

Do Not Make Any Oil with the Same Formula

This is to be my sacred anointing oil for the generations to come. Do not pour it on men's bodies and do not make any oil with the same formula. It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred. Whoever makes perfume like it and whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people. -Exodus 30:31-33

I'm glad that the Lord gave instructions that the formula for making the fragrant anointing oil used for consecrating the priests was not to be reproduced for any other purpose. It is not so much that I have some supreme reverence for the ancient oil. No. What relieves me is that we have been spared, at least in part, from a proliferation within the church of "anointed anointing oil." What I mean is that we don't need any more encouragement for well meaning enthusiasts to look for and rely on that specially anointed whatever from the holy land that will bring down the favor of God for that extra edge in ministry. Just think how much money someone is not making because of the prohibition on the sacred recipe. God knows that there are plenty of Christians who would buy the stuff and treat it as magical.

For too many people, the form becomes the object

I'm convinced that the reason the Lord Jesus didn't give us more ordinances than he did is because of the widespread parochial fixation on what Paul calls the *weak and beggarly elements* (Gal 4:9 KJV) of religious observance. Not that the Lord's Supper or baptism or anointing with oil in their proper function are lifeless in nature—but for too many people, the form becomes the object. And when it does, ritual takes the place of faith and superstition takes the place of worship.

And before we smugly judge the "formal" churches guilty of such heinous crimes, maybe we should take a look at some of our forms and how they too can subtly or overtly supplant true worship. For example, a man once said to me, "When you blow the shofar, it really brings the anointing." Wow—I didn't know that. Another fellow said to me after a performance (and I do mean performance) of southern style music, "Now, that's gospel music." Really? As if nothing else could be?

The superb worship leader, the great preacher and the powerful minister can become a substitution for God. We worship the worship, bow down to the sermon and venerate the anointing. And if someone offers to sell us that special oil from the holy land, we just might buy it.

Then the Lord Relented

"The Lord said to Moses, "...they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God...Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. -Exodus 32:9-11,14

How could an immutable God relent? How do you explain that the One *who does not change like shifting shadows* (Ja 1:17) and who said, *"I the Lord do not change"* (Mal 3:6), did not follow through on something that he said he would do? Doesn't what happens here in Exodus 32 contradict what is said in Numbers 23:19: *God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?*

In the King James Version of the Bible, we find Moses asking the Lord to *"repent of this evil against thy people"* (v12). We have been taught, and correctly so, that one aspect of repentance is to "change your mind." Did God change his mind? Would he be less than God if he did?

I personally wouldn't have a crisis of faith if it were shown that the Lord changed his mind—but in this case, I don't believe that he really did. My reasoning is not based on a theory that God had no real intention of following through with his threat. Doing away with the Israelites had to have been a real possibility. When God said that his anger was leading him to destroy these stiff-necked and idolatrous people, he was serious about it.

I believe the reason the Lord relented was because of the role that he chose to give Moses in intercession. Which way the Lord would go with this thing actually depended on Moses' response to the threat. For me, the key phrase in this whole interchange between God and Moses is when the Lord said, *"Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them..."* The only one who stood in the way of the destruction of the people was Moses. All Moses had to do was leave the Lord alone and the Lord would have destroyed the people and start all over with Moses.

A lot of times, what God does and doesn't do in a situation depends on our response. The people of Nineveh proved that. And just as the Lord gave Moses the role of intercession, so he gives it to us as well. There are often contingencies in what the future holds and if we, like Moses, persist to intercede, it is possible that the Lord will relent.

The Lord relented because of the role he chose to give Moses in intercession

What Else Will Distinguish?

"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" -Exodus 33:14-16

I was in a chapel service when a prayer of invocation was offered that went, "Lord, we don't have to ask you to be present with us today because we know that you are everywhere present." I would never pray along those lines because I, like Moses, am not content with the omnipresence of the Lord. I long to experience his manifest presence—especially when the people of God gather in worship.

Moses had many reasons for wanting to know the reality of the presence of the Lord. It is obvious from his request to see the glory of God (v18) that Moses had a personal desire to know God face to face. But more than that, he was jealous for the Lord's presence for the nation as they would travel from place to place. In Moses' mind, the only thing that would distinguish the Israelites from all the other people on the face of the earth was the manifest presence of God.

And for us it is the same. It has to be. If the presence of God is not with us, then what is the point? What will meaningfully set the church apart as the people of God if there is no manifestation of the presence of God? Was Moses being audacious when he said, *"If your presence does not go with us, do not send us from here?"* Just the opposite. How in the world could they be the people of God without the presence of God? How could they do what they were called to do if God did not go before them and with them?

The church claims to be the people of God entrusted with the truth of God, but the only thing that will definitively mark those claims as valid is the presence of God. And if that presence is to be the unassailable distinguishing mark of the church, it must go beyond the stirring of emotion, because a compelling story or beautiful song can do that.

Moses could not do without the manifest presence of the Lord. Can we?

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The Ability to Teach Others

The Lord has chosen Bezalel...He has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts...to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship. And he has given both him and Oholiab...the ability to teach others. -Exodus 35:30-31,33-34

If God gives you a gift to do something, you can use it to do good things. But if along with that gift, he gives you the ability to teach others, your gift can multiply and persist for generations.

Bezalel and Oholiab were filled with the Spirit of God—with skill, ability and knowledge to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship to fashion the tabernacle of God. But when they were done, it was not just a tent and its artifacts that came to be. They left a legacy that went beyond their reputations as skilled craftsmen. They didn't just build a tabernacle; they equipped people.

It is one thing to use your skill, but if you fail to impart what you have to others, your gift will die with you. Of course, your proteges must have their own giftings (as basketball coach Bobby Knight has said, "You can't teach 'em to be seven feet tall"). God will always provide opportunities to impart to others with like calling what has been given to you.

The operation of spiritual and natural gifts is not just about who can do what. It is also about who can equip others. God gave the church *some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers*. The operation of these ministry gifts will, in themselves, help to equip the saints for works of service, as prescribed in Ephesians 4. But the fulfillment of Ephesians 4 will not take place until we move from exercising the gifts to mentoring the called. Apostles are to raise up apostles; prophets, prophets; evangelists, evangelists; pastors, pastors and teachers, teachers.

