



# *Leaves* From the Tree

*Studies from God's Word*

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



NUMBERS 14 - 20

## Numbers 14

***14:1-4 - "Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."***

The entire nation of Israel lifts their voices in a loud wailing cry over their circumstance. What had stirred them so deeply to despair? This was the fruit of the evil report of the ten spies. They have been rescued by the mighty hand of God in the Ten Plagues from their slavery in Egypt. They have crossed the Red Sea on dry ground while the power of God held the waters of the sea back on either side of their path. They have been fed with miraculous bread from heaven and quenched with water from the rock. They have seen the glory of God descend upon Sinai with fire, lightning, and earthquake. They have been led by the pillar of cloud and fire from the Red Sea all the way across the Sinai wilderness. Now, as they are camped at the brink of the land to which God promised to bring them, they are despairing because ten men have told them that the inhabitants of the land ahead are stronger than Yahweh Who has done all this and more right in front of their eyes. It is an amazing flaw in human nature that, in spite of the evidence that the Lord virtually piled up in front of them of His power and faithfulness toward them, they were so easily convinced by one challenging report that they were now in a hopeless situation and that the Lord intended only harm for them.

Their discouragement and dismay required a target toward which they could release their frustration. They chose Moses and Aaron as the target. Their frustration, caused by their own disbelief, was taken out on Moses and Aaron in another fit of grumbling. Their grumbling against Moses and Aaron was aimed at pinning the blame for their situation on them. They were the logical people to blame because they were the leaders of the nation. It was because of the leadership of Moses and Aaron that they were in this situation. That was actually true. However, it was not true as a problem to complain about, but as an opportunity to trust the Lord Who had brought them this far and Who would bring them the rest of the way. Their grumbling was not limited to a horizontal complaint about their human leaders. The people easily transition from complaining about Moses to complaining about the Lord.

Their complaint about the Lord was an evil imagination which drew a completely wrong conclusion based upon their skewed perspective of their circumstance. Their complaint implies that the only reason the Lord brought them up out of

Egypt and to this land was so that all of them would be killed by their enemies in Canaan. This conclusion was as wrong as it could possibly be. It assumes that the Lord never had a good purpose for Israel. It assumes that He has only been teasing them through all their journey thus far, and that He never intended to keep His promise and honor His Word. In other words, their conclusion and response in this situation did more than fail to trust God for their own good. They blatantly insulted the character and purpose of God.

Compounding their already dangerous reaction, they heap insult upon insult by concluding that they would have been better off if they had died in Egypt or in the wilderness rather than be alive, following the Lord as His holy nation and camped at the verge of the Promised Land! This better off dead perspective and attitude is about as far in their rebellion against the Lord as they will be allowed to go. Their final step of rejecting the Lord's purpose is reflected in their community decision to turn their backs on the Promised Land and to return to Egypt. They decide to choose a new leader in place of Moses and try to recapture the "wonderful life" that they had as slaves in Egypt. Of course, they have completely forgotten how much they hated that life too. They have forgotten how they complained bitterly about the hardships they endured as Pharaoh's slaves. They have also not considered the practical impossibility of actually returning to Egypt. They only made it this far by the miraculous hand of God. How far will they get on the way back to Egypt without the Lord's blessing? What will they eat on the way back to Egypt with no manna? What will they drink with no water from the rock? How will they cross the Red Sea unless the Lord were to divide it for them as He did before? One thing we should learn from their tragic example is that grumbling and complaining never arise from a spiritually clear-minded perspective or a heart that is trusting the Lord. Grumbling is always short sighted and constantly subject to misreading the circumstances and drawing the wrong conclusions about what they mean.

***14:6-9 - "Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. "If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us--a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them."***

Out of the entire nation of Israel there were only two exceptional individuals (beside Moses and Aaron), who did not join in with the grumbling groundswell of the rebellion of Israel against the Lord. Joshua and Caleb, who were the other two of the twelve spies sent to scout out the Promised Land, saw the exact same things that the ten spies had seen in the land of Canaan. They did not dispute the strength of the inhabitants of Canaan, the fortifications of their cities, or the reality of the battle ahead of them in the land. What set Joshua and Caleb apart from

the ten spies, and from the nation which followed the fearful influence of their bad report, was their faith in the Lord. Joshua and Caleb saw the challenge of the giants in the land, but they were convinced from all they had already seen Him do that the Lord was a Giant of a God, far greater than any giant they may face ahead.

There was only one issue that needed to be resolved in the eyes of Joshua and Caleb in deciding whether they would move forward and take possession of the land of Canaan. That issue was whether or not the Lord was pleased with them. "If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us..." They declared their simple, but essential perspective to the gathered nation in the form of an If-Then statement of faith. If the Lord was pleased with them, then they would surely take the land just as He had said. The implication of their statement was that the only barrier to their conquest of Canaan was the state of the relationship between the Lord and His people, not the relative strength of the Canaanites. They tried to warn the people. They appealed to them to not rebel against the Lord by their unbelief, to not fear the people of the land, but to see them as their prey. They insisted that they were not nearly as fearsome as they looked because the Lord was not protecting them as He would protect Israel.

The contrast between the heart perspectives of Joshua and Caleb from the rest of Israel is intentional and instructive for us. Even as believers in Christ, we can respond to the purpose of God for our lives as Joshua and Caleb did by trusting that the Lord is greater than any difficulty or challenge we will ever face in the path He has ordained for us. We can also respond as the rest of Israel did, and conclude that the challenges we face are the evidence of the Lord's failure toward us. Believers who embrace this demonic lie choose the same path Israel chose; imagining that they know better than God whose leadership to follow, what direction leads to true happiness, and what their life is "supposed" to be like.

***14:22-25 - "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it. Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys; turn tomorrow and set out to the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea."***

The Lord is known and characterized by His mercy and grace. He is patient, longsuffering, tolerant with our weaknesses, and even our struggles to trust Him. However, He will not forever endure blatant unbelief and insults to His character. He will not put up with continuing refusal's to trust and obey Him forever. At a certain point, which He determines, and not us, He will draw a line and withdraw

His mercy and grace. Israel had finally reached that point. They pushed their rebellion to the line marking the difference between God's grace and His judgment. The Lord, Who had previously promised to take Israel into the Promised Land, now swears that this generation of Israel will never enter that land of promise. He declares, that with the two exceptions of Joshua and Caleb, every other Israelite alive that day would die in the wilderness and never experience the fulfillment of the promise made long ago to Abraham.

As we consider the judgment of God on Israel in the wilderness, we should not be confused and question why He judged them so severely. Instead, we would be wise to see this judgment from a higher perspective. The mystery is not why God finally judged them, but why He would wait so long, and why He would have shown them so much undeserved mercy, grace, and blessing up until this point. The Lord references the record of their heart's response to Him over the course of the short time of a little over a year since He brought them up out of Egypt. In just over a year's time, Israel has been tested by the Lord in ten circumstances.

