

# Numbers 3:45

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD.

## Analysis

God's command to take the Levites 'instead of all the firstborn' establishes the principle of substitutionary consecration. The firstborn belonged to God by right of the Passover deliverance, but He graciously accepted the Levitical tribe as substitutes, allowing the other tribes' firstborn to remain with their families. This foreshadows Christ's substitutionary atonement, where He takes the place of those who deserved judgment. The phrase 'I am the LORD' grounds this provision in God's sovereign authority to determine the terms of redemption.

## Historical Context

This substitution arrangement dated to the Exodus Passover, when God claimed all Israel's firstborn as His own (Exodus 13:2). Rather than requiring permanent temple service from every family's eldest son, God graciously concentrated this duty in one tribe. This allowed other tribes to focus on agriculture, military service, and civic life while the Levites devoted themselves entirely to sacred ministry.

## Related Passages

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

## Study Questions

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1. How does God's acceptance of substitutes demonstrate both His justice (firstborn belong to Him) and mercy (providing a substitute)?
2. In what ways does the Levitical substitution help you better understand and appreciate Christ's substitutionary work?

## Interlinear Text

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וְקַרְבָּן אֶת־פָּلָיִם כָּל־תְּחִתָּם בָּכֹר  
Take H853 and the Levites H8478 instead of all the firstborn  
H3947 H3881 H3605 H1060

בּוּנֵי וְאֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַמִּתְמָרָם תְּחִתָּם פָּלָיִם  
among the children of Israel H853 and the cattle H929 and the Levites H8478  
H1121 H3478 H3881

וְאֶת־בְּהַמִּתְמָרָם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל פָּלָיִם אָנֹכִי יְהֹוָה  
and the cattle H1961 H0 and the Levites H589 shall be mine I am the LORD  
H929 H3881 H3068

## Additional Cross-References

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**Numbers 3:12** (References Israel): And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine;