

FEBRUARY 28

Leviticus 22:17-23:44

There are many recurring phrases in the reading today, some of which actually show the structure of the chapters. Keep your highlighter and pencil handy.

Leviticus 22:17-33

Vs. 17-25 We talked a little about this yesterday, that the people had to offer the best animals for their sacrifices. We'll see the abuse of this in Malachi at the end of the year. If the people looked at everything they had as God's provision for them, it would make this easier; yet I'm sure there were situations that arose that made giving one of these animals in sacrifice, a real sacrifice.

V. 21 I never noticed this before, but animals offered for sacrifice couldn't be branded or cut with some identifying mark of ownership. This means that people had to be thinking in advance, at the birth of an animal, whether it would be used for sacrifice or not. This would be another one of those customs that would become a part of daily life and planning.

V. 23 For a *freewill offering* that had nothing to do with sin or guilt or repaying a vow, only thanks and celebration to God, the animal could be a little off.

Vs. 26-28 This must have been a way for the Lord to give them a cultural object lesson in propriety, respect and decency. This sounds very much like not boiling a goat or lamb in its mother's milk.

Vs. 29-30 I think the reason for this was that the celebration was supposed to be fully before the Lord with no thought of taking something home. If everything was supposed to be eaten that day, it was an incentive to invite the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame.

Vs. 31-33 This is the summary that gives the statement of purpose for the passage. The people were to sanctify God, that is, be separate to Him, and make Him special; because God had done that for Israel by saving them and bringing them out of Egypt. It was all based on the love of God and their love for Him.

Leviticus 23

Vs. 1-2 These feasts are more than religious events. They are feasts and celebrations of God's salvation and grace to them. Instead of non-religious holidays like New Year's, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's, May Day, and Halloween, all of the holidays of Israel pointed to God's mercy and their salvation. Two of these feasts would be generational reminders of the flight from Egypt and their salvation. Two of the feasts would remind them of the land and provision being given to them. All of this was a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, as Israel fulfilled its mission to become a light and blessing to the nations. And remember, they were feasts, fun times, to enjoy and celebrate God's blessing to them. This is pretty cool to have this built into their culture.

V. 3 It's funny that the Sabbath was mentioned first, because this was weekly; but the interesting thing is that it is mentioned under "feasts." The Sabbath was not a fast; it was a weekly rest of thanksgiving, remembering God's care. It should have been a weekly celebration.

Vs. 4-8 There are two things here. First came the one day Passover celebration. On the following day the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread began. In the NT when it says that Jesus went up to the "feast" or the "feast of the Passover," this is what is being referred to. Notice that regardless of when the Sabbath occurred during that week, both the first and last day of the feast were to be regarded as Sabbath days; that is, on those two days they could only celebrate.

This yearly feast was to be attended by all the men in Israel to remind them of God's salvation and the flight from Egypt. It was a celebration of their salvation.

Vs. 9-14 During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the day after the Sabbath that occurred in that week, or at the end of that week, came this very special anticipation of the blessings of God. This was at the time of the barley harvest, so barley was the sheaf that was being waved. What you have then is three major events being clustered together: Passover-Unleavened Bread-Firstfruits. It almost seems like a reminder of the salvation in Egypt-salvation through the wilderness-the blessing of the land.

Notice that v. 14 has one of those recurring phrases.

Vs. 15-21 So, once that sheaf was waved, you began counting and looking forward to the next feast. You had all the males in Jerusalem for the Passover-Feast of Unleavened Bread- Firstfruits of the barley harvest. This was linked to the salvation from slavery, flight from Egypt and the anticipation of the coming blessing in the land.

So, the men would all go home. After the wheat harvest, 50 days after the Feast of the Firstfruits, they would appear again for the Feast of Weeks, named for the seven weeks after the firstfruits. This is Pentecost, when we celebrate the birth of the church and the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Notice that this feast was designed to signify fullness or completion of blessing. This was the only feast where leavened bread was offered. This signified that the flight was over and that the fullness of the promise was complete. You realize that when the Lord instituted this day, linked to and following the Passover, He already had the birth of the church and the giving of the Spirit in mind.

