

Handout: Numbers Lesson 8

Numbers 16:1-17:26 is a single narrative that recounts another Israelite rebellion and its disastrous conclusion. The narrative is divided into seven parts:

Part I: The announcement of the revolt (16:1-3)

Part II: Moses' response to the rebels (16:4-15)

Part III: The test of divinely appointed leadership (16:16-19)

Part IV: Yahweh's judgment (16:20-35)

Part V: The sign of the bronze censers/firepans (17:1-5/16:36-40)

Part VI: The plague judgment and Aaron's intercession (17:6/16:41-15/16:50)

Part VII: The miracle of Aaron's living branch (17:16-26)

Reuben was Jacob/Israel's first-born son and Levi was the third born son.

Levi's sons = Gershon, Kohath, and Merari (fathers of the three clans of Levi)

Kohath's sons = Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel

Miriam, Aaron and Moses = children of Amram, the 1st-born son of Kohath, the 2nd son of Levi.

Korah = 1st-born son of Izhar the 2nd son of Kohath, the 2nd son of Levi

Elizaphan (leader of the Kohathites) = 2nd son of Uzziel, the youngest son of Kohath

The *minhah* for Yahweh that Moses mentions in Num 16:15 was designated in Leviticus 2:1-16 as voluntary tribute offerings that fulfilled three purposes:

1. Identified the covenant member's commitment to Yahweh as sovereign Lord.
2. Strengthened Yahweh's covenant bond with the individual.
3. It was a visual public sign of the individual's place within the covenant community.

The new legislation in chapter 18 defines the responsibilities of the chief priests, the clan of Kohath and the other Levite clans. Numbers 17:27-18:32 is divided into four parts:

1. Yahweh's response to the people's fears by defining the hierarchy of responsibilities for the priests and Levites in protecting the Sanctuary and the people from encroaching on the Sanctuary (verses 17:27-18:7).
2. The priests' reward for fulfilling their duties (verses 18:8-19).
3. The Levites' reward for fulfilling their duties (verses 18:20-24).
4. Commands concerning the distribution of the tithe (verses 25-32).

| The Hierarchy of Responsibilities for Priests and Levites in Numbers 18 | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Class | Responsibility | Encroachment by | Scripture |
| Priests and Kohathite clan | Most sacred objects in transit | Lay Israelites | Num 18:1a |
| Priests | Most sacred objects of the Sanctuary | Disqualified priests | Num 18:1b, 7a |
| Priests and Levites | Most sacred objects at rest | Levites | Num 18:3 |
| Levites | The Sanctuary as a whole | Lay Israelites | Num 18:22-23 |

Handout 2: Numbers Lesson 8

A Summary of the Sanctuary Responsibilities and God's Provisions for the Levites and the Chief priests in Numbers chapter 18 (related Scripture passages are included). The reason God shares His gifts from the Israelites with His priests and Levites is summarized in verses 19-20: the grants to the priests and Levites are to compensate for their exclusion from inheriting the land and as a reward for their service to God and Israel.

- 1) The priesthood of Aaron bore the primary responsibility for preserving the sanctity of the Sanctuary and its contents and the ritual purity of its own members. The Levites served the chief priests. They only had access to the outer areas of the Sanctuary complex and could not approach the sacrificial altar. The purpose of the legislation is to prevent unconsecrated laity and non-Israelites from risking death by entering the Sanctuary and having contact with any sacred object (Num 18:1-7).
- 2) God will reward His priests with the following types of revenue for fulfilling their priestly obligations (Num 18:8-20):
 - a. Portions of the "most holy offerings" not consigned to the altar fire, including most of the grain offerings, the sin and reparation offerings (see Lev 6:1-7:10). The portions were to be consumed in a sacred meal by ritually pure priests within the sacred precincts of the Sanctuary (Num 18:8-10).
 - b. The breast and foreleg and the right thigh from the peoples' peace/communion offerings (see Lev 7:11-38). These portions could be eaten by the priest's family, including daughters, wives and household slaves if they were in a ritually clean state. For additional legislation on holy food for priests and their households see Lev 22:1-16 (Num 18:11).
 - c. All the annual Israelite first fruits of the grain, fruit, olive oil and wine went to the priests to be shared with his household. These various laws appear in Ex 23:16-19; Lev 2:14; 23:17-18; Dt 18:4; and 26:1-11 (Num 18:12-13).
 - d. All that was proscribed under the provisions of the *herem* (curse of destruction/consecration) went to the priests. Lev 27:21 and 28-29 records that ancestral fields that were not claimed in the Jubilee year and became Temple property under the law of *herem* were at the priests' disposal. This legislation will also relate to the entire topic of *herem* as it is expressed in Dt 7:28 and 13:18, and during the conquest of Canaan in Josh Chapters 6-7 (Num 18:14).
 - e. All the first born males of man and beast went to the priests. First born human males were redeemed by a redemption tax and their value, plus a surcharge that was remitted to the priests. The firstlings of "unclean" animals not suitable for sacrifice were also redeemed and their value plus a surcharge was remitted to the priests. See additional passages in Ex 13:2, 11-13; 22:28; 34:19-20; Lev 27:1-13; Dt 12:17; 14:23; 15:19-23 (Num 18:15-18).
- 3) When the people occupy the Promised Land, the Levites are to collect from the twelve tribes of Israel one-tenth of the annual produce from their fields, vineyards, and orchards. Laws governing the national annual tithe are also found in Lev 27:30-32; Dt 12:17-19 and 14:22-29 (Num 18:21-24).
- 4) Out of the national annual tithe, the Levites are required to contribute one-tenth of the best of all they have collected to be given to the priests. The chief priests benefited from this tithe as a reward for their ministry; they were also exempt for all such tithes. The requirement of the Levites to support the Aaronic priesthood epitomized the Levites subservience to the chief priests (Num 18:25-32). www.AgapeBibleStudy.com