

YESHUA THE BRANCH?

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The Apostle Levi (aka Matthew) wrote that the (Old Testament) Prophets called the Messiah a Nazarene:

Matthew 2:23: “and Joseph came” (with Mary and little Yeshua, perhaps five years old) “and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the Prophets: ‘He (the Messiah) shall be called a *Nazarene*.’”

Sometimes Christians, especially Baptists, Charismatics and Pentecostals, misunderstand *Nazarene* and say that Jesus was a Nazirite. This would mean that Yeshua never drank wine, which fits in nicely with their teaching that drinking wine or alcohol is sin. The Nazirite Vow, found in Num. 6:1-21 specifies no wine. Samuel, Samson and John the Immerser (the Baptist) were Nazirites from birth.

There’s no biblical evidence, though, that Yeshua was a Nazirite, and Scripture actually negates it in several places. In Mt. 11:18-19 the Pharisees charge Yeshua with being a glutton and drunkard, and He doesn’t deny that He drank alcohol:

“For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man came eating and *drinking* and they say, ‘Behold! A gluttonous man and a *drunkard!* A friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet Wisdom is vindicated by Her children.”

The reason this particular charge was leveled against Yeshua was because the Pharisees wanted to present Him to the Jewish people as a rebellious man worthy of death. Moses wrote in Deut. 21:18-21:

‘If any man has a stubborn and *rebellious* son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him he will not listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him and bring him out to the Elders of his city at the entrance gate of his home town. They shall say to the Elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and *rebellious!* He will not obey us! He is a *glutton* and a *drunkard!*’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death. So you shall remove the evil from your midst and all Israel will hear of it and fear’ (God and His Ways).

The Pharisees wanted the Jewish people to see Yeshua in rebellion to God, and therefore, worthy of death, and obviously, not the Messiah. Most of the Jewish people, however, gladly heard Him and Jewish multitudes came to Him and followed Him.¹

Just as the Pharisees twisted and distorted God’s Word, so do Christians who say that Jesus was a Nazirite and so He never drank any alcohol. They say that He drank grape juice at the Passover, commonly mis-named the Last Supper by the Roman Catholic Church, to strip Jesus of this biblical and Jewish Feast.² This would have been the first time in history that Jews didn’t drink wine at Passover, but grape juice.

It also would have been the first time in history that Jews didn’t drink wine at a wedding feast. By their own insistence, though, that Jesus was a Nazirite, the Baptist, etc., teaching falls to the ground. If Yeshua were a Nazirite He could not drink wine *or* grape juice! He couldn’t even eat raisins. If He did, He would have sinned. Numbers 6:1-4 states:

“Yahveh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the Sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When a man or a woman makes a special Vow of Separation, the Nazirite Vow, to dedicate him-

¹ Mt. 4:25; 5:1; 7:28; 8:1; 9:8, 33, 36; 11:7; 12:23, 46; 13:2, 34, 36, etc.

² Cf. Lev. 23:4f.; Mt. 26:2, 17-19f.; Mk. 14:12, 14, 16f.; Lk. 22:1, 8, 11, 13, 15f.

self to Yahveh, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, *nor shall he drink any grape juice* nor eat fresh or dried grapes (i.e. raisins). All the days of his Separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin.””

That Yeshua changed the water into wine is beyond dispute when we realize how funny it would have been for the steward who drank it to say to the groom, who was responsible for providing the food and the drink:³

(John 2:10) *‘Every man serves the good grape juice first and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer grape juice, but you have kept the good grape juice until now!’*

Theologian Merrill Tenney says that the master of the banquet,

“was astounded by the high quality of the wine since generally a poorer quality was served once the taste of the guests became dulled.”⁴

Theologian Marcus Dods also speaks of the quality as being better than the earlier wine:

‘The significance of the remark consists in...the *quality* of the wine...Judging it by his natural taste and comparing it with the wine supplied by the host...pronounces this fresh supply better.’⁵

Substituting grape juice for wine makes absolutely no sense, but it is funny. Nowhere in Scripture, Old or New, does God ever say it’s a sin to drink alcohol or wine. Those who think otherwise lump alcohol and alcoholism together, but Psalm 104:15 states:

“And wine that makes glad the heart of man; oil to make his face shine, and bread, which strengthens man’s heart.”