V. 22 Since God has been talking about feasts and harvests, He reminds the people to leave parts of their fields un-harvested, so as to provide for the poor.

Now come the fall feasts. Just like the three feasts in March, these three feasts in October are all clustered together.

Vs. 23-25 The Feast of Trumpets was a Sabbath beginning the three feasts. All of the males in Israel were required to be at the Day of Atonement, so they probably showed up here. This feast is the symbolic calling of the people to come to receive forgiveness. It's a Sabbath, but it is a feast.

Vs. 26-32 Three days later is the Day of Atonement. This day was not a feast; it was a Sabbath and the only Sabbath in their year when they had to fast.

Vs. 33-44 Five days later was the Feast of Booths. This was a feast when all the people had to make little huts to sleep in to remind them of their journey in the wilderness to the promised land. Notice that they were to rejoice and celebrate before the Lord all seven days.

What hits me is that this looks like the covenant at Mt. Sinai, the trumpet sound before the mountain calling the people, God making the covenant with them, and then God carrying them through the wilderness.

Vs. 41-43 Notice the heart of God in giving this feast. He wanted the people to celebrate His love for them. It appears that although Israel may have celebrated this feast, they didn't do it consistently nor did they make the little hand-made huts. Look at Nehemiah 8:14-17.

Both the feasts in March and the feasts in October have to do with God saving, calling, forgiving, and providing for the people. The reminder that I think is interesting is the Feast of Booths. They needed to remember what it was like in the wilderness with nothing but God to sustain them, over 2,000,000 of them.

Maybe in the western world, we need reminders like this, too, something that helps us appreciate that only God sustains us. It is interesting that most of the world celebrates Christmas and Easter. But the main celebration the Lord has given for His disciples in the harvest involves a loaf of bread and a cup of wine. If you think about that celebration that coincides with the birth of the

church and the giving of the Spirit, we can get rid of those unleavened crackers and go back to the warm loaf of bread that symbolizes the fulfillment of blessing.

Mark 9:30-10:12

Particularly now, Jesus is using every incident as a teaching opportunity for His disciples. As those who are now called to make disciples we should probably see this in two ways. First, everything the Lord brings into our lives is designed to lead us closer to Him in following Him in the harvest. Second, as we encourage and mentor others, we should have that same sense of using the stuff of life as opportunities to apply the Word and focus them on following the Lord.

Mark 9:30-50

Vs. 30-32 This shows that Jesus was now preparing them for the completion of His mission and how that would affect them. They didn't understand at all. So why didn't they ask Him? I remember in Algebra when the teacher explained something to me in front of the class and then asked me if I understood. Of course I said, "yes," but I really had no clue. Then I was afraid to ask for fear of looking dumber than I already was.

Vs. 33-37 But they weren't afraid to talk about which of them would be the next in command when He established His kingdom. They still did not believe He would die. They still could only see the Kingdom being established. It was natural for any leader to choose his "right-hand man" out of his immediate group of followers. Jesus waited until they were settled at this house, most likely Peter's, before approaching the subject.

It is interesting that at first they didn't answer Him, but eventually they ask Him (Matt. 18:1). So who was the kid? I'm thinking it wasn't a son of any of the disciples. That would have been playing into their hand. But Jesus was followed by lots of people and many women who supported them out of their means, and it might have been from one of these women. Who knows?

Vs. 38-41 In answer to John's question in v. 38, Jesus says that no one who does a mighty work in Jesus' name will be able to speak ill of Him. How do you balance what Jesus is saying here to what He said in Matthew 7:21-23, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

Apparently, motives matter. Doing a mighty work in Jesus' name and not "speaking evil" of Him doesn't equal receiving Him as Savior and Lord. I think what Jesus was aiming at here was that they thought Jesus was forming an exclusive group.

