

Emor	Say	Handicapped, Wounded or Defiled
Torah:	Leviticus 21:1-24:23	
Haftarah:	Ezekiel 44:15-31	
Brit Chadashah:	Luke 14:12-24	

While this week's portion is not doubled, it does cover four whole chapters. It deals mainly with stipulations on how the priests should live their lives. It places restrictions on who the priests can mourn for (close relatives only) and what kind of mourning behaviour they were allowed to engage in. They were not to cut their hair or shave the edges of their beards and they were not allowed to make incisions on their bodies on behalf of the deceased. This was to prevent them from engaging in any kind of ritual defilement which would exclude them from exercising their ministry among the people. It also kept them away from paganism.

The High Priest was not allowed any kind of mourning while he was performing his duties. He could only marry a virgin and not a widow, a divorced woman or a former prostitute. If the unmarried daughter of a priest became a ritual prostitute, which was quite common among the Canaanites, she was to be burned at the stake. We have to avoid intrusive paganism.

The passage uses a strange phrase which linguistics would call *idiomatic*, where a phrase does not mean what it says, but refers to something else. The priests were to avoid defilement of any kind so that they could eat the food of their G-d. At first glance it would appear that G-d ate the sacrifices which were offered to Him, as if His people were feeding Him. It really refers to the sacrifices which were offered to G-d, which the priests could eat.

It also discussed handicapped Priests who were excluded from service in the tabernacle and another *idiomatic* phrase appears. The Hebrew word for hunchback can also be translated as having very long eyelashes. Same word, two meanings. A hunchback could not serve in the tabernacle or receive sacrifices to the L-rd. A priest who suffered from dwarfism was also excluded from service, along with one whose testicles were crushed. Priests who were blind, lame or who had a flattened nose also could not service in the tabernacle.

These exclusions were not so much prejudicial, as they were practical. The work of the tabernacle was quite physical and the listed handicaps meant they were not physically able to perform their priestly tasks. In much the same way, people deemed physically unfit for combat by the armed forces received a 4F designation. This term originated in the American Civil War, where soldiers needed their four front teeth in order to bite open the bullet cartridges and could not do so if they did not have at least four front teeth. Without four front teeth, you were deemed 4f. In our Messiah, how many front teeth do you have?

Handicapped members of the priesthood could not serve, but they could eat the priestly portion of the food. G-d has nothing against handicapped people, but they had to be flawless in order to serve the flawless G-d in the tent of meeting. Handicapped priests were not treated the same as defiled priests who were ritually impure. Those deemed impure were also excluded from the eating the priestly portion of the sacrifices. Handicapped meant you could not serve, while defiled meant that you could not even come close enough to share in the priest's portion of the sacrifices. It is better to be handicapped than impure!

Do these restrictions still apply today? Our Messiah had no physical handicaps or physical deformities and He was crucified as the spotless Lamb of G-d. Handicapped people are welcome in our midst and are in no way limited in what they can participate in our midst. Our praise and worship has to be flawless, but even those who do not have a good singing voice are still welcome and can still offer flawless praise which comes from a heart fully dedicated to the Messiah. He is flawless and He is our perfect Saviour.

The portion also discusses which family members of the priest's family could eat of the priest's portions. Hired help could not share in the food, but slaves could, since they had no other source of food. A priest's daughter married to a non Jew could not share in the food, and by application the son of a priest married to a non Jew would also be excluded from the right to share in the priestly portion. A disqualified person who accidentally ate of the priestly portion had to pay a fine to cover the price of the sacrifice, to which they would add one fifth of its value.

While non Jews could not eat of the priestly portion, they could make offerings and they would not have been excluded from eating the portion which those making the offering were allowed to eat.

Acceptable sacrificial animals had to be flawless in order to be used as a sacrificial animal and three kinds of livestock are mentioned: cattle (calf), goats (kids) and sheep (lambs). They had to be male without any of the flaws which were already mentioned in conjunction with the priestly exclusions. If a handicapped priest could not serve, the people were also forbidden to offer handicapped animals. Castrated animals could not be sacrificed to the L-rd. We do not offer damaged goods to the L-RD and we do not accept damaged goods from Gentiles who want us to sacrifice on their behalf. In Messiah we are never damaged goods!

If a newborn male was being offered, it had to be left seven days with its mother, so that she did not suffer from milk bloating which may have affected her fertility. As well, you could not offer an animal's offspring and slaughter the same animal for food on the same day. You had to eat your portion of the thanksgiving offering the same day it was offered and whatever was not eaten had to be disposed of (likely burned).

These instructions were given so that the freed slaves of Egypt could become the people of the L-RD. Holiness means obeying all the pertinent stipulations of His Word in order to avoid any kind of defilement, which for us would refer to any paganism which was trying to take root in our lives. We do not want to give the enemy or the flesh any points of access to our hearts.

