

# Numbers 17-19

Bible Study

## Review

### Chapter 15

(Instructions for life in Canaan—anticipating the end of years of wandering)

- Instructions on sacrifices to be made in the land
  - Section covering unintentional sins
  - Section covering defiant sins ('with a high hand')
  - Example: Man gathering sticks on the Sabbath
- Tassels—to remind one of God's laws and not to follow harlotry of the land

### Chapter 16 (Rebellion of Korah)

- Korah along with three men from Reuben and 250 other leaders accused Moses and Aaron of superseding their authority
  - Moses puts them to a test—offering incense (priest's job)
    - Earth swallowed the rebels as God's judgment
  - Many of the congregation blamed Moses and Aaron for the deaths of the rebels
    - A plague killed 14,700 besides the 250 and those who offered incense

Because the priesthood had been contested, **Chapter 17** is God's way of settling who are the legitimate priests

## Numbers 17

## The vindication of Aaron and the priesthood

<sup>1</sup>And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

<sup>2</sup>“Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father’s house, all their leaders according to their fathers’ houses—twelve rods. Write each man’s name on his rod.

<sup>3</sup>And you shall write Aaron’s name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of *each* father’s house.

v. 2 “rod”= staff

(TWOT) “Apparently, each tribal leader led his group with a staff. This suggests that the ruler’s staff may have originally been a symbol of the tribe”

- Each man’s name was written on the staff so identification would be clear in the upcoming test

(Und. Bible Com. Series) “The staffs are not newly cut branches but the official staffs carried by the leader of each tribe to symbolize authority”

v. 3 **Aaron’s name** written on Levi’s staff...as Levi’s staff must be chosen over the other tribes staffs...Aaron’s name limits the choice to him and his descendents as priests

<sup>4</sup>Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you.

<sup>5</sup>And it shall be *that* the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you.”

v. 4 The staffs of the tribes are to be put in front of the ark, in the place of divine communication

v. 5 The staff of the one whom God has chosen as priest will **blossom miraculously** to put an end to the controversy as to who can approach God as priest

(Expositors) “The selection of the twelve staffs, one from each tribe, was for a dramatic symbolic act whereby the divine choice of Aaron would be indicated again”

<sup>6</sup>So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers’ houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron *was* among their rods.

<sup>7</sup>And Moses placed the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness.

<sup>8</sup>Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.

<sup>9</sup>Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

v.8 “blossom” (Heb. *sis*)—the same word describes the golden diadem worn by Aaron on the high priest turban which have the words: “Holiness To The Lord”

v. 8 “almonds”—the cups of the golden lampstand in the tabernacle were “shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms” [Ex. 25: 33-34]

- The almond tree blossoms before other trees in the spring

<sup>10</sup>And the Lord said to Moses, “Bring Aaron’s rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.”

<sup>11</sup>Thus did Moses; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did.

Aaron’s rod is placed in front of the ark—as a sign from God to warn anyone leaning towards rebellion...so they will not die

#### Hebrews 9:3-4

<sup>3</sup>and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All,  
<sup>4</sup>which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which *were* the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant;

v. 12-13 The people of Israel react in an extreme way

(Und. Bible Com. Series) “with the dramatic deaths in chapter 16 and the demonstration of divine power in this chapter, the people panic and fear death.”



<sup>12</sup>So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, “Surely we die, we perish, we all perish!

<sup>13</sup>Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all utterly die?”

v. 13 “Whoever comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die”

The people are terrified, especially to go near the tabernacle where God’s presence was

- In the next chapter God allays their fears—the priests will bear the culpability of the priesthood

## Chapter 18

### The responsibilities of the priests and Levites

<sup>1</sup>Then the Lord **said to Aaron**: “You and your sons and your father’s house with you shall bear the iniquity *related to* the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity *associated with* your priesthood.”

v.1 “said to Aaron” —God speaks only to Aaron (Lev. 10:8 the only other place)

(Und. Bible Com. Series) “The divine address to Aaron affirms Aaron’s relationship with God, and his place as high priest, appropriately, after the series of rebellions beginning with Numbers 11”

“your father’s house” —Aaron’s family group, the Kohathites

- They work with the priests in preparing and carrying the holy items

“bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary” —the priests and Kohathites will bear guilt for any future trespass against the holy items

v.1 (last part) “shall bear the iniquity associated with the priesthood”

- The priests are responsible for protection of their priesthood and position of holiness



<sup>2</sup>Also bring with you your brethren of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you while you and your sons *are* with you before the tabernacle of witness.

<sup>3</sup>They shall attend to your needs and all the needs of the tabernacle; but they shall not come near the articles of the sanctuary and the altar, lest they die—they and you also.

v. 2 “the tribe of Levi...that they may be **joined** with you”—they are not independent but linked with the priests, in a subordinate role

“serve you”—in tabernacle guard duty and physical labor

v. 3 “attend to your needs and all the needs of the tabernacle”

(OKJ)“keep thy charge, and the charge of the tabernacle” (Heb. *samar mismeret*)=guard duty

- They guard the tabernacle from encroachment—but **outside** the sanctuary
- Their failure to stop encroachment means death

<sup>4</sup>They shall be joined with you and attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, for all the **work** of the tabernacle; but an outsider shall not come near you.

