

Leviticus 22 - 27
The Priests and Their Duties
January 13, 2019

Next Week. Numbers 1-4

Proverbs 28:10. “He who leads the upright along an evil path will fall into his own trap, but the blameless will receive a good inheritance.”

Wesley's Questions for Class Meetings. #2. Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?

What does the Bible Mean?

Today we complete the *Holiness Code* section of Leviticus and the book itself. When we look back after we finish this study, I hope we will be glad we gave Leviticus its full due. That it will enhance our full understanding of God’s word to us. Remember, this section links God and society. This week deals with how the priests fit into the pictures as well as the festivals and observances. The book closes with a chapter on the de-sanctification or de-consecration of gifts or vows that cannot be kept. How can the gift be returned to everyday life?

Read. Leviticus 22: 1-9.

The priests were to respect the sacred offerings given by the people. We have learned that a portion of sacrificed foods belong to the priests. But the priests must obey God so “...they may not incur guilt and die in the sanctuary for having profaned it.” If a priest is unclean he must not “come near” donated sacrifices. First, he must wash and wait for sunset.

Read. Leviticus 22: 10-16.

A layperson could not eat any sacred food. The sacred food could be brought home by the priests but who could not eat it was carefully defined. For example, a daughter married to a layman was prohibited. Hired laborers could not eat but purchased slaves of the household could.

Read. Leviticus 22:17-25

Sacrificed animals – cattle, sheep and goats – must be without blemish. The disqualifying defects resembled the defects that disqualified priests. Those included blindness, lameness, mutilations, broken feet, itching diseases, and so forth. Only the best serves God.

Read. Leviticus 22: 26-33.

Animals could not be sacrificed until the eighth day – the age when males were circumcised? Even then the mother and newborn could not be sacrificed on the same day.

The chapter concludes with a reminder from God that the people's obedience should sanctify God as God sanctifies people (makes God and his people as one). God is the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt.

Except for an interruption to the theme in Chapter 24, Chapters 23 – 25 set a ritual calendar of sacred times and activities. From creation, events were set by "days" and creation was orderly. The calendar means that Israel will perpetuate the order. The order had roots in the ancient agricultural year.

Read. Leviticus 23: 1-8.

After six days of labor, the Sabbath is to be observed with "complete rest." The term is only used with the Sabbath and the Day of Purification. The Sabbath is not an appointed festival because it comes weekly.

Passover is to be celebrated on the day 14 of the first month and the festival of unleavened bread on the day 15 of the same month. On the seventh day of unleavened bread one shall not work *at their occupation*.

Read. Leviticus 23: 9-14.

When the people reach the Promised Land they are to bring a sheaf of barley or armful of the first fruits. After the Sabbath the priest is to hold the sheaf up. On that day burnt, grain and drink offerings are also required. One is not to eat of the harvest until after the offering is presented to God.

Wesley thought bringing our firstfruits is a life application practice. Our firstfruits are the *best* of our abilities and possessions. So our worship requires us to not only reflect about our thanks but to dedicate our best in an offering of thanks.

Read. Leviticus 23: 14-22.

Seven Sabbaths or 50 days after unleavened bread the Festival of Weeks (or Harvest) is observed. The first sheaf of wheat is offered. Each settlement is to bring two loaves of bread made from a gallon of flour as well as several animals for sacrifice. The harvest must leave gleanings on the edges of the field for the poor. The festival marked the end of the first half of the year. Today we commonly know this festival as Pentecost meaning fifty.

Read. Leviticus 23: 23-25.

On the first day of the seventh month the people were to celebrate the Festival of Trumpets – Rosh Hashanah or New Year’s Day although it is not called New Year's day in the Bible. The Biblical New Year is in the spring, but Rosh Hashanah is the spiritual new year. This was a day of rest.

Read. Leviticus 23: 26-32.

The tenth day of the seventh month was declared as the Day of Atonement (to make God and man as one) or Day of Purification. It is Yom-Kippur, the holiest day on the Biblical calendar. No work was to be done. The day was to be a Sabbath of complete rest. This was the one day of the year that the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the nation. It is a day of repentance and self-evaluation which ended nine days later with atonement and regeneration.

Read. Leviticus 23: 33-44.

The Festival (or Pilgrimage) of Booths or Tabernacles begins on the day 15 of the seventh month and lasts eight days. The people gather leafy branches and construct booths to live in. Perhaps the booths were to accommodate pilgrims. “Booths” is the Hebrew word “Sukkot” which is the first place the Hebrews camped after the exodus. Perhaps this was used as a time to celebrate the exodus and for consecration of the late harvest. It is a time of celebration.

