



We are continuing a sermon series in the Book of Numbers. For those **who hate math**, let's use the Hebrew title *In The Wilderness*. The title of this biblical book serves as a great reminder: **the greater the maze of life, the greater the haze of being satisfied in the One True God**. I invite you to open your copy of God's Word to Numbers 17.

Ask. Right now, if you found the Ark of the Covenant in your back yard what would you do? Various TV shows suggest that it can be found in Ethiopia, Egypt, Israel, or even in North America where the Native Americans hid it for safe keeping. If you found the Ark today, and if you could consider this treasure what would you find? Scripture tells us that if you removed the mercy seat you would find **three items** that **visibly** and **vividly** represents Yahweh among His people: the Decalogue/ 10 Commands – His **Precepts**, manna from heaven – His **Provision**, and a staff- which represents the **Aaronic Priesthood**. Today we open the lid of the Ark and examine the miraculous staff of Aaron.

Chief of Staffs [Numbers 17:1-12]

In our modern translations, the use of chapters and verses help us easily navigate through the Word with points of reference. Truly, some of you quickly found our text today because I referenced chapter and verse. One of the cautions of use chapters is that it can create in our western minds visual breaks in the text that don't exist. Here in Numbers we have such a case. In the Hebrew manuscripts no break exists between the end of chapter 16 and 17.

Actually our 17:1 is 17:16 in the Hebrew edition. Evidently, the original text **wanted its audience to clearly link the Lord's divine authority and deliverance here with the rebellion of God's community**, which ended up killing 14,700 in addition to Korah and his men. This textual cohesion affirms a spiritual truth: before you can ask for Jesus' deliverance and salvation you must answer the question, "**saved from what?**" Why do you need to be saved if you are good? *What good is God's guidance if you have it all figured out?*

Explanation

Staff (17:2). In Hebrew, staff- *metteh*- also signifies an entire tribe. The staff was the official signia of an Israelite chief. It could also designate an ordinary walking stick. **In ancient Babylon a person of status would carve distinctive designs into his/her staff to represent its owner—write the name. the staff clearly represents ownership.** And what we have is a heavenly test in which Adonai has set up to reveal His divine will. And

clear from this test is an overwhelming fact—this is the Lord’s choosing. This is not the plan of man but of the Almighty.

Sprout (17:4). What an odd test. A staff by nature is dead! It was alive, but someone cut it from a living tree and separated from its root and source of substance. *A staff is not a stick that you find along the path because it weakened over time. Those such remnants are rotten and lack internal integrity to support your weight.* Clearly, this is a supernatural examination. And yet it serves are much more, a spiritual reminder for us today. **Only Yahweh can impart life to that which is dead.** *The tests in your life today carry the same eternal weight.* Will you rely upon the Lord alone?

The Next Day (17:8). Aaron’s staff sprouted as the Lord had promised. Fox translated is this way, *And it had sprouted, the staff of Aaron, of the House of Levi! It had put-forth a sprouting-flower, it had blossomed a blossom, it had ripened almonds!* (Fox, 745). To Moses surprise he found more than he was expecting. Levi’s staff sprouted-formed buds- blossomed- and produced fruit! One OT scholar suggested that the staff actually had four parts – each in a different phase of miraculous detail.

Even more, Aaron’s rod had flowered or produced a *sis*. This is not the only place in the Word were we find a sis/flower/plate. In Exod 28:36 we read that the priest was to wear a turban and on the hat was a plate (sis/flower). The same Word used in Numbers 17. And on the plate reads “Holy is the Lord.” *What does your forehead say to others?*

You will find the Lord concerned with your forehead in the NT, particularly Revelation. One day as the world increasingly degenerates away from the glory of Christ, we find that everyone who worships the beast- the ways of the world- will receive a mark on their forehead -666. What we often forget the next verse (Rev. 14:1) that thse in Christ Jesus will receive the Father’s name written on their forehead. And I believe that today every has a spiritual mark upon their forehead. I’m not afraid of the mark of the best one day. I’m only concerned about the mark today! **Does yours say, “Holy is the Lord.”**

Almonds (17:8) The staff produced Almonds. **Why not figs or olives or pomegranates?** Do you think Moses was tempted to pluck one off an eat it? These small fruits have tremendous significance in Scripture. Almonds were the 1st of the flowing plants after winter and called “the watching” plant. It was the first one to watch out for spring.

