

## February 1: Scriptures Leviticus 14-16

### SUMMARY

Yup. Chapters 14 and 15 are precisely why peoples' eyes glaze over reading Leviticus. As if the sacrifices were tough enough to follow, now we're faced with the minutiae of how to address skin diseases when they finally go away. I mean, seriously. Why not just shout, "Hallelujah! They're gone!" and go on one's merry way? Because holiness, purity, cleanness, and life matter to God. It's not enough to be clean in one's own eyes. The eyes of a third party (the priests in this case) are crucial to confirm a person's clean state before the Lord. Who else to do this but the trained and anointed representative of God Himself?

The process is fairly long and involved. It starts outside the camp with a priest's examination. Then a bird is sacrificed over a clay pot of fresh water (14:5). By now, you should start picking up pictures because that's the way Hebrew often conveys ideas. Blood plus fresh water (living water) is sprinkled on the healed person. The live bird "takes away" the person's uncleanness when released. Red yarn that's used in this cleansing process is later used by Isaiah as a picture of sin's stain (Isaiah 1:18). Hyssop was used in the Passover blood door application (Exodus 12:7) so there's the idea of protection added in. The rabbis look at the cedar chunk as representing haughtiness since the cedar tree grows so tall. The red yarn and the hyssop are also interpreted by the rabbis as pictures of humility since the red dye for the yarn comes from a humble insect and the hyssop is a lowly bush. Can you see the picture being painted?

Moving on, skin disease is regarded as an outward manifestation of an inward state of sin. Why? The rabbis find the clue in the name of a person with the skin disease. In Hebrew, they're called a *metzarah*. Since the original Hebrew has no vowels, the word is written like this – MTZRH, but read right to left like this – HRZTM. The Sages have no qualms about doing interesting things with the Bible's text to find insights. Sometimes, their methods violate the obvious meaning, and their conclusions based on those interpretations are clearly off base. However, sometimes they find interesting clues that even Jesus Himself would endorse. In this case, since there are no vowels, the rabbis could read (MTZRH) *metzarah* as *motzi-rah*. And because both words share the same consonants, then the two words must have a relationship. *Metzarah* is a skin diseased person and *Motzi-rah* means "From within comes evil." Therefore, they conclude, *a skin disease is an outward manifestation of someone's inward sin condition*. How can they say that? Because when Moses' sister, Miriam, was speaking ill against her brother, God smote her with a skin disease as we'll see in Numbers 12:10. And as I pointed out before, here's what Jesus said about the source of impurity, "It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth—this defiles a person... But what *comes*

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*out* of the mouth comes (*out*) from the heart, and this (*evil*) defiles a person" (Matthew 15:11, 18, italics and parentheses – writer). See the correlation and the picture?

So when a person is healed of their skin disease per Leviticus, they are also treated for cleansing from sin. This simple physical hygiene process carries a spiritual hygiene component as well. As a person takes steps to be healed, there are steps to be cleansed from a "deep-seated" condition that caused the affliction. As the person walks through the process, they come into the camp but can't go to their tent lest they infect someone else. After a week they're reexamined, and if they're still okay they go through the cleansing process again of shaving and bathing. Now they look like a newborn baby! In a way, this is very fitting as it is part of declaring a person clean and innocent inside as well. But wait! There's more!

The person goes through the sacrificial process involving a grain offering (*minchah*), a restitution offering (*'asham*), a guilt offering (*chatta'ah*), and a whole burnt offering (*olah*). The person is dabbed with the blood and oil of the offerings (14:14, 17-18). The oil is also sprinkled before the Lord. Finally, after all this, the person has completed the cleansing process! Why is it so involved? Because a skin disease is no light matter. Yes, it can be a patch of chafing. But it can also be cancer, leprosy, or any other contagious disease that can lead to death. Skin disease is regarded as a manifestation of death in an otherwise healthy human body. The process is intended to "cleanse death" from a person so they can dwell in holy God's presence and among His holy people. How much more would it take to cleanse a person from advanced, deep-seated sin inside that manifests itself outwardly in so many ugly and hurtful ways? It would take more than an animal's blood and olive oil. It would take the blood of the Lamb (Jesus) and the anointing oil of the Holy Spirit, right?

The skin disease section ends with allowances for those who don't have the financial means to bring animals for the cleansing sacrifice because the Lord wants healing and cleansing available to all. Isn't the Lord merciful and gracious?

The next section is kind of like the skin disease instructions we just went through, only it's a "skin disease" of a house caused by mildew. Houses in ancient Israel were built from stone and the walls were overlaid with mud and plaster. This works well from springtime through fall as Israel can get rather hot and dry and the stone-plaster construction keeps everyone in the home cool. However, in the winter season, the rains come. With the increased moisture, mildew can grow very easily in the moist plaster walls, and as we've all learned in life, mold and mildew in a house are unhealthy. Long story short, if mildew is spotted, it's reported to the "health inspector," the priest. The house is cleared out, the spot is examined to see if it's superficial or under the surface,

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and the house is shut up tight. After a week the house is reexamined. If the mildew has spread, the affected stones and plaster are removed and replaced. The mildewed material is thrown into a dump to isolate the unclean garbage. If the contamination reappears, *the house is torn down because it's defiled and irreparable*. The "rot" is too deep and too widespread to remedy. A whole new house needs to be built. But if the mildew doesn't spread, the same type of cleansing process is applied as with a person who has been cleansed from a skin disease. And because of the cross-contamination/transference principle, anyone who has come into contact with the defiled house also needs to be cleansed. With the threat of this complicated and drawn-out process, you can bet people were vigilant to oversee their personal and environmental conditions.

Chapter 15 turns to bodily discharges that render a person unclean. Yes, this does have more of the *yuck* factor to it, but such is life. What is remarkable again is that even though the ancients did not have the level of medical, biological, or communicable disease knowledge we have today, such discharges were recognized as signs of ill-health, disease, and death back then. Add in the "spiritual death" component and now you have the reason for these bodily discharge laws. Washing is sufficient to cleanse the person from most of the "issues."

If a discharging person spits on another person, well, that's grounds for cross-contamination. In fact, there are a lot of examples of cross-contamination that follow. On a literal note, it recognizes the infectiousness of some bodily fluids. On a spiritual note, it reinforces how sinful actions, attitudes, words, and thinking can spread from one person to another, right?

And then we hit the specific cases of semen and menstrual blood. These two specific discharges are not brought up to shame people or make the reproductive process disgusting or wrong. It's quite simple why they're addressed here. *Both involve creating life*. The shedding of blood and the emission of semen indicates a type of "death," I.e. life being "poured out." So right here, the Lord provides the way for a person to be cleansed back into the "sphere of life" after contacting the "sphere of death" and becoming "touched" and "contaminated" by "death." Again, this is important because God is holy and He's establishing clear lines between what is life/death, clean/unclean, holy/unholy, and pure/impure.

