

1 Chronicles Chapter 23

Verses 23:1 - 27:4: This labor-intensive project needed more than building materials. David marshaled his human resources and announced their division of labor as follows:

- (1) The Levites (23:1-32);
- (2) The priests (24:1-31);
- (3) The singers (25:1-31);
- (4) The gatekeepers (26:1-19);
- (5) The administrators (26:20-32);
- (6) The army (27:1-24); and
- (7) The leaders (27:25-34).

Remember, the original readers of Chronicles were the Jews, who returned from exile in Babylon and were rebuilding the destroyed temple. This would remind them of what their fathers' sin forfeited and how inferior their new temple was.

1 Chronicles 23:1 "So when David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel."

The description here of David as "old and full of days" is a sign of honor and places him among the ranks of other Old Testament men of faith, including Abraham (Gen. 25:8), and Moses (Deut. 34:7). The account does not elaborate on the coronation of Solomon as "king over Israel" or the attempts to seize the throne from him (1 Kings Chapters 1 and 2), but on the building of the temple by all Israel. A fuller account of Solomon's coronation is recorded (in Chapters 28 and 29).

For fuller narrative of Solomon's coronation and the attempts to seize his throne (see Chapters 28, and 29; 1 Kings 1:1 – 2:9; also see the note on 29:22).

Generally speaking, a king remains king, until he dies. David anointed his son, Solomon, king while he was still alive. He did this so there would be no question which of his sons was to reign in his stead. It was actually God who had chosen Solomon to be king. David was king over all twelve tribes of Israel, and so would Solomon be.

1 Chronicles 23:2 "And he gathered together all the princes of Israel, with the priests and the Levites."

Ordered them to be assembled, partly to acquaint them with his will and pleasure, that Solomon should succeed him in the kingdom. And partly to settle the order of the work and service of the temple; and therefore, these were convened.

"With the priests and Levites": To assign to them their respective places and offices.

These princes were all of David's sons. They included all of the heads of families as well. The Levites were all in the service of the LORD in some capacity or other.

Verses 3-5: David wanted to be sure that there was a system in place to accomplish everything God had in store for Israel. This numbering of the Levites was intended to help organize “the work” of the temple. It followed the guidelines given by Moses (Num. 4:1-3). Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, not Levi, became both the ultimate High Priest and the ultimate sacrifice (Heb. 7:11-14, 28).

1 Chronicles 23:3 "Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and upward: and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty and eight thousand."

“Thirty years and upward”: (Num. 4:3), established the age of recognized priests from 30 to 50 years of age. A 5 year apprenticeship began at 25 (Num. 8:24), and in some cases 20 (1 Chron. 23:24, 27). This number, 38,000, is 4 times greater than the early census in Moses’ time (Num. Chapters 4 and 26).

The Levites did not begin to serve the LORD, until they were thirty years old. This was, possibly, the reason they were not counted until they became this age. There was not much reason to count the Levitical tribe, because they did not go to war and they were not required to pay taxes.

1 Chronicles 23:4 "Of which, twenty and four thousand [were] to set forward the work of the house of the LORD; and six thousand [were] officers and judges:"

“Set forward”: The duties of these Levites are discussed (in 1 Chron. Chapter 24).

“Officers and judges”: This particular function is covered (in 1 Chron. 26:20-32).

We see that these 24,000 men were to supervise the work on the temple. We see 6,000 were officers and judges.

1 Chronicles 23:5 "Moreover four thousand [were] porters; and four thousand praised the LORD with the instruments which I made, [said David], to praise [therewith]."

“Porters” (1 Chron. 26-1:19), gives information on them.

“Praise” (1 Chron. Chapter 25), identifies and describes these musicians.

“Which I made”: David, a gifted musician was not only the maker, but the inventor of musical instruments (Amos 6:5).

The porters were keepers of the doors. They were stationed day and night to guard the doors. Earlier in these lessons, we got into the importance of the praise and worship conducted in the music and singing.

1 Chronicles 23:6 "And David divided them into courses among the sons of Levi, [namely], Gershon, Kohath, and Merari."

“Courses”: The Levites were divided among the 3 groups with distinct duties, just as they were in Moses’ day (Num. 3:14-37), and in Ezra’s day (1 Chron. 6:16-30). The family of Gershon (23:7-11), Kohath (23:12-20), and Merari (23:21-23), are each discussed.

All Levites were in the service of the LORD. Each family had their uniqueness. Kohath was the father of the priests and high priests. Merari was more associated with the musical ministry. The descendants of Gershon were keepers of the treasury in the time of David.

1 Chronicles 23:7 "Of the Gershonites [were], Laadan, and Shimei."

(Chronicles 23:7-11), give the names of nine Gershomite houses, or guilds. David’s “courses” of Levites were formed according to the natural divisions already existing. I.e., they coincided with the father-houses. They were doubtless twenty-four in number, like those of their brethren the musicians (1 Chron. 25:31), and like the priestly classes (1 Chron. 24:4). So states Josephus.

