

## Part Three: The Years of Wandering (15:1–21:35)

### I. IN PARAN (15:1–19:22)

#### A. LAWS OF OFFERINGS vv. 1-31

##### TEXT

Chapter 15:1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you, 3. And will make an offering by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill offering, or in your solemn feasts, to make a sweet savor to the Lord, of the herd, or of the flock: 4. Then shall he that offereth his offering unto the Lord bring a meat offering of a tenth deal of flour, mingled with the fourth part of a hin of oil. 5. And the fourth part of a hin of wine for a drink offering shalt thou prepare with the burnt offering or sacrifice, for one lamb. 6. Or for a ram, thou shalt prepare for a meat offering two tenth deals of flour, mingled with the third part of a hin of oil. 7. And for a drink offering thou shalt offer the third part of a hin of wine, for a sweet savor unto the Lord. 8. And when thou preparest a bullock for a burnt offering, or for a sacrifice in performing a vow, or peace offerings unto the Lord; 9. Then shall he bring with a bullock a meat offering of three tenth deals of flour, mingled with half a hin of oil. 10. And thou shalt bring for a drink offering half a hin of wine, for an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord. 11. Thus shall it be done for one bullock, or for one ram, or for a lamb, or a kid. 12. According to the number that ye shall prepare, so shall ye do to every one according to their number. 13. All that are born of the country shall do these things after this manner, in offering an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord. 14. And if a stranger sojourn with you, or whatsoever be among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord; as ye do, so shall he do. 15. One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also

for the stranger that sojourneth with you, an ordinance for ever in your generations: as ye are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord. 16. One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you.

17. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 18. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land whither I bring you, 19. Then it shall be, that, when ye eat of the bread of the land, ye shall offer up a heave offering unto the Lord. 20. Ye shall offer up a cake of the first of your dough for a heave offering: as ye do the heave offering of the threshingfloor, so shall ye heave it. 21. Of the first of your dough ye shall give unto the Lord a heave offering in your generations.

22. And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the Lord hath spoken unto Moses, 23. Even all that the Lord hath commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the Lord commanded Moses, and henceforward among your generations; 24. Then it shall be, if aught be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for a burnt offering, for a sweet savor unto the Lord, with his meat offering, and his drink offering, according to the manner, and one kid of the goats for a sin offering. 25. And the priest shall make an atonement for all the congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them; for it is ignorance: and they shall bring their offering, a sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord, and their sin offering before the Lord, for their ignorance: 26. And it shall be forgiven all the congregation of the children of Israel, and the stranger that sojourneth among them; seeing all the people were in ignorance.

27. And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. 28. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the Lord, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. 29. Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both

for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them.

30. But the soul that doeth aught presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 31. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 15:1. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2. "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, 'When you come to the land of your dwellings, which I give to you, 3. make an offering of fire to the Lord, a burnt offering or a sacrifice to fulfill a special vow, or as a freewill offering, or in your solemn feasts to make a sweet aroma to the Lord, from the herd or the flock; 4. then he who presents his offering to the Lord shall bring a meal offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil. 5. You shall prepare wine for the drink offering: one-fourth of a hin, with the burnt offering or sacrifice for each lamb. 6. Or for a ram, you shall prepare as a meal offering two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil. 7. And for a drink offering you shall give one-third of a hin of wine as a sweet aroma to the Lord. 8. And when you prepare a bull for a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a special vow, or as a peace offering to the Lord, 9. then he shall bring with the bull a meal offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-half a hin of oil. 10. And you shall bring for a drink offering one-half hin of wine for an offering by fire, of a sweet aroma to the Lord.' 11. "Thus it shall be done for a bull, for a ram, for a lamb, or for a goat. 12. According to the number you shall prepare, so you shall do for everyone according to their number. 13. All who are born in this country shall do these things in the same manner in presenting an offering by fire, of a sweet aroma to the Lord. 14. And if an alien sojourns with you, or anyone who is among you throughout your generations, and

if he wishes to present an offering by fire, of a sweet aroma to the Lord, he shall do as you do. 15. There shall be just one regulation for you of the congregation, as well as for the alien sojourning with you, a regulation forever throughout your generations: as you are, so shall the alien be before the Lord. 16. One law and one code shall apply both to you and to the alien who sojourns with you."

17. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 18. "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, 'When you come into the land into which I bring you, 19. it shall be that when you eat of the bread of the land you shall offer up a gift to the Lord. 20. You shall offer a cake from the first of your dough as a gift; just as you offer the gift of your threshing floor, in the same manner you shall set it apart. 21. You shall give an offering to the Lord from the first of your dough throughout your generations.

22. "If you have erred and have not kept all these commandments which the Lord spoke to Moses, 23. everything the Lord has commanded you through Moses, from the day the Lord gave commandment and onward throughout your generations; 24. then if it is done unintentionally or without the knowledge of the congregation, all of the congregation shall offer one young bull for a burnt offering, for a sweet aroma to the Lord, along with its meal offering and its drink offering according to the regulation; and one young goat shall be given as a sin offering. 25. Then the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the children of Israel, and they shall be forgiven; since it was unintentional, and they have brought their offering, a sacrifice brought by fire to the Lord, and their sin offering made before the Lord, for their ignorance. 26. And it shall be forgiven unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and the alien sojourning among them, since all the people were in ignorance.

27. Also, if one person sins through ignorance, he shall bring a year-old female goat for a sin offering. 28. And the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins in ignorance when he sins unintentionally before the Lord, to make atonement for

him: it shall be forgiven him. 29. "You shall have just one law for him who sins ignorantly, whether he is born among the children of Israel or the alien who sojourns among them.

30. But the person who acts defiantly, whether he is native born or an alien, dishonors the Lord: that person shall be excommunicated from among his people. 31. Because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be entirely cut off; and his guilt shall be upon himself.

### COMMENTARY

At this point comes a most abrupt break in the account of Israel's history. For thirty-seven years, with the exception of a single item, in chapter 16, no actions of the people are recorded. It is as if the time spent in the wilderness should be forgotten. True, the places of their encampments are given (33:19-30); but even these are all but unidentifiable. We must not assume that God abandoned the people. They were certainly provided their daily manna, and, just as certainly, it would have been necessary that He furnish copious supplies of water for the people and their animals. In addition, the fire and the cloud went before them (see Ex. 40:34-37), so that the 'wandering' was not aimless and undirected; the Lord led them from place to place as it was appropriate. In analyzing the general circumstance, *KD* suggests the silence of the account is to be attributed to the fact that "the fighting men of Israel had fallen under the judgment of Jehovah, and the sacred history, therefore, was no longer concerned with them; whilst the youth, in whom the life and hope of Israel were preserved, had as yet no history at all," (p. 100).

