

Numbers 16-17 Chapter Study

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To recap where we are – Israel arrived at the border of the Promised Land, only to be scared off from going up to take possession of it by the discouraging report of 10 of the 12 scouts Moses sent out.

This was a huge slap in the face of God Who'd given them the promise of the land and Who'd proven Himself more than capable of giving them victory over the Canaanites.

Because of their rebellion and refusal to go up into the land, God sentenced the entire adult population to what they had said they preferred – they would rather die of old age in the wilderness than to die in battle with the Canaanites.

So they were doomed to wander around the wilderness of Sinai till everyone 20 years and older died.

It would be their children who would go up and take the land.

While Israel was sentenced to wander in the wilderness for nearly 40 years, that time is passed over rather briefly in the narrative of Numbers.

Were' given just a few stories of events that took place during this time.

One of the most grievous is the rebellion of Korah in ch. 16.

Numbers 16

1Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; 2and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. 3They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

The leader of this challenge to Moses' leadership was a guy named Korah.

Korah was a Levite, one of the Kohathites whose privilege it was to carry the sacred furniture of the tabernacle.

Korah is also identified as the son of Izhar, who Exodus 6:18 tells us was the brother of Amram, Moses' father.

So Korah, Moses and Aaron were cousins.

But Korah had a problem – he was ambitious.

He wasn't content serving in the honored role of being a levite and having the privilege of carrying the holy things – he wanted more; more honor, more fame, more position, power, & prestige.

So he began to grumble and complain – the focus of his complaint being Moses and his brother Aaron.

His beef was: “Who put Moses & Aaron in charge ?!?!”

His complaint soon found its way to the ears of some others who were all too ready to take it in and nurture it – Dathan, Abiram, & On of the tribe of Reuben.

The Kohathites were camped on the south side of the tabernacle, next to the tribe of Reuben.

As leaders, these men would pitch their tents near Korah’s – they were neighbors.

It wasn’t long before the ambition that had corrupted Korah’s heart infected their theirs.

Since Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob, it was easy for these Reubenites to think they ought to be the one’s leading the nation, or at least have a more prominent role.

As Korah, Dathan, Abiram, & On talked among themselves, egging each other on in their complaint against Moses & Aaron, they quickly found there were plenty of other ears that were ready to dig dirt on the nation’s leaders.

They found 250 other well-known leaders of the tribes who were discontent with Moses.

When their numbers were large enough and contained the “heavy-hitters” among the people, they deemed it was time to go and challenge Moses & Aaron.

So they come and voice their complaint – v. 3 . . .

“You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”

This is a ludicrous charge! Yes – Moses was the leader of the nation!

But he was so for only one very good reason – God had made him the leader!

Moses, you will remember from Exodus, tried his best to get out of the job, but God wouldn’t let him back out!

When Moses tried to exempt himself by saying he wasn’t a very good public speaker, God said that his brother Aaron would become his spokesman to the Egyptians and the children of Israel.

Moses & Aaron had not picked their roles themselves – there had been no self-promotion here as Korah and his cohorts are charging – but in fact, this was the real ambition behind Korah’s complaint!

The implication behind what Korah is saying is –

“Moses, you and Aaron are nobody special and it’s not right that you 2 have taken the role of leading the nation; Moses, you’ve assumed the role of civil leader and Aaron has assumed the role of religious leader.”

“But God has picked all of us as His covenant people and has shown all of us His mighty power – so we’re all as qualified as YOU!”

“You’re only the leader because you say so and that’s not good enough anymore! It’s time to step aside and let others take the helm.”

4So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face; 5and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, “Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him.

The first thing Moses did when Korah and his pals made their charge was to fall on his face before the Lord!

