YESHUA THE BRANCH?

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The Scriptures have many symbols or pictures of Yeshua. For instance, Yeshua is known as the (Passover) Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36) because God used a lamb to *save* Israel from Egyptian slavery and our Father used Yeshua to save Israel from slavery to sin, sickness, death and Satan, and to give us eternal life.

Yeshua is also known as the Light (Jn. 8:12; cf. Gen. 1:3), which is a picture of freedom and the ability to walk on a path without stumbling (Mt. 4:16; Lk. 1:79; Jn. 1:5; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10, etc.). The Lion from the Tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5) is another symbol of Yeshua because He will rule Israel as a strong king (Mt. 27:42; Jn. 1:49, etc.). He's also known as the Root and Offspring/Descendant or Son of David (Revelation 22:16; Mt. 9:27; 12:23, etc.). He spoke of being the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn. 14:6), which are all synonyms for Torah (Mosaic Law or God's Word; Ps. 119:1, 14, 43, 143, Dt. 30:15, etc.).

Isaiah 11:1 states, "…a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his Roots" (Isaiah 11:1 NKJV). Both phrases are saying the same thing, which is the Hebrew way of writing; the first phrase being reinforced and emphasized by the second phrase, which also helps in understanding both phrases: a 'Son' will come from Jesse who will have the Spirit of God upon Him, as the next verse states:

> "The Spirit of Yahveh shall rest upon Him: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahveh" (Isaiah 11:2 NKJV).

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 four 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*.'"[1]

On face value it seems that Nazarene applies to the city of His upbringing, and that Levi is only confirming what the Prophets spoke about the Messiah. There is much more here, though.

Sometimes Christians, especially Baptists, Charismatics, Methodists and Pentecostals, etc., confuse *Nazarene* with Nazirite. In English they sound similar. Nazarite would mean that Yeshua never drank wine, which fits in nicely with their teaching that drinking wine, beer or any alcohol is a sin. The Nazirite Vow, found in Num. 6:1-21 specifies no wine. Samuel (1st Sam. 1:11; cf. Num. 6:5), Samson (Judges 13:3-5; cf. Num. 6:2-5) and John the Baptist (Lk. 1:15; cf. Num. 6:3) were all Nazirites from birth.

There's no biblical evidence, though, that Yeshua was a Nazirite, and New TestamentScripture negates it. In Mt. 11:18-19 the Pharisees charge Yeshua with being a glutton and a *drunkard*, which the charge obviously meaning He drank wine, and Yeshua doesn't deny it:

> "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."

One of the reasons that the "glutton/wine charge" was leveled against Yeshua is because He was always being invited to parties, and so He ate and drank wine, but it's obvious He wasn't a glutton or an alcoholic because that is a sin, as the accusation reveals. The reason these particular charges were leveled against Yeshua was because the Pharisees wanted to present Him to the Jewish people as a rebellious man *worthy*

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[1] Mt. 2:23 MHNT: הוּא בָּא וְיָשַׁב בְּעִיר הַנִּקְרֵאת נָצְרַת, לְמַעַן יִתְקַיֵּם הַנֶּאֱמָר עַל־פִּי הַנְּבִיאִים כִּי נָצְרִי יִקָּרֵא לוֹ

of death. In Mosaic Law, Deuteronomy 21:18-21, God equates gluttony and drunkenness with a stubborn and rebellious son whom He commands to be stoned to death:

> '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 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 must remove the evil from your midst and all Israel will hear of it and fear'* (God and His Ways; Dt. 21:18-21).

This is the reason why the Pharisees accused Yeshua of being a glutton and a wino. They wanted the Jewish people to see Yeshua in rebellion to God, and therefore, worthy of death, and obviously, He couldn't be the Messiah. 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 of Darkness vs Light. The Pharisees were looked up to by the people as 'holy,' and Yeshua was 'the new kid on the block,' but multitudes of the Jewish people followed Him (John 12:19).[2] All that to say—Yeshua wasn't a glutton or a drunkard, but He obviously ate food *and drank wine*, which negates the Baptist/Pentecostal/Charismatic teaching that Jesus was a Nazarite (the Vow taker who could not drink wine; Num. 6:1f.).