Anticipating the time when the young generation should arrive in the Promised Land, the Lord reveals certain provisions which complete previous laws. When *KD* proposes that the reason for this revelation is to revive the hopes of the oncoming generation and direct their minds toward the Land, the reasoning seems too thin. It is hard to see how such a minor factor could serve as such a buoy for forty years. Perhaps a

better reason is that of *PC*: "it is evident that the primary object of their promulgation was simply to supply certain defects and omissions in the Levitical legislation," (p. 181).

The laws pertain to certain meal offerings, which are to be added to other sacrifices. The first of these relates all burnt offerings and all offerings which were killed to meat and drink offerings. A fixed amount of meal, oil and wine should be presented with each animal. The quantity differed according to the kind of animal being sacrificed. The occasion of the offering had no effect upon this law—it did not matter whether the animal was being given during the observation of a feast, or in confirmation of a vow, or as a free will offering.

The second law, vv. 17-21, establishes a procedure for offering the "first-fruits"—coarsely ground meal was to be made into a "cake", which, in turn, was lifted up or "heaved" unto the Lord in token of gratitude and blessing. It then became food for the priests.

A final enlargement, 22-31, relates to offerings occasioned by sins of omission. Considering the broad expanses of the terms of the Law, and countless points upon which questions of personal interpretation might arise in carrying out the Law, it is not at all surprising that provision is made for those who, in ignorance or oversight, err. This law had no relationship whatever to deliberate or willful sins, such as blasphemy or rebellion against the Lord. In each of the three provisions, the same details are to apply to both stranger and native-born (see verses 16, 26 and 30).

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

279. What purposes would be served in giving the Israelites instructions for sacrificial procedures they would not use until they occupied their new land?
280. Is it logical for Moses to change the account so abruptly at this point in his history of the people? Enlarge upon your answer.

281. The period in Israel's history between Kadesh-Barnea and the end of their days in the desert have commonly been called the "Wilderness Wanderings." How is this both accurate and inaccurate?
282. Why are the special provisions given in this section to be applicable to both native Israelites and strangers alike?
283. Under what circumstances should an Israelite make an offering for unknown sins?

## B. STONING OF THE SABBATH-BREAKER vv. 32-36

### TEXT

Chapter 15:32. And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. 33. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. 34. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. 35. And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. 36. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.

### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 15:32. Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the sabbath day. 33. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. 34. And they held him in custody, since it had not been told what should be done to him. 35. And the Lord said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." 36. And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

## COMMENTARY

Following immediately upon the law distinguishing between unwitting and deliberate sins, the brief account of the Sabbath-breaker may well be introduced as an exemplum, as well as a concrete reference for future cases in which labor on the Sabbath might require judgment. The man appears to be acting presumptuously rather than in ignorance of the law. Much of the discussion upon the incident, especially that of liberal scholarship, purports to find a basic contradiction between the statement here that "it was not declared what should be done to him," (v. 34), and the clear teaching of Ex. 31:14ff. and 35:2—that Sabbath-breaking is a capital offense—overlooks a basic point. Labor on the Sabbath clearly is such an offense; but, is gathering sticks considered labor, or is it an excusable necessity under the circumstances? God's answer is quick and decisive: the man had broken the law, and must suffer the consequences previously prescribed. He is stoned by the congregation to his death.

The incident offends certain modern minds which find the death penalty horrendous under any or all circumstances. They are especially disturbed that death should come upon an individual for such an apparently trivial reason. Where such an attitude can be found, it is evidence of a more deeply seated reaction against the sovereign right of God to prescribe laws and govern human conduct by standards which do not rest upon human reasoning. Much more than our present age, the Israelites were taught from infancy to recognize the holiness of the Lord. Since His laws were nothing less than the extension of His will and His person into the ideal human society, they were always justifiable, always above question. Such conclusions were inevitable and essential in a truly theocratic system.

Stoning "without the camp" preserved the undefiled nature of the camp. In no manner were the people to be held accountable for the presumptuous man's sins; they were to be totally dissociated from both the living violator and the dead victim of the law of God.



QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

- 284. Upon what grounds can we justify the death sentence for this apparently trivial offense?
- 285. What point of the Law needed clarification before the man's fate could be decided?
- 286. Why should the congregation participate in execution of the sentence?
- 287. What important fact is impressed upon us regarding the Sabbath in the incident?

C. LAW OF THE TASSELS vv. 37-41

TEXT

Chapter 15:37. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 38. Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments, throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue; 39. And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: 40. That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God. 41. I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 15:37. And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 38. "Speak to the children of Israel and tell them that they shall make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and they shall put on the tassel of each corner a blue cord. 39. And it shall be a tassel for you to see and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them. Do not seek after your own heart or your own eyes, after which you wander, 40. in order that you may remember to do all my commandments, and be holy to your God. 41. I am the Lord

your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord your God."

### COMMENTARY

*Tzitzit*, the Hebrew term used in v. 38, probably means "tassels". Ezekiel used the word (8:3) where its apparent meaning is "lock of hair." They were placed at the corners of the garments, attached by a blue cord. Two purposes have been ascribed to the tassels: they are to remind the people of their living relationship to the Lord and His Laws; and, they serve as a readily recognizable means of identification for His people. Wherever they went, and among whatsoever people they might mingle, they were uniquely marked unless, in repudiation of this commandment, they should be ashamed or unwilling to comply with God's requirement.

Historically, the Israelites complied with the commandment by wearing the *tallith*, a special garment worn by all males beyond the age of thirteen. It was a long, narrow cloth with a tassel at each corner and a hole in the center. The head was passed through the hole, and the cloth fell to the chest and the mid-back. Among the many other aberrations and showy practices of the Pharisees, making these tassels extremely large was a practice which Jesus condemned (Matt. 23:5). Their actions had become exhibitions of pride—far from the purpose for which the Lord had prescribed the tassels in the first place. Numerology has figured in the rabbinical attitude toward the *tzitzit*, whose gematria is six hundred. Adding eight threads and five knots (arbitrarily assigned as components of the garment), one arrives at the total of 613, the total number of commandments accepted as obligatory upon the Jews. Of further interest is the fact that the blue dye used for the tassels was derived from the blood of the *hilazon*, a shellfish, and was very expensive. It was later determined, perhaps because of the prohibitive cost, that the knotted cord might be white.

Non-Jewish scholars have usually cited the psychological importance of the *tzitzit* as constant reminders of the individual's relationship to God. Following "their own heart

and their own eyes" would mean spiritual defection according to their personal whims rather than the righteous laws God had delivered to them. Such a defection is termed "a whoring" here in *KJ*—a strong, symbolical term frequently applied to such conduct in both testaments.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

288. Describe the *tzitzit*, its appearance and function.
289. What use, and what abuse, was made of the tassels?
290. Discuss the numerological significance attached to the tassels.
291. For what reason were the Israelites later permitted to make the tassels white rather than blue?
292. Do you find any memorials or instructions in the New Testament which resemble the one given here?

