

Opening Message:

Last week one of the topics we discussed was Unintentional Sins and Intentional Sins and the differences and consequences of each:

Numbers 15:22-31

Laws About Unintentional Sins – Also known as the Feast of Atonement

²²“But if you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments that the Lord has spoken to Moses, ²³all that the Lord has commanded you by Moses, from the day that the Lord gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations, ²⁴then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer **one bull** from the herd for a **burnt offering**, a pleasing aroma to the Lord, with its **grain offering** and its **drink offering**, according to the rule, and one male goat for a sin offering. ²⁵And the **priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the people of Israel**, and they shall be forgiven, because it was a mistake, and they have brought their offering, a food offering to the Lord, and their sin offering before the Lord for their mistake. ²⁶And all the congregation of the people of Israel shall be forgiven, and the stranger who sojourns among them, because the whole population was involved in the mistake.

²⁷“If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a **female goat** a year old for a sin offering. ²⁸And the priest shall make atonement before the Lord for the person who makes a mistake, **when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven**. ²⁹You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them. ³⁰**But the person who does anything with a HIGH HAND, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the Lord, and that person shall be CUT OFF from among his people.** ³¹**Because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him.”**

“*shall be cut off*”: i.e.

Matthew 18:15-20

“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.”

As a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Individuals who were considered as not being a part of the congregation of Israel with the benefit of fellowship.

If two of you agree. This statement pertains to individuals coming together to make a judgment, as to whether something is to be permitted or forbidden. To take one or two more individuals to confront the offender *so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed* (Deuteronomy 19:15); and it is in this context that God says he will be in the midst of them, as one of the witnesses and judge.

1 Timothy 1:8-20

⁸Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,¹⁰the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

¹²I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³**though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,** ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

¹⁸This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom **I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.**

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

Sexual Immorality Defiles the Church

¹It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ²And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? **Let him who has done this be removed from among you.**

³For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵you are to **deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.**

Hebrews 10:26-31

²⁶For if we go on **sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,** ²⁷but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

"We should not allow strife, jealousy, self-expansion of power, or any other sin to taint our calling as royal children of the Most High King."

Unintentional Sin and Intentional Sin Uncovered

So what happened to those who could not make sacrificial atonement for their sins, because the sins they committed were classified as **intentional**? They were turned over to the other part of God's justice system, the curses of the Law. That is, ALL unintentional sins could be remedied by a proper sacrifice . . . the sacrificial system atoned for them . . . this was a great blessing because by God's grace your sin could be atoned for. **BUT NO intentional sins could be covered by the sacrificial system; now it was a matter for the curses of the Law.** Let me be clear; I'm not talking about Law in some vague sense, or some local criminal justice system. I'm talking about the **Biblical Law as found in the Torah.** To be fair, some unintentional sins did require reparation in addition to a sacrifice if there was an injured party. For instance, a man's donkey broke its leg in a hole you had dug and failed to cover up. You would have to make an animal sacrifice at the Tabernacle, AND make reparation to the man for the loss of his donkey. But, in doing so, you have BOTH made peace with God and fairly compensated the injured party for your error. Now you're OK.

But, an individual who does something **wrong intentionally**, whether a citizen or a foreigner, is **blaspheming Yehoveh** (the name of God, meaning, "who was, who is, and who shall be"). That person will be cut off from his people. Because he has contempt for the Word of Yehoveh, and has disobeyed His command, that person will be **cut-off completely: his offense will remain with him**".

This is a great example of what is called the curse of the Law. Now if you ever wondered why so many pastors, teachers, and church leaders prefer not to teach, nor really even have you read, the OT, this passage is certainly at the top of the list. This statement, and the principle it so clearly and unambiguously spells out, is a thorny theological problem when trying to fit it in with modern day doctrines. Because **even though most modern pastors are generally unfamiliar with the OT, they would unhesitatingly agree with the statement that Jesus satisfied all the requirements of the sacrificial system.** We've all heard that from the pulpit, and probably everyone in this room would agree with that statement as well. But, exactly which sacrificial system are they referring to? *That Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, once and for all, and an authorized substitute for all those prescribed animals deaths that were used to atone for sin within the Bible's sacrificial system, as found in Leviticus, is absolutely accurate* . . . those Pastors and I would have no problem with that. But, what do we do about the stark reality that God plainly said that now that you know what is right and wrong in my eyes, to **intentionally** do wrong, is to sin against Me. . . . to BLASPHEME against Me; and for that you will be cut-off, and for those sins there is no atonement . . . they will stay with you forever. Yikes. This is a much more difficult issue when we actually examine the sacrificial system, than when we are blissfully ignorant of it and just assume some things that aren't so; that is, when we look at the actual words of the Bible, in context, and not just accept a greatly distilled and unquestioned doctrine that fits a predetermined agenda.

Let me put it another way, and please pay close attention because it may change the way you've ever looked at the Law: the sacrificial system represented the **blessings** part of the Law, and the curses of the Law represented the **punishment** part of the Law.

