

# NUMBERS

## Chapter 17

### *The Budding of Aaron's Staff*

The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> “Speak to the Israelites and get twelve staffs from them, one from the leader of each of their ancestral tribes. Write the name of each man on his staff. <sup>3</sup> On the staff of Levi write Aaron’s name, for there must be one staff for the head of each ancestral tribe. <sup>4</sup> Place them in the Tent of Meeting in front of the Testimony, where I meet with you. <sup>5</sup> The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites.” <sup>6</sup> So Moses spoke to the Israelites, and their leaders gave him twelve staffs, one for the leader of each of their ancestral tribes, and Aaron’s staff was among them. <sup>7</sup> Moses placed the staffs before the LORD in the Tent of the Testimony. <sup>8</sup> The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Testimony and saw that Aaron’s staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds. <sup>9</sup> Then Moses brought out all the staffs from the LORD’s presence to all the Israelites. They looked at them, and each man took his own staff. <sup>10</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Put back Aaron’s staff in front of the Testimony, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die.” <sup>11</sup> Moses did just as the LORD commanded him. <sup>12</sup> The Israelites said to Moses, “We will die! We are lost, we are all lost! <sup>13</sup> Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD will die. Are we all going to die?”

**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** *in front of 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 not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced 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** *in front of 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 will die!* 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)

