

Exegetical Notes, Numbers 17:1-13 "Aaron's Staff"

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NUMBERS 17:1-13

Verses 1-5

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. ³ On the staff of Levi write Aaron's name, for there must be one staff for the head of each ancestral tribe. ⁴ Place them in the tent of meeting in front of the ark of the covenant law, where I meet with you. ⁵ The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites."

- YHWH approached Moses with a plan designed to settle the issue, once and for all, whom he had chosen to serve before him as priest. This was necessary because Korah's rebellion (see Numbers 16) had centered in this very question (Korah wanted to be a priest) and because the rebellion had been so widespread, involving 254 leaders of Israel from all of the tribes.
- Each of the twelve tribal leaders, the chief member of each tribe, was to bring a staff to Moses upon which was written the name of that tribe. Aaron was to bring the staff for the tribe of Levi and, in addition to the tribal name "Levi," he was to write his own name.
- All of the twelve staffs were taken into the Tent of Meeting and placed before the Ark of the Covenant.
- God promised that the staff of the tribe which he chose to serve him as priests would bud while it stood in the Tent of Meeting. The budding rod would be an indication of God's will in the matter.

Verses 6-7

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.

- Moses did exactly as God told him to do. The twelve staffs were placed in the Tent of Meeting before the Ark of the Covenant.

Verses 8-9

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.

- The next day when Moses went into the Tent of Meeting he discovered that Aaron's staff had not only budded but had also blossomed and now bore fruit, almonds. By "overdoing" the proscribed results of the test, God was making his choice overwhelming clear. Clearly, God was choosing the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron to serve him as priests.

Verses 10-11

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.

- Exodus 16:33-34 and 25:16, tell us that the stone tablets on which the commandments had been written and a jar of Manna had been placed in or near the Ark of the Covenant. Now the staff of Aaron was to be placed with them. It was to serve as a reminder of God's choice of Aaron and his sons as priests and to end any question from the people about the matter.

Verses 12-13

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

- The people recognized that Korah and the others who had stood with him had been wrong. They became concerned that God would reject them, too, and kill them as he had the other participants in the rebellion. They may have come to this conclusion since they had accused Moses of killing God's people after Korah and the others with him had died. They finally realized that not obeying God had huge negative consequences.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Aaron's Staff*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)