

WORSHIPING A HOLY GOD AND WALKING IN HOLINESS

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF LEVITICUS

SINCE GOD IS HOLY, OUR ACCESS TO GOD AND FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD MUST BE CONSTRAINED BY HOLINESS

Paul Apple (January 2022)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

Leviticus 20:26 *“Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.”*

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BACKGROUND NOTES

Bob Deffinbaugh: Learning to Love Leviticus

In this lesson I want to try to identify some of the reasons for our mental block about this book. I want to isolate some of the reasons why people think that Leviticus is an impossible book to read, to study, and most of all, to teach. I then will seek to show that these reasons are not valid. In the process, I hope to show **why we should study the Book of Leviticus**.

Characteristics of the Book of Leviticus:

- (1) Leviticus is largely a code book, a book of regulations.
- (2) The Book of Leviticus is, to a great degree, a book of priestly regulations.
- (3) The Book of Leviticus contains many regulations pertaining to the laity, as well as to the priests.
- (4) The Book of Leviticus is a book of regulations which is given by God through Moses, spoken to him from the tent of meeting.
- (5) The Book of Leviticus is essentially a narrative form of literature.
- (6) Leviticus is closely connected with the entire Pentateuch, and especially with Exodus and Numbers.
- (7) Essentially, Leviticus can be divided into two major divisions, separated by **chapter 16**, which deals with the annual day of atonement.
- (8) Leviticus is quite frequently quoted or referred to, but in the Old Testament, perhaps no other book is more influenced by Leviticus than the prophecy of Ezekiel.
- (9) Leviticus makes a great deal of some distinctions.
- (10) Leviticus does not press the distinction between ceremonial holiness and civilian holiness.

So What's Your Problem With Leviticus?

- (1) Leviticus is boring, it is not exciting enough.
- (2) The Book of Leviticus is too bloody.
- (3) The Book of Leviticus is too difficult to understand.
- (4) The Book of Leviticus is not relevant to the New Testament Christian.

Conclusion:

I would like to ask you to do several things as we come to the conclusion of this message. First, I would like to ask you to agree with those who have studied the Book of Leviticus carefully and have concluded that it is a book which has great value for us. I want you to agree in particular to the fact that Leviticus is inspired of God, and that it is thus profitable to you for doctrine, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that you can be equipped for every good work (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**).

Second, I would like for you to act on this acknowledgment. I would like you to commit yourself to study this book. That you would read it consistently, consecutively, and in large portions at a time. I ask you to ponder (meditate) its teachings and to pray that God would give you insight and understanding as to its meaning and its application in your life. Finally, I ask you to do what you have committed to do, for the glory of God, in obedience to Him, and for your good.

J. Sidlow Baxter: To speak of Leviticus as “dull reading” misses the point of the book completely. How could we expect a book like Leviticus, which is occupied throughout with regulations, to provide exciting reading? Obviously, it is not meant just to be read, but to be **studied**. It yields little of its treasure to a mere reading; but a reasonable concentration transforms it into one of the most intriguing articles in the Scriptures. . .

Leviticus was written to show Israel how to live as a holy nation in fellowship with God, and thus to prepare the nation for the high service of mediating the redemption of god to all the nations. Above all, then, Israel must be taught the **holiness of God**, and Leviticus reveals this in three ways:

- (1) in the **sacrificial system**, which insisted that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission,” thus pressing on the most obtuse conscience the seriousness of sin;
- (2) in the **precepts** of the law, which insisted on the one Divinely revealed standard for character and conduct;
- (3) in the **penalties** attaching to violations of the law, which sternly proclaimed the inflexibility of the Divine holiness.

Involved in this revelation of Israel’s holy God is the imperative insistence on Israel’s **separation** from the other nations; and the laws of Leviticus are intended to ensure this separation, and to prepare the nation for the fulfilling of its high vocation. It may be added, also, that Leviticus was designed to prepare Israel for the coming Christ, by awakening a sense of need, and at the same time pointing forward, through the Tabernacle ritual, to the one all-atoning offering on Calvary. . .

Leviticus thus follows Genesis and Exodus with obvious sequence. In Genesis we see God’s remedy for man’s ruin – the Seed of the woman. In Exodus we see God’s answer to man’s cry – the blood of the Lamb. In Leviticus we see God’s provision for man’s need – a Priest, a Sacrifice, and an Altar. (It is from this that Leviticus gets its name. Israel’s priests were the Levites, and the word “Leviticus” comes from the Greek *Leuitikos*, meaning, “that which pertains to the Levites.”) With good reason Leviticus holds the central place among the five books of Moses, for, with its doctrine of mediation through a priest, absolution through a sacrifice, and reconciliation at the altar, it is the very heart of the Pentateuch – and of the Gospel.

C. I. Scofield observes, “Leviticus stands in the same relation to Exodus that the Epistles do to the Gospels.” In the Gospels we are **set free**, by the blood of the Lamb. In the Epistles we are **indwelt**, by the Spirit of God. In the Gospels God speaks to us from **without**. In the Epistles God speaks to us from **within**. In the Gospels we have the **ground** of fellowship with God – sanctification. As in Leviticus, so in the Epistles, there is exhibited to us the **many-sidedness** of the work of atonement as it bears on those who are already redeemed.

The Structure:

Throughout these first seventeen chapters we are dealing with **non-moral** regulations, whereas in the remaining ten we are dealing with regulations concerning **morals**. The first part has to do with **worship**. The second part has to do with **practice**. In the first part all relates to the Tabernacle. In the second part all pertains to **character and conduct**. Part one shows the **way to God** – by sacrifice. Part two shows the **walk with God** – by sanctification. The first part

deals with **ceremonial** and **physical** defilement. The second part deals with **moral** and **spiritual** defilement. In the first part **purification** is provided. In the second part **punishment** is to be inflicted. The first part has to do with the people's **cleansing**. The second part has to do with the people's **clean living**.

The Central Message: Fellowship through Sanctification

I. The Ground of Fellowship – Sacrifice (i. – xviii.). [Propitiation of the Holiness of God]

The Offerings (Absolution) –	i. – vii.
The Priesthood (Mediation) –	viii. – x.
The People (Purification) –	xi. – xvi.
The Altar (Reconciliation) –	xvii.

II. The Walk of Fellowship – Separation (xviii. – xxvii.). [Pursuit of Holiness in Living]

Regulations Concerning the People –	xviii. – xx.
Regulations Concerning the Priests –	xxi. – xxii.
Regulations Concerning Feasts, etc. –	xxiii. – xxiv.
Regulations Concerning Canaan –	xxv. – xxvii.

John Schultz: If we read through Leviticus in a superficial way it makes for rather dull reading; a dry piece of literature. If we look at the book, however, as a handbook for sanctification in the light of the accomplished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the book becomes a document of vital importance. The message of Leviticus is: “*Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.*” (Ch. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8). The subject of Leviticus is the sanctifying effect the sacrifice of Christ can have upon our daily lives.

The central role in the book is played by the Levitical priests. We may consider the chapters 8 and 9 as the chapters around which everything revolves: the consecration of Aaron and his sons. The **role of the priest** is the main topic in the first seventeen chapters and also in the chapters 21 - 25. So the name of the book, LEVITICUS, is very appropriate. According to the Thompson Chain Reference Bible the theme of the book is: “**How can a sinful man approach a holy God?**”

Malick: Message Statement – [3 part outline of the book]

In order for Israel to live with their Holy God as an individual in the community or as a nation in the land they must approach him through sacrifice, through a holy priesthood who honors him and does not presume upon him and through established cultural patterns of separation from uncleanness and morality which are in distinction to the life of their pagan neighbors.

It seems that the book of Leviticus was given to Moses during the one month period between the erection of the Tabernacle and the departure of the people for the Promised Land from Mount Sinai.

Because YHWH is now dwelling among His people in holiness, He provides prescriptions mediated through Moses for the people to remain in relationship with Him (e.g., through ritual and cleanliness).

Constable: Leviticus reveals that God is also holy. He is different from people in that He is sinless. The proper human response to this revelation of God's character is "worship" on the part of sinners. In order for a holy God to have a close relationship with sinful people, someone had to do something about sin. This is true even in the case of redeemed sinners. "Atonement" was the solution that God provided.

The first half of Leviticus reveals the laws that the redeemed Israelites had to observe in their public life, so that they could enjoy an ongoing intimate relationship with God (**chs. 1—16**). These included laws concerning sacrifices (**chs. 1—7**), the priesthood (**chs. 8—10**), and the means of purification from various defilements (**chs. 11—16**).

The second half of the book reveals God's provisions for the maintenance of covenant fellowship in the private lives of redeemed Israelites (**chs. 17—25**). This involved holiness of conduct by the people (**chs. 17—20**) and the priests (**chs. 21—22**) in all their time (**ch. 23**), their worship (**ch. 24**), and their land (**ch. 25**).

The book closes with God formally exhorting the nation to obey and remain faithful to the covenant that He had established (**ch. 26**). He also gave directions concerning the vows His people would make out of devotion to Him (**ch. 27**). Obedience would maximize His blessings.

"The central figure in Leviticus is the High Priest. The central chapter is **xvi**.—the annual Day of Atonement. The central theme is fellowship through sanctification. The central lesson is: *'Ye shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy'* (**xix. 2**)." (**Baxter**)

Leviticus focuses on priestly activity, but it is also a great revelation of the character of God and His will to bless people. In it, God's people can learn what is necessary for sinners, even redeemed sinners, to have an intimate relationship with a holy God who has entered into covenant with them. These necessities include sacrifice, mediation, atonement, cleansing, purity, etc., all of which Jesus Christ ultimately provided. This revelational value of the book continues today, even though its regulatory value (i.e., how the Israelites under the old covenant were to behave) ended with the termination of the Mosaic Law (cf. **Mark 7:18-19; Acts 10:11-15; Rom. 7:1-4; 10:4; 14:17; 1 Cor. 8:8; Gal. 3:24; 4:9-11; Col. 2:17; Heb. 9:10**).

R. K. Harrison: Leviticus is a well-organized reference manual for the Old Testament priesthood, and consists of two principal divisions or themes which have as their pivot the sixteenth chapter, dealing with regulations governing the annual day of atonement. The first fifteen chapters deal broadly with sacrificial principles and procedures relating to the removal of sin and the restoration of persons to fellowship with God. The last eleven chapters emphasize ethics, morality and holiness. The unifying theme of the book is the insistent emphasis upon God's holiness, coupled with the demand that the Israelites shall exemplify this spiritual attribute in their own lives. The material content is priestly in character, and therefore deals with the covenant obligations of the Israelites at a level which is not found elsewhere in the Pentateuch. The regulations and procedures connected with the observance of the day of atonement are an illustration of this tendency. . .

The reason the newly consecrated Israelite priests were given such detailed instructions about the care of God's sanctuary was to ensure his continuing presence with his people. In the covenant relationship God approached Israel and made specific promises to them, contingent upon their obedience to the terms of the Sinai agreement. One of these was the demand that the Israelites should live in a way that would show to contemporary Near Eastern nations the true nature of holiness. This attribute was of an advanced moral and ethical character, and was fundamentally different from the sexual and orgiastic connotations which the term had amongst Israel's neighbours. Only as the chosen people maintained ceremonial and moral holiness could they expect God to honour them with his presence and bring into effect the promised blessings.

W A Criswell: Leviticus is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. Without an understanding of the principles of atonement and holiness found in Leviticus, much of the New Testament has no foundation on which to rest. To say that Leviticus is one of the "most New Testament" books of the Old Testament would hardly be an exaggeration, for it foreshadows the Person and work of Christ in a most remarkable and elucidating manner.

Irving Jensen: The book of Leviticus is God's manual for His people on how to approach Him and live pleasing in His sight. In the experience of the Israelites, encamped on Mount Sinai, the laws of Leviticus were the guideposts which they needed for life on the wilderness journey ahead, and for settling in Canaan. The key command, "*Ye shall be holy,*" pervades the book, revealing something of the awesome message which God always wants all His people to hear and obey.

Gordon Wenham: At the beginning of nearly every chapter, and often several times within a chapter, it says, "*The Lord spoke to Moses.*" In other words, all the laws are set within a narrative framework. According to the author they were revealed to Moses during Israel's wilderness wanderings to meet specific problems that arose at that time. This historical setting accounts for some features of the book that seem out of place if the book were arranged in a purely logical fashion.

The Theology of Leviticus:

1) The Presence of God

God is always present with Israel in a real way. On occasion his presence becomes both visible and tangible. This idea is expressed times without number in Leviticus. The enduring presence of God is one of the theological presuppositions running through the whole book. . .

God is preeminently present in worship. . .

God is present not only in worship, but at all times, even in the mundane duties of life. Leviticus knows of nothing that is beyond God's control or concern. The whole of man's life must be lived out in the presence of God. . .

Leviticus distinguishes between the permanent presence of God with his people, a presence which is to regulate their whole way of life, and his visible presence in glory which was obvious on special occasions. The book similarly distinguishes between his general presence within the camp of Israel and his localized presence above the ark within the tent of meeting.

2) Holiness

“*Be holy, for I am holy*” (11:44–45; 19:2; 20:26) could be termed the motto of Leviticus. Certainly “*holy*,” “*clean*,” “*unclean*” and cognate words are among the most common in the book. . .

Everything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups, the clean and the unclean. Clean things become holy, when they are sanctified. But unclean objects cannot be sanctified. Clean things can be made unclean, if they are polluted. Finally, holy items may be defiled and become common, even polluted, and therefore unclean. . .

The basic meaning of cleanness is **purity**. For example, “*clean*,” i.e., pure, gold was required for plating the ark and other items of tabernacle furniture (Exod. 25:11, 24, etc.). That cleanness basically means purity is shown by the frequent use of water to purify unclean persons and things (Lev. 11:25, 28; 14:8–9, etc.). Once fire was specified as an alternative means of purification (Num. 31:23). But cleanness is a broader concept than purity. It approximates to our notion of **normality**. . .

I have suggested that cleanness is the natural state of most creatures. Holiness is a state of grace to which men are called by God, and it is attained through obeying the law and carrying out rituals such as sacrifice. Uncleanness is a substandard condition to which men descend through bodily processes and sin. Every Israelite had a duty to seek release from uncleanness through washing and sacrifice, because uncleanness was quite incompatible with the holiness of the covenant people.

3) The Role of Sacrifice

In Leviticus sacrifice, or more precisely sacrificial blood, is regularly associated with cleansing and sanctification. . .

According to Leviticus, then, sacrificial blood is necessary to cleanse and sanctify. Sacrifice can undo the effects of sin and human infirmity. Sin and disease lead to profanation of the holy and pollution of the clean. Sacrifice can reverse this process. . .

Through the animal’s death and the subsequent rituals men are ransomed from the death that their sin and uncleanness merit.

4) The Sinai Covenant

Leviticus explains how covenant worship should be conducted (chs. 1–17), then how the covenant people should behave (18–25), and closes with a section of blessings and curses, entirely appropriate to a covenant document (ch. 26). Indeed the last verse of this chapter connects all that precedes with Sinai, where the covenant was concluded. “*These are the rules, judgments, and laws which the Lord put between himself and the Israelites in Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses*” (26:46).

The covenant/treaty background of Pentateuchal law highlights three important features of the laws. First, the law was given in a context of grace. . .

Second, though Israel had been saved from Egyptian bondage and called to be God's people, this did not mean they were free to do as they pleased. The very reverse was the case. As a holy nation they had to keep themselves pure from sin and uncleanness lest God's wrath break out against them. . .

The third point to note about the covenant is its eternity. In the covenant God pledged himself to Israel forever, and Israel was expected to reciprocate by offering back her eternal allegiance to her sovereign redeemer.

John Hartley: The congregation likewise heard these instructions to the priests and became knowledgeable about special requirements laid on them for their service to the holy God at the sanctuary. By having this knowledge, the congregation was given some responsibility in encouraging the priests to live in harmony with these laws. This cooperation between the priests and the laity was a liberating dynamic for the nation Israel. An informed laity could not be easily dominated or oppressed by a priesthood that kept knowledge about the cult a closely guarded secret. In Israel God spoke to all Israelites, not to a select few. Thus the instruction of the congregation about this professional knowledge guarded against the growth of a rich priestly class that could dominate and exploit the people. Rather, in Israel the priests were Yahweh's servants to lead and assist the people in worship and in keeping the law. . .

The Message of Leviticus:

1. Holiness

In Leviticus Yahweh makes himself known to Israel as their holy God. Holiness is not one attribute of Yahweh's among others; rather it is the quintessential nature of Yahweh as God. . . Holiness thus distinguishes Yahweh from all other creatures (1 Sam 2:2). . . "Holiness" thus refers to Yahweh's inner nature and "glory" to his outward appearing. . .

Because only Yahweh is intrinsically holy, any person or thing is holy only as it stands in relationship to him. Thus there are degrees of holiness depending on the proximity of an item or person to Yahweh. . .

The laws of ritual purity regulated the need for separating the holy from the common in the ancient Israelite community. In fact, separation is a major dimension of holiness. Whatever is holy has to be removed from its usual sphere and set apart unto God. This process is called sanctification (cf. 27:14–27). To be a holy nation, Israel had to separate herself from the other nations, especially all the forms of idolatry and immorality pursued by her neighbors (18:2–5, 24–25; 20:23–26). . .

Another polarity inherent to the holy is that of whole/defective. That which is whole, perfect, free from blemish witnesses to the holy. The defective is imperfect, marred, or corrupt. It is that which is no longer completely congruent with its design or purpose. . .

The call to be holy like Yahweh means that the people are to develop in themselves characteristics similar to his own. The process of developing these qualities is sanctification. That process is reciprocal: Yahweh sanctifies (20:8; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32) and the people

are to sanctify themselves (11:44; 20:7). By keeping the law and by worship, the people sanctify themselves and revere Yahweh as holy in the congregation (22:32). Yahweh himself also sanctifies them through his holy power working in their lives, affirming the noble and purging out the corrupt. . .

According to the laws in **chaps. 17–26**, two qualities are the girding pillars of a holy life, i.e., justice and love. Justice means equity. . .

The love ordered here is primarily expressed in deeds of kindness. The emphasis falls on helping another, not on one's feelings toward another. . .

As revealed in Leviticus, the holy is not an abstract, metaphysical concept hanging in thin air. Rather it is the essential quality that gives eternal meaning to serving Yahweh. The call to become holy like God affects every dimension of life. This call captivates the imagination and like a gyroscope directs one's longing for purpose toward life in Yahweh's presence. While the demands of holy living are overwhelming, the promise of God's presence empowering his people encourages pursuit of the call. A holy life is a blessed life, a life of personal growth, and a life of meaning and joy. It is a life lived in communion with the Holy God.

2. Presence

All activity at the tabernacle took place in Yahweh's presence. . .

Special times and seasons in the calendar were declared holy. They were times to rest from one's labors and worship Yahweh. . .

Another way the presence of Yahweh was brought near was through the hearing of his word.

3. Covenant

The covenant formalized the relationship between Yahweh and Israel (cf. **Exod 19–24**). It was based on Yahweh's saving Israel from Egyptian bondage. Therefore, the covenant was founded on what Yahweh had done, not on the natural process (Vriezen, *An Outline*, 141). This covenant was similar to a suzerainty covenant, for Yahweh, the superior party, initiated it in order that he might have a people who worshiped him. The slogan, "*I shall be your God and you are my people*" (26:12), speaks to the aim of the covenant. . .

The primary reason two parties enter into a covenant is for continuing **communion**. In Israel's case, she was "admitted into God's sphere of life" (Vriezen, *An Outline*, 141). Since God was holy, Israel had to be sanctified in order to approach this sphere. To make this possible Yahweh mercifully revealed his will in the law and provided the cult as the means for a people prone to sin to maintain the covenantal relationship. Sacrifices offered at the tabernacle were essential for Israel to find expiation from her sins and thus to continue to be acceptable to Yahweh. Also at the tabernacle the tribes gathered to worship and praise God for his blessings, especially at the great pilgrim festival. The ceremonies of these feasts bonded the tribes together into Israel, the people of God. . .