If an Israelite sinned **Unintentionally**, he could always turn to the sacrificial system that is laid out in detail in Leviticus, and be reconciled with God. Is that not exactly what we Believers in *Jesus* (Yeshua) rely on? When we sin we turn to the sacrifice of Jesus as our way out. If in committing a sin a person did harm to another person, either financially or bodily, then some reparation to that harmed person was usually prescribed, together with the appropriate animal sacrifice at the Tabernacle as reparations to God. Further, forgiveness . . . real forgiveness, not some inferior kind . . . atonement was achieved, and peace with God was restored to the wrong doer, the sinner, through the indispensable sacrificial system that was the agent of atonement. They were blessed by this process, rather than punished.

However if someone sinned **intentionally, high handedly,** they could NOT go to the sacrificial system and gain reconciliation with God. Instead they were to be dealt with under the curses of the Law. Instead of being under the blessing and **grace** of the sacrificial system, they were put under the punishment (the curse) of the Law. Let me state that again: the sacrificial system was based entirely on grace. It was the animal that lost its life rather than the person who committed the sin. The curses of the Law, however, were different. And when a sin was of the type that required a punishment UNDER THE LAW, although Hebrews usually did not lose their physical lives (but sometimes they did), they DID lose their relationship with God, and there was really no defined method to regain it.

Even though Jesus provided the once and for all sacrifice that had formerly been the purpose of the Levitical Sacrificial System, He was MORE than what that system could provide. He also provided what the Passover provided, and THAT was the key.

*Let me explain: **The Passover sacrifice was not really part of the Law per se or the general Sacrificial System** . . . it actually came BEFORE that. The Biblical Feasts (even though contained within a body of Scripture that is loosely called Law) generally functioned somewhat separately, and had different purposes than the Laws of do's and don'ts. The Passover sacrifice is a case in point: it was not about atoning for sins, was it? The Passover sacrifice was originally established as a means of being protected from death. Lambs' blood was smeared on doorposts in Egypt so that God's wrath, His hand of death, would not come to the homes of His people and kill the firstborn sons. When the Israelites celebrated Passover, it was for them a remembrance, a memorial holiday, to recall God freeing them from Egypt and protecting them from death . . . it was not about atonement for sins. Of course it had much deeper significance that they *didn't* comprehend . . . that it was a foreshadowing of Christ's death on the Cross. But the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb had NOTHING to do with the sacrificial system whose job it was to make peace with God by means of atonement.*

When Jesus died on the Cross at least 2 things were accomplished that directly affects us: **One, He paid the price with His blood for our sins** . . . He atoned for our sins . . . **intentional and unintentional.** **Two, as the Passover Lamb, His blood marked us to be passed over for the Eternal Death** . . . Spiritual Death . . . which the Bible describes as, first and foremost, eternal separation from God.

Further what had infuriated the Jewish religious authorities about Jesus, even beyond His claim of being Messiah, was that during the time of His ministry He was running around giving divine forgiveness to those who had committed INTENTIONAL sins!! Jesus was pronouncing that the person who put their trust in Him could achieve reconciliation with God even after committing an INTENTIONAL SIN. My goodness, even the sacrificial system, the holiest most blessed, gracious and powerful part of the entire Hebrew justice system, couldn't do that!!

i.e. John 8:1-11

A Woman Caught in Adultery

¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" ⁶ This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the

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ground.⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, **“Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”**

... Nothing in the sacrificial system . . . atones for INTENTIONAL sins. And as you have occasion to read Paul’s *letters* in the New Testament, try to grasp just how INFERIOR the sacrificial part of the Law must have seemed to him, once he comprehended what *Jesus’* death had accomplished. **Paul never says the Law is obsolete or dead;** he only says that compared to Christ, the Law (primarily the sacrificial portion) is as nothing. Amen, brother! That by faith in Christ, you now are subject to Christ’s grace when you intentionally sin, instead of subject to the curses of the Law when you intentionally sin is too wonderful for words. You can be sure that while Paul is awestruck at how *Jesus* can provide for “forgiveness of sins”, that what he was thinking about, at least what was in the forefront of his mind, was INTENTIONAL sins . . . because Paul took it for granted that Unintentional sins could be forgiven . . . as they always had, by means of a proper animal sacrifice, since the days of Moses. Also keep in mind that Paul NEVER compared the ability of Christ to forgive against the Law’s FAILURE in that same area. **The Law never failed in forgiveness because it was never designed to forgive . . . or to atone . . . every Jewish child knew that much.** But guess what . . . the sacrificial system DID provide a means of forgiveness but it was limited to the unintentional sin. *As an analogy of the Law:* when compared to the incredible flying ability of Eagles, are Elephants failures? Of course not. Elephants don’t FAIL to fly, because they were never built to fly. **The Law portion of God’s justice system was not designed to atone or forgive, but to draw a line between obedience to God and disobedience to God.** The Law established moral choices for humankind; in doing so it showed us what sin is. The sacrificial system, on the other hand, *was* designed to achieve forgiveness by means of atonement. But the sacrificial system had limits; it could ONLY deal with a certain class of sin and then on a case-by-case basis. **Both systems, both parts of God’s justice system, did what they were designed to do, perfectly.**

