

# Levitical Ministry - Part 1 of 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the significance of the Levitical ministry in both the Old and New Testaments, emphasizing the call for believers to uphold God's testimony through sanctification and holiness.*

**Duration:** 49:10

**Scripture:** Malachi 2:4, Malachi 3:1, Revelation 1:2-9

**Topics:** "Ministry"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the significance of the Levi tribe in the Bible and how it relates to the church. The Levi tribe represents the principle and meaning of the history of Levi summed up in Jesus Christ. Jesus overcame the corruptor and the tenter, and his victory is deposited with the churches. The speaker emphasizes the importance of the church being a sanctified and separated people for the Lord, and how the Lord's discipline is necessary for this purpose. The sermon concludes with the speaker expressing a burden for the Lord to carry his testimony further.

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## Transcript

Now will you follow with me, thoughtfully through a number of places and passages in the Word of God, beginning in the book of Exodus, chapter thirty-two, Exodus, chapter thirty-two, at verse twenty-five, and when Moses saw that the people were broken loose, for Aaron had let them loose for a derision among their enemies, then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. In the book of Numbers, chapter eight, at verse nine, Thou shalt present the Levites before the tent of meeting.

Thou shalt assemble the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and Thou shalt present the Levites before the Lord. The children of Israel shall lay their hands upon the Levites, and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord for a wave offering on behalf of the children of Israel, that it may be theirs to do the service of the Lord. The Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks, and offer Thou the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering unto the Lord, to make atonement for the Levites.

And Thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron and before his sons, and offer them for a wave offering. In the first book of the Chronicles, chapter fifteen, verse two, then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites, for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him forever. Verse twelve, And said unto them, Ye are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites.

Sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye bear it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not according to the ordinance. So the priests and the Levites sanctify themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel.

Children of the Levites bear the ark of God upon their shoulders, with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord. Prophecies of Malachi, prophecies of Malachi, chapter two, verse four. Ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant may be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.

My covenant was with him of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear, and he feared me, and stood in awe of me. Chapter three. Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.

The Lord whom ye seek will suddenly come to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant whom ye desire, behold, he cometh, saith the Lord of hosts. But who can abide the day of his coming? Who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soup, and he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver. They shall offer unto the Lord offerings in righteousness.

Book of the Revelation. Revelation chapter one, verse two. Who bear witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ? Verse five.

From Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, firstborn of the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth, unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood, he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father. To him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Verse nine.

I, John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. You have been thoughtful in passing from one passage to another through them all. You will have discerned a common link and basis in every one.

The Old Testament links in the chain of the history and ministry of the Levites in relation to the Lord's testimony. None but the Levites ought to carry the ark of the testimony. Those passages lead us over into the New Testament and right at the end we find ourselves once more in the presence of this central thing, God's mind and interest, the testimony of Jesus.

And it is significant, important to be noted, that we pass straight on from chapter one of the Revelation into what is in chapters two and three concerning the overcomers. The message to every church and in every case, the issue is to him that overcometh. It seems perfectly clear that this whole matter right through the scriptures is a matter of that service of peculiar importance and value to the Lord, the bearing of his testimony.

It is that which is called the service of God. If we want to know what the Levites really are in representation and spiritual significance, that is made perfectly clear for us in the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation. The churches were brought into being by God for the testimony of Jesus.

That is, I think, beyond dispute. They are, wherever they are, meant to be the vessels of that testimony. But here, in these representative churches of the whole dispensation, in these first chapters of the

Revelation, we find the churches in general failing in the matter of the testimony of Jesus.

Perhaps we have not been sufficiently impressed with this fact that the book opens with the emphasis upon the testimony of Jesus. Really, the introduction to the whole book is that very phrase. John tells us quite clearly that he was where he was, and that means that what he saw and what he set down in writing in Patmos related to the testimony of Jesus.

He says that quite emphatically and quite clearly. It was for the testimony of Jesus. That phrase governs this book on its first page, runs right the way through the book.

You can only understand the whole of the book of the Revelation if you see that everything there is centered in this that is called the testimony of Jesus. That is the explanation. Everything is accounted for by that.

Then, when that is laid down, the foundation and the introduction to the whole book. The first movement of the Spirit. I was in the Spirit.

The first movement of the Spirit is to the churches which, as we have said, were brought into being for the testimony of Jesus. That is what the Levites came into being for. Their whole history, right the way through, related to the testimony.

In type and figure, of course, in the Old Testament as represented by the Ark of the Covenant or the Ark of the Testimony. In spiritual meaning, it's the same in both Testaments. They came into being as a people right at the very center of the Lord's people in relation to the Lord's testimony.

You want to know what the essential service of the Lord is? It is that. It is the bearing and maintaining and carrying forward of the testimony of Jesus in the history of this world. I repeat, the Levites came right in for that very purpose.

