
January 21 : Scriptures Exodus 16-19

SUMMARY

Israel is now in the Lord's School of Trust. The future nation of Israel has been born like a baby is born, through blood and water (Passover and the Red Sea). The *huge* multitude (600,000 men plus women and children) is now on the east bank of the east fork of the Red Sea in what is now the Arabian Peninsula. Where are they heading? Why to Mount Horeb (Mt. Sinai), of course! That's what the Lord had commanded Moses to do, "He answered, 'I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I am the one who sent you: *when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain*'" (Exodus 3:12).

Here are the tests and lessons of the Lord's School of Trust in chapters 16-17:

Waters of Marah – God can keep His people healthy despite *any* circumstances they face. God is their Healer. His primary lesson is "If you will carefully obey the Lord your God, do what is right in his sight, pay attention to his commands, and keep all his statutes, I will not inflict any illnesses on you that I inflicted on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you" (15:26). God is *all* they need for life. All that is required is for the people to obey Him, for that is their side of the covenant which will soon be enacted at Mount Horeb/Sinai in chapter 20.

Wilderness of Sin – God can provide food and water to sustain His people. God is their Sustainer. "This way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions" (16:4). The first test is to teach them God will preserve them *if* they obey His commands. This test is to find out if they *will* obey His commands. God promises to give them exactly what they need every day. It will be completely sufficient. No more, no less. And since the Lord wants them to rest on the Sabbath, He will give them double *before* the Sabbath (Day 6, Friday) to help them follow His command to rest.

Lo and behold! God sends quail for meat at the start of the day (the evening) and manna in the morning for breakfast (16:13). The morning bread they called *manna* ("What?", as in "What's this stuff?" 16:31). All they had to do was collect what they wanted every morning, and it would be exactly what was needed for the day. So, what was the Lord teaching them? "Food and water don't sustain you. The Lord who provides the food and water is your Sustainer" (paraphrase, Deuteronomy 8:3). The Israelites survive only because God sustains them.

There's a very important lesson in this chapter. Did you notice how the Israelites whined about food and water (16:3, 8) and later didn't follow God's food gathering instructions, and yet He didn't spank them? *That's because they're in training.* A good parent doesn't spank a child when they're learning to walk and they fall and cry. A good parent helps the toddler get up. Then the teaching and encouragement continue. It's only later when a person should know better that corrective measures are given.

Here's an amazing fact that seems to escape many. The constant supply of food God supplied continued to fall *for forty years!* As we'll see when we get to the Book of Joshua, the manna stopped the very moment the Israelites set foot in their Promised Land.

Water from the Rock – God can provide water to sustain His people. The Israelites continue to travel through the Wilderness of Sin. The food doesn't run out, but the water sure does. Panic time! The Israelites (all 600,000 men plus women and children and all their animals) desperately need water. Once again, they *kvetch* (Yiddish for "complain") to Moses. The Lord tells Moses to take the same rod that was used to turn the Nile's good water bad and use it to bring forth water from a rock by striking it. Truth be told, the Lord brought the water from the rock, not Moses. "I am going to stand there in front of you on the rock at Horeb; when you hit the rock, water will come out of it and the people will drink" (17:6). Again, God doesn't rebuke or discipline His people. He's teaching them they can not only trust Him for health and food but also water. But now one of the most frightening tests approaches.

Amalekites Attack – God can protect His people from enemies. While encamped at Rephidim, the place of the miraculous provision of water, a people called the Amalekites attack the Israelites. For the record, the Amalekites are distant relations to the Israelites. They come from the line of Esau's grandson, Amalek. One thing you might notice if you pay close attention to those "boring" genealogies is they often explain why various nations are at odds with others. The Israel/Amalekite fight is a family fight. The Ammonites and Moabites were descended from Abraham's nephew Lot. Therefore, fights between Israel and Ammon/Moab are family fights as well. Even today, the fight between Arab/Islamic nations and Israel can be traced back to Ishmael vs. Isaac and Esau vs. Jacob. And you thought *your* family had issues! So back to the battle. As long as Moses' arms were holding God's staff aloft (the symbol of God's authority and power), the Israelites under Joshua prevailed. When Moses' arms dropped, the Amalekites prevailed. So, Moses' brother, Aaron, and Hur held his arms up until the battle was won. This explains why we hold our arms up when our favorite sports team wins. (Actually, no. I was just having some fun with you.) Finally, don't miss this. From this point on, God

declares continual war against the Amalekites. This *will* be important to remember for the future (*Ahem, regarding both King Saul and Esther*).

So, the Lord has proved to Israel He can sustain their health, provide food and water, and protect them from their enemies. What more could they ask?

Chapter 18 opens with Moses and the Israelite entourage nearing Midian and Mount Horeb/Sinai on the western edge of the Arabian Peninsula, *not* in the Sinai Peninsula as tradition claims. Moses brings the *huge* Israelite family to meet the Lord as God had commanded (3:12). Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, comes to meet Moses and his family in the wilderness close to Mount Sinai, the mountain where God first manifested as a fire burning a desert shrub. Do you remember that Jethro was a priest of Midian? Now, remember that God appeared in that same area. Therefore, Jethro served the Most High God as we see him join Moses shortly in bringing an offering to God (18:12). But while Jethro knew God and served Him, Moses had the far greater revelation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses not only knew His name, Yehovah, but he had seen Him in action against the Egyptians, all of which Moses recounts to Jethro. After hearing what God did for His people, Jethro's eyes were opened a lot wider, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods because he did wonders when the Egyptians acted arrogantly against Israel" (18:11).

Jethro is not only a God-serving man, but he's wise to boot. He sees Moses wearing himself out trying to solve everyone's problems (18:13) and suggests that Moses set up a team of judges to settle disputes, leaving only the toughest ones for Moses to decide with the Lord (18:21-22). A perfect solution! The chapter ends with Jethro heading home. Moses and the Israelites are about to keep their appointment with the Lord. This will be one of the grandest introductions of all time! *Israel, prepare to meet your God*

If you're keeping track, Israel has finally reached Mount Sinai 47 days after leaving Egypt (19:1-2). By Jesus' day, the Pharisees said it was 47 days after the day of Passover while the Sadducees said it was 47 days from the Sabbath *after* Passover during Unleavened Bread Week, making it the day of the Feast of First Fruits. (The Pharisee reckoning has prevailed among most Jews today.) Regardless, the important point is that it was 47 days. Why? Because God calls Moses up to the mountain and tells him to prepare the Israelites for an amazing event "on the third day" (19:11). They are about to be transformed from a collection of tribes into *one nation, under God*. The nation of Israel's national birthday became the 50th day after its liberation from the dark kingdom of Egypt. The Lord tells the Israelites, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my

covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation" (19:4-6). Imagine that! *From slave to God's nation in 7 weeks and 1 day!* But the words above mean something very significant is happening.

What's happening here is Yehovah is making another covenant with His people. This one is known as the **Sinai Covenant**. It's a **suzerain-vassal covenant**, well-known in the day, that was made between a conquering king and his newly conquered people. It goes like this – "Alright everyone. Here's the deal. I defeated your old king and I'm your new king. Swear allegiance to me, follow the laws of my reign, and I'll take care of all your needs – food, water, and protection." Gee! Does that sound familiar? Now, do you see God's purpose in the Lord's School of Trust over the previous 47 days? *Yehovah was preparing them to receive Him as their King!* There is a flip side to this *suzerain-vassal* covenant, though. "If you disobey me," says the new King, "I will have to discipline you for your rebellion. But even if you break my covenant, I'll provide a way to reinstate it so you can remain my people as long as I live," which for Israel's King is a *very* long time. King Yehovah, "conquered" Egypt, freed His people from the lesser king's power (Pharaoh), and is now making them into His kingdom on earth.

Here's another cool thing! Although Israel was, at that moment, God's newest nation on earth, one created by a miraculous birth centuries earlier, God regards the Israelites as his firstborn son from among all the rebellious nations of the world (Exodus 4:22-23) which had rejected Him at the tower of Babel. As God's firstborn son, Israel will serve as firstborn sons served their families – as *kings*, ruling the family, and *priests*, representing God to the family and the family to God in place of the father upon his death. Israel will be God's firstborn son, "you will be my *kingdom of priests* and my holy nation" (19:6). In just three days, the nation of Israel will accept upon itself the mantle of king and priest over the family of nations on the earth. This will find its fullest expression when Jesus returns to reign over Israel and the rest of the world.

Okay, back to the account. Moses delivers God's words to the people and the Israelites' agreement back to God. Imagine all that trudging up and down the mountain. Not bad for an 80-year-old-guy! The Lord tells Moses to set boundaries around the mountain. Why? The Lord is so holy (spiritually pure) that spiritually impure people can't touch Him. They can come only come as close to the Lord as He deems safe for them (19:12). Anything closer is asking for death for violating His terms. "Israel, prepare to meet thy God!"

The third day arrives and what a display – thunder, lightning, a roaring wind, immense fire, the earth-shaking violently, smoke like a blast furnace, and the sound of a shofar, a ram's horn trumpet that grew louder and louder. The rabbis know this was not a human being blowing the trumpet because we run out of breath. Yet this shofar blast only grew stronger. I can only imagine Moses thinking, "Now this is really something. A year ago, it was only a bush that burned. Now it's the whole mountaintop!" Israel is face to face with their new Divine King and He's about to spell out the covenant terms Israel must obey as the King's subjects.

INSIGHT

The Rabbis also regard this event as a Marriage Ceremony. Here's an odd thing embedded in this event. The Israelites are to abstain from sexual relations as a preparation for meeting their God (19:15). The rabbis see this in an interesting light. Leading up to her wedding day, a Jewish bride goes through a purification process to prepare herself for her husband. Therefore, interpreting backward, the rabbis not only see this as Israel's birth as a nation but also the day Yehovah married His bride! There is a national and marital component in this event. (This is going to blow your mind later.)

For those of you keeping track at home on your Covenant Scorecard, here are the covenants that are active at this point: the Creation covenant (with all humanity), the Noah covenant (with all humanity), and the Abraham covenant (with Abraham's physical descendants, the Jewish people). Now Yehovah is going to "cut" a national covenant with Israel, the Sinai covenant. All these covenants are active together, all of them share the same basic terms, but they have basic differences as to whom they apply. More on this later.

January 22 : Scriptures Exodus 20-23

SUMMARY

We now reach the summit (pun intended) of Israel's Exodus experience at Mount Sinai, meeting face to face with Yehovah, the Lord God Almighty, and the Creator of All Things. Yehovah, Israel's new king, spells out His condensed version of the "laws of the kingdom," the commands by which Israel will live in harmony with their new national king (God) and with one another.

