

Numbers 15 -17 • Korah's Rebellion and Aaron's Staff

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

Numbers chapter 15. The Book of Numbers.

As I was studying through this, and right before I came up here tonight, I was just kind of thinking to myself that studying through the Old Testament can be very gratifying, very satisfying. But it could also be very encouraging or— yeah, it can be encouraging, but it can also be very challenging – that's the word I was thinking of. Because you go through a lot of things in the Old Testament that just kind of feels like you're wearing really heavy boots, or something, to kind of trudge through.

And I'm sure that it felt that way for them too, sometimes, because as we get into Numbers chapter 15— which is where we're beginning tonight— we're just coming off that very difficult point in time when the nation of Israel came to the border of the Promised Land and failed to go in because of their unbelief. And because of their grumbling, because of their complaining, you know that God turned them back to the wilderness for an additional 38 years. That was how long God said He had— would give them during that time that entire generation of unfaithful believers would die in the wilderness. And then, God would bring their children eventually into the land.

We don't know how much time necessarily elapsed between what we read last week and what we're beginning with here tonight in chapter 15, but the differences between what these two chapters have for us are pretty stark because you begin— and I don't know if you any of you have read ahead, but as you begin reading Numbers chapter 15, it's like we've taken a detour back to the Book of Leviticus – and you know how challenging that was. I mean, going through all of that detail that was given to the priests and the sacrificial system, and all that stuff. Chapter 15 kind of goes back again.

Now, believe me, there's reasons for it. There's always reasons for it. God has reasons for everything. Reading through this chapter kind of feels like I've just gone back in time a little bit. It's like, not just the nation of Israel was sent back into the wilderness, but they were kind of sent back to school to kind of talk

about some of these most basic things, of how to do certain offerings, and stuff like that.

But before we get into this chapter, can I just remind you of something about offerings? What I mean offerings, I'm talking about sacrificial offerings because that's what he's going to primarily talk about in this chapter: the giving of sacrifices, the offering up of certain animals, and the things that were to go along with those sacrifices.

You and I read those things, and we kind of read through it, and it was this, and then the bull, and then the sheep, and then, Leviticus—it got real challenging sometimes, because he was even telling us what parts to burn, what parts to throw away, what to do with the blood – and we're all, huh, yeah.

But I want to just remind you that the sacrificial system gave Israel a means of dealing with sin – and we've got to be careful not to forget that. It was a means of dealing with sin. That may not seem like a big deal to you, but it's a huge deal. Remember, they had just failed miserably at the border of the Promised Land, sent back into the wilderness, and boy, especially after failure, there needs to be a path to forgiveness.

One of the things we forget as Christians, because we've been dealing with the Gospel for so long, many of us, we end up spending a lot of our time just pointing out sin without giving people a path to forgiveness. There has to be that path. There has to be some mechanism, some revelation of what you are going to do with your sin.

Have you ever—? Maybe— I don't know if you've ever had an opportunity to witness to somebody who was an unbeliever and you were talking to them about the issue of sin, but it makes people very uncomfortable.

The Bible tells us that when Paul was in captivity, he was speaking in front of one of the kings. I can never remember if it was Felix or Festus. They just had to have almost identical names. I want to say Festus. But anyway, it says Paul was talking; he was going on and on about sin and judgment, the wrath of God and the judgment to come; and the Bible says that the king just said: that's enough for now I'll call you when it's convenient to talk again.

And we recognize that response. That response is one where I'm being confronted with my sin, but you haven't yet gotten to the place where you've given me a path. Now, had Paul been given the opportunity to continue to talk, he certainly would have gone on and talked about.

Listen, Jesus is the way that sin is dealt with in our lives, that we resolve the issue of our sinfulness. But as Christians, we can forget to make sure that we've given people that path to forgiveness because we go around pointing our finger at sin and calling things what they are, and so on and so forth, but we forget sometimes that people need to hear.

