

# biblestudy: february 2016

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series

## February 7, 2016 Text: Exodus 12:1-14 “Passover”

These verses describe in great detail how the festival of Passover is to be observed: when it is to occur (Exodus 12:2-3, 6), who is to take part (Exodus 12:3), what is to be done (Exodus 12:6-8), what clothes to wear (Exodus 12:11), how to take part (Exodus 12:11), why it is to be done (Exodus 12:13), and how often to do it (Exodus 12:14).

In my younger days, I thought that ritual and liturgy were pretty much for folks who didn’t have any real, live religion. In later years, I have come to realize that it is the very nature of the faith journey to have community (shared life), ritual (connecting to memory) and liturgy (the community’s witness and protection against untruth). This week’s study lesson certainly makes the same point.

The text begins with a key statement: “The Lord said...” (Exodus 12:1). This invitation—no, it is stronger than that—this command is from God, not something that Moses and Aaron engineered. Just as God will lead the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land, so God tells the Hebrew people to remember that Exodus. The word in Exodus 12:14 translated “remembering” (the King James Version says “memorial”) literally means “keep a record.” Celebrating the Passover is a way of maintaining that record, keeping it alive. It is both a time of recalling the past gift (“remembering”) and seeing the present gift (“observe”).

When our Lord told the disciples to “do this in remembrance of me”(Luke 22:19), He was telling us both to recall what was done in His shed blood and broken body, but also to “re-member” (put the members back together) so that gift is in the present tense. Gathering and feasting at the Lord’s Table indeed reaches back in memory, reaches out in common love, and reaches ahead to the banquet in the coming kingdom.

There is an echo of this Passover text when we gather at the Lord’s Table. God is still delivering God’s people from the captivity of sin and the ritual and liturgy of that celebration recalls, restores, and renews.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Thomas C. Oden (*John Wesley’s Teachings: Christ and Salvation*, Zondervan) has written: “By receiving Holy Communion again and again, this new life is nurtured. If baptism is analogous to birth, the Lord’s Supper is analogous to a constant feeding of the reborn life, which bears the fruit of the Spirit.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Gracious God, in Christ Jesus You have planted the seeds that continue to feed us. Open our hearts and minds to the remembrance of the Exodus journey and the living presence of a Promised Land...

## February 14, 2016 Text: Leviticus 23:15-22 “Feast of Weeks”

In this day when most of our food comes via Harris Teeter, Kroger, and Food Lion, these study verses seem to be from another planet. Bundles of grain (Leviticus 23:15)? Two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour (Leviticus 23:17)? Flawless one-year old lambs (Leviticus 23:18)? One male goat (Leviticus 23:19)? What are we to do with these agricultural instructions?

It might be a bit of a stretch, but could we substitute “computer” for two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour? Could we replace one male goat with “Toyota?” How about “school desk” in the place of bundles of grain?

These celebrations in Leviticus are ways to remember that what we have comes from God, belongs to God, and is for God’s benefit and pleasure. How can I use my computer for God’s glory? How can a day at the office become the bundle of grain that is presented to God? How might a day at school—or church—or grocery store—or farm—or convenience mart become the flawless one-year old lamb?

The last verse in this week’s study text gives us one clue: “Leave these items (from your harvest) for the poor and the immigrant” (Leviticus 23:22). It is God’s intent that what God has provided be shared. I am blessed so that I might bless others.

There is another clue in Leviticus 23:21. The injunction is to set aside a specific time for these acts of mercy and kindness and thanksgiving. That means that we are called to be intentional in giving thanks and in sharing. The NRSV translation speaks of a “holy convocation.” That implies that we are to live out this life in community.

Clearly, these verses define what it is to live a life of stewardship. The words of 1 Chronicles 29:14 reflect that awareness: “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Earn. Save. Give.* (Abingdon Press), James Harnish quotes John Wesley: “(A steward) is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his hands as he pleases, but as his master pleases..... We are not at liberty to use what (God) has lodged in our hands as we please, but as he pleases, who alone is the possessor of heaven and earth, and the Lord of every creature. We have no right to dispose of anything we have, but according to His will, seeing we are not proprietors of any of these things.”

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “God of this and every generation, we need Your grace that we might use the gifts of our lives to bring honor to You...”

