

Free - Take One



# Shaqah

*“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”  
Colossians 2:8*

Issue #87

[www.livingspringsinstitute.org](http://www.livingspringsinstitute.org)

November & December 2016

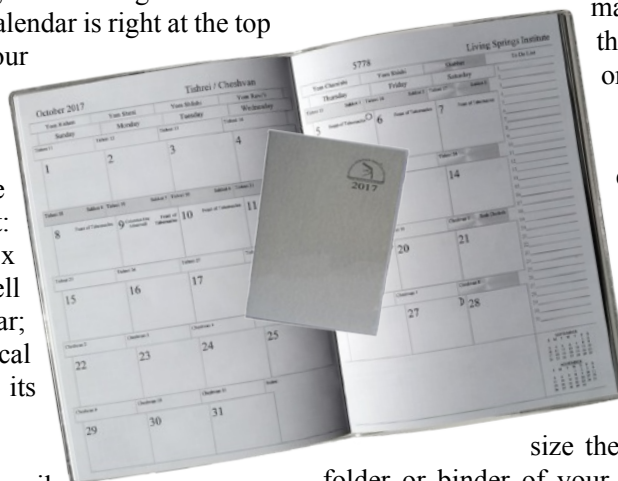
## Step Into the Springs!

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Now, if you are a regular mail subscriber to this publication, you should have received one of these calendars with this issue of *Shaqah*; but you may still want others to share. On that note, I would like to remind everyone that it does save us on postage to send more than one calendar in the same package. So, if you and your spouse and/or a friend would each like one, or you know of others you would like to give one to, please, don’t hesitate to order the total number of calendars you would like, all at once! We would also like to send calendars to all of our e-mail subscribers, but we don’t necessarily have your current physical mailing address. Your calendar is waiting for you, so be sure to contact us with your current mailing address, and put in your order today!

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We also want to remind everyone we produce a PDF version of the calendar (as well as many other materials in PDF), which you can download from our website. PDF is very printer friendly, so you can print out your own calendar(s), and in doing so, you can play with the size the calendar is printed, put it in the folder or binder of your choosing, use just the pages you want, etc. You can even download previous years of the calendar for study and reference purposes. All the information about what the PDF calendar is, more tips on how to use it, and even the ability to share your own useful tips can be accessed by visiting the Calendar Project page of our website! Just click on “Learning Center,” then “Calendar Project.”

In closing, I just want to say thank you and please remember to share Living Springs Institute with others, so they too may learn and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ! God bless, and we pray you will be blessed by this issue of *Shaqah*!

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As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, our last segment covered Israel's rebellion and mistrust of God's promise to give them the land He had been guiding them to, and the fact this meant they would now take a journey of forty years through the wilderness before the nation could come into the land of promise. This was also, with a couple exceptions, so only those who were children at this time would see the promised land one day. As Israel returns to the wilderness of Sinai, God begins to give them ordinances for how to follow His Laws in ways that would make them more mindful of the fact they were God's chosen nation, not just a group of people who should be guided by their own thoughts! This brought us through the end of chapter 15, and we are ready to begin chapter 16.

Considering the events that had just taken place before this time, chapter 16 opens with a very amazing story of another rebellion against how God set up the nation and specifically Moses' leadership! God had specifically taken the tribe of Levi for His service, from among the children of Israel, in place of all the first-born in Israel. Jacob's son Levi had four sons, all of whom became namesakes of divisions within the tribe of Levi. These family divisions were placed one on each of the four sides of the tabernacle as Israel camped, and had special duties regarding the maintenance and movement of the tabernacle as Israel traveled. The Kohathites, named for Levi's son Kohath, camped on the south side and were the family responsible for carrying the tabernacle's most holy elements such as the altars, menorah, the Ark of the Covenant, etc. Now, Kohath had four sons, Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Moses and Aaron were the sons of Kohath's oldest son Amram, and their leadership roles as well as their separation even from the rest of the tribe of Levi were apparent. However, a descendant of Kohath's youngest son Uzziel was named the head of the Kohathites as one of the four family divisions of Levi. (Num. 3:27-32) Possibly feeling slighted by the fact he expected to be named head of the Kohathites, a son of Kohath's second son Izhar, who's name was Korah, brought a challenge against Aaron's position directly.

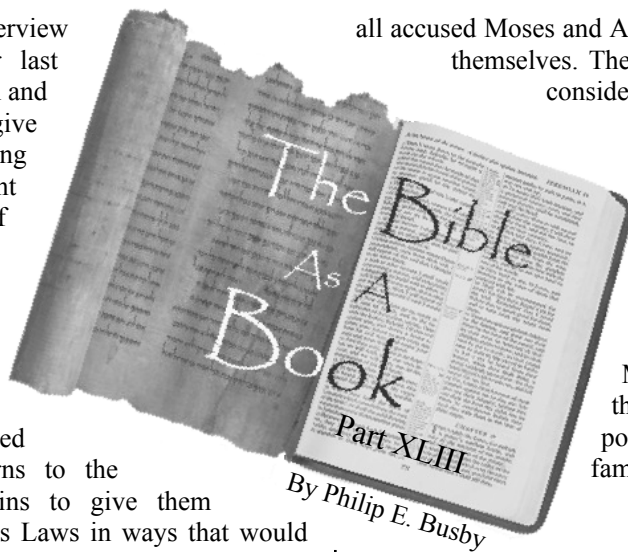
Looking at the tribes as a whole, we know Jacob had twelve sons and Reuben was the oldest. Also possibly feeling the tradition of passing authority to the oldest was somehow being violated due to the fact Judah seemed to be taking the leadership role as a tribe, three men from the tribe of Reuben would bring a challenge against Moses' authority over the nation at this same time. Along with these, and more directly in relationship to Korah's challenge of Aaron, came two hundred and fifty men who were also considered very respected men among Israel. How many of these were of Levi or other tribes and how many were considered leaders over families or just men of great honor for one reason or another, we don't really know. However, they seem to be of a group believing they too should be considered for the position of High Priest, and they

all accused Moses and Aaron of taking too much authority for themselves. They made the argument that especially considering the fact all the congregation was considered separated for the purposes of God, Moses and Aaron had no right to believe they held exclusive positions of leadership. They seemed to understand that without a king the High Priest would end up being the closest thing to a national leader once Moses was gone, and this is likely why they found it important to not allow that position to belong so exclusively to one family.

Moses, not Aaron, acting as a buffer of sorts between these men and their most dangerous coming against the Lord's anointed, falls on his face to show his humility (a quality very rare but very important in a leader) and prayerful grievance to God. He then tells Korah, along with those who came with him, that the next day God would show them all who the man was God had chosen to be the High Priest! Moses goes on to explain each one of them were to bring a censer with fire and incense before God the next day in order for God to answer their challenge. However, Moses admonishes Korah and the Levites in general about how much they were already standing in a position of great responsibility before The Lord, and to think about the fact they were demeaning their calling in believing they needed a share in the High Priesthood as well. Moses also points out they were not challenging Aaron in this matter, but God Himself!

