

Parashah Ninety-Two

Leviticus 22:1–23:44; Zechariah 14:1–19; Colossians 2:16–17

notes by Tim Hegg

The Holiness of God's Presence

The *parashah* before us may be nicely divided according to the chapters. Chapter 22 focuses attention upon the offerings of Israel, and the manner in which they are to be held as holy. Desecrating them draws penalties, some of which are severe. Chapter 23 speaks of the *mo'edim*, the “appointed times” of HaShem, when His people are to gather (*mikra kodesh*, often translated “solemn assembly”) and celebrate in worship. For each of these festivals additional sacrifices are apportioned, and thus the connection to the previous chapter. But there may also be another connection: chapter 22 begins by warning the *kohanim* (priests) that they are not to participate in offering or eating the holy offerings brought by Israel if by some measure they (the *kohanim*) have contracted ritual impurity. To do so draws the *karat* penalty, i.e., being “cut off.” (The sages understand this to be a premature death.) Then chapter 23 speaks to all of Israel regarding the appointed times. Even as the priests are to consider the gifts of Israel, offered to their God, as sacred and not to be profaned, so the children of Israel are to consider the gift of the appointed times given to Israel as sacred. Indeed, failure on the part of Israel to observe the *mo'edim* (noted particularly in the case of Yom Kippur) could result in the same penalty—being cut off from one's people.

Chapter 22

Why would the priests need to be warned about contaminating the gifts or offerings the people of Israel would bring to the Tabernacle (and eventually the Temple)? It is most likely for a number of reasons. First, we should never forget that in all of the regulations and laws which God gave to Israel regarding the sacrificial system, Yeshua is the goal to which they point. And particularly the priests foreshadow the work of Yeshua. In this regard, they cannot be doing their sacred work in a state of uncleanness. They are to exemplify the ultimate Servant of HaShem Who would procure everlasting purity for His people. A priest could not offer a pure sacrifice to God if he himself were unclean. This was to teach us that our High Priest, Yeshua, would Himself be “without blemish,” and that as our intercessor, He would fulfill His work in taking our offerings to the Father and presenting them in such a way as not to compromise His holiness.

But there is a second reason why the priests should receive such a stern warning. It is not uncommon among the annals of human history that economic advantage is gained by those who “control” the worship of a society. Let me explain: a person in Israel could not properly offer his sacrifice unless the priests did their job as God had prescribed. If the priests operated without scruples, they could take the offerings for themselves and short-circuit the ability of the people to offer their gifts to God. This is, no doubt, the reason that the tribe of Levi was not to have an inheritance in land ownership. Their livelihood was dependent upon the generosity and obedience of the people. They were not to get rich by “selling” their service of worship.

The priests, therefore, were constantly to have this perspective: they were not ministering to gain their living, nor were they ministering to attract the applause of the people. They were to minister with a focus upon God—to serve Him and honor His holy Name. Note carefully that in the severe penalty of being “cut off,” the text (22:3) makes it clear that they are “cut off *from before Me*.” It is the holy Name of HaShem they are to constantly hold before their eyes. If they were to give proper respect to the holiness of the God they served, they would offer the correct picture of an intercessor that God intended to give.

We know that in the time of Yeshua, the priests had for many years forsaken the ways of God and had taken to lining their own pockets with the wealth of the Temple offerings. There is little doubt that they had forsaken the laws outlined in our *parashah*. While it may not have been the primary reason, their disobedience most certainly contributed to the wrath of God's judgment that resulted in the destruction of the Temple. Interestingly, after the destruction, the priestly line was literally cut off. While the Pharisees and other sects continued (to one extent or another), the Saducees, the primary sect of the *kohanim*, no longer were recognized as distinct sect among the people of Israel.

