

Parasha Emor (“Speak!”; The 28th Parasha of the year 5773)

Torah:	-Vayikra (Leviticus) Chapters 21 through 24
Haftarah:	-Yechezk'el (Ezekiel) 44:15-31
Brit Chadasha ¹ :	-Luke 14:12-24 (Jeff Feinberg) -Mattiyyahu (Matthew) 5:38-42; Galatians 3:26-29 (David Stern) -1 Kefa (Peter) 2:4-10 (John Parsons; Jack Farber) -Matthew 25:1-13; Jochanan (John) 8:7; Hebrews 6:4-6; 6:20-7:28; 8:5 (Aaron Shaw)

The four Leviticus chapters (in fact, the whole book) takes place at mount Sinai.

Let's summarize the contents of the *torah*² and *haftarah*³ for this week, then I'll victimize you with – I mean give you! – my *torah* meditation entitled “If you’re a priest, don’t get stoned! (Not that kind of stoned!...)”

Leviticus 21 highlights the *cohanim*, the Aaronic priesthood. Priests contaminated by death couldn’t carry out their duties; therefore, *cohanim*, could have no contact with the deceased. Exceptions were made for all priests except the *Cohen HaGadol* (high priest) when the deceased was a close relative. Aaronic priests were never to emulate pagan priests. Rules governed who *cohanim* could marry; not just Aaron’s sons, but also his daughters. Daughters didn’t serve in the sanctuary, but they did receive priestly benefits.

The *Cohen HaGadol* was key to *Yisra’el*’s proper relationship with G-D. He was the head of the *cohanim*, the *cohanim* were heads of the Levites, and the Levites were the heads of the rest of *Yisra’el*. If the functioning of the *Cohen HaGadol* was disrupted, not only was his status with G-D affected, but also that of all Israel.

Leviticus 22 shows us how the *cohanim* mediated sacrifices to G-D on *Yisra’el*’s behalf, and how they were do so in a responsible, careful manner. All *Yisra’el* provided for the physical needs of the priests, and the *cohanim* were never to take that provision for granted. What *Yisra’el* set aside for the *cohanim* was for *cohanim* only, highlighting both the importance of the priestly office and the responsibility of the community for providing for it. Priests maintained ritual purity when serving in the sanctuary, or when partaking of what the community had provided for them. Diseases or contact with persons ritually unclean required a *cohen* to undergo purification before he could resume priestly duties. The physical sanctuary was an earthly copy of the heavenly original⁴, thus physical ritual purity pointed to a deeper spiritual purity.

Yisra’el was to maintain standards of the quality of animals sacrificed or offered: no animals with defects. Forgiveness was never automatic just because a sacrifice was physically performed. The one giving the sacrifice had to be personally involved in the process; The *cohanim* helped the community apply and maintain objective standards in serving G-D, to prevent the nation from slipping into self-centered subjectivity.

A newborn bull, sheep or goat was left with its mother for 7 days before it could be sacrificed, And no animal was to be offered on the same day as its offspring. This showed that the sacrificial animals symbolized people with relationships; they weren’t just butcher shop meat. G-D accepted an animal

¹ The New Covenant/New Testament

² The 1st five books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).

³ Each *Shabbat* [Sabbath], the *torah* is read through in synagogues around the world in an annual reading cycle (in some Jewish communities, it is a 3 year cycle). Thematically similar passages from the remainder of the Hebrew bible were chosen to go along with the weekly *torah* readings. *Haftarah* refers to these other readings.

⁴ Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:5

sacrifice in place of an Israelite; what should have been done to the trespassing Jew was done instead to the sacrificial animal!

Leviticus 23 details the appointed times of G-D, their timing relative to the different yearly harvests, and what sacrifices went with them. The community was to provide for the poor whenever a harvest was reaped. These are not the feasts of the Jews, or of *Yisra'el*, but the feasts of The L-RD. The *Shabbat* features front and centre.

