

**Message #18****Numbers 17:1-13**

I am convinced that when you are doing exactly what God wants you to do, someone will oppose you. Aaron had been chosen by God to be the priestly family and people opposed it. They arrogantly stood up and defied Aaron's authority. Moses had even said, "why in the world would you grumble and complain about Aaron?" (Num. 16:11). Aaron hadn't done anything against the people. What is important to see here is that when someone challenges God's appointed leadership, they are challenging God. That is what happened in Numbers 16 and, as a result, those who challenged the leadership suffered judgment in that God killed them. But, as we saw last time, Aaron's authority had been challenged

So as we come to Numbers 17, God wants to show the people of God that Aaron is still His chosen priest. Aaron still has God's stamp of approval. Others thought they were just as good as Aaron, but God said, "no you aren't." What God does is He decides to do something very unusual to show that Aaron is His special man.

**GOD FULLY AUTHENTICATED THAT THE PRIESTHOOD BELONGED TO AARON AND HIS SONS BY A SIGN THAT WAS DESIGNED TO SILENCE THE REST OF THE CONGREGATION AND STOP THEIR MURMURING FOREVER.**

**In chapter 16, God destroyed the grumblers but in chapter 17, God is going to give a sign that is designed to destroy the grumbling.** Murmuring and grumbling against leadership is a very serious and very dangerous matter in the mind of God. This would be a sign to the arrogant rebels that would remind the people of God of this truth.

God had chosen Aaron and the Levites to serve Him as priest. What that means is that He did not call others to this responsibility. Now grumbling against leadership is a very serious issue. If our chief end is to glorify God, then when we grumble against God's choices, we are actually assaulting the glory of God who made the choices.

A believer who is grumbling cannot possibly glorify God nor enjoy their relationship with God.

In this chapter, God makes it clear that His choice is His choice, and if His people persist in grumbling against His choice, there will be serious, negative consequences.

Now this chapter breaks down nicely into three simple parts:

**PART #1 – God instructs Moses to get twelve staffs; one from each tribal leader. 17:1-5**

In the aftermath of God dropping people dead in chapter 16, He wants to reinforce His selection of Aaron and put a stop to grumbling, so **verse 1** says, "the LORD spoke to Moses." This is important. It is not Moses coming up with this, this is directly from God.

In **verse 2**, God tells Moses to speak to the sons of Israel. What God wanted Moses to do was to communicate six messages to the people of Israel:

**Message #1** - Get one rod from each of the twelve fathers. **17:2a**

The Hebrew word “rod” (matteh) is one that refers to a staff, scepter, or branch. It appears that the choice of type of wood was left to the tribe. So each tribe was to bring some stick to Moses.

**Message #2** - Get one rod from all their leaders according to their father’s household. **17:2b**

Now the staff or rod was to be brought to Moses from the leader representing the various tribes. The leaders who were still alive needed to see this object lesson.

**Message #3** - Each leader was to write his name on the rod. **17:2c**

Now the text does not identify who the guys are. It is possible that they are the same leaders named in previous accounts. The leaders of the tribes that were recorded were as follows:

- (Tribe #1) - Nahshon was the leader of the tribe of Judah. 10:14
- (Tribe #2) - Nathanel was the leader of the tribe of Issachar. 10:15
- (Tribe #3) - Eliab was the leader of the tribe of Zebulun. 10:16
- (Tribe #4) - Elizur was the leader of the tribe of Reuben. 10:18
- (Tribe #5) - Shelumiel was the leader of the tribe of Simeon. 10:19
- (Tribe #6) - Eliasaph was the leader of the tribe of Gad. 10:20
- (Tribe #7) - Elishama was the leader of the tribe of Ephraim. 10:22
- (Tribe #8) - Gamaliel was the leader of the tribe of Manasseh. 10:23
- (Tribe #9) - Abidan was the leader of the tribe of Benjamin. 10:24
- (Tribe #10) - Ahiezer was the leader of the tribe of Dan. 10:25
- (Tribe #11) - Pagiel was the leader of the tribe of Asher. 10:26
- (Tribe #12) - Ahira was the leader of the tribe of Naphtali. 10:27

We don’t know much about these guys, but God knew every one of them. As we have said many times in this series, Numbers proves you are not just a number to God.

**Message #4** - Aaron’s name was to be written on the rod representing Levi. **17:3**

Now Aaron’s name was to be written on a rod representing Levi. This shows us that God’s specific choice of leader from Levi’s family was Aaron. Now one of the debated points is whether or not Aaron’s rod was one of the twelve or an additional, thirteenth rod.

We think that this is specifically an additional thirteenth rod to the twelve. In fact, we think that **verse 6** makes it clear that his thirteenth rod was put in with the other twelve.

Apparently the leader of Levi chose an almond branch or staff. We may assume that because of what happens. The common denominator of all of these staffs is that they were dead pieces of wood that obviously had been cut or taken from some tree.

