

NUMBERS 17:1-13 (LIFE FROM DEATH)

There are certain things in Scripture which are taken as an axiom. One of them is creation. In Hebrews 11, the author actually speaks about creation, and he takes the whole sh'bang of the Genesis account at face value. Things seen were not created from things visible. One could argue that to a point, but the word "visible" truly encompasses all matter, even if we can't see it with our naked eyes. If it is matter, it is – at some point – visible.

He speaks about Cain and Abel as if the story about them is really true. And the fact that there is a Cain and an Abel, by default, means they came from someone else, meaning an Adam and an Eve. He speaks about Enoch being translated and not seeing death, and he says it as if there is no question of the reliability of that.

The story of Noah and the flood... yep, like Jesus, he accepted the narrative as written. I could go on, but you get the point. Jesus repeatedly spoke about the absolute truth of Scripture, even arguing with Israel's leader about single words which had the most significant of importance to theology.

And those who authored the New Testament write about the Old with the same absolute assurance that the stories there are true and reliable, even down to some of the most incredible stories of all...

Text Verse: Then indeed, even the first *covenant* had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. ²For a tabernacle was prepared: the first *part*, in which *was* the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; ³and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, ⁴which had the golden censer and 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; ⁵and above it were the cherubim of glory

overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. Hebrews 9:1-5

In just those five verses, the author indicates that the sanctuary written about by Moses was real. If one part of that detail is true, then the rest surely must be as well, and he later speaks quite a bit more about it. He also says that those things on earth were copies and shadows of the things in heaven, meaning there really is a heaven, and what that is like is represented by those earthly things.

And then he goes on to say that those earthly things actually prefigure Christ. Thus the heavenly man is the anticipation of the earthly pictures. The author then speaks about the golden pot with the manna in it, confirming the account of manna in the wilderness. Yes, it really happened. Even Jesus spoke of that in John 6.

And more, he also writes in these verses about Aaron's rod that budded. Well, isn't that the cat's meow. A lifeless rod of wood actually comes to life. And it doesn't happen by being grafted into a living branch. And more, it doesn't just come to life, but it literally flourishes overnight. Is this story to be believed? Well, the author of Hebrews seemed to believe it.

As you read Scripture, it is time to ask yourself, "What do you believe?" Is God making up stories which are allegorical, or does He expect us to accept His word as true? The author of Hebrews, probably the apostle Paul, certainly believed these stories were not only true, but that they are the very words of God and thus wholly reliable.

Whether you can stomach it or not, I believe in a literal creation that literally came about in six days. I believe Enoch got translated to heaven without dying (as did Elijah the prophet), I believe that the Flood of Noah swept away all life on the earth except eight people, I believe that Aaron's rod budded, and I believe – without any doubt at all – that Jesus Christ died for

my sins, was buried, and was raised to life by the power of God. And, I believe He did it even for me. Such wonderful and truthful stories are to be found in His superior word. And so let's turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Rods Before the Lord (verses 1-7)

¹ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

The chapter starts with the standard address, most often used to begin a new thought. The context should be remembered, however. The previous chapter involved the incident with Korah in his rebellion and attempt to usurp the priesthood. That was dealt with magnificently by the Lord as He swallowed up the tents of some of the offenders, and as He sent out His fire to burn up others.

After that, the people of the congregation came forward and accused Moses and Aaron of having "killed the people of the Lord." That began a plague which then needed Aaron's intercession in order to stop it. And it was stopped completely. Where death prevailed, the mediator's intercession arrested it. What a picture of Christ's perfect intercession for His people.

With those details recalled, the Lord has words to convey which will demonstrate that what occurred was from Him, and that Aaron is, in fact, chosen to mediate between the Lord and the people...

² "Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father's house,

What appears simple to follow brings in numerous questions. First, a *matteh*, or rod, is used as the symbol of a household. This was seen, for example, in Genesis 38 where the authority of Judah's house was assumed by Tamar. This was taken in pledge and included his signet, cord, and staff (rod).

Thus, when the term *matteh* is used, it speaks of a literal rod, but it is also a metonym. It speaks of the tribe itself just as "Hollywood" means a place, but it also stands for the movie industry. But the rod also is used figuratively as a support of life, such as bread.