Leviticus thus makes it explicitly clear that Israel's right to continue to occupy the land Yahweh had given her resided in her morality. That is, Israel's title to the promised land was guaranteed by the covenant, but not her occupancy of it.

4. Sacrifice

An elaborate sacrificial system was a major component of the cult. The regulations and instructions for the various sacrifices are found mostly in Leviticus. These regulations establish the types of sacrifice, the materials appropriate for each sacrifice, and the various ritual procedures. They do not articulate the ideology underlying the sacrificial system. . .

The variety of purposes addressed by a sacrifice may be discussed under three headings: sacrifice as a gift to God, sacrifice as a means of expiation, and sacrifice as a means of communion between Yahweh and members of the community. . .

5. Leviticus and the New Testament

Four of these contributions may be highlighted here.

First, the information on the sacrificial system is vital to understanding Jesus' sacrificial death. Its perception of sin and atonement provides essential insight into both the need of and the benefits available through Jesus' sacrifice. Through his sacrifices all who believe on him have forgiveness of sins and eternal life (**Rom 3:21–28; John 6:47**).

Second, according to the NT, Jesus is the ultimate high priest. Leviticus offers insight into what this role meant for Jesus and what special requirements were laid on him in order to fulfill this role, both in his earthly ministry and in his session at the right hand of the Father (**Heb 3–5, 7–10**). The NT, furthermore, teaches that all believers in Jesus are priests (**1 Pet 2:9; Rev 2:6; 20:6**). Leviticus offers great insight into what that role for believers constitutes, and it lays before them the special requirements placed on priests to live a holy life in order that they might have the spiritual standing to perform their role effectively.

Third, the tabernacle and its operation were a gift under the covenant in order that the congregation might continue to have access to the Holy God. In the New Covenant, Jesus himself becomes the sanctuary for all who believe on him. Because the regulations and laws taught Israel how to approach God, they provide insight into how believers may approach God and worship him. Whereas one who sinned might find forgiveness through the proper sacrifice under the old covenant, believers who sin now have access to God for forgiveness through Jesus, their sanctuary. Jesus serves as their Advocate, their High Priest, in order that they might live a blessed life, free from bondage to sin, and with the hope of an eternal inheritance. The great spiritual benefits available through Jesus may be better appreciated through the study of Leviticus.

Fourth, the call to be holy like Yahweh is clearly restated in the NT. Jesus taught, "*Be you perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (**Matt 5:48**).

Ross: In the New Testament Paul explained that the law was a "*tutor*" (*paidagōgos*) to lead us to Christ (**Gal. 3:24**). In the words of the NIV, "*the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ,*"

who is elsewhere in the New Testament called “*the end [or goal] of the law*” (**Rom. 10:4**). This means that for centuries God was teaching people important theological aspects about his eternal plan. When the Son of God came into this world to fulfill this plan, a treasure of theological images and ideas was ready at hand. People knew exactly what God meant by sacrifice, because the Spirit of God had taught it to and through Israel in the revelation of the sacrifices and offerings. People understood what was meant by atonement, purification, or consecration because the people of God had been living out these rituals for centuries. People were fully aware of the differences between clean and unclean or between holy and unholy because those categories had been applied to every detail of life for as long as folks could remember. By the time of Jesus, sacrifices, rituals, festivals, and all of the Levitical procedures were at the center of Israel’s way of life. . .

While each sacrifice will be discussed in detail in the following expositions, at this point a few general observations will be helpful:

1. Sacrifices were **gifts**. Sacrifices were gifts that the offerer brought to please God; they expressed gratitude and devotion. Such offerings acknowledged that the LORD was the sovereign God and that everything belonged to him in the first place (**Ps. 50:9–12; 1 Chron. 29:14**). Accordingly, a sacrificial gift was one way of expressing complete surrender and allegiance to the LORD. But a sacrifice was not merely a required tithe or tribute; it was a gift. It could be a domesticated animal, vegetable produce, or breads and cakes—things that were necessary for life. As with any giving of gifts, the offerer gave up something in the giving. What was sacrificed was usually consumed by the fire or eaten by the priests; it could not be reclaimed for the worshiper’s use. Nevertheless, offerers gained something as well, for by expressing gratitude to God in this way they knew that God continued to provide them with all things necessary for life.
2. Sacrifices expressed **communion**. As a consequence of the nation’s dependence on the LORD, they had a constant need to maintain union with him. And the greatest expression of that kind of union was in the ritual of a communal meal. Even in secular life, contracts between people were sealed by sharing a meal together (**Gen. 31:45–54**). To be able to eat at the king’s table was considered a high honor (**2 Sam. 9:7; 2 Kings 25:27–30; Ps. 113:7–8**). Therefore, to share the sacrificial meal in the house of the LORD was the highest honor (**Exod. 24:11; 1 Cor. 10:18**). Accordingly, the peace offering became the culmination of the entire sacrificial process, for it celebrated communion with God.
3. Sacrifices brought **expiation**. Every animal sacrifice had some sanctifying function because of the blood (**Lev. 17:11**). But some sacrifices were specifically legislated for those times that the need for expiation was more acutely felt. When people became defiled in one way or another, they needed to find cleansing and consecration for readmission into the presence of God. And when people sinned, they needed to renew the benefits of God’s grace. Thus, people needing purification were able to bring specific sacrifices to maintain their covenantal relationship with God. In expiatory sacrifices no incense was added because these were not times of joy but times of spiritual need; and no communal meal was involved since union with God had been interrupted. The blood of these sacrifices was put to special use—atonement.

Oswald T. Allis: The laws of Leviticus are very varied. They are both general and specific; they are both ceremonial and moral; they are severe and also merciful. They separate Israel from the nations and set her apart for the service of the God who has made this people His own by delivering them from Egyptian bondage. In so far as these laws are purely ceremonial, they are temporary and binding only during the Mosaic dispensation to which they belong. They had immediate reference to Israel as a nation which was to be governed in every aspect of its national and individual life by the law of Moses. In this strictly historical sense this book has great interest for the Christian reader. It tells him how God dealt with Israel as a people “under age” and in need of training and preparation . . . The insistent demand of Leviticus that Israel be holy because the God of Israel is holy is confirmed and strengthened in the NT (**1 Pet. 1:15**).

Wiersbe: The fact that God devoted an entire book of the Bible to the subject of **holiness** would indicate that it’s an important subject, one that we dare not ignore.

Our God is a holy God --

Whenever we minimize the holiness of God, we’re in danger of minimizing human sinfulness, and the combination of these two errors results in the minimizing of the cross of Jesus Christ. . .

God’s holiness means His complete “*apartness*” from anything that is sinful. He is **different** from that which is common; He is **separate** from that which is defiling. But God’s holiness isn’t a static thing, like a block of pure ice. His holiness is active and alive, a “*sea of glass mingled with fire*” (**Rev. 15:2**). . .

Many of God’s people today have lost the awesome sense of the holiness of God. . .

The absence of church discipline and high standards of Christian conduct indicates that we don’t take holiness too seriously.

God wants His people to be holy --

Eight times in Scripture, God said, “*Be holy, for I am holy.*” . . .

God wanted His people Israel to be “*an holy nation*” (**Ex. 19:6**), and this high calling applies to Christians today (**1 Peter 2:9**). . .

Israel failed to be a holy nation and therefore failed to give the witness to the world that God wanted them to give. . . Jesus didn’t say, “Ye are the lips of the world,” but “*Ye are the light of the world.*” He didn’t say, “Ye are the sermons of the earth,” but “*Ye are the salt of the earth.*” A holy life dispels darkness and repels decay.

Holiness begins at the altar --

The Book of Leviticus doesn’t begin with a prayer meeting, a praise service, or a sharing meeting. It begins at the altar where innocent sacrifices shed their blood for guilty sinners. It begins with the description of five sacrifices, all of which point to the Lord Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

Holiness involves obedience and discipline –

The Old Testament Jews had to walk carefully to keep from being defiled (**Eph. 5:15**). They had to incorporate God's standards of holiness into every aspect of their daily lives: the clothes they wore, the food they ate, the things they touched, the people with whom they fellowshiped. . . There was no such thing as "secular" and "sacred" to the Old Testament saint, for everything in life belonged to God.

Holiness must be from God and be genuine –

We must beware of "false zeal." God killed Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, because they brought "false fire" and false zeal into the sanctuary, violating the holy law of God. . . Refined human nature can imitate spirituality but never duplicate it. Sentimental religious feelings are no guarantee that we're pleasing God, and the absence of them doesn't mean we're failing God.

Holiness involves priestly mediation –

In the New Testament church, all of God's people are priests; but we must come to God through Jesus Christ, our mediating High Priest in heaven (**1 Peter 2:5**). There can be no growth in holiness apart from fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Lack of holiness affects our land –

Idolatry and sexual immorality are the two sins that God especially singled out as polluting the land. . . Sins that ought to send us to our knees weeping are now acceptable recreation. . . Judgment is coming, and it will begin "*at the house of God*" (**1 Peter 4:17**).

Holiness isn't a private affair –

The Old Testament believer was part of a worshiping community; he or she didn't try to "go it alone." . . . When we forsake "*the assembling ourselves together*" (**Heb. 10:25**), we rob ourselves of the blessings God gives to those who are a vital part of a worshiping fellowship.

Holiness glorifies the Lord –

Since only God can make a person holy, a godly life is a trophy of His grace and a tribute to His power.

Holiness means living to please God alone –

One of the principles Jesus stressed in the Sermon on the Mount is that we live our lives before the eyes of God, to please Him alone, and not before the eyes of People in order to impress them (**Matt. 6:1-18**). . .

Knowing God and becoming more like Him is the easiest thing in the world because God is for us and gives us all the help we want as we seek to attain the goal. But it's the hardest thing because almost everything within us and around us fights against us, and we have to exercise a holy determination to run the race and keep our eyes on the Lord (**Heb. 12:1-3**).

But it can be done; otherwise, God would never have said eight times in His Word, "*Be holy, for I am holy!*"

Mark Rooker: Leviticus was a critical work for the understanding of postbiblical Judaism. In fact it is no exaggeration to claim that the Book of Leviticus has had more impact on Judaism than any other book of the Old Testament. Traditionally it was the first book taught to Jewish children, and over half the commentary of the Talmud is concerned with understanding its contents.

Unlike the deserved veneration given to the Book of Leviticus among the Jews, the book has been largely ignored by the church. At no point, for many Christians, does the Bible appear more mysterious and seemingly irrelevant than when it focuses on the temple and the sacrificial system. But the truths found in these texts and what they foreshadow must be grasped if the New Testament teaching is to be understood. . .

In reading the Old Testament text alongside the New Testament we observe similar correspondences or patterns between the Testaments. The study of these patterns or correspondences is what is known as typology. Typology is the study of types that consist of “persons, institutions, and events of the Old Testament which are regarded as divinely established models or prerepresentations of corresponding realities in the New Testament.” The New Testament corresponding realities are called antitypes. In contrast to allegory, typology does not ignore the ancient historical context by trying to read the New Testament back into the Old Testament. Both the Old Testament type and New Testament antitype must be based on historical facts or occurrences, though there is an escalation or intensification from the Old Testament type to New Testament antitype. The New Testament writers approached the Old Testament with a typological outlook. The typological approach leaves the Old Testament in its historical setting; but in bringing it alongside and in connection, the New Testament recognizes its function as relevant proclamation. Thus typology is a way to explain the understanding of the Old Testament when it is read alongside the New Testament. Since Leviticus addresses the functions of Israel's priesthood and institutions, we will explore the possible typological connections to the New Testament.

Perry Yoder: Perhaps you can picture yourself deep in the desert with the people of Israel. Moses, the revered leader, has come down from the mountain, a near-catastrophic rebellion against him has been averted, and the covenant between the people of Israel and Yahweh their God has been established.

The tabernacle has been built. God's presence has descended from Mount Sinai and is present in the tent outside the camp. What comes next? What will happen now that God's presence is so near as to be visible? Moses and the people must now ask: How can we live in the presence of this holy God in the days and years ahead?

The book of Leviticus addresses this question, answering it in very practical detail. In this answer we find out a great deal about the character of God, about worshiping God, and about living with God. . .

From Leviticus we learn above all that God is **gracious**. Leviticus reveals a God of extravagant grace—by human standards an irresponsibly gracious God. Indeed, God's grace is so shocking in

Leviticus that it may be hard for us to accept. That just isn't the way God should be! God, we sometimes think, must be more judgmental. . .

Even when Israel does not want to maintain their agreement with God, God does not write them off. Instead, God declares, *"I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them"* (Lev 26:44). God chooses to forgive instead: *"I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt"* (26:45). After punishment, Israel will continue to experience God's grace, which seemingly is timeless. . .

Most of the texts in Leviticus are **ritual texts** (Lev 1–16, 22–24). Ritual texts are a special type of text, and they immediately raise interpretive questions. So what is a ritual? The definition of what constitutes a ritual is difficult and has led to complex and abstract definitions that have varied over the past two centuries and from scholar to scholar. In this commentary, two assumptions are made about rituals. First, a ritual is composed of fixed actions or words having a set order. A ritual is **performed**. It takes place only when its words are spoken and the proper actions or gestures are made by the appropriate people.

Second, a ritual is performed to **achieve some end**. The act of doing a ritual is performative—that is, the performance of a ritual causes something to happen. For example, in a marriage ritual the statement "I now pronounce you husband and wife" causes the couple to become husband and wife. The outcome of a ritual is the reason it exists and why it is carried out. . . Like recipes, rituals need the right person(s), the right equipment, and the right ingredients.

Ray Stedman: Leviticus is the book of access to God, of instruction in how to worship. Worship is nothing more than laying hold of God. We don't worship when we simply bow our heads and let some kind of pious thoughts run vagrantly through our minds. We worship when we lay hold of what God is. Though it may seem dry reading, when we begin to analyze it, Leviticus opens up as a great book which gives us tremendous lessons in the life of worship. . .

The book of Leviticus is designed to teach us three major principles: The first is **representation**. That is, we never would have been permitted into the Holy of Holies, had we been part of Israel. Only the high priest could go in. But when he did, he represented the whole nation. By that representation, the nation began to learn the wonderful principle of appropriating the value of another's work. After all, this is exactly what we are asked to do, isn't it? We are asked to believe Christ died for us, and that we died with him. And all of our victory rests upon our ability to appropriate the work of Another who is our representative. God began to teach this to the world in Leviticus.

The second great principle or truth God began to teach was his **adequacy**. The book opens with the institution of five offerings, each one speaking of Jesus Christ in his death for us, each one showing how a basic need of human life is fully met already in what Christ has done, and all of them together showing us that there is nothing we will ever run into which hasn't already been taken care of. Therefore it is absolute unbelief to come to God and start asking him to do something for us which he hasn't already done. What is necessary is not to plead with him to do something new, but for us to start believing and appropriating what he has already done.

The third great truth God began to teach was that all of the representation and all of the adequacy become expressive in our life, become actual in terms of our experience, by the simple act of obedience, of faith in action -- **faith moving**, acting upon what has been done. Leviticus is that book of instruction. If you read it in conjunction with the book of Hebrews it is one of the most illuminating studies in all of the Bible."

Paul Van Gorder summarizes the seven feasts in **Leviticus 23:1-44 - Leviticus 23** outlines the sacred calendar of redemption. These seven feasts in the Jewish year foretell and set forth the plan of salvation from the death of Christ through His millennial reign. They give us in sequence the different stages in God's redemptive scheme. I suggest that you study carefully the details of each feast named in **Leviticus 23**, for they are "*a shadow of things to come*" (**Colossians 2:17**).

The Feast of Passover (Lev 23:4,5).

The history of redemption begins with the Passover. To Israel this was the first feast and the beginning of months to them. This feast commemorated their deliverance from Egypt, and 1 Corinthians 5:7 says that "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us." There is no way to God apart from the work of Christ upon the cross. We can know nothing of holiness, rest, or fellowship except on redemption ground. And that begins with Passover.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:6-8).

This feast began on the next day after the Passover and continued for 7 days. It was closely associated with Passover because the Israelites ate the roast lamb and the unleavened bread that night in Egypt (Ex 12:8). The blood was the foundation of fellowship with God; the feeding upon the lamb was the means of maintaining fellowship. Unleavened bread speaks of holiness, the condition necessary for the enjoyment of fellowship. "For even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast" (1 Cor 5:7,8). Fellowship is established on the basis of the applied blood. But fellowship is maintained as we walk in holiness of life, obedient to God.

The Feast of Firstfruits (Lev 23:9-14).

1 Corinthians 15:20 states, "But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept." The feast of firstfruits represents His resurrection. At the beginning of the harvest, the Israelites cut a sheaf of grain and brought it to the priest, who waved it before the Lord. He did this to show that it was accepted by God on the sinner's behalf (Lev 23:11). [Note that Christ was raised 'on the day after the sabbath'.] Christ's resurrection has been accepted by God for us and is the guarantee of our own.

The Feast of Wave Loaves, or Pentecost (Lev 23:15-22).

This feast took place 50 days after the feast of firstfruits. Its New Testament fulfillment is found in Acts chapter 2. Fifty days after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended upon waiting Jewish believers. Later, the same was experienced in the household of Cornelius, a Gentile. Both Jews and Gentiles were formed into one body, the church the body of Christ. The wave-loaf offering consisted of two loaves baked with leaven. Its counterpart, the church, has in it leaven (evil) because of the old nature of its members. Although evil is present, it has been taken care of by a burnt offering, a sin offering, and a peace offering. This feast therefore pictures the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost to bind the waiting believers into one body.

The Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:23-25).

This event was observed on the first day of the seventh month. A long interval of 4 months stood between the feast of Pentecost and the feast of trumpets. This interval corresponds to the present church age. There were always two trumpets in Israel: one for assembly and another for war. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says, "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible." Likewise, Matthew 24:31 states, "He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect." One trumpet sounds for the rapture of the church; another trumpet sounds for the gathering of Israel. Please read and compare Isaiah 18:3,4; 27:12,13; Joel 2:15-17.

The Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26-32).

This feast closely followed the feast of trumpets, occurring on the tenth day of the seventh month. The sacrifices of that day included a sin offering and a burnt offering for Aaron and his house; and two goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering for the congregation. The blood of the slain goat, sprinkled within the veil, pictures the [satisfaction] of the claims of God's justice. The live goat that was led away into the wilderness pictures our Lord bearing away our sins. Three characteristics were evident in the celebration of atonement: first, affliction of soul (Zechariah 12:10-14; Jeremiah 8:20); second, atonement for sin (Zech 13:1); and third, rest from labor [Heb 4:9,10]. Just as the day of atonement closed with the appearance of the high priest from behind the veil, so Israel's future day of atonement will be climaxed with the appearance of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, from heaven.

The Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:33-44).

The time setting for this feast is given in Deuteronomy 16:13, "After thou hast gathered in thy grain and thy wine." The fruit of the field and the vintage of the earth-- after these two are harvested, this feast is celebrated. The feast speaks of the millennial reign of Christ. There will be a time of rejoicing over a regathered and redeemed Israel. (Be sure to read of that important time in Zechariah 14:16-21). Life's battles will finally be over. Sword and spear will be changed into instruments of peace. Every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree, enjoying a balanced economy (Micah 4:4). Earth's glorious sabbath of 1,000 years will have begun. Throughout the book of Leviticus, we are given glimpses of the holiness that is ours as God's redeemed, the holiness that becomes ours through a life of obedience, and the perfect holiness that will be ours in the Millennial Age to come. (OT Reflections of Christ - Leviticus)

Eugene Merrill: Though the covenant arrangement up to this point clearly specified the need for Israel, the vassal, to appear before her Lord on stated occasions and singled out first Moses and then the priesthood as mediators in this encounter, there yet remained the need to describe the nature of the tribute to be presented, the precise meaning and function of the priesthood, the definition of holiness and unholiness, and a more strict clarification of the places and times of pilgrimage to the dwelling place of the great King. This is the **purpose** of the book of Leviticus.