One way of looking at the Commandments (the Torah, the terms of the Sinai covenant) is as Israel's National Constitution. But while the U.S. Constitution is the basis of our national laws, to call God's commands laws is incomplete. The Hebrew word is *Torah*, meaning *teaching, instructions, guidelines, commands*, and yes, *laws*. The Torah that God gave to His people at Sinai is their personal and national owner's manual for life. It has a wealth of revelation about what God says is right and wrong, proper and improper, and holy and unholy. It's a shame that Christians have been taught that it's bad or obsolete because it's not. Why not? Because we get a great idea of what God's standards of right and wrong are.

When a person speaks, you learn who they are (their being) and what they want (their will), "for his mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart" (Luke 6:45). How does Exodus 20 open? "Then God *spoke* all these words..." (20:1). Therefore, God's Torah reveals who He is and what He wills. Strange, isn't it, that a significant part of the very word of God that reveals Him to humanity, has been ignored, degraded, and abrogated by those who follow His Son?

The Christian Church has been taught for almost 2,000 years that Jesus ended the Law, and the Law is bad. Surprise! *Both teachings are wrong*. Jesus did not come to do away with the Torah, but to reveal how a human being should live it properly (Matthew 5:17, see insights below). And rather than dismiss the Torah, He *totally* affirmed its ongoing operation until the End in clear and irrefutable terms (Matthew 5:18, see insights below). Even Paul says it's good, *but only if it's used in line with its purpose* ("But we know that the law is good, provided one uses it legitimately," 1 Timothy 1:8). That purpose is to guide people on how to walk with God and with one another, to live out the righteousness our heavenly Father has graciously and freely given us through Jesus's atoning death. So, yeah, Christians who believe the Law/Torah doesn't apply to them are in error. And just as Israel is face to face with the Lord, confronted by the way He wants them to live, so are Christians today. Only now rather than God speaking from Sinai, it's Jesus' telling us to follow His example, which includes lining up our lives with God's negative (Thou

shalt not) and positive (Thou shalt) commands. Oh, and there's this from Jesus, "If you love me, you will keep my commands" (John 14:15). To which the Christian replies, "But...but... but... that's Jesus' commands, not God's commands in the Torah!" Jesus' commands *are* His Father's commands, "If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, *just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love*" (John 15:10). Finally, keeping God's commands is *how* we show our love to God. And I should mention one more thing. "Showing love" to one's covenant partner isn't about gushy feelings. "Showing love" or loving one's covenant partner means in the ancient world context, *remaining faithful to the covenant terms, I.e., obeying them in thought, word, and deed*. In other words, what Jesus is saying to His disciples is this, "If you want to show your covenant faithfulness to Me, you'll obey My commands as I show my covenant faithfulness to My Father by obeying His commands."

There is so much more to be said, but we'll leave it right there except for one more thing on this, "The Law no longer applies to us" thing. The 10 Commandments which so many Christians fight for in the public square? Yeah, that's the entire Torah boiled down to 10 commands. And Jesus' affirmation of the greatest command, "Love God and love others, too" is the Ten Commands boiled down to 2 commands and welded together as 1 command, just to make it easy to remember. You can't reject God's Torah while embracing the 10 Commands because they are the same thing! 'Nuff said.

How did the Israelites react? *They freaked out!* After all, who wouldn't? Who wants to stand at the foot of what looks like a volcano threatening to erupt? But this is more than a physical event. This is a mind-blowing spiritual revelation, a spectacular intrusion of the spiritual realm into the physical realm. When the spiritual realm encounters the physical realm, there's often a dramatic reaction. Since Moses has encountered God before (see the burning bush, plagues, personal encounters, and discussions), he's not so shaken. But the people sure are! They push Moses forward saying, "We don't want to die! You talk to Him. Then you tell us what God said, okay?" Therefore, Moses goes to God who gives him two commands up front. 1) You've seen the real God so, forget about other gods or making idols to represent them and, 2) You'll need an altar for sacrifices. This is how you build it. Why an altar? Because the Sinai covenant is a blood covenant. Blood seals the deal. By using the blood covenant procedure, both sides are saying, "May I die if I break this covenant!" God did this with Abraham (Genesis 15:10). By the way, since God can't die, He will never break His covenant with Abraham. It will forever endure! Pretty cool, huh?

Chapter 21 dives into God's commands. These are directions that will guide human interaction in ancient Israel's day. I'd like to point out the importance of *context*. Because

of what God allowed in ancient times, some commands will apply to us, and some won't... on the surface. Yes, we don't own slaves today. But Christian businesspeople have employees. Many of the principles regarding slaves are great wisdom for employer-employee relationships. Nor do we kill people who break the Sabbath. BUT I'm convinced that God does reveal how important it is to set apart time to focus on Him every week and rest. I believe every command *does* have something of God's will in it that can be properly interpreted and properly applied for us today. So, let's take a quick look at some of the society commands in this chapter.

Commands re: "slaves." The key is, "When you buy a *Hebrew* slave." The Torah says you can *never* enslave a fellow Hebrew. A closer look reveals this "slave" is a servant who has indentured his/her service to another Hebrew as a way to get out of debt. In the Sabbath year (the 7th year cycle), the servant is to be released. But if the servant wants to remain in the master's employ for life, he can willingly adopt "bondservant" status. Hey, it's a job and provision guaranteed for life! In another case in this section, a Hebrew servant is a young woman who is serving another family on a "trial basis" to see if she is fit for marriage. It's a pre-marriage arrangement. As you read through the text note the protections for the woman and her family. And although the ancient Israelites allowed for multiple wives, *all* the wives must be properly cared for equally.

Commands re: persons and personal property. A word that comes to mind when I read through this is *responsibility*. The perp is to be held responsible for their actions whether major or minor. Another thing that jumps out is that the severity of the punishment reflects the severity of the crime in God's eyes. So, a question to mull over after reading this chapter is, "Why is striking or cursing a parent or kidnapping someone worthy of capital punishment?" Also, take time to reflect on the restitution aspects of these commands.

Chapter 22 continues with more societal commands regarding theft, crop protection, property protection, seduction, commands with the death sentence attached, protecting the vulnerable, and respecting God. Again, please note the restitution required for violations. This is simple responsibility and accountability even in cases of seduction (22:16-17). The scenario is that a man seduced a woman. Let me be blunt. Sexual intercourse is the "seal of marriage" in the ancient world. Entering into marriage as a virgin is extremely important. To seduce a virgin just to use her is fraud. Therefore, the fraudster must back up his seduction by marrying her or paying the bride price if the dad refuses to have the jerk marry his daughter. The choice is up to the father and the seducer has no say in the matter. Boy, would that ever shake up our society today! Go ahead and

take a moment to process how that would affect men-women relationships. Our conclusion is the sex and marriage link are very important to the Lord.

As stated above, the severity of the punishment reflects the severity of the crime in God's eyes. Keep that in mind as you read 22:18-20. Think about that as you read through verses 21-26 as God reveals His heart for the vulnerable in society and His command that we don't take advantage of them, but rather help them. Verses 27-31 show that what belongs to God, His name, and his leaders, are not to be talked bad about. The firstborn of people, animals, and flocks belong to the Lord. Most of all, His people belong to Him. Eating found food (roadkill or mauled by an animal) may not seem like a big thing but throwing it to the dogs is God's statement that people are to be more than animals. They belong to the Lord and they are to be holy, set apart from the people who act like animals in the rest of the world.

And look! More commands! In chapter 23 we see God's heart and standards for honesty and justice. For the first time, God gives His people national holidays which are coordinated around the agricultural cycle of the Middle East, specifically the Promised Land. As you read, note the number seven and how it's used as a "rest point" for many things – rest for people and animals (7th day of the week) and land (every 7th year). This is followed by the 3 big Feast celebrations: Unleavened Bread/Passover (late-March/early April), Shavuot (a festival of the wheat harvest, aka Pentecost, late May/early June), and Sukkot (a Festival of Ingathering, aka Tabernacles, a year-end harvest, late September/early October).

Finally, the Lord tells the Israelites that He will send His Messenger (that's what the word *angel* means) with them as His representative. With the Messenger's help, the Israelites will defeat their enemies, claim their Promised Land from the Canaanites, and be blessed by God. In fact, there is something really interesting here. God tells them their land grant (as Yehovah promised to Abraham) will stretch from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River. The big caveat? They *must not* worship the gods of the nations.

INSIGHT

1) When Jesus said, "Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17), He was using a rabbi idiom. "Abolish" doesn't mean "do away with" and "fulfill" doesn't mean "do away with" as many Christians interpret or understand His saying. To "abolish" the Torah means to either misinterpret it or misapply it. To do so would be harming God's intention and is regarded as "destroying" God's word. On the flip side, to "fulfill" means to properly interpret and properly apply God's Word. So, what Jesus is saying has nothing to do with throwing

out the Torah. Rather, it has *everything* to do with affirming the Torah as the ongoing source of instruction, direction, guidance, and yes, law, for God's covenant people.

2) When Jesus said, "For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished" He wasn't referring to the Torah's end after He completed His work on the Cross. Did heaven and earth pass away when Jesus died and rose again? Nope. What Jesus was affirming was the Torah's continuance *until God's whole work was completed on earth* including Jesus' return, the 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom Age, Satan's defeat, and humanity's total restoration to our Edenic state. That's when heaven and earth will pass away, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for *the first heaven and the first earth had passed away*, and the sea was no more... Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new..." (Revelation 22:1, 5a). Why will God's commands end at that time? Because humanity will have reached its God-ordained perfect state and will no longer need His commands to keep us on the right track. His way of human life will be an ingrained part of our nature. Until then, not the smallest letter of the Torah (the *yod*, a "y") or the tiniest ornamentation of a letter (called a *tittle*) will be done away with, contrary to what misinformed Christians may believe.

January 23 : Scriptures Exodus 24-26

SUMMARY

In chapter 24 we come to the covenant ceremony. Moses is the go-between. Aaron, Hur, and a few others represent the nation (24:1-2). The people agree to the terms, "We will do everything that the Lord has commanded" (24:3). Moses writes down the covenant terms (the commands) and sets up twelve pillars to represent the twelve Israelite family lines (24:4). Young men, likely firstborn sons from the 12 tribal families, prepare the sacrifice (24:5). Moses takes half of the collected blood and spatters the altar (24:6). The application of the blood is "signing" the covenant. The altar represents God signing the covenant. Then Moses reads the terms, and the people agree (24:7). The Israel side of the covenant is signed by spattering the people with the blood (24:8). Done and done.

