

Numbers Chapter 17

Verses 1-13: The fact that the rod of the tribe of Levi budded, bloomed, and yielded almonds proved that Moses and Aaron were not wrong in asserting divine appointment to leadership over the nation. And the budding of a rod that bore the name of Aaron gave added denial to the claims of Korah and his Levitical followers that they had as much right to the priesthood as the family of Aaron (16:8-11). Aaron's rod was to be kept for a memorial "before the testimony". The last two verses seem to indicate the people still pitied themselves rather than praising God for His power and deliverance.

Verses 1-7: The attack on Moses and Aaron by Korah and his accomplices left some people uncertain about whether Aaron and his sons were the true priests for the Lord. "Twelve" wooden "rods", one for each tribe, were presented. While the rods were to have the names of Israel's tribes on them, the Lord demanded that the one for the tribe of "Levi" bear "Aaron's name" instead. In the aftermath of the Levite uprising (in chapter 16), this was an important reaffirmation of whose descendants would serve as priests from that tribe.

Numbers 17:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

After the plague ceased. For the further confirmation of the priesthood in Aaron's family, another method is directed to by the Lord.

"Saying": As follows.

This message is probably given on the same day. God will settle the question of whether Aaron is called of the LORD to be high priest or not.

Numbers 17:2 "Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of [their] fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod."

"Twelve rods": These sticks of wood were to bear the names of the 12 tribes, with the tribe of Levi replaced by the name Aaron.

Each tribe of Israel was considered a branch, or a rod of Jacob. This rod of each of the leaders of each tribe, represented that particular tribe. Since there were twelve tribes, there were twelve rods. The rod of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi, would be in addition to these rods. Ephraim and Manasseh were both of the tribe of Joseph, but each were given a tribe of their own. Each of the rods had the name of their tribe written on it.

Numbers 17:3 "And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod [shall be] for the head of the house of their fathers."

Or upon the rod that was for the tribe of Levi. The name of "Aaron" was to be written, not the word "Levi", or a "Levite", as Josephus. For that would not have decided the controversy about

the priesthood. Which chiefly lay between the Levites and the family of Aaron, who were of the same tribe.

"For one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers": One rod for the head or prince of every tribe. Every prince representing his own tribe he was the head of, and the rod the prince. And though the tribe of Levi was divided into two families, the family of the priests, and the family of the Levites; yet, as Jarchi observes, they were but one tribe. And so one rod for them, as for the other tribes.

There was no prince for the tribe of Levi, but it was undisputed that Aaron was their leader.

Numbers 17:4 "And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you."

"Before the testimony": The Testimony is the Ten Commandments written on two stone tablets kept in the ark of the covenant. The phrase "in front of the testimony" is synonymous with "before the ark".

Moses would lay these rods up in the tabernacle of testimony. They would be lain in front of the ark, in the presence of the Lord.

Numbers 17:5 "And it shall come to pass, [that] the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you."

Or make it manifest that he had chosen him. And so confirm the choice he had made of him and his family. For the priesthood to be and continue in.

"Shall blossom": Bud and blossom, and yield fruit, as it afterwards did. Which is here declared beforehand. That the miracle might appear the greater, exactly answering to a prediction delivered out before of it.

"And I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you": Against Moses for setting up his brother as a high priest, and establishing the priesthood in his family. And against Aaron for accepting of it, and officiating in it. But by this method now taken, God would for ever silence their murmurings. So that they should never be able, with any face, to object any more to the authority of the Aaronic priesthood. Which should appear by the predicted miracle beyond all dispute and contradiction.

The miraculous blooming of this rod, would settle the dispute forever of whether Aaron was to lead the people as high priest or not. This will be a permanent sign from the LORD, that He has chosen Aaron for the job of high priest. This rod is from a stick that has been removed from the branch for quite a long time. By normal standards, it would be dead wood. For it to bloom is miraculous.

Numbers 17:6 "And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, [even] twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron [was] among their rods."

What the Lord had bid him say unto them concerning the rods, which they hearkened unto and observed.

"And every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one": Every prince of the several tribes, and so a rod for every tribe, as well as for each prince.

"According to their father's houses, even twelve rods": There being twelve tribes named after their fathers, or the patriarchs, the twelve sons of Jacob. And Joseph having two tribes which sprung from him, called after his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh. There were twelve rods besides that of Aaron. And so the Vulgate Latin version renders the words with the next clause, "and there were twelve rods besides the rod of Aaron. "In all thirteen.

"And the rod of Aaron was among their rods": In the middle of them, and was so placed, as Jarchi thinks. That it might not be said, because it was put on the side of the Shekinah or divine Majesty, therefore it budded. But being in the middle of them there could be no difference in that respect.

The prince of each tribe had a rod with his name on the rod. The rods, including Aaron's rod, was put before the LORD in front of the ark of covenant.

Numbers 17:7 "And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness."

In that part of the tabernacle where the testimony or witness was. That is, the law, which was in the ark, over which was the mercy seat. With the cherubim between which Jehovah dwelt, and this was the most Holy Place. And the rods being laid here, might be said to be laid before the Lord, who, by making a difference in one of those rods from the rest, would decide the controversy about the priesthood. Which was the end of their being laid before him.