<https://www.torahclass.com/old-testament-studies-tc/36-old-testament-studies-leviticus/153-lesson-2-leviticus-introduction-cont>

Hebrews 10:26-31

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there **no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

i.e. 2 Samuel 24 – “Intentional Sin – and the Laws Consequences”

David’s Census

1 Chronicles 21

David’s Census Brings Pestilence

¹ Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.² So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, “Go, number Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, and bring me a report, that I may know their number.”³ But Joab said, “May the Lord add to his people a hundred times as many as they are! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord’s servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should it be a cause of guilt for Israel?”⁴ But the king’s word prevailed against Joab.

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”² So the king said to Joab, the commander of the army, who was with him, “Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and number the people, that I may know the number of the people.”³ But Joab said to the king, “May the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see it, but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?”⁴ But the king’s word prevailed against Joab and the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to number the people of Israel.⁵ They crossed the Jordan and began from Aroer,^[a] and from the city that is in the middle of the valley, toward Gad and on to Jazer.⁶ Then they came to Gilead, and to Kadesh in the land of the Hittites;^[a] and they came to Dan, and from Dan^[a] they went around to Sidon,⁷ and came to the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites; and they went out to the Negeb of Judah at Beersheba.⁸ So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.⁹ And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to the king: in Israel there were 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000.

The Lord’s Judgment of David’s Sin

¹⁰ But David’s heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”¹¹ And when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David’s seer, saying,¹² “Go and say to David, ‘Thus says the Lord, Three things I offer^[a] you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.’”¹³ So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, “Shall three^[a] years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days’ pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me.”¹⁴ Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man.”

¹⁵ **So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men.**¹⁶ And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, “It is enough; now stay your hand.” And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.¹⁷ Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, “Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father’s house.”

David Builds an Altar

¹⁸ And Gad came that day to David and said to him, “Go up, raise an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.”¹⁹ So David went up at Gad’s word, as the Lord commanded.²⁰ And when Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his servants coming on toward him. And Araunah went out and paid homage to the king with his face to the ground.²¹ And Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” David said, “To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be averted from the people.”²² Then Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood.”²³ All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king.”

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And Araunah said to the king, "May the Lord your God accept you."²⁴ But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.²⁵ And David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.

i.e. 2 Samuel 11:26-12:15 - *"Intentional Sin – and the Laws Consequences"*

²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. ²⁷ And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

Nathan Rebukes David

¹² And the Lord sent Nathan to David . . . ⁷ Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. ⁸ And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' ¹¹ Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" ¹³ David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ **Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.**" ¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house.

"GREAT" Tribulation / MISLEAD / Fall Away Meaning

The Beginning of Birth Pangs

Matthew 24:4-8 and Mark 13:5-8

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a journey with Jesus)

And Jesus answered and said to them, "**See to it that no one misleads you.** For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will *mislead many*. And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; **see that you are not frightened.** For those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."

The Apostasy

Matthew 24:9-14 and Mark 13:12-13

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a journey with Jesus)

"Then they will deliver you to *tribulation*, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will *mislead many*. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come."

"Tribulation": 1 Peter 4:12-19 - ¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But **rejoice** insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also **rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.** ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ **For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?** ¹⁸ And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Mislead / Fall Away: (STRONG'S NO. 4624 – Skandalizó): to put a snare (in the way), hence to cause to stumble, to give offense; to entrap (apostasy (defection - revolt) – literally, "a leaving, from a previous standing" - (make to) offend).

COGNATE (related definition): properly, *set a snare ("stumbling-block")*; (figuratively) *"to hinder right conduct or thought; to cause to stumble" – literally, "to fall into a trap"*. See 4625 (Skandalizó - properly, the trigger of a trap (the mechanism closing a trap down on the unsuspecting victim); (figuratively) an *offense*, putting a *negative cause-and-effect relationship* into motion (ex. "the stick in the trap that springs and closes the trap when the animal touches it").

b. "to cause a person **to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey; to cause to fall away.**" and in the passive, **to fall away** (John 6:61; Matthew 13:21; MATTHEW 24:10; Matthew 26:33, Mark 4:17, Mark 14:29; John 16:1).

i.e. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17 (*Paul re-enforces Jesus' Teaching on this same Event*) - **The Man of Lawlessness** - ¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion (apostasía (646) - apostasy) comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ *who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God . . .* ⁷ For the **mystery of lawlessness** is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. ⁹ **The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,** ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ **Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,** ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness . . . ¹⁵ So then, brothers, **stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.**

BLASPHEMES (STRONG'S NO. 988 – blasphemía): "switches" right for wrong (wrong for right), i.e. calls what God *disapproves*, "right" which "exchanges the truth of God for a lie" (Ro 1:25 - "because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie"); **Isa 5:20** - "you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness.". Literally, slow (sluggish) to call something *good* (that *really is good*) – and slow to identify what is truly bad (that really is evil). (**THAYER'S GREEK LEXICON** – βλασφημία, railing, reviling): *a.* universally, slander, detraction, speech injurious to another's good name.

i.e. **Mark 3:28-29** - ²⁸"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever **blasphemes** against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—

Matthew 12:31-32 - ³¹Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but **blasphemy** against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³²Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Luke 12:10 - ¹⁰And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever **blasphemes** against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

The Scriptures Interpretation of the Last Great Harvest:

Like the Days of Noah and Lot

Luke 17:26-33

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a journey with Jesus)

"And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, let not the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house go down to take them away; and likewise let not the one who is in the field turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall preserve it."

