

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 10

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

CHAPTER 17-18

INTRODUCTION

The rebellion by the children of Israel which was instigated by Korah and two hundred and fifty prominent leaders together with Dathan and Abiram, descendants of Reuben, was put down by the LORD with fatal consequences for those who opposed Moses and Aaron. In addition, when the whole congregation charged Moses and Aaron for being the cause of the deaths of the rebels, God did not tolerate their behaviour and sent a plague that was spreading fast and killing the people. Moses showed compassion and told Aaron what to do to stop the plague from consuming the whole community. It is a serious thing to oppose those whom God had called and chosen to be His servants and spokesmen. May we learn this precious lesson so that the wrath of God might not be upon us.

Chapter 16 ended with a sad note—fourteen thousand and seven hundred Israelites died before the plague was stayed. Chapters 17 and 18 reveal the graciousness of God towards a rebellious, murmuring and complaining people who oppose His chosen leaders. God gave them a sign so that they would forever be reminded not to repeat the sin they had committed and not to incur the wrath of God and perish.

Chapter 17 relates the sign that God gave so that the Israelites would not die because of their foolish sinful acts against God. Chapter 18 touches on the privileges and responsibilities of the Aaronic priests and the Levites. These two chapters teach precious principles that we can learn so that we might not sin against God.

OUTLINE

A. The LORD Gave Another Sign to Establish Aaron's Position as High Priest (17:1-13).

1. The LORD instructed Moses what to do (17:1-5).
 - a. Twelve rods representing the twelve tribes were taken with the names of the heads of the tribes (1-3).
 - b. The rods would be laid in the Tabernacle (4).
 - c. The rod of the person whom the LORD chose to be high priest would blossom (5).
2. The result of the test (17:6-9).
 - a. Moses carried out the test (6-7).
 - b. Aaron's rod blossomed with buds, flowers and almonds (8).
 - c. Moses showed the results to the people (9).
3. Aaron's rod was preserved as a testimony in the Ark (17:10-13).
 - a. The LORD instructed Moses to preserve Aaron's rod as a testimony against future rebellions (10).
 - b. Moses obeyed (11).
 - c. The people were terribly frightened (12-13).

B. The LORD Reaffirmed the Appointment and Duties of Aaron and His Sons as the Priests (18:1-19).

1. The responsibilities of the priests and Levites (18:1-7).
 - a. Aaron and his sons were responsible for the laws governing the tabernacle (1).
 - b. The Levites were to assist Aaron and his sons in their duties in the tabernacle (2-5).
 - c. The Levites were a gift of the LORD to Aaron and his sons (6).
 - d. The service of the tabernacle was a gift of the LORD to Aaron and his sons (7).
2. The LORD provided for the priesthood from the sacrificial offerings brought by the people (18:8-19).
 - a. The priests were in charge of regulating the sacrificial offerings brought by the people (8-10).
 - b. The provisions for the priests from the sacrificial offerings (11-19).

C. The LORD was the inheritance of the priests and the Levites (18:20-24).

1. Aaron and his sons were not to have any inheritance of the land for the LORD was their inheritance (18:20).
2. The Levites who served in the tabernacle were also not given an inheritance of the land (21-23).
3. The Levites were given the tithes of the children of Israel (24)

D. The LORD Required the Levites to Give Tithes and Offering to the LORD (18:25-32).

1. The LORD instructed Moses to speak to the Levites (18:25).

2. The Levites were to offer a tithe of all their gifts to the LORD as a heave offering (18:26-30).
 - a. The Levites were to offer the best of the tithes brought by the children of Israel to the LORD (26).
 - b. The Levites' tithes would be the heave offering to the LORD (27-28).
 - c. The Levites were to give the best of the gifts (29-30).
 - d. The Levites must faithfully carry out their duties and responsibilities and they would be rewarded (30-32).

COMMENTARY

THE SIGN OF AARON'S ROD

God instructed Moses to conduct a simple test the result of which would cause the people to stop their murmurings against Moses. The test was that the heads of the twelve tribes were to bring their rod or staff to Moses. Aaron would bring his staff and inscribed his name on it. These staffs would be placed before "the testimony" (which was the Ark of covenant in the most holy place). And what would happen was that the owner of the rod that blossomed would be the one whom God chose to be the high priest or His special servant.