#### D. REVOLT AND PUNISHMENT OF KORAH, DATHAN AND ABIRAM (16:1-40)

##### TEXT

Chapter 16:1. Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: 2. And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown; 3. And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord? 4. And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face; 5. And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to-morrow the Lord will show who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. 6. This do: Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; 7. And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the

Lord tomorrow: and it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi. 8. And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: 9. Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? 10. And he hath brought thee near to him, and all the brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also? 11. For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?

12. And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; which said, We will not come up: 13. Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? 14. Moreover, thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up. 15. And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the Lord, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them. 16. And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the Lord, thou, and they, and Aaron, to-morrow: 17. And take every man his censur, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the Lord every man his censur, two hundred and fifty censurs; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censur. 18. And they took every man his censur, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron. 19. And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation. 20. And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, 21. Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. 22. And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt

thou be wroth with all the congregation?

23. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 24. Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. 25. And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. 26. And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. 27. So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dethan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. 28. And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. 29. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Lord hath not sent me. 30. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.

31. And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: 32. And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. 33. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. 34. And all Israel that were around about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also. 35. And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

36. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 37. Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed. 38. The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the Lord, therefore they are

hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel. 39. And Eleazar the priest took the brazen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar: 40. To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the Lord said to him by the hand of Moses.

### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 16:1. Now Korah, son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, along with Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On, son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, gathered men 2. and rose up against Moses, together with certain of the children of Israel—two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, regularly chosen by the assembly, men of renown. 3. And they gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “You assume too much, since all the congregation are holy, each one of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why, then, do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?” 4. When Moses heard this, he fell on his face 5. and spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, “Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is His, and who is holy, and will cause him to draw near Him; even the one whom He will choose. He will bring near to Himself. 6. Do this: Take censers, both Korah and all his company. 7. Put fire in the censers and put incense in them in the presence of the Lord tomorrow. The man whom the Lord chooses, he shall be holy. You assume too much, you sons of Levi!” 8. Then Moses said to Korah, “I ask you to listen, sons of Levi. 9. Is it too little for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to Himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them? 10. He has also brought you near Him, and all your brothers, sons of Levi, with you? 11. Do you also seek the priesthood? For this reason you and all your company who are brought together are against the Lord. And who is Aaron, that you

complain against him?

12. Then Moses issued a summons to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab; 13. but they said, "We will not come. Is it not enough that you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? and now you also make yourself a prince over us? 14. Furthermore, 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 gouge out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!" 15. Then Moses was very angry and he said to the Lord, "Do not regard their offering. I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I hurt any of them." 16. And Moses said to Korah, "Be present before the Lord with all your company tomorrow: you, they, and Aaron. 17. Let every man take his censer and put incense in it, and present his censer unto the Lord—two hundred and fifty censers. You and Aaron, each shall bring his censer. 18. So each man took his censer, putting fire in it, and laid incense on it, and stood in the door of the Tent of Meeting with Moses and Aaron. 19. And Korah gathered all the congregation before them at the door of the Tent of Meeting; and the glory of the Lord appeared to the entire congregation. 20. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, 21. "Separate yourselves from among this congregation so I may consume them immediately." 22. But they fell on their faces and said, "O God, God of the spirit of all flesh, if one man sins, will you be angry with the entire congregation?"

23. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the congregation, saying, 24. 'Get away from the area around the homes of Korah, Dathan and Abiram' " 25. And Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, with the elders of Israel following him. 26. And he said to the congregation, "I pray you, get away from the tents of these corrupt men, touching nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed among all their sins." 27. So they left the homes of Korah, Dathan and Abiram on all sides; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood in the door of their tents, as did their wives, their sons, and their little children. 28. And Moses said, "By this you shall know that the

Lord has sent me to do all these works; I have not done them of my own volition. 29. If these men die a death common to all men, or if that which comes upon them also comes upon all men, then the Lord has not sent me. 30. However, if the Lord creates something quite new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with everything related to them and they enter alive into the Grave, then you shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.”

31. As he finished speaking these words, it happened that the ground split open beneath them. 32. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their homes, and all the men associated with Korah, together with all their possessions. 33. They, and all their belongings descended alive into the Grave, and the earth closed upon them; and they perished from among the congregation. 34. And all the Israelites surrounding them fled at their shout, for they said, “The earth must not swallow us also!” 35. And a fire came from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

\*36. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 37. “Tell Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, that he should take up the censers from the fire and scatter the burning coals around; the censers have become holy. 38. As for the censers of these men who sinned at the cost of their very lives, let them be made into beaten plates for a covering for the altar, since they presented them before the Lord, and they have become holy. 39. They shall be a sign unto the children of Israel.” So Eleazar the priest took the brass censers which had been offered by the men who were burned; and they beat them into a covering for the altar, 40. to be a reminder to the children of Israel so that no one who is not a priest, who is not a descendant of Aaron, may come near to burn incense before the Lord, lest he become like Korah and his company, as the Lord told Eleazar through Moses.

### COMMENTARY

This section has been subjected to severe attack by the

\*Some versions divide the chapter at this point.



critics' knives. The usual contention is that we have here not one rebellion, but two; and that they are interwoven records of the revolt of Dathan and Abiram against Moses' civil authority, while the revolt of Korah and his company is directed against the religious authority of the great man of God. The first account is presumed to be that of JE; the second, by P. Admittedly, there are some problems with the early portion of the text, but in no logical manner do these problems give substance to the critical view. Besides the contention that we have two, rather than one incident, critics have pointed to the fact that the verb "took" (v. 1) has no object. Finally, there is a change of number in the verbs from verse 1 to the following verses— from the singular to the plural.

Each of the charges can be answered without straining the intent or the integrity of the text. Regarding the change of number, we may assume that Moses himself began the account by calling attention to Korah, the instigator of all of the difficulty, as he gathered the other leading participants about him and influenced them to join in the protest against Moses. From that point, we are dealing not with one individual, but with a group; hence, the entire group receive the author's attention.

Nobody knows certainly what is the intended object of the verb "took", although the *KJ* supplies "men", a very logical choice under the circumstances; the Jerusalem Targum suggests "counsel", which would also fit the situation; *RCP*, more original but less probable, supplies "himself". With Dathan and Abiram having been mentioned within the same verse, and anticipating the association all would have in the revolt, the conjecture that Korah "took men" for the purpose of organizing the resistance would seem most probable; and it would reinforce the argument regarding the change of number previously discussed.

