israel (Numbers 35) placed teachers and worship leaders in every region, though they owned no tribal territory. This arrangement persisted until the Babylonian exile disrupted the temple system.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the Levites' willingness to "bear iniquity" for others preview Christ's substitutionary atonement?
2. What does it mean that they found complete satisfaction in having "no inheritance" except God?
3. How might modern ministers lose the Levitical vision of being supported by others precisely because they serve others full-time?

Interlinear Text

וְעָבְדוּ	הַלֵּל י	אֶת הַוָּא	עֲבֹדָת	אֵל הֵל	
shall do	But the Levites	H1931	H853	the service	of the tabernacle
H5647	H3881		H5656	H168	
מִמֶּנִּי	וְהֵם	וְשָׂאוּ	עֲוֹנֵם	חֻקַּת	
of the congregation	H1992	and they shall bear	their iniquity	it shall be a statute	
H4150		H5375	H5771	H2708	
עוֹלָם	לְדֹרֹתֶיךָ	וּבְתוֹךְ	בְּנֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לֹא
for ever	throughout your generations	that among	the children	of Israel	H3808
H5769	H1755	H8432	H1121	H3478	
וְנִחְלֵם	נִחְלֵם:				
they have	no inheritance				
H5157	H5159				

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 3:7 (Temple): And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.

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