Matthew 22:1-14

The Parable of the Wedding Feast

¹ And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ²"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."' ⁵But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen."

Zechariah 12:1-11

The Lord Will Give Salvation

¹ The oracle of the word of the Lord concerning Israel: Thus declares the Lord, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him: ²"Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples. The siege of Jerusalem will also be against Judah. ³On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it. ⁴On that day, declares the Lord, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But for the sake of the house of Judah I will keep my eyes open, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. ⁵Then the clans of Judah shall say to themselves, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the Lord of hosts, their God.'

⁶"**On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves. And they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem.**

⁷"And the Lord will give salvation to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not surpass that of Judah. ⁸On that day the Lord will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord, going before them. ⁹And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

Him Whom They Have Pierced

¹⁰ "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. ¹¹On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great . . .

Luke 11:29-32

The Sign of Jonah

²⁹ When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. ³⁰For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. ³¹The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. ³²The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Romans 11:25-29

The Mystery of Israel's Salvation

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

“We should not allow strife, jealousy, self-expansion of power, or any other sin to taint our calling as royal children of the Most High King.”

“The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;²⁷ “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

²⁸ As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Week 35 - Korach (Korah)

Numbers 16:1–18:32; 1 Samuel 11:14–12:22; Acts 5:1–11

“We should not allow strife, jealousy, self-expansion of power, or any other sin to taint our calling as royal children of the Most High King.”

In last week’s Parasha (Torah portion), Shelach Lecha, the seeds of rebellion were sown as the Israelites threatened to replace Moses as their leader. So great was their fear of the giants in the Promised Land, and so great was their “UNBLIEF” that they would be able to overcome those giants, that they wanted to forsake the promises of God and return to Egypt.

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We learned: “How God Tests His People”

What was Actually Happening Spiritually, in spite of what was being Seen Naturally, if the Spies only Took God at His Word:

Deuteronomy 2:7

⁷ For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing.”

Faith Moves Us into His Promises

- **God had already put defeat into the hearts of their enemy.**

Rahab Hides the Spies

“I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. ¹¹ And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Joshua 2:1-11

- **God had already put the Army of God in place ahead of them to fight for them.**

The Commander of the Lord's Army

Joshua 5:13-15

Deuteronomy 1:29-33

²⁹ Then I said to you, ‘Do not be in dread or afraid of them. ³⁰ The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, ³¹ and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.’ ³² Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the Lord your God, ³³ who went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go.

- **God had already given the Land and the People into their Hand, as He had promised.**

The Fall of Jericho

Joshua 6:1-27

Now in the land that their parents so feared, the next generation of Israelites witness God move and have great faith, being “fully convinced that God is able to do whatever He promises.” Romans 4:21

Ryan Roberts, Springs of Living Water

In this week’s Torah study, the rebellion continues with the mutiny against Moses’ leadership by a man named Korach (קֹרַח), which means baldness, ice, hail, or frost.

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Korach (derived from Korcha which means split) created division, strife, and disaster within the community through his rebellion, discontent, and dirty politics.

Numbers 16-18

Numbers 16:1-3

Korah's Rebellion

16 Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, 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 a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men. ³ They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. **Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”**

In fact, **this sin that they accused Moses of was, in reality, their own sin.** Sadly, many are guilty of such self-deception and projection.

“We should not allow strife, jealousy, self-expansion of power, or any other sin to taint our calling as royal children of the Most High King.”

It is vital to realize that people often unknowingly judge others for the very sins that they themselves are committing.

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.” Romans 2:1

Moreover, wicked people don't necessarily realize that their deeds are evil, having internally justified themselves that their way is the right way. This in no way negates the seriousness of that sin, however.

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Numbers 16:4-7

4 When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, **5** and he said to Korah and all his company, **“In the morning** the Lord will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him. **6** Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; **7** put fire in them and put incense on them before the Lord tomorrow, and the man whom the Lord chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!”

COME MORNING, AND G-D WILL SHOW WHO IS HIS, AND WHO IS HOLY... AND WHOM HE HAS CHOSEN WILL HE CAUSE TO COME NEAR TO HIM (16:5)

Why this reference to “the morning”? Moses said to Korach: G-d has set boundaries in His world. Can you transform morning into evening? If you can, you can change this... It is written: “It was evening and it was morning... And G-d distinguished...” (Genesis 1:4-5); in the same way, “And Aaron was distinguished, to be consecrated...” (I Chronicles 23:13). www.Chabad.org

Numbers 16:8-11

8 And Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: **9** is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the Lord and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, **10** and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? **11** Therefore it is against the Lord that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?”