The suggestion that we are dealing with two interwoven records, not a single incident, is purely a subjective judgment. *IB* demonstrates well a very obviously anachronistic prejudice in

commenting that the mistake of all the revolutionaries was not that of insurrection, disrespect for authority, or attempted usurpation of rights not properly theirs; it was, instead, a mistake of bad timing. In the commentator's words, "In what then did the crime of Korah and his associates consist? Was it not that they failed to see that their timing was wrong?" (p. 222). The conclusion is based upon the premise that the contemporary reader should "glory in their two main contentions, viz., ecclesiastical and political democracy as over against autocracy", (*Ibid*). It is hard to imagine a more unwarranted and myopic argument. The author has ignored the facts that Moses served in his place, not by demagoguery or without divine sanction, but as the very personally appointed legate of God Himself. It is historical folly to suggest that a democratic government among either the priests or the people of Israel would have been a more equitable form of rule than that which had been ordained by the Law: a theocracy, with political leadership placed squarely in Moses' hands, and religious leadership assigned to the Levitical priesthood, with Moses and Aaron standing in primary positions. It must not be forgotten that these positions, while most honorable and prestigious, also were positions of almost incalculable responsibility. Rebels like Korah and his crew have, more often than not, sought honor and prestige rather than equity and responsibility. From the manner in which the revolt began, but more particularly from the manner in which God dealt with it, we may confidently affirm that the critics stand upon thin ice.

The most interesting treatment of Korah's mutiny undoubtedly is that of Rabbi Tanhumah in the Midrash. He points out that Reuben camped on the south side of the Tent, which put Korah and the other rebels in near proximity to each other. And why did Korah rebel? Because of jealousy toward Elizaphan, son of Uzziel, who was appointed prince of the Kohathites (at Moses' hand, but at God's instruction), whereas Korah, son of Izhar and in seniority next to Amram, should have received the honor, in his own opinion. Tanhumah relates a test question devised by Korah and his company, by which he

proposed to humiliate and expose Moses as unfit to lead the people: standing before Moses, Korah asked, "Does a garment made entirely of blue wool still require the *tzitzit* with its single blue thread, or is such a garment exempt?" When Moses replied that the *tzitzit* must still be fastened to the garment, the scoffers retorted, "Is it possible that a garment of a different color is legally covered by a single thread of blue, while this robe made wholly of blue should not be exempt?" (*RCP*, pp. 148, 149).

While such a story may lack historical validity, it would blend well with the true meaning of "rose up *before* Moses", v. 2; in harmony with v. 3, we may understand that the rebels "rose up *against* Moses," plotting their insurrection, but not necessarily standing directly before his face at the outset of their plot.

At the actual confrontation (v. 3ff.), their words accuse Moses of assuming too much authority, elevating himself above all the people without authorization. Their weak premise is that all of the people, not Moses alone, had the abiding presence of the Lord in their midst; hence, the proposal is that all the people should be a holy people—perhaps even an entire nation of priests. Such a proposal ignores, according to *KD*, both the "transition of the universal priesthood into the special mediatorial office and priesthood of Moses and Aaron," and overlooks "the fact that God Himself had chosen Moses and Aaron, and appointed them as mediators between Himself and the congregation, to educate the sinful nation into a holy nation . . . the rebels, on the contrary, thought that they were holy already," (pp. 106, 107).

For the fourth time, a serious incident has disrupted the smooth progress of history among the Israelites. They had worshipped the golden calf, murmured bitterly against Moses and the Lord, and followed the bad advice of the ten faithless spies. Each time Moses had interceded in their behalf; each time God had been merciful. But the potential of this rebellion seems to be the worst of all. Moses "fell upon his face" once more,

doubtless experiencing a combination of frustration, bitter disappointment, and grief. Only the Lord can fully and properly handle the problem and, while prostrate, Moses seeks the course of Divine counsel. When he rises, it is with God's own prescription for action: the rebels are to bring their censers into His own Presence on the following day, and He would make his verdict clear to the entire camp. Of course, only the Levites following Korah would be involved in the test at this point. Theirs is a higher station than that of the Reubenites; theirs is, therefore, a weightier responsibility. The Reubenites will be dealt with differently but appropriately. Moses pinpoints the sin of Korah and his troupe in v. 7 when he turns their own argument upon them: "Ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi!" They have been presumptuous to the extreme, standing in criticism of a system designed by God, but making Moses the butt of their snide remarks.

The entire structure of the priestly system is placed in its proper perspective in vv. 9-11. Every Levite holds a place of special honor and service of ministry; now these malcontents seek to break out of their prescribed assignment, considering it beneath their dignity or their ability. Typically human, they complain about not holding the highest stations while ignoring the singular place of honorable service to which they have been set aside.

Moses next turned his attention to Dathan and Abiram, whose precise role in the conflict is not clear. They were not of the two hundred and fifty previously referred to, but they are called to the same scene of impending trial. They refuse emphatically. They propose four basic criticisms against Moses: 1. he has brought them from a land of plenty; 2. he will cause their death in the desert; 3. he has made himself a prince over the people; and, 4. he has failed to bring them to the land promised them when they left Egypt. The charges have no substance whatever. They have forgotten that they were slaves without privilege, and under heavy oppression, regardless of any other circumstances. Again, although death has indeed been promised to all those adults now in the camp before they

emerge from their time in the wilderness, it is a death they have brought upon themselves because of their hardness of heart and refusal to follow God's will in entering into Canaan. This argument is directly related to the last point, since their failure to enter the Promised Land is coupled with their own obstinacy, and the resultant promise of death. The charge that Moses had made himself a prince over the people is patently untrue. The accusers had forgotten, or did not know, that, although Moses chose to repudiate his place among the royal family in Egypt in order to identify himself with his own people (Ex. 2:11-15; cf. Heb. 11:24-27), God had selected him to return from Midian as the leader of his people from the land of bondage over Moses' sincere efforts to refuse the place of leadership (see Ex. 3:7-4:17). These circumstances made the unkind criticisms even more difficult for Moses to bear. His angered response (v. 15) is not only understandable, it is wholly justified. His counsel to the Lord, that He should not recognize their offering, hardly seems necessary, although it is a natural statement, as is his defense of personal integrity.

To Korah, Moses repeats God's instructions, (vv. 16, 17). The next day arrives, and Korah appears as directed, with his companions, while the congregation draws near to watch the proceedings. When God warns Moses and Aaron to draw apart from the throng to avoid being caught in their destruction, they immediately react against the thought that punishment might visit upon the entire audience—how shall they all be held responsible for the deeds of a few? Their intercession is based upon the knowledge that God is aware of the innermost thoughts of all men, and He will not cause the innocent to suffer here with the offenders; He will punish with discrimination. To this end, Moses and Aaron are told to leave the dwelling of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

Moses makes one last effort to dissuade the revolutionaries from their course. He came before Dathan and Abiram to request an end to their rebellion, but his efforts are without success. Consequently the people are told to separate themselves from the spot and to touch nothing whatever among

their belonging, for all are to be destroyed. This leaves the rebels and their families in virtual isolation, whereupon Moses sets forth the terms of the divine ordeal: if the men die an ordinary death, then he is not God's ordained spokesman. If, however, the earth splits and they are taken into the crevice, the people must recognize them for what they are: rebels against the Lord. He had scarcely finished his charge when the earth opened up and they were destroyed. The sight was made more horrendous by the accompanying screams of the victims, a flame which no doubt flashed forth from the sanctuary like lightning, and the disappearance of people, houses and possessions. Fear struck the hearts of the congregation and they fled to escape a similar fate. At the same instant, the two hundred fifty Levites and, no doubt, Korah himself were overcome by a fatal fire emanating from the Tabernacle. It was a most convincing demonstration of righteous judgment, and a clear exoneration of Moses and Aaron.

