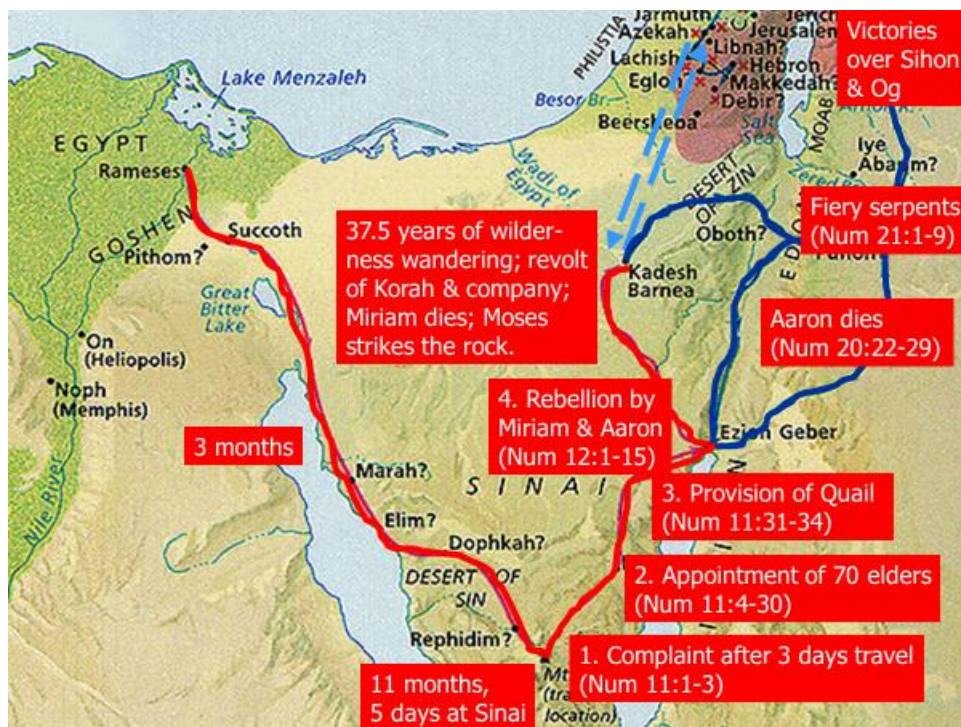


THE PRIESTLY COVENANT

THE SETTING OF THE PRIESTLY COVENANT

- Numbers begins with God commanding Moses to take a census of the people a little over a year after the Exodus
- The people have left Mt. Sinai and have begun their journey toward the promised land
- Numbers covers a period of time known as the wilderness wanderings, the time from when Israel departed Mt. Sinai to when they were about to enter the promised land (a period which lasted 38 years, 9 months and 10 days)
- The book is called “Numbers” because of the two censuses taken in Numbers 1 and 26



- God told them how to arrange themselves as tribes around the tabernacle when camped (Num 2)
- The Levites were given instructions regarding their special role (Num 3, 4, 8)
- The people were given instructions regarding defilement and ceremonial uncleanness (Num 5)
- Instructions regarding the Nazirites were given (Num 6)
- The people complained after leaving Sinai about their lack of meat so God provided quail (Num 11)
- Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses (Num 12)
- The 12 spies went into the land and brought back a report which led the people to rebel (Num 13-14)
- Korah led a rebellion of 250 leaders against Moses (Num 16)
- Moses and Aaron were told they would not enter the promised land due to Moses' disobedience (Num 20)
- God sent a plague amongst the camp for their complaining and then provided the bronze serpent; they defeated Sihon and Og (Num 21)
- Balak, king of Moab, heard of this great conquering hoard, and sought for Balaam, a seer, to bring a curse on them (Num 22-24)
- But Balaam blessed Israel 3 different times instead of cursed them

- “Balaam has spoken God’s word, and God has said that the promises of heir, covenant and land will indeed be fulfilled. These are God’s words, and they are infallible even when delivered by a foreign, on-the-market, unseeing, divining man like Balaam. His true character may be uncertain, but the power and truthfulness of what God forces him to say are not.”¹
- Balak realizes that Israel can only be stopped if the people stop worshipping Yahweh
- So, he tried a different strategy...he invited Israel to the sacrifices of their gods...he encouraged the Moabite women to invite the Israelite men to participate in the worship of Baal, whom the Canaanites believed was the god of fertility
- Baal worship in this instance would have included offering sacrifices, eating a meal, and engaging in immorality with Moabite women
- Numbers 31:16 indicates that Balaam was instrumental in bringing this incident about

Numbers 25:2-3 ~ For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel.

