

Numbers Chapter 18 – The People to Support the Priests and the Levites

In Chapter 16, Korah and some fellow Levites led a revolt in which they claimed equality with Aaron and his sons, the priests. God demonstrated His judgment between Moses and Aaron on one side and Korah and the rebels on the other by opening the earth to swallow the rebels up. In Chapter 17, we read about how God confirmed the priesthood of Aaron by causing his rod to bud, blossom, and bear fruit. In Chapter 18, God restores the broken relationship.

Read Numbers 18:1-3

Aaron and the Levites were responsible for the people's actions against the tabernacle. Although God had made clear that he had chosen Aaron as priest, here, God reminds Aaron that as leader, he was responsible for the people's rebellion. He then restores the relationship of the Levites to the priests. God is calling Aaron to humility.

Read Numbers 18:19-24

Aaron and the Levites were to have no share of the land. That meant they would have no fields to till and to harvest, no cows to milk, no grapes to pick, and no need to protect their land from wild animals. God did not want their ministry to the people to be interrupted by such things.

But how would they live? They would live on the animal and grain sacrifices that the people brought to the tabernacle, and they would be supported by the tithe the people devoted to the Lord. They depended on the faithfulness of God's people, and they walked by faith.

What is the foundation for tithing?

Read Genesis 28:10-22

Here Jacob enters a covenant with God. In response to the promise God made without preconditions, Jacob promised that in return, the Lord would be his God, and that of all the Lord gave him, he would give back a tenth.

Read Leviticus 27:30-32

God remembered Jacob's vow, and required as part of the Law, that "Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord. ... And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the Lord."

Read Malachi 3:8-10

Failure to tithe was not merely withholding a gift, it was "robbing" something that already belonged to God. Tithing was never demanded of a person who had nothing. Only out of the abundance provided by God was a tithe required. Failure to abide by this requirement brought a curse, but obedience brought a blessing of far more riches than before.

The curse God threatens in Malachi is directly related to the purpose of the tithe established in Numbers 18. The tithe was crucial to support the priests and Levites, whose ministry was critical to Israel's right relationship with God.

Does this apply to us today?

Does this mean that tithing (giving a tenth) is required of us? Certainly, nowhere in the New Testament is the requirement of a tenth re-applied to Christians.

But the principle of giving certainly does still apply, and particularly, giving to support our ministers, as taught by Numbers 18. **Read Galatians 6:6; 1 Cor. 9:13-14.** These passages clearly indicate that like the priests and Levites, our pastor should not be required to work on a farm – or sit in an office – in order to support himself through a "day job." The ministry suffers and the church suffers when that happens. As the people depend on the pastor for guidance, he must depend on the people for support, walking by faith that God will supply his needs.

Read Numbers 18:25-26: Those directly involved in ministry must also give, showing honor to God. In addition, the principle of giving out of our first fruits still applies. **Read 1 Cor. 16:2**

Read Luke 21:1-4; 2 Cor 9:6-8

God measures not the size of the gift but the sacrifice it represents and the sincerity of the heart which gives it.