In each of the ten tests, the Lord had given Israel more than sufficient reasons to trust Him. In each case, they turned on Him and blamed Him, or His chosen representative, Moses. In other words, there was no valid excuse for their faithless complaints, grumbling, and disobedient, dishonoring rebellion. Caleb is named by the Lord as a notable exception among them. His faith and obedience are the proof that their circumstances have not made them this way, or else the circumstance would have made Caleb turn away from the Lord as well. He experienced the same set of challenges in the ten tests, but instead of him testing the Lord in a bitter spirit, he showed that he had a different spirit than the rest of Israel. The Lord is most concerned by who we are, and what we really think about Him in our hearts. As Caleb's example demonstrates, if our heart is trusting the Lord, our heart of true faith will be expressed in faithful obedience to His direction and will, and not our own chosen direction and will.

The judgment of the Lord upon the nation will now play out in a new direction for the nation. For the first time, the Lord commands His people to turn their back to Canaan and to set out through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. God's judgment carries an irony in light of their previous grumbling desires. They wanted to return to Egypt and complained that they should have died in the wilderness. The Lord now judges them by their own words and desires. He sends them back to the wilderness when they had gotten so close to the land of promise. He sends them back toward Egypt, even though they will not reach Egypt either. Their unbelief will cause them to die in the wilderness. "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief." (Hebrews 3:18-19).

**14:39-45 - "When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised." But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you." But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses left the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah."**

Once the Lord declares His judgment, the people begin to realize the consequences they have purchased for themselves by rebellion. They "mourned greatly" that night, but it was not the deep heart mourning of true repentance which produces a transformed heart. Instead, their mourning was only the self-indulgent sorrow which strains at the consequences of sin. It's similar to the reaction of a child that is caught in disobedience and punished by spanking. If the pain of the spanking does not reach the child's heart and change their attitude for the better, then they may cry, but not because of a tenderized heart, but only because of the discomfort they have to endure in the punishment. "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death." (II Corinthians 7:9-10). Israel was sorrowful, but not changed.

The next day, they proved that they had learned nothing from the previous day's experience. They arise early in the day and trying to convince themselves that they can repair everything that has soured between them and the Lord they announce that they are going to enter the land of Canaan after all. The Lord was no impressed by their apparent change of mind about entering Canaan. Their decision was actually produced by the same stubborn, self-centered hearts that got them into trouble in the first place. This was merely another expression of disobedient rebellion. It's true that the Lord had originally brought them here to enter the land, but the last thing He had commanded on the previous day was for them to turn back to the wilderness. By trying to enter the Promised Land this day they were again disobeying a direct command of the Lord. The Lord would not overlook this rebellion to His command. When they went forward, they did so without the presence of the Lord in the pillar of cloud, without the ark of the covenant, and without the leadership of Moses. Apparently none of those things

concerned them greatly, because they continued forward imagining that everything would work out fine because they were going forward.

The people learned a terribly costly lesson that day. They suffered a complete defeat at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites. It was not because of how strong the people of the land were, but because they presumed to go up and fight without the Lord. The lesson to be learned here is no less important for our lives. If the Lord says, "Go", then trust Him and go. If not, then don't presume that He is saying it just because that is what you desperately want to hear. Our victories are only found when we are following the Lord where He is leading. When we strike out on our own there is only defeat and death on that path.

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## Numbers 15

***15:17-21 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land where I bring you, then it shall be, that when you eat of the food of the land, you shall lift up an offering to the LORD. Of the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake as an offering; as the offering of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up. From the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD an offering throughout your generations.'"***

This is another of the laws of the land in which the Lord anticipates eventually bringing Israel into possession of the Promised Land and gives them commands in advance for when they settle there. There are two points we can draw from this kind of law. The first point is the meaning of the actual law, and the second is the spiritual implication of why the Lord chose to give a law forty years in advance of when it could actually be obeyed. This particular law requires an offering be made to the Lord from their dough. Once they entered the land, they would plant crops, harvest them, and grind the grain of the harvest to make dough for bread. Then, before baking the bread they were to take enough of the first portion of the dough to make a cake of bread and set it apart for an offering to the Lord.

This offering of the first of their dough is another in a series of first portion offerings commanded in the Law for Israel. They were to set apart the first born of their children, the first born of their herds, the first fruits of their crop, and now the first portion of their dough. Each of these offerings was a tangible expression of real value to demonstrate their faith that the Lord was first in their lives. The offerings were essential to this expression. It was not enough for an Israelite to say the words, "The Lord is first place in my life and He means more to me than anything else in my life!", while failing to give the first portions to Him. The words without the offerings would be empty expressions with no real heart of worship behind them. Our primary expression of the first portion principle today is found



in the tithe. The important thing is not just that we give a significant portion of our income to the Lord (10%), but that we give the tithe from the first portion of our income, and not the last, or left over portion. A heart of faith trusts that giving this first portion to honor the Lord will not only meet with the Lord's approval, but that He will cause our remaining 90% to be sufficient to meet our own needs.

The deeper implication of this kind of law which pointed forward to the next generation and beyond which would enter the land is that the Law of God is not an evolving document and was not designed by the Lord to have later additions or amendments. The Lord could have waited to reveal the laws of the land until the next generation of Israel which actually entered and possessed the land. However, to do so would have meant that the Lord identify a second prophet as law giver in addition to Moses. Since Moses died in the wilderness and never entered the Promised Land, he would not be present to serve as the Lord's prophet to give any later laws. From the beginning the Lord intended all of His Law, even the laws which could not be obeyed until they later entered Canaan, to be given only through Moses. This fulfills the Lord's purpose for both the Old and New Covenant to have one primary human revealer of His will and purpose. "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17).

***15:28-31 - "The priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who goes astray when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven. You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them. But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him."***

There are two categories of sins identified in these two laws. One addresses unintentional sins, and the second addresses defiant sins. The intention behind these categories is to teach the people of God that God is concerned about our behavior whenever we transgress His boundary lines, but that He is also concerned with the heart attitude of the person that sins by crossing those boundary lines. We should be clear that both categories are identified as sin. Breaking God's Law is always a sin, even if I do so inadvertently. I may not know at that moment that I have sinned, nor may anyone else, but any boundaries of God's righteousness and holiness that are crossed is still a sin. I remember counseling a Christian who had not yet learned much of what God had revealed in His Word about our behavior. They were surprised to learn that God considered any sexual relations outside of the marriage covenant to be a sin of either fornication or adultery. They honestly did not know that it was a sin because of the common behavior they saw portrayed in movies, TV, etc. Their

ignorance of the sinfulness of that behavior did not make it any less sinful for them to cross those same lines. In our justice system as a society the same principle is expressed in this well known saying; "ignorance of the law is no excuse."

The second category is aimed at defiant sins. The word translated defiant literally described a "high handed" sin. This described a serious heart attitude behind the behavior in question. A person that crossed God's boundaries in a high handed way was blatantly, arrogantly disregarding the Law. This was a person that knew what they were doing and chose to cross the line with disregard for the one that drew the line in the first place. We might describe it as "thumbing your nose" at the law. The behavior in both cases was equally serious, but the attitude that produced both transgressions was seriously distinct. The high handed person was hardened in their heart and unwilling to recognize, let alone honor the Lord's authority over their life. In this law, the defiant person is shown no mercy, but was cut off from among the covenant people. His sin was greater than the behavior alone. He had despised the Word of the Lord and had blasphemed the Lord by his proud disregard of the Law of God.