- Since such immorality was evidence of idolatry, a violation of the first commandment, God ordered Moses to execute all who had joined themselves to Baal of Peor

Numbers 25:4-5 ~ The LORD said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.” 5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.”

- So blatant was the sensual idolatry that an Israelite man brought a Midianite woman to his family in plain view of Moses and engaged in immorality

Numbers 24:6 ~ Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

- To stem the idolatrous outbreak and the plague Yahweh sent to punish it, Phinehas, Aaron’s grandson through Eleazar, executes the Israelite man and the Midianite woman

Numbers 24:7-9 ~ When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, 8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. 9 Those who died by the plague were 24,000.

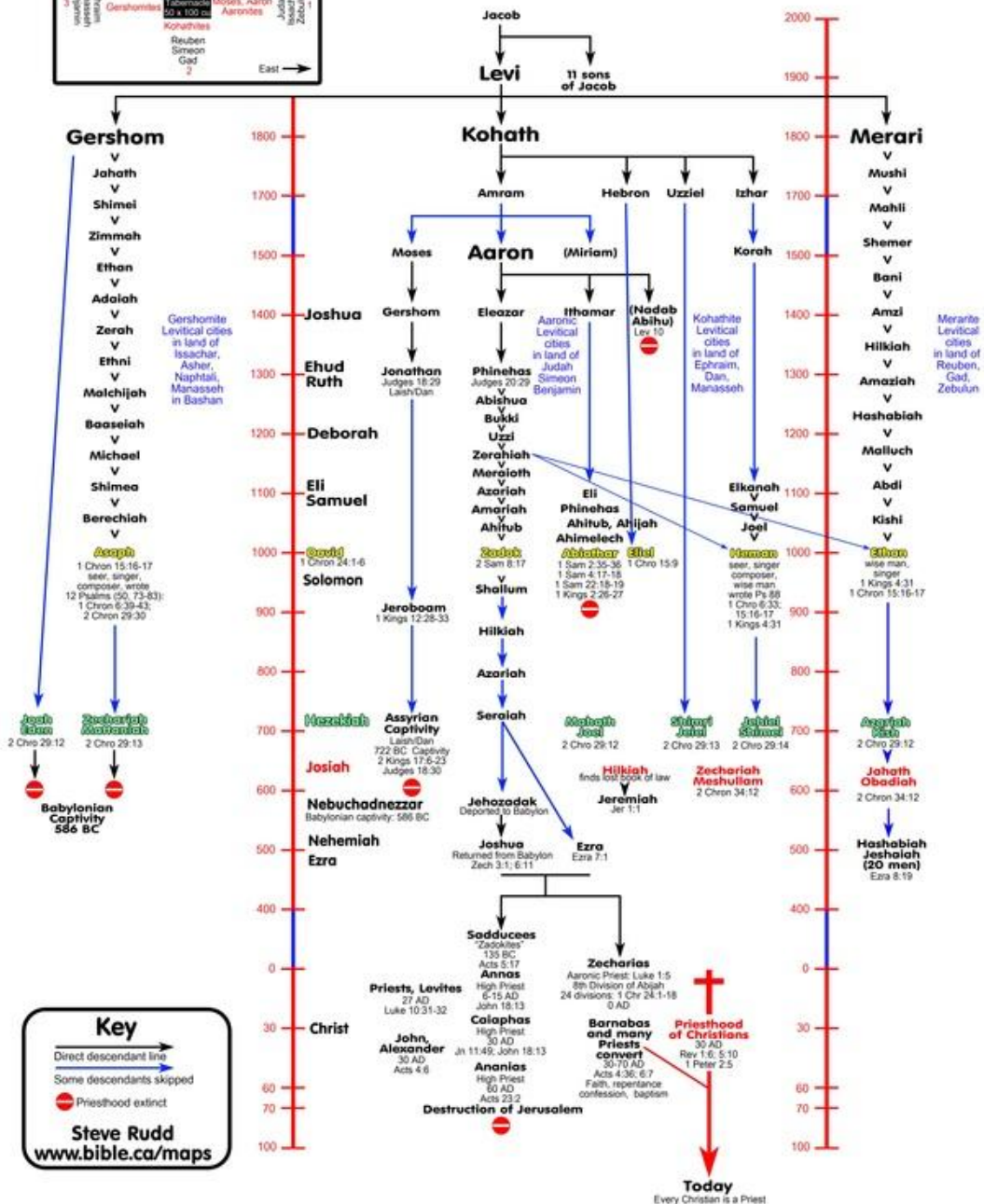
THE PROMISE OF THE PRIESTLY COVENANT

- It was through the killing of the offenders that Phinehas allowed the Lord to pardon his people and halt the spread of the plague
- And, in response to Phinehas’ actions, God made a covenant with him and his descendants
- In the Priestly Covenant, God promised the perpetual priesthood of the line of Phinehas that carries all the way through to serving in the Lord’s earthly millennial temple

Numbers 25:10-13 ~ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 11 “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. 12 Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; 13 and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.’”

¹ Paul House, *Old Testament Theology*, 164.

The Levitical Priesthood



- The reason Phinehas acted is because “he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel”
- The essence of the covenant is the guarantee of a perpetual priesthood for the descendants of Phinehas
- The priesthood that was promised to Phinehas continued among the Israelites (with the exception of an interval during the time of Eli – 1 Samuel 1-3), until the Jewish state was finally dissolved in NT times
- Thus, all future, legitimate High-Priests would come from his descendants

THE FUTURE FULFILLMENT OF THE PRIESTLY COVENANT

- What is significant about this covenant is that God promised Phinehas a priesthood with an enduring nature

- That this is a permanent covenant is evident from the fact that it is placed alongside the Davidic Covenant in Jeremiah 33

Jeremiah 33:20-21 ~ Thus says the LORD, “If you can break My covenant for the day, and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers.”

- “This passage has been a *crux interpretum* for expositors. It is especially difficult for those who hold an amillennial position in eschatology. The only resort for them is in allegorization of the text or the use of a dual hermeneutic. Simply stated, the passage assures that just as the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7) is guaranteed by God’s promise, so is the Levitical priesthood. But whereas the amillennial system can find room for the Son of David to reign now and in the future by transferring the earthly throne to the heavenly one at the Father’s right hand, it is not so easy to find Levitical priests with their ministrations in the same framework.”²
