

### NUMBERS

#### Lesson 10 - Chapters 8 and 9

I think of all the many misunderstood or misconceived principles that we find in the Bible (especially by Christians and modern Judaism), yet one this is so indispensable for God's followers, at the top must be the idea of atonement that is expressed in the Hebrew root word of *kippur*. We concluded last week's lesson by discussing this term and but one or two of its offshoots such as *kofer* and *kapparah*. I would like to resurrect that thought briefly because as we have learned, what was in the minds of the writers of the Bible and the culture they lived in (an ancient Hebrew culture) is one that is so distant from modern thought that it can be challenging to apprehend it let alone comprehend it. But it is oh-so important if we are to get the true understanding that the Lord wants us to have regarding His laws and His plans.

The notion of ransoming a person from the wrath of a god (including the God of Israel) for a price was prevalent in ancient culture and it is equally as prevalent in the Bible; don't ever think otherwise. The church especially (but Judaism also) have tried all sorts of allegorical tricks to reconcile our 21st century minds to the words of Scripture on this subject and thus have effectively blunted the impact it ought to have had upon us. We typically find the literal concept as much too primitive for our modern sensibilities, so we twist it and remold it until it is comfortable for us. I promise you that if we were to enter a time machine and go back King David's era and tell them what atonement and redemption means in our modern understanding of it, that it would be unrecognizable to them. Proverbs is but one of many books where we get this thought about the fundamental God-principle of ransom and its irreplaceable purpose.

***CJB Proverbs 21:18 The wicked serve as a ransom for the righteous, and likewise the perfidious for the upright.***

This is an excellent Biblical statement to help make my point. This passage literally says that the termination of the lives of wicked people (meaning those who deny the God of Israel) is an acceptable payment to Yehoveh to appease Him in order that the righteous people (meaning those who are devoted to the God of Israel) receive forgiveness for their sins. It is an exchange that God has decided will satisfy Him. Please note, we are not speaking of the righteous killing the wicked and then offering them to God, but rather of God taking out His wrath upon the wicked in whatever manner He determines. Let me say that another way: this is not an act of men upon men, but rather of God upon men.

Despite standard teaching to the contrary, there is no principle of God that has ceased to exist or was changed. Thus the central place of ransom as a way to satisfy the justice that God inherently requires cannot be overlooked or made to be some kind of obsolete divine protocol

that was only for more primitive times.

**CJB Leviticus 17:11** *For the life of a 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.*

It is God's very nature that He cannot accept that what He has created can be killed without the killer being subjected to His righteous wrath. **Please hear me:** just as we like to say that God cannot tell a lie, neither can He NOT be angered by the death of one of His creatures. When I say can't I mean can't. Just as God is **not capable** of lying so He is incapable of not being angered at the spilling of blood. It is not a matter of a limitation of God or a choice of God that I am referring to; rather it is His essence and His character that makes Him who He is.

Thus the God-principle that one of His creatures must pay for the death of another of His creatures. Always. This is reflected in a number of ways. For instance when it comes to sinning (trespassing against the Lord) the guilty party's transgression must be paid for by an innocent party if it is to be forgiven. Otherwise the guilty party's blood is on his own head and God's anger is satisfied only when that guilty party's life is taken (and forgiveness is NOT granted). Thus in the sacrificial system an INNOCENT animal is slaughtered as a ransom that is paid so that the GUILTY person's own life is spared by God. Why is this necessary in every case without exception? Because God is so holy and so perfect that He cannot let even one instance slide otherwise His righteous anger will not be appeased and His holiness defiled. And such a thing is simply not possible.

When it comes to killing and butchering an animal for food, the animal's blood must be given back to God as a payment of ransom for the death of that animal at the hands of a human; it is an act of appeasement for the anger of the Lord for the killing of one of His creatures whether it be a lawful or unlawful killing.