<sup>5</sup>And you shall attend to the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, that there *may* be no more wrath on the children of Israel.

<sup>6</sup>Behold, I Myself have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel; *they are* a gift to you, given by the Lord, to do the **work** of the tabernacle of meeting.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything at the altar and behind the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood *to you* as a gift for service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”

v. 4 and v. 6—addresses the Levites “for all the **work** of the tabernacle”

**Work**—refers to the physical labor and guard duty of the tabernacle

v. 5 and v. 7—addresses the priests

Their duties are to guard and watch over the holy items inside the tabernacle and the altar... “the altar and behind the veil”

v. 8-20 Support for the priests  
Language anticipating settling the land of Canaan

“to be raised”—set  
apart or presented to

<sup>8</sup>And the Lord **spoke to Aaron**: “Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings, all the holy gifts of the children of Israel; I have given them as a portion to you and your sons, as an ordinance forever.

<sup>9</sup>This shall be yours of the most holy things *reserved* from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, *shall be* most holy for you and your sons.

<sup>10</sup>In a most holy *place* you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you.

- As understood in Leviticus the priest’s portion of certain offering were to be eaten by the priests in the tabernacle courtyard

v. 8 [last part] (NIV) “I give to you and your sons as your portion and regular share”  
(Expositors) “The sacral gifts are their provisions. They may enjoy the things they receive without guilt. This provision is from the hand of the Lord”

v.9 “reserved from the fire”—the portions that are not consumed by the fire

v. 11-18 Less holy contributions given

(Tyndale) “In recognition of their altar service, the priests are to receive parts of the sacrifices, first-fruits of the harvest, and first born animals [v.17]”

<sup>11</sup>“This also *is* yours: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and your sons and daughters with you, as an ordinance forever. everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.

<sup>12</sup>“All the best of the oil, all the best of the new wine and the grain, their firstfruits which they offer to the Lord, I have given them to you.

<sup>13</sup>Whatever first ripe fruit is in their land, which they bring to the Lord, shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.

v. 11 The “heave”/ wave offerings were for the families of the priests as well

(NICOT) “both sons and daughters can eat of these gifts if they are ceremonially clean. These contributions may be eaten in the priest’s home rather than being limited to the sanctuary”

<sup>14</sup>“Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours.

<sup>15</sup>“Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to the Lord, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem.

<sup>16</sup>And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs.

<sup>17</sup>But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they *are* holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat *as* an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the Lord.

<sup>18</sup>And their flesh shall be yours, just as the wave breast and the right thigh are yours.

v. 14 “devoted thing”= things dedicated to God by an oath

v. 15 (Tyndale) “Unclean animals and human first born which cannot be sacrificed must be redeemed; that is their owner must make a cash payment to the priest instead of giving him his animal or child” ...the redemption price was five shekels [v.16]

v. 17-19 (Expositors) “The firstborn of clean animals were not to be redeemed; they were to be sacrificed in the usual manner, but the meat would belong to the priests [v.18]”

<sup>19</sup>“All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the Lord, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever; it *is* a covenant of salt forever before the Lord with you and your descendants with you.”

<sup>20</sup>Then the Lord said to Aaron: “You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I *am* your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel

v. 19 The meat from the offerings belonging to the priests was a permanent obligation symbolized by salt, a lasting compound

v. 20 “you shall have no inheritance in the land”—having no jobs or income they depended on God

v. 20 [last part] “I am your portion and your inheritance”

▪ God’s special blessing to Aaron—and by extension his descendents  
(Expositors) “While Aaron does not have a part in the land that the rest of the people will inherit, he has more—a peculiar relationship to the Lord”

## Tithes to the Levites

<sup>21</sup>“Behold, **I have given** the children of Levi **all the tithes** in Israel as an inheritance **in return for the work which they perform**, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.

<sup>22</sup>Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die.

<sup>23</sup>But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; *it shall be* a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

<sup>24</sup>For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up *as* a heave offering to the Lord, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, ‘Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.’”

God instructs with new information—the tithes from Israel are to be given to the Levites in return for their work in service at the tabernacle

<sup>25</sup>Then the Lord **spoke to Moses**, saying,

<sup>26</sup>“Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: ‘When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the Lord, a tenth of the tithe.

<sup>27</sup>And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though *it were* the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress.

<sup>28</sup>Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the Lord from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the Lord’S heave offering from it **to Aaron the priest**.

The Levites then, after receiving the tithes from Israel, then tithed on what they received and gave it to Aaron the priest



<sup>29</sup>Of all your gifts you shall offer up every heave offering due to the Lord, from all the best of them, the consecrated part of them.'

<sup>30</sup>Therefore you shall say to them: 'When you have lifted up the best of it, then *the rest* shall be accounted to the Levites as the produce of the threshing floor and as the produce of the winepress.

<sup>31</sup>You may eat it in any place, you and your households, for it *is* your reward for your work in the tabernacle of meeting.

