

This morning we looked at Psalms 133-134,
and the importance of the high priest
as the one who unified all Israel.

Tonight, as we look at the tribe of Levi,
I want you to see *how* Levi (and especially Aaron)
united all Israel.

You see this in three ways in our text tonight:
in the Aaronic priesthood itself;
in the liturgical service of the Levites;
and in the dwelling places of the Levites.

The genealogy of Levi is almost as detailed as the genealogy of Judah –
though as we saw, Judah’s genealogy was clearest on the line of David.

Most of the other tribes have rather sketchy records –
perhaps due to the fact that they had all been taken into exile 300 years before!

But the tribe that maintained the most careful records was the tribe of Levi.

No one should be surprised!

The Levites were the priestly tribe.

An inherited priesthood that depends on ancestry

renders it rather crucial that you know who your ancestors were!

1. The Sons of Levi: (v1-30)

Our first point is that the Levites unite the church (the sons of Israel)
in the person of the high priest,
and in the Levitical office.

a. Kohath and the Zadokite Priests (v1-15)

¹ *The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.* ² *The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.* ³ *The children of Amram: Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.* ⁴ *Eleazar fathered Phinehas, Phinehas fathered Abishua,* ⁵ *Abishua fathered Bukki, Bukki fathered Uzzi,* ⁶ *Uzzi fathered Zerachiah, Zerachiah fathered Meraioth,* ⁷ *Meraioth fathered Amariah, Amariah fathered Ahitub,* ⁸ *Ahitub fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Ahimaaz,* ⁹ *Ahimaaz fathered Azariah, Azariah fathered Johanan,* ¹⁰ *and Johanan fathered Azariah (it was he who served as priest in the house that Solomon built in Jerusalem).* ¹¹ *Azariah fathered Amariah, Amariah fathered Ahitub,* ¹² *Ahitub fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Shallum,* ¹³ *Shallum fathered Hilkiyah, Hilkiyah fathered Azariah,* ¹⁴ *Azariah fathered Seraiah,*

Seraiah fathered Jehozadak;¹⁵ and Jehozadak went into exile when the LORD sent Judah and Jerusalem into exile by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

This is not a list of high priests – but the genealogical record of the high priestly family.

What is the difference?

If you are the high priest, and your son dies before you do,
then your grandson would become the next high priest.
Unless, of course, your grandson was too young –
in which case a different son might become high priest.

So several of these men may not have served as high priest.

Also, there are several high priests who are not listed here, such as:

Eli – the high priest who adopted Samuel;
and Uriah – 2 Chronicles 28:24 – the idolatrous priest in the days of Ahaz.

At the same time, this list is probably incomplete,
since it only allows 9 generations between Solomon and the exile (a period of 400 years),
but it is the most detailed list in the OT.

If you compare the various genealogies of the priests in Ezra 7, Nehemiah 11,
and 1 Chronicles 6 and 9,
there are a number of discrepancies,
but nothing quite as perplexing as the genealogy of Caleb that we saw earlier!

But the point is that (however the details work out)
we have a high priest who is descended from Aaron.

The high priest wore a breastplate with twelve stones –
representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

When the high priest entered the holy place,
he bore the twelve tribes of Israel on his breast.

The unity of the people of God is found in Aaron –
in the *person* of the high priest.

The line of Aaron is set forth from the Exodus to the Exile.

It is possible that the parenthetical comment in verse 10
was originally in verse 9
(since *that* was the Azariah who served in Solomon's day).

Another reason for this suggestion
is that the result would be a list that would include two groups of 12 names.
Twelve generations from the Exodus to the Temple,
and twelve generations from the Temple to the Exile.