There are **other places** in the Bible where you can find a miniature tree with almond flowers and buds. This is exactly the image in which the lampstands in the tabernacle were fashioned. These lamps were commanded by Yahweh to burn all night. The almond lampstands were a constant remember to the congregation of faith to always stay watchful- in and out of season. There is a song that beautifully illustrates this truth: *Get up, wake up, for you've been justified, Wake up, oh sleeper, rise from the dead, Christ will shine on you* *Wake up, oh sleeper, rise from the dead, Christ has shined on you.* **The almond is a reminder to wake up!**

What does the almond tell us about the Lord? The almond on Aaron’s staff is a powerful reminder that Yahweh is constantly awake and vigilant. **The Lord will never go to sleep and he will not sleep on you.** For one prophet Jeremiah he receive the same object lesson when the Lord asked, *“What do you see, Jeremiah?”* I replied, *“I see a branch of an almond tree.”* The LORD said to me, *“You have seen correctly, for I watch over my word to accomplish it. As the Psalmist reminds us Psa. 121:3 He will not allow your foot to slip; your Protector will not slumber.*

Application- So What?

It is as if the writers of the New Testament knew that one day we would ask this question. It is as if Hebrews was written to comfort the community who needed the Lord to water their souls concerning this passage. In Hebrews 9:4 we find clear instruction concerning the ark of the covenant cover with gold on all sides, with Aaron's staff that budded. As He continues to expound upon the eternal truth of the Savior we find his climactic exhortation. **Listen to Hebrews 10:19-24.**

Although Aaron was God's designated high priest, he was not the perfect **High Priest**. You see even Aaron would have to offer sacrifices for his sin before enter into the presence of the Lord. The High Priest represented the people in a **participative** way. The priests garments bore the *names of the 12 tribes*, suggesting that the priest was their advocate and representative before the Lord. Why? Because literally the people of Israel were "**sons of rebellion (17:10) and declared Look! We are perishing!**"

And now what? We have the **perfect High Priest in Jesus Christ**. He alone as mediator serves as an advocate or **defense attorney** (1 Jn 2:1). **Is the Father's attitude towards us so antagonistic to Christ's desire to saves us?** No, Christ does not need to change the Father's mind. The Father loved us all along (John 3:16). However, he must maintain justice when he grants mercy or he will violate his own moral character of love (1 John 4:8). Christ's **sacrifice makes it possible** for God to be both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (NIV, 647). **You don't wont ever be saved unless you realize your need.** Will you like the people today look to Jesus and say. "I am perishing, Jesus save me! *Richard- "I guess."* **Invitation**

If Jesus is your high Priest, you are marked. You have a new name of your forehead. Because of the great-better High Priest You can now

Approach with boldness (10:19). What a privilege of those who are born again. The limitations of the earthly sanctuary are contrasted with the new heavenly sanctuary. **Boldness** is a rare Greek word that has to do with **free or open expression**. My kids know that they can boldly enter my presence. Approach with Boldness!

Draw Near (10:22). Not only can we approach, but Jesus changes the way in which we approach the Holy One. Only Jesus can give you a new/sincere heart. Only the Son of God takes your heart of stone and gives a heart of flesh. After he changes your heart he changes your mind and gives you **full assurance**. This describes a **clear-headed confidence and stability** as a result of Christ's work on your behalf. **Heart-Mind.** What a Savior!

Hold On (10:23). Because of Christ we hold onto our confession of hope. **John Wesley describes this as the hope which we professed at our baptism.** A belief is something you hold, a conviction is something that holds you!

