

The Compass

Week 8

OT Readings – Lev. 9:7-20:21

NT Readings – Mark 4:26-8:38

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- The “clean and unclean” sections served the purpose of teaching Israel, “this mixture of food, health, sanitation and ritual laws is thus aimed at helping the covenant people to show that they belong to God and reflect His purity...always in the light of divine presence.”¹
- Lev. 16. The Day of Atonement is the “Good Friday” of the OT.
- Lev. 17. The animal’s *life* is in the blood, therefore atonement is found in the forfeiting of *life*. Thus the emphasis on blood and the why behind the prohibitions about eating blood (17:10-16).²
- Remember the context for the various laws of Lev. 18-20. They are given to teach Israel how to live with God and one another and how not to live like their pagan neighbors with their false religious practices.

New Testament

- In this week we read some of the most remarkable miracles recorded from Jesus ministry: the feeding of the four and the five thousand, raising a dead girl, calming a storm. Watch how the disciples respond in all these situations. What was Jesus after?
- Look for the continuing theme of “faith” running through these events. Also, the contrasts of “seeing” (understanding) and being blind. This is especially a concern for Jesus with His own disciples – do they get it? (6:45-52, 8:11-33)
- Jesus commissions his disciples to go out and do the same kingdom ministry which He had been doing. And they do! (Mark 6:7-13) One wonders how this on-the-job training shaped their understanding of Jesus, their life purpose and their thoughts about the future.³

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

The Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16. A goat, called the “scapegoat,” is presented alive as *atonement*. The priest lays his hands on this goat’s head and confesses the sins of the people. The goat is then taken *away* from the people and released into the wilderness. The symbolism is profound. *God* has taken away and removed in entirety the sins of the people, who now are completely “clean” before God! (Lev. 16:30) Nothing stands between God and His people; they are “at-one-ment” in fellowship. This *God* has done and this *God* has provided. It is very important to see that *God* has made the way for us to receive mercy, to be forgiven, to have fellowship. The “direction of movement” is from God to us. There is no thought of “appeasing” God or needing to “satisfy” His anger or wrath. No, God loved His people, the atonement was real mercy, creating a way for continual relationship and fellowship. The direction is not man to God. Atonement is not for God, but for us.⁴ Hebrews in the NT will show how Jesus fulfills these OT atonement themes by His once for all sacrifice.⁵

Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

How well do you *see*? Check out <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0grANlx7y2E> and find out! It’s possible to miss the obvious. Mark 8:11-38 records several incidents about “seeing.” Jesus expects that His disciples will begin to “connect the dots” and understand not only Who He is but what that means for their lives and world. They struggle. They were with Him day in and day out, yet they struggle. The story of Peter’s confession of Jesus in 8:27-33 is quite telling. He must have been quite proud of himself to see what the others do not see (or are afraid to say) – Jesus is the Messiah King! (8:27-30) Yet,

in the next moment he reveals his lack of true perspective and understanding of what this revelation really means. (8:31-33) What clouds his vision? He has yet to lay aside his own agenda and life, so that he can really see – Peter still sees only from a human point of view and misses the point after all. What a powerful lesson for us – we might think we see, but do we? Have God’s perspective? His heart? Is His agenda *the* agenda of our lives? If not, we cannot yet see rightly. Jesus provides the solution so that we can see as we should. We must follow Him, truly, by taking up a cross with our name on it and die there. Then and only then can we see rightly from God’s perspective.⁶

Difficult Question of the Week

Lev. 10:1-11. Q. Why would God take the lives of Nadab and Abihu just for burning incense?

God’s directions concerning the “how to” of Israel’s worship were clear and precise. Aaron’s family was appointed with the very important task of maintaining this worship system; they were the “gate keepers” of Israel’s worship life. The system with its specifications was only recently introduced. And like anything of this magnitude, to begin well was essential to the system being able to fulfill its God-given purpose in the long term. What was that purpose and why was God so concerned about the particulars? Other peoples of the ANE⁷ also had systems of worship with similarities to Israel’s but with one critical difference. Israel’s was given by the true God and its’ practice was a gift intended to teach about Him and about truth. It was a tool to reveal how to relate with God; God was giving grace to His people through this way of worship. In contrast, the other religious systems of the ANE were designed to manipulate and use the personified forces of nature to gain for themselves what they needed for survival and continuity of life. They were creating their own way of worship to serve their own needs and it had nothing to do with the true God.