God gave the sacrificial system as a path to forgiveness, and you and I both know that the path He gave them was given also to point to the ultimate means of forgiveness that we have in Christ Jesus, that Jesus is in fact the perfect and final sacrifice for sins.

But anyway, just a point I wanted to make here for just a moment.

Numbers chapter 15. Since we've dealt with a lot of this information in the Book of Leviticus as it relates to how these sacrifices should go, we're not going to give a lot of comment here, except where it's appropriate. It says:

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving you, ³ and you offer to the LORD from the herd or from the flock a food offering or a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or at your appointed feasts, to make a pleasing aroma to the LORD, ⁴ then he who brings his offering shall offer to the LORD a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah...”
(ESV)

And what he's going to be doing here in these first several verses is simply giving some instruction about when you bring this offering, or that offering, bring with it also a grain offering. And he's going to tell them about how they should do it. He says here the grain offering is a tenth of an ephah. By the way, an ephah was a unit of measurement, and it came to about eight quarts, right? They were to bring that much.

“...of fine flour, mixed with a quarter of a hin (and a hin was essentially a quart, so a quarter of a quart) of oil; ⁵ and you shall offer with the burnt offering, or for the sacrifice, a quarter of a hin of wine for the drink offering for each lamb. ⁶ Or for a ram, you shall offer for a grain offering two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a third of a hin of oil. ⁷ And for the drink offering you shall offer a third of a hin of wine, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. ⁸ And when you offer a bull as a burnt offering or sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or for peace offerings to the LORD, ⁹ then one shall offer with the bull a grain offering of three tenths of an ephah of fine flour, mixed with half a hin of oil. ¹⁰ And you

shall offer for the drink offering half a hin of wine, as a food offering, a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

¹¹ “Thus it shall be done for each bull or ram, or for each lamb or young goat.

¹² As many as you offer, so shall you do with each one, as many as there are.

¹³ Every native Israelite shall do these things in this way, in offering a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. ¹⁴ And if a stranger is sojourning with you, or anyone is living permanently among you, (and this would speak of non-Jews that would come to kind of connect themselves to the Jews, by faith, by culture; he said if any of those are among you) and he wishes to offer a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD, he shall do as you do. ¹⁵ For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a statute forever throughout your generations. You and the sojourner shall be alike before the LORD. ¹⁶ One law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.”

All right, now, we move on. Verse 17: *“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,*

¹⁸ “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land to which I bring you ¹⁹ and when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a contribution to the LORD.”

Now, your Bible may have a different word other than contribution, but basically this is talking about what you and I would refer to as a tithe, like an offering, if you will. It doesn't specifically use the idea here of a tithe in this verse, but it's talking about giving back a portion because it is the Lord who gives, and the Lord says when you return a portion of what I've given, it is an expression of thanks and appreciation and gratitude.

All right, so he says: *“²⁰ Of the first of your dough, you shall...”* That's not money. That's real dough. Do people even use the word dough for money today? That's an old term, isn't it? Give me all your dough, or something like that. Yeah, that's probably 1950s or 60s. Anyway, so it was a non-issue and I shouldn't have even brought it up.

“Of the first of your dough, you shall present a loaf as a contribution; like a contribution from the threshing floor, so shall you present it. ²¹ Some of the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD as a contribution throughout your generations.”

So again, this is a reminder for when the people come into the land of Canaan, they begin to enjoy the produce of the land and they begin to make bread with the grain and so on, they were to show their devotion to the Lord by presenting

Him with these things baked from the first cutting of the grain, and again, showing gratitude and appreciation for the Lord's goodness.

And by the way, this is something we still do today. We show our gratitude, our appreciation for God with the gifts and offerings that we give.

So many people ask me today: Pastor Paul, what does the Bible say about how much should—what does the Bible say about tithing? How much should we give as Christians? So, they'll say: I know tithing was an Old Testament principle, so what does the New Testament say? And so forth.

