

LESSON ELEVEN 23-24

THE LEVITES AND THEIR DUTIES

15. THE LEVITES AND THEIR WORK (Chapter 23)

INTRODUCTION

The successful functioning of the Temple required a careful organization of the priesthood. All of the Levites were appointed special assignments with regard to the Temple.

TEXT

Chapter 23:1. Now David was old and full of days; and he made Solomon his son king over Israel. 2. And he gathered together all the princes of Israel, with the priests and the Levites. 3. And the Levites were numbered from thirty years old and upward: and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty and eight thousand. 4. Of these, twenty and four thousand were to oversee the work of the house of Jehovah; and six thousand were officers and judges; 5. and four thousand were doorkeepers; and four thousand praised Jehovah with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith. 6. And David divided them into courses according to the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

7. Of the Gershonites: Ladan and Shimei. 8. The sons of Ladan: Jehiel the chief, and Zetham, and Joel, three. 9. The sons of Shimei: Shelomoth, and Haziel, and Haran, three. These were the heads of the fathers' house of Ladan. 10. And the sons of Shimei: Jahath, Zina, and Jeush, and Beriah. These four were the sons of Shimei. 11. And Jahath was the chief, and Zizah the second; but Jeush and Beriah had not many sons; therefore they became a fathers' house in reckoning.

12. The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, four. 13. The sons of Amram: Aaron and Moses; and Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons, forever, to burn incense before Jehovah, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name forever. 14. But as for Moses the man of God, his sons were named among the tribe of Levi. 15. The sons of Moses: Gershom and Eliezer. 16. The sons of

Gershom: Shebuel the chief. 17. And the sons of Eliezer were: Rehabiah the chief; and Eliezer had no other sons; but the sons of Rehabiah were very many. 18. The sons of Izhar: Shelomith the chief. 19. The sons of Hebron: Jeriah the chief, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, and Jekameam the fourth. 20. The sons of Uzziel: Micah the chief, and Isshiah the second.

21. The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. The sons of Mahli: Eleazar and Kish. 22. And Eleazar died, and had no sons, but daughters only: and their brethren Kish took them to wife. 23. The sons of Mushi: Mahli, and Eder and Jeremoth, three.

24. There were the sons of Levi after their fathers' houses, even the heads of the fathers' houses of those of them that were counted, in the number of names by their polls, who did the work for the service of the house of Jehovah, from twenty years old and upward. 25. For David said, Jehovah, the God of Israel, hath given rest unto his people; and he dwelleth in Jerusalem for ever: 26. and also the Levites shall no more have need to carry the tabernacle and all the vessels of it for the service thereof. 27. For by the last words of David the sons of Levi were numbered, from twenty years old and upward. 28. For their office was to wait on the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of Jehovah, in the courts, and in the chambers, and in the purifying of all holy things, even the work of the service of the house of God; 29. for the showbread also, and for the fine flour for a meal-offering, whether of unleavened wafers, or of that which is baked in the pan, or of that which is soaked, and for all manner of measure and size; 30. and to stand every morning to thank and praise Jehovah, and likewise at even; 31. and to offer all burnt-offerings unto Jehovah, on the sabbaths, on the new moons, and on the set feasts, in number according to the ordinance concerning them, continually before Jehovah; 32. and that they should keep the charge of the tent of meeting, and the charge of the holy place, and the charge of the sons of Aaron their brethren, for the service of the house of Jehovah.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 23:1. By this time David was an old, old man, so he

stepped down from the throne and appointed his son Solomon as the new king of Israel. 2. He summoned all the political and religious leaders of Israel for the coronation ceremony. 3. At this time a census was taken of the men of the tribe of Levi who were thirty years or older. The total came to 38,000. 4,5. "Twenty-four thousand of them will supervise the work at the Temple," David instructed, "six thousand are to be bailiffs and judges, four thousand will be temple guards, and four thousand will praise the Lord with the musical instruments I have made." 6. Then David divided them into three main divisions named after the sons of Levi—the Gershom division, the Kohath division and the Merari division.