We also see that Aaron did not put the rods there, Moses did. There was nothing peculiar about Aaron's rod. God would prove Aaron's call to be high priest in this.

Verses 8-9: The rod that blossomed would further signal which tribe the Lord had designated to be Israel's priests (17:5). That Aaron's rod alone also miraculously bore ripe fruit ("almonds"), on the same day it sprouted and blossomed unequivocally affirmed God's choice. As the first fruit tree that blooms in Canaan, the almond tree is known as the harbinger of spring. Its Hebrew name means "The Watchman" (Jer. 1:11-12).

Numbers 17:8 "And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."

“The rod of Aaron”: God had stated that the stick of the man He had chosen would blossom (17:5). The stick of Aaron had not only blossomed, but had yielded ripe almonds. Thus, God had exceeded the demands of the test, so there would be no uncertainty of the fact that Aaron had been chosen as High-Priest.

First of all, this is one day later. Not only did the rod bloom, but produced full grown almonds. The word almond was translated from means awake. The almond is the first of the trees to produce in the spring. This miraculous growth was overnight. The blossoms and the full grown almonds were actually at different stages of growth. This is a sign from God. Aaron's rod had no special ability to live and produce fruit, any more than did any of the other rods. It was the Spirit of God, that caused Aaron's rod to bloom. Aaron's abilities are not within himself. They are in the office of high priest, and through the anointing power of the LORD upon him.

Numbers 17:9 "And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod."

He brought them out of the holy place, and showed them to the princes of the several tribes.

"And they looked, and took every man his rod": Which they knew by their names upon them. By their own handwriting, as Aben Ezra. For though Moses is bid to write their names on them (Num. 17:2); yet no more may be meant by that than that he should order them to be written, and take care that they were.

The princes could not go into the area where the rods were left, because God would have killed them. Moses brought all the rods out for them to see. Each person claimed the rod with his name on it.

Numbers 17:10 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not."

“For a token”: Aaron’s rod that blossomed and brought forth fruit was to be kept as an indication of God’s choice in order to permanently stop the murmuring of the rebellious Israelites.

Other items in the ark of the “Testimony” were a jar of manna (Exodus 16:33-34), and the two tablets with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 25:16; see note on Exodus 33:15-16). The stunning thing about these three objects is that no one but Yahweh would ever see them once they were placed in the ark. These were “reminders” of His great mercy, not to the people but to the Lord!

After all of the princes saw Aaron's rod that bloomed, the Lord had Moses to bring it into the Holy of Holies. Any time there was any question again about Aaron's authority, they could see the rod that bloomed and know Aaron is the high priest that God anointed for the job. Actually, the rod of Aaron, the manna, and the stones with the ten commandments were kept in the ark itself. The murmurings should stop now. This should close the mouths of the rebellious.

Numbers 17:11 "And Moses did [so]: as the LORD commanded him, so did he."

Took Aaron's rod, and laid it up before the ark for the purpose mentioned. Being a faithful servant to God in all his house.

Moses did exactly as God had commanded him to do.

Numbers 17:12 "And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish."

“Behold, we die”: Finally, the people realized their sin in challenging Aaron’s role.

I believe the people suddenly realize their error in questioning Moses and Aaron. They know they were wrong, and think that God will kill them for their doubt and questioning. This is as if they are saying, "I have sinned". Perhaps they deserved to die, but God will let them live. They are defeated and disheartened. Perhaps, their rebellion against God is over.

Numbers 17:13 "Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?"

“Cometh any thing near”: The people’s fear of going near to God led to a reaffirmation of the priesthood of Aaron and his sons (in chapter 18).

This is understandable, since so many have died recently at the tabernacle. Truly they all will die in the wilderness. The only people who can go into the Holy Place, or into the Holy of Holies, are the high priest and the priests.

There is a lesson here for the ministers and the members of churches. God puts whoever He chooses in as the minister of the church. He has jobs for all of us to do, but they are of His choosing and not our own. We also learned to have respect for the office of the priesthood, or those God has placed in authority over us.

Numbers Chapter 17 Questions

1. When was this message given to Moses?
2. What was Moses to take from the prince of each tribe?
3. How many tribes were there?
4. Aaron's rod represented the tribe of _____
5. Ephraim and Manasseh were from the tribe of _____.
6. How could they determine who each rod belonged to?

7. There was no _____ of the tribe of Levi.
8. Where was Moses to take the rods?
9. What will happen to the rod of the man, that God has chosen to be high priest?
10. What will this cause the people to stop doing?
11. The rod that bloomed would be a _____ sign from the LORD, that He had chosen Aaron for high priest.
12. By normal standards, this rod is _____.
13. Where was Aaron's rod put?
14. Who actually put the rods there?
15. What had happened to Aaron's rod?
16. Had the same thing happened to the others?
17. It was the _____ of God that caused Aaron's rod to bloom.
18. Where does Aaron's ability come from?
19. Where were the rods examined?
20. Where was Aaron's rod to be kept?
21. What else was kept in the same area?
22. What did the children of Israel say to Moses?
23. Whatsoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall _____.
24. What are some lessons ministers and members of churches can get from this lesson?