Thus it is imperative that we see that the word **atonement** that is woven throughout the Bible and used so commonly within Judeo-Christianity encompasses a huge range of meaning; not different meanings for different situations but rather atonement has a cosmically complex meaning that has many facets integrated into it. Atonement in its simplest form means a payment, a ransom, a substitute, a just requirement of a holy God for which none other will do. Who does this payment go to? God. Why does it go to Him? Because His righteous anger MUST be appeased and He has determined that this WILL satisfy Him. There is simply no other choice or possibility. Who benefits? His worshippers.

Now let's see this same God-principle of **kippur** in action in yet another setting: redemption.

### **RE-READ NUMBERS 8:16-18**

This is a great opportunity to look back and review for a few minutes. Yehoveh reminds us that redemption is a costly thing; it can only occur with a price.....a ransom...being paid. When He determined to redeem Israel out of the hand of Egypt, the redemption price was that ALL Firstborns were to become His holy property. Not just all firstborns of Israel, but ALL firstborns

of Egypt as well. These firstborns were designated to be a SACRIFICE for all the other people.

So when it came time for Israel to leave Egypt, God would call in His marker. All Firstborns (of people and cattle, of Egypt AND Israel) would be literally sacrificed.....slaughtered, killed.....to pay the price for Israel being redeemed from slavery. HOWEVER.....even though all firstborns now belonged to God, and were marked to be a sacrifice of atonement, He would NOT sacrifice those firstborns who TRUSTED Him enough to follow His provision that every home was to slaughter a lamb and then paint the blood of that lamb on the doorposts of their homes. In other words, that lamb was to be the payment for all the Firstborns who were rightfully to be slaughtered as a sacrifice. Of course we know of this event as the Passover.

The result was that the vast majority of Israel believed God and so the Israelites firstborns were saved, but the vast majority of the Egyptians did NOT Believe God and so the Egyptian firstborns were slaughtered as a ransom. As said Proverbs 21, the wicked were the ransom for the righteous (an inalterable requirement of God).

Now that Israel had escaped Egypt, the firstborns of Israel still weren't out of the woods, though: they were still God's holy property. They owed God a lifetime of service to Him. Therefore Yehoveh, in His mercy, decided that the Levites would become the substitute (a ransom) for all these Israelite firstborns. Rather than all the Israelite firstborns being God's holy property, subject to service to God, NOW the Levites would be God's holy property in their place and the firstborns relieved of their responsibility to Him.

That is why the census we read of earlier in Numbers was so carefully conducted. Recall that the number of Levite males available to substitute on a one on one basis for each Israelite FIRSTBORN fell short of the needed amount. Therefore those Israelite firstborns who had no Levite to redeem them instead had to pay money to the priesthood for their redemption. Redemption has a tangible cost.

But since God requires a blood sacrifice (which the Firstborns of Egypt paid for Israel's redemption) this requirement still lay upon the firstborns of Israel who now passed that burden off of their shoulders and (according to God's instructions) onto the Levites, who then passed the blood sacrifice part of the requirement onto the bulls who were sacrificed. So we see this long chain of substitution being established; kind of a kick the can on down the road process.

Eventually it all fell on Yeshua's shoulders. He was the final and best substitute for atonement. He could either have accepted being the blood atonement sacrifice (as He did) or He could have laid it on an animal.....like men had always done.....and the cycle would simply have continued. It is the Torah that carefully establishes God's requirements for redemption by means of blood sacrifice and it also establishes that His justice can be satisfied with an authorized substitute AS A RANSOM to pay for what each of us rightly owe Him.

The final few verses of Chapter 8 only reiterate that those Levites, who do heavy work, are retired from that heavy work at age 50. That does NOT mean they are excused from service. They became Temple guards and watchmen and did other sorts of labor that would not overly tax an older person.

Next we'll examine the 2nd Passover ..... the 1st Passover having occurred the night before Israel left Egypt.

Let's move on to Numbers chapter 9.

Chapters 9 and 10 join together to record all the final preparations for the journey of Israel....now released and redeemed from Egypt.....outfitted with God's sanctuary.....and prepared with God's laws and commands.....as they set out for the Promised Land.

It's been 600 years since Yehoveh made His covenant with Abraham that a place has been set-aside for the set-apart people to live; and that place is what at-the-time was called the Land of Canaan, but in the near future would be renamed Israel.

