

**PARASHAH:** Emor (Speak)  
**ADDRESS:** Vayikra (Leviticus) 21:1-24:23  
**READING DATE:** Shabbat  
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\*Updated: May 1, 2007

(Note: all quotations are taken from the **Complete Jewish Bible**, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,  
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,  
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.  
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.  
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,  
you have selected us from among all the peoples,  
and have given us your Torah.  
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.  
Ameyn.)

Welcome to **Parashat Emor**. Last week we focused on holiness. This week the first two chapters of Emor focus on the cohanim (priests) and their separation unto holiness. As priests, as leaders in a high-visibility position, they needed to take extra special care to demonstrate the holiness of HaShem in the sight of the people. As we shall find out in a future parashah, although not a priest, Moshe was the preeminent high-viz leader and his failure to demonstrate this holiness—as a leader among them—coupled along with disobedience and a lack of faith (read Hebrews 3:15-19 carefully) warrants his inability to enter into the Land of Promise. Don't get me wrong. The same chapter of Hebrews states that Moshe was faithful (3:2, 5). However, this must be balanced with the truth of his angry outburst in striking the Rock that HaShem commanded to be spoken to only. From this example alone, we should be able to catch a glimpse of the seriousness of representing God on a priestly/leadership level.

Chapters 21 and 22 of our parashah contain various positive mitzvot as well as negative (prohibitive) commands, viz “prescriptions and proscriptions.” These commandments would not be any different from some of the others that we have encountered in the book of Leviticus except that they are specifically addressed to the priestly line. Therefore, they become specific to them and should be understood in that sense. We do damage to the text when we remove the context of certain commands, which identify specific recipients. The Torah is indeed for all to act upon, but the delegation of authority helps us to ascertain which commands apply to whom. Consequently, when we arbitrarily apply a command to someone for whom it was not intended, we “destroy” the clear

meaning of the text and we misunderstand its application. Our haftarah portion of Yechezk'el 44:15-31 also echoes this same sentiment. The student should refer specifically to 44:23, 28.

The thrust of the priestly instructions of chapters 21 and 22 is summed up in the final verses of chapter 22:

**“You are to keep my mitzvot and obey them; I am ADONAI. You are not to profane my holy name; on the contrary, I am to be regarded as holy among the people of Isra'el; I am ADONAI, who makes you holy, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God; I am ADONAI.”**

These words are extremely powerful! This is the calling of the priests of the LORD. This is the challenge of the leaders of the community. In one sweeping statement, HaShem defines their divine purpose and calling, while simultaneously giving us an unmistakable definition of his identity and authoritative election process: the Children of Isra'el can proudly proclaim “WE are HOLY because HE makes US HOLY!” This statement extends to us today because we have become righteous heirs through the adoption process of our Great High Priest, Yeshua HaMashiach!

Moreover, since this statement of HaShem's contains three references to his name (similar to the “Shema”), it has been recognized as one of those mysterious passages which gives us a glimpse of the concept of the Divine Unity of the Holy One. The Shema states that “YHVH, Eloheynu, YHVH is echad!” Here we see three instances where HaShem is revealed among his children, hinting at the Unified nature of his Three Persons; similarly, our present verse states: “I am YHVH... your Elohim... I am YHVH.” Although verses 31-33 summarizes the primary admonition of the priests themselves, the Talmud comments on these verses in this way (recognizing that indeed the whole Nation was chosen as a “Kingdom of Priests” it states): “A Jew's primary privilege and responsibility is to sanctify God's Name through his behavior, so that people say of him, “Fortunate are the parents and teachers who raised such a person.” Conversely, there is no greater degradation for a Jew than to act in a way that will make people say the opposite (Yoma 86a).

What an awesome responsibility the priests carried among the people; what an equally important responsibility that the Jewish Nation carries among the various peoples of the world.

To be sure, we believers carry this responsibility as well.

**May the Holy One grant us mercy as we daily sanctify the name of the Anointed One, Yeshua ben-Elohim, among the nations!**

## **Mo'eydim (Festivals)**

The most easily recognized feature of our parashah this week is the listing of the **Mikra'ey Kodesh**, that is, the Holy Convocations. Since we carry studies on each individual Festival at my web sites, I will provide highlights from each one for us here in **Parashat Emor**.

