

Why Samuel Could Offer Sacrifices

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

Because Samuel's primary residence was in the area where the majority of the tribe of Ephraim dwelt, some conclude that he was a descendant of this tribe and not a Levite. This belief has caused some to wonder why Samuel was allowed to offer sacrifices to God.

The belief that only Levites, particularly the descendants of Aaron, could offer sacrifices was a concept that developed after the Jews returned from exile. However, the Scriptures document several instances in which men who were not Levites offered sacrifices.

For example, the first sacrifice offered after Israel left Egypt was performed by the father-in-law of Moses who was not of Israel (Exo. 18:12). Later, Gideon was a judge in Israel from the tribe of Manasseh. This man built an altar and made burnt offerings that were acceptable to God (Judges 6:24-26). When we examine the prophet Samuel, the Scriptures depict him as a Judge and Levite (1Sam. 7:9-10; 10:8). Consider the line of Samuel's forefathers mentioned in the first verse of his book:

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim, of the mountains of Ephraim, and **his name was Elkanah** the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite (1 Samuel 1:1).

Elkanah is the father of Samuel, and some believe this verse indicates that Elkanah's great, great grandfather was from the tribe of Ephraim. However, that is not the case. Instead, these words specify where his family lived. This is evident when we consider the book of Joshua which indicates that the children of Kohath (who were Levites) were given cities in the portion of land allotted to the tribe of Ephraim:

Now the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites. And the children of Aaron the priest, *who were* of the Levites, had thirteen cities by lot from the tribe of Judah, from the tribe of Simeon, and from the tribe of Benjamin. The rest of **the children of Kohath had ten cities by lot from the families of the tribe of Ephraim**, from the tribe of Dan, and from the half-tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 21:4-5).

Even though Samuel's forefathers were referred to as Ephraimites, they were not members of that tribe. They simply dwelt in the area assigned to Ephraim.

In order to understand the actual tribe of Samuel's lineage, we must consider 1 Chronicles 6 where the sons of Levi are listed. Notice that Samuel's father is among them:

The sons of Levi; Gershom, Kohath, and Merari. And these *be* the names of the sons of Gershom; Libni, and Shimei The sons of Kohath *were* Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The sons of Merari *were* Mahli and Mushi. Now these *are*

the families of the Levites according to their fathers: Of Gershon *were* Libni his son, Jahath his son, Zimmah his son, Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son, *and* Jeatherai his son. The sons of Kohath *were* Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son, Elkanah his son, Ebiasaph his son, Assir his son, Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uziah his son, and Shaul his son. The sons of Elkanah *were* Amasai and Ahimoth. As for Elkanah, the sons of Elkanah *were* Zophai his son, Nahath his son, Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, *and* **Elkanah his son**. The sons of Samuel *were* Joel the firstborn, and Abijah the second (1 Chronicles 6:16-28).

Elkanah was the father of Samuel and a descendent of Korah who was a Levite. This is the same Korah who rebelled against Moses, and God punished Korah's family by opening up the ground which engulfed them. However, God preserved his children. As the Scriptures document:

And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign. Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die (Numbers 26:10-11).

Korah's children lived and served God. The Bible tells us that some became gatekeepers and others were songwriters (1Chr. 26:19; Psa. 47, 49). Samuel was one of these children. Samuel's mother dedicated him to serve God in the temple. The evidence suggests that this was appropriate due to his lineage. As the Scriptures state, he ministered wearing official priestly garments:

But Samuel ministered before the LORD, *even as* a child, wearing a linen ephod (1 Samuel 2:18).

Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli (1 Samuel 3:1).

The fact that Samuel wore a linen ephod and that he ministered to the Eternal reflects the fact that he was of the priestly line. Therefore, it was appropriate for Samuel to offer sacrifices to God.