Constable: The major theme of Leviticus is **worship**. Moses introduced this theme in the later chapters of Exodus, but he developed it more fully in Leviticus. The book reveals how sinful, albeit redeemed Israelites, could enjoy a continuing relationship with the holy God who dwelt

among them. It also reveals how they could maintain that relationship and express it through worship.

The first major revelation in Leviticus is the **nature of sin**. God took for granted, in Leviticus, the fact that man is a sinner. He had already established this in Genesis and Exodus. He clarified the nature of man's sinfulness in Leviticus.

"Sin" has a threefold character: First, sin is "**unlikeness**" to God. . .
Second, sin is essentially the **wrong** that man does to God. . .
Third, sin results in **distance** from God. . .

A second major revelation in Leviticus is the **nature of atonement**. Atonement is the solution to the worldwide problem that sin creates. "*Atonement*" means reparation for a wrong or injury, having one's account with God covered, and sin-debt forgiven, albeit pending a final removal of sin after Christ's sacrifice. God removed (covered) the sins of the Israelites until a final, acceptable sacrifice would pay for them completely. Old Testament saints obtained salvation "on credit." God accepted a substitute sacrifice (the "credit payment") until final payment would be made (by Christ), like a merchant accepts a credit card until final payment is made. Through atonement, men who were sinners could enter into fellowship with God. Three things had to be present to make atonement for sin. These applied to both initial atonement and to continuing atonement

First, there had to be substitution. Every animal sacrifice in Israel involved the substitution of one life for another. A living being had to stand in the sinner's place and take the punishment for his sin. The substitute had to be sinless. Every sacrifice of an animal involved the death of an innocent substitute, since animals do not sin. They are not morally responsible.

Second, there had to be imputation. God transferred the guilt of the sinner onto his animal substitute, when the sinner personally identified with his substitute by laying his hands on it. This ritual symbolized the transference of guilt for the Israelites.

Third, there had to be death. Finally, the substitute to which God had imputed the sinner's guilt had to die. Atonement could not take place without death. The "*shedding of blood*" both illustrated and symbolized death, and was the biblical basis for the removal (forgiveness) of sins. Blood is the essence of life (**17:11**). Bloodshed was a visual demonstration of life poured out. Sin always results in death (cf. **Rom. 6:23**).

Clearly, **love** lay behind this plan, even though Moses did not explain in Leviticus why God provided atonement. This comes first in Deuteronomy. God opened the way for sinners to have fellowship with Himself by providing for the covering of sins. Alternatively, God could have preserved His holiness, and satisfied the demands of His justice, by annihilating every sinner. Instead, God chose another way, because He loves people.

A third major revelation in Leviticus is the **nature of redemption**. "*Redemption*" essentially means "purchase." To "redeem" means to "purchase for oneself." When God "redeemed" Israel

in Egypt, He "bought the nation of Israel for Himself." God thereby provided freedom for the Israelites, so that they could be His special treasure (**Exod. 19:5-6**).

Leviticus teaches three things about redemption: First, redemption rests on **righteousness**. Leviticus reveals that God "did what was right" (provided both forgiveness and righteousness) in order to restore man to Himself. He did not simply dismiss sin as unimportant. He provided a way—substitutionary atonement—whereby the guilt of sin could be paid for righteously. Redemption rests on a righteous payment to God, not pity.

Second, redemption is possible only **by blood**. The sacrificial shedding of blood is the giving up of life. The rites of animal sacrifice portrayed this graphically. People do not obtain redemption when they pour out their lives in service, but by "*a life poured out*" in death (cf. Heb. 9:22). Mankind's redemption ultimately cost God the life of His own Son.

Third, redemption should produce **holiness**. Redemption should lead to a manner of life that is separate from sin. Redemption does not excuse us from the responsibility of being holy. It gives us the opportunity to be holy. Holiness of life results from a relationship to God and fellowship (communion) with Him—that redemption makes possible. Redemption deals with the sinner's relationship to God, whereas atonement deals with his relationship to sin. People experience redemption (the positive freedom and rightness to love, know, serve, and worship God), but God has atoned for their sins (the negative punishment, destruction, and removal of all their wrongness).

I would summarize the message of Leviticus as follows, on the basis of this threefold emphasis on **sin**, **atonement**, and **redemption**: God has made provision for the removal of human sin so that people can have fellowship with Him.

MacArthur: The interpreter is challenged to compare features of this book with NT writers who present types or analogies based on the tabernacle and the ceremonial aspects of the law, so as to teach valuable lessons about Christ and New Covenant reality. Though the ceremonial law served only as a shadow of the reality of Christ and His redemptive work (**Heb. 10:1**), excessive typology is to be rejected. Only that which NT writers identify as types of Christ should be so designated (cf. **1 Cor. 5:7**, "*Christ our Passover*").

The most profitable study in Leviticus is that which yields truth in the understanding of sin, guilt, substitutionary death, and atonement by focusing on features which are not explained or illustrated elsewhere in OT Scripture. Later OT authors, and especially NT writers, build on the basic understanding of these matters provided in Leviticus. The sacrificial features of Leviticus point to their ultimate, one-time fulfillment in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ (**Heb. 9:11–22**).

The Book of Leviticus

Focus	Foundation Events						Foundation People									
Divisions	Offerings of Praise & Dedication		Offerings of Restoration		Holy Office of the Priest		Holiness in Daily Life		Holiness in National Life		Holiness for the Individual		Holy Priests & Holy Feasts		Holiness in the Holy Land	
	1	3	4	7	8	10	11	15	16	17	18	20	21	23	24	27
Topics	Worshiping a Holy God						Walking with a Holy God									
	Vital Offerings						Various Obligations									
Place	Mount Sinai															
Time	Approximately 1 Month															
Author	Moses															

Kayser Commentary:

Outline of Leviticus

The basis of fellowship with God				The way of life before God as kings and priests						
1-----17				18-----27						
<u>Laws of reconciliation</u>	<u>Laws of priests</u>	<u>Laws of purity for people</u>	<u>Laws of national atonement</u>	Sanctifying the <u>people</u>	Sanctifying the <u>priesthood</u>	Sanctifying <u>worship</u>	Sanctifying the <u>land</u>	Blessings & Curses	Sanctification through vows	
1----7	8--10	11-15	16-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage (18) • Culture (19) • State intervention in previous spheres (20) 	21-22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasts • Elements of worship • Name of God 	25	26	27	
18-----20	21-22	23-----24	25	26	27					

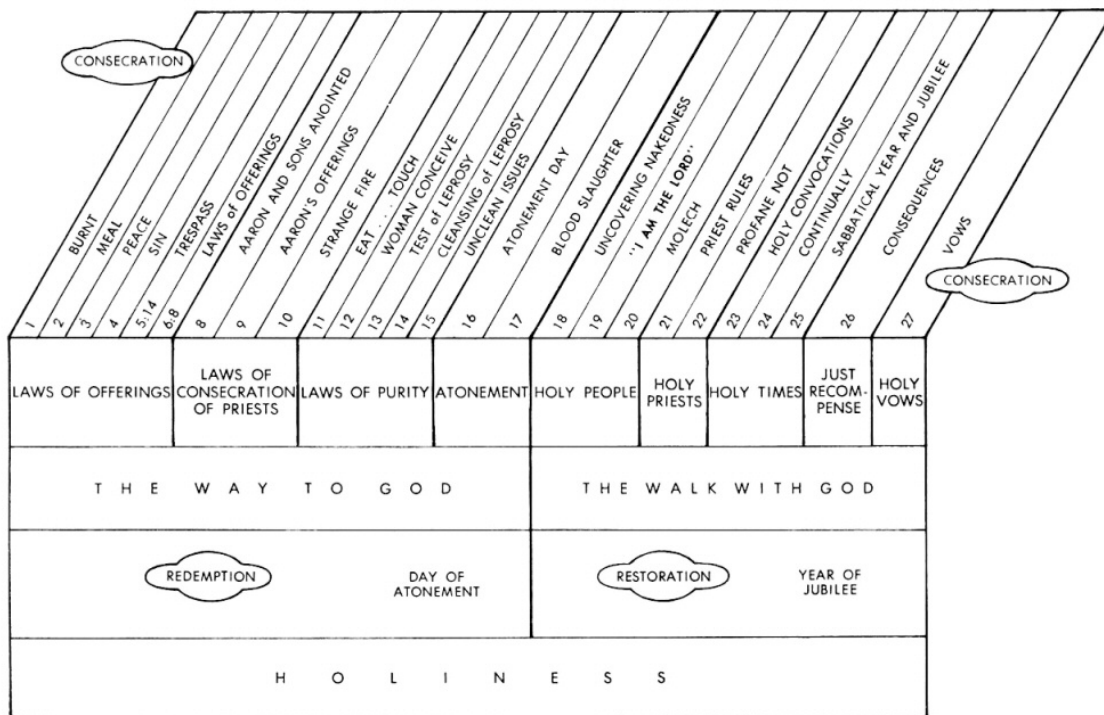
Chuck Swindoll: The overall message of Leviticus is **sanctification**. The book communicates that receiving God’s forgiveness and acceptance should be followed by holy living and spiritual growth. Now that Israel had been redeemed by God, they were to be purified into a people worthy of their God. “*You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy,*” says **Leviticus 19:2**. In Leviticus we learn that God loves to be approached, but we must do so on His terms.

LEVITICUS

	<p>The Way to God Access</p> <p>The approach: offerings</p> <hr/> <p>The representative: priest</p> <hr/> <p>The laws: cleansing <i>Physically</i> <i>Spiritually</i></p> <hr/> <p>CHAPTERS 1–17</p>	<p>The Walk with God Lifestyle</p> <p>Practical guidelines</p> <hr/> <p>Chronological observances</p> <hr/> <p>Severe consequences</p> <hr/> <p>Verbal promises</p> <hr/> <p>CHAPTERS 18–27</p>
Emphasis	Ritual (for worship)	Practical (for living)
Location	Mount Sinai . . . one full year	
Key Word	“Holy” (appears 90 times)	
Theme	How sinful humanity should worship a holy God	
Key Verses	17:11; 19:2; 20:7–8	
Christ in Leviticus	Pictured in each sacrifice and ritual	

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Precept Austin – Jensen’s Survey of the OT



Bible.org: Leviticus 23 – The Feasts

	Passover (Lev 23:5)	Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:6-8)	First Fruits (Lev 23:9-14)	Weeks (Lev 23:15-22)	P E R I O D O F S I L E N C E	Trumpets (Lev 23:23-25)	Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26-32)	Tabernacles (Lev 23:33-36)
Time and Length	14th of Abib 1 day	15th of Abib 7 days	day after next Sabbath 1 day	50 days after First-fruits 1 day	O F S I L E N C E	1st of Tishri 1 day	10th of Tishri 1 day	15th of Tishri 7 days
Historical Occasion	Redemption of Israel out of Egypt	Separation from the supply of Egypt	New supply in the Land	Climax of grain harvest	S I L E N C E	Announcement of the Day of Atonement	National cleansing from sin	Remembrance of living in booths in the wilderness
Agricultural Cycle			Beginning of barley harvest	Completion of wheat harvest	L E N C E	Completion of olive harvest		
Required Attendance	Passover			Pentecost	C E			Tabernacles
Theological Significance	Redemption from bondage and sin	Separation to God who is the source and complete supply of life	New supply of life	Climax of the supply of life	3rd TO 7th M O N T H	Call to repentance	Cleansing from sin	Celebration in anticipation of blessings promised to Abraham
Theological Interdependence	Theological	progression	from	redemption	T H	through	to	celebration

OUTLINE OF LEVITICUS

WORSHIPING A HOLY GOD AND WALKING IN HOLINESS

BIG IDEA:

SINCE GOD IS HOLY, OUR ACCESS TO GOD AND FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD MUST BE CONSTRAINED BY HOLINESS

Leviticus 20:26 “Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.”

I. (1-15) WORSHIPING A HOLY GOD -- FOCUSED AROUND THE RITUALS ADMINISTERED BY THE PRIESTS

A. (1-7) RITUALS INVOLVING SACRIFICES

1. (1:1 – 6:7) Instructions for the Laity
 - a. (1) The Burnt Offering – Access to a Holy God
 - b. (2) The Cereal (Grain) Offering – Dedication / Consecration
 - c. (3) The Peace Offering -- Reconciliation / Fellowship
 - d. (4:1 – 5:13) The Sin Offering -- Purification
 - e. (5:14 – 6:7) The Reparation (Guilt) Offering -- Repentance
2. (6:8 - 7:38) Instructions for the Priests
 - a. (6:8-13) The Burnt Offering
 - b. (6:14-23) The Cereal (Grain) Offering
 - c. (6:24-30) The Sin Offering
 - d. (7:1-10) The Reparation (Guilt) Offering
 - e. (7:11-36) The Peace Offering
 - f. (7:37-38) Summary

B. (8-10) ROLE OF THE PRIESTS REQUIRING CONSECRATION

1. (8) Installation of the Priesthood
2. (9) Dedication of the Sanctuary
3. (10) Sanctification of the Priesthood -- Judgment of Presumptuous Worship

C. (11-15) RITUALS INVOLVING PURITY

1. (11) Uncleaness Related to Dietary Restrictions
2. (12) Uncleaness Related to Childbirth
3. (13-14) Uncleaness Related to Blemishes
4. (15) Uncleaness Related to Bodily Discharges from Sexual Organs

II. (16-17) HINGE = THE KEY TO ACCESSING GOD’S HOLY PRESENCE

A. (16) THE GREAT DAY OF ATONEMENT

B. (17) THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLOOD

III. (18-27) WALKING WITH A HOLY GOD -- FOCUSED AROUND HOLINESS IN PERSONAL LIFE AND COVENANT COMMUNITY

A. (18-22) HOLINESS IN PERSONAL LIFE

1. (18) Holiness in Sexual Behavior
2. (19) Holiness in Daily Life – before God and Our Neighbors
3. (20) Holiness in Avoiding Specific Offenses that Merit Serious Punishment
4. (21-22) Holiness for Priests

B. (:23-27) HOLINESS IN COVENANT COMMUNITY

1. (23) Celebrating Annual Religious Festivals
2. (24:1-9) Tabernacle Regulations:
 - Regarding Oil for the Lampstand
 - Regarding Bread for the Table of the Presence
3. (24:10-23) A Case of Blasphemy and Laws on Personal Injury
4. (25) Observing the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years
5. (26) Covenant Blessings and Curses
6. (27) Covenant Commitment: Vows, Dedications, and Tithes

TEXT: Leviticus 1:1-17

TITLE: *WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS (THAT WHICH ASCENDS) -- ACCESS*

BIG IDEA:

**ONGOING ACCESS TO A HOLY GOD FOR FELLOWSHIP AND WORSHIP
PROMPTS BURNT OFFERINGS REFLECTING SUBSTITUTIONARY
ATONEMENT AND TOTAL SURRENDER**

INTRODUCTION:

Constable: The Hebrew word *qorban*, translated "offering," comes from the verb that means "to bring near." It literally means "that which one brings near to God."

God designed these offerings to teach the Israelites, as well as to enable them to worship Him; thus they had both a revelatory and a regulatory purpose. They taught the people what was necessary to maintain and restore the believers' communion with God in view of their sin and defilement.

Ross: Sacrifice is at the heart of all true worship. It serves as the consecrating ritual for participation in the holy rites, it forms the appropriate tribute due to the LORD, and it represents the proper spiritual attitude of the worshiper.

Wenham: The burnt offering was the commonest of all the OT sacrifices. Its main function was to atone for man's sin by propitiating God's wrath. In the immolation [burning] of the animal, most commonly a lamb, God's judgment against human sin was symbolized and the animal suffered in man's place. The worshiper acknowledged his guilt and responsibility for his sins by pressing his hand on the animal's head and confessing his sin. The lamb was accepted as the ransom price for the guilty man [cf. **Mark 10:45; Eph. 2:5; Heb. 7:27; 1 Pet. 1:18-19**]. The daily use of the sacrifice in the worship of the temple and tabernacle was a constant reminder of man's sinfulness and God's holiness. So were its occasional usages after sickness, childbirth, and vows. In bringing a sacrifice a man acknowledged his sinfulness and guilt. He also publicly confessed his faith in the Lord, his thankfulness for past blessing, and his resolve to live according to God's holy will all the days of his life.

Jacob Milgrom: The ritual procedure with the burnt offering can be reconstructed as follows: After the offerer has performed the hand-leaning rite and slaughtered his animal, the officiating priest dashes the animal's blood—collected by his fellow priest(s)—upon all the sides of the altar, while the offerer skins and quarters the animal and washes its entrails and skins. Once the priests have stoked the altar fire, laid new wood upon it, and then laid the animal parts, the officiating priest supervises the incineration of the sacrifice.

Peter Pett: The whole burnt offering could be of a bull-ox, of sheep or goat, or of specific birds depending on the wealth and occupation of the offerer. These animals and birds were of especial value to a man as they would otherwise be eaten by him, or would provide clothing and milk for him. Thus they were sacrifices in more ways than one because the sacrificer was sacrificing the opportunity of he and his family eating them, and of them providing his family with clothing, and there was therefore a cost to offerings and sacrifices, especially those that were wholly consumed in the offering. And for a poor man to offer a bird may well have been far more costly to him than for a rich man when he offered a bullock. For him food was in short supply. Our first lesson is thus that what we give to God must not be without cost, for otherwise it will mean nothing to us, but that He does not demand from us what we cannot afford to provide. He does not demand too much.

John Schultz: The regulations in this chapter pertain to three different offerings of the same category: **Verses 3 - 10** concern a head of cattle; **vs. 11 - 13** concern a ram or a male goat and **vs. 14- 17** concern a pair of doves or turtle doves. Except for these three distinctions there is no real difference in the sacrifices.

Mark Rooker: the type of sacrifice presented would correspond to the donor's ability and resources. The Israelite of some means would offer a bull (**1:3-5**), the Israelite of average means would offer a sheep (**1:10**), while the poor would offer a bird (**1:14**). . .

Since the burnt offering was the most common sacrifice in Israelite worship, offered not only on a daily basis but also in conjunction with other festivals (**Num 28**), it was a daily reminder that believers must continually confess their sins to God (**1 John 1:9**). Moreover, the sacrifice was made wholly to God and thus was an expression of total obedience. Many commentators believe that Paul's admonition for believers to present themselves as a living sacrifice in **Rom 12:1, 2** is an allusion to the presentation of the whole burnt offering.

Kenneth Mathews: The Lord required the Israelite worshipper to bring the proper gift to the proper place and to worship him by the proper presentation of the offering. We will discover that the demands made of the ancient Hebrews were perfectly performed on our behalf through Jesus Christ who himself was the proper gift and the proper place and fulfilled the proper presentation of sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. By his perfect obedience, we as Christians can worship with the perfect assurance that our worship is accepted by the Father.

Warren Wiersbe: The significance of the offering is seen in the repetition of the phrases "*before the Lord*" and "*unto the Lord,*" which are found seven times in this first chapter of Leviticus (**vv. 2-3, 5, 9, 13-14, 17**). The transaction at the altar wasn't between the offerer and his conscience, or the offerer and the nation, or even the offerer and the priest; it was between the offerer and the Lord.

(:1) PROLOGUE – FELLOWSHIP OF DIVINE ACCESS AND COMMUNICATION

“Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying,”

MacArthur: Leviticus begins where Exodus left off. No sooner did the glory cloud come down to rest on the tabernacle in the concluding verses of Exodus, than God instructed Moses with the content in Leviticus.