The Feasts of ADONAI are just that: Feasts of ADONAI! They are not man's feasts; they are not Isra'el's feasts. Is Isra'el the caretaker? Yes. The owner? No. The student should carefully read Leviticus 23: 1-3. As we shall see, the feasts were meant to serve as daily, monthly, and yearly reminders, of our identity and purpose, in the historical plans that HaShem has for all of mankind. The Torah teaches us that they are the **"rehearsals of messianic redemption."** Properly understood, they tell the story of the birth and life, atoning work, death, resurrection, promise of power, assurance of dedication, promise of return, and promise of eternal abiding, of the Messiah Yeshua, in relation to all genuine followers. Surely it is in the mind of the Holy One, for his children to have an intimate knowledge of these aspects of his Son's ministry! Yet, for nearly two thousand years, our appreciation of these feasts, within historic Christian circles, has remained marginal at best and non-existent at worst.

Below are brief themes and biblical and spiritual concepts of the seven mikra'ey kodesh, plus Shabbat, which the Torah has for us:

### **Shabbat (Sabbath) – resting in Messiah; resting from work**

In my dealings with the particular topic of Sabbath vs. Sunday I have decidedly noticed that conventional reasoning seldom contains Scriptural legitimacy. Traditional Christian reasoning as to why the days have been switched most often seem to point towards Christ having been raised from the dead on Sunday. That this was no trivial event for the whole of Christianity is certain. However, an event in the life of the Messiah, whether significant or not, is hardly reason enough to challenge clear Scriptural commands.

Pseudo-biblical reasoning is often employed to support abandonment of Sabbath in favor of Sunday observance. Observe the most common p'sukim (verses) that are used:

- Matthew 28:1, 6
- Mark 16:9
- Luke 24:1, 6
- John 20:1

This trip down Gospel lane is quite simply presented as valid proof that Sunday should be honored over and above Shabbat. For, as the Christian argues, is it

not clear that Christ really did raise from death to life as seen in these verses? Yes, I agree that this event is central to basic Christian theology. Why then should I reject such reasoning? Simply because such hermeneutic reasoning ignores the fact that these p'sukim are merely part of a greater narrative of the Resurrection event and consequently carry no halakhic function whatsoever. There is no Scriptural support for Sunday worship from such a narrative, let alone any evidence to support the absconding of Shabbat altogether.

Although I did not focus on the Creation account and its impact on Sabbath pageantry, in truth my personal primary conviction of the theology of Shabbat and its supposed abrogation would read something like this: Along with the fact that it is a memorial of Creation, the Sabbath day is also an identification of HaShem's authority. Only he could set a day apart as holy (read B'resheet 2:1-3). Only he could sanctify a day as an eternal memorial of his uniqueness. No other created being has this authority. This includes man. This includes religious institutions. When we attempt to override this authority, we undermine the very character, identification, and nature of our All-mighty God. Once we find ourselves playing God, it is then that we are in serious trouble. While it is true that we have been given the authority to make lasting decisions governing everyday communal matters (read Mattityahu 18:15-20 to understand an often-misunderstood application of heavenly authority), we have not been given the authority to switch God's Sabbath Day, nor to abrogate it.

As for personal observance I tend to go out on a limb (so to say) and believe that Sabbath observance can seem like a tricky subject... especially when viewing it through the lens of someone else. I personally believe that Torah-observance (to include Sabbath) is first understood and applied from the individual perspective, especially when the Ruach HaKodesh has firmly revealed a certain aspect of it to you. In other words: how YOU keep Torah is going to necessarily differ somewhat than the way I keep Torah, understand? Only after personalizing the mitzvah can the corporate aspect be actualized as well. The Sabbath is but one command that is to be internalized using the faith of Messiah Yeshua.

### **Pesach (Passover) – redemption, salvation, deliverance, freedom**

Shabbat notwithstanding, Pesach is the beginning of the biblical feasts of Leviticus chapter 23. The actual feast known as Pesach spans three separate, yet inextricably-linked feasts: Pesach, observed on the fourteenth day of the Jewish month of Nissan, HaMatzah (Unleavened Bread), observed on the fifteenth day of Nissan, and Omer Reisheet (First Sheaf), observed the day after the Sabbath of HaMatzah.