These words to Korah and the others seeking what he sought may have caused one of the three men from the tribe of Reuben, named On, to abandon his cause, as Moses only calls out the other two men, Dathan and Abiram, in order to deal with the challenge to Moses' overall leadership. These two brothers refused to do anything Moses instructed. They would not go or come anywhere at anytime for him. They simply accused Moses of leading the people out of Egypt, which they describe as a land flowing with milk and honey, and killing them in the wilderness only for the purpose of making himself a king over Israel. They also accused Moses of being directly responsible for God's judgment on the people that was actually caused by them failing to believe God was able to bring them into the promised land, by bringing up the fact he had not given them a new land. They insinuate that if given the chance Moses might be devious enough to harm them as an example of what he does to political opponents by putting out their eyes or the like. In a rare moment of not standing between such people and God's wrath, Moses asks God not to respect these men, and points out, unlike a king, Moses had taken nothing from the people nor ever done anything to harm them! Moses then reiterates to Korah that he and the two hundred and fifty other men with him were to do as he had instructed if they wanted God's answer, and Aaron would do the same.

The next day, Korah and his men showed up at the door of the tabernacle with the censers as they had been instructed. They also assembled the entire congregation to



# Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we talked about the meaning of Isaac's name and how it relates to all those who have and will follow The Lord in their lives no matter how foolish it might seem to others. We also talked about the fact Ishmael as well as Isaac would both have twelve princes or heads of tribes born of them, and this led into a discussion of the number twelve being a doubling of man's number of six. We ended by talking about how we can all work to divide what we have, but it really is only God Who can bring true increase or value to our lives. All this is seen in the conversation Abraham is having with God, as God explains to Abraham how much He wants to use his life in this world as well as the lives of his family!

All this brought us through Genesis chapter 17 verse 20, which brings us to verse 21. In verse 21 God leaves off explaining to Abraham how much He had not lost sight of blessing Ishmael's life, but that, again, it was important Abraham be clear on the fact Sarah would bear him the son who would be the son of promise through whom God would continue the covenant, which was God's real reason for bringing Abraham out of his father's house. We also have in this verse the very specific fact that the birth of Isaac would take place at a set time in the next year. While Abraham did not doubt God, he also would not have to wait much longer to see the promise of God come to be. If Isaac's birth was going to be in the next year, it was only going to be a matter of months before the process would begin.

Verse 22 of chapter 17 gives us another one of those items I believe we so often miss, and that is the fact it talks about God's presence as being very physically apparent. As we go into chapter 18, we come into a story I reflect on often in my teaching as being a time when God actually appeared to Abraham as a human. To be clear, I always have to make sure we are all on the same page when it comes to understanding, I'm not suggesting God was in any way walking in the same form Jesus came in, because Jesus was born as a newly created Adam. (I Cor. 15:42-49) This is to say, Jesus was as human as you or I when it came to His physical form, and this is proven by the fact He was able to be killed. However, this by no means, means that God was incapable of walking in human form before this time. The difference was/is that much in the same way angels can appear in human form there is nothing - shall we say - locked in, about it. This is to say, they can appear and disappear at any moment. Jesus was literally physical and limited to living in His human form from conception until His death!

What I find fascinating and important about our understanding of this is that it shows us a lot about why God did what He did in order to lay out His plan for salvation in the way He has. Adam and Eve sinned, and for that they were punished by no longer having access to the source of their

physical immortality, which was the Tree of Life. However, God did not end the world at that point. Later, the world got so bad God told Noah the end of all flesh had come before Him, but again, God did not end the world at that point. (Gen. 6:13) After the flood God came down to see the city and tower man was building, and due to the purpose they were building it, God had to confound man's language to keep him from corrupting all of humanity so swiftly after God had taken action such as He did in sending the worldwide flood. (Gen. 11:1-9) However, God did not end the world at that point. God goes on to call Abraham from his father's house to the promised land, and took several generations to build a nation from him, then allowed that nation to go through centuries of events before we even see the first coming of The Messiah, but even then God did not end the world at that point!

We are now almost two thousand years removed from the ascension of Christ back to The Father, and we still wait for His return. However, what we are told is that when Jesus returns, God will not end the world at that point. Instead, as He returns, Jesus will gather all those both living and dead who have served God through all these millennia and set His feet on the Mount of Olives. Then, in spite of all who will resist Him, Jesus will set up an earthly kingdom that Revelation tells us will last for at least another thousand years; for the devil will be locked away for a thousand years before he is allowed to return and make his final attempt to overcome God. We do not know how long it will take for the devil to work with men and build his resistance that will come against Jesus' throne in Jerusalem, but only when that event finally takes place will God bring the world to an end! (Rev. 20)

My point is that in the Garden of Eden God walked with man on a daily basis. Adam and Eve expected Him to show up after they had taken of the fruit He had told them not to take of, and that is exactly what happened. After the flood, we are told God decided to go down and see the city and tower man was building. While this does not indicate God came down in a physical way, we should consider the fact God knows everything. He did not have to come down to see anything! This indicates there was still a desire on God's part to come directly into the midst of what man was doing at the Tower of Babel. When we couple this with the story we are told at the beginning of the book of Job where God asks Satan where he had been and Satan says he had been walking the entire earth, basically implying there was no point in what he found, God asks if Satan had considered His servant Job! (Job 1:6-8) All these stories indicate to us there is value in coming to this place and time that God made for us and walking among the events taking place.

There was/is value even to God and/or the opportunity He has always given man to access Him for God

to come, not just know what it was/is man was/is doing. In doing this at the Tower of Babel, God would make the determination confounding man's language was the justified action to be taken at that point. This takes us back to the Garden of Eden, where God clearly already knew what Adam and Eve had done; for as they tried to hide from God, He points out to them the reason they, for the first time, desired to hide! In that story, there was obvious relevance to God giving Adam and Eve a chance to respond, as they desired to respond to a direct interaction with God following actions they had already done and could not undo. One has to believe the same was true in some form at the Tower of Babel, as God came down to give man a chance to explain himself or at least pay attention to the presence of God in whatever form God had manifest Himself. In many ways, this is the simple story of Jesus coming to walk among us in actual human flesh. (John 1:14)

Here too in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis as God speaks to Abraham, there is more going on than just a prayerful conversation. There is no reference to Abraham seeing this in a vision, and he is clearly not in some deep meditative state of mind in the way he experiences God's presence in chapter 15. Here in 17, at one point Abraham specifically falls on his face before God! Now, we can't say for certain if God appeared in any type of human form to Abraham during this conversation, but verse one says God "appeared." Now in this twenty-second verse of the chapter we are told not just that God left, but even in the English it comes out specifically that God "...left off talking with him,..." It's as if we are being told God walked away in some fashion. This becomes more of a visual as we are also then told the specific, God "...went up from Abraham." Thinking about both these facts being given together, maybe God did not so much walk away from Abraham and disappear, or ascend in some way while still in Abraham's sight, but there was some kind of knowledge that God was done with what He had to say. Abraham also says nothing more, and so God, in whatever form He may have manifest Himself, ascends back to heaven out of the direct presence of Abraham!