- This means that the genealogical line of Phinehas must continue into the millennial kingdom
- Because of Zadok’s faithfulness to David and Solomon (1 Kings 1:32–40), Zadok’s sons will serve as priests in the millennial temple

Ezekiel 40:46 ~ but the chamber which faces toward the north is for the priests who keep charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who from the sons of Levi come near to the LORD to minister to Him.”

Ezekiel 44:9-16 ~ Thus says the Lord GOD, “No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary. 10 But the Levites who went far from Me when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, shall bear the punishment for their iniquity. 11 Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering in the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them. 12 Because they ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn against them,” declares the Lord GOD, “that they shall bear the punishment for their iniquity. 13 And they shall not come near to Me to serve as a priest to Me, nor come near to any of My holy things, to the things that are most holy; but they will bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed. 14 Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the house, of all its service and of all that shall be done in it. 15 But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood,” declares the Lord GOD. 16 They shall enter My sanctuary; they shall come near to My table to minister to Me and keep My charge.

Ezekiel 48:11 ~ It shall be for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray as the Levites went astray.

- These verses distinguish the descendants of Zadok (himself a descendant of Phineas) as being able to minister directly to the Lord, because of their past faithfulness
- The Levites in the line of those unfaithful in days before the judgment can minister in temple services...they will still do work in the temple complex...but those Levites are prohibited from coming near to the Lord and touching the most holy things...they cannot make offerings or enter the Most Holy Place
- Only Zadok’s line will be able to make the sacrificial offerings and enter the Most Holy Place
- The future kingdom will include the descendants of Zadok ministering to the Lord in the temple in fulfillment of the perpetual covenant promised to Phineas
- Thus, the promise given to Phinehas continues into the Millennium
- By the way, the animal sacrifices in the Millennial temple (Ezek 43:19-20) will likely not be merely memorial; they will provide ceremonial cleansing for those redeemed Israelites in non-glorified bodies
- This will not constitute a return to the Old Covenant, but will make the people clean in their worship of Christ

² Charles Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, 237.