What was a priest to do if he became ritually unclean? He was to “withdraw” from the people (וַיִּנְזְרוּ) מִקִּדְשֵׁי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל, “that they withdraw from the holy things of the children of Israel,” cf. Mid. Rab. Num 10:8). The verb נָזַר, *nazar*, when used in the nifal (as here), means to “separate oneself,” “to withdraw,” and even “to fast” (cf. Ezek 14:7; Zech 7:3). It is the same root word from which we derive נָזִיר, *natzir*, “a Nazirite,” who is characterized as abstaining from things (fruit of the vine, anything that has died, cutting one’s hair). The priests were to deny themselves that which otherwise would be their priestly due, and they were to do so because they had put the sanctity of HaShem above their own needs and desires. Of course, once they had returned to a state of ritual purity, they were once again allowed to claim from the offerings of Israel that portion which was rightfully theirs. From many of the sacrifices, a designated portion belonged to the priests.

It was not only the priests who were required to be ritually clean in order to bring sacrifices to the altar, and to partake of that portion which belong to them. The same was true of the worshiper himself: he or she must be clean in order to partake of the sacrifices.

The stipulation in 22:5, that seems to indicate that touching a swarming thing renders a person (in this case, specifically, a priest) unclean must be understood against the background of 11:29-30. There it is specifically stated that the swarming thing has died, and thus touching the carcass of the swarming thing makes a person unclean. Nevertheless, something like “snake handling” would be out of the question (cf. the spurious ending of Mark, 16:18).

22:10-16 concerns itself with the “sacred *food*” of the priests. Since the previous section deals with the food of the priests taken from the sacrifices, the Sages as well as most modern commentators consider that the laws here deal with the tithes given to the priests, that is, the first-fruits, the first-born cattle, that which is dedicated (*cherem*), and the tithe of the produce and the flock or herd (Num 18:11-19, 26; Lev 27:30-33). Most interestingly, the household of the priest, whether or not the persons were actual offspring, hired workers, or life-long slaves (including the children of such) were allowed to eat of the sacred tithes given to the priests. Only when a member of the household comes under the legal status of someone outside of the household are they prohibited from eating the sacred tithes. This speaks to a kind of “adoption” which cuts all former blood ties and renders the person as though he or she were actually within the bloodline of the priest. This matter of “adoption” (or at least being counted as one who has been adopted) seems to find a consistent thread throughout the Tanach. Perhaps the most obvious example of this were the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Menashah, who were counted as full-blooded sons of Jacob even though their mother was an Egyptian. That Jacob adopts them renders them to be full-fledged Israelites.

Following the theme of the sacredness of the sacrifices and tithes, the next section (22:17-33) deals specifically with the perfection of the animals that are brought. Even the smallest defect renders an animal unfit for sacrifice, though it may be used for other purposes. The Torah is specific that castration of animals is forbidden in the Land, v. 24. The NASB translates it as expegetical with the previous clause repeating the leading verb: “...or sacrifice in your land,” but the Hebrew is וּבְאֶרְצְכֶם לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ, (literally) “in your Land you shall not do,” and the construction of the sentence would favor the interpretation that it is the act of gelding animals itself that is forbidden. From a very literal reading of this text, however, this prohibition pertains only to animals raised in the Land of Israel.

The section ends with a pointed summary: “You shall not profane My holy Name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel; I am HaShem who sanctifies you, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, to be your God; I am Adonai.” The keeping of the *mitzvot* (in this context, particularly emphasizing the commandments of sacrifice and priestly due) is the manner in which the Name of God is portrayed as holy. The converse is likewise true: disregarding the *mitzvot* is to profane the Name of God. This underscores the motivation of the Sages for both understanding and implementing the commandments. Only when God’s commandments are followed as He intends are His people able to sanctify His Name—the very purpose for which they were created.