Here, the children of Israel are to provide a rod from "each father's house." The "house" then would be the main tribe, such as Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and so on. One would assume that this is the staff of an individual who is to represent his clan, but it is argued by some that it isn't an old staff, but rather all are freshly cut staffs from the same tree and then designated to represent the house. The Hebrew is not specific, but I have always assumed it to be an old rod, already designated. However, being dogmatic is simply to bark into the wind. Another complication lies in the next words...

² (con't) **all their leaders according to their fathers' houses—twelve rods.**

The "leaders according to their father's houses" are probably the individuals named in Chapter 1. The term is *nasiy*, or prince, and it was also used of the twelve spies who went to search out Canaan, and so the term can mean any type of leader, but these are probably those most distinguished during the census. But, it then says, "twelve rods."

This brings in the question as to whether this is inclusive of Aaron's rod, as noted in verse 3, and that Ephraim and Manasseh are joined together in one rod. Or, are there twelve rods presented along with Aaron's thirteenth? At times, the two tribes under Joseph are listed as one people, such as in

Deuteronomy 27:12. Again, being dogmatic would be a “ruff” position to cling to.

I would personally go with twelve plus one. This would eliminate any doubt that could later arise that one sub-tribe was purposely left out when it should not have been. Jacob specifically adopted these two, and his name was upon them. Deuteronomy 27 is a completely different situation which does not call for the same precision and care as this.

² (con’t) **Write each man’s name on his rod.**

The word is *kathav*, and it indicates to write, but that writing can be with a pen on the surface, or with a knife as an engraving. The Lord is said to have written out the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone with His finger. Whatever way the inscription is made, it would be in a way which could not later be erased or leave any doubt about the authenticity of the particular rod. The name of the man, in this case, is representative of the tribe...

³ **And you shall write Aaron’s name on the rod of Levi.**

al matteh levi – “on rod Levi.” As you can see, there is the difficulty of whether this is one of twelve, or if it is in addition to the twelve. No matter what, Aaron is designated by the Lord as the head of the tribe of Levi. He is Moses’ older brother, and the family of Kohath has been designated as the main tribe, apart from birth order, in order to represent Levi. It then will set aside any future dispute in regards to all of Levi’s positions within the tribe.

In writing Aaron’s name, it is specifying that within Levi there is a separating of the classes of those who descend from him – priestly Levites and non-priestly Levites. The specificity here is similar to that of Ezekiel 37 –

“As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: ‘For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.’ Then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and *for* all the house of Israel, his companions.’ ¹⁷ Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand.” Ezekiel 37:16, 17

Here in Numbers, there are not to be three staffs of the subgroups of Levi, nor merely one staff for all of Levi without distinction, but rather one staff for Levi, and Aaron represents the entire tribe. It is an act of grace, then, to have been bestowed this distinction. As Aaron was from Kohath, the second son of Levi, the choice of his placement was of the Lord, and not of natural descent.

As the claim had been made that the entire congregation was holy, the Lord determined to show who was, in fact, holy for the priesthood. The burning of the two hundred and fifty offenders still left a doubt in the people’s minds, and so the Lord is preparing to settle this matter once and forever.

³ (con’t) **For there shall be one rod for the head of *each* father’s house.**

This statement is given to confirm that Aaron’s staff stood representative of the entire house of Levi, along with the single staff of the rods of the other heads of the father’s house, meaning the main tribes.

⁴ **Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you.**

Although a simple verse to understand, the words here actually give us insights into another question that has arisen elsewhere. That is whether Moses actually went into the Most Holy Place, or not. Here he is told to place them into the tent of meeting, but more specifically, he is told to put

them “before the Testimony.” That is the Ark of the Covenant into which the Tablets of the Testimony were placed. That means, in the Most Holy Place.

And so we can see that the restriction of entering this place, only once a year and only with blood, did not apply to Moses. He was given access to the Lord anytime. This is then confirmed with the words, “where I meet with you.”

Moses went in to seek the Lord’s counsel at his own will, and also at the call of the Lord. As the Lord says this is where He met with Moses, we don’t need to speculate if it is outside of the veil or not. Moses was granted a special dispensation to come before the Lord, unlike any other, including Israel’s high priest.