Chapter 16 opens with an interesting statement, "The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of two of Aaron's sons *when they approached the presence of the Lord and died*" (16:1). That's the theme of this chapter – how to approach God and not die. The previous chapters talked about how people, in general, are to come near to a holy God. To be in our holy

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God's proximity, we must be "clean," spiritually uncontaminated by the realm or sphere of death. This is both practical (not touching dead things or eating unclean food) and spiritual (sins of any cause). The Lord specifically "lays down the law" how Aaron is to approach Him during a specific day of the year to make national atonement. Yes, atonement is made for individuals and groups throughout the year at the Bronze Altar. But there is a specific day when national atonement is made to clear the nation of its sin and cleanse the Lord's dwelling place from the "sin" that has accumulated in the outer court during the previous years' sacrifices. In a sense, it's Israel's National Sin Erasure and Cleansing Day. In the Bible, it's known as Yom Kippur, the Day of Covering or Atonement. Kippur means "to cover." The head covering many Jews wear today is called a *kippah*, from the same root word. On this day, a special ceremony is conducted to atone for sin – first for the High Priest and his household's sin (16:6), then the nation's sins (16:15), and then any spiritual defilement of God's Tabernacle (16:16). After the Tabernacle is set up for the first "official" time, Yom Kippur will be the only day during a calendar year that Aaron can enter the Most Holy Place and stand face-to-face with God.

The ritual requires multiple sacrifices which Yehovah allows to cover over sin up to that point. I say *cover*, not *erase*, because as the writer of Hebrews points out, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). *Only Jesus' 1 to 1 human sacrifice can pay for sins committed by humans.* After you've read Leviticus 16, read Hebrews 9-10 which talks about the sacrificial system, Yom Kippur, and the High Priest as to how Jesus fulfills them all. You'll be amazed at how the Lord has set the blueprint for Jesus' atonement for us 1,500 years before He was crucified!

Read through the text slowly and again use your imagination to see the High Priest in action. Note the clothing changes, the sacrifices, the repeated trek into the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood before the Lord's presence, purifying the Tabernacle and its furnishings by dabbing blood, and the Scapegoat being driven out into the Wilderness carrying with it the nations' sins. God has given us vivid pictures to teach us the why and how of forgiveness, cleansing, and purification from sin so we can live with Him as a holy person and community!

On a final note, the Day of Atonement occurs on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of the Hebrew Calendar. On our calendar, this happens sometime between mid-September to early October. The Day of Atonement/Yom Kippur is sandwiched between the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles.

**INSIGHT**

Our portion today shows the need for outward cleansing to approach our holy God. But it's clear from the Bible that impurity, defilement, and contamination at a spiritual level comes from the inner person (Matthew 15:11). We need inward cleansing more than outward cleansing. When manifestations of "death" (sinful actions) appear in our words or actions, then we need to look at the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. But even then, we easily deceive ourselves and we can't even understand the deepest parts of our being (Jeremiah 17:9). But God's word can point out precisely where we stand before Him (Hebrews 4:12). We need someone to help us see our faults and flaws that contaminate us, making us unclean, hindering our closeness to the Lord. Who else but God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of our Highest Priest, Jesus, to be our examiner and judge? The Holy Spirit not only "examines the mind and searches the heart" (Jeremiah 17:10), but through Him, we receive forgiveness and cleansing so we can continue to approach a holy God.

## February 2: Scriptures Leviticus 17-20

### SUMMARY

Well, here we are cruising through parts of the Bible many Christians don't even know to exist. Let's see what points of interest lie along today's road!

Chapter 17 begs the question, "Who cares if someone slaughters an animal outside the camp and why would they be excommunicated from the nation for doing so" (17:3-4)? Because this isn't about slaughtering food to eat. It's about sacrifices and what makes them legitimate or not. Verse 5 is the proof, "This is so the Israelites will bring to the Lord *the sacrifices they have been offering in the open country.*" The Israelites are no longer allowed to make sacrifices to God on their own. First, the sacrificial system has been standardized for each Israelite and second, this prevents individuals from intentionally worshiping other gods on the sly. The focus is on Yehovah and Him alone, "They are to bring them *to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting* and offer them as fellowship sacrifices *to the Lord.*" God is weaning the Israelites from the pagan ways they learned from Egypt, "They must no longer offer their sacrifices to the goat demons that they have prostituted themselves with" (17:7). This applies to not only the Israelites but also to the non-Israelites living among the people. After all, the group that left Egypt were mostly Israelites, but other non-Israelites left with them making them a "mixed multitude" (Exodus 12:38).

The final part of ch. 17 deals with the proper use of blood and an additional food command. Blood belongs to the Lord. It must be used for sacrifice or, in other cases such as "kosher" slaughter to prepare food, it must be poured out into the ground. A person in the Israelite community may eat food that was not properly killed may eat it (via natural death or mauled to death by an animal), but because the blood was not properly drained, it would make the person unclean. This has no national ex-communication attached, but only the requirement to recognized personal uncleanness that must be resolved.

Chapter 18 launches into a list of practices and customs the Lord undeniably prohibits His people from doing. "Do not follow the practices of the land of Egypt, where you used to live, or follow the practices of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. You must not follow their customs" (18:3). Notice that the countries identified are Egypt, the land the Israelites left, and Canaan, the land the Israelites are entering to take over. Rather than following the pagan practices and customs, "You are to practice *my* ordinances and you are to keep *my* statutes by following them; I am the Lord your God" (18:4, italics – writer). Why must the Israelites keep the Lord's ordinances and statutes? Because, "*...a person will live if he does them.* I am the Lord" (18:5) Notice it doesn't say, "a person will live if he

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*learns them*" or "a person will live if he *thinks about them*" or "a person will live if he *discusses them* in a small group setting." The person will live if he/she follows them as a matter of practice. God's commands are His way for His Israelite covenant people to *live*, as in "not die," which is obviously the case when you read what the practices and customs of their eastern and western neighbors were.

Let's see what those disgusting practices were, shall we? The Egyptians and Canaanites practiced sex with close relatives (yes, we call that incest) and had multiple wives from the same family as in a man marrying (having sex) with a mother and her daughter. The Egyptian and Canaanite men had sex with a woman during her period which was out of bounds for the Israelites due to God's "spilled blood" prohibition, and apparently, the Egyptians and Canaanites didn't scorn adultery either. As a side note, I came across an article some years ago that studied the Orthodox Jewish community in New York and their strict observance of the "no sex with a menstruating wife" command. What was the researchers' amazing finding? There was a far lower rate of cervical cancer in the Orthodox Jewish community than in the U.S. public at large. It wasn't too surprising to me because God said in Leviticus 20:18 if a man and woman have sex during the woman's period "he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has uncovered the source of her blood" (Leviticus 20:18). In other words, her body is open to viruses and germs due to her open blood vessels due to shedding of the uterine lining and is vulnerable to various pathogens. On a purely practical note, since this is the case, then the Lord's command is protection for her. On a psychological note, this time of separation encourages the couple to relate as friends, not just as lovers. And on a spiritual level, Yehovah is maintaining the sanctity of blood and holiness.

The next three prohibitions (18:21-23), based on pagan practices, are disturbing to various degrees: No child sacrifice, no homosexual sex, and no sex with animals. Again, *yuck*. What's stunning is the Lord is saying these three things were part of Egyptian and Canaanite culture. What's even more frightening is our nation is not only practicing *but has endorsed by Supreme Court rulings two of these three grave sins* – abortion and homosexual sex. On our present immoral trajectory, I wouldn't be surprised if someone made the insane proposal to legalize bestiality. After all, who thought abortion and homosexual sex would be as widely embraced today in the U.S. fifty to sixty years ago?