If God’s revelation of Himself and truth were to come through and give grace and help to His people it must be done *exactly* the way He said, no exceptions or alterations. Nadab and Abihu acted like the peoples of the ANE and “made up” their own worship. This was no mistake, Nadab and Abihu acted intentionally and with full knowledge. They put God in a terrible place.

God knew He must act quickly and decisively if He was to avoid the possibility of the whole worship system and its purpose being compromised. What we know from the whole of the Bible is that God never acts arbitrarily. He never takes any pleasure in the hurt or pain of others and hates to bring judgment or discipline. It is always a last resort. How serious was this situation!⁸

Copyright February 2012 by Mike Huckins

¹ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 47. For help in understanding the reasons behind the specific commands in the OT Torah, I would recommend Paul Copan’s *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*.

² There is no magic in the blood, to the contrary, the imagery of the blood is *representative* of the life, and that is all.

³ Remember that they were common, ordinary folks, just like us. Now they are swept up into events and moments of power that must have not simply awed them and left them wondering where all this was going! I did a study some years ago of how in over their heads and “discombobulated” the disciples must have been as they followed Him. They were completely out of their comfort zones most of the time.

⁴ See 2 Cor. 5:18-21. It is *we* who need reconciliation, not God. The purpose of atonement is NOT to make some change in God, as though He is angry and then once “satisfied” by blood becomes merciful. This appeasement or satisfaction idea in my mind is closer to the paganism of the ANE than to the revelation of the OT. God is always desirous of mercy, always willing to forgive. The problem is from our side – our unwillingness to live under His loving rule. The atonement provides a way for God to forgive and yet show Himself just in doing so.

⁵ Peter alludes to the scapegoat, Jesus “bore or carried our sins up to the cross.” (1 Peter 2:24)

⁶ While it was metaphorical, i.e., they were not being asked to die on a cross as Jesus did, the end result was to be *exactly* the same. Until we die to our own lives, our own ways, our own thoughts, our own agendas, we will never see as we should. And more, if we are to take Jesus at His word, we are not really His followers.

Consider the following letter, written by an American college student who had been converted to communism in Mexico. The purpose of the letter was to explain to his fiancée why he must break off their engagement:

“We Communists have a high casualty rate. We’re the ones who get shot and hung and lynched and tarred and feathered and jailed and slandered, and ridiculed and fired from our jobs, and in every other way made as

uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive. We Communists don't have the time or the money for many movies, or concerts, or T-bone steaks, or decent homes and new cars. We've been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor, THE STRUGGLE FOR WORLD COMMUNISM.

We Communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty, personal selves into a great movement of humanity, and if our personal lives seem hard, or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind. There is one thing in which I am in dead earnest and that is the Communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife and mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens as time goes on.

Therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, books, ideas and actions according to how they affect the Communist cause and by their attitude toward it. I have already been in jail because of my ideas and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad."

From MacDonald, *True Discipleship*, 33-34.

If this young man's commitment is disturbing, seems radical and even deluded, then ask this: "What kind of zeal would be an appropriate response if it were true that God left heaven, was executed on a Roman cross, was resurrected to life – all for us? What kind of cause would it be to be commissioned to tell the whole world that truth and see people, homes, cities and nations liberated into that love?"

⁷ ANE is an abbreviation for "Ancient Near East." It referred to that region of the world and its cultures resident in the crescent region surrounding modern day Israel.

⁸ Ezek. 18: Lam. 3:33. There could be no hesitation, too much was at stake. Given Adab and Abihu's flagrancy and knowledge, the death penalty alone could reveal the seriousness of the matter.