<sup>32</sup>And you shall bear no sin because of it, when you have lifted up the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy gifts of the children of Israel, lest you die.'"

The best part of the tithes must be passed on [v. 29] and once they have done that they can eat the rest of the tithe when and wherever they choose without any blame being attached to them [v.31-32]

## Chapter 19

## Laws on cleansing: (Death)

<sup>1</sup>Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,

<sup>2</sup>“This *is* the ordinance of the law which the Lord has commanded, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there *is* no defect *and* on which a yoke has never come.

(Tyndale) “This chapter deals with the provision of a means to cure the uncleanness of death. Leviticus prescribes two methods of dealing with uncleanness: either washing in water and waiting until evening, or in more serious cases waiting seven days then offering a sacrifice.

Offering a sacrifice was a difficult and expensive procedure, which would have added to the distress of family and friends when someone died.

This chapter provides an alternative remedy which marked the seriousness of the pollution caused by death, yet dealt with it without the cost and inconvenience of sacrifice.

Instead, those who have come in contact with the dead can be treated with a concoction of water that contains all the ingredients of a sin offering.”

(Und. Bible Com. Series) “The color red probably symbolizes blood as a purifying agent”  
“A heifer is a female which has not yet had a calf”

<sup>3</sup>You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him;

<sup>4</sup>and Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting.

(Und. Bible Com. Series) “Eleazar the priest is to supervise the killing and burning of the animal **outside the camp**.

- Aaron the high priest does not perform this duty as to avoid the contact with death. He would probably stay closer to the sanctuary. Eleazar is beginning to take over some priestly duties.”

v. 4 “take some blood and sprinkle...seven times directly in front of tabernacle”

- Indicates that the blood of the cow is for the purpose of maintaining purity for the tabernacle

- <sup>5</sup>Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned.
- <sup>6</sup>And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast *them* into the midst of the fire burning the heifer.
- <sup>7</sup>Then the priest shall wash his clothes, he shall bathe in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; the priest shall be unclean until evening.
- <sup>8</sup>And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening.
- <sup>9</sup>Then a man *who is* clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store *them* outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of <sup>£</sup>purification; it *is* for purifying from sin.
- <sup>10</sup>And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. It shall be a statute forever to the children of Israel and to the stranger who dwells among them.

(Und. Bible Com. Series) “Just as the slaughter and burning are outside the camp, the ashes are stored there. The location probably indicates concern with death and the power of the rite.

Verse nine indicates that the ashes will be used for the water of cleansing, a purifying agent.”

<sup>11</sup>He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days.

<sup>12</sup>He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; *then* he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean.

<sup>13</sup>Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness *is* still on him.

(Und. Bible Com. Series) “These verses deal with the circumstance in which someone touches the dead body of anyone. The resulting uncleanness lasts seven days.

The person is to be purified on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day and the 7<sup>th</sup> day. This cleansing water has been mixed with the ashes of the heifer”

v. 12 (OKJ) “he shall purify himself with it on the third day and on the seventh day he shall be clean”

(NICOT) “The text should be translated to convey the fact that there were two applications of the waters, on the third day (midway through the period) and the other on the seventh, rather than one on the third day that would then lead to cleanness on the seventh.

This double application of the waters may indicate the seriousness of the pollution of contact with a corpse.”

<sup>14</sup>This *is* the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who *are* in the tent shall be unclean seven days;

<sup>15</sup>and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, *is* unclean.

<sup>16</sup>Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

(BKC) “This same uncleanness would apply to an individual who even entered a tent in which someone had died. The effect of death was so pervasive that it corrupted open containers in its proximity.

Contact outdoors with a corpse or with human bones or graves also brought impurity.”

<sup>17</sup>And for an unclean *person* they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel.

<sup>18</sup>A clean person shall take hyssop and dip *it* in the water, sprinkle *it* on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave.

<sup>19</sup>The clean *person* shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.

(BKC) “The ritual of cleansing consisted of mixing ashes and water in a jar and applying this mixture with a branch of hyssop ( a shrub with medicinal properties) to the areas or objects affected by death.

The unclean person must then be sprinkled on the third and seventh days, after which he washed his clothes and bathed himself.”

<sup>20</sup>‘But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he *is* unclean.

<sup>21</sup>It shall be a perpetual statute for them. He who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes; and he who touches the water of purification shall be unclean until evening.

<sup>22</sup>Whatever the unclean *person* touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches *it* shall be unclean until evening.’”

(BKC) “Failure to follow this procedure rendered the unclean party unqualified to approach the tabernacle on pain of death.

He who officiated in the cleansing must also wash his clothing (and bathe) as must anyone who merely touched the sacred water.

Anything...an unclean person touched became unclean and communicated that uncleanness to anyone who came in contact with it. (Hag 2:13)”



## Lessons

The Levites and priests were responsible for assuring proper care and service towards the tabernacle

Leadership, including the ministry in the Church today carries great responsibility and accountability

There was a great deal of symbolism in the red heifer sacrifice

### Hebrews 9:13-14

<sup>13</sup>For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,

<sup>14</sup>how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?