



“Reading the Bible Together”

Issue 3.

Book of Exodus: The great journey that shapes a nation.

April 2009.

How's it going?

Well, this is the beginning of month three; how's it going? Hopefully, even if you feel you're some way behind, as I have been from time to time, that you're still enjoying it and getting something out of each time when you sit down with the Scriptures and to be with God. Can I just encourage you, each day you are able to spend even five minutes, that is five minutes you may not have spent focussed upon what you might bring and what God might be saying to you through His word. So however you are and wherever you are in all this: keep going! And if you've missed quite a few weeks even, let alone days, don't worry, go at a pace that suits you: each day can be a bonus.

Issue this month: what about discernment – do we really hear God's voice through Scripture?

Traditionally, reading Scripture has been one of the key ways in which we can get in touch with God. Other ways include, prayer, worship, creation, fellowship. I have to say the number of times I've actually heard God speak whilst I have been reading Scripture is, for me, very few. However, quite often I have, or have felt a deep resonance within me/beside me either because the story, words, phrases, or whatever speak into my own life and circumstances, and/or because they reveal something of God's character or presence for me. Such occasions I cherish deeply, and I don't ever really know when they are going to come, sometimes in and under certain sorts of circumstances, on other occasions by situations and circumstances, not to mention my mood, which might be very different. It almost seems to lack rhyme or reason but I know I have to try simply keep plugging away and keep trying to be faithful.

Background to the month and the Book of Leviticus:

Last month we looked at the key story of the Exodus, from which the Book of Exodus takes its name. It cannot be over-emphasised how important this historical event was and is to the people of God from generation to generation, Jew and Christian alike for, just as the Book of Genesis revealed to us God as Creator, here the Book of Exodus has revealed to us God as Liberator and Redeemer.

But what next?

This month we see the people begin their journey through the wilderness, after crossing the waters of the Red Sea. We see the people begin to form a community and establish order and structure both amongst themselves and in their relation to God, remembering always everything is a whole: to love one's neighbour is to love God, and to love God is to love one's neighbour. The month begins with the establishment of the Ten Commandments, soon follows the Ark and then the Tabernacle – the Tent of Meeting. Soon after that follows liturgical practice and ritual, and the establishment of a priesthood. The Book closes with God Himself making His dwelling with the people, no longer in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, but now in a Tent.

The Book of Leviticus: Depending upon how you look at it this can either be a marvellous book, full of sexual taboos and blood. Or it can seem full of petty legalism, repetition and pointless rituals.

At its core is a simple belief, developing already in the Book of Exodus; if God is holy then His people need to be holy, and this holiness is contained in the 'living' blood and the 'life' of sexual reproduction and so all sorts of attention is given to them. In theory this makes good sense, for holiness is certainly something which we should aspire to. But in reality God knows and we know that our human nature being what it is means however hard we try we pretty much always fall short, not least for the sin of our pride when we think we've got it sussed and therefore think we've got there, hence why Jesus had to come.

But before we move on, see beyond all the ritual and the sacrifice to what benefit and insight the Book of Leviticus has to offer:

- The importance of the immediate presence of God – God is mentioned in the Book more than three hundred and fifty times. He is not a concept, an idea or a figure of history. He is here and He is now.
- Leviticus 19 points us to how God’s holiness is the source of brotherly and sisterly love and therefore the life of society. Life is itself then made holy, and is a gift from God. Life is contained in the ‘living blood’ of any animal or creature, and in the sperm of sexual reproduction. This itself then becomes ‘holy’ or sacred. How does the sanctity of life, and the sacred nature of sexual intercourse challenge our thinking or our behaviour towards life and towards sexual practice today?
- Time also is made sacred by the keeping of the Sabbath – how many people say they are worn out or busy even though we have now pretty much lost the concept of Sabbath. Would we be healthier not just if it returned but if we were to see all time as God given and shaped our lives therefore around Him not around ourselves?
- Leviticus 16 presents the great festival of Forgiveness – Yom Kippur, when once a year the priest was to enter the holy of holies and make atonement to obtain remission of the nation’s sins. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews takes up this very liturgy to express Christ’ sacrifice: His blood becomes the really true ‘living’ blood which sets the people free.

Of course in Jesus, in many ways He replaces so much of this practice, and yet in other ways He is also the complete fulfilment of it. Working with the concepts of the sacred and the profane, Jesus makes all things sacred. How? By taking upon Him the profanity of the world. Hence the Book of Hebrews, and elsewhere, see Jesus as the true great High Priest for all time. As we journey through Leviticus, try to ponder these things, see not just the Tabernacle and the Tent but also the great Temple, in each of its guises, that was to replace it, leading right up to the time of Jesus when a million pilgrims would flock into the Temple Courts and offer sacrifice at Yom Kippur, such that they said, “the steps of the Temple flow with so much blood.”

How simple, and yet how marvellous is the sacrifice of Jesus.

I hope we all get something out of reading Leviticus.

Scheme of Reading:

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>
Wed 1 st Apr	Exod 20:1 – 20:21	Sat 18 th Apr	Lev 1:1 – 3:17
Thurs 2 nd Apr	Exod 20:22 - 21:36	Sun 19 th Apr	-----
Fri 3 rd Apr	Exod 22:1 - 22:31	Mon 20 th Apr	Lev 4:1 – 5:13
Sat 4 th Apr	Exod 23:1 - 23:33	Tues 21 st Apr	Lev 5:14 – 6:30
Sun 5 th Apr	(Palm Sunday – Holy Week)	Wed 22 nd Apr	Lev 7:1 – 7:38
Mon 6 th Apr	Exod 24:1 - 25:40	Thurs 23 rd Apr	Lev 8:1 – 8:36
Tues 7 th Apr	Exod 26:1 - 27:21	Fri 24 th Apr	Lev 9:1 – 9:24
Wed 8 th Apr	Exod 28:1 - 29:46	Sat 25 th Apr	Lev 10:1 – 10:20
Thurs 9 th Apr	Exod 30:1 – 31:18	Sun 26 th Apr	-----
Fri 10 th Apr	Exod 32:1 – 33:6	Mon 27 th Apr	Lev 11:1 – 12:8
Sat 11 th Apr	Exod 33:7 – 33:23	Tues 28 th Apr	Lev 13:1 – 13:59
Sun 12 th Apr	(Easter Day)	Wed 29 th Apr	Lev 14:1 – 14:57
Mon 13 th Apr	Exod 34:1 – 34:35	Thurs 30 th Apr	Lev 15:1 – 15:33
Tues 14 th Apr	Exod 35:1 – 36:7	Fri 1 st May	Lev 16:1 – 16:34
Wed 15th Apr	Exod 36:8 – 37:29	Sat 2 nd May	Lev 17:1 - 18:30
(Next Bible Together Meeting)		Sun 3 rd May	-----
Thurs 16 th Apr	Exod 38:1 - 39:31	Mon 4 th May	Lev 19:1 – 19:37
Fri 17 th Apr	Exod 39:32 – 40:38	Tues 5 th May	Lev 20:1 – 20:27