The importance of Aaron and the Levitical priesthood for the unity of the people of God is seen in how Hebrews requires *six chapters* to show how Jesus has a better priesthood than Aaron.

b. Gershom, Kohath, and Merari (v16-30)

¹⁶ *The sons of Levi: Gershom, Kohath, and Merari.* ¹⁷ *And these are the names of the sons of Gershom: Libni and Shimei.* ¹⁸ *The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel.* ¹⁹ *The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites according to their fathers.* ²⁰ *Of Gershom: Libni his son, Jahath his son, Zimmah his son,* ²¹ *Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son, Jeatherai his son.* ²² *The sons of Kohath: Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son,* ²³ *Elkanah his son, Ebiasaph his son, Assir his son,* ²⁴ *Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uzziel his son, and Shaul his son.* ²⁵ *The sons of Elkanah: Amasai and Ahimoth,* ²⁶ *Elkanah his son, Zophai his son, Nahath his son,* ²⁷ *Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, Elkanah his son.* ²⁸ *The sons of Samuel: Joel his firstborn, the second Abijah.* ²⁹ *The sons of Merari: Mahli, Libni his son, Shimei his son, Uzzah his son,* ³⁰ *Shimea his son, Haggiah his son, and Asaiah his son.*

Verses 16-30 then provide the basic genealogies of the three clans of the Levites.

The Aaronic line of the Kohathites were the priests,
but the rest of the Kohathites, like Gershom and Merari,
were “ordinary” Levites.

The genealogies appear to be designed to get from the time of Moses
to the time of David,
which is the focus of verses 31-53.

The most curious name in this list is Samuel.

In 1 Samuel 1:1 we hear the genealogy of Samuel:

Samuel was the son of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu,
son of Zuph, an Ephrathite.

Since Elkanah was from the hill country of Ephraim,
Samuel is usually considered to be from Ephraim,
although the designation “Ephrathite” means “from Ephrathah”
which elsewhere in Scripture always refers to someone from Bethlehem.

But Chronicles says that Samuel was a Levite.

(Indeed, we know from Moses, Joshua, and Chronicles
that the Levites were given cities throughout Israel,
so it is entirely plausible that Elkanah was in fact a Levite).

And when you look at the list of names given in verses 26-28,
and compare them with the names in verses 33-35,
it looks very much like the list in 1 Samuel 1!

Of course, it is also possible that Samuel really was of the tribe of Ephraim,
and the Chronicler is connecting Samuel's genealogy to Levi
because Samuel became a priest – in spite of his non-Levitical parentage –
by his adoption into Eli's family.

So – *either* Samuel was a Levite born to a Levitical family in the hill country of Ephraim,
or Samuel was an Ephraimite who was adopted into the Levitical family of Eli.

Either way, Samuel wound up as a Levite,
and his descendents served in song before the tabernacle in David's day.

2. The Levites in the Time of David (v31-53)

Our second point is that the Levites unite Israel through their liturgical service in the temple.

a. The Service of Song (v31-48)

³¹*These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the LORD after the ark rested there.* ³²*They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting until Solomon built the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they performed their service according to their order.*

The Chronicler is very interested in the liturgical history of Israel.
Samuel-Kings gives us very little detail regarding the worship in Jerusalem,
but Chronicles provides a great deal of information.

But these Levites who served in the ministry of song
were essential for the unity of the people of God.

We have been spoiled by the printing press and modern literacy rates!
In ancient Israel, they had neither printing presses, nor high literacy!
We have no evidence for people owning their own private copy of the psalms.
When it says that "they ministered with song"
it means that they *sang* all the Psalms.

Yes, it appears that the people would have memorized some,
but while oral cultures do better at memorizing,
we have no *evidence* that would suggest that everyone sang all the Psalms!
And in fact, we have clear evidence right here in 1 Chronicles 6 (and elsewhere)
that it was the levitical singers who ministered with song.

The Levitical choir sang *in the place* of the people of God.
Incidentally, the early church was not that different from ancient Israel.
Some pastors worked hard to teach their people how to sing (or chant)
but the fact remained that most people did not have all the Psalms memorized.
So the cantor or choir would chant the Psalms (or hymns),

and the congregation would chant a response (or refrain).

