

# Numbers 17-18: Aaron's Staff and Provisions for Priests & Levites

- Sacrifices: review and revision (based on Hugenburger lesson on Leviticus 6 in sermon archive)
  - Previously: Leviticus 6:1-7 cited as an example of a sacrifice for “intentional” sin
    - Note: only property based examples are given
    - There is no sacrifice described to atone for other sins (E.g., idolatry (Exo. 22:18,20), blasphemy (Exo. 22:28; Lev. 24:10-23), sabbath-breaking (Num. 15:32-36), dishonoring your parents (Lev. 20:9), murder (Num. 35:29-31), adultery (Exo. 21:17; Lev. 20:10), or covetousness.)
    - Hugenburger (and others) argue this sacrifice in Lev. 6:1-7 is to propitiate the curse which was on the thief, not to atone for the actual sin
    - The “sin offerings” described in Leviticus 4-5 are strictly for unintentional misdeeds and ritual impurity
    - This would further support an understanding that Num. 15:30-31 describes how all intentional sin (i.e., “defiant sin”) is deserving of death
    - The fact that the sacrifices did not actually deal with sin was made abundantly clear during the period of the exile (cf. Psalm 40:6-8)
  - Framework for the three basic types of sacrifices (based on who eats the sacrifice) (more thorough description in Hugenburger’s Leviticus 6 lesson on the sermon archive)
    - God eats the sacrifice: burnt offering => consecration
    - Worshipper eats the sacrifice: peace/fellowship offering => communion
    - Priest eats the sacrifice: sin/guilt offering => atonement/propitiation
    - The day of atonement: uncleanness of whole community has been transferred to the priest through sin offerings now transferred to God through a burnt-sin offering
- Re-confirmation of Aaron as Priest
  - Collect a staff from the leaders of each of the 12 tribes and inscribe with their names (with Aaron representing Levi)
  - “The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites.” (Num. 17:5)
  - Place the staffs in the tabernacle
  - The next day, Aaron’s staff “had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds” (Num. 17:8)
  - Leave the staff with the ark of the covenant  
“This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die.” (Num. 17:10)
  - The Israelites react in fear  
“We will die! We are lost, we are all lost! Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord will die. Are we all going to die?” (Num. 17:13)
  - Is this the right kind of “fear of the LORD”?

- Duties of the Levites
  - “You, your sons and your family [father’s house] are to bear responsibility for offenses connected with the sanctuary”
    - “Bring your fellow Levites from your ancestral tribe to join you and assist you when you and your sons minister before the tent of the covenant law.”
    - The Levites (father’s house?) are to take care of the tabernacle
    - The Levites do not have a license to do as they please at the tabernacle
- Duties of the Priests
  - “Bear responsibility for offenses connected with the priesthood”
    - The Levites are a gift to Aaron and his sons, to help with administration
    - Only Aaron’s sons are to work as priests (see the restrictions above)
    - The privilege to serve as priests is a gift to Aaron and his sons
- Offerings for the Priests
  - The portion not burned in the offerings to God (but it is still regarded as “given to God”) “You are to have the part of the most holy offerings that is kept from the fire” (Num. 18:9)
  - Wave offerings (cf. Leviticus 7:28-38)
  - Firstfruits offerings: includes olive oil, wine, grain
  - Firstborn animals
    - Technically includes humans, but those are meant to be “redeemed” back
    - Do not redeem back any firstborn cow, sheep, or goat: those are for the priests
  - Reminder: Aaron and his sons will have no land-based inheritance. The priesthood is their inheritance... “I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.”
- Tithes for the Levites
  - These are not technically specified for the priests, only for the Levites
  - These really are payments “in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting” (Num. 18:21)
  - This is described as their inheritance (since they also have no specific land inheritance among the Israelites)
  - The Levites are also supposed to pay a tithe as “the LORD’s offering”
    - The best and holiest part
    - Paid to the priests
    - Withholding the best part incurs guilt on the Levites