When we compare all this along with the next story told to us in chapter 18 about God coming by Abraham's tent, with the stories of how Moses much later on encounters God's presence, there are more interesting facts to consider. We do not have very much indication that God appeared to Moses in any kind of recognizable human form, for there is just the one incident where Moses and the elders witness God's presence together at Mount Sinai, and even this does not confirm God looked like a man at that appearing. (Ex. 24:9-11) However, we are told very specifically God appears in the form of cloud and fire to the people as He leads the nation from Egypt to the promised land, and at those times when they see God's presence descend to cover the tabernacle, which was very often as Moses went in to talk with God directly, a cloud is seen. For all this, what we are told in Exodus seems to indicate no man ever stood so directly in the presence of God as Moses did. (Ex. 33:11-20) To quantify this statement with the fact Abraham seems to talk directly with God in a true face to face as God appears in a human form kind of way, one is led to

conclude that saying no one has spoken to God as directly as Moses, would have to do with the fact Moses, even more so than Abraham, Adam and Eve, or the like, came in the direct presence of God when He was not - for lack of a better term - "masked" in human form!

Especially as it relates to the story we read in the next chapter here in Genesis, God was walking in an open form. This is not to say He intended or was willing to walk among all men, as Abraham and Sarah are the only people it appears God spent any time with, and this is solidified in the fact that only the two angels go on to Sodom and Gomorrah. However, I repeat, God was in a human form and Abraham recognized Him. When God came to Adam and Eve, He definitely intended to walk among all men. It is only a technicality there were only two humans alive at that point. After that, it became more difficult for God to walk among sinful men, and we see He does not; but He met with Abraham more directly than we see done for just about anyone else for quite some time before this. When it comes to the time of Moses, God appears in the form of something physical but certainly not at our level of human to human like interaction. This is what scared the people of Israel. When Moses directly meets with God in these very direct ways, he is alone, and that is why God says He never spoke face to face with anyone the way He did Moses.

By the time of the prophets of Israel, it seems clear God is speaking to them in the form we so often dramatize it all as happening when doing plays and the like, which is that God's voice is heard but no physical manifestation is there. This is the way Samuel was called into the ministry, but it is also pointed out, leading up to this there had been no open "vision" for some time. (I Sam. 3:1-14) Even Elijah when he returns to the very same mountain range where God met with Israel so long before, experienced wind, an earthquake, and fire, but all that was to make the point God was in the still small voice! (I Kin. 19:9-13) By the time we are down to Daniel during the Babylonian captivity, Daniel is only shown visions, and these are mostly directed by an angel speaking to him. It is not to say this kind of communication was not done before this time, but Daniel was greatly beloved of God, and in some cases fasted and prayed for long periods of time in order to receive what he did. (Dan. 9:21-23) There is no doubt that in looking at these facts we see a degrading of man that hinders the direct and even physical appearing of God among men!

This finally culminates in The Messiah coming in literal human flesh in order to walk among us on a daily basis. This was God enduring the physical the way we endure it and not being able to escape it at any point unless He chose to leave His physical life cycle, thus ending it, which is not what He came to do. This enduring meant He was touchable as any human is touchable, and as I said earlier there is no greater evidence of this than the fact He was able to be put to death. After His resurrection He appeared in a new form like never before, and which demonstrated the new form those granted eternal life shall one day possess. However, He did not stay because it was important that The Holy Ghost be able to come Who was not inhabited by this physicality - meaning He can

# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part XVII

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

*"Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people."*

In our last segment, we began a look at the events that led directly up to the historical reason the Jews celebrate Hanukkah. In that we talked about how this era is where we begin to see the Romans become involved in the affairs of the Greek Empire. To be more clear on this issue, one should realize that the Romans had fought with the powers in the Greek homeland off and on as these powers became a nuisance to the Romans during their war with Carthage. Thus, what is more important to our study here is that the Romans began to be involved with the Seleucid Kingdom, which held much of the land Alexander the Great had taken control of, excluding Egypt and the Greek homelands. Most importantly, the Seleucid king held control over the promised land by this point.

As the Seleucid king, named Antiochus Epiphanes, came to the throne around 175 B.C., he was motivated by his ambitions to shape the world to his way of thinking. In doing this, he understood the Laws of God which the Jews clung to were a more dire threat to those ambitions than anything else in his kingdom. As we begin to go deeper into the events of this time period, it is also a good time to start referring to the land of Judah as Judea. This is not to diminish the Jews in any way, but because we need to be clear on how much the land had truly become a region within the various territories being fought over by the powers of the day! This will also help us remain clear while discussing any historical figures who share the name Judah with the forefather and namesake of the tribe.

As we talked about last time, due to Epiphanes' decree, the observance of the Torah was outlawed in its entirety; but when the Jews resisted, emissaries and soldiers were sent. Copies of the Torah were burned, circumcision was banned, heavy taxes were imposed on the Jews, and the temple itself would be desecrated by setting up a statue of the Greek god Zeus and sacrificing swine on the altar, thus making it unusable for the offerings commanded in the Laws of God. This was the desecration that made the temple desolate which Daniel was told about, and it would foreshadow the fact the temple would later be destroyed in its entirety during the Roman rule but after The Messiah's first coming. (Dan. 11:29-31) These later events are what Jesus was referring to as He wept over Jerusalem, and later as He talked to His disciples while on the Mount of Olives. (Matt. 24:1-28, Mark 13:1-23, Luke 19:41-48, 21:5-24)

In talking about these most difficult times for the Jews under the Greek rule, we again return to the fact many Jews were willing to go along with the Hellenization of their lives.

That being said, we also don't want to pass over what those Jews who were not willing did in order to be sure the Laws of God were not lost. In an earlier segment, we talked about how copies of the Torah had become more widely available than they had been, but this still did not mean everyone had a copy. Now, the fact the Greeks were burning copies of the Torah made them even more scarce than they ever had been. One of the greatest stories for our point here about preserving the Torah under these difficult times comes from the fact the Torah was one of those things, especially Jewish men, would gather together in order to teach and discuss with one another. This is part of that hiding the Word in one's heart we talked about, and because this was already a tradition, the fact physical copies of the Torah were becoming scarce did not stop Jews from knowing, learning, and discussing how the Law affected and should still guide their daily lives in real time as life's events unfolded.

The problem was that Jews getting together to do such a thing was something the Greeks were going to notice and put a stop to. Thus, the Jews came up with clever ways to do this without being noticed, and one of the main traditions of Hanukkah remembers one of the things they did. During Hanukkah, there is a game that mostly children play, but I would suggest adults take time to do it as well; it's called Dreidel. The game is named after the main object used to play it, which is called a "dreidel." Today this is seen as a toy, but when it was used for the real thing it was no toy! While today dreidels are often wood or plastic, and in days gone by many were made of metal, the original dreidels were even more simple and one might say, disposable, if necessary. This was so any group anywhere could make one to begin the game and even remake one if out of malice, or the like, a Greek enforcer chose to destroy a dreidel. To make a dreidel one simply needed a square form, which could easily be made of wood or the like, and that form would be packed with clay. At one end a stick would be pushed into the middle of what would become the top of the dreidel. When it was dry, the clay "block" was removed from the form, and the end opposite the stick could be carved into a simple blunt rounded shape like the larger end of an egg.

