

Reading: Mike p. 159 and Psalm 26 or 15. Jewish hero: Priscilla (Aquila) Torah Carrier: Marie

Acharei Mot/Kedoshim (after the death/holy ones) Holiness: A Lifestyle of Separation and Rest
Torah: Leviticus 16:1-18:30/Leviticus 19:1-20:27

(1) **16:2: YHVH said to Moses: speak to your brother Aaron, in order that he would not enter at all times into the sanctuary behind the veil, before the mercy seat, which is on the ark, for fear that he might die, for I shall appear in a cloud upon the mercy seat.** Access to the Holy of Holies was only according to the rules which the Lord established. There is no room for free lancing and winging it when we consider how to deal with the holy presence of G-d. He remains holy and separate and His dwelling in our midst must never be degraded into familiarity.

(2) **17:11: For the life of the flesh is in the blood. I gave it to you upon the altar in order that it would serve as an atonement for your souls, for it is the life in the blood which makes the atonement.** One of the biggest misunderstandings which lingers in traditional, rabbinic Judaism concerns the eating of blood. First of all, it was specifically the blood of the atonement or sin offerings which the Children of Israel were not supposed to eat. Part of the sin or atonement offering involved eating some of the flesh of the sacrificial animal, but all of its blood belonged to G-d and was not to be eaten along with the flesh. Secondly, it was the life in the blood of the sacrificial animal which was making the atonement and all of it belonged to G-d.

We are not commanded never to consume the blood of non-sacrificial animals or to bleed them so thoroughly that most of their blood is removed (which is why orthodox Jews will not eat steak or red meat of any kind). The ancient Canaanites ate their sacrificial animals alive to absorb their life force. We are commanded to offer this life force to G-d and not try and highjack it. Meat with all of the blood removed is virtually dust. Related to this, Jews were just required to salt of their offerings and not to add salt to all of their food. My stomach is not an altar and every meal I eat is not an offering to G-d. We are required to keep biblical kosher and not follow rules which are merely the commandments of men.

(3) **18:28: Take heed that the country does not vomit you out if you defile it, just as it shall have vomited the nations who were there before you.** This chapter deals with 18 forbidden kinship marriage unions and six abominable sexual practices, including offering up your children to be burned as an offering to Moloch. Having sexual relations with your neighbours wife defiles you and a man having sex with a man is an abomination, in the same category as a man or a woman having sex with an animal.

The term abomination is used six times in this chapter and refers to forbidden sexual practices. Sexual behaviour cannot violate: kinship, gender or species. This is the clear position of both the Torah and the New Testament. Sex is not forbidden, only certain perverted sexual practices are. Sex needs to be the bonding agent in a marriage and not a source of recreational pleasure which we enjoy with multiple partners.

(4) **19:2: Speak to the entire assembly of the children of Israel and you shall say to them: be holy, for I am holy, me, YHVH your G-d.** I am YHVH appears 14 times in this chapter and

deals with a variety of admonitions so that the people would stop acting like they did in Egypt and never adopt any of the criminal behaviour of the Canaanites. It included never engaging in idolatry of any kind, taking care of the poor, not lying to each other and especially loving each as we love ourselves. It also forbids getting tattoos in the name of foreign gods or piercing your skin in the name of a strange god. Tattoos and body piercings as a fashion statement are not forbidden, I just think it is foolish and unhealthy. In order to be holy you have to obey all of the commandments of G-d and never just pick and choose those you feel are more important than others. Holiness remains an all or nothing proposition.

Chapter 20 covers some of the same ground as the two previous chapters, giving specific cases where these rules can be shown to apply and ends with forbidding any kind of spiritism which attempts to use either the spirits of the dead or familiar spirits for help or to predict the future.

Haftarah: Amos 9:7-15/Ezekiel 20:2-20

(5) ***Amos 9:9:For behold, I will give my orders and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations, as your grain is shaken in a sieve, without a single grain falling to the earth.*** This one of my favorite passages which talks about the care which the L-rd exercises over the Jews He has scattered among the nations. He will not lose a single righteous one. However it is also one of the saddest passages because when our people came home to the land, they never had to be disturbed ever again, as long as they walked with YHVH according to His Word, nothing less and nothing more. How about you?

