

Parashah Ninety-Eight

Numbers 2:14–3:13; Isaiah 8:18–22; John 6:26–51

notes by Tim Hegg

God's Dwelling in the Midst of His People

Our *parashah* this Shabbat finishes the enumeration of the tribes, and goes on to teach that the same positions in which the tribes camped were to be utilized as they journeyed. The Tabernacle was to be in the center of the caravan with the respective tribes on all four sides. The significance of this should not be missed. From a purely outsider's perspective, it may appear as though the surrounding tribes guarded the sacred dwelling of Adonai, much like a army would surround the chariot of the King. From an insider's perspective, however, it was clear that God was the One protecting Israel, not Israel protecting God. But the protection is not by surrounding the perimeter, thus keeping the enemy out. The protection was by strength from within, giving Israel the ability to fight to victory. As long as Israel maintained her faith in her God, and gave Him the central focus of her existence, she would be victorious. Only when she looked outside, to other nations, seeking their protection, did she fall prey to her enemies.

A spiritual application of this scene is obvious: God dwells within us in order to strengthen us against the enemy, and to assure us victory as we walk by faith. He does not protect us from engagement with the enemy, but gives us the ability to be victorious over the enemy. He offers us divine armor, even the very person of Yeshua, and places within our hands the sword of the Ruach which is the word of God (Eph 6). He calls us to engage in battle and to emerge victorious through the strength He supplies.

Our text also gives us a very important insight into the office of the High Priest (*cohen hagadol*) and his relationship to the tribe of Levi. First, we should note the designation “anointed priests” (הַכֹּהֲנִים הַמְשֻׁחִים, *hacohanim hameshuchim*). Aaron was first anointed (Lev 8) but not his sons. Likewise, on Yom Kippur, only Aaron entered the Most Holy Place, not his sons. Yet it is clear that his sons entered into this special anointing (Ex 30:22-23; 40:1-38; Lev 7:34-38). The obvious point that is being made by these texts of the Torah is that Aaron's special position as the High Priest was to be at once unique, yet passed on to his sons by way of generational succession. Each generation was to see in the High Priest a foreshadowing of the ultimate and final High Priest, Yeshua. Even as the promise of a Savior was given in “seed” form to Chavah (Gen 3:15), so each successive generation of Israel, the nation through whom the Messiah would come, was to contemplate the unique role of Messiah by observing the office and function of the High Priest, a unique servant of Adonai in their midst.

So important was this picture that to disrupt it drew the death penalty. “...but the layman who comes near shall be put to death” (3:10). Why would anyone attempt to displace the High Priest? Did anyone honestly think that they could fulfil a role specifically detailed for Aaron and his sons? Apparently so. And in fact, the schemes of Satan have always been to attempt to undermine and discredit the unique and absolute role of Yeshua as the only way to the Father.

That the High Priest is designated by the term “anointed” (מְשֻׁחַ *mashiach*) gives a direct parallel to the Messiah, for the word “Messiah” is the very same term, “the anointed One.” Note Psalm 89:20, for example: “I have found David My servant; with My holy oil I have anointed him.”

Furthermore, the manner in which the High Priest is anointed is likewise instructive. Oil was

poured upon his head, as pictured in Psalm 133: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes.” Here, the unity of the covenant people is pictured by the Psalmist as bound up in the anointing ceremony of the High Priest. This symbolizes the manner in which God anoints His people with the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit). For the promise of the prophets, that the covenant people of God would all be anointed with the Spirit is realized by the work of the Messiah. “You know of Yeshua of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). “. . .and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:5). The body of Messiah receives the anointing of the Ruach because the Head of the body, Yeshua, was anointed. Like the oil that ran down upon the beard and garments of Aaron, so the power of the Ruach, manifest in the person of Yeshua the Head of the body, comes upon the whole body through Him.

The lessons in this are clear: only those connected to the Head, those who are “in Messiah,” are blessed and protected by the outpouring of the Ruach. Moreover, it is the presence of the anointing that proves one’s inclusion in the covenant people: “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Messiah (the anointed One), he does not belong to Him” (Rom 8:9). The “Spirit of Messiah” may be understood as “the Spirit who comes from Messiah” or “the Spirit Who comes as a result of the work of Messiah” (genitive of source). Thus, all who are part of the body of Messiah have the anointing because the Head of the body has been anointed. It was this sure sign that proved the inclusion of the non-Jewish believers following the Shavuot of Acts 2. When Cornelius and those gathered in his home manifested the anointing of the Ruach, it was clear to Peter that they had been included in the covenant even as the Jewish believers were. The presence of the Ruach in the lives of the believers thus became the hallmark of their covenant membership: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1Cor 12:13).

