

<b>Emor</b>	<b>Say</b>	<b>Special Requirements of the Priests</b>
<b>Torah:</b>	Leviticus 21:1-24:23	
<b>Haftarah:</b>	Ezekiel 44:15-31	
<b>Brit Chadashah:</b>	Luke 14:12-24	

This portion deals with specific instructions for the priests and also with the Festival Cycle. It begins by setting limits on who a priest can mourn for. Mourning for his wife is not discussed, but she would also be among the very close people the priest was allowed to mourn for. This was to limit the priest's contact with a dead person, which would defile them if they touched a dead body.

In the ancient Middle East, there were also some extravagant pagan mourning rituals which Israel was to avoid. During the mourning, Jews were not to shave the top of their heads or cut the edges of their beards. They were also not to make incisions in their skin on behalf of a dead person. Jews and especially Levites were to be separate from all and any paganism so they would not profane the name of YHVH. The passage uses a curious phrase to describe the portion of sacrifice which the Levites and Aaronites could eat. It is called the food of their G-d. G-d does not eat, but they lived on portions of the sacrifices.

A priest could only marry a virgin or a widow of good reputation. And they were not to follow the Canaanite practice which allowed the priest's daughter to become a prostitute. If she did, she was to be burned alive for practising this criminal idolatry.

When it came to the High Priest, he was not allowed to mourn which implied he was not to touch a dead body. He could only marry a virgin from among the Children of Israel, but it does not stipulate that she had to belong to the tribe of Levi.

No Levite or priest with any bodily deformity was allowed to offer sacrifices. They could still eat the priest's portion, but they were not allowed to enter the Holy Place.

Chapter 22 opens with a statement that could be confusing. It says that Aaron and his sons should abstain from eating the Holy Things consecrated to YHVH. In the verses which follow, we see that this abstention was only if they became unclean such as having leprosy or an open weeping sore (gonorrhoea). If they became permanently unclean, they could not eat of the priestly food until they were recovered.

When a priest touched an unclean (living) person or someone who had touched a cadaver they were unclean until the evening. This also applied to touching unclean animals like reptiles. Part of the process of becoming clean again required that they wash their bodies. Unclean priests who were not permanently unclean could still eat priestly food. They were not allowed to eat dead animals which they did not slaughter themselves and they were not allowed to eat beasts that had been torn. They are reminded that observing the commandments is required so they and the people do not die.

The next part of this chapter deals with categories of sacrifice and repeats that all animals had to be without defects in order to qualify as an acceptable offering. The one exception concerns the voluntary offering.

An animal with one leg longer than the others was acceptable, but only for this category of sacrifice (voluntary offering).

When preparing an animal for sacrifice, the calf, kid or lamb had to be left with the mother for seven days, probably because it prevented too much trauma to the udder. As well, you could not slaughter the mother and the offspring on the same day. A Thanksgiving offering was to be eaten the same day it was offered and nothing was to be left until morning. This meant the left overs were burnt.

These practical instructions for symbolic behaviour taught the people both that the G-d who dwelt in their midst was still separate and that He was without any flaws. He was to be served by ritually clean priests who offered flawless sacrifices so that the people would not get a flawed or deficient understanding of the nature of YHVH. The people would only be blessed and preserved when they kept His commandments because YHVH took them out of Egypt so that they could be His people. Serving YHVH according to His Word assured them of both His protection and His provision.

The remaining chapter of this portion deals with the festival cycle. The weekly Sabbath is the most important festival and all the festivals were holy gatherings. So whatever day a festival fell on, became a Sabbath on the same footing as the weekly sabbath. The Festival cycle begins with Passover in the spring and ends with Sukkoth in the fall. They fall into three distinct categories and were timed to the annual harvest cycle in the Holy Land.

In the spring, we have three festivals in a row: Passover, Unleavened Bread and the festival of First Fruits. Unleavened Bread lasted seven days and the first and seventh days were considered sabbaths. Beginning at First Fruits, there was a fifty day countdown to the wheat harvest, also known as Shavuot. The people were reminded to leave a portion of their harvests for the poor and the strangers.

