

Numbers Chapter 17

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[0 : 00] So, number 17, that's page 1, 1, 5, 4 in your Bibles. The Lord said to Moses, speak to the Israelites and get 12 staffs from them, one from the leader of each of their ancestral tribes.

Write the name of each man on his staff. On the staff of Levi, write Aaron's name, for there must be one staff for the head of each ancestral tribe.

Place them in the tent of meeting in front of the Ark of the Covenant Law, where I meet with you. The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites.

So Moses spoke to the Israelites, and their leaders gave him 12 staffs, one for the leader of each of their ancestral tribes, and Aaron's staff was among them. Moses placed the staff before the Lord in the tent of the Covenant Law.

The next day, Moses entered the tent and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the tribe of Levi, had not only sprouted, but had budded, blossomed, and produced almonds. Then Moses brought out all the staffs from the Lord's presence to all the Israelites.

[1 : 21] They looked at them, and each of the leaders took his own staff. Then the Lord said to Moses, Put back Aaron's staff in front of the Ark of the Covenant Law, 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. Moses did just as the Lord commanded him. The Israelites said to Moses, We shall die. We are lost. We are all lost. Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord will die. Are we all going to die? May the Lord bless his word to us. Well, we're looking today at Numbers 17.

But actually, Numbers 16 provides a lot of important context for this chapter. So I just want to start by briefly talking about what's gone on in the chapter before.

And in chapter 16, we see a dispute between Moses, between Aaron and this family in the tribe of Levi, Korah, the sons of Korah, who oppose Aaron and his priesthood.

[2 : 42] And there, the Korahites, they have an important role among the Levites. And that is to look after the holy things of the tabernacle.

They transport them. And this is an important role. But they're not happy with what God has given them. And they come before Aaron and come before Moses.

And they say this in Numbers 16, verse 3. It says, That means, you know, the God who we've seen on Mount Sinai, who shakes the mountain.

You know, the people, when they saw this, they didn't want to go anywhere near the mountain. And throughout this book, we've seen that God is holy. God is to be feared. It's not something to be taken lightly to come into God's presence.

So it's a real sign of arrogance to say, you know, give us the priesthood. This is not something that you would choose for yourself. This is something that God bestows, God gives.

[4 : 14] But they don't seem to have learned the lesson from this book. You know, throughout the book, we see God again and again disciplining his people. Sometimes people die.

Sometimes God sends plagues. They don't seem to have grasped that God is holy. God is a God to be feared. Clearly, they had the wrong motives for wanting the priesthood.

It wasn't out of service for God. It wasn't out of love for God. But they wanted it to elevate themselves, didn't they? It was a pride thing. And so God gives them this test.

They're told to come before the tabernacle with censers where they would burn. These are implements where they burn incense before God. And Moses said that if God does a new thing and swallows you whole, if the earth opens up and swallows you up, then you'll see that God has chosen Aaron for the priesthood.

And this is what God does. It's a terrifying thing. The earth opens up and these men who have opposed God, they've opposed Moses and Aaron, they're swallowed alive by the earth.

[5 : 28] Well, if chapter 16 is about a dispute within the tribe of Levi, for whose is the priesthood, in chapter 17, God settles this matter, not within Levi, but between the 12 tribes, which tribe has the right to come before God, which tribe has been chosen by God.

I want to start by saying this. Actually, God here is doing something gracious. You see, God, he doesn't want to punish us, he doesn't want to judge us.

So here we see him preempting Israel's sin. He knows that time and time again, Israel have failed him. Israel have sinned. And so before Israel have the chance, again, to dispute the priesthood, he's going to settle this matter once and for all.

And he gives this sign of the staffs. So what are the staffs? Well, a staff in those days was a symbol of authority.

And so God says, bring me 12 staffs, one with the name of your tribal leader, and I'll put these before my presence in the tabernacle. And basically what he's saying is this, who has the authority to come before my presence?