Chapter 23 deals with the eight festivals of the L-rd. The first one is the weekly Sabbath which is defined as a day when you shall do no servile labour. The seven others were also Sabbaths. The day when each of the other festivals fall, are considered special Sabbaths where no servile labour was to be performed. The dates on the Hebrew calendar when these feasts occurred are given for each special celebration. Passover was to be celebrated on the 14th of Nisan, between sundown and full dark, in memory of when the angel of death flew over the Children of Israel and killed all the first born of Egypt.

The next day, the 15th of Nisan was the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The 1st day and the 7th day were to be considered Sabbaths. Sometime between the two temples, the 15th of Nisan ceased to be considered a Sabbath and this honour was given to the Festival of First Fruits. The week of Unleavened Bread also came to be called the week of Passover.

When we come to the chronology of the events of our Messiah's sacrifice, He was arrested,

tried and crucified, died and was buried on the 15th of Nisan, even though this was supposed to be a Sabbath. He spent the 16th, 17th, and 18th of Nisan in the grave and resurrected around dawn on the 19th of Nisan. From the Festival of First Fruits, fifty days were to be counted until the Festival of Shavuot or Pentecost (the Greek word for fifty). You counted seven weekday Sabbaths and Shavuot was observed on the day after the seventh weekday Sabbath.

Even though Shavuot never falls on a weekday, Sabbath it is still considered a special day or a high day when no servile labour was permitted. Then you had a long summer pause where the work of the fields could be completed until the fall harvests. The first day of the seventh month was called the Feast of Trumpets and it was also a special weekday Sabbath.

The tenth day of the seventh month was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which is the only Sabbath day when you are allowed to afflict your soul. This is another *idiomatic* expression in Hebrew where to afflict your soul means to fast. Months in the Bible are calculated from the month of Nissan where Passover is celebrated on the 14th day of this month.

Sukkoth brings the annual festival cycle to a close and it begins on the 14th day of the seventh month (Tishrei). It is a seven day, plus one festival where the people were to rejoice and wave branches from leafy trees and dwell in tents in memory of their exodus from Egypt. Many extra observances have been added to these festivals over the years, but if we understand the rationale behind each one, we are less likely to add non-biblical elements to them in the way we celebrate them. Adding or subtracting are not good habits to develop.

Chapter 24 begins with a discussion of the menorah, which had to burn every day, from sundown to dawn. It also mentions two piles of special leavened bread which were to be eaten by Aaron and his sons each Shabbat. This is where we get our use of Challah bread from, which we will resume sharing, once Covid is done getting in our way.

Right in the middle of giving these instructions a terrible event occurs. There was a quarrel between a Jewish man and a man with an Egyptian father and a Jewish mother. In the process of the fight, the boy with the Egyptian father blasphemed and cursed YHVH. He was imprisoned, judged and stoned and a similar fate waited anyone who committed this serious crime on the future. This was a pagan habit the L-RD does not want us to fall into.

The Talmud gives a fanciful story, that because his mother was from Dan, the boy with the Egyptian father wanted to live among the tribe of Dan and was refused, hence the blaspheming and the curse. This is pure invention and is not found in the text. This situation likely came up while Moses was teaching and he had to pause to deal with it. Blasphemy was listed as a capital offense for both Jews and those Gentiles who sojourned in the camp.

Some final instructions were given concerning the punishment for murder and for maiming a man. The punishment had to fit the crime. We learn later that maiming could be dealt with by the payment of a fine, so an eye was not given for an eye if a fine was paid. Killed animals had to be replaced and in all of these stipulations about punishment, the same stipulations applied to both Jews and Gentiles living in the camp. There was to be no favoritism and no prejudice. Holiness is defined as obedience and the avoidance of any kind of defilement. Our lives are still to revolve around the festival cycle where we rejoice annually in the provision and the protection of the L-RD. Nothing more and certainly nothing less.

Sermon: **The Countdown to Shavuot (Pentecost)**

Yesterday was the 33rd day in the counting of the Omer. It is remembered for two things. First it was the day when a plague ceased which had struck the students of Rabbi Akiva. Next, it is one of the five new year's in Judaism. It is the new year's for the scholars and along with bonfires and feasting and dancing, it is traditional to take a scholar out for a meal. While restaurants are closed due to Covid restrictions, you could always get gluten free take out and bring it to my home. We could sit on my back deck and eat together!