This is a baseless charge the rebels are making, and no one knows that better than

Moses, but he doesn't stand and defend himself.
He doesn't rehearse his calling and attempt to reason with Korah.
He falls on his face in the most earnest prayer to seek the Lord for truth.
Is he wrong? Has his leadership of the nation painted the wrong picture?
Has his motive in ministry gone astray that this attack has come?
Moses knows the charge is patently absurd, but still he uses it as a check
on himself.

And there, in prayer, God shows him all is well with his soul and the
complaint of Korah and his cronies is nothing but unholy ambition that
has grown into a dangerous rebellion.

God gives Moses instructions in how it's to be dealt with.

Moses will not need to defend himself or vindicate his call by himself – God will
make clear who He wants leading the nation, and how He feels about those who
resist those He's placed in authority.

**6Do this: [Moses says] Take censers, Korah and all your company; 7put
fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it
shall be that the man whom the Lord chooses is the holy one. You take
too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"**

Offering incense before the Lord as a symbol of prayer & worship was one of the
duties of the high priest.

The rebels had claimed that all were equally qualified to serve as priests.

Moses says, "Okay, let's test your theory. All of you act like priests by offering
incense before the Lord and let's see what happens."

But then Moses issues this strong word of caution – "Korah! You've accused me of
taking on too much and promoting myself – it's you who's guilty of that charge!"

Now, what's interesting is that this warning must have made an impression on On, the
son of Peleth, because while he's mentioned as one of the original conspirators in
v. 1, we don't see his name mentioned among the rebels again!

He came to his senses and realized his opposition to Moses was ill-advised.

There were a couple things that may have helped him wake up:

1st – Not long before this, Miriam & Aaron had made much the same complaint
against Moses' leadership, and Miriam's judgment had been immediate
leprosy!

2nd – When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron tried to usurp their rightful
place as priests, fire came from the Lord and fried them on the spot.

On realized God had set His favor on Moses and had set the rules for who the
priests were and how they were to operate.

He would not tolerate with anyone fiddling with His design.

So On wisely backed out of the rebellion.

Unholy ambition has always been a problem in the ministry!

It began in the Garden with the temptation of Eve to bypass the authority of her
husband in a bid to "be like God."

It happened in the family of Isaac when Rebekah and Jacob conspired to steal the
blessing.

It was repeated among Jacob's sons in their envy against Joseph.

Miriam & Aaron were driven by ambition when they complained against Moses.

Korah was motivated by unholy ambition here.

Absalom's rebellion against his father King David was another bid for power by

unholy ambition.

And it's a problem in countless churches and works of God today.

A man or woman will rise up against the one the Lord has called to lead.

Driven by envy and ambition he/she will begin to grumble and complain about the leader & the quality of his/her leadership.

But they don't keep their complaint private – they spread it around.

Men like Korah are always playing to an audience, always trying to draw a following after themselves.^[1]

They can't gather a crowd themselves. No – they have to steal someone else's!

It wasn't Korah that freed Israel from slavery or made good her escape from the world's most powerful nation. Moses did that!

Rebels like Korah cannot do a work of their own – they only steal someone else's.

Korah was clever in his attack, hiding his motive behind something he knew others would listen to.

He acted as if he was representing the people, fighting for their interests, when in fact all he wanted was a greater position for himself.

It's interesting that Korah declared that the whole nation of Israel was holy in v. 3 and that the strong leadership Moses was using was unnecessary.

The fact of the matter was - the nation was not holy and desperately needed strong leadership!

This is the problem with ambitious rebels, because they aspire to a position & title but not the work of the office, they misread the state of affairs and bring destruction & ruin.

Only a shepherd cares for the flock. Ambitious rebels aren't shepherds.

Korah was able to find 250 other notable leaders of Israel to join him in his rebellion against Moses.

There will always be those who are driven by pride who lend a ready ear to the complaint against those God has placed in authority.

They don't enjoy the position they think they're worthy of, so they delight in moving against those they see as standing in the way of their advancement.

It has been my experience, limited as it is, that there are some people who have to be in control of every situation they're in – their marriage, their business, their friendships, their neighborhood, their family, their club, their church.

