

Pinchas

Phineas (Dark Skinned)

This week's Torah Portion deals mainly with four concerns: Phineas' redemptive military action, Joshua's designation as the replacement leader, the census after the plague and the timing of the various offerings which people were to make to the L-rd. They were to offer these daily, weekly, monthly and as annual sacrifices to the L-rd.

There are at least two different people who are called Phineas in the Bible. In the case of the grandson of Aaron, his name is actually of Egyptian origin and refers to the people who dwelt south of Egypt and who were dark skinned. His military intervention, which resulted in 24,000 idolaters being killed, prevented the whole camp from succumbing to the plagues which struck when some of the people practised Moabite idolatrous fornication. For his faithfulness in acting promptly, he is given the promise of an eternal priesthood and we will deal more with when we come to the sermon portion of our time together. Our Messiah possesses a double priesthood, but only exercises the one which supersedes the Aaronic priesthood.

Our passage then discusses the transfer of power from Moses to Joshua and we should notice two things about this transfer. First, it will only occur after Moses has given the Law a second time on the plains of Moab. Next, there are no serious challenges to the man who escaped death by being a faithful spy who wanted the people to believe in YHVH's ability to lead them victoriously into the Holy Land. He is now quite old, but like Moses he has had no reduction in either his strength or his stamina.

Now that the people have dealt with the last attack of their camp by the enemy of their souls, they want to count the men capable of functioning as warriors, once they are ready to both punish Moab and to enter victoriously in to the Holy Land. The first census before the wilderness, said that this number of eligible warriors numbered some 603,550 men. The second numbering listed their number at 601,730, which may appear at first to be a lesser number. If we add the 24,000 who were killed in the plague, the second census counted more people than the first, even if many of those who died were also the Moabite priestesses.

The people of Canaan have likely spent a generation spying on and trading with this mighty host. The reason for their wandering was likely known, as was what is about to happen, once they cross the Jordan. Fear and panic was sweeping through the land, this was the testimony which Rahab gave to the two spies who were sent in by Joshua before the conquest began.

What follows is the most detailed account of when and what was offered to the L-rd, daily, weekly, monthly and seven times annually. The daily offerings were always offered first, then the weekly offerings on the Sabbath. If the beginning of the new month fell on a Sabbath, then along with special offerings, both the daily and weekly offerings were also added. Seven times a year, special festival offerings were made, over and above the daily, weekly and monthly offerings.

Most of the festivals fell on a specific date on the Jewish calendar and when this was also a weekly sabbath, daily and weekly offerings were made, along with the festival offerings.

Each set of offerings always included a portion of meat which was a burnt offering. There was also always a portion oily bread which was eaten and a libation or pouring out of wine which went over the burnt offering. I have called these two chapters a Jewish concept of time because they outline how we are to serve our King, daily, weekly, monthly and all through every year of our lives. Do your days belong to our King? Does your Sabbath belong to the King as you celebrate with your community? Does each month, with all of its varied activities, also belong to the Messiah? Finally, do you give every year of your life over the service of our King? I know it sounds kind of cutesy, but, truly, if He is not L-rd of all, He is not L-rd at all. Tithing is one of the most practical demonstrations of His lordship in our lives.

Beginning with the monthly cycle of regular sacrifices, there was always also an atonement offering of at least one goat. Most of the time, these were offered as burnt offerings, but once a year, on Yom Kippur, one of the goats was loaded up with the people's sins and driven into the wilderness so that what was now forgiven, can also be forgotten and never retrieved.

The oily flour offerings were never burned and many of portions of the other sacrifices were also eaten, both by the priests who were offering them and the people for whom they were offered. Passover had the majestic Seder meal and then observed the festival of unleavened bread for seven days. There was to be a solemn gathering on the first and on the seventh days, where along with the daily offerings, special festival offerings were made. If any of these appeared on a Sabbath, then both the daily and weekly offerings were made first, to be followed by the special, festival sacrificial offerings.

The people used to make cakes for every meat offering, and to make libations of wine over the meat offerings, the size of which varied according to size of the sacrificial animal. I was surprised not to find any offerings of fowl mentioned, but these were a series of offerings being made on behalf of the people and not by the people themselves. It was to be a unified group effort and does not speak of offerings you would have offered for yourself or even by yourself, when you could not make it to the tabernacle or the temple.