On each of the four sides of the dreidel a symbol to represent an action would be carved. Today each side has one of the Hebrew letters: Nun, Gimel, Hey, and Shin. These letters stand for the Hebrew phrase "Nes Gadol Hayah Sham." meaning, "A great miracle happened there." This refers to the miracle Hanukkah celebrates. Now, sadly the game is widely misunderstood and used as a gambling game. I say sadly because quite the opposite is the real truth of its meaning in that it was made to seem to be a gambling game so the Greeks would simply pass it off as something "guys do," when, in fact,



it gives a perfect way to make sure everyone goes home in the end with exactly what they came with! Coins would be used, and each person would put the same amount of coins in front of them as everyone else. To start, each person put one coin in the “pot.” In turn each person would spin the dreidel, and when the dreidel stopped it would land with one side up. Depending on what symbol was on that side, the player would do nothing or give to or take from the pot. As each person ran out of coins, they were out, and when all the coins were in one person's possession the game ends.

Children like to play this game because they enjoy spinning the “top,” but in playing Dreidel with adults, I have noted some will remark the game is “boring.” Unfortunately, this has contributed to people using it for actual gambling; but in many ways boring is the point! Remember the game was made so the Jews could gather in public to discuss the Torah. Depending on how many coins each person put in to start the game, many people can be knocked out very quickly and have nothing to do - except what they actually came to do! Also, if the discussion became so deep that everyone stopped playing the game, it could easily be started up at any moment in case a Greek enforcer came by. Observers who saw the group getting into heated discussions thought nothing of it. Money often causes arguments! People leaving or joining the game could easily be done, and in the end of it all the coins that had been put in the pot could simply be redivided among the players. The game could then begin again or each could go home with what they brought. Even if a Greek wanted to join in, if he lost, it was his loss. If he won, the coins were a small price to pay for what could be accomplished by having this “game”!

These kinds of practices ensured that iron could still sharpen iron in the ways of God. (Prov. 27:17) However, for all the things the Greeks did in their attempt to make it impossible for the Jews to continue performing the ordinances of the Law by taking it and its practices from the Jews, the persecution did not end there. Perhaps this is the point where I should clarify again that the official groups such as Pharisees and Sadducees did not exist as yet, but the predecessors of such groups did. What this meant is there were those totally willing to go along with Greek practices, those who were not, and many shades of gray in between. With that in mind, the Greeks were so determined to convert all the Jews to the Greek way of doing things, they demanded the Jews set up pagan altars in their towns, villages, etc. in order to offer sacrifices to the gods of the Greeks. No covert action on the part of any Jew could cover for taking part in such abominations, and this is where those who truly felt the ways of God were higher than life itself had to draw the line! As Greek enforcers were sent out to make sure Jews followed such edicts, they came to the town of a certain elderly priest named Mattathias, and this brought the issue to a head. Mattathias would not perform the sacrifice, and this is where we see those who were willing to conform come in conflict with those who said enough was enough!

Mattathias not only refused to perform the sacrifice himself, but as those willing to do so stepped forward, he intervened to stop them. The pagan altar was destroyed, and blood was shed as the one willing to step forward and do the

sacrifice, as well as the Greek enforcers, were killed. Mattathias, along with his five sons and others, fled to the Judaeen mountains where they would hide in the caves. As others fled their homes in resistance and joined them, they began striking at and destroying the pagan altars which had been set up. Some say this was a war more with the Greek power of the Seleucid Kingdom, and others look at it as more a civil war between Jews who were willing to be Hellenized and those who were not. To a degree both thoughts are correct. The elder Mattathias himself would die about a year after these events began in earnest in 166 B.C. However, his sons would continue the cause. His son Judas would receive the name Maccabeus, which means “The Hammer,” and would eventually form an army that would be known by that same name.

Epiphanes was determined to hold on to the region of Judea, but he had other troubles as well. In negotiating peace with the Romans, high tribute money had been demanded, and this meant he could not afford to lose valuable trade routes and pieces of his kingdom. In the East this is exactly what the Parthians took advantage of. As Epiphanes' troubles in the West increased, the Parthians seized a main city along the trade route to India in 167 B.C. Not wanting to risk losing the East, Epiphanes left a general named Lysias in charge while he took an army and headed east. This meant that Lysias was in charge while most of this was going on in Judea, and when the Maccabees were finally a sizable enough force to launch directly against those in Jerusalem who held the temple, they did so. They would attack in the year 165 B.C., and their attempt to retake the temple would be successful.

Now, their main purpose for retaking the temple was to cleanse it and begin again the commandments of God, which they wanted to do as quickly as possible. They cleansed the temple and it was ready to be rededicated unto the service of The Lord, but one of the main things that needed to be done was to light the seven lights of the menorah inside the Holy Place. To do this there was special oil needed that was not easily made, and the supply found on hand was only enough for one day. They did not wait, for if God had brought them this far He would surely make a way, and He did! The miracle of the oil is not that God provided oil out of something, such as God did with water out of the rock in the desert as Israel traveled from Egypt to the promised land. (Ex. 17:1-7) Instead, it would be more like the oil and the flour during the famine of Elijah's day. (I Kin. 17:8-16) It would take eight days for more oil to be produced for the menorah, but miraculously with only the one day's supply of oil the lights would not go out the entire eight days it took for the new oil to be ready. This was a great symbol that God had truly rewarded their efforts in standing up for His ways and not bowing to pagan corruption or giving up on being the people He had called them to be!

Daniel chapter 11 verses 34&35 talks about how many in the chosen nation would fall in these days, but when they did they would be “...holpen with a little help:...” Hanukkah remembers that help God gave his people, but as Daniel was told it would be a little help, meaning the nation would continue to be embroiled in the political circumstances of the

day. The help would be so those who desired the ways of God would know God had not left them nor forsaken them. Hanukkah remembers the war, the victory, the terrible times the people suffered, but it is important to understand that Hanukkah does not celebrate the winning of the war or any of the violence it entailed. Hanukkah does not celebrate national pride, though there is rightfully national pride in the remembrance today. Hanukkah celebrates God's miracle, the miracle of the oil as the temple was once again put back into service. This is why Hanukkah means, "The Feast of Dedication" in English, and it is referred to as such in the Gospel of John when it talks of The Messiah walking in the temple during Hanukkah! (John 10:22-31)

Getting back to the history, of course, the Seleucid Kingdom was not going to stand by and do nothing, and while the war in the East initially went well for Epiphanes, when he heard of Lysias' failure to hold Judea he attempted to head home. He would not make it back! There is dispute as to exactly how he died, but it would seem the most likely general explanation is that he fell ill and died before he could return. Epiphanes' death threw the Seleucid Dynasty into question. General Lysias had been left in charge because Epiphanes' heir Antiochus V Eupator was not old enough to take the throne, and still only 9 years old when Epiphanes died. General Lysias recognized Eupator as the king, but another man named Philip, who was on the campaign in the East with Epiphanes, had originally been named regent during Eupator's youth. While being threatened even by other generals on this whole matter, in 162 B.C. Lysias and Eupator did attempt to retake control over Judea. They had some success and made it to Jerusalem where Lysias was determined to take back the city, but then word came of Philip returning from the East with the other half of the Seleucid army.