The closing verses of this section (vv. 36-40), establish the sacredness of the vessels used by the lately deceased. They are not to be discarded or used profanely. Rather, they are to be made into brass covers for the altar of incense. As such, they would be continuing reminders of the fate which surely awaits any who would be so foolish as to repeat the irreverent errors of Korah. The incident is closed. Moses and Aaron have been vindicated, and the justice of God has again been demonstrated most convincingly.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

293. Review the distinction between priests and Levites, and relate this to Korah, Dathan and Abiram.
294. Upon what grounds do critics attempt to show that chapter 16 is actually a composite of two separate incidents? Look through the chapter carefully, separating the proposed incidents. What happens to the text's logic, order and credibility?
295. List the actual problems encountered in the account.

- How is each of them interpreted by the critical schools?  
How can the problems be explained without doing violence to belief in the Mosiac authorship of the chapter?
296. What is essentially wrong in suggesting that the error of the revolutionaries was simply a matter of bad timing?
  297. Pinpoint the primary point of guilt in Korah's criticism and ambition.
  298. Relate the test Korah is said to have proposed to Moses, in an attempt to trap him.
  299. Explain why Moses would continue to intercede before the Lord in behalf of a rebellious people time after time.
  300. Why should the verdict of God be pronounced separately and differently upon the Levites and the Reubenites?
  301. What four basic criticisms do Dathan and Abiram level at Moses? Answer each of them.
  302. Why was it necessary for God to call the congregation apart from Korah—would He have destroyed them along with the rebels?
  303. Others, besides Moses, have predicted the manner of God's destruction upon false prophets or revolutionaries. Find as many examples as you can, such as Micaiah (I Kings 22:24-28).
  304. What would be considered an "ordinary death", as Moses speaks to the rebels?
  305. Describe the circumstances under which God effected the punishment of the rebels.
  306. What emotion came upon the congregation as they witnessed this scene?
  307. Why were the censers not destroyed? To what use were they finally put?

## E. THE FATAL PLAGUE vv. 41-50

## TEXT

Chapter 16:41. But on the morrow all the congregation of

the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord. 42. And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation; and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. 43. And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation.

44. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 45. Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces.

46. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the Lord; the plague is begun. 47. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. 48. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed. 49. Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, besides them that died about the matter of Korah. 50. And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed.

#### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 16:41. But on the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the Lord." 42. And it happened when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron that they looked toward the Tent of Meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. 43. Then Moses and Aaron came before the Tent of Meeting.

44. And the Lord said to Moses, "Get away from this congregation so that I may consume them immediately." 45. And they all fell on their faces. And Moses said to Aaron, "Take



a censer and put fire from the altar in it, and put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation to make atonement for them;

46. for wrath has gone out from the Lord, and the plague has begun.” 47. And Aaron took the censer as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and behold, the plague had begun among the people. Therefore, he put incense on the censer, and made atonement for the people. 48. And he stood between the dead and the living so that the plague was stopped. 49. Now all those who had died in the plague were 14,700, besides those who died in the incident of Korah. 50. Then Aaron returned to Moses, to the door of the Tent of Meeting, since the plague had been ended.

#### COMMENTARY

While the incident given in closing chapter sixteen may almost seem to be an epilogue to the account of Korah and the rebels, it is only partly so. The multitude had had no part in the rebellion, and should have been convinced by the dramatic visit of divine justice that Moses' conduct was altogether acceptable to the Lord, and that the destruction was nothing less than deserved. Had the matter been left here, the story would have had a different end. But, with the unpredictability of human nature, the crowd now proved to be most fickle as they hurled bitter charges against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of having “killed the people of the Lord”! Such a judgment cannot be justified, under any circumstances. True, the lives of a number of people have been taken, but they have suffered a self-imposed condemnation; and the people themselves were spared only because Moses and Aaron had interposed for them, eliciting God's instructions that they all should withdraw from the proximity of the destruction (v. 26). Since the 250 men had been very important men in the community, their loss would be a serious blow. But it should not have obscured the issues themselves, which the people have now forgotten.

While the protest is being lodged with Moses and Aaron, God again takes decisive action, appearing in a covering cloud at

the tabernacle. From this covering, His words issue a call for the two faithful men to separate themselves again from the murmurers. Quickly, Aaron is dispatched to offer incense in behalf of the offenders, to prevent their death. And what is the plague which has already begun to ravage the camp? Our information is inadequate, but it seems to have been a direct visit of death upon them. In a very brief time, 14,700 had been victims. That there were not many more is directly due to the quick actions of Aaron at the instruction of Moses. For so fierce a visitation to have ended so suddenly would leave no doubt whatever but that God heard the intercession of His servants once again; the surviving people owed their very lives once more to the men of whom they had been most severely critical.

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

308. By what sort of logic could the congregation hold Moses and Aaron responsible for the death sentence executed upon the rebels?
309. Why would the loss of these 250 men be a special blow against the life of the community?
310. The Law prescribed no such service as Aaron's special incense offering, made on this occasion. Why should it have been effectual?
311. What do we know about the kind of plague which visited the people?
312. Explain the scripture saying that Aaron "stood between the dead and the living" in giving his offering.

#### F. BUDDING OF AARON'S ROD (17:1-13)

##### TEXT

Chapter 17:1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers, twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod. 3. And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of

the house of their fathers. 4. And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet you. 5. And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you.

6. And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their father's houses, even twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. 7. And Moses laid up the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness, 8. And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds. 9. And Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod.

10. And the Lord said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not. 11. And Moses did so; as the Lord commanded him, so did he. 12. And the children of Israel spake unto Moses saying, Behold, we die; we perish; we all perish. 13. Whosoever cometh anywhere near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die; shall we be consumed with dying?

#### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 17:1. Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2. "Speak to the children of Israel, and take from each one of them a rod, one for each father's family, of all their princes according to the father's family: twelve rods in all. Write every man's name on his rod, 3. and write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi, for one rod shall represent each of the fathers' families. 4. And you shall lay them up in the Tent of Meeting in front of the Testimony, where I will meet with you. 5. And it will happen that the man whose rod I shall choose shall blossom. In this way I will put an end to the grumbings against Me—the

grumbings of the children of Israel who complain against you.”