It is interesting to note that only atonement goats were mentioned and not lambs, but even in the Passover Seder either a young goat (a kid) or a lamb could be used. When you add up the diminishing number of young bulls offered over the seven days of Sukkoth, the rabbis saw this as Israel making sacrifices for the seventy nations of the world. This was to be done until such a time that all nations would come to faith in the Messiah of promise. The number of offerings over the week of Sukkoth is staggering.

When it comes to the sacrifices offered for Shavuot and First Fruits, we have a minor textual problem. While Leviticus mentions both First Fruits and Shavuot (weeks), our passage in Numbers appears to only mention Shavuot. This is not a mistake or an omission. Daily from the 16th of Nissan until the 6th of Sivan the people were to wave sheaves of grain each day. So in a very real sense, Shavuot is the official end of the Festival of First Fruits. In the times of the second temple, First Fruits was one of biggest and most important festivals of the year.

After the second temple was destroyed, First Fruits dwindled in importance and now, in synagogues, First Fruits is only mentioned as the beginning of the daily countdown to Shavuot and even though it is the week of unleavened bread in the Scriptures, most Jews now refer to this time period as the week of Passover. Never let terminology diminish your ability to joyfully celebrate the festival cycle all year long.

Sermon: The Messiah's Double Eternal Priesthood

In this week's Torah portion, Phineas (Pinchas), the dark skinned grandson of Aaron is promised a perpetual priesthood (Num. 25:13). This means that one of his descendants will always stand before YHVH and exercise a priestly ministry. This would mean that the House of Aaron would always be the guardians of the symbols and rituals of salvation. Salvation itself would not be accomplished through the descendants of Aaron, but even when Salvation was won by our Messiah, there will always be an Aaronite standing before YHVH.

How can this be if Salvation was won by a descendant of the House of David? We know that G-d does not renege on any of His promises and we read in the Psalms 110:4 that our Messiah would be of the Melchizedek priesthood forever. Does this mean that two people are standing before YHVH and each exercising his unique, everlasting priesthood? No.

The Bible says there is one G-d and one mediator between G-d and men and He is called Yeshua the Messiah man (I Tim. 2:5), which means that He is the only one to be both fully divine and fully human. There is both no room and no need for a member of the Aaronic priesthood to stand before G-d and to exercise a priesthood which was fulfilled and made redundant by our Messiah's sacrifice on the cross.

Yet, the Scriptures give us no indication that the promise made to Pinchas was either withdrawn or rescinded. G-d always remains true to His promises. This is why the Gentile church never replaces Israel. We are fellow citizens with the new man, built on the foundation of both the prophets and the apostles. The Gospel remains the power of G-d for Salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile and never just to the Jews or just to the Gentiles. This distinction will disappear when the kingdom comes and all temporary states of all mankind are abolished (Gal. 3:28). With this in mind how can YHVH both abolish all temporary conditions of mankind and still have a descendant of Aaron stand before Him in perpetuity?

The solution is found in Mary, the mother of our Messiah. She is both a descendant of the line of David, through Nathan, and not through the line of Solomon which was cursed (Jeremiah 22:30 and 36:30) and of the House of Aaron. It was not uncommon for people at that time to be descendants of more than one tribe.

John the Baptist (Yohanan hamatbil) was our Messiah's cousin because his mother Elizabeth and Yeshua's mother were related. In Luke 1:36, we read that they were cousins. The exact nature of their kinship is hard to determine with any degree of accuracy, but these ladies were closely enough linked by blood for Mary to go and visit her cousin when Elizabeth was in the sixth month of her pregnancy.

We know that both Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah, were descendants of the priestly house of Aaron, so Elizabeth's blood link with Mary, would make our Messiah both a descendant of the House of David and of the House of Aaron. The promise made to Pinchas was fulfilled in our Messiah, even after the priesthood of the House of Aaron was rendered redundant after our Messiah died on the cross. Messiah fulfilled in reality what the rituals and sacrifices of the House of Aaron portrayed symbolically.

There is both no need to continue the priestly rituals of the House of Aaron, nor do we have to treat them as if they never existed. G-d always remains faithful to His promises.