Bezalel and Oholiab—those famous guys—were chosen and supernaturally equipped for a purpose. How great it was that they could do all that they could do. I'm sure that they found satisfaction in their work. But there is something more satisfying about seeing another achieve the things that you have achieved (and even more) because you taught them what you know.

Bezalel and Oholiab's calling was not complete until they had equipped others. Neither is ours.

The fulfillment of Ephesians 4 will not take place until we move from exercising the gifts to mentoring the called

A Priesthood That Will Continue for All Generations

"Anoint them [Aaron's sons] just as you anointed their father, so they may serve me as priests. Their anointing will be to a priesthood that will continue for all generations to come." -Exodus 40:15

The sons of Aaron were anointed to a priesthood that the Lord God promised would continue for all generations. The question, over four thousand years later, is how has this priesthood continued until our present day and where can you find it?

There are people, including some Christians, who would like to think that there has been an unbroken succession of priests from the natural line of Aaron that has continued to this day. Somewhere out there, no doubt, are persons who carry that lineage, but the restoration of the Aaronic priesthood is not to be. God is done with the old covenant priesthood and, as a witness, has not allowed it to be reinstated since the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D..

Since Jesus Christ, there is not now, nor will there ever be, a need for any Levitical priest to perform any duty to accommodate the holy requirements of God. That has been done through the Great High Priest himself, the Son of God, and any attempt to return to the weak and beggarly shadows of the old covenant priesthood would be an affront to the new covenant glory of the cross.

Does this mean that his promise in Exodus 40:15 is invalid? Not at all. A new continuing priesthood has replaced the old. It is called "the priesthood of believers:" *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1Pet 2:5,9)*. The Lord Jesus *has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Rev 1:6)*.

We have received an entitlement greater than the sons of Aaron the first high priest of the earthly tabernacle. Ours is the anointing from the High Priest of Heaven which, does indeed, fulfills the promise of a priesthood for all generations to come.

We have received an entitlement greater than the sons of Aaron

If the Anointed Priest Sins

If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. -Leviticus 4:3

Leviticus 4:3 tells us that if the anointed priest sinned, it would bring guilt on all the people. Hardly seems fair. Why should the people be counted guilty? Why would they bear guilt in the wake of one man's sin?

The priests served as spiritual overseers for the people as well as intermediaries between them and God. As such, their sin would be serious, even more than the tribal leaders whose sin needed to be atoned for but did not bring guilt on all the people (see v22). The priests carried a spiritual anointing as they represented the people before God. Because of this representative role, they could mediate the sin of the people. But the authority that they had before God to atone for the sin of the people also meant that their own personal sin would bring guilt on the people. Their mediatory role was a double-edged sword. They could impute forgiveness as they performed the rituals of atonement before the Lord, but they could also produce guilt if they sinned before the Lord. They were the representatives of the people.

All this explains why Jesus' mediation was perfect

All this explains why Jesus' mediation was perfect. As the anointed High Priest he could atone for the sins of all the people because of his sacrifice on the cross. And because he was sinless, no guilt could be imputed back to the ones that he represents as Mediator. Because there can be no accusation against him, we have the certainty of the efficacy of his representation.

Now, we who serve with an anointing as spiritual overseers do not act as intermediaries between God and the people. That is Jesus' role. But this does not mean that our sin has no effect on the people in our care. The history of the people of God under both the old and new covenants shows clearly that the effect of sin is communal and not just personal. When there is sin in the camp it affects the entire camp—and even more so when committed by those with spiritual authority. Our sin may not impute guilt directly to the people, as in the case with the priest, but the authority we carry creates an open spiritual door to impart to our people collectively whatever fruit is being born in our own lives as overseers, whether good or bad. And if that doesn't produce a holy fear, then we had better get out of the ministry.

Because He Does Not Speak up

If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible. -Leviticus 5:1

A miscarriage of justice has always been a distressing thing. Wrongful convictions or non-convictions are vexing to the soul of any honorable society. Justice is often a fragile commodity that depends on the truthfulness and diligence of everyone who has been assigned a part—by vocation or by circumstance—in its preservation. In order for a justice system to work, there must be faithful witnesses to testify to the truth of what they know.

To remain uninvolved when it came to testifying to something that they had seen or known was not an option for the people of Israel. They were required to *speak up* about what they knew. It is not clear to me if the *public charge to testify* was a general call for anyone who had information concerning a matter to come forward, or if it was a charge to a specific person to tell what he or she knew about the matter as they stood before a judge. Either way, if someone was unwilling to testify to what they knew concerning a case, they would be hindering justice and would be *held responsible*.

There is a certain risk involved in telling what you know in the name of truth and justice, but if you don't tell what you know, truth and justice might not be served. That certain risk always has its locus in the fear of reprisal: From the elementary school children who are afraid to tell the teacher who did it, to the person who becomes aware of the wrongdoing of a friend, to the one who witnesses a serious crime and fears for their own or a family member's safety. There are also those who don't want to get involved and are willing to dam the river of justice merely for convenience sake. They are selfish cowards and a blight on society.

James 4:17 says, *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins*. This is called the sin of omission. And if you do not speak up when you know you should you are not only guilty of this sin, but your dereliction could contribute to the travesty we call injustice.

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So That the Glory of the Lord May Appear to You

They took the things Moses commanded to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and the entire assembly came near and stood before the Lord. Then Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you." -Leviticus 9:5-6

Many of us are looking for the glory of the Lord to appear but have yet to see what we long for. Our motives are good and our desire is pure and we find ourselves asking the Lord, "How long until we see your glory?" Perhaps we need to be reminded that there are certain conditions that the Lord sets out before he will reveal his glory.

By the time we have hit Leviticus chapter 9, the Lord has laid out explicit (some would say "tedious") instructions about how the nation of Israel is to come before him in worship. His commands are clear, precise and purposeful. And the Lord's promise is that if the people are faithful to follow these commands, his glory would appear to them.