(6) ***Ezekiel 20:20: Sanctify my Sabbaths and let them be a sign between you and Me by which it is known that I am the L-rd your G-d.*** No matter what else is going on in our lives, be it ever so good or ever so bad, as long as we are on the same page with G-d and are Sabbath resting in Him, things are really okay. How good are you at resting in Him?

Brit Chadashah: I Corinthians 6:9-20/Matthew 5:43-48

(7) ***I Corinthians 6:9-11: Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of G-d? Do not be deceived, neither the debauched, nor the idolaters, nor the adulterers, nor the male prostitutes, nor the homosexuals, nor the thieves, nor the greedy, nor the drunkards, nor the slanderers, nor the swindlers shall inherit the kingdom of G-d. And such were some of you, but you have been washed, you have been sanctified and you have been justified in the name of the L-rd Yeshua and by the Spirit of our G-d.*** It is only those who practice and cling to the ten kingdom exclusions who shall be excluded from the kingdom. It is not because their conduct is so evil, but because they call acceptable that which the Father calls unacceptable and because they refuse to be forgiven and cleansed. They have chosen darkness over light and will not come to the light.

G-d has always hated evil, but He will always love those who cry out to Him from the depth of their shadows and who want to be released from their darkness. Instead of trying to describe evil as if it were some kind of good, we need to release it to Him and learn to live cleansed lives of separation and rest. Forgiveness opens us up to holiness and to resting in Him.

Sermon: **The Sabbath, a Generational Sign of G-d's Sanctification**

Passage: YHVH spoke to Moses and said: speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: you shall not miss out on observing my Sabbaths, for they shall be a sign between you and Me and your descendants by which it shall be known that I am YHVH who sanctifies

you. You shall observe the Sabbath, for it shall be for you a holy thing. The one who profanes the Sabbath shall be put to death and the one who does any work, shall be removed from the midst of my people. You shall work six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath, the day of rest, consecrated to YHVH. The one who does any work on the day of the Sabbath, shall be put to death. The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath and shall celebrate it, them and their descendants as a perpetual covenant. It shall be a perpetual sign between me and the Children of Israel that in six days YHVH made the Heavens and the earth, and on the sixth day He ceased from His work and rested. (Exodus 31:12-17).

In this series, I want to give you a broad biblical understanding of how to observe the Sabbath and in our passage this week, we see that it is a temporal, generational sign which links the Children of Israel both to G-d and to His finished creation. Keeping the Sabbath sanctifies our time and makes sure that our time revolves around the L-rd and His coming Kingdom and not around anything less. It is a generational, weekly link between our generations and the L-rd who created time and who wants us to give our time to Him.

Tithing ten percent of our material increase is a witness to the fact that we have made the King the real L-rd of all that we own and that everything we own really belongs to Him. He gives us breath and all the abilities we need in order to make a living and when we tithe ten percent of our increase back to Him, it is both an act of submission and an act of our faith in His ability to help us meet all of our practical needs. There is a proverb which I heard as a young believer which continues to impact my life: If He is not L-rd of all, He is not L-rd at all. We only have so much time between the cradle and the grave and observing the Sabbath is a kind of temporal tithe which empowers our lives and which transforms our use of time into an expression of holiness for the rest of the week.

Our passage mentions both the Sabbaths of the L-rd and the seventh day of the week. This is because the festival cycle specifies a special series of special days which also need to be observed as well as the seventh day Sabbath. Our passage also stipulates twice that the one who refuses to obey the Sabbath shall be put to death and that the one who does any work on the Sabbath shall be excluded from the community. This is because all of our time really belongs to YHVH and if we do not give Him back one day, we are effectively stealing from Him and should be treated as temporal thieves who are desecrating the L-rd by turning our time into something which we worship, in the place of the King whom we should be serving.

It sounds harsh until you think about it because, how we use our time matters to the L-rd and if we misuse our time, He will not and cannot sanctify us because we are effectively cutting ourselves off from Him and His blessings. How the L-rd deals with Sunday worshippers on the day of judgement is none of our business, but how we serve Him with our time should be our primary business. The Scriptures call us to worship on the seventh day and to rest from all of our labours on the day which YHVH set aside as the only acceptable day of rest.

