

Who Is On The Lord'S Side?

We Must Choose

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 04-Oct-05; Sermon #741A

I remember when I was a kid, from about age 10 to about 14, while we lived on Springfield Drive in West Columbia, South Carolina, there was an open field a few streets up. It was behind the house of a friend of mine, whose name was Mark Attaway. Most spring, summer, and fall days, my friends and I—all the boys in the neighborhood—could be found in that empty lot. Actually, it turned out to be about three lots, I think. When they actually did build on them, it was such a sad day. Our playground was exchanged for housing!

There were quite a few boys in this neighborhood, but the mainstays were Mark Attaway, Louie Huffstetler, and I. After putting our equipment down (because we would haul out there all of our gloves and balls and bats and whatever else we thought we might need for bases and such), the first thing that we would do when we got to the field was to choose sides. Oftentimes, because of who showed up or who did not show up, not much choosing was necessary. Louie and I almost never got to be on the same side, because we were pretty equal in our abilities. That was a disadvantage to us. He was left-handed; that just gave certain advantages to the other side.

We would make out as even teams as we could, and then we would commence to play a never-ending game of baseball—that is, until one of us had to go home, usually because it was getting dark or it was supper time, which was 4:30 p.m. at our house. That was pretty much on the dot, too.

You know, human beings tend to choose sides a lot. Just about every time we do something, we choose sides. Sometimes it happens subconsciously. When we watch some sporting event—and we might not even care who it is on the field—we will usually choose a side for which to root. Maybe if we watch a news show in which the host and a guest are discussing something, we choose which fellow we are going to back, maybe because it is his ideas with which we tend to agree.

How about product loyalty? We might choose Tide over Gain or over Arm & Hammer or over OxiClean or Purex or whatever brands of detergent you happen to have in your area. We might choose Home Depot over Lowe's, or maybe we like TrueValue. We might choose a Chevrolet over Ford or Honda or Toyota or Nissan. Some people, unfortunately, might choose one child over another.

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

We all have a natural tendency to align ourselves for or against something or anything, and it is often for the silliest reasons or for none at all—just on a whim. I have heard that some people choose their favorite racing teams (of course, I'm a NASCAR fan) because they have a cool color scheme on their cars. That does not say anything about the team, the driver, or their record. They choose it only because that car is so neat! It looks like it will go so fast! It has flames painted on its side!

A few years back, many people were turning away from presidential candidate Dick Gephardt because his facial hair was so light that it looked as though he did not have any eyebrows. Is that any way to choose a President? "I like this guy because I can see his eyebrows."

Often, too, there is no middle ground when you are choosing sides; it is just one thing or the other. We are either all for the one thing, or we are all against the other thing. "Budweiser is wonderful, and Miller is awful," or is it the other way around? One does not see a Raiders fan warmly embrace a Broncos fan after a hotly-contested game. There is no middle ground there. You do not put a Bush voter and a Gore voter in the same room while dropping the word *chad*. There is no middle ground. Rodney King's "Can't we just all get along?" does not seem to have any effect when we have chosen sides.

Similarly, the Day of Trumpets is a day of choosing sides. It is not just of choosing sides but also of committing everything that we have to our chosen side—especially the One side, if we make the proper choice. It is a day of decision. The question is, "Are we on the Lord's side?" Are we really on the Lord's side? Will we prove that we are on the Lord's side by giving everything that we have to His cause?

Let us go to a verse at which we have already looked this morning. Martin already read this, but it will work for me also.

Leviticus 23:24-25 "Speak to the children of Israel saying, 'On the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a Sabbath rest, a memorial of blowing trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord.'"

I am sure that we have all read this dozens of times, if not hundreds of times, in our church of God experience. We have heard that phrase *it is a memorial of blowing trumpets* a lot, and we probably understand that it could just as easily be translated as *a remembrance of shouting* or, perhaps, *the shout of the shofar*—not just people shouting,

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

but an actual trumpet bark, blast, or shout. If we go to Numbers 10, we find out for what trumpets are used. I want to pick up a few of the uses here just to remind us how the trumpets were used in Israel

Numbers 10:1-2 And the LOORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the assembly and for directing the movement of the camps."

That is pretty clear how He wanted them to be used. These were the silver trumpets, but we can add the shofar in there also. Actually, the command there does not imply or suggest we need to use exclusively the shofar as our trumpet on the Day of Trumpets. Today we rarely use the shofar; modern trumpets are brass or silver.