Israel is now sealed into a blood covenant with the Lord. *This is not a light thing.* If Israel breaks the Sinai covenant, from this point onward Yehovah has the covenant right to punish them for their disobedience. However, disobedience isn't the end of a covenant. Disobedience is simply a "covenant-in-violation" situation that can be restored or reinstated if the violating party "makes it right," usually through confession, paying a cost, etc. Some of the various sacrifices the Lord will command function as a way for the Israelites to atone for disobedience (sin or violating God's holiness) as a nation and as individuals. Hebrews puts it well, "According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22).

With the Sinai covenant sealed and operational, Moses and the rest of the leaders have lunch with God (24:9-11). I'm being serious here. Covenant meals are often observed to express the peaceful relationship covenant partners have with each other. This is an awesome experience because Moses and the leaders get to sit in God's presence as the veil between heaven and earth is lifted momentarily! After lunch, God invites Moses up the mountain for a special one-on-one session with Him (24:11). Joshua goes along with Moses (at least part way) and the leaders return to the people in case some disputes need to be settled among the people in Moses' absence (24:14). Moses waits 6 days and on the 7th day (yes, there is the number 7 again!) Moses heads up Mount Sinai into God's fiery glory (24:16-18).

Moses is commanded to receive an offering from the Israelites and he receives blueprints for God's dwelling place on earth, the Tabernacle. That's right! God's plan is to live with His covenant people. No surprise, really. That was our original state with God (Genesis 1-3) and will be when God restores everything to the way it was in the beginning (Revelation 21:3). In the meantime, God lived with humanity in the Tabernacle, in the

Israelite Temple, in human form as Jesus, and now He lives in us via His Holy Spirit. God doesn't want to be separated from His beloved human children. So, for this first step, God instructs Moses to collect the materials necessary to build the Tent. Then God starts parceling out the blueprints for the Tent. The fact is, God showed Moses what it was to look like (Exodus 25:40, Hebrews 8:5) and Moses relayed the info to his builders, to whom we will soon be introduced.

First, there is **the Ark**. This was a box, plated with gold inside and out, with a solid gold lid on top. The lid had two cherubim looking downward with their wings outstretched forming a type of seat. This was to be God's earthly throne. When Moses or Aaron were allowed in the tent to meet God, they saw His glory hovering over the Ark. Next was **the Table of Showbread**. The Table of Showbread was built to hold two stacks of leavened bread, six wide loaves per stack. For those of you who are good with math, this makes 12 loaves. The bread represented the Israelite clans and God's promise to provide for them. It was also a reminder to them that He alone is their Provider. Again, like the Ark, the Table was made of wood and overlaid with gold. The third item in this chapter is **the Menorah**, the 7-branched lampstand that was to give light inside the Tent. It was hammered out from a single ingot of gold! The branches curved outward and upward in successive extensions. Do an internet search on "gold Menorah" and you'll get the idea. All the accouterments to trim, light, and put out the oil lamps were also made of gold.

Now for **the Tabernacle** itself (chapter 26). The Tabernacle was the Tent within the courtyard. Again, search "God's Tabernacle" and you'll see a plethora of artists' renderings to get the idea. The first layer of the Tent was of a fabric spun with white, blue, purple, and red fibers. It was spun with pictures of cherubim woven into it. Yes, there's a reason for this. The Tent was God's throne room on earth. It was designed to describe His throne room in heaven. What's in His heavenly throne room? You got it! Cherubim. Over that was a dusky covering of goat hair joined with bronze clasps and over that was a layer of red-dyed skins and a covering of fine leather. That's just the top part of the Tent. The sides were wooden boards as supports, overlaid with gold with rings attached for carrying purposes. The supports were joined side by side at the top and bottom corners with silver bands and set in silver sockets. The supports were stabilized with gold-covered crossbars. Finally, a curtain was to be woven to separate the Ark from the rest of the inside of the Tent. The Tent was divided into two rooms – the Ark room (Holy of Holies) and the room with the Table, the Menorah, and the soon-to-be-described Gold Altar of Incense (Holy Place). A curtain was to be woven and placed at the entrance to the Tent as its doorway. What a picture so far! Imagine being a priest in this tent, a gold-covered box with a heavenly covering, lit by the Menorah, and with God's glory shining

just on the other side of a grand curtain. And all above you, pictures of heavenly beings that serve the Living God. Amazing. But wait! There's more!

INSIGHT

The Lord does nothing by accident. Have you noticed the type of metal Yehovah called for in the parts of the Tent closest to Him? Gold! Nothing but pure, priceless gold. It's not until we move a bit farther out and away from Him that the construction metals move to silver, then bronze. Gold is used to represent God's purity, holiness, and extreme worth. Silver is still pure and precious but of lesser worth. Bronze, a mixture of tin and copper is often used with items that are used in connection with sin and cleansing. Yehovah is teaching His people about His holiness and our sinful condition. Before we approach the Living God, we must be purified from our "mixture and low value" brought about by our sin so that we can be like gold before Him, pure and holy as He intended us to be.

January 24 : Scriptures Exodus 27-29

SUMMARY

In chapter 27 we move outside the Tent to the Courtyard. Here we find instructions for the Bronze Altar, the Courtyard, and the Menorah Oil. **The Bronze Altar** is the altar used for the sacrificial service to atone for sin, guilt, and purification. **The Courtyard** was a 75' wide and 150' long curtained area which housed the sacrificial area and the Tabernacle/Tent. The Courtyard walls were fashioned from linen fabric suspended from wooden rods by silver hooks and bands fixed between wooden posts resting on bronze bases. The Menorah in the Holy Place was to be kept burning continually. **The Menorah Oil** for the lamps was to be specially made from the purest of olive oil. According to rabbinic sources, the purest oil is *in* the olive. To get this purest oil, the olive must be gently squeezed *just enough* to produce a drop without any of the olive's "flesh" becoming a part of the finished product. Doesn't that say a lot about us? We learn our best lessons when the Lord gently presses on an area of our lives that is at that moment, the focus of His attention. He presses us just enough to see the oil of the Holy Spirit's anointing (His work) come out of our lives, but without our flesh becoming a part of the finished product.

As we move to chapter 28, the focus shifts. If you have a Tabernacle for serving God you need a staff to operate it, right? In this chapter, we read about the design and materials used to make the official garments of the High Priest, God's main man. In this case, Aaron, Moses' brother. As Aaron went about serving the Lord, the Lord wanted his glory to be reflected from him. The sun is glorious, and the moon reflects its splendor, right? So it is with God and His representative. The garments Aaron will wear are striking in color, very similar to the colors used in the Tent's construction. Hmmm, could God be making a correlation between a physical tent and the tent of our body within which He wants to reside?

So, what do we have described here? Some very curious things. **The Ephod** is made of finely spun linen and blue, purple, and scarlet yarn. It was to be embroidered with gold thread. On his shoulders, there were two stones upon which were inscribed the names of the Israelite tribes. In effect, Aaron is carrying the tribes upon his shoulders as their representative before God and Aaron was God's representative to the Israelites.

What follows is the Breast Piece. **The Breast Piece** was a rectangle folded into a square, making a pocket. This pocket was attached to his shoulders and waist by gold chains. The front of the Breast Piece had inlaid stones, again representing the Israelite tribes by name.

Not only did Aaron carry the responsibility of Israel upon his shoulders, but he also carried them on his heart.

The pocket contained **the Urim and Thummim** (*oo-reem'* and *toom-meem'*). We don't know what the Urim and Thummim were, but the context reveals they had something to do with sharing information from God for making decisions.

Next came **the Blue Robe**. This was a very expensive garment as the blue dye was costly to obtain. It came from a gland found in the *murex* snail. It would take a *tremendous* number of snails to harvest enough fluid from the gland to dye the fabric needed for this robe. When the fluid was collected, it was initially clear. As it oxidized, the fluid would turn yellowish, then green, then blue, and if left alone long enough, it turned purple. Its value made it desirable (and affordable) for only the extremely wealthy or royalty. And now you know why Lydia, the seller of purple in Acts 16:14 was such a rich woman! Getting back to the robe, it was finished off at the top with a rolled collar (so it wouldn't tear) and at the bottom with alternating woven pomegranates (of blue, red, and purple) and gold bells around the hem.

Aaron's **Turban** was made of linen cloth with a frontispiece gold plate tied to it with blue yarn. The gold plate had the words *Holy To The Lord* as a reminder to all, especially to the High Priest. that as Israel's representative Aaron *must* maintain his state of separation unto the Lord. Infractions were not taken lightly as we'll see later. This is a great lesson that we should never take our separation unto the Lord for granted.

Finally, simple **white Linen** garments were to be made for the rest of the priests who assisted in the Tabernacle service.

In chapter 29 the Lord instructs the consecration (setting apart for service) of the future priests for their duties. In a nutshell, they were all to be washed, clothed with their special garments, make sacrifices to cover their sin, have themselves dabbled with oil and blood, and prepare, then eat a consecration meal before the Lord. This process was to be performed for a full seven days. Aaron and his sons could then be released into service.

The chapter ends with an interesting special offering called **the Tamid** (*tah-meed'*), also known as **the Daily or Continual offering** (29:38-46). It required two lambs, one offered at 9 am and the other offered at 3 pm. These two offerings began and ended the daily sacrificial service, the first and last sacrifices of the day. The Tamid was a whole burnt offering, indicating the Tamid as a sin offering (Leviticus 1) and was the highest sacrifice performed on behalf of all Israel. It was a symbol of Israel's constant devotion to God and

was to bring Israel before the Lord's remembrance. All the priest's spiritual service was contained within these two sacrifices. Here's a tidbit! Both Daniel (Daniel 11:31, 12:11) and Jesus (Matthew 24:15) say that the stopping of the "Daily" (the Tamid) *will be the major sign of the Antichrist's revealing and Jesus' soon return*. But the sacrifices are no longer being offered. How can someone stop something that's not happening? *Only if it begins again!* Keep your eyes on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for God's timing of the End.

INSIGHT

Here we have instructions for consecrating a priesthood. The important question is this: Who is going to serve as God's first priests? Why, Israel's firstborn sons, of course. In Exodus 13:1-2 God already claimed every firstborn son for Himself. Yehovah intends to start His priesthood with the firstborn sons. After all, they step into the function as the family "king" and "priest" after the father dies.