Our Messiah stands before G-d and intercedes for us from the stance of a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek and He stands before YHVH in fulfillment of a promise YHVH made to the House of Aaron on the plains of Moab. The ongoing relevance of the Aaronic priesthood should be seen as a reminder of the rituals, symbols and sacrifices which were performed until G-d's Son came and did in reality, what they were only able to do symbolically.

There are three more issues which I want to deal with in our study this morning: (1) who was the historical Melchizedek we encounter in Genesis 14? (2) what is the difference between a Theophany and a Christophany in the Bible? (3) and why are there two genealogies for our Messiah, one in Matthew and another in Luke?

We know that our L-rd functioned as a priest of the order of Melchizedek, but does that mean He appeared as Melchizedek in Genesis 14? Our L-rd's human nature came from the tribe of Judah and from the House of David. Melchizedek received a tithe which Abraham offered to the most High G-d through his ministry. He was not a Jew, since the House of Israel had not yet been established. So we can say with certainty that the Melchizedek in Genesis 14 was not a manifestation of our Messiah because Melchizedek was a Gentile, while our Messiah's human nature was Jewish.

The human nature of our Messiah had not yet come into existence and only became perpetual after the ascension of our Saviour. Both of these natures will now exist eternally, but only His divine nature has always existed before the foundation of the universe.

Melchizedek was not his name, but it was a Hebrew translation of his title. If we look ahead to the Book of Joshua, one of the kings which he executed was called Adonizedek, also the king of Salem. Both of these names were titles of the kings of Salem and neither one was the given name of either king. We do not know what their titles were in the Canaanite language, but both of them were ordinary men and the first one was not an appearance of the Messiah.

Hebrews follows up on David's assertion that Melchizedek represented a different, higher priesthood than the one which the House of Aaron possessed. And though our Messiah's mother belonged to both tribes (Houses), it was as a member of the tribe of Judah and the House of David that our Messiah fulfilled His ministry. Through His death and resurrection, He defeated sin and earned the right to rule as King, forever, over all the generations and nations of mankind.

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, is presented as another righteous Gentile priest of YHVH and Balaam is presented as a prophet of YHVH. Jethro presided over the first ritual meal which Israel celebrated with YHVH at Mount Sinai and advised Moses about how to organize the spiritual leadership of the camp. We have no indication that he was part of generational Gentile priesthood which existed among the Midianites (south Moabites). He may still have been alive when the evil King Balak hired the treacherous prophet Balaam to curse Israel.

It is quite clear that Balaam was not a righteous man, but there is every indication that Jethro was. But just as Jethro was just a man who happened to be a priest of the most High G-d, so also was Melchizedek just a man who happened to be a priest of the most High G-d. If our Messiah were to have appeared before His incarnation, would He not have appeared as a High Priest and not just as a priest? He is used as a figure or symbol of the Messiah, because Messiah's everlasting priesthood came from a higher source than that of Aaron's.

The Bible mentions that other righteous men have appeared over the ages, either as priests or as prophets, but our Messiah would not have appeared as a Gentile, even though the salvation which He won applies equally to the Gentiles as it does to the Jews. There were no Jews around when Melchizedek blessed Abraham and received his tithe and since Jethro presided over the first ritual meal with G-d, you might as well argue that He was also another preincarnate appearance of our beloved Messiah. Both of them were good men and acted as priests of the most High G-d, but neither of them was a preincarnate appearance of our Messiah.

In fact, though we know that His divine nature has always existed, there is no evidence in the Scriptures to say that He appeared more than once in His human form. Hebrews 9:26-28 says that Messiah will only appear twice. Once and only once to die on the cross for the sins of the world and once and only once as the victorious King coming to judge all the nations and generations of mankind. The trinity of G-d has always existed and will never be changed or compromised. The human nature of Messiah did not exist before His incarnation and only appeared once when His earthly mother gave birth to the Saviour who was also the Son of David.

Before the foundation of the world, G-d prepared for Messiah to exercise His eternal priesthood, but it was never manifest before His arrival. The Aaronic priesthood came into being so that the greater glory which was to come, would be represented in the rituals and sacrifices in the tabernacle and in both of the temples. No one today is performing any feature of the priesthood of Aaron and even if the temple were to be rebuilt, Aaron's priesthood has been superseded by the real Priesthood which he and his descendants only represented symbolically.

