

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
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DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 14 LEVITICUS CHAPTERS 24 & 25

INTRODUCTION

Leviticus 24 and 25 are two great chapters for knowing more about the character and personality of God. They also show how a nation can maintain strong family ties, social justice and economic growth. Israel was a privileged people to be given such wonderful laws. If they had faithfully obeyed the laws, they would have been the showcase nation to the world.

In chapter 24, God reminded Israel of His everlasting covenant which He had made with them. God solemnly warned them that taking the name of God in vain was a very serious sin. God's laws were just and equitable to instruct and guide them in their dealings and relationships one with another. In chapter 25, God commanded them to observe the Sabbatical Year of the Land and the Year of Jubilee. The purpose was not only to alleviate the poor and needy and keep the family united together but also to test Israel's faith in Him. They were good laws. Our study of these two chapters will yield valuable insights in theology and ecclesiology.¹

¹ Meaning of Ecclesiology. From Greek, *ekklesia*, "church," and *logos*, "the study of." In theology it means a study of the nature and government of a church.

OUTLINE

- A. The Laws Concerning The Light And The Bread In The Tabernacle Must Be Faithfully Kept (Leviticus 24:1-8).
 - 1. The LORD continued His instructions to Moses for the children of Israel (vv.1, 2).
 - 2. The golden lamp-stand must be kept burning continually (vv.2-4).
 - a. The oil made from pure olive (v.2).
 - b. The lamps to be burning evening and morning (v.3).
 - 3. The table of bread had 12 cakes of bread (vv.5-9).
 - a. Each cake was made of fine flour and two-tenths of an ephah (v.5).²
 - b. Divided into two rows of six in each row (v.6).
 - c. Pure incense was put on each row as a memorial (v.7).
 - d. Every week they were to be replaced (v.8).
 - e. The previous 12 cakes of bread could only be eaten by the priests (v.9).
- B. The Blasphemer of the Name of the LORD and His Punishment (24:10-16).
 - 1. A conflict arose between the son of an Israeli woman (whose husband was an Egyptian) and an Israelite (v.10).

² An ephah is about 4.5 litres.

2. The half-breed cursed the name of the LORD (v.11).
 3. The half-breed was detained while the people sought the will of the LORD (v.12).
 4. The LORD spoke to Moses to stone the blasphemer to death (vv.13-15).
 5. The law demanded that any blasphemer of the LORD would be put to death (v.16).
- C. Some of the Cardinal Principles of Biblical Law Applied to the Native Israelites and the Resident Foreigners (24:17-23).
1. A murderer must be put to death (v.17).
 2. The killing of an animal must pay an equal compensation (v.18).
 3. A person who injured another, the same must be done to him (vv.19, 20).
 - a. Breach for breach (v.20)
 - b. An eye for an eye (v.20)
 - c. A tooth for a tooth (v.20)
 4. Summary of the laws of retribution (vv.21, 22).
 5. The execution of the judgment against the blasphemer (v.23).
- D. The Sabbatical Year of the Land (25:1-7).
1. The LORD spoke to the Israelites through Moses (vv.1, 2).
 2. The Israelites were commanded to keep a sabbatical year of the land when they possessed it (vv.2-5).
 - a. Six years they would sow and harvest the land (v.3).
 - b. The seventh year the land was left to rest (vv.4, 5).
 3. The Lord would bless them in the six years that there would be no lack for their sustenance (vv.6, 7).
- E. The Year of Jubilee (25:8-22).
1. The sabbath of jubilee (vv.8-16).
 - a. The jubilee would be kept after seven cycles of the sabbatical year (v.8).
 - b. The jubilee would begin on the day of atonement (v.9).
 - c. The Israelites were to proclaim liberty throughout the land (v.10).
 - d. It would be a holy sabbath to the people (vv.11, 12).
 - e. The people were to return every person's possession (vv.13-16).
 2. The LORD promised blessings if they obeyed Him (vv.17-22).
 - a. The basis for obeying was that they should fear the LORD their God (v.17).
 - b. If they obeyed God, He would bless the land and there would be peace (vv.18, 19).
 - c. The Israelites did not have to worry about provisions for the sabbatical year (vv.20-22).

