

## 5780 - Leviticus) 21-24 - Emor (Speak [unto the Priests])

*Parashat Emor* deals with two kinds of holiness: that of person and of time. Chapter 21 relates to holy people: priests, and above them, the High Priest. Their close contact with the Sanctuary means that they must live with certain restrictions: on contact with the dead and whom they may marry. Chapter 22 recaps similar laws relating to ordinary Israelites when they seek to enter the Sanctuary, as well as defects in animals that bar them from being offered as sacrifices. Chapter 23 is about holy time, the festivals of the year. Chapter 24 speaks about the Menora, lit daily, and the show bread, renewed weekly, and ends with a story—one of the only two narratives in Leviticus—about the fate of a man who blasphemed in the course of a fight.

The first of the essays that follow is about the laws, whose source is in this *parasha*, of sanctifying and not desecrating God's name. The next four are about the list of festivals in chapter 23: what makes it different from the Torah's other lists, why Shabbat is described here differently from anywhere else, the great controversy about what the Torah means when it says that the Omer should be offered on "the day after the Sabbath," and why Sukkot is different from all other festivals. The last essay is about the story of the blasphemer: what is it about and why is it here?

### *Sukkot: The Dual Festival*<sup>1</sup>

In each of the three major passages of the Torah where the festivals are set out in detail, **there is something unusual about Sukkot**. Consider first the list in Deuteronomy 16, where the emphasis is on the civic dimension of the festivals as occasions of social inclusion, when not only "you, your sons, and daughters," celebrate but also "your male and female servants, and the Levites, **the foreigners**, the fatherless, and the widows who live in your towns."

One of the keywords of Deuteronomy as a whole is שִׂמְחָה (*simcha*), מִמּוֹת (*memot*), מִצְוָה (*mitzvah*), collective celebration. It occurs only **once in the book of Exodus**, **once in Leviticus** (specifically in the context of Sukkot), and **once in the book of Numbers**. It appears **twelve times in Deuteronomy**. And in the passage dealing with the festivals, it occurs not once but twice in connection with Sukkot:

Be joyful [v'sam-ach-ta] at your festival. For seven days celebrate the festival to the Lord your God at the place the Lord will choose. For the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of

your hands, **and your joy will be complete** [v'ha-yita ach sameach]. (Deut. 16:14-15)

Deuteronomy makes no mention of joy in connection with Passover. It mentions it once in relation to Shavuot. In the context of Sukkot, it refers to it twice. Doubtless it was this that led to the traditional description of Sukkot as *zeman simchatenu*, "the season of our joy." But why a double joy?

The second strange feature appears in this parasha, the only place in the Torah to specify the two special practices of Sukkot. This is the first:

Beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days ... On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches, and willows of the brook, and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. (Lev. 23:39-40)

This is a reference to the *arba minim*, the "four kinds"—palm branch, citron, myrtle, and willow leaves—taken and waved on Sukkot. The second command is quite different:

Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths, so your descendants will know that I made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. (Lev. 23:42-43)

This is the command to leave our houses and live in the temporary dwelling that gives Sukkot its name: the festival of "booths, huts, tabernacles," an annual reminder of the temporary and portable homes in which the Israelites lived during their journey through the wilderness.

No other festival has this dual symbolism. Not only are the "four kinds" and the tabernacle different in character: **they are even seemingly opposed to one another**. The "four kinds" and the rituals associated with them are about rain. They were, says Maimonides,<sup>(1)</sup> the most readily available products of the land of Israel, reminders of the fertility of the land. By contrast, the command to live for seven days in booths, with only leaves for a roof, presupposes the absence of rain. If it rains on Sukkot we are exempt from the command (for as long as the rain lasts, and providing it is sufficiently strong to spoil food on the table).

The difference goes deeper still. On the one hand, **Sukkot is the most universalistic of all festivals. The prophet Zechariah foresees the day when it will be celebrated by all humanity:**

The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day the Lord will be One, and **His name the only name**. Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: Exodus*, (Maggid Books & The Orthodox Union), pp. 347-351.

