

Bible Study Lesson Summary, May 10, 2020

Today's lesson includes Days 54-60 on your reading guide.

I had a short presentation on the purpose of law in God's plan. Rules and laws are made because something went wrong. So they are put in place so it won't create the same problem again. God works in the same way. He saw the progression of sin starting with Adam and Eve and gave the Commandments. As people were dying unnecessarily in the desert, he gave them the purity laws; like don't eat pork, shellfish, roadkill, wash your hands, keep those with open sores separate until there are no more open wounds, etc. These prevented more deaths. These laws also made the Israelites seem ahead of their time in terms of civilization. The surrounding tribes and nations were mostly governed by the whims of the dictator or king of the time. God, in giving these laws to the Israelites is giving them stability, a set of laws they could count on so that they would know how to act for the most part. Obviously a bad leader could still cause problems but it was by far better than the neighbors. By the time Jesus came along, he changed many of the laws concerning purity because they were not going to be as big a problem for the future. He made all food clean so we can eat pork and shellfish, but I still don't recommend roadkill.

The laws in the Book of Leviticus are of a particular class. They have to do with pleasing God and not just the safety of the people. As you will see, they are very particular. What is very interesting is how much of these rules still affect how we try to please God with our worship.

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

Notice that 'Leviticus' has to do with Levi or the priestly class. This book is about priesthood. Much of the Letter to the Hebrews is foreshadowed by this book.

Lev. 1: Every culture that I know of, that has a god figure in their tradition, has sacrifices. We are always trying to please god. God is showing them that sacrifice is important. He does not allow blemished or damaged sacrifices. These sacrifices must be offered over and over again because they are not perfect. That perfect sacrifice will only come when the people are ready to understand that Jesus is the one perfect sacrifice. Several times in chapter one it mentions washing the inner organs. (vs. 13) Having butchered animals I know this is not a random washing but to wash the fecal material from the intestines so it will actually be a sweat smelling oblation to the Lord.

Lev. 2: Notice that vs. 4 is already focusing on unleavened bread. In the 1970s, some parishes were starting to make their own unleavened bread, to make it more realistic than the hosts we use. Some were adding honey for taste. Verse 11 will tell you where the church looked back to in order to decide if this was a good idea or not. "Every cereal offering that you present to the Lord shall be unleavened, for you shall not burn any leaven or honey as an oblation to the Lord." My guess of why the bread needed to be unleavened for it to be a sacrifice was that it was no longer pure. It had bacteria, or yeast, added to make it more palatable for human consumption. God just wants the pure wheat and eventually pure grapes.

Lev. 3: In vs. 1, these “peace offerings” might be for a blessing of a wedding or other celebration so it could be male or female. The other offerings all had to have been male. God seemed to be focusing the responsibility of sin on the men; or from the beginning of time to the fullness of time on one man, Adam the cause of the first sin and then Jesus replaces Adam to atone for all sin.

I’ve wondered why, as in vs. 17, “They shall not partake of any fat or any blood.” The blood was seen as life force, which should not be mixed in God’s plan, because would change how God wanted us to see creation. Each of His creatures is good as He makes us. If we consume the life force of another creature, it is saying that we want to be partially something else. This is the case until we could have our blood mixed with the blood of Jesus. That would raise up our life force. The blood of animals would lower our view of ourselves. The only thing I can figure out with the fat is that God was worried about their high cholesterol. Since it no longer applies in New Testament times, this might be the case. I don’t know of any other reason not to eat fat. Have any of you heard of any other ideas?

Lev. 4: In vs. 20, “Thus the priest shall make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.” (also referred to in vs. 26, 31, 35) This is repeated again and again. The need for forgiveness for offenses against God’s law and the role of the priest in dealing with the atonement of sin is a very important part of how God wants things done. The price for sin for a priest, the whole community, or a prince was a male animal. That was because, like Jesus would, they represent others and not just themselves. The price for a private person (vs. 27-28) could be a female animal. In my personal thoughts I wonder if this was to foreshadow individuals seeking Mary’s intercession (female), whereas the community approaches God through the Eucharist (male).