[6 : 51] Which staff will I cause to flourish? Will I show is the man that I've chosen, who I've given authority to come before me? And so the staffs, the place before the Ark of the Covenant, where God says, where I meet with you.

So it's a symbol of God's presence. And what happens? Well, we see overnight, the staffs are left. And the next day, the 12 staffs are brought out. And the staff of Aaron has three things on it. It has buds, it has blossoms, it has almonds. And you might think, this is a strange miracle.

But God is doing something unique. He's doing something new. And what is he saying? Well, the staffs, well, think about the three things that I've mentioned.

They're all, they're all different stages of growth, aren't they? You'd never have an almond, a bud, and a blossom at any one time.

[7 : 56] You know, they're all associated with different seasons. And so God is proving that this isn't, this is genuine, this isn't fake. And God is saying, this is the man I've chosen, this is the man I've chosen, and I've made him fruitful.

So God chooses Aaron, and he puts to rest their grumbling. But why does God have to do this? Well, clearly, time and time again, it's been proven that Israel had hard hearts, didn't they?

They didn't learn their lesson, and they would sin. And God knew, that if he didn't do this, they would, they would have inevitably disputed the priesthood again, they would have come before Moses, they would have grumbled, they would have complained.

And actually, when I was thinking about this, I was thinking of moments in my own life, where God, well, I think God has taken me out of situations, where I think I would have fallen, I would have sinned.

God knows us, and he, he, he, he doesn't want us to sin, does he? Maybe you can think of situations like that in your own life.

[9 : 12] The picture of, the picture of us and our sinfulness in the Bible is pretty bleak, isn't it? Not only, it's not only true of Israel, that they had hard hearts, that they, they would inevitably sin, but it's true of each one of us.

It says this in Romans 3.11, there is no one righteous, not even one, there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. So the truth is, each one of us, if we were left to our own devices, we'd turn away from God, wouldn't we?

But God, is a God of grace, he's a God of mercy, and here, just as he prevents sin here, he prevents sin in our own lives, doesn't he? And we need to acknowledge this, that he's a God of grace, and it's only because of his grace, we are not worse than we are, we're not worse sinners than we are.

Now, it's because God has given us his righteousness, God is working in us, God is changing us, it's God who's doing the work in us. So that's the first thing, I want us to think about, God's grace to Israel, and God's grace to each one of us.

Now, just gather my notes. Yeah, so, so what does God, God do with, God commands Moses, to bring this tribe, this sign, that he's chosen Aaron, he says, to keep it in the tabernacle, so this was kept, forever in the tabernacle, as a sign, to those who would, grumble against Moses, and in the same way we see in chapter 16, we talked about the censures, well, these were beaten into a

covering for the altar, and the reason, again, it was a sign, it says, it says in verse 10, sorry, in 1638, it says this, the censures of the men who sinned, at the cost of their lives, hammer the censures into sheets, to overlay the altar, for they were presented before the Lord, and have become holy, let them be a sign to the Israelites, so we see these two signs, which God has placed, in the tabernacle, to prevent further sin, from his people, but actually,

[11 : 41] I want to think, in a similar way, God has placed these stories in the Bible, to teach us a similar lesson, isn't it, and what's the lesson, well, we don't take the things of God, lightly, we come before God, with trembling, and with fear, he's a holy God, and so our service to God, it's a gift that he's given us, and what's our attitude to service, well, we shouldn't be like Korah, they weren't serving God, because they loved God, were they, they wanted this position, of the high priesthood, they wanted it, because they wanted a position of authority, it was out of pride, why are we serving God, are we serving God, for our own gain, for our own pride, to look good before others, or are we doing it, out of a humble heart, you know, before the God, who's given us mercy, and grace, I wonder if we can have, a similar attitude, well, I want to think about, Romans 12 actually, and we saw last week,

