

CHAPTER 23

David, having given charge concerning the building of the temple, in this and the following chapters settles the method of the temple-service and puts into order the offices and officers of it. In the late irregular times, and during the wars in the beginning of his reign, we may suppose that, though the Levitical ordinances were kept up, yet it was not in the order, nor with the beauty and exactness, that were desirable. Now David, being a prophet, as well as a prince, by divine warrant and direction, “set in order the things that were wanting.” In this chapter we are informed,

I. He declared Solomon to be his successor, (v. 1).

II. He numbered the Levites, and appointed them to their respective offices (v. 2-5).

III. He took an account of the several families of the Levites (v. 6-23).

IV. He made a new reckoning of them from twenty years old, and appointed them their work (v. 24-32). And in this he prepared for the temple as truly as when he laid up gold and silver for it; for the place is of small account in comparison with the work.

<1320> 1 CHRONICLES 23:1-23

THE NUMBERING OF THE LEVITES

Here we have,

I. The crown entailed, according to the divine appointment, v. 1. David made Solomon king, not to reign with him, or reign under him, but only to reign after him. This he did,

1. When he was old and full of days. He was but seventy years old when he died, and yet he was full of days, *satur dierum* — *satisfied with living* in this world. When he found himself going off, he made provision for the welfare of the kingdom after his decease, and pleased himself with the hopeful prospect of a happy settlement both in church and state.

2. He did it in parliament, in a solemn assembly of all the princes of Israel, which made Adonijah's attempt to break in upon Solomon's title and set it aside, notwithstanding this public recognition and establishment of it, the more impudent, impious, and ridiculous. Note, The settling or securing of the crown in the interests of the temple is a great blessing to the people and a great satisfaction to those who are themselves leaving the world.

II. The Levites numbered, according to the rule in Moses's time, from thirty years old to fifty, ^(~~0042~~) Numbers 4:2, 3. Their number in Moses's time, by this rule, was 8580 (^(~~0047~~) Numbers 4:47, 48), but now it had increased above four-fold, much more in proportion than the rest of the tribes; for the serviceable men of Levi's tribe were now 38,000, unless we suppose that here those were reckoned who were above fifty, which was not the case there. Joab had not numbered the Levites (^(~~1306~~) 1 Chronicles 21:6), but David now did, not in pride, but for a good purpose, and then he needed not fear wrath for it.

III. The Levites distributed to their respective posts (v. 4, 5), that every hand might be employed (for, of all men, an idle Levite makes the worst figure), and that every part of the work might be carefully done. Now it was for the honour of God that so great a number of servants attended his house and the business of it. Much of the state of great men consists in the greatness of their retinue. When God kept house in Israel see what a great household he had, and all well fed and well taught. But what were these to the attendants of his throne above, and the innumerable company of angels? It was the happiness of Israel that they had among them such a considerable body of men who were obliged by their office to promote and keep up religion among them. If the worship of God go to decay in Israel, let it not be said that it was for want of due provision for the support of it, but that those who should have done it were careless and false. The work assigned the Levites was four-fold: —

1. Some, and indeed far the greater number, were to set forward the work of the house of the Lord: 24,000, almost two-thirds, were appointed for this service, to attend the priests in killing the sacrifices, flaying them, washing them, cutting them up, burning them, to have the meat-offerings and drink-offerings ready, to carry out dirt, and keep all the vessels and utensils of the temple clean, and every thing in its place, that the service might be performed both with expedition and with exactness. These served 1000 a-week, and so went round in twenty-four courses. Perhaps while the

temple was in building some of these were employed to set forward that work, to assist the builders, at least to quicken them, and keep good order among them, and the decorum which became temple-work.

2. Others were officers and judges, not in the affairs of the temple, and in the controversies that arose there (for there, we may suppose, the priests presided), but in the country. They were magistrates, to give the laws of God in charge, to resolve difficulties, and to determine controversies that arose upon them. Of these there were 6000, in the several parts of the kingdom, that assisted the princes and elders of every tribe in the administration of justice.

3. Others were porters, to guard all the avenues of the house of God, to examine those that desired entrance, and to resist those that would force an entrance. These were the life-guards of the temple, and probably were armed accordingly.

4. Others were singers and players on instruments, whose business it was to keep up that part of the service; this was a new-erected office.

IV. The Levites mustered, and disposed of into their respective families and kindreds, that an account of them might the better be kept, and those that neglected their duty might be the more easily discovered, by calling over the roll, and obliging them to answer to their names, which each family might do for itself. When those of the same family were employed together it would engage them to love and assist one another. When Christ sent forth his disciples two and two he put together those that were brethren. Two families were here joined in one (v. 11) because they had not many sons. Those that are weak and little, separately, may be put together and appear considerable. That which is most observable in this account of the families of the Levites is that the posterity of Moses (that great man) stood upon the level with common Levites, and had no dignities or privileges at all peculiar to them; whilst the posterity of Aaron were advanced to the priest's office, to *sanctify the most holy things*, v. 13. It is said indeed of the grandson of Moses, Rehabiah, that *his sons were highly multiplied*, v. 17, *margin*. When God proposed to him that, if he would let fall his intercession for Israel, he would make of him a great nation, he generously refused it, in recompence for which his family is here greatly increased, and makes up in number what it wants in figure, in the tribe of Levi. Now,

1. The levelling of Moses' family with the rest is an evidence of his self-denial. Such an interest had he both with God and man that if he had aimed to raise his own family, to dignify and enrich that, he might easily have done so; but he was no self-seeking man, as appears from his leaving to his children no marks of distinction, which was a sign that he had the spirit of God and not the spirit of the world.