***15:32-36 - "Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses."***

It was no coincidence that Moses wrote the account of this story immediately after declaring the law for those who defiantly break the Law of God. This story is an illustration from the actual history of Israel of the kind of defiant, or heavy handed sin that this law covered. This particular case served as the perfect illustration of the seriousness of Law, because the behavior itself seems at first glance to be fairly light. During this time in the wilderness, one man of Israel was observed gathering wood on the Sabbath. When they found him gathering wood they brought him to Moses and Aaron to deal with him. Moses sought the Lord to determine His will, and the Lord spoke to Moses and commanded that the man be put to death. His execution was to be by stoning in which the entire community of Israel participated by each one taking up a stone to throw together at the man until he was dead. The story may trouble some modern readers with a modern sensitivity to any execution of a death penalty for any reason at all. The man had not murdered anyone. What he did was gather wood. The wood was for building a fire most likely and cooking a meal. A society like ours today, that struggles to even execute murderers, would certainly hesitate to execute someone for gathering wood.

What was so serious about his behavior to require a death penalty? Well, the behavior was serious for one simple reason. God forbade any Israelite to work on the Sabbath, or even build a fire to cook on the Sabbath. It was wrong because God told them not to do it. What carried this man's transgression to an even more serious place was that he was gathering wood defiantly. In other words, he knew better. He was not ignorantly, or unintentionally gathering wood. He knew God had forbidden it, and he blatantly chose to do so anyway. Perhaps he thought he was above the law. Perhaps he despised the inconvenience obeying the Sabbath restrictions created for his lifestyle. Perhaps he just wanted a hot meal and did not care about potential consequences of building a fire. Whatever his thoughts, the Lord was observing and made sure that his transgression would not remain hidden. The Lord also insured that Israel would not soon forget the consequence of defiant disregard of His Law.

***15:37-40 - "The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God."***

This law of the tassel was an accommodation of the Lord in consideration of the weakness of His people. Recognizing the tendency of Israel to forget His boundaries, the Lord ordained that they sew four special tassels with a cord of blue into the corners of their garments. The blue was a reminder of the presence of the Lord as He dwelt in the tabernacle above the ark of the covenant. The ark was covered with blue each time it was moved. There were blue reminders throughout the tabernacle in the garments of the high priest and in the curtains of the tabernacle. Blue was a symbol of the heavenly source of the Law of God. The tassel was designed to be more than decorative. It was to be a redemptive reminder for each Israelite each time they saw it. It was a practical memory device much like when people tie a string around their finger to remind themselves of important things.

The whole purpose of the tassel was to keep them from following after their own heart and their own eyes. The implication is that the human heart and eyes can be deceived and become untrustworthy guides for our behavior. The man gathering wood in defiance of the Law on the Sabbath day was following his own heart. He did so to his own destruction. It is a common error in our culture today to think that a person's heart is a faithful guide to always lead them in the right direction. People are often told to listen carefully to their own heart and follow it. There is a popular health food store in this area named Follow Your Heart, which carries some healthy foods, but promotes a New Age perspective in which the heart of each person is the best guide for their life direction. This is even

common in Christian circles. That well intended advice fails to recognize that our hearts can be blinded, affected by evil desires, deceived, and hardened. Remember Jeremiah's declaration, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). The Lord never instructs us to follow our own heart, but instead calls us to follow His heart and mind as He has revealed them in His Word.

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## Numbers 16

***16:1-4 - "Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took action, and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" When Moses heard this, he fell on his face;"***

The recent lessons of the death of the ten unbelieving spies, the declaration by the Lord that the current generation would die in the wilderness due to their unbelieving grumbling and complaining, and the ensuing utter defeat at the hands of the Canaanites has been quickly forgotten. Those events should have burned into the hearts and minds of every man, woman and child in Israel the deadly consequences of rebellion. Had the people gained what they should have gained from those events, they would never have responded like they do in this chapter. What this chapter shows is that the people were not taking to heart any of the words and actions of the Lord. For them, these events became like a series of disconnected, unrelated events. The Bible uses terms like dullness of heart to describe their spiritual condition that led them to continue to make the same blunders over and over without any real change or improvement.

In this latest rebellion, certain leaders rose up against Moses and Aaron. Korah, Dathan and Abiram were the ringleaders. They were from two different tribes which were assigned different responsibilities in the nation. Korah was from the tribe of Levi and was in the group that was given the special privilege of transporting the ark of the covenant and the other furnishings of the tabernacle from place to place. Dathan and Abiram were from the tribe of Reuben and were not involved in tabernacle service at all. Their complaints were mixed together as they first rose up in rebellion, but as the Lord dealt with each it becomes apparent that they held different concerns. They combined their complaints however, probably for strategic purposes to find strength in numbers and build together a stronger case against Moses and Aaron.

They did not simply discuss their complaints among themselves, but before even approaching Moses, they had rallied 250 leaders of the nation to their side. What should strike our hearts before we even consider the substance of their complaint was how wrong their approach really was. It is difficult to discern for those who are serving in leadership whether a complaint is valid and how to respond to it. In this case, the substance of their issues was betrayed by the way they addressed it. If Korah had a legitimate concern for how Moses and Aaron were leading, what should he have done with his concern? The simple answer is that he should have prayed to the Lord first, and if his concern was not resolved in prayer, then he should have approached Moses directly and respectfully spoken his concern to Moses. Instead of going to Moses, Korah and the others went to at least 250 other men to murmur and grumble about Moses! If these were one on one conversations, then Korah sinned 250 times before he ever spoke to Moses.

If every member of the body of Christ were committed to this one principle, so many of the issues that grow to divide and destroy churches could be avoided. Please understand, that handling concerns with spiritual leadership in the right way is no guarantee that the leader will receive it in the right way. Leaders can be defensive, proud, stubborn, and unyielding, especially when it is their leadership that is being questioned. I can confirm this as someone who has been in church leadership for nearly 20 now. I have reacted to legitimate concerns at one time or another in all of those wrong ways. The point though, is that the intent of sharing concerns with spiritual leaders should be to help them see what for whatever reason they are not currently seeing. The approach chosen can make a huge difference in how the leader receives the concern. A concern shared in humility, bathed in prayer, and with a heart of concern for the leader and God's kingdom is much more likely to be accepted well than how Korah and Dathan handled this.

The summary of their issue with Moses and Aaron was that they were exalting themselves above the assembly of the Lord. If true, it would be a serious issue and one which Moses and Aaron should take to heart. The problem in this case was their accusation was not true. Neither Moses or Aaron had exalted themselves. Yes, they were set in leadership positions that granted them greater access to the tabernacle than other Israelites, but it was the Lord that had exalted them to those positions. Korah's argument was directed at Moses and Aaron, but the real argument was with the Lord for choosing them for those roles, rather than him. Korah's rebellion became an infamous example in the generations that followed of rebellion against legitimate spiritual authority. This reference in Jude compares Korah to the similar actions of those leading rebellions within the early church congregations. "Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame

like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever." (Jude 1:11-13).