I want to provide the readers with a concise look at Passover by supplying a direct quote from a book I highly recommend reading called 'The Seven Festivals of the Messiah' by Edward Chumney, available through Treasure House Publishing. One may also read this book online at Chumney's web site at

<http://www.hebroots.org>. In Chapter Three, pages 23-25, he provides this vital background look at understanding the overall message of the Pesach and its relevance and fulfillment in Yeshua the Messiah:

G-d declared Passover (Pesach) to be a permanent celebration for all eternity (Exodus [Shemot] 12:2,6,13-14). Historically, Passover (Pesach) celebrates G-d's deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt (Mitzrayim), where they were slaves to the Egyptians (Exodus [Shemot] 2:23-24; 6:5-8; 13:3,14).

The spiritual application that G-d wants us to understand is this: Egypt (Mitzrayim) is a type of the world and the world's system. Its ruler, Pharaoh, was a type of satan (Ha satan). The bondage people are in when they live according to the ways of the world's system is sin (John [Yochanan] 8:34).

Historically, the children of Israel were delivered from the bondage in Egypt (Mitzrayim) by putting the blood of a lamb upon the doorposts of their houses (Exodus [Shemot] 12:2,6,13). Spiritually, this is a picture of the Messiah Yeshua and how those who believe in Him are delivered from the bondages of sin and the rule of satan (Ha satan) in their lives. Yeshua is the Lamb of G-d (John [Yochanan] 1:29). Yeshua is also our Passover (Pesach) (1 Corinthians 5:7). Those who follow Yeshua are the house of G-d (Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter [Kefa] 2:5). The doorposts are our hearts. It is only through trusting by faith (emunah) in the shed blood of Yeshua (Jesus), our Passover (Pesach), that we are free from the bondage of sin (Galatians 4:3-5,9; 5:1; 2 Peter [Kefa] 2:19). This is because the blood of Yeshua redeems us from sin (Leviticus [Vayikra] 17:11; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; 1 Peter [Kefa] 1:18-19; 1 John [Yochanan] 1:7; Revelation 1:5).

### **Chag HaMatzah (Unleavened Bread) – sanctification**

The festival known as **HaMatzah** follows immediately after Pesach. The fourteenth of the Jewish month Nisan is Pesach; the fifteenth is HaMatzah. As the Torah so clearly instructed the offspring of Avraham, all bread eaten during this observance was to be matzah.

**“Get rid of the old hametz [leaven], so that you can be a new batch of dough, because in reality you are unleavened bread. For our Pesach lamb, the Messiah, has been sacrificed. So let us celebrate the Seder not with leftover hametz, the hametz of wickedness and evil, but with the matzah of purity and truth.” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)**

Here we learn that hametz (leaven) was interpreted by Rabbi Sha'ul as a type of sin. The leaven of sin, like its culinary counterpart, has the capacity to work its

way into the complete dough of our lives, expanding and rising, until the whole “loaf” is permeated with sin. This is why, with the guidance of the Ruach within us, we need to remove all of the leaven from ourselves. Will this result in a sinless life? No. Yet, our efforts will surely be rewarded in the form of a renewed and strengthened walk with our LORD. In other words, as long as we have these earthen vessels, our desire should be to flee from sin, until we finally reach that blessed time when our LORD Yeshua will return in Power and Glory to cleanse us completely!

### Omer Reisheet (First Sheaf) – sanctification, deliverance

Baruch A. Levine in his commentary to Leviticus by the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) outlines the logistics of this part of chapter twenty-three for us:

In this section, two offerings taken from the new crop are prescribed: ‘*omer* and *bikkurim*. The first, ‘*omer*, is the offering of a “sheaf” of new barley. As originally intended, the priest was to offer it on the morrow of the first Sabbath subsequent to the seven-day festival. New grain could not be eaten until this offering was made. It constituted desacralization, a rite that gives God the first of the new crop, thus releasing the rest of it for ordinary human use.

Beginning on the day of this offering, a period of counting is initiated. Seven full “sabbaths,” or weeks, are counted off. On the fiftieth day, the second offering of meal of new wheat, baked into leavened loaves, is offered in the sanctuary as *bikkurim*, “first fruits.” It consists of grain furnished by the Israelite settlements. That day is a sacred assembly on which work is forbidden. Here, it is not designated [*chag*], “pilgrimage,” as it is in Deuteronomy 16:10, a significant difference.<sup>1</sup>

As explained by Levine the Hebrew word for “sheaf” is “omer” עֹמֶר. The omer counting leads to the well-known event called “**Shavu’ot**,” or **Pentecost**, as it is more widely recognized by many Christians. To wit, we must understand from this passage that the days from Pesach to HaMatzah to Omer Reisheet to Shavuot are inextricably linked. A biblical principal worth remembering, which carries significant truth down to this very day, is that **the “first” always belongs to HaShem.**