The Lord set out certain conditions for his glory to be revealed

Sure enough, the promise is fulfilled. Check this out:

Moses and Aaron then went into the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown (vs 23-24). And every subsequent revival of the glory of the Lord has been marked by both the joy and the fear of the Lord.

The Lord set out certain conditions for his glory to be revealed. I'm not saying that there is a 1-2-3 formula guaranteed to extricate the glory of God on cue. But if you look at what Moses says, there is a clear cause and effect principle. If they do what God has commanded, the glory will appear. If they don't, well....

So what are the conditions now? Basically, two: Obedience and faith. Disobedience would have prevented the Israelites from seeing the glory of the Lord—and so it will us. As far as the role of faith, consider Jesus' words to Martha in John 11: 40: "*Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?*"

Be Holy, Because I Am Holy

I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy...therefore be holy, because I am holy. Leviticus 11:44-45

Whatever calling you have in the kingdom of God, there is one that supercedes them all. It is the call to be holy—the call to be his. Here in Leviticus 11, and many other places in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures, the call is to "*Be holy, because I am holy.*" The call of God to his people has always been to be holy.

When something is holy it is "set apart." The tabernacle, its fixtures and everything offered as a sacrifice there were set apart for the Lord and thus considered holy. The Sabbath day and the Jewish festivals were set apart for God and that is what made them holy. The first fruits of the land and the tithe were considered holy. Why? Because they were set apart for the Lord. But these things could be set apart as truly holy only if the people were set apart as holy.

The ancient calling has not changed

The holiness of God is established in his perfection. Since he is perfect he requires a people to be set apart to his perfection. This is what I believe Jesus is talking about when he echos Leviticus 11 in saying, "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Mt 5:48) . The call to be set apart to a perfect, holy God, helps to explain the painstaking instructions that the people received about what would and would not make them "unclean." The holy God must have a pure people.

Is the New Testament concept of holiness different from what is found in the old covenant? No. God's holiness still requires that his people still be set apart. But the means to that state is vastly different under each covenant. The Mosaic covenant prescribed a form of consecration to God by compliance to the law through the power of the corrupted human will. The gospel offers holiness through faith in Jesus and a consecration through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

We have been bought with a price. We have been set apart and belong to him. The ancient calling has not changed. We are still called to be holy—not just judicially because of our pardon but in essence, belonging to him in spirit, soul and body.

So They Will Not Die in Their Uncleanness

'You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them.' -Leviticus 15:31

When you study the moral code of Leviticus, with all its attention to what is considered “clean” and “unclean,” it becomes obvious that these regulations would have had a favorable effect on the physical health of the people of God. This is especially true considering what we know about communicable diseases. The meat that they were allowed to eat was generally much safer (rats, lizards, vultures, bats, and sea scavengers were out). If they were to touch a carcass of a dead animal, they were to wash themselves and their clothes afterward. If something “unclean” found its way into a clay pot, the pot was to be destroyed. They were not to eat meat that was over a day old. Persons with infections had to shave their body hair and be quarantined until the contagion was gone. Bacterial laden clothing was to be burned. If a fungus in a house couldn't be controlled, the entire house was to be destroyed. If anyone were to come in contact with the pus, semen, blood, or saliva of another, they were considered “unclean” for a time and had to wash their clothes and take a bath. And here's an interesting one: *If the man with the discharge spits on someone who is clean, that person must wash his clothes and bathe with water* (Lev 15:8). More than ever, in our awareness of infectious diseases (especially STD's), these passages from Leviticus make a whole lot of sense.

In our awareness of infectious diseases, Leviticus makes a whole lot of sense

The Israelites were to be kept separate from the things that would make them “unclean” so that they would not *die in their uncleanness*. Obviously, their adherence to these instructions would go a long way to prevent an outbreak of deadly viruses and infections. In that respect, they were ahead of many cultures—ancient and modern.

No doubt, the Lord wanted to prevent their demise due to the physical defilement of communicable diseases. But if they did not remain separate from that which would make them unclean, there would be a defilement that would go beyond germs, bacteria and viruses. Their uncleanness would defile the Lord's dwelling place, and that would be the thing that would be the true cause of their demise. It would be the fear of defiling the tabernacle of God that would truly motivate the people to “stay clean” and would, in turn, keep them safe from the things that could cause physical disease.

In the Midst of Their Uncleanness

He will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. -Leviticus 16:16

In Leviticus 15, the Lord warns the Israelites to separate themselves from things that make them “unclean,” so that they would “*not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them.*” The people put themselves in harm's way if they did not remain clean in the presence of the Lord. If they defiled the tabernacle by their uncleanness, they could die as a result.

In Leviticus 16, the focus adjusts from how the people could survive in the presence of the holy tabernacle, to how the tabernacle could survive in the midst of an unholy people. No matter what kind of proscriptions the Lord would hand down to the people, the *uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites* would be a given. If that were to be the case, how then could the holy dwelling place of God subsist in the midst of their uncleanness?

The focus adjusts from how the people could survive in the presence of the holy tabernacle, to how the tabernacle could survive in the midst of an unholy people

Just as the uncleanness of the people had to be atoned for in order for them to be holy to the Lord, interestingly enough, the Tent of Meeting and the Most Holy Place within it had to be atoned for so that these places could continue to be set apart as the dwelling place of God. Because the tabernacle was among the people in the midst of their uncleanness it had to be cleansed and made holy by sacrificial blood.

So here is the incongruity of the Lord living with this nation that he has chosen as his people: A holy God living among an unholy people. How ironic and yet beautiful that the Almighty, perfect in splendor and majesty, would find a way to dwell with them—and with us, in the midst of our uncleanness. The fact that he would want to do this tells us something of the desire of his heart.

When Jesus came and “tabernacled” among us (see John 1:14), he did so in the midst of our uncleanness. His mission and his sacrifice was to make atonement for a holy place for God to come and dwell in the midst of our uncleanness.

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. -Leviticus 19:18

Leviticus 19 is one of the consummate chapters of the Bible. It contains the scripture that Jesus said was the second most important commandment of the Hebrew Bible, one that helps to sum up the entire writings of Moses and the prophets. Besides this, the chapter is full of potent and insightful principles that carry practical relevance for the modern reader.