Yesterday, I sent out an email about the Lag B'Omer tragedy which occurred on Thursday evening in Israel. Around 200,000 orthodox Jews gathered at Mount Meron in northern Israel and as they were celebrating, a congested crowd coming into (or out of) the stadium panicked on a slippery walk way and there was a stampede where 45 people were crushed to death and 150 more were injured. Tomorrow is a national day of mourning for those who were lost. I hope something will be said about how this preventable tragedy could have been avoided. May the peace and grace of our beloved Messiah be extended to the families of the victims and to those were injured and traumatized by this horrible occurrence.

During the counting of the Omer, some people count every day and say special blessings, while others use it to set the date for Shavuot and make their plans for this, as the second pilgrimage festival approaches. Four amazing things occurred during this 50 day countdown.

Our Messiah was arrested, tried, crucified, died and was buried on the 15th of Nisan, which was a Wednesday that year. His body spent the 16th, 17th, and 18th of Nisan in the grave, while His Spirit descended to the Remand centre of G-d, called hell or Hades. While He was there in the Spirit, He preached the Gospel to all the spirits, both those in the Paradise section and those in the criminal section. He was not giving anyone a second chance, He was just letting them know what would be waiting for them on the Day of Judgment.

Those in the criminal section went back to sleep and those in Paradise came out of the grave with Him and scared the wits out of many people in Jerusalem (and wherever else they appeared). We are not told what this group of glorified spirits did while Messiah personally visited each of His 500 disciples, but we know that they were not physically resurrected. In spirit form, they obviously could take on the appearance of a physical form and when Messiah ascended, they ascended with Him and went back to sleep under the heavenly altar and remain there sleeping until Judgment Day, when they shall receive their reward.

They cannot be contacted and they cannot intervene in the lives of the living on earth. From that point on, all the righteous who died, ascended and joined their brethren to sleep under the altar in Heaven. No one has yet been rewarded and no one has yet begun their punishment, because no one has been judged yet and the books of G-d's reckoning are not yet opened. There will be many surprises on the Day of Judgment, but deep down, no one will really be very surprised. Whatever happens to people after the final resurrection will be personally decided, on a case by case basis, by our Messiah and by our Messiah alone.

Again, no one will be given a second chance, they will just receive our Messiah's verdict with no possibility of appeal. Again, I emphasize that those who would have, if they could have, will treated as if they had. Those who claim to be believers, but who gave no signs of spiritual life in this life, will be treated as if they were unbelievers on Judgment Day. Whatever happens, everyone will be treated with righteousness and mercy according to the contents of their heart. Everyone's deeds bear their personal signature. What have you been signing?

I have taught you in the past that forty days is not meant to be taken as a literal number, but

refers to a painfully long time. In the case of our Messiah, though He must have been anxious to ascend back to the Father, He fulfilled the promise He made to His disciples that they would see Him again after He rose from the dead. He also breathed on the apostles so that they would receive a temporary anointing of the Holy Spirit until the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would be poured out and come to dwell in the hearts of believers from all the nations and generations of mankind. He may have also breathed on other disciples as He wandered around appearing to them, but we are not told.

Paul records some of these appearances (I Corin. 15:3-5) and mentioned that He appeared more than once to some of them. The reason for His ascension was twofold. First, in His flesh, He could only be in one place at once and did not want to spend His days running all over the earth to greet every new believer who accepted Him into their hearts and lives.

The second was that He could not indwell the hearts of believers while He was in His flesh on earth. He ascended into Heaven and when the Holy Spirit was poured out, He tagged along and came into believer's hearts as they were being filled with the Spirit. His indwelling and His infilling occurred at the same time on the Day of Pentecost as a form of catch up because so many believers were not yet indwelt by Him.

Now, once we accept the Messiah, we are instantly indwelt by the Messiah, whether we feel anything or not. When I accepted the Messiah, I experienced an incredible inner peace after a very stormy life, but it took me well over a year to be infilled with the Holy Spirit. When it happened, I was so joyful that I laughed and cried at the same time and when I was walking to my car, I jumped up and bit a leaf off a low lying tree branch.

What is the sign that someone is infilled by the Spirit? Well, all experiences aside, the biblical witness states that the infilling starts at your toes, rushes up past your knees and your thighs. It then passes beyond your torso, your lungs and bubbles out of your mouth as you speak in tongues. It doesn't have to be a yelling and screaming experience and you don't have to foam at the mouth or roll on the floor. It is never to be some kind of psychotic event.

When it happened to me, I suddenly felt like I was in the warm cool of an English country church in the summer. I had been struggling in my walk with the Messiah and had become quite agitated. The original peace I had experience was turned up and I was so calm, I could have gone to sleep. Now, when I pray for people and do not know what to pray, I pray in tongues and receive the assurance that I have been heard (Rom. 8:26, 27). If you have any questions and concerns about this, lets talk. We do not understand the Scriptures by our experiences, we understand our experiences by the Scriptures. Nothing more, nothing less.