⁵ And it shall be *that* the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom;

Here the word is *parakh*. It speaks of the blossoming of a flower, the breaking forth or spreading of leprosy, and so on. It gives the sense of flourishing, and is often translated in that manner, such as when a righteous man flourishes. What is promised is a miracle of no small significance.

Whether the rod was cut and used for many years, or whether it was freshly cut to stand with a dozen other freshly cut rods, the impossibility of what will occur, other than by divine intervention, is certain. It is to be a miracle in its truest sense, and like all other miracles, it is to serve a purpose beyond the event itself...

^{5 (con’t)} thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel,

Here is a word not seen since the time of the Flood of Noah, *shakak*. It means to abate, just as the waters of the flood abated when God made the

wind to pass over the earth. It comes from a root meaning to weave a trap, laying it up secretly. Thus, through that, the Lord is saying He will cause the complaints of the people to abate in such a way that they will never rise again, just as the waters of the flood were promised to never rise in that manner again. The complaints of the people will be secreted away...

^{5 (con't)} **which they make against you."**

The word "you" is plural. The Lord has said that He would get the complaints of the children of Israel from off of Him, but they are complaints which were directed to both Moses and Aaron. That was seen in the last section of the previous chapter –

"On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the Lord."
Numbers 16:41

This then reveals the purpose of what is directed. The authority of Moses and the word he transmits to the people, and which included Aaron's priestly authority, was to be forever solidified through this act. And these two things were certain even almost fifteen hundred years later. The authority of both of them was regarded as absolute at the time of Christ. For Moses, it is seen in words such as –

"When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. ² And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'

³ Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

⁴ And Jesus said to him, 'See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'" Matthew 8:1-4

And for Aaron, it is seen in the following words –

““Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” ² And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?”

⁴ And those who stood by said, “Do you revile God’s high priest?”

⁵ Then Paul said, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”” Acts 23:1-5

Despite seemingly contradictory, though the Law of Moses was often forgotten or disobeyed, the authority of the law and of its designated appointees was not forgotten. This is actually not uncommon though. We have laws which are forgotten or simply broken in our nation, but the authority of the law itself, and the authority of those who sit in positions of authority within the law, are still recognized as such. Here, the Lord is settling the matter of this authority henceforward, just as the civil war of the US settled it for those who thought to break themselves apart from it.

⁶ So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece,

Again, the account isn’t specific if these were tribal rods which had been maintained by the people, or if they were freshly cut rods then designated for each tribe by affixing the name of the leader. Either way though, each would be distinct enough to recognize by one and by all. There would be no way that Moses could manufacture a false miracle in this matter. Each rod was...

6 (con't) for each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods;

The words follow closely with those of verse two. They show an obedience to what was directed, but again, it is not known if there are eleven now, plus one, or if there are twelve rods which will then be added to by Aaron to make thirteen. The Latin Vulgate specifically said twelve plus one, but that is not made perfectly evident in the Hebrew, and it is not confirmed or denied in the next words either...

6 (con't) and the rod of Aaron was among their rods.

If this had simply said, "And the rod of Aaron," it would indicate thirteen, but it says, "And the rod of Aaron *was* among their rods." The word is *betok*, and it signifies, "in the midst of." Twelve or thirteen. And so, if we get dogmatic, we might get bit later.

7 And Moses placed the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness.

The words follow closely after verse 4, and they show that what was directed was also followed through with. The NKJV, following after the KJV, incorrectly translates this and the next verse by calling it the tabernacle of witness. Rather, it is the tent of the Testimony. It is the same word, *eduth*, used in verses 4 and 10 which are translated as "Testimony." In a lack of consistent translation, it is extremely hard to follow the narrative properly.

The reason for calling it the tent of the Testimony, instead of the more common tent of meeting, is because it is the Testimony which establishes both the Law of Moses and the Aaronic priesthood, which are on trial here. Moses is not conducting meetings with Lord at this time. Rather, the Lord is making a defense for the law which Israel agreed to, and for the authority of those as revealed in that law. The specificity of wording clues us in to what is on the mind of the Lord, and how He is dealing with affairs which arise.