6. So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of the princes gave him a rod, one for each prince, according to their fathers' families: twelve rods, among which was the rod of Aaron. 7. So Moses put the rods before the Lord in the Tent of the Testimony. 8. And it happened on the next day that Moses went into the Tent of the Testimony; and lo, the rod of Aaron, representing the house of Levi, had sprouted and brought forth buds and bloomed, and had produced ripe almonds. 9. Moses then brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

10. But the Lord said to Moses, “Put Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels so that you may put an end to their complaining against Me, in order that they may not die.” 11. And Moses did it; just as the Lord commanded him, he did it. 12. And the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, “Look we are dying! We perish! We are all dying! 13. Everyone who comes near, everyone who even approaches the Tabernacle of the Lord dies! Shall we all perish?”

#### COMMENTARY

Of this account, *IB* says, “The story of Aaron's rod presents a miracle which the modern mind finds difficult to accept as a literal historical fact,” (p. 227). The revealing comment is hardly surprising from such a source; we might expect it to have been made of virtually any miracle in Scripture, since all revolve about the intervention of God in normal life, and they vary only in time, dimension and circumstances. But to the man who is convinced of God's supreme power, and of His concern with the affairs of men, the miracle is more than credible, it is virtually mandatory at this point in time. When the seeds of rebellion have been sown widely among Israel, and the full crop has led to the deaths of nearly 15,000 people; when God's appointed leaders have been subjected to crude, cruel and totally unjustified criticism, nothing could be more appropriate than for God to demonstrate convincingly that He is still in

power upon His throne, and that His selection of Moses and Aaron is now more fully justified than ever before.

True, it is unusual that a branch, broken from its source, should live, let alone bring forth buds, blossoms and fruit overnight. But who would have been convinced by a sign requiring natural processes to produce the same effects in four months? The God of nature, Whose Son eliminated the time and process required to turn water into wine naturally, chose a like technique to gainsay the scoffers of Israel and reaffirm the station of Aaron, further setting him apart to the highest permanent office among the people: High Priest.

It is probable that the twelve rods presented before the Lord were not sticks randomly chosen to fulfill a specific commandment of the Lord, but that they had served each individual man as a useful staff in daily life; and that each might have been identifiable to its owner even without inscribing his name upon it. The identification would demonstrate beyond dispute, however, ownership of the rod chosen of the Lord; and none could question it. Hebrews 9:4 lists the rod, along with the tablets of the Law and a pot of manna, as an item kept within the Ark of the Covenant—continuing as a reminder of the divine appointment of the High Priest. And, just as the rod, separated from the tree, could have produced nothing at all except by divine power, so the priesthood itself, if severed from God, would be sterile.

The rod is preserved as a sign against rebellion, and God remarked that thus He had literally “buried” their murmurings (v. 10). When the people witnessed the sign of the fruitful rod, they were struck with terror, perhaps realizing the gravity of their complaints more fully than ever before. They feared another fatal judgment upon their number at the moment, or at intervals in the future when they approached the Tabernacle, and their cries, “We are dying!” are expressed in what are known as “percepts of certainty”, indicating the inevitable. But they have only seen God’s warning, not His execution, in the sign: and they have no reason to fear unless they should repeat the dastardly conduct of the recent past.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

313. Name ten miracles, besides the one in Numbers 17, in which the power of God neutralizes, reverses, or accelerates some natural power.
314. Why would it be important that the twelve rods were placed in the Tabernacle during the time of the test?
315. Why was this test important, and why was it appropriate to the circumstances?
316. What was the probable service of the rods before they were brought for this test?
317. What was the ultimate destination of Aaron's rod?
318. Explain the reaction of the people to the sight of Aaron's rod.
319. Under what circumstances should they have been afraid?

G. LEVITICAL DUTIES AND THEIR EMOLUMENTS  
(18:1-32)

TEXT

Chapter 18:1. And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. 2. And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness. 3. And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die. 4. And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle; and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you. 5. And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar; that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel. 6. And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a

gift for the Lord, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. 7. Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the veil; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

8. And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever. 9. This shall be thine of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for thee and for thy sons. 10. In the most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee. 11. And this is thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it. 12. All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee. 13. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine; every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it. 14. Everything devoted in Israel shall be thine. 15. Everything that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the Lord, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem. 16. And those that are to be redeemed from a month old thou shalt redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. 17. But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they are holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savor unto the Lord. 18. And the flesh of them shall be thine, as

the wave breast and as the right shoulder are thine. 19. All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee.

20. And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. 21. And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. 22. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. 23. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statue for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. 24. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as a heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

25. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 26. Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up a heave offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe. 27. And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress. 28. Thus ye also shall offer a heave offering unto the Lord of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof of the Lord's heave offering to Aaron the priest. 29. Out of all your gifts ye shall offer every heave offering of the Lord, of all the best thereof, even the hallowed part thereof out of it. 30. Therefore thou shalt say unto them, When ye have heaved the best thereof from it, then it shall be counted unto the Levites as the increase of the threshingfloor,



and as the increase of the winepress. 31. And ye shall eat it in every place, ye and your households; for it is your reward for your service in the tabernacle of the congregation. 32. And ye shall bear no sin by reason of it, when ye have heaved from it the best of it: neither shall ye pollute the holy things of the children of Israel, lest ye die.

## PARAPHRASE

Chapter 18:1. And the Lord said unto Aaron, "You and your sons, as well as your father's family with you, shall bear the guilt of the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear the guilt of your priesthood. 2. But bring with you also your brothers, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father; in order that they may be joined with you to serve you, while you and your sons with you are before the Tent of the Testimony. 3. And they shall attend to your duty, and to the duty of all the Tent; but they shall not come near the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, lest they, or you, should die. 4. And they shall be joined with you and attend to the duties of the Tent of Meeting, for all the service of the Tent; but no foreigner may come near you. 5. And you shall keep the duty of the sanctuary, and the duty of the altar so that there may be no more wrath upon the children of Israel. 6. And behold, I have taken your brothers from the Levites, from among the children of Israel. They are given to you as a gift for the Lord, to do the duty of the Tent of Meeting. 7. Therefore you and your sons with you shall keep your priesthood for everything related to the altar, and inside the veil; and you shall do the service. I have given your priesthood to you as a service of gift; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."

8. And the Lord said to Aaron, "Behold, I have also given you charge of my heave offerings of all the sacred things of the children of Israel; I have given them to you as a share, and they are unto your sons as a perpetual portion. 9. This is to be yours of the most holy gifts, reserved from the fire: each offering of theirs, each meal offering of theirs, and each sin offering of theirs, and every guilt offering of theirs which they shall render

unto me shall be most holy for you and your sons. 10. In the most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you. 11. And this also is yours: the heave offering of their gift, even all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them to you and to your sons and daughters with you by law forever: every one in your house who is clean shall eat of it. 12. All of the best of the oil, and all of the best of the wine, and of the wheat, of the first of them offered to the Lord: these have I given you. 13. The first ripe fruit of everything in the land, which they are to bring to the Lord: these shall be yours. Everyone in your house who is clean shall eat of it. 14. Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. 15. Everything coming forth first from the womb of all flesh, which they bring to the Lord, whether of men or of animals, shall be yours. However, the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. 16. And those which are to be redeemed are to be redeemed from one month old by your ordinary counting for five shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. 17. But the firstborn of an ox, or the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you are not to redeem: they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and burn their fat for an offering of fire, as a sweet aroma to the Lord. 18. And their flesh shall be yours, just as the breast of the wave offering and the right thigh. 19. All the heave offerings of holy gifts, which the children of Israel offer to the Lord, I have given to you and your sons and your daughters with you forever by law. It is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord to you and to your children with you."

