

Palestine for the Young - the Tribe of Levi

by Andrew Bonar

Andrew Bonar's sermon explores the significance of the Tribe of Levi, their role in Israel, and the blessings they received from God despite their initial curse.

Scripture: Genesis 49:7, Exodus 32:26, Deuteronomy 33:8-11, Joshua 21:1-42, 1 Chronicles 6:54-81, Matthew 5:14-16, John 10:11, Romans 12:1, Hebrews 7:23-28, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "The Role of the Levites", "Jesus as the High Priest"

Description

Andrew Bonar emphasizes the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy regarding the Tribe of Levi, highlighting their unique role as servants of God scattered throughout Israel. Unlike other tribes, the Levites were given cities not to possess but to dwell in, serving as spiritual leaders and maintainers of worship across the land. Bonar illustrates how their dispersion turned a curse into a blessing, allowing them to spread God's influence and teachings everywhere. He draws parallels between the Levites' responsibilities and the ultimate priesthood of Jesus, who fulfills the role of the true High Priest. The sermon concludes with a call to recognize the blessings of being aligned with Christ, the ultimate source of spiritual inheritance.

Transcript

The prophecy of Jacob regarding Levi was remarkably fulfilled : "I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel" (Gen. 49. 7). You have to search for their dwellings in every corner of the land. They were scattered and divided over all Israel; for they got forty-eight cities, taken out of all the other tribes, to dwell in, not to possess. They did not rule these cities, nor were they theirs in the same sense as cities belonged to others; they had them only as habitations, with an assigned portion of the neighbouring fields around the cities for their flocks and cattle. We read the list of these cities at full length in 1 Chron. 6. 54-81, and more generally in Josh. 21. "These are their dwelling places," says the writer of the Chronicles; and then he adds, "throughout their castles." It should be, "at their inclosures," for the word has nothing in it to suggest greatness, far less baronial mansions, such as studded our country in old days. The Levites had nothing in common with the abbots and other dignitaries of the church of Rome. The Levites were simple men of God, assuming no prerogatives, and living really in the service of God. The word for "castles" is properly "inclosures," and speaks of localities marked off for their use. Probably there would be squares of building, or villages, occupied by them, and some of the cities were wholly peopled by their families.

It is very pleasant to look upon these quiet resting-places whereby provision was made to keep up spiritual light and life throughout all the coasts of Israel. It was the Lord's appointment and arrangement.

Judah gave Hebron (where the men of Levi might often recall Caleb and learn to "follow the Lord fully ") a City of Refuge; Libnah, also Jattir, Eshtemoa, Hilen, Ashan, Debir, the city for which Achsah won by petition the upper and nether springs, so teaching us to pray to our heavenly Father; Beth-shemesh also and Jutta, where some say that Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, resided.

Benjamin gave up Geba, Alemoth, Anathoth, where Jeremiah wept and prayed, and Gibeon, ever to be remembered for the Lord hearkening so to the voice of a man.

The tribe of Dan provided Ajalon, the spot over which the moon stayed its course when Joshua prayed; Eltekeh also, and Gibbethon.

From Ephraim they got Shechem, a City of Refuge, where too was Joshua's Oak of Witness when he adjured Israel to cleave to the Lord, and when Levi might remember their father's sin that had so scattered them (Gen.34.); Gezer, Jokmeam (" the gathering of the people," called also Kibzaiin, "the two heaps"), Bethhoron, and Aijalon.

The half-tribe of Manasseh gave Gathrimmon, Aner, Bileam, and Taanach, fraught with its memories of Deborah and Barak.

Issachar furnished Kedesh, or Kishion, Daberath, Ramoth, or Jarmuth, Anem, the same as En-gannim, the city of gardens, in the plain of Jezreel.

Asher gave up Mashal (" the weighty saying" is its meaning), Abdon (" service" is its meaning), Hukkok, and Rehob.

Naphtali gave Kedesh, the City of Refuge in Mount Naphtali, with all its interesting associations and scenery; Hammon, where warm baths were found, and Kirjathaim, or Kartan.

From Zebulun they got Rimmon, and Nahallal-Tabor, a town near the famous Mount Tabor; so that under its shadow their cattle and flocks pastured, and themselves meditated and taught.

Beyond Jordan, the half-tribe of Manasseh supplied another City of Refuge for Levi to garrison (so to speak), Golan; and also Ashtaroth, once dedicated so specially to the goddess Astarte, but now to be wholly the Lord's city.

Gad furnished Ramoth-Gilead, the City of Refuge, Mahanaim, so fragrant with the memory of Jacob's convoy of angels, afterwards with David's sorrows and joys, Heshbon, so full of the past history of Israel's first coming into the land, and Jazer.

Last of all, Reuben furnished Bezer, the sixth City of Refuge, to be kept open by Levi, and Jahzah, where Sihon perished; Kedemoth also, and Mephaath.

Thus God turned Levi's curse into a blessing to all Israel; for thus they were dispersed, in terms of the threatening, and yet made instruments of good, teaching and living for God all over the land. A network of Levitical influence was spread over both sides of Jordan, from Dan to Beersheba, from Hermon to the river Arnon. Every district had some among them whose presence and words told of Jehovah's temple, and of the sacrifices of atonement which it was their duty and privilege to commend to all the people. Thus was borne a living testimony everywhere through the land to the value, importance, and necessity of the typical institution, God's special "statutes."

The curse was turned into a blessing to themselves also; for theirs was the high privilege of handling holy things more than other men. "The sacrifices of the Lord were their inheritance" not only in the common way of being part of their subsistence but in the far higher sense, as understood by the spiritual among them, of having Jehovah, who revealed himself in the sacrifices, as their soul's portion and joy.

Here is the blessing pronounced on them by Moses (Deut 33. 8-11): "Let thy Urim and thy Thummim be with thy Holy One." The breastplate, like the ark of the covenant, had the Law within its folds, and this Law, "the Urim and Thummim," light and perfection in very deed. Jacob says to Levi; "Let the breastplate worn by the priest of thy tribe be committed by thee to the keeping of the Holy One - that Holy One whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah." Remember thy failure there: thine is but a typical priesthood and service; look up to thy Holy One as the true Priest. He then goes on, appealing at one time to Levi, at another to the Lord. "Ever remember, O Levi, that day in thy history which was the turning-point to thee; the day when the Lord reversed the curse and gave thee the blessing; the day when at the foot of Horeb, thou didst take the Lord's side" (Exodus 32.26). Lord, this is he who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen them, neither did acknowledge brethren, nor know his own children; for they have observed thy words and kept thy covenant.

Let them teach Jacob thy judgments and Israel thy law!

Let them put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice on thine altar.

Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands;

Smite through the loins of them that rise up against him,

And of them that hate him, that they rise not again !"

If such the blessing of the typical priestly ones, what may be said of the true priest and Levite that fulfils all, Jesus! He is our Prophet to teach us how the Father is pleased with us in him; he puts before God the sweet incense of his merit, and the great sacrifice of his suffering unto death. The Lord accepts the work of his hands, all his obedience, and all that he undertook. Whoever rejects or resists him must perish, never to rise again. Happy they who are one with this Priest and Minister of the true Tabernacle! In the very highest sense "the Lord is their inheritance."

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