7. Subdivisions of the Gershom corps were named after his sons Ladan and Shime-i. 8, 9. These subdivisions were still further divided into six groups named after the sons of Ladan: Jehiel the leader, Zetham, Joel; and the sons of Shime-i—Shelomoth, Haziël, and Haran. 10, 11. The subclans of Shime-i were named after his four sons: Jahath was greatest, Zizah was next, and Jeush and Beriah were combined into a single subclan because neither had many sons.

12. The division of Kohath was subdivided into four groups named after his sons Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 13. Amram was the ancestor of Aaron and Moses. Aaron and his sons were set apart for the holy service of sacrificing the people's offerings to the Lord. He served the Lord constantly and pronounced blessings in his name at all times. 14, 15. As for Moses, the man of God, his sons Gershom and Eliezer were included with the tribe of Levi. 16. Gershom's sons were led by Shebuel, 17. and Eliezer's only son, Rehabiah, was the leader of his clan for he had many children. 18. The sons of Izhar were led by Shelomith. 19. The sons of Hebron were led by Jeriah. Amariah was second in command, Jahaziel was third, and Jekameam was fourth. 20. The sons of Uzziel were led by Micah, and Isshiah was the second in command.

21. The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. The sons of Mahli were Eleazar and Kish. 22. Eleazar died without any sons, and his daughters were married to their cousins, the sons of

Kish. 23. Mushi's sons were Mahli, Eder, and Jeremoth.

24. In the census, all the men of Levi who were twenty years old or older were classified under the names of these clans and subclans; and they were all assigned to the ministry at the Temple. 25. For David said, "The Lord God of Israel has given us peace, and he will always live in Jerusalem. 26. Now the Levites will no longer need to carry the Tabernacle and its instruments from place to place." 27. (This census of the tribe of Levi was one of the last things David did before his death.) 28. The work of the Levites was to assist the priests—the descendants of Aaron—in the sacrifices at the Temple; they also did the custodial work and helped perform the ceremonies of purification. 29. They provided the Bread of the Presence, the flour for the grain offerings, and the wafers made without yeast (either fried or mixed with olive oil); they also checked all the weights and measures. 30. Each morning and evening they stood before the Lord to sing thanks and praise to him. 31. They assisted in the special sacrifices of burnt offerings, the Sabbath sacrifices, the new moon celebrations, and at all the festivals. There were always as many Levites present as they required for the occasion. 32. And they took care of the Tabernacle and the Temple and assisted the priests in whatever way they were needed.

COMMENTARY

A further proof that David was deeply concerned about the Temple is evident in his careful organization of the Levites with respect to their Temple duties. When David became very old and his health failed, he proclaimed Solomon to be king in his place. David's son, Adonijah, forced his hand in this matter (I Kings, chapter 1). The military census which Joab had taken did not include the Levites. It was necessary that a careful count of this tribe be made so proper work assignments could be given. The Levite males thirty years of age and older were counted. There were thirty eight thousand. Twenty four thousand had assigned responsibility with regard to the Temple. Six thousand would serve as officers and judges. The officers were overseers