Moses obeyed and carried out the test. He collected the rods and placed them before the Ark. The next day Moses took out the rods, and only Aaron's rod budded, blossomed and bore almonds on it! This was a miracle—dead wood became alive and sprouted flowers and fruits! The children of Israel saw it. Then the LORD instructed Moses to take Aaron's rod

back to the Ark to be kept there as a memorial to the children of Israel that they should never again rebel against the LORD'S anointed or be struck dead. Moses obeyed and did as the LORD commanded. How obedient Moses was!

God in his mercy and kindness provided for the people of Israel and their posterity a reminder that they should never murmur and rebel against the LORD'S anointed so that they would not die. Those who plan to rebel against God's called and chosen servants are actually acting against God. They face the terrible danger of being severely censured by God. Sometimes God's servants do make mistakes, and there are better and constructive ways of "opposing" him without incurring God's displeasure.

The Lord Jesus Christ taught that the Old Testament speaks of Him.¹ Aaron's rod that budded, blossomed and bore almonds is a type of Christ. Christ is our High Priest just as Aaron was the high priest of the Israelites. Christ was rejected of men and was crucified and died on the cross. But God vindicated Him by raising Him from the dead. This is signified by the budding and blossoming of the dead-wooden rod; and the almonds signify the firstfruits of those who are saved of whom Christ is the first. Moreover Aaron's rod or staff was a symbol of power and authority. The day is soon coming when Christ shall reign over all the earth and every knee shall acknowledge that He is Lord to the praise and glory of God!

The people cried in desperation and panicked. In fact, they over-reacted and bemoaned that they would now all die. God once again revealed that He is

gracious and ever merciful to His people. He is always faithful to His covenant promises to the children of Israel. God provided again a means in which they did not have to die if they submit to His servants and obey.

GOD'S MINISTERS & MINISTRY

God placed a great responsibility on the Aaronic priesthood. Aaron and his sons were to "bear the iniquity of the sanctuary" (18:1). It means that they were responsible for any unauthorized encroachment of the tabernacle. They must guard and warn the people not to approach the holy place of God without the proper way prescribed by God. They would be held responsible and bear the consequences of the sin. They too would also be responsible for the "iniquity of the priesthood." In other words, they must also guard against anyone of them from offering "strange fires" like Nadab and Abihu. As for the Levites, the LORD declared that they might join Aaron and his sons to help them in serving the LORD. The Levites were subordinate to the priests. The Levites would keep the charge of the tabernacle except they might not handle the holy vessels of the tabernacle, lest they die. Again the LORD mentioned that both Aaron and his sons together with the Levites were to see that the people did not violate the laws of God concerning the tabernacle so that they might be free from the wrath of God.

There are several valuable things that we can learn today from these accounts God gave to the children of Israel. First, like the priests and Levites whom God chose and called to serve Him and to be responsible for the spiritual purity of the people, ministers or pastors, elders and deacons of the church today are accountable to God for the faithful exercise of their ministries. It

¹ John 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

is sad that these servants, who faithfully carry out their responsibility, will meet opposition and criticism by some church members that aspire in their own way to become leaders of the church. The ministry is a God given ministry. Do not aspire to it unless we are sure of God's calling. God Himself had chosen the Levites to be His dedicated servants to do His work. This is God's law for all His work.² We should heed the counsel of Jeremiah the prophet (Jeremiah 45:5) *And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.*

James Philip comments, "The truth is, it is possible to covet a place in the work and the service of God, and to do so as a means of self-expression, or for the gratification of personal ambition, or as the indication of a lust for power, or even merely for the prestige it seems to bestow. It is oddly impressive to realize that what so often attracts from the outside is the kudos, the glory and the dignity that position seems to offer; the 'other side' seldom seems to be seen, with solemn responsibilities matching every privilege."³