Also, Paul wrote to Timothy:

“No longer drink only water, but *use a little wine* for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.” (1st Timothy 5:23 NKJV) And Paul also said of the deacons:

“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given *to much wine*, not greedy for money,” (1st Timothy 3:8 NKJV)

It’s obvious that the Apostle to the Gentiles didn’t think that drinking wine was a sin, but why the confusion over Nazarene and Nazarite?

Yeshua’s Last Passover in Jerusalem

Scripture reveals that wine was at Yeshua’s last Passover (Mt. 26:29; Mk. 14:25; Lk. 22:18).⁶ All Passovers, either ancient or modern, have wine. If the Lord’s Passover only had grape juice it would have been so unusual that the Gospel writers would certainly have made it a point to mention it so that every-

³ Donald Guthrie, *John*, New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition; ed. D. A Carson et al.; Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 1029.

⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, *John*, EBC 9; ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), paragraph 50,012.

⁵ Alexander Balmain Bruce, D.D., and Marcus Dods, D.D., authors; W. Robertson Nicoll, editor, M.A., LL.D., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. one: *The Synoptic Gospels* (Bruce) and *The Gospel of St. John* (Dods; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), p. 705.

⁶ Those verses literally speak of the ‘fruit of the vine,’ which is the phrase used in blessing God for wine.

one after them would do the same. As the New Testament does not tell us that Yeshua substituted grape juice for wine, there is no biblical support for grape juice being at His last Passover in Jerusalem, especially when we realize that Yeshua's words literally point to wine being in the Cup that He spoke of as being His blood, which He passed around to all His remaining 11 disciples, telling them to drink of it. Matthew records:

“Then He took the Cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins and I say to you, I will not drink of this *fruit of the vine* from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom.’” (Matthew 26:27-29; cf. Mk. 14:25; Lk. 22:18)

The term, *fruit of the vine* is a specific reference to wine, which is to this day in Judaism used to thank God for the wine they are about to drink. Those who teach that the drinking of alcohol is sin have no biblical basis for it. They are speaking against God and His Word and presenting their own biased teaching and agenda—a tradition of man. Yeshua might well say to them today:

‘Why do you...transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?...In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ (Matthew 15:3, 9)

Yes, too much wine is seen as a mocker (Prov. 20:1), but too much food is also a sin known as gluttony (Dt. 21:18-21; Mt. 11:18-19; Lk. 7:29-35).⁷ When was the last time you heard a preacher speak against gluttony? It's not as though it's a moot point. Many Christians in the USA are extremely overweight.

Nazareth

The misunderstanding over Yeshua being a Nazirite (the Vow taker) or a Nazarene (a person from the city of Nazareth) is understandable as both words are similar in English. In Hebrew, however, they are spelled and sound differently.

1. The Hebrew word for Nazirite, the Vow taker, is נָזִיר and it would best be spelled in English as *Nazir*.
2. The Hebrew word for Nazarene is נִצְרִי and it would best be spelled in English as *Notes'ri*. It simply means a person from the city of Nazareth.
 - A. Yeshua was called a נִצְרִי, (*Notes'ri*), one who came from Nazareth נִצְרַת (*Knots'raht*).⁸
 - B. Israelis call Christians נִצְרִים (*Notes'reem*), which is the plural of Nazareth, because they are followers of the Nazarene, the One who came from Nazareth.

When Matthew spoke of the Prophets calling the Messiah a נִצְרִי (*Notes'ri*) he was making a profound

⁷ The reason why the Pharisees accused Yeshua of being a glutton and a drunkard is because Dt. 21:18-21 says that any Hebrew who was *rebellious* and would not listen to his parents (his immediate authority) was to be stoned to death. The passage speaks of the parents taking their son to the Elders, and saying, ‘This son of ours is *stubborn and rebellious*—he will not obey our voice. *He is a glutton and a drunkard.*’ Then all the men of the city would stone him to death, thus ending rebellion in Israel and what God calls evil (v. 21). *That's the reason* why the Pharisees accused Yeshua of being a glutton and a wino. It wasn't as if the Pharisees didn't like to drink wine, but they were bringing *an official authoritative charge from Mosaic Law against Yeshua*, meaning that He was worthy of death because He was stubborn, rebellious and evil. It was quite a confrontation. The Pharisees were looked up to by the people as ‘holy,’ and Yeshua was ‘the new kid on the block,’ but most of the Jewish people were following Him! (John 12:19) All that to say: Yeshua wasn't a glutton nor a drunkard, but He obviously ate food and *drank wine*.