"Laadan, and Shimei" (see 1 Chron. 6:2), where the two principal branches of the Gershonites are called “Libni” and Shimei. “Laadan” is hardly the same as Libni, but a branch prominent in the time of David.

1 Chronicles 23:8 "The sons of Laadan; the chief [was] Jehiel, and Zetham, and Joel, three."

Not his immediate sons, but some that descended from him. These are named in two groups: viz., first, the three mentioned in this verse. Secondly, the three named in (1 Chron. 23:9), and called “sons of Shimei.” This Shimei is not the same as the Shimei of (1 Chron. 23:7), whose subdivisions are not given till (1 Chron. 23:10).

1 Chronicles 23:9 "The sons of Shimei; Shelomith, and Haziël, and Haran, three. These [were] the chief of the fathers of Laadan."

Not him that was the son of Gershon, but a descendant of Laadan, his son, as Kimchi observes.

"Shelomith, and Haziël, and Haran, these were the chief of the fathers of Laadan; of the families that sprang from him.

1 Chronicles 23:10 "And the sons of Shimei [were], Jahath, Zina, and Jeush, and Beriah. These four [were] the sons of Shimei."

The son of Gershon, and brother of Laadan, according to Kimchi, which seems right.

"Were Jahath, Zina, and Jeush, and Beriah; these four were the sons of Shimei; descendants of his in the times of David.

1 Chronicles 23:11 "And Jahath was the chief, and Zizah the second: but Jeush and Beriah had not many sons; therefore they were in one reckoning, according to [their] father's house."

The prince and head of a family.

"And Ziza the second; the same with Zina in (1 Chron. 23:10), and is there read Ziza in the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions.

"But Jeush and Beriah had not many sons; so as to constitute distinct families.

"Therefore they were in one reckoning, according to their father's house; made one family with their brethren.

The verses above are the genealogy of Gershon.

1 Chronicles 23:12 "The sons of Kohath; Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, four."

The second son of Levi.

"Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, four (see Exodus 6:18).

The Amram mentioned here, was the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

1 Chronicles 23:13 "The sons of Amram; Aaron and Moses: and Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons for ever, to burn incense before the LORD, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name for ever."

A son of Kohath (1 Chron. 23:2).

"And Aaron was separated; from the children of Israel (Exodus 28:1).

"That he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons for ever": By a holy use of them, and keeping them from all unholy and profane uses. And this they were to do as long as the Aaronic priesthood lasted.

"To burn incense before the Lord": In the holy place, on the altar of incense; which none but priests descended from Aaron might do.

"To minister unto him": Both at the altar of burnt offering and of incense; and the High Priest in the Holy of Holies.

"And to bless his name for ever, or "in his name"; that is, the people in his name (see Num. 6:23).

Aaron was the first High Priest. His family would be the priests and High Priests in the service of the LORD. The priest burnt incense before the LORD. We have already mentioned that this symbolizes the prayers of the saints. Basically, he represented the people to God and God to the people. Moses we know was specially chosen of God to be the deliverer of Israel. He was the one whom God decided to give His law through.

1 Chronicles 23:14 "Now [concerning] Moses the man of God, his sons were named of the tribe of Levi."

Once again, various genealogies are recorded to remind the people of Israel of their spiritual heritage.

The term "man of God" stresses the nature of the relationship between God and His servant: he is God's man. The term is often used also to designate a prophet (see the note on 1 Sam. 9:6-11). The description of Moses as "the man of God" should give readers pause as they contemplate what God might say of them.

"The man of God" was used five times in speaking of Moses. Moses was chosen of God before birth, to lead the people of Israel out of bondage, and to the Promised Land. His relationship with God was on a one to one relationship. He was of the tribe of Levi, but his sons were not priests.

1 Chronicles 23:15 "The sons of Moses [were], Gershom, and Eliezer."

(See Exodus 18:3).

These two sons were born to Moses and Zipporah, while Moses was in exile.

1 Chronicles 23:16 "Of the sons of Gershom, Shebuel [was] the chief."

"Chief": Hebrew, head. The statement that "Shebuel was the chief" implies that Gershom had other sons not mentioned here, as being reckoned members of the clan the sons of Gershom. Shebuel is called Shubael in (1 Chron. 24:20).

1 Chronicles 23:17 "And the sons of Eliezer [were], Rehabiah the chief. And Eliezer had none other sons; but the sons of Rehabiah were very many."

The word "were" (became), ought not to be in italics in the text, as it is expressed in the Hebrew.

"The chief": (head), means founder and eponym of the clan the sons of Rehabiah.

