
NUMBERS 17:1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

The twelve chiefs of the tribes are commanded to take their rods, and to write the name of each tribe upon the rod that belonged to its representative; but the name of Aaron is to be written on the rod of the tribe of Levi, Num 17:1-3. The rods are to be laid up before the Lord, who promises that the man's rod whom he shall choose for priest shall blossom, Num 17:4, Num 17:5. The rods are produced and laid up before the tabernacle, Num 17:6, Num 17:7. Aaron's rod alone buds, blossoms, and bears fruit, Num 17:8, Num 17:9. It is laid up before the testimony as a token of the manner in which God had disposed of the priesthood, Num 17:10, Num 17:11. The people are greatly terrified, and are apprehensive of being destroyed, Num 17:12, Num 17:13.

NUMBERS 17:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and take rods from them, one for each fathers' house, of all their princes according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods. Write each man's name on his rod.

Verse 2

And take of every one of them a rod - מַטֵּה matteh, the staff or scepter, which the prince or chief of each tribe bore, and which was the sign of office or royalty among almost all the people of the earth.

NUMBERS 17:3 You shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi; for there shall be one rod for each head of their fathers' houses.

NUMBERS 17:4 You shall lay them up in the Tent of Meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you.

NUMBERS 17:5 It shall happen, that the rod of the man whom I shall choose shall bud. I will make the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against you, cease from me."

Verse 5

The man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom - It was necessary that something farther should be done to quiet the minds of the people, and for ever to settle the dispute, in what tribe the priesthood should be fixed. God therefore took the method described in the text, and it had the desired effect; the Aaronical priesthood was never after disputed.

NUMBERS 17:6 Moses spoke to the children of Israel; and all their princes gave him rods, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods. Aaron's rod was among their rods.

NUMBERS 17:7 Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tent of the testimony.

NUMBERS 17:8 On the next day, Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, Aaron's rod for the house of Levi had sprouted, budded, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds.

Verse 8

The rod of Aaron - was budded, etc. - That is, on the same rod or staff were found buds, blossoms, and ripe fruit. This fact was so unquestionably miraculous, as to decide the business for ever; and probably this was intended to show that in the priesthood, represented by that of Aaron, the beginning, middle, and end of every good work must be found. 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. It has been thought by some that Aaron's staff (and perhaps the staves of all the tribes) was made out of the amygdala communis, or common almond tree. In a favorable soil and climate it grows to twenty feet in height; is one of the most noble, flourishing trees in nature: its flowers are of a delicate red, and it puts them forth early in March, having begun to bud in January. It has its name $\tau\alpha\psi$ shaked from shakad, to awake, because it buds and flowers sooner than most other trees. And it is very likely that the staves of office, borne by the chiefs of all the tribes, were made of this tree, merely to signify that watchfulness and assiduous care which the chiefs should take of the persons committed, in the course of the Divine providence, to their keeping.

Every thing in this miracle is so far beyond the power of nature, that no doubt could remain on the minds of the people, or the envious chiefs, of the Divine appointment of Aaron, and of the especial interference of God in this case. To see a piece of wood long cut off from the parent stock, without bark or moisture remaining, laid up in a dry place for a single night, with others in the same circumstances - to see such a piece of wood resume and evince the perfection of vegetative life, budding, blossoming, and bringing forth ripe 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. It is worthy of remark that a scepter, or staff of office, resuming its vegetative life, was considered an absolute impossibility among the ancients; and as they were accustomed to swear by their sceptres, this circumstance was added to establish and confirm the oath. A remarkable instance of this we have in Homer, Iliad, lib. i., ver. 233, etc., where Achilles, in his rage against Agamemnon, thus speaks: - $\text{Ἄλλ' ἐκ τοῖ ἐρεῶ, καὶ ἐπὶ μέγαν ὄρκον ὀμοῦμαι· Ναι μὰ τοδε σκηπτρον, τὸ μὲν οὐποτε φύλλα καὶ ὄζους Φυσεῖ, ἐπειδὴ πρῶτα τομὴν ἐν ὄρεσσι λελοῖπεν, Οὐδ' ἀναθλησεί· περὶ γὰρ ῥά ἐ χαλκὸς ἐλεψ ἔ Φύλλα τε καὶ φλοιὸν· ὁ δὲ τοῖ μέγας ἐσσεταὶ ὄρκος.$

But hearken: I shall swear a solemn oath:

By this same scepter which shall never bud,

Nor boughs bring forth, as once; which, having left

Its parent on the mountain top, what time

The woodman's axe lopp'd off its foliage green,

And stripp'd its bark, shall never grow again.

Cowper.

Virgil represents King Latinus swearing in the same way, to confirm his covenant with Aeneas: -

Ut Sceptrum hoc (dextra sceptrum nam forte gerebat)

Nunquam fronde levi fundet virgulta neque umbras,

Cum semel in silvis imo de stirpe recisum.

Matre caret, posuitque comas et brachia ferro;

Olim arbos, nunc artificis manus aere decoro

Inclisit, patribusque dedit gestare Latinis,

Talibus inter se firmabant foedera dictis.

Aen., lib. xii., ver. 206-12.

Even as this royal Sceptre (for he bore

A scepter in his hand) shall never more

Shoot out in branches, or renew the birth;

An orphan now, cut from the mother earth

By the keen axe, dishonor'd of its hair,

And cased in brass, for Latian kings to bear.

And thus in public view the peace was tied

With solemn vows, and sworn on either side.

Dryden.

When the circumstance of the rod or scepter being used anciently in this way, and the absolute impossibility of its reviviscence so strongly appealed to, is considered, it appears to have been a very proper instrument for the present occasion, for the change that passed on it must be acknowledged as an immediate and incontestable miracle.

NUMBERS 17:9 Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the children of Israel. They looked, and each man took his rod.

NUMBERS 17:10 The LORD said to Moses, "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the children of rebellion; that you may make an end of their murmurings against me, that they not die."

NUMBERS 17:11 Moses did so. As the LORD commanded him, so he did.

NUMBERS 17:12 The children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Behold, we perish! We are undone! We are all undone!"

Verse 12

Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish - גוּעוּ gavaenu signifies not so much to die simply, as to feel an extreme difficulty of breathing, which, producing suffocation, ends at last in death. See the folly

and extravagance of this sinful people. At first, every person might come near to God, for all, they thought, were sufficiently holy, and every way qualified to minister in holy things. Now, no one, in their apprehension, can come near to the tabernacle without being consumed, Num 17:13. In both cases they were wrong; some there were who might approach, others there were who might not. God had put the difference. His decision should have been final with them; but sinners are ever running into extremes.

NUMBERS 17:13 Everyone who keeps approaching the LORD's tabernacle, dies! Will we all perish?"