Let's read Numbers chapter 9 together.

### **READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 9 all**

The first thing spoken of in Chapter 9 is the Passover (Pesach in Hebrew). This is the 2nd Passover celebrated by Israel and there is a distinct difference in the way this Passover will be observed as compared to the very first Passover.

Let's remember that the first Passover took place in Egypt. It was that great and terrible night that the Lord killed all the unprotected firstborns in Egypt. The only firstborns exempted were those who followed Moses' instructions that they were to kill a yearling male lamb, eat it, and spread its blood on the doorposts of their mud-brick homes. Now it is a key God-principle to understand that while this instruction was primarily aimed at Israel, ANY family living in Egypt....no matter their nationality.....who worshipped Yehoveh and obeyed and followed this command was passed-over by death. Any family whom a circumcised male led as a sign of joining Israel (no matter their nationality) could participate and many did. As a result we see in Exodus that a mixed-multitude left Egypt and traveled with Israel. Some who came officially joined Israel while others came as hitchhikers who NEVER joined Israel (they had probably lost their firstborn and were awed by this God's power) and so wanted to live among Israel and enjoy the benefits of such a God. So 3 categories of people left Egypt: 1) natural-born Israelites....Hebrews....., 2) those of other nationalities who wished to officially become Israelites, and 3) those who had no intention of becoming Israelites but simply wanted to live among Israel (for various reasons) while retaining whatever national identity they were. The Bible usually refers to those who were NOT natural born Israelites but wished to become Israelites as "sojourners"; and this is apart and distinct for those hitchhikers who are referred to as "strangers" or "resident aliens".

This 2nd Passover (that we see here in Numbers 9) is, if you would, the **FIRST commemoration** of the Egyptian Passover. And all Passovers from here forward would be commemorations of the first Passover in Egypt. In other words the FIRST Passover was the actual historical event, and then every Passover after that was simply a remembrance of it.

Now, the main difference between the first Passover (as occurred in Egypt), and the 2nd

Passover (out in the Wilderness), is that in between the two the Torah, the Law, was given to Israel on Mt. Sinai early in their exodus. Further a place for God to dwell among Israel....the Tabernacle.....had been constructed. As a result the character and nature of the Passover Lamb also changed somewhat.

In the first Passover, each individual family slaughtered their own Lamb in their own home, as there was no commonplace to do so, or priesthood to officiate. Further while that first Passover Lamb was "sacrificed".....killed for a divine purpose..... it was NOT a formal sacrifice as in the new mold that would be ordained in Leviticus. With the giving of the Law ALL sacrifices had to be supervised by the priests of Israel. I have no doubt that it was those FIRSTBORNS of Israel (who were going to be passed-over for death by means of blood painted on the doorposts of their homes) who did the slaughtering of the lamb in that first Passover but would not be allowed to in the future. And we discussed (rather recently) that until the Levitical Priesthood was established at Mt. Sinai...which happened about 1 year AFTER the first Passover..... it was traditional that the Firstborns acted sort of like priests within each of the Israelite families.....so since the slaughtering of the Lamb was a divinely ordained thing, it would have fallen to the firstborn to kill the Lamb.

There's a lot of symbolism here isn't there? It was the lives of the FIRSTBORNS who were threatened by God, so it was the Firstborns who killed the Lamb and did the smearing of the blood. Sometimes we get a wrong impression about the first Passover. It was NOT to save the physical lives of ALL the Israelites from death. Women and NON-firstborns were not subject to God's death threat. His wrath was ONLY going to be poured out on the firstborns because it was the firstborns that He declared as now belonging to Him and He was willing to sacrifice them (so to speak) in order to save His people. The killing of those firstborns was the redemption price for Israel, thereby satisfying His justice.

So it was each person who was subject to condemnation (in Egypt that meant the Firstborns) that had to slaughter the lamb and appropriate those saving qualities of its blood. Do you see this? The Firstborn who slaughtered the Lamb was appropriating it for HIMSELF. Now in the end it LED to His family escaping the slavery of Egypt; but this was not about saving the physical lives of the other family members because their physical lives were not actually in danger.