King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. (Zech. 14:9, 16-17)

Hence the interpretation given by the sages about the list of the festivals in the book of Numbers. **On Sukkot, seventy bulls were sacrificed in the course of the festival** (Num. 29:12–34). **The sages say they correspond to the seventy nations** (the traditional number of civilisations; see Gen. 10). Following the cues in Zechariah, they said that “On the festival [of Sukkot], the world is judged in the matter of rain.”<sup>(2)</sup> There is nothing distinctively Jewish about the need for rain. All countries, especially in the Middle East, needed it.

At the same time, though, **it is also the most particularist of festivals**. When we sit in the sukkah we recall Jewish history—not just the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, **but also the entire experience of exile**. The sukkah is defined as a “temporary dwelling” (*dirat arai*). It is the most powerful symbol of Jewish history. No other nation could see its home not as a castle, a fortress, or a triumphal arch, but as a fragile tabernacle. No other nation was born, not in its land, but in the desert. Far from being universalistic, Sukkot is intensely particularistic, the festival of a people like no other, whose only protection was its faith in the sheltering wings of the Divine Presence.

1. The sukkah is a reminder of God’s care during Israel’s sojourn in the Wilderness. And, it must be possible to see the sky through the “roof” of a sukkah—especially at night—as the stars remind us of God’s promises to Abraham.
  - a. The sukkah reminds us that, as God’s people, we are but “strangers and sojourners” here (Lev 25:23)—not permanent residents.
  - b. In times of distress—David prayed to be enveloped in a protective Sukkah.
    - 1) Psalm 27:5  
he will hide me in the shelter of his **tabernacle** ...
    - 2) Psalm 31:20  
... in your **dwelling** you keep them safe from accusing tongues.
  - c. **The idea that Sukkot reminds of God’s care throughout our “entire experience of exile” is particularistic (i.e., part of God’s unique [or particular] relationship with Israel)—so like with David, we add our own experience of God’s care to the significance of the holiday generally.**

It is almost as if Sukkot were two festivals, not one.

It is, and therein lies its unique character. Although all the festivals are listed together, they in fact represent two quite different cycles. The first is the cycle of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. These tell the particularistic

story of Jewish identity and history: the Exodus (Passover), the revelation at Mount Sinai (Shavuot), and the journey through the wilderness (Sukkot). **Celebrating them, we re-enact the key moments of Jewish memory. We celebrate what it is to be a Jew.**

There is, however, a second cycle: the festivals of the seventh month: Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. **Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur are not only about Jews and Judaism. They are about God and humanity as a whole. The language of the prayers is different. We say: “Instil Your awe upon *all* Your works, and fear of You on *all* that You have created.”** The liturgy is strikingly universalistic. The Days of Awe are about the sovereignty of God over all humankind. On them, we reflect on the *human*, not just the Jewish, condition.

The two cycles reflect the dual aspect of God: as creator and as redeemer. **As creator, God is universal.** We are all in God’s image, formed in His likeness. **We share a covenant of human solidarity, the Noahide covenant.** We are fellow citizens of the world God made and entrusted to our care. **As redeemer, however, God is particular.** Whatever His relationship to other nations (and He has a relationship with other nations—so Amos and Isaiah insist), Jews know Him through His saving acts in Israel’s history: Exodus, revelation, and the journey to the Promised Land.

## 2. Exodus 12:21-23

<sup>23</sup>When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, **he will see the blood** on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, **and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.**

### a. Exodus 12:37-39

<sup>38</sup>**Many other people went up with them**, and also large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds.

No sooner have we identified the two cycles than we see what makes Sukkot unique. It is the only festival belonging to both. It is part of the cycle of Jewish history (Passover-Shavuot-Sukkot), and part of the sequence of the seventh month (Rosh HaShana-Yom Kippur-Sukkot). Hence the double joy.

**The “four kinds” represent the universality of the festival.** They symbolise nature, rain, the cycle of the seasons—things common to all humanity. **However, the sukkah itself, the tabernacle, represents the singular character of Jewish history with its repeated experiences of exile and homecoming and its long journey across the wilderness of time.**

In a way not shared by any other festival, Sukkot celebrates the dual nature of Jewish faith: **the universality of God and the particularity of Jewish existence.** We all need rain. We are all part of nature. We are all dependent on the complex ecology of the created world. Hence the “four

kinds." But each nation, civilisation, religion is different. As Jews, we are heirs to a history unlike that of any other people: small, vulnerable, suffering exile after exile, yet surviving. Hence the sukka.

