

March 3, 2019 - Num 8:1 – 9:23 - Lampstand, Levites, Passover, the Cloud
Torah Reading: Numbers 8:1 – 9:23 - Lampstand, Levites, Passover, the Cloud
Psalm 97
Haftarah: Zechariah 4:1-9 + 6:12-13
Zechariah 2:14-?

Lighting of the Lampstand

Rashi - Why is the portion dealing with the menorah juxtaposed to the portion dealing with the chieftains? For when Aaron saw the dedication [by their offerings] of the chieftains, he felt distressed over not joining them in this dedication - neither he nor his tribe. So God said to him, "By your life, yours is greater than theirs, for you will light and prepare the lamps." - [Tanchuma Beha'alothecha 3]

Numbers 8:1-2 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, and say unto him, When thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick."

Rashi - "When you light": Heb. בְּהֵעֲלִיתָּ, lit., when you "cause to ascend." Since the flame rises, Scripture describes kindling in terms of ascending. He is required to kindle the lamp until the flame rises by itself (Shab. 21a). Our Sages further expounded from here that there was a step in front of the menorah, on which the kohen stood to prepare [the lamps]. — [Sifrei Beha'alothecha 3]

"over against the candlestick" = toward the face of the menorah/lampstand: Toward the middle lamp, which is not on [one of] the branches, but on the menorah itself. — [Men. 98b] Why [were the wicks facing inwards, thus giving off so little light]? So that [people] should not say that He [God] needs the light. — [Tanchuma Beha'alothecha 5]

But probably, the light shined on the Table of Shewbread.

The full description of the lampstand is given in **Exodus 25:31-40**

Numbers 8:4 - "And this work of the candlestick was of beaten gold, unto the shaft thereof, unto the flowers thereof, was beaten work: according unto the pattern which the LORD had shewed Moses, so he made the candlestick."

This was a shadow or reflection of a Heavenly design.

The Lampstand was made of one piece, as Christ is one with His church (**John 15:5** - True Vine and branches).

The bowls were to be "made like unto almonds." Aaron's rod "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**).

"almond" = *shakeid* - wakeful, watchful (and almonds are shaped like eyes). Also pointing to the "awakening" of the Resurrection.

Recall that according to the Talmud (Shabbat 22b), while all the lamps received the same amount of olive oil, the "westernmost" lamp (according to Rashi, the center lamp, due to its orientation) miraculously never ran out of oil, even though it was kindled first in the sequence. In other words, when Aaron would rekindle the lamps every evening, he found the shamash still burning, so he simply refilled it with oil and trimmed its wick. (This continued until the time of Christ's crucifixion, when the miracle ceased)

The Lampstand represents Christ as the Light of the world. It can also be seen as a symbol of the Tree of Life. Aaron is a type of Christ kindling that Light as our High Priest.

Vision of the Golden Lampstand - Zechariah 4:1-14

- **Zechariah 4:10-14** - "For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel — these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth." Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?" And I answered the second time and said to him, "What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from themselves?" So he answered me, saying, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth."

Zerubbabel rebuilding the Temple is here a type of Christ building His church.

The reference is to the Lampstand in the Tabernacle and later Temple, but it is seen spiritually and not in the same design as the one Moses had made (**Exodus 25:37**).

Two olive trees stand beside the Lampstand, each supplying oil to a central bowl, which then carries it to the seven lamps.

Rashi is of opinion there were seven pipes going to every lamp, 49 in all.

The idea is that this spiritual Lampstand doesn't need any human help - neither to press the olives into oil, nor to refill the lamps, nor to trim the wicks nor light them - and it never runs out of oil.

As stated in **verse 6** - "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts"

The Seven Lamps are variously pictured throughout scripture - the Seven churches in Revelation (**Revelation 1:4**); the seven "eyes of the Lord"; the seven spirits of God; or possibly the ministers of the Word or believers in general (**Matthew 5:14**).

- **Revelation 1:20** - "The seven lampstands are the seven churches."

- **Matthew 5:14-16** - "Ye are the light of the world."

- **Revelation 4:5** - "And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God."

The oil could represent the Holy Spirit or the Gospel message of the cross itself.

The two Olive Trees:

- **Zechariah 4:14** - "Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth."

The same image is referenced in Revelation:

- **Revelation 11:3-5** - "And I will empower my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." These witnesses are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouths and devours their enemies."

Israel is called an olive tree:

- **Jeremiah 11:16** - "The LORD called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit"

Many of the rabbis saw these two as Joshua and Zerubbabel, the one anointed for the priesthood, and the other anointed as king. This would be the two aspects of Christ - both High Priest and King.