Constable: This section of Leviticus, and the whole book, opens with the statement "*the LORD called to Moses*" (v. 1). This is the third time that we read of the LORD calling to Moses in this way: in addition to the burning bush incident (**Exod. 3:4**), and on Mt. Sinai (**Exod. 19:3**). Having taken possession of the tabernacle, God now gave orders to His servant from that audience chamber. Previously, God had spoken to the Israelites publicly from Mt. Sinai, and to Moses privately on that mountain, but now that the tabernacle was complete, God spoke to Moses in an audible voice from above the mercy seat. All of the revelations that follow these announcements are very significant.

Baxter: Before this, a distant God has spoken from "*the mount that burned with fire*"; but now – as we see at the end of Exodus – the Tabernacle is erected "*according to the pattern showed in the mount*," and a God who dwells among his people in **fellowship** with them speaks "*out of the Tabernacle*." The people, therefore, are not addressed as sinners distanced from God, like those of other nations, but as being already brought into a new relationship, even that of **fellowship**, on the ground of a blood-sealed covenant.

Kenneth Mathews: Before the people departed for their promised homeland in Palestine (ancient Canaan), the Lord spoke from the tent. The book of Leviticus is essentially the message that God spoke to his people at that time in preparation for their departure. The teaching of Leviticus was both revelatory and regulatory. This message revealed more about their God and also regulated the relationship that he had established with them at the exodus. Repeatedly in Leviticus we are told that the Lord "*spoke to [Moses]*" (**1:1**). Moses was the mediator of God's word to his people. Unlike any other person, the Lord met with Moses: "*With [Moses] I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord*" (Numbers 12:8). At Sinai the mount was enveloped by a cloud that was identified as "*the glory of the Lord*" from which the Lord spoke to Moses.

Mark Rooker: The importance of the Tent in Israel's covenant relationship with God is twofold: (1) the tent was the place of God's **revelation**, where he communicated his word, and (2) the tent served as the place of **worship**, where God was approached through sacrifices.¹⁵ In Jesus Christ the presence of God would be incarnated in a human being, the divine God-Man. Jesus is not only the revelation of God but the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system that foreshadowed his sacrifice that would remove sins once and for all. The apostle John specifically alludes to this connection in stating that Jesus "*tabernacled*," among us (**John 1:14**). The tabernacle

as the special place of God's presence is a type of the incarnation of Christ, who “*made his dwelling*” (tabernacled) among us.

I. (:2-9) BURNT OFFERING OF CATTLE

A. (:2-3) Presentation of Offering Based on Selection Criteria

1. (:2-3a) Selection Criteria

*“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them,
‘When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD,
you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock.
If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it,
a male without defect;”*

David Guzik: In the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, there were three major parts. The covenant included the *law* Israel had to obey, *sacrifice* to provide for breaking the law, and the *choice* of blessing or curse that would become Israel’s destiny throughout history.

i. The sacrificial system was an essential element of the Mosaic covenant because it was impossible to live up to the requirements of the law. No one could perfectly obey the law, and sin had to be dealt with through sacrifice. Each commanded sacrifice was significant, and they all pointed toward the perfect sacrifice Jesus would offer by His crucifixion (**Hebrews 7:27, 9:11-28**).

ii. This was not the beginning of God’s sacrificial system. Adam knew of sacrifice (**Genesis 3:21**), as did Cain and Abel (**Genesis 4:3-4**), and Noah (**Genesis 8:20-21**). Israel offered sacrifice at the Passover (**Exodus 12**). **Job 1:5** and **Exodus 10:25** also mention burnt sacrifices before the book of Leviticus.

R. K. Harrison: For the burnt offering only **domesticated** animals, indicating a developed stage of agricultural life, were to be presented, since wild species did not cost the donor anything. In addition, wild animals had not received the labour and care that had been expended on herds and flocks.

Perry Yoder: The distinguishing characteristic of the whole burnt offering is that it is wholly given over to God and, except for the hide, is entirely burned on the altar. The priest retains the hide. The worshiper gains nothing from the sacrifice.

Maclaren: “*burnt offering*” -- Its name literally means ‘*that which ascends*,’ and refers, no doubt, to the ascent of the transformed substance of the sacrifice in fire and smoke, as to God. The central idea of this sacrifice, then, as gathered from its name and confirmed by its manner, is that of the yielding of the whole being in self-surrender, and borne up by the flame of intense consecration to God.

Robert Vasholz: The Lord’s call to Moses begins with instructions for Moses to teach Israel the proper way to present the so-called burnt offering. Instructions for other

offerings will shortly follow. The word translated ‘*burnt offering*’ derives from the verb that means to ascend. It could be dubbed the **ascent offering**, though it is not the only offering that ascends in smoke. However, it is the only sacrifice where the whole sacrifice ascends in smoke. All but the skins of the burnt offerings are offered up on the altar. It is fitting that the details of the burnt offering are the first presented by Moses to the people. The burnt offering is referred to more times in the Old Testament than any other sacrifice. Subsequently, all public events in Israel will be celebrated with burnt offerings.

Kenneth Mathews: In the presentation of the burnt offering, the layperson and the officiating priest each played vital roles. Both were essential to the success of the ritual. Their respective parts in the ritual alternated between layperson and officiating priest. There was a symbiotic harmony between the worshipper and the officiating priest.

John Hartley: The first ritual is fuller than the other two. There are two reasons for this. First, details from the first ritual are assumed to be carried over to the ritual for a member of the flock. Second, some information, such as that for preparing the fire, is mentioned only here because it is assumed that a whole offering is to be the first sacrifice offered at the newly established Tent of Meeting.

2. (:3b) Sacred Objective

“he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.”

Constable: The reasons for listing this offering first, include that it was the most common, and therefore the most important one, in this sense, and because it belonged completely to God. The priests offered a burnt offering every morning and every evening, and more frequently on holy days, as a public offering.

Ross: The LORD accepts with pleasure whoever comes into his presence by substitutionary atonement through the shedding of blood.

B. (:4) Identification with the Offering

“And he shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.”

MacArthur: This symbolic gesture pictured the transfer of the sacrificer’s sin to the sacrificial animal and was likely done with a prayer of repentance and request for forgiveness (cf. **Ps 51:18, 19**). . . This was a substitutionary sacrifice that prefigured the ultimate substitute – Jesus Christ.

F. Duane Lindsey: Like all Levitical sacrifices, the underlying purpose of the burnt offering was to secure atonement for sins (**1:4**; cf. **Num. 15:24-25**), though its more immediate purposes was to express total dedication to the Lord. . .

The related Hebrew word *koper*, “ransom,” supports the conclusion of **Morris** that in ritual usage *kipper* acquired the technical meaning – “to accomplish reconciliation between God and man” (p. 148), particularly through offering as a ransom price a substitute for the object of divine wrath (p. 152). In Old Testament usage it is apparent that the atonement or reconciliation involved not only expiation of the sin but also propitiation of the divine Lawgiver. Though the offense had to be expiated, more significantly the sacrifice was required because the personal relationship between God and man had been disrupted. So expiation had the effect of making propitiation – turning away divine wrath by a satisfactory, substitutionary sacrifice.

David Guzik: “to make atonement” -- The idea behind the Hebrew word for atonement (*kophar*) is **to cover**. The idea was that an individual’s sin and guilt were covered over by the blood of the sacrificial victim.

i. Leviticus is a book all about **atonement**. “The word *kipper* (“to make atonement”) is used almost fifty times in Leviticus.... It is used about fifty times more in the rest of the OT.” (**Harris**)

ii. But there is a difference between the Old Testament idea of atonement and the New Testament idea. In the Old Testament, sin is “covered over” until redemption was completed by Jesus on the cross. In the New Testament, sin is done away with – and a true “at-one-ment” was accomplished by Jesus’ sacrifice. The believer is therefore right with God on the basis of what Jesus has done at the cross, not on the basis of what the believer does. “There are two ruling religions around us at this day, and they mainly differ in tense. The general religion of mankind is ‘Do,’ but the religion of a true Christian is ‘Done.’” (**Spurgeon**)

C. (:5-9) Sacrifice of the Offering

1. (:5) Killing the Animal and Processing the Blood

“And he shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron’s sons, the priests, shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting.”

Constable: Whereas both the offerer and the priest could slaughter the animal sacrifice (vv. 5, 14-15), only the priest could sprinkle its blood. The method of slaughtering was by slitting the throat.

David Guzik: Of course, the priest would assist as necessary, and the priests would do the heavy work of skinning and cutting the animal up. But the one who brought the offering delivered the deathblow. The individual Israelite cut the jugular vein of the bull, in the presence of the priests at the tabernacle of meeting. This was a solemn testimony to the need for sacrifice, a confession of the fact, *I need atonement for my sin.*

2. (:6) Skinning the Animal and Dissecting It

“He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces.”

Constable: Cutting the sacrificial animal in "*pieces*" (vv. 6, 8) made it appear as though it was part of a family meal. The animal was thus like "a meal" presented to God.

3. (:7-8) Arranging on the Altar

"And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8 Then Aaron's sons, the priests, shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar."

Constable: The animal perished completely, consumed in the "*fire*" on "*the altar*" ("*all of it ... a burnt offering*"; v. 9), except for the skin, which went to the priest (v. 6; 7:8). This symbolized the comprehensive nature of the offerer's consecration to God—his or her total subjection to the Lord, "the extinction of the offerer's worldly values". Perhaps God excluded the skin to focus attention on the internal elements, the real person. God deserves the surrender of the entire person, not just a part.

4. (:9a) Cleansing Entrails and Legs

"Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water."

5. (:9b) Burning the Offering

"And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD."

David Guzik: A sweet aroma to the LORD: This is stated for all aspects of the burnt sacrifice. The atoning for sin and the giving of all, in obedience to God's instruction, pleased God as a **sweet aroma** pleases the senses. The Bible specifically tells us that Jesus Christ fulfilled this sacrifice with His own offering, perfectly pleasing God in laying down His life at the cross: *As Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:2)*

Kenneth Mathews: The Greek Old Testament's translation of our phrase is important to us as Christian readers. It translated the Hebrew phrase as "*sweet aroma*," which is the same language used by the Apostle Paul when describing the atoning sacrifice of Christ: "*Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*" (Ephesians 5:2). Unlike the animal slain on behalf of the worshipper in Leviticus, the sacrifice offered up by our Lord was wholly voluntary. He "*gave himself up*." That the Father fully accepted the atonement of Jesus was proven by the resurrection of the Lord. We who have entrusted ourselves to Christ by faith can have the same assurance of acceptance with the Father.

II. (:10-13) BURNT OFFERING OF SHEEP OR GOATS

A. (:10) Presentation of Offering Based on Selection Criteria

"But if his offering is from the flock, of the sheep or of the goats, for a burnt offering, he shall offer it a male without defect."

B. (:11-13) Sacrifice of the Offering

1. (:11) Killing the Animal and Processing the Blood

“And he shall slay it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD, and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar.”

2. (:12) Dissecting and Arranging on the Altar

“He shall then cut it into its pieces with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar.”

3. (:13a) Cleansing Entrails and Legs

“The entrails, however, and the legs he shall wash with water.”

Constable: they washed the entrails and legs of the animals in water (**vv. 9, 13**). This washing probably symbolized the need for internal purity. They did not wash the birds, however. Perhaps they were regarded as already clean.

Robert Vasholz: It is hard to miss the point. Anything that smacks of **defilement** has no place in the Tent-Sanctuary, a principal theme in Leviticus. All dung, a symbol of defilement, must be removed (**Deut. 23:14–15**). The worshipper skins the animal and gives the inedible skin to the priest (cf. **Lev. 7:8**). It is not necessary to divide birds since they are small of size. The skin goes to those who minister at the altar as a kind of prebend, or honorarium, for his service. Cattle hides, in particular, are valuable.

4. (:13b) Burning the Offering

“And the priest shall offer all of it, and offer it up in smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.”

III. (:14-17) BURNT OFFERING OF BIRDS – PROVISION FOR PARTICIPATION BY POOR PEOPLE

A. (:14) Presentation of the Offering Based on Selection Criteria

“But if his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering from the turtledoves or from young pigeons.”

R. K. Harrison: These verses deal with **fowls** as a burnt offering. There would be persons in Israel who could not afford to slaughter a prime animal, even if they possessed one. For such poor people the law permitted fowl to be presented, and relaxed the specifications for the offering to the extent of not stipulating that the bird must be male and unblemished (cf. **5:7; 12:8**). The birds most suitable for such offerings were turtledoves or ... young pigeons. The dove was one of the most commonly mentioned birds in the Bible. Ancient traditions maintained that the dove had no bile, and as a result it was considered to be clean, gentle and inoffensive. Although sometimes attacked by more aggressive birds the dove never retaliates, and

for this reason has become a symbol of the Christian virtues. In **Matthew 10:16** Christ used the dove as an exemplar of innocence. Its non-aggressive nature has enabled the dove to be employed as an international peace symbol. **Isaiah 60:8** indicates that the dove had also been domesticated, although wild doves lived in caves throughout the hilly regions of Palestine, as did pigeons. Both types of birds continued to be sacrificed in New Testament times, and could be purchased in one of the temple courts (cf. **Matt. 21:12; Mark 11:15; John 2:14–16**). At the time of Christ's presentation in the temple (**Luke 2:22–24**), the sacrificial provisions of **Leviticus 12:8** were cited to cover the impoverished conditions of Mary and Joseph. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Christ at his baptism was described in terms of dove imagery also (**Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32**).

Jacob Milgrom: Built into the Israelite system of sacrifices is a mechanism to ensure that all Israelites, regardless of wealth, could communicate directly with God and participate in the spiritual life of their people.

B. (:15-17) Sacrifice of the Offering

1. (:15) Killing the Bird and Processing the Blood

“And the priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head, and offer it up in smoke on the altar; and its blood is to be drained out on the side of the altar.”

2. (:16) Defeathering the Bird

“He shall also take away its crop with its feathers, and cast it beside the altar eastward, to the place of the ashes.”

3. (:17a) Tearing the Wings

“Then he shall tear it by its wings, but shall not sever it.”

4. (:17b) Burning the Offering

“And the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar on the wood which is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.”

Constable: Generally, the higher the individual Israelite's responsibility before God (e.g., priests, rulers, common people, etc.), the larger and more expensive was the animal that he had to offer. People with greater responsibility would also have had more money, and therefore more ability to bring the more expensive sacrifices. . .

In summary, the burnt offering was an act of worship in which the Israelite offered to God a whole animal. The fire on the altar completely consumed it (the offered animal) as a "substitute" for the offerer, and as a symbol of his total personal self-sacrifice to God. These sacrifices were voluntary on the Israelite's part, as is "self-sacrifice" for the Christian (**Rom. 6:12-13; 12:1-2; cf. Matt. 22:37; 1 Cor. 6:19**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this chapter impact what types of voluntary offerings you bring to the Lord?
- 2) Do we appreciate how bloody the sacrificial process involved the offerer as well as the priest?
- 3) What is necessary for the Lord to accept our offerings as a sweet smelling aroma?
- 4) Why was the entire offering consumed in the fire to the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Longman and Dillard: The examination of individual sacrifices that follows leads to a covenantal interpretation of sacrifice in Israel. Covenant refers to the relationship that exists between God and his people Israel. This covenant relationship is related to sacrifice in three ways.

- First, sacrifice is a gift on the part of the worshiper to his covenant Lord.
- Second, a number of sacrifices include a notion of communion or fellowship between covenant partners.
- Last, and perhaps most important, sacrifice plays a major role in healing rifts in the covenant relationship. This function is frequently described by the technical theological term expiation.

Edersheim: The sacrifices of the Old Testament were symbolical and typical. An outward observance without any real inward meaning is only a ceremony. But a rite which has a present spiritual meaning is a symbol; and if, besides, it also points to a future reality, conveying at the same time, by anticipation, the blessing that is yet to appear, it is a type. Thus the Old Testament sacrifices were not only symbols, nor yet merely predictions by fact (as prophecy is a prediction by word), but they already conveyed to the believing Israelite the blessing that was to flow from the future reality to which they pointed.

Constable: All of these sacrifices were **voluntary** in the sense that there was no enforcement system in Israel that compelled the people to bring them. However, the first three "*soothing aroma*" offerings (burnt, meal, and peace) were voluntary in the sense that the offerer was not under obligation (by the Law) to bring them, but the last two "*non-soothing aroma*" offerings (sin and trespass) were compulsory in the sense that the offerer was under obligation (by the Law) to bring them.

The Israelites did not die if they did not bring any of them, but God commanded them nonetheless. By bringing them, the Israelite showed his sensitivity to God, and his desire to live in unbroken fellowship with God. Hardhearted Israelites probably brought very few voluntary sacrifices, just as hardhearted Christians fail to bring the sacrifices of praise, good works, sharing, submission to authority, and confession to God (**Heb. 13:15-17; 1 John 1:9**).

Two of the sacrifices dealt with **commitment to God** (the burnt and the meal), one dealt with **communion with God** (the peace), and two dealt with **cleansing from God** (the sin and the trespass). . .

The most basic difference between these offerings, was that some were primarily for worship (soothing or "*sweet savor*"), and the rest were primarily for expiation (non-soothing).

Quoting **Baxter**:

“The sweet-savour offerings typify Christ in His own **meritorious perfections**. The non-sweet savour offerings typify Christ as **bearing the demerit** of the sinner. The sweet-savour offerings speak rather of what the offering of Christ means to God. The non-sweet savour offerings speak rather of what the offering of Christ means to us—and it is in connection with these that we here find the nine occurrences of the words, '*It shall be forgiven*' (**iv. 20, 26, 31, 35; v. 10, 13, 16, 18; vi. 7**).”

In the revelation of the first three offerings, each chapter contains three paragraphs. In each chapter, God described the most valuable (costly) sacrifice first, and then the less valuable.

Burnt offerings (ch. 1)	Meal offerings (ch. 2)	Peace offerings (ch. 3)
cattle (vv. 3-9)	uncooked (vv. 1-3)	cattle (vv. 1-5)
sheep or goats (vv. 10-13)	cooked (vv. 4-10)	sheep (vv. 6-11)
birds (vv. 14-17)	miscellaneous (vv. 11-16)	goats (vv. 12-17)

David Guzik: Matthew Poole explained why there were so many different kinds of sacrifices: “To represent as well the several perfections of Christ, be true sacrifice, and the various benefits of his death, as the several duties which men owe to their Creator and Redeemer, all which could not be so well expressed by one sort of sacrifices.”

The fact that God gave so much instruction on how to specifically offer sacrifices shows that this was not a matter God left up to the creativity of the individual Israelite. They were not free to offer sacrifices any way they pleased, even if they did it with sincerity. God demanded the humility and obedience of His people in the sacrificial system. It had to be carried out in a way that was God-centered, not man-centered.

David Thompson: IF ANY BELIEVER WANTS TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD IN TRUE WORSHIP, HE MUST GO TO THE PLACE GOD HAS PRESCRIBED FOR WORSHIP AND LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD AND HE MUST OBEY THE WORD EVEN WHEN IT DEMANDS SACRIFICE.

TRUE PRIESTLY HOLINESS THAT TRULY WORSHIPS AND PLEASES GOD BEGINS WHEN SIN IS COMPLETELY FACED BY THE BELIEVER AND COMPLETELY FORGIVEN BY GOD THROUGH A BLOOD SACRIFICE.

No Jew would dare think in terms of trying to approach God without offering something to God. Worship was viewed as something that was costly (**II Sam. 24:24**). The main thought in Levitical worship was not what can I get from God, but **what can I give to God**. The idea that God immediately presents, with this first offering is this—there must be atonement made for sin by pouring out the blood of an innocent victim if one is to have any meaningful relationship with Me. To blossom in one's relationship with God, sin must be dealt with—God's way, not man's way. Now here is a very critical point to remember in these Levitical offerings—these offerings were to be offered by a people who were already God's people. These Levitical offerings are offerings that a redeemed people offer to God. Now we know that the "Burnt Offerings" point to Jesus Christ—**Hebrews 10:4-10; Mark 12:3**. But these Levitical offerings do not point to Christ so much in redemption as they do in **sanctification**. In other words, Leviticus gives us insight as to how the sacrifice of Jesus Christ which saves us continually is the basis for our **fellowship** and **communion** with God. The blood of Jesus Christ is that which enables us to worship God.

