

14. Holy, Holy, Holy

April 30, 2009

It seems that this particular chapter is out of place with what we've learned before. Between the Feasts of the Lord from chapter 23 and the Sabbath Year of chapter 25, this chapter talks about the furniture of the Tabernacles and how to take care of them and how to handle the one who blasphemed the name of God.

But when you look and study the feasts and the observances of the Sabbatic and Jubilee years in light of the Holiness of God, this chapter fits in perfectly.

The Tabernacle of Meeting was the most important structure in the camp of Israel. If you looked at it from the outside, it was not attractive due to the outer covering of badgers' skin. But once you step into the Tabernacle it becomes a different story. It was beautiful, costly and glorious.

A. THE HOLY OIL AND THE LAMPSTAND

Leviticus 24:1-4 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Command the children of Israel that they bring to you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to make the lamps burn continually. 3 Outside the veil of the Testimony, in the tabernacle of meeting, Aaron shall be in charge of it from evening until morning before the LORD continually; it shall be a statute forever in your generations. 4 He shall be in charge of the lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD continually.

The veil divided the Tabernacle in two parts – the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place. In the Holy Place there are three pieces of furniture: the Golden Incense Altar, the Golden Lampstand and the Table of Showbread.

Since there was no window in the Tabernacle, it was necessary to have light in there so that the priests could do their jobs. The Golden Lampstand provided that light. It was hammered out of pure gold and made into one piece with a central shaft and six branches. The Bible doesn't tell us its size.

Every morning and evening, when the high priest burned incense on the Golden Altar, he was to care for the lights on the Lampstand to make sure that they would continue to burn.

I asked you to underline that v2. God told the Israelites to provide the best oil they could for the Lampstand. He could do a miracle to furnish the purest oil in the universe, but He chose to allow them to be a part of this process.

I believe that the light from this Golden Lampstand symbolizes two aspects:

Jesus / The Word of God

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Psalms 119:105 Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Jesus is the Light of this dark and dying world. The non-believers can't see or understand the Light of the Word of God because they lack the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Nobody outside the Holy Place could see the light from the Golden Lampstand, but those within appreciated its light.

Apart from the light of the Word, God's servants can't see where they are or what they're doing, nor can they serve God effectively. The Golden Lampstand gave light so the priest could burn the Incense on the Golden Altar which symbolizes our prayers. Apart from the Scriptures, we can't pray effectively. The illuminating ministry of the Spirit of God makes the things of God real and clear to us.

At the same time, I believe that the Golden Lampstand also symbolizes two aspects:
The Israelites / the Church

The Golden Lampstand symbolizes the nation of Israel, as did the twelve loaves of bread on the golden table, which we'll study next. God called Israel to be a shining light in a very dark world, but they had to shine first of all in His presence before they could witness to their pagan neighbors. The tragedy is that the priesthood became wicked and failed to maintain the nation's light before the Lord.

The church should be the lampstand that upholds the light that is Jesus Christ. We are not the ones that produce our own light, because we have none of our own, but the light of Jesus Christ so that all men can see Him.

B. THE HOLY BREAD AND THE TABLE

Leviticus 24:5-9 "And you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. 6 You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the pure gold table before the LORD. 7 And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to the LORD. 8 Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. 9 And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the offerings of the LORD made by fire, by a perpetual statute."

Not only were the people to bring the pure olive oil for the Lamp, but also they were to bring the fine flour out of which twelve loaves of bread were baked each week.

According to Exodus 25, the size of the table is 36" long, 18" deep and 24" high. Not very big, if you will. It is made out of acacia wood and laid with a sheet of pure gold. We do not know the size of the bread.

The Showbread Table had a crown made of gold, unlike the Bronze Altar. In the Holy Place, we see Jesus "crowned with glory and honor".

These loaves were treated like a "grain offering," complete with the frankincense according to Leviticus 2. On the Sabbath, when the loaves were replaced, the priest would take a "memorial portion" from a loaf, add the frankincense, and burn it on the altar along with the daily burnt offering. The priests could then eat the old loaves, but they had to do it in the Holy Place.

On the Showbread Table were placed twelve loaves of unleavened bread, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The loaves of unleavened bread also remind us of the Lord Jesus.