Today, tradition still blinds us to the unchanging Truth of God’s Word—a Truth that should not be compromised! The world is watching us believers. They are observing whether or not we will make a difference between the clean and unclean, the holy and the profane, life and death! HaShem did not tell ‘Am Isra’el to “gather” on Omer Reisheet—the day after the Shabbat—which, according to

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<sup>1</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary to Leviticus* (Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 157.

the Sadducees, is Sunday itself!—in order to separate his truth from the error of paganism (remember sun worship has existed since the days of Babel). I believe that the people of the TaNaKH set the biblical example NOT to gather on that special Sunday during the Passover Week for a true heavenly reason. Why have we failed to grasp this truth?

Surely Yeshua was raised from death to life on that morning following the Sabbath! Surely he is the “firstfruits from the dead!” He is the first person to be raised unto a resurrection of incorruptible flesh! Although our flesh still houses sin, his flesh was sinless before his death on the execution stake; his resurrection demonstrates for us genuine believers what a resurrected body will be made like—raised to life everlasting! Why then do we continue to confuse this wonderful truth with our man-made traditions? Isn't it time we start demonstrating his holiness by the very days that we gather together on?

**The “first” always belongs to HaShem.** Why are we sharing it with paganism?

**Shavu'ot (Pentecost) – the giving of the Torah, the giving of the Ruach HaKodesh, firstfruits, ecclesiology**

The Hebrew word for week is “*shavuah*,” its plural is “*shavu'ot*.” Both of these words come from the root word for “seven.” This is where the festival gets its name. ***Shavu'ot*** is the annual counting of seven weeks of days, hence forty-nine days. This yearly count is listed in the Torah as a *mitzvah*, a command from HaShem himself. The name “**Pentecost**,” from the Greek word “*pentekoste*,” means “fifty days,” as the Torah instructed *Am Yisra'el* (the people of Isra'el) to add the final day after the seventh week.

Historically, the rabbis figure the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai to have occurred on this day, that is, in the third month after *Am Yisra'el* came out of Egypt. Actually, the exact date of this familiar encounter, recorded for us in the book of Exodus, is not explicitly stated; the chronological evidence is convincing, however.

We know that it was the Torah, the very same teachings that we have today, that was inscribed upon the stone tablets that day. We also know that this same Torah is to be inscribed upon our hearts as we serve Yeshua, to the glory of HaShem the Father. How do we get the Torah into our hearts? The Spirit of the Holy One makes real the fact that Yeshua the Messiah, in obedience to the Father, emptied himself on our behalf, and became as sin, that we might, consequently, become the righteousness of the Father! In other words, because the Ruach HaKodesh makes the effectual, sacrificial death of Messiah, a living reality in our hearts, we are now free to walk in newness of life! This act of faith on our part brings about the inscription of the Torah upon our hearts! To be sure, the Torah says that HaShem himself does this (Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Jeremiah 31:33)! We are free to pursue the Torah of Truth without condemnation (Romans

8:1)! This new identity in Messiah **is** the righteous relationship that our Heavenly Abba intended for us all along. The details surrounding that eventful **Shavu'ot** in Yerushalayim now serve to remind us of this present reality.

### **Rosh HaShanah/Yom T'ruah (New Year/Feast of Trumpets) – eschatology**

With the coming of the fall part of the year, comes the final series of festivals, as detailed in our theme passage (verses 1, 2) of Leviticus 23. In rabbinical thinking, these last festivals are known as the “season of t’shuvah,” the season of our repentance. The biblical name for this festival is called **Yom T’ruah**, meaning “**Day of the Awakening (trumpet) Blast.**” Your calendar probably calls this day “**Rosh HaShanah.**” This name literally means “Head of the Year,” from the Hebrew words “rosh,” meaning “head” or “beginning,” and “shanah” meaning “year.” It gained this title when the rabbis created the civil calendar to be used by all Jews living in the Land of Isra’el. It eventually became the standard for all Jews everywhere. A religious calendar was already in effect when this change took place. Rather than replace the religious one, the rabbis simply adjusted it, making the beginning of the months **Tishrei**, instead of **Nissan**.