January 25 : Scriptures Exodus 30-33

SUMMARY

Up to this point, we have Tabernacle construction instructions in chapters 25-27 followed by priesthood garments and installation instructions in chapters 28-29. Now the spotlight swings back to the rest of the Tabernacle instructions. **The Incense Altar** of verses 1-10 is a golden altar that stands in the Holy Place in front of the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place. It has only one purpose – to burn incense and make fragrant clouds before God. It was 3' tall, and 1.5' square. Aaron was tasked to burn incense every morning and evening at the time when he trimmed the lamps on the Menorah (30:7-8). **The Incense** to be used was a unique blend specifically for this altar' function. Any deviation from the formula or any unauthorized use (such as personal) would bring serious consequences. That's how special this incense is to the Lord.

Atonement Money. This was the Lord's way of taking a census. ½ shekel = 1/5 troy oz. silver today. Only 20-year-olds and up were required to bring the half-shekel (30:14). Notice that everybody is treated equally regardless of social or economic status (30:15). There is no preference for rich or poor, leader or follower. The tax was to support the Tabernacle and its functions. The Jews were still observing this Torah command in Jesus' day (Matthew 17:24-27).

The Bronze Basin (Laver). According to Rabbi *Rashi*, the Basin was a large, bronze water-filled bowl from which the priests would wash their hands and feet before serving. The purpose was for sanctity rather than cleaning up. Set on a copper base, it had two spouts at the bottom. Exodus 38:8 tells us that the bronze Basin and its bronze base were made from the mirrors brought by “the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.” The women of that day did not have glass mirrors as we do today. They used highly polished brass and other metals.

The Anointing Oil (30:22-33) required 37.5 pounds of fine spices and 1 to 2 gallons of fine olive oil to make and it was mixed as a perfumer would into an extremely fragrant and holy oil to smear on people, the Tabernacle, and its furnishings, and mixed with some sacrifices. Anointing is a picture of something, or someone being set apart solely for the Lord's use or purpose. Woe to the person who used the sacred anointing oil in an ordinary way! Cut off = excommunication, dead to the community (30:38). If you use what's set apart to the Lord, you were to be set apart from the nation.

The Head Honchos of the Building Crew. At this point, we have the Tabernacle blueprints and instructions for the priesthood. All we need are the contractors. *Voila!* The Lord chooses Bezalel and Oholiab, two special guys with an incredible skillset. What's more important, they're filled with the Holy Spirit (31:3)! This is one of the few cases where the Holy Spirit rests on a human being who isn't a prophet, priest, or king. But they've been chosen for the Lord's work, and they need the Lord's help to accomplish His work. Sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it? Between them, they can do everything needed to construct the Tabernacle exactly as God showed Moses.

Suddenly, the instructions in the text stop! Why? Because the Lord wants to tell His people not to work on the Sabbath. This is very appropriate because something as exciting as building the Lord's Tent could be done 7 days a week. But God doesn't want to burden His people. They get time to rest and during that time, they can turn their thoughts about the work of the Lord to focus on the Lord of the work.

Chapter 31 finishes with Moses receiving the stone tablets "inscribed by the finger of God" (31:18). Yes, there is a part of me that wonders if the stone tablets were still warm. Inquiring minds want to know.

And now comes an epic fail. This one will have repercussions for at least 3,500 years to come – the Golden Calf incident (32:19-35)! Many times, we fail the Lord because we grow impatient or feel insecure. This is what happened to the Israelites that motivated them to make the Golden Calf. Moses went up Mt. Sinai to talk with Yehovah and he stays up there longer than the people thought he would. Has their leader died or abandoned them? They didn't know. What they do know is they want a leader, *any leader*, to be with them to take them to their destination. How do we know this? Because they say to Aaron, Moses' brother, "Come, make gods for us *who will go before us* because this Moses, *the man who brought us up* from the land of Egypt – *we don't know what has happened to him!*" (32:1). Insecure people often grasp at anything that appears to give them security, even if it is wrong to God. The people want a leader who will lead them forward and demand Aaron make gods for them. Aaron readily agrees and this confuses us (32:1-2), doesn't it? Was Aaron really that quick to turn away from God or was he trying to pacify the people until Moses returned? After all, there were over a million people plus animals in the campground. Regardless of the answer, Aaron asks for gold earrings from the wives and children, and fashions them into a Golden Calf.

Why is this Calf their choice for a "god to go before them"? Perhaps this is the people hearkening back to their familiarity with Egypt. According to *The Meaning Of The Golden Calf* by Jonathan Lipnick (Israel Institute of Biblical Studies, December 5, 2016), "Why did

both Aaron and Jeroboam decide to erect golden statues of specifically of calves? Why this animal and not another? Likely, this has to do with a conscious attempt to imitate a common practice found in the temples of many of the nations in the Ancient Near East. For example, in Egypt, it was common to worship a calf idol known as *Apis*. In some cases, a king was depicted seated upon the calf as a way of emphasizing his divinity. Perhaps Aaron's purpose in creating a golden calf was not to create an idol of God but a platform upon which the invisible God would sit." Aha! Now we see the likely connection. Moses was the mediator between God and the Israelites who led them on their way just as the Egyptian bull *Apis* was the intermediary between *Ra* (represented by the disc carried between the bull's horns) and the Egyptian people. Fearing Moses' demise, the people looked for another mediator between them and Yehovah, a person to represent God to them. Moses out, Calf in.

Aaron declares a worship service for the next day, followed by a feast (32:5). See? Church services followed by a lunch have a long biblical precedent. However, *this* church lunch turned into quite an uncontrolled, wild party. I'm much too shy to describe the kind of activities implied by vs. 6, "and got up to party." Suffice to say, it was not wholesome family fun.

Back on the mountain (32:7), the Lord clues Moses into what is going on with the Israelites in his absence. The people have corrupted themselves and fallen back into the Egyptian idolatry they had left just over three months earlier. Idolatry is going to be an ongoing problem for the Israelite nation for the next 1,000 years. Idolatry easily enters our lives and is difficult to remove because it caters to our human desires and gives us permission to "party" and celebrate what and how we want to. Sadly, this often runs counter to God's will and the good things He has for us. But self-worship is tough to break because like the Israelites, "we are a stiff-necked people," i.e., stubborn! God's proposed solution? Wipe them out and start fresh with Moses!

But Moses is having none of that. Like a good intercessor and true mediator, Moses passionately pleads with Yehovah to stay his hand of righteous judgment. Moses presents two arguments. 1) Why do this and give the Egyptians a reason to smear Yehovah's name and reputation? And 2) "You swore to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that you would give them an uncountable number of descendants. Isn't this breaking Your promise by doing the opposite?" (32:11-13). God relents.

Moses then heads down the mountain, meets up with Joshua halfway down, and reaches the "Israelites Gone Wild!" party at the foot of God's holy mountain. Do you get the horrible juxtaposition here? In a fit of anger, Moses smashes the tablets of the law,

signifying the Israelites' breaking of their newly minted covenant with God (32:19). Next Moses takes the Golden Calf, grinds it to powder, and makes the people drink it (32:20). Why? It could be a "You want it, then consume it as it has consumed you!" It could also be a way of destroying and defiling the idol in a way that the people will eventually... well... excrete it. Either way, it's a vivid lesson. Next, Moses turns to his older brother, Aaron, for an explanation for his part in the debacle. Just like we all do, Aaron shifts the blame to others. "You yourself know that the people are intent on evil" (32:22). Aaron explains he *had* to cooperate. That's why he called for gold, threw it into the fire, and *POOF!* – *out jumped the Golden Calf, just like that* (32:24)! Right. Moses isn't buying it. He places the blame right where it belongs – on Aaron, who let the people get out of control, and on the peoples' lack of restraint. So, if Aaron isn't going to pacify the party-goers, then someone must. Moses calls for help and his kin, the Levite tribe, comes to his side and steps up to the task. Nothing short of executing several of their fellow Israelites was shocking enough to quell the crowd (32:28).

Moses returns to God on Mount Sinai to finish his intercession now that the community has been brought to its senses. Yes, Yehovah forgives the nation of their sin. He won't wipe out the whole community, but His judicial punishment of a plague still afflicts the guilty (32:35).

God reassures Moses that He will fulfill His promise to give the Israelites the Land promised by covenant to their Patriarchs, but He won't go with them. He'll send some sort of divine being, a messenger, to be with them in His stead (33:2-3). Wouldn't this be a terrible thing for a child to hear from his or her dad? "Yes, I'll take you to the park, but I won't go with you. I'll send a stranger to be with you." How terrifying to the child! No fatherly presence or protection or security or companionship? And Yehovah even lets them know it's for their safety because, "If I went up with you for a single moment, I would destroy you" (33:5). This isn't because He's an angry and vindictive God, but it's the nation's demonstrated weakness toward sin that would invite His judgment. Sometimes, God's separation from His people is His mercy. He doesn't want it that way. After all, our Heavenly Father provided Jesus to open the door to us coming home to His arms. But sometimes our unrepentant sinful thoughts and attitudes invite His punishment more than His embrace. Thankfully, our Father lovingly provided a way to stay His hand and open His arms!

So where will God be? Over at the Tent of Meeting (33:7). Notice the tent was set up *outside* the camp. God wasn't kidding. An Israelite had to separate themselves from the community and come to Him because He wasn't going to be in their midst for the time being. Moses communed with God in the tent-like a mini-Mount Sinai summit on the

plain. And here's a really interesting thing! Even though Moses left the Tent of Meeting, his right-hand man, Joshua, would remain in it (33:11)! Yehovah is already mentoring a replacement for Moses who will be chosen and set in place in 40 years.

The chapter concludes with Moses back in God's presence, pleading for His merciful help. Moses knows he has to lead the people and Yehovah will send a divine "rep," but Moses doesn't know who that is. Plus, Moses asks to understand the Lord's ways better, because knowing God's ways is knowing God better than just by His deeds. This is reminiscent of Psalm 103:7, "He revealed his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel." There's a big difference. Knowing someone's *deeds* reveals *who they are*. But understanding someone's *ways* reveals *a relationship* that knows the other person and how they'll act and respond. Moses is seeking more intimate knowledge of the God Who is leading them. God mercifully agrees to Moses' request by affirming His presence will indeed go with Moses and the Israelites (33:14).

Moses goes on to give the reason why he's asking for Yehovah's all-important presence. 1) God's presence shows His favor. 2) God's presence is the mark of God's people. The Lord again agrees with Moses for Moses has found favor and He knows Moses' name. Again, knowing someone's name is knowing who a person is inside – who they are, how they act, and what they are called to do in life. Since the conversation is moving in an increasingly favorable and intimate direction, Moses goes for all the marbles. "Please, let me see your glory" (33:18). Yes, Moses is boldly asking for the deepest revelation of God that humanity has had since the Fall. Amazingly, God says He will grant Moses' request! How will Yehovah reveal His glory to Moses? "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim the name 'the Lord' before you" (33:19). Moses won't be able to see God's face, because only the holy ones in God's realm can do that. There's been no atonement for sin, yet. Therefore, for the time being, "You cannot see my face, for humans cannot see me and live" (33:20). God will indeed "proclaim His name," that is, give Moses an unimaginable level of revelation of Who He is and What He's like, but it will still be incomplete. But for Moses... it will be enough.