There's a lot of Christians who are very legalistic, frankly, about it. They're like, 10%, boom, you just give 10%. Well, the reason they say 10% is because that's what tithe means, a tenth – and I suppose that's a fine place to start. I suppose.

But in the New Testament, the Bible doesn't teach giving tithes in the same sense that it did in the Old, and the only way you're going to try to say that is you're going to have to go back to the Old Testament and impose that upon New Testament believers. God required of the people of Israel a tenth. He required of them that much; and He said: I've given you this, you give a tenth back to me.

So, people say, how much do we give in the New Testament? And the answer is a hundred percent. It's a hundred. I didn't just tell you to empty out your pockets and your bank account right now. The point of this whole thing is that you belong to the Lord. He purchased you on the cross. And the Bible says, you are not your own; you've been bought with a price. Okay? So, you belong to the Lord. And if you belong to the Lord, certainly everything you have belongs to Him. So, everything is His.

Now then, how much are we to give? Somebody might say: Well, pastor Paul, that's not realistic. Am I supposed to give a hundred percent of everything that comes in? Because I can't; I wouldn't have nothing to live on.

No, the Bible says in the New Testament, each man is to give as he is led. He is to give according to what the Lord speaks to his heart. That's why I'm bothered a little bit when some Christians are very insistent on 10%, 10%. Well, that may not be what the Lord lays on somebody's heart. The Lord may, because of the faith of an individual, or the lack thereof, the Lord may say 1%, or 2, or 5 or 20, or 50, depending on someone's ability to give.

That is the New Testament principle. Each man is to give according to how his heart prompts him to give. Not under compulsion, but freely, because as the

Bible says, God loves a cheerful giver. That means if you can't give cheerfully, just keep it. Just don't give it all. Because it's not doing you any good, and probably nobody else either. So, it's like, don't give it out of a perfunctory sort of a, eh, got to give this.

People use this term all the time, and I have to tell you, it makes the hair on my neck stand up. They talk about paying tithes, and you've heard me say that—some of you who've been around—I hate that term. You pay Idaho Power. You do not pay God, right? You give freely to God. You don't give freely to Idaho Power. You pay what you owe them for what you've used. You give God freely. You get to give God out of your abundance.

Now, why do you give these things to God? Does He need your money? No. God doesn't need one red cent. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the Bible says. It's a lot of cattle, I expect, but it's just a way of saying He owns everything anyway, already, so He doesn't need your money. So, we give for largely the same reasons that they were encouraged to—or actually mandated to give in the Old Testament. We give out of devotion. We give out of that sense of gratitude.

I have found in my own life that giving regularly is a good way of keeping your stinking hands off that kind of this feeling like it's mine. When you're giving regularly, there's just a sense of freedom. It's a greater sense of freedom that comes with the money that you have. And so, it's actually a blessing to give. God promises great blessing, but there are some of the same reasons for giving that in the New Testament that there were for the Old.

We see it through the Book of Acts, where Paul came and gathered tithes and offerings to help out, to give to the church in Jerusalem because there was famine, and the church was there distributing money to people and food to the widows and the orphans; and plus, some of that money was to supply for those who were in full-time ministerial service.

We see that, in the Book of Acts, too. Paul even quotes the Old Testament to say—it says in the Word, do not muzzle the ox while he's treading out the grain, which is a picture of that idea of what Paul goes on to actually say explicitly, which is, the faithful worker is worthy of his hire.

So there, the principles, just like in the Old Testament, they took care of the Levites, right? They took care of the tribe of Levi, which was given over to the full-time service of the Lord. Their tithes and offerings went to support those people. And it's the same thing today under the New Testament: gratitude,

thanksgiving, support and benevolence. All those things that were in play in the Old Testament are in play for the reasons that we give in the New Testament.