Leviticus 24 recounts a certain man stoned to death by the community for *Chillul HaShem*⁵, or desecrating G-D's name. This man treated as light G-D's weighty authority. He did something else, which I'll come back to shortly.

Pure oil was to be kept burning continually in the pure *m'norah*, or lampstand. The *m'norah* was pure in that while the other tabernacle furnishings were made of acacia wood merely covered with gold, the *m'norah* was of pure gold⁶.

The bread of the presence, (literally the face-bread⁷) was put in the holy place *Shabbat* after *Shabbat*. For lack of a better word, the "faceyness" of this bread points to its personal character, a bread interacted with face to face. This bread was placed with frankincense (which, by the way, was not lumps of incense shaped like Frank Sinatra!)

Chapter 24 closes with the well-known "break for break, eye for eye, tooth for tooth". This rule of equitable justice can be compared against other ancient law codes of the time, where severity of punishment could actually exceed the wrong done, or different standards applied depending of someone's social status.

The Ezekiel *haftarah* portion closely mirrors the *torah*, highlighting the service of the *cohanim* in Solomon's fixed temple instead of the portable *mishkan*, or tabernacle. Priests wore white linen, which could only be worn in the inner court of the sanctuary. These *cohanim* were descendants of *Tzadok*, the 1st high priest to serve in Solomon's temple⁸. They were Aaronic priests, but G-D chose *Tzadok* and his sons to restore morally compromised *Yisra'el*.

"If you're a priest, don't get stoned! (not that kind of stoned!...)"

Now, back to the blasphemer. Leviticus 24:16 reads: "...whoever **blasphemes** the name of ADONAI must be put to death; the entire community must stone him. The foreigner as well as the citizen is to be put to death if he blasphemes the Name" (Complete Jewish Bible, my emphasis). Something told me to check the Hebrew for the word for **blaspheme**; I was stunned! The Hebrew word is נִזְבֵּךְ (NO-kev) – a verb meaning to pierce, bore a hole through, puncture⁹. So this man was essentially crucifying the name of G-D! In case anyone thinks it isn't possible to do that nowadays, let's look at Hebrews 6:4-6:

For when people have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, become sharers in the Ruach HaKodesh,[Holy Spirit] and tasted the goodness of God's Word and the powers of the 'olam haba [the coming age] – and then have fallen away – it is impossible to renew them so that they turn from their sin, as long as for themselves they keep executing the Son of God on the stake all over again and keep holding him up to public contempt (Complete Jewish Bible)

⁵ <http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Parashah/Summaries/Emor/emor.html>

⁶ Exodus 25:31

⁷ Exodus 25:30; 35:13 and 39:36. Besides the *torah*, there are many other references in the *tanakh*. *Tanakh* is an acronym formed from the 1st 3 letters of the 3 divisions of the Hebrew Bible: *torah*, *nevi'im* [the Prophets], and *ketuvim* [the Writings].

⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zadok>

⁹ <http://www.morfix.co.il/>; <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H5344&t=NIV>

Dear L-RD: Keep us from falling away! Help us to build on the precious cornerstone¹⁰ (Solid Truth) and not heap up a pile of precariously balanced small rocks (snippets of truth here and there), and then what we built fall on us and we are stoned to death just like that poor blasphemer...

Leviticus 21:13-15: “He [namely, the high priest] is to marry a virgin; he may not marry a widow, divorcee, profaned woman or prostitute; but he must marry a virgin from among his own people **and not disqualify his descendants among his people**” (Complete Jewish Bible, my emphasis)

With our individualistic focus, we tend to think of obedience to G-D only in terms of how we personally are affected. On an iffy course of action, which of us hasn't heard or said “I'm not hurting anyone else”, when in reality we are undermining G-D's ability to help us be a blessing to someone else...

