

November 18, 2018 - Lev. 24:1–23 - Menorah, showbread, and blasphemy
Torah Reading: Leviticus 24:1–23 (25:13) - Menorah, showbread, and blasphemy

[Although it's listed as part of this week's reading, we will study Leviticus 25:1-13 with the rest of the passages regarding the sabbatical and jubilee years next week]

Psalm 88

Haftarah: Hosea 14:7 – Joel 1:5, 14 + 2:4

Jeremiah 11:16 – 12:2 + 15:15-16

Oil for the Lampstand

Leviticus 24:1-2 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually."

This was previously anticipated in **Exodus 27:20-21**.

Rashi - pure olive oil: Three [grades of] oil are extracted from an olive: The first [drop of oil that the olive issues after crushing] is called תָּר, "pure," [and is used for the menorah; the second and third oils that result from grinding are used for the meal offerings]. These [grades of oil] are enumerated in Tractate Men. (86a) and in Torath Kohanim (24: 210).

"Continually" - The perpetual light in the Temple is mentioned by classical writers (pseudo-Hecataeus, in Josephus, "Contra Ap." i. 22; Diodorus Siculus, xxxiv. 1) The central lamp of the Golden Lampstand miraculously never ran out of oil, according to tradition (See below).

Leviticus 24:3-4 - "Without the veil of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the LORD continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually."

Rashi - "Without the veil of the testimony" - which was situated in front of the ark, which was called "the Testimony (תְּעֻדָה)." And our Rabbis expounded [that the תְּעֻדָה (testimony) alludes to] the Western Lamp, which was a "testimony (תְּעֻדָה)" to all the creatures on earth that the Shechinah rested upon Israel, for [the Kohen Gadol] would place into it the same amount of oil he placed into the other lamps, and from it he would begin [the kindling] and with it he would finish [the cleaning, since it continued to burn miraculously until the following evening]. — [Rashi Shab. 22b; Nachalath Ya'akov]

The Western Lamp (the lamp on top of the Menorah's middle shaft) was said to be always kept lighted, from which the others drew on its oil supply; though the oil was undoubtedly for the supply of the lamps, that they might burn always, night and day; or

from night tonight; and both on sabbath days and working days, as in the Targum of Jonathan.

There was one Golden Lampstand consisting of seven branches holding individual lamps.

The Zohar relates the pure oil to the study of the Torah.

Oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit and was used to consecrate and anoint priests, the king, and the Messiah. "God anointed him (Jesus) with the Holy Spirit and with power" - **Acts 10:38**) As used in lamps, oil as the Holy Spirit reveals and illuminates God and his word.

- **Revelation 4:5** - "...and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God."

Zohar - The pure oil represents pure motives in Torah study, not self-serving ones, which would be considered as equivalent to oil that contains sediments. The less-pure oil could be used in meal offerings, however.

Hanukkah - Miracle of the Oil

The miracle of the oil celebrated on Hanukkah reflects this same idea. The lamp burned for eight days past the time it should have run out of oil, until the priest arrived with the proper mixture of holy pure oil. If Hanukkah represents Christ's conception, then a miraculous Light entered the world. Now each Jewish household must light a lamp each Hanukkah night, facing toward a window - like the Western Lamp, it declares God's presence to those outside; You can't benefit from it.

In Sifrei Bemidbar (sec. 59), a midrashic text that predates the Talmud: "Why does God need a menorah burning continuously in the Temple?" It informs all inhabitants of the world that the Shechinah, God's presence, rests upon the people Israel. How is this so? Because every night the designated priest would pour the same amount of oil into all seven branches of the Temple menorah. By the next morning, six of the flames would have gone out. But the seventh, called the Western lamp, would remain lit until the following evening when the priest would come back to light the menorah. He would use the one remaining flame to kindle the six others. That is, the oil of the Western lamp lasted twice as long as it should have.

The Hanukkah menorah similarly uses the central lamp - called the "servant Lamp" - to light the others, just like the central "western lamp" in the Temple.