Lev. 5: In verse 11, “If he is unable to afford even two turtledoves or two pigeons, he shall present as a sin offering for his sin one tenth of an ephah of fine flour.” Lk. 2:24 infers that the offering that Mary and Joseph gave was two doves when presenting baby Jesus. So it is an offering typical of poor people, but not the poorest of the poor. I bring this up because there are Theologians who are starting to claim that Joseph would not have been poor, because he was a middle-class worker. That doesn’t fit the culture. Manual laborers were not paid well. Verse 14-15 shows that the missing of “sacred dues” is more important than other sins and demands a ram as sacrifice. That means it is a big deal.

Lev. 6: Almost everything that is sacrificed to God is to be burned. But in vs. 11 “All the male descendants of Aaron **may partake of the unleavened cereal offerings**. That is why Jesus made us a “priestly people” through baptism so we could partake. When a child is baptized, Sacred Chrism is put on the top of their head to tie them into Christ mission as Priest, Prophet, and King. Vs. 15-16 confuse the issue because it seems to reverse the previous laws and makes it seem that **not even the priests can eat the bread**. Since it has to do with the “anointing” of a priest, it might have to do with Holy Thursday when “the anointed” or the Christ was the sacrifice and did not partake of it, and this is a perpetual ordinance for all time. This reemphasizes the idea that I would think most people would agree with; that Jesus did not receive Communion at the Last Supper. So He would not have received the bread that He changed into His body. Also, Jesus said He would not partake of the cup until He drank it new in the kingdom which for Him is as He died on the cross. Scott Hahn says that last cup was the

cup of fulfillment, which was why Jesus said it was finished after He was offered the wine mixed with myrrh.

Lev. 7: Much of this chapter sets up the share that the priests are to receive. This is partly what they live on. Many priests still depend on stipends for special events like weddings and funerals, etc. In most countries they also receive a salary like we do here in the U.S.A. The bishop even gets a stipend for each Confirmation he does in a parish. The parish takes care of this.

Lev. 8: This elaborate ordination ceremony is a reminder of how important the priesthood was to these people and to God. Everything that the people did wrong, they had to go to the priest, who would make a sacrifice to atone for the sin. Everyone had to deal with God in this way from peasant to prince. I've mentioned the ritual washing and its foreshadowing of the washing of feet. You also have the vestments, the anointing, and the mitre here. Note in vs. 14-15, that the priests laid hands on the bullock. For Reconciliation priests extend their hand over the person. For ordination the bishop lays hands on the one to be ordained. This is all the foreshadowing of Holy Orders and Reconciliation.

Lev. 9: At the end of the ordination ceremony (vs. 23-24) the glory of the Lord was revealed. Today the glory of the Lord has actually been seen, especially as expressed in the Gospel of John, for he says the glory of the Lord is the death or sacrifice of Jesus which proclaimed His love. It is all about the Father receiving the appropriate sacrifice, livestock in the OT, or His Son in the NT.

Lev. 10: The first verses of this chapter are a reminder that the priest had to do things correctly or he would be punished. In the case of Nadab and Abihu death was swift. These sons of Aaron did not follow the law. This might be a good time to mention that there is a difference in the death penalty from the OT to the NT. God showed in the OT how deadly each sin was in His eyes. Punishment came soon to make sure everyone understood what God was angry about. In the NT these sins are still deadly so we call them mortal sins, but God's mercy allows for the sinner to repent. If they don't repent, then it is eternal death in hell. The problem for some people, this delayed punishment that they cannot see yet, makes them complacent. In vs. 14-15, notice that since these priests were married and had families, their families would also partake of the priestly portions. Also notice that it is important for the priest to eat his part of the sacrifice to complete it. Just like receiving communion completes the crucifixion.

Lev. 11: As the footnotes mention, these laws may not be based on great science but they are the best hygiene information that they had and they took it very seriously. Being a person with a shellfish allergy I appreciate the restriction in vs. 10 from eating water creatures without fins.

Lev. 12: These are the instructions that Mary and Joseph followed for the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple.

Lev. 13: It is important to realize that the Jews were concerned about the health consequences of bodily fluids. It did not matter to them whether they came because of normal activity like childbirth, or from problem or unnatural activities like sickness or violence. All bodily fluids were scary for them. Blood was the most important for they saw it as the sign of life, but puss or

spit were just as scary. They didn't understand germs but they had observed the consequences. Jesus dealt with these laws when He cured the sick. I'm wondering if in vs. 42 they might have also been dealing with skin cancer along with an early version of leprosy. Either way, when Jesus touched these people who were unclean with puss or open sores, He was unclean in many people's eyes.