⁸ Notes'ri (Nazarene) changes to Knots'raht (Nazareth) because of the addition of the ‘t’ sound at the end of the Hebrew word, and the change of the first and last vowels.

theological statement about Yeshua being the Messiah; not just that He came from Nazareth. The verb for the name of the town in which Yeshua grew up is נֶצֶר (*Knots'zar*), which means, 'a branch or a shoot; to be fresh, bright, grow green or be alive: a living branch.'⁹ This is what Matthew means when He says the Prophets called the Messiah a Nazarene, because many Prophets called the Messiah Hebrew words for a rod or branch, or a shoot or a sprout. Note the parallel thought of rod and branch, and root in v. 1 of Isaiah 11:1-2:

‘There shall come forth a Rod from the Root of Jesse and a Branch shall grow out of his Roots.

The Spirit of Yahveh shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and Power, the Spirit of Knowledge and the Fear of Yahveh.

The Hebrew verb for ‘come forth’ (come out, and come up) is יָצָא (*yahtz'tzah*). It refers to the concept of what a sprout or a branch does in growing forth.

The word for ‘rod’ (or shoot) is הֶטֶר (*ho'tare*), which a Messianic title¹⁰ that is conceptually similar with the Hebrew noun for Nazareth, a branch.

Branch in Is. 11:1 is נֶצֶר (*Nets'zair*), which is the basis of Nazareth נֶצְרֶת (*Knots'raht*), and what Yeshua, coming from Nazareth was called, a נֶצְרִי (*Notes'ri*); a man from Nazareth, but also, a branch because that's what Nazareth means.

The Hebrew, “from the root’ of Jesse is מִשְׁרָיִו (*mih'sharav*) from the verb שָׁרַשׁ (*shoresh*), which means that which, ‘springs up from the root; shoot or sprout.’ The noun in Is. 11:1 means, ‘a root.’¹¹ In Zech. 6:12-13 it states:

“Thus says the Yahveh of Hosts! ‘Behold! The Man whose name is *The Branch!* From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the Temple of Yahveh! Yes! He shall build the Temple of Yahveh! He shall bear the Glory and He shall sit and rule on His Throne! So He shall be a High Priest on His Throne, and the counsel of Shalom shall be between them both!”

The word for Branch in Zech. 6:12 is צֶמַח (*Tzeh'mach*) and for ‘branch out’ is יִצְמַח (*Its'mach*), which is the future tense of the verb meaning, He will branch out. The verb means, ‘to shoot (out), to spring (forth).’ The noun means, ‘a shooting, a springing up, a shoot, a plant, a branch.’¹² צֶמַח (*Tzeh'mach*) is conceptually the same as נֶצֶר (*Nets'zair*), the basis for Nazareth; a Nazarene, which means a branch.

Isaiah 4:2 speaks of the Branch of Yahveh as צֶמַח (*Tzeh'mach*):

“On that day the Branch of Yahveh shall be beautiful and glorious and the fruit of the Land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.”

‘Branch of Yahveh’ is a reference to Messiah’s deity since, ‘Yahveh,’ obviously speaks of God in ‘the Heavens.’ On the other hand, the Fruit of the *Earth* pictures Yeshua’s humanity. In Larnaka, Cyprus an ancient Phoenician inscription from the third century BC speaks of a *righteous sprout* or branch, צֶמַח צֶדֶק (*Tzeh'mach Tzeh'dek*), which is a technical term meaning that he was the legitimate son and heir to his father’s throne. Yeshua, as the Righteous Sprout or Branch, is the legitimate heir to the Throne of His earthly Father, King David.

⁹ Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 560.

¹⁰ Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings* (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit, 1992), pp. 50-51, 165 (note 30 which speaks of the Targum presenting verse one as the Messiah).

¹¹ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, pp. 524, 742.

¹² Ibid., p. 646.