Robin, he, he spoke on Romans 12, and it was, really, he spoke about, us as a body, serving one another, and what is our motive, of service, towards one another, and ultimately, it's, it's because God, has loved us first, isn't it, it's out of grace, so I just want to read, some verses, which, from Romans 12, starting in verse 3, it says this, for by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourselves, more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself, with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith, God has distributed, distributed to each of you, for just as each of us, has one body, with many members, and these members, do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, the many, form one body, and each member, belongs to all the others, we have different gifts, according to the grace, given to each of us, and so, whatever our gifting is, it's because of the grace of God, isn't it,

God is the one, who makes us fruitful, God is the one, who chose Aaron, for the role of high priest, but equally, he's given gifts, to each one of us, hasn't he, and notice the word gifts, the word gifts, what does that insinuate, well it's not something, that we have brought about, in ourselves, it's something that God, has given each one of us, and the word actually says, that God has given, every one of us a gift, he's given us a unique, part to play, in his body, in the church, and perhaps, you know like, the sons of Korah, you might say, I don't want, I don't want this gift, God's given me, I want the high priesthood, obviously we're living, in a different system, aren't we, but actually, God has given us, God has given us, the gifts he's given us, and we should use those, 1 Corinthians 12, verse 17 says this, if the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be, if the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be, but in fact,

God has placed the parts, in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be, if they were all one part, where would be, where would the body be, as it is, there are many parts, but one body, and so actually, the gifting that God has given us, is indispensable to the body, every part is important, isn't it, every part is vital, for the body to function as a whole, and if we desire other gifts, we're not walking, in the gifting that God has given us, we're not going to be fruitful, are we, and what's your motivation behind that, is it, you know, is it that, is it pride, you know, we should be happy, with what God has given us, so the truth is, God has given each one of us, a unique gifting, so for some of you, maybe you're good at evangelists, maybe you're good at witnessing, to your friends, maybe for some of you, it's hospitality, that's mentioned in the Bible, as a gift, some of us are very practical, some of us have teaching gifts, some of us are called to serve, in various ways, there are probably hundreds, of different types of gifts, aren't there, but God, it says in the word, has given each one of us a gift, each one of us a role to play, so every one of us, is important in the body, how do we find this gifting, well, one thing is, we recognize it in each other, don't we, we're to encourage the gifting, in our brothers and our sisters, we're to, you know, we should notice things in people, and encourage them in that, perhaps you know, that you've got a gift, that you're not using, but I encourage you, to use it, the body will be better off, if we walk in the gifting, that God has given us, so whatever gift,

God has given us, that's God's grace to us, isn't it, it's God's favor, and it's not to be taken lightly, it's not to be despised, we're not to be ungrateful, for the gifting, that God has given us, we're to have humble hearts, aren't we, and we're to serve, in the way, in any way we can, now I think actually, these, we see unbelief in Israel, don't we, in their questioning, of the priesthood, in their

questioning, of Aaron and Moses, and if we look at, verses 12 and 13, what is their reaction, when they see this miracle, well it says in verse 12, we shall die, we are lost, we are all lost, anyone who even comes, near the tabernacle of the Lord, will die, are we all going to die, and that's a complete reversal, of their previous attitude, isn't it, but if they'd really understood, what it means, to come before God's presence, they would have had, a lot more fear, they would have had, a lot more respect, wouldn't they,

[18:00] I'm not sure, they really believed, they really trusted, they really understood, who God was, which is amazing, the hardness of the heart, after, you know, what's gone on, in the previous chapters, you'd have thought, they'd have learnt their lesson, but is their response right, is it a good response, to what's happened, you know, fear and humility, it's the right response, to God isn't it, we should come before him, with reverence, but actually, I think they've gone, to two extremes here, and so, on one side, we see flippancy, we see a lack of reverence, for, for the, for the, you know, the priesthood, the roles that God has given, to come before God, they've taken that lightly, but the next one, is equally wrong, they say, we die, we are lost, we are all lost, anyone who even comes near, the tabernacle of the Lord, will die, but actually, that's not the case either, is it, God has given them, a way to access, his presence, and that's through Aaron, that's through, the high priest, you know, they weren't abandoned, there was still grace, available from God,