Ezekiel 44:15: “...the cohanim, who are *L'vi'im* [Levites] and **descendants of Tzadok**, who took care of my sanctuary when the people of Isra'el went astray from me – they are the ones who will approach me and serve me; it is they who will attend me and offer me the fat and the blood,’ says ADONAI ELOHIM. ‘They will enter my sanctuary, approach my table to minister to me and perform my service” (Complete Jewish Bible, my emphasis)

The end of Hebrews 6 and all of Hebrews 7 (Hebrews 6:20-7:28) shows us how Yeshua is a high priest of the order of *Malki-Tzedek*. The *Tzedek* in *Malki-Tzedek* and *Tzadok*, 1st high priest of Solomon's temple, come from the same Hebrew root. In Peter's 1st letter which bears his name, Peter encourages us: “...you are a chosen people, the King's cohanim, a holy nation, a people for God to possess. Why? In order for you to declare the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (verse 9, Complete Jewish Bible, my emphasis).

Leviticus 24:2-4: “Order the people of Isra'el to bring you pure oil from crushed olives for the light, to keep the lamps burning always. Outside the curtain of the testimony in the tent of meeting, Aharon is to arrange for the light to be kept burning always from evening until morning before ADONAI; this is to be a permanent regulation through all your generations. He is always to keep in order the lamps on the pure menorah before ADONAI” (Complete Jewish Bible)

G-D help us to be like the wise virgins in Yeshua's parable who watched their oil reserves and kept their lamps lit!¹¹

If Yeshua is a high priest of the order of *Malki-Tzedek*, and Jews and Gentiles in Messiah Yeshua are priests (and priestesses) of G-D, then we also are priests of the order of *Malki-Tzedek*; not just any priests, but priests of a certain kind. There is no longer an Aaronic priesthood, but the priesthood G-D has called us to is forever¹². For messianic believers, service in Yeshua's priesthood is not optional. If such service seems like a burden, our hearts are out of alignment, and we need to seek the L-RD for realignment.

In *Yisra'el's* tabernacle and temple, there were certain offerings for certain sins and fixed ways various defilements had to be dealt with. Today, we need to be just as diligent in our priesthood as the *cohanim* were in theirs. There are still degrees and categories of sin and various harmful effects of sin and its defilement¹³. Yeshua's precious blood has given us **life**, but the choices we make affect our **health**, how pure the oil in our *m'norah* is, if it burns well or not, and how well our eyes work to see by that light given off...

Leviticus 22:29, 31: “When you offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to ADONAI, you must do it in a way such that you will be accepted... You are to keep my mitzvot and obey them; I am ADONAI” (Complete Jewish Bible).

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:6

¹¹ Matthew 25:1-13

¹² Hebrews 7:21

¹³ 1 John 5:16-17; 1Corinthians 6:18

In *Yeshua*, we are builder priests, architect priests, called to build each other up into a building the likes of which when we're inside it, *shalom* is tangible and the joy of new life is palpable. As Peter points out, again in his 1st letter:

*As you come to him, the living **stone**, rejected by people but **chosen** by God and **precious** to him, you yourselves, as living **stones**, are being built into a spiritual house to be cohanim set apart for God to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him through Yeshua the messiah (1 Peter 2:4-5, Complete Jewish Bible, emphasis in original.)*

At one and the same time, we are both builders and building material, being built up by G-D and building each other up.

So, how was your week in the builder priesthood? Is something you've been building not turning out well? You may need to tear some (or all) of it down and rebuild. Go to the Chief Architect; hold the *m'norah* in your hand, let its light illuminate the blueprints on the table. Look at them with Him. Maybe your strength for building is depleted, because you're spiritually tired, malnourished or dirty. Wash, spend Shabbat with Him and savour His rest; eat the bread thankfully from the shewbread table, face to face with Him. Let He who is without sin **BE** the first stone¹⁴ in your heart! (then you won't get stoned!...)

Shabbat Shalom!

¹⁴ Jochanan (John) 8:7