Humanity is formed out of our commonalities and differences. Our differences give us our identity. Our commonalities give us our humanity. *If we were completely different, we could not communicate. If we were completely alike, we would have nothing to say.* Sukkot brings both together: our uniqueness as a people and our participation in the universal fate of mankind.

(1) Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:43.

(2) Mishna Rosh HaShana 1:2.

### 3. The Paradigm of Particularism vs. Universalism

- a. Professor Rae<sup>2</sup> believes that Luke's purpose is "**to show how a provincial Jewish message of the Kingdom salvation became a universal gospel for the Gentiles as well as the Jews**"<sup>(17)</sup> and that the purpose of Acts was "**to show the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the gospel from its roots in Israel to the entire world.**"<sup>(18)3</sup>

(17) Scott Rae, *Survey of Matthew-Revelation, Argument of the Gospel of Luke*, from the Class Syllabus.

(18) Ibid., *Argument of the Book of Acts*, from the Class Syllabus.

- b. Not surprisingly, Professor Dollar believes that Luke-Acts is a "missionary story."<sup>(24)</sup> To "scholars devoted to the study of missiology ... it is assumed that one can find in Acts missiological guidelines of contemporary relevance."<sup>(25)</sup> However, there is a difference between discovering missiological guidelines in Acts that have contemporary relevance and saying that "two thousand years of Jewish history **characterized by particularism were reversed in two short decades by a renewal effort which arose out of the ministry of (Yeshua) of Nazareth and culminated in the formation of Christianity (and that) ... Luke alone provides the record of how this Jewish movement developed into a universal faith** within two decades after the death of its founder"<sup>(26)</sup> (italics added).

(24) Harold E. Dollar, Ph.D., *A Biblical-Missiological Exploration of the Cross-Cultural Dimensions in Luke-Acts* (University Microfilms International, 1990), p. 1.

(25) Ibid., p. 2.

(26) Ibid., p. 1.

- c. Dollar believes that Luke wrote his Gospel in order to prepare "his readers for the eventual inclusion of the Gentiles"<sup>(27)</sup> **in a universal faith THAT WOULD REPLACE JUDAISM—and he wrote Acts in order to complete the record, i.e., of the paradigm shift away from the EXCLUSIVE centripetal** (i.e., *moving or tending to move toward a center*) **PARTICULARISM OF JUDAISM to the INCLUSIVE centrifugal** (i.e., *moving or tending to move away from a center*) **UNIVERSALISM OF CHRISTIANITY**. According to Dollar, Luke prepared his audience for this paradigm shift by "including information (in his Gospel that deals) with the way (that) (Yeshua) related to those who were oppressed and marginal to normal Jewish life."<sup>(28)</sup> And he believes that Luke's "inordinate interest in woman, 'sinners,' tax-collectors, the poor, the helpless and Samaritans ... represent anomalies that conflict with (the) dominant paradigm (of Jewish particularism) and prepares (the reader) for the introduction and acceptance of **a new paradigm where Gentile inclusion becomes the accepted norm.**"<sup>(29)</sup>

(27) Ibid., p. 21.

(28) Ibid., p. 35.

(29) Ibid., p. 40.

#### 1) Galatians 3:6-9

**<sup>8</sup>Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through YOU."**

- d. Luke's account of Philip's rendezvous with the Ethiopian eunuch is more enigmatic. Is he a proselyte or a Gentile? Dollar believes that Luke includes the encounter **to make "the point that (he) represents one of those marginal characters (mentioned above) who, though completely unacceptable within Judaism, find ready acceptance within the messianic movement"**<sup>(63)</sup> (italics added). He adds,

On every occasion when Luke refers to him in personal terms ... he makes it known that the man was an eunuch. This may be an indication that for Luke, **though this man tried to find answers ... within Judaism, he was unable because of his handicap and the incompleteness of Judaism ...** This eunuch from (Ethiopia), having failed to find answers to his spiritual need in Jerusalem, finds understanding and acceptance from God through the gospel preached by Philip. **Thus Luke shows the progressive movement of the gospel as another threshold is crossed in the direction of the Gentiles ... (this) alerts the reader to another step in the gospel becoming universal.**<sup>(64)</sup>

(63) Ibid., p. 115.

(64) Ibid., p. 115-116.