Of all the precepts found here that call out for exposition and application, the one Jesus singled out must be the most profound: *Love your neighbor as yourself*. I used to buy into the idea that in order to fulfill this command, you had to be working on your own self esteem, because how could you love your neighbor if you didn't love yourself? Yet, how can that be true when we are told to esteem others better than ourselves (Php 2:3 KJV)? No, if you love someone, your regard is for their best interest, so to fulfill this command you must look out for your neighbor's best interest in everything, just as you would naturally do for yourself.

You must look out for your neighbor's best interest in everything, just as you would naturally do for yourself

The context of Leviticus 19 bears this out. Look at the ways we find here to love our neighbors:

- Leave the gleanings of your harvest for the poor (vs9,10).
- Do not steal, lie, or deceive (v11).
- Do not swear falsely (v12).
- When it comes to money, do not defraud, rob or hold back wages (v13).
- Treat the physically challenged with respect (v14).
- Do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great (v15).
- Do not slander (v16).
- Do not do anything to endanger your neighbor's life (v16).
- Do not hate your brother in your heart (v17).
- Rebuke your neighbor with frankness when he is in the wrong (v17).
- Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge (v18).

All of these seek the welfare and best interest of others. Jesus reframed these principles in what has become known as the Golden Rule: *In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets* (Mt 7:12). This is loving your neighbor as yourself.

Rejoice Before the Lord Your God for Seven Days

On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. -Leviticus 23:40-41

The Israelites were commanded by the Lord to celebrate a number of sacred assemblies throughout the year. In the first month of the festival calendar (springtime) was the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven weeks later was what we know as Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks (also known as Firstfruits or Harvest). The seventh month (in the fall) had the Day of Trumpets (day 1), the Day of Atonement (day 10) and the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths (days 15-22).

The sacred assemblies, of course, commemorated different things. Unleavened Bread: Deliverance from Egypt; Weeks: The firstfruits of the harvest; Trumpets: The call to prepare for the Day of Atonement; Day of Atonement: The forgiveness of sin; and Tabernacles: The ingathering of the harvest and the wanderings in the wilderness.

Can rejoicing be legislated? Indeed it can.

Each assembly was commemorated differently. For most, there was a Sabbath rest proclaimed. There were a number of different sacrifices and offerings prescribed. Not all of the assemblies were "feasts," as fasting was called for on the Day of Atonement.

The commemoration of Tabernacles was special. On the first day they were to take choice fruit and for the next seven days they were to have a celebration. They were told to *rejoice before the Lord*. And there was reason to rejoice. For one, there was to be a sense of thanksgiving following the ingathering of the harvest. For another, they had just come through the Day of Atonement (the most serious of all the assemblies) with the knowledge that their sins for that previous year were not to be counted against them. The Lord had been good to them and it was time to celebrate.

Can rejoicing be legislated? Indeed it can. The Lord didn't say, "If you feel like it, rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days." It was prescribed. Even if there was a bad harvest, rejoicing was what they were called to do.

There is something we as new covenant believers can learn from this Old Testament practice. Seven days of rejoicing before the Lord. Hmm...not a bad idea.

The Lamps...Must Be Tended Continually

Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the Lord from evening till morning, continually...The lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the Lord must be tended continually. -Leviticus 24:2-4

We know, from Hebrews 8, that the sanctuary in which Aaron served was actually a copy and a shadow of a greater reality found in heaven itself. The Israelites were commanded to bring oil to the Tent of Meeting (the sanctuary of the Lord) so that the lamps which burned before the Lord there would never go out. This is a picture of heaven where *the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp* (Rev 21:23). It would not be fitting for there to be darkness in the earthly tabernacle when there was always light in the heavenly one.

Just as Aaron needed to continually tend to his lamps, we must attend to ours

This ancient custom not only reveals things about heaven, the tending of the lamps has symbolic meaning for the Christian life as well. John's Revelation (which can be understood only with a thorough working knowledge of the Old Testament) talks about lamps and lampstands. Jesus is found to be walking among the seven lampstands. This picture represents his activity among the churches (1:20). The lamps and the oil that burned in the lamps represent the presence of the Holy Spirit (4:5). We also see the presence of the Holy Spirit represented in the parable of the ten virgins (see Matthew 25). Here are depicted five wise virgins who had oil to keep their lamps burning and were ready for the return of the Bridegroom and five foolish virgins who let their lamps go out for lack of oil, and consequently, were not ready for his return.

Just as Aaron needed to continually tend to his lamps, we must attend to ours. We cannot be like the foolish virgins and let the light of our lamps go out. Our spiritual lives need constant attention. The oil of the Spirit of God must be renewed on a regular basis and our wicks trimmed by the disciplines of the spiritual life. Our lives, like the lamps in the tabernacle, are to burn before the Lord. We must tend to our lamps continually. If we do, our lamps will so shine before God and give light to the world.

If You Follow My Decrees

If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands...But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands... -Leviticus 26:3,14

It is difficult not to be shocked by the contrast in Leviticus 26 between what would happen when the people would obey and when they wouldn't. The expression "night and day" does not do justice to the dissimilarity between the end results of obedience and disobedience.

If God's people obeyed, they would have rain in season, abundant crops, safety, peace, no fear, no savage beasts, no enemy attacks, victories in battle, increase in numbers and the presence of God. Not bad.

If they disobeyed, they would have sudden terror, wasting disease, blinding and fatal fever, undue fear and enemies to eat their crops and defeat them in battle. If they didn't repent after this, the Lord would break their pride through total crop failure. If they still didn't listen, then wild animals would come to destroy their livestock and children. After that, comes the sword, plague and famine. If after all this there is still disobedience, the Lord would hand them over to cannibalism, genocide, ruin and dispersion. The progressive severity of the Lord's judgment is stupefying.

God's love is unconditional but his blessing is not

The history of Israel shows that the Lord keeps his word. Both scenarios of reward and punishment came to pass at different times. And both were dependant on the simplicity of either obedience or disobedience.