Well after He had finished His business of appearing in the flesh to all of His disciples, He rounded up the glorified spirits, hid them from the view of His apostles and ascended with them into the clouds while the apostles were looking on. I am not entirely sure that He hid the glorified spirits from the apostles, because the Scriptures are silent on this point. But the angels who were present told the apostles to quit staring up in the clouds. They said that Messiah would return the same way He left, but instead of going into the clouds, He would be coming down out of the clouds. I wish more believers understood this and quit gazing at the clouds and making guesses about the timing of His return. He will return when He is good and ready and He wants us to be about His business while we wait for this to happen.

Before we finish discussing the events of the Spirit being poured out, lets deal with a wonderful

gifting by G-d which occurred on the Day of Pentecost many centuries before the Spirit was poured out. It took our people several weeks of wandering to arrive at Mount Sinai and set up camp around the mountain. When they arrived, they were a disorganized muddle of people who may have been roughly divided among the tribes, but again, the Scriptures are silent on this point.

Just a note, when Paul talks about Mount Sinai in Arabia, His talking about the mountain which was in the Roman province of Arabia and not some other location in what is now Saudi Arabia. The Muslim claim is spurious, specious (misleading) and is an invention which the Scriptures do not support. As a life long geographer, I have always been aware that under the Romans, the Sinai peninsula was part of the Roman province of Arabia. If you would like, I can show you historical atlases which show this unique Roman province.

When our people were settling down around the mountain, Moses was called up the mountain and on the 6th day of the Hebrew month of Sivan, after a considerable time, he came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments written on both sides of two tablets of stone. They are also called the ten sacred words and we are not told whether each commandment was represented by one word or if they were written out in full.

They are the unchanging foundation of the Law and are the Law which the Messiah said He did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. There are only ten commandments – all the rest are applications of these basic spiritual principles. Maimonides wrongly estimated that there are 613 commandments. There are only ten. Sometimes various kinds of teachings can be called Torah, but the sacred Torah of Moses is the Ten Sacred Words. They were immediately followed by a whole series of jurisprudence (applications), but the sacred words are the Law of G-d and all the rest are based on them or on applications of the ten.

When the ten were given, it was a milestone in the life of Israel. Now they knew exactly what YHVH expected from them and they promised to adhere to these laws as the preamble of the basic principles of everything which came afterwards. They remain unchangeable!

The camp left the mountain on the 21st day of the month of Iyar and camped twice before the 6th of Sivan hit them for a second time. They had been murmuring about the lack of meat, because they did not want to decimate their herds (not everyone had cattle in abundance). While the problem was being dealt with, to encourage Moses, YHVH took of the Spirit which was on him and placed on the seventy elders, who prophesied.

The Law was given on the first Pentecost in the wilderness, the Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost in the wilderness. Centuries later, while 120 disciples were gathered in the Upper Room where they held the Seder which is also called the Last Supper, there came a sound like a mighty rushing wind and the room where they were gathered was filled and they all fled out of doors, perhaps thinking it was the beginning of an earthquake.

Tongues of fire appeared over their heads and they began to speak in other tongues. We are not told whether they came down the stairs with tongues of fire still hovering over their heads, but others who had joined them outside heard them praising G-d in a variety of foreign languages. Those from various regions heard their own languages and others assumed the crowd was drunk, even though it was only nine in the morning. They were not drunk. Peter went on to preach the first of a whole series amazing messages and said that this blessing,

the infilling of the Holy Spirit, was for all the nations and generations of the world who turned over their hearts to the Messiah (Acts 2:39). The disciples had already been given the mandate to go to the ends of the earth and over many generations this mandate continues to be fulfilled among all the nations of the earth. The Spirit continues to be poured out and this will never change until that which is perfect (the Kingdom) comes.

As we finish counting down the Omer again for another year and as the fiftieth day arrives, which is also the 6th of Sivan, may we learn to be patient as the kingdom of our resurrected Messiah draws closer and closer. Instead of getting impatient and indulging in a fruitless and endless game of date guessing, we need to apply His Word in every area of our lives and be filled with the Spirit, so that no dark corners of our hearts and lives can become breeding grounds for the works of the flesh and the sin which so easily besets us.

The infilling experience is not measured by volume or by strange behaviour. It is an empowering for service. If you get a little excited when it happens, that's fine. It is good to get excited in the L-rd. Being infilled is not the same as walking in the Spirit, but if those who claim to be infilled, do not walk in the Spirit, I challenge the authenticity of their experience. The Corinthians were carnal believers who had been infilled, but who never let this experience draw them closer to the Messiah or let this experience drive them to dig deeply and regularly into the Word. What are you letting it motivate you, as we wait for the coming Kingdom? What are you digging deeply into?

Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.