Numbers 10:9 "When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the LOORD your God, and you will be saved from your enemies."

That is interesting. This day is a memorial of blowing of trumpets, and here it is talking about going to war and God remembering us because we, while we do not wake Him up with the trumpet blast, we draw His attention to us by this.

Numbers 10:10 "Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial [there is that word again!] for you before your God: I am the LOORD your God."

We have several uses of the trumpet here. It is used to call the assembly, for directing the movement of the people and the camp, for calling the people to war, to announce the feast days, to announce the beginning of the months, and to announce the offerings that are made. There are others, as well, that are not necessarily mentioned here; we would have to go elsewhere to find them. We see that the trumpet blasts separates people and moves them to do something. That is all I am getting at here. It calls attention to something. Once the attention is gotten, something happens when one blows the trumpet. You can use that basic principle in all of the examples here.

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Psalm 81 is traditionally associated with the Day of Trumpets. Many have scratched their heads over this passage in lack of comprehension as to how this actually fits with the Day of Trumpets, but it does very neatly, I think. Certainly, it fits my topic today. In a sermon a few years ago, my dad explained what is probably the most puzzling part of this, and that was how does Joseph fit in with the Day of Trumpets? I will not try to go through that again today; that is not my point today. This psalm actually does have a connection with my subject, which is choosing sides, and that comes along in the midst of the psalm.

Psalm 81:1-2 Sing aloud to God our strength; make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob. Raise a song and strike the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the lute.

What are they doing here? Obviously, they are praising God! Here you have another use for trumpets.

Psalm 98:5-6 Sing to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm, with trumpets and the sound of a horn; shout joyfully before the LORD, the King.

Here we see that another facet of this day is that it is a day of worship and praise to God. In the Day of Trumpets, we praise God for the things that He has done and the things that He promises to do.

Psalm 81:3-4 Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day. For this is a statute for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob.

Here is a reminder about the use of trumpets. They were used to announce every new moon and, of course, the Day of Trumpets is a new moon. If you went out last night, you would have seen a new moon, weather permitting, and a slightly larger sliver tonight.

However, it also mentions a full moon. How does that go with Trumpets? Well, it is not necessarily saying that this has to go with the Day of Trumpets exclusively. He is talking about blowing trumpets. When do you blow trumpets? At the new moon and at the full moons when there is a solemn feast day. There are two feast days that begin on the full moon: the full moon of Passover and the full moon of Tabernacles. Both of them occur on a full moon. Thus, you blow a trumpet on the new moon and one particular new

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

moon especially—Trumpets—but every month you also announce the new moon by the blowing of the trumpet (Numbers 10); and you also blow in on the solemn feast day on a full moon, twice a year. God makes sure in verse 4 that we understand that this is a law for Israel—and it continues for the Israel of God, the New Testament church of God—that they blow the trumpet on the new moons and the full moons that are solemn feast days.

This is where the puzzling connection with Joseph is:

Psalm 81:5-7 This He established in Joseph as a testimony, when He went throughout the land of Egypt, where I heard a language I did not understand. "I removed his shoulder from the burden; his hands were freed from the baskets. You called in trouble, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah."

I do not think that this is a very troubling or difficult section, once you really read what it really says. Once you really understand what the Day of Trumpets means, what it portends for us, then it becomes very clear. What He says here is that this blowing of trumpets, this Day of Trumpets, is something that God established in Joseph. That means that there was a founding there. There was a beginning in the life of Joseph of this idea of blowing of trumpets as being something to remember.

Joseph, then, and his life—and a particular instance in his life—was something that is memorable as a type or an example that fits this day. He tells us exactly what time it is that was the perfect type, and that was when he went throughout the land of Egypt. When did that happen? If we go back to Genesis, we would find out that he did not go throughout the land of Egypt until Pharaoh raised him up to be second in command over all of Egypt. He said, "No one in this land has more power than Joseph, except me." Then they got out a chariot; Joseph was put on that chariot; and they had runners going before him announcing who he was and what he was there to do. He went throughout the land of Egypt. He was, then, recognized not only by the Pharaoh, but also by the people as their savior. They did not know it was such at the time, but that is eventually what he did for them. He was a Hebrew, as it says in that last part of verse 5, in a strange land; but God had worked something out to make him the one through which He would work to bring liberty as well as salvation: liberty to the people of Israel and salvation to everyone.