Certain Psalms were very well known
(Psalm 104 was regularly sung in the evening in parts of the west;
while Psalm 141 was regularly sung in the east;
Augustine and many others taught their congregations to sing Psalm 42
for baptisms).

It is clear that in *some* congregations,
like in Milan during Ambrose's day,
the church sang beautifully together.

But in most places, the congregation would only have around 10-12 Psalms memorized,
along with a couple hymns and responses;
any other Psalms used in the service would have to be sung by a cantor or choir.

Of course, in the monasteries, where the monks and nuns memorized all 150 Psalms,
congregational singing took off!

And in the 16th century, with the printing press and rising literacy rates,
the reformers argued that the whole congregation should be the choir!

You could argue that modern technology (in the form of the printing press)
enabled the transformation of a Levitical and monastic ideal
into a congregational reality.

For the first time in the history of the church,
from the Creation of the world,
the whole congregation was able to sing *everything together*.

We'll come back to musical matters later in Chronicles –
but for now it is worth pointing out that
the men who served are themselves quite interesting:
Heman is said to be the son of Joel, the son of Samuel – the famous Samuel, the judge.

³³*These are the men who served and their sons. Of the sons of the Kohathites: Heman the singer the son of Joel, son of Samuel, ³⁴son of Elkanah, son of Jeroham, son of Eliel, son of Toah, ³⁵son of Zuph, son of Elkanah, son of Mahath, son of Amasai, ³⁶son of Elkanah, son of Joel, son of Azariah, son of Zephaniah, ³⁷son of Tahath, son of Assir, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah, ³⁸son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, son of Israel;*

Heman's brother was Asaph –
but don't think that "brother" means "close relative"
because Heman was a Kohathite and Asaph was a Gershomite
(in other words they are – at closest – 13th cousins eight times removed!)

³⁹and his brother Asaph, who stood on his right hand, namely, Asaph the son of Berechiah, son of Shimea, ⁴⁰son of Michael, son of Baaseiah, son of Malchijah, ⁴¹son of Ethni, son of Zerah, son of Adaiah, ⁴²son of Ethan, son of Zimmah, son of Shimei, ⁴³son of Jahath, son of Gershom, son of Levi.

Likewise, the son of Merari, Ethan, is equally distant.

⁴⁴On the left hand were their brothers, the sons of Merari: Ethan the son of Kishi, son of Abdi, son of Malluch, ⁴⁵son of Hashabiah, son of Amaziah, son of Hilkiah, ⁴⁶son of Amzi, son of Bani, son of Shemer, ⁴⁷son of Mahli, son of Mushi, son of Merari, son of Levi.

To give you an example,
my family left Scotland more than 300 years ago.

I am more closely related to my Scottish Wallace cousins,
than Ethan, Asaph, and Heman were!

I realize that they may have intermarried –
and so on their mother's side, they may be far closer!
But in terms of their paternal descent,
Ethan and Asaph and Heman
are only two generations closer to each other than to the Ishmaelites!

The Ishmaelites are 15th cousins – Ethan and Asaph are 13th cousins!

But in the order of Levites,
they are brothers!

And as they sing together as brothers dwelling in unity,
they demonstrate to Israel the unity of their brotherhood under God.

If you take the time to compare the genealogies at the beginning of the chapter (v16-30)
with the genealogies listed here (v31-48),
there are all sorts of discrepancies:

but given the way that the Chronicler thinks about relationships,
that's not particularly surprising!

The point of verses 31-48 is to show the relationship between the three main clans of singers:
Heman – in the middle,
with Asaph on his right, and Ethan on his left –
singing the praises of God in the temple.