**Yom T’ruah** is a call to return to holiness! Our God is in the business of calling men back to himself. In order to get man to realize his fallen spiritual state he sometimes needs reminders. The Torah says of itself, in Psalm 19:11, that by it’s words “your servant is warned.” Warned of what? Of the impending doom that is to befall all of the evil of mankind and the deeds that he does. Within this warning is a message of mercy; the time to repent is now! **Turn to HaShem with your whole heart, cry out for his mercy, beg for his forgiveness in pardoning your sin, and receive his atonement!**

### **Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) – atonement, forgiveness, blood sacrifices**

With the arrival of **Yom Kippur**, comes a central aspect of our relationship with our Holy God: **atonement**. Why is atonement so important to HaShem? Apparently, ever since the incident in the Garden of Eden, mankind has carried within himself the sinful propensity of that first act of disobedience, and consequently, the sinful results as well. Our sin nature is in direct conflict with the holy nature of HaShem. As a result, we cannot fathom approaching him without first making some sort of restitution, which would satisfy HaShem’s righteous requirement. His nature demands that there be atonement for sin, for indeed, sin cannot exist in his sight.

In an attempt to continue explain the matter, we need to understand the plans and purposes of HaShem as expressed in the **whole** of the Torah. From our vantage point and using twenty-first century hindsight, it makes perfect sense to send the Messiah to atone for our sinful nature. After all, if God left things in the hands of mankind, each individual man would have to atone for his own personal

sins and consequently every man would eventually have to die for such a payment. But what does the Torah say?

**"Here is how it works: it was through one individual that sin entered into the world, and through sin, death; and in this way death passed through to the whole human race, inasmuch as everyone sinned."**  
(Romans 5:12)

With the entrance of sin came the punishment for sin—death. So we see that HaShem is perfectly righteous when he says that the wages for our sin is death; every man does deserve to die. But here is where the mercy of HaShem comes in! He has lovingly provided a means by which mankind can redeem himself. In the period of the TaNaKH, the sacrificial system was that means! Even though it only served to cleanse the flesh, it was authentically God's solution. No Jew living in that time period was able to circumvent this system, and remain officially within the community. To answer the question posed above, **if we take HaShem seriously, then we will accept his provision—no matter what means, or how inadequate that provision may seem! This is our first lesson in "Torah logic."**

This brings us to the current situation facing every man and woman and child, Jew or non-Jew, living today: "Since the sacrificial system used in the TaNaKH did not bring the participant to the goal of attaining positional righteousness, what was his means of attaining positional righteousness then and what is his means of gaining such atonement today?"

The modern rabbis would have us to believe that the three ways by which we appease HaShem today are "**T'shuvah**" (repentance), "**T'fillah**" (prayer), and "**Tzedekah**" (righteous acts). To be sure, all of these principles are found in the teachings of the Torah! And each and every one of them has valid merit. For our God is highly interested in our **repentance from sin**, and he is very supportive of a **prayer time**, and he is enthusiastic of our **righteous acts** done in his name! But what does our Torah portion say?

**"For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for yourselves; for it is the blood that makes atonement because of the life."** (Leviticus 17:11)

According to the book of Hebrews, the sacrifices of Dah-vid's day could cleanse the flesh, but not the conscience, that is to say, I understand Hebrews to be teaching that only the eternal blood of a Sinless Sacrifice can regenerate the mind of an individual. By comparison, the blood of bulls and goats focused on the external:

**For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How**

**much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13, 14, KJV)**

Moreover, the writer of Hebrews makes his point explicit in this additional passage:

**The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4, NIV)**

The "Old Testament" saints were not "saved" by a different system than the one in which we rely on. If they were, then this would suggest that there were really two separate ways unto righteousness—a theory, which we know, cannot be true. Hegg's conclusion is fitting for our study:

The older idea that "atonement" was only a "temporary fix" for sins for those who lived in the time before the coming of our Messiah must be abandoned. The idea of atonement as portrayed in the Scriptures encompasses both a temporal aspect as well as an eternal one.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, Yeshua himself stated emphatically that he was THE way, and that NO man can come unto the Father except through HIM.