In the fall, three more festivals occurred in a row. Rosh Hashanah was the beginning of the end of the harvest cycle and was a time for reflection. Next, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was the only time the High Priest went behind the veil to renew the Holy Places for another year of sacrifices. It is called the Sabbath of Sabbaths and is the only Sabbath where the people were allowed to humble their souls, which generally meant fasting.

At the first full moon of fall, the eight day festival of Sukkoth occurred. The people made their last harvest and gathered around the tabernacle to spend seven days living in tents, both as a reminder of their wilderness journey and as a reminder that we are also just strangers and pilgrims, travelling through this life towards our Father's Home in Glory.

As they camped, the people were to wave branches and have nothing but joy because of all the harvest provisions of YHVH. The first day and the eighth day were to be Sabbaths. At the end of the final festival, the people went home for the winter, while they waited for another harvest festival cycle to begin.

There are two more festivals which were added to remember victories where our people were preserved from destruction by the intervention of YHVH. Chanukah began as the Festival of Sukkoth of the month of Kislev and soon developed its own symbols which celebrate the cleansing of the temple when it had been defiled by the Jews who had become adherents of the Greek religion. Purim celebrates our people's victory over the Persians who wanted to destroy them. When your life revolves around the L-rd you have great joy and peace.

## **Sermon: Discovering the Will of G-d**

I have a series of life theme verses which serve to remind me of the central truth of our faith and how the Messiah wants us to live as we wander through this darkening world as strangers and pilgrims. Today, I want to examine with you how to discover the will of G-d for our lives, both as a congregation and as individuals.

Here are three verses which shine like bright beacons in my heart and life: Phil. 2:13 (it is G-d who is at work you give you the desire and the ability, according to His good pleasure); Eph. 2:10 (we are His workmanship, created for good works which He has prepared beforehand); and Phil. 4:13 (I can endure all things through the One who strengthens me).

Since G-d takes such an active role in our lives, when we walk with Him according to His Word, how does He speak to us, so that we may know and accomplish His will? In the days of Moses, His voice thundered from the mountain and the people begged Him to speak to them through Moses and not directly from that fiery, scary mountain. When Elijah fled from Jezebel, he made it to the same mountain and hid in a cave. Three things happened: a mighty wind, an earthquake and fire, just like it was in the days of Moses.

But the voice of G-d was not found in any of these great supernatural manifestations. Once the show was over, YHVH spoke to Elijah with a still, small voice. He may do any number of things to get our attention, but once He has it, He speaks softly and clearly, from the foundation of His Holy Word.

So hearing the voice of YHVH and discovering His will for our lives is rarely and light and sound show. David said the heavens declare the glory of YHVH and the expanse of the skies show His handiwork. That being said, He gives us four friends who will help us discover His will and how it is to be fulfilled in our lives. This is something which I have said to you in the past, but a review is a good way of making sure we get the message.

They are your mind, your heart, His Word and your community. If you do not understand it, don't do it because He gave us a brain, not to keep our heads from caving in, but to guide us and help recognize His truths. He may call us to do things we do not fully understand, but He never bypasses our understanding when He wants to speak to us.

Next comes the heart. Even though it is wicked beyond all measure before we came to faith, He reignites our conscience and help us develop a feel for what is right. So if it does not feel right, don't do it and listen to the warnings He is going to quicken in our hearts. We may be called to do some pretty scary and difficult things, but deep down, we will have the conviction that we are doing the right thing.

As well He speaks to us through His Word. As a matter of fact, if His Word says to do it, do it and if His Word says not to do it, avoid it like the plague. I have known too many people who use "proof texts" where they remove verses from their original context and give them meanings that were never intended. When the L-RD wants to speak to us, He will use passages in context that we can clearly understand.

So do not rely upon some strange intuition (carnal gut feeling) and don't wait for the thunder and lightning before you hear from YHVH. He does not show off, He speaks clearly.

