

Aaron's Rod that Budded

Hebrews chapter 9 informs us that along with the engraved tables of stone, and the hidden manna contained in a golden pot, there was also a particular rod that was laid up in the Ark of Divine Presence. This rod which was of such great importance, was "Aaron's rod that budded", and it is our purpose to examine the Scriptural testimony concerning it, and the background which led to its inclusion in the Ark.

The first reference where we find a Rod being attributed to Aaron is in Exodus 7, which records the signs that testified to the power of Almighty God to the Egyptians. Here, Aaron was told: "take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent" (Exo. 7:9). He obediently did this, to find that Pharaoh's magicians could do likewise: "They also did in like manner with their enchantments. For thy cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods." (Exo. 7:9-12).

Just like the ecclesiastical magicians of today, the magicians of Pharaoh were able to perform signs and wonders which, if it were possible, could even deceive the very elect (cp Mat. 24:24). But their emulations were all negative: in each of the occasions where they copied Aaron and Moses they could only inflict—they could not heal. They were able to produce serpents, but they could not take them away. Only the priest of Yahweh's choosing could do this: "Aaron's rod *swallowed up* their rods" in a manner which foreshadowed Messiah's victory against death itself: So Paul expressed his joy at the prospect of immortality:

"... when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in victory*. O death where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Just as the Egyptian serpents of death were victoriously swallowed up by Aaron's serpent-rod, even so will mortality itself be swallowed up of life, and finally be removed through the work of the High Priest of Yahweh's choosing.

A CHALLENGE TO AARON AND MOSES

Numbers chapter 13 describes how that 12 men were sent to spy out the land of Canaan (Num. 13:17), and how that they quickly became discouraged when they saw the obstacles that they would have to overcome in order to take up their inheritance. Whilst all of the spies recognised that the land was prosperous: a land "that floweth with milk and honey", ten of them lacked faith in Yahweh their deliverer. Comparing themselves with the greatness of the people of the land, they lamented their situation: "... there we saw the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight".

Rather than to compare their adversary with the greatness of their God, the people despaired at their own weakness, and natural inability to overcome. Indeed, there is a danger that we can do likewise: to be disheartened by the difficulties that life brings. We, like Israel of old, need to consider the greatness of our God, and the power of the Angels which are with us, and trust in faith that He will ultimately deliver us from all of our adversaries.

The consequence of all this, was that the people became discouraged, "and all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in

the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness ...” (Num. 14:1-2). They even mooted the idea of returning back to Egypt: “they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (Num. 14:4).

KORAH, DATHAN AND ABIRAM

It is against this background, that we read of Dathan and Abiram, who rebelled against Moses with 250 princes of Israel, under the leadership of Korah. They:

“gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and Yahweh is among them: wherefore then lift ye up above the congregation of Yahweh” (Num. 16:3).

Here was the challenge: who would Yahweh choose to lead his people? Those who delivered them out of Egyptian bondage, or those who would lead them back again? The matter was to be settled by a display of Yahweh’s power, in favour of His chosen ones, and the destruction of the usurpers. The account in Numbers chapter 16 describes how that Korah’s company were commanded to offer incense (as was Aaron), and Yahweh would make known whose offering would be accepted. In a most dramatic way, the earth opened up and swallowed alive “all the men that appertained unto Korah and all their goods” (Num. 16:32). Then, a fire came out from the presence of Yahweh, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense, so that none of the rebels remained. By this judicial means, Yahweh demonstrated that it was Aaron whose incense would be accepted.

However, the people continued with their complaining:

“But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of Yahweh” (Num. 16:41).

So it was that in Yahweh’s wrath (v. 46) a plague began, which consumed the murmurers until Aaron “made atonement” for the people, by again offering acceptable incense, on behalf of the people.

This, then, forms the background to the events described in Numbers chapter 17. In this chapter, we read of the manner by which Aaron would be demonstrated once and for all, to be chosen of Yahweh to lead the people in acceptable worship. The entire proceedings described in this chapter was that “I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you” (Num. 17:5).

SELECTING TRIBAL RODS

Yahweh spoke to the Moses, commanding:

“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” (Num. 17:1-2).

Aaron’s name was written upon the rod for Levi, and the heads of the tribes wrote their names upon their respective rods. Interestingly, the word for “rod” can also signify “tribe,” and forms an apparent play on words: these “rods” represented the various tribes, and the leaders thereof. Moses was then to take these rods, being commanded “thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you” (Num. 17:4).

