

GOD'S DEFENSE OF HIS SERVANT: ISRAEL'S LEADER

BIBLE TEXT : Numbers 17:1-13

LESSON 106 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "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" (John 15:16).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Numbers 17:1-13 (KJV)

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.

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.

⁹ And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD unto

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Representative Rods

1 The princes, or heads, of the houses of Israel brought every man his rod, twelve rods, Numbers 17:1, 2,

Numbers 1:5-16 (KJV)

⁵ And these *are* the names of the men that shall stand with you: of *the tribe of* Reuben; Elizur the son of Shedeur.

⁶ Of Simeon; Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.

⁷ Of Judah; Nahshon the son of Amminadab.

⁸ Of Issachar; Nethaneel the son of Zuar.

⁹ Of Zebulun; Eliab the son of Helon.

¹⁰ Of the children of Joseph: of Ephraim; Elishama the son of Ammihud: of Manasseh; Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.

¹¹ Of Benjamin; Abidan the son of Gideoni.

¹² Of Dan; Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.

¹³ Of Asher; Pagiel the son of Ocran.

¹⁴ Of Gad; Eliasaph the son of Deuel.

¹⁵ Of Naphtali; Ahira the son of Enan.

¹⁶ These *were* the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel.

2 The name of each man was inscribed upon his rod, according to the house of his fathers, Numbers 17:2

3 Aaron's name was written upon the rod for the house of Levi, Numbers 17:3

4 All the rods were laid in the Tabernacle before the testimony, Numbers 17:4, 7

II The Blossoming Rod, Aaron's Vindication

1 This test was made that the murmurings of the Children of Israel might cease, Numbers 17:5;

Numbers 16:41-50 (KJV)

⁴¹ But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD.

⁴² And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.

⁴³ And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation.

⁴⁴ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

⁴⁵ Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces.

⁴⁶ And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun.

⁴⁷ And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people.

⁴⁸ And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

⁴⁹ Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah.

⁵⁰ And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed.

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.

¹² And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish.

¹³ Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?

2 The rods were brought forth on the morrow, and Aaron's rod had budded, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds, Numbers 17:8

3 The rods were exhibited to all the Children of Israel, and each man took his own rod, Numbers 17:9

III Aaron's Rod a Treasured Testimony

1 God commanded Moses to bring Aaron's rod again before the Ark of the testimony to be kept for a token against the rebels, Numbers 17:10;

Hebrews 9:4 (KJV)

⁴ Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein *was* the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;

2 "And Moses did so: as the LORD commanded him, so did he," Numbers 17:11

3 The Children of Israel at last realized their position, and never murmured on this point again, Numbers 17:12, 13

NOTES:

The Questioning Throng

It has been said, "A miracle is never wanting where a miracle is needed." If a man or group of men are honest in their question, God will never fail to supply the answer. Jesus said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). God does not want us to be in doubt; and at an opportune time He will reveal Himself to us as He did to Thomas.

The Israelites at this time were halting between two opinions. The rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram had been subdued by the strong hand of God's judgment. God had unmistakably shown His choice through the acceptance of Aaron in the matter of burning incense at the door of the Tabernacle (**Numbers 16:16-18** ¹⁶ And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, to morrow: ¹⁷ And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each *of you* his censer. ⁸ And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron. **Numbers 16:35** ³⁵ And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense). The seeds of discord had been sown deep by the rebels, however, and the people still seemed to question as to who was God's true representative. Had the people considered all the facts **of Aaron's representation in the priest's office**, they would not have questioned his call to that office. When the plague broke out among the Children of Israel as a result of their rebellion and murmurings on this subject, Aaron ran into the congregation with a censer in his hand to make atonement for the people. The Lord respected Aaron's intercession, and the plague was stayed. If Israel had no further proof, this incident should have been sufficient evidence that Aaron was God's choice for the priesthood.

Aaron's Type Needed

Without God's assistance no man could have done what Aaron did. This was the true vindication of Aaron's priesthood — the efficacy of his offering of incense to stay the plague, by which he was seen to be accepted by God as an intercessor for the people. Job sought for such an intercessor, without avail. In Ezekiel's time the Lord "sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:30). Men of Aaron's type are not so plentiful as some would have us suppose, but surely there is a greater demand for them than ever before.

The men of Israel thought, under Korah's persuasion, that "all the congregation are holy, every one of them." They soon found, through God's swift punishment of the guilty, how wrong they were. The Lord has always needed men who will stand between the living and the dead as Aaron did, making intercession for those still alive. We, as Christians today, are called to make supplications, prayers, and intercessions for all men (**1 Timothy 2:1** ¹ I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men). We are made "kings and priests unto God"; therefore our responsibility to Him is great. The duty of telling the good news of salvation does not rest with our ministers alone; it rests with every "born-again" child of God. After we sow the Seed it is our duty to water it with our prayers that it might spring up into eternal life in the hearts of the hearers.