INSIGHT

Sometimes, God's separation from us is His mercy. When Adam and Eve were in a sinless state, they were allowed to be in God's presence. After they sinned, they were banished from the immediacy and intimacy of the Lord's presence that they had known. Had they interacted with Him as before, God's holy presence and justice would have struck them physically dead. But with the God-provided separation, He still interacted with them and others as we saw back in Genesis and up to Moses' day. But the full revelation of God was too much for people. When God's glory interacts with humanity's sin, judgment and

death occur. Case in point: Ananias and Sapphira lived in a godly community saturated with dedication and holiness to God (Acts 4:31). And yet, they chose to lie to God by lying about the property they had sold. They wanted to look good and yet they wanted to retain some of the money for themselves (Acts 5). Both of them were struck dead for sin in God's presence (Acts 5:4-5, 9-10).

The greatest act of God's judgment and subsequent death came when the holy and sinless Jesus took upon himself our sin "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God's judgment fell, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matthew 27:46). Then we were given mercy, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!" (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Many Christians cry out for revival and an increase in God's physical presence in our church services and meetings. When none comes, we're disappointed. But maybe it's God's mercy because he doesn't want to kill us with his glory? I'm convinced there is a correlation between how much sin we hold onto and how much of God's presence we experience. The Lord must prepare His people for an increase in His presence. Maybe the Lord grants enough of His physical presence in our quiet times and corporate gatherings to prompt us into repentance because He wants to bless us with even more of Himself. As we release more sin, He grants us more of Himself. The reverse is true. Most revivals die when sin intrudes. Let's be like Moses. Let's ask for more of God and prepare ourselves to receive Him.

January 26 : Scriptures Exodus 34-36

SUMMARY

Chapter 34 opens with Moses at the base of Mt. Sinai with Yehovah. Yehovah instructs Moses to carve out new tablets just like the first ones he broke. Again, the Lord will inscribe the baseline covenant laws (the Ten Commands) with His finger. This is a good sign. Although the people broke their newly instituted covenant with God, signified by the shattering of the tablets, God forgives them and reinstates the covenant because of Moses' intercession. Moses then climbs Mt. Sinai, carrying the blank tablets to meet with God and see His physical form. As promised, the Lord reveals His physical presence to Moses and passes before him, not allowing Moses to see His face. However, God does something remarkable. God proclaims His name. Again, names in the Bible often reflect who a person is and/or how they act. The string of descriptors the Lord pours out are stunning:

"The Lord—the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation" (34:6-7). Take a moment to ponder each name. There is a plethora of teaching on the internet about what they mean and how we can apply them. But for now, let the Holy Spirit speak to you about how they apply to your relationship with the Lord.

What's Moses' reaction to God's presence? He hits the floor in worship just like so many others as you will see throughout the Bible. God's presence is often overwhelming and when human beings encounter His glory, they usually fall apart, faint, are stunned, and otherwise deeply affected, some for life. The Apostle Paul, for example. Moses again pleads with Yehovah to accompany them along their path to the Promised Land. Isn't it fascinating? Moses yearned for God's presence to go with him and the people just as the Israelites yearned for a leader to "carry" God's presence with them. In the Israelites' case, it was an Egyptian god that carried the Egyptian "supreme god."

God agrees to Moses' request! Yehovah reiterates commands the Israelites will need to follow once they enter their Promised Land. The land is theirs and theirs alone. They are not to make treaties with the inhabitants. Why? Treaties (covenants) established relationships. God knew the Israelites would be tempted to embrace the gods of the Canaanites if they formed friendly relations with the spiritually corrupt people of the land. On the contrary, God's command was to purge the Canaanites from the land so that their influence would not be intermingled with the Israelites. Gardeners understand this

when they turn over a new patch of ground for a garden. They use herbicides or lay down a plastic sheet to destroy not only any remaining weeds but also seeds of undesirable or noxious plants. It's the same principle with the Israelites "sterilizing" the land from its corrupt, ungodly Canaanite tribes. The rest of the commands in chapter 34 can all be categorized as laws that keep the Israelites focused on God as they obey them.

It's quite amazing that this whole process of Moses seeing God and receiving His commands took 40 days and nights. Not eating food for so long is one thing. But not drinking water is quite another! God supernaturally sustained Moses during his summit meeting. When Moses descends Mt. Sinai, it's obvious he had soaked in the Lord's presence. His face was glowing! I don't know about you, but that's just freakish! Can we just say that when God revealed Himself and His Torah to Moses it was an "illuminating" experience? (Thank you. I'll be here all week.) This so unnerved the Israelites, Moses put a veil over his face to cover the radiance until it faded.

The next two chapters are easy to summarize. Moses gets to work with the Tabernacle's construction, but not until after relaying God's command to not work on the Sabbath. This is interesting because God not only has the Israelites start from a resting point, but they are to rest and refresh themselves every 7th day. Why? Because the Sabbath refocuses God's people on who is their Creator after a week of creating through work and who is their ultimate Provider after providing for themselves all week.

God calls for an offering of materials to build the Tabernacle as well as the enlistment of skilled artisans. That's the people part of the process. God's part is to give Moses the "blueprint" of the Tabernacle's design and a special gift of two extremely talented men, Bezalel and Oholiab, who are anointed by the Holy Spirit to guide the work and teach the assistant artisans how to do it.

One of the best little bits in this section of chapters 35-36 is that Moses had to restrain the people from bringing any more contributions for the work of the Lord. Wow! How many pastors and elder boards would *love* to have that problem? It shows what happens when God's people get really excited and truly commit themselves to the Lord's work. The section ends with detailed design details. Yes, they seem tedious, but some incredible insights and lessons can be taught. Don't gloss over the details! For you, new readers, simply absorb the information, find some pictures of the Tabernacle on the internet, and begin to grasp the immensity and awesomeness of the project. Spoiler alert! According to Hebrews 8:5, what Moses is building is a representation of God's throne room on earth! Why? Because when it's done, God will take up residence with His much sought-after

physical presence resting over the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies and the cloud of His presence over the Tabernacle tent.

INSIGHT

God's presence is beyond a person's ability to endure as was pointed out above. His whole being is beyond our ability to understand. The only way to get to know the Lord is through what He reveals both in word and deed. One way God reveals Himself is through various names reflecting various things He is or can do. He is known as Yehovah-Yireh, "Yehovah provides." He is known as Yehovah-Nissi, "Yehovah, our banner (leader, protector)." Since we are unable to ascend to God's realm nor see Him face to face, God chose to descend to us, to reveal Himself in a way we could grasp through a form we can relate to – a human form, Jesus. Not only that, He took on a name that revealed *why* He did so. Jesus' name is Yeshua, based on the Hebrew root word *yasha*, which means "to save." Jesus' whole being and His mission were about saving humanity from sin and bringing them to a place of salvation called God's kingdom. So, the Lord gathered up physical materials like human cells and created a physical body, a human tabernacle, so He could dwell with His people. What an amazing God we embrace!

January 27 : Scriptures Exodus 37-40

SUMMARY

We start our reading today with chapter 37. In this chapter, Bezalel continues his construction of the Tabernacle with his team of helpers. In the previous chapter, the tent that houses the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place was constructed. Now it's time to add the furnishings. The first furnishing to be constructed is the Ark of the Covenant. You probably know what it looks like because, let's face it, almost everybody has seen Raiders of the Lost Ark. It's basically a wood box plated with gold with a massive lid on top called the Mercy Seat. It's made of 1 hammered sheet of gold to serve as both a lid and a seat. The seat is constructed with two cherubim facing down toward the lid with their wings pointed toward each other. Why is this a seat? Because it serves as God's throne on earth in the middle of the Israelites camping in the wilderness. Remember, God told Moses to build it according to the pattern he saw on the mountaintop. According to the book of Hebrews, the Tabernacle is a copy of things that find their reality in heaven. When you look at the entire Tabernacle, it is a reconstruction of God's throne room in heaven. As God's throne is the holiest of all Holy Places in the cosmos, the ark is in the holiest of all Holy Places on earth. God's presence hovered over the ark.

Now we move from the Holy of Holies to a "less" holy area called the Holy Place. You'll notice that as we move away from God's presence the degree of holiness begins to drop. This doesn't mean sinful. It simply means the closer we get to God the greater the intensity of holiness. The next furnishing to be made is the Table of Showbread. Once again this is acacia wood overlaid with gold. The Table of Showbread represents God's constant provision for Israel. It illustrates God's care for his people, whether in Eden, or on a fallen earth under his care, or in heaven. Note that there are rings to help the Levites carry these furnishings from place to place. If you're standing in the Holy Place looking toward the most Holy Place the Table of Showbread is positioned to the right, and the Menorah (which we'll talk about shortly) is to your left. The Golden Altar of Incense is directly in front of you on your side of the curtain that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

Speaking of the Menorah, this is a 7-branched, 6-foot candlestick. It's hammered out of one ingot of gold. Can you imagine being the crew carrying the Menorah whenever the Israelites were on the move? So, if the Table of Showbread is God's physical provision what does the Menorah stand for? Many rabbis speak of it as showing God's light to the world which is his word. Didn't God say through Moses, "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God?" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Therefore, in the Holy Place, we see a picture of God's physical and spiritual provision for mankind.

And lastly, the Golden Altar of Incense is constructed. Once again this is a wood box plated with gold, three feet high a foot and a half wide, and a foot and a half deep. It had just one purpose – burning incense before the Lord. It has an excellent application to us today. The Table of Showbread signifies our physical provision, the Menorah is God's provision of his word and spiritual revelation, and the Incense Altar is our worship and prayer back to Him. We see in the Book of Revelation that incense depicts the prayers of the saints (Revelation 8:3-4). So, in a manner of speaking, the Holy Place is our place of communion with the Lord where we receive from him and give back to him in unending praise.