**Message #5** - Each rod was to be put inside the tent of meeting in front of the ark. 17:4

We learn from **verse 8** that each rod was to be put in there and left there overnight. This was a very sacred spot. The rod was to be placed in the Holy of Holies in front of the ark box that contained the written Word of God. As I understand it, you have thirteen total staffs or rods in this tent, twelve from the leaders of the twelve tribes and one from Levi with Aaron's name written on it.

**Message #6** - God will cause the rod of the man He chooses as priest to sprout. 17:5

Now a rod is a piece of dead wood. It is cut off from some tree. But God says I will perform a miracle and will cause the staff of the man of my choosing to sprout and produce life. Now the miracle will be twofold. **First**, something dead will produce life. **Second**, the time to produce the life will be shortened. God will cause a dead piece of wood to blossom in one night.

It reminds us of the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine. He changes the substance of water into a grape product and then shortens the time of fermentation, and immediately the water is wine.

What we do see here is that God does have the power to take something dead and dry and turn it into a beautiful, fruit-producing, blossoming, and flourishing display of His glory.

Now the purpose of God doing this was to stop the grumblings against Aaron. People were still talking and still grumbling. The verb "stop" is Hiphil stem in Hebrew which means God is going to use this dramatic miracle and illustration to cause the people to stop talking and murmuring.

**PART #2** – Moses took each staff and put it inside the tent of meeting. 17:6-9

Moses completely obeyed God. Moses had all the leaders bring him their staffs including the one from Aaron, and according to **verse 7**, Moses put the staffs before the LORD in the tent of meeting before the ark in the most holy place.

According to **verse 8**, the next day when Moses went into the tent of the testimony, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms and bore ripe almonds. This was a stick the night before that was dead, and now it was alive by the power of God and producing fruit.

Now it is possible from the text that when you looked at Aaron's rod, it displayed all stages of growth. In other words, it is possible that when you looked at the rod, on one portion of it were buds, on another portion were blossoms, and on another portion were almonds. This would be an impressive thing to see.

This is exactly what God does with those He saves. They were dead in their sins and He saves them and then miraculously uses them to bear fruit. For those who watch the life, they see the growth process in the life touched by God. First, there is a budding, then a blossoming, and then a fruit producing.

According to **verse 9**, Moses brought out all of the sticks of wood to the sons of Israel and they all looked and saw that their wood was still wood, but Aaron's was an amazing, fruit-bearing branch.

One very important point to see from this is that God's choice of leadership was miraculously empowered and enabled by God to bear fruit that no one else is authorized to bear. I am convinced this is true in any dispensation.

**PART #3 – God instructs Moses to put Aaron's staff as a testimony of God's choice of Aaron.  
17:10-13**

According to **verse 10**, God told Moses to put back Aaron's rod before the testimony as a sign to the rebels. In other words, this rod was to remain where Moses found it.

God did not want anyone to ever forget that Aaron was His sacred choice. Aaron was God's only choice in this. The location in front of the ark was a powerful sign of the importance of this leader.

This did not mean that others did not have responsibilities; it just meant that Aaron was His choice of priest.

Now one question would be if this rod was in the Holy of Holies where no one could see it, how would it be a sign against the rebels for everyone to see? First of all, the other leaders had their own rod and knew that their rod did not come to life like Aaron's. Every day when a tribal leader picked up his own staff, he saw that. Second, the high priest would bring it out from the Holy of Holies as evidence of this very reality.

According to **verse 11**, Moses precisely obeyed God.

Now the Israelites had just come through a very serious judgment. In **chapter 16**, God executed many people and now in **chapter 17** Aaron's staff blossoms and none of theirs did. They assumed they were going to die.

According to **verse 12**, the sons of Israel realized they had done wrong. They realized that just as God had executed others, they were on the verge of execution themselves. This rod business brought them under that kind of conviction and they started saying, "We are dead." Every time we come near to the tabernacle, we will be killed, because that rod of Aaron shows he was God's choice and we had no business murmuring against him.

Truth is, if they persisted in grumbling against God's leadership or if they came near to the tabernacle of God in that frame of mind, they would and could die. One writer said, "Although they would engage in other forms of rebellion, they would never again question Aaron's priesthood" (Glen Martin, *Numbers*, p. 322).

Now there were three visible reminders that God gave to Israel that they should stop rebelling against God and continually obey God's Word:

- 1) He gave them the tassels on their garments for each person to see (15:38-39);
- 2) He gave them the hammered out bronze plates that they saw at the altar (16:38-39);
- 3) He gave them Aaron's budded staff (17:10).

Now what are the tangible reminders we have that we need to stop rebelling and obey God?

- 1) God has given us copies of His written Word;
- 2) God has given us His indwelling Holy Spirit;
- 3) God has given us the Lord's Supper.

According to I Corinthians, this is a specific sign we are to see until the Lord returns (I Cor. 11:23-32). The Apostle Paul warned the Corinthian church that it is serious business to worship God in a wrong frame of mind. In fact, in the communion service, he said people need to examine themselves, and some of them didn't, and for this reason some are weak, some are sick and some are dead.

These three witnesses of the written Word, the Holy Spirit, and the Lord's Supper are specific Church Age testimonies that we will be without excuse for continuing in rebellion. May each of us examine our own hearts and minds.