In Jeremiah 23:5-8, Yahveh promises that Judah and Israel will return to the Land of Israel and that *His Righteous Branch* will accomplish it. Here branch is also נְזֶחַח (*Tzeh'mach*) and of course, it's Yeshua:

“Behold! The days are coming!,” says Yahveh, “That I will raise up for David *a Righteousness Branch*. A King shall *reign* and prosper, and He will execute judgment and righteousness in the Land of Israel. In His days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell safely. Now this is His name by which He will be called: ‘Yahveh is our Righteousness!’ ‘Therefore, behold! The days are coming,’ says Yahveh, ‘that they shall no longer say, ‘As Yahveh lives, who brought up the Sons of Israel from the land of Egypt!,’ but, ‘As Yahveh lives, who brought up and led the descendants of the House of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.’ And they shall dwell in their own land.” (Jeremiah 23:5-8; see also Zech. 3:8-10 where נְזֶחַח (*Tzeh'mach*) is the Branch who will remove sin in a single day.)

This Branch will be the High Priest–King of Israel. He brings both offices together, something Torah (Mosaic Law) doesn't seem to speak of, for the High Priests come from Levi through Aaron's line, and the kings come through Judah and David's lineage. It's a picture of Malkizedek, the High Priest and King of Jerusalem (Gen. 14:18-20), which of course, pictures Yeshua. Psalm 110:4 states of the Messiah:

“Yahveh has sworn and will not relent! ‘You are a’ (High) ‘Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek!’” (cf. v. 1 and Heb. 5:6ff.)

In Luke 1:67-79 Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, prophesies. In v. 78 there are two messianic images in the Greek word for ‘rising sun.’

“because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven.” (Luke 1:78 NIV)

The word for ‘rising sun’ is $\alpha\nu\alpha\tau\omicron\lambda\eta$ (*ana'toe'lay*), and means both, ‘to sprout or grow,’ like our Hebrew words for branch and sprout, and also, ‘to rise,’ for the ‘rising of the sun (or) the dawn.’¹³ The rising of a heavenly body, like a star or the sun, implies deity. It also means the dawning of a day or the dawning of *salvation*.

The literal translation of 1:78 is, ‘through the tender mercies of our God, by which will visit us, the rising from on high’ (i.e. Heaven). The word for ‘sun’ or ‘star’ is not in the Greek, but because ‘high’ is used in the verse it points to a celestial or heavenly rising; not an agricultural sprouting or growing like a branch. This is complemented by the next verse which states, ‘to appear to the ones sitting (or dwelling) in *Darkness* and in the *Shadow* of Death.’

The name Zechariah means, ‘Yahveh has remembered,’ and the name Elisheva (Elizabeth) means, ‘My God has sworn an oath.’ The two together symbolically mean, ‘Yahveh My God has remembered the oath He swore’ (to Abraham), and Yochanan is born—the proclaimer of the Messiah to Israel. The promise of God to Abraham will be fulfilled in Yeshua. We actually see the meaning of their names, Zechariah and Elisheva, in the prophecy itself. Luke 1:70, 72-73 states:

“As God spoke by the mouth of His holy Prophets, who have been since the world began ...to perform the *mercy promised* to our Fathers and to *remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our Father Abraham.*”

Genesis 17:1-8 states: “When Avram was 99 years old, Yahveh appeared to Avram and said to him, ‘I am El Shaddai! Walk before Me and I will cause you to be blameless. I will make My *Covenant* between Me and you, and I will *multiply you* exceedingly.’ Then

¹³ Wesley J. Perschbacher, Editor, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1990), p. 26.

Avram fell on his face, and God spoke with him, saying, ‘As for Me, behold! My Covenant is with you and you shall be a Father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you a Father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish My Covenant between Me and you *and your descendants* after you in their generations, for an *Everlasting Covenant, to be God to you and your descendants* after you. Also, I give to you and your descendants after you *the Land* in which you are a stranger—all the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession, and *I will be their God!*’”

The name John or Yochanan means, ‘the Grace of Yahveh,’ and John proclaimed the coming of Messiah, who is Grace and Law, to all Israel. In Mal. 4:5 God says of Yochanan,

‘Behold! I am going to send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and terrible Day of Yahveh!’ (Cf. Mt. 11:14; 17:12)

Elijah will most likely be one of the Two Witnesses (Rev. 11:3). The other? Probably Enoch (Gen. 5:24). Neither one of them died, but they will, facing the Beast (Rev. 11:3-12).