When the Perpetual Light was Extinguished

Jerusalem Talmud: "Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the western light went out, the crimson thread remained crimson, and the lot for the Lord always came up in the left hand. They would close the gates of the Temple by night and get up in the

morning and find them wide open" (Jacob Neusner, 'The Yerushalmi,' p.156-157).

Every night for forty years the western lamp went out, and this in spite of the priests each evening preparing in a special way the western lamp so that it would remain constantly burning all night!" ('The Significance of the Year CE 30,' Ernest Martin, Research Update, April 1994, p.4).

Today in synagogues a "perpetual light" is maintained in a lamp that consists generally of a glass vessel containing a wick burning in olive-oil; this is held in an ornamental metal receptacle suspended from the ceiling in front of the "Holy Ark," or "Aron ha-Kodesh," just as the candlestick ("menorah") in the Tabernacle and Temple had its place before the Ark of the Covenant.

When Jesus - the Light of the World - fulfilled His mission, there was no longer any need for the Western Lamp to communicate the Shekinah presence of God. In fact, the Shekinah had departed previously (**Ezekiel 10:23**), and the ark of the covenant was not present in the Temple of Jesus' day.

- **Hosea 9:12** - "Woe to them when I depart from them!"

Shekinah means "indwelling," according to the rabbis. The indwelling is now "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (**Colossians 1:27**).

Give me Oil in my Lamp

One a personal level, Jesus' parable of the Ten Virgins speaks to all of us:

- **Matthew 25:6-7** - "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps..."

Do we have oil in our lamps? Just as the other lamps "drew" on the oil from the central Western Lamp, we need to draw on Christ's supply of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out for us.

- **Luke 11:11-13** - "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

The Showbread - Leviticus 24:5-9

Leviticus 24:5 - "And thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof: two tenth deals shall be in one cake."

The Targum of Jonathan says the 12 cakes represent the twelve tribes. New Testament believers see them also as the spiritual Israel of God.

Leviticus 24:6 - "And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the LORD."

"pure table" - i.e. Overlaid in pure gold (**Exodus 25:24**).

The table is called "the table of His Presence" (**Numbers 4:7**), and the cakes are called "the bread of His Presence" (**Exodus 25:30; Exodus 35:13; Exodus 39:36**). -
"presence" = "before His face"

Every Sabbath a fresh supply was furnished; hot loaves were placed on the altar instead of the stale ones, which, having lain a week, were removed, and eaten only by the priests, except in cases of necessity (**1 Samuel 21:3-6**; also **Luke 6:3, 4**).

Leviticus 24:7 - "And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the LORD."

Frankincense

The frankincense was burned on the altar as incense, but not the bread - the bread was taken away and eaten by the priests.

Recall that the wise men offered Jesus "gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh." (**Matthew 2:11**)

Research shows the fragrant aroma of frankincense lowers levels of anxiety and might help regulate emotions such as depression.

- **Psalms 141:2** - "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!"

- **Revelation 5:8** - "And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints."

Jewish commentators think frankincense might be responsible for this phenomenon: The Mishnah in Avot (5:5) states that there were no flies in the area of the Temple, nor was a snake or scorpion ever able to harm anyone anywhere in Jerusalem as long as the Temple stood.

A Man who Cursed God - A Warning Against Intermarriage

Leviticus 24:10-11 - "And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel: and this son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp; And the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan:)"

Tradition says the father is the Egyptian whom Moses slew, **Exodus 2:12**. Part of the mixed multitude according to the Targum of Jonathan. The son of the Egyptian sought to spread his tent in the midst of the tribe of Dan, and they would not suffer it, because the "ranks of the children of Israel were according to the genealogy of their fathers."

The Chaldee version translates this part of the verse, "And when they came out of the house of judgment, having been condemned, the son of the Israelitish woman pronounced and reviled the great and glorious name of manifestation which had been heard on Sinai, and he was defiant and annoying."

It was a common practice among the Egyptians to curse their idols when disappointed in obtaining the object of their petitions. - *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*

Leviticus 24:12 - "And they put him in ward, that the mind of the LORD might be shewed them."

