

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger ..." John 6:35

NUMBERS 4-5

CHAPTER 4 – Transportation of the Tabernacle

The core story in Numbers 4 is what is typically called the second Levite census. The earlier Levite census counted from aged one month,¹ whereas in this new census the age range to be counted was from 30 to 50 years old —the thought being that these men must be very responsible and emotionally mature so as to perform their jobs with absolute dedication, and they must be physically able to lift heavy objects and defend the Sanctuary in hand to hand combat if necessary.

After the census and consecration of the Levites, God commanded Moses and Aaron regarding the dismantling and transportation of the Tabernacle. The Kohanim (sons of Aaron) were given the sole responsibility to insert the holiest items into their coverings and only then were the Levites called to transport them, but they were forbidden to gaze upon them in their uncovered state, lest they die. Nor were they permitted to touch the Ark itself, even while carrying it—it was to be carried only by its staves.

It is worthwhile looking at the various coverings for the different items:

- First, the Ark is covered with the curtain of the tabernacle, then wrapped in *tachash* skins and a blue cloth (garment);
- Secondly, the Table of Shewbread is first spread with a blue cloth and all the implements, including the "Shewbread", are placed upon it; these are covered with scarlet cloth and *tachash* skins;
- Thirdly, the lampstand and Golden altar of incense are also covered first with a blue cloth, then *tachash* skins;
- Then the ashes from the altar are spread with a purple cloth;

Each one of these coverings have profound significance. You will recall that the fine linen curtains of the tabernacle are woven with blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and *tachash* skins were one of the coverings over the Tabernacle².

Tachash skin – First mentioned in Exodus 26:14 as one of the coverings for the Tabernacle, where we saw that it was an unknown animal (which is why it has been translated in various ways). The only mention of this word outside of this context is in Ezek. 16:10 "*I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of tachash skin;*" This must have been a skin with very special qualities. Whatever animal this skin belongs to, we can assume it was tough and water repellent, protecting the exquisite interior which the outside world never saw.

Blue cloth – represents God's throne of glory in heaven

¹ Said to have been counted by God himself

² See Exodus 26.

Scarlet cloth – It is important to see that the Table of Shewbread (which includes the 12 loaves) is the only piece that is covered with a scarlet cloth, representing shed blood. Why?

“The Hebrew word translated “scarlet” is also translated as worm.³ When the female of the scarlet worm species, *coccus ilicis*, was ready to give birth to her young, she would attach her body to the trunk of a tree, fixing herself so firmly and permanently that she would never leave again. The eggs deposited beneath her body were thus protected until the larvae were hatched and able to enter their own life cycle. As the mother died, the crimson fluid stained her body and the surrounding wood. From the dead bodies of such female scarlet worms, the commercial scarlet dyes of antiquity were extracted. What a picture this gives of Christ, dying on the tree, shedding his precious blood that he might 'bring many sons unto glory' (Heb. 2:10)! He died for us, that we might live through him! Ps. 22:6 graphically describes such a worm and gives us this picture of Christ. (cf. Isa 1:18)”⁴

Purple cloth – Purple, which represents royalty, covers the ashes from the altar of incense – purple is a mixture of blue and red!

*And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die.*⁵

4:23 From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, all who enter to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting.

To perform service - In addition to carrying the various ritual objects, the Levites assisted the Kohanim by slaughtering & cleaning animal sacrifices. Some were selected to guard the Mishkan, while others were designated as singers and musicians in the Camp of the Shekinah, (music accompanied the daily sacrifices). *“Singing is considered an essential part of the communal sacrifices, which lose their ability to atone for the sins of the people if not accompanied by song.”*⁶

Discuss the importance of praise and worship to us, and to God.

The remainder of this chapter covers the specific roles of the remaining Levitical tribes. But it was only the Kohanim – Aaron and his sons – who were allowed to perform priestly service. It takes different skills and different jobs, working together to perform different functions, to form an entire and complete community. Each had a critical role to play and no role was menial except in the minds of men.

Apostle Paul expounds on this important concept in Romans 12:4: *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function...*; and also in 1 Cor. 12.

Discuss the importance of churches recognizing the various spiritual gifts within the body of Christ.

CHAPTER 5 - Cleansing of the Camp

Now that the Tabernacle is part of the Israelite's daily life and therefore God's presence among them is assured, it is necessary that the sacredness of the entire Tabernacle area be kept free from impurity or defilement. Since nearness to God is an inherently dangerous proposition, many preventative measures were taken – beginning with a scrupulously purified priesthood who were the only ones anywhere near the Divine Holiness. Levite guards were deployed to keep unauthorized

³ e.g. Exodus 16:20

⁴ Henry Morris. *Biblical Basis for Modern Science*, Baker Book House, 1985, p. 73

⁵ Kohath was the second son of Levi - the line of Moses and Aaron

⁶ Rabbi Eli Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, 35.

people away and a system of dealing with ritual impurity was established that involved removing any unclean people from the area and then, in most cases, making the unclean clean again so they could enjoy God's presence in their lives. (See 1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Num. 5:2 *“Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper,⁷ everyone who has a discharge⁸ and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. 3 You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell.”*

This passage makes it Israel's duty to remove contamination from the camp. Jewish commentary links this with Proverbs 25:4: *Remove the dross from the silver as the refiner does in producing a vessel.* What makes ritual impurity so serious is that it is contagious—spiritually contagious. The constant uncleanness of the people would defile the camp, and the camp would become so defiled that God would no longer be able to dwell among His people. An unclean person also presented a danger to himself or herself because, if they came too near to God in that condition, they would be destroyed.