But again, in the New Testament, it's not mandated. Okay? That's the difference. You are not under law. You are beat to be led by the spirit. And when I tell people that, it makes them crazy sometimes because they just want somebody to give them a number. Just give me a number. How much should I give? I'm not going to give you a number. That is between you and the Holy Spirit, and you need to pray about it.

There's no shortcut to hearing from God. And if you do take it— well, I shouldn't say there's no shortcut. There are shortcuts. They're never good ones, and they're never going to benefit you in the long run. If you take a shortcut to hearing from God about the area or the issue of giving, and you just go with the legalistic— I got to give 10 percent— or you can go with whatever somebody tells you to do, you have shortchanged yourself from having that personal relationship with Jesus, where He speaks to your heart and says, give like this.

Now, let me just add one little thing. There are some people— and this happens quite often, where you have a situation where there's an individual in a home who longs very much to give, but they are married to someone who refuses. This happens actually quite often. They're, maybe, married to an unbeliever or they're married to a believer who just does not have the faith to let go of even a small portion of their income. And so, there's often in a home, one believer who really would like to, but they may not be in a position to give. And so, I've been asked that as well, several times: What should I do in that situation?

If it's a woman—it's different for a man or a woman. If it's a woman, you walk under submission to your husband, even if he's the one— the Bible says in Peter: if any of you women have a husband who does not believe the Word, and that could be even believing the Word in the area of giving, you are to win him over without words. When he sees your devotion and the purity of your own heart— and I encourage women in those situations to pray about what they can do to give to the Lord's service. Many times, it can be something else.

Back in the New Testament times or early times of the early church, widows were put on what they called a widow's list. You can read about it in the Book—well, in various letters. Paul even makes reference to it. These widows would give by the rest—they donate or dedicate the rest of their lives just in service to the Lord. They didn't have any money. They didn't have any income. So, they'd give their lives. They would just serve the saints.

Well, that can still be done in a real, genuine sort of a way by a woman, particularly who's in a marriage situation where she cannot give financially. There are many other ways that the Lord could prompt you to give of your time, and your resources, and your efforts, helping out, planning, decorating, cleaning, taking care of children. You name it; there's tons of ways if a woman would just pray about that.

Now if it's a man whose wife is stressed out to the max about the area of giving and just is restricting his freedom in a sense, he needs to really pray through how to respond to his wife in a loving, yet encouraging way as the leader of his home. Not jerking her around, but encouraging her to come along into a place of just biblical obedience and recognition of what the Word has to say. And I think a man should lovingly take his wife by the hand and just say: Honey, let's give what God tells us to give, and let's put the responsibility on Him, and let's just give whatever He tells us. Just at least talk to your wife about praying about it, and do what God says. If she doesn't want to go with that, then you've got a bigger problem. So, enough about giving.

As we move on in verse 22 and following, it's going to begin to talk about times or sacrifices and things when unintentional sins take place both by the community at large and by individuals.

And it says in verse 22: *“But if you sin unintentionally, (and that's the key word of the verse) and do not observe all these commandments that the LORD has spoken to Moses, ²³ all that the LORD has commanded you by Moses, from the day that the LORD gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations, ²⁴ then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation (okay, that's key), 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.”*

All right, you stop here for just a moment. You wonder, how could the whole nation forget? I mean, it's talking about the whole congregation, which is another word for really just all the people of Israel. How could they all just kind of go, oops, we forgot to do something Moses told us to do? Well, it's almost like God was preparing the nation of Israel for those times in their history that are to come when the nation of Israel would—and you can start reading about it in the Book of Judges—start moving toward idolatry, neglecting the Word of God, neglecting the sacrifices of the Lord, neglecting the law of Moses, and they would go into a period of disobedience for which the Lord had to get their attention, usually through hardship.

The good old Philistines, they were used a lot as God's spanking spoon over those years, and the people of Israel would eventually cry out, and then you guys know the story. They would call out to the Lord and they would begin to serve the Lord again.