Idolatry of any kind is a violation of our covenant with the L-rd and observing the Sabbath sets us free from making our use of time into a kind of idolatry. In fact, it could be seen as our temporal link with the L-rd of all eternity. It could also be seen as our weekly countdown towards the coming Kingdom. It was one of the first commandments the Children of Israel were called to obey and it is a sign that we are no longer slaves who have no control over how they use their time. When we rest on the Sabbath we are rejoicing in our new freedom.

It is one of the major biblical requirements and should never be seen as a form of legalism which the Gospel sets us free from. Israel was set free from the slavery of Egypt and they became masters of their own fate. Observing the Sabbath is a sign that we are a free people who voluntarily surrender their time to resting in the L-rd and worshipping Him one day a week.

Keeping the Sabbath sanctifies the other six days of the week and makes sure that we face them with a full spiritual tank. It is also a testimony to the fact that we are in regular contact with the L-rd of Creation and want to live our lives in sync with Him and with His agenda.

He promised to Abraham that he would become a great nation and that he would be a blessing to all nations and open the way back to G-d through the same faith and obedience which Abraham lived by. The Sabbath is a sign between G-d and us that this promise to both be a great nation and also a blessing to all nations is being fulfilled through us. And instead of fussing and worrying about the direction which this darkening world is taking, keeping the Sabbath means that we are at peace both with G-d and with what He is doing in the world around us. We are at rest in Him, no matter what is happening in our lives.

Observing the Sabbath means that we are resting in both YHVH's finished creation and in His active participation in the world around us. But why did He twice command us to put people to death if they did not keep the Sabbath and what makes the violation of the Sabbath a capital crime? This is not an easy question to fully answer, but I would suggest at least three reasons in support of this stringent requirement.

First of all, unless we rest in what the L-rd has done, we cannot find the rest in Him which we need in order to build holiness into the rest of our lives. Secondly, making Him the functional centre of our lives is only possible when we rest on the day which He set aside for this important spiritual discipline. Lastly, we need to learn the important lesson of coming to Him on His terms and not transforming our spirituality into something which we are in final control over. It is His life in us which gives us power over death.

We do not live in a restful society and our world is not one which relates well to any form of spirituality. Ours is a hectic, selfish secular world where the accumulation of material wealth competes with the pursuit of personal advantage as the primary target we are told that we should be aiming towards. The Sabbath is a peg we firmly drive into our lives week by week, so that we are never swept up in the pursuit of the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life.

This spiritual prioritizing of our lives was built into the Ten Commandments, so that we would always make the L-rd, the lord of our time.

It is not a minor offence not to keep the Sabbath, especially since the Sabbath was given as a permanent link to resting in the finished creation of G-d. Resting on the seventh day keeps our weeks focused on who the L-rd is and what He has done for us, from the time of creation, right up to the present day. It remains our practical connection to restful holiness and allows us to infuse the rest of the week with this weekly reality. In a very real sense the Sabbath allows us to remove ourselves from the hopes and fears of our weekly lives and to spend quality time contemplating the things of the L-rd and our heavenly future.

Without rest, we begin to wear out and lose touch with what is really important in life. The Sabbath becomes a sanctuary where we reaffirm our grasp of what is really important to the L-

rd. It is also a time when we fill up our spiritual tanks and recover from the trials and tribulations which have plagued us during the week. It is a time where we can have a good look at our souls and at our life priorities and move closer to the L-rd and to His Word. It is a time where we dedicate our time to what really matters and where we put things into a proper spiritual perspective. Without this rest, we begin to die and slip back into the world.

What really matters to you in life can be measured by what you get done and by what you keep putting off, because you keep giving your time and energy to what you feel is really important. People say a lot of things and even make all kinds of promises, but it is actually what they get around to doing which is a measure of what they truly value. Those who truly value spiritual rest and spiritual renewal will always make observing the Sabbath a sign of their trust and confidence in the L-rd.

