

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Leviticus 24:15-23

Dear brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. Today, we will continue with Leviticus 24, verses 15 to 23.

Chapter 23 and Chapter 25 both talk about the feasts of the Lord. Chapter 23 describes the seven annual feasts, while Chapter 25 discusses feasts that span more than a year, including the sabbatical year every seven years and the Jubilee every fifty years. Sandwiched between these two chapters is Chapter 24, which at first glance might seem abrupt because it does not appear to be directly related to the feasts. However, if we understand the purpose of God's instructions regarding the feasts, we can see why God arranged it this way.

The feasts of the Lord reflect God's heart for humanity: that people may enjoy rest. In God's original creation, He worked for six days, and on the seventh day, He rested and sanctified it as the Sabbath. Humanity was created at the end of the sixth day, and their first day was God's seventh day—the Sabbath. Here, we see that God desires for humans to first enjoy rest. It is in rest that they can commune with God and understand His will. After this, they can go out to work according to God's will and undertake the responsibilities He has given them.

Human thinking typically prioritizes work, and rest becomes a byproduct of labor. However, this is not God's intention for humanity. Rest is not merely relaxation; it precedes work. In God's eyes, rest is proactive, positive, and must be prioritized.

What exactly is rest? The answer is found in Chapter 24, which explains why this chapter is placed between the chapters about the feasts of the Lord. True rest is being filled with God's presence within and having no external disturbances. I will say it again: true rest is being filled with God's presence within and having no external disturbances. To have God's presence within, one must light the lamps and partake of the showbread in the sanctuary. The sanctuary symbolizes the soul. In

the soul, one must ignite the lamp of life and manage it. On the one hand, this involves adding oil, which means drawing from the Spirit's supply from within. On the other hand, it involves trimming the wick, which refers to the work of the cross in removing the flesh and natural self. Once the soul is illuminated, it also requires the nourishment of God's Word. Every week, there must be fresh insights, and these insights must lead to new understandings. These understandings must be presented before God and experienced subjectively in our lives. Such subjective experiences become our spiritual nourishment. In this way, God's presence fills our inner being, or our soul, while externally, there must be no disturbances.

This chapter begins with an incident where an Egyptian man, whose mother was an Israelite, quarreled with someone in the camp of Israel and blasphemed and cursed God. Quarrels are civil disputes and are relatively easy to handle, but blasphemy and cursing God violate God's commandments and must be dealt with by Moses. However, since the offender was not an Israelite, yet the incident occurred within the Israelite camp, Moses did not know how to handle it and awaited God's instructions.

The passage we are reading today contains God's instructions to Moses to convey to the Israelites, forming statutes and ordinances for them. Through this incident, we see that the outward manifestation of rest includes no one violating God's commandments within the camp of Israel, and peaceful relationships among people. From the perspective of the New Testament, this means that in the church, everyone exalts the Lord, and the saints love one another. These are necessary outward conditions for rest.

God's words to Moses for the Israelites are recorded in verses 15 to 23, which we will study today. In this passage, God's instructions are presented in a symmetrical structure, typical of Hebrew literature. We must first identify the symmetrical pairs of text, as the central portion contains the most important message. The chapters and verses numbers in our modern Bibles were added later for convenience in reference and discussion, without considering the symmetrical structure of Hebrew literature. Therefore, when studying the text, we must look beyond these divisions and identify the original symmetrical structure of the passage. In this structure, the

corresponding sections express the same meaning. We will read today's passage using this symmetrical approach.

Verses 15-16a: "Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him,'"

God instructed Moses to tell the Israelites that anyone who curses God or blasphemes His name must be put to death. The method of execution is stoning by the entire congregation. Now, let us read the corresponding verse, verse 23.

Verse 23: "Then Moses spoke to the children of Israel; and they took outside the camp him who had cursed and stoned him with stones. So the children of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses."

Here we see that God gave this instruction, Moses conveyed it, and the Israelites obeyed it. They took the man who had cursed God's name outside the camp and stoned him to death. This marks the symmetrical structure's beginning and end, with both passages expressing the same meaning.

Verse 16b: "the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death."

Here we see that whether the offender is a stranger or a native-born Israelite, if the incident occurs within the Israelite camp, it must be treated as if it involved an Israelite. Any Israelite who misuses God's name must be put to death. Let us now read the corresponding verse.