It is possible that we can be mistaken of God's call, if there is a lack of spiritual discernment and knowledge of ourselves in respect of our real gifts and spiritual maturity. We can be moved by a sudden inward feeling of emotions and enthusiasm. It is a noble desire to be a pastor, elder or deacon of a church. But we must honestly and strictly apply the test of the Word by

² Hebrews 5:4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

³ James Philip, *Numbers*, 205.

ourselves and the church concerning our calling.⁴ We must also see that the ministry is a shared ministry. God not only selected Aaron and his sons to be priests, but He chose the Levites to assist Aaron and his sons in the discharge of their service in the Tabernacle. As born again believers and each a member of the royal priesthood of God, we have a share in the exercise of God's ministry. While God called and gave pastors and teachers, the lay ministers have the equal shared responsibility of building the church "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). We also learn that, like Aaron and his sons and the Levites who were called to *serve*, and whether we are pastors, or elders or deacons, we too are called to serve and not to lord over the people.

THE SUPPORT OF THE MINISTRY

Having declared the responsibility and duties of the priesthood and the Levites, God revealed the way He would provide for the needs of His chosen servants. First they were not allotted land inheritance when they occupied Canaan, the Promised Land (18:20). The LORD was their inheritance. God provided for the needs of His specially called servants through the various sacrificial offerings of the congregation. It was to be a permanent ordinance, as God described it as a "covenant of salt". Salt is a substance that is used to prevent decay. So this law of providing the LORD'S special servants must not be allowed to decline. In this respect God's ministry was shared by all the people of God. Paul reiterated this principle when he taught Timothy to

⁴ Gordon J. Keddie, *The Message of the Book of Numbers*, 128.

teach the churches he pastored.⁵ Our Lord Jesus Christ also taught this when He sent His disciples two by two to preach that “the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”⁶

Now the Levites, having received the tithes from the children of Israel, must also give their tithes from the tithes they received unto the LORD. They must give the best part of the tithes they received to the LORD. The rest of the tithes would be for their consumption and enjoyment. The LORD declared that it was their reward for their service in the Tabernacle (18:31).

God’s specially called servants must be provided for by the congregation. The people of God must learn this principle of providing for the needs of God’s called servants. The reason is simple and clear. Aaron, his sons and the Levites who were not given any land inheritance were freed from working and tilling the land for their subsistence. They were to devote all their energy and time to the work of the tabernacle. Their responsibility and work was great and necessary. In the same token, God’s specially called full-time pastors and ministers should be adequately provided for so that they are freed from spending the hours and the energy of providing for their own needs. They should then devote all their time and energy to feed the flock of God and effectively assume the spiritual oversight of the

congregation. We learn too that God will bless abundantly those who faithfully obey and honour God. God is no debtor to any man.

SUMMARY

God’s grace is evident in these chapters. He provides the means by which those who take heed will be freed from His displeasure and be blessed by Him. On the other hand, it is equally true that those who reject His warnings will face His wrath and displeasure. God put a great responsibility upon the shoulders of His specially called servants. His specially called servant, who knows better His Word and His Will, is required to oversee the spiritual growth of the people. Again God shows His grace and mercy upon the people so that they might walk uprightly before Him and be blessed. In turn, God rewards the specially called servants and provides for all their needs. Their work is a full-time work that requires their complete commitment. Its demand on the people of God who are being served by them is to appreciate and understand their work and cooperate with them and provide for their every need. God, who is no debtor to any man, will in turn bless those who honour Him by obeying Him. In this respect, we all learn that the ministry of God is a shared ministry between the called leaders and the lay people.

AMEN

⁵ 1 Timothy 5:18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer *is* worthy of his reward.

⁶ Luke 10:7 And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

Monday: Numbers 17:1-13; Jeremiah 3:15; Acts 20:28; Psalm 105:15.

Tuesday: Numbers 18:1-7; Hebrew 13:7; 2 Timothy 2:15; Ephesians 4:11-16.

Wednesday: Numbers 18:8-19; John 12:26.

Thursday: Numbers 18:20-24; Genesis 14:17-24; Psalm 16:1-11; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14.