Somehow, we have a tendency to believe that the Lord of Hosts lightened up on his zeal with the coming of the new covenant. Ananias and Sapphira might have a different opinion on that. Disobedience has never lost its potential to deliver the corrective discipline of the Lord, nor has obedience its ability to invoke his blessing. God's love is unconditional but his blessing is not. This is not about performance, it is about obedience.

His blessing in this present apostolic age may look a little different from what he promised in Leviticus 26 (or it may not). Paul, for instance, knew that there was a reward laid up for him in heaven and didn't care much about the temporal blessings of this life. But he knew that the Lord still required obedience and that he could look for its accompanying reward.

All we have to do is obey.

The Men Appointed from the Community

These were the men appointed from the community, the leaders of their tribes. They were the heads of the clans of Israel. -Numbers 1:16

We in the western world have been so inculcated with democratic presupposition that we project this particular bias onto the witness of the pages of Scripture. However, there is no democratic process in the Scriptures to speak of, and there are certainly no examples of voting for leadership. God chooses, calls and appoints as he sees fit because he knows what is in a person's heart better than anyone—including the person being appointed.

If asked to comment on this passage in Numbers, we might assume that these leaders were appointed, or even elected, by the people from their community. Not so. God rarely, if ever, gets his leaders that way. If you'll notice a bit earlier in the chapter, it was the Lord who gave Moses the names of these leaders (v5). They weren't elected. They were appointed. And they weren't appointed by any man. They were appointed by God.

When the appointments are made by God, self-promotion, popularity contests, political wrangling and arguments about who should be the leader are precluded

Out of 603,550 men who were eligible to be chosen as the leaders of their tribes, God appointed twelve by name. Were they already known as leaders among the people? Certainly. Would they have been functioning in leadership roles at the time of their appointments? No doubt. But when the appointments are made by God, self-promotion, popularity contests, political wrangling and arguments about who should be the leader are precluded. And God doesn't make his choices based on who is next in line. These men were chosen for God's own reasons.

The word "appointed" is a common Hebrew word which most often is translated, "called." In God's kingdom, leaders have to be called by the Lord, or they are not to lead. That calling needs to be affirmed by some objective standard but, nonetheless, without the calling there can be no appointment.

It is interesting to note that none of the men named here in chapter 1 were among the twelve that Moses chose in chapter 13 to explore the promised land. Evidently, it was a different job requiring a different kind of man. But I can't help but wonder that when Moses chose these twelve—ten of whom had an unbelief problem—whether he had the mind of God on the subject. Maybe he did. But if he didn't, and these were not the ones that God had in mind, it was a big part of a forty-year mistake.

Each Was Assigned His Work

All the men from thirty to fifty years of age who came to do the work of serving and carrying the Tent of Meeting numbered 8,580. At the Lord's command through Moses, each was assigned his work... -Numbers 4:47-49

At Moses' command, 8,580 men turn out to *do the work of serving and carrying the Tent of Meeting*. Now that's what I call a successful work day at the local assembly. Looks like enough help to get it all done. Perhaps the biggest worry would be whether the ladies guild had enough donuts for break time.

8,580 men in the prime of life does seem like a lot of guys to take care of the tabernacle of the Lord. But who am I to say what it would take for the three Levite clans to pack up the 11,000 square foot meeting place and all its furnishings according to strict instructions and carry it lock, stock and barrel across the Sinai Peninsula.

One thing that we are told about this work force is that *each was assigned his work*. That says something. First, it says that there

Now that's what I call a work day at the local assembly

was organization. For as much as I would like to believe that all it takes for the work of God to be done is for a Holy Ghost revival to sweep through a place, much of the work that needs to be done has to be organized. The Mererite clan, for instance had these duties: *To carry the frames of the tabernacle, its crossbars, posts and bases, as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their bases, tent pegs, ropes, all their equipment and everything related to their use*. Each man had a specific assignment for what he was to carry. Work, to be done well, must be organized.

The fact that each one was assigned a job also says that there was no one left without a purpose. Each one had a contribution to make. Each one was productive because each one was assigned a task. I don't know what the under 30's and the over 50's were up to, but I'm sure that they weren't left twiddling their thumbs.

One of the great things about present life in the kingdom of God is that no one is to be left without the ability and opportunity to make a contribution. 1 Peter 4:10 says, *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms*. We each have our own assignments according to the unique giftings we have received from God.

We are the modern day Levites—each with a job to do. We assemble before the Lord and wait for our assignments. Now, who's got the donuts?

He Must Make Full Restitution

“When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord, that person is guilty and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged.” -Numbers 5:6-7

Have you ever noticed that nowhere in all the social code provisions given to the people of God is there an allowance for prison? The Egyptians had prisons. The Philistines had prisons. The Assyrians had prisons. But the nation of Israel was not to have prisons.

Obviously, this wasn't because of the absence of a penal code. There was, in fact, a strict one—an exacting one. The cynical might explain the absence of prisons by reason of the liberal use of the death penalty. And to a qualified degree, they would be right. Capital punishment was a significant component of the judicial system that God gave to Israel. According to the Lord, society needed to be protected from murderers, occultists, sexual offenders and the rebellious. This was to be done by way of stoning rather than incarceration. But there is another, more fundamental, reason for the absence of prisons.

Nowhere in all the social code is there an allowance for prison

The reason that God did not call for the use of prisons is because prisons are not the most effective means of redemption for a crime. According to the Lord, there were categories of offense that warranted execution. Death was the way those crimes were redeemed—not so much for the satisfaction of any persons wronged but for the sake of the sanctity of the nation. But when it came to other offenses that did not require the penalty of death, the best way to gain redemption was not prison, but restitution. Old Testament justice was a lot more about protecting the weak than punishing the offender (a study on the biblical word ‘justice’ will bear this out). Justice was served by “redemption,” and redemption was achieved by restitution. And the Lord’s formula was first, confession of the wrongdoing and second, 120 percent restitution.

The fact that there were no prisons prescribed for God’s people is a clear indication to me that imprisonment will never be the best answer to dealing with offenders. Do I think we should go back to stoning? Jesus answered that question in John 8. But we all know that we in the western world have created a monstrosity with our prison systems. Part of the solution is the proper application of the principles of restitution. For persons who have done wrong, but pose no ongoing threat to society, restitution, not prison, is the redemptive penalty.