20. The Lord said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you own any portion among them: I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel. 21. "And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance for the service they perform, even the service of the Tent of Meeting. 22. Neither must the children of Israel come near the Tent of Meeting from now on lest they bear sin and die. 23. Only the Levites shall do the

service of the Tent of Meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity. It shall be an everlasting regulation throughout your generations that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. 24. But I have given the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as a gift to the Lord, to the Levites as an inheritance. Therefore, I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.' "

25. Then the Lord said to Moses, 26. "Furthermore, you shall speak to the Levites and tell them, 'When you take the tithes which I have given you from the children of Israel as an inheritance, you shall offer from it a gift for the Lord, a tithe of the tithe. 27. And your offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were grain from the threshing floor, or as the completeness of the winepress.' 28. In this way you also shall present an offering to the Lord from your tithes, which you receive from the children of Israel; and from it you shall give the Lord's offering to Aaron the priest. 29. From all that is given you, you shall lay aside all that is due as a gift to the Lord, from everything the very best, even the sacred portion of it. 30. Therefore you shall say to them, 'When you have laid aside the best of it, it shall be counted to the Levites as the increase of the threshing floor and of the winepress. 31. And you may eat it anywhere, you and your households, since it is your reward for your service in the Tent of Meeting. 32. And you shall bear no sin because of it when you have offered the best from it; nor shall you pollute the holy things of the children of Israel, lest you die.' "

### COMMENTARY

The duties of the priests and the duties of the Levites are now put in clear relationship to each other. The priests attend unto all affairs of the sanctuary and of the altar of sacrifice. The Levites supply what assistance may be required, but they are under severe warning not to come directly into contact with the vessels or the altar, under threat of death (v. 3). To Aaron and the Kohathites comes the weighty assignment of fulfilling the detailed requirements of the expiation of all types of sins in the

various sacrifices and offerings. The inherited office would remain as long as the very covenant itself, making it unnecessary for the members of any other tribe to endanger his life by approaching the sanctuary. The "stranger" of v. 4 would not only include anyone of foreign birth, but also any proselyte or other Israelite not of the tribe of Levi; it is a prohibition to be universally applied, exempting only the authorized priests and Levites. Compliance would prevent such calamities as that of Korah's.

Two gifts are mentioned in verses 6, 7: the Levites are given as servants to the Levites; the priestly office is given unto the descendants of Aaron. The two gifts combine to render effectual service for an entire nation. The services are not to be considered a burden, a problem, or as the mere accident of inheritance, but a sacred privilege.

Various sacrifices, when completed, became, in part or in whole, food for the male members of the priestly family. The general regulation is set forth in v. 8, which is followed by specific details regarding the individual processes. All of the remaining portion of meat offerings, sin offerings and guilt offerings may be eaten, but only "in the most holy place," a term almost certainly used of the court of the tabernacle in this context. In addition, all wave offerings, all offerings of the first fruits, everything dedicated to the Lord, and all the firstborn, or their substitutes, came to the priests in lieu of an inheritance of land to the tribe of Levi. The priest's family might partake with him of the wave offering. The total agreement is termed "a covenant of salt," or a binding, inviolable agreement. This idiomatic expression was derived from an ancient custom of sealing a bond by sharing the same food; the parties involved would, from that time forward say, "There is salt between us," and they were bound to mutual respect and defense, even to death.

Both the priests and the Levites were entirely supported by the revenue from their service of the Tabernacle. Besides the food they received from allotted portions of the sacrifices, they were assigned the tithes from the people. These were exacted

upon all produce from the fields, as well as the increase of the flocks and herds. Carefully observing all the instructions which God had given them in the process of implementing the total sacrificial system, the priests and Levites obviated the necessity of the people's personal participation. This was for their own protection, since they would have been dealing with holy things, and an abuse or a careless act could well have been fatal. In this sense, the Levites bore the iniquity of the people.

When the Promised Land was later divided among the tribes, no proportionate land grant was given the Levites. Instead, 48 cities with their suburbs were designated as Levitical cities (see chapter 35). Six of these served as cities of refuge; all of them were distributed among the tribal lands, and with each went a two-thousand cubit suburban area surrounding the city proper. Here the Levites might cultivate the land or graze their herds, but by no means could they all live on such a small allotment; the tithes and sacrificial concessions would be essential to their very existence. Paul uses this principle to point out the appropriateness of having those who proclaim the gospel live by the revenue gained through its proclamation. The picture, in both instances, is not that of a staid, complacent professional; the man is first and always a servant of God and a servant of men, whose recompense is totally unwarranted unless he is a faithful servant in both relationships.

The effective program of God with reference to the people's giving depended upon their faithful stewardship, especially in tithing their increase. Mal. 3:8-10 makes it clear that this was not always done. Consequently, the Levites were sometimes deprived, and even poor. Even so, whatever their situation might be the Levites were required to tithe their incomes through heave offerings. And these, like the offerings of the people, were not to be the left-overs, but the very best of all they received, v. 32. In so doing, they recognized that everything they were given had come from the Lord. They could do nothing less, conscientiously, than this.

QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

320. What clear line of demarkation does God draw between the duties of the priests and the duties of the Levites?
321. Propose some reasons which would explain why God would commit such duties through inheritance rather than by any other method.
322. How is the term 'stranger' to be understood here? Why is this an unusual use of the word?
323. Which of the offerings of Israel became the priests' food? Why should they be eaten only "in the most holy place"?
324. Explain the term, "a covenant of salt".
325. What would be the most grave danger if someone other than a priest or a Levite were to perform the functions of the sacrifice?
326. Why were the descendants of Levi given no land inheritance in the Promised Land? What were they given instead?
327. What precedent is set for the Christian system in the paying of tithes to support the priesthood?
328. Show what improper attitudes might be adopted by the servants of God, and how they might endanger both them and the people.
329. For what reasons would God require the Levites themselves the tithes?

H. LAWS OF THE RED HEIFER AND UNCLEANNESS  
(19:1-22)

TEXT

Chapter 19:1. And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, 2. This is the ordinance of the law which the Lord hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke. 3. And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth

without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face: 4. And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times. 5. And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn: 6. And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer. 7. Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even. 8. And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even. 9. And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin. 10. And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever.