F. The Laws Governing the Relationships Between the Israelites (25:23-38).

1. The land must not be sold because it belonged to God (vv.23, 24).
2. The people were allowed to redeem their property (vv.25-28).
3. The laws governing the redemption of houses (vv.29-34).
4. The people's obligations to one another (vv.35-55).
 - a. An Israelite must help another Israelite, (or foreigner) if he was stricken with poverty (v.35).
 - b. They must not lend another money or food by charging interest on them (vv.36, 37).
 - c. The basis of these laws was that the LORD is their God who delivered them from Egypt and who gave the land to them (v.38).
5. The prohibition of enslavement of an Israelite (vv.39-55).
 - a. An Israelite who bought another Israelite must not treat him as a slave but as a hired servant respecting his human rights (vv.39-41).
 - b. The reason was that they were also the servants of God whom He also brought out of Egypt (vv.42, 43).
 - c. Only a foreigner could serve them as slaves but not an Israelite (vv.44-46).
 - d. If a foreigner became rich and bought an Israelite to serve as a slave, his family

members could redeem him (vv.47-53).

- e. If the Israelite were not redeemed, he would be released in the year of jubilee for Israelites were God's servants (vv.54, 55).

COMMENTARY

The Light and The Bread

Chapter 23 introduces and describes the seven important feasts of the LORD. The people gathered together as a nation to worship and show their gratitude to God. Surely when the children of Israel congregated during these festivals, it was like a spiritual mountain-top experience. But chapter 24 abruptly brings the children of Israel down to the mundane daily duty of keeping the lights of the seven-branch "candlestick" in the tabernacle glowing and of maintaining the freshness of the "shewbread."³

A few details are given here. The oil for the lamps was made of pure olive oil, beaten from the olives. The lights must be kept burning all the time, even when the priests retired from the evening to the morning. If the lights were extinguished, there would be total darkness in the Holy Place. The "shewbread" or the "bread of His presence" must be freshly replenished every week. Incense was placed on the table, not on the bread because the sanctified bread was consumed by the priest in the Holy Place. The incense was burned as a memorial portion to the LORD. These things reminded the

³ The "shewbread" literally means "bread of the face." "Face" symbolises a person's presence. Hence the "shewbread" is sometimes translated "Bread of His Presence."

children of Israel of the everlasting nature of the covenant which God had made with their forefathers. It is most assuring and comforting that God's covenant which He had made with man can never be broken. God does not make a mistake when He makes a covenant with man. God is faithful and true to His promises. We, who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and received Him into our hearts as our Lord and Saviour, are assured of God's promises that we have eternal life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as our guarantee.

The light and the bread also aptly describe the New Testament priesthood of believers. First, the light in the tabernacle spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ who declared that He is the Light of the world (John 8:12).⁴ The Lord Jesus Christ said that we are the light of the world and we ought to shine before men so that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in Heaven (Matthew 5:14, 16). That light must be kept glowing all the time! Jesus Christ also said that He is the Bread of life. Anyone who comes to Him shall never hunger and he that believes on Him shall never thirst (John 6:35). This reminds that we, who have eaten of the Bread of Life, must continue daily to feed on that Bread, the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God.⁵

The Case of a Blasphemer

This narrative relates a mixed-Israelite whose father was an Egyptian

⁴John 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the **light** of the **world**: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the **light** of life.

⁵Matthew 4:4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

and mother was an Israelite. He quarrelled with an Israelite and "blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed" (24:11). The blaspheming of the name of God did not mean just swearing or cursing in the name of God. He undermined the faith of the people of Israel by saying that the LORD (Yahweh) was not like His name. He insinuated that the idea of a covenant was a lot of nonsense.⁶ He was caught. Moses and the people did not know what to do with him. They waited on the LORD. The LORD personally instructed Moses on what to do with the blasphemer. He was to be taken out of the camp and all that heard him were to lay their hands on him and stone him to death. All those who heard him seemed to have been defiled too, and thus the laying of the hands on the blasphemer. No one, not even a foreigner among them, could blaspheme the name of God and get away with it. It was a very serious offence to blaspheme the name of God. God himself imposed the death penalty on him.

An Eye for An Eye

The premeditated taking of a person's life was punishable by death. This penalty was non-negotiable. Other crimes like the killing of an animal, injuring another's eye or tooth were compensated with equity. In other words, the punishment must befit the crime. The sense of the phrase, "breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" was that an equivalent compensation must be met. It made no sense to take an offender's eye or tooth or to inflict the same kind of injury on the other. In many instances the principle of equitable compensation was just, for

⁶Tidball, 194.

even our courts of law follow this biblical principle in settling such disputes.

