



Understanding the Parsha

Leviticus 16:1-18:30

Parashat HaShavuah

אַחֲרֵי מוֹת

Vayikra (Leviticus)
16:1-18:30 Acharei Mot
(After the death)

We will Learn how to

- 1) **interpret the main theme (subject) of a Parsha** (weekly reading from the Torah),
- 2) **make thematic connections to that Parsha** (study the Scriptures related by a common theme [subject], line upon line and precept upon precept)
- 3) **learn how to gain greater understanding of the Parsha we are looking at through its thematic connections to other portions of Scripture.**

The Yom Kippur Ceremony

Let's jump right into the passage using thematic analysis.

Read Leviticus 10:1-2. When did the death of Nadav and Avihu occur?

In Leviticus 1₀₁, in Parashat Sh'mini

Browse over Leviticus 10:1- 11:1. Wouldn't it have made better sense to add the story beginning in Leviticus 16:1 at the end of chapter ten? Of course. Does it make you wonder why this passage wasn't recorded until six chapters later? This is a classic example of thematic order versus chronological order (the arranging of events in the order they happened). In our studies before, we found out that the Scriptures were meant to be studied using the tool of thematic analysis. In this technique, we can see the importance of the underlying themes of

each Parsha. Many times the Torah will “rearrange” stories out of chronological order. Instead, the Torah will put stories in what the sages call thematic order. We should try to find a thematic reason for why the story of Acharei Mot was not placed immediately after the sin of Nadav and Avihu.

Do you think Leviticus 11-15 plays an important part in the thematic placement of the story in Acharei Mot, and why?

Yes, these chapters play an important part in the thematic placement of Parashat Acharei Mot. Since the death of Nadav and Avihu happened in Leviticus 10, there must be a reason for the insertion of Leviticus chapters 11-15 before the Torah records Parashat Acharei Mot.

Draw a line of the matching sidras (Torah portions) we’ve studied since Leviticus.

Passage	Topic
Leviticus 10	Purification of Tzara’at
Leviticus 11	Instructions concerning male and female discharges
Leviticus 12	The Yom Kippur Ceremony and continuation of the Nadav and Avihu narrative
Leviticus 13	Tzara’at of the flesh and clothing
Leviticus 14	The deaths of Nadav and Avihu
Leviticus 15	Permissible and forbidden animals
Leviticus 16	Instructions for women after childbirth

In order to understand the thematic importance of these seven chapters, let’s review what we learned about each section. Afterward we will put all of the pieces together to help us see the overall connection.

The Sin of Nadav and Avihu—Leviticus 10

In order to understand the sin of Nadav and Avihu, we need to go back to Parashat Sh’mini. Let’s see if we can remember why they were punished.

Read Leviticus 10:1. Leviticus 10:1 gives us two clues as to why Adonai consumed Nadav and Avihu. What are they?

1) They offered a strange /alien fire before Adonai

2) they did something [offering the strange/alien fire]

that Adonai hadn’t commanded.



Let's focus in on the second clue, the fact that they did something Adonai hadn't commanded. In order to understand the importance of the fact that they did something Adonai hadn't commanded, we saw that we needed to go back to Exodus and begin reading about the events leading up to this tragic occurrence.

The place to begin would be Exodus 38-40 (Parashat Pekudei), because this section of Scripture records how Am Yisrael began to fulfill all of the commandments pertaining to the building and consecration of the Mishkan.

What phrase is used over, and over, and over, and over?

They performed the tasks "AS YHVH HAD

C _____ MOSES."

COMMANDED

What great event was the result of Am Yisrael's diligence to do everything as YHVH had commanded Moses?

The Shekhinah Glory of Adonai, which had departed as a result of the sin of the golden calf, r _____.

returned

This phrase is also used in Leviticus 8:4-5, 9, 13, 17, 21 and 36; 9:5-7, 10 and 21! **Now read Leviticus 10:1** again. Now do you see how the phrase, "that YHVH hadn't commanded," sticks out like a neon light in the darkness? Now that you've seen how often the Torah used the phrase "as YHVH had commanded Moses" leading up to the event concerning Nadav and Avihu, your attention should immediately be drawn to the phrase, "that YHVH hadn't commanded!" Let's list our first clue linking Leviticus 10-16.