Wherever the Cloud Settled

On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire...Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. -Numbers 9:15,17

Perhaps the most common physical manifestation of the presence of the Lord is the cloud of his glory. The Lord came to Moses on Mt. Sinai in a thick cloud that covered the mountain (Ex 19:16;24:15). The cloud would also manifest when Moses would come to talk to God at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Ex 33:9). In both the wilderness tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple, the presence of God was manifest as a cloud of such great glory that it was impossible to enter (Ex 40:35;1Ki 8:11). When Jesus went up with Peter, James and John to what is known as the Mount of Transfiguration, it was a cloud that enveloped them there and it was out of that cloud that the voice of God came (Mt 17:5).

Would I like to have the cloud of his presence lead me twenty-four seven?

You may have been in a worship gathering, prayer meeting or a time of personal devotion where there was a perceptible physical manifestation of the cloud of his glory. You could see an actual mist and feel the accompanying Presence. Those times are captivating, holy and awesome.

Would I like to have the cloud of his presence lead me twenty-four seven? Well, it would be rather comforting (if not frightening) to open your eyes in the morning to see the cloud of his glory and be able to say, “Yep, the presence of the Lord is with me still.” To have the tangible guiding of that cloud to rely on from day to day would have its certain advantages.

However, with what we have been given in the treasure of the Spirit of God who resides within, we actually possess something not far removed from the cloud that led the children of Israel. Individually, we each have seen the glory of God in the face of Christ and have been given a closer communion with God than what a guiding cloud can provide. And corporately, we as the people of God can follow the manifest presence of the glory of the Living God to the place he wants to take us.

I Wish That All the Lord's People Were Prophets

Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" - Numbers 11:29

Moses was complaining to the Lord that the burden of leadership was becoming too much for him. In his frustration he says to God, "Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised...If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now..." The Lord lets the melodramatics pass and tells Moses to gather seventy of Israel's elders at the Tent of Meeting. These seventy would help Moses carry the burden of the people. As they gather around the Tent, God comes down in a cloud, takes of the Spirit that is on Moses and puts it on the seventy Elders and they begin to prophesy.

This precedent-setting experience of people prophesying at the coming of the Holy Spirit is repeated a number of times in the history of the people of God (1 Sam 10:10; 1 Sam 19:20; Lk 1:67; Acts 2:11; Acts 19:6; see Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17 and 2 Peter 1:21). The elders prophesied because the Holy Spirit came upon them. The Holy Spirit and prophecy go together. When he comes and gives utterance, prophecy results. And true prophecy cannot happen apart from his inspiration.

Now it just so happens that two of the seventy are not at the Tent but back at the camp, yet the Spirit comes upon them and they begin to prophesy as well. Joshua is evidently jealous for his mentor's exclusive role as spokesperson for God and tries to get Moses to stop them. But Moses' response shows his understanding and appreciation for the gift of prophecy—which is the ability to hear what God is saying and to speak it for the benefit of others. He is not at all jealous that the Spirit that was on him has now been disseminated to others. This is actually what he was hoping for. He wishes that "all of the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them."

Paul, the apostle, echos these sentiments in 1 Corinthians 14 when he tells the Corinthians that they should desire the gift of prophecy and be eager to operate in it (vs 1, 39). He, like Moses, knew that the word of the Lord was always a good thing. And the more people on whom would rest the Spirit of God to bring it, the better.

***The Holy Spirit and prophecy
go together***

These Are Their Names

So at the Lord's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. These are their names... -Numbers 13:3-4

Have you ever heard of Shamua, son of Zaccur? How about Shapat, son of Hori? No? Well then maybe Palti, son of Raphu or Gaddiel, son of Sodi? Still not ringing a bell, I take it. Well, they were part of a famous group of explorers. There are a few additional names from that group (six to be exact) that you probably wouldn't recognize either, but there are two others that you just might: Caleb, son of Jephunneh and Joshua, son of Nun. "Ah," you say, "Those ineffable ten are they that went out to explore the promised land and came back with a bad report." Yes. And they would probably prefer to remain anonymous.

Their names as individuals did not go down in infamy, but they as a group certainly did. They were instigators of a bonafide disaster for the people of Israel. They were all leaders, leading their entire generation out of the will of God and into perpetual wilderness.

Look at the chain of events that their lack of faith set off: Their report incites a wave of unbelief, wailing and rebellion. The people begin to plan—if you can believe this—to choose another leader to lead them back to Egypt (I can just hear it: "Excuse us Pharaoh, but there has been a mistake...we're back"). Joshua and Caleb are beside themselves. They tear their clothes and plead with the people to stop this insanity and get back on track with God. But the people do not listen. Instead, they are going to stone these two with the minority opinion. God has to intervene. His glory appears to the people and he begins to speak with Moses. For a second time within a year, the Lord means to destroy them all and start over with Moses. Moses intercedes for the people by way of jealousy for the name of the Lord, and the Lord relents—again. But there will be a tragic price for their unbelief. No adult among the people, except for Joshua and Caleb, will ever get to enter the land of promise. In addition, our ten not-so-famous explorers are struck dead. The people change their minds about wanting to go take the land, even sending some troops, but it's too late. First thing in the morning they are going on a forty-year hike.

Today, we may not remember the names of the ten, but I can tell you this: The children of Israel remembered their names for a long, long time.

***They were all leaders, leading
their entire generation out of
the will of God and into
perpetual wilderness***

Make Tassels on the Corners of Your Garments

Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. -Numbers 15:38-39

In Matthew, chapter 23, the Lord Jesus denounces the Pharisees because *everything they do is for men to see*. One of the things that they did for show was to *make the tassels on their garments long*. Have you ever wondered about the original purpose of these tassels?

The people of Israel were instructed to wear tassels on the end of their garments for the same reason that someone might tie a string around their finger, put a cross around their neck or hang a Bible verse on their wall—to act as a reminder. Numbers 15:38-40 clearly explains the rationale for wearing these tassels, and it seems a good one: *To remember all the commands of the Lord* so that when temptation comes the ever present tassel will be there as an encouragement to obey the Lord and stay consecrated to him.