The Prophets that the Apostle Levi (Matthew) spoke of said that the Messiah would be called a Branch נֶצֶר (*Netz’zair*), which is the basis for both the city of Nazareth and a Nazarene; one who comes from Nazareth. It’s God’s divine way for Yeshua to be known as The Branch—having Yeshua grown up in a town whose name means, branch.

There’s another meaning to Nazareth, besides branch. Nazareth was like Sodom and Gomorrah. The city was a crossroads for caravans and was despised by many Jews because of its sexual sins and debauchery. That’s why Nathaniel said to Philip, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ (John 1:46)

When Yeshua is crucified, John 19:19, states:

“Now Pilate had an inscription written and fastened it to the cross. And the inscription was: Yeshua of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

Symbolically it says, ‘Yeshua the Branch, the King of the Jews,’ the very Messianic title of the Messiah that Levi speaks of.

The inscription can also be interpreted as, ‘Jesus the Despised One, the King of the Jews.’ Isaiah 53:3 says of the Messiah,

“He is *despised* and rejected by men. A Man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief. And we, as it were, hid our faces from Him. He was *despised*, and we esteemed Him not.”

Yeshua was not a Nazirite (the Vow taker), but a Nazarene, a person from the city of Nazareth, which means branch. That’s how Matthew could write that the Prophets called the Messiah a Nazarene, and be speaking of Yeshua. **Why**, though, did the Prophets call the Messiah a branch? Just because Yeshua would grow up in Nazareth? It all began in the Wilderness with the rebellious Sons of Israel.

The Branch in the Wilderness

Like most things in the New Testament we find their origin in Torah. In one of a number of their rebellions, the Sons of Israel came against Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16:1–17:13. Korah, Datan and Aviram wanted ‘to serve Yahveh,’ and rejected God’s choice for High Priest, Aaron, thereby rejecting and rebelling against God Himself. The Pharisees wanted to serve God and lead the people, but rejected His Choice, Yeshua, and thereby rebelled against God like their Fathers in the Wilderness against Moses and Aaron.

Grumbling is the attitude and words of the Hebrews against Moses and Aaron. The Hebrew word is תִּלְבוֹת (tlu’note) and comes from the Hebrew לִין (loon). It means,

‘to express resentment, anger in half muted tones of hostile opposition to God’s leaders and the authority which he has invested in them.’¹⁴

Except for one case where Israel is displeased with Joshua, because of the covenant he made with the deceptive and lying Gibeonites (Joshua 9:18), the word is found in six chapters of the Torah relating to the rebellious Sons of Israel in the Wilderness (Exodus 15, 16, 17; Num. 14, 16, 17). In each case it involves the entire Camp of Israel verbally assaulting Moses and Aaron as individuals, and indirectly, God Himself. This grumbling is an attitude of rebellion against God Almighty because of the conditions the Israelis found themselves in. For example, no food or water. In Numbers 16 it’s not because of lack of food or water, but prestige.

Korah was a first cousin of Moses and Aaron:

- Aaron and Moses’ father was Amram, son of Kohath, and
- Korah’s father was Izhar, son of Kohath.

They had the same grandfather (Kohath), and their fathers, Amram and Izhar, were brothers.

Levi’s three sons were Gershon, Kohath and Merari (1, 2 and 3 below).

1. Gershon had two sons: Libni and Shimei (Gen. 46:11; Ex. 6:16).

(A) Libni had six sons (1st Chron. 23:8-9).

- (1) Jehiel
- (2) Zetham
- (3) Joel
- (4) Shelomith
- (5) Haziël
- (6) Haran

(B) Shimei had four sons (1st Chron. 23:10).

- (1) Jahath
- (2) Zina
- (3) Jerush
- (4) Beriah

2. **Kohath** had four sons (Ex. 6:18), Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel:

(A) **Amram**

¹⁴ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, pp. 761, 419.