"And Eliezer had none other sons": Literally, And there became not to Eliezer any sons, and the sons of Rehabiah had multiplied exceedingly (unto height 1 Chron. 22:5). The clan Rehabiah was very populous.

"Thus (1 Chron. 23:16-17), the descendants of Moses were comprised in two father-houses, or clans, viz., Shebuel and Rehabiah.

1 Chronicles 23:18 "Of the sons of Izhar; Shelomith the chief."

Another son of Kohath, the son of Levi (1 Chron. 23:12).

"Shelomith the chief": The principal descendant of Izhar at this time.

1 Chronicles 23:19 "Of the sons of Hebron; Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, and Jekameam the fourth."

A third son of Kohath (1 Chron. 23:12).

"Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, and Jekameam the fourth": Of the sons of Uzziel; another son of Kohath (1 Chron. 23:12).

"Micah the first, Jesiah the second": The sons of Merari, Mahli and Mushi (Exodus 6:19).

"The sons of Mahli, Eleazar and Kish (of whom see 1 Chron. 24:28).

1 Chronicles 23:20 "Of the sons of Uzziel; Micah the first, and Jesiah the second."

(Compare 1 Chronicles 24:24). Nine Kohathite families seem to be here reckoned.

1 Chronicles 23:21 "The sons of Merari; Mahli, and Mushi. The sons of Mahli; Eleazar, and Kish."

(See Exodus 6:19, Num. 3:33 and 1 Chron. 6:19).

1 Chronicles 23:22 "And Eleazar died, and had no sons, but daughters: and their brethren the sons of Kish took them."

Thus, his house merged in that of the sons of Kish, who married his daughters according to the Law (Numbers 36:6-9). The sons of Mahli then, were represented in David's day by the house of Kish (See 1 Chron. 24:29).

1 Chronicles 23:23 "The sons of Mushi; Mahli, and Eder, and Jeremoth, three."

The other son of Merari.

"Mahli": So called from his uncle, his father's brother.

"And Eder and Jerimoth, three": Mentioned again (1 Chron. 24:30).

It is interesting to note at this point, that the houses of the Levites had sprung to twenty-four houses. There were 11 Kohathite families, 9 of the Gershonite, and 4 of the families of Merari. The daughters, were taken in marriage by their near kinsmen. They remained Levites.

1 Chronicles 23:24 "These [were] the sons of Levi after the house of their fathers; [even] the chief of the fathers, as they were counted by number of names by their polls, that did the work for the service of the house of the LORD, from the age of twenty years and upward."

Soon after the first census, David ordered another census of the Levites. Because of the need for more help in the temple, this one counted men who were at least 20 years and older (23:3, Num. Chapter 4). Moses had made a similar age adjustment (Num. 8:23-24).

(See note on 23:3).

The twenty years here, is most of the time spoken of as thirty years. I would assume thirty years to be the age for taking on duties as priests and high priest, because Jesus' formal ministry began when He was thirty. All of the Levites were in service of the LORD. The Kohathites through Aaron were the priests.

Verses 25-32: The duties of the non-priestly Levites are enumerated in their duties to provide the temple service in support of the priest who descended from Levi, through Kohath, through Aaron, through Eleazar and Ithamar (1 Chron. 6:1-3). The original duties of the 3 families are given specifically (in Num. 3:25, 31, 36-37).

1 Chronicles 23:25 "For David said, The LORD God of Israel hath given rest unto his people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem for ever:

As a reason why he ordered a new account to be taken.

"The Lord God of Israel hath given rest unto his people": From all their enemies round about, and settled rest in the land, so that there was no danger of being carried captive, as they were time after time in the days of the Judges. And whereby they became more numerous.

"That they may dwell in Jerusalem for ever": Where the temple would always continue, and not be removed, as the Ark and tabernacle had been, and where all Israel would appear three times in the year continually.

There would be no more journeying with the tabernacle. The place of worship would be established forever in Jerusalem. Three times a year, all of the Hebrew men were to come to Jerusalem to worship. The women came also, when they did not have a baby to care for. The central place of worship would be in the temple in Jerusalem.

1 Chronicles 23:26 "And also unto the Levites; they shall no [more] carry the tabernacle, nor any vessels of it for the service thereof."

Or with respect to them.

"They shall no more carry the tabernacle: On their shoulders, from place to place, as they had done.

"Nor any vessels of it for the service thereof": And so, the service of it did not require men at their full strength, but such as were but twenty years of age might be employed in it.

Part of the duties of the Levites had been to carry the tabernacle, and set it up at each spot God chose. Each Levite had a particular job to do. Now we see that the tabernacle would not be moved again. Those who were in the service of moving it would now be assigned new jobs.

1 Chronicles 23:27 "For by the last words of David the Levites [were] numbered from twenty years old and above:"

(See note on 23:3).