The Lord says these practices and customs have defiled the land and the Canaanites living there (18:24-25). Therefore, He's going to remove the Canaanites from the land for "the land will vomit out its inhabitants." The Lord tells His people this doesn't just apply to the pagans, either. The same "vomiting from the land" applies to them as well if they commit these horrible practices and follow those horrendous customs. I sometimes

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wonder if the day will come when we U.S. citizens are vomited out of our land for defiling it and ourselves by endorsing grave and terrible sins rather than stopping them? It's certainly food for thought and much prayer.

Chapter 19 turns toward the Lord's laws that are to replace the ugly practices and customs of Egypt and Canaan. Take time to read through the list slowly. You'll recognize some of these commands immediately, such as "love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18). Some of them are strange, such as "Do not crossbreed two different kinds of your livestock, sow your fields with two kinds of seed, or put on a garment made of two kinds of material" (19:19). However, there is wisdom here. Two kinds of materials sometimes work against each other. Not all grains thrive when intermixed in the same field. The more important point is the Lord is reinforcing purity and uniformity as opposed to mixing unequal things. This also points up the idea of holiness. The entire list is God's way of establishing holiness and uniqueness for His people among the nations. Following these ways will bring life and not death to the individual, the community, and the environment in which God's holy people will soon live. In the list, you can find honesty, respect, integrity, faithfulness to God and family, compassion, mercy, community support, and most of all, love! Regarding the Royal Law, "love your neighbor as yourself," Jesus said this command plus the command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength sum up the *entire* Torah in two commands made into one command (Matthew 22:36-40).

Some sins are so bad they demand the ultimate penalty – death – and that's what we read in Leviticus 20. Idolatry, occult practices, and sexual immorality have a high price to pay. Some people think these are trifles today, but anyone who has sought other gods, messed around with demonic forces through the occult, and wallowed in sexual sin eventually realizes how high the price really is and how irrevocably they've wrecked their lives. From the start, God is guiding the Israelites into the best way to live before they ever reach their new homeland. The chapter ends with the Lord's reminder to His people they have to learn holiness and that only comes from the Lord's commands.

## INSIGHT

There's an easy way to determine what is inside and outside of God's boundaries for acceptable sexual activity. Of course, this flies in the face of our culture. Here are the factors – "flesh that's too similar or too different." Let me explain. Sexual relations between a married man and woman are perfect because they are sufficiently different as to gender and sufficiently similar as to their humanity. Sex between an unmarried man and woman is too dissimilar because they are not "one flesh" (similar) via the marriage covenant, although they're properly similar in nature and dissimilar in gender.

Homosexual sex is not sufficiently dissimilar regarding gender. Incest is not sufficiently dissimilar regarding family relationships. Bestiality is right out because it is radically and disgustingly dissimilar in all ways. Only a marriage between one man and one woman constitutes the right combination per God's design.

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## February 3: Scriptures Leviticus 21-23

### SUMMARY

Priests carry a special holiness status before the Lord. Therefore, they have more stringent restrictions regarding maintaining their holiness and purity. Chapter 21 talks about priests and the High Priest and how they are to interact (if at all) with the sphere of death (dead family members), whom they are allowed to marry, and physical defects.

The average Levitical priest is only allowed to handle the dead bodies of immediate family members for burial. They may only marry a virgin or widow (no divorcees or prostitutes). They are not to follow the grieving customs typical of pagan cultures such as, "make bald spots on their heads, shave the edge of their beards, or make gashes on their bodies" (21:5). If a priest's daughter defiles herself by promiscuity, she is to die (21:9). Why so stringent? Because in ancient Israel the family was regarded as a single unit. The defilement of one affected everyone. Even the community is called upon to protect every priest's holiness (21:8).

The High Priest, "The priest who is highest among his brothers, who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and has been ordained to wear the clothes," is even more tightly restricted regarding a family member's death and the woman he's allowed to marry. He is forbidden to act out his grief or touch any human corpse even if it's an immediate family member like mom or dad. He is not allowed to leave the sanctuary to attend a burial because of his highly elevated state of his holiness. As for a wife, he may only marry an Israelite virgin.

As you can see in these cases, what is permitted for the average Israelite is not permitted for the Levitical priest and what is permitted for the Levitical priest is not permitted for the High Priest. This is all due to the "holiness factor." The closer one is to God, the more strict the requirements. The farther within the sphere of life one lives and works, the farther from the sphere of death they must be, even to the point of not touching it *at all!*

So what about this list of blemishes and physical defects that disqualify a man of the priestly line from serving God. Again, this reinforces the holiness/perfection/purity standard. Blemished sacrifices are not acceptable to God. Unblemished sacrifices are to be offered by unblemished priests. But that doesn't mean they're excluded from their families or priestly support. They are allowed to eat from the holy offerings and are allowed to carry out duties other than serving in the Tabernacle and offering sacrifices

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on the Bronze Altar. Those furnishings and areas are a level of holiness above the level of the person with a disqualifying blemish or disfigurement.

Yehovah continues to draw the straight and clear “holy line” in chapter 22. The key verse introducing the topic is, “The Lord spoke to Moses: ‘Tell Aaron and his sons to *deal respectfully with the holy offerings* of the Israelites that they have consecrated to me, *so they do not profane my holy name*; I am the Lord’” (Leviticus 22:1-2). The priesthood is to stay holy and the sacrifices from which they eat are to stay holy. An unclean priest touching a holy offering invites trouble – being excommunicated from the Lord’s presence – and He isn’t kidding. Keep this section in mind when you read about the High Priest, Eli, and his unholy priestly sons (1 Samuel 2-4). The men scornfully ignored the Lord’s law from this section (among other laws) and suffered death for doing so! However, there is a provision here for eating the holy offering in error. There’s no death penalty, but there is restitution that must be paid (22:14).

The final part of this chapter prohibits offering blemished (imperfect) offerings. You probably get the idea that the priests, their families, their food, and the Lord’s offerings are to be in a holy state of “perfection.” This is to exalt the Lord’s name, “You must not profane my holy name; I must be treated as holy among the Israelites. I am the Lord who sets you apart” (22:32). Everything associated with the Lord and His service is to reflect the holiness of the Lord Himself.

Finally, we reach chapter 23 where the Lord expands on His appointed times, weekly, and yearly celebrations that are to be held as sacred assemblies. They are the Sabbath, Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. There is *so much* to be taught about these festivals that it can’t be covered in this cruise through the Bible. However, a few things can be pointed out.

The Sabbath occurs every week on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Got it? Piece of cake!

The Spring Feasts are Passover which is technically the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> biblical month (Aviv, aka Nisan), but it “begins” with preparations on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup>. The Week of Unleavened Bread also begins on the 15<sup>th</sup> and runs for 7 days. Firstfruits is a spring harvest festival thanking the Lord for the barley crop and thanking Him in advance of the harvests yet to come during the summer and into early Fall. Firstfruits occurs on the “day after the Sabbath” during Unleavened Bread Week (23:11). So, while Unleavened Bread Week and Passover can start on any day, Firstfruits is always on a Sunday. 50 days after Firstfruits, the early summer festival of Shavuot (Weeks) occurs.

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It's called "Weeks" because it arrives 7 weeks plus 1 day after Firstfruits (50 days). In Christianity, Shavuot is called Pentecost as a nod to the 50-day count.