Due to this, Lysias wanted to return to Antioch and to do this convinced the young Eupator to offer the Jews religious liberty if they would keep the peace. Eupator agreed and the Jews accepted! While the Seleucid army did great damage to Jerusalem's fortifications before heading back home, when they got to Antioch they found what would further ensure the Jews some breathing room. Philip had indeed taken control. This led to civil war. Lysias, along with the young Eupator, won back the capital and generally control over the kingdom. However, this is where the Romans get involved once again. Previously the Romans had pulled back from the Greek regions of the East content their success in battles against them would keep the peace, but time and again this strategy had not worked. The Romans were becoming increasingly irritated by this and desired to keep a closer eye on the Greek powers. This particular point in time caused them to take notice of the fact the Seleucid Kingdom was keeping a larger navy and military force than the treaty Rome had made with them allowed.

The Roman's appeared and began sinking ships and crippling the Seleucid military. Lysias feared standing up to the Romans in any way, and this made him very unpopular with the people. If you go back to the original involvement of Rome with the Seleucids, you find that Antiochus III had to send hostages to Rome as part of his punishment for pushing

westward and running into the Romans. Epiphanes was one of those hostages, and his brother became king when Antiochus III died. Eventually Epiphanes was allowed to return from Rome in exchange for his brother's heir Demetrius I Soter. When Demetrius I's father was assassinated, it was Epiphanes who became king by overthrowing the assassin. When Epiphanes died, Demetrius I, then 22 years old, petitioned the Roman government to allow him to return and take the Seleucid throne, but Rome at the time favored Lysias and young Eupator. Two years later, as Rome was exacting punishment on the Seleucid Kingdom for their military overstock, Lysias' unpopularity with the people grew to the point they rose up and killed a Roman envoy on their own. About this same time, Demetrius I escaped from Rome. Upon returning, Demetrius I was welcomed back as the rightful king in 161 B.C. To solidify his power, he almost immediately put Lysias and Eupator to death.

Now, before we go any further, it's important to our study that we attempt to cover the events of the High Priesthood because this has great ramifications on the fact that while the temple service had been restored, things were still not as they really should be. The fact this further degrading of the nation needed to come to a full is why God did not miraculously intervene further to help the Jews at this time. It's also why The Messiah was sent when He was, and we see what we do by the time The Messiah arrives on the scene! Through the Greek era leading up to and through the time of Hanukkah's events and those shortly thereafter, we do not have a complete picture of who held the High Priesthood. However, what we do know is that there was plenty of those who were both for and against a certain level of Hellenization, which is the main point. There is also quite a bit of evidence there was a lot of political jockeying as well as all-out bribery involved in how some came to the office, especially going forward starting with Epiphanes.

When the Seleucid Kingdom took control over Judea they were originally "friendly" to the temple service. However, after the High Priest Onias III stopped an attempt to further plunder the temple's treasures, an event set in motion by a Hellenistic Jew and involving many of the main actors that brought Epiphanes to power, the relationship with the Seleucid Dynasty was never on his side again. By the time Epiphanes came to the throne of the Seleucid Kingdom, Onias III, who was against the Hellenization of the Jews, was obligated to step aside in 175 B.C. Onias III's brother Jason became the High Priest. There is some evidence even this happened through bribery, but the real point is that Jason did support the Hellenization of the Jews. In spite of this, he made a fatal mistake in sending a man named Menelaus, who would appear to be the brother of the man who caused trouble for Onias III, to deliver the tribute money to the Seleucid ruler. Menelaus basically bribed the Seleucid king to give him the office of High Priest in place of Jason.

This man was not of the house of Aaron and should never have been a priest, much less the High Priest, but as the Greeks considered the office something they had the right to appoint at will, not something determined by the Laws of God, this did not matter to them. An officer with soldiers was sent

back to Jerusalem with Menelaus to put down any opposition to his appointment. Menelaus then did what Onias III had stopped, which was to make use of the temple treasures to fulfill the promises he had made to the king in order to obtain the High Priesthood. When news of this reached Onias III, he publicly accused Menelaus of robbing the temple. Due to this, Menelaus bribed the king's officer to kill Onias III before an official complaint could be made to the capital. This the officer accomplished. However, Menelaus' plunder of the temple did not end there, and when this resulted in disfavor among the Jewish people, violence broke out. Menelaus then accused the Jewish people of being against him in favor of the Seleucid Dynasty's Greek rivals in Egypt. This not only led to the death sentence of many Jews but fanned the flame of desire for Epiphanes to forcefully Hellenize the Jews completely!

By the time the temple is retaken by the Maccabees in 165 B.C., it is unclear if Menelaus served in any real capacity as High Priest, but it is said he was killed by Epiphanes' son Eupator when the young king made peace with the Jews in 162 B.C. It is believed that in the interim Judas Maccabeus may have served as the High Priest. However, when Demetrius I took the Seleucid throne in 161 B.C., a man of the house of Aaron, but still not of the High Priest's line, named Alcimus, who was very Hellenistic and opposed to the Maccabees, went to Demetrius I to be named High Priest. This request was granted, and an army was sent to ensure his installment. At first the Jews seemed to simply be glad to again have a man of the house of Aaron in the position, but he turned the people against him with his cruelty and corruption. This is where the Maccabees again find themselves at serious odds with the Seleucid kings. When the Seleucid army returned to Antioch, Judas Maccabeus would attack and drive Alcimus back to Antioch as well.

It's possible the youngest of the five sons of Mattathias, Jonathan Maccabeus, took over as High Priest, but Demetrius I demanding to have control over the Jews' high office sent an army to reinstate Alcimus. Judas Maccabeus would defeat this army just north of Jerusalem, but Judas was not ignorant to the fact his forces were likely too small to withstand a continual assault from the king. Judas would turn to the Romans for help, sending two envoys to Rome. The Roman's Senate received these two men and agreed Judea deserved to be an independent state that would serve as a buffer between the two factions of what was left of the Greek Empire: the Ptolemy and the Seleucid realms. Sadly, this would not help as the Romans really only worked in their own interests and sent no troops to enforce such a thing. In any case, Demetrius I quickly sent an even larger army to Jerusalem. Judas, once again, gathered his forces and met them north of the city, but was defeated and killed in battle in 160 B.C. Alcimus would be reinstated as the High Priest, and a garrison of soldiers would be left to keep him there. However, Alcimus' arrogance would quickly catch up with him as he was killed pulling down the wall of the court that divided the Gentile area from that part only Jews could enter in 159 B.C.

