

**May 19, 2019 - Num. 17:1-13 - Aaron's Rod**  
**Torah Reading: Numbers 17:1-13 - Aaron's Rod**  
**Psalm 103**  
**Haftarah: Isaiah 11:1-10**

### **The Budding of Aaron's Rod**

After the demise of Korah, the people still weren't convinced.

**Numbers 16:41** - "...the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD."

Then God sent a plague that killed 14,700, but it was halted through Aaron's intercession.

The people still murmured. Hadn't Aaron been instrumental in the sin of the Golden Calf? Perhaps, the people thought, there is someone better suited to be High Priest.

So God tried another miracle, this time giving life instead of taking it.

Redemption requires not only our death - illustrated by the demise of Korah, the 250 and the ones struck down by the plague - but the resurrection life of Christ, risen in us. The incident of Aaron's rod budding displays this with clarity.

The death of the Lord silences the gainsaying of Korah within us. The life of the Lord allows us to walk in newness of life, submitted to Him.

### **A Priesthood Confirmed**

Just as the priesthood of Aaron was attested by a miraculous "resurrection" of this dead almond branch, Jesus' priesthood after the order of Melchizadek (**Hebrews 7:4-10**) was confirmed by His own resurrection from the dead.

**Numbers 17:1-2** - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod."

**Numbers 17:3** - "And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers."

**Numbers 17:5** - "And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you."

**Numbers 17:8** - "And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded,

and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."

What was Aaron's Rod, and what is the spiritual meaning of the almond bud?

### **Almonds and the Lampstand**

In describing the branches of the Lampstand in the Tabernacle:

- **Exodus 25:33** - "Three bowls made like unto almonds, with a knop and a flower in one branch; and three bowls made like almonds in the other branch, with a knop and a flower: so in the six branches that come out of the candlestick."

The bowls were to be "made like unto almonds" - boat-shaped according to the Talmud. In fact, it contains representations of the buds, blossoms and fruit of the almond tree, connecting it the miracle of Aaron's rod. (Although some sources interpret the knops as pomegranates or apples, and the blossoms as lilies).

Almonds blossom in early February, the first plant to awaken from the death of winter, and thus a harbinger of spring, and a symbol of resurrection. Aaron's rod budded, sprouted, and offered fully formed fruit, all at the same time.

Abarbanel (Spanish rabbi, 1437-1508) says normally, when almonds grow, the flowers fall off first. But here a miracle occurred and the flowers, unripened fruit, and almonds all were present at the same time. And they remained there throughout summer and winter.

The miraculous budding of the almond flower represented the Divine approval of Aaron's priesthood from above. But then, the almonds continued to develop naturally, as a sign to the Jewish people that Aharon was "naturally" suited to be the High Priest.

In comparison with other fruit, almonds ripen very quickly. Thus the almond is the most fitting symbol for the priesthood because it represents the blessings of the priests, which race unimpeded to their recipients - like Aaron running to intercede. But it also pictures the swiftness with which God will judge those who intrude into Aaron's priesthood.

See [https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/680240/jewish/Fruit-on-the-Staff.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/680240/jewish/Fruit-on-the-Staff.htm)

### **The resurrection life of Christ is not time-dependent**

- **John 4:35** - "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

"almond" = *shakeid* - wakeful, watchful (and almonds are shaped like eyes).

- **Jeremiah 1:11-12** - "And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do

you see?" And I said, "I see an almond branch." Then the Lord said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it."

There are several words for "rod" in Hebrew - *Matteh* means a staff denoting authority and tribal office, and can mean "scepter." *Anaf* means a branch and denotes growth and fruitfulness. *Mishe'net* is a stick used by the old or infirm for support.

*Makei*, the word Jeremiah uses here, means a rod associated with beating. It symbolizes the "rod of correction."

Aaron's rod utilizes the ideas of authority, of fruitfulness, as well as correction ("for a token against the rebels" - **Numbers 17:10**)

token = *'owth* - a sign, a flag or evidence. The same word is used (**Genesis 9:17**) for the rainbow as a token of God's covenant with humanity not to destroy the world again with a flood.

### **Almonds and Resurrection**

Another name for the almond in Hebrew is *luz*. In Talmudic tradition this is the "nut of the spinal column" from which human beings will "blossom forth" at the resurrection. (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 12:5), referring to the "dry bones" vision of **Ezekiel 37**.

"On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds." (**Numbers 17:8**) Almonds normally blossom early but yield fruit late.

This miracle hinted at the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His status as the first fruits of resurrection (**1 Corinthians 15:20**).

At the same time, the almond bloom is symbolic of the brevity and fragility of our natural human life - see **Ecclesiastes 12:5** for the almond bloom as the white hair of the aged.

### **A Root out of Dry Ground**

- **Isaiah 53:2** - "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."

In effect, Jesus can be pictured as laid - dead - amidst the "staves" of all other gods. Which blossomed?

Jesus' resurrection is unique among founders of other religions and philosophies. Like Aaron's rod, his resurrection "blossomed," while all others remain dead. Jesus' tomb is empty.

