

# REMO

FUSION  
WITH RABBI JASON



*with*  
**Rabbi Jason Sobel**

5785 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS

**TORAH PORTIONS**  
**Parashat Emor**



## THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

# LEVITICUS 21:1-24:23

*Parashat Emor* / פרשת אמור

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Many Christians associate the Book of Leviticus with rules and, by extension, "legalism." Aside from being an inaccurate assessment of the text, it robs people of experiencing the ultimate purpose of God's Law: faithful participation in God's prophetic calling to His people. This article hits the reset button on all of this, offering us a fresh perspective on holy living!

### NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

The Bible is an amazing book (it ought to be, considering its inspiration!). Children are captivated by it and scholars are confounded by it. We must approach the sacred text with childlike faith, but never childish reductionism. This week, we explore the nuance and diverse meaning of "leaven." Get ready for an infection of Pentecost power in your life!

### HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

Profanity. The word evokes crass movie scripts and vulgar "locker room" conversation. This week's Commentary refers to the Hebrew word for "profane." And here we go all in, exploring the wildly diverse meanings of *chahal*—from battlefields to orchestra pits to our everyday lives.

## OVER VIEW

*Emor* is Hebrew for "speak." It is the first distinctive word in this Torah portion, as in, "Speak to the *kohanim*..." That last word in that phrase (*kohanim*) is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for "priests"—the focus of the first part of the *parsha*. God gave Moses detailed regulations for members of the priesthood, from marriage requirements to acne! *Emor* also includes a critical section establishing a foundation for the biblical feasts. The reading concludes with unexpected details relating to the Lampstand and the Bread of the Tabernacle.

# Fusion Global

Weekly Torah Portions – *Parashat Emor* / פרשת אמור | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

## COMMENTARY

In *Parashat Emor*, we read of the Lord's reminder to the *Kohanim* (i.e., members of the priesthood) to maintain a holy and righteous life before Him. They were to live lives separate from and holy before the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*. We should note that this was not to say they had to live *entirely* separate, but rather, they were to maintain an example of a holy life before the rest of God's people. That said, a specific aspect of this parsha is intriguing to me.

In Leviticus 22:31-33, we read, "So you are to keep My *mitzvot* and do them. I am *ADONAI*. **You must not profane My holy Name**, for I will be made holy among *Bnei-Yisrael*. I am *ADONAI* who makes you holy, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. I am *ADONAI*" (*emphasis added*).

The Hebrew root of the English word "profane" (above) is the word *chalal* (חלל), meaning "to profane or desecrate," as well as "to bore or pierce."<sup>1</sup> Another, more simplified, understanding of *Chalal* is to damage or wound. We see this same selection of words in Leviticus 18:21, 19:12, 22:2, and 22:32—all describing Israel's calling to be set apart, righteous, and holy from the pagan nations in the Promised Land.

Moses' decision to utilize the word *chalal*—obviously made by the leading of the *Ruach HaKodesh*—is particularly fascinating. Why? For starters, we should recognize that God called *Bnei Yisrael* to be a light to the nations (*cf.* Isaiah 42:6) and gave the Torah to define what that "enlightening" lifestyle should look like. Beyond this, we realize that as followers of Messiah, we too have a calling to live our lives in a way that draws people to God, rather than pushing them away from Him. Sadly, far too many believers' lifestyles are contradictory to this calling. A prime (and practical) example of this failure to be a light is the way many believers unfortunately treat service staff in restaurants and retail establishments.

Much like the divine call to be a light to the nations, I suggest that those around us should **see** God's presence in our lives before they **hear** us proclaim the gospel message. Hence, my simplest definition of sin is anything in our lives that damages or mars the image and likeness of God that the Creator has destined us to bear. Spiritual maturity is related to one's sensitivity to anything in our lives that gives people a bad taste for God. So, the wording "you must not profane (*chalal*) My holy Name" is such a powerful reality. Our lives should never present a profaned, damaged, or wounded presentation of the true and living God to the world. We shouldn't limit this phrase (above) to Torah observance. It is that, of course, but it's also so much more! This divine reminder to not profane God's name affects every thought and deed in our lives, insisting we wholly and humbly submit them to the leading of the *Ruach HaKodesh*.