of work outside the Temple which pertained to the functioning of the Temple. The Levitical judges had responsibility in those matters which had to do with decisions pertaining to the Temple. The doorkeepers would be charged with the security of the Temple. Four thousand Levites had charge of the musical instruments such as harps and cymbals as these would be used in Temple services. The census would indicate the particular Levitical family to which each Levite belonged. Responsibilities were assigned which agreed with the kind of service that the Kohathite, Gershonite, or Merarite could perform. Verses 7-11 name certain leaders of the Gershonite family. Nine households were counted. Three of these belonged to Shimei and six belonged to Ladan (Libni). In Moses' day the Gershonites had charge of the tent materials in the moving of the Tabernacle. Now they were appointed other tasks relating to services at the Temple. Verses 12-20 concern the Kohathites. Kohath, Levi's son, had four sons. Amram was the father of Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. Aaron's "separation" or selection for the high priesthood was an important event in Israel's history. His responsibilities were "to sanctify the most holy things", to regard Jehovah's appointments in the tabernacle as most sacred; "to burn incense before Jehovah", the sweet odor of dutiful service, the symbol of prayer; "to minister unto him", to carry out every detail of the ritual; "to bless in his name forever", to be Jehovah's agent in mediating his grace to men. Moses' sons, Gershom and Eliezer, were heads of houses and shared Kohathite obligations. Moses is here called "the man of God", a most honored descriptive phrase. No false prophet in Biblical record is ever called "a man of God". The Kohathite assignments in Moses' day had to do with the sacred furniture of the tabernacle which they carried on their shoulders or arms. The priests who officiated at the altar were members of this family. Their duties would be of this highest order in the Temple. Verses 21-23 concern the Merarites. Merari was Levi's third son (Genesis 46:11). Gershon was represented by nine houses, Kohath by eleven, and Merari by four. Altogether there were twenty-four divisions of the tribe of Levi. In Moses' day the

Merarites had to transport the boards, bars, pillars, and sockets of the tabernacle. They probably assisted in cutting wood and carrying water for the Temple. Verse three in the present chapter indicated that the Levites were numbered beginning at age thirty. Verse twenty four states that the enumeration began at age twenty. It is possible that David understood that more Levites would be needed than could be provided under the thirty year limitation. Among the last directives (verse 27) given by David was the one which lowered the age limit to twenty years. A summary of the tasks reveals a variety of exercises that had to be done to keep the Temple functioning. Work in the courts, in the rooms built in the Temple walls, officiating at the altar, and serving in the Temple proper would involve many men. Preparing shewbread, processing the meal offerings, presenting daily sacrifices, and discharging added responsibilities during the sabbath days and special feast days required many willing hands. The whole Temple routine was amazingly involved and wonderfully demanding. It was the heart of Jehovah's government of His people. It was the life line of the total relationship of Israel to Jehovah. It was peculiarly the charge of the Levites to keep this institution functioning.

16. THE CLASSES OF PRIESTS AND LEVITES

(Chapter 24)

TEXT

Chapter 24:1. And the courses of the sons of Aaron were these. The sons of Aaron: Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. 2. But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children: therefore Eleazar and Ithamar executed the priest's office. 3. And David with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to their ordering in their service. 4. And there were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar; and thus were they divided: of the sons of Eleazar there were sixteen, heads of fathers' houses; and of the sons of Ithamar, according to their fathers' houses, eight. 5. Thus were they

divided by lot, one sort with another; for there were princes of the sanctuary, and princes of God, both of the sons of Eleazar, and of the sons of Ithamar. 6. And Shemaiah the son of Nethanel the scribe, who was of the Levites, wrote them in the presence of the king, and the princes and Zadok the priest, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the priests and of the Levites; one fathers' house being taken for Eleazar, and one taken for Ithamar.

7. Now the first lot came forth to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, 8. the third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, 9. the fifth to Malchijah the sixth to Mijamin, 10. the seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, 11. the ninth to Jeshua, the tenth to Shecaniah, 12. the eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim, 13. the thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth to Jeshebeab, 14. the fifteenth to Bilgah, the sixteenth to Immer, 15. the seventeenth to Hezir, the eighteenth to Happizzez, 16. the nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to Jehezkel, 17. the one and twentieth to Jachin, the two and twentieth to Gamul, 18. the three and twentieth to Delaiah, the four and twentieth to Maaziah. 19. This was the ordering of them in their service, to come into the house of Jehovah according to the ordinance given unto them by Aaron their father, as Jehovah, the God of Israel, had commanded him.

