

Verse 9 concerns the Levites, or the descendants of Jacob's son Levi. From this tribe are taken the priests like Aaron. All priests are Levites, but not all Levites are priests. Levites are given special privileges and responsibilities like carrying the ark of the covenant when the tribes of Israel are on the march.

What the Levites are not given is their own territory (other than some cities and pasture land). Instead, the Lord Himself is their inheritance. You might say their citizenship is in heaven.

You might also think that Levi must have been a particularly godly person for his offspring to become the priests of Israel. But see how Jacob on his deathbed cursed Levi:

*"Simeon and Levi are brothers;
weapons of violence are their swords.
Let my soul come not into their council;
O my glory, be not joined to their company.
For in their anger they killed men,
and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen.
Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,
and their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob
and scatter them in Israel (Genesis 49:5-7).*

And Levi is indeed scattered in Israel. Simeon also will be assigned an enclave within Judah rather than its own distinct territory (Joshua 19:9).

Why does Jacob say this about his sons? It hearkens back to Genesis 34 where a Hivite named Shechem

violates Levi and Simeon's sister Dinah. Then he wants to marry her. Shechem's father says to the brothers, "Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves." But Jacob's sons trick Shechem and his family into circumcision, then while they are recovering Levi and Simeon slaughter them and their whole city. Jacob rebukes them for making him a stench among their neighbors. But we can also say that Levi and Simeon have prevented the people of God from becoming united with the Hivites in violation of Abraham's stern prohibition in Genesis 24:3-4.

So Levi has a complicated and violent history. Yet here are his descendants, bearing on their foreheads the inscription "Holy to the Lord" and being allowed to handle the ark, an act which brings death for others.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 starts with a list of detestable sins practiced by the unrighteous. But then it goes on to say *"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."* How many followers of Christ have a complicated or violent past like Levi and yet are redeemed and made *"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"* (1 Peter 2:9)?

Questions:

1. What happened to the original tablets?
2. In verse 10, why is the Lord unwilling to destroy the people?

3. Read verses 12 and 13. Does the Lord require the same things from us?

4. Why is the statement in verse 14 important to understand?

5. What could it mean to circumcise your heart?

6. What could verse 19 mean for us?

7. What attributes of God can we find in this chapter?