

# NUMBERS

## Chapter 17

### *Aaron's Staff Buds*

**The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel, and get from them staffs, one for each fathers' house, from all their chiefs according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. Write each man's name on his staff, 3 and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. For there shall be one staff for the head of each fathers' house. 4 Then you shall deposit them in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you. 5 And the staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout. Thus I will make to cease from me the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against you.” 6 Moses spoke to the people of Israel. And all their chiefs gave him staffs, one for each chief, according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs. And the staff of Aaron was among their staffs. 7 And Moses deposited the staffs before the LORD in the tent of the testimony. 8 On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. 9 Then Moses brought out all the staffs from before the LORD to all the people of Israel. And they looked, and each man took his staff. 10 And the LORD said to Moses, “Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumbings against me, lest they die.” 11 Thus did Moses; as the LORD commanded him, so he did. 12 And the people of Israel said to Moses, “Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. 13 Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, shall die. Are we all to perish?”**

**17:1–13** This story follows the account of the divine judgment of Korah (16:1–35) and the narrative of the symbolic use given to the censers of the rebels and its aftermath (16:36–50). Ch. 17 is thus the third in a series of accounts vindicating the Aaronic priesthood against all opposition. The selection of 12 staffs, one from each tribe, was a symbolic act whereby the divine choice of Aaron would be indicated again. (CSB)

**17:2** *staffs*. Symbols of authority. Cf Gn 49:10. (TLSB)

**17:3** *On the staff of Levi write Aaron's name*. The test needed to be unequivocal because of the wide support given to Korah's rebellion. The 250 who had joined with Korah were from many, perhaps all, of the tribes. (CSB)

As high priest, Aaron would also be head of the tribe of Levi. Aaron's rod was to be placed “before the testimony” (i.e., the ark of the covenant) and preserved there as a warning for the rebels (v 10; cf Ex 25:21–22). (TLSB)

**17:4** *before the Testimony*. In front of the ark, with the Ten Commandments, thus probably in the Holy Place, near the altar of incense. (CSB)

**17:5** *sprout*. The test would involve a miracle. (TLSB)

**17:8** *had sprouted and put forth buds and it bore ripe almonds*. God exceeded the demands of the test so that there might be no uncertainty as to who had acted or what he intended by his action. (CSB)

To demonstrate the validity of Aaron's ordination, the Lord let Aaron's rod blossom during the night, while other staffs, representing other tribes, showed no signs of life. This miraculous sign was to convince the people to "make an end of their grumblings" against the Lord (v 10). Proper respect is due to God's rightly called and ordained servants. (TLSB)

*sprouted ... buds ... blossoms ... ripe almonds.* The Lord multiplies the miracle beyond the standards of Moses' test (v 5). (TLSB)

**17:10** *before the Testimony.* Aaron's rod joined the stone tablets of the law of Moses (see note on Ex 25:16) and the jar of manna (Ex 16:33–34) within or near the ark of the covenant (see Heb 9:4). These holy symbols were ever before the Lord as memorials of his special deeds in behalf of his people. Moreover, should anyone of a later age dare to question the unique and holy place of the Aaronic priests in the Lord's service, this symbolic memorial of God's choice of Aaron would stand in opposition to his audacity. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the role of Aaron and his sons in the worship of Israel (see note on 18:1–7). (CSB)

**17:12–13** The people immediately regret their rebellious attitude and anticipate judgment to fall as before. Instead, the Lord responds to their regret with teaching from His Word (chs 18–19). (TLSB)

**17:12** *We perish.* At last the people realized the sin of their arrogance in challenging Aaron's role. The appropriate ways of approaching the Lord are detailed in chs. 18–19. (CSB)

**Ch 17** God supports Aaron's priesthood by a miracle that distinguishes Aaron from the leaders of the 12 tribes. He provides a visual reminder of God's seal of approval on the Levitical priesthood. Properly ordained and installed leadership is a blessing from God, not a curse. Respect those in authority over you by praying for them in patience and by trusting without envy. Rejoice that the Lord Himself reigns among you by His life-giving Word. • "Jesus, Thy boundless love to me No thought can reach, no tongue declare; Unite my thankful heart to Thee, And reign without a rival there! Thine wholly, Thine alone I am; Be Thou alone my constant flame." Amen. (LSB 683:1) (TLSB)