

Levitical Heritage

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Honoring the Bar Mitzvah of Michael Levy

Today we are celebrating Michael Levy's *Bar Mitzvah* – a day when a Jewish boy can echo Apostle Rav Shaul by saying:

“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” (1 Corinthians 13:11) And Today I am a man!

But Michael is not just any man as I am about to show him. Michael, please come over here with your father.

This, Michael, is your family tree. Let's see what it tells us. You, Michael, are at the top and your ancestral roots are below. So let's start on the top and find Michael Levy. What does your place on the tree say?

1. Miycha'eil Levy ben Even Levy

Now let's make our way down the tree toward your roots. Please read the name of each one of your relatives. The next card down is your father's card. Please read it.

2. Even Levy ben Yehuda Levy

Who is Even Levy? (Michael responds: “My father”)
Okay, let's go further. Please read the next card.

3. Yehuda Levy ben Eitan Levy

Who is Yehuda Levy? (My grandfather)
Alright, read some more!

4. Eitan Levy ben Yochanan Levy

Who is Eitan Levy? (My great grandfather)
Okay, let's read more:

5. Yochanan Levy ben George Levy

6. George Levy ben Yochanan Levy

7. Yochanan Levy ben George Levy

And please read the date on Yochanan's card. (1820)

Wow! We have traced the Levys who preceded you all the way back to 1820. Now you notice this long stretch on the tree where there are no cards. That is because we don't know the names of those relatives. But let's go closer to your roots where the cards again appear. Who is there?

8. Levi ben Yisra'el or Levi ben Ya'akov

Do you know who he is? (Levi, one of the sons of Jacob) He is your relative from where you get your name "Levy." The spelling and pronunciation are different but it is the same name nonetheless.

Okay, who's next?

9. Ya'akov or Yisra'el ben Yitzchak

Do you know who Ya'akov is? (Jacob, my relative, whose name God changed to Israel).

Yes. Ya'akov is your relative who conveyed the covenant to you that defines you as a Jew. And let's go back a little further.

10. Yitzchak ben Avroham (Isaac)

11. Avraham ben Terach (Abraham)

His name was originally "Avram," but God changed it to "Avraham." Avraham was your relative with whom God made the covenant of circumcision that was passed to you through Isaac and Jacob.

You are indeed blessed, Michael, to be able to identify ten relatives of past generations by name. We have already noted that your relative Ya'akov ben Yitzchak (Jacob) is the one who entitles you to call yourself a Jew. But let's take a look at another very important relative – Levi ben Ya'akov, "Levi," from whom your family gets its name "Levy." Levi was one of Jacob's twelve sons, and he fathered your entire family, the "Levites," whom God used in a very special way. To see how God used your family, let's read Numbers 1:47-53, about how the Levites were an exception to the numbering of the children of Israel:

"But the Levites were not numbered among them by their fathers' tribe; for the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around

the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony."

So, Michael, your relatives had a very special job to do for God, and that was to set up, take down, maintain, and guard the His Tabernacle.

But your relatives were not only given a job, they were allowed a very special relationship with God which we can read about in Numbers 8:5-14:

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially. Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean. Then let them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull as a sin offering. And you shall bring the Levites before the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall gather together the whole congregation of the children of Israel. So you shall bring the Levites before the LORD, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites; and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD, like a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of the LORD. Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, and you shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them like a wave offering to the LORD. Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine.'"

Think about that Michael. Isn't it special that God said that of your family "They are mine!"?

Now I can tell from you and your father that your family is very persuasive. Why they even formed a labor union and talked God into giving them a retirement plan that was better than Social Security. Let's read about that in Numbers 8:23-26:

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'This is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more. They may minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs, but they themselves shall do no work. Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties.'"

Not bad working conditions either, huh?

What is not very well known is that all of your relatives the Levites were considered priests when they performed certain functions. One of those functions was to be judges of difficult cases involving serious violations of the Mosaic Law. Deuteronomy 17:8-11 explains this:

"If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD

your God chooses. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.”

Another priestly role your family had was to teach the community how to contain outbreaks of diseases. Deuteronomy 24:8:

“Take heed in an outbreak of leprosy, that you carefully observe and do according to all that the priests, the Levites, shall teach you; just as I commanded them, so you shall be careful to do.”

Now all of this would just be academic history were it not for two Scriptures that we need to take seriously. The first is Romans 11:29:

“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

The second is 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

On first impression we might be tempted to say

“Well, all that was long ago before the Second Temple was destroyed. The Levites don’t have – can’t have those functions any longer.”

Well, maybe not exactly those functions, but how does God expect them -- let’s make it personal – Michael – How does God want Michael to use his gifts and callings that God gave his family, the Levites, that Scripture says are irrevocable? And God’s priestly commission of the Levites has been documented in Scripture where Paul says:

“... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

And you might notice that, although God gave us a New Covenant, He did not explicitly revoke the Levites’ priestly responsibilities. So it seems to me we are missing something if we think the Levites have no special role or responsibility in the New Covenant.

In contemplating this, I am intrigued by the parallel aspects of the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of believers in the New Covenant. 1 Peter 2:5-10 says:

“... you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Messiah Yeshua. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.’”

A new priesthood under Yeshua our new High Priest, and a new people of God who comprise both Jewish and Gentile followers of Yeshua. It is so tempting to just dismiss the Levites as shadows of the Yeshuic Priesthood, but what of those gifts and callings of the Levites that are irrevocable?

No, the gift and calling of a priest in any priesthood of God is to serve God by helping to bring God and man together. We don’t hear a lot of teaching about our identity as New Covenant priests; could it be that we don’t have sufficient understanding or intuition about New Covenant priestly function to know what to do with our New Covenant priestly identity? Levites like you who are also believers in Yeshua are priests twice over. Perhaps you are destined to be leaders and equippers of the rest of us to help us understand and embrace our priestly roles.

Michael, I don’t have an answer today, but perhaps if you pray, God will reveal it to you. And if He does, please call me and explain it. Meanwhile, I am convicted that, just as we don’t allow Jewish identity to morph into “one new man,” we ought to not allow Levitical identity to be lost either.

Just one last thought. Because the Levites had no inheritance in land, they got paid through the tithe, for Numbers 18:24 states:

“For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance;”

Well, you are not going to get any of Ohev’s tithe but you’re going to get lots of *Bar Mitzvah* gifts later. Perhaps that’s what God intended.

May God bless you Miycha’eil ben Even haLevi – Michael, son of Craig, the Levite.