AND YOU DESIRE ALSO THE PRIESTHOOD? (16:10)

“The memory of the righteous should be to blessing, and the name of the wicked should rot” (Proverbs 10:7). So how is it that an entire section in the Torah carries the name of a person whose deeds were most negative and destructive?

But the name “Korach,” as the name of a Parshah in Torah, pays tribute to the positive aspect of Korach’s “rebellion”. While the story of Korach comes to teach us what not to do - not to act on even the most lofty of ambitions, if such action is contrary to the will of G-d - it also comes to teach us that we should desire and yearn for the highest ideals, even those which we are prohibited from actually attaining. (*The Lubavitcher Rebbe*)

The Genesis of Discord and Strife

Wisdom calls for discerning the underlying motivation of a brother creating strife before making judgments and issuing condemnations. And this is just what Moses did.

Moses knew the reason for Korach’s discord — the dark desire that lurked in his heart to exalt himself and the Levitical priesthood to the position God had expressly granted to the Aaronic priesthood.

Since God Himself had made the priesthood and outlined the duties of the Levites, they acted in rebellion against the authority of God.

Moses pinpointed the problem when he said, **“Hear now, you sons of Levi: Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you?” Numbers 16:8–10**

Not too long before their rebellion, God chose the Levites to be caretakers of the Holy Tabernacle — the structure and its vessels — as servants to the Aaronic priesthood.

While all Levites serve God, Aaron and his descendants held the special appointment of being able to approach the altar to perform sacrifices. The High Priest could even enter the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant stood, a status that would certainly stir some hearts to great envy.

Moses pointedly asked the group, **“Are you seeking the priesthood also?”**

The Word of God warns us against this sort of self-aggrandizing ambition as it brings with it great evil.

“For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” James 3:16

Envy and selfish ambition cause all kinds of trouble in our personal lives, not only at home or at work, but also in congregations and fellowships as **those who are neither qualified nor anointed vie for positions God never intended them to occupy.**

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Numbers 16:12-25

¹² And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and they said, “We will not come up. ¹³ Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you must also make yourself a prince over us?¹⁴ Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up.” ¹⁵ And Moses was very angry and said to the Lord, “Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, and I have not harmed one of them.”

¹⁶ And Moses said to Korah, “Be present, you and all your company, before the Lord, you and they, and Aaron, tomorrow. ¹⁷ And let every one of you take his censer and put incense on it, and every one of you bring before the Lord his censer, 250 censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer.” ¹⁸ So every man took his censer and put fire in them and laid incense on them and stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹ Then Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

²⁰ And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ²¹ “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” ²² And they fell on their faces and said, “O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?” ²³ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ “Say to the congregation, Get away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.”

²⁵ Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him.

AND MOSES ROSE UP AND WENT TO DATHAN AND AVIRAM (16:25)

Resh Lakish said: This teaches that one must not be obdurate (stubbornly refusing to change one's opinion or course of action) in a dispute.

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 110a)

Numbers 16:26

²⁶ And he spoke to the congregation, saying, “**Depart**, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, **lest you be swept away with all their sins.**”

In fact, in this Torah reading, Moses warned the people of Israel to move away from the tents of Korach, Datan, and Aviram lest they be destroyed by God's judgment of their sin, as well:

“Depart, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins.”

Numbers 16:26

Paul confirms this sage advice of King Solomon and the rabbis: *“Do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character.” 1 Corinthians 15:33*

That is not to say that we should not minister to those who are caught in sin.

Jesus ate with and talked to sinners and social outcasts - tax collectors, prostitutes, adulterers, beggars, and lepers. **He loved them enough to share the Kingdom of God with them and called them to repentance and holiness.** He did not, however, allow their sinful desires and behavior to influence or deter His holy purpose.

Jesus did not allow any outside influence to taint the holiness of His calling.

Likewise, we should not allow strife, jealousy, self-aggrandizement, or any other sin to taint our calling as royal children of the Most High King.

We should not allow strife, jealousy, self-aggrandizement, or any other sin to taint our calling as royal children of the Most High King.

And rather than being jealous of the power, prestige, position, or possessions of others, let us be content with what God has given us.

“Godliness with contentment is great gain.” 1 Timothy 6:6

Moreover, Jesus said, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” *(Hebrews 13:5)*

With God as our Father and Friend, we can trust Him to meet our social, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

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Numbers 16:27-33

²⁷ So they got away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, together with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. ²⁸ And Moses said, “Hereby you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. ²⁹ **If these men die as all men die, or if they are visited by the fate of all mankind, then the Lord has not sent me.** ³⁰ **But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows**

them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord.”

³¹ And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. ³² And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

The firepans on which they were offering incense were pounded into copper plating for the altar, a visible warning for the Levites to stop encroaching on the Tabernacle and assuming the responsibilities of the Aaronic priesthood.