**The sacrifices, performed with a genuine heart of repentance, afforded real-life forgiveness, but only to the purification of the flesh! However, the mortal blood of the animals in and of themselves—and by themselves—could not even take away sin; only the eternal blood of the Perfect Sacrifice—to which the animals pointed—could purify both flesh and soul.**

Thus, the blood of the animals "washed, wiped clean" the Holy Place where God "manifestly dwelt." The objective faith of the individual still remained dependent upon God's Promised Word to Come, namely Yeshua himself, yet his obedience was demonstrated by adherence to explicit Torah commands where sacrifices were concerned. What is more, the salvation of the eternal soul of an individual was always dependent upon a circumcised heart, exactly as it is today.

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Hegg, The Meaning of כַּפַּר, torahresource.com (<http://www.torahresource.com/Parashpdfs/kafarstudy.pdf>), p 5.

**Succoth (Feast of Tabernacles/Ingathering) – worship, praise, redemption, eschatology, thanksgiving, celebrating the harvest of righteousness in our lives**

“Just what exactly is a **“sukkot”** (say “soo-coat”) anyway?” Well, this is the plural form of the Hebrew word translated as “booth,” “tabernacle,” “tent,” or “hut.” Its singular is **“sukkah,”** and, based on the command to dwell in temporary booths for seven days (verses 42, 43), we can see why the Feast is called by this name.

Here in Leviticus chapter 23, HaShem instructs the people to build sukkot in memory of the temporary dwelling places that they had while wandering in the desert. But the most important temporary dwelling place during that period was still the Tabernacle. To be sure, according to **past history**, once the people built a Tabernacle for HaShem, he indeed did come to **“dwell among his people”** as he said he would, and they did behold his Sh’khinah (manifest Glory of God)! But Yochanan gave us an even deeper understanding of this “Tabernacle”:

**“The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw his Sh’khinah....” (1:14)**

This immediately brings to memory the indwelling, manifested-Glory present in the earthly Tabernacle. But the Tabernacle had long since been replaced by a more permanent Temple structure. Moreover, the Sh’khinah of HaShem is reported to have been displayed fully in the person of Yeshua (Colossians 2:9)!

The Feast of Sukkot is a holy convocation that speaks of **corporate** involvement. Is there still some future “dwelling with men” that HaShem is waiting for? What does our prophetic Scripture (from Jeremiah) for this point say? “I will be their God, and they will be my people” (31:33). So God is consistent in his intentions. Where is his sukka today? Romans 11:25, 26 begins to hint of a future time when all Isra’el shall know the salvation of their God, once and for all (“Baruch HaShem! May that day come soon!”). Tied up within that **future redemption**, is the concept that HaShem started with way back in the days of the TaNaKH: “I [will] dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8, KJV, emphasis mine). From the prophetic book of Revelation, we learn that there will be a day, when the final plan of HaShem will be fully realized among men. Chapter twenty-one, verse 3,

**“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them”” (NIV, emphasis mine).**

This overview of the Feasts hopefully provided some of the biblical, historical framework to which we can apply the messianic fulfillment of each feast. Ultimately, it is my intent to invite each one to consider taking HaShem up on his offer, of divine permission, to participate each year in his feasts. **“Shomer**

**mitzvot**" (Torah observance) is a wonderful way to "walk out" the reality of the newness of life, found **only** in union with Yeshua HaMashiach! A Godly desire to be submissive to the Torah, as Jewish and non-Jewish believers, is evidence of the Holy Spirit's activity of "**putting the Torah of HaShem within you, and writing it on your heart**" (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10, paraphrase mine).

The last verse of chapter 23 reads appropriately:

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶת-מִעְדֵי יְהוָה אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

**"Vay'daber Moshe eht-mo'adey YHVH el-B'ney Yisra'el."**

**(Thus Moshe announced to the people of Isra'el the designated times of ADONAI.)**

### **An Eye for an Eye**

Before I close out the parashah, I want to briefly share some Talmudic quotes that revolve around an issue found in chapter 24 verses 17-22:

**Version: NAS  
Lev 24:17-22**

**17. 'And if a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death. 18. 'And the one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life. 19. 'And if a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: 20. fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. 21. 'Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. 22. 'There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God.'"**

That the sages of antiquity had differing opinions as to the meanings behind these verses is made evident from our Talmudic extract, taken from **Tractate Bava Kama**:

MISHNA /.: One who wounds his neighbor is liable to pay the following five things, viz.: damage, pain, healing, loss of time, and disgrace. "Damage."--If he blinds one's eye, cuts off his hand, or breaks his leg, the injured person is considered as if he were a slave sold in the market, and he is appraised at his former and his present value. "Pain."--If he burns him with a spit or with a nail, if even only on the nail (of his hand or foot), where it produces no wound, it is appraised how much a man his equal would take to suffer such pain. "Healing."--If he caused him bodily injury, he must heal him; if pus collected by reason of the wound, he must cause

him to be healed; if, however, not by reason of the wound, he is free. If the wound heals up and breaks out again, even several times, he must cause it to be healed; if, however, it once heals up thoroughly, he is no more obliged to heal it. "Loss of time."--The injured person is considered as if he were a watchman of a pumpkin field, as he was already paid the value of his hand or foot. The disgrace is appraised with consideration of the station and rank of the one who causes as well as of the one who suffers it.