2. The elevation of Aaron's family above the rest was a recompence for his self-denial. When Moses (his younger brother) was made a god to Pharaoh, and he only his prophet or spokesman, to observe his orders and do as he was bidden, Aaron never disputed it, nor insisted upon his seniority, but readily took the inferior post God put him in, submitted to Moses, and, upon occasion, called him *his lord*; and because he thus submitted himself, in his own person, to his junior, in compliance with the will of God, God highly exalted his family, even above that of Moses himself. Those that are content to stoop are in the fairest way to rise. Before honour is humility.

~~<3224>~~ 1 CHRONICLES 23:24-32

THE OFFICE OF THE LEVITES

Here is,

I. An alteration made in the computation of the effective men of the Levites — that whereas, in Moses's time, they were not enlisted, or taken into service, till they were thirty-years old, nor admitted as probationers till twenty-five (~~<44824>~~ Numbers 8:24), David ordered, by direction from God, that they should be numbered *for the service of the house of the Lord*, from the age of twenty years and upwards, v. 24. This order he confirmed by his last words, v. 27. When he put his last hand to the draught of this establishment he expressly appointed this to be done for ever after; yet not he; but the Lord.

1. Perhaps the young Levites, having no work appointed them till twenty-five years old, had many of them got a habit of idleness, or grew addicted to their pleasures, which proved both a blemish to their reputation and a hindrance to their usefulness afterwards, to prevent which inconvenience

they are set to work, and brought under discipline, at twenty-years old. Those that will be eminent must learn to take care and take care betimes.

2. When the work of the Levites was to carry burdens, heavy burdens, the tabernacle and the furniture of it, God would not call any to it till they had come to their full strength; for he considers our frame, and, in service as well as sufferings, will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear. But now God had given rest to his people, and made Jerusalem his dwelling-place for ever, so that there was no more occasion to carry the tabernacle and the vessels thereof, the service was much easier, and what would not over-work them nor over-load them if they entered upon it at twenty-years old.

3. Now the people of Israel were multiplied, and there was a more general resort to Jerusalem, and would be when the temple was built, than had ever been at Shiloh, or Nob, or Gibeon; it was therefore requisite there should be more hands employed in the temple-service, that every Israelite who brought an offering might find a Levite ready to assist him. When more work is to be done it is a pity but there should be more workmen fetched in for the doing of it. When the harvest is plenteous why should the labourers be few?

II. A further account of the Levites' work. What the work of the priests was we are told (v. 13): *To sanctify the most holy things, to burn incense before the Lord, and to bless in his name;* that work the Levites were not to meddle with, and yet they had work enough, and good work, according to that to which they were appointed, v. 4, 5.

1. Those of them that were to *set forward the work of the house of God* (v. 4) were therein to *wait on the sons of Aaron* (v. 28), were to do the drudgery-work (if any work for God is to be called *drudgery*) of the house of God, to keep the courts and chambers clean, set things in their places, and have them ready when there was occasion to use them. They were to prepare the show-bread which the priests were to set on the table, to provide the flour and cakes for the meat-offerings, that the priests might have every thing ready to their hands.

2. Those of them that were judges and officers had an eye particularly upon all *measure and size*, v. 29. The standards of all weights and measures were kept in the sanctuary; and the Levites had the care of them, to see

that they were exact, and to try other weights and measures by them when they were appealed to.

3. The work of the singers was to *thank and praise the Lord* (v. 30), at the offering of the morning and evening sacrifices, and other oblations on the sabbaths, new moons, etc., v. 31. Moses appointed that they should blow with trumpets over their burnt offerings and other sacrifices, and on their solemn days, ~~<0400>~~ Numbers 10:10. The sound of the trumpet was awful, and might be affecting to the worshippers, but was not articulate, nor such a reasonable service as this which David appointed, of singing psalms on those occasions. As the Jewish church grew up from its infancy, it grew more and more intelligent in its devotions, till it came at length, in the gospel, to *put away childish things*, ~~<4311>~~ 1 Corinthians 13:11; ~~<8048>~~ Galatians 4:3, 9.

4. The work of the porters (v. 5) was to keep *the charge of the tabernacle and of the holy place*, that none might come nigh but such as were allowed, and those no nearer than was allowed them, v. 32. They were likewise to keep the charge of the sons of Aaron, to be at their beck and go on their errands, who are yet called *their brethren*, to be a memorandum to the priests that, though they were advanced to a high station, yet they were *hewn out of the same rock* with common Levites, and therefore must not lord it over them, but in all instances treat them as brethren.