Just as the Pharisees twisted and distorted God's Word, so do many Christians today who say that Jesus was a Nazirite and that He never drank any alcohol, and so they teach that He drank grape juice at the Passover (intentionally misnamed "the Last Supper" by the Roman Catholic Church, to strip Jesus of His Jewishness).[3] If Yeshua drank grape juice at Passover (especially for 'communion'), it would have been the first time in Jewish history that Jews didn't drink wine at Passover, but grape juice. He would have been a very good Baptist!

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, Christians who teach that Jesus was a Nazirite, 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 in His Nazarite Vow. Numbers 6:1-4 states that God spoke to Moses and said:

> "Speak to the Sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man or a woman makes a special Vow of Separation/consecration, the Nazirite Vow, to dedicate himself 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 consecration he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin.'"

The three Hebrew men that took the Nazarite Vow for life, consecrated to God even as they were in the womb (Samson, Samuel and John) were asterisks, meaning that one took the Vow for much shorter time periods. That Yeshua changed the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, is beyond dispute when we realize how absurd and comical it would have been for the steward who drank it, to say to the groom (Jn. 2:10), who was responsible for providing the food and the drink:[4]

> *'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!'*

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

[3] Cf. Lev. 23:4f.; Mt. 26:2, 17-19f.; Mk. 14:12, 14, 16f.; Lk. 22:1, 8, 11, 13, 15f. There is nothing in the New Testament that speaks of a 'last supper.' It's a total fabrication of Rome to stripe the Passover of its Jewishness.

[4] 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.

Christian theologian Merrill Tenney says that the master of the banquet, "was astounded by the high quality of the wine…a poorer quality was (usually) served once the taste of the guests became dulled."[5]

Christian theologian Marcus Dods also speaks of the quality of *wine* 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 (first) supplied by the host…(he) pronounces this fresh supply better.'[6]

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…" Also, Paul wrote to Timothy, saying:

> "No longer drink only water, but *use a little wine* for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities." (1st Timothy 5:23 NKJV)

Paul also said of the deacons that they shouldn't be known for drinking *too much* wine, which infers that they could drink some wine:

> "Likewise, deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given *to much wine*, not greedy for money (and) holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience." (1st Timothy 3:8-9 NKJV)

It's clear that the Apostle to the Gentiles didn't think that drinking wine was a sin, but why the confusion over the words Nazarene and Nazarite? More on that in a moment, but first:

Yeshua's Last Passover in Jerusalem

Scripture also reveals that wine was at Yeshua's last Passover, less than 12 hours before His crucifixion (Mt. 26:29; Mk. 14:25; Lk. 22:18).[7] All Jewish Passovers, both ancient and modern, have wine. If the Lord's last Passover only had grape juice it would have been so unusual that all the Gospel writers would certainly have made it a point to mention so that all Christians after them would do the same. As the New Testament does not tell us that Yeshua substituted grape juice for wine, there is absolutely 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 because He spoke of it as picturing His blood, which He passed around to His remaining 11 disciples, telling them to drink of it. Matthew records:

> "Then He took the Cup,[8] 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)

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

[6] 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.

[7] Those verses literally speak of the 'fruit of the vine,' which is the Jewish phrase used in blessing God for wine.

[8] This is the third of four Cups at the Passover Meal called the Cup of Redemption. The First Cup being the Cup of Sanctification; the Second Cup being the Cup of Remembrance, and the Fourth Cup being the Cup of Praise. See Passover and The Passover Ceremony for what the Passover entailed.

The term, *fruit of the vine*, is a specific Jewish reference to wine, which is to this day how the Jewish people thank God for the wine they are about to drink.[9] Those who teach that the drinking of alcohol is sin have no biblical basis for it. They are teaching against God and His Word, and presenting their diametrically opposed heresy and biased agenda—a tradition of man that negates God's Word and His will, and like the Pharisees before them, are making something to be sin that God never calls sin (the drinking of alcohol).