God's idea was to change the outer witness of the tassels into the inner witness of the Holy Spirit

From what I've been told, these tassels were quite noticeable because of their color and the fact that they would twirl when you walked. They were meant to be an outer witness to the one who wore them. The problem with this idea, other than the fact that the whole thing could become a spiritual side show to impress others, is that outward reminders can be easily ignored. The speed limit sign on the highway will remind you of the law, and even hold you more accountable, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you are going to obey it. Without the inner conviction, the speed limit sign, and the tassels, become a nuisance.

Ah, but the Lord had a much better idea. You see, even with an inner conviction, sin is still at work in the human breast. God's idea was to change the outer witness of the tassels into the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. With the new covenant in Jesus, God's law is now written on our hearts, which brings the inner conviction that we need. But it doesn't stop there. The Spirit also brings the inner empowerment to obey. So, now you have what it takes to *remember all the commands of the Lord, to not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes and to be consecrated to your God.*

Aaron's Staff

The Lord said to Moses, "Put back Aaron's staff in front of the Testimony, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious." -Numbers 17:10

Throughout the history of the people of Israel there was no place that arrested their collective psyche like the tabernacle. Whether it was the transportable "Tent of Meeting" or the permanent temple, this was the dwelling place of God and the center of the spiritual, as well as cultural, life of the nation. And within the tabernacle, there was no place like the Most Holy Place. This little 15' x 15' room would never be surpassed in significance and reverence whenever, and wherever, the tabernacle stood. Naturally, then, those things within the Most Holy Place would be considered significant. The presence of the Lord was paramount. Without it, the chamber could never really be said to be "Most Holy." There were four material articles that furnished the Holy of Holies: The Ark of the Testimony, the tablets of the law, a jar of manna and Aaron's staff.

Aaron's staff was the last item to be put in the Most Holy Place

The latter three were contained either in or next to the four-foot-long by two-foot-wide by two-foot-high ark, which was adorned with golden cherubs on either side. These three things had to have special significance—a special reason for being there. All three communicated something that the Lord wanted his people to remember. The stone tablets of the covenant were there to signify the giving of the law—the embodiment of the covenant between God and Israel. The jar of manna signified the constant provision of the Lord for his people (see Ex 16:31-35). God's covenant and provision were two especially notable concepts that were of first importance for the people to grasp. But there was a third that ranked with these—represented by Aaron's staff.

Following Korah's rebellion, where he and 250 others rose up to oppose the leadership of Moses and Aaron, the Lord acted to vindicate the House of Levi as the holders of priestly authority. Each tribe was to bring a staff to the Tent of Meeting and the staff that sprouted would represent the Lord's chosen. Aaron's lifeless staff not only sprouted, but budded, blossomed and produced almonds. This proved the Lord's choice and convicted the people that they should never again grumble or rebel against his chosen leadership.

Aaron's staff was the last item to be put in the Most Holy Place. It would serve as a warning to those who would rebel against the Lord's appointed authorities.

Anyone Who Is Bitten Can Look at it and Live

The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. -Numbers 21:8-9

The Israelites are now in their fortieth year of wandering in the wilderness (see Numbers 33). Miriam and Aaron are gone and the nation is beginning their conquests of the people to the south and east of the promised land. The nation of Edom would not let Israel pass through their land on the way to Canaan so the people of God are taking the long way around. The people are tired of their forty-year diet of manna and they are anxious to finally get into the land flowing with milk and honey. Impatient, they speak against God and Moses. In response, the Lord sends venomous snakes among them and many begin to die. The people acknowledge their sin and come to Moses in repentance. What happens next is a prophetic picture of the eternal salvation that was to come through the cross of Jesus Christ. The Lord instructs Moses to make a snake and put it on a pole. A bit unusual, yes, but the way it works out is that anyone bitten by a snake would live if they would look at the bronze snake that was lifted up on the pole.

***Sin has been allowed
to remain in the world,
but not without a remedy***

Jesus, when speaking to Nicodemus in John 3, says, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." Jesus is referring to his crucifixion when he says that he must be "lifted up." We have been infected with the venom of sin which leads to death. But if we will look to the cross where Jesus bore our sin, we just as surely will find the antidote that will cause us to live.

It seems to me that the easier solution to the snake problem in the desert would have been that the snakes be exterminated by God. But the Lord allowed the snakes to remain, requiring then a remedy against their poison. So we see also that sin has been allowed to remain in the world, but not without a remedy—praise God. There is a hymn of the church which says, "Look and live...look to Jesus now and live...it is only that you look and live." Looking on the cross of Christ is more therapeutic than most of us know. Some people never look at the one who was lifted up and they end up dying in their sin. We, however, have been reclaimed from the fatal venom because we have seen—and believe.

I Will Find out What Else the Lord Will Tell Me

But Balaam answered them, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord my God. Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the Lord will tell me." -Numbers 22:18-19 (Thanks to John Bevere for insight into this story)

There are times when people will try to justify going against a clear word from God because there is an idol in their heart. And sometimes God will give them over to that idol because of the place that it has. As C.S. Lewis has said, "There are two kinds of persons in the world: Those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.'" Balaam didn't know which kind he was.

Balaam, a prophet from pagan Aram, was summoned by the King of Moab to come and curse Israel. The King perceived that Israel was too formidable a foe to defeat in battle without some advantage. Balaam had a reputation as one whose blessing and cursing was not without effect. So the King sent some of his princes, along with the standard fee given to fortune tellers. Balaam hears their offer and asks them to stay overnight for time to get an answer from the Lord. That he wouldn't already know the will of the God of Israel on the matter is suspect, but the Lord makes it clear and says, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed" (v12). Balaam relays the message and they leave. However, the King of Moab sends more distinguished and more numerous princes with a much better offer. Balaam makes this noble speech about not doing anything "beyond the command of the Lord my God..." but then adds, "just stay here fellas and I'll go see if there might be another word."

***Just stay here fellas and I'll
go see if there might be
another word***

What's up with that? What need is there to get another word? It wasn't clear the first time? What has changed? The only thing that has changed here is the offer. The offer has touched an idol in Balaam's heart.