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<sup>2</sup> Scott Rae, Ph.D. is a professor of Biblical Studies/Ethics at Talbot School of Theology.

<sup>3</sup> Robert R. Gorelik, A Critical Analysis of "The Paradigm of Particularism and Universalism." Taken from "A Biblical-Missiological Exploration of the Cross-Cultural Dimensions in Luke-Acts" by Harold Dollar, Ph.D. (Professor, Department of Missions, Talbot School of Theology.

- 1) Dollar ... believes that Luke's "inordinate interest" in women, sinners, tax collectors, the poor, the helpless and the Samaritans **represent "anomalies that conflict with the dominant paradigm of Jewish particularism and prepares the reader for the introduction and acceptance of a new paradigm where Gentile inclusion becomes the accepted norm."** But they do not. With the possible exception of the Samaritans, all of the people in these "marginal" groups were Jewish. Furthermore, there is nothing in the text itself (as Dollar readily admits) to suggest that Luke was preparing his readers for such a paradigm shift. **Rather, he systematically confirmed the messiahship of Yeshua by demonstrating that he was doing precisely what the Bible said the Messiah would do when he comes.** He was preaching good news to the poor, binding up the brokenhearted, proclaiming freedom for the captives, the release from darkness for the prisoners and the acceptable year of the Lord (cf., Isa. 61:1-4 with Luke 4:18ff).
- 2) Isaiah 56:3-5  
<sup>4</sup>For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—<sup>5</sup>**to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.**
- 3) When the ... religious leaders asked Yeshua's disciples why their master spent so much time with the (same) marginal groups that Dollar identifies, Yeshua answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Lk. 5:31; cf., Mt. 9:12; Mk. 2:17; Lk. 4:23). Yeshua met the needs of people who *should have been taken care of within the context of Judaism and weren't*—**not because Judaism the way God intended it to be was too particularistic, but because the Judaism of men was too particularistic. These religious leaders, in their zeal to serve God, missed the point of it all.**
- e. Dollar believes that when Paul is "converted" after Stephen's death and called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, **Luke makes it clear that he is not supposed to minister or witness<sup>(67)</sup> to them according to the particularistic Jewish paradigm of the Old Testament. Instead, he is called to preach to them on the basis of the emerging universal paradigm of the New Testament.** For "in most instances those who were converted to the religion of Judaism (in the Old Testament) were also socialized into the culture of Israel so that they became Jews."<sup>(68)</sup> Paul was specifically called to evangelize Gentiles qua Gentiles, **and not require that they convert to Judaism or become Jews in the process.**

(67) Ibid., p. 129. Dollar uses the words "ministering to Gentiles" and "witnessing to Gentiles" to describe sharing the Lord with Gentiles in the Old Testament whether it is undertaken by prophets or by Jews generally. It is interesting to me that he does not describe what they do vis-à-vis Gentiles as "preaching the gospel."

(68) Ibid.

1) Isaiah 40:9

<sup>9</sup>You who **bring good news** to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who **bring good news** to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; **say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"**

f. Dollar's paradigm shift innocently misrepresents the nature of God's covenant relationship with Israel. It fails to account for the continuity of the faith and practice between believers in the Old Testament and believers in the New. And it fails to account for the ongoing commitment on the part of the Jewish believers in the first century to hold the Law in high esteem even after they were "saved," and ultimately decide not to impose the ethnocentric cultural aspects of Judaism upon their Gentile counterparts.

1) This can also be seen in the story of Naaman. He was the commander of the army of the king of Aram who was cleansed of (tzaraat) in the days of Elisha. After his cleansing he praised God. And before he left Israel to go home he asked the Lord to forgive him for entering the temple of Rimmon and bowing down to him beside his master. He knew that when he got back he would be required to do so in the course of his duties. He also knew that it would be wrong—but, as he told Elisha, he would have no choice. In his heart, he said that he would be bowing down to the God of Israel instead (2Ki. 5:1ff). **Naaman was not Jewish. He did not convert to Judaism. He did not show himself to the priest after his cleansing. He did not get circumcised and he did not embrace Jewish customs—but in my opinion, he was "saved."** This is also true of the "men of Nineveh" and the "queen of the south." They will be among those who "will rise up in judgment" against the generation that rejected Yeshua as the Messiah—something said only of believers (Mt. 12:1ff; cf., Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30).

