

What Is The Difference Between A Priest And A Levite?

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to see the difference between a Priest and a Levite. In our study, we will note that all Priest were Levites, but not all Levites were Priests. Levites was the name given to the descendants of Levi; who was the third son of Jacob by Leah. They occupied a significant place of greatness as a tribe in Israel. The event at Mt. Sinai gave the Levites their place of privilege and responsibility in God's plan. The divine selection of Moses and Aaron who were descendants of Kohath, one of Levi's three sons, further enhanced the significance of the tribe of Levi. The other two sons of Levi were Gershon and Merrari.

Exodus 32:25-29

“And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:) [26] Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. [27] And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. [28] And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. [29] For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.”

The Levites were not to be numbered with the 12 tribes of Israel.

Numbers 1:47-54

“But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them. [48] For the Lord had spoken unto Moses, saying, [49] Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel: [50] But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle. [51] And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. [52] And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts. [53] But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony. [54] And the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did they.”

But we read here that the Levites were not to be numbered with the 12 tribes, but were to be appointed over the things pertaining to the Tabernacle.

The history of the Priesthood in Israel began in the Patriarchal times when the heads of families offered sacrifices, prayers, and performed general religious functions. It is in

Exodus 28 and 29 and Leviticus 8 where it is recorded that the founding of the Aaronic order of Priests. The choice of the tribe of Levi as the Priestly tribe to serve as assistants to the Aaronic Priests is recorded in **Numbers 3:1-17**

Aaron and his sons occupied the upper level of the tribe of Levi, as the Priests belonged to the family of Kohath. The middle level included all the Kohathites who were not part of Aaron's family. They were given certain privileges in bearing the most sacred parts of the Tabernacle.

Numbers 3:27-32

“And of Kohath was the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izeharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these are the families of the Kohathites. [28] In the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were eight thousand and six hundred, keeping the charge of the sanctuary. [29] The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward. [30] And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites shall be Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. [31] And their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof. [32] And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be chief over the chief of the Levites, and have the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary.”

The bottom level of the Levites comprised all members of the families of Gershon and Merrari. They performed lesser duties as described in Numbers 3:21-26.

Numbers 3:21-26

“Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimites: these are the families of the Gershonites. [22] Those that were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, even those that were numbered of them were seven thousand and five hundred. [23] The families of the Gershonites shall pitch behind the tabernacle westward. [24] And the chief of the house of the father of the Gershonites shall be Eliasaph the son of Lael. [25] And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation shall be the tabernacle, and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, [26] And the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about, and the cords of it for all the service thereof.”

Those of Gershon were to serve in taking care of the Tabernacle, and the tent, the covering thereof, and the screen for the door of the tent of meeting and hangings of the court and the screen for the door of the court, which is by the Tabernacle and by the altar round about and the cords of it for all the service thereof.

Those of Merrari had charge of seeing about the boards of the Tabernacle and bars thereof and pillars thereof and the sockets thereof and all the instruments thereof and all the service thereof and the pillars of the court round about and their sockets and their pins and their cords.

Numbers 3:36, 37

“And under the custody and charge of the sons of Merari shall be the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and the sockets thereof, and all the vessels thereof, and all that serveth thereto, [37] And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords.”

Those of Kohath who were not of the family of Aaron were to see about the furniture of the Tabernacle. They were to see about the Ark and the table and the candlesticks and the altars and the vessels of the sanctuary where they minister and the screen and all the service thereof.

Numbers 3:31

“And their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof.”

Not all the Kohathites were to be Priests. The only ones consecrated and appointed from the family of Kohath to be Priests were Aaron and his sons.

It was only Aaron and his sons that were to minister in the office of the Priesthood

Exodus 28:1

“And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.”

Conclusion

We may simply say that all Priests are Levites, but not all Levites are Priests. Aaron and his sons are of the family of Kohath of the tribe of Levi, are Priests. But all who are Levites are not of the family of Kohath and not all of the family of Kohath are of the family of Aaron.

The Priests were consecrated to serve the Lord and the Levites were purified and considered a gift to Aaron and his sons to assist them. Only the Priest had the right to minister at the altar and to enter the Most Holy place. The Levites assisted the Priests in the performance of their duties.