One thing that I want you to understand is the idea of God's sense of time. Israel was not even in the land of Goshen yet—only Joseph was. He was the only one there.

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

However, by raising Joseph up, He was making possible the entire series of events that really has not stopped yet. In particular, it made possible Joseph's calling for Jacob and the rest of the family to Egypt to live there in good circumstances for a while before being enslaved; and then to go through grievous bondage; and then to cry out to God, who God hears them and sends another savior—Moses—to them. Moses negotiates with the Pharaoh and eventually God wins that battle, too, and God frees Israel. They walk out of the land; they go through the Red Sea; they go through the wilderness for forty years; they do all the stuff that they do there; they finally come into the Promised Land; and they are totally free. Thus, when God established this in Joseph, He was not only thinking about what was happening with Joseph but He was also talking about the entire plan that would flow from that. That is why He ends up where He does in verse 7.

In verse 6, we see that God removed the burden from Joseph's shoulder. Joseph was in prison, a slave who had been accused and convicted—although it was not true—of making moves on the master's wife. God freed him from that—the one person, the type—and what did He do? He brought him before Pharaoh, and he made him, basically, a king—second in command. There was no one higher except the Pharaoh himself; there was Pharaoh and then his prime minister, Joseph.

I want you to think of this in terms of Jesus Christ and us, the Israel of God. We cannot have Jesus Christ's job. It is filled. Eventually, however, we are going to be raised to the point where we will fill the highest offices available in His kingdom—after we have been taken out of the slavery of this world, after the basket has been taken off our shoulder, after all the things that we have done in this flesh that have enslaved us. God will eventually free us. This Day of Trumpets is a type of that—the ultimate freeing. It is a type of not only the freeing but the elevation, too, to something far greater.

Notice in verse 7 that He changes. In verse 6, He was talking of Joseph; but in verse 7, He changes to the whole nation of Israel. "You called in trouble." Who called? If you go back to Exodus, you would find out in the early chapters that it was all the Israelite slaves who cried out to Him in their bondage. We have suddenly leaped forward 300 years or so to the point at which all of Israel is in slavery. In the verse before, they were freed from slavery in Joseph; and the very next verse, we have leaped forward to where the whole nation is back in slavery. All his descendants and all his brothers' descendants are now in slavery, and they are crying out to God.

God said, "I delivered you. I answered you in the secret place of thunder," meaning that He took them out of Egypt and brought them to Sinai where He established a relationship with them as a nation; and then He proved them at the waters of Meribah, meaning that He tested them to see just where they stood. What I want you to see is the

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

movement from Joseph and what God did with Joseph (who did everything right) to the children of Israel. He is setting up a contrast as we go through this chapter. "I did this with Joseph, and he responded."

He was ultimately the one who saved everyone from this terrible famine, and he then provided an inheritance for his family in Goshen, a place to live. It says very clearly that Goshen was the best part of the land. It was the most fertile. It was where they could live in prosperity and peace. Over time, though, his descendants and all the other Israelites ended up back in slavery. The question is, "How would Israel respond?" Joseph already gave them the right example. How would the whole nation respond?

Verse 7 is just *boom, boom, boom*: "You cried out to me, and I delivered you." The second thing was, "I established a relationship with you at the place of thunder." Right after that is the test. How would they respond?

What is my subject today? Choosing sides! That is the test! Which side are you going to be on? Here is where the element of choosing sides comes out. God is speaking to the whole nation:

Psalm 81:8 "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me!"

You may want to put this in the back of your mind: Every time that you see "Hear!" in the Bible, pay attention. It is important, not just to Israel, but to us too. This is a big red flag saying, "O.K., people, I am going to tell you something really important!" Remember, also, that we are the Israel of God and this applies to us.

Psalm 81:8-10 "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! [He is going to give us some good advice.] O Israel, if you will listen to Me! There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god. I am the **LOORD** your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it."

That is the choice! Is it not interesting, here, what He tells them? What is the choice? How does He phrase the choice? Do you remember my last sermon where I talked about the basic, the most fundamental element of belief? What did I say that it came down to? Commandments numbers one and two. What does He say?

1) "There shall be no foreign God among you."

2) "Nor shall you worship any foreign god."