Well, they had to have a path for coming back; and again, God is giving them here a path to come back, that time when the whole lot of them neglects the Word of God. You could see potentially where the people could say, we haven't done this for so long. There's just no coming back from something like this.

Well, God actually put it in the Word. If you guys go through this where— and it wasn't really intentional because—well, it was intentional at first, but as they go on and people are raised up, they're just doing what their parents did, or whatever, and to them it's just life, and I'm just sacrificing to these stupid idols, and all of a sudden God makes us aware of our sin, and what are we going to do to come back?

Well, God begins to outline that for returning to the Lord, recognizing when they've been delinquent, and so forth:

“²⁵ And 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. ²⁶ And 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.”

Now, deal with unintentional sins by an individual: *“²⁷ “If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering. ²⁸ And 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. ²⁹ You 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.”*

So much for unintentional. Now, verse 30: *“But the person who does anything with a high hand, ...”*

Now that's a literal but somewhat unfortunate translation of those words. Sometimes, like I've told you guys before, a word-for-word literal translation of the Bible isn't always the clearest. And this talks about doing something with a high hand. Well, what does that mean? Do you ever use that term? I don't. It

means to do something defiantly. It means to do something deliberately in defiance of a known law or a known rule.

In other words, it's like you—every parent has gone through this with their child. It's one thing when your kids make mistakes, or they forget; but it's another thing—have you ever had one of those kids that just looks you in the eye, and you're telling them, don't touch that, or don't do that, or don't walk into here with those muddy shoes, and they look at you, and they start walking?

That's called defiance, and you got to deal with it as a parent, because every parent is going to have at least one of those kids, if not the whole litter. You're going to have kids that are going to look you in the eye and just say: well, what you can do about it?

Well, it's serious, actually. I mean, that's rebellion, and parents who wink at it or laugh at it are going to have serious problems for their child later on, and with their child. So, doing things with a high hand is defiantly— *“whether he is native or a sojourner, (this person then, he says) reviles the LORD, ...”*

And by the way, that word “reviles” in the Hebrew is as strong as when it means blasphemes, okay? It's also translated, blasphemes, actually, more than it is reviles. *“...and that person shall be cut off from among his people.”*

So, what are we talking about here? We're talking about somebody who sees and knows the Word of God, who knows the commandment of God, and who basically says: I reject that; the Word of God is unworthy to be followed, and I choose to say no; I choose to say, I'm not going to do that.

Well, what exactly is that person doing? Look at verse 31. It goes on to explain it: *“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.”*

And that's a way of saying there is no forgiveness. The iniquity is on him. Why? Because they've rejected the only means of forgiveness. They've rejected the Word of God. They've rejected the method, the path. Remember, we talked about that as we began. God gave them a path for forgiveness.

Well, what do you do when you reject that path? What if somebody hears the Gospel and says: I don't care; I don't accept that; I don't accept that Jesus is the only means of forgiveness; I reject it? What can you do with that individual?

Well, what can God do? Oh, it's okay; I was just testing you to see. No, there's only one means of forgiveness: the blood of Jesus Christ, the blood of the Lamb, right? So, if that is rejected, there's nothing remaining. Then it says, as it says here, *"his iniquity shall be on him,"* because he refused the path.

Then they give an example of this sort of a thing. Verse 32: *"While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. (Remember, the Sabbath is a day of rest.)"*³³ *And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation.*³⁴ *They put him in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him."* In other words, they knew what he was doing was wrong, but the punishment was unclear.

"³⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." ³⁶ And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, as the LORD commanded Moses."

Again, people, this seems very strong in terms of the reaction that they were to show this man. It's like, wow, that seems kind of harsh. I mean, you kill the guy? But please understand something. This is not an example of somebody forgetting or just not knowing in the first place.

This example is given to us here as an example of a defiant rejection. This God is not going to tell me when I can do this or that, or I am free to do whatever I want on any day I want, and there's no God in heaven who's going to tell me what to do. Okay? This isn't just a little old man who is having memory problems about when to rest and ooh, I forgot it was the Sabbath day.