## The Traditional History of Aaron's Rod

Like the shepherd's staff, the rod can be used for correction, guidance and to depict sovereignty.

Midrash Yelamdenu (Yalk. on Ps. ex. § 869) states that "the staff with which Jacob crossed the Jordan is identical with that which Judah gave to his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Gen. xxxii. 10, xxxviii. 18). It is likewise the holy rod with which Moses worked (Ex. iv. 20, 21), with which Aaron performed wonders before Pharaoh (Ex. vii. 10), and with which, finally, David slew the giant Goliath (I Sam. xvii. 40). David left it to his descendants, and the Davidic kings used it as a scepter until the destruction of the Temple, when it miraculously disappeared (). When the Messiah comes it will be given to him for a scepter in token of his authority over the heathen."

It was made of sapphire, weighed forty seahs (a seah = 10.70 pounds), and bore the inscription , which is composed of the initials of the Hebrew names of the Ten Plagues (Tan., Waëra 8, ed. Buber). It radiated light from the divine name (Zohar I:9a). Like the later story of Excalibur, only the rightful owner could withdraw the rod once it was planted in the ground.

Another traditional history of the rod expanded on this:

God created it in the twilight of the sixth day of Creation (Ab. v. 9, and Mek., Beshallah, ed. Weiss, iv. 60), and delivered it to Adam when the latter was driven from paradise. After it had passed through the hands of Shem, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob successively, it came into the possession of Joseph. On Joseph's death the Egyptian nobles stole some of his belongings, and, among them, Jethro appropriated the staff. Jethro planted the staff in his garden, when its marvelous virtue was revealed by the fact that nobody could withdraw it from the ground; even to touch it was fraught with danger to life. This was because the Ineffable Name of God was engraved upon it. When Moses entered Jethro's household he read the Name, and by means of it was able to draw up the rod, for which service Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, was given to him in marriage. Her father had sworn that she should become the wife of the man who should be able to master the miraculous rod and of no other (Pirke R. El. 40; Sefer ha-Yashar; Yalk. Ex. 168, end). It must, however, be remarked that the Mishnah (Ab. v. 9) as yet knew nothing of the miraculous creation of Aaron's Rod, which is first mentioned by the Mekilta (l.c.) and Sifre on Deut. (Ber. xxxiii. 21; ed. Friedmann, p. 355). This supposed fact of the supernatural origin of the rod explains the statement in the New Testament (Heb. ix. 4) and Tosef., Yoma, iii. 7 (it is to be interpreted thus according to B. B. 14a), that Aaron's Rod, together with its blossoms and fruit, was preserved in the Ark. King Josiah, who foresaw the impending national catastrophe, concealed the Ark and its contents (Tosef., Soṭah, 13a); and their whereabouts will remain unknown until, in the Messianic age, the prophet Elijah shall reveal them (Mek. l.c.).

Origen on Exodus (chap. vii.) says: "This rod of Moses, with which he subdued the Egyptians, is the symbol of the cross of Jesus, who conquered the world." Some early

Christians claimed it had served as the cross-beam at the crucifixion.

### **Why this test of the rods?**

Korah was a member of the tribe of Levi, and thus his rebellion against Moses and Aaron was largely an internal matter within the tribe of Levi itself. So how would Aaron's right to the priesthood be established by taking only one staff from the tribe of Levi, with his name written on it. Why not one rod for the leader of the other Levites and another for Aaron?

Though the blossoming of the rod did not prove conclusively that there could not be a second High Priest from the tribe of Levi, this was unnecessary, for it had already been proven by the miracle of the censers (16:16ff.), which demonstrated graphically that "we only have one High Priest"

Rashi explains that Moses placed Aaron's staff in the middle of the pack "amidst the staffs," lest the people say that it blossomed only because he had placed it closest to the Ark and the Divine Presence.

The rod was put away with the Ark of the Covenant:

- **Hebrews 9:3-5** - "Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly."

The Mishnah (Talmud, Yoma 53b.) says "when King Solomon built the Holy Temple, knowing that it was destined to be destroyed, he built a place in which to hide the Ark, [at the end of] hidden, deep, winding passageways."

The Ark, Aaron's staff and the jar of manna along with the anointing oil and the Urim and Thummim were hidden by King Josiah in subterranean tunnels beneath the Temple Mount (see II Chronicles 35:3) 22 years before the destruction of the First Temple. As such, these elements were not present in the Holy of Holies of the Second Temple.