The punishment of the sinner was simultaneously a physical demonstration and learning tool designed to progressively reveal the deepest and most critical spiritual truths. There were three zones within the camp, each of which represented a higher degree of sanctity; the more serious the contamination, the greater the exclusion – *that they may not defile their camps.*

Discuss the relevance each of these laws may have for New Covenant believers.

5: 5-10 – Rabbi Hirsch states, “Every wrong against another person's property is an offence against God Himself because he has forbidden it... Hashem is the invisible third party present in all transactions of his creatures.” The person must confess their sin aloud. Hirsch observes that “the value of confession lies in its action upon the consciousness of the one confessing.” It is important to note that this truth is also carried into the NT: James 5:16 *Therefore, confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another that you may be healed.* Confession is a very humbling act, which was recognised as important by the early Church, and remains a true principle for every Christian today, but has largely been discarded outside of mainline churches—to the detriment of our faith and healing. As with the law of the guilt offering, without repentance and restitution, one is not absolved.⁹

The Law of Adultery – 5:11-31 (read carefully before continuing)

We now come to the Law of Adultery – termed *Sotah* in Judaism – which refers to the jealousy of a husband who suspects his wife of adultery. Central to the story is a seemingly bizarre ritual involving holy water and dust from the temple floor; the woman is put under oath, the curse read out, to which she is to say: “Amen, Amen”. The curse is written on a scroll and dissolved into the water, which the accused is then required to drink – the water is thereafter referred to as “bitter water”.

v.21 *then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman—“the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people - if she is found guilty, the curse words state, “her belly will swell, her thigh will rot,”* meaning that the woman would become

⁷ Leprosy is covered in depth in Leviticus 25-27.

⁸ Usually arising from sexual sin, refer to Lev. 15. This is what Jesus is referring to in Mark 7:15 “...it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.' ”

⁹ Matt. 5:23-24

barren (v.27), and become a curse amid her people—but if she is innocent, then she will be proven so, and will bear children (v.28).

The commentators all explain that the stakes involved in Jewish family purity and the preservation of marital trust that serves as its foundation is paramount. It is unclear whether this ritual ever actually took place. Nevertheless, sadly, the Mishnah states that the ritual was rescinded before the destruction of the Temple because so many adulteries were committed that the rite became no longer relevant.¹⁰

We may well ask why this law appears to be one-sided – seemingly only dealing with a wife’s possible adultery. The answer may lie in seeking a deeper meaning. The relationship between a man and his wife often serves to symbolize the relationship between God and Israel. Unfaithfulness in both cases is called *prostitution*. It is assumed in this case that the husband is faithful and the wife has “turned aside to uncleanness”.¹¹ Over and over the Bible tells us that God is faithful—He never breaks His covenantal faith with His people—but we know that is far from true of Israel; see for example, Hosea, Ezekiel 23, and also the Babylonian exile.

In verse 14, the word, jealous/spirit of jealousy, comes up four times – this repetition serves to draw our attention. Can jealousy be ascribed to God concerning Israel? Of course, the answer is yes, as spelled out in Exodus 20:5: *for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God*; and 34:14: *... for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God*. Why? Of course, it is because He loves them and wants only the best for them, also knowing that the enemy is out to lure them and separate them from His love.

Therefore, might this law really be about ‘spiritual unfaithfulness,’ causing the curse of ‘spiritual barrenness’?

There are many elements to the Sotah ritual, but central are the three components which are ingested: holy water, dust, and the curse containing the holy name of God. There is no other Torah Law like it— no-where else does God direct a curse, containing His own holy name, to be dissolved and ingested. Indeed, what struck the sages most forcibly about this ritual was God’s willingness to allow His own Name to be effaced in order to, potentially, make peace between a husband and wife. So, what are we to make of these particular ingredients?

A valuable key to unravelling the deeper significance of this ritual is an important link to the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. In Exodus 32:20 Moses descends Mt Sinai with the first two tablets in his hands, and is furious to find the people having an orgy around an idol. **He grinds up the golden calf to dust, scatters it onto water and makes the people drink it.** Many die as a consequence – some by the sword, some by a plague (32:35). It is said that ‘their stomachs burst if they were guilty, like the Sotah’. In fact, Jewish Midrash has cited many parallels between the Sotah ritual and the Golden Calf incident, for example, seeing God as the husband and Israel as the unfaithful wife, and idol worship as adultery.

