

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 (יְלֵוִת 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 (דְּצִיּוֹת נְגֻדָּה 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

אַתָּה יְשִׁיבָה בְּלִי אֶת הַעֲבָדָה
shall do But the Levites H1931 H853 the service of the tabernacle
H5647 H3881 H5656 H168

מִזְבֵּחַ וְעַל מִזְבֵּחַ וְעַל מִזְבֵּחַ וְעַל מִזְבֵּחַ
of the congregation H1992 and they shall bear their iniquity it shall be a statute
H4150 H5375 H5771 H2708

עַל מִזְבֵּחַ לְדִרְתִּיכֶם וּבְתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי
for ever throughout your generations that among the children of Israel H3808
H5769 H1755 H8432 H1121 H3478

וְלֹא יְשִׁיבָה לְבָנָה
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.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org