

# A Tale of Four Brothers

By Kevin Phipps

For Parasha Vayikra

Torah: Vayikra/Leviticus 1:1-5:26 (6:7)

Haftarah: Yesha'yahu/Isaiah 43:21-44:23

You have been cordially invited  
to attend the Great Banquet of the King.  
Enclosed are the directions to the Palace of the King.  
Begin your journey immediately.  
The banquet will begin when you get there.  
The King will be anxiously awaiting your arrival.

This invitation went out to four brothers, John, Aaron, Paul, and Martin. All four loved the King and very much desired to dine at the table with Him. All four read the invitation, along with the explicit directions to get to the Palace. However, each had a different idea concerning what the invitation meant, so each had a different plan for responding to the invitation.

John read the invitation, though he never really knew much about the King. He knew there was a king, but never made much effort to know who He actually was. He had his own ideas, but they were based more on his own imagination and fears than truth from the King Himself. He wanted to go to the banquet since it seemed the thing to do, but he noticed the direction went way out of the way, and would take him over mountains and through territory known for bad storms and dangerous creatures. He saw a better, safer, more direct way to get to the Palace. So that was the way he chose. He packed all the items important to him in a large sack and went on his way.

Aaron and Paul had actually met the King personally, so they knew Him well. Receiving the invitation made them very excited. They studied the directions very carefully. Aaron even added some notes of His own to make sure he would not get lost. They sold all he had and left empty handed on the path the King laid out for them in the invitation.

Martin studied the invitation for many hours. He had heard much about the King from Aaron and Paul, so he knew the King to be one of love and grace. So he sent correspondence back to the King telling Him of His desire to be at the banquet. He believed that to actually travel the way the King laid out for Him, would deny the King the ability to extend his compassion to him by sending one of His own carriages to come and pick him up to take him in honor to the King's Palace. So he left His horse in the stable and stayed at home. Oh, he made sure everyone knew of his invitation, and how great and merciful the King was to invite a commoner like himself to His banquet, but

day after day went by and he was no closer to the King than the day he received the invitation.

Aaron and Paul journeyed through rivers, deserts, defeated giants, and weathered many storms, but before he reached the Palace, they found they could not continue. Despair overtook them as they realized the directions given them by the King were impossible for them to travel. When all hope was almost gone, an old wooden wagon pulled by a donkey began to come toward them. It stopped and a man in a white robe walked out and told them he was the King's Son, coming to take them to the Palace for the Banquet. Aaron knew that if this were truly the King's Son he would be in a royal carriage, in fine robes, and escorted by armed guards. Therefore, this could not possibly be the King's Son, so he chose to stay where he was, and thought he could still make his way to the Palace.

Paul, however, remembered that the invitation was not sent on fancy stationary, but on dull parchment. His brother Aaron had his own explanations for why this was, but suddenly, Paul put the parchment to the messenger before him and believed that what He said was true. So he climbed on to the wagon, and he and the King's Son went on their way to the Palace.

At the banquet table, Paul sits in his seat of honor set for him by the King. Next to Him are three empty seats. He knows they are meant for his other three brothers. He knows why Aaron is not there, but what has happened to his other brothers? He asks the King about this. The King tells him that his Son has gone out along the path laid out in the instructions, and John was nowhere to be found, so he could not be picked up. He had taken his own road, which despite what it seemed to him, did not lead to the Palace of the King. His path led him into enemy hands where he is now a prisoner.

The King's Son could not find Martin on the path either, so he was not picked up to come to the banquet. Despite his desire to be with the King, since he never journeyed on the path described in the invitation, he had not proven his devotion to the King by following His directions. If he had even made the first step to get closer to the Palace, according to the directions sent by the King, then His Son would have done what Martin believed he would do and pick him up to take him to the banquet. He still might come to the banquet, since he hasn't actually fell into enemy hands like John, but he has to begin the journey to the King, and where his legs fail him, that is where the Son will pick him up.

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Beginning this week, we will be studying the book of Vayikra (Leviticus). The book starts out describing the various sacrifices and offerings required to atone for sin and spiritually cleanse the man or woman of God. So how does the story relate to the parashah? The word for offering is korban, which literally means, to draw close. One of the biggest conflicts Torah Observant Believers face is the issue of faith vs. works for salvation. The New Testament clearly teaches that we are saved by faith and not by

works, so following the commands of God appears to many people that we are trying to earn our salvation. In fact, “salvation” (atonement) as an act of faith has always been God’s way. It was always God who atoned for the sins of His people, not the sacrifices and offerings themselves.

“You are to keep my mitzvot and obey them; I am Adonai. You are not to profane my holy name; on the contrary, I am to be regarded as holy among the people of Isra’el; I am Adonai, who makes you holy, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God; I am Adonai.” – **Vayikra/Lev.22:31-33**

In Isaiah we even see God chastising Israel for making the same offerings and sacrifices He commanded them to perform. Why? A sacrifice was meant to draw a person closer to God, and when that didn’t happen, the sacrifice was worthless.

The Torah is God’s invitation to us to have fellowship with Him, which includes the directions for getting there. Like John, pagans have a concept of God, but think they can get to Him their own way. They ignore Torah, and follow their own lusts. Whatever path they take only leads them to death and despair, and ultimately the fires of hell itself.

Many Christians, like Martin, know God and desire to be with Him. They trust in faith alone to save them from their sins. They make a “profession of faith” and some continue with life as usual. Sure, they claim a relationship with God, but their lives bear no fruit that show them on the path which draws them closer to Him. Some, like John even create their own way and end up in the hands of the enemy. Like Aaron, many Jews follow the path set forth in Torah believing that they can reach the Kingdom of God on their own efforts. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, so even their best efforts in following Torah brings them short of holiness. This is when faith takes over and provides the atonement our efforts fail to accomplish. God meets us halfway and when we show our love for Him, His grace, through the sacrifice of His Son, gives us the holiness our works cannot give. So we are saved by faith and not by works, but it is by giving God the best of the works of our hands (tithes), our acts of sincere service (sacrifices without defect), and offer our prayers to Him (a pleasing aroma) that His Son finds us on His Way, and His grace brings us into fellowship with Him as His holy people. Like Paul, we need to be able to recognize Messiah for who He is, not who we want Him to be, or expect Him to be. We need to walk the Way set before us under the power of the Spirit who dwells within us.

Though there were four brothers invited to the banquet of the King, only one made it. Perhaps if Paul had been able to show Aaron how the man in the wagon could have been the King’s Son despite His lowly appearance, if Paul could have shown Martin the importance of traveling the Way described in the invitation, and if Paul could have told John the truth about the King and His Way, those three empty seats may have been filled.

“Oh, how good, how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in harmony.”  
-**Tehillim/Ps.133:1**