⁴⁸*And their brothers the Levites were appointed for all the service of the tabernacle of the house of God.*

The Chronicler indicates that during the period of the judges
the Levitical service fell on hard times.
But David restored the Levites to their functions
as he prepared to build the temple.

b. The Line of the Aaronic Priests (v49-53)

⁴⁹*But Aaron and his sons made offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense for all the work of the Most Holy Place, and to make atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded.* ⁵⁰ *These are the sons of Aaron: Eleazar his son, Phinehas his son, Abishua his son,* ⁵¹ *Bukki his son, Uzzi his son, Zerahiah his son,* ⁵² *Meraioth his son, Amariah his son, Ahitub his son,* ⁵³ *Zadok his son, Ahimaaz his son.*

Verses 50-53 recount the Aaronic priests from Aaron to David
(using the same genealogy that we saw earlier in the chapter).
They are highlighted here
as a reminder of the various functions of the Levites in the liturgy.

The singers take up the main focus in verses 31-47,
but the rest of the Levites (verse 48)
and the Aaronic priests (verses 49-53) are not ignored.

Indeed, the duties of Aaron and his sons come into focus here:
making “offerings on the altar of burnt offering
and on the altar of incense for all the work of the Most Holy Place,
and to make atonement for Israel,
according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded.”

But in all this we see how it is not only in the person of the high priest –
but also *in his work* that he unites Israel.

And finally we hear about:

3. The Dwelling Places of Levi (v54-81)

We heard from Psalm 133 this morning,
how good and beautiful it is when brothers dwell together in unity.

The Levites were scattered throughout the tribes of Israel
as a means of reminding all Israel
that they are brothers.

Levi receives cities from each of his brothers,
so that through *Levi* the children of Israel might remain one.

In Exodus 13:1-2 God had required that all the firstborn of Israel should be consecrated to him.
The implication was that the firstborn of Israel would be “priests.”
(and in Exodus 24, it was the “young men”
who offered the burnt offerings and peace offerings –
since by Exodus 24, there still were no priests or Levites!)

But in Numbers 3:40-51 God told Moses to take the Levites in place of the firstborn of Israel.
So the Levites became the “replacements” for the firstborn of Israel.

The stood in the place of the firstborn.
(Think in terms of the Passover –
where the firstborn would have died, except for the blood of the lamb.
The Levites stand in the place of Israel’s firstborn for the rest of Israel’s history!)

And so throughout Israel’s history,
the Levites are given no separate inheritance in Israel:
instead they receive cities scattered throughout Israel.

And every time you would see a Levite in one of these towns,
you would be reminded that these “brothers”
were scattered all over Israel
as a reminder that we are to dwell together in unity.

a. The Aaronic Kohathites (v54-60)

⁵⁴These are their dwelling places according to their settlements within their borders: to the sons of Aaron of the clans of Kohathites, for theirs was the first lot, ⁵⁵to them they gave Hebron in the land of Judah and its surrounding pasturelands, ⁵⁶but the fields of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh. ⁵⁷To the sons of Aaron they gave the cities of refuge: Hebron, Libnah with its pasturelands, Jattir, Eshtemoa with its pasturelands, ⁵⁸Hilen with its pasturelands, Debir with its pasturelands, ⁵⁹Ashan with its pasturelands, and Beth-shemesh with its pasturelands; ⁶⁰and from the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon, Geba with its pasturelands, Alemeth with its pasturelands, and Anathoth with its pasturelands. All their cities throughout their clans were thirteen.

The Sons of Aaron receive 13 cities from Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin.
The rest of the Kohathites receive 10 cities in the western portion of Manasseh.
The Gershomites receive 13 cities from Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh.
The Merarites receive 12 cities from Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.
for a total of 48 cities.

The account in Chronicles follows Joshua 21 quite closely,
except there is no mention of the tribe of Dan!

All the tribes of Israel are included in the genealogies –
except Dan.

Dan is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 2:2 as one of the sons of Israel,
and 1 Chronicles 27:22 refers to the leaders of the tribe of Dan in David's day,
but here in the genealogies,
Dan is omitted.

