

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Numbers 8:9-19

Peace be with you, brothers and sisters, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for our Bible reading again. We will continue reading Numbers chapter 8. Today, we are reading verses 9 through 19.

On the twelfth day of the first month, in the second year after the Israelites left Egypt, God commanded Moses to consecrate the Levites to serve Him in place of every firstborn among the children of Israel. Yesterday, we read about the preparation of the Levites: Moses was to sprinkle the water of purification on them, and they were to shave their entire bodies with a razor and wash their clothes. Then, for the consecration ceremony, they were to take a young bull for a sin offering, another young bull for a burnt offering, along with the accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil. Today, we will read about the consecration ceremony itself.

Verse 9: “And you shall bring the Levites before the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall gather the whole congregation of the children of Israel together.”

The CUV translates this as “presenting the Levites before the tabernacle,” which means bringing them to the front of the tabernacle of meeting to dedicate them to God. Moses was also to assemble the entire congregation of Israel. At that time, there were 22,000 male Levites, while the total numbered men of Israel came to 603,550. With such a vast population, it would have been impossible for every single Israelite and Levite to physically gather at the entrance of the tabernacle of meeting. Therefore, it is likely that the leaders of the twelve tribes represented all of Israel, while the patriarchs of the three main clans of Levi represented all the Levites. These fifteen representatives stood at the entrance of the tabernacle, while the rest of the Israelites and Levites gathered around the perimeter to witness the ceremony.

In Leviticus 8:3, when the priests were being consecrated, the entire congregation of Israel likewise gathered at the door of the tabernacle to observe. This demonstrates that the consecration was a public, grand ceremony. Because the ordination of the Levites was directly tied to all of Israel, the presence of the people was essential.

Verse 10: “So you shall bring the Levites before the Lord, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites;”

The tabernacle was the place where God dwelt among the Israelites. To come before the tabernacle was to stand before the Lord Himself. To dedicate the Levites to God, the Israelites were to lay their hands on the Levites' heads. Most likely, as the heads of the three main Levite clans stood before the Lord, the leaders of the twelve tribes laid hands upon them. The laying on of hands signifies identification and union—it unites the one laying hands and the one receiving them into a single whole. In this way, when the Levites stepped forward to serve God, it was as if all of Israel were stepping forward to serve Him. The service of the Levites became the service of all Israel. God's requirement for the Israelites to lay hands on the Levites reveals His highest intention: that the entire nation of Israel would be a people devoted to serving Him.

However, due to human weakness, the people could not attain God's highest standard. In His permissive will, God first set apart the Levites to serve Him on behalf of all Israel. Yet even within this permissive standard, God reminded the Israelites of their calling by having them lay hands on the Levites, participating in the service through their union with them—a truly beautiful picture. When Leah originally gave birth to Levi, she named him “Levi” out of a deep desire to be joined to her husband, Jacob; the name Levi itself means “joined” or “attached.” How fitting that name is! Now, the entire tribe of Levi was set apart to serve God, united with the rest of the nation through the laying on of hands as the tribe that represented all Israel in service.

Verse 11: “and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord like a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of the Lord.”

After the Israelites joined themselves to the Levites through the laying on of hands, Aaron, the high priest, was to present the Levites before the Lord as a wave offering from the children of Israel. A wave offering involved waving the sacrificial gift back and forth before the Lord, symbolizing the power of resurrection and making the offering acceptable to Him. On the Feast of Firstfruits, the priest would wave a sheaf of the first grain before the Lord as a wave offering. Similarly, when priests offered peace offerings on behalf of the people, they would wave the breast of the sacrificial animal as a wave offering before the Lord, and that breast was then given to the priests.

On this occasion, however, the wave offering presented by the priest on behalf of Israel was the Levites themselves. Naturally, Aaron could not physically lift the Levites in his hands to wave them; it was likely a symbolic gesture where he waved his hands before the Lord to dedicate the Levites to Him. Unlike traditional sacrifices that were slaughtered and cut into pieces before being waved, the Levites were presented as living offerings. This naturally brings to mind Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

The “living sacrifice” Paul speaks of in Romans references how the Levites were consecrated as a wave offering for Israel—dedicated to God in a way that was pleasing to Him and entirely reasonable. The Levites became a wave offering to perform the work of the Lord in place of the rest of Israel. This first wave offering enabled the Levites to step forward and serve God as representatives of the entire nation. However, no one can serve God simply because they have the desire to do so; God is righteous, holy, and glorious. A person must first go through sacrifice, have their sin removed, and surrender themselves completely to God before they are qualified to serve Him. New Testament typology shows us that we must experience the salvation accomplished through Jesus Christ before we can be accepted by God.

Verse 12: “Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, and you shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the Lord, to make atonement for the Levites.”

The Levites first had to lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, signifying their complete identification with the sacrifices. The first young bull was offered to God as a sin offering. As for the regulations of the sin offering found in Leviticus 4:15–21, I invite you to review our previous daily study on that passage so I need not repeat it here. I will simply emphasize that the laws of the sin offering perfectly foreshadowed how Jesus Christ would become our sin offering on the cross fifteen hundred years later. Thus, the Old Testament imagery provides the best explanation and application for the New Testament truth of atonement.