20. And of the rest of the sons of Levi: of the sons of Amram, Shubael; of the sons of Shubael, Jehdeiah. 21. Of Rehabiah: of the sons of Rehabiah, Isshiah the chief. 22. of the Izharites, Shelomoth; of the sons of Shelomoth, Jahath. 23. And the sons of Hebron: Jeriah the chief, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, Jekameam the fourth. 24. The sons of Uzziel, Micah; of the sons of Micah, Shamir. 25. The brother of Micah, Isshiah; of the sons of Isshiah, Zechariah. 26. The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi; the sons of Jaaziah: Beno. 27. The sons of Merari: of Jaaziah, Beno, and Shoham, and Zaccur, and Ibri. 28. Of Mahli: Eleazar, who had no sons. 29. Of Kish; the sons of Kish: Jerahmeel. 30. And the sons of Mushi: Mahli, and Eder, and Jerimoth. These were the sons of the Levites after their fathers' houses. 31. These likewise cast lots even as their

brethren the sons of Aaron in the presence of David the king, and Zadok, and Ahimelech, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the priests and of the Levites; the fathers' house of the chief even as those of his younger brother.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 24:1. The priests (the descendants of Aaron) were placed into two divisions named after Aaron's sons, Eleazar and Ithamar. Nadab and Abihu were also the sons of Aaron, but they died before their father did and had not children; so only Eleazar and Ithamar were left to carry on. 3. David consulted with Zadok, who represented the Eleazar clan, and with Ahimelech, who represented the Ithamar clan; then he divided Aaron's descendants into many groups to serve at various times. 4. Eleazar's descendants were divided into sixteen groups and Ithamar's into eight (for there was more leadership ability among the descendants of Eleazar). 5. All tasks were assigned to the various groups by coin-toss so that there would be no preference, for there were many famous men and high officials of the Temple in each division. 6. Shemaiah, a Levite and the son of Nethanel, acted as recording secretary and wrote down the names and assignments in the presence of the king and of these leaders; Zadok the priest, Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and the heads of the priests and Levites. Two groups from the division of Eleazar and one from the division of Ithamar were assigned to each task.

7-18. The work was assigned (by coin-toss) in this order: First, the group led by Jehoiarib; Second, the group led by Jedaiah; Third, the group led by Harim; Fourth, the group led by Se-orim; Fifth, the group led by Malchijah; Sixth, the group led by Mijamin; Seventh, the group led by Hakkoz; Eighth, the group led by Ahijah; Ninth, the group led by Jeshua; Tenth, the group led by Shecaniah; Eleventh, the group led by Eliashib; Twelfth, the group led by Jakim; Thirteenth, the group led by Huppah; Fourteenth, the group led by Jeshebe-ab; Fifteenth, the group led by Bilgah; Sixteenth, the group led by Immer; Seventeenth, the group led by Hezir; Eighteenth, the group led

by Happizzez; Nineteenth, the group led by Pethahiah; Twentieth, the group led by Jehezkel; Twenty-first, the group led by Jachin; Twenty-second, the group led by Gamul; Twenty-third, the group led by Delaiah; Twenty-fourth, the group led by Maaziah. 19. Each group carried out the Temple duties as originally assigned by God through their ancestor Aaron. 20. These were the other descendants of Levi: Amram; his descendant Shuba-el; and Shubael's descendant Jehdeiah; 21. the Rehabiah group, led by his oldest son Isshiah; 22. the Izhar group consisting of Shelamoth and his descendant Jahath. 23. The Hebron group: Jeriah, Hebron's oldest son; Amariah, his second son; Jahaziel, his third son; Jekameam, his fourth son. 24, 25. The Uzziel group was led by his son Micah and his grandsons Shamir and Isshiah, and by Isshiah's son Zechariah. 26, 27. The Merari group was led by his sons: Mahli and Mushi. (Ja-aziah's group, led by his son Beno, included his brothers Shoham, Zaccur, and Ibri.) 28. Mahli's descendants were Eleazar, who had no sons, 29. and Kish, among whose sons was Jerahmeel. 30. The sons of Mushi were Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth. These were the descendants of Levi in their various clans. 31. Like the descendants of Aaron, they were assigned to their duties by coin-toss without distinction as to age or rank. It was done in the presence of King David, Zadok, Ahimelech, and the leaders of the priests and the Levites.