It is still exactly like that for mankind today. Each person subject to condemnation (which is EVERY human) must appropriate the blood of the sacrifice for Himself. As much as might prefer it, I cannot appropriate Yeshua's blood for my brother or sister, mother or father, children or grandchildren. Each person MUST be redeemed one-by-one, by his or her own free will choice and action. Yet a person within a household who DOES appropriate Yeshua's sacrificial blood DOES open a door for his family to escape by showing them the way. Still each family member must now go and obtain the saving power of Jesus for him or her self.

Now in this 2nd Passover the Pesach Lamb is to be selected and taken to the Tabernacle (later the Temple) where the Priests are to officiate over its slaughter. Part of the lamb (EVERY lamb) is to be offered on the official Altar of Burnt Offering to God. Then some of the blood is to be taken back home and smeared on the entryway into their home.

In the 1st Passover it didn't happen this way because there was no formal Torah, there was no official Priesthood and there was no Tabernacle.

As was ordained in Leviticus the Passover was to occur on the 14th day. This rule is repeated here in Numbers 9 verse 3 along with the regulation that the sacrifice of the Lamb at the Tabernacle should occur (in Hebrew) at *bein ha'arbayim*. This means literally "between the two evenings". So exactly WHEN is that? Well most ancient Rabbis determined it was between sunset and complete darkness. Later it was determined that it meant between what we would call about 3 in the afternoon and the time of total darkness.

Remember the Hebrew day begins and ends in the evening not the morning like it is among gentiles today. More specifically it is not at DARK that the day ends but when that final edge of the sun disappears over the horizon. Even MORE specifically it's when 3 stars in the sky can be seen that the current day ends and the new one begins.

Obviously it was humanly impossible for the Priests to officiate over the slaughtering of thousands of lambs in the few minute interval between the sun setting and complete darkness. So one can understand the reason for declaring that the slaughter of the Lambs should commence at 3 pm.

Now what is interesting is that there is NO mention of the Feast of Matza here; that is the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That feast is to begin the day after Passover. And from the timing of these passages we can know that the Passover occurred on the 14th and Israel left on their journey from Mt. Sinai into the Wilderness on the 20th. There is no way they would leave in the middle of the Feast of Matza.

The reason I point this out is that just as God ordained in Leviticus, Passover and Matza (although connected) were two distinct observances. It was only in later times that they were so intimately connected that they became looked at as one combined feast. Even today it is common to call the period of time that includes the first Passover and then the Feast of Unleavened Bread, simply Passover. Some prefer to call the combined two feast events only Matza. Many Jews today treat Passover as but the first day of Matza, although that is not correct by the commands of Torah.

There is a very important reason that Passover had to be celebrated before they packed up and left: it involved the sacrificing of an animal. Matza did not have a sacrificial element. The only requirement was to clean out one's dwelling of all leaven.....yeast.... and to eat unleavened bread, Matza, during the 7 day period of the feast. Therefore while the Tabernacle was essential (starting at Mt. Sinai) for proper observance of Pesach (because a lamb had to be sacrificed with Priests in attendance) the Tabernacle was NOT necessary to observe the 7 day Feast of Matza. In fact one did not even have to be ritually pure to celebrate the Feast of Matza because no sacrifice was ordained.

Verse 6 brings forward a circumstance whereby some Israelites came to Moses and said essentially, 'We have a problem'. And, the problem was that some number of Israelites had become defiled because they had touched a dead body..... in Hebrew, they were *tamei le-*

**nefesh.** But, since the focal point of the 2nd Passover was the sacrifice of a Lamb at the Tabernacle, and because the Law did not allow anyone who was severely unclean to approach the Sanctuary of God with their sacrifice, then what about those who were currently unclean? Were they going to STILL be allowed to participate in the Passover? Those who brought the question to Moses were certainly hoping so.

So Moses goes into conference with God over this matter and God issues His edict: no, they may NOT participate. HOWEVER on the 14th of the following month (assuming one is no longer in a state of ritual uncleanness) they may celebrate Pesach. And verse 11 says they shall eat the Passover Lamb along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. But they shall leave none of it until morning (no leftovers for a snack) and they shall not break a bone of the Lamb.

