



## Numbers - Chapter Seventeen

### III Numbers 13:1-19:22 - Forty Years Near Kadesh (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Seventeen

This experiment is a symbolic re-enactment of the Korah episode, which showed who had the right to approach God (16:5). The chief of each tribe puts his staff in front of the ark for a night to see what will happen to it. Nothing happened to the staffs, except for Aaron's, which miraculously produced blossom and bore ripe almonds overnight. It may well be that flowering almonds are significant. Their white blossoms symbolise purity, holiness, and God himself, which are all associated with the priesthood.

#### III.d Numbers 17:1-13 - The Budding of Aaron's Rod

Refer to the chapter summary above.

<sup>1</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Speak to the Israelites, and get twelve staffs from them, one for each ancestral house, from all the leaders of their ancestral houses. Write each man's name on his staff, <sup>3</sup> and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. For there shall be one staff for the head of each ancestral house.

#### Numbers 17:1-3

Get twelve staffs from them, one for each ancestral house. A staff or rod was a symbol of authority, because shepherds would use a staff to guide and correct the sheep: <<*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me*>> (Psalm 23:4). Moses, as a shepherd, had a staff in his hand when tending sheep in the wilderness: <<*The Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' He said, 'A staff'*>>

(Exodus 4:2); this staff later became known as the staff of God, a symbol of the authority God gave to Moses: <<*So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses carried the staff of God in his hand*>> (Exodus 4:20).

This same staff demonstrated Moses' authority in action, by miraculously becoming a serpent, and then becoming a staff again (Exodus 7:9-10), by turning the waters of the Nile into blood (Exodus 7:17), by bringing forth plagues of frogs (Exodus 8:5), lice (Exodus 8:16-17), hail (Exodus 9:23), and locusts (Exodus 10:13); God commanded Moses to raise the staff over the Red Sea when it was to be parted (Exodus 14:16), the staff that was raised in prayer over Israel in victorious battle (Exodus 17:9), the staff that struck the rock and brought forth water (Numbers 20:11); the staff is a picture of God's authority over man (Psalms 2:9, 23:4 and 89:32, Isaiah 10:24 and 11:4, and Ezekiel 20:37); Jesus, in his divine authority, is given the title "the rod" or staff who will rule and judge through his word: <<*but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked*>> (Isaiah 11:4); and the staff is an emblem of an apostle's authority in the church: <<*What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?*>> (1 Corinthians 4:21 NIV).

Write each man's name on his staff, and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. In gathering staffs, and inscribing each with the name of a tribe, and on Levi's rod inscribing Aaron's name, God would declare which tribe possessed priestly authority by choosing one of the staffs. This was the issue at hand in light of Korah's rebellion.

<sup>4</sup> Place them in the tent of meeting before the covenant, where I meet with you. <sup>5</sup> And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout; thus I will put a stop to the complaints of the Israelites that they continually make against you.

#### Numbers 17:4-5

The staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout or blossom. Not only would this obviously be a miraculous sign, the blossoming of dead wood spoke of fruitfulness. Fruitfulness, miraculous fruitfulness, is present when godly authority and leadership is being practiced.

Thus I will put a stop to the complaints of the Israelites. This did not mean that after this the children of Israel would never complain again. But God, having demonstrated more than sufficient evidence to the complainers, would no longer regard their murmuring. Indeed, he would then judge their complaints.

Complainers are rarely satisfied by evidence or the resolution of one issue. Complainers are not issue-motivated, although they claim to be and appear to be; they are heart-motivated. They complain because they have complaining, discontent hearts. The complaining heart is demonstrated when people murmur about one issue after another, never being satisfied. So, God will give them an unmistakable answer to this matter of contention, then rid himself of their complaints.

<sup>6</sup> Moses spoke to the Israelites; and all their leaders gave him staffs, one for each leader, according to their ancestral houses, twelve staffs; and the staff of Aaron was among theirs. <sup>7</sup> So Moses placed the staffs before the Lord in the tent of the covenant.

#### Numbers 17:6-7

The twelve staffs probably do not include Aaron's. There are twelve secular tribes in Chapters 1 and 7, so Aaron's staff brings the number up to thirteen.

So Moses placed the staffs before the Lord in the tent of the covenant. The miracle of the budding staff was to occur away from human gaze for it was performed by God alone so that no one could claim deception.

<sup>8</sup> When Moses went into the tent of the covenant on the next day, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted. It put forth buds, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds. <sup>9</sup> Then Moses brought out all the staffs from before the Lord to all the Israelites; and they looked, and each man took his staff.

#### Numbers 17:8-9

When Moses went into the tent of the covenant on the next day, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted. The miracle occurred during a single night. This was another of God's convincing proofs so the people could have faith: <<*After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God*>> (Acts 1:3).

God's choice of Aaron's staff did not mean that Aaron was the most spiritual man in the nation. God's chosen leaders will have godly character according to the principles of 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9, but it was not a contest to determine the most spiritual man among them. It also did not mean that Aaron had not and would not sin or fail significantly. God's chosen leaders may fail, despite the Roman Catholic idea of papal or pastoral infallibility, but they must try to set things right when they do fail. This demonstration meant Aaron was God's chosen priest, and the nation was required to recognise it.

It put forth buds, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds. Not only had the staff budded and blossomed, it had also ripened thus producing a full season of growth in one night, and that to a dead stick!

**If God can perform such amazing miracles with a piece of dead wood, what transformations can he achieve with a living person who puts their faith in him?**

Each man took his staff. This was a dramatic scene. Each complainant from the different tribe took his staff, and clearly saw that his had not budded or borne fruit, and that Aaron's had.

If God demonstrated his choice of Aaron and his descendants as priests for Israel, how can Jesus, a descendant of Judah, now be the high priest, as Hebrews 2:17 says? It is because Jesus is a high priest of the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (Hebrews Chapter 7).

<sup>10</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, 'Put back the staff of Aaron before the covenant, to be kept as a warning to rebels, so that you may make an end of their complaints against me, or else they will die.'<sup>11</sup> Moses did so; just as the Lord commanded him, so he did.

#### Numbers 17:10-11

Put back the staff of Aaron before the covenant, to be kept as a warning to rebels. The miraculous staff was kept in the ark, which seems to be what is meant by before the covenant, to become both a sign and a warning; refer to the comment made on Hebrews 9:4.

Or else they will die. Many people had died in the rebellion so far and God makes it clear he will not tolerate those who oppose his will for his people.

Moses did so. Moses was not perfect, either as a man or as a leader, but he was faithful to God's will and commands. This is what made him such a great leader and also marks out Jesus as the same: <<***Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day***>> (John 6:37-39).

<sup>12</sup> The Israelites said to Moses, 'We are perishing; we are lost, all of us are lost!' <sup>13</sup> Everyone who approaches the tabernacle of the Lord will die. Are we all to perish?'

### Numbers 17:12-13

We are perishing; we are lost, all of us are lost! This shows that the people of Israel were clearly convicted of their sin. They now clearly knew that it was wrong to rebel against the leadership of Aaron. This kind of hysterical fear does not necessarily mean their hearts were changed. This will not be the last account of a complaining, murmuring Israel. This shows that dramatic events do not take away complaining and rebelliousness. The heart has to be changed by God.

Are we all to perish? The miracle of Aaron's staff seems to have finally convinced the people about the status of the priests and prepares the way for a statement of the priestly tribe's rights and privileges in Chapter 18. The mediatorial role of the Aaronite high priests foreshadows the even greater role of Christ, the ultimate high priest (Hebrews Chapters 4-10).