

Priesthood Order

Part 7

“For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For, He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” (Col 1:9-20)

When undertaking a subject as extensive as the Priesthood our vision can become blurred, making it seem as though the Priesthood is being presented as our ultimate goal. As important as it is to become a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood and kingdom of priests, it is only part of the “in-part” realm and a “means to His Fullness,” not the perfection of His Fullness. The Fullness of GOD’S purpose will only be complete when GOD is All in all. When the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, (the kingdom of the Son He loves), and the last enemy, “death,” is overcome in every realm, everything in heaven and earth will revert back into the Father.

“If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.” The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For, He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. (1Co 15:19-27)

As we continue our series it may be helpful to express some thoughts connected to the “transition” Israel and the priesthood were experiencing as they entered Canaan. We’ve already established that God’s purpose didn’t change as a result of the failure of Israel to obey His voice, keep His covenant, and become a kingdom of priests. Instead of Israel ascending the mountain and coming into the cloud that shrouded His presence and glory, HE descended and dwelt in the midst of Israel. The tabernacle was erected and the Cloud came down and rested over the

tabernacle, and His glory filled the sanctuary. We could say, “God was made manifest in the Tabernacle that was placed in the midst of His people.” This became the place where Israel could approach God, through those who were set in their placement as heads of their clan, the Levitical Priests and the First Order of Priests. No one could approach who was not circumcised and, when they did approach, they could not come “empty handed.” For forty years they were witnesses of God’s glory, honor and power. The pillars that led them by day and by night shrouded God’s Glory so men could look at Him and live. Everything Israel experienced during those forty years was directly related to them as a Nation whose God is the LORD. His desire toward Israel was that they might be reconciled to Him, thereby making peace, and to love him with their whole heart, soul, mind and strength and love their neighbor as themselves. In other words, God’s desire was to make Himself KNOWN to ISRAEL, the Nation. He wanted, “a people for His name.”

We know from scripture that Israel did not fulfill God’s desire and the small remnant we recognize as the “Priesthood” were carefully prepared to be an “expression” of Himself to the Israelites. They were to continue to be God’s expression to the peoples of Canaan, when they crossed over Jordan and the Tabernacle was erected at Shiloh.

The previous document ended with Israel being prepared to move, based on the report of the two spies, into Canaan. It’s interesting to me that Joshua, who was one of the two spies who returned with a “good report,” when the twelve were sent to Canaan from Kadesh, sent only two. It appears he was very selective and sent only two, (so by the mouth of two witnesses their report could be established), who would be able to give an accurate assessment of what they saw. Unlike the report of the ten who only saw themselves like grasshoppers and the Canaanites as giants, these men told Joshua that the LORD had surely given them the land and all the inhabitants melted before them. That may not seem like a very pragmatic report considering they were sought and pursued immediately by the king of Jericho’s men, when their presence was reported. They had to be hidden, the roads were patrolled in an effort to find them and they had to “lay low” for three days before they felt safe to return to their brethren. So, what was the basis for their report?

“I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you, "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. "When we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

These are the words Rahab the harlot spoke to them. Their “good report” was given in the belief that what she said was true. You could say, “Their report was, “faith based.” They were acting on the “word” that was spoken and not according to what they actually saw.

When the whole assembly came to Jordan, that same “faith” became evident when, after three days of watching the river rushing past their camp, Joshua told the priests they were to take the, “Ark of the Covenant” upon their shoulders and step into the waters of Jordan. These are folk who had known God by seeing His **works**, **signs** and **wonders** for forty years. Again, this

doesn't seem like a very pragmatic course to be taking; however, they responded according to the "word" which the LORD had spoken to Joshua.

We are all familiar with the things that happened when they came to Jericho so we'll just emphasize a few things related to the priesthood. The actions that led to Jericho's destruction are summed up like this: For seven days, seven priests, with seven rams' horn trumpets, circled the city while blowing the trumpets. The first day they circled once and returned to camp to spend the night. Each day this was repeated and the city was circled once a day for six days. On the seventh day they circled seven times and the order was given to "shout," because those carrying the ark and all the army that followed the priests had kept silent on all of the previous days. They had circled the city a total of thirteen times in those seven days and, with a shout, the walls came tumbling down..

There are so many things that could be written about the days, and years that followed it would take a very long time to review. We all have our bibles and can refer to Joshua, Judges, and Ruth to read how Israel and the priesthood changed during that period. For our study we will focus on what may be "watershed" moments. Suffice it to say, for the next several years, until Joshua reached the age of one hundred, there were many kings who were conquered, many cities overthrown, and much of the land was "possessed." Even after all this had been accomplished, there was still a large part that had not been overcome.