*Life from death, how can it be?
Nothing such as this has been seen before
And yet our eyes haven't failed; we really did see
It is as if heaven has opened a brand new Door
What does it mean, that life has come from death?
And that One who was dead is now seen alive again?
Into His crucified body, has returned life's breath
What does this mean for the sons of men?
O God, we know that what we have seen is certainly true
And in Christ, death's door has been swung open wide
In the giving of Jesus Your Son, great things You did do
And because of Him, we shall with You eternally abide!*

II. A Sign Against the Rebels (verses 8-13)

⁸ Now it came to pass on the next day

These were *matteh*, or rods, used as tribal insignia. Regardless as to their age, they would be single rods, stripped bare and without root or branch on them. And yet, the words here say, *v'hi mimakhorat*, "and it came to pass on the next day." It only means this, and it cannot mean anything except the day following that mentioned in the preceding verse. And so what will now be described is truly miraculous...

^{8 (con't)} that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness,

As with the preceding verse, the Hebrew says, "tent of the Testimony." It is the Testimony which is being highlighted in this passage, being mentioned four times in just 13 verses. After this, the term will be used once in the next

Chapter in regards to the duties of the Levites in relation to Aaron, and then not again until the book of Joshua.

8 (con't) and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted

Out of death has come life. As noted earlier, the *matteh*, or rod is at times used figuratively as indicating a support of life such as bread. Here the rod of Aaron is emblematic of Christ from whom life comes because of His death. Aaron's priesthood is confirmed through the life which came from that which was dead.

Likewise, Christ's priesthood came about when He proved His right to the position of High Priest through the fulfillment of the Law and the introduction of the New Covenant in His shed blood. From His death, life springs forth. It is His priestly duties, and His alone, that provides life to man.

The implication of the words that Levi's rod had sprouted is that this is a unique occurrence not seen in the other rods. Only through the rod of Aaron, which looks forward to Christ, can life come. All other rods remained as dead as when they were severed from the tree. As far as the sprouting, it is the same word, *parakh*, that the Lord said would occur in verse 5. The rod had gone from a clean staff of wood, to that which had broken forth and flourished. But there is more...

8 (con't) and put forth buds,

v'yotse perakh, "and brought out buds." This definitively shows that there is a Force behind the event. One might dismiss a rod sprouting, as if there was enough life in it to put out a sprout, but nothing further could be expected. This rod had sprouted and put forth buds...

8 (con't) **had produced blossoms**

v'yatsets tsiyts – “**and** had blossomed blossoms.” One can feel the excitement in the words, as if the marvel is more than words can adequately express, but which must be mentally visualized by the reader. But there is yet more...

8 (con't) **and yielded ripe almonds.**

v'yigmol sheqedim – the word *gamal* comes from a root signifying to treat another person well or ill. It is used to describe the weaning of a child, or a just reward, such as when the psalmist says, “The Lord **has rewarded** me according to my righteousness.” It is an end result based on events which led to it.

Thus, when an almond tree has fruit, it is a reward of the time of production necessary for the fruit to come forth. If an almond tree could speak, it might say, “The fruit are the reward of my time and labors.” There is the sense, then, of the Lord dealing bountifully with the rod of Aaron in putting forth *shaqed*, or almonds.

That word comes from *shaqad*, meaning to watch over, or be on the lookout. The reason the almond is so named is because of its unusually long cycle from bud to fruit which encompasses the entire harvest season in Israel.

The bud develops from November to February. The blossom period goes from February to March – the earliest of all the trees. From March to June the almond transforms from blossom to hull. The harvest season then goes from August to October. At that time, the cycle begins again. Thus, the almond *watches over* the entire year, from beginning to end.

And yet, the miracle of the rod of Aaron is that the entire cycle was accomplished in a single night. It signifies that the Lord was watching over the rod of Aaron, and thus over the Aaronic priesthood. And in turn, it is a witness to Aaron that his priesthood was to be in constant watch over their duties, day unto day, and throughout the year.

In Ecclesiastes, the blossoming of the almond tree is said to reflect the aged condition of man. The almond blossoms are white just as an aged person's hair is white. Following on with that, white hair is reflective of honor in Leviticus 19. And in the book of Jeremiah, we read Scripture's last use of the almond -

“The word of the LORD came to me: ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’

‘I see the branch of an almond tree,’ I replied.

