

Bible Study Lesson Summary, May 17, 2020

Today's lesson includes Days 61-67 on your reading guide.

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

Lev. 15: The problem this chapter deals with is summarized in vs. 32-33, "This is the law for the man who is afflicted with a chronic flow, or who has an emission of seed, and thereby becomes unclean; as well as for the woman who has her menstrual period, or who is afflicted with a chronic flow; the law for male and female; and also for the man who lies with an unclean woman." Worrying about laws for incontinence may seem silly to us. In the time it is written it was not. Visualize what Mother Teresa was doing in Calcutta. Not every culture takes good care of those who are aged, especially back then. God was teaching the Israelites to do this, long before it was culturally efficient. Now we have a culture that is moving toward euthanizing the elderly. Menstruation is normal for healthy women during their fertile years, but they still had to deal with the fear of fluids (viruses). Again, we have to remember the AIDS crisis a few decades back to understand these precautions for men and women. Bladder control and other problems with illness and aging could be a cause of becoming a social outcast. Even normal menstruations, with its blood flow, is dangerous when you don't understand germs.

Lev. 16: In this chapter we have their concept of the scapegoat. This creature would have the sins of the people put on it and its slow death in the desert would make up for those sins. In this way the sins were removed from the people so that they would not pay the price for them. Jesus was our "sin-offering goat" (vs. 15) so we just have to go to Confession. In the movie, "The Passion of the Christ", Judas saw the dead scapegoat and thought he would have to carry the weight of the sins like the goat did. Azazel is another unique word. The footnotes refer it to the goat which may be why a goat's head is used many times as a symbol of Satan in literature. Vs. 32 says, "This atonement is to be made by the priest who has been anointed and ordained to the priesthood in succession to his father. He shall wear the linen garments, the sacred vestments..." When Jesus was crucified, they removed His linen garment, which was woven in one piece. This was a priestly garment. Its being taken off was the Father's way of showing us that Jesus had acted as the priest to offer a sacrifice, but now is becoming the sacrifice himself.

Lev. 17: Vs. 7 mentions, "and there burn the fat for an odor pleasing to the Lord." Think in terms of the smell of a barbeque. It is the fat burning that smells so good. Vs. 11, "Since the life of the living body is in its blood, I have made you put it on the altar, so that atonement may thereby be made for your own lives, because it is the blood, as the seat of life, that makes atonement." This sets up the shedding of the blood of Jesus as the Father's plan for our atonement.

Lev. 18: Vs. 18, "While your wife is still living, you shall not marry her sister as her rival; for thus you would disgrace your first wife." Obviously, they practiced polygamy, but they already saw the problems with it in terms of jealousy. Vs. 22, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; such a thing is an abomination." Some of these rules are still held by the church. The question that always comes up is why hold some and disregard others? The answer is natural

law. People like St. Thomas Aquinas did the work to figure out what we were made for and why God would have made us in this way. These natural laws will not change unless God actually changes our bodies. Our changing them will not change what the church feels is God's will that comes from this set of laws of nature.

Molech, who is mentioned in vs. 21, is the Canaanite god whose people offered to him a sacrifice by which they burned their children alive.

Lev. 19: Vs. 9-10 speaks of not being too thorough about the harvest so that there is something left for the poor to go out and get. This was their way of helping the poor, but not humiliating them by simply giving them charity. The poor had to go out and work to get the leavings. You will see the result of this in the book of Ruth. Vs. 26-28 get into some interesting practices, like divination, hair cutting, body cutting or tattoos. These are seen as bad because they are the practices of the Canaanites. So, our prayer to saints is not affected by this condemnation of divination. But Ouija are still condemned because they don't discern between saints and demons. I am sorry to say that this would not forbid tattoos, but the blood rules might. Remember that St. Thomas Aquinas, who figured much of these distinctions out, was a Dominican. They had tonsure haircuts. Vs. 31 condemns mediums and fortune-tellers because they might not be listening to God, but other spirits. I personally like vs. 32 more and more for it lets us know that we should show respect to the aged. "Stand up in the presence of the aged, and show respect for the old; thus shall you fear your God." In other words, dad still gets the recliner.

Lev. 20: Vs. 10 condemns adulterers to death, men and women. Note that this was what Jesus dealt with when faced with possibly stoning the adulterous woman. Vs. 13 condemns sodomites to death. Some people want one or both of these to be changed, most of us are glad that Jesus stopped the death sentence. As mentioned before Jesus, still saw these as mortal sins but gives us a chance for repentance. But without that repentance it becomes an eternal punishment after death, for He said they could not enter heaven. Adultery and sodomy have the same rationale in the Church's mind and laws. Sex is at least partly for procreation. When that part of the equation is removed, there will be problems coming. Vs. 21, "If a man marries his brother's wife and thus disgraces his brother, they shall be childless because of this incest." This would be hard to legislate, but does explain John the Baptist's concern with Herod.