GEMARA: Why so? Perhaps it is to be taken literally, for the Scripture reads [Ex. xxi. 24]: "Eye for eye"? This cannot enter the mind, as we have learned in the following Boraitha: Lest one say, if he blinds one's eye or cuts off one's hand, that the same should be done unto him, therefore it is written [Lev. xxiv. 21]: "And he that killeth a beast shall make restitution *for it*; and he that killeth a man," etc. As in case of a beast only the value is paid, so also in case of a man. And lest one say, Does not the Scripture read [Numb. xxxv. 31]: "Moreover, ye shall take no redemption for the person of a murderer, who is guilty of death"? you may say that from this, very verse it may be inferred that no redemption money is to be taken for a *murderer*, but redemption money is to be taken for one who destroys such members of the body as cannot grow on again.

We have learned in a Boraitha: R. Simeon b. Johi said: "Eye for eye" means its value. You say, its value. Perhaps it means literally? Nay, for what should be done when a blind man blinds another, etc.--how should be fulfilled the commandment "eye for eye"? And lest one say that such a case is an exception, therefore the Scripture reads [Lev. xxiv. 22]: "One manner of judicial law shall ye have"; from which is to be inferred that it means a law which can be applied alike to all human cases.

In the school of R. Ishmael it was taught: The Scripture reads [ibid., ibid. 20]: "So should it be given unto him"; and by "given" is meant a thing which is given from hand to hand. If so, how are the preceding words in the same verse to be explained? "In the manner he should give a bodily defect," etc. (hence the word "give" is used also for such a thing as is not given from hand to hand)? It may be explained thus: The school of R. Ishmael deduce it from a superfluous verse, thus: Let us see. It reads already in the preceding verse [ibid. 19]: "And if a man cause a bodily defect in his neighbor; as he hath done, so shall it be done unto him." Why, then, the repetition in verse 20? To indicate that it means money. But still the above-stated objection as to the use of the word "give" in the beginning of the verse remains? Because at the end of the verse the Scripture desired to use a term from which it should be deduced that it means *money*. It used the same expression also here.

The school of R. Hyya deduce it from the following: The Scripture reads [Deut. xix. 21]: "Hand for hand" --that means something that can be passed from hand to hand, *i.e.*, money.<sup>3</sup>

Well-respected Torah scholar Nechama Leibowitz adds her comments on how the Chazal (ancient sages) wrestled with the intended meaning behind this Levitical passage, eventually favoring a monetary interpretation:

Few are the verses from the Bible which have been so frequently and widely misunderstood by Jew and non-Jew as verse 24:20, from which our title is taken. This misconception has transformed our text into a symbol, the embodiment of vengeance at its cruelest level. One who wishes to express his opposition to forgiveness, concession, and compensation, insisting instead on his pound of flesh, on retaliation of the most brutal and painful kind, resorts to the phrase: "Eye for eye," a formula which conjures up a vision of hacked limbs and gouged eyes. Even he who is familiar with the traditional Rabbinical interpretation of our text, "eye for eye," *i.e.*, monetary compensation, does not rule out the possibility of this being merely an apologetical explanation, a later toning down of ancient barbarity, humanization of the severity of the Torah by subsequent generations.

