

FEBRUARY 17

Leviticus 4-5

These chapters are a good exercise in Bible study. Look for words or phrases that repeat. These will go through both chapters. Also, look for *or if*... Notice also the order of those who had to seek forgiveness. It began with the leaders. If the leaders were sensitive and responsive to God, the people would follow their example. A disciple is not greater than his teacher.

Leviticus 4

The offerings described here have to do with sin that is unintentional. Another way to think of this is that it was a sin that was not punishable by death or expulsion from the community of faith.

Vs. 1-12 This offering was for the sin of the high priest. Notice that the animal has to be a bull, that the blood has to be presented in the Holy Place, and that the entire animal had to be burned. Nothing was to be eaten.

Vs. 13-21 This offering was for the sin of the nation, but not specifically for the Day of Atonement. This entire procedure was identical to that of the offering for the high priest.

Vs. 22-26 This offering was for a leader of the people. Notice that the animal was a male goat, the blood was sprinkled on the altar for burnt offering in the courtyard. When it says that the fat was burned on the altar, it means that the meat went to the priests. Notice that this "fat" isn't what you or I normally eat.

Vs. 27-35 This offering was for the common people, and it could be a goat or a lamb; but this time the animal was a female.

Leviticus 5

What stands out to me here is that sin not only cost people something (animals weren't cheap), but they had to put something to death. Practically speaking, today if this same practice were true, it might make people think twice about repeating bad habits and doing stupid stuff. The price of covering sin should remind us as disciples that sin isn't something we should get "used to."

Vs. 1-6 Now we have specific examples of the kinds of sins the common people might commit, for which they would need a sin offering to seek forgiveness. I don't think this list is exhaustive, but it gives guiding examples.

One thing that hits me was that this person realized their guilt. Realizing their guilt would be the ministry of the Spirit, but to really "realize" it would cost them something. The examples given here also suggest some instances of cleansing the conscience and some of cleansing the body.

V. 3 Mary, the mother of Jesus, had to offer a sacrifice for purification or cleansing after Jesus' birth. Obviously, Mary hadn't sinned.

Vs. 7-10 This offering is what Joseph and Mary gave. It showed they were poor, but not completely destitute. Again this was an offering for purification and not for sin.

Vs. 11-13 This offering is what you gave if you were very, very poor.

Vs. 14-19 This guilt offering seems to be a special variation of the offerings for sin and guilt. It appears that this had to do with a sin against God, which held back a portion of tithe or something due to the priests. The animal had to be a ram, and there had to be restitution of what was not given or what was lost. Then, on top of the restitution, you had to give another fifth (v. 16).

As I read this it seems to me that it would be burned into the minds of these people that when they sinned, even if it was unintentional, a life would be lost. And not only would an animal die, the person had to put his hand on its head and kill it himself. That's pretty heavy. I wonder, as disciples, if we truly appreciate the deep repercussions of sin. I know it's true of me that at times I take both sin and the Lord's death for granted. In Leviticus, God is making the people, and nation, appreciate the meaning of sin. He will also make them value their responsibility toward each other to be holy before the Lord.

Mark 2:13-3:6

Mark 2:13-28

Vs. 13-14 Levi (Matthew), the rich tax collector and socially rejected man, felt comfortable to accept Jesus' offer, because Jesus dared to face off against the religious right on the issue of "shunning" sinners. You cannot attract the lost with the message of the love of Christ, by not loving the lost. Distance of values does not mean you have to be distant from the person. You don't find a greater separation of values than between holy God and sinful man, but still, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

When I read this I always get the idea that Jesus had noticed Matthew paying attention to His teaching. By this time, Jesus had done many miracles in Capernaum. In fact, Matthew might have been there when the paralytic was healed. On this day as Jesus walked past the tax office, the Spirit nudged Him to invite Levi to follow Him.

Vs. 15-17 Apparently Matthew invited his friends to mingle with Jesus. Tax collectors were looked on as vile traitors, and sinners were "common" people who didn't know the law. *But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.* (John 7:49) It is interesting here that it was the religious people that Jesus had the problem with. He was there to be a physician to the lost and sinners.

Vs. 18-22 We saw this in Matthew's Gospel. Not all of John's disciples followed Jesus. These men were mourning that John had been imprisoned, and the Pharisees probably influenced them to be bitter toward Jesus. Ironically, Jesus reserves His first use of parables for these disciples, and His answer to them is very compassionate. If you look at the end of John 3, you will see John the Baptist use the illustration of a bridegroom with his own disciples. Apparently Jesus heard about that, and used the same illustration here to smooth their feelings. As Mark relates this event, he is showing Jesus' authority over the teaching of John.

Vs. 23-28 To put this in perspective, insert John 5 right before this event. This is why the Pharisees were now following Him so closely. In John 5 Jesus was in Jerusalem for the second Passover of His ministry. There, He healed a man on the Sabbath, and in the conflict that followed, Jesus called Himself, both the Son of God and the Son of Man. The way He used these titles is really interesting. It made the Pharisees hate Him because it was so clear.

Here Jesus states very clearly that as the *Son of Man*, He is Lord of the Sabbath and more important than the temple. Matthew/Mark/Luke have this event and the one that follows, together, meaning that's exactly how it happened chronologically. Since all three Gospels include this event, it means it was a very significant event.

Mark 3:1-6

Matthew mentions that it was "their" synagogue, suggesting that it was the home base of the Pharisees with whom Jesus was just in conflict. Some believe this man was put there on purpose as a trap for Jesus. Doctor Luke mentions that it was the man's "right" hand. The Pharisee's reaction is intense and insane. They never would have joined together with the Herodians. Sin is like that.

As disciples, if we are doing our job, walking closely with Christ in the harvest, this kind of opposition will be ours, and not just from the “unbelieving” community. Following Christ and making disciples in the harvest has to be our true reward and passion.

When you read what Jesus says in John 5, He says he couldn't help but heal on the Sabbath because He could see what the Father was doing and what the Father wanted Him to do. The Son always did what the Father did, even on the Sabbath. Even if the Pharisees couldn't see it, Jesus lived to imitate His Father. It didn't matter what the crowd thought. Jesus acted in obedience for an audience of One.

Psalm 36

There are two things I've never seen here before.

Vs. 1-4 First, the description of the man in these verses is dark. What defense do you have if this sort of secret, black-ops deceitfulness is aimed at you?

Vs. 5-12 Second, notice the repetition of *your steadfast love*. This is our true hope and refuge. Only God can know all of the things aimed at us as we serve Him in this dark time of harvest. But knowing He knows is not the only comfort and strength we have. We have something better. Our hope and joy and strength is in the steadfast love of the Lord. That's got to be enough. Lord, teach me this.

Proverbs 10:1-2

One of the things that always interests me is the connection between verses, if there is one. Doesn't the connection between verses in Proverbs seem completely random sometimes? So, is v. 2 the reason for the responses in v. 1? If so, that would kind of be like saying...

A wise son, whose righteousness delivers him from death, makes his father glad;

But a foolish son, who gains things by pursuit of ungodliness, finds no lasting value in his life and brings sorrow to his mother.

Just a suggestion.