Yes, too much wine is seen as a mocker (Prov. 20:1), but too much food is the sin of gluttony (Deut. 21:18-21; Mt. 11:18-19; Lk. 7:29-35). When was the last time you heard a preacher speak against the sin of 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 *not* good Christian teaching, even though both words are similar in English. Theologians and pastors should realize this elementary point, and in Hebrew they are spelled differently.

1. The Hebrew word for Nazirite, the Vow taker, is נָזִר and it would best be spelled in English as *Nazir*.

2. The Hebrew word for Nazarene is נָצְרִי and it would best be spelled in English as *Notes'ri*. It simply means a person from the city of Nazareth:

a. Yeshua is always called a נָצְרִי, (*Notes'ri*) in the Gospels, one who came from Nazareth נָצְרַת (*Knots'raht*).[10]

b. Today, Israelis call Christians נֹצְרִים (*Notes'reem*), which is the plural of a person coming from Nazareth because they are followers of the Nazarene, The One from Nazareth.

When Matthew spoke of the Prophets calling the Messiah a נָצְרִי (*Notes'ri*), a Nazarene, he was making a profound theological statement about Yeshua being the Messiah; not just that Yeshua came from the city of Nazareth. The verb for the name of the town in which Yeshua grew up is נָצַר (*Knots'zar*), which means, 'a *branch* or a *shoot;* to be fresh, bright, grow green or to be alive: a living branch.'[11] This is what Matthew means when He says the Prophets called the Messiah a Nazarene, a נָצְרִי (*Notes'ri*), because many Prophets called or symbolized the Messiah of Israel, Hebrew words for a branch, staff, rod, shoot or a sprout. Note the parallel thought of the English words, rod and branch, in v. 1 of Isaiah 11:1-2:

> [1]'There shall *come forth a Rod* from the *Root* of Jesse and a *Branch* shall *grow out of his Roots*.'
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> [2]'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 or come up) is יָצָא (*yahtz'tzah*). It refers to the concept of what a sprout or a branch does in growing.

The word for 'rod' (or shoot) is חֹטֶר (*ho'tare*), which is a Messianic title[12] that is conceptually similar

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[9] The English for blessing God for wine is: Blessed are You, Yahveh our God, King of the Universe, who created the fruit of the vine. It's not used for grape juice. In Hebrew it's:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אַבָּא אֱלֹהֵנוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

[10] 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.

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

[12] Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings* (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah

with the Hebrew noun for Nazareth, which means a branch.

Branch, in Isaiah 11:1, is נֵצֶר (*Nets'zair*), which is the basis of Nazareth נָצְרַת (*Knots'raht*), and what Yeshua, coming from Nazareth was called, a נָצְרִי (*Notes'ri*); a man from Nazareth, and symbolizes a branch because that's what Nazareth means. This is why Matthew writes of the Messiah being called a Nazarene or someone from the city of Nazareth; the city of the Branch, which is a strong Messianic title.

The Hebrew, 'from the root' of Jesse is מִשָּׁרָיו (*mih'sharav*) from the verb שֹׁרֶשׁ (*shoresh*), which means that which is a root or a sprout, or that which springs up from the root. The noun in Isaiah 11:1 means, 'a root.'[13] Moving on to the Prophet Zechariah, he writes in 6:12-13 that God declared:

> "Thus says 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' (of God) 'and He shall sit and rule on His Throne! So He shall be a High Priest on His Throne, and the counsel of Shalom' (God's Peace) 'shall be between them both!'"

The word for Branch in Zechariah 6:12 is צֶמַח (*tzeh'mach*), and for 'branch out' is יִצְמָח (*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' (forth), 'a springing up, a shoot, a plant, a branch.'[14] צֶמַח (*tzeh'mach*) is conceptually identical to נֵצֶר (*nets'zair*), the basis for the city of Nazareth, and one who comes from it: a Nazarene, which means a *branch*. Matthew is also referring to Zechariah as one of the Prophets who spoke of the Messiah as a/the Branch.

Isaiah 4:2 speaks of the *Branch* of Yahveh, using 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' speaks of the glory of God in the Heavens. On the other hand, the Fruit of the *Land* (i.e. Israel) pictures Yeshua's humanity, as *fruit of the land* is of an earthly nature.