***16:12-14 - "Then Moses sent a summons to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come up. "Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also lord it over us? Indeed, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"***

Korah's issue primarily was born out of his envious desire to be granted the same priesthood honors as Aaron. Dathan and Abiram were more focused on complaints about the leadership of Moses. They saw the prospects of their current circumstances in the wilderness and were comparing that with what could have been. Israel had recently come close to the fulfillment of their hope by camping near enough to the Promised Land to taste the fruits of the land as the 12 scouts returned with samples. Now however, the nation had not moved forward into the land of Canaan and begun to possess it. Instead, they had turned away from the land of milk and honey and had begun to travel back into the fiery wilderness. Dathan and Abiram decided that this circumstance was all the fault of Moses. They insinuated that if he was a better, more effective leader that they would already be in the land of Canaan enjoying its bounty. They accused Moses in this passage of blinding the eyes of everyone else to his failings as the leader.

Dathan and Abiram were not speaking the truth in love, or in any other manner. It was not Moses' fault that Israel was not moving forward into Canaan, but actually moving further away into the wilderness. The fault was laid, not by Moses, but by the Lord at the feet of the entire congregation of Israel with the exceptions of Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb. The fault was their own unbelief and disobedience. These men were doing the classic transference of responsibility from themselves to Moses. Because they could not, or rather would not accept their own responsibility for the judgment upon them of an imposed 40 years in the wilderness until they all died, they had to find someone else to blame for their woes. Moses made an easy target as the leader.

**16:19-24 - "Thus Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the doorway of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation. Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly." But they fell on their faces and said, "O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, when one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?" Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'"**

Korah's rebellion was now shared by all the congregation which had been swayed by his persuasive words. The agreement of the congregation did not insure the rightness or appropriateness of their actions. Many are under the impression that if enough believers all agree on the same thing that they must be right about whatever they agree on. Here, the entire congregation was wrong and the Lord appeared to everyone to make sure they heard from the only opinion that really matters in such cases; His opinion. It is telling that the Lord did not choose to speak directly to the congregation in this case. Instead, He spoke to them only through Moses. In doing so, the Lord again validated in the eyes of all Israel that Moses was His chosen representative.

The message of the Lord was not one of mercy and grace, even though the Lord did end up showing them undeserved mercy. His message was further judgment. This entire generation of Israel was already living under the judgment of God. When He declared they would all die in the wilderness over the next 40 years with none of them ever entering the Promised Land, that was a judgment of God. Now, the Lord declared His intention to remove the mercy of even those 40 years of life in the wilderness when He warned Moses and Aaron to stand aside so that He "may consume them instantly."

Moses and Aaron did not take any satisfaction from the Lord's announcement of an immediate death penalty for the whole nation. They fell on their faces before the Lord and cried out for His mercy on behalf of the nation. The Lord relented, and limited the death penalty judgment to only the leaders of the rebellion and their households. Again, as we have seen in earlier examples, this is not meant to teach us that Moses and Aaron are more merciful than the Lord. If God planned to execute the whole nation, nothing said or prayed by Moses and Aaron would have stayed His hand. The Lord handled this in a way that both fully showed what the entire nation really deserved, and at the same time made room through His stirring the hearts of Moses and Aaron for Him to show the depths of His mercy and grace.

***16:41-45 - "But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD'S people." It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared. Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly." Then they fell on their faces."***

The previous day had ended with the awesome and never before seen executions of the leaders of the rebellion. You would think that as every Israelite laid down to sleep that night their hearts would have finally and fully been impacted by the events of the day. You would think that the hard lessons of rebellion would have now been learned. The next day dawned and rather than a people with a new perspective and attitude of holy fear and humble gratitude that they were not themselves consumed as was Korah and the others, all Israel arose with the same ugly and unrepentant hearts that got them in trouble the day before. What do they do together the very next day? They "...grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD'S people." Some people will only learn the hard way. Their accusation against Moses and Aaron was as empty as the accusations Korah and Dathan had made the day before. Moses did not cause the death of Korah. Moses did not open the earth and cause him to be swallowed up. They even knew better, because they saw with their own eyes that the Lord had appeared and that it was His doing to execute the rebels. The refusal of the people to accept the truth and their insistence to follow the evil example of Korah resulted in over 14,000 of them dying that day in a judgment plague from the Lord.

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## **Numbers 17**

***17:1-5 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and get from them a rod for each father's household: twelve rods, from all their leaders according to their fathers' households. You shall write each name on his rod, and write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi; for there is one rod for the head of each of their fathers' households. "You shall then deposit them in the tent of meeting in front of the testimony, where I meet with you. It will come about that the rod of the man whom I choose will sprout. Thus I will lessen from upon Myself the grumbings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling against you."***

Following the rebellion in chapter 16 and the questions that were raised by the tribal leaders regarding the calling of Aaron as high priest, the Lord chose to give another convincing miraculous evidence that Aaron was His choice to be high



priest. The miracle of the earth opening beneath Korah and the others and swallowing them alive should have been convincing enough. More than that, the Lord had also caused His fire to break out and consume the 250 leaders that had followed the rebellion. Then, the next day after the congregation still complained a third miracle of a judgment plague confirmed where the Lord stood on these issues. Now, in this chapter, the Lord provides a final miraculous proof to eliminate any remaining questions or doubt about the priesthood of Aaron.

Keep in mind as you read the degree to which the Lord went to confirm Aaron in the eyes of the people, that Aaron is a type of Christ and represents Him as a symbol. God went to similar and even greater lengths in the three year ministry of Jesus to confirm that Jesus is His only Son. "God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." (Hebrews 2:4). The many miracles God did through Jesus in His public ministry were all repeated confirmations of the unique role of Christ in God's plan.

The proof that God gave of the ministry of Aaron in this chapter was provided in a test. Each of the tribal leaders of Israel were to take a rod of wood and write the name of their tribe on the rod. Aaron was to do the same representing the tribe of Levi. Then Moses was to gather all the rods and place them before the ark of the covenant within the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. The Lord declared that the rod corresponding to the man He had chosen would sprout. Any sprouting at all would be amazing because these were not freshly cut branches, but rods that were long since dead and used as tools by the men that provided them. The Lord's choice of rods as the focal point of the test was not arbitrary. The rod was a well recognized symbol in Israel of authority (Genesis 49:10). As an interesting side note, the Hebrew word translated as rod here is the same word translated as tribe in other passages. The test would show to which man God had granted the authority to approach Him in the tabernacle, and to lead the people with spiritual authority.