- (1) **Aaron** (Ex. 6:20). Aaron had four sons (Ex. 6:23).
 - Nadab
 - Abihu
 - Eleazar
 - Ithamar
- (2) **Moses** had two sons (Ex. 2:22; 18:4).
 - Gershom
 - Eliezer
- (B) **Izhar** had three sons (Ex. 6:21).
 - (1) **Korah**
 - (2) Nepheg
 - (3) Zichri
- (C) Hebron had four sons (1st Chron. 23:19).
 - (1) Jenah
 - (2) Amariah
 - (3) Jahaziel
 - (4) Jekameam
- (D) Uzziel had three sons (Ex. 6:22).
 - (1) Mishael
 - (2) Elzaphan
 - (3) Sithri
- 3. Merari had two sons, Mahli and Mushi (most likely twins by the similar sounds of their names; Exodus 6:19).
 - (A) Mahli had two sons (1st Chron. 23:21).
 - (1) Elazar
 - (2) Kish
 - (B) Mushi had three sons (1st Chron. 24:30).
 - (1) Mahli
 - (2) Eder
 - (3) Jeremoth

The Rabbis say that the sin of jealousy and rebellion was Korah's motivation as he challenged Aaron's role to be the High Priest of Israel (Num. 16:3-11). Korah wanted to be High Priest, or at the very least, to serve in the Tabernacle as was designated for only the High Priest. He most likely said:

‘The only reason that Aaron is High Priest is because Moses *is his brother!* Moses made Aaron High Priest!’

Korah tried to usurp Aaron's divine position by posing as a reformer; a champion of the people, to right a wrong (that Aaron really shouldn't be High Priest). Korah presented himself as desiring *to serve Yahveh*, saying that he, too, wanted to burn incense. A noble goal, but God had given that assignment to the High Priest Aaron (Ex. 30:7-8). The Rabbis say that Korah was consumed by jealousy and that he felt he had *passed over or overlooked*.

Datan and Aviram (Dathan and Abiram; Num. 16:1, 12, etc.) led the other part of this joint conspiracy; this two pronged unholy alliance. These two *questioned and came against* Moses' position as *leader*, throwing in Moses' face that Israel was still in the Wilderness. It wasn't a land flowing with milk and honey, as Moses had promised, *although it was their fault to begin with*, in being part of Israel that had continually rebelled against God (Num. 14:8-11) and caused Israel to wander for 40 years.

Jacob's Prophecy About His Firstborn Son

When Yakov (Jacob) was on his deathbed he prophesied to all his sons about their future. Beginning with Reuben, his firstborn son, he said in Genesis 49:3-4:

'Reuben, you are my firstborn. My might and the beginning of my strength. Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power, but unstable as water. You shall not have preeminence because you went up to your father's bed. You defiled it. He went up to my couch!'

Rueben had slept with his father Jacob's concubine wife Bilha, the maidservant of Rachel (Gen. 35:22). Because of his incestuous sin, which symbolized usurping the place of his father as the authority in the family, before his father was dead (cf. Absalom usurping David's authority as king; 2nd Sam. 15:10-14; 16:20-22), Rueben's three rights as the firstborn son were divided up among Jacob's other sons:

1. The priesthood of the firstborn was given to Levi.
2. The right to rule or kingship was given to Judah, and
3. The double portion for the firstborn son was given to Joseph.

Like their ancestor Ruvane (Rueben), Datan and Aviram (great grandsons of Ruvane) were trying to usurp the authority figure of their day—Moses:

1. ***Ruvane*** had four sons (Gen. 46:9): Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi:

1. Hanoch
2. Pallu had one son (Num. 26:8)
 - a. Eliav had two sons (Num. 16:1)
 - (1) ***Datan***
 - (2) ***Aviram***
3. Hezron
4. Carmi

On (the son of Pelet) was also part of the rebellion (Num. 16:1). We don't know his full lineage except that he too, came from Ruvane. They all wanted *prestige of leadership*. They wanted to lead God's people, another noble desire, but the motivation was pride, self-righteousness and self-glorification.

It seems that they were trying to recover their lost birthright position, the right of the firstborn to lead and to be king in Israel, but now this was held by Moses. Their sin was rebellion against God's ordained authority to lead Israel. They didn't really want to serve, but to receive honor and glory.

At the root of the unholy alliance was their *rejection* of God, but they couched it in non-selfish terms and holy words. This is especially evil and reminiscent of the deception of the Snake in the Garden, and the vain glory and rebellion within Adam and Eve. Interestingly enough, the Tribe of Ruvane and the clan of Kohat lived next door to each other, south of the Tabernacle—the literal and only Dwelling Place of Yahveh on Earth.