Dan contributes no cities to the Levites (unlike Joshua 21, where they contributed four).

b. The Rest of the Levites (v61-65)

⁶¹ To the rest of the Kohathites were given by lot out of the clan of the tribe, out of the half-tribe, the half of Manasseh, ten cities. ⁶² To the Gershomites according to their clans were allotted thirteen cities out of the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and Manasseh in Bashan. ⁶³ To the Merarites according to their clans were allotted twelve cities out of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. ⁶⁴ So the people of Israel gave the Levites the cities with their pasturelands. ⁶⁵ They gave by lot out of the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin these cities that are mentioned by name.

c. The Cities of Refuge and Levitical Cities (v66-81)

i. Kohathite (v66-70)

⁶⁶ And some of the clans of the sons of Kohath had cities of their territory out of the tribe of Ephraim. ⁶⁷ They were given the cities of refuge: Shechem with its pasturelands in the hill country of Ephraim, Gezer with its pasturelands, ⁶⁸ Jokmeam with its pasturelands, Beth-horon with its pasturelands, ⁶⁹ Aijalon with its pasturelands, Gath-rimmon with its pasturelands, ⁷⁰ and out of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Aner with its pasturelands, and Bileam with its pasturelands, for the rest of the clans of the Kohathites.

Aijalon and Gath-rimmon (verse 69) in Joshua 21 are said to be part of Dan –
but that was back in Dan's original inheritance.
After Dan moved far to the north (Judges 17-18),
the original Danite cities were now part of Ephraim.

And so the Chronicler identifies the cities as Ephraimite –
because that was how *everyone* would have remembered them!

And the region where Dan moved *to* –
had originally not been part of the inheritance,
and so there were no cities there!

ii. Gershomites (v71-76)

⁷¹ To the Gershomites were given out of the clan of the half-tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan with its pasturelands and Ashtaroth with its pasturelands; ⁷² and out of the tribe of Issachar: Kedesh with its pasturelands, Daberath with its pasturelands, ⁷³ Ramoth with its pasturelands,

and Anem with its pasturelands; ⁷⁴out of the tribe of Asher: Mashal with its pasturelands, Abdon with its pasturelands, ⁷⁵Hukok with its pasturelands, and Rehob with its pasturelands; ⁷⁶and out of the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee with its pasturelands, Hammon with its pasturelands, and Kiriathaim with its pasturelands.

iii. Merarites (v77-81)

⁷⁷To the rest of the Merarites were allotted out of the tribe of Zebulun: Rimmono with its pasturelands, Tabor with its pasturelands, ⁷⁸and beyond the Jordan at Jericho, on the east side of the Jordan, out of the tribe of Reuben: Bezer in the wilderness with its pasturelands, Jahzah with its pasturelands, ⁷⁹Kedemoth with its pasturelands, and Mephaath with its pasturelands; ⁸⁰and out of the tribe of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead with its pasturelands, Mahanaim with its pasturelands, ⁸¹Heshbon with its pasturelands, and Jazer with its pasturelands.

There are differences between the list of cities in Joshua 21
and the list of cities here.

Many of the cities are the same,
but others are different.

How do we account for it?

Well, Joshua 21 explains the division of the land,
and the provision of these cities,
in terms of the original distribution in Joshua's day.

The fact that Dan is described as a western tribe,
and the four Danite cities come from the western region,
indicates that Joshua 21 was written at a fairly early date,
back when people remembered that Dan had originally settled in the west!

But 1 Chronicles 6 gives strong evidence for coming much later.

We don't know what sources the Chronicler had,
but it seems clear that his description of the land
(who lived where)
comes from the era of the divided kingdom.

Dan has disappeared into the far north,
and the Levitical cities have shifted here and there –
either the names have changed,
or, as is more likely,
some of the Levitical cities were destroyed by enemies,
and so the Levites were given other cities in their place.

But the purpose of the scattering of the Levites throughout Israel remains the same:
to demonstrate the unity of the people of God,
as they dwell together as brethren in the land.