The Lord also told Moses that this test "...will lessen from upon Myself the grumbings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling against you." This is a striking statement coming from the Lord, and we should not miss the implications of it. It indicates that the grumbings of the people are in some sense weighing on the Lord, and that this test was designed to lighten that weight. The Lord is using a physical image to convey a spiritual concept. The physical image is of a person being weighed down by the burden of their grumbings, as if each time someone in Israel grumbled against the Lord, or His representatives Moses and Aaron that it was like another burden being added to the weight. This principle is also described in the New Testament. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Ephesians 4:30). The word grieve in this verse carries the meaning of to weigh down, or make heavy. It referred to the emotional heaviness people experience when they are grieving. The point that should stand out for us, is that our heart attitudes and behavior have an effect

upon the Lord. His heart is weighed down when His people grumble, complain, rebel and sin. I know that it is common to think of God as so above us that He is completely unaffected by us. However, He wants us to understand that He has so involved Himself with our lives that He is affected by the way we respond to Him. It is similar to how a parent's heart is lifted by the obedience and good attitude of their child, but burdened by their disobedience and bad attitude.

***17:8 - "Now on the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds."***

The next day after the Lord ordered this test, Moses entered the tabernacle and retrieved all of the rods. Every rod was unchanged from the previous day with the exception of Aaron's rod. It had sprouted like a living tree overnight and produced, not only buds and blossoms, but fully ripened almonds. This was a miracle in which the Lord brought this dead rod of wood back to life. On the surface of this test, it served the purpose to distinguish Aaron among all the other leaders of Israel. There were other layers to this miracle beneath the surface. The living rod pointed as a symbol both backward in time to two other notable symbols in God's revelation to His people, and forward in time to the ultimate fulfillment of what all of these symbols represented.

Pointing backward in recent history, all of Israel should have noticed the connection to one of the furnishings of the tabernacle of the Lord. The golden lampstand was designed by the Lord to portray within its construction branches of the almond tree. "Three cups shall be shaped like almond blossoms in the one branch, a bulb and a flower, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms in the other branch, a bulb and a flower--so for six branches going out from the lampstand;" (Exodus 25:33). This is not an accidental correspondence. From our study on the lampstand in Exodus 37, we saw that the Lord commanded that branches of the lampstand represent the almond tree as a way of symbolically connecting the first great tree in history (the tree of life) to the plan of salvation fulfilled in Christ. In the same way, Aaron's rod draws that same symbolic connection.

The way that the almond tree represents both the original tree of life in the Garden of Eden, and the fulfillment of the plan of salvation is by the symbolism of the almond. The almond was known as the tree of first fruit. Each new season in Israel, the almond tree produces buds, blossoms and fruit before any other tree. Paul connected that first fruit principle with the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His

coming," (I Corinthians 15:20-23). The resurrection of Christ identifies Him as the first fruits of the dead because the first fruits were the first portion that pointed to a greater coming harvest. His resurrection is the promise of the future resurrection of all who are saved through faith in Him.

Out of the cross of Christ, which is the place of His death, God brought forth the new life of His resurrection. Both the lampstand and the rod of Aaron point back to the tree of life in Eden, but also forward to the cross and resurrection of Christ. His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead is the unique and only source of eternal life that God has provided in this world of death. When the rod of Aaron sprouted with new life and produced almonds, it was identifying the role of the high priest with God's salvation. Christ is the one and only high priest through Whom God has provided salvation to a lost world. There are many throughout history that claim similar authority to Christ, but the test is whether any of them ever rose from the dead! Jesus died, and three days later, rose from the dead; conquering death forever. Buddha died, and is still dead today. Mohammed died and is still dead today. Everyone else that has claimed the special authority that only belongs to Christ has died and none of them have risen from the dead! This is God's test that we can identify with certainty His heavenly high priest and the only source of salvation. I am only going to believe and follow the Man that actually rose from the dead.

***17:9-13 - "Moses then brought out all the rods from the presence of the LORD to all the sons of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod. But the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to their grumblings against Me, so that they will not die." Thus Moses did; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did. Then the sons of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Behold, we perish, we are dying, we are all dying! Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, must die. Are we to perish completely?"***

Once the rods were returned to their owners each leader of the tribes that had given his rod had a double confirmation of Aaron's special role. The first and obvious confirmation was the new life evident in Aaron's rod. The second confirmation was simply that their rods had not come to life and had produced no buds, blossoms or almonds. What was obvious in this distinction was that it was not simply the environment of being in the tabernacle overnight that caused the new life. All the rods were exposed to the same environment, and only the rod of Aaron sprouted. This indicated the sovereign selection of the Lord of Aaron and not the other leaders. This double confirmation was strong evidence that could be seen by everyone in Israel. Once everyone saw the difference in the rods, they reacted with a strong and sudden realization. They cried out that they were all dying and that everyone that approached the tabernacle of the Lord would die. This is a classic case of an emotionally based overreaction. The people were not dying. The Lord did not bring any further judgment upon them at this point. It was

also not true that everyone that came near to the tabernacle died. What was true was that anyone who God had not given the authority to enter the tabernacle, that dared to trespass and enter without permission would die. The overreaction was based upon their earlier rebellion (Numbers 16:1-10) in which they decided that they should all have access to the tabernacle. The lesson here is that when God disciplines us, we are meant to learn the lesson He is teaching, and not add burdens to His lesson that He has not given us.

### **Questions from Number 16:**

**Question:** 14:22 - 25 - Is it a coincidence that there were 10 plagues in Egypt and 10 circumstances of testing for the Israelites in the wilderness? Does the number 10 have any significance?

**Answer:** I'm 100% certain that when the Lord uses numbers like he does in this passage that there is significance to it beyond just keeping count. There may be an intentional parallel between the 10 plagues in Egypt and the 10 tests of Israel in the wilderness. Both sets of circumstances involved the Lord dealing with the nations involved based upon their heart response to Him. Yes, all Bible teachers who acknowledge the intentional use of Bible symbolism in some of the numbers of the Bible identify 10 as a significant number. It is the number the Lord chose not only for the Plagues, but also for the summary of His Law in the 10 Commandments. Noah was also the 10th generation from Adam.

These examples indicate full sets of God's work or revelation. As the concept relates to the 10 tests, Israel tested God sinfully 10 times in the wilderness before God declared that He was pronouncing a death penalty judgment upon them and taking the Promised Land away from that generation. So, the 10 tests represent the full measure of God's patience, long suffering and graciousness toward that generation. Once they crossed that tenth line, they had reached the final limit and received the judgment they deserved. The Plagues represented repeated opportunities to repent for Egypt before the tenth and final judgment fell. The ten generations from Adam to Noah represented the time the Lord gave to fallen mankind to repent and turn before the final judgment of the Flood fell.

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## Numbers 18

***18:1-5 - "So the LORD said to Aaron, "You and your sons and your father's household with you shall bear the guilt in connection with the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the guilt in connection with your priesthood. But bring with you also your brothers, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you, while you and your sons with you are before the tent of the testimony. And they shall thus attend to your obligation and the obligation of all the tent, but they shall not come near to the furnishings of the sanctuary and the altar, or both they and you will die. They shall be joined with you and attend to the obligations of the tent of meeting, for all the service of the tent; but an outsider may not come near you. So you shall attend to the obligations of the sanctuary and the obligations of the altar, so that there will no longer be wrath on the sons of Israel. Behold, I Myself have taken your fellow Levites from among the sons of Israel; they are a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD, to perform the service for the tent of meeting. But you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil, and you are to perform service. I am giving you the priesthood as a bestowed service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."***

Chapter 17 ended with a fearful outcry by the congregation, in which they questioned whether anyone would be able to approach the tabernacle and survive the judgment of Yahweh. Their cry was precipitated by the deaths of over 14,000 of their number due to their continuing rebellion. The Lord chooses not to directly answer their implied question of whether anyone would be able to approach Him. Instead, the Lord speaks to Aaron and confirms what He has already revealed. The tabernacle will continue to be a place of death for anyone that dares to approach the Lord when they have not been called. Only the household of Aaron may enter into the tabernacle itself. Only the members of the tribe of Levi may approach to serve the practical needs of the tabernacle service.