Watch Out (10:24). Because of Jesus, we > me. This word consider means to take notice, pay attention, and look closely. Only Christ can do this. Only Christ can take our selfish hearts and turn them towards love for others. Because Jesus watches for me, I can watch out for you. We are now to motivate one another to love expressed in good works. Who have you stirred up today?

Gather together (10:25). Because of our Great High Priest we now have the privilege of a **new community**. To forsake carries the idea of **abandonment**. Our High Priest will never forsake the Christian community and

yet some were forsaking God. Let us gather together. **Church is not something I do, or a place I attend, It is who I am because of Jesus.**

There is a profound lesson in Numbers 17 and the blossoming of Aaron's staff. We are nothing more than dead sticks, fit only for the fire. Without the grace of Jesus we too would be forced to cry out We will die! We will die!

John 15:6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.

Are you withering right now? w/out Christ, we have no boldness, we can't draw near, we can't hold on, and we can't watch out. w/out Christ it is impossible for you to know him or experience His love. But, while we were still sinners Christ Jesus died. The gospel is not get it together. The gospel says, you will never get it together and Jesus made a way for you!

Jesus sacrificed his perfect life to become your high priest.

If Jesus is your high Priest, you are marked. You have a new name of your forehead. Because of the great-better High Priest you can draw near with confidence!

Notes

Num. 17:1 The LORD instructed Moses: **2** “Speak to the Israelites and take one staff from them for each ancestral tribe, twelve staffs from all the leaders of their tribes. Write each man’s name on his staff. **3** Write Aaron’s name on Levi’s staff, because there is to be one staff for the head of each tribe. **4** Then place them in the tent of meeting in front of the testimony where I meet with you. **5** The staff of the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of the Israelites’ complaints that they have been making about you.”

Staff

Hebrew *metteh* also means tribe as in 1:16. The staff was the official insignia of a tribal chieftain. It also designated the ordinary walking stick, which in ancient Babylonia bore a distinctive design to designate its owner (JPS, 143).

Sprout

Only God can impart life to that which is dead, and this test would show to the combined tribes of Israel that Yahweh conferred a special blessing upon the tribe whom he would choose (Cole, 275).

Against/About You

The Hebrew is puzzling given that the purpose of the test is to vindicate Aaron alone. The opening and concluding verses of this section show that the plague and the staff incidents have been soldered by connectives and allusions (JPS, 144).

Num. 17:6 So Moses spoke to the Israelites, and each of their leaders gave him a staff, one for

each of the leaders of their tribes, twelve staffs in all. Aaron's staff was among them. 7 Moses placed the staffs before the LORD in the tent of the testimony.

Num. 17:8 The next day Moses entered the tent of the testimony and saw that Aaron's staff, representing the house of Levi, had sprouted, formed buds, blossomed, and produced almonds! 9 Moses then brought out all the staffs from the LORD's presence to all the Israelites. They saw them, and each man took his own staff. 10 The LORD told Moses, "Put Aaron's staff back in front of the testimony to be kept as a sign for the rebels, so that you may put an end to their complaints before me, or else they will die." 11 So Moses did as the LORD commanded him.

And it had sprouted, the staff of Aaron, of the House of Levi! It had put-forth a sprouting-flower, it had blossomed a blossom, it had ripened almonds! (Fox, 745).

Blossomed

We are probably supposed to understand that some parts were in bud, others in bloom, and others had fruited (TOTC, 140)

Aaron's staff has produced a sis. This happens to be the same word that describes the golden diadem worn by Aaron on the front of his high priestly turban, which are inscribed the words, "Holiness to the Lord" (Exod. 28:36, 39:30)

Almonds

Where else in Scripture do you find a miniature tree with almond flowers and buds? This is exactly what the lampstand in the tabernacle was (Exod 25:31-40).

Why almonds is not specifically stated. Jeremiah associates the almond with watching (Jer. 1:11-12).

Almonds have tremendous significance in Scripture. They were pictured on carvings in the Temple. Also almonds were the first of the flowing plants after winter and thus called the "watching" plant.

For Jeremiah it was a symbol of God's guarding his word so as to bring it to pass and accomplish his purpose (Cole, 277).