To put the history of the Spring Feasts into perspective, the Israelites were released from Egypt on the night of Passover, they emerged from the Red Sea on Firstfruits, they arrived at Mount Sinai 47 days later, and met God and became a nation on the 50<sup>th</sup> day (Shavuot). Isn't that an interesting coincidence? Oh, just wait! There's more to come!

The Fall Feasts of the Lord begin on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month with the Feast of Trumpets. Guess what you're supposed to do at this feast? Right! Blow trumpets! On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the same biblical month, the Israelites are to observe Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Then on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month, the Feast of Tabernacles begins and lasts for a week. During the feasts, special sacrifices are offered, the first fruits of the herd and field are presented, and the intensity of the participants ranges from deep solemnity to outrageous joy! And while the Spring Feasts commemorate Israel's flight from Egypt to Mount Sinai, the Fall Feasts are not so oriented, except for Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles commemorates the 40 years Israel spent with the Lord in the Wilderness.

## INSIGHT

Not only do the Feasts of the Lord commemorate history, but I believe they're also profoundly prophetic. You see, Jesus died on the day of Passover as our Passover Lamb (Matthew 26:2, John 18:39). He rose from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits, the first and only person to rise from the dead with a resurrected body (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1). Jesus ascended to heaven on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after His resurrection and sent His Holy Spirit on the 50<sup>th</sup> day, Shavuot, to start a born-again people of God, just like the Israelites were created as God's physical nation on earth on the 50<sup>th</sup>-day post-deliverance from Egypt. Pretty amazing, huh?

So here's a question. If Jesus fulfilled the Feasts of the Lord during His first coming, will He fulfill the Fall Feasts of the Lord at His second coming? Possibly. We'll only know for sure if it happens on those days. But the themes *are* very telling. The Feast of Trumpets is about blowing trumpets (shofars – ram's horn trumpets). Jesus' return will be announced with a trumpet/shofar blast (Matthew 24:31, 1 Corinthians 15:52, 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The Day of Atonement is about the complete cleansing of God's people and His place. Could it be Jesus will return on or around the Day of Atonement to cleanse the earth of sin and wickedness? Finally, when Jesus returns, He will begin a 1,000-year kingdom on earth and we will live in His presence and under His care just like the Israelites did in their Wilderness wandering. It's a compelling case. But again, I don't want to be dogmatic about it. We'll find out when we get there.

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## February 4: Scriptures Leviticus 24-27

### SUMMARY

This is a *huge* section dealing with some *very* important things. So let's dive in, shall we? Leviticus 24 starts with instructions to the High Priest about the Gold Menorah and Table of Showbread daily and weekly maintenance. The Menorah is to be kept lit throughout the night, and by that, it means all the oil lamps on all the branches are lit during the day, but the westernmost lamp is the only one kept burning through the night. If maintained properly, the Menorah is like the perpetual candle that many churches keep burning continuously in their sanctuaries. Twelve loaves of fresh bread are to be baked every Sabbath and laid out on the Table of Showbread along with some of the special Tabernacle incense. Why? First of all, it is a reminder to the priests and the people just who their Provider is. It is a memorial of the Lord's past provision, a recognition of the Lord's current provision, and a promise of the Lord's future provision. Since it's placed on the Table on the Sabbath, it's also a reminder that the Lord provides even when He commands us to take a break from our work week. He is our provider, not our jobs or by the work of our own hands. Our support comes from the Lord and the Lord alone.

The next part has an odd shift to a blasphemy case. A son from a "mixed marriage," an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father, get into a fight with an Israelite man. Notice how specifically it's written, "the Israelite woman's son and an Israelite man" (24:10). There's no recognition of the Egyptian father. In the heat of the moment, the mixed-family son both curses and blasphemes Israel's God, Yehovah. The Hebrew here suggests the guy treated the Lord lightly and therefore, saw no problem with speaking injuriously (the meaning of *blaspheme*), and cursing God. What was Yehovah's verdict? The one who treats the Lord lightly will bear His sin. But the one who outright curses God will die, which the son did, and he soon suffers the consequence.

There are a couple of very important points to be made here. 1) The whole community takes part in the son's execution, which means blaspheming God is not an individual matter, but one that concerns the entire people of Israel. Why? Because a little blaspheming can spread. If one person gets away with it, then so can others. 2) The severity of the punishment reflects the severity of the crime. 3) Would the son have acted differently if his parents were not of two different "faith" backgrounds? Was it because of the father's teaching, attitude, or example that the son disregarded the Lord so easily and dared to insult the One True God? Was the father doing so in secret, but the son did it openly? Was there a question in the family as to theology, I.e. are the Egyptian gods real and are they on the same level as Yehovah? But the Lord already showed Himself

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supreme over the so-called Egyptian gods. This is a classic case of the Lord getting the Israelites out of Egypt but now He has to get Egypt out of the Israelites. How much more difficult when it came to an Israelite/Egyptian “unequally yoked” marriage. Read 2 Corinthians 6;14-18 for more clarity on the topic as Paul talks about Christians binding themselves to non-Christians. This applies not just to marriage, but to a variety of situations (business ventures, agreements, etc.). I’ve seen it occur too often in marriages and families. There is inherent strife when one spouse follows Jesus and the other doesn’t. Marriage can be tough enough, but imagine when one of the spouses follows the Lord but the other doesn’t and finds it easy to ridicule their mate’s beliefs in front of the children? What do you think the children pick up? This seems to be the case in this short section. And what about a church congregation where people join for social reasons versus joining the community of believers *as* a believer. I’ve seen churches torn up by people who are not on the same page as the rest of the born-again believers. Why? *Because people who are born-again by God’s Spirit are new creations and are foundationally different from the rest of the world of unchanged, spiritually unregenerated people!* Believers are led by the Holy Spirit, even if they struggle with Him. Non-believers follow their passions. Don’t you think *that* would create tension as the Holy Spirit in one person fights against the human spirit in another? Isn’t this a fascinating section that has profound implications?

Here's more food for thought. Why does the “blaspheming son” event immediately follow the High Priest’s duties? Rabbis see adjacent accounts as having something to do with each other. In the first account, the focus is on the Lord and His primacy in our lives. The next section shows what happens when we treat God lightly and progress into outright rebellion. Tending the oil lamps and prepping the bread and incense may seem like little things, but it’s the little things in life and practice that keep us tight to God. Ignoring the little aspects of our life with God can lead to great sin and consequences.

Again, why does the text now jump to the famous “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” decree (24:17-22)? Because of the previous execution. Just because God allows execution in some cases, it never sanctions killing for just any reason. There *must* be boundaries! Therefore, people can’t murder other people. Killing animals indiscriminately requires restitution. Harming a neighbor requires consequences, but (and here’s the kicker) the consequences can never exceed the level of what was done initially. God’s “eye for eye” decree isn’t about promoting punishment, it’s a *limitation* on punishment. The decree is not for vengeance or revenge, for the punishment to fit the crime. Justice demands that punishment must be delivered, but not in anger or excess. Punishment must be delivered with equal justice for all. We see this affirmed in the “the same law for the resident alien and the native” command (24:22) that completes the section. So killing is permitted for capital punishment but it’s never sanctioned outside of God’s strict guidelines.