I take that in terms of physical worshipping as it is shown in the second commandment. Number one says that, "You shall have nothing before Me. Nothing comes between our relationship. Our relationship is number one in your life." Whatever the god is—whether an idol or car or house or job or nice clothing or whatever—it is not supposed to rank higher than God. Then He says, "Whatever you do, do not worship that thing. Do not give it your obeisance; do not sacrifice for it; do not praise it like that," and all the other ways that we can show our worship.

It comes down to this thing. The choice is, "Which God do you choose? Which side are you on? Are you on God's side, or are you on some foreign god's side?" Everything spiritual—that which is spirit and truth (John 4)—flows from making the choice to worship the true God and Him only.

Why should we worship Him? God just does not say, "I am the only choice." No! He says that there is another choice. There are foreign gods out there, and He is not so inconsiderate as to just say, "It is my way or the highway, My way or nothing at all." He gives us reasons to worship Him. He gives us two right here in verse 10: and they are 1) I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and 2) open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

Those are the two reasons, and they are very good reasons. One, He frees us from bondage to sin. Is not that the type that we learn from the Days of Unleavened Bread? He frees us from bondage to sin, and as mentioned previously, ultimately He brings us into the Promised Land. It is not only freedom at that one point and then we go our own way. No, He brings us on eagle's wings all the way into the wilderness where He establishes a relationship, and then He continues that relationship all the way to the point where we are in the Promised Land. It is not just the freedom, not just the initial emancipation from bondage, but it goes all the way until everything that we have ever wanted to happen does happen, because He has been there, at our side, leading us the whole way.

The second reason is that He is the only one that can really abundantly provide for us. The image here—opening our mouth wide and then His filling it—has to do with physical sustenance. However, we know that it goes so much further than that. It is not just that we live well and that we have food to eat, that we are protected, that we have opportunities to do things that we want to do. That is somewhat carnal, because it deals

with our flesh.

There is much beyond that: all the spiritual promises and blessings that He has to give us, in spades! It is not just that He will trickle them down to us. He says to open that mouth of yours as big as possible, and He will pack it in! It is like Jesus' illustration in the gospels where He says, "Give me this container, and we will fill it up. We will shake it; we will pack it down; we will make sure that it is full—and not only that, but running over." It is the same sort of thing. God is able to provide so much more abundantly than any foreign god could ever think of doing—if it could think.

In other words, God saves us from, first of all, self-destruction in our slavery, in which we played a part. Secondly, He gives us what we need to live, to really live. He not only liberates us from all the bad things, but He provides all the good things also! Those are pretty good reasons to choose God's side.

Let us go on. Remember, He was setting up a contrast here between Joseph and all of Israel. He finally gets to Israel's choice here:

Psalm 81:11 "But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. [How sad!] So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels."

That sounds like Romans 1 to me. He just gave them up to whatever came to their mind. Israel is like that scene in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, where Indiana Jones solves all the puzzles and gets to the room with all grails, supposedly, and he has to choose which one. However, there is also the bad guy in there, too, who has been chasing him this whole time. He comes in and he "knows" which cup it is. He chooses the most costly, ornate gold one with all the gemstones—"This is the cup of a king"—and takes a drink from it, and he dies right there; and the knight who had been there all these centuries says, "He chose poorly."

Well, Israel chose poorly—very poorly. They consistently, all those years, chose the wrong side! It seems that every time they had a choice, every time that they could finally get back on the right side and do the right thing, they chose the wrong side again. The times of their being faithful to God are very few and far between in God's word. It seems that if they did not have a really strong leader who basically dragged them along, they went the other way.

This last phrase in verse 11 where "Israel would have none of Me" is literally, "Israel

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

would not of Me." *Would* implies the use of their will. They would not turn their will toward Him. It means, "They would not acquiesce to Me; they would not consent to Me." They would not choose God. They **would** not. It was an act of will. It is not as if they just let the time pass and ended up with whatever was going at the time. They chose. They made up their mind not to go on God's side. They **would not** have Him.

That is how God judged. They preferred Baal and Chemosh and Milcom and Ashtoreth and whatever other foreign god came along. It did not matter. Anybody but God is the way that it turned out to be. Because they decided to be that way, they went the way of the nations; and God decided, "O.K., fine. Let us see how they like this in so many years after they reap the curses that automatically come from choosing the other side." That is what He said: "I gave them over to their own stubborn heart."