Friday: Numbers 18:25-32; 1 Corinthians 9:4-10, 13-14; Matthew 10:9-10.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the sign signify apart from the fact that Aaron was God's anointed priests?

2. How can we oppose the servant of God without incurring His wrath when there is a need to?

3. What do you think is the main point of God in including chapter 17 in the Bible?

4. In what way is the rod of Aaron a type of our Lord Jesus Christ?

5. What impresses you most about Moses in this chapter?

6. How serious were the responsibility of the Aaronic priesthood?

7. What principle of ministry is exemplified in the appointment of Levites to be helpers of the Aaronic priests?

8. When God selected only the Levites to “do the service of the tabernacle,” what universal law of the ministry of God can we learn?

9. What assurance may we find in chapter 18 that God will make all needful provision for those whom He calls to special service?

10. In the provision for the priests and the Levites, how many people were involved?

11. Why do you think God substituted land inheritance for the people with inheritance of Himself for the priests and Levites?

12. Normally the giving of tithes involved agricultural produce and animals. Is it wrong to substitute it with money, as is the practice today?

13. Having received the tithes of the people, should the Levites tithe again to the LORD?

14. How can you show that God is gracious in these two chapters?

15. As all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:5-9), how do you consider your service before God in the church?

LIFE APPLICATIONS

A. The Knowledge of God.

What do we learn about God in these two chapters?

1. That God is gracious.
 - a) The test to re-affirm the position of Aaron and his sons as priests, God's mediator between Him and Israel was initiated by God.
 - b) God imposed on the priests the accountability and the responsibility to guard the tabernacle, holy ground, against unauthorized trespassing.
 - c) The purpose God stated was to "make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel" against Moses (17:5), and against God so that they would not die (17:10).
2. God keeps His covenant promise.
 - a) The prevention of the Israelites to sin against God so that they would not die, demonstrated God's faithfulness in keeping His covenant promise.
 - b) He had promised that they would enter into the land. However it was not at any cost. The sin of the people would be dealt with to His satisfaction.
3. The person whom God chooses to be His representative and

servant will have God supporting him when he is being opposed.

- a) God vindicated Moses and Aaron when they were opposed by the Israelites in their positions as leader and high priest.
 - b) God more than adequately provided for all their physical needs (18:14).
4. God's chosen servant must devote full time and focus on His work.
 - a) Aaron, his sons, and the Levites were not given land inheritance. The reason is obvious and clear.
 - b) They were required to fully concentrate on the work that God had given them so that they would not make any mistake and be punishable by death. Everything done was to be pleasing in His sight.
 - c) The contemporary concept of "tentmaking" is not biblical. It is the invention of man who desires to the best of both worlds—the secular and the spiritual. Nothing short of full commitment.

B. Obedience is better than Sacrifice.

1. Statement explained. Illustrate it by relating the incident when Saul kept the best sheep and cattle under the pretext to offer them to the LORD, instead of destroying them as commanded by God (1 Samuel 15:14),

*KJV 1 Samuel 15:14 And Samuel said, What meaneth then **this bleating** of the sheep in mine ears, and the*

lowing of the oxen which I hear?

will call if it is His will. Do not think and do for God.

2. Moses exemplified this thus far. 18:11 is a significant verse. One might think little about it. But the fact that it was written and the sentence structure emphasizes the aspect of Moses' obedience, obviously mean something important about Moses' obedience.
3. Apply to modern day living. What does it mean in practical terms, obedience is better than sacrifice—obey in what ways and sacrifice in what ways?

D. Some abiding principles of God's ministry.

1. The priests and the Levites were accountable for the offences against the sanctuary and the priests alone were responsible against the priesthood.
2. The ministry is SHARED between the priests and the Levites. Each believer has a place in God's scheme of things. No one should lift himself up above others. All serve God.
3. The ministry is a SERVING ministry. The priests and the Levites were called not to lord over the Israelites. Similarly, pastors and elders and deacons and leaders of the church are called to serve and not to lord or boss around.
4. The ministry is a God-given ministry. It is by one's own choice. Waiting on the Lord who