It also served as a reminder to the community of Israelites that:

- sowing strife,
- questioning God's leadership,
- and exalting themselves to positions of leadership ultimately lead to their own destruction.

“A worthless person, a wicked man ... he sows discord. Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly; Suddenly he shall be broken without remedy.” Proverbs 6:12–15

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Numbers 16:34-35

³⁴ And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us up!” ³⁵ And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men offering the incense.

Lesson 17: Fruit Inspection

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 7:15-20 and Luke 6:43-45

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit; nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

With the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection from the dead, power was given to the Church to prophesy and perform signs and wonders. However, it would provide an opportunity for false prophets and teachers to creep in unnoticed and destroy God's people from within. Jesus foresaw this time of deception and warned the disciples that in the last days false prophets would come and mislead many. Knowing that some would be able to both speak in His name and perform signs and wonders that would come to pass, Jesus instructed His disciples to use a third method to test the prophets and teachers: the test of character. *“You will know them by their fruits”*.

These false prophets are difficult to detect because they disguise themselves as members of Jesus' flock but inwardly they are ravenous wolves (Acts 20:29-30).

Acts 20:29-30

²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Based on the book of Jude verse 11 it appears that the false prophets and teachers have three basic traits in common. Jude says, *“For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.”*

Cain, Balaam and **Korah** have several things in common with one another. Each of them intimately knew God, heard Him speak, and was placed in a position of prominence by God. They each worshipped God and made offerings to Him. However, none of them was content with God. Each was motivated by covetousness and wanted to override God authority by doing things their own way. And each of them was responsible for the death of God's people.

These men's primary focus was self-promotion. Their actions show they were motivated by personal gain not by the love of God and man. Cain (Genesis 4), Balaam (Numbers 22-25) and **Korah** (Numbers 16) are used in Scripture as examples that wrong motivation can occur in the three different aspects of man: body, soul, and spirit. The way of Cain involves the body. It is satisfying the desires of the flesh and is evidenced by 1) unholy living in the midst of the people of God. The error of Balaam is satisfying the desires of the soul by greed and is evidenced by 2) teaching that causes the people of God to fall. The rebellion of Korah involves the spirit. Its basis is pride and consists of grumbling and complaining against God, His leaders and His ways. It is evidenced through 3) causing division in the people of God.

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Numbers 16:36-40

³⁶ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁷ “Tell Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest to **take up the censers out of the blaze**. Then scatter the fire far and wide, for they have become holy.³⁸ As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar, for they offered them before the Lord, and they became holy. Thus they shall be a sign to the people of Israel.” ³⁹ So Eleazar the priest took **the bronze censers**, which those who were burned had offered, and they were hammered out as a covering for the altar, ⁴⁰ to be a reminder to the people of Israel, so that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of

Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before the Lord, lest he become like Korah and his company as the Lord said to him through Moses.

G-d instructs that the pans in which the 250 men offered the ketoret ('incense') should be retrieved, and hammered into plates to be used as the copper covering of the Altar. "For they offered them before G-d, and they have become holy." Also, this will serve as "a memorial to the children of Israel, that no stranger, who is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before G-d; that he be not like Korach and his company."

The next day, the people again massed upon Moses and Aaron. "You have caused the deaths of the people of G-d!" they accuse them.

G-d's anger is again aroused, and a plague breaks out among the people. "Take a censer," cries Moses to Aaron, "and put fire in it from off the altar, and put on ketoret ('incense'), and take it quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them; for wrath is gone out from G-d..."

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Numbers 16:41-50

⁴¹ But on the next day **all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled** against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the Lord." ⁴² And when the congregation had assembled against Moses and against Aaron, they turned toward the tent of meeting. And behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. ⁴³ And Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, ⁴⁴ and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ⁴⁵ "Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces. ⁴⁶ And Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer, and put fire on it from off the altar and lay incense on it and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the Lord; the plague has begun."⁴⁷ **So Aaron took it as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly. And behold, the plague had already begun among the people. And he put on the incense and made atonement for the people.** ⁴⁸ **And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped.** ⁴⁹ **Now those who died in the plague were 14,700, besides those who died in the affair of Korah.** ⁵⁰ And Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting, when the plague was stopped.

Numbers 17:1-3

Aaron's Staff Buds

17 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the people of Israel, and get from them staffs, one for each fathers' house, from all their chiefs according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. **Write each man's name on his staff,** ³ and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. **For there shall be one staff for the head of each fathers' house.**

Each should write his name on his staff. "And it shall come to pass that the man's staff, whom I shall choose, shall blossom; and I will put to rest the murmuring of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you."

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IT BROUGHT FORTH BLOSSOMS, PRODUCED BUDDING FRUIT, AND BORE RIPE ALMONDS (17:8)

There are two types of miracles: a) miracles which utterly disregard the laws of nature; b) miracles which, though they may be no less "impossible" by the standard norms and no less obvious a display of the hand of G-d, nevertheless occur by natural means, employing natural phenomena and processes to achieve their ends.