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Punishment must be equivalent and equal for all human beings, whether they are in God's "family" or not under the "all people are God's creation" fact.

Chapter 25 addresses unique calendar times – Sabbath Years (every 7<sup>th</sup> year) and the Ultimate Sabbath Year, the Jubilee, or *Yovel*, year (every 50<sup>th</sup> year).

The Sabbath year command is amazing! God commands that His people take a whole year of rest from their regular employment (mostly farming) so the whole nation *and the land* can rest. Farmers have known for a long time how beneficial it is to let the land lie fallow to "recharge" for future growing seasons. So, in a sense, God is asking His people and their land to lie "fallow," rest and recharge, for future activity. During this time, God promised to provide for them because He is, after all, their Provider. And He will have to! The only food they will get is what grows by itself by the Lord's hand. And this is a big act of faith (trust) on the Israelites' part. They will enjoy a promised bumper harvest in the 6<sup>th</sup> year, then eat from that harvest for the 7<sup>th</sup> year, and then eat from the same harvest for the 1<sup>st</sup> year until the new crop comes in. Think about that. Are you ready to stop working and enjoy what the Lord provides for you for that same amount of time?

And then comes the Jubilee year. The Jubilee year comes after the 7<sup>th</sup> Sabbath year. If you're not so good at math, it follows the 49<sup>th</sup> year of a Sabbath year cycle. Therefore, the Jubilee year is the 50<sup>th</sup> year and is also a Sabbath rest year. It's announced by a ram's (*yovel*) horn (a *shofar*) on the Day of Atonement of the newly-begun 50<sup>th</sup> year.

The themes of the Jubilee year are *rest, return, and restore*. It is a year that proclaims freedom throughout the land. Sound familiar? It should be because the Jubilee verse was cast as part of the Liberty Bell in Boston, MA. "As the Bell was created to commemorate the golden anniversary of Penn's Charter, the quotation 'Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof,' from Leviticus 25:10, was particularly apt. For the line in the Bible immediately preceding 'proclaim liberty' is, 'And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year.' What better way to pay homage to Penn and hallow the 50th year than with a bell proclaiming liberty?" ([ushistory.org/libertybell](http://ushistory.org/libertybell)).

In the year of Jubilee, all leased out property is returned to the original owner. That way no one can permanently accumulate wealth as it is in our day when increasingly wealthy people scoop up more and more land and material goods even if it's detrimental to individuals or society as a whole. The result of such greed is a gross economic imbalance and the power that can be used as a part of that imbalance. Under the world's system, wealth can be accumulated in the hands of fewer and fewer people leaving more and

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more people with less and less and even completely dependent on the few wealthy persons, corporations, or governments.

Even if one doesn't sell their land, leasing it out is also connected to the Jubilee year. For the person using another's land, payments are prorated based on the declining number of potential harvests relative to the land being restored to its original owner in the Jubilee year. Both buyer (leaser) and the seller (lease) are therefore protected and blessed.

Just like the Sabbath year, the Jubilee year carries with it God's amazing provision. The Lord promises He will boost the final crop of the 48<sup>th</sup> year so it supports His people for the Sabbath year (49), the Jubilee year (50), and the next year as the new harvest is coming in!

Why can't the land be permanently sold? Because it belongs to the Lord. He created it, so He owns it. Truth be told, the Lord gave the earth to humanity, not as a possession, but to steward for Him as His representatives, His vice-regents. It's the same idea with the land of Israel proper, only a bit more so. God has tied the Promised Land to His people, the Jews, through His covenant with Abraham. According to God, no other nation can take it from the Jews. He gives it to the Gentile nations when His people need discipline for covenant violations. Furthermore, God can take it back and give it to His people at will. Just look back over the last 3,500 years and you can see it's so.

If you're an Israelite, Yehovah loans the land to you as part of your family's possession and His terms are that it comes back to you if you lease it out. That's why I believe Israel has its land now and will have even more land in the future. God gave it to the Jews through Abraham (Genesis 13:15), even to an extent they have never realized – from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18).

The Jubilee year applies not just to land, but to the homes on the land. Land can be bought back at any time. Homes can also be bought back, but they're treated differently depending on whether they're in the country or city. One reason for selling land is due to poverty. And as we've seen before, even a person can "sell themselves" into indentured service. This is not a shame or a punishment. The idea is to get the poor person back on their feet. Once they do, they can buy back (redeem) their land. During the intervening years, the right to redeem land (and family members, 25:39-42) is in force, but both land and people are to be released in the Jubilee Year just as in a Sabbath year.

On the other hand, there are the non-Israelites, servants, and slaves from other nations. Sadly, at the time they were regarded as property that could be inherited. No, the Bible

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is not condoning slavery. It's the recognition of the customs of the day. However, the Lord gives strong commands regarding the fair and merciful treatment of slaves as we've read about before.

Chapter 26 is one of two chapters (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28) dealing with covenant blessings or curses (disciplines, judgments) that are common to covenants. The usual wording is along the lines of "If you and I are obedient to the terms of this covenant, may the Lord bless us and our relationship. If either one of us breaks the terms of this covenant, may the Lord do to us what we have done to these animals" (in the case of a blood covenant, I.e. killed and cut them apart) or "May the Lord deal with us ever so harshly..." and the curses are named.

In this case, God is Israel's covenant partner. He won't ever break His covenant with them, but the nation might become unfaithful to Yehovah. If the people of the nation obey the terms of the covenant, then "*you will be blessed!*" the Lord says. If they break the terms, "I will exercise covenant disciplinary measures against you. Those disciplinary judgments are the reverse of the blessings and will increase in intensity the longer you refuse to turn back to Me and restore our covenant. Continued rebellion on your part will result in escalated measures. The end of your rebellion will be an exile from My land that I gave you." That's why Israel was broken in two (1 Kings 12). The northern kingdom was exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and the southern kingdom of Judah was exiled by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. That was Yehovah's final judgment for their rampant and unrepentant idolatry. According to Jesus, Israel was exiled by the Romans in A.D. 70 for the refusal of Israel's leadership to receive Jesus as their Messiah and for rejecting and executing Him. Jesus prophesies their coming covenant judgment by saying, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Matthew 23:37-39).

However, God's plan rolls on and He hasn't forgotten His covenant with His people. He does what He promised (Leviticus 26:42-45)! He *has* returned them to their land as He promised (Ezekiel 36:24), He *has* returned Jerusalem to their hands as He promised (Luke 21"24), and He *will* return to them for their complete forgiveness and cleansing as He promised (Ezekiel 36:25-30, Romans 11:25-26).

The final chapter of today's reading (Leviticus 27) deals with how the Israelites will fund the Tabernacle's operation through dedicated offerings, houses, crops, or land. Note that

a person can't dedicate any firstborn livestock to the Lord because they belong to Him already. You can only dedicate to the Lord what belongs to you and no one else. And once something is dedicated to the Lord, it's the Lord's. In case you get into trouble and you need to use a dedicated thing, you can but the person must add 20% of its value to the dedicated object when settling accounts with the Lord later. What also belongs to the Lord is the tithe, a tenth of "the land's produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees... animal from the herd or flock, which passes under the shepherd's rod (27:30-33). It comes right off the top. If a person tries to make a substitution for the tenth that already belongs to the Lord, both the tithe and the substitute belong to Him.