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" God does. Thus, He said, "O.K., fine. I am going to let their heart lead them, and they will rue the day," and they did. Listen to the anguish in God's voice here:

Psalm 81:13-16 "Oh, that My people would listen to Me [after He commanded "Listen" in verse 8 and they would not], that Israel would walk in My ways! I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him, but their fate would endure forever. He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; and with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you."

He just wanted to bless them, just like you when you have children of your own. You tell them to do something and say, "Look, if you would just do this, this is the reward that I am going to give you," and you really want to give it to them. However, your kid decides to go do something else. God had that same feeling. "I would have done all this for you, if you would have done what I had said, but now I cannot. I have principles."

He says here, "I would have gladly turned my hand from being against you to being against your enemies." He could not, though, because they had already cast their decision and voted for the wrong candidate, as it were. He said, "I would have gladly made your enemies submit to you, but I cannot."

Thus, they ended up where they did: at war, in captivity, diseased. Compare with Leviticus 26, and you will find all the things that did happen to Israel because they made the wrong choice. They chose poorly.

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

This began right away. Turn back to Exodus 32 and the incident of the golden calf. This is right after things were going well at the "mountain of thunder," as He called it. Moses went up on the mount to receive the Ten Commandments, the tablets (Exodus 31:18); but while he is gone, the people convince Aaron to make a golden calf, and they start worshipping that and sinking into debauchery. However, I want to start at a later point:

Exodus 32:25-28 Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies) [just from this you can tell it was pretty bad], then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the LORD'S side—come to me." And all [the whole tribe] the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. [Now after all that, listen:] Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother."

What we see here is Israel's choosing in the incident of the golden calf. Most of Israel chose the calf. Perhaps it was the Apis bull of Egypt. Who knows how many Levites were also involved in this? We know that at least Aaron was. We know that one of the heads of the tribe (Aaron) was involved in this, and how many of the Levites had followed his lead and given in? I do not know; it does not say. However, when Moses called, Levi responded. Evidently, they repented. They responded to Moses' call, "Who is on the Lord's side?"

How long had it been since God had done all those things in Egypt for them? It was not very long. Weeks maybe? A couple of months? Those things were still fresh in their minds. However, the people chose an object of gold, shaped and molded like a calf, who had done nothing but sit there and look shiny, over the One who had freed them from bondage, given them what would have amounted to billions of dollars in the spoils of Egypt, defeated the Egyptian army in the Red Sea and saved Israel through that, gave them a perfect law of liberty, fed them daily in the wilderness, and appeared to them constantly in the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud—and they chose a statue of a shiny young bull? It does not make sense! It borders on the amazing!

How could they do that? God had proven to them and provided for them time and time

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

again in visible ways, and they chose the idol. I think Moses, if he had any hair left, was about to pull it all out, and he called, "This is it! Whoever is on God's side get behind me! We are going in!" Moses had pleaded for Israel already, that God might spare them. God's anger was pretty hot at the time. "I am going to wipe them out and start over with you, Moses." However, when Moses got down and saw what was happening, he started understanding why God said what He had said originally. He was inspired by God to teach Israel a big lesson.

It went further than that, though. Notice what he did: He went to the entrance of the camp, which had turned into a licentious "city." Supposedly, this was God's camp, but now it was "The Camp of the Golden Calf." He went to the entrance of the city, and he called out a few, and got the sons of Levi. He did not do this specifically, which is different from the analogy that I am crafting here, but a certain number came; and those were the ones of Levi. All the sons of Levi were called out of the sins of Israel. They were there at the entrance of the camp, and in a sense, by that action—by coming out of the camp—they consecrated themselves to the service of God. They had chosen their side.

Then what did Moses do? He immediately molded them into an army, and he sent them into the camp to slay. What he says in verse 29 is very intriguing for us. Let us read that again:

Exodus 32:29 Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the LOORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother."

Notice that! The sense of this is, and I will give you a paraphrase here: "By what you have done today, you Levites have set yourselves apart as God's zealous servants. Prepare yourselves to receive God's blessing because in your zeal for Him, you opposed even the closest members of your family."

They chose a relationship with God over even their closest human relationships. If Moses is to be believed—and he is—they went through and slew even other Levites. It could be just Israelites, but they were willing to kill anyone who was an idolater and who was involved in these terrible acts. I am not saying that that is what we should do; that is not it at all. We do it a different way. This is the way, in type, that was shown. That is how they showed their zeal for God. They did not allow their personal feelings to keep them from obeying God, no matter what the task was set before them. It was a huge test!