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 phrase meaning that *he was the legitimate son and heir to his father's throne*. This is what Levi is ultimately speaking of: Yeshua the Nazarene (Yeshua the Branch) is the legitimate and righteous heir to the Throne, of not only His earthly Father, King David (cf. 2nd Sam. 7:16; cf. Lk. 1:32-33), but also His heavenly Father, also known as the *King* of Israel.[15]

In yet another Prophet that Levi had in mind, the Father promises Jeremiah that Judah and Israel will return to the Land of Israel and that *His Righteous Branch* will accomplish it. Here *branch* is also צֶמַח (*tzeh'mach*) and of course, we it refers to Yeshua the Nazarene (the Branch)…

> "'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 Sons of the House of Israel from the north

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Meshihit, 1992), pp. 50-51, 165 (note 30 which speaks of the Targum presenting verse one as the Messiah).

[13] Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, pp. 524, 742.

[14] Ibid., p. 646.

[15] Ps. 5:2; 10:16; 29:10; 44:4; 47:2, 7; 48:2; 68:24; 74:12; 84:3; 95:3; 98:6; 145:1; cf. Mt. 5:35, etc.

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 Zechariah 3:8-10 where צֶמַח [*tzeh'mach*] is the Branch who will remove sin in a single day.)

This Branch will also be the High Priest-King of Israel. He brings both offices together, as we read about in Zechariah 6:12-13, something Torah (Mosaic Law) doesn't seem to speak of, for the high priests come from the son of Jacob, Levi, through only Aaron's line, and the kings of Israel come through Judah and David's lineage. This understanding, though, is seen in Torah when it speaks of Malkizedek (Hebrew pronunciation), the High Priest and King of Salem, which is Jerusalem (Gen. 14:18-20), and of course, pictures Yeshua as the High Priest-King. 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 also Hebrews 5:6ff.)

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

> "because of the tender mercies of our God, by which *the rising sun* will come to us from heaven." (Luke 1:78 NIV)

The word for 'rising sun' is ανατολη (*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, the dawn.'[16] The rising of a heavenly body, like a star or the sun, implies deity; something of the Heavens. It also means the dawning of a new day or the dawning of *salvation*, as light is symbolic of freedom or salvation, and a main reason why Yeshua calls Himself the Light of the World (cf. Gen. 1:3; John 8:12).

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 confirmed by the next verse which states, 'to appear to the ones sitting (or dwelling) in *Darkness* and in the *Shadow* of Death.' So, the Light from Heaven will appear to those in Darkness (cf. Psalm 107:10-16; 112:4).

The Symbolism of Hebrew Names

As we've seen, the name Nazareth means branch and speaks of the Messiah as God's righteous Branch or Priest-King. The name Zechariah means, 'Yahveh has remembered,' and the name Elisheva (Elizabeth) means, 'My God has sworn an oath' (i.e. covenant) The two together symbolically mean, 'Yahveh my God has remembered the oath/covenant He swore' (to Abraham), and Yochanan is born, who proclaims of the heavenly Light of Israel; the Messiah—the Branch. 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:

> "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."* (Luke 1:70, 72-73)

Genesis 17:1-8 states:

> "When Avram (English: Abram) 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

[16] 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 (English: Abraham), 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 the Hebrew, Yochanan means, 'the Grace of Yahveh,' and John proclaimed the coming of Messiah, who is Grace, Truth and Law, to all Israel. In Malachi 4:5 God says of Yochanan,

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

We know that John was seen as Elijah, preparing the way for Yeshua, but he wasn't the actual Elijah that God took up into the Heavens in the Chariot of Fire (2nd Kings 2:11-12). In other words Elijah, like Enoch before him, never died (Genesis 5:24, cf. Heb. 11:5). Elijah will most likely be one of the Two Witnesses that Revelation 11:3 speaks of. The other? Probably Enoch. Neither one of them died and they will be facing the Beast—the anti-Christ (Apollyon/Abaddon, which means 'destroyer/destruction; the Son of Perdition;' 2nd Thess. 2:1f.; Rev. 9:11; 11:7; 11:3-12; 17:8, 11, 13-14).

The Prophets that the Apostle Levi spoke of said that Messiah would be called a Branch נֵצֶר (*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 grow up in a town whose name means branch.