They use any and all means to assert control – complaint, rumors, threats, fear, intimidation, manipulation, & conspiracy.

It's hard enough dealing with the "Korah's" – what's distressing is how the venom and corruption Korah spews on others lingers and continues to do damage long after Korah is gone.

Leaders aren't perfect and even those God has called and gifted to lead in dramatic and powerful ways still have room to grow in grace and truth.

No man is above rebuke, but there is a right way to go about it if it's genuinely meant to improve the leader.

Even if Korah had been right in his complaint against Moses, the way he went about it was all wrong.

This was a "power play", a public showdown he was staging in which He thought HE would be vindicated in the eyes of all Israel.

The method of Korah (accusation, intimidation, the gathering of a rival

following) reveals his rebellious, divisive heart. [2]

8Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi: 9Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; 10and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?”

Meaning the high priesthood of Aaron and his sons.

11Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?”

Moses doesn't bother defending himself – he leaves that to God.

But he does speak up in defense of his brother Aaron because he was in a position to do so!

He knew that Aaron hadn't appointed himself to the role of being high priest – God had assigned him that office & task.

Moses knew this to be the case because it was to Moses God had said so!

So while Moses won't defend himself, he will defend his brother, or anyone else who is being falsely accused that he knows the truth about!

You see, here's the balance on this whole issue of defending ourselves from attack and accusation.

We ought to leave the defense of ourselves to God.

But how is God going to defend us? One of the main ways God defends us is by having others who are in a position to know the truth to come and speak up for us, on our behalf to back down the accusations.

Proverbs 27:2 says, . . .

Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.

When you find yourself in a conversation that is becoming critical and complaining about some leader, it would be a good idea to issue a strong word of caution.

And if you are able to refute the criticism with a confident knowledge of the truth, do so.

12And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, “We will not come up! 13Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us?”

14Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!”

Moses called for Dathan and Abiram to reason with them but they wouldn't even meet with him!

Then they say some really foolish things.

1) They refer to Egypt as a land flowing with milk and honey!

Their anger at Moses has so tweaked their thinking that it's blurred their memory.

When rebellion infects a heart, it does great spiritual damage, including distorting our perception of reality.

Look at how they speak of the place of their slavery – as flowing with milk

and honey! Absurd!

2) Then they say Moses brought them out of Egypt to kill them in the wilderness.
No – he brought them out to bring them into the Promised Land.

3) Then they blame their failure to enter Canaan ON HIM!

This is CRAZY!! Moses had plead with them not back away but to go up and take the land.

They had balked out of their own fears.

4) Finally, they accuse him of planning to do something he'd never done and they had not one shred of evidence that he would do – blind them!

As Rob McCoy would say, someone needs to serve Dathan and Abiram a big, hot, frothy cup of “SHUT-UP!”

See what these guys have done?

Korah's complaint, driven by his ambition, was like a spark that fell into the dry tinder of their envious hearts.

That envy fed on itself and manufactured a whole house of lies about Moses.

15Then Moses was very angry, and said to the Lord, “Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them.”

16And Moses said to Korah, “Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the Lord—you and they, as well as Aaron. 17Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the Lord, two hundred and fifty censers; both you and Aaron, each with his censer.” 18So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses and Aaron. 19And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

Not only did the 250 conspirators come to the door of the tabernacle, but Korah managed to send out word to the entire camp of Israel so that they all turned to see what was happening.

Korah really believed he was going to be honored before the people and he didn't want a soul to miss it!

And so we see Korah's sin for what it is – Blind Ambition!

That ambition, that unholy desire for position, introduced a cancer into the nation of Israel that brought it to the brink of ruin, as we will see.

20And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 21“Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.”

Now that the showdown has finally come and the whole nation is arrayed, with Moses & Aaron on one side and the rest on the other – God says, “Okay, I've had enough of this. Stand back boys because I'm going to wipe 'em out!”

