

Numbers 18:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

Analysis

But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. God establishes the Levites' economic support system through tithes. The Hebrew *ma'aser* (מָעֵשֶׂר, "tithes") means tenth part—systematic giving of 10% of agricultural produce and livestock to support ministry. "Heave offering" (*terumah*, תְּרוּמָה) describes an offering lifted up or set apart for sacred use, emphasizing its consecration to God.

"I have given to the Levites to inherit" (natati la-Leviyim be-nachalah, נָתַתִּי לְלִיִּם בְּנָכְלָה) uses inheritance language typically applied to land distribution. While other tribes received territorial inheritance, Levites received tithes as their *nachalah* (portion, inheritance). This substitution was both practical (supporting full-time ministry) and theological (Yahweh Himself was their inheritance, Numbers 18:20).

"They shall have no inheritance" among other Israelites establishes Levites' unique status—separated from land ownership to dedicate themselves wholly to tabernacle/temple service, teaching Torah, and mediating between God and people. This prefigures New Testament teaching that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). The principle extends beyond economics to identity—ministers find sufficiency in God and His people's provision,

not worldly wealth or status. This models dependence on God and community interdependence.

Historical Context

Numbers 18 occurs during Israel's wilderness period (1446-1406 BC traditional dating) after the Exodus and before Canaan conquest. Following Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16-17) which challenged priestly authority, God confirmed Aaron's priesthood and defined Levitical responsibilities and compensation. The tribe of Levi was set apart for sacred service from the golden calf incident forward (Exodus 32:25-29).

Ancient Near Eastern temples typically owned vast lands and estates, making priests wealthy landowners and political powers. Egypt's Amun priesthood controlled enormous wealth. Mesopotamian temple complexes owned fields, herds, and businesses. God's system prevented Israel's priesthood from accumulating land-based power while ensuring adequate support. Levites received 48 cities with surrounding pastureland (Numbers 35:1-8) but no tribal territory.

The tithe system functioned throughout Israel's history with varying faithfulness. Malachi later condemned withholding tithes as robbing God (Malachi 3:8-10). Nehemiah restored tithing after exile (Nehemiah 10:37-39, 13:10-13). Jesus affirmed tithing while warning against neglecting justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23). Early Christians practiced generous sharing (Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-37), and Paul taught supporting ministers (Galatians 6:6, 1 Timothy 5:17-18). The principle continues—those freed from secular employment to serve God's people full-time merit community support, allowing interdependence and mutual care within Christ's body.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the Levitical system inform Christian understanding of supporting ministers and missionaries?
2. What does it mean for God to be our inheritance rather than material possessions?
3. How should Christian leaders balance dependence on congregation support with avoiding financial manipulation?
4. What principles of systematic, proportional giving apply to New Covenant believers?
5. How does giving support God's work express worship and acknowledge His ownership of everything?

Interlinear Text

יְהִי יָמָן אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּאָל בְּנֵי מַעַשׂ רְאֵת כִּי
H3588 H853 But the tithes of the children of Israel which they offer
H4643 H1121 H3478 H834 H7311

לֵיהָוֶה קָרְבָּן תְּרֻמָּה נָתַת תִּי לְלוּיִם נְקֻלָּה:
unto the LORD as an heave offering I have given to the Levites no inheritance
H3068 H8641 H5414 H3881 H5159

בְּנֵי בְּתֻזּוֹן לְבָם אֶם רְתִי כִּי עַל
H5921 H3651 therefore I have said H1992 unto them Among of the children
H559 H8432 H1121

נְקֻלָּה: יִנְקַלְוּ לְאַיִל אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּאָל
of Israel they shall have no inheritance
H3478 H3808 H5157 H5159

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 18:26 (Sacrifice): Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe.

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