

Numbers 8:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me.

Analysis

They are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel (נתנים נתנים) —the emphatic repetition 'given, given' (a Hebrew intensification pattern) stresses total dedication. God claims the Levites **instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn** (תחת פטר), establishing the substitutionary principle at the heart of biblical redemption.

The firstborn belonged to God by right of Passover redemption (Exodus 13:2), but the Levites become corporate substitutes—a tribe for individuals across all tribes. This prefigures the ultimate substitution: Christ, the firstborn over all creation (Colossians 1:15), given in place of the many. The language of being 'wholly given' echoes Paul's exhortation to present ourselves 'wholly' to God (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Historical Context

After the golden calf apostasy (Exodus 32), the tribe of Levi was chosen for exclusive service. They numbered 22,000 males (Numbers 3:39), slightly fewer than the 22,273 firstborn sons of Israel, requiring a redemption payment for the difference (Numbers 3:46-51).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to be 'wholly given' to God in an age of divided loyalties and competing allegiances?
2. How does the substitutionary principle of the Levites inform your understanding of Christ's atoning sacrifice?
3. In what sense are all Christians 'given ones,' set apart from the world for God's purposes?

Interlinear Text

ל	י	ה	פָה		
נָתַן	יְמִ	נָתַן	יְמִ	לִ	י
H3588	For they are wholly given	H5414	For they are wholly given	H1992	H0
מִתְ וְךָ	מִבְנֵי	מִשְׁרָאָל	תְּמִתָּת	פָטָבְ תָ	
unto me from among	of all the children	of Israel	H8478	instead of such as open	
H8432	H1121	H3478		H6363	
כָל	כָל	כָל	כָל	מִבְנֵי	מִשְׁרָאָל
every womb	even instead of the firstborn	H3605	of all the children	of Israel	
H3605	H1060	H1121	H3478		
לִי	אַתָּה	מִ	לִקְ	חַטָּא	
have I taken	H853	H0			
H3947					

Additional Cross-References

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;

Numbers 3:45 (References Israel): 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.

Numbers 3:9 (References Israel): And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel.

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