COMMENTARY

David requested the advice and assistance of Zadok and Ahimelech in setting up the courses of the Levites for Temple service. Four sons were born to Aaron. Nadab and Abihu had been stricken down by Jehovah and they had left no sons. Eleazar and Ithamar remained and Jehovah gave them sons. In David's day Zadok represented the line of Eleazar and Abiathar (Ahimelech's son) represented Ithamar's descendants. In organizing the courses of priests in the high priestly line sixteen courses were from the line of Eleazar and eight courses were lineal descendants from Ithamar. The distinction between "princes of the sanctuary" and "princes of God" is difficult.

The suggestion has been made that the princes of God refer only to the regular high priests. Sacred lots were cast in determining the divisions and Shemaiah served by keeping the written record listing the personnel of each course.

The names of the persons who were the chief leaders of the twenty four courses are listed in verses 7-19. Some of the descendants of Jehoiarib (Joiarib) were among those returning from the Babylonian exile about 536 B.C. (Nehemiah 11:10). Jedaiah is also mentioned later in the same connection (Ezra 2:36). Sons of Harim in Ezra 2:39 and Nehemiah 7:35 would relate to this present reference. Malchijah is named in Nehemiah 11:12 and Jeremiah 21:1. Abijah, who headed the eighth course is named in Nehemiah 10:7 and Luke 1:5. The father of John the Baptist served in this course. References in the lists of those who returned from Babylonian captivity include the people of Jeshua. Descendants of some of the other heads of these Levitical courses are named in the lists in Ezra and Nehemiah. The sacred lot by which these divisions were determined may have involved the Urim and the Thummim or a similar instrument. In the using of the lot, the leaders did not simply trust mere chance. This was David's way of emphasizing the fact that Jehovah made the decision as to which persons should be in each course of priests.

Assignments for "the rest of the sons of Levi" are detailed in verses 20-31. These are the Levites who were not of the high priestly order. They could not officiate at the altar and do that kind of priestly work. These Levites had obligations as musicians, doorkeepers, and Temple guards. Jehdeiah and Isshiah were the chieftains over "the rest of the sons of Levi". These leaders were descended from Amram. David, along with Zadok and Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, cast lots to determine how and when these men should serve.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

LESSON ELEVEN 23-24

351. How old was David at this time?

352. Why was Solomon placed on the throne? David had sons older than Solomon.
353. How many Levites are numbered at this time?
354. Describe the work assignments given to the Levites.
355. At what age would the Levite begin to serve at the Temple?
356. Name Gershon's two sons.
357. Name Kohath's four sons.
358. What had been Aaron's specific assignment?
359. How is Moses described in 23:14?
360. Name Moses' sons.
361. Name Aaron's sons.
362. Name Merari's two sons.
363. Why would the writer of Chronicles be concerned about this detailed genealogy of the Levites?
364. According to 23:24, at what age might a Levite begin to serve?
365. What is the "rest" of which David speaks?
366. Once the Temple was established, how were the Levites relieved of certain responsibilities?
367. List the specific tasks of the Levites who served in the Temple.
368. Describe showbread.
369. When did the Levites thank and praise Jehovah?
370. When were the new moons celebrated?
371. Identify the three great "set feasts" or annual festivals.
372. What had happened to Nadab and Abihu? Why?
373. Why did David use two chief priests? Who were they?
374. How many courses of priests were set up out of the house of Eleazar and out of the house of Ithamar?
375. What service did Shemaiah accomplish?
376. Where in the Bible outside of this chapter is there a record of a priest named Jeshua?

377. Locate in the Bible another reference to the name "Jachin". What does the name mean?
378. Why not let the priests come and serve at their own pleasure?
379. Why is Amram important in the Biblical record?
380. Identify two other persons in the Bible named Micah besides the one in 24:24.
381. Mahli's son was Eleazar. Identify another priest by this name.
382. Another Biblical character was named Kish. Who was he? Identify his tribe.
383. What device would be used in the matter of "casting lots"?