Offering	Class	Meat	Place Eaten	Time Eaten
חטאת של יום הכפורים sin offering of Yom Kippur	Most Holy	Burned outside the camp	Not eaten	Not eaten
חטאת - sin offering; blood put on the altar of incense (Lev 4)	Most Holy	Burned outside the camp	Not eaten	Not eaten
חטאת - normal sin offering; blood is put only on brazen altar	Most Holy	Eaten by Kohanim	Courtyard	1 day & night
עולה - elevation offering; whole burnt (Lev 1)	Most Holy	Burned entirely on the brazen altar	Not eaten	Not eaten
אשם - Guilt offering (Lev 5)	Most Holy	Male kohanim	Courtyard	1 day & night
שלמי צבור - communal peace offering	Most Holy	Male kohanim	Courtyard	1 day & night
שלמי יחיד – personal peace offering (Lev 3)	Holy	breast & thigh to priests; rest eaten by anyone	anywhere in the camp	2 days and the intervening night
תודה – thanksgiving offering (Lev 7)	Holy	breast & thigh to priests; rest eaten by anyone	anywhere in the camp	1 day & night
בכור - firstborn offering (Num 18:17-18)	Holy	eaten by Kohanim and their families	anywhere in the camp	2 days and intervening night
מעשר - tithe offering (Lev 27:32)	Holy	eaten by anyone	anywhere in the camp	2 days and intervening night
פסח - Pesach offering (Ex 12)	Holy	eaten by any covenant member	anywhere in the camp	1 night (until midnight)

(chart adapted from the Stone Chumash, p. 1291)

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 of Leviticus is the well known text that outlines the yearly festivals. That it begins with the weekly Sabbath shows without a doubt that this is considered just as necessary as the yearly festivals. While many suggestions have been given to show the festivals form a unified picture of HaShem's redemption of His people, I would like to offer the picture of marriage as at least one metaphor worthy of our discussion.

Pesach: Redeeming the Bride

The first issue of marriage in the Ancient world was the redemption of the bride—paying the bride price to the bride's father as the first step in the betrothal process. This also meant that a selection—a choosing—had taken place. The groom-to-be, along with his father, had cast their eyes upon a maiden as the fairest prospect for a bride.

But the bride would not come without a price. Paying such a bride price speaks to the issue of redemption, the heart and soul of the Pesach festival. There, at Passover, the payment required to redeem Israel from Egypt's servitude is dramatically displayed every year. The slaying of the Lamb, the blood on the doorposts, and the slaughter of Egypt's first-born sons all vividly remind us that the freedom we enjoy was purchased at great cost. But such a price was paid, and Israel was redeemed to become the bride of Adonai.

Shavuot: The Ketubbah

Shavuot, or the Feast of Pentecost, is directly connected to Pesach by the counting of the omer. This means that the bride-price symbolized by Pesach is directly tied to the events of Shavuot. While the festival itself has a great many other symbolisms, the fact that, by all reckonings, the first Shavuot occurred while Israel was standing at Sinai, is significant. The Torah, given on Sinai, comes to Israel as a contract, and in our picture, as the *ketubbah* or the marriage contract. Written to assure the maintenance of the Bride, the *ketubbah* outlines what is expected of each party, and the commitment the bride and groom make to each other.

The giving of the Torah, then, may be viewed within the context of the love relationship between God and Israel. Redeemed as His future bride, the Torah comes to her as the treasured token of her Groom's fidelity and promise to maintain her. It also requires her faithfulness but promises enduring blessings and security within the marriage bond.

Interestingly, the Ruach was poured out at the Feast of Shavuot (Acts 2) in anticipation of the harvest of the nations to worship Israel's God. Yet the Ruach is also viewed as a marriage contract or bride price when Paul uses the term ἀρραβών (*arrabon*), “pledge” in reference to the Ruach (2Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14). This same word (which is actually an Aramaic term, אַרְבּוֹן, transliterated in the Greek) is used to describe the bride price. Thus, the giving of the Torah as a *ketubbah* and the giving of the Ruach as an *arrabon* continue the picture of the Divine betrothal of Israel.

Yom Teruah / Rosh Hashannah

Rosh HaShannah is the Feast of Trumpets, and literally *Yom Teruah*, Day for Blowing the Shofar. What is the significance of the shofar blasts? It is a call to return—a call for repentance.

The betrothal of Israel to Adonai was interrupted by the maiden's unfaithfulness. This is the message of the Prophets. Consider Jeremiah 31:31-34: here the Lord presents Himself as Israel's Husband (or Husband to be, for in ancient times betrothal was legally binding even as marriage was) and describes Israel's unfaithfulness to Him.

When a betrothed maiden is unfaithful to her betrothed, he has every right to “put her away,” that is, to give her an annulment of the betrothal contract. In such a case, the bride price returns to the would-be groom, and the bride is disgraced. The groom is not required to do this, mind you, but he may if he so desires. The example that immediately comes to mind, of course, is that of Mary and Joseph.