11. He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. 12. He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean. 13. Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him. 14. This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. 15. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean. 16. And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. 17. And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a

vessel: 18. And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: 19. And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. 20. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean. 21. And it shall be a perpetual statute unto them, that he that sprinkleth the water of separation shall wash his clothes; and he that toucheth the water of separation shall be unclean until even. 22. And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even.

#### PARAPHRASE

Chapter 19:1. Then the Lord said unto Moses, and Aaron, 2. "This is the regulation of the Law which the Lord has commanded, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel that they bring you an unblemished red heifer, without defect, on which no yoke has ever been put; 3. and you shall give her to Eleazar the priest, in order that he may bring her outside the camp. And she shall be slaughtered in his presence. 4. Then Eleazar the priest shall take some of her blood upon his finger and sprinkle of her blood toward the front of the Tent of Meeting seven times. 5. After this, the heifer shall be burned in his sight: her skin, her flesh, her blood, with her refuse shall she be burned. 6. And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet material and throw it into the midst of the burning heifer. 7. Then the priest shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, after which he shall come into the camp; and he shall be unclean until the evening. 8. The one who burns the heifer shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his body in water, and shall be unclean until the evening. 9. And a man who is clean shall



collect the ashes of the heifer and put them outside the camp in a clean place; they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification offering. 10. And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the evening. And this shall be a law forever to the children of Israel, as well as to the foreigner who sojourns among them.

11. " 'Anyone who touches the corpse of any man shall be unclean for seven days. 12. If he purifies himself with it on the third day and on the seventh day, he shall be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he shall not be clean. 13. Whoever touches a dead body of any man who has died but does not cleanse himself defiles the tabernacle of the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from Israel. Since the water of sprinkling was not thrown upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness still is upon him. 14. " "This is the Law: when a man dies in a tent, all who come into the tent, and every one who is in the tent shall be unclean for seven days. 15. And every open vessel which has no lid fastened upon it is unclean. 16. Any one who touches one who is killed with a sword in the open field, or a corpse, or a man's bone, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. 17. For the unclean persons they shall take some ashes of the burnt offering and running water shall be added in a container; 18. then a clean person shall take hyssop, dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, upon all the vessels, upon the people who were there, and upon that one who touched a bone, or one killed, or a corpse, or a grave; 19. and the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; in this manner on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean at evening. 20. " "But the man who shall be unclean and shall not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the congregation because he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord, since he has not had the water of sprinkling thrown upon him; he is unclean. 21. And it shall be a perpetual regulation for them that he who sprinkles the water of sprinkling shall wash his clothes; and he

who touches the water of sprinkling shall be unclean until evening; and anything the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches it shall be unclean until evening.' ”

### COMMENTARY

Attitudes toward death have been many and varied in all ages, and they have run the gamut of human emotions. Perhaps the predominant attitude has been a combination of fear and frustration. Along with the varying sentiments held toward death itself are the attitudes toward the dead. From the most ancient days have come the beliefs that the living would be contaminated by contact with any corpse. Nobody knows where the belief arose, since it is, with notable exceptions, found in various records throughout the world.

If the living man was looked upon as the creation of God in whom lived His very breath, the corpse quickly suggested the departure of this breath, or spirit. It was nothing but the clay from which man had been originally made (see Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:7; 3:19). God had not yet revealed the marvelous full promises of eternal life in heaven; these remained for full disclosure through His Son and the Spirit-inspired writers of the New Testament. But death was formidable, and Sheol, the abode of the dead, mysterious. The fact of death was viewed as the result of man's sin since the time of Adam (Gen. 2:17). When a man died, he was a symbol of sin, and his body a source of defilement to the living.

Carefully detailed instructions now are given by the Lord to provide for the purification of one who had come into contact with a dead body. Of the sacrifice of the red heifer, *PC* comments, "This offering was obviously intended, apart from its symbolic significance, to be studiously simple and cheap. In contradiction to the many and costly and ever-repeated sacrifices of the Sinaitic legislation, this was a single individual, a female, and of the most ordinary colour of cattle, and a young heifer is of less value than any other beast of its kind," p. 240.

The stipulations are clear the red heifer must be unblemished, and one which had never been used for work under the yoke. Delivered to Eleazar, son of Aaron, the heifer then was killed outside the encampment. A small sample of her blood—such as would adhere to the priest's finger—was then brought toward the front of the Tent of Meeting to be sprinkled there seven times, after which the animal was burned up in its entirety. Wood from the cedar, along with hyssop and scarlet were thrown into the fire. Both the priest and the one presiding over the burning of the heifer bathed themselves and their clothing, remaining unclean until the evening. During this time, one who was clean took the heifer's ashes and preserved them for the purifying water. This liquid was used to remove uncleanness from death, as well as to cleanse a leprous man or house (see Lev. 14:4f., 49-52).

Uncleanness from coming in contact with a dead body lasted for seven days. During this time the unclean person was required to offer himself on the third and seventh days for cleansing with the purification water. Failure to comply with this regulation would result in his being cut off from his people. Such a one became as much as dead, even to his immediate family, and forfeited all of the rights and privileges extended to the chosen people. The threat is great enough to impress all with the severity of the offense.

Beyond actually coming into contact with a corpse, the Israelite might be rendered unclean by entering the place of habitation in which death had occurred, or by touching any uncovered vessel within the dwelling. His uncleanness was of the same days' duration, and required the same manner of expurgation. Outside the dwelling, contamination might result from touching the corpse of one killed out of doors by the sword, or touching any remains of the corpse, or even the grave in which such a body had been placed.

The mode of purification remained the same in all above instances. Verse 17 specifies the use of "living" water—water from a flowing source, such as a river—as the basic ingredient.

The water was to be administered by means of a twig of hyssop, at the hands of one who was clean. The water was administered to the contaminated man, the dwelling which had been made unclean, and all furnishings on the two days specified. Two facts emphasize the importance of the entire provision: it is termed "a perpetual statute", a phrase reserved for matters of the most solemn importance; and, the penalty is repeated for the sake of underscoring the significance. Of the circumstance and the remedy, *PC* says, "But the whole design of this ordinance, down to its minutest detail, was to stamp upon physical death a far-reaching power of defiling and separating from God, which extended even to the very means Divinely appointed as a remedy," (p. 242).

#### QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH ITEMS

330. Where and when did the belief arise that the living would be contaminated by contact with the dead?
331. Show how the attitude and instructions here, as well as the Biblical teachings regarding man, make this account stand in contrast with pagan superstitions.
332. What reasons have been suggested for the selection of a red heifer in this offering?
333. For what special purposes was the purifying water to be used in conjunction with death and the dead?
334. Explain what it would mean to an Israelite to be "cut off from among his people."
335. How might an individual become contaminated without actually coming into contact with a dead body?
336. What is "hyssop" and how was it to be used in the purification ceremony?
337. Can you see in this law some suggestion of an explanation for the conduct of the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan, (Luke 10:30-32)?
338. What lesson was being impressed upon the people's minds through the law of purification from uncleanness by the dead?