AND THE whole congregation of the Israelites assembled at Shiloh and set up the Tent of Meeting there; and the land was subdued before them. And there remained among the Israelites seven tribes who had not yet divided their inheritance. Joshua asked the Israelites, How long will you be slack to go in and possess the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you? Provide three men from each tribe, and I will send them to go through the land and write a description of it according to their [tribal] inheritances; then they shall return to me. And they shall divide it into seven parts. Judah shall remain in its territory on the south and the house of Joseph shall remain in its territory on the north. You shall describe the land in seven divisions, and bring the description here to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the Lord our God. But the Levites have no portion among you, for the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance. Gad and Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance east of the Jordan, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave them. So the men arose and went, and Joshua charged them saying, Go and walk through the land and describe it and come again to me, and I will cast lots for you here before the Lord in Shiloh. And the men went and passed through the land and described it by cities in seven portions in a book; and they came again to Joshua to the camp at Shiloh. Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord, and there [he] divided the land to the Israelites, to each [tribe] his portion. (Jos 18:1-10)

Then the heads of households of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of households of the tribes of the sons of Israel. They spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, "The LORD commanded through Moses to give us cities to live in, with their pasture lands for our cattle." So the sons of Israel gave the Levites from their inheritance these cities with their pasture lands, according to the command of the LORD. (Jos 21:1-3)

Note: Because there were forty-eight cities given to the Priesthood, six of which were "cities of

refuge,” we will explore these things in a separate document. The cities are significant because of their names, locations, and events associated with them. (We may be interested in seeing some of this in greater detail; more detail than we want to include in this study.)

Now that we’ve reached the time when the Tent of Meeting was set up at Shiloh we will consider the transformation Israel and the priesthood experienced during this period. It may be good to include the words Joshua spoke to Israel before he died and portions of scripture following his death because it gives us a sense of the overall conditions that existed throughout the land they had taken possession of during the time the Tabernacle was at Shiloh.

"Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make *anyone* swear *by them*, or serve them, or bow down to them. "But you are to cling to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. "For the LORD has driven out great and strong nations from before you; and as for you, no man has stood before you to this day. "One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, just as He promised you. "So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the LORD your God. "For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you. "Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed. "It shall come about that just as all the good words which the LORD your God spoke to you have come upon you, so **the LORD will bring upon you all the threats**, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you." When you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you." (Jos 23:6-16)

"I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.' "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but **as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.**" The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. "The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God." Then Joshua said to the people, "**You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God.** He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn

and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you." The people said to Joshua, **"No, but we will serve the LORD."** Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses." "Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." The people said to Joshua, **"We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice."** So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God." (Jos 24:13-27)

"The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. **The sons of Israel did what was evil** in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth." (Jdg 3:5-7)

Note: These were the five nations God left in the land to test Israel, to see whether they would obey the Law given to Moses and to teach the young men, who had not experienced the former wars, to fight.

The following portion of scripture is taken from the end of Chapter Eighteen in the Book of Judges. We will not take the time to relate the whole experience of Micha and the Levite whom Micha "consecrated," and provided an Ephod to wear, to minister as a priest in his house. It is a very interesting look at this "deviation" from the placement of sons that was established in the wilderness.

"Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire. And there was no one to deliver *them*, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it. They called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish. The sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh." (Jdg 18:27-31)

Here we may have been given the name of the "nameless" Levite who had been "hired" by Micha to be his personal priest. This Johathan, son of Gershom, may well have been a direct descendant from Moses and would have been set in his order among the "rest of the Kohathites" who camped on the South Side of the tabernacle in the wilderness and were in charge of carrying the holy and most holy objects on their shoulders. There seems to be some indication that the letter "n" in the name Manasseh was "elevated" above the word to indicate that it was not really supposed to be used, which would change the name to "Moses." If indeed it was a descendant of Moses it becomes another indication of the "corruption" that not only affected Israel but also the

priesthood. We may have had the idea that the priesthood became defiled when Eli and his sons began to behave badly but it doesn't seem likely that "corruption" entered "all at once" while Eli was the High Priest.

In the chapters that follow the above incident we have an account of the Levite who traveled with his wife to Gibeah, where she was taken from the house where they were staying, raped and murdered by the men of the city. Again, time will not be taken to relate the whole incident. We will just consider what had been related in an earlier document that concerned Phinehas, the son of Eleazar. This was what happened after the Levite cut his dead wife's body into twelve parts and scattered them throughout the land Israel inhabited.

"Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. The sons of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God *was* there in those days, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son, stood before it to *minister* in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand." (Jdg 20:26-28)

These three verses say that Bethel was where the ark of the covenant of God was located in those days. We cannot be absolutely certain that this was not Shiloh, where the tabernacle, which may have been referred to as the "house of God," (which is what Bethel literally means), was set up. Regardless of where it was, the significant thing to take note of is that Phinehas stood before the ark to minister in those days. There is only a single mention of Eleazar's death which would allow for Phinehas to become High Priest in his stead: "And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the hill country of Ephraim." (Jos 24:33)

This brings us to what may be considered another "watershed" experience concerning the priesthood; the activities of Eli and his sons, and our introduction to Samuel.

(To be continued...)