And it is that that explains their existence and their history. I go back again, that if you want to know what the Levites represent in this dispensation, in our own day, they are presented to us in those who overcome. If it is true that the purpose of the churches was to be vessels of the testimony of Jesus wherever they are, then when the churches are approached and in every case, in every case, the final word is to him that overcometh, it is, I think, unmistakably clear and obvious that it is in such people, those who overcome, that you have the Levitical principle, service and purpose carried on, carried forward.

They are the people who are put in trust with the testimony. That is clear in both old and new lessons. They are the people who in the first place and in the last place are the people who react against all departure from what is called the testimony of Jesus.

They are the people in whom God's full thought concerning his church is represented. Saying these things, I am saying a great deal supported, backed up by the word of God. Whenever the Lord was going to take a new step, whenever a crisis was reached in the onward march of God in eternal history, the Lord called for the Levites to come to the fore and to sanctify themselves.

They are the people of the crisis and of the crises all the way through. We could say that the Lord was at a loss and a disadvantage when the Levites were out of their place and out of their condition. The Lord was unable to go on until the Levites came into their place and sanctified themselves.

That I think is clear if I only touch on one or two of the instances of which we have read. We do recognize that a very serious crisis was reached there at Sinai. Moses was in the mount and as we have read the people broke loose.

And that is a tremendously impressive bracketed sentence. They would be made a derision among their enemy. We can see through that.

There is one thing that the enemy and all the hosts of enemies in the heavenlies are set upon, it is to make the church a derision in this universe. A derision. The universe could sneer at it and say, That is your church, is it? That is your church.

When they had broken loose and everything in that onward march of God from Egypt to the land was brought to a standstill, the crisis turned upon the Levites. The prospect opened up through the Levites. There could be no movement forward.

Everything was in suspense until the Levites came forward and took up this issue of a derision among their enemies. They took responsibility to answer that challenge. To deal with that thing and get it out of the way.

The people of God should go on. Passing over all those centuries to the time of David, another crisis in the onward movement of God has been reached. Testimony is to be brought to Jerusalem.

Know of David's unfortunate, impulsive action. Forgetfulness making the Philistine cart for the testimony. Creating a very link with this world.

And opening the door to death. Everything again brought to a standstill. The ark was in the house of Abinadab a long time.

Then David was exercised before the Lord about this whole thing. When he had got over his offendedness with the Lord. Dear friends, the Lord's dealings with us sometimes can bring about a controversy between us and the Lord.

Until we get through that, there's nothing going to happen. The Lord does not do things without a reason. He does not bring everything up short and bring in judgment and discipline without a very good reason.

Very often we take the whole thing personally and are disaffected toward the Lord. David was grieved with the Lord that day. Well, David, you'll have to get rid of that.

However long it takes before the Lord will move on. However, David being the man that he was, with a heart for God, searched the matter out. Had the right kind of exercise about it all.

And found it in the Word. A place you'll always find it in the Word. Somewhere it's there.

It's there the answer to all our difficulties and problems and controversies. It's there somewhere clear and straight. And as David was exercised before the Lord, turning over the pages of the Word, he came on it.

And right on it, the answer to everything. None ought to bear the ark save the Levites. When the Levites came into their place, were sanctified and resumed their work.

Things went on. I just take those two instances which are sufficient to indicate this. That every forward movement, every fresh advance in the great purpose of God is bound up with this Levitical idea.

Principle and people. You will not challenge me, I'm sure, on this matter of the churches in Revelation. Was there a crisis? The Lord was saying, in effect, quite definitely, positively, I can't go on any further with you.

Indeed, I'll have to remove your lampstand out of its place. We just cannot go on. We've come to a crisis.

We've come to a standstill. We can go no further. If there is to be any future, it will be with those who take up the Levitical principle of sanctification, of holiness amongst the Lord's people.

And with them the future rests to him that overcometh. Will I? Will I? Will I? See, the towardness of the Lord is there. And I feel that we are right in saying those who are in those chapters referred to as those who overcome are the people who spiritually and actually step right into the place and meaning and service of the Levites.

So let us make it perfectly clear before we go any further that while in the old dispensation the Levites were a tribe, were a people by themselves, a separate community in a sense. They only embodied, as all other things in the old dispensation embodied, a spiritual truth which belongs to all the dispensations and which is the law of all God's movement forward to his end. Today the Levites are not a separate class, a separate people, an association, an institution, a fellowship or anything like that.

Today the Levites are those people of God who do what the Levites of the Old Testament did in a spiritual way. They are the people who are the embodiment of all that thought and purpose of God and whose hearts are given to debt and who are prepared to react against everything that threatens that, that assails that. And it is usually, as we find in the Old and the New, it is usually a matter of corruption, corruptions.