F. Duane Lindsey: The **typology** of the burnt offering is that while all of the animal offerings pointed forward to the death of Christ, the burnt offering typified Christ's death not so much as bearing sin as accomplishing the will of God; Christ was the Lamb of God given in **complete dedication** to the accomplishment of God's will, as indicated in Hebrews 9:14: "*Christ . . . offered Himself unblemished to God*" (cf. **Eph. 5:1-2; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 10:5-7**).

TEXT: Leviticus 2:1-16

TITLE: *GRAIN (CEREAL) OFFERINGS – DEDICATION / CONSECRATION*

BIG IDEA:

ONGOING ACCESS TO A HOLY GOD FOR FELLOWSHIP AND WORSHIP PROMPTS GRAIN OFFERINGS REFLECTING OUR TOTAL DEDICATION FOR HIS DAILY PROVISION

INTRODUCTION:

Peter Pett: We must not be too dogmatic about the differing significance of these sacrifices, as if we could limit them to one idea, for in all the animal sacrifices there was the presentation in one way or another of the blood to God, and the offering to Him of the fat along with the vital organs. The former sought atonement, the latter offered a pleasing odour to God. But we cannot doubt that each offering had its own special significance, and therefore its unique place within the system. And each presented an aspect of the greater offering, when our Lord Jesus Christ was offered up and sacrificed for us.

Allen Ross: The worshipers were instructed to offer a cooked or uncooked meal offering (which included only those ingredients representing the best of God's lasting bounty and eliminated those representing corruption), in order to demonstrate their dedication to the LORD and find him pleased to accept them and their offerings. . .

The LORD expects his people to offer themselves and the best they have as a token of their dedication and gratitude.

Noordtzi: the burnt offering ... speaks of complete self-surrender, and the grain offering ... an acknowledgement of absolute dependence.

F. Duane Lindsey: Since the grain offering involved the Israelites' normal food and cooking methods, it may have symbolized the dedication of everyday life to God and perhaps the recognition of God's provision of daily needs. Especially in the form of a first-fruits offering, it constituted a recognition of God's covenant mercies and an affirmation of loyalty to the Lord of the covenant who had brought Israel into their land (**Deut. 26:9-10**).

Gordon Wenham: The cereal offering is a kind of **tribute** from the faithful worshipper to his divine overlord. . . It was an act of dedication and consecration to God as Savior and covenant King. It expressed not only thankfulness but obedience and a willingness to keep the law. Like the burnt offering, the cereal offering was a sacrifice that was repeated often in a worshipper's lifetime.

Jacob Milgrom: The cereal offering in Scripture is of two types. First, it is an accompaniment to animal sacrifices, the required auxiliary of the burnt offering and the well-being offering. “When the Hebrew ate flesh, he ate bread with it and drank wine, and when he offered flesh on the table of his God, it was natural that he should add to it the same concomitants which were necessary to make up a comfortable and generous meal.”

[**W. Robertson Smith**]

The cereal offering could also be offered by itself, in which case, according to the priestly rules, it would be accompanied by oil and, if uncooked, by frankincense (**2:1–3***, **14–16***). If it was cooked, the requirement of frankincense was waived (see at **vv. 4–10***) as a special concession to the poor, for whom even a few grains of this precious spice would have strained their means.

Allen Ross: only a handful of this one was burned. The rest of it became food for the priests. **Wenham** (67) rightly points out that the way this sacrifice was used makes unlikely the rabbinic suggestion that the meal offering was a poor person’s burnt offering.

I. (:1-3) UNCOOKED MEAL OFFERING

A. (:1) God’s People Must Offer Tribute to God from Their Substance

“Now when anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour, and he shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it.”

Constable: A meal offering always followed the official daily burnt offerings (cf. **Exod. 29:39-40; Num. 28:3-6**), and it often accompanied a peace offering (cf. **Num. 15:3-5; 2 Kings 16:13**). It was only offered by itself on two occasions: as a priest's offering (Lev. 7:12), and in the ritual used to determine a wife's faithfulness or unfaithfulness to her husband (**Num. 5:15**). The meal offering was a type of "tribute" from a faithful worshiper to his divine overlord. The Hebrew word *minha'*, here translated "meal offering," also means "tribute" (cf. Gen. 32:13; 1 Kings 10:25; 2 Kings 8:8). . .

The offering itself was the "fruit" (product, "first fruits," "first ripened things") of human labor. . . the contrast intended was primarily between the person of the offerer and his works. The animals offered in the burnt offering were God's creations, but the cake or grain offered in the meal offering was the product of man's labor.

God charged mankind with the responsibility of cultivating the earth (**Gen. 1:29**; cf. **9:4-6**). Man cultivates the ground to provide for the needs of man—his own needs and the needs of other people. The grain or flour, from which the "staff of life" (bread or cake) comes, symbolized what God enabled man to produce. By offering this sacrifice, the offerer was saying that he viewed all the work that he did as "an offering to the Lord."

Peter Pett: The primary significance is one of gratitude and love to Yahweh for His provision of grain and oil, a constant reminder of their dependence on Him for the rain, and of a dedication of all their abilities to Him. As far as the offerer was concerned it was a whole offering to God, even though most became available to the priest for his consumption in the tabernacle (**Leviticus 6:16**). It must be stressed again that there is never any suggestion that Yahweh partook of such offerings. They were quite openly said to be for the priest. Yahweh is simply revealed as pleased with the offering. The frankincense adds to the offering a further token of special gratitude and worship and love, and that is wholly offered to Yahweh (it was inedible). The grain offering was regularly offered with whole burnt offerings (it was part of the daily offerings morning and evening), and sometimes with peace offerings. In those cases no frankincense was required, because the pleasing odour came from the other offerings, demonstrating that the frankincense replaced the offered animal or bird. But it could equally be offered on its own, as could frankincense.

R. K. Harrison: Frankincense was symbolic of holiness and devotion (cf. **Ps. 141:2**), and was one of the gifts presented to the infant Jesus by the wise men (**Matt. 2:11**). Because the sacrificial offering was intended to secure goodwill, the frankincense had to be placed on the ground cereal, in contrast to the procedure required for a sin offering (**5:11**), where the use of frankincense was forbidden.

Warren Wiersbe: The offering had to be accompanied with oil (**Lev. 2:1-2, 4, 6, 15**), either poured on it or mingled with it, a picture of the Holy Spirit of God, who was given to Christ without measure (**John 3:34**).

B. (:2) God's Priests Make Sure the Offering is Pleasing to God

1. Mediation by the Priests

"He shall then bring it to Aaron's sons, the priests;"

2. Measuring Out the Portion Dedicated to the Lord

"and shall take from it his handful of its fine flour and of its oil with all of its frankincense."

3. Memorial Portion Offered Up by Fire

"And the priest shall offer it up in smoke as its memorial portion on the altar, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD."

Robert Coleman: It was burned as a **memorial** – to put God in remembrance (cf. **Acts 10:4**).

C. (:3) God's People Must Support God's Full-Time Ministers

"And the remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons: a thing most holy, of the offerings to the LORD by fire."

Oswald T. Allis: the priest's portion was to be eaten only by male members of his family and in a holy place, i.e. within the court of the Tabernacle (**6:16**; cf. **10:12f**).

II. (:4-7) COOKING OPTIONS

A. (:4) Baked

“Now when you bring an offering of a grain offering baked in an oven, it shall be unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers spread with oil.”

Peter Pett: The oven would be a deep earthenware vessel with a fire in the bottom. The flat cakes would adhere to the side so that the fire could cook them. The wafers would be extra thin, probably round, cakes, with oil spread on them. An alternative was to use a heated flat-plate, or a deep pan with a cover. The former would produce a large flat pancake which would be separated into pieces, with the oil poured on the pieces. The latter would have oil in it, with pieces of milled grain dough dropped in the oil in order to cook them.

R. K. Harrison: The previous section had dealt with an offering of **uncooked grain**, doubtless the most primitive kind of cereal offering, and thus placed appropriately in this chapter. Subsequent forms comprised dough flattened out by hand and then, either on a hot rock or on the inside of a previously heated stove or oven. The **cooked** resultant bread was an offering of flour baked in the manner familiar in Palestine from the Early Bronze Age, and still in use among Arab peasants. Once more, even the poorest of persons could offer a home-made flat cake or a wafer of bread as a sacrifice to God, and come to know him more fully in the breaking of bread (cf. **Luke 24:35**). The unleavened cakes would probably be thicker than the wafers, the latter perhaps corresponding to the unleavened bread used by modern Jews at the feast of the Passover.

B. (:5-6) Grilled

“And if your offering is a grain offering made on the griddle, it shall be of fine flour, unleavened, mixed with oil; you shall break it into bits, and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering.”

Constable: A "griddle" (v. 5) had no lid, whereas a "pan" (v. 7) did.

C. (:7) Fried

“Now if your offering is a grain offering made in a pan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil.”

III. (:8-13) CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A. (:8-10) Ritual Procedure

1. (:8) Presentation to the Priest

“When you bring in the grain offering which is made of these things to the LORD, it shall be presented to the priest and he shall bring it to the altar.”

Kenneth Mathews: The acceptance of the gift by the priest with its memorial portion burned on the sacred altar symbolized the acceptance of the offering by God.

2. (:9) Presentation by the Priest to the Lord

“The priest then shall take up from the grain offering its memorial portion, and shall offer it up in smoke on the altar as an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.”

3. (:10) Portion Reserved for the Support of the Priests

“And the remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons: a thing most holy, of the offerings to the LORD by fire.”

Constable: Humankind, symbolized by the priest, derived most of the benefit of this offering. This was appropriate, since the offering represented man's work for his fellow man. The offerer received none of this sacrifice for himself. This too was obviously appropriate.

B. (:11-12) Prohibition against Leavening Agents of Yeast or Honey

“No grain offering, which you bring to the LORD, shall be made with leaven, for you shall not offer up in smoke any leaven or any honey as an offering by fire to the LORD. As an offering of first fruits, you shall bring them to the LORD, but they shall not ascend for a soothing aroma on the altar.”

Peter Pett: It is now pointed out that the Grain Offering must not contain anything that ferments, neither leaven nor honey. Rather it must positively be seasoned with salt as a preservative. The emphasis is on its unalloyed purity and its continual permanence in that state.

Kenneth Mathews: The prohibition against honey is not explained. Since the context refers to “first-fruits,” it was probably the sweet syrup coming from fruit. Bees’ honey, no doubt, would have been understood as included. It too could corrupt the dough because of its sweetness that leads to fermentation. Still others believe that since honey was a common feature in pagan offerings to the gods, it could lead to confusion with idolatrous offerings. The grain offerings of the Israelites were different in appearance and taste.

Robert Coleman: Only offerings given to the priests (7:13, 14) could contain leaven.

C. (:13) Requirement of Adding Salt – Signifying Eternal Covenant Relationship

“Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.”

Constable: "Salt" symbolized a "covenant," in that nothing in antiquity could destroy salt, including fire and time (cf. Num. 18:19). Salt was also a symbol of friendship.⁴

Adding "salt" to an offering reminded the worshiper that he was in an eternal covenant relationship with his God.

MacArthur: This was included in all of the offerings in **2:4-10, 14-16** since salt was emblematic of permanence of loyalty to the covenant.

IV. (:14-16) CEREAL OFFERING OF FIRST FRUITS

A. (:14) Apportioning Your First Fruits to the Lord

“Also if you bring a grain offering of early ripened things to the LORD, you shall bring fresh heads of grain roasted in the fire, grits of new growth, for the grain offering of your early ripened things.”

Peter Pett: Having forbidden the offering of leaven and honey on the altar, even though they can be offered as first-fruits, he now indicates what first-fruit can be offered on the altar. The early ears of grain, which being green and moist were parched with fire to make them more edible, and bruised by threshing/grinding to remove the chaff and prepare them for eating, were offerable, with oil put on them and frankincense laid on top. The emphasis is on the fact that these are the very earliest ears and they are roasted with fire and de-chaffed, and then offered with oil in an unfinalised but edible state together with the frankincense as an offerable first fruit.

B. (:15) Application of Oil and Incense

“You shall then put oil on it and lay incense on it; it is a grain offering.”

MacArthur: *incense* – A gum resin with a pungent, balsamic odor, used in the tabernacle sacrifices (cf. **Ex 30:34**).

C. (:16) Burning the Memorial Portion to the Lord

“And the priest shall offer up in smoke its memorial portion, part of its grits and its oil with all its incense as an offering by fire to the LORD.”

Perry Yoder: Although this offering is a food offering to God (**Lev 2:16**), there is no pleasing aroma for God’s pleasure. The reason is that while the previous grain offerings have been voluntary, the first-fruits offering is **obligatory**. For example, a first-fruits offering of the harvest is mandated in **Exodus 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26**. As we shall see in **Leviticus 4**, “*pleasing God*,” which occurs frequently with voluntary offerings, occurs only once with obligatory ones.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do you interpret the typology related to Jesus Christ in this offering?
- 2) How do you view your responsibility to support the Lord’s full-time ministers?

3) Does your daily dependence on the Lord for the necessities of life prompt you to express gratitude via tangible offerings?

4) Is it your customary practice to offer up the first fruits to the Lord or rather to scrape together offerings out of leftovers?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Perry Yoder: Why break up the series of rituals involving animal sacrifice (chs. 1 and 3) with the grain offerings (ch. 2)? Animal offerings were often accompanied by a grain offering (see 9:3-4, 15-17; 14:10, 20, 21). Perhaps because of this close association the grain offering is introduced after the first set of animal sacrifices, separating the animal sacrifices in chapter 1 from those in chapter 3.

Constable: Christ fulfilled the requirements of this sacrifice, too (**John 8:29**). The fine flour suggests the perfection of His personality made perfect through suffering. The oil suggests the Holy Spirit's presence in His life, the frankincense the fragrance of His life brought out by the fires of testing, and the salt the incorruptibility of His character. Honey, representing natural sweetness that sours, and leaven, which often represents sin and evil in Scripture, picture what was absent from His nature.

F. Duane Lindsey: The typology of the grain offering pictures the person of Christ and points up the substitutionary value of His death on the cross. This is illustrated in the normal conjunction of the grain offering with the burnt or fellowship offerings. It may be that the fine flour speaks of His perfect, well-balanced humanity, the oil pictures the Holy Spirit who overshadowed Him at the Incarnation, the frankincense points to the moral fragrance of His person, and the absence of yeast (leaven) illustrates His separateness from sin.

Gordon Wenham: The offerer first of all prepared the cereals. If it was fine flour or roast new grain he mixed it with oil and added a little incense (**vv. 1-2, 14-15**). If it was a cooked offering, he baked the flour without yeast, broke up the wafers, and sprinkled them with oil (**vv. 4ff.**). This was then presented to the priest who took a handful of the mixture and all the incense and burned it as a memorial portion. The rest of the offering was given to the priests to eat within the sanctuary: this is implied by **v. 3**, it is a most holy portion of the Lord's food offerings (cf. **6:7-11 [Eng. 14-18]**).

Kenneth Mathews: The Lord's Prayer recognizes that the ultimate source of our daily sustenance is the Lord God: "*Give us ... our daily bread*" (**Matthew 6:11**). By presenting grain offerings, the individual Israelite expressed recognition and thankfulness for God's grace in providing his everyday blessings. Jesus remarked that disciples should not obsess over acquiring the basic needs in life because the Lord will care for them (**Matthew 6:25, 26**). In our affluent times we forget that some societies

struggle for daily food. The grain offering offered by the Israelites was the simplest and most common offering because everyone, even the poorest of the poor, could present a measure of flour. Flour, for example, was acceptable for sin and guilt offerings by the very poor who could not afford animals or even birds (5:11; 14:21). Bread products, not meat, were the common food on the table for most people. Meat was a delicacy enjoyed by royalty and the wealthy. If enjoyed at all by common families, it was reserved for special occasions.

David Thompson: This is the one offering that does not have blood shed. Two main differences between the Burnt Offering and Grain:

- 1) No life was involved;
- 2) Only part was burned by the priest.

THE BELIEVER WHO IS TRULY BECOMING HOLY WILL SENSE A DESIRE TO THANK GOD FOR ALL HE HAS GIVEN AND PROVIDED AND WILL DESIRE TO SACRIFICIALLY GIVE A PORTION OF HIS SUBSTANCE TO GOD AND TO THOSE MINISTERING FOR GOD.

The Grain Offering recognizes God in one's work and accomplishments.

Allen Ross: Theological Ideas –

The main emphasis of an exposition of the meal offering should be its idea of dedication to God. The expectation is that those who have been reconciled to God and have access into his presence will regularly acknowledge that they owe everything to God—dedication follows atonement. This sacrifice gave the thankful Israelite worshiper the way to do this.

The qualifications for the meal offering provide additional theological ideas. That which is given to the LORD must be without corruption or contamination. This speaks of the devotion of those who were loyal to the covenant and wished to show that loyalty by giving to God the best that they had.

The meal offering also shows that God laid claim to the first-fruits as well. It became a natural part of the mentality of Israel that out of whatever God provided the first part was returned to him in gratitude. The devout watched for the first things to grow in the fields so that they could designate them for the LORD. They then brought these first-fruits to the sanctuary.

And finally, what God required from his people was a memorial, a token as it were, that demonstrates the bountiful goodness of God. He gives abundantly to his people; and all he asks from them is some evidence that they recognize this and are thankful. This exchange is at the heart of the covenant relationship between God and his people.

TEXT: Leviticus 3:1-17

TITLE: PEACE OFFERINGS – RECONCILIATION / FELLOWSHIP

BIG IDEA:

**ONGOING ACCESS TO A HOLY GOD FOR FELLOWSHIP AND WORSHIP
PROMPTS PEACE OFFERINGS REFLECTING THE BENEFITS OF OUR
RECONCILED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHER BELIEVERS**

INTRODUCTION:

Constable: The "peace (fellowship [NIV], well-being [NRSV]) offering" is the third voluntary sacrifice of worship. It represented the personal fellowship between God and each Israelite person, and between believing Israelites, that resulted from the relationship that God had established with the redeemed individual (cf. **Rom. 5:1**). Peace and fellowship resulted from redemption, and this act of worship highlighted and celebrated those blessings from God. It did not obtain them. . .

The Israelites could present this offering for any of three possible reasons: as a thanksgiving offering, as a freewill offering, or to fulfill a vow (i.e., a votive offering; cf. **7:12-16**).

David Thompson: . . . when one is becoming whole and sound and complete in one's relationship with God and when one is living in true harmony with God, that one will be continually and willingly going to the place of worship and offering up sacrifices to God for all of the blessings He has given.

Bush: In the Hebrew the import of **prosperity**, of welfare, is prominent to the enjoyment of the petition of which this offering was especially appointed. The idea of grateful acknowledgment therefore is the leading idea which it is calculated to suggest.

Gordon Wenham: The traditional rendering "peace offering" connects *shelāmîm* with Heb. *shālôm*, "peace." Peace in Hebrew means more than the absence of war. True peace means health, prosperity, and peace with God, i.e., salvation. This understanding of the peace offering, accepted by a number of ancient and modern writers, seems to do most justice to the OT evidence.

Jacob Milgrom: The **well-being offering** is, at its core, an offering of thankfulness. Although it takes on three unique forms, discussed below, its overarching purpose is to provide a ritual by which the Israelites could acknowledge the miracles of their lives and express gratitude for them. . .

The main function of all the well-being offerings is to provide meat for the table. Except for kings and aristocrats, meat was eaten only on rare occasions, usually surrounding a celebration. Because a whole animal was probably too much for the

nuclear family, it had to be a household or clan celebration. All joyous celebrations would have been marked by a well-being offering, the joyous sacrifice par excellence.