Congratulations! You've read through the book of Leviticus and hopefully, understand it a little better. Now don't ignore this very important part of the Bible. Remember, we're part of God's kingdom of priests and we're part of His holy nation (Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). Therefore, if you will let the Holy Spirit speak to you and guide you, there are many valuable guidelines and lessons you'll discover if you'll read and discuss Leviticus again, especially with friends and mature Christians in a one-to-one or small group setting.

### **INSIGHT**

When Jesus returns on or around the Day of Atonement, note that His return is announced with a *shofar*, a ram's horn trumpet. Could it be that per the theme of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) not only is Jesus going to deal with evil, wickedness, and sin on earth, but His Kingdom on earth (Israel) will be a time of freedom, release, returning of possession to their owners, and all the hallmarks of the Jubilee year as well?

## February 5: Scriptures Numbers 1-3

### SUMMARY

The name of this book may be Numbers (because numbers play such a big part in the opening chapters and throughout the book), but in the Hebrew version of the Bible, it's called B'midbar or Bamidbar, (B' – in, Midbar – wilderness). It is an account of the Israelites' journey in the Wilderness.

The nation's journey from Mount Sinai to conquering and settling down in the Promised Land, *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel) was only supposed to take a very short time. However, failure to trust God at a pivotal moment led to a disastrous chain of events that caused Israel to begin a 40-year campout in the Wilderness. Part of it was judgment for their lack of trust. But much of it was discipline. Read what Hebrews says about discipline, "No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:1). God called His son (Israel) out of Egypt, but that son was immature and not ready to trust the Lord as they should have been. Why was a mature trust in the Lord so important? Because the nation was going to face not one, not two, not three peoples in the land of Canaan, but *seven* pagan nations, not to mention several giants that reappeared after the Flood. For Israel to defeat these strong opposing armies, they would have to depend on the Lord's help which He promised as part of His covenant with them.

The book of Numbers covers the time starting from Israel's 2<sup>nd</sup> year out of Egypt to the 40<sup>th</sup> year when they are stationed on the east side of the Jordan River, just north of the Red Sea, preparing to start their attack on Canaan under Joshua's leadership.

A great many lessons can be learned from this book. I've often taught my Torah class that Bamidbar (In The Wilderness) is very much like our lives in this world from the time we're saved by Jesus to the day we die. Yes, we're freed from enslavement to sin and death, but we then start a journey of learning how to trust God in every area of our lives. And just like the Israelites, we often fail the trust test when it comes. And so, we go around the wilderness of our lives learning how faithful God is to His promises, only to be tested and tried again and again until we're more disciplined in our faith in Him. There are some remarkable accounts we can learn from Numbers and some amazing commands and procedures that will not only enrich your life with the Lord but explain big events in the New Testament. So let's get started!

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Chapter 1... and we go right to sleep. C'mon. Be honest. The selection of leaders for the individual tribes, a census of each tribe, and the Levites getting assigned to transport the Tabernacle isn't the stuff of riveting reading, right? But there are some things to note and remember here. First, the census involved only men 20 years old and up. Why? This set the minimum age for ancient Israel's "army service." Second, tribal identity is shown to be determined through the father. Around Jesus' day, being a Jew was changed and reckoned through the mother's side of the family. There's an interesting reason for the change but I'll let you do some internet research as to how that came about. Third, Judah is the largest tribe with 74,600 men, Manasseh is the smallest tribe with 32,200 men, and Ephraim is just a bit larger than Manasseh with 40,500 men. The Ephraim vs. Manasseh numbers and how they change will be an interesting observation later. Finally, the Levites are designated as the official "Tabernacle Transporters." This is part of God's blessing on them for standing up during the Golden Calf episode. Those who serve the Lord will be honored by the Lord (John 12:26). Oh, and anyone who comes near the Tabernacle who isn't a Levite will be executed. Yikes!

So, how does one organize and lead a group comprised of 603,550 men plus their women, children, and animals across a wilderness? Chapter 2 of Numbers tells us. Looks like Moses' early Egyptian military training (per Josephus' writings) comes in handy. Moses organizes the camp into military divisions. Picture this. The Tabernacle is in the center of the camp. The three Levite sub-families are camped around the Tabernacle on the south, west, and north sides. Moses and Aaron are camped on the east side. Around them, the 12 tribes (not counting the Levites, with Joseph split into Ephraim and Manasseh) are camped in groups of three to a side. Each tribe has a unique banner for identification and location. The east side is where Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun are camped. The south side is the location of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. On the west side are Ephraim, Menasseh, and Benjamin, leaving Dan, Asher, and Naphtali on the north side. According to the size of each tribe, if you were to fly a drone over the entire camp complex, it would look like a huge cross with the Tabernacle at the intersection point of the vertical and the horizontal lines. Pretty cool, huh? Do you think the Lord is trying to tell the world something?

With chapter 3, the text zeroes in on Moses' and Aaron's family line. Since Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, were killed when they performed their duties in a violation of God's command and holiness, Aaron's remaining two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, are selected to assist him (3:4). Furthermore, all of the Levites are now assigned to assist Aaron concerning the Tabernacle and the sacrificial service (3:7-8).

Now we come to something amazing. Do you remember when the Lord chose all of the firstborn Israelites males for Himself (Exodus 13:2)? Now there comes a shift. Because of

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the Golden Calf incident where the Israelites got out of hand and the Levites stepped up to take care of the situation, the Lord now chooses the Levites to take the place of Israel's firstborn males to serve Him. Therefore, the priesthood that once fell to Israel's firstborn of each family, is now transferred to every Levite male (3:11-13). This is a change of the law, "For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must be a change of law as well" (Hebrews 7:2). Why is this important? See the insight below.

The Lord next registers every Levite male, one-month-old and up, and assigns specific duties regarding the Tabernacle to the three family lines of the Levite tribe – Gershon (the Gershonites), Kohath (the Kohathites), and Merari (the Merarites). The holiest items of the Tabernacle were the responsibility of the Kohathites (the Ark, et al) and the least holy items were assigned to the Merarites (posts, sockets, structural elements). To put it a bit crassly, the Kohathites were in charge of the furniture, the Merarites were in charge of the "hardware" (the posts, sockets, and crossbars) and the Gershonites were given charge of the "software" (the curtains and other hangings).

To conclude chapter 3, there is a one-to-one exchange of the Levites for the firstborn sons of Israel. However, there were 273 more Israelites than available Levites. The overage was solved by the extra Israelites giving a one-time five-shekel redemption for the Tabernacle.