Verse 22: “You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am the Lord your God.”

This expresses the exact same meaning: whether a stranger or a native-born Israelite, the same law applies. This is the declaration of the Lord. The entire incident began with a stranger in the Israelite camp blaspheming God’s name. Moses did not know how to handle it and awaited God’s instructions. God established this statute directly. But God does not stop here, because this passage is about human rest. For rest to exist, there must be no external disturbances. Beyond offenses against God disrupting rest, offenses among people also disrupt rest. God continued to address how interpersonal offenses should be handled.

Verses 17-18: “Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death. Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal.”

Those who kill a person must be put to death—life for life. Similarly, anyone who kills an animal must compensate with a similar animal—life for life. Let us now read verse 21.

Verse 21: “Whoever kills an animal shall restore it; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death.”

This verse corresponds to the previous two verses. Because of this correspondence, it first mentions the restitution for killing an animal, followed by the punishment for killing a person, which is death. This symmetry is very clear.

Verse 19: “If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him.”

If you injure someone during a fight, the harm you inflicted on your neighbor will be inflicted on you in the same way. The corresponding text is found in the latter part of verse 20: “As he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.” If someone causes death, the punishment is life for life; if someone causes injury, the punishment is proportional—what you inflicted on others will be inflicted on you. This correspondence completes the paired structure. Now, what remains is the central verse of the passage, found in the first part of verse 20.

Verse 20a: “fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.”

In this symmetrical literary structure, the central text conveys the core message of the passage: “Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.” What others do to you, you are entitled to do to them in return. Knowing that others have the right to retaliate in this manner, you will refrain from harming others. If you break someone’s hand, they can break your hand; if you blind someone’s eye, they can blind your eye; if you knock out someone’s tooth, they can knock out your tooth. When the punishment is so fair and clear, people, not wanting harm to themselves, are deterred from harming others. This was the law God gave to Israel under the Old Covenant.

This principle laid the foundation for Israel’s societal conduct for thousands of years: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Even today, we observe that Israel applies this principle in conflicts with its neighboring countries in the Middle East. The Israelites, as God’s earthly chosen people, possess a sinful nature, as do all humans. This sinful nature often drives greed and self-interest. Therefore, the principle of “an eye for an eye” helps people restrain the sinful impulses of greed within, ensuring that they do not overstep the boundaries of the law and maintain a certain degree of harmony in human relationships.

However, this is not Christ’s teaching for New Testament believers. New Testament believers are God’s heavenly people. When Jesus fulfilled His ministry on earth, He brought His disciples up a mountain and delivered the Sermon on the Mount,

recorded in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. This passage serves as the constitution of the kingdom of heaven and the guiding principle for New Testament believers.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus specifically addressed the Old Testament principle of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” saying the following in Matthew 5:38–44: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” We are all familiar with this passage, and I believe most saints, like me, find this teaching exceedingly difficult. Who can do this? Indeed, we cannot, but Christ can.

Christ came and died on the cross for our sins. On the third day, He rose again, ascended into heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within every saint who has received grace and salvation. The Holy Spirit now resides within our spirit, which corresponds to the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. The Holy Spirit, carrying all the riches of the Triune God, dwells in our spirit. When we light the lamp in our soul—the equivalent of the sanctuary in the tabernacle—and partake of the showbread, we receive the supply and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The veil between the soul and the spirit has been torn in two from top to bottom through Christ’s death on the cross. Therefore, the indwelling Holy Spirit in our spirit can directly supply our soul, enabling our mind, emotion, and will to understand and follow the will of the Spirit. In this way, our soul can direct our body to go beyond the principle of “an eye for an eye” and instead love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

This is precisely what Paul declared in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live

in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You. You have shown us that true rest is being filled with God’s presence in our soul while being free from external disturbances in our body. Thank You for placing us in the church life after saving us by Your grace. Bless my church, that it may be one where the Lord is magnified, and the brothers and sisters love one another. May every Lord’s Day, when we come to the house of God and worship together with the saints, be a moment where we corporately experience rest. May we light the lamp of life in our souls, receive the supply of the words of life, and enjoy a church life filled with harmony and peace. Help us, after experiencing rest, to fulfill the commission You have given us and accomplish the mission You have entrusted to the church. Bless my church. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray.