

The Validation of the Aaronic Priesthood

Numbers 17

Numbers 17 - *“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ² “Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father’s house, all their leaders according to their fathers’ houses—twelve rods. Write each man’s name on his rod. ³ And you shall write Aaron’s name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father’s house. ⁴ Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. ⁵ And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you.”*

⁶ *So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers’ houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. ⁷ And Moses placed the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness.*

⁸ *Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds. ⁹ Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.*

¹⁰ *And the LORD said to Moses, “Bring Aaron’s rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.” ¹¹ Thus did Moses; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did.*

¹² *So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, “Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! ¹³ Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD must die. Shall we all utterly die?”*

Background Notes

Numbers 16 gives the account of Korah’s rebellion. Korah and his followers didn’t want to submit to the leadership of Moses and they didn’t want to acknowledge that Aaron was God’s appointed high priest. In addition, they showed contempt for both Moses and Aaron. Korah and the other Levites involved in the rebellion weren’t satisfied with being Levites -- they wanted to be priests!

The Levites were God’s servants of the Tabernacle, a privileged position in Israel - but Korah and the other rebellious Levites wanted the priesthood as well. God dealt with the rebellion by sending an earthquake and fire to remove the rebels.

Numbers 16:8-11, *“Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of*

the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?"

In Numbers 17 the Lord showed, in no uncertain terms, that Aaron was indeed the high priest, and the line of Aaron was the priestly line by divine appointment. The Lord said to Moses, "*Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels...*"(v10).

In Hebrews 9:4 we read about Aaron's rod in connection with the Ark of the Covenant: "*...the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant...*" Three items were kept in the Ark of the Covenant: the stone tablets containing the Law, reminding the people of **God's holy standards**; a golden jar of manna, reminding the people of **God's provision**; and Aaron's rod that budded, reminding the people of **God's authority**.

At the dedication of the Temple during King Solomon's reign, in 1 Kings 8:9 we read, "*Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.*" What happened to the pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded? We don't know. About 500 years had gone by. Maybe these two items had been lost, or maybe they had been removed by the time of King Solomon. Remember, the Ark was captured and held hostage by the Philistines during the time of Samuel (see 1 Samuel 4-6).

Doctrinal Points

1. God's leaders are divinely chosen for the congregation.

The Lord told Moses to have twelve rods or staffs brought to the Tabernacle, one for each of the tribes of Israel. A man's staff or rod was symbolic of his position as a leader or ruler. In the case of kings and princes that staff became a scepter, the insignia of rule.

The name of the leader of the tribe was to be inscribed on each tribe's rod. Aaron's name was to be put on the rod for the tribe of Levi; this was "Aaron's rod." All twelve rods were to be brought into the Tabernacle and placed in the Holy of Holies, where the testimony of God's Law was kept, and God would point out the man He had chosen by having that man's staff come to life and bear fruit.

Aaron's rod sprouted buds - and blossomed - and bore fruit! **God had spoken!** There was no doubt that God had chosen Aaron to have the position of high priest, and the authority of the high priestly office.

God's leaders are divinely chosen for the congregation. This was true in Old Testament times, and it is true today. In Acts 20:28 Paul said to the elders of the church of Ephesus, *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."* Who made these men the spiritual leaders at the church of Ephesus? **God did!** *"...the Holy Spirit made you overseers..."* They didn't buy the position, or win the position by popular vote. No, God made them spiritual leaders, and then the congregation was responsible to recognize them as the spiritual leaders.

That's the way it was in Numbers 17. That's the way it was in the early Church. And that's the way it should be today!

2. God's leaders should be recognized by the congregation.

Verses 8-10: *"...the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds. Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod. And the LORD said to Moses, "Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die."*

All the children of Israel recognized that God had definitively chosen Aaron for the office of High Priest. In fact, the people feared for their lives, because many of them had questioned God's chosen leadership, and it was now obvious that they had been wrong (v12-13)!

Recognizing God's chosen leaders is important – both then and today. Hebrews 13:7 says, *"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct."* And Hebrews 13:17 says, *"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."* The congregation should recognize and follow God's chosen leaders.

But now the question arises: How should we officially recognize the spiritual leaders who have been chosen by God? It would be nice to have everyone put their walking sticks in the church overnight, and then we could check the staffs of God's chosen leaders for fruit - but it doesn't work that way today! So how do we recognize God's chosen leaders today?

Here's an illustration. How do we recognize an athlete? We recognize a person as an athlete when he or she is involved in athletics. No one becomes an athlete by receiving the most votes, or being the most popular. No, athletes are recognized as athletes because they do athletic things - running, biking, swimming, rowing - in short, athletes "do sports"! In the same way, we can recognize the spiritual leaders that God has chosen for our congregation because those people are already doing the work of a spiritual leader! They will already be interested in the spiritual welfare of the people of the congregation. They'll be involved in caring for and shepherding God's people. People don't get involved in caring and shepherding unless they have a heart for God's sheep.

Once it's clear who the spiritual leaders are, a church can formally recognize its spiritual leaders. But the church members should not do it the other way around. They should not formally appoint someone to be a leader, and then

expect him to somehow **become** a leader! Unfortunately, sometimes people who are not **God's** chosen leaders are put into leadership positions -- and then there are big problems.

Recognition of God's chosen leaders is important, and the congregation should recognize God's leaders.

Practical Application

Let's be "Triple-B" believers!

Triple-B believers? What's that all about? Verse 8: "*and behold, the rod of Aaron... had sprouted, had put forth buds, had produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds.*"

Aaron's rod budded, blossomed, and bore fruit! **B-B-B!** And Aaron and his rod are spiritual pictures.

Aaron is picture of Christ in His **atonement**. In Numbers 16:48, he took his stand between the living and the dead.

Aaron's rod is a picture of Jesus Christ in His **resurrection**. In Israel, the almond tree is the first to blossom in the spring and bear fruit. Aaron's staff that seemingly came alive from the dead is a spiritual picture of Christ in His resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15 refers to Christ as the "first fruits of resurrection."

In Aaron's rod we also have a spiritual picture of the believer, with **new life in Christ**. We, who were once spiritually dead, are now alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1). And now we are to bear spiritual fruit, the fruit of the Spirit. "*The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Believers are not only to show signs of life with buds and blossoms – God expects us to bear fruit! Does God see the fruit of the Spirit fruit emerging – increasingly - in our lives?

Let's be "Triple-B" believers!