However, our Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples that if a person struck them on the right cheek, they should turn their other cheek to him as well (Matthew 5:38-39).⁷

The Sabbatical Year

The Fourth Commandment required that the children of Israel kept the seventh day each week holy unto the LORD. They should not do any work (Exodus 20:10). The LORD told the children of Israel that when they go into the Promised Land, they must keep a sabbatical year of the land. For six years they could sow, prune, reap and harvest the land but in the seventh year, the sabbatical year, they must let the land lie fallow for a year (25:4). And, whatever grew spontaneously in the land during the sabbatical year could be pick by anyone or by anyone's livestock, not just the owner of the land (25:6). This law was an extension of the weekly sabbath.

The Year of Jubilee

In addition to the sabbatical year of the land, the children of Israel must observe the year of jubilee. The jubilee was celebrated after seven cycles of sabbatical years and on the 50th year, on the 10th day of the seventh month, which was also the day of atonement. It was a very special year holy unto the LORD within which the children of Israel must proclaim "liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (25:10). Land and property that had been sold to pay debts incurred by the

original owners must be returned to them. If an Israelite had been sold as a slave to another, he too must be released in the year of jubilee (25:30). Both property and slaves could be redeemed by their kinsmen (25:25). The property or house in a walled city might be redeemed within the year. If within the year, it was not redeemed, the property became the seller's permanently (25:29-30). This rule was not applied to houses in villages. These village houses were considered as part of the land (25:31). Levites could redeem their property in the cities or in the villages at any time. If they were not redeemed in the year of jubilee, they would all be released and returned to their original owner.

The purpose of this law was to curb the exploitation of the poor by the rich. The children of Israel were forbidden to oppress or suppress one another. After each cycle of 50 years, the poor people could start anew. Their family members would be re-united. The basis for this law is the fact that the LORD God owns the land (25:23). God had generously divided the land among them. The land could not be permanently sold to any man. The children of Israel were commanded to fear God for He is their LORD (25:17).

It was also a test of their faith in God. The jubilee year followed the sabbatical year of the land and for two years the land would have laid fallow. God promised that if they obeyed Him, He would bless the land in the sixth year so that the land would bear its produce for three years (25:20-21)! This reminds us of how two days portion of manna were given to the Israelites on the sixth day because no manna would fall on the seventh (Sabbath) day. The extra portion which the Israelites kept

⁷Matthew 5:38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

overnight would not turn bad (Exodus 16:22-24). Nothing is impossible with God for He is *El Shaddai*!

The Old Testament did not record an instance of the keeping of the year of jubilee. This implied that the Israelites did not observe it or that they had violated the commandment. If this was true, it would explain why the community of Israel had deteriorated as described by the prophets Amos and Isaiah (Amos 2:6; 5:4-27; Isaiah 5:8).⁸

Slavery & the Poor

God cares for the poor, the needy and the humble. He expects His people to do likewise. The children of Israel must help one another. If an Israelite or a foreigner who lived among them became poor, the others ought to help him (25:35). An Israelite must not enslave another Israelite. If an Israelite became poor and was sold to another Israelite, the latter must not treat him as a slave but as a hired servant and a sojourner. He would serve him until the year of jubilee when he would be released together with all his children if he had them when he was serving his employer (25:39-41). The employer must treat the hired servant well. No Israelite could be a slave to another because he was the LORD's slave (25:55). Israel belonged to God. However, the rule did not apply to the foreigners. When a foreigner became a

⁸Amos 2:6 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes;

Isaiah 5:8 Woe unto them that join house to house, *that* lay field to field, till *there be* no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!

slave of an Israelite, he would be a slave. The children born to the foreigner slave would remain the property of his master permanently. But they must be treated well and not be exploited (25:46). If a wealthy foreigner who lived among them bought an Israeli servant, the hired servant must be allowed to be redeemed by his kinsman. If no one could redeem him, he would be released in the year of jubilee (25:41-54).