Most profoundly, we should not forget that, central to the Golden Calf story, is the breaking of the Tablets – the very Word of God.¹² We should also remember that the firstborn lost their status to the Levites, who did not worship the Golden Calf.

Numbers 5:13 emphasises the *hiddenness* of this sin. The idea being, that one who defiles himself by following idolatry, is compared to a woman "hidden" from her husband—but as we know, nothing can be hidden from God.

¹⁰ Sotah 9:9

¹¹ Heb. *Tuma*, is most often used in connection with spiritual uncleanness.

¹² See study Exodus 32.

Stay with me now, because this is so very profound. Bearing in mind the apparent link with the spiritual adultery of Israel, and also recalling that the breaking of the first Tablets by Moses points to Jesus¹³ – the “Word made flesh” – being broken for the sin of the world, but first for Israel, let us look at some NT scriptures:

Heb. 4:13 *And there is no creature **hidden** from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

Matt. 23:25 *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. ... 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. ...*

Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem

Luke 19:41-44 *Now as He drew near, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.*

The Jewish leaders may have rescinded the Law of Adultery, but God did not! On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and gave a rousing speech to all who gathered: “...*Let all the House of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ....Repent therefore...*”

The Holy Spirit was poured out, and many signs were given after Jesus was crucified (and are even written in the Mishnah) but, though many thousands of Jews believed in Jesus in the beginning, the Jewish hierarchy remained stubborn—thus sealing their own fate, the fate of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Jewish people, for 2000 years.¹⁴ **In crucifying their Messiah, the House of Israel had “drunk the cup” of God’s judgment.** They had no idea that this was a crucially pivotal time in their history. They did not know the truth of the words Paul would later write to the Galatians:

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.” (Galatians 3:13)

But let us not forget also, that the crucifixion of Jesus was all in the purpose and foreknowledge of God. *Jesus on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed, O My Father, if it is possible, **let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as you will.*** Jesus Himself ‘drank the Cup of Judgment’¹⁵ – the bitter cup the Father had given him – so Israel would not have to drink it – and He gave her and us another cup to drink: the Sacramental Cup. In doing so, the Son of God, became a curse for us, so that all who believe would be declared innocent and would not be barren, but would be fruitful in God’s Kingdom.

So here we see, as with so many other inexplicable laws, that it is the Messiah that holds the key to deeper understanding. We should also realize that Joseph (NT) could have been jealous over his betrothed, Miriam (Mary), and had her go through the Sotah ritual when she was found to be with child – but an angel assured him she was innocent of any unfaithfulness, and he didn’t want to ‘make a public spectacle of her’ (Mt 1:18-20). Thus, Mary—a potentially accused one—becomes the model of faithfulness, who brings forth the Christ child.

¹³ See Exodus 32 study.

¹⁴ For a more in depth look into this, I recommend you read this article:
<http://www.askelm.com/prophecy/p160901.pdf>

¹⁵ The second cup of the Passover Seder.

There is coming a time, in the not too distant future, when God will send “a spirit of grace and supplication” upon the children of Israel, leading them to a national repentance, as they mourn for the one “whom they have pierced,” according to Zechariah 12:10-14. Meanwhile, Israel has had a hard road to travel, as is foreshadowed in Isaiah 40:

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

On a personal level

On a personal level, this law highlights the fact that man is easy prey to temptation to follow sensual passions, and to allow the pursuit of pleasure to lure one away from dedication to the LORD. In this sense, it also speaks of sin which may lie hidden within our own souls. We can see a correlation here with the cleansing of the camp at the beginning of the chapter; whereas we saw that allowing “unclean” people to remain within the camp could contaminate and bring disunity to the whole, the Sotah law beckons us to look within our own hearts. Is there anything within us—perhaps hidden even from our own sight—which contaminates and entrenches disunity of body, soul and spirit, and which needs to be brought to the light – perhaps by confession.

An interesting tidbit

Num. 5.22 *And the woman shall say “Amen, amen”.*

Did you know that “Amen” is a Hebrew word, and this is the first use of this word in the Bible? It is with this word, repeated, that the woman accepts the cup that the priest offers her – which potentially brings a curse.¹⁶

We are mightily privileged that Jesus offers us His cup of the New Covenant in His Blood to drink, which we should take very seriously, *... for a person who eats and drinks without recognizing the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.* (1 Cor. 11:29)

The only other use of the word ‘Amen’ in the Torah is in Deuteronomy 27, in the list of curses, beginning:

“Cursed is anyone who makes an idol—a thing detestable to the LORD, the work of skilled hands—and sets it up in secret.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!” (Deut. 27:15)

Today, this word is still said after Jewish blessings - it means, in effect, *I confirm what has just been said*, and assumes full understanding and assimilation of what has just been said....This profession of faith must come from the heart, not merely the lips.¹⁷

In our next study we come to the law of the Nazarite who desires to draw close to God – and we will discover that it holds a profound connection to the story we have examined here.

¹⁶ When a Catholic accepts the cup (blood of Christ) during the Mass, they are required to say “Amen”.

¹⁷ *The Call of the Torah*, p.50.