The Joshua / Yeshua mentioned in **Zechariah 3** was a Levite and descendant of Aaron in post-exilic Jerusalem in approximately 538 B.C. He was the first person chosen to be the High Priest after the return from exile.

Zerubbabel was a grandson of the former king, and his name means "winnowed in Babylon" i.e. born in exile. He was in the line of David, and Messianic expectations later were attached to his name.

Zechariah 6:12-13 - Zechariah is told to fashion a crown out of the silver and gold, set it on the head of Joshua the High Priest, and tell him the following:

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Branch (Hebrew: *Zemah*): for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord ... he shall bear royal honor, and shall sit upon his throne and rule. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them."

Thus, the two Olive trees - Messiah in his office as High Priest and Messiah in his office

as King - are standing before (or under the watchful eye and protection of) the Lord.

The Purifying of the Levites

Numbers 8:5-7 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean."

"water of purifying" = *chatta'ath*, literally "sin" or "sin offering" - i.e. to cleanse them from contamination by those who were in contact with the dead. The water of cleansing was made with the ashes of the Red Heifer (see description in **Numbers 19**). According to tradition, the burning of the Red Heifer had already occurred on the second day of the 8-day dedication of the Tabernacle.

Rashi - On the second [day] [after Moses Moses "had fully set up the tabernacle"], the red cow was burned; on the third [day], they sprinkled the first sprinkling (described in Numbers 19) of the blood of the Red Heifer before the Tabernacle; and on the seventh [day], they [the Levites] were shaved. - [Sifrei 1:145]

This ceremony is a shadow of the true spiritual "refining" and purifying that Christ effects in believers:

- **Malachi 3:3** - "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness."

Levites a Picture of Those Cleansed from Leprosy

"let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean."

Rashi - Since they [the Levites] were submitted in atonement for the firstborn who had practiced idolatry [when they worshipped the golden calf], which is called sacrifices to the dead - and one afflicted with *tzara'ath* (leprosy) is considered dead - they required shaving like those afflicted with *tzara'ath* (leprosy).

- **Leviticus 14:9** - "But it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off: and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean."

"and so make themselves clean" - The Targum of Jonathan adds "in forty seahs of water"; and according to the sense of that paraphrase, both the bodies and clothes of the Levites were dipped in water.

The Laying on of Hands

Numbers 8:9-11 - "And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together: And thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites: And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the LORD."

Just as the High Priest laid his hands on the goat at Yom Kippur, so Israel was doing the same on the Levites, because they were a sacrifice - a living sacrifice, in atoning for the firstborn of Israel.

This should give is a more sober view of ordination and other "laying on of hands" ceremonies. It means the "death of self" - picking up the cross - for the ordained into a life of service for God.

Numbers 8:12-13 - "And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites. And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an offering unto the LORD."

The Levites in turn, lay hands on two bullocks, one as a sacrifices to atone for their own sin and the other as a burnt offering picturing their being "consumed" in God's service.

In the New Testament, this rite of laying on of hands signifies the consent of the people in the designation and appointment of ministers of the word, deacons, etc.

- **1 Timothy 4:14** - "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."

Sometimes the whole congregation participated in this with the laying on of hands, other times the elders stand in for the people.

'For a Wave Offering'

"for an offering" - *těnuwphah* - a wave offering; tumultuous shaking

The waving signified the "shaking" that is necessary for God's ministers to become "flames of fire." This in close connection with the lighting of the Lampstand previously.

'Waving' to Release Light

wave offering = *těnuwphah* - from *nuwph*, which means to quiver, shake, vibrate up and down, a tumult

It is also used to mean "sift" once here:

- **Isaiah 30:28** - "And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift (nuwph) the nations with the sieve of vanity..."

In Peter's case:

- **Luke 22:31** - "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

"converted" = *epistrephó* - "turn back, come to myself"

The release of heat and light from fire - whether from a match or a lightbulb or a nuclear weapon - comes from increasingly agitated electrons and other particles.

The Levites were "kindled" as light because they were "waved" before God.

The waving signified the "shaking" that is necessary for God's ministers to become "flames of fire." This in close connection with the lighting of the Lampstand previously.

- **Psalms 104:4** - "He makes the winds His messengers, flames of fire His servants."

- **Hebrews 1:7** - "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire."

Like with Peter, there is resistance, a sifting by Satan and the world, from within and without, against the Gospel we preach.

When we are "converted" or *epistrephó* - "turn back, come to myself" - the light is released.

All of us are "a royal priesthood" in God's Kingdom.

- **1 Peter 2:9** - "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"

"peculiar people" = a people for God's own possession - a restating of what God said about the Levites in this chapter of Numbers: "They are Mine."

The preaching of the cross must first slay the messenger before it can become light to others.

