

a. The Levites to serve the tabernacle under priestly direction (iii.1-13)

These verses state the duties of the Levites in a general way, preparatory to the more detailed description that follows. Since the Levites are to be under the direction of the priests (9) the first members of the priestly family are named (103). It is not the purpose of the chapter to tell how the priests were selected and set apart for their functions, since that has already been done in Ex. xxviii, xxix, and in Lv.viii,ix. The names are repeated here for the sole purpose of making absolutely clear the divine plan for leadership of the tribe of Levi. Verse 4 points out that only the two younger sons of Aaron were left to carry on the work, since the two older sons had lost their lives as a result of their sin (Lv. x). Verses 5-10 state the general function of the Levites, to serve the tabernacle (7-8) and to minister under the direction of the priests (6,9). Verse 10 again lays emphasis on the fact that priesthood is to be limited to the family of Aaron. Verses 11-13 state the general principle, that God is taking the Levites for Himself as a substitute for the firstborn of Israel who were spared when He killed the firstborn of Egypt at the time of the original Passover (Ex. xi,xii).

Evolutionary criticism has sought to explain the origin of the Pentateuch by denying its Mosaic authorship and alleging that it represents a long development, with the Levites attaining a separate ecclesiastical status at a late period in Israel's history, and the restriction of the priesthood to the family of Aaron coming later yet. Such a theory requires the assumption that most of the history contained in the books of Exodus and Numbers is the product of the imagination of a later period and did not actually happen. It involves a degree of scepticism regarding ancient documents which is now scarcely found in other ~~documents~~ fields of study, and requires the division of the books of the Pentateuch into numerous tiny ~~books/~~ sections and the assumption of many changes and omissions in their contents. It is obvious that in this chapter the priests and the Levites each have their separate functions, and to eliminate either from the chapter leaves it incomplete. The principal reason advanced for the claim that the Aaronic priesthood developed later is the occurrence five times in Deuteronomy and twice in Joshua of the phrase 'the priests the Levites.' Actually, however, this lends no support to the critical theory. In Hebrew, directly contrary to English usage,