¹² The LORD said to me, ‘You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.’” Jeremiah 1:11, 12 (NIV)

The miracle here is similar to that of the making of wine from water by Jesus. An entire process was brought from conception to full maturity in an instant, as if creation itself had taken place. To deny the Genesis creation account is no less egregious of an error than it is to deny the giving forth of fruit by the rod of Aaron, or bringing forth wine from the water jars of Cana by the same Lord. But the symbolism, for now, is revealed in Christ. Not only did He come forth from death, but He is the One who initiates, and who sees through until its completion, the entire span of the covenant which He has introduced. The Lord began the covenant of Moses, which included the priesthood of Aaron, and He saw it through to its bearing of fruit on the cross of Calvary, thus ending that covenant.

He further then introduced the New Covenant, and He will see it through until its end. However, as His covenant is said to be eternal, then there is no end to be anticipated. His priesthood is eternal, and His people have the

promise of an eternal walk before God with Him watching over them during the entire, endless expanse of time.

This is actually spoken of by David in the 110th Psalm where he first uses the term, *matteh*, or rod, of Lord's strength out of Zion. He then says that this will lead to the priesthood of Christ being on the order of Melchizedek which is then explained by the author of Hebrews as being an eternal priesthood. Here are David's words –

““The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at My right hand,

Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

² The Lord shall send the **rod** of Your strength out of Zion. (**matteh**)
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

³ Your people *shall be* volunteers

In the day of Your power;

In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning,

You have the dew of Your youth.

⁴ The Lord has sworn

And will not relent,

“You *are* a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.”” Psalm 110:1-4

David, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, spoke forth words which looked back to Melchizedek, which are sprinkled with hints of Christ's priesthood from here in Numbers, and which then look forward to that eternal position described in Hebrews and which will be realized forever and ever.

Adam Clarke poetically looks to the budding, blossoming, and fruit-bearing of the rod as representing a believer's life in Christ now –

“The buds of good desires, the blossoms of holy resolutions and promising professions, and the ripe fruit of faith, love, and obedience, all spring from the priesthood of the Lord Jesus.” Adam Clarke

And this is true. Because of Christ’s ministry, our lives in Christ are made possible.

⁹ Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel;

The same word, *v’yotse*, or “and brought out” from the previous verse is used again. The Lord, through the rod, brought out buds which produced blossoms and almonds. Moses has now brought out the rods from before the Lord, after His miraculous work, and revealed what He did to all the people. The Lord accomplishes the miracle, and Moses reveals the miracle to the people.

It is reflective of Christ the Man who, through the power of the Lord, revealed the work of the Lord to the people of Israel. He filled both roles, being the God/Man; the Lord incarnate.

^{9 (con’t)} and they looked, and each man took his rod.

“And they” is referring to “all the children of Israel.” Whoever was present, be it only the leaders as representatives, or anyone who desired to see, the proof of the miracle was made manifest to Israel.

Nobody could doubt that an amazingly marvelous miracle had been revealed, and nobody could doubt its significance. The Lord was watching from moment to moment over the position of Moses and Aaron, and in regards to the authority they possessed.

¹⁰ And the Lord said to Moses, “Bring Aaron’s rod back before the Testimony,

The rod of Aaron is not mentioned again in the Old Testament. What happened to it is unknown except as is mentioned in extra-biblical writings. However, it is mentioned in Hebrews 9:4 where the author states that the rod, along with the gold pot with manna, and the tablets of the covenant, were all kept in the Ark.

In this, we have several pictures of Christ in one. He is the Giver of the Law, seen in the Tablets of the Testimony. He is the Embodiment of the law, seen in the Ark. He is the Manna, which was said to be rested in the Ark. When we come to Christ we are thus rested in Christ and our status before God changes –

“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:3

And in the rod of Aaron, Christ is the One who watches over and accomplishes the entire process of priestly duties for His people, from the beginning to its completion.