Listen, God had clearly outlined the Sabbath regulations. This very man heard God's voice echo from Mount Sinai the Ten Commandments. He didn't just hear Moses say it; he heard God say it. Okay, you with me? This man is old enough. It's only been—it's only been probably a little over two years since they received the law, and so forth – maybe even less.

So, here's a man who heard God say: You shall keep the Sabbath. Did the man know the Sabbath was going on? Oh, heavens, you're in a Jewish camp, a group of about two-and-a-half million people, and everybody's keeping the Sabbath. Everybody is observing the Sabbath. Everybody knows that it's the Sabbath. This man walks out of the camp in defiance of the Word of God and says: I'm going to do my own thing.

And that is the point. What is God saying to you and I? Defiance of God's method of forgiveness brings death, right? The wages of sin is death. Paul talks about in Romans. He says that— but we're really uncomfortable as Americans when we actually see it being done—the wages of sin is death? I mean, they're really going to, like, kill him?

Do you understand, though, that the Sabbath was a picture of resting in Christ, right? It's a picture of what it means to rest and trust. And this man was making his own statement: I do not— I am not resting in God. I'm not trusting in Him. I'm defying Him. So, as it says, *“his iniquity is on him.”*

Verse 37: *“The LORD said to Moses, ³⁸ “Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. ³⁹ And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. ⁴⁰ So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God. ⁴¹ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD your God.”*

So here, God gives them, as this chapter ends, this interesting way of remembering the law of the Lord. Just in case somebody might use that excuse, oh, I forgot, well, he said: I want you to all put tassels on the ends of your robes, which will be a constant memorial to you of the law of God.

Chapter 16: *“Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, (so we know who he is; he's a Levite) 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, (how many?) 250 chiefs of the congregation (in other words, leaders), chosen from the assembly, well-known men.”*

So, this is a concerted movement on the part of Korah and Dathan and these others to stand against Moses and his leadership. There are a lot of people who believe that the more people I have standing with me, the more credence that lends my cause. And largely that's true. They say that because it's true. The more, the bigger crowd that you can put together, the more your complaint seems justified. And these guys didn't just gather a group of rabble rousers. They gathered a group of 250 chosen leaders from Israel. So, it's all the leaders are coming against Moses and Aaron.

And what is their complaint? Verse 3: *“They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them (here we go), “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?”*

Yeah, you know what that's basically saying? Who died and left you in charge? Who do you think you are? You think you're so important? How come you get to—you're always telling us what God says, giving us the law like you lorded over us, like you're some big taskmaster. Why? Why you? Why you? Why are you doing it? That's what they're saying.

Now, I want you to notice how Moses responds. Verse 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 (in other words, that means, set apart for His use in this specific area), 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!”*

Now, please understand, Moses isn't saying: I'm holy, and my brother's holy, and we're the only ones that are holy. That word, again, we use it in our culture to describe this feeling of being over others. And we'll say to people, well, what makes you so holy? Or, we call somebody with a feeling of self-righteousness as someone is having a holier-than-thou attitude. Oh, I just hate your smug, holier-than-thou attitude.

Again, the word “holy” means exalted above others. That's technically not the meaning of the term. It means set apart. You would use it for—if you've got some special dishes in your house, or maybe silverware, it's not a big deal much anymore. Back in my mother's day, every woman in the world had her fine china and her silver set. Modest though it may have been, it sat usually in a drawer in a bureau or a hutch, and you would only take it out when you had special guests. That's really the idea of holiness: set apart for special use right for a particular function.

Aaron and Moses were set apart from the rest of the nation of Israel, not to be elevated over everybody, but to function in the role in which they were given. Right? So, and it's not like the nation of Israel—it's not like these people who are complaining don't have jobs to do. It's not like they're not set apart as well. What they're coveting is what Aaron and Moses have.