At first glance, it might seem that the second miracle's "need" to resort to natural processes makes it less of a miracle. In truth, however, a miracle that operates through nature is more elevating — hence, more "miraculous" — than a miracle that supersedes it.

A sudden, shattering change has not transformed nature — it has only gone beyond it. But when a miracle is integrated into the workings of nature, nature itself is elevated. Otherwise stated: a supra-natural miracle liberates the person who experiences it from the natural order; a natural miracle liberates the natural order itself.

The bearing of fruit by a dry stick of wood would surely have sufficed as a Divine sign of Aaron's chosenness. But G-d did not simply make almonds appear on Aarons staff. Rather, He stimulated in it the full natural process of budding, blossoming, and the emergence and the ripening of the fruit. Aaron's staff defied nature's laws and restrictions, yet it conformed to the phases of growth that the almond naturally undergoes. It transcended nature, but did so on nature's own terms.

(The Chassidic Masters)

Numbers 17:4-8

⁴ Then you shall deposit them in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you. ⁵ **And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout. Thus I will make to cease from me the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against you.** ⁶ Moses spoke to the people of Israel. And all their chiefs gave him staffs, one for each chief, according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. **And the staff of Aaron was among their staffs.** ⁷ **And Moses deposited the staffs before the Lord in the tent of the testimony.**

⁸ On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and **behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds.**

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(The Chassidic Masters)

Numbers 17:9-18:29

⁹ Then Moses brought out all the staffs from before the Lord to all the people of Israel. And they looked, and each man took his staff. ¹⁰ *And the Lord said to Moses, “Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumblings against me, lest they die.”* ¹¹ Thus did Moses; as the Lord commanded him, so he did.

¹² *And the people of Israel said to Moses, “Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone.”* ¹³ Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the Lord, shall die. Are we all to perish?”

Duties of Priests and Levites

18 So the Lord said to Aaron, “You and your sons and your father’s house with you shall bear iniquity connected with the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear iniquity connected with your priesthood. ² And with you bring your brothers also, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may join you and minister to you while you and your sons with you are before the tent of the testimony. ³ They shall keep guard over you and over the whole tent, but shall not come near to the vessels of the sanctuary or to the altar lest they, and you, die. ⁴ They shall join you and keep guard over the tent of meeting for all the service of the tent, and no outsider shall come near you. ⁵ And you shall keep guard over the sanctuary and over the altar, that there may never again be wrath on the people of Israel. ⁶ And behold, I have taken your brothers the Levites from among the people of Israel. They are a gift to you, given to the Lord, to do the service of the tent of meeting. ⁷ And you and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood for all that concerns the altar and that is within the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood as a gift, and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”

⁸ Then the Lord spoke to Aaron, “Behold, I have given you charge of the contributions made to me, all the consecrated things of the people of Israel. I have given them to you as a portion and to your sons as a perpetual due. ⁹ This shall be yours of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering of theirs and every sin offering of theirs and every guilt offering of theirs, which they render to me, shall be most holy to you and to your sons. ¹⁰ In a most holy place shall you eat it. Every male may eat it; it is holy to you. ¹¹ This also is yours: the contribution of their gift, all the wave offerings of the people of Israel. I have given them to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it. ¹² All the best of the oil and all the best of the wine and of the grain, the firstfruits of what they give to the Lord, I give to you. ¹³ The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the Lord, shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it. ¹⁴ Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. ¹⁵ Everything that opens the womb of all flesh, whether man or beast, which they offer to the Lord, shall be yours. Nevertheless, the firstborn of man you shall redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. ¹⁶ And their redemption price (at a month old you shall redeem them) you shall fix at five shekels^[e] in silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. ¹⁷ But the firstborn of a cow, or 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 shall burn their fat as a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the Lord. ¹⁸ But their flesh shall be yours, as the breast that is waved and as the right thigh are yours. ¹⁹ **All the holy contributions that the people of Israel present to the Lord I give to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due. It is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord for you and for your offspring with you.** ²⁰ *And the Lord said to Aaron, “You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel.*

²¹ **“To the Levites I have given every tithes in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting,** ²² so that the people of Israel do not come near the tent of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. ²³ But the Levites shall do the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the people of Israel they shall have no inheritance. ²⁴ For the tithes of the people of Israel, which they present as a contribution to the Lord, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance. Therefore I have said of them that they shall have no inheritance among the people of Israel.” ²⁵ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁶ “Moreover, you shall speak and say to the Levites, ‘When you take from the people of Israel the tithes that I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present a contribution from it to the Lord, a tithes of the tithes.’ ²⁷ And your contribution shall be counted to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor, and as the fullness of the winepress. ²⁸ So you shall also present a contribution to the Lord from all your tithes, which you receive from the people of Israel. And from it you shall give the Lord’s contribution to Aaron the priest. ²⁹ Out of all the gifts to you, you shall present every contribution due to the Lord; **from each ITS BEST PART is to be dedicated.**”

OUT OF ALL THAT IS GIVEN TO YOU, YOU SHALL SET ASIDE ALL THAT IS DUE AS A GIFT TO G-D; OF THE CHOICEST THEREOF, THE HALLOWED PART OF IT (18:29)

Whenever one designates something for a holy purpose, he should sanctify the finest of his possessions; as it is written, “All the fat is to G-d.”