Before now, if any other Israelite approached where they did not belong, their transgression would bring judgment upon the entire nation. Now, the Lord makes the tribe of Levi responsible to guard the entrance to the tabernacle. The Levites were responsible to preserve the holiness of the tabernacle by allowing access only to those the Lord had ordained. If an outsider came near when they should not, the Levites were charged with the responsibility to execute the trespasser. If the Levites failed to carry out this responsibility and allowed someone access that did not belong in the tabernacle, then instead of the nation suffering the consequences the Levites themselves would be held accountable for neglecting their charge, and they would pay the penalty.

The seriousness of this standard is emphasized by it being a life and death level consequence. What is the application of this principle today? There is no longer a

physical tabernacle to be guarded from outside trespassers. There is a heavenly tabernacle, which the earthly tabernacle in the wilderness only symbolized. The point is that people are not allowed to simply waltz into heaven like they belong there. There is a very common misconception in our culture about heaven. Many no longer believe in its reality at all, but among those who do, most believe that everyone who dies gets an automatic pass into heaven. That is just not the truth. Heaven is only open for those that the Lord calls. Only those who are in the family of the high priest will be granted access to the heavenly tabernacle. Jesus is the high priest of the New Covenant and only those in His family are welcome there.

***18:19 - "All the offerings of the holy gifts, which the sons of Israel offer to the LORD, I have given to you and your sons and your daughters with you, as a perpetual allotment. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD to you and your descendants with you."***

The Lord's provision for Aaron, his sons, and his family was identified by the Lord as a perpetual allotment. The family of Aaron was set apart for the entire duration of the Old Covenant to serve the Lord in the tabernacle and temple. They were to refrain from pursuing the normal ways of making a living, and instead receive all of their personal provision from the holy gifts offered to the Lord. Those gifts were given by the Lord, after they were offered, to Aaron. The Lord confirmed the security of His promised provision to Aaron by calling His commitment "an everlasting covenant of salt." The covenant of salt signified an enduring covenant. Salt was commonly used in ancient times as a preservative. Foods were preserved without corruption beyond their normal time by being salted. The Lord applied this imagery to the covenant. A salted covenant was one that would outlast normal agreements that might be broken over time.

***18:20-24 - "Then the LORD said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel. To the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting. The sons of Israel shall not come near the tent of meeting again, or they will bear sin and die. Only the Levites shall perform the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the sons of Israel they shall have no inheritance. For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer as an offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said concerning them, 'They shall have no inheritance among the sons of Israel.'"***

The Lord established special guidelines for the lives of all the Levites. They were a tribe that was set apart from normal life work activities, and devoted exclusively to the service of the Lord and His house. They were also set apart from normal

life circumstances. The Lord had ordained that each of the tribes of Israel would receive a portion of territory in the Promised Land of Canaan once they entered the land and possessed it. The portion allotted for each tribe was not their own choice. The Lord chose to give specific territories to each tribe. He determined where they would live and how much land they would receive. The families of those tribes were then free to settle within the boundaries of the portion selected by the Lord for them. Wherever each family settled, that portion of land became their inheritance. They were to pass down through each successive generation the same land as an inheritance for their descendants after them.

At first glance, the tribe of Levi seems to have been given the short end of the stick in this allotment by the Lord. They would not have any land to pass on to their children throughout their generations. Yet, the Levites were not deprived in this. On the other hand, the Levites received the greater portion, not the lesser portion. Their portion was not a territory of physical land. Their portion was the Lord! Which was greater; land or the Lord? I'll take the Lord over land. In the same way, believers in the Christ will never receive in this present world the fullness of the inheritance and portion that the Lord has ordained for us in Christ. Our inheritance is Him, and its full enjoyment is reserved for us. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you," (I Peter 1:3-4).

The one exception to each tribe receiving portions of the Promised Land was the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Levi was given no portion of the land as their inheritance. The Lord did not leave them without provision. The tithes of the other tribes belonged to the Levites for their inheritance. Of course, this meant that the Levites lived in complete dependence on the faithfulness of the other tribes. If all Israel was faithful to give their tithe to the Lord as He had ordained, then the Levites would always have more than enough to live. If the other tribes failed to give the tithe, or only gave a part of the full tithe of 10%, then the Levites would suffer the consequences of the selfishness of their brethren.

Paul applies this principle in the New Covenant to those who have been called and set apart by the Lord into full time service in the ministry. "For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to

get their living from the gospel." (I Corinthians 9:9-14). The Lord has designed it so that the support of those who work full time in the ministry of the Gospel is measured by the commitment of all of the people of God to value that work and make full provision for it. As I have mentioned before, the statistics of the giving of those who claim to know and follow the Lord does not reflect this level of commitment on average. The standard the Lord has established is the tithe, or 10% of our income to be returned to Him. The average American church gives 2% of their income. Both the person giving much less than what the Lord has ordained, and those Gospel workers dependent on their giving lose out on the greater blessing of God as a result.

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## Numbers 19

***19:1-6 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "This is the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel that they bring you an unblemished red heifer in which is no defect and on which a yoke has never been placed. You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and it shall be brought outside the camp and be slaughtered in his presence. Next Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and sprinkle some of its blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times. Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight; its hide and its flesh and its blood, with its refuse, shall be burned. The priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet material and cast it into the midst of the burning heifer.'"***

This chapter ends the section of Numbers in which the Lord gave additional statutes of His Law. The remainder of the book will return to the narrative of their 40 year journey through the wilderness. The last law given is unique among the laws and stands alone from the other laws for the various sacrifices. It is commonly known as the law of the Red Heifer. It required Aaron's oldest son, Eleazar, who was the main assistant to the high priest to take a special kind of cow outside the camp of Israel for sacrifice. The following required features each convey a symbolic element and together form a layered symbolic sacrifice. All of the symbolism of this sacrifice points forward to Christ just as the many other sacrifices of the Law were designed to do.

The heifer had to be unblemished which meant that it could have no physical defects and symbolized the sinless perfection of Christ in His unblemished obedience to God. It had to be a red color in its skin, which was what we would call a reddish brown tint. This color was an external indicator of the core of the sacrifice which was based upon the blood to be shed for the sake of those who offered the heifer. This one heifer was offered not for a single individual or family, but for the sake of the entire nation of God's chosen people. In the same way Christ was offered on the cross for all those whom God has chosen for salvation.



