

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Today is the last part of the series on Leviticus. In Leviticus chapter 22 we have a renewal of the instruction about the condition of animals to be offered before the Lord.

When anyone offers a sacrifice of well-being to the Lord, in fulfillment of a vow or as a freewill offering, from the herd or from the flock, to be acceptable it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it. Leviticus 22:21

What was the big deal about the animals having to be in perfect condition? These offerings were pointing to Jesus ... and to us. Jesus was the perfect, sinless lamb of God who offered himself on the cross to bring us forgiveness, peace, and blessing.

... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! Hebrews 9:14

Not only did the perfect specimens of animals point forward to Christ, they also prefigure us as well.

[Christ worked] to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. Eph 5:27

The Kingdom of God is not inhabited by those who seek to live as good people. The kingdom's citizens are those who have been made perfectly holy by the blood of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 23 the topic turns to the religious calendar. This system was so effective we still use it today. Most things have changed in their meaning now that we are in the New Testament. However, underneath our religious holy days lay these historical antecedents. The crown jewel of the liturgical cycle was the Sabbath. This was the seventh day of the week. For us that is Saturday. No one could go to work on the Sabbath day. Even housework was severely limited. This resting reflected the work of God as the creator of all things. He did his creative work for 6 days. On the 7th day God rested. So his people were to rest on the 7th day of the week, showing their connection to their creator. The New Testament church immediately changed the day of their worship/ rest to Sunday, the day of resurrection. As the Sabbath day pointed to God's rest, we find the fulfillment of this rest in Jesus. Jesus provides us with everything we need, so our hearts rest in him. All this is ours because of his resurrection. Therefore our day of spiritual (and perhaps physical) rest is typically Sunday. As the life of Israel revolved around Saturday, so now Sunday sets the rotation of the church's week. The other main religious observances outlined in Leviticus include Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Booths. These have now been superseded in the church with Easter, the New Testament Pentecost, and Epiphany.

Next, we are told about the Oil and Bread in the holy place of the tabernacle.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil of beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly. Aaron shall set it up in the tent of meeting, outside the curtain of the covenant, to burn from evening to morning before the Lord regularly; it shall be a statute

forever throughout your generations. He shall set up the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold before the Lord regularly. Leviticus 24:1-4

The golden lampstand was in the shape of a tree, symbolizing life. This is what the menorah is patterned after. If you think of a menorah, it does look something like a tree. That is the idea. The lamps set on the lampstand signified the presence of the Lord among us people, especially in the haunting darkness of night. This article in the tabernacle was highly symbolic. The Lord is the Tree of Life for Israel. His word is their light along the path of life. The flaming tree also resembles the night sky with all its lights. The seven lamps reflect the eyes of the Lord whose perfect number see all things in the universe. It is not hard to draw the parallels between the lampstand and Jesus. He is the light of the world. He fills all things. And as the apostle John teaches,

in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. John 1:4

I will conclude this sermon and series by touching on God's decrees concerning the use of his name.

Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death. Leviticus 24:15-16

Hopefully, no one has trouble understanding how God feels about this area! To blaspheme the name of God polluted not only the person blaspheming but also the whole community. Therefore, the culprit had to be taken outside the community and executed by the whole community. Just like when the priest laid

his hands on the scapegoat to transfer the sins of Israel onto it, so here the people who heard the person speak the blaspheme put their hands on him and then stoned him to death. Misusing the name of God is still an important issue today. Think of the first thing Jesus taught us to pray in his prayer... "hallowed be Thy name." Today we are not instructed to kill those who curse God. We are instructed to remove them from our midst (excommunication) with the hope that they will come to their senses, repent, and be brought back in to the Christian community. We treat them in the same spirit as the Lord treats us. We were born enemies of God, yet he died for us and made us his own children. Perhaps we have wandered from the right path a time or two. He has accepted us back into the fold. This is how we keep God's name holy. We honor it, respect it, and use it to thank and praise God and to call upon it for everything that we so desperately need from God for each day. Since we are his children in Christ, he hears and answers us every time we call. Thanks be to God!

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