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

When Moses stood there at the entrance of the camp and said, "Who is on the Lord's side?" and they came running over, the Levites had no idea what Moses was going to say next or give them to do. They just came. Whatever Moses said, they would do because they had consecrated themselves by their choice to follow his lead.

Let us go forward to Deuteronomy 33. This is the blessing that Moses gave to Levi as he was about to die. Remember in verse 29 back there in Exodus 32, he said, "Prepare yourselves to receive a blessing"? This is part of it. This is an encapsulation of that blessing.

Deuteronomy 33:8-9 And of Levi he said: "Let Your Thummim and Your Urim be with Your holy one, whom You tested at Massah, and with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah, who says of his father and mother, 'I have not seen them'; nor did he acknowledge his brothers.

Think back on Exodus 32 again. What did they do? They did not show any difference between their own families and their enemies.

Deuteronomy 33:9-11 "Who says of his father and mother, 'I have not seen them'; nor did he acknowledge his brothers, or know his own children; for they have observed Your word and kept Your covenant. They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, and Israel Your law. They shall put incense before You, and a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar. Bless his substance, LORD, and accept the work of his hands; strike the loins of those who rise against him, and of those who hate him, that they rise not again."

This is an encapsulation of the blessing that Moses said that they should prepare themselves to receive. It is very interesting to go through this. If you are not already, please think about this in terms of God's Firstfruits, His church. Do you know what the Urim, and Thummim in verse 8 are? They were the means that God provided for the priesthood to have contact with Him. To put it another way, they were the means by which they could determine God's will in a matter.

There was a breastplate with the jewels of each of the tribes and some stones on the shoulders. There were also stones of the Urim, and Thummim; one of them meant yes and the other meant no. This is as I understand them. Usually, whichever one of the stones lit up or glowed was the tribe that was to respond. If we go into the experiences of David or some of the others (judges and whatnot), they used the Urim, and Thummim

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

to ask, "Lord, should we go up against the Philistines (or whoever)?" One of the stones would glow or light up, yes or no, and a tribe's stone might also glow should the answer be affirmative. Oftentimes was Judah, but not always; sometimes it was another. This is how I understood that it worked.

However, the whole idea here is that Levi was blessed with communication with God. Think about that. They had the ability to have God's will revealed to them through the Urim, and Thummim. Notice also that He calls them, "Your holy ones"—saints, separated ones, consecrated ones, sanctified ones.

Now notice also at the end of that verse that it says that God tested them at Massah and contended with them at Meribah. You know the people did not fare very well in those tests.

Now think of this: Before they were called and consecrated to their priestly duties, they were tested, too, and failed. They were part of the group that did not respond properly. Eventually, though, they did. Did we all not do the same? We were all pulled out of lives of sin, out of lives contending with God, out of being anti-God and anti-Christ. However, He had mercy and called us to give us a blessing and to give us a job.

We went over verse 9, as we were going through there, looking back on what Levi did in the incident of the golden calf. They went through the camp and did not even recognize their own family while doing the command of Moses. He summarizes it at the end that they were observing God's word. They were keeping what He said. They were obeying His voice. It was part of, as it says here, keeping God's covenant. They had, in a sense, made a vow to God, in their action of going over to Moses. That was the covenant. They had already made the covenant, of course, back in Exodus 24, but they finally did keep it. They were the only ones that did keep it.

Notice the reward and blessing that starts in verse 10. Usually, to those of us who are still human, being given a job is not necessarily considered a blessing. However, this is the blessing for which Moses told the Levites to prepare themselves:

Deuteronomy 33:10 "They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, and Israel Your law. They shall put incense before You, and a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar."

In their day, they were made the priests of God in Israel. The Levites, generally, were given the tasks of teaching the people, transporting various pieces of tabernacle

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

furniture, singing and praising—basically, everything having to do with either the Temple or Tabernacle. The job—the blessing—that they were given to do was this representation of God within Israel and doing the work of the tabernacle.

Their primary job, if we take this from being listed first, was a teaching role. We can teach like this, or we can teach our children, or we can teach through our example. In whatever case that it is, they were set apart to teach Israel the statutes, judgments, and laws—God's way of life, and they were to do it in whatever way that God gave them to do it.