The bud and flower were shaped so elegantly that they three golden bowls on each side of the tabernacle lampstand were patterned after them (Cole, 276).

Watchfulness is the point of the sanctuary lamps burning all night (Exod. 27:21). The Lord is constantly awake and vigilant (Ps 121:4).

Wake up oh sleeper lyrics by Jason Crabb. [Now you've been busy sleeping
In the shadows of you own wasting the gift of your life](#)

Now the sun is rising, shadows are gone
Get up, wake up, for you've been justified

Wake up, oh sleeper, rise from the dead
Christ will shine on you
Wake up, oh sleeper, rise from the dead
Christ will shine on you

In the resurrection of Jesus we see the almond branch blossom. Spring is in the air in the empty tomb: in Christ's rising, the first fruits of eternal life have appeared and their scent is unmistakable. Death is clearly defeated, its power is broken. God is watching over his people to bring them into this presence forever (Duguid, 216).

That staff spoke eloquently of God's set purpose to bless his people and transform their grumbling hearts. In the resurrection of Christ, he assures us that the almond is already in bloom: our final resurrection is near (Duguid, 217).

Aaron

The role of the people is in some way specially focused and/or intensified in the priest. He represents the people in a participative way. The priest's garments bear the names of the tribes, suggesting his representation of all the people. Conversely, the blue thread in the tassels that all the people wear bears a resemblance to the garments of the priests, suggesting that all the people are like priests (Stubbs, 150).

Sign

Let it be a safeguarded as a sign for the rebellious-folk, that their grumbings may be finished from me, so that they do not die! (Fox, 746).

Hebrew safekeeping used in the sense with connection of manna and the ashes of the red cow (19:9). Also, divine staffs were kept in the sanctuaries of Egypt and Phoenicia (JPS, 145).

Literally, "sons of rebellion."

Num. 17:12 Then the Israelites declared to Moses, "Look, we're perishing! We're lost; we're all lost! **13** Anyone who comes near the LORD's tabernacle will die. Will we all perish?"

Anyone who comes-near, comes-near (at all) to the dwelling of Yahweh will die (Fox, 746).

The concept that in his mediatorial role Christ serves as an advocate or defense attorney (1 Jn 2:1). Is the Father's attitude towards us so antagonistic to Christ's desire to save us? No, Christ does not need to change the Father's mind. The Father loved us all along (John 3:16). However he must maintain justice when he grants mercy or he will violate his own moral character of love (1

John 4:8). Christ's sacrifice makes it possible for God to be both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (NIV, 647).

There is no preferred method to brings people to repentance. The Christian Gospel is a matter of decision. It is to be accepted or rejected (NIV, 649).

There is a profound lesson for you and me in the blossoming of Aaron's staff. We are nothing more than dead sticks, fit only for the fire. Without God's promise of grace we too would be forced to cry out, We will die! We will die! (Duguid, 214).

Application

The staff remained in the Ark of the Covenant

Almonds

In the Tabernacle

Ex. 25:33 There are to be three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with a bud and petals, on one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with a bud and petals, on the next branch. It is to be this way for the six branches that extend from the lampstand. 34 There are to be four cups shaped like almond blossoms on the lampstand shaft along with its buds and petals.

Jer. 1:11 Then the word of the LORD came to me, asking, “What do you see, Jeremiah?”

I replied, “I see a branch of an **almond** tree.”

Only when the wickedness of Israel had finally been dealt with could the people of God truly become that nation of priests that requires no Levitical mediator between them and the Almighty. – Ligonier

In our justification, God has declared us righteous in Christ through His blood. In our sanctification, God is working to make us righteous in what we do, say, think, and feel. As the Lord’s holy priesthood, we can be sure that His work to sanctify us is not in vain and that even though we might get discouraged at times, He will most certainly transform us into the holy priests He has designed us to be. –Ligonier

Psalm 132:8 Rise up, LORD, come to your resting place,
you and your powerful ark.

9 May your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and may your faithful people shout for joy.