There is another element to this whole procedure that is quite interesting. It says that in addition to those who are NOT ritually clean being afforded a make-up date to celebrate Passover, the 14th of the following month (the 2nd month of the religious calendar year), that those who are on a LONG journey may ALSO postpone the ordained Nissan 14 of Passover by 1 month. But this exception is strictly for those two conditions only. Verse 13 states that if someone does NOT celebrate Passover when, where and HOW it is ordained, and does not meet those two special conditions, that person is subject to being cut-off from his kin. In other words, that person is subject to being separated from God.

Further verse 14 continues to reinforce a principle set down in Genesis: that among Israel there is one law for everyone whether Hebrew or foreign born. In other words those of other nationalities who have thrown their allegiance to Israel.....thereby becoming Israelites..... are in the same boat with the natural Israelites. All the Torah applies to them and they are under the same requirements and the same blessings and the same curses. Naturally: because all who want to be followers of the God of Israel MUST operate under the same covenant. Further even the resident aliens who are NOT Israelites and don't WANT to be Israelites (but do wish to live WITH Israel) are required to follow the observance of Pesach, Passover.

Now as is not very hard to imagine there eventually came to be quite an argument over exactly what was meant by God when He says that a person on a "long journey" can postpone celebrating Passover, and presenting his sacrifice at the Tabernacle, for 30 days? Just how long, is long?

In essence the question boiled down to just how far one was from the Tabernacle when Nissan 14 arrived and therefore how far from his home one was required to travel to get to the Tabernacle.....later the Temple.....for Pesach. And of course, various Rabbis came up with various answers. Of what is written and recorded two main views arose: one that ANYONE who does not have the physical capacity to reach the Temple threshold is exempt; and the other is that anyone who lived further than 18 miles from the Temple was exempt.

This issue and its various solutions undoubtedly play a role in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death at Passover time. We know that the Judeans (that is those Jews who lived in Judah) and therefore were in close proximity to the Temple followed one set of rules, while Jews from the

Galilee where Jesus and His disciples were from followed another tradition. And this was due to the long distance that the Galileans would have to travel to and from Jerusalem. The Galileans even held their Passover meal on Passover Eve, the day before Passover, due to the logistics involved. They would have started clearing their houses of leaven earlier than their Judean brothers to the south as well. So some of the problems that we find in the Gospel accounts of that Passover when Jesus was crucified (and of the Lord's Supper) can be traced to this definition of what a "long journey" amounts to, just how strictly one had to observe the timing of Pesach, and what various groups of Jews did to solve the dilemma.

Now let me approach a subject that I know some don't entirely agree with me on, but I hope you're coming around.

I've already touched on the matter of Yeshua and the Passover. And the more we learn about Torah the more we see the precise parallels between the slaughter of the Paschal Lamb and the crucifixion of Christ; and between the Lord's Supper and the Passover Seder meal from which comes our custom of Communion. But there is another issue of commonality as well: the issue of clean and unclean and the people who should NOT participate as a result of being unclean.

Here in Numbers 9 a person who is unclean cannot participate in the Passover at all; it must be put off until a later date. We see a very similar kind of warning developed in the New Testament. First the link between the Passover and Jesus is established. ***NAS John 6:53 Jesus therefore said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.***

So after the invitation is established and the reason for participation is laid down, next we have a warning; in fact it's a death threat.

***NAS 1 Corinthians 11:27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.***

I have heard any number of guesses and allegorical statements about what drinking and eating in "an unworthy manner" means. And of course these various fanciful explanations are usually anything but in the context of Israel, Torah, and the Jews, which is the ONLY proper context within which to view ANY part of the Bible.