22Then they fell on their faces, and said, “O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?”

As hurt as Moses and Aaron had to be that the people would rally round this complaint, they knew the real rebels were just a handful and that it wouldn't be right to wipe out the whole nation just because of the sin of a few.

23So the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 24“Speak to the congregation,

saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'"

Since the real rebels were just these 3, only these 3 would experience God's judgment.

But those living near them needed to make sure they weren't actually standing with them or they would be caught up in the judgment.

25Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. 26And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins." 27So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children.

If Dathan and Abiram wouldn't come to Moses when he called them, defiant of his authority, then Moses would go to them.

And with him went the 70 elders of Israel, the men mentioned in ch. 11 whom Moses had delegated his leadership to.

See, this is proof that the rebels' charge that Moses was assuming too much leadership all by himself simply isn't true.

Twice now we've read of Moses delegating authority to other leaders who assisted in the oversight of the nation.

Korah's crew are just upset because they hadn't been picked to be a part of this group.

Their actions here prove why they weren't picked.

So, the warning went out – get away from the rebels – don't have anything to do with what is theirs.

That's a good warning for us too. Stay away from those who are critical and complaining about leaders in ministry.

Don't traffic in their sins, don't get caught up in their complaints and criticisms or you may get caught in their judgment!

In Titus 3:10-11 we read, . . .

Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

In Romans 16:17-18 Paul says . . .

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

A divisive, contentious person will never claim to be divisive and contentious – he/she always consider his/her work a noble cause. Use discernment! Look at what they're doing, not just at what they're saying.^[3]

28And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. 29If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me.

In other words, if these guys just go on from here to live happy, normal lives and die of old age – then God didn't send me.

30But if the Lord creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth

and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord.”

One would hope so.

31Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, 32and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. 33So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. 34Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us up also!”

This is tragic! And it was so unnecessary for all these men had to do at any point was confess their sin and repent.

While a few men of Korah’s household stuck by him, we learn in Num. 26:11 that his children fled and were saved from the destruction.

His sons & daughters had grown up in his house & knew what a pretentious fool he was.

They wanted no part of his rebellion and made good their escape when they heard judgment was coming.

Dathan’s and Abiram’s families weren’t as wise and stayed with them.

There’s a crucial lesson for parents in this.

Be careful of the attitude toward authority you demonstrate at home.

If you’re rebellious and critical of leaders, you may very well infect the heart and mind of your spouse and children and bring them to destruction.

35And a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

These guys were still back at the door of the tabernacle waving their censers back and forth waiting to see what sign the Lord would send indicating His choice of who should lead the nation. Here it was!

36Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 37“Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away. 38The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the Lord, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel.”

Aaron’s son Eleazar was told to gather the 250 censers out of the smoking remains of the rebels and empty their contents outside the camp.

Then he was to fashion them into bronze plates which would be placed on the altar of burnt offering as an perpetual reminder to the people of how serious rebellion is and how radically God deals with it.

39So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar, 40to be a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the Lord, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the Lord had said to him through Moses.

The lesson of the rebellion of Korah is clear – God appoints the leaders for His work.

Ambition is a dangerous thing if it's not an ambition for God himself.

So then, what are we to do with leaders who are ungodly, for certainly there are some of those in ministry.

And some leaders who were called by God when they began have been corrupted by the success of their ministry and have erred, strayed, and become cast-off in terms of the anointing of God. How do we deal with these?

We follow the example of David in the way he treated Saul – even though David was the rightful king of Israel, he left it to God to give him the throne in His time.

He refused to attack or criticize Saul but honored his position even when he could not honor the man.

With the dramatic execution of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and the 250 rebels – that's the end of all talk of rebellion – right?

Now the people all understand really well that Moses is God's choice to lead the nation civilly and Aaron is to lead religiously – right?