Early on as the ingathering of the nations got under way, the manifestation of the Ruach in the lives Yeshua’s followers was miraculous and evident: speaking in tongues, flames of fire, miracles of healing, etc. These were necessary to signal the time had come when the ingathering of the nations promised by the prophets had indeed begun, and that all who were covenant members had received the anointing given to the Head. But the enduring presence of the Ruach upon the body of Messiah as taught by the Apostles was not merely in the outward manifestation of signs and wonders: it was seen in the manner of life which the indwelling Ruach would develop. Paul refers to this as the “fruit of the Spirit,” the outward manifestation of the Spirit’s presence through righteous deeds, works or *mitzvot* which could not be duplicated in the flesh. The Spirit’s presence was thus characterized by deeds of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). The body would take on the same life characteristics as the Head. Conformity to Yeshua would be the inevitable result of the abiding Ruach HaKodesh.

The text indicates that the sons of Aaron were “ordained” as priests (3:3). The word “ordained” translates the Hebrew מֵלֵא יָדָם, *milei yadam*, literally “filling their hands.” This phrase is found elsewhere in the Torah as well (Ex. 28:41; 29:9, 33, 35; 32:29; Lev. 8:33; 16:32; 21:10). The expression has more meaning than simply to give someone work to do. It implies an authority to do

the assigned task (see Baruch's comments, *Numbers, Anchor Bible*, p. 155). Only the High Priest was given authority to fulfil the tasks of making atonement on Yom Kippur. The mention of the death of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, underscores the need to accomplish the work in accordance with the authority given. Once again, this speaks to the "one way" of atonement, realized ultimately in Yeshua.

We also have the notice in our text of how the entire tribe of Levi would be consecrated to the Lord in the place of the firstborn. In the redemption from Egypt, God required the firstborn. Since the blood of the Pesach Lamb purchased, as it were, the firstborn son of every Israelite home (thus sparing his life), he belonged to God. In our text, the tribe of Levi is taken in exchange for the firstborn sons of Israel. Of course, Israel herself is designated as God's "firstborn" (Ex 4:22). Thus, in a representative way, the tribe of Levi is all of Israel. Since the Levites would minister to Aaron (the High Priest), and since the Levites would serve in the Holy Place, they, representing Israel as God's firstborn, would picture the ultimate goal, namely, that all of Israel would dwell in the unhindered presence of God. Israel was God's firstborn because she was a nation of priests (Ex 19:6). That is, the nation as a whole, represented by her priests (now constituted as the firstborn), draw near to God and commune with Him. "I will be their God, and they will be My people" (Jer. 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 34:30; 37:23, 27; Zech. 8:8; 2Cor. 6:16).

God among His people: this is the ultimate and final purpose. For the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a God Who longs to dwell in the midst of His people, Who desires friendship and companionship, and Who brings the shalom of His presence. Such covenant promises are reiterated in Hosea 2, which paints the picture of God's enduring, covenant faithfulness. Hosea 2:19–20 is the text that was selected by the ancient Sages to recite as one binds the *tefillin* of the arm. In the final wrapping, the strap encircles the fingers, picturing a wedding ring, and the moving words of the Prophet are recited: "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know Adonai." The goal is not to "know about" Adonai, but to know Him, to experience that close, intimate love of a marriage covenant with one's Creator and Redeemer.

The *haftarah* selection was doubtlessly chosen because of the similar theme of the tribes of Israel surrounding the Tabernacle and the prophet's words, "Behold I and the children ..." of the opening verse (v. 18). Likewise, Isaiah refers to God as "Adonai of hosts, Who dwells on Mt. Zion," and as noted in the previous *parashah*, the Tabernacle functions as a "moveable Mt. Zion" in that Moses continues to receive direct revelation from God at the "Tent of meeting." Thus, Isaiah calls the people back to their beginnings when they traveled through the desert, being guided and protected by God Who went with them, dwelling in their midst. It is the very word of God ("To the Torah and the Testimony") that must govern the people of God.

This covenant relationship is the emphasis of the Apostolic portion—the loving hand of God that draws His beloved one to Himself: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (v. 44). The metaphor of betrothal is changed a bit in Yeshua's words. He is the groom, and those who believe in Him are the bride. The Father is the One making the arrangements of the betrothal, drawing the bride to notice and admire His Son. In fact, the bride is viewed in this passage as a gift from the Father to His Son: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (v. 37). We hear Yeshua using the same terminology in His priestly prayer (John 17): "Father, the hour

has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life” (vv. 1–2); “I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them” (vv. 9–10). In this greatest of marriages, the Father has chosen a bride for His Son, and she is betrothed to Him forever. Paul likewise spoke of this when he wrote: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Messiah also loved His assembly and gave Himself up for her...This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Messiah and His assembly.” (Eph 5:25, 32).