R. K. Harrison: The sacrifice (*zebah*) of well-being indicates conscious social communion, in which what is deficient in the offerer will be remedied as he comes in faith and penitence to God, the healer and restorer (cf. **Exod. 15:26; Ps. 103:3**). The ritual follows closely the pattern of the burnt offering.

Allen Ross: The peace offering was a shared meal in which the offerer celebrated with those assembled in the sanctuary the benefits of a peaceful relationship with God. It was a joyous time of feasting in the presence of God, made possible by blood atonement and occasioned by blessings from God.

This sacrifice was probably one of the most anticipated occasions of all the rituals because of its nature as a communal meal—it was a great feast. After performing the required ritual, the offering was apportioned as follows: the fat and the inner parts went to God to be burned on the altar, the right shoulder and the right thigh were given to the priest, and the rest was eaten by everyone present in the courtyard. This ritual was unique in that the people received part of this sacrifice as a communal meal. . .

Those who surrender their hearts to God and come before him on the basis of the shed blood of the sacrifice may celebrate being at peace with God (in a communal meal).

I. (:1-5) PEACE OFFERING OF CATTLE

A. (:1) Presentation of Offering Based on Selection Criteria

*“Now if his offering is a sacrifice of peace offerings,
if he is going to offer out of the herd, whether male or female,
he shall offer it without defect before the LORD.”*

Gordon Wenham: Female as well as male animals could be used in the peace offering. For the burnt offering only males were acceptable. The use of female animals in the peace offering shows that this was regarded as a less important sacrifice than the burnt offering.

B. (:2) Sacrifice of the Offering and Sprinkling of Blood

*“And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and slay it at the doorway
of the tent of meeting,
and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall sprinkle the blood around on the altar.”*

F. Duane Lindsey: In the case of the fellowship offering the laying on of his hand probably included the worshiper's explanation of why he was bringing the offering, whether an acknowledgment of declarative praise in answer to prayer, or the testimony of the fulfillment of a vow, or a freewill thanksgiving at harvest time, and so on.

C. (:3-4) Guts of the Offering

“And from the sacrifice of the peace offerings, he shall present an offering by fire to the LORD, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, 4 and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys.”

Jacob Milgrom: “Suet” refers to the layers of fat beneath the surface of the animal’s skin and around its organs that can be peeled off, in contrast to the fat that is inextricably entwined in the musculature. It was the exclusive reserve for the Deity and was forbidden for private use. That it was considered the choicest of the animal’s portions is demonstrated by its metaphoric use; for example, “*the suet* [erroneously ‘fat’] *of the land*” (**Gen 45:18***), “*the suet of wheat*” (**Deut 32:14***), where it denotes “the best.”

R. K. Harrison: While the lay worshipper carries out certain duties such as killing the animal, it is the priest’s responsibility to dash the blood against the sacrificial altar. After this had been done, the animal was cut into pieces, some of which were offered subsequently on the altar. No mention is made of the skinning process, but this was evidently part of the ritual (cf. **1:6**), since the regulations in **7:15–36** provided for peace offerings to be eaten by the worshippers, with certain portions being reserved for the priests. In this respect the well-being offering differed from the burnt offering, which was consumed completely on the altar.

Allen Ross: Why the viscera was burned on the altar is not explained in the text and so we can only suggest an explanation. Since the kidneys and other internal organs represented the seat of the emotions (i.e. the will and other related emotional instincts), by giving these internal parts of the sacrificial animal, offerers were in essence surrendering their own deepest emotions and intentions. This makes good sense because the peace offering came at very emotional times—praises, vows, and freewill offerings. In this part of the ritual, then, offerers were symbolically surrendering themselves—their innermost beings—to the LORD.

D. (:5) Effect of the Offering

“Then Aaron's sons shall offer it up in smoke on the altar on the burnt offering, which is on the wood that is on the fire; it is an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.”

Robert Vasholz: Moses states that the worshipper must bring his offering with his own hands (**Lev. 7:30**). While this applies to all offerings by fire, it is distinctly noted with the peace offering. It highlights the worshipper’s personal participation in the ritual. It is the only offering eaten, at least in part, by God, the priest and the worshipper. The worshipper must lean his hand on the head of the offering and kill the sacrifice at the doorway, just as he did with the burnt offering, to show his dependence on the sacrifice. The priest is commanded to sprinkle the blood around the altar and offer selected parts on the altar as a pleasing aroma. Only a priest is permitted to do so (**Lev. 1:8, 9, 12, 13, 17; 2:1, 9, 10, 16**).

Peter Pett: In the Law it is always made clear that the offerings, if eaten, are eaten either by the priests or the people. (Consider also the shewbread and see **Exodus 24:9-11**). God participates by receiving the *‘pleasing odour’*. Thus does He fellowship with His people through the peace offering, fellowshiping with them in their meal but not eating of it, an indication of friendly intentions and love and yet of separateness and non-earthiness. As we have seen this is made clear by the inclusion of the inedible frankincense in the grain offering. It was the pleasing odour not the actual food that came up to Yahweh. The food was consumed by the fire and turned into a pleasing odour. (In other words God accepted it spiritually).

II. (:6-11) PEACE OFFERING OF SHEEP

A. (:6) Presentation of Offering Based on Selection Criteria

“But if his offering for a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD is from the flock, he shall offer it, male or female, without defect.”

B. (:7-8) Sacrifice of the Offering and Sprinkling of Blood

“If he is going to offer a lamb for his offering, then he shall offer it before the LORD, 8 and he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering, and slay it before the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar.”

C. (:9-10) Guts of the Offering

“And from the sacrifice of peace offerings he shall bring as an offering by fire to the LORD, its fat, the entire fat tail which he shall remove close to the backbone, and the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, 10 and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys.”

D. (:11) Effect of the Offering

“Then the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar, as food, an offering by fire to the LORD.”

MacArthur: The sacrifice was intended to symbolize a meal between God and the one offering it, where peace and friendship were epitomized by sharing that meal together.

III. (:12-17) PEACE OFFERING OF GOATS

A. Presentation of Offering Based on Selection Criteria

[this part was skipped over – assumed from the earlier paragraphs]

Bush: Birds were not acceptable as peace offerings, however, perhaps because their smaller size was not conducive to dividing them among God, the priest, and the offerer; or that they did not have enough fat to burn on the altar.

B. (:12-13) Sacrifice of the Offering and Sprinkling of Blood

“Moreover, if his offering is a goat, then he shall offer it before the LORD, 13 and he shall lay his hand on its head and slay it before the tent of meeting; and the sons of Aaron shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar.”

C. (:14-15) Guts of the Offering

“And from it he shall present his offering as an offering by fire to the LORD, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, 15 and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys.”

D. (:16a) Effect of the Offering

“And the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar as food, an offering by fire for a soothing aroma;”

E. (:16b-17) Postscript Note

*“all fat is the LORD's.
It is a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you shall not eat any fat or any blood.”*

Robert Vasholz: Moses reminds Israel that these precepts are perpetual statutes (**Lev. 3:17**). That means they were to be practiced as long as the ancient nation of Israel was in a covenantal relationship with God constituted by Mosaic Law. The Book of Leviticus will announce ten additional perpetual statutes, the majority of which follow with throughout your generations. It signals the necessity of faithfully passing down the laws for future generations and the strongest motivation for writing them down and transmitting them faithfully.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why were the sheep and goat offerings broken out in separate paragraphs here?
- 2) Why is it so important to guard against anything that would disrupt the peace and fellowship of the local church?
- 3) What ceremonial laws imposed upon the Israelites also had some type of corresponding hygienic benefit?
- 4) Should our observance of communion sometimes be in conjunction with some type of pot luck common meal sharing as seems to be the case in the Book of Corinthians?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kenneth Mathews: The procedure closely resembled the **burnt offering**. The worshipper placed his hand on the victim, signifying the transference of his sin to the animal. Afterward the Israelite slew the animal, and the priests retrieved the blood, which they cast against the sides of the altar. The purpose of casting the blood against the altar was to show that the life of the animal belonged to the Lord. Moreover, the worshipper removed the kidneys and liver from the animal's carcass and especially the fat, and the priest burned them up on the altar. By burning up the organs and fat on the altar, the priest indicated that these portions belonged to the Lord exclusively. The fat was important due to its association with the best portion of an animal and its symbolic value indicating the robust power of the animal (**Genesis 4:4; 2 Samuel 1:22**). The kidneys and the liver also were prized portions since they were vital to sustaining life (**Job 16:13; Proverbs 7:23**). The kidneys were seen as the seat of the emotions, much like we refer to the heart as the center of feelings (**Psalms 73:21**). The liver is the largest and heaviest internal organ in the human body; the ancients practiced divination with animal livers, known as hepatomancy. This form of pagan sorcery was prohibited in Israel (**Deuteronomy 18:10–12**). By giving the liver to the Lord by fire, the Israelite worshipper showed his exclusive commitment to the Lord. He trusted in the word of the Lord as revealed to Moses for his life's direction, not in the world of the magical arts.

The entrails and pieces of the animal were placed by the priest on top of the daily burnt offering, which had already burned and was left smoldering on the altar. That the burnt offering preceded the peace offering conveyed to the worshipper that the basis for his fellowship with God was the atonement and forgiveness of sin that the burnt offering had represented (**3:5**; cf. **1:9; 6:12**). This was anticipatory of the Christian fellowship we enjoy with God and the church; our fellowship is founded on the atoning work of Jesus Christ (**Romans 5:1**). The heart of Christian fellowship is not a social event at the church where the folks enjoy their coffee and pastries. Christian fellowship is a spiritual dynamic that can only be experienced by those who have been spiritually regenerated. We are enabled to love all people, but the call to Christian love among the brothers and sisters of faith is of a higher order that calls for greater sacrifice (**Philemon 5, 7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 14, 16**).

Fellowship with the Lord (**3:6–15**). The peace offering also was symbolic of a shared meal with the Lord. Because the priest and the worshipper with his family and guests all partook of the animal's meat, it indicated that God had provided a means to have fellowship with his people. This was the desire of the Lord in forming a relationship with and in redeeming his people. The idea of a shared meal is shown by two aspects of the passage. First, the text repeatedly says that the offering was a "*food offering*" given to the Lord (**vv. 3, 5, 9, 11, 14, 16**). This did not mean that the Hebrews believed that the Lord actually consumed the food from the altar. The nations believed that the animal sacrifices and drink libations fed the gods and won their favorable response. The Scriptures show otherwise, for the Israelites recognized that their God transcended earthly and human institutions (**1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 50:12, 13**). The prophets condemned the false notion that God could be manipulated through food offerings.

“Food offering” is a figure of speech, alluding to the fellowship of the worshipper with the Lord in the setting of a shared meal. The importance of a shared meal has always pointed to a covenant loyalty and agreement between two parties. An example is the covenant meal shared by Jacob and his uncle Laban who formed a non-aggression pact (**Genesis 31:51–54**).

Robert Vasholz: Sitting down and eating with one another meant attachment, bonding. That meaning was incorporated in the Christian communion. Participation in the peace offering is illustrated in **1 Corinthians 10:17**: *Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf* (emphasis mine). This seems to have been universally understood in the ancient world. In all levels of both the Greek and Roman societies, communion with the gods and worshippers was demonstrated by eating a common sacrifice. Food offered on pagan altars was usually divided into three parts: one was burned upon an altar, a second given to the priest and the third to the laity.

Gordon Wenham: Very often the peace offering is associated with occasions when the covenant was emphasized (e.g., **Exod. 24:5**; **Deut. 27:7**; **1 K. 8:63**). Here it is difficult to be sure which aspect of the sacrifice was uppermost in the worshippers’ minds. It could have been pure gratitude for God’s grace in choosing the nation to be God’s people. It could have been linked with their vows to keep the covenant (cf. **Exod. 24:7**; **Deut. 27**). Or it could be a confession of God’s mercy and their own sinfulness of which the laws had reminded them, and a prayer for divine strength to keep them in the future. These different aspects of the peace offering are not mutually exclusive and could be presupposed in all these covenant ceremonies. . .

More directly related to the OT peace offering is the Lord’s supper. At the last supper Jesus referred to the cup of wine as “*the new covenant in my blood*” (**1 Cor. 11:25**). In so doing he alluded to the blood of the old covenant (**Exod. 24:8**). When the Sinai Covenant had been agreed to by the people, Moses took the blood of the burnt offerings and peace offerings and threw it over the people and said, “*Here is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you.*” The last supper was more like the peace offering than a burnt offering in that the peace offering and the last supper were both meals, while the burnt offering never was. Christ’s death on the cross is a closer parallel to the burnt offering. His sharing of his body and blood with his disciples forms the closer parallel to the peace offering.

Mark Rooker: This same sequence of burnt offering followed by fellowship offering occurs in **Lev 6:5b**. The order, burnt offering followed by fellowship offering, is theologically significant. It indicates that the atonement that resulted from the burnt offering was essential before the fellowship offering, which indicates fellowship with God could be enjoyed. This correlates to New Testament theology, where the death of Christ for our sins is the basis for sinners to have relationship and hence fellowship with God. As was the case with the burnt offering, the fellowship offering is likewise described as “*an aroma pleasing to the LORD*” (**3:5b**).

Wiersbe: In the East, to eat with people is to make them your friends and allies. It means the end of hostilities, as with Jacob and his father-in-law Laban (**Gen. 31:54**), or the sealing of friendship, as with Israel and Jethro and his people (**Ex. 18:12**). In the church today, the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, is a simple meal that shows the unity of God's family (**1 Cor. 10:16-18; 11:18-34**). That's why it's called "the Communion."

The peace offering meal, however, meant more than the enjoyment of good food and fellowship with loved ones. It was also an expression of joyful thanksgiving that the worshiper was at peace with God and in communion with God.

TEXT: Leviticus 4:1-35

TITLE: *SIN OFFERINGS FOR INADVERTENT SINS -- PURIFICATION*

BIG IDEA:

**ONGOING ACCESS TO A HOLY GOD FOR FELLOWSHIP AND WORSHIP
PROMPTS OFFERINGS FOR INADVERTENT SINS EMPHASIZING THE
NEED FOR CLEANSING AND PURIFICATION**

INTRODUCTION:

Now we are moving from the discussion of the soothing aroma offerings (the first 3 sacrifices) to the non-soothing aroma offerings. It is very difficult to parse out the distinctions in these different offerings. They all had many aspects in common. Certainly there was a sin aspect involved in them all – thus some touchpoint for atonement and forgiveness of sins as well as thankfulness for God’s grace and blessings. Here there seems to be a special emphasis on cleansing and purification.

Allen Ross: If people sinned unintentionally, they sacrificed an appropriate animal for a purification offering, and the priest applied the blood at the appropriate place, burned the inner parts and fat to the LORD, and in some cases burned the remaining parts outside the camp in order to make atonement so that there might be forgiveness.

Perry Yoder: When people become aware of their accidental trespass, they must perform the appropriate ritual for forgiveness. The ritual and the sacrifice to be offered depends on the status of the person committing the sin and whoever is affected by the sin, whether the whole community or a single individual. **Chapter 4** begins with the gravest sin, one committed by the high priest, which leads the entire community astray, and it ends with the inadvertent sin of a single common person. . .

The one who sinned inadvertently did not intend to transgress a negative command. In addition, not only was there no intention to transgress, but there also was no consciousness that a prohibition had been broken. Not carrying out a positive command, not acting as you should, is covered in the next ritual series (**ch. 5**).

Kenneth Mathews: The sacrificial system that is detailed in the book of Leviticus made an accommodation for the unavoidable human condition of sin. The sin offering was God’s gracious provision for the guilty person by which his or her sin was purged and by which he or she received divine forgiveness. The corruption of human sin polluted the tent and required a cleansing. The offering should be thought of as an offering of purification. But the sacrifice of an animal only purged the corruption of the outer person, the body, the book of Hebrews tells us (**9:13, 14**). What was needed to purge the malignancy of the inner person, the soul? We will discover that the Lord has made a sure and eternal means of forgiveness for each one of us through the death of Jesus Christ, whose sinless life made it possible for our iniquities to be purged from our souls.

F. Duane Lindsey: The general act of sin which occasioned a sin offering was qualified in two respects: it was done “*unintentionally*,” and it was against “*any of the Lord’s commands*” (it could include sins of omission as well as commission; cf. **Num. 15:30**, lit., “with a high hand”) – that is, sin with a set purpose of being disobedient to God – no sacrifice could be brought by an individual. . .

The **structure** of the law of the sin offering (i.e., the primary ritual portion, **Lev. 4**; cf. **6:24-30**) is divided according to the **status** of the offerer . . . Also the **variety** of acceptable sacrifices is presented in descending order of **value** – a bull for the priest (**4:3**) or nation (**v. 14**), a male goat for a tribal leader (**vv. 22-23**), a female goat (**v. 28**) or lamb (**v. 32**) for a common person, two birds for a poor person (**5:7**), and even an offering of flour for the very poor (**5:11-13**). The difference in sacrifices did not depend on the nature of the sin but on the social and/or economic status of the sinner. The supplementary information in **chapter 5** regards certain offenses requiring the sin offering (**5:1-6**) and concessions for the poor (**5:7-13**).

(:1-2) CONTEXT FOR SIN OFFERINGS FOR INADVERTENT SINS

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, If a person sins unintentionally in any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and commits any of them,”

Mark Rooker: Given the opening words of **Leviticus 4**, “*The LORD said to Moses*,” it is clear that a **new section** is being introduced. The last time the text had indicated that the Lord was beginning to address Moses occurred in **Lev 1:1** (“*The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him*”). This division may indicate that the sacrifices about to be discussed, that of the sin and guilt offerings, are of distinct nature from the previous offerings, the burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings. The difference may be due to the fact that the sin and guilt offering are to be made as a consequence to a certain offense, while the offerings of **Leviticus 1–3** could be viewed as voluntary. Whereas the main issue in the burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings was the **proper procedure** to be followed, the main issue in the discussion in the sin and guilt offerings is the **occasion** that would require these sacrifices. . .

Though the altar would be in need of purification because it was contaminated by sin (in the same way that Israel's sin contaminates the land), the overall objective is **divine forgiveness** of the Israelites in **Lev 4:1–5:13**.

Gordon Wenham: The most important feature of this rite is the sprinkling of the blood on the altar or the veil. Where the blood was sprinkled depended on the social status of the offerer. . . **Purification** is the main element in the purification sacrifice. Sin not only angers God and deprives him of his due, it also makes his sanctuary **unclean**. A holy God cannot dwell amid uncleanness. The purification offering purifies the place of worship, so that God may be present among his people. This interpretation of the term

seems to be compatible with its root meaning, and to explain the rituals of blood sprinkling peculiar to it. . .

The purification offering dealt with the **pollution caused by sin**. If sin polluted the land, it defiled particularly the house where God dwelt. The seriousness of pollution depended on the **seriousness of the sin**, which in turn related to the **status of the sinner**. If a private citizen sinned, his action polluted the sanctuary only to a limited extent. Therefore the blood of the purification offering was only smeared on the horns of the altar of burnt sacrifice. If, however, the whole nation sinned or the holiest member of the nation, the high priest, sinned, this was more serious. The blood had to be taken inside the tabernacle and sprinkled on the veil and the altar of incense. Finally over the period of a year the sins of the nation could accumulate to such an extent that they polluted even the holy of holies, where God dwelt. If he was to continue to dwell among his people, this too had to be cleansed in the annual day of atonement ceremony (see **Lev. 16**).