We can only speculate on what happened to the rod. As Hebrews tells us it was placed within the Ark, and as 1 Kings 8:9 says that there was nothing in the Ark except the two tablets at the time of Solomon, then this rod and the jar of manna may have been removed and lost when the Ark was captured by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 5. But that is only speculation. To be dogmatic would be to pointlessly wag one’s tail. What matters in Scripture is the account at hand. For the time being, it was to be brought back before the Testimony, specifically...

¹⁰ (con’t) **to be kept as a sign against the rebels,**

la'mishmereth l'oth livne meri – “for a charge, for a sign to the sons of rebellion.” A charge is something to be maintained as a guard watching over his patrol. An *oth*, or a sign, is something that stands as representative of something else. Thus, the rod of Aaron was to be kept as a guard and to be brought forth as a sign against the sons of *meri*, or rebellion, if needed.

That is a new word, coming from *marah*, meaning contentious or rebellious. Should they come forth in this manner again, the rod could be brought forth as a sign of the Lord's approval of Moses and Aaron and against the rebellious faction. No record of that being needed is ever recorded. Further, this is hinted at next...

¹⁰ (con't) **that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.”**

The word *tlunah*, or grumbling, was introduced at the time of the giving of the manna in Exodus 16 when the people grumbled about their hunger. It was seen six times in that chapter, once in Numbers 14 when the people complained about not entering Canaan after the bad report of the spies, and it was used twice in today's passage. This is its last use in Scripture.

In verse 5, the Lord said He would rid Himself of the complaints of the people which they made against Aaron and Moses. So it is. With the departure of this word, so the Lord rid Himself of what the word signifies. The Lord said this was to keep the people from dying, and at least in this manner, it came about. There are plenty of other ways to needle the Lord, and Israel, in its continued history would seek out new ways to do so. But the complaints against His established lawgiver and high priest are ended.

¹¹ **Thus did Moses; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did.**

Just as Moses is later recorded as a faithful servant in all of God's house, so he accomplished this task as directed by the Lord. The rod would remain before the Lord and before the Testimony of the Lord as a charge and a sign.

¹² So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Surely we die, we perish, we all perish!"

khen gavaenu abadnu kulanu abadnu - "Behold! We have expired, we have perished, all of us, we have perished." The words are quickly stated without any connecting words, and reveal utter desperation at the situation. The word translated as "perish," is *gava*. It gives the sense of breathing out one's last.

Though self-inflicted, there has been one catastrophe after another. The people continue to fail to understand that the law is written and it is binding upon them. They keep going around looking for an exit to it, as if it is something that is more of a hindrance to be cast off than a permanent and burdensome yoke which is forever tied to them. But this is exactly what the apostles called the law in Acts 15. Paul calls it a bondage of slavery in Galatians. The Pulpit Commentary rightly states –

"These are the last wailings of the great storm which had raged against Moses and Aaron, which had roared so loudly and angrily at its height, which was now sobbing itself out in the petulant despair of defeated and disheartened men, cowed indeed, but not convinced, fearful to offend, yet not loving to obey." Pulpit Commentary

They are right in saying that they will all expire and perish. Leviticus has told them that the man who does the things of the law will live by them. They have tried to get away from the law, and they have been destroyed. They will try to live out the law in the many generations to come, and they will all die under the law. But the law also provides avenues to obtain mercy, such as the Day of Atonement. Israel is being schooled on their need for Christ,

and we are being schooled through Israel to stay away from the law and head directly to Christ.

¹³ Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die.

Kol ha'qarev ha'qarev – “all the approaching, the approaching.” The words are in the typical Hebrew way of providing emphasis. They are exclaiming that without fail, coming near means death.

And here the term is *mishkan Yehovah*, or tabernacle of Yehovah. It has only been used once so far, in verse 16:9, when Moses spoke to Korah about his disobedience towards the Lord. Here, the people moan that “whoever” comes near it must die. This is untrue in one sense. It is only if a person approached the Lord’s tabernacle who was not a priest, who was to die.

However, it is true in another sense. Because the tabernacle of the Lord extends to cover all the people of Israel due to their nearness to Him in covenant relationship, if they were defiled through sin, they would, in fact, die. This was true anywhere within the camp of the Lord, and that will be dealt with in Chapter 19. For now, though, their thoughts stem directly from the disobedience of Korah’s rebellion.