This was a breach of the third commandment, but God had only said in general that he would not hold such a one guiltless, that is, he would punish them, but had not declared how he would have them punished by men.

Leviticus 24:14 - "Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him."

"without the camp" - All executions took place outside the camp, including Christ's crucifixion.

Stoning was the same punishment which was previously appointed for those who cursed their parents. (**Leviticus 20:9**)

At the same time the witnesses and judges uttered the solemn words, "Let thy blood be upon thine own head; we are not punished for thy death, thou hast brought this upon thyself."

Blasphemy was not mentioned in the Ten Commandments because it was unthinkable. The text here merely records that such an evil thing once happened, and we learn, incidentally, the law governing such a crime. - *The Biur, Moses Mendelssohn's commentary on the Bible*

Punishments - Blasphemy

Leviticus 24:15-16 - "And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death."

Again, blaspheming God like idolatry was considered a national crime, treason against God and Israel, and which threatened Israel's very existence.

But why would blasphemy deserve death?

The blasphemer “went out among the children of Israel” (**Leviticus 24:10**) Went out from where? He left his world (his humanity), which is the divine presence that invests itself in the worlds He created.” - Isaac Luria, Kabbala scholar (1534–1572)

The prohibition against murder derives from man’s being created in the image of God (Genesis 9:5-6). Blasphemy erases the divine image in man, without which there is complete lawlessness.

“By such evil utterance man divests himself of his goodness, and all his innate dignity become destructive. He becomes a beast. He abuses the very thing which sets him above the beast - the gift of speech...”

- Sefer Ha-hinukh

Lex Talionis (The law of retaliation or retribution in kind)

Leviticus 24:17-21 forms a *chiasmus* - a poetic structure in which the later parts match up to the former.

Leviticus 24:17-21 - "And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death. And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast. And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again. And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death."

See <https://biblicalchiasmus.wordpress.com/2010/06/06/leviticus-2417-21-lex-talionis/>

"An eye for an eye" is not meant literally. It means the severity of the punishment should not exceed the severity of the crime.

The rabbis insist this refers to monetary compensation. But with a nuance: there is a difference between compensation for goods and compensation for bodily harm.

“Once the damage to the goods has been made good, the guilty party has made atonement, whereas he who causes bodily injury to his fellow, though he has paid him the five things (injury, pain, medical care, loss of time, shame) has made no atonement even if he offered all the rams of Naboth. His iniquity is not forgiven until he asked the victim’s forgiveness and been forgiven.” - Hovel U-mazik, 5,9

Compare **Exodus 21:23-27** - The master who injured his slave was not punished by

inflicting upon him the identical injury he caused. He didn't lose his own eye or his own tooth. Rather, the slave was set free as fit punishment of the master for his crime. This alerts us to the fact that it is not always easy to determine precisely what punishment is of equal weight to the crime committed.

This law was meant to interrupt cycles of vendettas, escalating retribution that could span generations, as well as vigilante mob "justice." Punishment has to fit the crime, and be administered by legal authorities.

In Jesus' day many were applying Lex Talionis to personal offenses and in that way justifying the spirit and the practice of revenge. Jesus strongly forbade that:

- **Matthew 5:38-39** - "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Humans have no standing to personally condemn others. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

- **John 8:7** - "...He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

Jesus' crucifixion was a demonstration of Le Talionis. Perfect justice was dealt out by God. Only a terrible execution inflicted on a sinless victim could balance the depth of the sin of mankind.

- **Romans 3:26** - "...that he might be *just*, and the *justifier* of him which believeth in Jesus."

A note on **Leviticus 24:20** - "Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again."

Remember from Leviticus 21 that a "blemish" would disqualify a priest from holy service. Spiritually, anyone who causes another person to doubt that "it is finished" on the cross, or that they are not qualified to serve in God's royal kingdom of priests, will suffer the same doubts about himself. It will recoil on him. - *Ole Anthony, 1992*