41 On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the Lord."

As absurd as this is, don't miss the lesson it teaches.

These people had been infected with discontent by Korah, and even when Korah was shown to be absolutely wrong – the people are still entertaining his criticisms!

This story ought to make it clear we must not allow rebels and the ambitious to settle in our midst but must seek to affirm and be submitted to those the Lord has placed in authority over us, honoring them and watching diligently for any hint of complaint, criticism, ambition, or rebellion.

42 Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared.

43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting.

44 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

This sounds familiar.

And they fell on their faces.

And so does this!

3 times in this chapter we find Moses & Aaron falling on their faces to stay God's judgment from falling on the people.

In Num. 14:5 they fell on his faces before the Lord when the people balked at entering Canaan.

They were pleading with God not to wipe out the children of Israel but to show mercy.

You could always tell who Moses and Aaron were because they were he guys with the flat noses!

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."

Moses knew that the plague God promised had already begun to strike the people in the camp.

So he urged Aaron to take his censer and move quickly to stem the advance of the plague.

Now, let's think about this:

That censer in Aaron's hand as the symbol of his office as high priest.

It was his unique task to intercede on behalf of the nation-this is the office God had assigned him to.

The censers in the hands of the 250 rebels were symbols of their desire to be priests too. God didn't accept them, and their trying to help the people now would have availed not a bit.

But as soon as Aaron filled his censer and moved out among the people, the plague stopped!

This was yet one more sign, one more evidence that Aaron was God's choice and the people must submit to what is, to God's authority!

47Then 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. 48And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. 49Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. 50So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

If I were Aaron, I have to say I would not have run! I would have strolled casually, and stopped to fix the curtains of my tent, plucked a few weeds, taken out the trash, and smelled the flowers . . .

Aaron RUNS as fast as he can to stem the tide of the judgment that is even then killing the rebels.

What's implied but not stated is that these 14,700 were the chief trouble-makers among the people who had been most seriously affected by Korah's rebellious spirit.

These are the ones who had worked up their fellows to come against Moses & Aaron in v. 42.

The plague was affecting the people starting with the most vocal down and Aaron intervened at a point where the real rebellious-hearted were put down.

Aaron gives us a great picture of intercession here.

As we saw earlier, the censer, filled with incense, was a symbol of worship & prayer which rises before God as a sweet aroma.

Aaron made haste to intercede on behalf of the people upon whom the righteous judgment of God was due.

It was his intercession that stemmed the judgment and saved their lives.

He stood in the gap between the dead & the living.

This is what we are called to do as we pray for the lost – to ask that God's mercy would be shown to them & that they would come to faith while they live, before they die.

Your prayer of intercession may be the very thing that keeps a soul from the judgment of eternal death! [Pray]

Numbers 17

As dramatic as the events of ch. 16 have been and as much as we might think this

would forever settle the issue of God's choice of Moses & Aaron, God can see into the hearts of the people and decides to deal with any lingering questions some might have about who's supposed to lead the nation.

1And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2“Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father's house, all their leaders according to their fathers' houses—twelve rods. Write each man's name on his rod. 3And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house.

The ancient occupation of the sons of Jacob were shepherds, and even when they were slaves in Egypt, their primary task had been to tend flocks.

This meant the men would carry the tools of their trade as shepherds, the rod being one of them.

As the leaders of their tribes, the elders' rods became a symbol of their office. God called each of the chief elders to write his own name on his rod.

On the rod for the tribe of Levi, Aaron's name is inscribed.

4Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. 5And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you.”

After their names were inscribed on each of the 12 rods, they would be placed in the tabernacle over night.

The one which sent forth shoots and blossomed would belong to the man God had chosen as the one to be high priest.

V. 5 is interesting – God says, “In this way I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you.”

Even though the complaints were directed at Moses and Aaron, God took them personally!

This is why leaders do not need to defend themselves and why the critical and complaining rebels need to shut up!

