

WORSHIP SYMBOLS

LEVITICUS 24:1-23

**GOOD WORSHIP REMINDS US WHO GOD IS AND PROVIDES
US WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND TO HIM.**

I. GOD'S LIGHT (VS 1-4)

God Provides Light For Us So That We Will Not Have To Stumble Through Life.

- A. THE PEOPLE'S WORK (1-2)
- B. THE PRIESTS' WORK (3)
- C. GOD'S WORK (4)

II. GOD'S PROVISION (VS 5-9)

Acknowledging God's Provision and Presence Will Help Us to Approach Life Without Fear.

- A. GOD PROVIDES ABUNDANT CROPS (5)
- B. GOD PROVIDES INSTRUCTIONS AND MEANING (6-8)
- C. GOD PROVIDES (9)

III. GOD'S NAME (VS 10-23)

We Have Been Given The Name Above All Names So That We Can Confidently Approach God.

- A. OFFENDING GOD'S NAME (10-12)
- B. RESTORING GOD'S NAME (13-16)
- C. MAINTAINING GOD'S NAME (17-22)
- D. HONORING GOD'S NAME (23).

IV. EPILOGUE

Worship Symbols

Leviticus 24:1-23

When I first read this morning's text, I couldn't quite understand how the three different themes came together. I understood the regulations for tending to the lampstand in the Tabernacle and the regulations for maintaining the shewbread on the table inside the Tabernacle. These seem to be routine, everyday tasks. However, when I got to the section about using God's Name in vain, and then the explanation of the "eye for eye" law, I was having trouble in seeing how they all went together.

However, when I started looking at what the lampstand and the bread stood for, it became clear that this whole section had to do with God's personal character and holiness. So often we come to worship expecting God to do something for us. We forget that worship is our response to what God has already done and our faith in what He will do in the future.

I think that kids often expose our confusion in very innocent ways. One year, our Sunday school had a summer program for Scripture memorization. At the end of the summer, they had all the kids come up and recite their memory verses. One little girl started to recite her verse, and then her mind went blank. Her mother was sitting in the front row and she became as frantic as the little girl. She motioned to the little girl and even tried to silently mouth the words.

Finally in desperation the mother whispered the opening phrase of the verse, "I am the light of the world." Immediately the little girl's face lit up. She relaxed and smiled. And then with supreme confidence she said with supreme confidence, "My mother is the light of the world."

Of course, everyone laughed. But we really do often forget that worship is about God. It's not about us. We are not the light of the world, nor are we the center. Jesus is the light of the world. He is the center and focal point of worship.

The main idea of this morning's text is relatively simple and straightforward. **GOOD WORSHIP REMINDS US WHO GOD IS AND PROVIDES US WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND TO HIM.** Again I want to alert you to the fact that I am going to approach this passage from a Christian perspective. I will deal with the passage in its Hebrew context and then I will apply to the nature and person of Jesus Christ.

I. GOD'S LIGHT (VS 1-4)

God Provides Light For Us So That We Will Not Have To Stumble Through Life.

In verses 1-4 we are reminded of God's light. In other words, **GOD PROVIDES LIGHT FOR US SO THAT WE WILL NOT HAVE TO STUMBLE THROUGH LIFE.** In the worship setting described in these four verses, everyone participates: the people, the priests, and God. The people's work is described in verses 1-2. Before we get to their specific duty, let's remember that God gifted certain craftsmen to build this lampstand. Listen to its description:

³¹"Make a lampstand of pure, hammered gold. The entire lampstand and its decorations will be one piece—the base, center stem, lamp cups, buds, and blossoms. ³²It will have six branches, three branches going out from each side of the center stem. ³³Each of the six branches will hold a cup shaped like an almond blossom, complete with buds and petals. ³⁴The center stem of the lampstand will be decorated with four almond blossoms, complete with buds and petals. ³⁵One blossom will be set beneath each pair of branches where they extend from the center stem. ³⁶The decorations and branches must all be one piece with the stem, and they must be hammered from pure gold. ³⁷Then make the seven lamps for the lampstand, and set them so they reflect their light forward" (Exodus 25:31-37 / NLT).

The lampstand would resemble a beautiful almond branch in full bloom. The wicks would be fueled by pure olive oil that would drip into it from the ornate cups shaped like blossoms, buds, and petals.

A. THE PEOPLE'S WORK (1-2)

And that brings us to the people's work here. God wanted only the best. If too many olives were pressed at one time, the color of the oil would darken and become cloudy. God wanted the Israelites to bring the best product and He wanted it to be prepared with care. In the last chapter we said that God provided the Israelites special times and seasons in which He expected them to get back on God's rhythm for life. If it were our turn to provide the oil, we would have to be a lot more careful in our preparation than we would normally be. If we were going to just use the oil for cooking or lighting our own houses, it wouldn't matter much if there was a little impurity in it. However, when preparing the oil for the Tabernacle, we would have to be extra careful.

It seems to me that we have slipped a long way. I would say the exact opposite applies to most of us believers in the West. We are much more careful with our own stuff than we are with God's.

B. THE PRIESTS' WORK (3)

The priest's work is described in verse 3. This lampstand is the only light inside the Tabernacle. God required the priests to make sure the lights never burned out. It seems as if a priest may have had to stay on duty throughout the night to make sure the lamp kept burning. The priests had to make sure this light stayed constant throughout generations.

C. GOD'S WORK (4)

God's work is described in verse 4. Let me read to you once more the directional intent of the lampstand:

"³⁷Then make the seven lamps for the lampstand, and set them so they reflect their light forward" (Exodus 25:37 / NLT).

What exactly was directly in front of the lampstand? Directly across from the lampstand was the table that contained 12 loaves of bread. At this point in Israel's history, it wouldn't be hard to figure out the significance of the 12 loaves. They symbolized the 12 Tribes of Israel. God intended for His chosen people to live in His light, under His guidance and protection. Think about the Aaronic blessing the priests used at this time in their history:

"²⁴ The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace"

(Numbers 6:24-26 / NIV).

Listen to the key phrases: "the LORD make His face shine upon you, and the LORD turn His face toward you." Some people translate this last phrase, "May the LORD fix His gaze upon you." The light from the lampstand shone on the 12 loaves of bread and the priests were commanded to keep this light going constantly. God wanted the Israelites to know that they lived under His watchful gaze. Whenever pastors raise their hands and invoke God's blessing, it should be a reminder that we are under the constant loving gaze of God.

But this theme gets interesting as history progresses. God guided the Hebrews to the Promised Land by manifesting His guidance through the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Once they get settled in the Promised Land, the pillar disappears. From that point on, God's written word, the bible takes on the task of guidance. Listen to the Psalmist:

“Your word is a lamp for my feet
and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105 / NLT).

If the Hebrew wanted to live in God’s presence, he or she would have to study and memorize Scripture. Listen to what Joshua is told by a heavenly messenger:

“⁸Study this Book of the Law continually. Meditate on it day and night so you may be sure to obey all that is written in it. Only then will you succeed. ⁹I command you—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:8-9 / NLT).

Let’s just quickly review. The lampstand in the Tabernacle represented the gaze of God upon His people. That light was communicated through the Word, which is the written word, the Bible. Jesus entered the world in human flesh and this is how the Gospel of John starts out:

“¹In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn’t make. ⁴Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone. ⁵The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it” (John 1:1-5 / NLT).

Isn’t that interesting that John starts out His gospel by stating that Jesus is God, Jesus is the Word, and Jesus is the Light?

And then let’s follow that up with Jesus’ words:

¹²“I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life” (John 8:12 / NLT).

Again I think I need to correct our bad theology in the United States. We have preached the grace of Jesus so much that grace has lost its meaning and power because no one ever talks about the statements Jesus makes about His judgment of sin. If you want to do an exercise sometime, read the Gospels and see what Jesus has to say about sin, judgment, and hell. It may surprise you. But the key is that people must seriously read their bibles. Jesus is indeed the light of the world. Allow me to just let the Apostle John summarize the meaning of this section:

“⁵This is the message he has given us to announce to you: God is light and there is no darkness in him at all. ⁶So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness. We are not living in the truth. ⁷But if we are living in the light of God’s presence, just as Christ is, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin” (I John 1:5-7 / NLT). We could summarize this section by relating it to Jesus.

GOD PROVIDES LIGHT FOR US SO THAT WE WILL NOT HAVE TO STUMBLE THROUGH LIFE.

II. GOD’S PROVISION (VS 5-9)

Acknowledging God’s Provision and Presence Will Help Us to Approach Life Without Fear.

We have said that the lampstand shined its light on to the table where the 12 loaves of bread were. Verses 5-9 describe the symbol of God’s provision. For us, **ACKNOWLEDGING GOD’S PROVISION AND PRESENCE WILL HELP US TO APPROACH LIFE WITHOUT FEAR.**

A. GOD PROVIDES ABUNDANT CROPS (5)

Just as with the ministry of the lampstand, the ministry of loaves involved the people, the priests, and God. Verse 5 is a way in which we are reminded that God provides abundant crops. We need constantly to put this in perspective. At this time, the Hebrews are in the dessert journey to the Promised Land. They have not planted nor harvested anything at this point. Nevertheless,

they will be required to bake 12 loaves of bread using fine flour. Once they arrive and settle the Promised Land, taking the best part of their first portion would be a way in which they could demonstrate their acknowledgment that their abundant harvest was a direct result of God's provision. That is something that we Christians should always keep in mind. We need to give God our best and our first as a way of acknowledging that all we have comes as a gift from Him.

B. GOD PROVIDES INSTRUCTIONS AND MEANING (6-8)

In verses 6-8, God provides instructions and meaning. The original description of the table is given in Exodus:

"²³Then make a table of acacia wood, 3 feet long, 1 1/2 feet wide, and 2 1/4 feet high. ²⁴Overlay it with pure gold and run a molding of gold around it. ²⁵Put a rim about three inches wide around the top edge, and put a gold molding all around the rim. ... ³⁰You must always keep the special Bread of the Presence on the table before me" (Exodus 25:23-30 / NLT).

Just as the priests were required to keep the lamps burning, they were required to keep fresh loaves of bread on this table. Every Sabbath, new loaves were baked. They replaced the old loaves with new ones and the priests ate the old ones. It was a real reminder that God provided the wheat for the people to bring the offering of bread and God provided food for the priests through the people. There was also incense placed on the table. This incense was offered up on the altar. Keep in mind that there are only three pieces of furniture in the Tabernacle outer room; the lampstand, the table of bread and the incense altar.

C. GOD PROVIDES (9)

Verse 9 illustrates that God provides. What is really interesting to me is where they are when they receive these instructions. They are in the wilderness and their food is being provided directly by God in the form of *manna*. The manna was like a wafer. The Israelites lived on *manna* for the entire 40 years they wandered in the wilderness. After entering the land and eating of its produce, the *manna* stopped because now God provided them with crops:

"¹²No manna appeared that day, and it was never seen again. So from that time on the Israelites ate from the crops of Canaan" (Joshua 5:12 / NLT).

Here is what is interesting about the timing of this. Joshua and the Israelites had entered the Promised Land, but they had not yet begun to conquer it. God provided them with the land and the produce. However, in faith, they would have to conquer and possess the land.

The loaves of bread were called the bread of presence. Literally, presence translates face. This is God's people and God living face to face. Chapter 6 in the Gospel of John is all about bread. Jesus took 5 loaves of bread and two fish and miraculously fed 5,000 people. What is very interesting to me is that when the disciples collect the leftovers, there are 12 baskets, one for each disciple. Or perhaps, one loaf left over for each of the 12 baskets. I think this is meant to draw our minds back to the Tabernacle where 12 loaves were set out on the table. Through Jesus, mankind is now face to face with God. Jesus fed the multitudes with supernatural bread like the Father fed the Israelites with supernatural *manna* from heaven.

But wait, there's more. Jesus goes on to describe Himself as the bread of life:

"⁴⁵As it is written in the Scriptures, 'they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶(Not that anyone has ever seen the Father; only I, who was sent from God, have seen him.)

⁴⁷"I assure you, anyone who believes in me already has eternal life. ⁴⁸Yes, I am the bread of life! ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died.

⁵⁰However, the bread from heaven gives eternal life to everyone who eats it. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; this bread is my flesh, offered so the world may live" (John 6:45-51 / NLT).

Jesus makes it clear that in Him, we come face to face with God. Jesus is our provision, our salvation, and our life. Jesus is everything to us. **ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S PROVISION AND PRESENCE WILL HELP US TO APPROACH LIFE WITHOUT FEAR.**

III. GOD'S NAME (VS 10-23)

We Have Been Given The Name Above All Names So That We Can Confidently Approach God.

I think it has been easy to see that the lampstand and the bread of presence are articles used symbolically in worship. But why would the use of God's Name be described here in verses 10-23 and why would the description of the "eye for eye" law be laid out in this context? **WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES SO THAT WE CAN CONFIDENTLY APPROACH GOD.**

A. OFFENDING GOD'S NAME (10-12)

Verses 10-12 depict an event in which a man is heard offending God's name. The commandment for the Ten Commandments that underlies this incident is this:

"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Exodus 20:7 / NIV).

The incident went like this. Two men were fighting. In the course of the fight, one man blasphemed the Name with a curse. Since the fight took place in public, several people heard it. Since God was serious about the way His Name is used, they brought the man to Moses. Since there was no policy or procedure covering this offense, they incarcerated him until Moses heard from God.

There are two major themes that we have to deal with in this story. First of all, what does it mean to misuse the Name of God? To this day, orthodox Jews will not even write the word God. They abbreviate it G___. We all know that the covenant Name God revealed to the Hebrews was Yahweh or Jehovah. No one is really sure of the pronunciation because of the Jews reverence for this Name from the beginning. And besides, the original Hebrew had no vowel points. The text always reads YHWH. What they did was this.

Whenever the tetragrammaton appeared, they would simply pronounce the word lord, which is *Adonai*. In our English Bibles we have kept that tradition. Every time the Holy Name of God appears in the text, our English Bibles translate it LORD in all capital letters to distinguish it from the normal word for Lord. I think it confuses the whole issue when trying to read the Bible. Hebrews have also referred to God as *Ha Shem*, which literally means The Name. I prefer that translation in referring to God.

We have lost a sense of the holiness of the Name of God. We refer to God flippantly. We attach God's Name to all sorts of crazy stuff. People who have grown up in the church learn to use religious language and attach God's Name to their wishes and desires. Personally, I'm always suspicious of people who use religious language and I try never to use religious language. We in the West have lost the awe and respect that God demands. If you watch television or listen to the radio, God's Name is used in vain on a regular basis and is acceptable to censors. I personally cringe when I hear God's Name used as a curse word.

As Christians in the West, it would be good for us to catch ourselves and see what we find ourselves attaching God's Name to.

The second issue in this section is identifying the one who takes the Lord's Name in vain as a man of mixed descent. He is half Israelite and half Egyptian. It really didn't matter that his father was Egyptian because nationality was based on the mother. In ancient times they had no DNA tests. So if a child was born to a Hebrew woman, the child was Jewish. You could 100 %

identify the mother of the child but never could you determine with 100 % certainty who the father was. That's why the mother is so important here. Further, the meaning of the names is important here. The man's name is never mentioned. The mother's name was *Shelomith*, which means retribution. Her father's name was *Dibri*, which means lawsuit. They are from the tribe of *Dan*, which means judgment. Roy Gane quotes Mary Douglas in her take on this. She paraphrases it something like this. Once there was a no name man. He was the son of retribution and the grandson of a lawsuit from the house of judgment. He pelted insults at the Name and the Lord said, "He shall die, he pelted my Name, he shall be pelted with stones." I think Mary Douglas has caught the real essence of this passage.

B. RESTORING GOD'S NAME (13-16)

In verses 13-17, God Himself restores His Name. Look, this guy used God's Name as a weapon. He intended to call a curse on the guy he was fighting and to attach God's Name to it. God spoke clearly now. As Mary Douglas pointed out, this guy pelted someone with God's Name, and now, God will pelt him with death. I'm hoping that by now we are starting to understand that God takes sin seriously. American Christianity has turned God into this loving, indulgent, and benign grandfather figure that looks at our sin and chuckles, "Boys will be boys." Maybe it will take a revival in which God starts killing religious people. That's what it took in the early church. God killed Ananias and Sapphira right on the spot for being hypocritical Christians.

Paul pointed out the Christians were getting sick and dying in Corinth because they were being religious hypocrites. Maybe people need to start dying in church before American Christians get the idea that God is serious about sin. He will judge every word, every thought, and every action. I'm thinking we will all be in for a long day at our own personal judgment day. I know people don't like to hear about God's wrath, God's judgment, and the fact God will send people to hell. But again, let me remind all of us that Jesus spends a great deal of time talking about the final judgment and hell. That concerns me a great deal. Since Jesus spends so much time talking about it, I need to spend more time thinking about it. Because God will restore His good Name.