Constantly in the Old Testament the Levites had to sanctify themselves. Look in the book of Ezra for instance, how the Levites had to sanctify themselves for this service of the Lord. A sanctified people.

It is impressive, I think, significant again, that John the Baptist was said to go before the face of the Lord and that the result of his ministry would be to prepare a people sanctified for the Lord. To prepare a people, or that there should be a prepared people for the Lord. Now that is the principle of the Levite.

The Old Testament and the New Testament meet in John the Baptist. The book of the prophecies of Malachi, my messenger sent before my face to prepare my way before me, has on the authority of our Lord himself its fulfillment in John the Baptist. This is Elijah.

This is Elijah, if you will receive it. Going before the face of the Lord, preparing the way of the Lord and the preparation of a people, or securing of a people prepared for the Lord. Then what? Mark's Gospel.

Jesus began to be thirty years of age. So he is, so to speak, precipitated onto the platform, onto the stage. Jesus began to be about thirty years of age, entering on his ministry.

It was the year, the age of the Levites beginning his ministry. See how we can gather around this from all directions, all connections, to make it clear, if it needs making clear, that the Lord's testimony, the onward movement of God, reaching out his full end, rests with a people who embody all that is meant by the Levite. Well, if we've got that background, we are able to go on.

The thing which the Levite or the Levites in all times represent is a people sanctified for the Lord. Set apart for the Lord. Holy the Lord.

When the general mass of the Lord's people, who are the Lord's people, are not like that. The Lord cannot go on until he has got in the midst of them a people like that. He must have that which does represent his mind.

He's not going on. He's not going on unless he has something which answers to his mind, though it be in the midst of his people. That is where he will go on.

He demands that. A people set apart for the Lord. That opens up one line of very instructive teaching.

Right through the scripture, it introduces us to that whole course of God reacting, reacting to situations by the Levite, or by this principle of the Levite. You see, where they first came in, as we have read in Exodus 32, see what had happened. Moses had gone up into the mountain.

It was a way too long for the people's patience. And as it is put, they broke loose. They cast off restraint.

They evidently, evidently under the council instruction of Aaron, made that calf. Of what? Of what? The golden calf. The gold.

The gold that was to be for the sanctuary in which God was to have the whole place. The whole place. There broke in that day the evil powers which said in effect, God shall not have that place.

We will have it. And we will take the very gold that is intended for God and make it the basis and instrument of our worship. It is very difficult, dear friends, to fail to see that behind all this is this persistent breaking in from that evil world, the powers of evil against God's throne, against God having everything, at cost, if need be, and to draw it away from God, take it from Him.

Well, it was the Levites who took the stand over that, who, whether they understood all that it meant or not, we don't know, but it was the Levites who in effect said, No. No. We will not permit of anything to be taken from the Lord.

The Lord is to have His rights in fullness. We stand for that at any cost. At any cost.

It proved to be a very costly thing because, as you know, they had the command of Moses to take the sword against their own kin. Yes. And their own families.

Amongst their own children. Brothers. A very costly thing.

But they did it. They evidently did see the seriousness of this breaking in. Yes.

And their own families. Amongst their own children. Brothers.

A very costly thing. But they did it. They evidently did see the seriousness of this breaking in of evil and evil forces and what it implied.

This touch of corruption. This touch of corruption. For that's what it was.

It was spiritual fornication. They saw something of the meaning of it. And that day, all the sons of Levi said to that, No.

Positively and utterly no. God made His covenant that day with Levi. Later took the tribe of Levi and set them apart as the ministers of the sanctuary to be in close touch with himself in relation to all his purpose in his people.

Want to know what a Levite is? That's a Levite to begin with. To begin with. But oh, tragedy of all tragedies.

The enemy himself said very well. Very well. The Levites draw this upon themselves.

Then the Levites must be the focal point of our attention and of our activity. It's one constant history of the Levites, the Levites being corrupted and put out of their place, defiled, to arrest the whole movement of God. And I have said, call every time God wanted to go further was to bring the Levites into a new sanctification, place of sanctification.

Holiness unto the Lord. And when that was done, at any time, then the movement went on. God went forward.

Well, I could pile up the evidence, the data, the material, on this principle, this Levitical principle. And I think that's enough to begin with. This is a people in the midst of God's people who, whatever the cost, and with an utterness for God, stand for His rights and the fullness of His thought and purpose concerning His people.

I say again, they are not a distinct cult, but they are a spiritual people amongst the Lord's people who are marked out and marked off by this, that they are not going to allow themselves to be touched with the corruption that is in this world and the hand of the defiler. You've got to read those chapters of Malachi's prophecies with this one thought all the time before you. They are terrible chapters, aren't they? Terrible chapters.

God is saying, you're cursed with a curse, even this whole nation. Showing His fiery, fiery judgment. Touching their lives and their family and in the field and everywhere.