6So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. 7And Moses placed the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness. 8Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds. 9Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

This was nothing less than a miracle of regeneration.

Those rods, made as they were from various trees, were long dead.

There was no chance whatever of them sprouting apart from a miracle.

Not only did Aaron's rod sprout, it produced a month's worth of growth in a single night!

It had branches, leaves, flowers, and ripe almonds!

It was obvious to anyone who would look to see that God had made it clear – Aaron was the man God had chosen to lead as high priest.

10And the Lord said to Moses, “Bring Aaron's rod back before the

Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.” 11Thus did Moses; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did.

Having proven God’s call, God then told Moses to put Aaron’s rod in the ark of the covenant.

This meant that in the ark were 3 items; the 2 tablets containing the 10 commandments, a pot of manna, and Aaron’s rod.

All 3 of these things were symbols of God’s holiness and the people’s failure.

When the blood of the atonement offering was sprinkled on the mercy seat over the ark, then atonement would be provided for the 3 main ways the people sinned against God.

The 10 commandments represented God’s righteousness.

The pot of manna represented God’s gracious provision & faithfulness.

Aaron’s rod represented God’s authority and leadership of the nation.

The people had flagrantly violated and rebelled against all 3 of these things!

By breaking God’s holy law, they had sinned spiritually.

In rejecting God’s gracious provision of bread, they sinned in the flesh.

In rebelling against the leaders God picked, they sinned in the realm of the soul.

Inside the ark were the symbols of the 3 main ways in which we sin, body, soul, & spirit.

The blood of the atonement offering covered all these sins.

There is one more thing we need to look at here before we move on and it has to do with how we measure or gauge a ministry.

You see, God gives us a great way to test a leader and ministry to know if it is truly called, empowered and ordained by Him.

If it is, then it will produce fruit – supernatural fruit.

Just as Aaron’s rod budded, God will show His good pleasure in a ministry and His calling on a leader by bringing forth fruit, even when it seems the instrument is incapable of bearing fruit!

But careful now – the fruit that will be born isn’t what many might think.

It isn’t large numbers or big budgets – it isn’t the signs of success the world esteems and looks for.

It’s supernatural fruit – the fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

I have heard what seem like really good teachers of the Bible and while they have some good stuff, their ministry never really seems to go anywhere or accomplish anything.

They get some great stuff out of the Word – but when you examine the fruit in their own lives or the lives of those they consistently minister to, there just doesn’t seem to be any lasting fruit.

On the lampstand in the tabernacle, God told Moses to have the craftsmen who fashioned it, make ornamental almond blossom, like those which sprang from Aaron’s rod.

The lampstand was what gave light to the holy place, as the oil in its cups burned.

That lampstand was a symbol of the Word of God, alive by the Spirit of God, in the people of God, giving witness of the Lord to the world.

The ornamental almond blossoms were meant to teach the idea that the Word of

God is meant to produce life, spiritual growth, fruit!
It isn't meant to make us smarter but to make us holier.
Some Bible teachers do a great job of mining gems from the treasure house of scripture, but they never enrich the lives of their hearers because their teaching and ministry isn't anointed by the Spirit.
On the other hand, we've probably all heard preachers and teachers who aren't all that eloquent and don't really lay out deep spiritual truths, but there's something about the way they minister that puts in people a passion for purity and holiness, & that urges them to draw closer to the Lord.
The only way to explain all this is to understand that God calls and anoints those that He wills and it really doesn't have anything to do with schooling or natural talent.
So, when you are looking for a ministry to support or a church to plug in to, look to see where there is spiritual fruit, where lives are being changed.
Is the Word being taught, yes – but also, is the Word being caught because the one teaching is called and anointed by the Lord.

12So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, “Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! 13Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all utterly die?”

Though this is a bit dramatic and overblown, the people are finally getting it!

[1] Guzik, David *Online Commentary*

[2] Ibid.

[3] ibid