The Branch of Aaron and Messiah

In the Ark of the Covenant were the Two Tablets of Stone (the Ten Commandments; **Dt. 10:5**; cf. 1st Kings 8:9), which testified to God's reality, what He had done for Israel in setting them free from Egypt, His Covenant with Israel, and His Holy Standard—the Stone Tablets symbolizing all the commandments and rules or words of God for Israel to live by.

Yeshua, when tempted by Satan, told him, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4). Yeshua didn't say just the Ten Commandments. Yeshua was quoting what Moses told Israel in the Wilderness in Dt. 8:3:

“So God humbled you, *allowed you to hunger*, and fed you with Manna, which you did not know nor did your Fathers know, *that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Yahveh.*”

That has never changed. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

In front of the Ark of the Covenant was the gold jar filled with the Manna (Ex. 16:33-34; Heb. 9:4), which pictured Yeshua as the Bread of Life and the Bread from Heaven (John 6:1ff.).

Also in front of the Ark was the Rod or Staff of Aaron (Num. 17:10; cf. 17:3-4), formerly the shepherd's staff of Moses. This staff figured prominently in the salvation of Israel:

1. Exodus 4:2-5: God asks Moses, ‘What is in your hand? A staff.’ It becomes a snake and then back to staff, ‘so Israel will believe’ that Moses was sent by Yahveh.
2. Ex. 4:17, 20-21, 30-31: Moses is told to take the staff in his hand and God will perform all His miracles before Pharaoh with the staff that He's placed in the hand of Moses to do signs with, to make Israel believe in Moses.
3. Ex. 7:9-12: Aaron throws the Staff of Yahveh down and it becomes a snake before Pharaoh and gobbles up all the staff-snakes of the Egyptian magicians.
4. Ex. 7:15-20: The Staff is raised to strike the Nile River, which is turned into blood.
5. Ex. 8:5: The Staff is raised to bring the plague of frogs upon all Egypt.
6. Ex. 8:16-17: The Staff is raised for dust to become gnats.
7. Ex. 9:23: The Staff is raised for lightning, thunder and hail to come upon Egypt, like they had never seen before.
8. Ex. 10:13: The Staff is raised for locusts to come upon Egypt.
9. Ex. 10:21-23: An allusion is made to the raising of the Staff (‘stretch out your hand to the Heavens’) for thick darkness to be over the land of Egypt for three days.
10. Ex. 14:16f: Moses raises his Staff over the Red Sea, dividing it in two so Israel can walk across on dry ground, and Pharaoh's Army, following them, drowns, as the Sea reverts back to its former place.
11. Ex. 17:5-6: The Staff is raised to strike the Rock for water so that all Israel can drink and not die of thirst.
12. Ex. 17:9: The Staff is raised for victory over Amalek, the perennial enemy of Israel (cf. Ex. 17:16).
13. Num. 17:1-11: The Staff or Rod of Aaron buds, flowers and bears fruit.
14. Num. 20:7-9. Moses is told he will not lead Israel into the Promised Land. The Staff should have been raised and he should have only *spoken* to the Rock, to bring water out of it for Israel, but Moses, in his anger against Israel, rebels against Yahveh and disobeys Him and so he strikes the rock twice (the

first time was in Ex. 17:6, forty years earlier when had God commanded Moses to strike the Rock).

In Num. 16:20-35, God destroys the 250 Levites by Fire from Heaven, and He also kills Korah, Datan and Aviram and their families by having the ground open up and swallow them alive, to stop their rebellion, but there were others in Israel who were discontent with the way things were, and thought that Korah and Co. were good guys, and so murmuring and complaining arose. The next day God began killing them. Aaron acts as High Priest for Israel and halts the death toll by standing between the living and the dead (Num. 16:41-48), atoning for Israel's sin. Yeshua, our High Priest, is the only thing that stands between us and the Lake of Fire, for we're not unlike our Fathers in the Wilderness.

Yahveh's Sign to Israel

All the rebels were killed. It was a mini-day of judgment in Israel. Aaron *atones* for Israel's sins and the plague stops. Here is real spiritual power vested in Aaron to perform atonement and reconciliation—to atone for the sins of Israel and to bring Israel into fellowship once again with God. Yahveh moves through Aaron for salvation or deliverance and then God sets in motion a sign or miracle for Israel to know that Aaron was *chosen* by God to be the High Priest of Israel. God says in Num. 17:5,

‘And it will be, the man whom I choose, his *staff* will *sprout*.’