And so, when Moses says, God will show you who's holy, he means God will show you who He's chosen to do this – this leadership thing that you see me doing and my brother doing as the high priest. We didn't choose these positions. In fact, had they been on the mountain when Moses was first ordained to do this work, they'd have found Moses arguing with God saying: I think You got the wrong guy. You remember that he even kind of got a little angry, with his stubborn refusal to go and do what God asked him to do? He kept saying: Isn't there somebody else You want to do to get this?

So, anyway, Moses didn't ask to do it. Aaron didn't ask to be the high priest. God chose them. And so, He tells them to take their— put incense in their censers and da da da, and God's going to show you. And he says: *“You have gone too far, sons of Levi.”*

Verse 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 (meaning, what Aaron does)? 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 we know that Aaron wasn't all that special. I mean, he was special from the point of God's ordination. As a man, he was kind of a weenie sometimes. I mean, you guys remember, when Moses was up on the mountain, they convinced him to make a golden calf, and then he gave this super lame excuse for how it came to be.

Oh, I just put this stuff in the pot and out come this calf. I don't know how— it was like, oh, dude. Well, that was Aaron and this is the high priest. And so, Aaron, yeah— so Moses is saying, who's Aaron that you're grumbling against him? He didn't pick this.

“¹² And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and they said,” No, we're not going to go.

So, Moses wants to talk with them. He wants to probably reason with them or whatever. But he says, yeah— he calls for them to come and meet with him; they go, no, we're not going to come.

“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.”

Now what are they doing? Making it sound like it's Moses' fault they didn't go in. Isn't this crazy? You guys remember what happened? It was just a couple of chapters ago, the people wiggled out because of their fear and lack of faith. And now, here's this guy saying to Moses: Yeah, well you haven't kept your end of the bargain either. Where's this land flowing with milk and honey that you're supposed to bring us into? And these are, I'm sure, the very guys who were causing people to lose faith when the report of the spies came back. I'm quite sure of it.

But shifting blame is a very common ploy of those who are jealous, critical. And it says in verse 15: *And Moses was very angry and said to the LORD, “Do not respect their offering. I have not taken...”* That's another way of saying: don't forgive them, for these particular guys here, because remember the offering is the path of forgiveness.

And so, he says: *“I have not taken one donkey from them and I have not harmed one of them.”* This is Moses' way of saying to God: You know what? These guys are evil. They're not just misguided. They're not just having a bad day. They're not just mad because they got sand in their teeth. These guys are evil. There is an actual evil heart going on here.

“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.”

Now you might wonder why Korah went along with this suggestion. Why didn't he just kind of say: no, we'll decide or this is what we're going to do, or we're not going to?

Here's why: Everybody knew it was God's ultimate decision. Everybody knew that. They couldn't deny that. And so, by challenging them to put fire in their censers and incense, he was basically saying, we'll see who God accepts. We'll see who God is going to accept as His instrument to do this sort of a thing, right?

So, they were kind of caught. They really couldn't say no, because then they're kind of admitting that only Aaron can really go in and do that, and they're going to look weak in the eyes of the rest of the people. They pretty much have to take this challenge.

Verse 18 says: *“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?”

You can tell from the intercession of Moses and Aaron that they believe that Korah is behind this as the chief instigator of this rebellious attitude.

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

In other words, come out from under a connection with these men who are about to experience the judgment of the Lord. That's a good lesson for us today.

“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 (in other words, not my own idea). 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, (which is a Hebrew word for the grave) and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. 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.

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.”

You would kind of think, wouldn't you, that after something like that, that people would, like, be good for a while? I mean, wouldn't that put the fear of God? It's like, wow, you watch as the earth opens up and swallows this man and his family and all of his belongings and then seals up over the top. I would think people would say, note to self: stop complaining. Right?

Look what verse 41 says: *“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.” (As if Moses did it.) 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.”* Boy, they keep falling on their faces over these people.