We are, probably, looking over some minor detail here, that would explain it, such as they could have been in training when they were twenty, and actually began to minister when they were thirty.

1 Chronicles 23:28 "Because their office [was] to wait on the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of the LORD, in the courts, and in the chambers, and in the purifying of all holy things, and the work of the service of the house of God;"

A clear division of duties is detailed here. The Levites in general were to assist those descended directly from "Aaron." Those in the line of Aaron would continue to lead in the priestly ministries, especially in the worship "service" (compare Num. chapter 18). As for the rest, in addition to their musical ministries (compare 15:16-24), many of the Levites would be occupied with the care of the equipment and physical facilities.

We see that the twenty year old's were like apprentice workers who were serving those who were ministering. The young people did the menial labor.

o1 Chronicles 23:29 "Both for the showbread, and for the fine flour for meat offering, and for the unleavened cakes, and for [that which is baked in] the pan, and for that which is fried, and for all manner of measure and size;"

Also to make and get that ready every week for the priests to set on the showbread table, when they took off the other that had stood a week (see 1 Chron. 9:32).

"And for the fine flour for meat offering, and for the unleavened cakes, and for that which is baked in the pan, and for that which is fried": To deliver out the flour of which these several things were made (see 1 Chron. 9:31 and Lev. 2:1).

"And for all manner of measures and size": As the hin and the ephah, and the several parts of them for things both liquid and dry, which were in their keeping, and according to which they gave out the proper quantity of oil, and wine, and fine flour, upon occasion.

This is saying, that much of the cooking of the bread and the preparation of the meat and flour offerings were done by these young Levites.

1 Chronicles 23:30 "And to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even;"

The temple was built to provide a place where the people of God could "praise the LORD ... morning ... even" (Exodus 29:38-41). The people had only recently returned to Israel and needed to be instructed about how to worship God.

We remember from a previous lesson, that some of the Levites were to sing and play instruments in the temple and around the temple. They led the praise and worship in song. They would lead praise also, where they would lift their hands in praise to the LORD and praise and worship the LORD.

1 Chronicles 23:31 "And to offer all burnt sacrifices unto the LORD in the sabbaths, in the new moons, and on the set feasts, by number, according to the order commanded unto them, continually before the LORD:"

This was the work of the priests to offer such sacrifices, and not the Levites. But the meaning is, according to the Targum, and so Kimchi, that these not only sung the praises of God morning and evening, but at all times when burnt offerings were offered to the Lord. Besides, some of them helped the priests at such times in slaying the sacrifices, and bringing them to the altar. And especially their service was requisite,

"In the sabbaths, in the new moons, and on the set feasts, by number": Because, besides the daily sacrifices, there were additional offerings at those times.

"According to the order commanded unto them continually before the Lord (see Num. 28:1).

The priests did the actual sacrificing to the LORD. The other Levites could help with minor preparations for the sacrifices. The priests were to keep the Sabbaths, new moons, and the feasts ever on the minds of the people. The priests and the high priest were the spiritual leaders of these people.

1 Chronicles 23:32 "And that they should keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the holy [place], and the charge of the sons of Aaron their brethren, in the service of the house of the LORD."

That no unclean persons entered into it, and that none of the vessels were carried out of it; this was the business of the porters.

"And the charge of the Holy Place": Of things that belonged unto it, the vessels in it, and what was requisite for it, and used there.

"And the charge of the sons of Aaron their brethren": The priests, whatever they should command them to do.

"In the service of the house of the Lord": In any part and branch of it before specified.

Just as in a church, the ministering body does not just pertain to the pastor, there were many ministering functions in the temple. The High Priest and the priests were the family of Aaron set aside and made holy for their service, but all the Levites ministered in some capacity.

1 Chronicles Chapter 23 Questions

1. When did David make Solomon king?
2. What was unusual about this?
3. Who had actually chosen Solomon to be king?
4. Who were the princes that were gathered?
5. How many Levites above thirty were numbered?
6. Why was there not much reason to number the Levitical tribe?
7. How many were to supervise the work on the temple?
8. How many were officers and judges?
9. What was the job of the porters?
10. How many were involved in praise on instruments?
11. What were the three families of the tribe of Levi?
12. Kohath was the father of the _____ and _____.
13. The descendants of Gershom were keepers of the _____ in the time of David.
14. Amram was the father of whom?
15. Who was the first High Priest?

16. What did the burning of incense before the LORD symbolize?
17. What did the High Priest do, basically?
18. What was Moses called in verse 14?
19. Who were sons of Moses by Zipporah, while he was in exile?
20. How many houses had the Levites become, at the time of this lesson?
21. What would change about their worship, after the temple was built?
22. What were these 20 year olds to do?
23. Much of the cooking was done by whom?
24. Who actually did the sacrifices?
25. How does this resemble our church today?