For any but those designated to come near the tabernacle of the Lord, it is an absolutely true statement. It is not true, though, for the priests or the Levites in the proper performance of their duties. And it is exactly those duties which will be laid out in the coming verses of Chapter 18, including the restrictions and penalties for those who come near but who are not authorized.

***¹³ (fin) Shall we all utterly die?”**

ha-im tamnu ligvoa. The exact meaning of these words is debated, and so one should not be overly dogmatic and snarl at others about it. But, the word *tamam* means to finish or to complete, and so the intent may be, “Shall we ever finish expiring?” The question is asked in relation to coming near the tabernacle of the Lord. The tabernacle of the Lord is His dwelling. It is the place of access to Him, and is thus representative of heaven.

Only certain people were allowed to come near, and only under certain conditions of purity, and at set times according to law. The people had attempted to go around Aaron and access the Lord without him, and that proved fatal.

But the people’s question now signifies a desire to still come near the tabernacle of the Lord nonetheless. It is the constant condition of man, to want to draw near to God. This is what religion is, an attempt to draw near to Him. And there are lots of religions out there, claiming that their way makes it possible.

However, God – not man – determines what access to Him will be like. It is not by our will, but by Christ. And so, to bring an answer to the question, “Shall we ever finish expiring?”, Christ came. We saw in Exodus, again in Leviticus, and so far it has continued in Numbers, that the *mishkan Yehovah*, or tabernacle of Yehovah, intricately and absolutely pictures Christ in every detail.

And that is why in John 1:14 it says that He came and tabernacled among us. Because the people could not draw near to the tabernacle of Yehovah, the tabernacle of Yehovah came near to them. It is His life which brings about the access that man has, in every culture and in every age desired and attempted to make possible through their own efforts and means. But the impossibility of that is found in one three letter word, sin.

Our sin has separated us from the Creator. But our Creator took care of that in the giving of His Son, who became sin, meaning our sin, so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him. Imagine that! Access is restored, we have a Mediator who makes that possible, and it is granted to any who will just believe. When we opened today, I told you that I believed the words of the Bible. That is because in it is found the cure to our defect. In it is found JESUS.

Closing Verse: “For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, ¹⁹ for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, *there is the* bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.” Hebrews 7:18, 19

Next Week: Numbers 18:1-19 *The Lord willing, we will continue the chapter until it is done. But next week is...* (The Levitical Priesthood, Part I) (34th Numbers Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. It may seem at times as if you are lost in a desert, wandering aimlessly. But the Lord is there, carefully leading you to the Land of Promise. So follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

Life From Death

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying

These are the words He was to him then relaying

“Speak to the children of Israel

And get from them from each father’s house a rod

All their leaders according to their fathers’ houses—twelve rods

Write each man's name on his rod, even if his name is Todd
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 by and by
Then you shall place them
In the tabernacle of meeting, so you shall do
Before the Testimony
Where I meet with you
And it shall be that the rod of the man
Whom I choose will blossom, so it shall do
Thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel
Which they make against you
So Moses spoke to the children of Israel
And each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece as told to do
For each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods
And the rod of Aaron was among their rods too

And Moses placed the rods before the Lord
In the tabernacle of witness, according to His word
Now it came to pass on the next day
That Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, so he did do
And behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi
Had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms
-----and yielded ripe almonds too
Then Moses brought out all the rods
From before the Lord, after he had a look
To all the children of Israel

And they looked, and each man his rod took
And the Lord said to Moses
“Bring Aaron’s rod back before the Testimony, and here is why
To be kept as a sign against the rebels
That you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die
Thus did Moses; just as had commanded him the Lord
So he did according to His word
So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying
“Surely we die, we perish, we all perish!”, was their cry
Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die
Shall we all utterly die?”
Lord God, we are even now in a wilderness
And we are wanting to be led by You
Without You to direct, our lives would be a mess
And so be our guide, O God; You who are faithful and true
We long for the water in this barren land
May it flow forth from the Rock, our souls to satisfy
Give us this refreshing, spiritual hand
And may we take it, and to our lives daily it apply

And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone
We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise
Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown
Hallelujah we shall sing to you for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...