Clue Number 1—Nadav and Avihu did something Adonai had n _____ c _____ them to do.

not

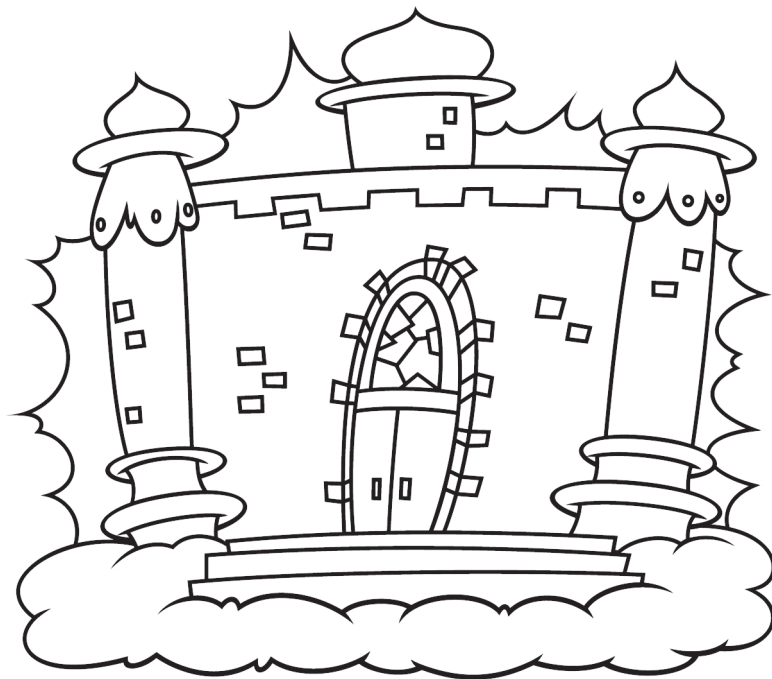
commanded

Remember, Adonai is in the process of making Himself known to Am Yisrael (the people of Israel) through His name YHVH. This began in Exodus 3:1-6 when Moses tried to approach the burning bush, but was told by Adonai not to draw near without first taking off his shoes! He is trying to make known to them that He is a Holy, Holy, Holy God. He is perfect and totally separate from sin. This part of His character was not known to the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob).

Through many other parallels, we have seen that the Mishkan is a representation of the revelation at Mount Sinai. Let's look at another parallel that will help explain why Nadav and Avihu were judged.

Read Leviticus 10:3. What does Adonai mean by saying He will be sanctified by those who draw near to Him? To answer that question, let's look at a verse thematically related to Leviticus 10:3.

Read Exodus 19:19-25 (notice the severity of the warnings not to come close to Adonai). Remember, this is when the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. Do you see the thematic connection? When one draws nigh to Adonai, one must be very careful. His Holiness is so intense that one cannot come near Him without being properly covered/protected. **We need protection from His purity and Holiness!** We learned before, that the incense was a picture of the prayers/intercession that protect/cover us from Adonai's **Holiness**. In the Yom Kippur ceremony of Leviticus 16, the High Priest can only go into the Holy of Holies AFTER making a cloud with the incense, or he'll come into direct contact with the Shekhinah of Adonai. The incense, which is a picture of intercession, is the cloud that protected the High Priest from a direct encounter with the Shekhinah



(during the Yom Kippur ceremony) just as the cloud on Mount Sinai protected the priests from a direct encounter with the Shekhinah! By offering a strange/alien fire that Adonai had not commanded, Nadav and Avihu drew near to the Holy God of the Universe without proper intercession/protection, and were therefore consumed by His Holiness. In order to understand Nadav and Avihu's sin, we must understand the extreme Holiness and inapproachability of our God.

Clue Number 2 — Adonai is perfect in Holiness and cannot be approached by sinful man without proper covering.

Now that we have two clues, let's start to write sentences that capture the understanding of the list of clues we will build on.

Sentence #1—Because of Adonai's intense H _____, one can only approach Him
Holiness
according to His revealed C _____.
commandments

Instructions about what is Tamei (ritually impure/unclean) and Tahor (ritually pure/clean)—Leviticus 11-15

Clean and Unclean — Before, we learned that there are two Hebrew words used throughout Leviticus 11-15 that are translated as clean/pure or unclean/contaminated/impure. These English words do not carry the true meaning of the original Hebrew. In fact, there are no English words that can give us the right meaning! Some translations use the word ritually clean or ritually unclean. These two words are closer to the mark.

Unclean—The Hebrew word translated unclean—beginning in Leviticus chapter eleven—is **tamei** (טמא).

Clean—The Hebrew word translated clean is **tahor** (טהר).

In Parashat Vayikra, we learned that the book of Leviticus would show us how Israel—each individual—could develop a relationship with Adonai through the service of the Mishkan. Do you remember the real issue, which is how sinful man can draw near to a Holy God. Again, THE REAL ISSUE taught by Leviticus is how one may draw near to Adonai. We already know that Israel HAD TO APPROACH ADONAI THROUGH BLOOD SACRIFICE. The Hebrew word for offering is **corban** (קרבן). This word, **corban**, is the Hebrew word for offering used continuously throughout Parashat Vayikra. The root for the word offering/corban is קרב, which means coming near! That's right. Normally when we think of an offering, we think of the word sacrifice. Sacrifice makes you think of giving up something of value. But this IS NOT the real theme of an offering as presented in the Scriptures. An offering is not about giving up something of value. An offering is about drawing nigh to Adonai!



We learned in Parashat Tazria and Parashat Metzora that the central issue was about being able to draw near to Adonai! Only certain individuals were allowed to draw nigh to Adonai! If one became tamei/ritually impure by

- 1) sinning (disobeying the commandments),
- 2) coming into contact with death, or
- 3) some form of the loss of life, then that person could not come into Adonai's holy presence. That was absolutely forbidden.

The **metzora** (“leper”) represented the most extreme case of uncleanness in a living person. This was because a metzora was a picture of the walking, living dead! The instructions for the metzora were a vivid reminder that the Mishkan (where Adonai dwelled) had to be zealously protected from all sources of death. Also, the metzora could NOT approach the Mishkan or it would result in actual physical death! One could only approach Adonai when one was **tahor** (ritually clean)!

Clue Number 3 — Leviticus 11-15 teaches us that only certain people, those who are tahor/ritually pure, are allowed to draw nigh to Adonai.

Sentence #3 — Because of Adonai’s intense Holiness, only those who are † (ritually clean), can draw h to Him. This can only be done according to His r commandments.

Now read Leviticus 16:2-3. What is the main point in these two verses?

The main point is about w and h the High Priest can enter behind the curtain into Adonai’s presence!

How is this thematically related with everything we’ve covered in the lesson so far?

Throughout Leviticus 11-15 we learned how one d n to Adonai!

Now we can see there is a common theme running throughout Leviticus 11-16—who can draw near to Adonai! This is the reason why Leviticus chapters 11-15 were placed between Leviticus 10 (when Nadav and Avihu died) and Leviticus 16 (when Adonai warns Aaron after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu). Leviticus 11-15 teaches us concerning who may and who may not draw near to Adonai. Understanding who may draw near to Adonai is the key to understanding the sin of Nadav and Avihu and why they were punished so severely.

Thematically, we know that the Torah places stories and events next to each other so that we can see the thematic connections between them. There are different times throughout Leviticus 10-16 when the Torah puts side by side certain instructions along with the story of Nadav and Avihu’s death. Here are the examples.

1. Leviticus 10:3—Immediately after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Adonai warns that those who DRAW NEAR TO HIM must do so while respecting His holiness. This was said because of the carelessness of Nadav and Avihu.

2. Leviticus 10:8-11—Shortly after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Adonai warns Aaron and his remaining sons that they are not to drink intoxicating drink when they enter the Mishkan or they’ll die! Also, it says that this is so that the priests will understand how to tell apart what is tahor (ritually clean) and tamei (ritually unclean).

Now why do you suppose the Torah recorded this command after the death of Nadav and Avihu?

Most likely Nadav and Avihu had taken in too much alcohol. This is why Adonai warned Aaron



and his remaining sons that DRAWING NEAR TO HIM in a state of intoxication could lead to

D _____!
DEATH

3. Leviticus 16:1-2—This Scripture says that after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Adonai commanded Aaron that he cannot enter behind the veil into the Holy of Holies any time he wanted or else he would die. He was also told he couldn't approach behind the veil without blood and incense!

Why do you suppose the Torah recorded this command after the death of Nadav and Avihu?

The deaths of Nadav and Avihu were related to these instructions. That's why the passage starts off

as “A _____ the death of Nadav and Avihu...”
After

Obviously, the instructions that follow had something to do with the deaths of Aaron's sons. Perhaps, the reason Adonai gave the instructions concerning Yom Kippur at this time in the Torah is because Nadav and Avihu made the mistake of boldly entering behind the veil into the Holy of Holies.

B. Putting it All Together—According to the three passages we just studied, Nadav and Avihu did not correctly approach or draw near to Adonai. It appears that they had too much to drink and went behind the veil into the Holy of Holies. At that time they didn't know that only the High Priest could go behind the curtain and only once per year at that. Even though they didn't know this at the time, they shouldn't have done it because they had not been commanded to do what they did! Leviticus 11-15 outline which Israelites can't approach or draw near to Adonai which is thematically related to the priests' limited access to the Holy of Holies.

The Blood and Life

The most important verse in Parashat Acharei Mot is Leviticus 17:11. What clear and important thematic connection is made in this verse?

The b _____ is thematically connected to l _____!
blood life

This verse gives meaning to all offerings. When an offering was made, the blood of the animal was poured out on the altar. Now we can understand that symbolically, the life of the animal was poured out at the altar! This teaches us that one life (the life of the animal) could cover the sins for another's life (the life of the worshiper).

In the combined sidras of Tazria and Metzora, we learned the importance of the contrast between life and death. This sidra contains the first mention of one of the most important themes that will begin to dominate the stories of the Torah.

Read Leviticus 18:4-5. What will be the result of obeying the commandments of Adonai?

If a man o _____ Adonai's commandments then he shall l _____! In other words, he'll have life!
obey live

These verses will sum up the entire book of Deuteronomy. And, they will teach you the main purpose of the Torah's commandments and help you understand how absurd is the teaching that the Torah was abolished.

Read Matthew 5:17-19; and 1 John 3:24 to finish off your study!