Read. Leviticus 24: 1-9.

God commanded that pure olive oil be brought for the lamp tended by Aaron in the Holy Sanctuary. Likewise twelve loaves of bread should be brought each Sabbath to an outer room of the meeting. The offering was to God, but it was eaten by Aaron and his sons.

The bread is referred to later in the scriptures. In 1 Samuel 21:1-9, we are told that David was a fugitive from Saul. He and his men were hungry, and he came to Ahimelech, the priest. He asked for bread. There was none but five loaves of consecrated bread. The priest gave them to David. Later in Matthew 12:1-8 as well as in Mark and Luke, Jesus disciples picked grain on the Sabbath and were criticized by the religious authorities. Jesus referred to the David incident. The Sabbath was important, but Jesus desires “mercy, not sacrifice.”

Read. Leviticus 24: 10-23.

A story is inserted in the text about a son of an Egyptian father and an Israelite mother. The son is in a fight and blasphemes God. The son is apprehended and confined until God’s decision is made known. He is taken outside the camp and is stoned. God says that this is the example for blasphemers – aliens and citizens alike. Further, a murderer shall be put to death. One who kills an animal shall make restitution. One who maims

another shall suffer an eye for an eye. The law is one for alien and citizen alike.

Chapter 25 deals with Sabbath and jubilee years. The land belongs to God. To God the people are tenants. In Exodus the people are called landless. Here the people may have sold “their” land or even themselves, but we cannot be treated as slaves by *each other*.

Read. Leviticus 25: 1-7.

The people observe the Sabbath every seven days. The land is to rest every seven years. There shall be no sowing or pruning or systematic harvesting. The owner and his slaves and wild animals can gather the yield but not harvest it.

Read. Leviticus 25: 8-22. The Year of Jubilee

Every seven years of years or 49 years on the day of atonement a trumpet will sound throughout the land. It shall be a year of jubilee.

- Liberty (release) shall be proclaimed for all Israelite inhabitants (but not to resident aliens or foreign-born slaves).
- Liberty will be throughout the land. Purchased and indebted land would be returned to the owner. Indentured servants would return to their clans.

Wesley spoke of liberty. All liberty and liberation (whether political or spiritual salvation or economic) is the result of God's act of free grace.

The year was also a Sabbatical year so those rules of cultivation and gathering applied. The land is not sold or indebted in perpetuity. The land is God's. The people are “...but aliens and tenants.” The land reverted in a Sabbath year. The people worried what they might eat the next year. God promised to bless them in the sixth year, so they were provided for through the eighth year.

Some suggest that the rule was possibly conceived by, but at least used by Exiles in Babylon. They went into captivity in 587 BC and returned 49 years later in 538 BC. They could demand repossession of their lands upon their return.

The people were warned to be honest in pricing land. The sale values were to reflect the number of harvests available to the buyer.

The chapter goes on to be very specific with many examples of how land or homes in walled cities or homes in villages without walls or of the Levites could or could not be redeemed. A close kinsman's right to redeem land is discussed in Verses 25-28. The rule was acted upon by Boaz in Ruth 4: 1-6.

Read. Leviticus 26: 1-46.

This chapter is one of the great promises to the people if they follow God's ways. Verse

3, “If you *follow* my decrees and are careful to *obey* my commands . . .” It also outlines penalties for disobedience including exile from the land. It ends with promise. Even if the Israelites (or we) separate ourselves from him (the text refers to when the people are in exile), God will remember his covenants and his people when they humble themselves and make amends.

Read. Leviticus 27: 1-34.

Sometimes people vowed to give or gave things to God but could not follow through. Chapter 27 focuses on the de-sanctification of things vowed or given to God. Where appropriate equivalent values are defined.

What does the Bible mean to me?

1. In what area(s) are you giving God less than your “best”? Are you trying to just get by with offering God “leftovers”?
2. What is keeping you from offering God your best?
3. What is God saying by requiring the “first” of the harvest?
4. Where do you burn your energy? What is most important in our lives? What does this say about our relationship with God?
5. What do you think about a Sabbath year?...about the Year of Jubilee?
6. 25: 55 says that we have been bought with a price, redeemed by God to become his servants. How do we demonstrate our redemption?
7. Chapter 26 outlines reward for obedience. An abundant life comes from obeying God. What is “abundant life”? Is the doctrine of abundant life sometimes misused?
8. Have you experienced the forgiveness and restoration of God? How would you go about explaining it to someone?