It was not the will of God for Balaam to go with these men. That is clear from the incident with the talking donkey. Why then did the Lord give him permission to go? Well, according to Ezekiel 14, the Lord will sometimes answer someone according to the idols in their hearts in order to expose them. So, please, if you have a clear word from the Lord on a certain matter, don't second guess him. If you do, it may be that you are trying to satisfy an idol of your heart. And he may allow it.

He Did Not Resort to Sorcery as at Other Times

Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not resort to sorcery as at other times, but turned his face toward the desert. When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came upon him... -Numbers 24:1-2

Commentators are divided about whether Balaam was a prophet of Yahweh or a pagan sorcerer. There is evidence for both.

Balaam was not an Israelite. He was from Aram, in the land of the Euphrates River (Nu 22:5; 23:7). He had a reputation as a prophet and a seer, but was known to operate in the forbidden practices of divination and sorcery (Nu 22:7; 23:23; Jos 13:22; 2 Pet 2:15-16). He had a knowledge of Yahweh, considered him to be his God and had the Spirit of the Lord come upon him to speak the word of the Lord, even speaking prophetically about the coming of the Messiah. (Nu 22:9,18; 24:2; 24:17). He taught the King of Moab to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food

How do you make sense of the fact that he was both a sorcerer and a prophet of God?

sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality (Rev 2:4). He was put to death by the sword of Israel after a battle with Midian (Nu 31:8; Jos 13:22). Three times he is referred to in the New Testament—always as a bad example.

Today, as the church attempts to restore and discern the true prophetic gift, a study of Balaam's life holds relevance. How do you make sense of the fact that he was both a sorcerer and a prophet of God? The key to understanding the dichotomy is found in Numbers 24:1 which says that Balaam did *not resort to sorcery as in other times.*" Balaam had a gift. How he used it determined if he was operating in the prophetic word or demonic sorcery.

At the shopping mall, one day, the Lord pointed out a woman to me and said, "False prophet." I later found out she made her living by divination (tarot cards, palm reading, crystal balls). I went to the psychic booth where she worked to tell her what the Lord had said, spoke to her about divination and invited her to come to church with me to see the true prophetic gift in operation. She came and recognized the anointing but was insistent that what she was doing was of God.

I believe that she, like Balaam did have a gift. And she, like Balaam, was enticed into using this gift by false and forbidden means and powers. There were times that Balaam did not resort to sorcery, but he needed to do more than that. He needed to renounce and repent of all such involvement and turn to the God of Israel with all his heart. That he didn't was his demise.

Commission Him in Their Presence

So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. -Numbers 27:18-19

As the time drew near for Moses' departure' from the land of the living a successor needed to be appointed to oversee the people of God and *lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd* (v17). The Lord chose Joshua—but it wasn't enough that he be appointed. The Lord also instructed that Joshua be commissioned in the presence of all the people.

Commissionings are by nature formal affairs. Those of us who value informality in our churches will need to make exception to formally commission those called to leadership.

In the Old Testament, we find examples of prophets, priests and kings being commissioned. In the New, Jesus himself was commissioned publically at the river Jordan. The apostles were also chosen and commissioned. In Acts 6, deacons were formally commissioned and in Acts 13, Saul and Barnabas were commissioned by the church after the Holy Spirit first called them out. In Joshua's commissioning, we find at least three principles for commissioning those called to leadership.

Of first importance is that *the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind* (v15) makes the appointment. God knows the inner person. He knew that Joshua was *a man in whom is the Spirit*. This is the essential qualifier for those who lead God's people (see Acts 6:3). Next, it was important that Joshua be commissioned in the presence of the entire Israelite community. This provided a sense of active participation on the part of the people. Without their presence, the value of the commissioning is severely diminished. The formal commissioning gives a concrete visual witness that carries significance to both the leader and the people. Finally, Joshua stands before Eleazar the priest as a sign that he will be accountable to seek the Lord regarding his leadership decisions. He also stands before Moses who actually transfers his authority to Joshua through the laying on of hands. This is likely the most powerful and necessary component of a commissioning service.

Spirit-filled, God-appointed, recognized and accountable leaders are still the order of the day. And so is their commissioning.

In Joshua's commissioning, we find at least three principles

Not One Is Missing

Then the officers who were over the units of the army--the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds--went to Moses and said to him, "Your servants have counted the soldiers under our command, and not one is missing." -Numbers 31:48-49

Moses is instructed by the Lord to *take vengeance on the Midianites* (Nu 31:2) for their part in seducing the Israelites to engage in sexual immorality and Baal worship. Out of the 600,000 fighting men of Israel, only 12,000 are chosen--one-thousand from each of the twelve tribes. The outcome of this military campaign is most uncommon.

One of the things that marked the early 1990's Persian Gulf war known as "Desert Storm" was the limited number of casualties on the side of the United States and its allies. The superior air power of the Americans and the over- extension of the Iraqi army accounted for the fact that American casualties were limited to 269 killed and 458 wounded compared to conservative estimates of 100,000 and 300,000 respectively for Iraq.

If you think that "Desert Storm" was one-sided, maybe you haven't heard of "Midianite Revenge"

If you think that "Desert Storm" was one-sided, maybe you haven't heard of "Midianite Revenge." 12,000 Israelite ground troops go up against a nation of at least 100,000 men and totally wipe them out. When they come home, the officers of the army do a role call and guess what? Not one of the 12,000 are missing. Remarkable? No, miraculous.

What happened here is simply not possible. The Vegas bookmakers would love to give you odds on that one. But God was proving that he indeed would go before this nation and fight for them. And they were grateful. The officers knew what a miracle this was. They took the gold articles that they had acquired as plunder from the war and presented them in gratitude to Moses and Eleazar the priest, as an atonement offering before the Lord. According to the NIV Bible Commentary, "The making of atonement was an offering of expiation for the lives of those who ordinarily would have died."

Far too many of our troops in the kingdom of God fall as casualties, get wounded in battle or go missing in action. This ought not be. "Midianite Revenge" has shown us what is possible when the favor of God is upon us. Atonement has already been made for us on the cross. If we stick together under the Lord's command, not one need go missing.