

Numbers Chapter 17 Commentary

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod. 3 And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers. 4 And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you. 5 And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you.

God gives Moses a permanent solution to the question; "**who is supposed to be in charge, the leader and the priest**" and we won't be seeing this particular question come up again in Moses' life.

We notice that God identified the murmurings as "**against Himself**" and "**against Moses and Aaron.**" Now, we know that the people cried out against Moses and Aaron, but we see that God took it as a personal insult against himself, acknowledging that it was a burden to Moses and Aaron. We should always remember what we are taught in NT scripture as seen in:

- **Mt 25:40 "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."**
- **1Ti 5:19 "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses."**

Every offence against one of God's children, or servants, is an offence to God himself. How? Christ told us in: **Joh 14:16 "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;"** From this scripture: we can see truth clearly. When we are born again; the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us "**abide with you forever.**" If the Holy Ghost is present in you, then you have the presence of God in you. Therefore, if you do something against one of God's children; it is a direct affront to God.

6 And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. 7 And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness. 8 And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.

God had told them in verse 5 that the rod of the man he chose would bud. This is, in and of itself, such a miracle, and all the leaders of the complainers are involved in the process. This is how the permanent solution is yielded, by God making the choice known through a miracle.

Why would the rod have buds, blossoms, and yield fruit? It shows the completeness of the finished work of Christ Jesus, our High Priest; and it gives the prophetic picture of the One who would be High Priest forever, Jesus Christ the risen and exalted Saviour of God's people. The beginning, the middle, and the end, of every good work, revealed by the three different stages of the life set forth.

There was the promise of the Messiah to come to earth, this is emblematic of the bud, which is the hope of the fruitfulness to come. Christ came and fulfilled that promise in incarnation, a picture of the bloomed blossoms. Remember Jesus told his disciples: **Joh 4:35 "Say not ye, There are yet four**

months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." With the suffering, death on the cross, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the ushering in the age of salvation by grace thereby; we see the picture of the yielded almonds, the fruit of the work of Christ in redeeming all of God's people.

This gives us the picture of the finished work of Christ being set forth, especially in this age of salvation by grace, how? Notice, God took a dry, dead, stick and caused it to go through all the stages of producing fruit. This is exactly what happens in the rebirth process of a sinner. That which is long dead (the spiritual man) is suddenly made alive. We notice also; this process happened in the night time, which is a picture of the dead and alienated state of a person before they are born again.

Being made alive, the born again sinner goes through the process of producing fruit. This picture gives us understanding of scripture teaching about producing fruit. Consider the words of Jesus and see; God does his own choosing, and He is the cause of productive work: **Joh 15:16 "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."** Check out these other references about producing fruit, or not producing fruit, and see the result in each circumstance. **Mt 7:18; Mr 4:20; Lu 6:43; 8:14-15; Joh 15:2,16; Ro 7:4-5.** Once again; we see that it is the finished work of Christ brings forth fruit.

Living fruitful lives, as God's people on earth, is an evidence of assurance to us, that we are indeed God's chosen people, and we have been saved by God's marvelous grace. What are fruitful lives you ask? Consider what the bible says and you will know:

- **Ga 5:22-26; 22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."** Notice in verse 26; the same principle, at work here in Numbers, is being taught here in Galatians. Satan is still tempting God's people to murmur against one another and God.
- **Eph 5:8-10; 8 "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: 9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth; 10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord."**

From these two texts; it is not hard to understand that fruitful lives are expedient in the life of a child of God. The opposite of being fruitful is also true and has its consequences. If we are not producing fruit in our lives, as ambassadors for Christ, we are giving evidence, against ourselves, that we are not one of God's chosen. Consider what Jesus says in: **Joh 15:2 "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."**

Thinking about producing fruit; we see that God's miracle here produced good fruit. The effect of this miracle was such, in its very miraculous nature, that this spirit of jealousy was put to rest, and no more will Israel complain; of who is supposed to be leading Israel, and who is to serve as high priest, in Moses's and Aaron's life. Now, make the comparison to your own life as a born again Christian. The very miracle, in your life, of being born again should remove all doubt of who should have headship and lead your life. It should be as the scripture teaches us in:

- **Eph 1:22 "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,"**
- **Eph 5:23 "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body."**
- **Col 1:18 "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."**

Being born again we should know that we have a High Priest in heaven as demonstrated in scripture in:

- **Heb 3:1 "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;"**
- **Heb 4:15 "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."**
- **Heb 5:10 "Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec."**
- **Heb 8:1 "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;"**

Seeing, we know who our leader and High Priest is; we should have no spirit of jealousy among the body of believers. Think about the eternal life we have been given. We are going to a place where there is no sin. We are going to be incorruptible and immortal and be in the presence of our Saviour and High Priest forever. Oh, How Wonderful!