# New Testament Tie-In

Understanding and engaging with the biblical feasts is foundational to our ministry here at Fusion Global. While Gentile believers bear no obligation to keep these holy days, they do have a standing invitation (as children of Abraham by faith, see Galatians 3:7) to experience these kingdom treasures on a deep and personal level. Rabbi Jason has written an entire book to help us understand and participate in the biblical holidays, [Aligning with God's Appointed Times](#).

This week's Torah portion features the primary account of these "holy days." After detailing the foundational *mo'ed* (i.e., "appointed time"), *Shabbat*, the text moves on to Judaism's most well-known holiday: Passover. This "appointed time" is a prophetic signpost, pointing to *Yeshua's* sacrificial death on Golgotha as "[the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world](#)" (John 1:29). Central to the Passover celebration is the unleavened bread we know as matzah. This flatbread's very appearance explicitly connects to the Lord's passion, as its dark striations and perforations remind us of the stripes on His back and His pierced side.

Not much further down in Leviticus 23, we read about the harvest festival of *Shavuot*. It is also called **Pentecost** in connection with the directive to "count **fifty** days" (v. 16) from Passover to determine the day of the holiday. One of the intriguing (surprising? confusing?) details in this later holiday is the difference in the bread: it has leaven!

At the very least, we should let this detail teach us a fundamental truth about the Bible—we must never read this inspired text presumptuously or haphazardly. What a term or concept means in one passage may be completely different in another. In the case of leaven, we know that the biblical text often presents it negatively. Famously, *Yeshua* warned about the "[leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees](#)" (Matthew 16:6 NKJV). And in 1 Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul used leaven as a metaphor for sinful boasting, admonishing the believers: "[Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let's celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth](#)" (vv. 7-8 NASB).

However, the Lord also said, "[The kingdom of heaven is like leaven](#)" (Matthew 13:33 NASB)! A narrow interpretation of "leaven" would make understanding of these diverse texts nearly impossible. However, leaven's infectious, disproportionate, and invisible nature is symbolically relevant in all instances. In other words, a little bit of "leaven" goes a long way and makes a huge difference. You may not see it, but it sure is working! This can be said of pride and bad teaching, as well as God's kingdom.

**For leaven to be effective, it must be mixed into the dough.** Transformation is the result of incorporation. This fact may help us understand why the celebration of Pentecost involved leavened bread. This *mo'ed* commemorates the giving of the Word (at Sinai) and the giving of the Spirit (in the Upper Room), both of which need to be incorporated into our lives if we hope to be affected by their goodness and power. Psalm 119, an ode to the Law of God, reads: "[Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You](#)" (v. 11 NKJV *emphases added*). And near the end of His earthly ministry, *Yeshua* said (concerning the Spirit), "[I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper so He may be with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him. You know Him, because He abides with you and will be in you](#)" (John 14:16-17 *emphasis added*).

As we approach the Feast of Pentecost, let's pray for an infection. You read that right. Let's ask that, like the leavened loaves of this ancient celebration, we will receive a fresh impartation of the Word and Spirit that will affect every area of our lives, causing us to rise and set our minds on things above.

# Hebrew Word Study

## *chalal* [חָלַל] / “pierce, pollute, profane”

“He is not to go out of the Sanctuary or profane the Sanctuary of his God—for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him. I am *ADONAI*.” – Leviticus 21:12

The word translated as “profane” in the passage above is חָלַל/*chalal*. As you may recall, all Hebrew words come from a three-letter verbal root. We should also note that translations are rarely a matter of a nice and clean, “one-to-one” equivalence or correlation. This reality often leaves a lot of room for discretion in the hands of the translator. *Chalal* is a prime example of this inevitable interpretative “roominess.” Let’s go to the Hebrew lexicon. According to Brown-Driver-Briggs, *chalal* has three possible meanings:

1. bore, pierce, hollow out...
2. Play an instrument...
3. Pollute, defile, profane.<sup>2</sup>

It would not be an understatement to say that this understanding of *chalal* constitutes a vast range of meaning, at least in English. Consequently, translators must reconcile this fact with their goal to use as few words as possible to convey the sense of a single word. Quoting one of my own professors in this regard, Dr. Eugene Peterson would say, “Words aren’t concepts. Words build sentences. A group of sentences is a paragraph, and that paragraph is a concept.” Generally speaking, he wasn’t wrong, until you come across a word like *chalal*, which defies simple expression. Why is this the case? Because it is, in itself, a concept alien to our (English) language experience.