It is not clear who served as High Priest for the next few years, but different suggestions have been made that would connect who it was to latter religious groups such as the one thought to be responsible for what we call the Dead Sea Scrolls. In any case, with Judas now dead, Jonathan was thrust into the position of leadership of the Maccabees. The oldest son John had been captured and killed during the battles leading up to Judas' death, and Eleazar had also been killed in battle. This left only Jonathan and Simon. Jonathan would be active in resistance to the Seleucid kings, and due to internal trouble for the Seleucid Kingdom he would see a fair amount of success. His diplomatic skills would gain him the name, Jonathan Apphus, which means, "The Diplomat." As the Seleucid Kingdom was in all-out civil war, Jonathan was offered various treaties by the leaders because the Maccabees, in spite of their being anti-Hellenistic, had become the most stable leadership in Judea. Jonathan, already the military governor, was also eventually appointed to the position of High Priest by one of the Seleucid rulers around 153 B.C.

Some in the Jewish community were not happy about this anymore than they had been over seeing some of the other men not of the correct line be in the position. However, Jonathan was fairly well liked and supported. Over the next ten years, he and Simon would take the opportunities that presented themselves to strengthen Judea's position and diminish those among the Jews who had sold out to the Hellenistic ways, all the while sorting their way through the treacherous civil conflict the Seleucid rulers were going through. In 143 B.C. one of the Seleucid rulers named Diodotus Tryphon made offers to Jonathan, and in gaining his trust the ruler captured him and killed 1,000 of his men. Tryphon, now facing Simon, offered to release Jonathan in exchange for Jonathan's two sons and a sum of money. Not wanting the people to blame him for Jonathan's death, Simon agreed even knowing Tryphon would not keep his word. Tryphon killed Jonathan as Simon had suspected he would, and Simon buried his brother in their home town.

Simon was now free to solidly stand in full opposition to Tryphon and side with Demetrius II Nicator, the rightful heir to the Seleucid throne. Simon sent a request for Judea to be freed of taxes, and Demetrius II granted the request. This gave Judea, which now included land holdings reminiscent of its past, political independence in 142 B.C. The joyous people held a large assembly, and by official resolution they made Simon the first prince of what would become the Hasmonean Dynasty in 141 B.C. This resolution also declared Simon and his descendants High Priests, "...until a faithful prophet should arise." This set the perfect stage for God eventually sending John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest prophet to be born, as well as The Messiah Himself! (Matt. 11:7-15, Luke 7:24-30)

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

**Questions submitted to the Institute, answered by  
Philip E. Busby.**



#### **FBS continued from pg. 4**

be in all places at anytime! When He came on the day of Pentecost, which is the Feast of Weeks or Shavuot, there was a physical manifestation, but it was and is carried out only through those who believe and are prepared to receive Him directly into themselves. We see even this comes in levels, as in Acts chapter 2 there are cloven tongues of fire and speaking in tongues.

While I have seen and experienced the speaking in tongues part, for all the intensity of The Holy Ghost's presence I have been fortunate enough to be a part of, I have yet to see the fire. To be crystal clear on this issue, just as I do not believe tongues have ceased, I do not believe the fire, nor even the sound of the rushing wind, is something that can no longer be experienced. It is all a matter of intensity, which is dictated mostly by the willingness of God's people to yield to Him. Not hearing the wind or seeing the fire is no more proof they are no longer part of the way The Holy Ghost is willing to manifest Himself than the lack of speaking in tongues in many churches is proof it is no more. The entire point is that as humans we have steadily lost the ability to have the presence of God directly among us, which is clearly something God desires to do. We do not see it based on the fact we as a society and world have grown in our sinfulness overall. We have also grown in our own personal failure to desire God and make the sacrifices of worldly things that keep our lives clean, pure, and both able to receive and experience such a direct presence of God!

Now, in talking about obedience to God and His will, the next and closing verses of chapter 17 are amazing. I know when doing a study like this where we cover so many things on our way through the verses, it can seem like a very long time ago that we talked about how God told Abraham about the symbol of circumcision. However, in spite of that, we must remember this commandment of the symbol of the covenant God was making with Abraham did, in fact, come in the same conversation as everything we've been talking about since we entered chapter 17. It can also be hard to think of it as all taking place in one day. This is an example of how much value there is in continuing to read the Word of God straight through even when you are getting regular in depth teaching. I talk a lot about how sad it is people do not take the time to hear a sermon and consider what they've heard in the context of the surrounding verses by reading those verses or being knowledgeable of them already. This is because context is king when it comes to communication! An investigation into knowing if anything a preacher or teacher is saying has any truth to it or not can and should start with understanding whether they are putting the scripture they are teaching about in the context it was written in or not.

Context can go much deeper than just reading through it, and that is some of what we hope to accomplish in a study such as this one as well as tie many of the individual verses to the Bible as a whole. This is because to teach one verse is to teach the Bible, and if we can't support what we are saying from Genesis to Revelation there is something wrong with what we believe or what we think we understand. Thus,

there is value in going into long conversations about just one verse but not without keeping in mind the context of the whole. There is no greater way to maintain our understanding of overall Biblical context than to just keep reading through the Bible day after day for ourselves!

If we read directly from verse 1 to verse 23 it is easier to grasp the importance of what we are told, which is that it was in this very same day Abraham has his conversation with God about all this that he goes right to work implementing the symbolism God gave him for his house. What is amazing about this is Abraham himself is ninety-nine years old when he goes through the procedure of circumcision. In the day and age which they lived there is little evidence they had very good equipment such as surgical knives with which to perform such a task. While there was likely some natural substance known to help with the pain, I believe it can go without saying they did not have sophisticated anesthetic or numbing medications that could be used to ease the pain while performing it. Beyond that, there is the truth that the most likely way to stop the bleeding was done by cauterization, which even the slightest mistake in applying could have caused not just more pain in the long term, but even permanent damage.

This may sound like I'm just attempting to be gruesome in some way, but all these are thoughts that should not be overlooked in thinking about the fact Abraham was given the information he was given about how he was to begin using this symbolism, and every male in his house has the procedure performed on them in that very day. Again, I'm not attempting to belabor the point, but this means they did not start with some servant as a test subject for how to do this procedure, and after perfecting the technique over several tries they move on to the more direct family members and Abraham himself. Just how much knowledge they may or may not have had about performing medical procedures or anything like this is something I guess we'll never know; but in any case, they followed what God said without hesitation, and this has interesting ramifications.

Beyond the profound obedience shown in the fact when God told Abraham to do something he simply did it, the other aspects to this are that as we talked about when covering the commandment from God to do this, even those bought with money who were part of Abraham's house took on this symbol. This brings us to two more amazing facts. First, this is not just a painful procedure, and in particular for the adult males, but the recovery time can be lengthy. The risk of infection or other complications are also high. Just how high complications are can also be greatly affected by how much each person is allowed the time to rest, recover, and take care to keep as clean as possible. What this means is that in one day every man of Abraham's house was basically put on sick leave until further notice, and for a house the size of Abraham's, this is no small thing! One can only imagine the work was then up to the women, who in a day and age without what we would call modern conveniences, not just inside the home but outside as well, such as stores, restaurants and the like, the women already had plenty to do! Taking on all the animals there were

to feed and care for, doing all the daily chores of keeping up with stocking supplies such as wood for the cooking stoves and anything that could not simply be let go until the men were better, all had to be done along with having to take care of the men in this state of recovery.