Lev. 21: Vs. 9 about a priest's daughter being burned to death for dishonoring her father by fornication and shows why preacher's kids have such a hard time. Lord, thank you for celibacy. The section, vs. 18-21, on human irregularities, is about who can be an active priest. The Church still works with this. St. Isaac Jogues had his hands disfigured by Indians who saw him as an enemy. He had to have special permission from Rome to be able to say Mass after that. Notice that it is not saying they are evil in any way. They simply cannot represent the People of God as a priest unless they are cleared.

Lev. 22: Vs. 4, "if anyone has had an emission of seed," is another reminder of the concern of fluids but this is talking about priests so it is also about the strictness of keeping things as perfect as possible. Vs. 5 mentions touching a "swarming creature." I imagine this primarily refers to locusts which could be carriers of disease. So much of this is a reminder that we much offer the best to God. I think of the silly notion of "Fr. What-a-Waste." As if God would be happy if we

just had priests who couldn't get a date to serve Him. Just realize that if eating sacred food is limited in this way in the OT, that in the NT it is serious when Paul warns us not to eat the Body of Christ unworthily, or without confession.

Lev. 23: Vs. 15 mentions Pentecost. The apostles received the Holy Spirit on this holyday. The Feast of Booths (or makeshift tents) celebrates the harvest. Vs. 11 mentions that the priest "shall wave the sheaf." It took me a long time to understand what this could mean until I thought about doing it. If you wave a sheaf of grain the seed will be all over and basically impossible to retrieve. That is a good sign that it is for God only. Vs. 40 says that waving branches from majestic trees is a good way to show your happiness to the Lord. Think Palm Sunday.

Lev. 24: Vs. 4, "the lamps shall be set up on the pure gold lampstand, to burn regularly before the Lord." We have a version of this, the tabernacle light, by the Tabernacle in every Catholic Church. Vs. 8-9, "Regularly on each Sabbath day this bread shall be set out afresh before the Lord, offered on the part of the Israelites by an everlasting agreement." A priestly people eat of it. When Jesus referred to King David and his men eating this showbread, He opens this up to those serving the Lord, who through baptism are servants of the Lord and a priestly people. Vs. 17-21 is the famous "eye for eye, tooth for tooth!" law. Jesus preferred forgiveness because of the difference of getting to the Holy Land vs. getting to heaven. These things are mentioned as "everlasting agreements" which the church honors as a part of the New Covenant in Jesus. But now we know that, since the goal is being in the Kingdom of Heaven, God will be the judge of these things when we approach the gates of heaven.

Lev. 25: I have been told that the idea of the Sabbatical year, the Jubilee year, and the redemption of property never really caught on with the Jews. I have no verification of that, but this is one way they can even things out so the rich don't just keep getting richer and the poor get poorer. We have taxes to help with this. The popes have set up Jubilee years in the recent past, but they are not like this. They are simply dedicated to getting us reset in terms of a particular aspect of faith. Also realize that this is very different than what we think of as slavery. It is more about repaying debts than owning people. St. Paul will be dealing from this perspective later on.

Lev. 26: Vs. 14 and on is God's warning for not obeying. My Dad had a much shorter version of this chapter. "Do what I say and you will probably live a long life." Dad was forgiving, just like God, so his idea was not that He would kill us, but that we might get ourselves killed. Farming is dangerous. Vs. 44, "Yet even so, even while they are in their enemies' land, I will not reject or spurn them, lest, by wiping them out, I make void my covenant with them; for I, the Lord, am their God." Even when the people of Israel are in exile, God has not forgotten them.

Lev. 27: Vs. 30 and on, the Book of Leviticus ends with a reminder of tithing, a priest's dream. The Old English root of the word tithe means a tenth. I have to presume from other references on one-tenth being offered by Abraham and vs. 32 saying to offer every tenth animal, that the word tithe is an accurate translation.

