

Is there a New Priesthood?

This weeks reading is from *Parsahat Bamidbar (Bamidbar / Numbers 1:1-4:20)*. The Torah reading this week tells us the Lord God spoke to Moshe in the Ohel Moed commanding him to number the Children of Israel. The Lord said the Levites were not to be numbered because they are given to the service of the Lord in the Tabernacle (1:47-50). The Levites are instructed to camp around the Tabernacle so the wrath of God will not fall upon the congregation of Israel (1:53). The Lord tells Moshe that the first born in Israel, from man or beast, are His (3:13). The reading ends with the mitzvot on what to do when the Tabernacle moves from one place to another and how the Levites are to prepare the Tabernacle for traveling (4:4-20).

This week we are looking specifically at *Bamidbar / Numbers 3:5-10* with the question, “*has the priesthood has changed today?*”

ספר במדבר פרק ג *Bamidbar / Numbers 3:5-10*

ה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: וְהִקְרַב אֶת-מִטֵּה לְוִי וְהִעֲמַדְתָּ אֹתוֹ לְפָנַי אֶהְרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וְשָׂרְתוּ אִתּוֹ: ז וְשָׂמְרוּ אֶת-מִשְׁמֶרְתּוֹ וְאֶת-מִשְׁמֶרֶת כָּל-הָעֵדָה לְפָנַי אֶהְלֵמוּעֵד לְעִבְדֵי אֶת-עֲבֹדֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן: ח וְשָׂמְרוּ אֶת-כָּל-כְּלֵי אֶהְלֵמוּעֵד וְאֶת-מִשְׁמֶרֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעִבְדֵי אֶת-עֲבֹדֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן: ט וְנָתַתָּה אֶת-הַלְוִיִּם לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו נָתַן-גַּם נְתוּנִים הֵמָּה לוֹ מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: י וְאֶת-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת-בְּנָיו תִּפְקֹד וְשָׂמְרוּ אֶת-כְּהֻנָּתָם וְהָזַר הִקְרַב יוּמָת:

3:5 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 3:6 ‘Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. 3:7 ‘They shall perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle. 3:8 ‘They shall also keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. 3:9 ‘You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel. 3:10 ‘So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman who comes near shall be put to death.’ (NASB)

A major doctrine found both in the Roman Catholic Church and the

Protestant Church, based upon the book of Hebrews, states that Yeshua is our High Priest in heaven for the New Covenant. By this reason, it is believed that he (Yeshua) did away with the Levitical priesthood on earth. But is this really true? This leads to the question of what kind of Priesthood Yeshua has taken (described in Hebrews) as compared to the priesthood that is spoken of in *Bamidbar / Numbers 3:5-10*. In discussions within the church on the levitical priesthood and of the priesthood of Yeshua, we are generally led to *Hebrews 7:1-19* as a proof text. Let's read through *Hebrews 7:1-19*.

Hebrews 7:1-19

7:1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 7:2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils was first of all, by the translation of his name king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. 7:3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually. 7:4 Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. 7:5 And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. 7:6 But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. 7:7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. 7:8 In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. 7:9 And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, 7:10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. 7:11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order

of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? 7:12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. 7:13 For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. 7:15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, 7:16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. 7:17 For it is attested of Him 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.' 7:18 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness 7:19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (NASB)

The author of Hebrews leads with the Torah portion, Parashat Lech Lecha, on *Bereshit / Genesis 14*, Abraham meeting Melchizedek (*king of righteousness*), king of Salem, priest of the Most High God. The author of Hebrews points out, according to the Torah portion, that the Torah speaks of Melchizedek and does not mention a mother or father, no genealogy, and no beginning of days or end of life. This person (Melchizedek) entered into the story line and then was never mentioned again. Based upon a lack of information on Melchizedek, the author in Hebrews is able to midrashically parallel Yeshua to Melchizedek. For example, in typical rabbinic style, the author of Hebrews is giving a midrash on these verses when he says that Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Abraham gave the 10% tithe (*Hebrews 7:10*), and therefore, the levitical priesthood also paid tithes to Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews use of a short midrash draws everything into the context of Malchizedek (*all of Israel in the loins of Abraham, and taking John 8, all believers, 'children of Abraham,' by faith in Yeshua the Messiah as well*). Malchizedek has a unique priesthood, being priest of the Most High God, and having no beginning and no end. The book of Hebrews speaks of something changing in the priest-