What Rosh HaShannah tells us is that, while Israel played the part of the unfaithful, betrothed maiden, God, her betrothed, calls her back—calls her to repentance. Her waywardness is grievous, but He is willing

to forgive, and even to heal, but she must return—she must repent of her evil deeds. The rightful Husband, the one who has signed the *ketubbah* with His own finger, calls His betrothed wife back to Him—back to faithfulness to the betrothal agreement, the Torah.

Thus, Rosh HaShannah also emphasizes God’s rightful ownership of His bride. The Day commemorates His sovereign kingship, and His right to possess His betrothed. In calling her back to Him, He re-establishes His rightful place beside her.

Yom Kippur: Cleansing the Wayward Bride

Yom Kippur (or Yom HaKippurim) is only 10 days after Rosh HaShannah. It is a day of solemn fasting, seeking to be cleansed of one’s sins. The bride, as she returns, is tattered and torn. Her garments are not white—they are soiled with the filth of unfaithfulness, and besmirched by the selfish indulgence of disloyalty. Can these garments ever be made white? Can she come from the wedding chamber “without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing?” (Ephesians 5:27) when in her *teshuvah* she came wearing such awful clothes?

The message of Yom Kippur is “yes”—Yes, she can be cleansed. The blood of the Lamb washes her garments and makes them white again. She comes, made new, and thus made ready for the Wedding ceremony itself. Indeed, in the solemn activities of Yom Kippur, there is a sense of coming back to where one belongs—back to the One to Whom one belongs. This, of course, is another significant aspect of Yom Kippur, for it is the beginning of every Jubilee year. Thus, Yom Kippur has a special attachment to the *Yovel* year, and this figures into the wedding picture as well. At the Jubilee, everything returns to its rightful owner, including the Land. It is fitting, then, that the bride should return at Rosh HaShannah and be cleansed at Yom Kippur, for her rightful owner is none other than HaShem Himself.

Sukkot: Consummation and Dwelling Together

The Festival of Sukkot hastens immediately on the heels of Yom Kippur. The sorrow of the maiden’s unfaithfulness during her period of betrothal is swept away by the forgiveness and cleansing afforded by the Yom Kippur atonement, and the rejoicing of the wedding feast begins.

The Sukkah symbolizes dwelling together. Here, the groom takes His bride into His own dwelling, a dwelling He has made for her, and the marriage is consummated. Nothing but joy can prevail: the bride and groom have joy unspeakable, for finally—at last, that which is promised is realized.

It is common to eat in the Sukkah, and thus the “marriage supper of the Lamb” fits into this picture well. What is more, the Festival of Sukkot is the only one prescribed in the Torah to be eight days long. Yet there is an issue: the Feast is described as seven days, yet requires assembly on the eighth day. The Sages have made much of the question whether or not the eighth day, called “*Shemini Atzeret*,” is part of Sukkot or not. No one can actually decide. It is thus seen as connected to Sukkot, but a Festival unto itself, nonetheless.

What does this symbolize? The seven days represent the “week” of the world’s history, with the seventh day being the “millennial rest.” The eighth day must therefore represent eternity, connected to the millennial reign of Messiah, but distinct from it. The picture is obvious: God and His bride will remain forever, moving from His millennial reign directly into eternity: “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Here, then, is a picture (one of many) that helps us understand why the Festivals are so important for God’s people. They remind in symbolic and real ways of God’s desire to “dwell among His people,” to engage in that intimate relationship pictured between the husband and his wife. This is the “big picture” of redemption—of God’s desire for His people.

The final word on this is simple: our marriages should reflect this cycle of redemption, a cycle so profound and infinite that God developed the whole scheme of the ages around it. Surely when Paul labels this a “great mystery” (Ephesians 5:32) he spoke well.

Thus, while we may revel in the intricate parts of each of the festivals, we dare not miss the greater message, that as we celebrate these appointed times (including the weekly Shabbat), we are acting out a drama of the greatest love story ever told: the bride of the Messiah as she prepares herself for the final wedding. Let us celebrate with this always in mind!