In the days of Yeshua there was a colloquial meaning to Nazareth. The city was a crossroads for pagan caravans and was despised by many Jews because of its sexual sins and debauchery. Nazareth was like Sodom and Gomorrah. That's why Nathaniel said to Philip, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' (John 1:46) When Yeshua was crucified, John writes of the placard that stated Yeshua's crime:

> "Now Pilate had an inscription written and fastened it to the cross. And the inscription was: Yeshua of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." (John 19:19)

Symbolically Jews could also see: 'Yeshua the Branch, the King of the Jews,' the very Messianic title of the Messiah that Levi spoke of. The inscription could 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 relate that the Prophets called the Messiah a Nazarene and be speaking of Yeshua's residence. *Why*, though, did the Prophets call the Messiah a branch? Just because Yeshua would grow up in Nazareth? No. God, in His infinite wisdom, truly had a divine reason for doing it. It all began in the Wilderness with the defiant and rebellious Sons of Israel.

The Branch—A Symbol of Messiah

Like most things in the New Testament we find their origin in Torah. In Numbers 16:1–17:13, one of a number of their rebellions in the Wilderness, the Sons of Israel came against Moses and Aaron. Korah, Datan and Aviram wanted 'to serve Yahveh,' but rejected God's choice for High Priest, Aaron, thereby rebelling against God Himself. The Pharisees, too, '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 word of the Hebrews against Moses and Aaron. The Hebrew word is תְּלֻנּוֹת (*tlu'note*) and comes from the Hebrew verb לוּן (*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.'[17]

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 only found in six chapters of the Torah, all relating to the Sons of Israel in the Wilderness (Exodus 15, 16, 17; Num. 14, 16, 17). In each case it involves the Sons of Israel verbally assaulting Moses and Aaron as individuals, and indirectly, God Himself; for Moses and Aaron had been established by God. This rebellious grumbling against God was because of the conditions the Israelis found themselves in. For example, when they had no food or water. In Numbers 16 it's not because of lack of food or water, but prestige and honor.

Korah, the leader of the rebellion, was actually a first cousin of Moses and Aaron:

- Levi had three sons: Gershon, Kohath and Merari (Gen. 46:11; Ex. 6:16).
- Kohath had four sons: *Amram*, *Izhar*, Hebron and Uzzeil (Ex. 6:18).
- Aaron and Moses' father was Amram, *son of Kohath*, and
- Korah's father was Izhar, *son of Kohath.*

Korah, Moses and Aaron had the same grandfather (Kohath), and their fathers, Amram and Izhar, were brothers. Korah was a first cousin of Moses and Aaron.

1. **Kohath**, son of Levi, had four sons (Ex. 6:18), Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel (A, B, C and D):
   - **A. Amram**
     - **(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).

[17] Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, pp. 761, 419.

(1) Mishael

(2) Elzaphan

(3) Sithri

The Rabbis say that the sin of jealousy 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, *his brother,* made Aaron High Priest!'

Korah was trying 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 responsibility to Aaron as High Priest (Ex. 30:7-8). The Rabbis say that Korah was consumed by jealousy and that he felt he had been *passed over or overlooked.*

Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 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 in the Wilderness 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 (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, sleeping with his father David's concubines; 2nd Sam. 15:10-14; 16:20-22), Rueben's three rights of inheritance as the firstborn son were divided up among three of Jacob's other sons:

1. The priesthood of the firstborn would be given to Levi.

2. The right to rule or kingship authority was given to Judah, and

3. The double portion of the firstborn son was given to Joseph, whose two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh would actually become two full Tribes within Israel.

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 the authority and *prestige of leadership.* They wanted to lead God's people, a noble desire, but their 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 divinely 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 and His will, 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 Kohath lived right next door to each other, south of the Tabernacle—the literal and only Dwelling Place of Yahveh on Earth. They were so close to God, but yet so very far away.

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 first,

1. to God's reality, that He *is*, and also,

2. what He had done for Israel in setting them free from Egyptian slavery, and

3. that He had made a covenant with them, and lastly,

4. His Holy Standard—the Stone Tablets symbolizing all the commandments, ordinances and rules for living in God's Kingdom on Earth.