Three Mentions of 'Wave Offering'

Rashi - In the same way that the trespass-offering of one afflicted with *tzara'ath* (leprosy) requires waving [the animal] while it is alive. Three wavings are mentioned in

this section: the first (verse 11) refers to the sons of Kohath, and for this reason it states with regard to them, "that they may serve in the Lord's service," since they were responsible for the work involving the most holy objects - the ark, the table, etc. The second (verse 13) refers to the sons of Gershon. Therefore, it is stated with regard to them, "a waving before the Lord" (verse 13), for even they were assigned holy work-the curtains and the clasps, which could be seen in the Holy of Holies. The third [waving] was for the sons of Merari (verse 15). - [Midrash Aggadah] 16

Although God had "taken" the Levites for Himself, the firstborn of the people had to agree and participate.

The prophets saw a future expansion of the Levites in a universal Israel:

- **Isaiah 66:19-21** - "And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD. And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD."

The Age of Service

Numbers 8:24-26 - "This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: And from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting upon the service thereof, and shall serve no more: But shall minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation, to keep the charge, and shall do no service. Thus shalt thou do unto the Levites touching their charge."

There seems to be a contradiction - was it from 25 years old and upward (**Numbers 8:24**) or 30 years old and upward (**Numbers 4:3**)?

Rashi - How can this be reconciled? From the age of twenty-five they came to study the laws of the service; they would study for five years, and at the age of thirty they would [begin] work. From here we learn that a student who does not experience success in his learning for five years, will never experience it. — [Chul. 24a]

Aben Ezra proposes a slightly different solution: At twenty five years of age a Levite entered into the service of the tent or tabernacle, where he was employed in lighter service, such as opening and shutting the doors of the sanctuary, keeping out strangers and unclean persons, and singing the songs of the sanctuary; but was not concerned till thirty years of age in carrying the vessels of the sanctuary on the shoulders, as the

Kohathites; or in taking down and setting up the tabernacle, loading and unloading the wagons, as the Gershonites and Merarites.

Rashi - At age 50 he would do no more (heavy) work, the work of carrying on the shoulders; however, he can return to [the work of] locking the gates, singing, and loading the wagons. This is the meaning of "He shall minister with his brethren.

Keeping Passover if you are Defiled

Numbers 9:1-2 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season."

Rashi - "In the first month": The portion at the beginning of the Book [of Numbers] was not said until [the month of] Iyar. [From this], you learn that there is no chronological order in the Torah. But why did Scripture not begin with this [chapter]? Because it is a disgrace to Israel that throughout the forty years the children of Israel were in the desert, they brought only this Passover sacrifice alone. — [Sifrei Beha'alothecha 1:18]

The reason of which was, because of the neglect of circumcision during that time, without which their children could not eat the Passover, **Exodus 12:48**.

A Hard Question - Numbers 9:6-13

Someone who had unavoidably touched a dead body, for instance by burying their parents, etc., would celebrate the Passover a month later - the fourteenth day of the second month.

The Targum of Jonathan here adds, "or that has an issue, or a leprous person:" Maimonides includes menstruous women, and those that lay with them, and women in childbed. If so, this must have been a regular occurrence.

An example of a postponed Passover in King Hezekiah's day is in **2 Chronicles 30:1-27**.

Numbers 9:13 - "But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbearth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin."

This shows the vital importance of Passover and the sacrifice of the Lamb in foreshadowing Christ and His sacrifice.

The Pillar of Cloud and Fire

According to Gershom ben Judah, (c. 960 -1040) the cloud covered the Tabernacle after

the seven days of the consecration of Aaron and his sons; on the eighth day, when it was said unto the people of Israel, "today will the Lord appear unto you" - **Leviticus 9:1**; "and the glory of the Lord shall appear unto you" - **Leviticus 9:6**.

The Targum of Jonathan calls this cloud the "cloud of glory," because of the glory of God in it.

It was the visible proof of God's presence with Israel. It is true, though not visible, for us as well. It was visibly displayed at Pentecost when flames of fire appeared over the disciples' heads.:

- **Isaiah 4:4-6** - "When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defense (*chuppah* = wedding canopy). And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain."

Sometimes the cloud tarried but half a day, sometimes a whole day, sometimes two days, at other times a whole month, and even a year; a full year, as the Targum of Jonathan and Aben Ezra say. In one place - Kadesh Barnea - it tarried 18-19 years, as Maimonides says.

See the accompanying Notes on Guidance and the Pillar of Cloud and Fire:
[http://www.communityoncolumbia.org/pdf/Readings_Notes/
Pillar_of_Cloud_and_Fire.pdf](http://www.communityoncolumbia.org/pdf/Readings_Notes/Pillar_of_Cloud_and_Fire.pdf)