## INSIGHT

Israel's High Priest and the general priesthood were from the Levite tribe, but it wasn't always so. As was pointed out earlier, the father served as the leader and the priest over his household, a king-priest so to speak. His firstborn son would "train" for the leadership and priestly role up until the day his father died, and then the firstborn son would step into those family roles. When God took His people out of Egypt, He "claimed" the firstborn sons for himself. While they remained family leaders, they were going to step into the role of His priests. And then came the awful episode with that stupid Golden Calf. Now came a "change of the law with the change of the priesthood." Now, according to God, the priesthood would come from the Levites, not the firstborn sons. The High Priest would be a Levite from Aaron's line. This continued until Jesus' day and a little while after according to history. However, when Caiaphas tore his robe (Mark 14:63), that disqualified him as Israel's High Priest, not to mention the blatant violation of "buying" the High Priesthood from the Romans every year rather than one man serving for life. Since Caiaphas was "disqualified" on two counts, Israel had no High Priest at the moment Jesus was about to be turned over to the Romans for judgment and execution. But God commanded Israel to have a High Priest to be in service at all times, so Israel needed a High Priest to obey God's command. Who best to serve as His Father's

most qualified High Priest than His sinless Son, Jesus. At that moment, Jesus became our Greatest High Priest (Hebrews 4:14, 9:11) and could preside over His sacrifice on a cross to bring us atonement, forgiveness, and cleansing from God. "But," someone may exclaim, "Jesus wasn't a Levite. He was of the tribe of Judah. God commanded by His law (the Torah) that the High Priest can only come from the tribe of Levi!" Yes, you're right. But God made a sovereign choice of the Levites over the firstborn. At Jesus' trial, God made a sovereign choice *to restore the priesthood to the firstborn, His Firstborn, who would serve as the family of Israel's High Priest and King!* Remember, "For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must be a change of law as well" (Hebrews 7:2). And since Jesus will never die again and will live forever, there will never again be another shift in the priesthood. Isn't that amazing how our Heavenly Father worked that all out?

## February 6: Scriptures Numbers 4-6

### SUMMARY

In chapter 3 we read about Moses' and Aaron's family line, the Lord's command to substitute them as priests instead of the firstborn sons of Israel, the census of the Levites along with the general assignment of duties, and the redemption transaction of the firstborns so the Levites can take their place.

Chapter 4 focuses on all qualified Levites (age and physical condition) from ages 30 to 50 and how they are to carry out their assigned duties. I don't know about you, but after changing domiciles numerous times in my life, four of them across the country, and taking quite a few vacation camping trips, packing and unpacking for a move is my most undesirable thing to do in life! One thing that's great about our text today is the idea, "Many hands make light work." The final census count of Levite males, one-month-old and up, was 22,000. Here's a Hebrew Bible tip: The way large numbers are usually recorded is as whole numbers, not a precise reckoning. That's a general rule, not a set-in-stone rule. Context determines the rule. Just be aware of it as you read. So, there are 22,000 Levites out of which are selected qualified males, ages 30 to 50. You can imagine there are more than enough Levites to handle the Tabernacle transport.

Aaron and his sons are the only ones allowed to cover the Ark, the Table of Showbread (also referred to as the Table of the Presence), the Menorah, and the Gold Altar of Incense. After those have been covered as well as the Bronze Altar, the Bronze Laver, and the utensils used in the Tabernacle service, then the rest of their Kohathite family can carry the Tabernacle furnishings to the next location. Think about this. Once the Tabernacle was set up, only a very few ever saw the Ark of the Covenant except in extreme situations. Outside of the Levite family, none of the other Israelites saw the furnishings of the Holy Place except when they were covered during transport. Thank God we now have free access to the Tabernacle in Heaven (Hebrews 8:1-2), His Throne Room, which we'll all be able to see with uncovered eyes!

Next, the Gershonites remove the software, the curtains, and the coverings of the Tabernacle and the Courtyard under the direction of Aaron's son Ithamar. Then the Merarites disassemble the hardware of the Tabernacle and the Courtyard, also under Ithamar's supervision. Finally, we get a count of the active-duty Levites handling the whole operation – 8,580 men. See? Plenty of help.

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With all the Tabernacle haulage duties now assigned, chapter 5 moves to other matters – the isolation of the unclean, compensation for theft (the rabbis define this as taking anything God did not give us, great or small, for whatever reason), and the Jealousy Ritual. There is *a lot* that can be taught from this seemingly weird test of a woman accused of adultery.

This test is about *jealous feelings* a husband experiences regarding his wife who may or may not have cheated on him. Here's the bottom line. Yes, the test is a humiliation for the woman because she *has likely given her husband a legitimate reason to suspect her of fooling around*. She may have spent an undue time with another man, she may have been in a secluded location with him, the husband may have been away from home and someone saw a man visiting his house, or she's pregnant and her husband's calculations lead him to believe he's not the father.

The test is designed to put pressure on the woman to confess if she has indeed committed adultery. If she is willing to go through the test that carries the awful punishment of God shutting down her reproductive system ("belly to swell and your womb to shrivel," 5:22), then she is either completely brazen and willing to suffer or she is completely innocent *and her husband has no right to accuse her or hold his suspicions over her head!* Yes, this may be a test for the woman, *but its purpose is for the Lord to prove to the man his wife is innocent and he's to get over his jealous feelings toward her!* When viewed correctly, this is merciful protection for an unjustly accused woman. It's also an act of mercy from God because if the woman has committed adultery, she has the opportunity to confess. If she confesses, she will be divorced, but not killed, and her reproductive system, along with a possible child from adultery, will not be harmed. It's only if the woman *and* her partner are caught in adultery that they can be executed (Leviticus 20:10). This situation pertains only to a woman suspected of adultery. Now read through the process carefully, using your imagination to watch the process. Here's a final aspect I want to share about this test. If the woman is innocent, but her behavior has been careless or flirty, this is also a warning, not from her husband but God Himself, that He's got His eye on her and she should mind her ways.

By the way, in case you think adulterous affairs warrant mandatory executions, read about King David committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of David's soldiers (2 Samuel 11). Although Uriah has died and David confesses a year later after his baby is born, the infant still dies as punishment for David's crime (similar to the Jealousy Ritual punishment), but David and Bathsheba are spared. Even though there is a punishment attached, God's mercy triumphs over His justice for David and Bathsheba.

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In chapter 6 we encounter another odd thing, the Nazirite Vow followed by the High Priestly Blessing. What is the Nazirite vow? First, it has nothing to do with the town of Nazareth, Jesus' childhood village. A Nazirite is a "person who vows for a specific period to abstain from partaking of grapes or any of its products whether intoxicating or not, cutting his hair, and touching a corpse (6:3-9). Such a person is called a Nazirite (Heb. *nazir*, from the root *nzr*, meaning to separate or dedicate oneself" (jewishvirtuallibrary.org). In essence, this person is a layman, a non-priest, who takes a vow of separation unto the Lord, a holy state similar to a priest's holy state. This can be done for any number of reasons such as increasing one's devotion to God, a time of focused prayer or intercession, a commitment to perform an act, etc. This was practiced by the Apostle Paul (Acts 18:18). See? Paul was a Torah-observant follower of Jesus.

Three things are prohibited to a Nazirite – cutting their hair, avoiding all grape products including wine or things made from wine, and touching a dead body. If these prohibitions ring a bell with you and you're somewhat familiar with Bible stories, you now know that Samson ("no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb" Judges 13:5), the Prophet Samuel ("no razor shall come upon his head," 1 Samuel 1:11), and John the Baptist ("he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink," Luke 1:15) were Nazirites, people especially dedicated to the Lord. They were from priestly and non-priestly families. Furthermore, the Nazirite vow was open to both men and women to take upon themselves. While the Nazirite vow of Numbers 6 is for a specified time (usually about 30 days), Samson, Samuel, and John were Nazirites before birth which meant they had to live within the Nazirite restrictions for their entire lives. Knowing this, you'll see why Samson got into so much trouble by touching dead things, walking through vineyards, and foolishly letting Delilah cut his hair which lifted God's special touch from his life until it grew back.