Many people talk about seeking the L-rd and about learning to do things His way, but the crowning jewel of this level and kind of spirituality is observing the Sabbath as a real day of rest. This resting is the whole point of Sabbath observance and it does take real discipline to actually stop working and give a whole 24 hour period over to the L-rd and to the things of the L-rd. The L-rd chose and even designed the seventh day as the day of holy rest and the entire festival cycle is an annual commitment to resting in the L-rd, both for what He did in Creation and for what He continues to do for us as we learn to rest in Him.

I have always wanted to be a good worker with a high work ethic, willing to give everything I do my best effort, but even those fitness buffs admit that efficient, regular rest is just as important as any series of exercise routines we get involved with. I want to work for the L-rd and reach out to help those in need as a reliable member of society, but in order to accomplish this, I need to come at all I do from a position of regular efficient Sabbath rest.

G-d built rest into the cosmos and selected one day for us to learn to access this tremendous resource. Rest is an essential ingredient in acquiring and maintaining holiness and the day which the L-rd set aside for us to access this rest, is the Sabbath.

When Paul says that some people make a distinction day between days, while others consider every day the same, he is not advocating that we change or relocate spiritual rest to another day of the week. He is saying that how we make these distinctions should be based on conviction and not on pressure or out of fear. Anyone who values spiritual rest ought to express this conviction through observing the day of rest chosen by the L-rd and not the one chosen by men. How convicted are you about your need to rest in the L-rd?

Taking a break and learning to rest, increases our efficiency as we set about completing the tasks we have set for ourselves. Sabbath rest should be a primary task which complete every week. There may be times when necessity requires that we pause from our Sabbath rest and reach out to help those who are in need, but if we do not feed ourselves before we feed others, we will run out of steam and flounder instead of being useful over the long term.

A regular weekly day of rest is not something which the human mind came up with and it is only as we make the L-rd the lord of our rest that we will get the full benefit of any rest which we take. Rest is His idea and the Sabbath is the day He set aside in order for us to fulfil this weekly requirement He places on our lives. How creative we are in deciding how we can get the maximum rest on the L-rd's day of rest is up to our personal convictions and our individual giftings. But committing ourselves to making Sabbath rest, the centre around which our week

turns, will keep us focused on the L-rd and on our final rest, which we know will one day be here. How well are you focused on both your weekly rest and your final rest?

I do not so much wish to be in control over every element of my life, as I wish that every element of my life is under the L-rd's firm and final control. How much control are you willing to give the L-rd over every element of your life? What we surrender to Him, He will bless and renew and what we keep to ourselves will wither, rot and eventually die. I have seen more than a few very talented people work themselves into a breakdown because they do not understand that resting is often the most important work which we do.

It is tempting to try and finish things up before we take our weekly work break, but one of the reasons those who violated the Sabbath were put to death, was that they were already dying and the L-rd did not want them to take the whole community down with them. Ministry tends to be a very unstructured set of tasks and one of the major objectives which needs to be set if our ministry is to be successful, is to force ourselves to take a Sabbath rest where we renew and recharge no matter how busy or fraught our lives become.

G-d wants each new generation of His people to pass on the baton of rest as a sign that He is sanctifying each of us and all of us, one generation at a time and one Sabbath at a time. This is the day which He has set aside to bless us and to sanctify us and the Sabbath needs to be the day which we set aside to bless Him and to sanctify His name. It is not a later innovation which He imposed on His people to keep them in line. Heaven is our eternal Sabbath, which He has set aside for us and our weekly Sabbath can be a taste of this glorious future if we learn to do all day on that day, what we will be doing everyday, once we enter into His Everlasting Kingdom.

We will be resting in His new creation and basking in the light of His true presence in all of its fullness. In a very real sense, Sabbath rest is doing our weekly homework so that we are ready to rest forever, once this darkening world finally dissolves before the mighty fire of His appearing. Resting in this life is the best practice for the life which is to come and it is at the core of true, enduring biblical holiness. Unless you are plugged in to taking a Sabbath rest, you are depriving yourself of one of the main ingredients of a biblical lifestyle and your spirituality will eventually grow thin, wear out and die.

How about you? Living an abundant life requires that we get abundant Sabbath rest. Shalom.