Notice that this goes on. It also said that they shall put incense on for Him. What does incense represent? I was thinking specifically of prayer. If you go back to Revelation, it says that the incense that goes up before God is the prayers of the saints. We have a job to pray!

The application can be wider in terms of worship, but I think that the specific mention of incense here has to do with the communication with God. It is not just knowing God's will in verse 8, but it is also praying in response back to Him. We have a responsibility as those called out of the larger group to pray—for the people, for God's plan, for this, that, and the other things; whatever the situation happens to be—because that is part of our job. It is part of our relationship with God and, as we have learned, in prayer we usually end up learning more about ourselves and our situation, about God's will, than we end up communicating.

It is a two way street. Most folks think that it just goes up, and God hears it. God does not work that way; He likes to communicate with His people. He will inspire us in prayer. Normally, this is not going to be a big, deep voice coming out of our ceiling: "Joe, go do this." No, He is usually much more subtle than that. I get a lot of ideas for things when praying, and I am sure that you do, too. Maybe you might be struggling over a verse, and you pray about it, and pretty soon either the answer will come to mind or you will find out from a concordance or a commentary or something the answer to it. You will be led to the answer. There are all kinds of examples like that.

Beyond that, it is the prayer for other people, and the prayer for the good of the people. It is also a prayer for the "quick and hasty" (as it says there in II Peter 3) hastening of God's kingdom.

Notice also the end of verse 10, something I do not want to leave out: "...and the whole burnt sacrifice." Not only do they offer incense, but they also offer whole burnt sacrifices. Go back to the sacrifice series. What does the whole burnt offering represent? It is

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

complete devotion to God—being totally consumed, as it were, with God's way of life, willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Then, of course, in verse 11, there is the blessing. Moses asked God for abundant blessings and acceptance before Him, as well as protection from their enemies and judgment upon them.

This is a wonderful thing and a wonderful section of scripture. We understand that we are antitypes of the Levites; we fulfill this. These are our duties, and these are our blessings within greater Israel, within the whole world, because we have been called out to do these things.

In the New Testament, the same idea goes on. What is so interesting here is that this is a similar example or a similar instruction from the High Priest Himself. This is not just any old Levite. This is instruction from the High Priest not of the tribe of Levi, but He is the One chosen by God to be the High Priest for all time.

Matthew 12:46-50 While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

He had the same attitude as those Levites back there in Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 33. He did not recognize his mother; He did not recognize his brothers. He recognized His fellow "Levites," as it were—those who do the will of His Father in Heaven. His first allegiance was to the Father and the Father's will, for that is the side that He had chosen; and all who have similarly chosen are His real brothers and sisters and mothers. We can see here, because He had this same attitude, that He does not ask us to do that which He does not do Himself.

He tells us we have a choice to make, just like this. Remember what Moses said. When he came, he said, "Who is on the Lord's side?" They came, and he gave them swords.

Matthew 10:34-37 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

The same standard applies to us. I am not saying that we would hate our physical family; I am showing you the prioritization of our allegiance. Our first allegiance, our first loyalty has to be to God, no matter what. God has molded us into an army. That is why He says through Paul in Ephesians 6 to take on the armor of God, because there is a fight coming! Put these things on and stand. Whatever you do, stand! Defend your ground. Hold your ground.

Paul tells us that our warfare is not carnal but spiritual, for the pulling down of strongholds and casting down arguments. We are no longer fighting a physical battle as the Levites did in the camp of Israel. Our weapons are spiritual, but we are still fighting. We have been drafted into an army; and as it says there in II Timothy 2, we cannot be dabbling in the affairs of this life. Our allegiance is to our General, and the King behind that General. A soldier is called to fight; to give his life, if need be, to take the enemy down; and to win the objective of the General. There are only two sides: the right side and the wrong side, God's side and the other side.

Matthew 12:30 "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad."

It is not just the allegiance—that is, "He who is not with Me is against Me"—but also it is the doing—"He who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." There is more than just saying, "I believe in Jesus!" There is the gathering that must be done, or you are scattering abroad. There is a step after belief, and that is walking in faith—obeying the voice of our General.

Let us finish in Joel 3, bringing it back around to the Day of Trumpets:

Joel 3:14-17 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision [of choice]. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of

Who Is on the Lord's Side? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the children of Israel. "So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again."