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

The Showbread is also called the Bread of the Presence. To eat Christ as the Bread of Life, we must be in the presence of God, who is Spirit.

This bread of the tabernacle speaks of fellowship and communion with God – a symbolic “breaking of bread” with God, and speaks of the continual fellowship God wanted with Israel as well as the church of Jesus Christ.

Significantly, God wanted the fellowship between Him and us to be fresh. He didn’t want a stale communion with His people – same old heartless prayers or some babbling chants, but a fresh, new relationship each and every day.

C. HOLY NAME AND BLASPHEMY

Leviticus 24:10-16 Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite woman’s son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. 11 And the Israelite woman’s son blasphemed the name of the LORD and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses. (His mother’s name was Shelomith the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.) 12 Then they put him in custody, that the mind of the LORD might be shown to them. 13 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 14 “Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. 15 “Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. 16 And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death.

Every Jew knew the third one of the Ten Commandments:

Exodus 20:7 “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

So fearful were the Jews of breaking this commandment that the Jews, in their traditions, went to extreme lengths to avoid saying or writing the name of God – because, in their thinking, you could not blaspheme God’s name if you never said it.

Only the High Priest was allowed to pronounce the holy name of God – Yahweh, and only once a year – on the Day of Atonement. The proper pronunciation of the name would be passed on from the high priest to his successor, with the former’s last breath. This is why there was confusion for many years about the exact pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, some mistakenly pronouncing the name “Jehovah” instead of “Yahweh” or “Yah-veh.”

When the Jews had to write God’s name during their process of copying Scripture, first they would take a ceremonial bath and change into a new set of clothes and only to write His name without vowels, but using only consonants – YHWH. Now they pronounce as ‘Adoni’ or ‘Elohim’ in substitution for the original pronunciation forbidden since the 2nd or 3rd century B.C.

The blasphemer was the product of a mixed marriage between an Egyptian father and a Jewish mother from the tribe of Dan. Since the father isn’t named as being present, we wonder if he had stayed in Egypt when the mother took her son and fled, or perhaps he was dead.

This much is sure: The boy didn't grow up learning a proper respect for the Lord or His name. Even in Moses' day, marriages between believers and unbelievers created problems for God's people. Moses had to contend with the bad influence of a "mixed multitude" who left Egypt at the Exodus but who really didn't have a heart for the things of the Lord.

This is one of the reasons that God told His people then – and He tells us now – that there should not be intermarriage between a believer and an unbeliever. This does not have anything to do with race.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

I had a few occasions to tell this to several believers. Rather than receiving this biblical advice, they go out and get married and go to a different church or not go to church at all.

D. LEX TALIONIS

Leviticus 24:17-23 'Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death. 18 Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal. 19 'If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him— 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him. 21 And whoever kills an animal shall restore it; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death. 22 You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am the LORD your God.'" 23 Then Moses spoke to the children of Israel; and they took outside the camp him who had cursed, and stoned him with stones. So the children of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses.

The Lord further applied this legal decision to other areas of life and laid down the principle that the punishment must fit the crime. This is known as the lex talionis, "the law of retaliation," a principle that made sure the guilty offender was not punished more severely than the crime demanded. The murderer was to be put to death, but the penalties for other crimes had to suit the offense.

In other words, the guideline God was giving to Moses is NOT for revenge, rather it was for the fair justice system and mercy.

The problem with the current justice system is that the penalties are not suitable enough for the crimes criminals commit. But God's justice system is always fair and just. He is the ultimate judge.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) God wants us to provide resources to take the Gospel of Jesus to others even though He can without us.

God wants us to be the channel to bless others with our financial supports through the church.

2) God wants us to uphold the Light of the world – Jesus – with our lives.

Anyone can claim to be a Christian even though he or she might be the farthest from the Lord. We are the ones who should uphold the name of Jesus in everything we do that the people around us may notice His light and draw near to Him.

3) God wants us to pray in His presence with His Word effectively.

When we pray to the Lord, we must come to Him in repentance, supplications and requests – all of these according to His Word.

4) God wants us to have ultimate respect for His name and His glory.

We should be careful not to take His name in vain in our conversation, at the same time our lives should be careful to reflect His glory to others.

5) God wants us to remember that His justice system is based on fairness and mercy, not personal revenge like we often think.