Lev. 14: Vs. 14, "Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the tip of the man's right ear, the thumb of his right hand, and the big toe of his right foot." The right side was the side of strength and was to be kept clean. So to this day in many parts of the Middle East the left hand is for the handling of toilet paper, if you know what I mean. With vs. 33 and on, you have infections of houses which seems weird unless you realize how many buildings have been torn down or totally redone because of mold contamination.

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 56: In this prayer of Jesus vs. 12 takes on a powerful meaning. "What can mere mortals do to me?" Because vs. 14 lets us know that God will act, "Once you have snatched me from death, kept my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living."

Psalm 57: Jesus prays with confidence that the Father will answer Him. He is confident that a new day will come.

Psalm 58: Jesus lets us know that the pagan ways or the "gods" mentioned in vs. 2 lead to horrible things. Following them is foolishness. But in the last verse, "Truly there is a reward for the just: there is a God who is judge on earth!"

Psalm 59: Vs. 4, "For no offense or misdeed of mine, Lord, for no fault they hurry to take up arms. Vs. 13-14, "For the lies they have told under oath destroy them in anger, destroy this they are no more." These foretell the ways that the Scribes and Pharisees tried to trip up Jesus and also the trial of Jesus by the Sanhedrin.

Psalm 60: This whole psalm is spoken in the plural so Jesus is speaking with and for us.

Psalm 61: This is the prayer of Jesus as He descended into Hell. Vs. 3, "From the brink of Sheol I call; my heart grows faint. Raise me up, set me on a rock."

Psalm 62: Another prayer of Jesus as He faced the scribes and Pharisees. Vs. 5, "They delight in lies; they bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse."

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew 27:51-66: This was obviously not a normal day in the park. Vs. 51-52, “And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised.” The next line gets missed, “And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many.” The graves were opened by the earthquake at His death, but the Saints started waking up after His resurrection.

But the burial and the placing of the guards, in vs. 57-66, is to clearly set up the awesomeness of the Resurrection, for it takes away all doubt that there is any other possibility of what happened to Jesus.

Matthew 28: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary see the angel, who scares the guards. After that Jesus comes and appears to them. Matthew does not worry about Thomas or those other appearances. He is focused on the Ascension, so he just has Jesus telling the women to have the guys meet him in Galilee. The only thing mentioned about things in Jerusalem is the bribing of the guards. The Ascension is also the great commissioning, last words with final instructions. Vs.16-20 are worth reading over and over.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 1: This is an extension of the Gospel of Luke, not Matthew, so there is a switching of gears for us with this reading guide. Luke recounts that last part of his Gospel, which ends with the Ascension, which doesn't include the last instructions mentioned in Matthew. He does mention that the Holy Spirit gives the apostles instructions, and that Jesus appears to them during forty days. His second Ascension account includes the question of restoring the kingdom, since they still wanted to have a world-wide kingdom. That sets up this book of the Bible because it is about them spreading the message to the world. Luke mentions the first community, which Mary is a part of. He places a lot of emphasis on the replacement of Judas, who didn't hang himself in this version as described in Matthew. Vs. 18, “He bought a parcel of land with the wages of his iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his insides spilled out.” We don't have to worry about which one was correct, for it is a matter of writing him out of the scene like in the soap operas. How he died is not important, just that he was gone. He probably hung himself with an old rope and it broke and then he hit the rocks.

Acts 2: The strong wind should remind you of the story of creation. This is a new creation, or at least the participation of the Holy Spirit in the creation of the church. Having all the people from different countries with different languages, all hearing the Good News, is the reversal of the Tower of Babel. With all that we now know about the message of the Gospel it is hard to

imagine this speech by Peter and its impact. But having 3,000 people join is an amazing sign of its influence. The results of the speech also is seen in the communal life mentioned in vs. 42-47.

Acts 3: The cure of the leper is the second sign to the people of the amazing power of the name of Jesus. Pentecost is the first. Peter's second speech give more details of the story. Notice in vs. 19 it is about repentance.

Acts 4: After Peter's second speech, there is a kick-back from the priests and the Sadducees. So now there is a follow-up trial after the nighttime trial of Jesus. They probably though the crucifixion would have ended the follower's spirit. But now it is growing. The warnings do no good. 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.