We have one more friend to help us in our quest to discover the will of G-d for our lives – our community. Now it should go without saying that if our community does not listen to the mind or follow the urging of the heart and does not walk according to the Scriptures, that we cannot go to them to help us discern the will of YHVH. However, people should be able to confirm what G-d is saying to us, as they help us to recognize His voice. In a very real sense, we were born to choose and not to follow blindly when we do not understand or feel right about something.

If the authority of the Scriptures is not involved in the process, we enter the territory of cults and many will prey on our uncertainty and make us feel that the voice of the leaders or leaders is the voice of G-d. Listen to your four friends and you will not be snared as you learn to discover the will of G-d.

Now, some well meaning believers have a rigid view of the will of G-d and they want to believe and to obey without having to choose or exercise their free will. Many mainstream Christians and orthodox Jews believe the silliest and the saddest things. They feel that free will and understanding are enemies of the will of G-d and would shut them completely down if they could. This is not what the G-d of the Bible wants.

In the beginning, G-d chose Abraham, because Abraham chose G-d. The same could be said of Seth and his descendants who called upon the name of YHVH and did not follow the errors of the children of Cain. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph also chose G-d and the promises given to Abraham were confirmed in their lives because they walked in the steps of faithful Abraham.

In Egypt, the people cried out to YHVH and when the time was right, Moses led them out of Egyptian bondage. When these same people chose the golden calf, they wandered around in the wilderness until they dropped dead. What choices and voices are you choosing to listen to? Too many believers wander around in a spiritual wilderness of their own making because they ignore their four friends and make carnal choices.

There are many ways G-d can call us to, so that we put our faith in Him. Some were raised in the faith from birth, giving our hearts and lives to the Messiah as the natural thing to do. Some were not raised in the faith and fought hard against the hand of G-d and had to be cornered by the Spirit, in order to accept the Messiah. Many people who were not raised in the faith have to have the Lord speak to us in various ways and at various times before we are ready to surrender and invite the Saviour into our hearts and lives.

My experience of coming to faith as a confused 19 year old, was a crisis conversion, where G-d had to beat me over the head repeatedly before I was ready to come to faith. My wife was raised in a believing home – it was not perfect, but the Messiah was always acknowledged as the centre around which their lives revolved.

My own son was not quite three when he accepted the Messiah while his mother was reading him a bedtime devotional. I was thrilled but I was not sure he fully understood, so after the fact I asked him where Yeshua dwelt and he pointed to his stomach. Close enough. He had invited the Messiah into his heart and life, so he had everlasting life. Too many believers believe that unless someone has said the sacred sinner's prayer, they have not come to authentic faith in the resurrected Messiah. There is no necessary wording we have to pronounce to accept the Messiah and receive everlasting life.

My own prayer was quite simple: G-d, I give up. If you are real come into my heart. If you are not, I will go somewhere else. That was 51 years ago and I never went somewhere else. He placed a musical peace in my heart and nothing I have yet encountered has been able to drown out its voice or overthrow its presence. Whether our lives are tumultuous or tranquil, we have the peace that passes understanding and our anchor will hold through the storms of life.

Sometime read 2 Corinthians 11: 16-33 and read about the kind of life we can expect when we walk with the L-rd on the bumpy straight and narrow. We should never allow the friction of life or the obstacles of life pull us away from the peace He always offers us in every situation we can encounter. But there are so many lost people,, sinking deeper and deeper in the spiritual darkness of this present age. What do we do about them?

As a young believer who had once embraced a form of Buddhism, I was concerned about all the good people who did not come to faith and all the others lived and died without hearing the good news of the Torah and the Gospel. Even in the darkest corner of our sorry planet the Spirit of G-d is at work in all of mankind (Prov. 1:20-23) and even among those who put up the most vigorous resistance. He will not be silenced and He will not be ignored.

But what is even more important for us to consider as believers who are listening to our four friends, is whether G-d is at work in our own hearts and lives. Spiritual deception and spiritual apathy are being used by the enemy to distract and sink believers when they do not keep their eyes focused on Him and His Word. The inevitable coming of Messiah's kingdom, does not depend on the permission or the agreement of any one or any segment of mankind. As it is drawing closer, we need to make sure that we are drawing close to it in how we live our lives. The world may shout at us, our flesh may try and deceive us and the enemy may try and undermine our faith, but two things.