Here are a few things from the vow to consider. If a Nazirite violated his or her conditions, they had to start their designated time all over from day 1. After they were done, they had to go through an elaborate ritual to signal their return to "ordinary" life without restrictions. The rabbis have seen some interesting things about the 3 prohibitions and it makes a great guideline for you or me should we want to practice a Nazirite vow. 1) Not cutting our hair: the rabbis see that as shutting oneself in with God as the hair grows around the head. It also is an outward sign of purposeful dedication to God. 2) Grapes, grape products, and alcohol: the rabbis see that alcohol lowers our inhibitions and makes it easy for people to consider "bending the rules," getting us close to sin, or just throwing commands and caution to the wind. 3) A dead body: the rabbis see this as an outright source of spiritual contamination per God's Torah. We can call that

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the contamination that comes upon us when we sin. So here's the picture. We choose a time to focus on God, we commit ourselves to stay away from sin, and the things that cause us to bend toward sin. Cool, huh?

Finally, we come to Aaron's Blessing, also called the High Priestly Blessing. It's also known in rabbinic literature as "the raising or lifting of the hands." As you read through it, the blessing may seem a bit redundant. I did a study about how some rabbis interpret the blessing. This is my summary of what is being imparted on the people:

"May the Lord bless you with all the material prosperity you need and may He protect you so that you can do good works, especially that you may grow closer to Him."

"May He give you insight into His Word so that you can see the absolute wonder of Who He is, how He's causing all things to work for good in His plan, and through that grant you favor with Himself and other people."

"May He top it all off with everything you don't deserve, but desperately need, everything that He is more than willing to give you through His covenant love and affection, and may you be completely overwhelmed with His peace!"

Here's a fascinating tidbit that confirms our Heavenly Father chose and anointed Jesus to be our High Priest. On the 40<sup>th</sup> day after His resurrection, Jesus ascended bodily to heaven. Just before it happened, He did a fascinating thing. See if you catch it. "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them" (Luke 24:50). Jewish eyes would catch it immediately. Jesus "lifted up His hands and blessed them." That's the Aaronic Blessing, the High Priestly Blessing that was granted only to Aaron and all subsequent High Priests to lay on the people. Yes, Jesus is our forever High Priest. And with that, we complete chapter 6.

## INSIGHT

"God's mercy triumphs over God's justice." God often compares idolatry to adultery, turning our backs on Him to pursue other gods to do for us what God, our "husband," has promised to do – provide and protect. Every person deserves death for turning our backs on God, especially if we've sworn covenant vows to remain faithful to Him under the New Covenant terms. God's mercy not only moves Him to provide a way out of sin and death, but His mercy continually forgives us, cleanses us, and restores us to a right relationship with Him when we stumble and fall. Our God is truly a loving and merciful God!

## February 7: Scriptures Numbers 7-9

### SUMMARY

Okay, get ready. Here come more numbers and repetitive information. On the day Moses finished erecting the Tabernacle (Day 1, Year 2 after leaving Egypt), the leaders of Israel brought wagons and oxen to equip the Levites for hauling the Tabernacle components. Now this doesn't mean there isn't anything to learn from chapter 7 and the tribal leaders' offerings. All the offerings were identical regardless of tribal birth orders, prominence among the other tribes, size of the tribe, or anything else you can come up with. They all gave the same items in the same amounts for the Levites' Tabernacle work and sacrificial operations.

There's a quick aside at the end of the chapter about Moses speaking with God in the Tabernacle. Since no one could enter the Holy of Holies except the High Priest once the Tabernacle was set up for operations, then Moses must have talked with God while standing in the Holy Place on the other side of the curtain (the *parochet*) that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. It's quite a fascinating thing to picture. Picture Moses standing or sitting on one side and hearing the voice of the Almighty God of the Universe speaking to him audibly through the *parochet* from the other side! On one hand, it reinforces the fact that fallen humanity is separated from God by our sin. On the other hand, it encourages us that the Lord still wants us to come as close as we can for Him to speak with us. How much better is it now that the Separating Curtain has been torn literally (Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45) and figuratively (Hebrews 10:20) so Jesus can live in us and speak to us more closely than Moses ever experienced!

There's a natural segue from chapter 7 to chapter 8 if you don't let the chapter number or heading get in the way. Chapter 7 ends with Moses in the Holy Place talking with God and chapter 8 opens with God telling Moses who is in the Holy Place to make sure Aaron has the cups of the menorah facing forward so they light up the room. Again, it's stressed that the Menorah is hammered out from base to petal-tip from one ingot of gold. What a masterpiece of craftsmanship that must have been!

What follows is the Levites going through a sacrificial ritual, which is common when a person or a group of people are set apart to God. The Levites are consecrated to stand in for the Israelite first-born, assist Aaron, and carry the Tabernacle (8:16-19). At the end of this section, Yehovah gives Moses instructions about when a Levite man begins to learn his duties (age 25), enters into active service (age 30), and when he retires from active priestly service (age 50). He can still advise but he's is not allowed to do the actual work.

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I wonder if it was annoying to any active-duty priests to have a retired guy giving pointers. Just something to ponder and smile about.

We come to an interesting event in Numbers. The scenario is this. Some guys want to celebrate the Passover as commanded (therefore, this event is about two weeks after chapters 7 and 8. However, they had touched a dead body, were ceremonially unclean, and were unable to participate in the celebration/observance. Some rabbis think these may have been the guys carrying Joseph's body to the Promised Land per his request in Genesis 50:25. Regardless, how can the "contaminated" men participate as commanded? Moses goes to the Lord to get a ruling. Again, this reminds us of Moses in the Holy Place and talking with God on the other side of the curtain. What was Yehovah's answer? A new command! Individuals who can celebrate Passover on the appointed day must do so. But if for legitimate reasons a person is unable to celebrate Passover on Aviv 15 they must do so exactly one month later. All Passover commands still apply. Case closed.

And what can be said about this final part of chapter 9? In summary, Israel moved when the cloud moved and stopped when it stopped and stayed put until it moved. Long or short stops didn't matter. The Lord directed their movements their entire way. Remember, what I shared about the book of Numbers (Bamidbar – "In The Wilderness") is like walking with the Lord throughout our lives. After personally walking with the Lord for over 46 years now I can testify that the Lord has had me stay put for long times and short times. He's moved me from one job to the next and from one career to the next, and from one church body to another. Life has been anything but predictable! But looking back, I can see the Lord's hand on many moments of decision that has made my life with my wife and family quite the journey. If you're beginning your walk with the Lord or in the midst of the turmoil of change, be patient. Perspective comes with time. The Lord's guidance becomes clearer in the rearview mirror. The important point in this passage? Follow the cloud!

### INSIGHT

Go ahead. Ask God any question you have. Check His word first because He may have already answered it. As you read, let the Holy Spirit impress on your mind and heart the scriptures that pertain to your question. Next, stay open to thoughts He may share with you, especially when they impress you as being wise solutions. Remember, it's the Holy Spirit's job to lead and guide you. As the Bible says, "Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day" (Psalm 25:2), and "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:13), and this, "Call to Me, and I will answer you,

and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3). No question is dumb or irrelevant or unimportant to our Heavenly Father. The Lord wants to listen to you, talk with you, and be with you all the time!