The heifer must be one that had never before worn a yoke. The yoke was the wooden harness placed upon the animal to dedicate it to the service of the farmer. God wanted an animal that had never served man, but was entirely dedicated to His service in the sacrifice. Christ testified that He lived to only do the will of His Father, and it was His total commitment to the Father's will that qualified Him alone as the necessary sacrifice for our salvation.

The heifer was to be sacrificed in an unusual location. All other sacrifices were offered on the altar in the tabernacle courtyard. The heifer in contrast was to be taken outside of the camp entirely and sacrificed there. Christ was crucified, not within the walls of the city of Jerusalem, but outside the walls. "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate." (Hebrews 13:12). When it was sacrificed, the entire animal was to be burned like a whole burnt offering which showed that in His death on the cross, Jesus withheld nothing and sacrificed everything in His death. An unusual aspect of this sacrifice from the other tabernacle sacrifices was what was to be done with the blood of the sacrifice. Some of the blood of the heifer was to be sprinkled by the priest by dipping his finger in the blood and sprinkling it toward the entrance to the tabernacle seven times. He could only sprinkle it toward the tent because this sacrifice was physically separated from the tent, and was outside the camp. The significance of sprinkling the blood toward the entrance to the tent though was to show that only through the shed blood of Christ was the way into God's house made open to God's people. It was sprinkled seven times to symbolize that Christ's death completely opened the door into God's house. Then, the remainder of the blood was burned along with the sacrifice, which was not done for any of the other sacrifices. The reason why the blood must be burned for this one sacrifice will become apparent in the next passage.

The priest was then to add cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet material to the fire of the offering. Cedar was added because the wood was rich in cedar oil and was a known symbol for something incorruptible. Branches of hyssop were used to dip in the blood of the tabernacle sacrifices in order to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the furnishings and the people, and were a symbol of purification. The scarlet red material symbolized a garment stained with shed blood, as the garment of Christ would later be stained with His blood.

***19:14-20 - "This is the law when a man dies in a tent: everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who is in the tent shall be unclean for seven days. Every open vessel, which has no covering tied down on it, shall be unclean. Also, anyone who in the open field touches one who has been slain with a sword or who has died naturally, or a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean for seven days. Then for the unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the burnt purification from sin and flowing water shall be added to them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the one slain or the one dying naturally or the grave. Then the clean person shall sprinkle on the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify him from uncleanness, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and shall be clean by evening. But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself from uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD; the water for impurity has not been sprinkled on him, he is unclean."***

The second aspect of the Red Heifer sacrifice was designed to extend the special benefits of the sacrifice beyond the day of the sacrifice itself. Once the Red heifer was slain and burned whole, the ashes created by the burning were to be gathered by a man assisting Eleazar and preserved in a clean place just outside the camp. This container of the ashes of the red heifer was kept for the special cleansing needs of the people of Israel. As we have studied in previous passages, there were various ways in which an Israelite could become ceremonially unclean. When they became unclean, such as through physical contact with a dead body, or someone else that had touched a dead body, they were rendered unclean for seven days. They were also ceremonially contagious for those seven days. Then, at the end of that full week of uncleanness in which they were not allowed to even come inside the camp, the unclean person still had to offer a costly sacrifice with one of the priests in order to be restored to a clean condition. In this provision of the red heifer's ashes, the Lord made a gracious way for the unclean person to be restored to a clean condition.

What the person who was unclean could do from this point forward was to go to the deposit of the ashes of the red heifer and take a small portion of the ashes, mix the ashes with water in a container. Then a clean person would take a branch of hyssop and dipping the hyssop in the mixture of ash and water, sprinkle the unclean person with what was now called the water for impurity. As you can imagine, sprinkling a person with water mixed with the ashes of a dead cow would actually make the person more physically unclean. This shows us that the whole point of the cleansing was not physical cleansing, but spiritual cleansing using the physical symbols involved.

This provision reveals a critical aspect of the ongoing benefit of the cross in a way that the other sacrifices do not and is the main reason why the Lord added this red heifer sacrifice to the other tabernacle offerings. The cross provides for believers an ongoing provision of mercy and grace beyond the initial cleansing we receive in our salvation. Thank God, that the cross does much more than cleanse us of all our sins up until the first day we believed. If that was all the cross addressed, then we would be cleansed of all our past sins until the day of our salvation, but not any sins we commit beyond that day. While it is true, that as saved believers, we do not sin in the same way that we did before we were saved, we nevertheless are not yet perfect and sinless. We have all sinned since the day of our salvation, and we need the full benefits of the cross to be applied to all our subsequent sins just like we did to all our previous sins. The ash and water mixture to be sprinkled whenever a person became unclean points to the continual, inexhaustible supply of mercy, grace, and cleansing we find in the cross. Each time we sin, we should return to the cross to be freshly sprinkled with the blood of Christ and cleansed by its purifying virtue.

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:11-14).

***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).***

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## Numbers 20

***20:1-5 - "Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people stayed at Kadesh. Now Miriam died there and was buried there.***

***There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! Why then have you brought the LORD'S assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink."***

The narrative leaps forward in time as this chapter begins. The children of Israel have now been in the wilderness for forty years since leaving Egypt. The Lord led them once again, as He had done before, to a location in which there was no adequate natural source of drinking water. We are meant to read their story here and the way the people responded to this circumstance, and learn from it. The lesson they have to teach us is based upon a bad example and shows us what not to do in similar circumstances. You and I will never camp in a waterless wilderness with two million others, so our physical circumstances will never be the same. What is similar to what happened to them, and what happens to us is the pattern of the Lord's leading, and the pattern of our response. This development shows us that the Lord has, does, and will lead His people into circumstances that test their faith to the core. The details of faith testing circumstances are different for each person, but the Lord knows our hearts completely, and designs situations that force us to face the same kind of test that Israel faced here. Faith testing circumstances usually involve a certain expectation on our part, and the Lord bringing us into circumstances that do not meet our expectations.

The point of the test is to provide us with an opportunity to either trust the Lord or grumble and complain about the circumstance. A heart of trust in this exact same circumstance would have responded quite differently than Israel did here. Trust would have looked at the lack of water and reasoned in a healthy direction. "This lack of water is difficult, but the Lord led us here. He would not have led us here to die of thirst. He always has our best interests at heart. He has proven so many times before that He is faithful to meet our true needs. He showed us years ago at Meribah, that He is able to provide water for the entire nation by giving us water from the rock if necessary. Let's call out to Him in dependence and faith. Surely, He will meet our need now, as He has always done before." Of course, Israel did not think along those lines, let alone respond in this way.

When the lack of water came to the forefront, Israel responded in the same rebellious, unbelieving way they had responded forty years before in an almost

identical testing circumstance. This was a second opportunity from the Lord for them to correct their previous sin. Instead, this circumstance served only to confirm that this generation of Israel had not really grown at all spiritually in their entire forty year journey. The reason for our life long journey in our walk with the Lord, is that we would learn from every single circumstance through which the Lord leads us. Each new test may stretch us, but that stretching is intended to make room for us to grow more like Jesus. It is the spiritual growth we gain from the tests that make the difficulties of the tests worthwhile. Testing that produces no actual changes in us is wasted. In the end, this forty years in the wilderness did not benefit the generation that lived through it at all with the exceptions of Joshua and Caleb.