Why is there so little mention of Melchizedek in the Scriptures? The actual man became a symbol of the Messiah and his priesthood became a symbol of the Eternal Priesthood which Messiah continues to exercise. He would never have appeared as a Gentile priest because from the beginning, He was to possess a Jewish human nature. Nothing more and nothing less.

Well, what is the difference between a Theophany and a Christophany? A Theophany is an appearance of G-d and usually occurs through the agency of one of His angels. He has also appeared in visions and dreams, but until the mountain, His eternal presence was not unleashed on humankind. Even at the mountain, what Moses saw was not even anything like what His appearance will be when Messiah returns. Solomon said that not even the entirety of the Heavens could contain the presence of G-d, so Moses just got a small taste of what is still to come.

The Scriptures say that at various times, G-d has appeared in various forms to His servants, but the fullness of His presence would melt the entire universe if He were to show us His fullness. We are given any number of pictures and descriptions of this marvellous reality, but even to Moses, YHVH said that no man could see his face and live.

Well what does a Christophany refer to? Some theologians feel that the Messiah has appeared in several forms over the centuries, before His incarnation. This is simply not possible and is not something the Scriptures actually teach. The Messiah will only appear twice, once as the Saviour to die on the cross and another time as the Mighty King of Glory. He has always existed along with the other two persons of the trinity, but His incarnation as the son of Mary has only happened once, even though enthusiastic people want to see Him

appearing frequently. There is no solid scriptural evidence to say that the Gentile priest Melchizedek was a preincarnate appearance of the Messiah. Messiah was not in the fiery furnace with the three Hebrew children. They were delivered by an angel and not by a preincarnate manifestation of the Messiah.

Over the ages, believers have always come up with well meaning doctrines which the Bible does not support. As believers who claim to hold fast to the unchanging word of G-d, we need to check out these teachings and only hold on to what the Scriptures actually teach. Nothing more and certainly nothing less.

This brings us to our final question for this morning's sermon. Why are there two genealogies of our Messiah, one in Matthew and the other in Luke? The solution is not complicated. Joseph was also of the House of David and his royal genealogy is given in Matthew. It is a unique genealogy in that five women are mentioned. four gentile ladies: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah, whom we know as Bathsheba. The fifth is Mary, who we know was His mother. This genealogy serves to show us that Messiah is indeed King of the Jews and King of the Gentiles.

However Matthew's genealogy has a problem. In Jeremiah's time, the line which descends from Solomon is cursed and Messiah cannot descend from this disreputable line (Jeremiah 22:30 and 36:30). And He does not because it is Joseph's line and not Mary's.

We see in Luke that Mary's line descends from Nathan, one of Solomon's brothers and not from the discredited line of Solomon. Genesis 3:15 prophecies that one day a woman, without the help of a man shall conceive our Messiah who is described as the snake crusher. Isaiah 7:14 says that she will still be a virgin when she conceives, and even though she went through a period when she doubted our Messiah, she stayed with Him as He hung on the cross and was adopted by John while Yeshua is dying on the cross.

She would have been one of the 500 people the resurrected Messiah appeared to after His resurrection and she was present in the Upper Room on Pentecost. She both received her Son into her heart and was filled with the Spirit along with the rest of those who were gathered. Neither genealogy was a mistake and each served a specific purpose.

Our Messiah has always existed as part of the trinity of G-d, whom we know to be both a plural singularity and a composite unity. The Scriptures have much to say about Him over the centuries and there are many people to whom He is compared. He is both the Prophet who is the Word incarnate and He is the eternal Son of David, the undefeated mighty warrior. He is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and the five fold incarnation of the special Son (Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty G-d, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace).

He is also portrayed as a Priest of the everlasting order of Melchizedek who never took a human form or appeared as a human until His mother was visited by the Holy Spirit and He took on His human form. He will always be human and He will always be Divine. He only appeared once as a Human Being and will appear again in His glorified Human form at the end of the age, when the full manifestation of His divinity will cause the entire universe to dissolve with great heat and noise. Nothing more and certainly nothing less. Shalom.