

“He Was Lost and Is Found”

Lesson
18
Summary

Luke 15, 17–10 Jesus gives the parables of the lost sheep, of the piece of silver, and of the prodigal son. Jesus speaks of offenses, forgiveness, and faith—Even the faithful are unprofitable servants—Ten lepers are healed—Jesus discourses on the Second Coming.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights: **Forgiveness and Gratitude Represent Our Blessings and Responsibilities:** Some Jewish thoughts on forgiveness, leprosy, gratitude, and work may add insights to the parables and scriptures to be studied this week. “Although Judaism sees sin as a most serious matter, even the sinner is not without hope . . . repentance consists of several stages — firstly the sinner must reflect on his actions and realize that he has indeed done the wrong thing. He must then make up his mind never to do it again, and confess his sin . . . even when a sinner has done all these things, his repentance is still not final until he has been exposed to the same temptation and withstood it. Of course he should not deliberately put himself on that spot again.” (*Encyclopædia Judaica Jr.*)

“How Odd of God to Choose the Jews” (This is a favorite Jewish quote of W.N. Ewer). “The rabbis insist that Israel was elected because it voluntarily accepted the Torah whereas other nations would not. Mercy and forgiveness, says the Talmud, are distinguishing characteristics of Abraham and his seed, and these characteristics motivated God to choose Israel as His people. (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Leprosy May Not Always Represent a Physical Disease: “The Hebrew word *zara'at*, which has been translated as leprosy is not actually the physiological disease of leprosy as we know it today (i.e., Hansen's disease). Rather it is a general biblical term to describe an affliction which strikes in one of three ways: on one's person, one's clothing or one's house . . . It was the priest who made the inspection; if he diagnosed the disease as *zara'at*, he then imposed a quarantine. (After) the quarantine period . . . If no further degeneration . . . the patient . . . could be pronounced healed. The priest played no part in the healing, however, and only performed rituals after the person was cured.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

“How, Then, Was the Cure Effected?” It was the responsibility of the afflicted person himself to pray and fast in order to win God's favor. *Zara'at* was seen as a disease inflicted by God and cured by God . . . *zara'at* was inflicted as a punishment for slander . . . the Hebrew word for leper, *mezora*, is a play on words . . . *mozi shem ra*, meaning to slander a person's reputation . . . Miriam . . . was stricken with leprosy after she had spoken ill of her brother, Moses. Then, after Moses had prayed for her, she was healed by God. Another case of *zara'at* mentioned in the Bible . . . King Uzziah of Judah . . . haughtiness and rebelliousness were seen as causes of the affliction.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) In the curing process, when the person had prayed and fasted, a purification ritual was performed. That may have been a way to “anchor” the experience of repentance.”

Leprosy as a Physical Disease: “Leprosy as it is known today is a physical disease and those who suffer from it must be isolated. In 1887 a leper hospital was built in Talbiyyeh, Jerusalem. For many years of the hospital's existence, the famous Rabbi Aryeh Levin acted as chaplain of the hospital, and despite the quarantine on lepers, continued to visit the hospital and extend his kindness to the patients.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Kindness, Expressions of Gratitude: “As a sign of gratitude for having been spared the fate of Egypt's firstborn who died on the eve of Passover . . . Jewish firstborn . . . fast on the day before Passover. (In an act of kindness) . . . if the child is too young, his father fasts in his place.” “The contents of Grace After Meals are as follows: The first blessing (*Birkat ha-Zan*) praises God for providing food for all His creatures. The second (*Birkat ha-Areẓ*) expresses particular gratitude for the redemption from Egypt, the covenant of circumcision, the revelation of the Torah and the “good land” of Israel which God has given the Jewish people.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

In Talmudic Literature, Hospitality May Be Even More Important than Prayer: “The guest should be shown his room on arrival, so that he will enjoy his meal and not have to worry about where he will sleep later. The host is forbidden to make his guest uncomfortable by appearing miserable or sad, or by watching him too closely when he eats. The guest too, has responsibilities, including showing gratitude to his host, and complying with his host's wishes. Guests must not accept hospitality if they think that doing so will impoverish the host.” “Because Jerusalem was regarded as the common possession of the entire Jewish people, householders in the capital were forbidden to take rent from pilgrims, but as a token of gratitude, the pilgrims would give their hosts the hides of the sacrificial animals.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

“Mormon” Leather for Torah Scrolls: It is interesting that hides of animals are still used for writing Torah Scrolls. Since there are no sacrifices, the supply of first born, unblemished animal skins is rare. A provision has been made to use the skins of unborn calves that have to be taken to prevent the traumatic death of a cow. Incidentally, a major source of this special leather for scripture scrolls in Israel is provided by a Latter-day Saint, Tom Thomaser, from Oklahoma.

Work, Labor and Charity – Modern Day and Biblical Examples: As I pass the “temporary labor market” close to the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem, Arab laborers are waiting for a day’s work. Some are skilled masons or capable in other crafts. Some get hired in the morning, others only later on in the day when contractors discover an urgent need for some temporary help. It is usually the custom to pay a full day’s wage even if the hire is only for part of the day.

Work is Praised: “The Bible regards labor as an aspect of world order. In the story of Creation, man working the soil is the important element in the development of vegetation (Genesis 2:5). Work is praised not only for purposes of earning one's bread but also for the contentment which results. Idleness, on the other hand, is condemned as a social evil. The sages declared, "He who does not teach his son a trade is as though he had taught him to be a thief." Rabbinic literature stresses the dignity of labor and refers . . . to its great scholars who did work . . . to avoid being dependent on others. The ideal suggested and followed by most of the sages is to combine learning and work. Maimonides proposed that the day be divided into thirds, with equal time for learning, labor and other matters.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Bible Instructions on Labor Relations: “Two basic principles helped shape Biblical labor policy. First, the employer's duty to pay his worker on time (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:15). Second, the right of the worker to eat from the produce of the field while he is working (Deuteronomy 23:25, 26). The worker's duty is to do his work in a faithful manner . . . rabbinic (Biblical) interpretation has developed . . . labor relations that are a model of social justice. Recent rabbinic decisions have upheld the right of workers to organize and, where unavoidable, to strike. In the modern State of Israel, labor, especially a return to agriculture, is regarded as a basic political philosophy. (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Responsibility in Receiving Charity: The responsibility of the “landlord” also extends to charity. “When necessary, accepting charity is perfectly legitimate and no shame attaches itself to the poor who are otherwise unable to support themselves. However, one is advised to do everything in one's power to avoid having to take alms: "Make your Sabbath a weekday (by not eating special food or wearing good clothes) rather than be dependent on other people." A person who is really entitled to take charity but delays doing so and consequently suffers rather than be a burden to the community will surely be rewarded and not die before he reaches a position in which he will be able to support others.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Belongs to God: “. . . specific Torah laws . . . apply to all firstborn human beings and animals of the following types: cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys. The purpose of these laws is to teach us that everything in the world belongs to God and man owns only what God has given to him. When a man has worked hard to raise a family or rear a herd of animals, and finally sees the first fruits of his labor, the Torah tells him that these first fruits belong to God. Therefore, if man wishes to own and enjoy these gifts, he must redeem them from their rightful owner.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

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