

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
11-23-21
Numbers 17

Gathering Rods, Identified With Each Tribe – Verses 1-3

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ²“Speak to the Israelites and get twelve staffs from them, one from the leader of each of their ancestral tribes. Write the name of each man on his staff. ³On the staff of Levi write Aaron’s name, for there must be one staff for the head of each ancestral tribe.

17:1-3 Get from them a rod from each father's house: A rod was a symbol of authority, because shepherds would use a rod to guide and correct the sheep (Psalm 23:4). Moses, as a shepherd, had a rod in his hand when tending sheep in the wilderness (Exodus 4:2); this rod later became known as the rod of God - a symbol of the authority God gave to Moses (Exodus 4:20).

This same rod demonstrated Moses' authority in action, by miraculously becoming a serpent, and then becoming a rod 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 rod over the Red Sea when it was to be parted (Exodus 14:16), the rod that was raised in prayer over Israel in victorious battle (Exodus 17:9), the rod that struck the rock and brought forth water (Numbers 20:11); the rod is a picture of God's authority over man (Psalm 2:9, 23:4, 89:32; Isaiah 10:24; 11:4, Ezekiel 20:37); Jesus, in His divine authority, is given the title "the Rod" (Isaiah 11:1; Micah 6:9); the rod is an emblem of an apostle's authority in the church (1 Corinthians 4:21).

17:3 Write each man's name on his rod. And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi: In gathering rods, 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 rods. This was the issue at hand in light of Korah's rebellion.

The Rods To Be Placed In The Tabernacle For God's Choosing – Verses 4-5

⁴ Place them in the tent of meeting in front of the ark of the covenant law, where I meet with you. ⁵The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites.”

17:4-5 The rod of the man whom I choose will 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 rid Myself of the murmurings: 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 murmurers, would no longer regard their murmuring. Indeed, He would then judge their murmuring.

17:4-5 Murmurers (complainers) are rarely satisfied by evidence or the resolution of one issue. Complainers are not issue-motivated, though they claim to be and appear to be; they are heart-motivated. They murmur because they have complaining, discontent hearts. The complaining heart is demonstrated when people murmur about one issue after another, never being satisfied.

The Budding Of Aaron's Rod – Verses 6-9

⁶ So Moses spoke to the Israelites, and their leaders gave him twelve staffs, one for the leader of each of their ancestral tribes, and Aaron's staff was among them. ⁷ Moses placed the staffs before the LORD in the tent of the covenant law. ⁸ The next day Moses entered the tent and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the tribe of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds. ⁹ Then Moses brought out all the staffs from the LORD's presence to all the Israelites. They looked at them, and each of the leaders took his own staff.

17:6-8 And behold, the rod of Aaron: When Moses checked on the rods the next day, Aaron's rod - and only Aaron's rod - had sprouted. It not only sprouted, it had put forth buds. It had not only put forth buds, it had produced blossoms. It had not only produced blossoms, it had yielded... almonds. It had not only yielded almonds, it yielded ripe almonds! This was a place where a "small" miracle would have been convincing. After all, God could have merely made a little green sprout come forth from Aaron's rod alone, and that would have - or should have - been enough.

But God gave, as in the words of Acts 1:3, many infallible proofs, to demonstrate His approval of Aaron's leadership. God gives us more than enough evidence; our problem is a lack of willingness to see what He has made clear.

17:7-9 Behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted: God's choice of Aaron's rod 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 wasn't 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 (we do not believe in the Roman Catholic idea of "papal" or "pastoral" infallibility), but must set things right when they fail. It meant Aaron was God's chosen priest, and the nation was required to recognize it.

17:9 Each man took his rod: This was a dramatic scene. Each murmurer from the different tribe took his rod, and clearly saw that his had not budded or borne fruit, and that Aaron's had.

The Command To Preserve Aaron's Rod In The Ark Of The Covenant – Verses 10-11

¹⁰ The LORD said to Moses, "Put back Aaron's staff in front of the ark of the covenant law, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die." ¹¹ Moses did just as the LORD commanded him.

17:10 After witnessing spectacular miracles, seeing the Egyptians punished by the plagues, and experiencing the actual presence of God, the Israelites still complained and rebelled. We wonder how they could be so blind and ignorant, and yet we often repeat this same pattern. We have centuries of evidence, the Bible in many translations, and the convincing results of archaeological and historical studies. But people today continue to disobey God and go their own way. Like the Israelites, we are more concerned about our physical condition than our spiritual condition. We can escape this pattern only by paying attention to all the signs of God's presence that we have been given. Has God guided and protected you? Has he answered your prayers? Do you know people who have experienced remarkable blessings and healings? Do you know Bible stories about the way God has led his people? Focus your thoughts on what God has done, and will become unthinkable.

The Reaction Of The Children Of Israel – Verses 12-13

¹²The Israelites said to Moses, “We will die! We are lost, we are all lost! ¹³Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD will die. Are we all going to die?”

17:12 Surely we die, we perish, we all perish: This shows they 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.

17:13 Shall we all utterly die? After seeing all what God did in the rebellion of Korah - destroying Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, along with their 250 followers among the leading men of Israel; the retrieval and hammering out of the censers for a covering on the altar; the plague destroying 14,700 of those who sympathized with Korah and his followers, and the miraculous confirmation of Aaron's priesthood - the people fear they are next to be judged, which was not an unreasonable fear.

This kind of hysterical fear doesn't necessarily mean their hearts were changed. This will not be the last account of a complaining, murmuring Israel. This shows that dramatic events don't take away our complaining and rebelliousness. The heart has to be changed by God.