After making atonement through the sin offering, the Levites were to offer the second young bull as a burnt offering, accompanied by a grain offering with frankincense burned upon the altar. The burnt offering symbolized complete consecration, while the grain offering with frankincense signified that the Levites' dedication was fully acceptable and pleasing to God. Through the sin offering, human shortcomings were removed; through the burnt offering, their dedication was rendered acceptable to God. Only then were the Levites qualified to step into the service of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, to be able to serve God is a privilege He bestows upon us. We were originally ruined and unworthy; how could we ever stand before God, let alone serve Him? It is only because God favored us and cleansed our sinful stains through the finished work of Jesus Christ that we can offer ourselves to Him and enter His service. Therefore, every time we come to serve, we must examine ourselves to ensure that we have cleansed our sins through confession and repentance, and that we have surrendered ourselves fully to Him. Even if this surrender is not fully maintained at all times, at the very least, our hearts should belong entirely to God during the time we are serving Him. We must never approach God's service flippantly; we must take to heart the solemn lesson of Nadab and Abihu.

Verse 13: “And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them like a wave offering to the Lord.”

Having been cleansed through atonement and set apart through consecration, the Levites were qualified to serve God. Moses was then to stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons and present them to the Lord as a second wave offering. While the first wave offering authorized them to represent all of Israel, this second wave offering dedicated them to direct service under the high priest and the priests. As mentioned earlier, when peace offerings were made, the wave breast was given to the priests; similarly, in this second wave offering, the Levites were presented before God to be given to the priests. They were to follow the priests' directions and assist them in serving God.

We see that God was meticulously detailed in consecrating the Levites for His service. They were to represent all of Israel, submit to the leadership of Christ, and assist the priests in their duties.

Verses 14–15: “Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting. So you shall cleanse them and offer them like a wave offering.”

Verses 9 through 13 provide a detailed account of the consecration ceremony. Beginning in verse 14—following the presentation of the two wave offerings—the text explains that once consecrated, the Levites were to be separated from the rest of Israel to belong to God and begin their duties in the tabernacle of meeting. Inside the tabernacle, they would handle various practical aspects of ministry while submitting entirely to the oversight of the priests. God reminded Moses once again to cleanse them, for they were handling holy things; failing to remain clean would bring death upon them. At the same time, as a wave offering, they represented all of Israel on one hand and were assigned to the priests on the other.

From verse 16 to 19, God reiterates why He chose the Levites for Himself. This explanation closely parallels Numbers 3:5–13. God’s painstaking repetition underlines the profound importance of this truth, which He wants us to deeply understand.

Verses 16–17: “For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself.”

God selected the Levites to belong entirely to Him as substitutes for every firstborn in Israel. On the night of the very first Passover in Egypt, God struck down every firstborn in the land, both man and beast. Only the households of Israel—whose doorposts and lintels were marked with the blood of the lamb—were passed over by the destroying angel. As a result, the firstborn of Israel, both human and animal, were spared from death through the coverage of the lamb's blood; therefore, they belonged to God and were set apart as holy to Him. Typologically, Christ is our Passover Lamb, and it is only under the cover of His precious blood that we are redeemed. Since Jesus purchased us at such an immense price, we no longer belong to ourselves, but to Christ.

Verses 18–19: “I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary.”

Originally, every firstborn in Israel was to belong to God; however, when the Israelites sinned against God with the golden calf, He chose the tribe of Levi to take

the place of every firstborn. Now that the Levites were consecrated, God presented them as a gift to Aaron and his sons to perform the duties of the Israelites at the tabernacle of meeting. Here, we see that God did not forget that the various practical tasks performed by the Levites in the tabernacle were originally the responsibility of all Israel, now carried out by the Levites on their behalf. Therefore, what the Levites performed in the tabernacle was truly the work of all Israel.

Furthermore, they were to “make atonement” for the children of Israel. The Hebrew word used here is kaphar (translated in the KJV as “make an atonement”), which does not mean offering a sin sacrifice, but rather serving as a covering for the Israelites to keep them in favor with God. Thus, this speaks of the Levites serving God in place of Israel so that the people would not draw too close to the sanctuary and bring a plague upon themselves.

Dear brothers and sisters, in the Old Testament, God operated on the principle of substitution. When Israel failed, fell short of God's standards, and failed to become a kingdom of priests, God chose the tribe of Levi to step in and serve Him on their behalf. As the twelve tribes marched and set up camp in the wilderness, the Levites guarded the tabernacle and handled the heavy labor for the nation, while the priests among the Levites burned incense and offered sacrifices before God. Upon entering the Promised Land, the twelve tribes conquered Canaan and received their respective land inheritances, whereas the Levites received no land inheritance because the Lord Himself was their portion, and they looked to Him for provision. As the twelve tribes settled down in their territories to build their livelihoods, the Levites were scattered among the tribes to teach the people God's law so that He might be glorified.

While the Old Testament operated on substitution, in the New Testament God grants every believer the identity of a priest. However, a believer only steps into the functional role of a priest when their spiritual life reaches maturity, their gifts are fully developed, and they accept God's call and commission. God no longer calls a special, isolated class to substitute for the service of all believers. Instead, He gives special spiritual gifts to the church to equip the saints, helping them mature

in life and spiritual gifts until they can fully fulfill their priestly calling—which was God's heart's desire from the beginning.

Therefore, my hope for every working believer is that you would set aside a dedicated time each week entirely for the Lord, learning the service of the Levites and carrying responsibility within the local church. Through this practice, your spiritual life will mature and your gifts will be perfected. When you are prepared, you will receive God's call, understand your divine commission, and step fully into your priestly role.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. You have shown us how the Levites became a wave offering—representing all of Israel in serving You on one hand, and submitting to the authority and management of the priests on the other. Lord, during this season before I enter full-time ministry, grant me the resolve to set aside dedicated time each week to learn how to serve You as a modern-day Levite in the church. Teach me the lesson of obedience, and help me remain faithful in every small task. Bless my service so that it may be pleasing in Your sight. In Jesus' holy name we pray, Amen.