Now in chapter 38, we move even farther away from the Holy of Holies to a place outside the tent of meeting. This is the courtyard. The first item constructed for the courtyard is the Bronze Altar of sacrifice. There is a fascinating understanding found in the materials used between the courtyard furnishings and the holy furnishings. The Ark, the Menorah, the Altar of Incense, and the Table of Showbread are made of gold. When we get to the courtyard the Altar is made of bronze and the Basin for washing is also made of bronze. Why? Because the Bronze Altar of sacrifice and the Bronze Laver deal with the forgiving and cleansing of sin. Holiness calls for purity. Gold is a pure metal. Bronze is a mixture of copper and tin. Sin is often depicted as a mixture of metals, or a single metal with impurity in it that needs to be super-heated to separate the metals and skim off the dross. Dross is a metaphor for sin. So when we look at the construction of the Tabernacle and the articles that furnish it, we see we start in an impure state on the outside and as we approach God, more and more purity is required. This is the truth of heaven. That which is sinful and impure must be atoned for through blood, for there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). That's the Bronze Altar. Then comes the cleansing from sin that's represented by the Bronze Laver. After forgiveness and cleansing, the priest is in a purified state so that they can enter the Holy Place to worship God. The ultimate goal is to reach God on the other side of the curtain in the Most Holy Place. However, no one on earth at that time could become so holy that they could dwell in God's presence. Only the High Priest on the single Day of Atonement was allowed by God to see his holy presence, but only after an extreme purification ceremony.

Ah, but things are different now. With our Heavenly High Priest, Jesus, making His "once for all atonement" for us believers, (Hebrews 7:27) we can now "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). Using the Tabernacle as our

picture, we (individually and as a body of believers) have now become God's Tabernacle. We have the altar of forgiveness (the Bronze Altar) and the Bronze Basin of cleansing within us through Jesus' blood and the Holy Spirit's cleansing power. With Jesus resident in us, we receive provision for all we need in life, both physically and spiritually, and we return our praise to him and our prayers. Best of all, his presence resides in us even more intimately than it ever was above the Ark in the Holy of Holies. There is coming a day when we will be away from the body at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). That will be the day we will see the Lord without limitation. And at the resurrection of the dead, we will receive our rebuilt bodies, body 2.0. After that, we will live in God's presence on earth. But for now, we settle for the picture of the Tabernacle.

As a side note, when you do the math, the amount of gold used in the Tabernacle's construction comes out to approximately 2,193 pounds of gold. That equals 31,980.5 troy ounces. Given the spot price of gold in recent days of around \$1800 per troy ounce, the price of the gold used for the Tabernacle would be approximately \$57,564,000. And you complain about your church building fund?

And now we move to chapter 39. God's temporary, mobile home on earth has been completed. It's time to outfit His staff. The garments for the High Priest were spectacular! Read the text and soak in the beauty of the blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finally spun bright white linen. Note in vs. 3 that they hammered out thin sheets of gold and then Bezalel cut threads from them to interweave with the multi-colored fabric. Remember, the High Priest's garments were called *vestments of splendor*. They were intended to bring him beauty and to reflect God's glory.

The first piece of his vestment was the Ephod. Read through the text carefully to see how it's designed. Then go to the web and search for a picture of the High Priest's garments and see how close you were in your imagination. The Ephod is like an apron, and it's attached at the shoulder with two onyx stones. The stones were memorial stones for the Israelites. In a sense it fulfills Isaiah 9:6, "and the government shall be upon his shoulders."

In front of the Ephod, a unique Breastplate was worn. It was made in a rectangle, folded into a square, and then attached at the shoulders and waist by gold chains. This created a pocket. As pointed out before, the Urim and Thumim were kept in this pocket to help the High Priest make decisions for the Israelites. The Breastplate was decorated with twelve individual stones inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

What follows is a beautiful blue Robe of a seamless knit design. Remember, this was not to be torn. The collar was reinforced to prevent tearing. Around the bottom of the Robe were alternating bells and knit pomegranates as decorations. The text says that tunics of fine woven linen were prepared for Aaron and his sons. These were their undergarments, their basic covering. The boys were resplendent in their bright white tunics, while Aaron glowed with color and flashed with gold.

The last item to be made was a metal Diadem or Head Plate inscribed HOLY TO THE LORD. This plate was tied with a blue cord onto Aaron's turban. It's stunning when you think that the government is upon his shoulders, the tribes of Israel are on his heart, and holiness is on Aaron's mind. What a great picture, right? Sounds kind of like Jesus, doesn't it?

Moses goes on his inspection tour at the end of the chapter. He examines the Tabernacle and the garments. They were all created just as the Lord had commanded Moses. It reminds me of God at creation examined everything he created and proclaimed it "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

The final chapter for today, chapter 40, is setting up the Tabernacle. This was done on the 1st day of the 1st month beginning the 2nd year of Israel's freedom from Egypt. This would be Aviv 1 (Nisan 1) of the Hebrew/Jewish/Bible calendar, somewhere late March, Early April. They were just two weeks short of their Passover evening flight from Egypt.

Moses sets up the Tabernacle and once that's completed, God's glory not only covers the tent but *fills* the tent. It was so intense no one could even enter it!

And did you catch the end? The cloud, God himself, determined when and where the Israelites were to move. This required their absolute obedience because if an individual missed his movement or they moved ahead of him they would die in the wilderness. Perhaps this is a good life lesson for us as we move through the Wilderness of Life?

INSIGHT

When I first read about the pomegranates and the bells alternating along the edge of the High Priest's robe, I thought it was barely interesting. It was a nice bit of accessorizing, so to speak. However, as so often is found in the Bible *there is a pattern*.

In first Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul begins his teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 13, he speaks about the primacy of love. And then in chapter 14, Paul returns

to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, primarily practical teaching on the proper use of speaking in tongues and the gift of prophecy.

What unlocked the pattern for me was Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 13:1, "If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a *noisy gong* or a *clanging cymbal*." Or a bell? And what is love? According to Paul in Galatians 5:22, *love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit*. And in chapter 14 we return to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the audible or spoken gifts. If there's no love, then speaking in tongues and prophecy is just noise, like a clanging cymbal... or a bell? Do you see the pattern? Bell, fruit, bell – 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14. Isn't that cool?

January 28 : Scriptures Leviticus 1-3

SUMMARY

We now move to the third book of the Torah. Many Christians avoid the book of Leviticus because of its many “tedious” laws about sacrifice and ritual purity. I get it. However, we are all called to be priests before the Lord (Revelation 1:6). Therefore, there is much we can learn from the priestly book of Leviticus if we allow the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and our hearts to his word.

In this book, God gives specific instructions to the priesthood, comprised of the Levites of the tribe of Levi. Therefore, the name of the book in the Christian scriptures is Leviticus. However, the Hebrew name is *Vayikra*, meaning “And he called.” In Judaism, the first five books of the Bible are separated into weekly segments called a *parashah*. Each *parashah* is divided into daily segments called a *sidrah*. The name of each weekly *parashah* is usually taken from the first few words of that portion. Both the Hebrew Bible and many English translations start with, “And he called,” *Vayikra*, from *qara*, “to call” in Hebrew. This sets the tone for the entire book.

God is calling his people to live with Him. However, there is this little thing called sin that stands in the way. If sin is not removed, then the sinful, impure person cannot approach a holy, pure God. The only thing that can clear the way is for the sin barrier to be removed. The only way sin can be removed is via a payment of death. We learned that in Genesis 3. The consequence of sin is death. Period. Paul affirms this in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death...”. The payment for sin is the surrendering of one’s life, i.e. death.

But if God required each person to pay for their sin, all mankind would die. *No one* would be left (Romans 3:23). However, God set up a principle from before creation that allows a *substitute* for a person. It is the death of something or someone else rather than the sinner. The book of Leviticus shows us the principle. “*For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement*” (Leviticus 17:11, italics author). Hebrews 9:22 says, “And almost all things are cleansed with blood, according to the Law, and *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*” Under the Sinai covenant, God allowed an animal's death in place of a person's death. This was God's way of covering over sin until the permanent solution under the New Covenant.

At the Last Passover (what we Christians commonly call the Last Supper) Jesus revealed that he would be the one-time, permanent sacrifice for sin. Jesus said, “for *this is My blood*

of the covenant, which is being poured out for many *for forgiveness of sins*" (Matthew 26:28). As for Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice for our sin, Paul wrote, "In Him we have *redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our wrongdoings*, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Redemption, in part, means the restoration of a person who was once estranged from the family. Therefore, every person can now point to Jesus and say, "Father, that's my substitute. Please forgive me and call me to yourself. Draw me near and restore me fully to your family!"

Leviticus is the book that details how the priesthood should operate the sacrificial system. It also reveals the difference between holiness and unholiness, purity and impurity, light and dark, the sphere of life and the sphere of death, what is of God and not of God, and what is sacred and what is profane. Keep this sphere of life and sphere of death idea in mind. It's crucial! If anything of this sphere of death touches the sphere of life, judgment falls. If sin touches holiness, judgment falls. But even when judgment is called for, God allows a sacrifice to "take the hit" rather than His child. Pretty loving and merciful, right? Even more, God teaches us how to enter the sphere of life and stay there by observing His moral guidelines and not be "contaminated" (spiritually) by sin, which causes God to separate us away from Him until our sin is erased. Understand?

The word for sacrifice in Leviticus is *corban* meaning "to draw near." God is not a bloodthirsty god who demands a blood sacrifice to slake His perverse thirst. The sacrifices are not for God. *The sacrifices are for us*. They are designed to help us draw near to God and for God to draw us near to Him. God is a God of righteousness and justice. The penalty for sin, impurity and the violation of His holy standards must be paid. However, God's love compels Him to reach out and save His children from the curse of death that we have brought upon ourselves. And so here in Leviticus God gives the procedure, the principle, and the commands to maintain holiness. Our goal and His call are this, "For I am the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so *you must be holy because I am holy*" (Leviticus 11:45).

As we talk about the sacrificial system, allow your sanctified imagination to take over. Read carefully what is done, what is being offered, and why, and then add the pictures in your mind to what you're reading. This will make the text come alive! If you find your eyes glazing over, take a break. Shake your head and then move back into the text. Many of my students find this book to be an incredibly enlightening book once they dive into it.