“⁴⁶ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer, and put fire on it from off the altar and lay incense on it (which, by the way, is a picture of intercessory prayer) 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, (that's the size of Ontario, roughly; so it's like the whole town just being gone in just a matter of moments) besides those who died in the affair of Korah (which was another 250, and then the families and so forth). ⁵⁰ And Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting, when the plague was stopped.” Wow, you think these people would learn.

Numbers chapter 17 is very short, and it goes along with this because it says: “The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to the people of Israel, and get from them staffs (your Bible may say rods), 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.” You might be thinking: why a staff? A staff was a picture of authority, a picture of power, a symbol.

“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 grumblings 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.” Which is no big deal for God, of course, but you and I are going, whoa!

By the way, just a quick note. The staff of Aaron is said to foreshadow the resurrected Christ, because as that staff budding proved that Aaron was the chosen high priest. It is a foreshadowing of Christ as the priest of God's choosing, if you will.

Plus, interestingly enough, the almond tree— and you notice it budded with ripe almonds—the almond tree is the very first tree apparently to blossom in Israel in the spring, which is believed to be a foreshadowing of Christ being the first fruits of the resurrection. So, interesting notes along the side.

“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 grumbings against me, lest they die.”¹¹ Thus did Moses; as the LORD commanded, so he did.

¹² And the people of Israel said to Moses, “Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone.” They seem like they’re kind of high-maintenance, don’t they? ¹³ Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, shall die. Are we all to perish?”

Wow. Yikes. We've actually had to deal with this subject before in the Book of Numbers; won't be the last time. One thing about complainers is—and by the way, complaining is alive and well. One thing, though, about complainers is they will always try to convince you that their complaints are about specific issues, and they will bring up those specific issues as the reasons for their complaints.

But you need to understand something about complainers. The issues that they're bringing up are not the real reason behind their complaining or their murmuring. The real reason is the condition of their hearts. Their hearts aren't content. Their hearts aren't good with the Lord, and that's why they murmur and complain.

And that's why the Apostle Paul said in the New Testament: Godliness with contentment is great gain, because when you're content, when there's a contentedness about your life, that takes away your purpose for complaining. Okay?

Now, I want to say something about complainers, too. Somebody who complains, just because they're complaining, doesn't mean that what they're complaining about isn't legitimate. Now, it wasn't the case here. This was just a pure case of jealousy and pride and stupidity.

But there are times when somebody will come to you, and they will complain about a family member, about a ministry leader, about your boss at work, and they'll kind of pull you aside in the lunchroom or talk to you at an opportune time, and they will complain to you. And when you stop and think about what they're saying to you, it sounds logical and it sounds right.

I'm not suggesting that complainers can't see real and legitimate problems. I'm not saying that, because sometimes they do. But instead of handling those, what they see, they don't in a godly and proper way; they are choosing instead to complain and to grumble, which is never a good idea. Okay?

It's never a sound and godly idea to complain. I don't care how justified your complaint may sound. Choosing to complain is choosing to take an ungodly path. When we complain, we spread our vitriol to everyone who will listen, and we begin to just poison people's hearts.

I just want to really encourage you with that because I wish I could say complaining and murmuring was a thing of the past, but it's not. And sometimes, complaining—there may be some legitimate things going on that are wrong or that need to be corrected, whether it's in your home or in your business or the place where you work. There's no perfect business. There's no perfect home. There's no perfect church. It doesn't exist.

So, are there reasons to complain about things, or—I shouldn't say it that way. Are there reasons to take note perhaps of areas that need to be improved? Absolutely. But to give into complaining and murmuring?

Just remember that when somebody's wah, wah in your ear about something or other, just remember they've taken the wrong path. And even though we kind of like to hear what they have to say, the Bible talks about gossip as choice morsels, which is a way of saying, a delectable feast. In other words, it tastes good. Listening to someone complain and grumble and gossip is very tempting, but it's never the right path.

So—and God doesn't want us to be complainers.