Terrible things in that book. But you notice, the focal point of all those prophecies is the Levite. And it heads up to this.

The messenger of the covenant will come suddenly to this temple. Lord whom ye seek, ye shall sit as refiner of fire and purify the sons of Levi. Purify the sons of Levi.

With that you pass out of the Old Testament into the new, so far as our Bible is concerned. And the great Levite comes. The great Levite comes.

The Lord Jesus. And in Him we see the whole principle. The whole meaning of the history of the Levites summed up.

He is the full-awed Levite. The corruptor assails. The tempter attacks.

Draw away this Levite from his steadfastness, if thou be the Son of God. But this Levite prevails. To the last cost, to the last cost, he overcomes.

He says to us, as he said to those around him, Fear not, I have overcome. I have overcome. The great Levite.

The great overcomer. And now, to the churches. To him that overcomes.

The testimony of Jesus. He overcame. That testimony is deposited with the churches.

To him that overcomes. I do trust your seeing far more than I am seeing. I present you with a matter that has far, far too much.

Too many details to encompass in any one time. If you see, what does it amount to? Sooner or later, sooner or later, this whole question of God's going on to His end in fullness will arise, and then it will be a matter of our spiritual condition, whether He can go on with us. The matter of our spiritual condition, whether He can go on with us.

And whether He has that necessary to Himself for going on. In the midst of His people, and I am speaking not condemnatory of anyone. I am simply taking out of history, and present history, this, that all those who are the Lord's people are not after this kind.

All who are the Lord's people are not, in the spiritual sense, Levites. They are intended to be. They are meant to be.

The Lord would have them be, but the fact is they are not. They are not. For various reasons, some of which are mentioned in the messages to the churches.

But the reason is what the Lord calls defilement. Corruption. That is a very, very large word.

Covers a lot of ground. Embodies a lot of things. But it is a sanctified people, prepared for the Lord.

People who are really, really separated unto the Lord. Now dear friends, I am quite sure that the Lord's disciplines are all in that direction. It's a terrible thing.

You may not like it put this way, but sooner or later you will come to it. You realize what is involved. It's a terrible thing for the Lord not to discipline us.

No greater loss could be suffered by us if the Lord's eyes of flame see something wrong. He should not deal with it. He should not deal with it.

That would be a terrible thing for him and for his church and for spiritual history. He must. And sooner or later he will.

He will. You may think this is a very solemn word. Why this? Well, I think for this reason.

And I can tell you that this is not just a studied subject for this time. It's a deep and heavy burden. Think of this.

The Lord wants to go on. He wants to carry his testimony further. He wants to do a new thing.

He wants to bring his people on. In order to do so, he must have that which is represented by the Levites. He must have a people in the midst of his people who really do embody the fullness of his thought.

And that people, that people must be a holy people. A holy people. These are strong words.

He shall sit as a refiner. A refiner. As of gold and silver.

Refiner. The picture has often been used, you know, in connection with those words of the refiner of gold and silver who heats and heats under the crucible and looks in until, until the dross is consumed and he can see his own face reflected in the metal. And then he says, it's all right.

It's finished. Is not that just what the Lord would do? The fire spot war. The judgment spot war.

To see his own face. To see his own face. Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

In our hearts. There's a purpose why the Lord brings such a word to us at this time. It is while solemn, perhaps challenging.

Let us realize there's a word that's linked with prospect. The Lord is a Lord who wants to go on. Whoever wants to reach new regions.

To attain his full end. He wants to do that. He wants to do something new and ever new.

Amongst his people. To do it. If I have not misread and misstated this whole history of this people.

To do it. He must have the people in the midst of his people. Who answer to him on the one side.

Concerning his desire. And answer the enemy on the other side. To deprive him of his desire.

He would corrupt. He would pollute. He would cause this loss to the Lord.

Levi says no. Never. Never.

Whatever it costs. Never. We may talk like that over service for the Lord.

Or we'll go where the Lord wants us. We'll suffer whatever is involved in serving the Lord in any part of the world. We talk like that.

Dear friends, let us bring that into this realm. There's a cost of holiness. Of sanctification.

A great cost. And it is in holiness, in sanctification that service rests. Not in works.

Not in traveling about. But not in meetings. But in holiness of life.

That's the core, the heart of service to the Lord. He will bring you to that sooner or later. Sooner or later.

He'll bring you to that. It may go on for some time. But we'll come to a terrible crisis.

The Lord sees that which is not holy. But, again, it is a positive, not a negative word. The Lord would say something to us gathered here this very day.

He wants to go on. He wants to move. He wants to do things.

Because he is like that. But even the Lord is held up by the Levites. As is so clear.

Whenever the next step is to be taken. The Levites must come into their condition. And into their position.

Before the Lord. The Lord make us true Levites. To be able to serve him truly.

Now we sing hymn.

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