While I'm sure Abraham's house was well organized, the fact this conversation of Abraham's and the circumcision of all the males was done in one day means no extra work was done in advance of this in order to stock up and prepare for it. On top of all the issues of work needing to be done, there is also the fact the house was now left defenseless in the face of anything from thieves all the way to all-out attack by another power. If we look again at the story about how Abraham went after the kings to recover what the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah could not protect in the first place nor recover after the fact, and how Abraham using his own men and supplies did what the kings could not do in recovering everything and defeating the coalition of kings that had started all this, one should have a good picture of how big Abraham's house and possessions were. (Gen. 14) There were plenty of people who, due to jealousy, spite, etc., might have wanted to take advantage of a situation such as this. However, this is another way in which Abraham did not waver at the promises of God. He trusted God would protect and provide for them, as he wasted no time in conforming his house to the commandment of God! This begs from us all the question of, would we do the same?

The second aspect of this is what an amazing thing this is to ask of every individual male in his house. No matter how odd or unpleasant going through such a procedure as this was for the men, and as Moses' wife later shows, even something the women might have objected being done to their husbands and sons, from the youngest to the oldest, there is not a single indication anyone refused or resisted compliance to this new ordinance Abraham just came back from his talk with God and asked them to do! (Ex. 4:24-26) In the Law of Moses there is an ordinance about servants that were bought only having to serve for six years before they were to be set free, but if the servant saw it in his best interest to stay with his master for life, he did not have to go. (Ex. 21:1-6) The symbol for this was basically a hole would be made in the servant's ear, presumably to place an earring of sorts, that would symbolize the person's willingness to commit to a lifetime of service. This procedure was not nearly as serious as that of circumcision, but it was intended to be something that would be hard to force on a person as a way to simply claim they had made the commitment. If it had been forced and an ornament of some sort was used to signify what house they belonged to, this also was something a person could simply remove; and if the hole in the ear was not very large, the skin would grow back over such a hole and make it hard to tell it was ever there!

While Abraham was not asking for something that was in the public view, he was asking his servants to do something far more painful and permanent than that put in the law to signify a person's dedication to serving a particular

master. It was also something very much not easily forced upon a person. One should note here there is no narrative about Abraham giving a speech explaining how if anyone did not want to take on this symbol they were free to leave his house. All this indicates that Abraham's servants, all the way from those who already desired to be with him and had joined his house for the purpose of being with him for life, to those simply bought for the purpose of having enough servants to take care of all the possessions God had blessed Abraham with, were so dedicated to this man of God they believed him, and without resistance went through this procedure! In many ways this has some foreshadowing to the fact the children of Israel would later have to trust Moses as the one who would speak to God, and what he told them they would follow.

As Israel traveled to the promised land they showed they had a lot of trouble doing this in spite of having to admit they were so scared of the direct presence of God that they witnessed at Mount Sinai, they themselves had made the request for this arrangement of having Moses as their go-between. However, God confirmed to Moses the people had spoken well in asking for this because, as we started this segment discussing, standing before the direct presence of God is no small matter. Thus, the children of Israel needed Moses, and they would have never made it without his leadership, which he was able to provide only by following God and receiving instructions for what to do when things were beyond human ability. All these examples foreshadowed how much we all need Jesus to be our intercessor between us and God The Father. Far too many people who claim to be Christians today will follow a minister because they find it the path of most ease; but as the saying goes, you cannot follow the wrong path and get to the right destination.

The Messiah has come, and John the Baptist, being the greatest prophet born of women, said he had to decrease because Jesus needed to increase! (Luke 7:28, John 3:25-36) Jesus came so we would have no question as to who the man is that we should be following and looking to for our example. Being God, Jesus came as a man so that it would not be so hard to stand before the direct presence of God. He also told us about The Father so we would understand, even if we have trouble seeing only a man in Jesus Christ, it should still be clearly understood He is the man between us and God! "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16 We are a demanding creature and very strong willed, but God has given every one of us the chance we need to find and follow the right path!

Until next time, Shalom!

## **The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2**

witness what they must have felt was going to be vindication. Thus, in the presence of the entire nation, God's glory appeared and instructed Moses and Aaron to separate themselves out from the people so God could wipe them all out in that one moment. Moses along with Aaron, once again, stand in the gap for the people, and falling on their faces ask God not to destroy the entire nation because of the arrogant sinfulness of one man. To this, God responds that Moses is to go out and warn the people to separate themselves from the literal area around the dwellings of the three men who led this rebellion. Moses immediately gets up and goes specifically to the places where these three lived, to instruct the people to get away and not even touch anything that belonged to these families if they did not want to take part in their sin. The elders of Israel followed Moses in giving these instructions in order to at least witness what was to happen, if not help get the people away. Knowing the rebellion that was in the people's hearts, these elders might have feared the people would be foolish enough not to listen to Moses at this point.

Since both the Kohathites and the tribe of Reuben camped on the south side of the tabernacle, one can presume this cleared the area to the south, with the exception of these three households. As this happened, the two men of the tribe of Reuben came and stood at the doors of their tents with their families, and Moses begins to explain how they all would know that Moses had not taken the actions he had by following his desires, but by what God had told him to do. Moses said if these men died a natural death in any way it would prove God had not sent Moses. However, it would be known among all the people that Moses was only following God's instructions if God did something the people had never seen before, which was for the ground to open up and swallow these men along with all that belonged to them. When Moses had finished explaining this, the ground did, in fact, open up, and these two men along with their families, servants, and all they possessed fell into an instantaneous grave which closed back up on them. This happened to the entire family and household of Korah as well, and when the people saw it and heard the cries of those going down into the pit, they began to run away for fear the ground would open up and they would all be consumed. As this was happening, fire came out of the pillar of God and consumed Korah and the other men who had brought their censers before the door of the tabernacle!

This brought to an end those who brought yet another challenge concerning their ability to form the national structure of Israel instead of simply following what God had set up and instructed them to do. Because it was important Aaron not be defiled by going among the ashes of the dead bodies, his son Eleazar was sent to collect the brass censers and gather up the fire and ash of the men who had been killed before the tabernacle. This ash was to be carried out of the camp to a desolate place much like the instructions for ashes from the altar. Because the censers survived this fire and had been offered before The Lord, they became part of what belonged to God in the same way anything offered to God would be. However, they would not be used as censers, but God commanded the metal be reworked and used to make thick plates for the altar of burnt offering, the wooden structure of

which had already been overlaid with brass when it was made. However, every time the people came to offer at the tabernacle, these thick plates, which would now cover the altar as well, served as a reminder of this event and how only Aaron and his line were to preside as the priests to present offerings before God!