Oh How Wonderful! 512 The Sacred Harp:

- 1 My God is real, oh, yes, he's real, My friend, oh, can't you see? He made the heavens and the earth, the little birds and the trees. Oh, how wonderful, Oh, how wonderful, What a wonderful day that will be.
- 2 He bled and died upon the cross, For sinners like you and me, He raised old Laz'rus from the grave, He set Paul and Silas free. Oh, how wonderful, Oh, how wonderful, What a wonderful day that will be.
- 3 He said one day he would return, My friends don't you believe? He's coming back just like he said, A wonderful day will be. Oh, how wonderful, Oh, how wonderful, What a wonderful day that will be.

9 And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod. 10 And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not. 11 And Moses did so: as the LORD commanded him, so did he.

Notice; Moses brought out the rods unto all the children of Israel, not just to the leaders whose rods were laid up. The testimony of Christ is presented to all of God's people, not just to the ministers. As they took every man his rod, so we are to take the testimony of Christ, the bible, and it will be a reminder to us of who is in charge and why. We are reminded; we have been drafted into the army of God, and that Jesus Christ, the God chosen High Priest, is our Commander in Chief.

Notice, God commanded that Aaron's rod be laid up for a token. A token is defined as; *a signal, as a flag, beacon, monument, omen, prodigy, evidence, mark, miracle, ensign*. Christ is the token of remembrance to us today. A reminder; we were saved from the penalty of eternal death in the past, the present, and the future. Christ is the fruitful rod.

Prophetically, we see the surety of our salvation. "**And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony,**" Every person, who will be in the eternal heaven, will be there, only, by the entrance given to them by Christ, who is the firstfruit of the resurrection from the dead. Christ is the first to be resurrected from the dead and ascend into the eternal heaven as seen in: **1Co 15:20** "**But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.**" Did you notice that firstfruits is in plural form? This indicates to us, all of God's redeemed rose with Christ, and this is our hope of the resurrection from the dead, seen in: **1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:**" Herein is "**the firstfruits**" manifested.

"to be kept for a token against the rebels" As we consider this we see; Israel is filled with insurrectionists, who are causing much confusion in the nation. This miraculous token, "**the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.**" is laid as a sign, to the rebels, that God has spared their lives, and removed them from under the penalty of death. A permanent sign of warning for any, who in the future, had such notions as to rise up in an attempt to usurp the leadership authority, or the office of the High Priest. All Israel would know of this token, and that it was there in the Ark of the Covenant. It would also have been a "**token**" to any who may think of usurping, a reminder that the death penalty was staid only by God's grace.

This token is a picture of Christ for us today. Christ came into the world into the darkness of sin and budded, blossomed, and brought forth fruit. Now Christ is gone back "**Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony,**" to his rightful place on the eternal throne of God. There, he is the testimony of ultimate power and authority, and we should always remember who and where he is, that we don't presumptuously rise up to usurp his God given authority. He is there, a reminder that he has spared us from the penalty of eternal death. Praises to our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, Amen!

12 And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. 13 Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?

"Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die:" A reminder to Israel that they are not to get out of their place and try to do something they were not called to do. A reminder to us today, we can't save ourselves eternally, because eternal salvation is the finished work of Christ. Man's vain attempts to produce eternal salvation will always result in death.

How easily we forget. Israel is consumed with dying, but the cause, of this dying, is their own sins and rebellions against God. How often we seek to find someone, or something, to blame for our own troubles. Yes, we will always have troubles, because Christ tells us it is so: **Joh 16:33 "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."**

What we must always consider about our trials and tribulations is; are we having trials for our own good as seen in "**Ro 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."**" or, are we having troubles; which have been brought upon us as judicial judgment for disobedience to God.

Lord Jesus Christ; please help us to be faithful in your service. Praise the Lord for salvation by grace! Hallelujah! Praise ye the Lord!