Here is a summary of the sacrifices according to gotquestions.org:

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- There are 5 main types of sacrifices in the Old Testament: The Burnt Offering (*Olah*), the Grain Offering (*Minchah*), the Peace or Fellowship Offering (*Shelamim*), the Sin/Purification Offering (*Chatta'ah*), and the Trespass Offering (*Asham*).
 - The Voluntary Offerings – Burnt, Grain, and Peace Offerings.
 - The Mandatory Offerings – Sin and Trespass Offerings.
 - **Burnt Offering** – An atonement for unintentional sin or as an expression of devotion or commitment to God.
 - **Grain Offering** – A First Fruits offering. It's an off-the-top gift to God of your field's or orchard's produce. It's to thank God for His provision and undeserved favor toward the person bringing the sacrifice.
 - **Peace Offering** – An offering to thank God for a general or specific blessing, and to fellowship with Him. Also, to fulfill a vow. It's a shared meal with the Lord, the priest, and anyone else who was invited to join in.
 - **Sin/Purification Offering** – An offering “to atone for sin and cleanse from defilement. A purification offering.”
 - **Guilt/Restitution Offering** – An offering to atone for unintentional sins that “required reimbursement to an offended party, and also as a cleansing from defiling sins or physical maladies.” It's also brought when someone desecrated something holy, i.e. touched, ate, or used something specifically dedicated to God.

Chapter 1 begins with the *Olah*, the Whole Burnt Offering. *Olah* means “to go up” or “ascend” and it refers to the fact that the entire sacrifice *goes up to God in flames*. It's also looked at as a means to lift one's spiritual condition to a higher level. The sacrificial animal can be from the herd (cattle), the flock (sheep), or birds depending on a person's economic standing or by a specific command. The value doesn't matter, for the sacrificial system was to be available for all. The burnt offering was the highest order of sacrifice in the Old Testament ritual. It was used for several sacrifices such as the Daily (Tamid) sacrifice, the Sabbath offering, and Feast offerings. In personal cases, the *Olah* was entirely voluntary, which makes sense. To force a person to give negates the idea of coming near to God with an open and willing heart. While parts of the other offerings are given to the priests as their “pay” for food and supplies (animal hides, meat, grain, oil), no part of the *Olah* is held back. It is entirely consumed by fire. It literally “goes up in smoke.” By the way, it's very useful to learn the Hebrew names for the offerings because when you read in scripture about a person making an offering, the precise name of the offering is very important to the context.

Chapter 2 address is the *Mincha*, the grain offering. This is a gift offering to the Lord, especially from a person of lower-income. This offering is a combination of finely ground wheat flour, oil, and frankincense. The ingredients can be thrown on the fire or prepared

in advance. There are five varieties of meal offerings: fine flour with mixed ingredients, oven-baked loaves or wafers, prepared in a shallow or deep pan. As a silly aside, is this the inspiration for deep dish pizza? Okay, on a serious note, vs. 1 implies that the first method is the preferred one. Notice that no yeast or honey can be a part of this offering. Why? Because yeast and other leavening agents are seen in the Bible as representing sin. Like yeast, pride puffs us up and pride leads us to sin. Yeast and honey are allowed as a first fruit (an off-the-top offering from one's produce), but they can't be used for offering dealing with sin or guilt. And what about the "covenant of salt" reference in Leviticus 2:13? Salt is something that cannot be destroyed (salt is NaCl – Sodium Chloride). Plus, salt has purification properties. Using salt for the sacrifice speaks of an everlasting covenant. Also, salt's purification properties stand opposite to the yeast/honey prohibition in the previous verse. The picture is that a sacrifice must be sinless for it to give holiness to the one who offers it. Do you see the holy vs. unholy aspect of it?

And finally, in chapter 3 we learn about the *Shelamim* offering (related to *shalom*, peace). This is a fun offering *because everybody gets to share in it* – God, the priest performing the offering, and the celebrants! It's like bringing a sacrifice to the temple and then everybody gets to sit down for a picnic dinner. In a sense, it's a Thanksgiving dinner! This sacrifice celebrates the peace and fellowship one has with God. Like the *Olah*, it can come from the herd or the flock, but we'll learn later that only a part of the animal is offered. Some parts will be classified for the priests, some for the worshipers, but *all* the fat and blood belong to the Lord! During the sacrifice process, the worshiper leans his hands on the animal, not to confess sin, but to praise God.

Now you have your introduction to the *Olah* (whole burnt offering), the *minchah* (grain offering), and the *Shelamim* (the peace/fellowship offering). Next, we'll examine the offerings that are required to atone for sin and guilt.

INSIGHT

Jesus is the totality of *all* the sacrifices. He is our *corban* (offering) that eliminates sin so we can "... near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). He is the *Olah* who was entirely consumed through death and yet he "went up" from death to life once again. He is our *minchah*, the First Fruit from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20), and Jesus is our *Shelamim*, the offering that brings us peace and fellowship with our Heavenly Father (Romans 5:1). Together, we can celebrate in His presence!

January 29 : Scriptures Leviticus 4-6

SUMMARY

Welcome to chapter four of Leviticus! It's good to see you survived chapters one through three. All kidding aside, I hope the summaries at the top helped you navigate some very unknown territory. The Bible now moves from voluntary offerings to mandatory offerings.

This chapter covers the Sin/Purification Offering (the *Chata'ah*). Why is this sacrifice important? Because holiness is *very important* to the Lord. The sphere of death should *never* touch the sphere of life. Unholiness should *never* contact holiness. If it does, death results. That which is unholy must be purified from its unholiness to draw near to God and enter His sphere of life, His holy presence, without consequence.

Notice that this offering is for the anointed priests, the community as a whole, leaders, or individuals "when someone sins unintentionally against any of the Lord's commands and does anything prohibited by them" or "so that they violate any of the Lord's commands and incur guilt by doing what is prohibited" (4:2, 13). Violating the Lord's commands causes the person to step over the line of holiness into unholiness, from purity into impurity, from clean into unclean. For that individual or group to draw near to God that person can't just step back over the line. A violation has occurred and a price must be paid. This sacrifice pays the price and imparts (grants/gives) purity to the person. The individual or group is once again in a state of holiness.

How do we know where the line is between what is holy and what isn't? By studying the Lord's word and His commands. God's person is the standard for right being and His will is the standard for right doing. Since God is holy, *any* violation of the standards of who He is and His will makes us unlike Him. In a word, unholy. Pure is holy and impurity is unholy. Life is holy, death is unholy. Ritually clean is holy, ritually unclean is unholy.

You will see as we go through Leviticus that many things in life render us impure, unclean, and unholy. On the surface, it could come from touching a dead animal, having a disease, or violating a command of the Lord. Jesus points out the ultimate source of personal unholiness and impurity comes from *under* the surface, *the heart*. "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 out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a person" (Matthew 15:11, 18). This sacrifice removes the impurity of the person desiring

to draw close to God. But we know that purity must first start in the heart, in the inward parts of a person.

Chapter 5 launches right into explanations about what was done to require a sin offering. Don't you find it interesting that the first thing listed is not speaking the truth when it's in your power to do so? Yes, lying is bad. But holding back the truth when it's required can be just as defiling. Impurity can also come by touching an animal or human that is impure. It can also come by breaking one's word. Chew on that for a while! The juxtaposition is jarring. Not speaking the truth when required or breaking one's word is as defiling as touching a carcass or something humanly yucky (unclean).

At the end of chapter 5 and into chapter 6, we reach the 5th sacrifice, the Guilt or Restitution sacrifice (the '*Asham*'), and the reasons for bringing it. Please note as you read through that there are three different occasions for which this sacrifice applies: 1) when a person unintentionally commits a violation regarding any of God's holy things, 2) when a person does what is forbidden by any of God's commands, even though he doesn't know it, and 3) when a person deceives his neighbor about something left in his care or cheats him or swears falsely about it. The common thread in these three instances is the desecration of something holy – God's holy property, God's holy people, or God's holy name. Not only must the sacrifice be offered, but the person is to give a 20% additional restitution for their infraction. I find it interesting that the person not only has to ask God's forgiveness, but their forgiveness requires restitution to make things right with God and other people.

The Lord next gives his commands for the whole burnt offering. He's not kidding about the procedure. The offering must be entirely consumed even if it takes the rest of the night. Since the sacrificial service ends around 3:00 pm, the ashes on the altar will have cooled by the early morning hours. The overnight priest makes sure the altar is cleared of the ashes and cleansed for the start of the next day's sacrificial service at 9:00 am.

The end of this chapter addresses the grain offering (*minchah*) concerning the priest's portion and for the priest's ordination, as well as the sin offering (*Chatta'ah*). Note that the sin offering is a holy offering. Only a priest in a state of holiness may eat his share, and only in a holy place. Even more fascinating is that the holiness of the offering can be transferred to another object simply by touch. This holiness/contamination transference property is very important to understand. Holiness and unholiness can be passed from one thing to another. Why is this important? Look below in the insight section.

INSIGHT

The ability to transfer holiness and unholiness back and forth under the right conditions is key to our salvation. When you understand this principle relative to the sacrifices in the Tabernacle, then Jesus' sacrifice for us begins to make even more sense. "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). In other words, Jesus took our sin and unholiness upon Himself so His Father could transfer Jesus' state of holiness and purity to us so we can stand in our Heavenly Father's presence and the Holy Spirit can live in us.

January 30 : Scriptures Leviticus 7-9

SUMMARY

Chapter numbers can sometimes be difficult things. When we start a new chapter according to the number system, it often feels like we've started a new thought. Sometimes this isn't so. Leviticus 7 is a continuation of the sacrificial laws in chapter 6. So ignore the chapter number and read through ch. 6 and ch. 7 as if it were one section.

The Lord covered more laws of the Burnt, Grain, and Sin offerings in Leviticus 6. Now He shares more on the Guilt and Fellowship offerings. You can read the specifics but note that there are very firm rules respecting that which is holy and unholy. That is, who may and may not eat it, and when and where it is to be eaten. Notice especially 7:19-21. Do you see the "transference of clean and unclean" principle? Again, God is showing there is a strict line between what is holy and what isn't holy. It's so serious that violating that line can get an Israelite excommunicated from the community!

Isn't a nice, juicy steak tasty? What makes a steak delicious is the fat. Without the fat, a serving of sirloin steak or a porterhouse is dry and, frankly, unappealing to many carnivorous people. That's why chefs and grill masters select meat that has nice marbling, streaks of fat, running through the muscle. Isn't it interesting that in chapter 7 God claims two specific things of the animal sacrifice that belongs to him – the fat and the blood? The blood is easy to figure out. The life of an animal is in the blood. Life belongs to God. Therefore, the blood belongs to God. It's a reminder to us all who ultimately gives and takes life. But what about the fat? To me, it speaks of God wanting us to surrender to Him that which is most desirable to us. On a less spiritual and more practical note, fat also provides excellent fuel to keep the altar fire burning.

The Bible closes out Chapter 7 with God's commands regarding the priesthood's portion of the sacrifice for their sustenance. Yes, it is very appropriate for those who serve God to earn their support from the people they also serve.