Some suggest that these rods were placed within the holy of holies, into the symbolic representation of the dwelling place of the Almighty itself. The given evidence for this is the description that they were to be placed “before the testimony”, and again, in verse 7, “Moses laid up the rods *before Yahweh* in the tabernacle of witness” (Num. 17:7). But this expression is also used of the positioning of certain items outside of the holy of holies, in the holy place. Exodus 29:11 speaks of how the sin offering was treated during the consecration of the priests: “thou shalt kill the bullock *before Yahweh*, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation”. Again, speaking of the lampstand, we read that Moses “put the lampstand in the tent of the congregation, over against the table, on the side of the tabernacle southward. And he lighted the lamps *before Yahweh*: as Yahweh commanded Moses” (Exo. 40:22-23).

These examples show how that certain things could be said to be “before Yahweh” whilst not being in the Holy of Holies. The opinion of the present writer is that entry into the Holy of Holies signified acceptance and immortality. It would have been premature therefore, for the 12 rods to be placed there, as the choosing had not taken place, and 11 of the rods were going to be rejected. It seems more likely therefore, that they were positioned in the holy place, in the light of the Lampstand.

A SIGN OF LIFE

It is obvious that all of the rods were previously alive: they were wood taken from living trees, but were now dead wood. The sign of Yahweh’s selection involved that which had died becoming alive again—a glorious sign of resurrection. So we read that:

“it came to pass 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” (Num. 17:8).

Notice the different stages here, all present at once:

1. the rod sprouted (budded)
2. It grew buds
3. It produced flowers
4. It yielded fruit

The rod sprouting displayed a sign of life. The buds spoke of a promise of flowers and fruition. The flowers represented the glory (cp. Mat. 6:29), and the fruit represented the final array of attributes derived from the promise of God. So we read of the attributes to be developed by the believer in Messiah: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22).

ALMONDS

The type of flowers and fruit which Aaron’s rod brought forth, was that of the Almond. Interestingly, this imagery is also used elsewhere in the Tabernacle worship. The Lampstand was itself patterned after the image of the almond tree:

“thou shalt make a lampstand of pure gold: of beaten work shall the lampstand be made: his shaft, and his *branches*, his bowls, his knops, and *his flowers*, shall be of the same. And six *branches* shall come out of the sides of it; three *branches* of the lampstand out of the one side, and three *branches* of the lampstand on the other side. 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* ... and in the

lampstand shall be four bowls *made like unto almonds*, with their knops *and their flowers ...*” (See Exo. 25:31-37)

Notice the language being used here: the Lampstand was a tree, with branches and flowers. It gave light, and is therefore used in the Apocalypse to represent the seven light-bearing Ecclesias to whom the Spirit wrote. There is an allusion back to this in Philippians chapter 2, which contrasts very greatly with the situation back in Numbers 17, and the murmuring of the people against Aaron and Moses:

“Do all things *without murmurings and disputings*: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom *ye shine as lights* in the world; Holding forth the word of life ...” (Phil. 2:14-16).

The Light represents the Word of God (Psa. 119:105), and the Lampstand represents the Ecclesia (Rev. 1:20). Just as the Lampstand in the Tabernacle arrangement held forth the various lamps, even so the Ecclesia must be found holding forth the Word of Life, shining as a beacon to any who might yet look beyond the darkness of this age, to the glories of the age to come.

Again, Philippians chapter 2 contrasts greatly with the murmurers, and Moses’ response to them, in verse 3: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory: but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). The people did things through strife and vainglory, whereas Moses was the meekest man in all the earth (Num. 12:3). In lowliness of mind, he did not give a railing accusation against the adversaries, but committed himself to Yahweh in all his ways.

THE ROD KEPT FOR A TOKEN

Through being brought back to life, Aaron’s rod demonstrated the principle of Divine selection. Speaking of resurrection, it was laid up in the Ark, as a testimony to Israel:

“Yahweh said unto Moses, Bring Aaron’s again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not. And Moses did so: as Yahweh commanded him, so did he” (Num. 17:10-11).

In this arrangement, we have a foreshadowing of the work of Messiah. He was declared to be the chosen one, the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). And just as the Rod was laid up in the symbolic Presence of Yahweh, even so Messiah rose, and ascended into the Divine Presence for us:

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us ...” (Heb. 9:24).

He is the preeminent “branch” (Zech. 3:8, 6:12), who brought forth good fruit to the glory of Yahweh. We desire to emulate him in this regard, seeking only his leadership and turning aside to no other. Then, we will become part of his tribe, members of a Divine Family, whose head has been raised to life everlasting.

Christopher Maddocks