

Why Were Levites Chosen To Be Priest Instead Of The Firstborn Of Each Tribe?

Introduction

The Book of Moses ordered that the Levites should assist the Priest and take care of the Tabernacle.

Numbers 3:5-10

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, [6] Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. [7] And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. [8] And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. [9] And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel. [10] And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.”

Naturally they later took care of the Temple. Moses' book also ordered that one family of Levites, Aaron's family, should be the source of Israel's Priests.

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.”

The Levites were to perform the most common and laborious offices. It was their business to take down, put up, and carry the Tabernacle and its utensils; for it was the object of their peculiar care. They were the servants of the Priests.

Several factors influenced the selection of Levi's descendants for their special place in Israel's religion. The divine selection of Moses and Aaron, who were descendants of Kohath, one of Levi's three sons, conferred on honor upon the Levites, which set them apart from the other tribes.

However the incident of the golden calf at Mt. Sinai gave to the Israelites their place of responsibility in God's plan.

Exodus 32:1-29

“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. [2] And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. [3] And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. [4] And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. [5] And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To

morrow is a feast to the Lord. [6] And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. [7] And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: [8] They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. [9] And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: [10] Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. [11] And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? [12] Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. [13] Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. [14] And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people. [15] And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. [16] And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. [17] And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. [18] And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. [19] And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. [20] And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it. [21] And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? [22] And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. [23] For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. [24] And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf. [25] 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."

In this passage we see that their faithfulness to the Lord in a time of moral dissension. They alone answered the call as to who was for the Lord, and they showed their committed faith by strapping on swords and killing their brother, friends, and neighbors as commanded by the Lord. For this, they were set apart and blessed.

The doctrine of substitution was illustrated by the selection of the Levites, for although God claimed the first-born males of all the tribes on the basis of the death of the first-born among the Egyptians; God allowed the Levites to become substitutes for their fellow Israelites. The Law of the tithe enhanced the selection of the Levites, for this tribe was the tithe of all tithes. It was to the Levites that the tithe was paid.

Numbers 18:21-24

“And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. [22] Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. [23] But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. [24] But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.”

The choice of the Levites as the Priestly tribe was confirmed by an event similar to the golden calf. When an individual Levite, Phinehas, stayed, the plague that was about to destroy the Israelites.

Numbers 25:1-13

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. [2] And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. [3] And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. [4] And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. [5] And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor. [6] And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. [7] And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; [8] And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. [9] And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand. [10] And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, [11] Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. [12] Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: [13] And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.”

Conclusion

We see that the selection of the Levites as the Priestly tribe was a result of their faithfulness and commitment to the Lord. It is most significant to note that God blessed them but gave them land inheritance as was given the other tribes. The Lord alone was their inheritance.