Allen Ross: The sins that could be expiated through the purification offering were those done inadvertently (*bišgāgā*). Parallel expressions help clarify that the sins described by this word largely result from either negligence or ignorance (**Milgrom**, 228). The statement in **5:17** that the sinner did not know (*lō 'yāda'*) about the sin indicates that these sins were not premeditated or intentional. The guilty party realized only later that it was sin. **Leviticus 4:13** says that such sin was hidden from the person's eyes. In the context of the law this is a "*sin of ignorance*" (**Lev. 4**), "*sin of carelessness*" (**5:4**), or sin without defiance (**Num. 15:30**). In other words, these were routine sins and overlooked failures that through various means came to a person's attention. When conviction gripped one's conscience, then a purification offering was made. The only prerequisites for making this offering were knowledge of the sin and remorse for it.

I. (:3-21) REMEDY = BLOOD SPRINKLED IN THE HOLY PLACE

A. (:3-12) Sin Offering for the Anointed Priest

"if the anointed priest sins so as to bring guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD a bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. 4 And he shall bring the bull to the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, and he shall lay his hand on the head of the bull, and slay the bull before the LORD. 5 Then the anointed priest is to take some of the blood of the bull and bring it to the tent of meeting, 6 and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the LORD, in front of the veil of the sanctuary. 7 The priest shall also put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense which is before the LORD in the tent of meeting; and all the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering which is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 8 And he shall remove from it all the fat of the bull of the sin offering: the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat which is on the entrails, 9 and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys 10 (just as it is removed from the ox of the sacrifice of peace

offerings), and the priest is to offer them up in smoke on the altar of burnt offering. 11 But the hide of the bull and all its flesh with its head and its legs and its entrails and its refuse, 12 that is, all the rest of the bull, he is to bring out to a clean place outside the camp where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned.”

Gordon Wenham: It may be noted that the very first paragraph lacks the normal closing phrase, “*the priest shall make atonement ... and he shall be forgiven.*” This is because the priest is the worshipper and he therefore cannot pronounce his own forgiveness. . .

Most commentators, however, believe that only the **high priest** is meant, i.e., Aaron. In favor of this **Num. 35:25** does seem to regard the unction of the high priest as something special. So “*the anointed priest*” would most naturally refer to the high priest, though the more common technical term is “*the great priest*” (**Lev. 21:10**, etc.).

Perry Yoder: The application of blood to these objects effects a cleansing for them and their areas, restoring their purity. The following reason is given explicitly for the purification rituals: so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst (**Lev 15:31b** NRSV). Sin can defile holy areas and objects: for by sacrificing his children to Molek, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name (Lev 20:3; NRSV, Molech). Once purified, the tabernacle and its furniture can continue to serve their proper function [*The Tabernacle*, p. 317].

John Calvin: The more illustrious was his dignity, the more diligently and zealously ought his life to be confirmed to the model of holiness.

John Hartley: Ritual procedure (vv 4–12)

- (1) Presentation of a bull (v 4a)
- (2) Laying on of hands (v 4b α)
- (3) Slaughter (v 4b β)
- (4) Handling of the blood (vv 5–7)
- (5) Burning of the fat (vv 8–10)
- (6) Disposal of the remainder (vv 11–12)

Kenneth Mathews: In addition to the costly animal, the extent of the priest’s sin required special handling of the animal’s blood. The priest retrieved some of the blood of the slain animal, probably captured in a vessel, and transported the blood inside the sacred tent itself. The high altar was located in the outer court, but the Tent of Meeting housed the two most sacred areas—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. This was a dramatic departure from the ritual of the sin offering for the ordinary Israelite person. The blood in that case was smeared on the high altar in the outer courtyard. But by requiring the blood inside the tent’s Holy Place, the Law indicated that the priest’s offense was so penetrating that it was necessary to cleanse the tent itself of sin. In other words, the sin of the priest contaminated the sacred tent as well as the outer altar. Why did the effect of the priest’s sin reach beyond the altar to inside the tent? Because the priests alone could enter into the tent to carry out the duties of mediation. The average

person was not allowed into the tent. The tent represented the very presence of God, and there had to be cleansing for the place where the priests carried out their exclusive duties.

B. (:13-21) Sin Offering for the Congregation

“Now if the whole congregation of Israel commits error, and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly, and they commit any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and they become guilty; 14 when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering, and bring it before the tent of meeting. 15 Then the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be slain before the LORD. 16 Then the anointed priest is to bring some of the blood of the bull to the tent of meeting; 17 and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD, in front of the veil. 18 And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar which is before the LORD in the tent of meeting; and all the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering which is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 19 And he shall remove all its fat from it and offer it up in smoke on the altar. 20 He shall also do with the bull just as he did with the bull of the sin offering; thus he shall do with it. So the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. 21 Then he is to bring out the bull to a place outside the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.”

David Thompson: The word “*congregation*” is the Hebrew word “*hethah*” which refers to the people of the congregation who have legal responsibilities. The word “*assembly*” is the word “*Kahal*” which refers to all people. So the emphasis here is on leaders within the body who sin. They are not priests, but they are leaders.

Gordon Wenham: If the anointed priest was offering the purification offering, the blood was sprinkled seven times on the veil of the sanctuary, that is, the curtain acting as the door into the holy of holies, the innermost part of the tabernacle. A little blood was also smeared on the horns of the incense altar that stood in front of the veil. These rites took place in the second most holy part of the tabernacle, the holy place, which only priests were allowed to enter.

If rulers or one of the common people offered a purification offering, the blood was not taken inside the tent of meeting but was smeared on the horns of the large altar of burnt offering that stood in the open court (vv. 22ff.). . .

Traditional Jewish commentators asserted that the **congregation** refers to the supreme court of justice in ancient Israel, the Sanhedrin. In the OT, however, “*congregation*” usually has a much broader meaning than this; sometimes indeed it seems to be coextensive with the whole nation (**Exod. 12:3, 6; 17:1; Num. 20:1, 2**). This has led most Christian commentators to regard “*congregation*” and “*assembly*” as interchangeable terms, meaning a large group, or gathering of people.

The truth appears to lie somewhere between these extremes. “The congregation is not the whole people, but **the people represented by its heads.**” The congregation was a clearly defined group of people in ancient Israel with representative and legal functions. From time to time we find the congregation acting in a legal capacity, especially in capital cases (**Num. 15:33ff.; 27:2; 35:12, 24f.**). It is a group alongside Moses and Aaron which comes into prominence in times of leadership crisis (**Exod. 16:1, 2, 9; Num. 8:20; chs. 13–14, 16**). Probably it was a large body, a sort of parliament with representative and judicial functions. It is tempting to see in **Num. 1:2; 14:29** a definition of the “congregation,” i.e., “all able-bodied men over the age of twenty.” Since the “congregation” contained representatives of every family in Israel, it is easy to see why it could be used occasionally to designate the whole nation. . .

It is preferable to see the fault in **13ff.** as a corporate sin of the leaders of Israel.

Perry Yoder: From this context it seems that persons come to knowledge in two ways: on their own or when they are informed by another.

Mark Rooker: Of paramount importance is the additional statement in **4:20** that atonement and forgiveness are the desired effects of the sin offering. It is safe to assume that though this statement is absent from the paragraph regarding the sin offering of the high priest, it was also true of that offering as well.

An important terminological addition is the occurrence of the root. The root (“*forgiveness*”) occurs for the first time in Leviticus in **4:20**. This is the unique term for forgiveness in the Old Testament, and it has only God as its subject. Many relate the nontheological, concrete meaning of the root to the Akkadian cognate, which has the meaning “*to wash, sprinkle.*” Theologically this root would convey the notion that forgiveness is equivalent to having sins “*washed away.*” The fact that only God is the subject and author of forgiveness explains the scribes' reaction to Jesus' announcement that the sins of the paralytic had been forgiven (**Mark 2:7**). Jesus' pronouncement was in fact a claim to be equal with God.

John Hartley: Ritual procedure (vv 14b–21a)

- (1) Action of the assembly (**vv 14b–15b**)
 - (a) Presentation of a bull (**v 14b**)
 - (b) Laying on of hands (**v 15a**)
 - (c) Slaughter (**v 15b**)
- (2) Action of the priest (**vv 16–21a**)
 - (a) Procedural instruction (**vv 16–20a**)
 - (i) Handling of the blood (**vv 16–18**)
 - (ii) Burning of the fat (**v 19**)
 - (iii) Treatment similar to first bull (**v 20a**)
 - (b) Statement of expiation and forgiveness (**v 20b**)
 - (c) Disposal of the rest (**v 21a**)

II. (4:22-35) REMEDY = BLOOD SMEARED ON THE BRAZEN ALTAR

A. (:22-26) Sin Offering for the Tribal Leader / Ruler

“When a leader sins and unintentionally does any one of all the things which the LORD God has commanded not to be done, and he becomes guilty, 23 if his sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a male without defect. 24 And he shall lay his hand on the head of the male goat, and slay it in the place where they slay the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering. 25 Then the priest is to take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering. 26 And all its fat he shall offer up in smoke on the altar as in the case of the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him in regard to his sin, and he shall be forgiven.”

Gordon Wenham: Tribal leader (*nāśî*) covers a variety of officers in ancient Israel. Its root meaning is “*lifted up*”; literally it means someone raised over the people. Most often it refers to the heads of tribes (e.g., **Num. 2:3ff.**), but it may also refer to the head of small groups within a tribe (e.g., **Num. 3:24, 30**) and even to the head of the nation (**1 K. 11:34; Ezek. 12:10**). It is a term particularly associated with the tribal organization of early Israel. With the establishment of the monarchy it seems to have fallen out of use, until Ezekiel revived it. He commonly designates the king of the restored Israel as “*tribal leader*” (e.g., **Ezek. 44:3; 45:7, 22**, etc.).

B. (:27-35) Sin Offering for the Ordinary Israelite

1. (:27-31) Offering a Goat

“Now if anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and becomes guilty, 28 if his sin, which he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without defect, for his sin which he has committed. 29 And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and slay the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering. 30 And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and all the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. 31 Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat was removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar for a soothing aroma to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.”

2. (:32-35) Offering a Lamb

“But if he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring it, a female without defect. 33 And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and slay it for a sin offering in the place where they slay the burnt offering. 34 And the priest is to take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt

offering; and all the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. 35 Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offerings, and the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar, on the offerings by fire to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him in regard to his sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How did people become aware of their inadvertent sins? Are we responsible to help others become aware of their blind spots?
- 2) What impact do the sins of spiritual leaders have on their flock?
- 3) How does the cross of Jesus Christ provide much more of a leveling function than the gradations of offerings under the OT economy based on social and economic status of the person sinning?
- 4) Why is the carcass of the bull burned outside of the camp?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gordon Wenham: **Leviticus 4–5** covers more general situations in which the purification offering was required. These situations fall into two main categories, of which the first includes unwitting or inadvertent sins, *bishgāgāh* (**4:2**; cf. **vv. 13, 22, 27**), and the second sins of omission (**5:1–4**). Other passages explain more clearly what was meant by inadvertence. **Num. 15:27ff.** contrasts unwitting sin with sinning “*with a high hand*” (**v. 30**), i.e., blatantly or deliberately. The sinner who sins “*with a high hand*” will not be forgiven, but cut off, whereas one who sins inadvertently can offer sacrifice and enjoy forgiveness. **Verses 32–35** apparently give an example of a highhanded sin, gathering sticks on the sabbath, for the convicted man is put to death for it. To remind them to observe the commandments the Israelites must attach tassels to their clothes so that they are not led astray by sinful whims (**Num. 15:37–41**).

Kenneth Mathews: We must address another aspect of the passage as readers of the New Testament, because we are told in the New Testament that sins could not be forgiven by “*the blood of bulls and goats*” (**Hebrews 10:4**). But in Leviticus we are told that forgiveness was granted. The necessity of repeatedly presenting the sin offering showed, however, that the ritual was not totally effective for purging the stain of sin. Moreover, the sin offering was only for the unintentional sins that polluted the house of God and condemned the wrongdoer; there was no specific ritual designated

for intentional sins of rebellion (**Numbers 15:27–31**). The sin offering of an animal was only provisional until an eternal and fully effective atonement could be made. This fully perfect atonement was supplied by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The animal ritual was only effective for cleansing the outer person (**Hebrews 9:13, 14**), but the cleansing provided by the blood of Christ purged the inner person. His death was once, and the atonement achieved was eternal, never to be repeated out of necessity (**Hebrews 7:27; 9:28; 10:2, 10**). It was the blood of the eternal Son of God whose perfect life and obedience made him alone a worthy substitute for the sins of all who repent and call upon his name for salvation. The Apostle Paul explained that the blood of Christ made complete atonement (**Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:5**), for Jesus was our perfect sin offering (**Romans 8:3; Hebrews 13:12**). As the priest took the blood of the animal into the earthly tent to purge the tent of its impurities and restore its holiness, the Lord Jesus took his own precious blood into the heavenly tent before the presence of God to cleanse our sin, making us holy in God's sight forevermore (**Hebrews 9:12; 10:10, 14**). By this unsurpassed act of sacrificial love, the Lord became our sin offering whereby we who believe have received the righteousness of Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:21**), never to be condemned again (**Romans 8:1**).

Robert Vasholz: When one brought a sin offering, he confessed his sin. An example of the confession of sin goes back to **Genesis 3:8–13; 4:9**. Moses, who confessed his people's sins and interceded for them, modeled this practice. The Lord forgave and forgot (**Exod. 32:11–14**). Confession to the god(s) in the ancient Near East was widely practiced. The verb used for confess (*√ydh*) suggests the sin is to be declared openly.⁸ The verb is in a reflexive-iterative stem suggesting that the one who brings a sin offering must himself confess his sin passionately. The sin offering provided both forgiveness and cleansing (**Lev. 4:26, 31, 35**). Forgiveness and cleansing were the only way for one to live in the presence of God.

TEXT: Leviticus 5:1-13

TITLE: SIN OFFERINGS FOR SINS OF OMISSION

BIG IDEA:

**ONGOING ACCESS TO A HOLY GOD FOR FELLOWSHIP AND WORSHIP
PROMPTS OFFERINGS FOR SINS OF OMISSION EMPHASIZING THE
NEED FOR CLEANSING AND PURIFICATION**

INTRODUCTION:

This is a continuation of **chapter 4** in light of the opening words of **4:1**. Now it takes up some specific case studies of sins of omission as well as providing remedies based on affordability for different economic and social classes. The importance of confession of sin is stressed here for the first time.

Allen Ross: **Leviticus 5** has sufficient material to warrant treating it as a separate exposition, if the expositor has enough time to do so. And it is important to take time with this chapter, because the ideas here are so often omitted or passed over lightly in messages dealing with sin or reparation. The exposition in this case can treat the passage in its order according to its structure. . .

Anyone who becomes aware of obligations left undone or impure contacts left unpurified must make confession and find forgiveness through God's provision of atonement.

Douglas Van Dorn: The difference between **Leviticus 4** and our passage now starts with the difference between sinning without knowledge, which would be the actual committing of a violation vs. sins of omission. What is a **sin of omission**? An omission is something that is missing. A sin of omission would therefore be the lack of doing something you were supposed to do. James says, "*Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin*" (**Jas 4:17**). This is a sin of omission.

I. (:1-4) CASE STUDIES OF TYPES OF VIOLATIONS

A. (:1) Witness Violations

"Now if a person sins, after he hears a public adjuration to testify, when he is a witness, whether he has seen or otherwise known, if he does not tell it, then he will bear his guilt."

David Guzik: It wasn't enough to merely not tell lies. God also required His people to make the truth known, so even if one merely *knew about a lie*, they were responsible to make the truth known.

R. K. Harrison: Being a true and faithful witness was an important consideration under the old covenant (cf. **Exod. 20:16**), since individual integrity and communal justice depended so much upon it.

Allen Ross: The first case deals with withholding evidence. The text indicates that any person (*nepeš*) who was an eyewitness or gained information should step forward and provide it to the magistrates. The implication is that some time has passed since the crime, and the witnesses have not come forward, even though they were bound by oath to do so. The “*voice of an oath*” (*qôl ’âlâ*) is the language of court and refers to giving testimony in a legal setting. Public adjuration also involved a curse, because with the call for witnesses, a curse was included on anyone failing to report.

B. (:2-3) Cleanliness Violations

1. (:2) Regarding Touching Unclean Animals

“Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of unclean cattle, or a carcass of unclean swarming things, though it is hidden from him, and he is unclean, then he will be guilty.”

Douglas Van Dorn: What he is suggesting here is that the omission in examples 2-3 are that the person should have undergone a ritual bath to remove the impurity and be cleansed (see **Lev 11:24-28, 39- 40; 22:4-7**). But they forgot about it and thus remain ritually unclean. This could result in serious contamination of the tabernacle precincts, should he decide to go there while in this unclean state.

R. K. Harrison: One of the greatest spiritual challenges for the Christian in the complexity of contemporary social life is to keep himself unspotted from the world (**Jas 1:27 av**).

R. Laird Harris: The laws of cleanness (**vv. 2-3**) were partly for public health (cf. **chs. 11-15**), but they were given sanction in the tabernacle. The priests were the public health officers. Uncleanness demanded ritual cleansing.

2. (:3) Regarding Touching Unclean Humans

“Or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever sort his uncleanness may be with which he becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know it, he will be guilty.”

Peter Pett: In this case the person has touched man’s uncleanness in one way or another. This could include among other things touching their grave, or a man’s waste left in the wilderness, or a menstruating woman. The first could occur where he learned afterwards that it was a grave, the second if he discovered it on his clothes or his skin on returning from the field or the wilderness, and the third could happen anywhere.

C. (:4) Oath Violations

“Or if a person swears thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, in

whatever matter a man may speak thoughtlessly with an oath, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know it, he will be guilty in one of these.”

Robert Vasholz: The verb root for the word thoughtlessly ($\sqrt{b\dot{t}}$) means to chatter, to speak incessantly and foolishly. It is translated *rashly* (nasb) in **Proverbs 12:18** and **Psalms 106:33**.

In other words, an oath was made rashly or impulsively with little thought as to what one was promising. An oath made publicly is binding (cf. **Deut. 23:23 [24]**). Failure to fulfill an oath is a breach of integrity; oaths are to be honored. The concept of ‘oath’ is at the heart of covenant making and was the way of establishing peaceful relationships. When Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, broke covenant with the Shechemites, Jacob told them that they had made him a stench among the Canaanites. They had undermined Jacob’s stature as one who keeps covenant, the way of maintaining civility among herdsmen. In the context of **Leviticus 5**, the oath refers to a vow made to the Lord without due consideration of terms and consequences. The breaking of a pledge requires a sin offering since it was made at the Tent-Sanctuary.

Allen Ross: Finally, the text deals with an unfulfilled oath, possibly an oath made rashly (cf. **Ps. 106:33** and **Num. 20:1–13**). Someone took an oath, but forgot to fulfill it, or chose to postpone it because it was unpleasant. But just as an impurity still had to be purified, an oath that was made also had to be fulfilled. Divine punishment could very well follow a false oath or an unfulfilled oath. So when such persons remembered the oath, they realized that they were guilty (*’āšēm*) and that they needed to fulfill their oath and make a purification offering.

II. (:5) MANDATORY CONFESSION

“So it shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that he shall confess that in which he has sinned.”

David Guzik: The proper confession of sin is a neglected practice among modern believers. There is a lack of serious recognition and confession of sin, both to God (**1 John 1:9**) and to others (**James 5:16**). We don’t need to confess to a priest, but for the sake of honesty, humility, accountability, and cleansing more confession of sin should be made “*one to another*” (as in **James 5:16**).

David Thompson: Now the word “*confess*” is the Hebrew word which means to point out or show one’s self as guilty. To confess is to object to yourself and to show yourself as guilty before God. Now what is interesting about this Hebrew word (*yadah*) is that also in the word is the idea of **praise** and **celebration** (**Gesenius**, pp. 332-333). So what I understand is that it is this confession, this honesty before God that will ultimately lead to praise and celebration. This particular verb in Hebrew is in the Hithpael stem, which means the action is the responsibility of the individual. In other words, the person, himself or herself, must confess his or her own sin.