The response of the people to the test of no water should be familiar to us by now. They once again wrongly identified Moses and Aaron and the cause of this challenge. At the very least, the people should have learned by now that it was the Lord that was leading them through the wilderness, and that Moses and Aaron were only following the Lord's direction. However, because the people are seeing their circumstances with natural, rather than spiritual perspective, their complaints focused on the human leaders as the target of their complaints. Their objection which they voiced is only a repeat of earlier complaints. They again claim it would have been better for them if they had died when their brothers were slain in the judgment of God. Again, this declaration reveals a glaring lack of discernment. Again they insinuate that they have only been brought all this way in order to die here without water. Again they blame Moses for having taken them from Egypt, where, in their short sighted forgetfulness, they imagine their lives were much better than now. Once again they bring up the memory of the foods they ate in Egypt. If there is one lesson every believer must learn to be able to move on into God's full purpose, it is this; our old life of slavery before we were saved is not better than our current life in the Lord, no matter what circumstance may have been more pleasant compared to our present challenges. It boils down to this; it is better to follow the Lord through a wilderness in freedom, than to be enslaved in luxury in Egypt.

***20:6-8 - "Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them; and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink."***

Moses and Aaron were the target of the complaints of the people, but as they were accused of causing this present difficulty, they responded by doing the best possible thing they could do. They fell on their faces. This indicates that Moses and Aaron turned fully to the Lord and waited for His response. They did not yield to the temptation to react to the pressure from the people by defending

themselves. They looked to the Lord, and in doing so demonstrated true humility and provided an example to the people of what they should be doing themselves. The Lord was faithful to meet Moses and Aaron as they looked to Him and waited upon Him. The glory of the Lord appeared to them and the Lord spoke a clear word of direction to Moses in how to handle the crisis.

There are two things about the Lord's response that catch my attention here. The first is that the Lord did not even address the grumbling of the people. We have seen in more than one previous situation how the rebellious complaints of the people affected the Lord. We know that how the people spoke this day must have grieved the Lord. In earlier similar confrontations, the Lord had even threatened to bring the nation to a sudden end in judgment. Now, the Lord does not even address them to threaten them. I believe that this is so, because this generation of people has been judged by the Lord as not worth the effort. The Lord's discipline is always purposeful. He disciplines us to change us. When a person refuses to change over a long period of time, then there is no point in further discipline. Their time is now coming to an end. They will all soon be dead, and the Lord will take the next generation into the Promised Land. The second notable thing the Lord did here is that He once again faithfully provided for their need of water. They did not deserve it, yet, the Lord provided for them.

The Lord chose to provide water for them in a way that would communicate a deep symbolic message to the generations to follow. The Lord instructed Moses to take the rod (probably Aaron's rod that had sprouted) and assemble everyone before a specific rock. There, Moses was to speak to the rock. We are not told what Moses was to say to the rock, but the result of his speaking to it was that the rock would pour forth water for the nation to drink. Now, this situation was familiar to all of them and was connected to one of the first tests in their journey forty years before. "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." (Exodus 17:5-6). In that early test, Moses was commanded to strike the rock with the rod and when he did so, the Lord brought water for the whole nation from the rock. We learned from Paul's teaching that this rock was a type of Christ. "and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ." (I Corinthians 10:4). Remember, the striking of the rock was a spiritual picture in symbol of the crucifixion of Christ. The water that flowed from the rock that was struck portrayed the pouring out of salvation.

***20:9-13 - "So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." Those were the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the LORD, and He proved Himself holy among them."***

There are great similarities between the test forty years previous, and this test. Almost everything in the symbolism of the type of the rock and the water was the same with one key difference. The first time, forty years earlier, the Lord commanded Moses to strike the rock with the rod. Now, in this situation, the Lord commanded Moses to take the rod, but instead of striking the rock with the rod, he was to only speak to the rock. The water would come forth this time without striking the rock a second time. This is no arbitrary change by the Lord in this situation. The change preserved a critical symbolic difference between striking the rock and speaking to the rock. Since striking symbolized Jesus being crucified, it was essential that Moses not strike the rock again as he had done forty years before. If Moses struck the rock again, it would be inadvertently communicating that Jesus must be crucified again for sin in order for the people of God to receive the blessings of salvation. So, the Lord ordered Moses to only speak to the rock to bring forth the continuing blessing of the water. This would picture that once Jesus was crucified, the people of God receive all they need from the rock of salvation by only speaking to the rock in prayer.

Moses has through all the forty years of this journey maintained an exemplary record as the leader of God's people. He has been characterized by full obedience toward the Lord and deep humility toward the people. This time, however, Moses cracks under the pressure of the moment. He allows his own frustration with their attitude and actions to overwhelm his better judgment. In his frustration, Moses ignores the command of the Lord and lifted his hand and struck the rock twice. In doing so, he not only disobeyed the Lord, he ruined the type of the rock of our salvation. The Lord did bring forth water from the rock in spite of the sin of Moses, but He was not pleased with Moses at all.

The Lord pronounces a judgment upon Moses because of this great failure. The judgment of the Lord is that Moses will join the rest of the rebellious generation and die in the wilderness without leading Israel into the Promised Land. At first glance, this may seem like a steep price to pay for a single failure by Moses after forty years of faithful and obedient service to the Lord. It is a steep price, but a necessary one. The standard of the Lord for Moses is higher than for the rest of the nation. He is the leader, and is held to that higher standard. Moses has seen

more of the Lord's glory, heard more of His voice, and been given greater responsibility.

The sovereignty of God is also on display here at a more subtle level. It would not fit the greater spiritual purpose of God for Moses to lead Israel into the Promised Land. Moses represents the Law of God. The purpose of the Law of God is to reveal to us our heart's condition apart from grace and convince us that we could never reach the goal of life based upon our own goodness. The Law can never take us into the Promised Land. Instead, the Lord ordained that Joshua (the same Hebrew name as Jesus), rather than Moses will lead Israel where Moses cannot go.

### **Questions From Numbers 20:**

**Question:** It says in 19:11 that a man who touches the dead will be unclean. Then only those who are clean can sprinkle on the unclean and the verse goes on. Is it related today that in ministering only clean people spiritually can minister?

**Answer:** Yes, that is a good connection to draw to this principle. All who minister in the New Covenant must be spiritually clean. There are two aspects of the necessary spiritual cleanliness to recognize. The first is that in order to minister in the New Covenant a person must first be truly saved, or born again. They must have experienced the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5) that takes place in salvation. We might think that this is too obvious to mention, but the reality is that every day some people graduate from Seminary and Bible College and begin to minister in various church leadership positions who have never been born again.

The second aspect of being spiritually clean for ministry that should be considered, is that even some who are born again and in ministry involve themselves in disqualifying sin. There are more than a handful of pastors, evangelists, teachers, and others in ministry that are participating in adultery, fornication, homosexuality, theft, drunkenness, drug abuse, and other disqualifying sins. Those who are, should not continue in such ministry positions because the ministry above all else is meant to represent the Lord both to the church and the world. It is shameful to portray the Lord in these ways.