A Miracle Performed

The large body of people was manifestly implicated in the rebellion of Korah. The 250 princes of renown who joined with him were men held in high estimation. They were champions of the unruly mob; and they were put forward to oppose the supremacy which Moses and Aaron had exercised. When they were consumed by fire from the Lord, the mob was awed and terrified for a moment; but terror soon gave way to rage, and they charged Moses and Aaron with the murder of their leaders. The plague again struck terror into their hearts; and now, that they might have visible and lasting proof that Moses and Aaron were not usurpers but were the chosen of the Lord, this miracle of the rod was wrought.

At the word of the Lord, Moses instructed the Children of Israel to bring a rod for each of the houses of their fathers, twelve rods according to their tribes. The princes or heads of the tribes were to bring the rods with each man's name inscribed on his rod. The twelve rods, with Aaron's rod among them, were laid up before the Lord in the Tabernacle of witness. The Lord's promise was, "It shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom **I** shall choose, shall blossom." When Moses went into the Tabernacle of witness the next day, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had budded, brought forth blossoms, and yielded almonds.

Never was the evidence of a miracle more complete. Everything about it was so far beyond the power of nature that no doubt could remain in the minds of the people or of the envious chiefs, of the divine appointment of Aaron and of the especial intervention of God in this case. To see a piece of wood, long cut off from the parent stock, without bark or moisture, laid up in a dry place for a single night with others in the same circumstances — to see such a piece **of wood resume** the perfection of life, budding, blossoming, and bringing forth fruit at the same time, must be such a demonstration of the peculiar interference of God as to silence every doubt and satisfy every scruple. All the Children of Israel examined the rods, and the princes took every man his rod. Thus God ordained Aaron priest three times: once by oil and blood, once by fire, and lastly by the token of the budded rod. The people acquiesced in the evidence, and never murmured about this authority again.

Aaron's Rod a Memorial

Forever to assure the future generations of Israelites of God's choice, and to make it a token against the rebels, the Lord instructed Moses to return the budded rod to its place before the testimony. "And Moses did so: as the LORD commanded him, so did he." Now the people had a visible sign of God's selection to the priest's office. The Children of Israel realized their position before

God and said unto Moses, "Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die." Evidently they saw themselves as God saw them. Their sins appeared very great and they felt there was no way back. If the people came presumptuously to the Tabernacle, or ever again came in the spirit of usurping Aaron's powers, they would die. However, if they came according to God's directions, they not only had a perfect right to come but could expect God's blessing in doing so.

The Rod Today

The evidences of the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be likened unto Aaron's rod. Jesus is our High Priest, and He brought the Gospel of the Kingdom to earth as the rod of His power. It was a flourishing sceptre while He lived and walked on earth; but when He expired on the cross and went down into the grave, His adversaries felt that the Gospel went with Him. The lively hope seemed to have perished in the hearts of Jesus' followers. Christ's enemies felt much the same as the murmurers of Israel — that He was not the Lord's anointed.

What a glorious triumph when Jesus arose! The Gospel, the power of His might, came forth to live anew, to bud, to blossom, and to yield fruit. Once again the glad tidings of salvation rang in the hearts of men. The lively hope was rekindled in the bosom of His disciples. They went everywhere preaching the Gospel, and the increase has been inestimable. We are in the gleaning time of that increase today; but, thank God! we can still work for Him in the vineyard. "Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2).

As Aaron's rod that budded brought an end to Israel's murmurings concerning this subject, so the Gospel has "with well doing ... put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (**I** Peter 2:15).

Aaron's rod was kept as a token of God's faithfulness to men. In the earth today there is no greater token of God's love for humanity than the Gospel of the Son of Man. This Gospel teaches us in its most simple words, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why did the Lord instruct Moses to take a rod from the princes of the Children of Israel?
- 2 How were the rods identified one from another?
- 3 Whose name was on the rod for the house of Levi?
- 4 Where did God tell Moses to put the rods?
- 5 Why do you suppose He wanted them there?
- 6 What happened when Moses inspected the rods the next morning?
- 7 Could anything like this have happened just by nature?
- 8 What did the Children of Israel do when they saw the rods?
- 9 What did Moses do with Aaron's rod? Why?
- 10 Did the Children of Israel know by this time their standing in the sight of God?