Unfortunately, it did not take long for the people to get over their fear of what had happened that day to those who rebelled against God's will. In an absolutely astonishing show of how much people think God is nothing but a power that can be harnessed and used for their own purposes, the very next day they began to accuse Moses and Aaron of being responsible for killing the people of God. It was as if they believed Moses had manipulated the power to kill other men they saw as servants of God. As the people gathered themselves against Moses and Aaron, they looked toward the tabernacle and saw the pillar of cloud over it as God once again started to show forth His glory from it. Moses and Aaron would go before the tabernacle where God again instructs them to get away from the people so He could consume them all in a moment. Moses and Aaron fall on their faces before God, but this time they could not make the argument this was the sin of one man or a few men.

Moses knowing there was only so much they could do to stand between God and the people at this point, instructs Aaron to fill a censer with fire off the altar and take incense to go out among the people and do what he could to offer an atonement for them! Moses knew the wrath of God was already at work, and as Aaron runs out, he finds a plague had already begun to kill the people. Putting the incense on the fire of his censer, he offered an atonement to God for them. The plague would stop consuming the people and Aaron would find himself standing between those who had died and those still alive, as if he was a shield of sorts! Not counting those who had died the day before, this incident alone killed 14,700 people. The plague had been stopped, and Aaron returned to Moses where he had remained before God at the door of the tabernacle.

After all this, God gives the people something they or, at the very least, all their leaders could take part in, but would show that Moses had not just put his brother at the head of the priesthood. The people had seen God act to destroy and kill when they came against Moses and Aaron, but God wanted to give the people something miraculous that had nothing to do with wrath or destruction, in order to confirm who He had chosen from among them to be His priest. For this, each of the twelve tribes were to bring a wooden rod or branch with the name of their tribe carved into it. This would be something the people of the tribes would pick out and know belonged to them. The tribe of Levi was also to choose a rod, but upon it, instead of the name Levi, Aaron's name was to be carved. These thirteen rods were to be placed inside the Holy Place where God would meet with Moses, and the one that God caused to blossom would show specifically God's will. The fact God asked all twelve tribes to bring a rod to be placed in the tabernacle should have been a sign in and of itself, but the blooming of one of them would, at the very least, prove who God intended to administer His service there!

Moses collects the rods from the leaders of the tribes

and puts them where God had said to put them. The next day when Moses went in to meet with The Lord, the rod of Aaron had on it all three stages of a plant's life cycle for reproduction. It had buds, it had buds that had already bloomed, and it had fully developed almonds on it. Moses took the rods out to the people for all of them to see what had happened, and they saw for themselves their rods had not been destroyed or changed and also what Aaron's rod alone had done. Each of the leaders took their rod to do with as they pleased, but God told Moses to bring Aaron's rod back inside the tabernacle as a witness against those who would question what God had chosen to do. Moses took the rod back inside as God had said, but when he came out the people showed their propensity to swing from one extreme to the other. They began to talk to Moses about the fact they believed now that God had made this point clear, they felt there was nothing they could bring before the tabernacle without God killing them. They just did not see how God, through the priesthood, was establishing a buffer between them and Himself so that such a thing would not happen. Indeed, God had shown a way for the people to come before His earthly throne!

Due to this on going misunderstanding, God begins to speak to Aaron about this buffer issue so he and his family might in turn teach the people. God explains to Aaron how the priesthood is a gift to Aaron's family. It was theirs to possess but also the all of what they were to be. While the people saw it as a position of power, God wanted Aaron to understand he and his family alone would bear the responsibility of the duties prescribed to them in offering the sacrifices and administering the tabernacle's ordinances on a daily basis. Those who would stand, not in their place, but next unto them in this, would be their family tribe of the Levites. The Levites would help them do the work of maintaining the tabernacle, and thus take many burdens off them; but Aaron's house would still be responsible to oversee this work, and never were any of the Levites to take up the responsibilities of performing the ceremonies of the tabernacle, which only Aaron's house was to do. In maintaining this they would provide the safe path for the people to approach God as He dwelt in their midst. Anyone who circumvented this would die!

From there God begins to affirm to Aaron, once again, what it is they as priests had been given and what they had not. This list emphasizes how much God was giving them things the people would bring, which would provide their daily needs but not the things of this earth that would cause them responsibilities outside the ministry. The first item was to remind Aaron the heave offerings of the plant-based offerings and portions of the sin and trespass sacrifices that the people brought belonged to him and the males of his house to eat there on the holy ground of the tabernacle's courtyard. Of the offerings the people brought as gifts, the heave portions and all wave offerings were theirs, and could be eaten by anyone in their family as long as the person was ceremonially clean. This would never change. To be clear about this, God specifies all the fresh oil, the fresh juices, and newly harvested grains that were brought as offerings for Firstfruits, along with any offerings of first ripe fruits brought by the people throughout the year, belonged to them in this same way.

This same stipulation of things belonging to them applied to everything the children of Israel were to bring, because certain things automatically belonged to God in the same way first ripe fruit did. One specific is that of animals that were the first-born of their mother. This first-born stipulation was actually true for both animals as well as people. People are, of course, never sacrificed, and nor are those animals considered unclean, but this does not mean they don't belong to God. Thus, God gave a way for the people to redeem these by giving money instead in the amount of that equal to five shekels - as a shekel is determined at the sanctuary - when the person or animal was a month old. Cattle, sheep, and goats were never to be redeemed, but sacrificed to God. Their blood was to be sprinkled on the altar and their fat burnt on the altar. Then the flesh would belong to the priest just as any of the other sacrifice portions that are allowed to be eaten by all those in the priest's house. God calls this a covenant of salt, meaning not just that it was forever, but again that it was to preserve them in the work of The Lord.

As for those things that the priest's house and the Levites would not have because they would be earthly burdens, they would not be given land of their own when the nation settled in the promised land. This is not to say they would have no place to live, as we later see the tribe was granted cities, but they were not to be farmers, herdsman, etc. Their inheritance in the promised land would be the tithe Israel was to bring, and their work was to be that of the tabernacle and later temple. No others were to do the jobs given to the priest's house and Levites in general. God even stipulates that others would die if they tried. Thus, it was incumbent on the Levites to take on the responsibilities God had given them without distraction of worldly things, or the things of God could not be done correctly. This small fact has a lot to do with what we see in the nation later on in its history!

For the next instructions that were to be given to the Levites as a whole, God would turn to Moses, and these would concern the way the Levites were to tithe. Every member of the nation was to tithe, but these tithes would become the property of the Levites, so God tells Moses to instruct the Levites that when they receive tithe of the people, the Levites were then to take a tenth part of what they had received and give it as a heave offering before The Lord. God goes on to explain that they were to give the best of what they received to heave offer, and, of course, heave offerings would then belong to Aaron's house. Since the heave offerings belonged to the priests, this technically meant anything they heave offered a tenth part of, that tenth still belonged to them. However, God makes it clear that in spite of this truth even the most holy things were to have a tenth heave offered by the priest before they themselves used it. If they did this, God would accept it as tithe from them in the same way He accepted all the physical giving of produce, money, and everything else from the rest of Israel. They were also not to fail in doing this because if they did, it would pollute the tithe and offerings of Israel with their sin in failing to do so, and this would result in the death of the priest(s).

Let's stay in God's Word!