

May 30

Scriptures: Read Numbers 17 & 18

Key Verse: "... You shall have no inheritance in their land... I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel." (Numbers 18:20)

Overview

Chapter 17 continues to challenges of the preceding chapter. It seems the people still needed additional proof of Aaron's authority and rightful position. God vindicated his religious leadership as the high priest by commanding a test that would put an end to all the complaints and how, once and for all, which tribe and priests He had chosen.

As the Lord commanded, the rods (symbols of authority and of their heritage as shepherds) from the head of all the 12 tribes, and one from Aaron representing the Levites, were gathered by Moses and placed overnight in the Most Holy Place before the Ark of the testimony. What happened was something totally supernatural and grew branches, blossomed, and produced ripe almonds in a few short hours, and all without any soil, roots, or sunlight!

Nothing is impossible with God. Just as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead attested to His divine commission and authority, so this piece of dead wood, which came alive by the power of God and was transformed into a life-giving branch, attested to Aaron's divine commission and authority. Even people who have been dead in trespasses and sin have been transformed by the power of God from something unlovely and barren into that which is beautiful and fruitful; made alive by the power of Christ (Eph.2:1).

What a blessing it must have been for Aaron to see that his rod had budded; a wonderful divine confirmation of his and his tribe's high calling. God has caused his position to be undisputed. To remind and warn the people against rebellion, Aaron's rod was placed into the Most Holy Place.

The reaction of the people was to cry out for mercy (17:12). Did they finally understand they needed someone to draw near to God on their behalf and make atonement for their sins? Now, with the firm establishment of the priesthood, the Lord continued with some general principles concerning sacrifices in His Holy Tabernacle. Since the people now knew the priesthood and the Levitical order were divinely appointed and essential for their own well being (spiritual and as well as physical, in the protection against divine wrath), they were ready to pay for these services by their offerings, first fruits, and tithes. This is the way the Lord provided for His servants' needs, since they were not to receive any inheritance of the land. The Lord God Himself was their inheritance, for they had a special relationship with Him much more important than wealth and possessions.

The Levites were given as gifts to the priesthood, as well as to all the children of Israel (18:6), and they were to be held responsible if any defilement came upon the Tabernacle. The priests' duties included guarding the Levites from trespassing (18:1). Many laws given before in the book of Leviticus concerning the priest's rights to receive certain portions of the sacrifices, first fruits and first-born clean animals, are now put into a more systematic order. The heave offerings were to be for the priests and their families, "as an ordinance forever; it is a covenant of salt"

(18:19), an expression that was used to indicate a perpetual covenant (Lev.2:13; 2 Chron.13:5; Mark9:49).

We learn something new here: the tithe belonged to the tribe of Levi for their much-needed ministry (18:21). This law would be put into effect upon settlement in the Promised Land, and then the Levites in turn would tithe the best of whatever they received to the priesthood (18:26-29). All the people were to do likewise, for only the best was to be given to God and to His priests (18:12).

The Lord wants His servants, both then and now, to be well provided for by those they serve, having all their needs met, as a “reward” for the service they perform on behalf of the congregation (18:31). Then they are to be good stewards of what has been given to them, for they are “holy gifts”, (18:32) since they were given firstly to the Lord, then He gives them to His ministers “as an inheritance” (18:21), for the Lord is their inheritance and as such He is their all-sufficiency.

Prayer

O Lord, we too cry out for mercy. Thank You that Your Word declares that it’s not according to our works of righteousness but according to Your mercies You have saved us. (Titus 3:4-5)