

The Covenant of the Priesthood: Part 3: Aaron's Rod Numbers 17- 18:7

The children of Israel saw the deaths of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and the two hundred fifty elders who attempted to offer incense before the LORD as Moses and Aaron “killing” God’s people.

Numbers 16:46-48 NKJV 46 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun." 47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.

The plague stopped and Aaron returned to stand beside Moses at the door of the Tent of Meeting.

Numbers 16:50 NKJV 50 So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

Discussion Question: How is this like those who reject that God sent the son as His representative and the “doorway” to life? (John 3:35-36)

God would put an end to this rebellion that insists there was no need for a specific

Numbers 17:1-5 NAS95 1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and get from them a rod for each father's household: twelve rods, from all their leaders according to their fathers' households. You shall write each name on his rod, 3 and write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi; for there is one rod for the head of each of their fathers' households. 4 "You shall then deposit them in the tent of meeting in front of the testimony, where I meet with you. 5 "It will come about that the rod of the man whom I choose will sprout. Thus I will lessen from upon Myself the grumblings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling against you."

Rod: # 4294, “mattah” meaning a staff, branch or tribe.

Moses, as the leader of the nation, was instructed to place the rods in the tent of Meeting, the “ohel moed,” the tent of the appointed meeting place.

Testimony” #5715, עֵדוּת “eyduth” from #5707, eyd meaning a witness or a testimony.

Exodus 25:21-22 NKJV 21 "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. 22 "And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.

This appointed place is the Holy of Holies before the mercy seat of God. The testimony or witness referred to the tablets of the Ten Words that were stored in the Ark of the Covenant

Exodus 40:20 NKJV 20 He took the Testimony and put it into the ark, inserted the poles through the rings of the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark.

Moses followed God's instructions and then we read that Moses placed the rods in the tent of testimony.

Numbers 17:7 NAS95 7 So Moses deposited the rods before the LORD in the tent of the testimony.

Discussion question: Why is the tent of Meeting now called the tent of testimony?

Aaron's rod had budded, produced and yielded almonds.

Numbers 17:8-9 NAS95 8 Now on the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. 9 Moses then brought out all the rods from the presence of the LORD to all the sons of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

Produced blossoms: tzoots Tzits: The word "Tzits" is the same Hebrew word used for the plate that Aaron was to wear on his head.

Exodus 28:36-38 NAS95 36 "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the LORD.' 37 "you shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. 38 "It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD.

It is also a form of the word used to describe the fringes, tzeetzet, that the children of Israel wore.

Numbers 15:38-39 KJV 38 Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: 39 And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring:

Almond: #8247, שקד sha-kade from #8245, meaning to wake, watch, be alert; to keep watch, to be sleepless, on the lookout, to hasten.

The almond tree is the first tree to blossom in the early spring, usually by the 15th of Shevat, tu B'Shevat.

The almond is also a warning of judgment to come. The prophet Jeremiah says that it is the LORD that watches, Shakade, over Israel for judgment and for life.

Jeremiah 31:28 NKJV 28 "And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over (sha-kade) them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over (shak-ade) them to build and to plant, says the LORD.

The LORD watches and hastens to bring judgment of uprooting or the of planting.

Jeremiah 1:9-12 NKJV 9 Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. 10 See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant." 11 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see a branch of an almond tree." 12 Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word."

Daniel says that the LORD watched over the evil and when Israel disobeyed, He brought evil upon them.

Daniel 9:14 MKJV 14 Therefore the LORD has watched over (sha-kade) the evil, and has brought it on us. For the LORD our God is righteous in all His works which He does; for we did not obey His voice.

So, the almond represents both the promise of resurrection and life as well as the warning against judgment. It warns that the judgment, when it begins, will proceed swiftly.

Finally, the almond reminds us that God never sleeps and is always watchful.

Psalms 121:1-8 MKJV 1 A Song of degrees. I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where shall my help come from? 2 My help comes from the LORD, who made Heaven and earth. 3 He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. 4 Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. 6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The LORD shall keep you from all evil; He shall keep your soul. 8 The LORD shall keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.

When Moses brought the rods out, each man had to claim his own rod.

Numbers 17:9 MKJV 9 And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the sons of Israel. And they looked, and each one took his rod.

Aaron's rod had blossomed showing that God chose the entire tribe of Levi.

Discussion Question: In what way did God choose all of Levi? How, then, was Korah both correct and incorrect in his assertion that he could draw near to God?

God commanded that Aaron's rod be kept before the Testimony as a sign against rebellion.

Numbers 17:10-11 MKJV 10 And the LORD said to Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept as a token against the rebels. And you shall completely take away their murmurings from Me so that they do not die. 11 And Moses did as the LORD commanded him, so he did.

The verses from Numbers 17:5 to 11 form a chiasm.

Vs. 5: I will rid myself of their complaints

Vs. 6: Moses spoke to the children of Israel and each leader gave him a rod

Vs. 7: Moses went in and placed the rods before the LORD

Vs. 8 The rod of Aaron sprouted and brought forth buds, produced blooms and yielded almonds.

Vs. 9: Moses brought out the rods of each leader

Vs. 10: Lord spoke to Moses, to put Aaron's rod before the Testimony

Vs. 11: You will put their complaints away from me

The children of Israel went from claiming that everyone could draw near to God, to thinking that no one could draw near to God!

Numbers 17:12-13 MKJV 12 And the sons of Israel spoke to Moses saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. 13 Whoever comes near the tabernacle of the LORD shall die. Shall we be consumed to die?

Those who began the rebellion with the words that all could come near now fear that no one can draw near to God. What is the truth?

Numbers 18:1-7 NAS95 1 So the LORD said to Aaron, "You and your sons and your father's household with you shall bear the guilt in connection with the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the guilt in connection with your priesthood. 2 "But bring with you also your brothers, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you, while you and your sons with you are before the tent of the testimony. 3 "And they shall thus attend to your obligation and the obligation of all the tent, but they shall not come near to the furnishings of the sanctuary and the altar, or both they and you will die. 4 "They shall be joined with you and attend to the obligations of the tent of meeting, for all the service of the tent; but an outsider may not come near you. 5 "So you shall attend to the obligations of the sanctuary and the obligations of the altar, so that there will no longer be wrath on the sons of Israel. 6 "Behold, I Myself have taken your fellow Levites from among the sons of Israel; they are a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD, to perform the service for the tent of meeting. 7 "But you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil, and you are to perform service. I am giving you the priesthood as a bestowed service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."

Discussion Question: Who is our high priest and how can we draw near to God?

Next time we will look in more detail at the responsibilities of the priesthood and the Levites and the benefits that go to the priests and the Levites.