Vs. 42-50 This is a very serious warning and aimed at the disciples. In this context, I would suggest this meaning. Jesus knew there would be diversity among those who would follow Him. Salt and light are important to Him, not Jew/Gentile, educated/illiterate, spotless theology/flawed theology. At the end of this, Jesus tells them to mind their own business and bear fruit (salt in the world) and live at peace with others. To enter into theological or racial conflict with other believers, causing them to stumble and become "unsalt" (give up following) is absolutely wrong. The reality of life is that some of us have spotless theology, yet reach few. Some, in China or in Siberia or the Ukraine, are reaching people for Christ and risking their lives, yet they have very spotty theology. Some of these people are so narrow, that they wouldn't worship with us, and we wouldn't worship with them. Jesus says to His disciples to watch out and be aware of pride and arrogance. Whatever causes a disciple to feel superior and make the weaker brother stumble (read Rom. 14-15) needs to be "cut out" before it causes ruin.

I don't think we can lose our salvation, but like some of the people mentioned in Matthew 7:21, I don't think everyone I've met in church or in Christian service is necessarily a believer. If we constantly are making others stumble and lifting ourselves up, it might indicate that "Christianity" means something other to us, than Christ alone.

V. 49 I think this is referring to the judgment seat of Christ where our work in Christ will either survive or be burned away. (1 Cor. 3:12-15)

V. 50 We are to have salt in ourselves (following in the harvest making disciples) and to live at peace with others who are following Christ in the harvest, though perhaps not, in every detail, according to our particular denomination or view of the rapture.

Mark 10:1-12

Vs. 2 The Pharisees were like fire ants in Texas, always everywhere and ready to sting. There were two very different views of divorce built around two different rabbis. One view was very liberal allowing divorce for everything and the other view was conservative, allowing divorce only for unfaithfulness. What the Pharisees were interested in was trying to find out which "rabbi" Jesus held to.

Vs. 3-9 Jesus answered their question with a question about the Bible and then taught them the Bible. What a great idea.

Vs. 10-12 In the house, the disciples ask Jesus and He tells them the awful truth. In God's eyes a couple is still married after a divorce and when they remarry, as they consummate the relationship with the new spouse, they both commit adultery, breaking the covenant of their first marriage. This is messy business in a dying world where hardness of heart keeps people from being unified in God. God granted a certificate of divorce and laws regarding remarriage, but only because sin keeps us in rebellion to God. The miracle and need for oneness is built into our being, and even in rebellion to God its need for fulfillment is irresistible.

Interesting that Jesus taught them like this instead of giving a schedule and saying, "Next week, Tuesday, 2 p.m., we'll meet at Peter's porch for a lecture on *Scripture and Marriage*." That might have been forgettable, but this discussion, born out of conflict, would always be remembered, and it has been. These are good lessons for us too, as we make disciples in the harvest.

Psalm 44:1-8

Today we only get the first eight verses of this 26-verse cry for help.

Vs. 1-3 The writer, like us, looks to the past and sees the power of God in saving the people.

Vs. 4-8 Based on what he knows from the Bible, he has put his trust in the Lord.

Now comes the real drawing near to God. We see this pattern so often in the psalms and in our lives. God shows us truth and then allows us to suffer. In it all, in a heart of faith, we draw even nearer and learn the truth even deeper.

We live in this tension in following Christ. We "know" Him and we "know" the Word. Yet it is so easy in all of what happens, subtly, to think we are the ones opening doors and pushing everything forward. Then the Lord leads us into a situation where doing everything we've done before doesn't work. We can't even start gasoline on fire. And we realize it always was the Lord. Sometimes the Lord needs to dry up the well, to make us realize the water comes from Him. He alone is the One who brings fruit or success to working in the harvest. We have to be willing to get involved, but then, it is really all from Him.

Proverbs 10:19

I wish I had learned this in my 20's. Still, reading Proverbs like this, it makes you wonder some days if the Spirit isn't giving you a warning. I've had many days when something has come up unexpectedly, and this word of caution from the Lord is exactly what I needed to remember, to honor Him and stay out of trouble.