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 63: A prayer of Jesus at the trial. Vs. 10, “But those who seek my life will come to ruin; they shall go down to the depths of the earth! They shall be handed over to the sword and become the prey of jackals! But the king shall rejoice in God....” The prayer for violence always bothered me when reading the psalms. I wanted to be more forgiving and so be like Jesus. But as I have mentioned these are the prayers of Jesus so the question is whether Jesus praying for them to be condemned or not? The answer is not easily proven one way or another. Jesus preached repentance. I know that destruction was obviously the result of many sinful acts. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 66 and some believe it was because so many Jews did not accept Jesus. Others just think it was because God didn’t need it anymore because Jesus replaced it. But we do not even know if those people were condemned, for we don’t know if they repented before death. But the thing I had to remember as I cringed at these violent words in the psalms, is that, without repentance, we will be condemned.

Psalm 64: This psalm is certainly one that Jesus would have prayed during His Passion.

Psalm 65: By speaking in the plural Jesus is bringing us into this prayer. Vs. 1, “To you we owe our hymn of praise...”

Psalm 66: This psalm sounds like Jesus is trying to rally the troops, encouraging them to praise the Father. Vs. 6b: “Therefore let us rejoice in him who rules by might forever...” I personally don’t know what burnt offerings or holocausts He brings to the house of the Lord so I’m not sure of vs. 13-15, which includes, “I will bring holocausts to your house...” This is what King David did. Jesus was a sacrifice Himself but was not burned, so it is one of the few times it doesn’t seem to connect perfectly as a prayer of Jesus.

Psalm 67: A psalm of praise and petition in which Jesus is praying for us.

Psalm 68: This long psalm is about God’s actions with us. I love vs. 6: “Father of the fatherless, defender of widows; this is the God whose abode is holy who give a home to the forsaken, who leads prisoners out to prosperity, while rebels live in the desert.” Vs. 21, “Our God is a God who saves; escape from death is in the Lord’s hands.” Vs. 29-32 are prayers of petition and vs. 33-36 are prayers of praise.

Psalm 69: This is a prayer of Jesus but He is not drowning in vs. 1, “Save me, God, for the waters have reached my neck.” These waters are the waters that symbolize chaos, that are described in Gen. 1:1, so Jesus is describing the chaos that He is experiencing. Vs. 10 is what is quoted in John 2:17, “His disciples recalled the words of scripture, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” Vs. 22 foreshadows Mt. 27:34, “They gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall.” But notice vs. 29, “Strike them from the book of the living; do not count them among the just!” This is different than in Lk 23:34, “Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.” But the footnote I have for that verse in the Gospel of Luke is that this part of the verse does not appear in the earliest Gospel manuscripts. What that would mean would be that some will not be going to heaven. “Father forgive them..., might also just be referring to some who do not

understand, like some of the crowd. The hard-heartedness of the High Priests might be another matter.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 4:23-37: Vs. 25-26 are a quote from the first verses of psalm 2. They weren't accepting the king then either. By vs. 31 their prayers are answered and more of them receive the Holy Spirit. Then we get another mention of the community life. This time we get some details because it is all about sharing. Each parish and Catholic organizations like Catholic Charities, help with this now.

Acts 5: Great gifts and signs have come to the people so great things are expected. Ananias and Sapphira think they can con Peter. It doesn't go well. Vs. 12-16 mentions even more signs, which bring a backlash from the bigwigs again. This is a pattern for the church. The apostles are arrested and put in jail. An angel gets them out. This slows the bigwigs down.

Acts 6: The first half of this short chapter is about the first deacons. Notice the ordination was by the laying on of hands. Paul talks about laying hands on Timothy to make him a bishop. This was not a simple servant job, but truly meant to be an ordination. We now have a papal commission set up to study the possibility of having women deacons. Because it is an ordination, it is unlikely to accept women deacons. Stay tuned.
The second half of the chapter is the beginning of the story of the first martyr, Stephen.

Acts 7: Stephen gives a great summary of God's work with the people to save them. After all, Acts 6:5 said, "They chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the holy Spirit... In vs. 23, He mentions that Moses was forty when he killed the man. In vs. 30 it says that forty years later he saw the burning bush. And we know that he spent forty years in the desert. That is how we know that Moses was 120 years old. In vs. 55-56 we hear an account of the first near-death experience: "But he, filled with the holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 8:1-24: Now we are introduced to Saul who will become Paul. Everyone hid except the apostles. Vs. 1b, "On that day, there broke out a severe persecution of the church in Jerusalem, and all were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." This might be when Mary started to convince John to move to Ephesus, or vice-versa. She was with them from Good Friday and Pentecost. The apostles had hidden on Good Friday and were now over their fear. Philip does miracles in Samaria and in vs. 13 Simon the Magician starts to believe because of Philip. In vs. 14-17 we have the beginnings of Confirmation. Obviously, Simon did not have pure motives at first but ending up proving himself.