PRACTICAL VALUE

We learn many valuable lessons from these two chapters. God once again demonstrates that His covenant and promises are true and irrevocable. In no uncertain terms, God demonstrated that He is not to be taken lightly. No one who took Him for granted and blasphemed His Name would get away with it. He would surely punish the offender. As Christians who have been bought by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must learn to fear and love God. We must live constantly with the conviction that God is ever present in our life. We must be mindful of what we say and do. We must not take His name in vain.

God teaches us how we ought to treat the earth. He knows that man will exploit the earth to his own detriment. We do see this happening today. Man has ravaged the earth to the extent that many animals have become endangered species and the environment is under great stress. God instructed the children of Israel to observe the sabbatical year of the land, and let it lie fallow for a year.

The jubilee release sought to give the poor and needy another chance. Debts could break and separate

families. When the family units were broken, the nation became weak. The Jubilee release allowed families to be reunited and to start anew. The LORD teaches us how we ought to treat our fellow brethren. We must love one another and treat each other justly. God has been generous and gracious to us. He has delivered us from the terrible effects of sin and Satan. Yet many Christians today live selfishly without a care for their fellow brethren.

God promised to bless the children of Israel if they obeyed Him in observing the sabbatical year of the land and the jubilee release. It was a test of their faith and trust in God. God can be trusted. His Word is true. We must learn to obey and trust Him. How many times have we tried to get rich or move up the corporate ladder by forfeiting our duty towards God and trading off our spiritual growth for a morsel of the world's goods! God says (Matthew 6:33): "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you". God is true to His Word. The biblical record has shown that He is true and faithful to His Word. His promises are "yea, yea." The question we must ask ourselves is, "Are we prepared to obey and trust God no matter what?"

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Leviticus 24:1-9; John 8:12; John 6:48-51; Matthew 5:14-16.

Tuesday: Leviticus 24:10-23; Matthew 5:38-39; Psalm 86:12; 1 Corinthians 6:20.

Wednesday: Leviticus 25:1-24; Matthew 6:25-33; Galatians 5:1.

Thursday: Leviticus 25:25-38; Romans 8:14-23.

Friday: Leviticus 25:39-55; Luke 4:16-21.

Discussion Questions

1. The lamps had to be kept burning continually. What evidence indicated that the priests did not have to be on 24-hour round the clock duty?

2. Why were there 12 cakes?

3. How do we know that the incense was not poured onto the cakes?

4. Why was blasphemy against God such a serious sin?

5. What was the value of the life of a person?

6. What principle of retribution was given in chapter 24:18-21?

7. What do you learn about God's character and personality in chapter 24: 8, 15, 17 and 22?

8. What was meant by keeping the sabbatical year of the land?

9. What were the consequences and how could they be overcome?

10. Why did God command them to keep the sabbatical year of the land?

TEACHING LESSON

11.State simply the basic law of redemption and jubilee.

12.How can we tell that God did not approve of human slavery?

13.What have you learned of God's character and will? What should we do to glorify Him?

A. THE LIGHT IN THE TABERNACLE & THE TABLE OF SHEWBREAD.

- 1. Light symbolizes God's presence.
- 2. The Lord Jesus Christ said that He is the Light.

B. The LORD promised to bless them so that they lacked nothing when they obeyed him by keeping the sabbatical year of the land (25:6-7, 20-21).

C. The importance of resolving to know God's Will and to do His Will in His Way so that we may discern what is right and wrong, walk uprightly before Him and not be deceived.

D. The basis of their dealings one with another was to fear the LORD God (25:17; 37; 42; 55). Answer the question: Why must the children of Israel behave as such?

E. The results of obeying the laws, judgments and statutes of God (25:18-21).

F. The land belonged to God. God leased the land of the earth to man in order to keep him alive.

G. Seemingly discrimination in the treatment of an Israelite slave and a non-Israelite slave (vv.44-46). The theological reason is that Israel belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). As for the non-Israelites, permanency ensured shelter, food and clothes for them and they were not to be treated harshly by their Israelite masters.

Main points discussed and the related verses:

- 1. The Lamp and the Table of Shewbread - regulations (24).

2. The Death Penalty for Blasphemy (24:10-16).
3. The Imposition of the Death Penalty for taking the life of another person (24:21)
4. The Sabbatical Year of the Land (25:1-9)
5. The Year of Jubilee (25:10-24)
6. The Laws of Redemption (25:25-38)
7. The Laws Governing Enslavement (25:39-55)