But this is not the case. On the contrary, our Sages and commentators adduce many and varied proofs indicating that the plain sense of the text can be no other than monetary compensation.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, the Karaite attacked the Rabbinic interpretation on two counts, first from the wording of the text. The Gaon demonstrated that the two phrases do not necessarily bear out the Karaite interpretation. (Benno Jacob notes that the case of Adoni-Bezek – As I have done, so God has requited me (Judges 1:7) is no proof to the contrary, for there he uses a different verb in each clause of the phrase, and is therefore not comparable to our verse). The proof from Samson is the clearest indication that the phraseology when... implies an equivalent or analogous, but not identical punishment. Again, from Bava Kama:

"Eye for eye": Rav Saadya said we cannot take this text literally. For if a man deprived his fellow of a third of his normal eyesight by his blow, how can the retaliatory blow be so calculated as to have the same results, neither more nor less, nor blinding him completely? Such an exact reproduction of the effects is even more difficult in the case of a wound or bruise which, if in a dangerous spot, might result in death. The very idea cannot be tolerated. Ben Zuta (a Karaite) retorted: But surely it is explicitly

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<sup>3</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2005 CD-ROM).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/torani/nehama/emor.html>

written: (Lev. 24:20) As he has maimed a man so shall it be rendered to him. The Gaon answered: The word on, implying so shall punishment be imposed upon him. Ben Zuta retorted: As he did, so shall be done to him! The Gaon replied: We have in the case of Samson (Judges 15:11): As they did to me, so I did to them, and Samson did not take their wives and give them to others (as they had done to him), but only punished them. Ben Zuta retorted: What if the attacker was a poor man, what would be his punishment? The Gaon replied: What if a blind man blinded one with normal eyesight, what should be done to him? The poor man can become rich and pay; only the blind man can never pay for what he did!<sup>5</sup>

The Karaite then forsook the argument from the wording of the text and attacked the Rabbinical interpretation from the point of view of feasibility of its implementation. Here Ben Zuta evidently did not realize that by doing so he was advancing the objection that could be raised against all judicial fines. Just as he asked: What if the attacker is a poor man, so he could have asked: What if any defendant on whom a fine was imposed was a poor man? He thus played into R. Saadya's hands by showing him that the same flaw in execution that could be pointed out in the monetary interpretation could be objected in the literal one, bringing in R. Shimon b. Yohai's argument.

## Conclusions

First a quote from my own commentary to **Parashat Mishpatim**:

[Exodus] Chapter 21 – Verses 22-27 speak about restitution in the event of accidental injury. We are familiar with the saying, "An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth." We remember that our LORD Yeshua made a comment about this in the B'rit Chadashah book of Mattityahu 5:38-42. We often feel that his comments reflect the right, enacted by this particular Torah passage, to go out and take "revenge" on the individual who took our "eye" or "tooth." In Yeshua's estimation (we suppose), revenge is not the correct course of action, and instead, we should seek to forgive our brother. Actually, these verses of our current parashah establish justice in such a situation. For instance, if indeed your brother accidentally (or maliciously) takes your "eye" or "tooth" (these are symbols of your precious commodities), then the ruling says that you are entitled to an equal share of recompense—but not more! This ruling sets the order so that greed and unforgiveness don't become rife in the community. But Yeshua, realizing that the person wronged is owed an "eye" or "tooth" for his compensation, challenges his audience to seek forgiveness instead of compensation. He does NOT contradict the Torah here, rather he establishes its true intent.

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<sup>5</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2005 CD-ROM).

If the Rabbis are right that money is the compensation, then it can be observed that one who pays compensation for the loss of sight does not make good the damage as one who damages his fellow's goods. The money only serves to make good the monetary damage involved in the loss of the eye or hand, but the actual loss of the eye can never be made good. Injury to another human being is a crime that cannot be made good by ransom or monetary payment.

This is the reason why the Torah did not use the expression, "He shall pay for his eye...." This emerges even more clearly from the verse of our parashah that we cited at the beginning of this section. After the punishment for mortally injuring a man or beast is stated (v. 17-18) comes the punishment of the one who causes bodily injury to which the punishment for the one who injures a beast is not juxtaposed. For in the case of man the difference between mortal injury (murder) and maiming is qualitative (death—money), whereas in the case of beast there is merely a quantitative difference between killing it and injuring it (greater or lesser compensation according to the injury).

Our parashah concludes by contrasting both:

**"He who kills an animal is to make restitution, but he who kills another person is to be put to death." (Lev. 24:12)**

The verse appears superfluous, a repetition of the previous, unless we bear in mind that it wishes to impress upon us the difference between man's responsibility for his fellow's goods and his responsibility for his fellow's life as a human being created in the image of God.

The closing blessing is as follows:

***"Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-'Olam,  
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,  
v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.  
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.  
Ameyn."***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,  
you have given us your Torah of truth,  
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.  
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.  
Ameyn.)

"Shabbat Shalom!"

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