



Around the Shabbat Table Tetzaveh / Shabbat Zachor 5764

March 2004

This week marks a first for Around the Shabbat Table, as we have a guest writer who is a young man who is celebrating his becoming a Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat. We wish him and his family mazel tov on this joyous occasion, and thank him for volunteering to write this week's article.

This week's writer: Evan Finkel, Student, Oceanside Middle School and Oceanside Jewish Center Religious School

Shalom!

Introduction

Parashat Tetzaveh

Today we read the Torah portion Tetzaveh. This Torah portion focuses mainly on Aaron and his sons. The Israelites are commanded to bring clear oil of beaten olives to the sanctuary. This is to be used for the menorah, as symbolized by the *ner tamid*, or continuously burning light. This is supposed to be lit from morning until night, and is supposed to be watched by Aaron and his sons. This is the same as the light over the ark in our temple. Aaron and his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazer, and Ithamar, are appointed priests. They are to manage the sacrifices and offerings of the people. Aaron is told to wear eight garments, including the ephod, breastplate, *Urim* and *Thumim*, blue robe, the gold plate with the words "Holy to the Lord", a fringed linen tunic, a linen headdress, and an embroidered sash. The breastplate is similar to the one "worn" by the Torah outside of its cover. Aaron's sons are told to wear a tunic, pants, sash, and turban. Their initiation includes many sacrifices and offerings. A bull is the first offering. It is used in its entirety. Some of the blood is put on the altar, while the rest is poured on the base. The fat of its entrails, its two kidneys and its liver are burnt on the alter. Its skin is burnt outside of the camp. Next, a ram is slaughtered. Aaron and his sons are sprinkled with its blood and oil. At one point, Aaron and his sons hold pieces of the ram in one hand and wafers, cakes of oil bread, and flat loaves of bread as an offering to God. This ceremony is to be repeated on each of seven days. The last duty given to Aaron is to burn incense every morning and night on a gold plated acacia altar placed

before the curtain in front of the ark. Once a year he is to paint the horns with the blood of a sin offering.



Parashat Zachor

This Shabbat is known as *Shabbat Zachor*. It has its own special *Haftorah* and *Maftir* portions. These special readings focus on the conflict between the people Israel and the nation of Amalek. They are read today, because we believe that Haman is a descendant of Amalek, and Saturday night marks the beginning of Purim. The killing of the Amalekites raises serious problems. In one sense perhaps it was right to destroy Amalek. In another sense, perhaps it was wrong to destroy Amalek, because people are a product of their environment. If the children of Amalek were evil it may have been because their parent's were evil. Nowadays, we must fight anti-Semitism (and indeed all evil, as represented by Amalek), by stripping our enemies of power. Our enemies today may be more powerful than Amalek was, and we must take a strong approach to ensure our survival.

The haftorah (prophetic reading) tells of the choices made by King Saul (late 11th century BCE [Before the Common Era]). It begins with God recalling how Amalek brutally attacked the Israelites when they left Egypt. God orders the prophet Samuel to tell Saul to attack the Amalekites, and to kill everyone- men, women, children, infants, oxen, sheep, camels, and donkeys. 200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 soldiers from Judah are gathered at Telaim. When the soldiers reached Amalek, Saul stayed in the valley. Saul separated the Kenites from Amalek. Israel destroyed Amalek, but spared King Agag, and the best sheep, oxen, lambs, and all else that was good. This was a direct disobedience of what Saul was supposed to do. God then tells Samuel that he regrets making Saul king. Samuel cried for Saul all night. Saul lies to Samuel and tells him he did what the Lord asked. Samuel finally gets Saul to admit his deed. Then, Samuel reveals to Saul what God said to him. Saul still tries to defend himself, and shift the blame. Samuel tells Saul he has sinned and has done only for his own good. Saul again admits he sinned and tries to repent and asks Samuel to go with him. Samuel says the Lord rejects his repentance and refuses to go with him. After Saul leaves, Samuel finishes what Saul could not and kills Agag. This signifies that Saul's rein has ended.

Questions for your Family's Discussion

As your family shares their Shabbat meal this Friday evening, you might want to discuss some of the following thoughts and questions:

1. Why were so many different special clothes worn by the *kohanim* (priests) when they officiated? What is the purpose of special clothes worn by people who help to lead services today? Consider, for example, the *kittel* worn by many on the High Holidays.
2. Why do you think that this is the one parasha during Moses' lifetime from which he is excluded? Could it have anything to do with the fact that his brother, Aaron, is highlighted in the parasha?
3. The tie-in between the special readings and the holiday of Purim is the link between the nation of Amalek and Haman, the villain of the Purim story. Amalek stood for violent anti-Semitism. For what reasons does anti-Semitism persist?

Some Texts to Wrestle With

God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him

Genesis 1:27

- When people choose to hate an ethnic group (in the way that Amalek hated the Israelites), does that mean that they are denying God?

You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

Exodus 19:6

- According to the Torah, all Jews are a "kingdom of priests." Since kohanim (priests) had to wear special garments when they "served," many Jews wear special garments when they pray. What special clothes do you, or people you know wear?
- Is there a difference between the special garments worn for prayer by men and by women? How are those differences changing?



Towards an Action Agenda

- Purim is a time in which we share our joy with friends. Make and deliver shalach manot (Purim food) baskets to your friends.
- Learn more about the holiday of Purim at: www.holidays.net/purim.
- One special Purim custom is to give to those in need, so that they, too, may enjoy Purim. Learn about how the Metropolitan Council on Jewish poverty reaches out to Jewish poor in the New York area, and how you can help, at <http://www.metcouncil.org/New/index2.html>
- The movie "The Passion of the Christ" opened recently. This controversial movie is viewed by some as opening the door to anti-Semitic reaction. You can learn more about responses to this film at the BJE website, http://www.bjeny.org/erc_ce_thepassion.asp



Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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