Remembering that everything about the Passover meal and the Lord's supper is a Torah ordained event (in other words this is NOT manmade tradition) there is but ONE clearly stated condition that makes a person unworthy to participate: being unclean. And of course the punishment in Torah for partaking of Passover in an unclean state is being "cut-off; and cut-off



is biblically defined as divine punishment up to (and at times including) death. Naturally as a parallel to the Torah command Rabbi Paul warns that those who are "unworthy" (and I say that this means, generally, unclean) and who drinks the cup and eats the bread anyway will become sick and weak and "fall asleep". Fall asleep is a common Biblical euphemism that means to die. And just as obviously the context makes it clear that this is divine retribution; you don't become ill because something about the wine and bread is toxic. Do you see this hard and tight connection between the ordinance of Numbers 9 and the NT version of the same thing? The NT simply adds to the context by making Yeshua the Paschal Lamb.

Well let's move on to verse 15. This begins a section of Numbers 9 that explains the operation of the Fire-cloud (the glory of the Lord) and what Israel's response to it ought to be.

Really this is but a resumption of something that started earlier in Exodus; Israel had followed the Fire-cloud all the way from Egypt to Mt. Sinai. Since they had been stationary for about 13 months (at the base of Mt. Sinai) the Fire-cloud had not been needed to direct their movement, but that was about to change.

This sequence of events can be inferred from the circumstances: the Fire-cloud led them from Egypt to Sinai, then it rose up and rested at the top of the mountain where Moses went to receive the Torah and it rested there for some time. Now that the Tabernacle was completed (it was a pattern of God's heavenly throne and the NEW and latest earthly place where God dwelled among men) it replaced Mt. Sinai as God's earthly dwelling place, which itself had replaced the Garden of Eden. So naturally the Fire-cloud that we often read about Moses ascending up to at the top of Mt. Sinai came down and rested upon the Tabernacle.

During the day the sunlight more or less hid the brilliance of the Fire-cloud so that only the cloud itself was seen; but when it grew dark the fire within the cloud lit up the night sky. Wouldn't you have LOVED to be there to witness that? What a site it must have been and how reassuring to God's people who must have been awfully apprehensive about their future.

Beginning in verse 17 we get the drill: when the cloud lifts the Israelites are to strike the camp, take down the Tabernacle, and move following the Fire-cloud. When the cloud stops, they stop; whether it is overnight, for a week, a month, or a year it says. And by the way, this is not saying that the maximum time they stopped and camped at any one place was a year. It just means that whether for a long or a short time, they followed the Fire-cloud.

The final verse says that on a sign from the Lord they either made camp or broke camp. Don't be confused; this "sign" is the movement or the stopping of the Fire-cloud. There is not an additional sign.

What we must not overlook is that God's presence.....as associated with the Fire-cloud...was real and tangible for the Israelites. But, it happened because the people of Israel OBEYED God; they built for Him this complex sanctuary at His command. It is also interesting to note that we had never heard of the Fire-cloud in the Bible BEFORE the first Passover. It was not until after God redeemed His people, Israel, that He appeared to them to lead them in such an intimate and visible manner. And, once He had redeemed them, and made Him so real and

tangible to them, they were expected to respond by obedience. God leads, they follow. Where God goes, they go. Where He does NOT go, they do not go. When He stops they stop, and WHEN God indicates it's time to move on they move on.

This is a beautiful and appropriate pattern and demonstration of our walk with God. All this Fire-cloud imagery, and of Israel living in tents.....temporary dwelling places.... is poignantly brought forward into the New Testament so that we don't EVER doubt that God's patterns are abolished or obsolete. We'll find the transfiguration of Jesus occurring in a cloud, and then later when he arose and ascended, it was into a cloud. He'll be coming back in a cloud.

Two of the leading Apostles, Paul and Peter, constantly make use of the metaphor of a human body being likened to a tent.....a temporary dwelling place.....which will be replaced with incorruptible and permanent housing when we have reached our Promised Land; Heaven. All of these examples and patterns and metaphors that we see Jesus and the Apostles use in the NT aren't new and made up, random or arbitrary; they're used because they directly refer to the Torah, the Word of God. And, the purpose.....even if they didn't fully recognize it.....was to make that ironclad connection between the Newest Covenant in Christ and the earlier Covenants revealed in Torah.

We'll begin chapter 10 next time.