Numbers 18:30-32

³⁰ Therefore you shall say to them, **‘When you have offered from it THE BEST of it, then the rest shall be counted to the Levites as produce of the threshing floor, and as produce of the winepress.’³¹ And you may eat it in any place, you and your households, for it is your reward in return for your service in the tent of meeting.³² And you shall bear no sin by reason of it, when you have contributed THE BEST of it. But you shall NOT PROFANE the HOLY THINGS of the people of Israel, lest you die.’”**

The Strife Among God’s People Today

“When you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, **‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ when the LORD your God was your king.**”
1 Samuel 12:12

Sadly, strife and questioning God's appointed leadership did not end with this incident in the wilderness.

In the Promised Land, God gave the Israelites judges and prophets, but they continuously rebelled against them.

For instance, in *prophetic portion of Korach*, we find that:

God answered the Israelite's request for a king by appointing Saul, and yet the people questioned Saul's fitness for the job.
1 Samuel 11:14–12:22

In doing so, they also questioned the authority of the prophet Samuel, who at their request went to God with their demand for a king. Samuel defended his authority by saying:

“Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and His anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes?” 1 Samuel 12:3

Likewise, Moses defended his conduct as an honorable leader, saying to God in the presence of his accusers, "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them." (*Numbers 16:15*)

When the people admit that Samuel had never defrauded them, Samuel outlines how God had faithfully delivered them from their enemies without the aid of a king.

Samuel then provides a sign of his authority, confirming that the choice of Saul as king is ordained by God. That sign is unseasonable rain during the dry season:

“Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that He may send thunder and rain. **And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for yourselves a king.**”
1 Samuel 12:17

So the Lord confirmed His displeasure with the people by sending thunder and rain on what should have been a joyous feast day.

When the people repent and ask Samuel to pray, he tells them how to avoid God's wrath:

“Fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things He has done for you. *But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.*” 1 Samuel 12:24–25

Still, strife did not end with this incident. The Jewish historian, Josephus, recorded that the Jews of his time:

“fought with each other, doing everything their besiegers could have desired.”

At the time of the invasion of Jerusalem in AD 70, Titus and his Roman warriors found no less than 24 different factions fighting amongst themselves, each convinced that only they had the right way to ensure the salvation of the Jewish People.

In fact, the destruction of the Second Temple is linked to **baseless hatred** between opposing factions.

Today, the Jewish People still struggle with division and strife. In Israel, animosity and contention rise up between various movements of Judaism: Ultra-Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, secular, and even Messianic.

All this discord and friction in the Jewish community exists despite being a people who share a common history and heritage and who worship the same God.

This problem of strife and division amongst brethren is not unique to Israel and the Jewish People. The Christian Church is also plagued with many thousands of splits and denominational divisions — each once convinced that they have the truth while all others are in error.

Strife and division result in splits. **A quarrel-ridden congregation or home is doomed to destruction.** How can it be otherwise since:
“a house divided upon itself will not stand?” Mark 3:25; Matthew 12:25

“We should not allow strife, jealousy, self-expansion of power, or any other sin to taint our calling as royal children of the Most High King.”

Choose Humility: A Solution to Strife

The truth of the matter is that Moses did not exalt himself over Korach and the others; it is God who raised him up into the position of leading Israel out of Egypt.

It was not his own desire to be the leader of Israel; rather, **he was a leader of Israel as an act of obedience to the Lord. He was not in that position due to self-aggrandizing ambition or a desire to rule over others.**

Even in that exalted position, Moses was called the most humble man on earth (*Numbers 12:3*), and we are told to humble ourselves as well.

Walking in humility is being willing to walk in obedience to our calling –

whether God is requiring us to wash dishes or serve in a position of leadership or wash dishes while in a position of leadership.

It also means allowing God to exalt us in His perfect way and time - not to exalt ourselves out of jealousy or discontentment, but to be content in our status today. **1 Peter 5:6**

Choose Gentleness: Another Solution to Strife

In addition to contentment and humility, we are not to seek a showdown or create a power-struggle;

we are to seek harmony and peace, allowing God to judge between people.

The Bible tells us that “a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (*Proverbs 15:1*)

We must remember also that we all see through the glass of God’s mysteries dimly (*1 Corinthians 13:12*). One day, though, when all truth is revealed at the Second Coming of the Messiah, it may be effortless to live in a world without strife or division while our Messiah reigns from Jerusalem.

Until then,

We Must Make a Concerted Effort to Walk in Holiness and Unity because this is where The Anointing Is.

May we all learn to **walk in greater humility, contentment, and gentleness towards all people**; and may God bring unity and peace between brothers, as it is written:

“Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.”

Psalm 133:1

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Next Week’s Reading:

**Week 36 - CHUKAT (Statute or Decree)
Numbers 19:1–22:1; Judges 11:1–33; Hebrews 9:1–28**