C. MAINTAINING GOD'S NAME (17-22)

Verses 17-22 provide some understanding in maintaining God's Name. To me, these 6 verses really seemed out of place. They contain the legal principle called *Lex Talionis*. For us, it is more easily recognized as "an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth" principle. If you were carefully to study these 6 verses you would notice that they are in a chiastic arrangement. Verse 17 matches the second half of verse 22. Verse 18 matches the first half of verse 21. Verse 19 matches the second half of verse 20 and the first half of verse 20 are where we find the principle, "Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth." There is a lot of debate as to how this would be administered.

For example, if someone poked your eye out, how would that help you if you poked his eye out. While administering the punishment, you accidentally broke his nose, and then would he have to break your nose? And if while breaking your nose, he accidentally knocked out one of your teeth, would you have to knock out one of his teeth, and on and on? In general, the law seems to be saying that the punishment must fit the crime. In other words, if someone stole a loaf of bread, you weren't allowed to execute him. This law seems to be limiting the amount of punishment. And also, there was to be no discrimination. The law had to equally be applied to native-born citizens and immigrants. Justice means that the punishment fits the crime and that it is applied equally to all people. The passage talks about proper restitution as well.

D. HONORING GOD'S NAME (23)

I understand the law somewhat, but why does it appear here? It is located between the incident of the man using God's Name inappropriately and the execution of this man in verse 23. Verse

23 states that God's Name will be honored. Again we need to emphasize that the God we have come to believe in, in the United States is a false god. It is not the God of the Bible. How does this square with your idea of God, His love, His grace, His mercy, and His forgiveness? God just stated that the punishment should fit the crime. The punishment should not exceed the seriousness of the crime. A man used God's Name inappropriately. God Himself pronounced the judgment, "The entire assembly must stone him." And verse 23 is the fulfillment of that command, "... and they took the blasphemer outside the camp and stoned him." Is that your idea of God?

You may say to me, that's the God of the Old Testament. We believe in the God of the New Testament. Let me just quote from the Gospel of John:

"¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1 / NIV).

John starts out his biography of Jesus by identifying Him as the God of the Old Testament.

Jesus identifies Himself with the God of the Old Testament when He said:

"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!"

Think about Jesus' use of grammar. Notice that something is very wrong. He starts out with a past tense verb. He said, "Before Abraham was born." And then He switches to a present tense verb, "I am." The significance of this is that Jesus has just claimed to be Yahweh, Jehovah. The meaning of God's covenant Name is translated as "I am Who I am." The God of the Old Testament is named "I am." Jesus claims to be "I am." It couldn't be any clearer. There is only one God. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. Before we try to water down sin, before we attach God's Name to anything, we would do well to stop and think because God said that death was the appropriate response to having His Name misused. We should not stop thinking that He may still decide to kill us on the spot. It is only when we realize how powerful and dangerous that God is that we can start to appreciate the fact that **WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES SO THAT WE CAN CONFIDENTLY APPROACH GOD.**

V. EPILOGUE

I'm pretty sure that many pastors don't want to preach through Leviticus because they are uncomfortable with it. I'm sure that most people don't want to hear Leviticus preached because it describes a God that we are uncomfortable with. But true worship, **GOOD WORSHIP REMINDS US WHO GOD IS AND PROVIDES US WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND TO HIM.**

We really do need to take our lives in Christ seriously because we bear His Name. People started calling people who followed the teachings of Jesus Christians as a form of derision. Christian means little Christ. I don't where this story came from but I think it depicts what I'm trying to get at:

"A couple took their young son with them on a trip to Europe where they visited many of the cathedrals on the tourist trek. When they returned home the little boy's Sunday school teacher asked him, 'Did you learn what a saint is?'

He remembered the many stained glass windows which depicted the Christian saints so beautifully, and he said, 'A saint is a person who the light shines through.'

I wonder if that is not the best definition I've ever heard, and a good testimony to what we are trying to do ourselves here on earth."

Our lives are to be constant worship. We bear the Name of Jesus. We are Christian. We are commanded not to take the Name of the Lord our God in vain.