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February 21, 2016 Text: Leviticus 16:11-19 “Day of Atonement”

In the Wesleyan tradition, there is an awareness that God’s grace not only saves us, but God’s grace moves to make us holy. It is called sanctification. This week’s lesson calls us to stay on that journey toward “perfect love of God and perfect love of neighbor.” The Hebrew observance of the Day of Atonement is an acknowledgment that—Lord, have mercy!—we have not done too well in this matter of holy living, this journey of sanctification.

The text gives some rather specific (and gory) details about how the Israelites were to use ritual and liturgy to get things straightened out with God. Christians quickly recognize the use of blood as a channel of our repentance and reconciliation with God (Leviticus 16:14, 15, 18). No wonder that Christians have understood the blood of Jesus as being the sufficient sacrifice for our sins (Matthew 26:28, John 6:53, Romans 5:9, 1 John 1:7).

It is significant that the instructions from God about this Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:11-19) begin with the assumption that sin has polluted the sanctuary (for example, verse 16). Not only has some of the sin been intentional (what the Common English Bible calls “rebellious sins”), but some of the sin has been inadvertent. God loves God’s people so much that even though God knows there will be sin, God sets up a way for God’s people to be cleansed of that sin. Why would God bother to make provision for cleansing if God did not want God’s children to know forgiveness and new beginnings?

February 28, 2016 Text: Leviticus 23:33-43 “Feast of Booths”

This week, as we move deeper into Lent, we complete this month-long study of some of the Hebrew holy days. The “Feast of Booths” has many of the characteristics of the other celebrations: freedom from work (Leviticus 23:35), food offerings (Leviticus 23:37), burnt offerings (Leviticus 23:37), etc. However, there is one stand-out difference in this particular observance. The participants are to live in huts (or booths) for seven days (Leviticus 23:42). This is so the children and the children’s children will recall how God stayed with the Israelites as they lived in booths as God led them across the Exodus wilderness.

Recently, I saw an article that described what life was like one hundred years ago. Fuel for automobiles was sold in drug stores. The speed limit in most cities was ten miles per hour. Sugar costs four cents a pound. The population of Las Vegas was thirty. It doesn’t take long for us to find ourselves living in a new and different world. What about our yesterdays?

The command to observe the Feast of Booths was to help maintain a memory bank of how God had been among God’s people, those yesterdays. That is of two-pronged importance: (1) It is easy to think we are the first persons ever to have experienced newness or change and (2) It is easy to forget that God’s love has preceded us to our place in the journey.

Take a look at Deuteronomy 6:7, 20-25. The call to pass on the story

The word “atonement” comes from two old Middle English words that we certainly recognize: “at” and “one.” Atonement is making “at one” what had been broken. Our sin separates us from God’s holiness. God’s provision for “at-one-ment” is divinely initiated grace that offers reconciliation.

The writer of Hebrews understood that Jesus Christ was the “great high priest” who could work out atonement for us (Hebrews 4:14). Human priests seek reconciliation in behalf of the people, but the priests themselves are captured by sin and weakness. Jesus Christ is different in that even though He was tempted/tested in every way as we are, He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). He becomes the blood sacrifice that Leviticus understood to be sufficient.

**What Someone Else Has Said:** In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis), James H. Cone wrote, “If human power in history—among races, nations, and other collectives as well as individuals—is self-interested power, then ‘the revelation of divine goodness in history’ must be weak and not strong. ‘The Christ is led as a lamb to the slaughter.’ “

**Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin, “O Lamb, Whose blood was shed…”

from generation to generation is important. I recently read a series of e-mail exchanges among local church historians, lamenting the casualness with which church records and artifacts are handled. Tradition is not a boundary to limit where we can go; tradition is a foundation upon which to stand as we sets our sights on new tomorrows.

So much of this week’s text is farm based that our more urban culture may miss some of the dialogue between rural life and the journey of faith. In a sense, the Festival of Booths magnifies the way in which food is a meeting place between the divine and the human.

As we continue the Lenten walk with our Lord toward Calvary, we do well to remember other journeys: the flight from the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24), the escape across the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22), Jonah’s effort to avoid God’s call (Jonah 1:1-3), Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus fleeing to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). In each of these, God stayed with God’s people and that is something worth remembering!

**What Someone Else Has Said:**

Clifton Black (*The Eighth Day of Creation*, Eerdmans) wrote, “Leviticus…detailing the cultic and moral preservation of Israel’s holiness…”

**Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Help me remember, O Lord…”

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