hood and the corresponding change in the Torah also. He says that Yeshua descended from Judah, a tribe of whom Moshe did not speak concerning priests. Yeshua was raised after the order of Melchizedek, in the sense that He is officiating something different, something new, and something that has changed from the Torah in the sense that He is not a Levite and is not dealing with earthly rituals in the earthly Temple / Tabernacle. Understanding this distinction and what the author is trying to say is very important. *Hebrews 7:18-19* states, *7:18 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness 7:19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (NASB)* The text appears to say that in Yeshua, the former command has been set aside, the mitzvot in the Torah, are set aside because they are weak and useless. Thus we find the Christian interpretation that He has done away with, for the purpose of making way for something better, what the author calls “*a better hope through which we draw near to God.*” What exactly is this “*better hope*” through which we are able to draw near to the Lord? What was it about the Torah command that is lacking (weak and useless) and causes the hope of drawing near to the Lord to fall short? These are very important questions and so let’s try to understand these verses by an example taken from Mark chapter 7.

The key to understanding these verses from the book of Hebrews is to understand this idea of a better hope that is brought in the Messiah Yeshua as opposed to the command given in the Torah. This better hope may be illustrated in Mark chapter 7. The Gospel of Mark is a discussion on the washing of hands and food between Yeshua, the disciples, and the Pharisees.

Context of Mark 7

Mark 7:1-23

7:1 The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 7:2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 7:3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 7:4

and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) 7:5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?' 7:6 And He said to them, 'Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 7:7 'But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' 7:8 'Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.' 7:9 He was also saying to them, 'You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. 7:10 'For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; 7:11 but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God , ' 7:12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; 7:13 thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.' 7:14 After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, 'Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: 7:15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. 7:16 ['If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.'] 7:17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. 7:18 And He said to them, 'Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 7:19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?' (Thus He declared all foods clean.) 7:20 And He was saying, 'That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 7:21 'For from within, out of the heart of men,

proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 7:22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 7:23 'All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.' (NASB)

Reading through Mark chapter 7, we are presented with a number of questions. “*What exactly did He mean by saying that ‘there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him?’*” (7:18 καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀσύνετοί ἐστε; οὐ νοεῖτε ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἔξωθεν εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς τὸν ἄνθρωπον οὐ δύναται αὐτὸν κοινῶσαι.) In the Greek manuscript, the word “*defile*” is koinowsai (κοινῶσαι), from the stem koinow (κοινῶ meaning, *1. to make common 1a. to make ‘Leviticallly’ unclean, render unhallowed, defile, profane 1b. to declare or count unclean*). This is the verbal base for the noun, koinos, “*common,*” defined as that which was not set apart for ritual purity, or something that is not set apart for the Lord. What Yeshua is saying here is straightforward, food does not make you ritually unclean. The cultural context of *Mark 7* is that the Jews would be careful to only eat food that was clean, indicated by the ritual of hand washing (netilat yadayim), the discussion is not centered on whether God has done away with the food laws in Parashat Kedoshim (*Vayikra / Leviticus 19*). The point Yeshua was making is that food coming into their bodies did not defile them to make them ritually unclean. However, in the process of elimination, that which comes out, feces, does convey ritual impurity. Notice how Yeshua is using our physical functions, eating and defecating to teach a spiritual non-physical reality on the source of uncleanness. The concept that is put forward based upon Yeshua’s words, ritually pure foods did not make one unclean when eating, whereas the pharisees taught that if one had unwashed hands, the clean food itself would become unclean and consequentially one would also become unclean. In addition, Yeshua was also saying that eating unclean food did not make one ritually unclean. Literally, nothing that one eats could technically make a person ritually unclean. The Peshat meaning of what Yeshua is saying is that eating “*treif*” (טרײף) does not make one ritually unclean. What makes one unclean comes from the heart, and disobedience to the command. It is actually the “*act*” of eating treif, in willing and blatant disobedience to the command that causes one to sin.

Disobedience to the mitzvah (command) is the definition of sin, and there are commands against eating unclean foods.

The point Yeshua is making is that there is a clear difference between ritual impurity and sin. The Pharisees were placing their emphasis upon the ritual purity or impurity as opposed to disobedience to the command and sin. The Pharisees in this instance were neglecting to consider obedience and/or disobedience to the command, where it is not disobedience (not a sin) to become ritually unclean. Many examples may be given to illustrate this point, a woman does not sin by becoming ritually unclean through her monthly cycle. The only sin that is related to ritual impurity was to enter the court of the Tabernacle or the Temple while knowing that one was ritually unclean.

All of the mitzvot in the Torah that are related to ritual purity, are given to reveal symbolically a very important lesson for us today, that one must have one's life and heart purified before the Lord God in heaven (*before our Father in heaven*) if one wants to enjoy His presence. The point Yeshua was making was that the Pharisees were concerned primarily with one's hands (the physical) which they believed could convey ritual impurity to food that is being eaten, and consequentially would effect one's relationship with God. Yeshua's point was that eating kosher food (*note the cultural context here*), ritual impurity from the hands did not make the food non-kosher. Note also that there are no ritual purity laws, in the Torah, for food. In Parashat Kedoshim, the Torah classifies foods as either "*clean*" which is something that may be eaten or "*unclean*" something that may not be eaten. From a Torah context regarding foods, those foods labeled as "*clean*" the Lord tells us that we are allowed to eat, and those foods labeled as "*unclean*" is a reference to those foods that are forbidden to be eaten. We are called to set ourselves apart from the world in this manner because God has sanctified and made us holy, therefore, we too are to live sanctified and holy lives and doing so according to the command.

Now the major point here that is related to our understanding the book of Hebrews, is that ritual impurity is related to the body, and when one would go to the Tabernacle, a person could be ritually clean physically, and still have unconfessed sin in their heart. This is why the author of Hebrews speaks of the gifts and sacrifices offered in the Tabernacle or Temple related to "*food and drink and various washings, regulations for*

the body imposed until a time of reformation,” could not “*cleanse the conscience*” (*Hebrews 9:8-10*). The point that he is making is that ritual purity which was brought by the sacrifice in the Temple was not a means for cleansing the conscience or dealing with sin as he says in *Hebrews 10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (NASB)* (Note the ritual service of the thank offering where both the worshiper and the priest are allowed to eat, or in the Passover lamb, the blood was poured out first, on the door posts (mezuzot) or upon the altar before eating.)

The Torah does not give commands or make statements that eating non-kosher food makes one ritually unclean. It is the act of disobedience to the command that causes sin. It is also important to note the biblical definition of kosher foods as opposed to the rabbinic definition of kosher foods, in order to differentiate between the two and to not place our focus upon making something more difficult from something that is very easy. Or as Yeshua said in *Mark 7*, placing more emphasis upon the external things as opposed to the internal uncleanness due to sin.

Yeshua’s statements in *Mark 7* was that one’s hands do not make kosher foods non-kosher and do not make one ritually impure. Thus, by eating with unwashed hands, one is not by that reason eating non-kosher foods and thus sinning by violating the Torah commands regarding food. In a similar manner, through the ritually cleaning of one’s hands (netilat yadayim), this does not take care of the impurity in one’s heart. The ritual washing of the hands also does not deal with sin in one’s life. This is the key to understanding what Yeshua has done for us regarding the words of the book of Hebrews (*Hebrews 7:1-19*). Confessing one’s sins, seeking God’s forgiveness by faith in the promised Messiah and His Sacrifice for sin is the only way to deal with the internal issue of impurity. Note that there are not commands in the Torah that deal with the internal issue of impurity. Yeshua’s priesthood is different in the sense that He stands in heaven before our Father God, and by his blood, we have atonement, we are able to seek forgiveness, the Lord hears us because our sins are forgiven, and our conscience - our hearts - are cleansed from impurity and sin. This was the point that Yeshua was making in *Mark 7*, that one can polish the outside of the cup, but still have filth on the inside, *7:21 ‘For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 7:22 deeds of coveting and wickedness,*

as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 7:23 'All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.' (NASB). One can polish the outside of the cup but still harbor sin in the heart. In addition, the earthly priests could not judge the heart, they could only enforce the regulations for the body (the external ritual impurities) whereas Yeshua knows the thoughts and intention of the heart (the internal impurities). Therefore, we have in and through Yeshua what the author Hebrews calls *"a better hope through which we draw near to God."* This is how the Torah command is lacking (weak and useless) and causes the hope of drawing near to the Lord to fall short. The author of Hebrews is not saying that the Torah command is done away with, he is actually illustrating and significance of what Yeshua has done for us and the importance of believing upon Him for our salvation.

So the question did Yeshua do away with the priesthood in the Torah? What Yeshua did upon the cross, and by His blood did not do away with the Torah command of the Tabernacle / Temple services or the sacrifices. If the Temple was built today, it would be a sin to go up unto the Temple and not follow the command God had given to Moshe at Sinai. In addition, based upon this analysis, the Korbanot (sacrifices) do not replace what Yeshua had done upon the cross. The Korbanot are brought purely by reason of the covenant, the Torah, and obedience to God's Word. What Yeshua did was something greater, in that as our high priest in heaven, we have a spiritual cleansing, and an internal purification that was not possible through the command. Praise the Lord because most assuredly in Christ the Messiah we have *"a better hope through which we draw near to God!"*