Chapter 8 begins with the ordination service for Aaron and his sons. Now that the Tabernacle has been set up, the Lord is putting his staff in place. This chapter is best read slowly with your sanctified imagination turned on again. The ordination process took place over an entire week and it wasn't a clean event. Part of the process involves spattering Aaron and his sons with the blood of the sacrifice and with God's special anointing oil. The Tabernacle and especially the Bronze Altar were also spattered and anointed. Yes, there's a bit of a "yuck" factor here. Visualize the process. See the blood being poured out around the altar. When the Bronze Altar finally is lit, you can imagine

the smell – a combination of a backyard barbecue and burning flesh. Not too nice. But neither is sin, right?

Chapter 9 starts on the 8th day. Aaron and his sons have completed their ordination process. With sacrificial animals in hand, the priests offer their sacrifices in full view of the people for their atonement and for the people whom they will serve. And now comes one of those cool events in scripture. The Tabernacle is ready, the priesthood is ready, and the sacrifices are in place. Aaron blesses the people, enters the Tabernacle with Moses (most likely to get the Holy Place ready), and emerges to bless the people of Israel once again. *At that moment, fire shoots out from the presence of the Lord within the tent of meeting and ignites the first fire of the official sacrificial service on the Bronze Altar in the outer court (Leviticus 9:24).* What did the people do? The same thing I think every one of us would do. They hit the ground shouting!

INSIGHT

It never ceases to amaze me how God granted the Israelites such great manifestations of his presence. And yet, the Israelites so easily fell into sin. Let's face it, many of our church gatherings are fairly sterile. We sing songs, we listen to scriptures, we pray, our pastor brings a good message, there's a closing song, and we go home. What would happen if God's presence manifested during our services as it did in the Tabernacle with the surrounding Israelites? It would probably amaze us. Okay, we would be stunned. Or we would be struck with fear and fall face down on the carpet. *But would it change our hearts?* There is only one thing that can do that and that's the work of the Holy Spirit who brings His manifest presence into us when we're saved. When our hearts are right with God, His fire illuminates our lives, consumes us as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), and lights up the world wherever we go!

January 31 : Scriptures Leviticus 10-13

SUMMARY

We've all heard about burnout from too much work. Some of us have experienced it and it isn't pleasant! Well, in chapter 10 there's a different kind of burn-out that comes from doing the wrong work. Remember what I wrote about dire consequences for doing God's work the wrong way? Well, this is one of those times. And do you remember what I wrote about God's holiness being a *very* important thing to God, so much so that violating His holy standards could get you separated from the Israelite community? Yeah, this is one of those times.

Nadab and Abihu did a proper priestly thing. They burned incense to the Lord. But there was something about what they used or how they used it that got them burned-out... literally. Because of their action, they crossed God's holy line. The unholiness of the guys' deed caused the holiness of the Lord to judge them. Here's the important principle again, the principle Leviticus repeats over and over. When unholiness touches holiness, death results. When sin mixes with God's glory, death results.

We don't really know the specifics, just that it was wrong. And evidently, Aaron knew it was wrong in God's eyes because he remained silent in the face of God's judgment. He was not allowed to grieve for his sons as a father. As God's anointed High Priest, he was to reflect God to the people. I'm sure God was sad to have to take Nadab and Abihu's lives, but there comes a time when judgment must override affection. Despite his obvious grief over his two sons' death, Aaron was in a state of holiness and had to remain so. Therefore, other family members came and retrieved the bodies for burial. We seem to get a clue about what led to the infraction in verse 9. Apparently, alcohol was involved and as we all know, alcohol clouds our judgment. It clouded the boys' judgment to the point where they were judged.

We live in an age where God's holiness is scorned. We live in a generation where the idea of God's judgment is pooh-poohed. But the scriptures were written, and the events were recorded so we would learn from them (1 Corinthians 10:11). Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, learned that lesson too late (Acts 5:5, 10). They lied to the *Holy* Spirit and died. If God did that today, I wonder if church attendance would be sparse. On the other hand, if the seriousness of God's presence were regarded, God's people would be very holy, committed, and would probably have a more significant impact on society, right?

So, here's God's holiness principle to Moses and the priesthood: **"You must distinguish between the holy and the common, and the clean and the unclean, and teach the**

Israelites all the statutes that the Lord has given to them through Moses" (Leviticus 10:10).

And yet, there is another apparent violation that follows. The holy sacrifice was burned up before the required part could be separated and eaten by Aaron and his remaining sons (Leviticus 10:17-18). So why wasn't Aaron judged? Because this was a procedural/protocol matter, not a holiness matter. His offering could have been burned without consequence because it was holy and remained holy even though Aaron didn't consume it. Therefore, no judgment.

Now onto a controversial topic for Christians – kosher food. After teaching the Torah for the last number of years, I find this aspect of the law is ridiculously contentious among Christians of various denominational backgrounds. Many will kick and scream about not being able to eat bacon *and yet totally embrace sins which God's Torah (His Word) says are an abomination!* In other words, we'll fight for the lesser aspects of the Torah while justifying violations of the greater aspects. Homosexuality and other out-of-bounds sexual expressions, for example.

What does "kosher" mean? According to the Orthodox Union Kosher website, "The Hebrew word 'kosher' means fit or proper as it relates to Jewish dietary law. Kosher foods are permitted to be eaten, and can be used as ingredients in the production of additional food items...The basic laws are of Biblical origin (Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 17)." In short, kosher determines what is or isn't food for us, i.e. *foods* and *not-foods*. Within the food category, there are clean and unclean foods. Both may be eaten, but their clean vs. unclean status will affect the clean and unclean status of the person eating them. In the Leviticus context, a clean person eating unclean food would render the person unclean. Therefore, the person must then go through a cleansing process to be able to approach God. Non-kosher food is an oxymoron because non-kosher consumables are "not-foods", i.e. not to be eaten at all.

When you read through the Leviticus 11:1-23 list, it's self-explanatory. Generally speaking, the animals, birds, fish, and insects that eat vegetation and clean things are regarded as kosher. The animals, birds, swimming things, and insects that are regarded as not kosher are often those things that are bottom feeders, things that feed on dead and decaying stuff. This is fascinating because the ancients did not know about microbiology and bacterial contaminants, only the evidence of it. God put food sources that "feed on death" as off-limits to the people. Why? Cross-contamination.

And right away when we reach this point in my Torah class, I hear the despairing cry, "But what about my morning bacon? What about Italian sausage and pepperoni for my pizza?" First, are you so centered on your desires that it would override obedience to God? Isn't that what causes humanity to fall in the first place? Secondly, the great news is there are wonderfully tasty meat substitutes today that taste very similar to pork-based products. Sure, it's not *exactly* the same as the original, but I've had turkey Italian sausage that easily competes with pork Italian sausage! But, even if there weren't satisfying options, the issue is *obeying God whether it's easy to or not*. I keep biblical kosher as much as I can. Sometimes I'm served something with pork. Well, it won't kill me and I don't heap guilt on myself. I just move on. But what about the newbie to this kosher thing? I let the Holy Spirit guide the learner. As my friend often said to me, "everyone wakes up at a different time in the morning." Therefore, I will simply lay the kosher laws before you and let the Holy Spirit speak to you.

Some would then ask, "If that's the case, then can I violate other laws such as prohibitions regarding honoring parents, stealing, lying, etc.? After all, I'm just a learner." There's a difference between God's ceremonial, civic, and moral laws. Moral laws demand immediate obedience. Ceremonial laws are learnable, but even those have consequences, such as becoming "unclean" to God. Civic laws depend on being Jewish or living in the land of Israel. There is much more to be said, but that would take an entire book.

Speaking of cross-contamination, the rest of the chapter deals with how to cleanse oneself and one's possessions after contacting an unclean object. As you will see water is sufficient in most cases. For objects that can withstand fire like pots and pans, fire is used to sterilize or "kosher" the cookware. Also, note that after washing oneself a person is declared purified when the sun goes down. Why? Because sundown is the start of a new day.

Although the kosher laws are inconvenient to many of us in the western world, they still stand as God's line "...to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between the animals that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten." Again, here is Leviticus reinforcing the difference between clean vs. unclean, holy vs. unholy, pure vs. impure, life vs. death, good vs. evil, light vs. dark.

Chapter 12 reveals God's commands for the purification of a woman after childbirth. Why would a woman need to go through the purification process? Remember God's "life is in the blood" declaration? During the birthing process, when life is brought forth, it starts with blood loss, the loss of "life." For a baby boy, the mother goes through a 40-day

purification ritual. For a baby girl, the process is 80-days total. If you've read Luke's Gospel, you've already come across this.

"When the eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus—the name given by the angel before he was conceived. And when *the days of their purification* according to the law of Moses were finished, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (just as it is written in the law of the Lord, *Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord*) and to offer a sacrifice (according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, *a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons*)" (Luke 2:21-24, italics – mine). Look at that! Two Torah laws were fulfilled regarding Jesus as an infant. The *law of the firstborn* (Exodus 13:2,12) and *the law of purification* (Leviticus 5:11, 12:8). On a purely practical note, this is a wonderful blessing that God has provided for the mom's healing after such an exhausting, physically difficult, and painful process.

Finally, we come to a *very* long chapter about skin diseases and mildew. Why are these two such a big thing? Because skin diseases and mildew are looked at as a type of death that is spreading through either a person's body or a material "body" such as cloth, leather, or a house. Since skin disease and mildew works slowly, it requires a trained eye to spot whether it is a condition that has appeared and is healing, or a condition that has appeared and continues to spread. Again, it's the difference between the sphere of life and the sphere of death. If a condition is healing, that's "life." If a condition worsens, that's "death" in action and imparts uncleanness. If a person's condition does not improve, it can result in being placed outside the camp for the safety and hygiene of those inside the camp. But this only lasts as long as the condition does. For cases of mildew, simple washing can solve the problem. If not, then the item must be destroyed. Whether it's a person or a fabric or a house, this is not a case of good or bad, this is a case of clean or unclean. Moral impurity and uncleanness are not acceptable to God. He is looking for moral purity and cleanness which are indicators of holiness.

As a help, read through this chapter while visualizing what is being described. It keeps your eyes from glazing over.

INSIGHT

Purification starts at sundown, the beginning of a new day. There are many things that we think, do, and say that are not holy. They render us spiritually impure because they are ultimately sinning. However, we have a cleansing agent – the blood of Jesus – that both forgives and cleanses us. But the picture and the principle are the same. For those who refuse to be cleansed, destruction awaits. For those who are cleansed, our cleansing is renewed every day, bringing us peace and joy. As it says in the book of Lamentations

"Because of the Lord's faithful love we do not perish, for *his mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness!*" (Lamentations 3:22-23).