Greater is He who is in us than the one who is in the world. My heart burns with sadness and anger when I think of the horror which is being heaped on the Ukraine and I know that there are many Russian believers and others of good faith who are equally appalled by Putin's madness. G-d will uphold us through our trials and not always exempt us from any trials. In light of eternity, even the darkest hour dwindles into nothing, compared to the mighty weight of glory which about to burst forth upon our unsuspecting world.

Secondly, G-d is faithful and will never let us be tempted beyond our ability to resist and He will always provide a way of escape, even if that means death. When we see things from a kingdom perspective and rely on the faithfulness of G-d, in every trials we will keep looking for the Way of escape and not get hypnotized by the host of things which can go wrong. There may be giants in our lives. Modern day Philistines and Haman's may try to bully us and work for our extermination, but nothing they can say and nothing they can do will be able to remove us from the provision and protection of the Messiah. You do not give up when the road gets bumpy because we have been told to expect this. We need to call upon our four friends and not get brainwashed by the folly of this fading world.

My heart breaks when I consider all the slaughter and genocide which has filled our world with innocent blood and my spirit rages when I consider all those who abuse and rape and murder innocents and who never have to pay the price for what they did. But this life is not all we have coming to us. JudgSment day is more real than any human folly we encounter.

Now, because G-d is at work in the lives of all mankind and because He is at work in my heart and my life, do I just sit back and watch the action, or do I have a role to play. Our role must be firmly rooted in the fruit of the Spirit and should never be allowed to wander through the choking works of the flesh. Peter said we must sanctify the Messiah in our hearts and be ready to give an answer to those who ask us a reason for the hope we have – and our response must be made with meekness and respect.

I share my faith with a broad spectrum of people, but I am not a fan of intrusive proselyting, where we make an unwanted presentation of the Gospel and expect people to respond immediately. Creating an environment of hostility is not a very productive way of sharing our faith.

I have a well meaning friend who feels she has to share her faith whenever she meets anyone. She has turned more people off with her mechanical presentation and I do not believe she has led a single person to faith. I have seen her in action, but she is my friend, so I am not embarrassed by her and one of these days I may sit her down and discuss how effectively share our faith. She can become quite quarrelsome, but she is not doing herself or the Gospel much good by barging into people's lives like a bull in a china shop.

Gently building a respectful dialogue is the most effective way to share our faith. Unless you have gotten someone's spiritual attention you had better work on being a salty light as you speak with conviction and assurance. I do not like to back down when people challenge my faith, but I never want to get involved in spiritual brawls where people may actually come to blows. G-d will always have the last word, even when people refuse to listen to us or His Word.

Some evangelists use specific formulas and try to program people so that they will respond in a certain way. This was a tactic of the Inquisition. Some resistance is really a sign that G-d is working on people and we should wait until they open up before we go charging in. Salvation needs to be seen as a personal relationship with the G-d of the Bible. And surprisingly, there are many people from many faith backgrounds who have this relationship, even though they clutter their lives with some really weird and wonderful traditions which have nothing to do with the Bible or with the G-d of the Bible.

As a young believer on the campus of the university of Calgary, I met a catholic priest whom I became friends with. He knew that I violently opposed many of his Catholic traditions, but His love for the Messiah and His love for the lost students of that campus, shone very brightly and eventually we just had fellowship and did not continually clash about the follow he was wallowing in.

It is not up to me to grant an entrance into the Kingdom of our Messiah. There are some contentious believers who will get an unfortunate shock when their carnality and disobedience block their entrance into the Kingdom. There will be some people of little or no faith who are welcomed by the King, because their hearts are in the right place and they spent their lives hungering and thirsting after the light.

There is not way to the Father outside of the Messiah. He is the way, the truth and the life, but He will always judge according to the truth and righteousness which is found in men's hearts. We need to aggressively discover the will of G-d and not wallow in darkness.