**So let’s start with the use of *chalal* as related to playing a musical instrument.**

“Then those who sing as *well as* those who play the flutes [*kecholelim*] will say, ‘All my springs of joy are in you.’” – Psalm 87:7 (NASB)

“All the people went up after him, while the people were playing on flutes [*mechallelim*] and rejoicing with great joy, so that the ground shook at their noise.” – 1 Kings 1:40

Sound is physical, comprised of vibrations in the air. In live music performance and audio recording, there is a phenomenon known as a “sound floor.” It describes the amount of noise in the environment that the performer needs to overcome so the audience can hear the intended sound. This goal is accomplished in one of a few ways.

The first way to overcome a sound floor is via a higher frequency. Military bugles and trumpets on battlefields are excellent examples of this. They could emit a frequency higher than the sound floor created by the battle, “piercing” through it. Unsurprisingly, this is why loud, high-pitched noises often evoke a stabbing pain in the ear. Of course, when the Bible uses *chalal* in the sense of literal piercing—“*But He was pierced [*mechola*] because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities*” (Isaiah 53:5a)—it describes something forcing or making a way into or through something else. “Piercing” can describe a nail or a spear through a body or a sound wave through other frequencies.

Now let us come around to *chalal*, meaning to profane and defile. While similar, these terms are a tad different. Profane means "common," as in, *emptied* of holiness or distinctiveness. We see this sense of commonplace in Genesis 4:26, "[To Seth, also was born a son. He named him Enosh. Then people began \[hucha\] to call on ADONAI's Name.](#)" In this context, *chalal* describes a time when calling on God's name became normative.

Let's take things one step further, to fully "defiling." Once emptied of holiness (i.e., made common), wickedness and evil *fill* that "space." We see this sense in Leviticus 21:4, "[But he is not to defile himself—a husband among his people—and so profane \[hucha\] himself.](#)" The holiness has been removed and replaced with the unclean.

In closing, I should point out that *chalal* and *halal* (a Hebrew word for "praise") are closely related. The key takeaway is that we have a tremendous ability to alter atmospheres, both for good and evil. To bring holiness or unholiness. To bring God into a situation or to empty Him from it.

# FUSION

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present  
**HEBREW WORD STUDY**

חלל

**חלל / *chalal*:** VB. **to profane, desecrate, defile, render unholy, debase.**  
*Describes the act of defiling something holy by treating it as common.*

This term is the opposite of קדש (*qadash*, “to set apart as holy”). It indicates defiantly and deliberately defiling something that has been set apart as pure or holy. In Leviticus, God repeatedly shows concern that his name not be profaned (*chalal*; Lev 18:21; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2, 32); swearing falsely in God’s name constituted profaning (*chalal*) his name (Lev 19:12). In Ezekiel’s day, God’s name had become so thoroughly desecrated by his own people that it had suffered abuse among the nations (Ezek 20:9, 14, 21–22).

taken from the Lexham Theological Wordbook

[fusionglobal.org](http://fusionglobal.org)

## THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- This week’s Commentary concludes with a profound, yet deeply sobering, thought, “Those around us should **see** God’s presence in our lives before they **hear** us proclaim the gospel message.” Another way to phrase this is: don’t just talk about it—be about it. What is most challenging about living a holy life? How have you experienced God’s grace in the process of pursuing holiness?
- It’s safe to say that “transformation” is a core value at Fusion Global. We experience transformation in many ways, but this week, we consider “leaven” as one of them. While we do have a serious part to play in this process, the primary responsibility lies with God. He is the primary agent in our personal transformation. As He incorporates His Word and Spirit into our souls, they affect us as leaven transforms a lump of dough. Are you ready to rise this Pentecost?

# GLOBAL

**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** *Parashat Behar-Bechukotai* / פרשת בהר־בחקתי

## TORAH

*Sunday* / Leviticus 25:1-18

*Monday* / Leviticus 25:19-28

*Tuesday* / Leviticus 25:29-38

*Wednesday* / Leviticus 25:39-26:9

*Thursday* / Leviticus 26:10-46

*Friday* / Leviticus 27:1-15

*Saturday* / Leviticus 27:16-34

## Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*):

Jeremiah 16:19-17:14

## New Covenant Reading:

Luke 4:14-22; Matthew 16:20-28

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.

<sup>2</sup> "H2490 - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (KJV)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed May 12, 2025. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2490/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 320.