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, in part, what Moses told Israel in the Wilderness, recorded in Deuteronomy 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 despite the Church teaching against Mosaic Law. Christians should not live by bread alone, but by *every* word of God that applies to them. The Ten Commandments symbolize Yeshua as God's eternal Word, the Covenant the Father has given to Israel and how God requires Israel 'after the Spirit' to live out their life of faith in Yeshua, because stone symbolizes something that lasts 'forever.'

In front of the Ark of the Covenant was the gold jar filled with 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 from Egypt:

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 Moses down and it becomes a snake before Pharaoh and gobbles up all the staff-snakes of the Egyptian magicians. (We've got some heavy-duty sorcery here. Egypt was the most powerful nation at that time, and so their gods were seen by Egypt and the other nations as the most powerful of the gods.)
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 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), that's a symbol of our own carnality, which seeks to destroy us.
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. He strikes the rock twice (the first Rock was in Ex. 17:6, forty years earlier when God commanded Moses to strike the Rock).

In Num. 16:20-35, God destroys 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 & Friends were good guys, and so rebellious murmuring and complaining arose. The next day God began cleansing Israel, killing the rebels. 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.

God's Sign to Israel

Most of the rebels were killed. It was a mini-judgment day in Israel. Aaron *atones* for Israel's sins and the plague stops. We see real spiritual power vested in Aaron to perform atonement and reconciliation to God to bring Israel into fellowship once again. Yahveh moves through Aaron for salvation or deliverance and then God sets in motion a sign or a miracle for Israel *to know* that Aaron was *chosen by God* to be the High Priest of Israel.

God had the leaders of each Tribe give their staff, their symbol of authority, with their name on it, to Moses to lay before the Ark of the Covenant. God said, 'And it will be, the man *whom I choose*, his *staff* will *sprout*' or come to life (Num. 17:5).

The next day Moses brings the staffs out and Aaron's staff had buds, flowers and nuts on it: ripe almonds. Out of the turbulence of rebellion Yahveh caused the staff or *branch* of Aaron to become a miraculous sign to Israel as to whom God had chosen to be High Priest.

Both 'staff' and 'to sprout' (twice) are found in Numbers 17:8 where Moses goes into the Tabernacle and gets the staffs:

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

The Hebrew noun 'staff' is מַטֶּה (*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."[18]

'Sprout' is יִפְרָח (*yif'rach*) and comes from the verb פָּרָח (*pah'rach*), which means, 'to sprout, to flourish and to blossom.'[19] The noun means a young shoot, a flower or blossom.

This *precedent* was set by *a dead staff or branch come back to life.* It's from this event that the Hebrew words for branch, staff and sprout would come to be, through the Prophets, a title for the Messiah—The Branch.[20]

Yeshua of Nazareth—Yeshua the (dead) Branch, came back to glorious, eternal 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 (of this dead Branch) as *Proof* that Yeshua is the Messiah, the High Priest-King of Israel (cf. Zech. 6:12-13). Peter told the Jewish crowd that day:

> "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:"
>
> > "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 living Prophet (Jonah) who came out of the whale. Of course, Yeshua's point, with the sign of Jonah, is that He, like Jonah, would not be seen for three days; everyone thinking He was dead, gone and not the Messiah, even His Apostles.

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

> "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 had come against Moses and Aaron, and here, God was presenting the same sign to them that He had to their Fathers.

Aaron's Branch, with its blossoms and almonds, was placed in front of the Ark of the Covenant. It was a

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[18] Ibid., p. 546.

[19] Ibid., p. 632.

[20] 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.

picture of Yeshua, the dead Branch, who would come back to glorious Life as God's Chosen One, so that all Israel could know that Yeshua was chosen by God to be the Messiah—the eternal King and the High Priest of Israel.

Yeshua is the rightful and legitimate heir to the Throne of Israel, taking the place of both God His Father and His earthly Father, King David—a Throne that now encompasses both kingship and priesthood. 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 Levi speaks of the Prophets calling the Messiah a Nazarene—a Branch, who just happened to grow up in the city of the branch—Nazareth.[21]

[21] 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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