God still wanted them, to come to him, in relationship, but it was through Aaron, it was through, the priest that he had appointed, now if you think of Aaron, you might understand, if you think of, if you think of, what he's done, in the previous chapters, he's not perfect, is he, we see at the bottom, of Mount Sinai, he led Israel, into idolatry, he let them, worship a false God, God, we see later on, that him, and, and, and the sister of Moses, they both oppose Moses, don't they, and so Aaron, is he really, a good representative, to come before God, it's amazing grace, that God chose Aaron, isn't it, but actually, Aaron, he's not the ultimate, high priest is he, we've already, we've already looked, to Hebrews, where it talks about, our ultimate high priest, Aaron was merely, a picture, of the true high priest, the one who was truly, worthy to come before God, to come before God's presence, and that's Jesus, isn't it,

Jesus, in a sense, he's, he's the fruitful branch, Zachariah, three verse eight, and six, twelve, he's called the branch, this is a prophecy, of the Messiah, who was to come, he'd be called, he'd be called the branch, we see it in John, he's the fruitful vine, isn't he, he's the fruitful one, in a sense Jesus, he's the dry, dead bit of wood, that came alive again, and he's the one, who has authority, to come, before God's presence, he's the only one, who has the authority, and so in Christ, we access God's, throne room, his very presence, through Jesus, don't we, through our high priest, and so he's the ultimate, mediator between God, and between man, he came to earth, he was fully man, he was tempted, in every way, as we are, he was tried, in every way, he understands, our weakness, and yet he's without sin, he's perfect, he is God, in the flesh, and so, he's defeated death, he's defeated sin, and he can come, before God's throne, and we access,

God's throne, through Jesus, through our high priest, and actually, we see in Jesus, he doesn't have, the attitude of, Korah, of the Israelites, he doesn't hold this, out of, you know, a sense of arrogance, a sense of pride, but actually, he's the only one, who's worthy, to come before God's presence, but the amazing thing is, we see in Jesus, a high priest, who came, not to be served, but to serve, and we see him, in the Lord's Supper, he went down, on his hands, and his knees, and he, he took the, the picture of a servant, and he washed, the disciples feet, and he says this, in Matthew 20, speaking to his disciples, you know that the rulers, of the Gentiles, lord over them, and their high officials, exercise authority, over them, not so with you, instead, whoever wants to become, great among you, must become your servant, and whoever wants to be first, must be your slave, just as the son of man, did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life, as a ransom for many, and so none of us, none of us can come before God, with any authority, except through Jesus, but yet we have this privilege, to serve, and it's not, it's not a service, so that people will look at us, and think you know, look how good, look how good this guy is, he can do all these things, but it's a service, out of gratitude, to what God has done for us, to what Christ has done for us, in dying for us, what's our attitude, in service, and so it's not wrong, to desire to be fruitful, is it, it's not wrong, to desire, that God would bless us, in our ministry, in whatever we do, but what is our attitude, why do we want to serve God, we want to serve God, with a humble heart, because God has loved us first, we love others, we love God, because we've been loved, by him, and so how do we become fruitful, in our service, well it's John 15 isn't it, it's abide,

I am the vine, you are the branches, if you abide in me, you will bear much fruit, and so if we want to bear fruit, we're to abide, in the true high priest, we're to abide in Christ, and he, will help us to serve, and he'll make us fruitful, in our service, but we're to serve, from an attitude of humility, I'll close there, well we're going to sing, at the same time, I'll close, to a certain place, or just for a tip, there is right, I love you.

[24 : 34] And so much for the full power, how do we make us, and we're to serve, let's define the style of word, and the best thing, and I can gap if we were to serve, and show up, and I can't wait for the rest, but I'm going to offer aquí, I'm going to give to you the pull, so I have to imagine, a couple of things, I will be to serve, and this feature, and I'll try this, and that is it,