Aaron's staff buds, flowers and bears fruit: almonds. Out of the turbulence of rebellion Yahveh caused the staff or branch of Aaron to become a miraculous sign for whom God had chosen to be the High Priest. From this the Hebrew words for branch would come to be a title for the Messiah—The Branch.¹⁵

The Hebrew noun ‘staff’ is מַטֵּה (*ma'teh*) and comes from the verb נָטָה (*na'tah*), which means, ‘to stretch out, to extend.’ The noun means, “a branch, a bough (of a tree), a rod, a staff, a scepter” (because the staff was also a symbol of authority), “or a tribe.”¹⁶

‘Sprout’ is פָּרַחַת (*yif'rach*) and comes from the verb פָּרַח (*pah'rach*), which means, ‘to sprout, to flourish and to blossom.’¹⁷ The noun means a young shoot, a flower or blossom. We also find both ‘staff’ and ‘to sprout’ (twice) in Numbers 17:8:

‘And it was on the next day that Moses came to the Tent of the Testimony and behold! The *Staff* (מַטֵּה *ma'teh*) of Aaron from the House of Levi had *sprouted* (פָּרַחַת *pah'rach*), *blossomed* (צִיָּץ *yatz'zeats*), and had *flowers* (blossomed צִיָּץ *tzeats*; the same Hebrew word for both our English blossomed and flowers) and almonds (שְׁקֵדִים *shke'deem*).’

By this miracle Aaron is confirmed as God's *chosen* High Priest. This *precedent* was set by a *dead branch come back to life*. *Yeshua of Nazareth—Yeshua the (dead) Branch*, came back to glorious Life, to show all Israel that He is God's Chosen High Priest and King.

In Acts 2:32-36 Peter speaks of the Resurrection as *Proof* that Yeshua is the Messiah, the High Priest-King of Israel (cf. Zech. 6:12-13). Peter says:

“This Yeshua God has *raised up*, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the Heavens, but he wrote:”

¹⁵ See [The Names of the Messiah of Israel](#), which reveals that Yeshua had many names or titles, not just that of the Messiah and the Branch.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 546.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 632.

“Yahveh said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool!’

“Therefore, *let all the House of Israel know for certain that God has made this Yeshua, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!*”

In Matthew 12:38-40 Yeshua speaks of the sign of Jonah as proof that He was the Messiah. *He could well have said the sign of Aaron’s Priesthood*, because both speak of being raised from the dead—the dead branch even more so than the live Prophet (Jonah) who came out of the whale. Of course, Yeshua’s point, with the sign of Jonah, is primarily the time Jonah was in the belly of the whale, for how long Yeshua would be dead, but the idea of a dead branch coming to life, and Yeshua known as The Branch, certainly makes the sign of Aaron’s Priesthood a fitting picture of the dead, and then resurrected, Savior and High Priest of Israel.

The Jewish religious leaders who hated Yeshua fully understood who He was presenting Himself to be. At the crucifixion Luke 23:35 has:

“the Jewish people stood by, looking on, and even the Jewish rulers were sneering at Him, saying, ‘He saved others! Let Him save Himself *if he is the Messiah of God—His Chosen One!*’”

Those evil Jewish leaders, who condemned Yeshua, were the spiritual Sons of their Fathers in the Wilderness, who came against Moses and Aaron.

Aaron’s Branch, with its blossoms and almonds, was placed in front of the Ark of the Covenant. It was a picture of Yeshua, the dead Branch, who would come back to glorious Life as God’s Chosen One.

Hebrews 4:14–5:10 declares that no one takes the High Priesthood upon himself, because it’s given by God *who chooses whom He wants*. The *resurrection* of Aaron’s *dead branch* is the basis for why the Apostle Levi speaks of the Prophets calling the Messiah a Nazarene.¹⁸

¹⁸ Yeshua, not being a Nazirite, means that all the pictures of Him with long hair are false (cf. Ezk. 44:20). He would have also had a full, untrimmed beard (see [The Biblical Beard](#)).

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