### **The rod of God will eventually be given to the Messiah:**

"The Lord will give Hephzibah, the mother of Menachem son of Amiel, a staff for acts of salvation," he said, "A great star will shine before her. All the stars will swerve from their paths." Now the staff that the Lord will give Hephzibah, the mother of the Menachem ["comforter] son of Amiel, is made of almond wood, and it is hidden away in Rakkath... This is the staff the Lord gave Adam and Moses, and Aaron and Joshua and King David. Then Hephzibah, the mother of the Messiah, will come and hand over to him the staff by which the signs were performed (Sefer Zerubbabel- 7th century A.D. but drawing on older material). It then passes from her to the Messiah ben Joseph [the suffering Messiah who dies] and then to the Messiah ben David [hidden as an outcast

until the time of the end], who will wield it in end-times struggles and reign at the resurrection of the dead (Sefer Zerubbabel; PdRE 40; Yalkut Ps. 110 # 869; Buber Tan., Yaeira 8).

In fact, Hephzibah is said herself to be "passed on from old" until she finally "blossoms by the word of God" with her child the Messiah, just like Aaron's rod blossomed. In this picture the rabbis drew together the blossoming of Aaron's rod with the future "shoot of the kingdom" which will "sprout and blossom" from the stem of Jesse as in Isaiah 11:1. The Messiah's birth is identified with the "staff of Israel's salvation" and combines a conquering image with redemptive motherhood. Both "rod" and "shoot" are translated in the Septuagint with the Greek rhabdos - staff, branch or rod as in Numbers 17, and also as "scepter."

- **Psalm 110:2** - (God speaking to the Davidic Messiah) - "The LORD shall send the rod (*matteh* - scepter) of your strength out of Zion: rule you in the middle of your enemies."

Compare the story of Hephzibah with **Revelation 12:5** - "And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod (rhabdos) of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne."

See "Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity" By Alexei Sivertsev

### **The Rod in Christian Symbolism**

The thirteenth century Christian Syriac text the Book of the Bee contains one of the most fanciful and extensive treatments of the staff. It notes that the staff was a branch cut from the tree of knowledge in Eden — a point also made in the Zohar. It further states that the staff was used by Abraham to smash his father's idols, and it was the stake to which Moses attached the copper serpent in the desert (see Numbers 21:8). It was hidden by Phineas at the entrance to Jerusalem, was later found by Jesus, and ultimately, was used as the wood for the cross on which Jesus was crucified. This account makes much of the Torah's linking of staffs and snakes, but it is also suffused with Christian imagery and symbolism. The staff's origin as a branch of the tree of knowledge links it with the doctrine of original sin, and it is therefore fitting that Jesus' crucifixion forgiving original sin should be associated with the staff. Moreover, the affixing of the copper serpent to the staff again associates it with snakes while simultaneously prefiguring the crucifixion—the snake that brings physical salvation to the plague-stricken Israelites is akin to Jesus' salvific role on the cross. Earlier Christian works make a similar point. The Epistle of Barnabas (12:5-7) states that when the snakes were biting the people, Moses made "a type of Jesus" and that this "serpent which is placed on the tree" saved them. Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho (112) calls the snake on the pole set up by Moses the "resemblance of the crucified Jesus."

[https://www.thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/the-life-and-death-of-moses-staff/#\\_edn4](https://www.thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/the-life-and-death-of-moses-staff/#_edn4)

### **Jesus Lifted Up**

- **Numbers 21:8** - "And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live."

- **John 3:14** - "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up"

Although the brazen serpent was said to be placed on a "*nec*" or pole rather than a staff or rod, this word is elsewhere translated as ensign or standard.

Rashbam (A leading French rabbi c. 1085 – c. 1158) says Moses used his staff - "the staff of God" - at the battle with Amalek as an "ensign" — "the equivalent of a flag" or banner — as an inspiration that the troops could rally around.

Regarding the healing through the snake on the staff, our Rabbis commented, "Could a snake [on the pole] cause death [by not looking at it] or give life [by looking at it]? Rather, at the time Israel would look upward and subject their heart to their Father in Heaven, they would be cured; but if not, they would waste away" (Rashi, from Rosh HaShanah 29a)

## The Zohar

The Zohar points to Moses' rod becoming a serpent, and says this represents two ways of thinking and knowing. When God asks "What is that in thine hand?" it is to discern whether you have fallen from the perspective of Aaron's budding rod into that of the serpent.

"Cast it on the ground," and then, "it became a serpent." It means that there is no intermediary state between the rod and the serpent.

The word used to describe the staff of Moses and Aaron is called a *matteh*. It is not the only word used for staff in the Bible, but is deliberately chosen to reference Moses and Aaron's staves. *Matteh* also means a tribe, as in the twelve tribes of Israel, from the idea of a branching out of one's geneology. The 12 tribes were "branches" of Jacob's line. When Moses or Aaron stretched out their staffs, it was as if they were summoning the entire Israelite nation to partake in the wonder they were about to perform.

Tribal staffs often had the whole lineage and geneology carved upon it.

Believers are like the budding of this dead stick -

- **2 Corinthians 5:17** - "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

See [http://www.messengers-of-messiah.org/GodsMasterPlan/Ch6\(2014\)Aaron'sRodTreeofLifeCrucifixionTree.pdf](http://www.messengers-of-messiah.org/GodsMasterPlan/Ch6(2014)Aaron'sRodTreeofLifeCrucifixionTree.pdf)