

Numbers 8:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Analysis

God commands Moses to separate the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them for tabernacle service. The Hebrew 'taher' (תָהַר, 'cleanse') indicates ritual purification, removing ceremonial defilement to enable service in God's presence. This cleansing involved shaving their entire bodies, washing their clothes, and offering sin and burnt offerings (8:6-12)—comprehensive purification addressing both external and internal defilement. The Levites' consecration was less elaborate than priests' ordination but still required careful preparation for sacred service. The phrase 'take the Levites from among the children of Israel' emphasizes their separation from common life to special ministry. This pattern of purification before service appears throughout Scripture—God requires holiness from those who serve in His presence. The Levites' cleansing points forward to Christians' cleansing by Christ's blood, which purifies our consciences to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). The principle remains: effective ministry flows from personal holiness and consecration to God. We cannot effectively serve God while harboring unconfessed sin or ceremonial uncleanness (spiritually understood today).

Historical Context

The Levites' consecration occurred during Israel's second year after the Exodus, following the tabernacle's completion and the priests' ordination. The ceremony described in Numbers 8:5-22 was a one-time event initiating the tribe into their corporate consecration for service. Unlike priests who were ordained individually, Levites were consecrated as a tribe. The ceremony's public nature—conducted

'before all the congregation of the children of Israel' (8:9)—emphasized that the Levites served on behalf of the entire nation. The ritual shaving of the entire body was unusual in Israel (priests trimmed but didn't completely shave), symbolizing the removal of old identity and assumption of new consecrated status. After this consecration, Levites served from age 25-50 (Numbers 8:24-25), though later practice modified the age requirements. The Levitical system continued until the temple's destruction in AD 70, when the sacrificial system ceased and the priesthood's role ended with Christ's final sacrifice.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the comprehensive purification (shaving, washing, sacrificing) illustrate that service to God requires thorough cleansing from sin?
2. In what ways does Levitical consecration anticipate Christians' cleansing by Christ's blood for priestly service to God?

Interlinear Text

לֵאמֹר: מֵשֶׁה אֶל יְהוָה וְיְהוָה רֹאשׁוֹת
spake And the LORD H413 unto Moses saying
H1696 H3068 H4872 H559