Douglas Van Dorn: To confess (*yadah*) comes from a word meaning “to throw” or “to cast.” You are literally taking something inside of you (your guilt) and throwing it or casting it. You do this by taking the guilty conscience and recognizing it for what it is: guilt before God. You did something that violated his commandments. This acknowledgement is a recognition of guilt, a taking personal ownership in it. It is not a throwing of the guilt on to another person, which is what blame does. Rather, it is a throwing it upon God, not blaming God, but casting it upon him.

As the Psalmist says, “*Cast your burden on the LORD*” (Ps 55:22). Why? He says because “*he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.*” Peter says, “*Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you*” (1Pe 5:7). This is the heart of confession.

Kenneth Mathews: Such is the mathematics of the kingdom of God. One’s economic or social position does not advantage or disadvantage a person in receiving God’s forgiveness (Acts 10:34). Every man and woman could receive forgiveness by bringing an offering in hand. The Lord accepted them because of their repentant heart and confession of sin. The same is true of the salvation that the Lord Jesus Christ extends to each person today. There is no excuse for those who do not experience the forgiving grace of God for salvation, since it is a free gift to us, purchased through the shed blood of Christ and offered to all persons who entrust themselves to the Lord. Jesus gave this assurance when he said, “*whoever comes to me I will never cast out*” (John 6:37b). There is no one who is outside God’s loving desire that we come to him in repentance, receiving his gracious mercy.

Perry Yoder: First, as a prerequisite for performing the ritual, they must confess in what way they have sinned (v. 5). The confession of sin was not necessary in the case of unintentional sin (ch. 4), but in a case of neglecting to do the right thing, the supplicant must announce their negligence. This confession might also be considered an additional penalty.

III. (:6-13) OFFERING OPTIONS BASED ON AFFORDABILITY

A. (:6) Lamb or Goat Offering

“He shall also bring his guilt offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin.”

B. (:7-10) Bird Offering

“But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD his guilt offering for that in which he has sinned, two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. 8 And he shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first that which is for the sin offering and shall nip its head at the front of its neck, but he shall not sever it. 9 He shall also sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, while the

rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar: it is a sin offering. 10 The second he shall then prepare as a burnt offering according to the ordinance. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin which he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him.”

Robert Vasholz: Like the burnt offering, accommodation is made for those who cannot afford to bring a lamb or a goat. Two turtledoves or pigeons, the first for a sin offering and the second for a burnt offering are required. The sin offering is offered before the burnt offering, a practice throughout the Old Testament. The sin offering prepared the way for all the other offerings offered on the altar by fire. Like the burnt offering, the priest killed the bird by wringing off its head (cf. **Lev. 1:15**).

C. (:11-13) Flour Offering

“But if his means are insufficient for two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then for his offering for that which he has sinned, he shall bring the tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering; he shall not put oil on it or place incense on it, for it is a sin offering. 12 And he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it as its memorial portion and offer it up in smoke on the altar, with the offerings of the LORD by fire: it is a sin offering. 13 So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin which he has committed from one of these, and it shall be forgiven him; then the rest shall become the priest's, like the grain offering.”

Peter Pett: So do we learn that God’s forgiveness comes equally to all, whether to priest, or whole congregation, or ruler, or commoner, or poor man or destitute. God’s forgiveness is offered to all equally. For in the end all these offerings obtained their efficacy from the one great offering offered once-for-all at Golgotha.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does our withholding of testimony impact the justice provided to another?
- 2) What practical steps can we take to mitigate the degree to which we are defiled by the corrupt society in which we live?
- 3) Why are Christians so reluctant to confess their sins to one another as James exhorts?
- 4) How does God maintain impartiality in terms of dealing with the sins of people of different economic and social classes?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jacob Milgrom: Modern critics tend to regard **5:1-13** as the 'poor man's' offering, the option given to the offender of **4:27-35** who cannot afford the prescribed flock animal. This interpretation, however, is beset with stylistic and contextual difficulties: ... My own hypothesis is herewith submitted: The graduated *hatta't* [sin offering] is a distinct sacrificial category. It is enjoined for failure or inability to cleanse impurity upon its occurrence. This 'the sin of which he is guilty' (**5:6, 10, 13**) is not the contraction of impurity but its **prolongation**.

... someone has contracted impurity knowingly, even deliberately, but has forgotten to purify himself within the prescribed time limits. If he subsequently remembers and feels guilt, he must confess his wrong and expiate it by a purification offering (v. **5**), thereby purging the sanctuary of the pollution caused by his prolonged impurity. Yet because he has not violated a prohibitive commandment, the sine qua non of the *hatta't*, the latter is scaled according to his economic circumstances.

Mike Miller: Sins of silence.

- A. The four examples mentioned all involve keeping something hidden.
- B. The guilt is from not standing against the wrong.
- C. The trespass consists of allowing something to defile, harm, or deceive others.
- D. The idea is that God sees and hears everything we do and say and think, so nothing is hidden from Him.
- E. So that means that being insignificant is impossible for every one of us.
- F. Every wrong we do, and every wrong we let remain hidden and secret, will have its effects on others, and to an extent that we cannot imagine.
- G. To hear the word of swearing, and not rebuke it, is to share its guilt.
- H. Men are responsible to one another because they are responsible to God.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/42019310522419.pdf>

Allen Ross: The law reminds people of sin—not just the major sins, but sins that are often overlooked, like not keeping one's word, failing to do what is right, or living in a defiled world and never considering what that does to the spiritual life. These things also defile the holy place and bring guilt that has to be dealt with, even if they have been let go too long. But the good news is forgiveness. The psalmist instructed the congregation not to be stubborn like the mule—as he had been—but to confess while there was yet time. He had waited too long to confess—and was miserable; but when he said, "*I will acknowledge [’ôdeh] my transgressions against the LORD*" (**32:5**), he was immediately forgiven.

The Christian also must make confession for sin in order to maintain fellowship with the Father (**1 John 1:9**). The more that one studies the word of God, the more the word brings to light sins that have been done or left undone; and when confession is made there is immediate cleansing by the blood of Christ. By this process the believer not only maintains fellowship with the LORD but also grows in grace and knowledge. And

since the provision of forgiveness comes from the grace and goodness of God, it is open to all, rich or poor.

Roy Gane: Notice the factor of **delay**. Committing an inadvertent offense and realizing it only later (**ch. 4**), balking at a requirement to testify (**5:1**), or forgetting a duty to undergo ritual purification or to fulfill an oath (**5:2–4**) all involve delay between the time when evil occurs and the time when it is expiated. Just as inadvertence does not excuse a person from responsibility to remedy a fault, neither do forgetting or procrastinating.

As in United States law, negligence was culpable when an Israelite had a legal duty to act. **Delay expiates nothing**. In fact, where fulfillment of an obligation to God is concerned, time is of the essence and inordinate delay constitutes sin, as shown by the fact that a person who is purified or fulfills an oath in a timely manner incurs no sin at all. Although physical ritual impurity itself is not sin in the sense of moral fault, violation of a divine command regarding treatment of ritual impurity, including a requirement for timely purification, is sin.

F. Duane Lindsey: The **distinctive purpose** of the sin offering was to atone and provide forgiveness for specific unintentional or non-defiant sins where (in contrast with the guilt offering) no restitution was involved. God accepted the slaughter of the animal as a ransom payment for the particular sin which occasioned it, thus diverting His wrath from the sinner and (ultimately) to Christ on the cross.

The **typology** of the sin offering emphasizes the death of Christ as a satisfactory substitutionary sacrifice to provide the forgiveness of sins (**2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:7**). Identification with Him through personal faith leads to the practical experience of this forgiveness.

TEXT: Leviticus 5:14 – 6:7

TITLE: GUILT OFFERINGS – REPENTANCE / RESTITUTION / REPARATION

BIG IDEA:

**ONGOING ACCESS TO A HOLY GOD FOR FELLOWSHIP AND WORSHIP
PROMPTS REPARATION OFFERINGS WHERE ONE HAS DEFRAUDED
GOD OR HIS NEIGHBOR**

INTRODUCTION:

Allen Ross: Anyone who sinned by defrauding the LORD's sacred property or holy name or by cheating his neighbor and swearing falsely about it had to make full restitution, pay an additional surcharge, and present a reparation offering to the priest to make atonement for forgiveness p 148 from the LORD, thus ensuring a clear conscience and continued fellowship in the covenant community.

Richard Hess: In contrast to the purification offering just described, the **reparation offering** addresses offenses that involve a financial payment on the part of the one who commits the deed. Whereas specific examples of the purification offering include matters related to one's word and to cultic uncleanness (**5:1–4**), those of the guilt offering imply the misuse of temple property or a neighbor's property. Because both cases require the offerer to make restitution in addition to a sacrifice, it seems more accurate to designate the guilt offering as a reparation offering. An early and non-Israelite example may occur in **1 Samuel 6**, where the Philistines return Israel's ark of the covenant but add additional gifts of gold in order to appease God.

Wenham: The reparation offering is prescribed for two main types of offenses, trespass against holy things and trespass against God's holy name by uttering false oaths in court.

Kenneth Mathews: To defraud someone meant to take from a person his good name or property. By blaspheming the "*holy things*" of God (**5:14–19**) or by blaspheming the holy name of God through a false oath (**6:1–7**), a person stood guilty for depriving God of his sacredness. These crimes are called acts of sacrilege, which means disrespecting God and the holy things pertaining to the worship of God. An example of this today would be arsonists who burn a church building or thieves who rob and deface burial places. It was also possible to defame the Lord in another way—by defrauding another human being. When an Israelite cheated a fellow Israelite, the crime involved defrauding God by taking the Lord's name in vain through a false oath. The way a person claimed his innocence was through swearing an oath in the name of the Lord. If we were to find a modern parallel, we might consider how people sometimes heatedly say, "I swear this is true!" Or in a formal court setting an oath to tell the truth is accompanied by swearing on the Bible. In effect a witness is saying that God will judge

him if he fails to tell the truth. In ancient Israel when a cheater swore falsely, he made the name and reputation of the Lord worthless.

F. Duane Lindsey: The examples given in this section pertain to unintentional misappropriation of sacred property (5:14-16) and service (cf. 14:12, 24), suspected transgressions of divine commands (5:17-19), and the violation of others' property rights (6:1-7; cf. 1:20-22; Num. 5:6-10)

I. (5:14-19) DEFRAUDING GOD – INADVERTENT MISUSE OF THE LORD'S HOLY THINGS AND SUBSEQUENT CONFESSION

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,”

Roy Gane: In 5:14–19, there are two subcases, the first regarding inadvertent misuse of which the sinner later becomes aware (vv. 14–16) and the second concerning inadvertent misuse of which he or she remains unaware (vv. 17–19).

A. (5:15-16) Unintentional Transgression with Subsequent Awareness

“If a person acts unfaithfully and sins unintentionally against the LORD's holy things, then he shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD: a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation in silver by shekels, in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering. 16 And he shall make restitution for that which he has sinned against the holy thing, and shall add to it a fifth part of it, and give it to the priest. The priest shall then make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and it shall be forgiven him.”

Kenneth Mathews: First, the translation “breach of faith” (v. 15) accurately captures the meaning of the original language. “Breaking faith” then meant acting disloyally, betraying a trust.

Richard Hess: The use of a ram (*ʿayil*, GK 380) is something new to the sacrifices in Leviticus, and it is the only animal that can be offered for the reparation offering. But it occurs earlier with sacrifices that Abraham makes in his covenant to God (Ge 15:9) and is offered as a substitute for the sacrifice of Isaac (22:13). Rams are sacrificed in the ordination of the priests (Ex 29; Lev 9). While not as valuable as a bull, the ram still represents a major capital investment by its owner. . .

To stipulate this animal as the reparation offering for all offenders, regardless of their financial status, reflects the serious nature of the offense and its absolute criterion for what will satisfy the demand for justice.

Wenham: Quite what constituted an inadvertent sin against the Lord's sacred property (holy things) is not specified. Eating holy food is one possibility (see Lev. 22:14). Perhaps failing to fulfil a dedicatory vow or to present the tithe would also have constituted an offense meriting a reparation offering. Notice that the penalty is in two

parts: the man has to restore to the priesthood that of which they had been deprived by his mistake, plus 20 percent. He must also bring a ram to be slain at the altar. The worshipper had to compensate the man he had offended by giving him back what he lost, and had to acknowledge his guilt before God by bringing the sacrificial ram.

F. Duane Lindsey: This could refer to the improper use of sacrificial flesh eaten by worshipers after a fellowship offering; misuse of the “*most holy*” portions of the grain, sin, or guilt offerings which were reserved for the priests alone (2:3, 10; cf. 22:14-16); failure to present to God due gifts of sacrifices, tithes, first-fruit offerings, or things dedicated to God (cf. chap. 27); failure to fulfill dedicatory vows (Num. 6:11-12); or deprivation of service due to the Lord (cf. Lev. 14:24).

MacArthur: For sins against the Lord’s property, restitution was made to the priest (5:14-19), while restitution was made to the person who suffered loss in other instances (6:1-7).

B. (5:17-19) Unaware Transgression

“Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty, and shall bear his punishment. 18 He is then to bring to the priest a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he sinned unintentionally and did not know it, and it shall be forgiven him. 19 It is a guilt offering; he was certainly guilty before the LORD.”

Richard Hess: This section is central to the reparation offering. It falls between crimes against the religious order and crimes against other people. It summarizes the key elements of the reparation offering without adding much that is new.

Wenham: This then is an instance of a suspected trespass against sacred property, one of the most dreaded sins in antiquity. Someone suspects he has sinned, but does not know exactly how. In his uncertainty he fears the worst, and therefore a reparation offering must be brought, a ram or its equivalent (in money).

Roy Gane: The stative verb *’šm* (“*experience liability*,” v. 17) indicates that the unknowing individual has a kind of negative experience (suffering, pain, etc.) involving cognitive dissonance (pangs of conscience) associated with consequences of sin, suggesting that all is not well with the divine-human relationship. Beyond this vague prompting, the sinner is clueless. So how does the sinner know that the wrong is sacrilege, which requires the reparation offering? He doesn’t. Neither does he know that it is not sacrilege, which is the worst-case scenario. So to cover any contingency, he offers the sacrifice that would cover the worst possibility: the reparation offering. However, without even knowing for sure that sacrilege is involved, it is impossible to make prior reparation, so this requirement is waived.

R. K. Harrison: A more general class of unwitting offence consists of acts forbidden under covenantal legislation. Here provision is made for a person who may have committed an offence, but is not absolutely certain ('though he does not know it') about the matter. To cover all possible contingencies, a compensation offering without the added premium is required, and as in the preceding section this consists of an unblemished ram valued in terms of the monetary standard of **verse 15**.

Jacob Milgrom: Concern over **unconscious sin** permeates the Bible. Picture it: A person is experiencing psychological (and perhaps even physical) suffering whose cause he does not understand. Because he cannot attribute his suffering to any sin he knows he committed, he attributes it to an unwitting offense against God, confirming the psychological truth that one who does not know the exact cause of his suffering imagines the worst. This section speaks to the unwitting sinners who, without knowing what sin they have committed to cause such grief, believe they have affronted the Deity, committed sacrilege against the sanctums, and "*incurred liability to YHWH*" (v. 19*). The law of **5:17–19*** responds to this psychological phenomenon by offering the suffering individual a way to repair the unknown wrong and, it is hoped, thereby ease his or her suffering. One of the most significant contributions of Israel's expiatory sacrifices, therefore, is that all accidental sins are expiable by sacrifice. Intention does play a role in the divine judgment. This constitutes a major break with the theology of the ancient Near East and of old Israel.

II. (6:1-7) DEFRAUDING YOUR NEIGHBOR – DELIBERATE MISUSE OF A NEIGHBOR'S PROPERTY AND SUBSEQUENT DECEPTION

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,"

The key in this case is that before being apprehended and forced to acknowledge such a crime, the conscience informs the individual so that he recognizes his guilt and responds with reparation and sacrifice.

Kenneth Mathews: The first crime listed was "**deceiving**" a neighbor (v. 2). The word is used frequently to mean "to lie." It indicates in our passage the "distorting" or "dissembling" the truth of a matter. Two specifics follow in the text: first, a neighbor had left an item with a person for a deposit or pledge, but the person refused to acknowledge it; second, a person robbed another by seizing his property. **Exodus 22:7–13** instructs the Israelites in the matter of receiving a deposit of money or an animal for safekeeping. For example, if an animal was in a person's custody, but it was stolen by a thief or injured by a wild animal, the person holding the property had to demonstrate his innocence, showing that he did not steal the animal for himself. In some cases there was a monetary restitution required if the holder of the property had acted neglectfully in the loss of the property.

Another crime was "**oppressing**" a person (v. 2), which has usually been understood as **extortion**. Extortion means to obtain something from someone through force or

intimidation. This means of stealing was prevalent in suppressing the poor (e.g., **Micah 2:2**). Someone in a position of power can take advantage of another through threats, thereby gaining something dishonestly. Christian employers and supervisors must especially beware of using their power base for obtaining their ends through pressuring employees directly or subtly. Extortion of money, gifts, or inappropriate actions makes us guilty before God.

Another way to gain advantage over a person is through **misleading him**. This crime was the result of finding an item that had belonged to a neighbor. Instead of returning it, however, the offender kept the item and when asked about it lied about the discovery. **Deuteronomy 22:1–4** legislates the correct procedure for the discovery and return of a lost animal. If the lost animal's owner is known, it should be returned to him right away; but if he lives too far away, the animal should be kept until the owner comes inquiring for the animal.

Jacob Milgrom: As a general matter, expiation by sacrifice depends on three factors: the unintentionality of the sin, the remorse of the worshiper, and the reparation the worshiper brings to rectify the wrong. Intentional crimes cannot be remedied by sacrifice. This sacrifice, however, breaks the mold. If someone falsely denies under oath having defrauded his fellow—an intentional crime—and **subsequently feels guilt**, restores the embezzled property, and pays a twenty percent fine, he may then bring a reparation offering to expiate his false oath (**5:20–26*** [**Eng. 6:1–7***]). Here we see the Priestly legists in action, bending the sacrificial rules in order **to foster the growth of individual conscience**. They permit sacrificial expiation for a deliberate crime against God (in this case, knowingly taking a false oath), provided the person repents without being apprehended. Thus they ordain that repentance converts an intentional sin into an unintentional one, thereby making it eligible for sacrificial expiation.

A. (6:2-3)

“When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery, or if he has extorted from his companion, 3 or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do;”

Wenham: The third situation where a reparation offering was required was quite different. It is again described as trespassing against the Lord (**v. 21 [6:2]**). The sin dealt with here is not merely stealing a neighbor's goods, either by blatant robbery, extortion, or by failing to return property entrusted for safe-keeping (**vv. 21–22 [6:2–3]**), but when challenged about this swearing falsely (**v. 22 [3]**) that one is not guilty.

Perry Yoder: These offenses are **against God** because Israel was commanded to swear only by God's name: *“The LORD your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear”* (**Deut 6:13** NRSV). To commit perjury in God's name would be to take God's name *“in vain”* (**Exod 20:7** KJV); accordingly, the NIV

translates: “*You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.*” Just as the larger unit begins with the subject of an oath (5:1), so it ends with oath taking.

Mark Rooker: What is distinctive in 6:1-7 is that now the act of unfaithfulness to God is committed through the deception of a neighbor in the matter of personal property (6:2-3). **Demarest** comments, “Sin against a neighbor is a sin against God.” The offense was compounded when it involved some sort of oath and the oath taker swore “*falsely*” (6:3) regarding another's possessions. The guilty party has taken an oath affirming that he did not take the property in question (see **Exod 22:11**) and has not been honest. This offense thus violates the Third Commandment, where the same root, is also used in the phrase take the Lord's name “*in vain.*”

B. (6:4-5)

“then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him, or the lost thing which he found, 5 or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full, and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his guilt offering.”

C. (6:6-7)

“Then he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering, 7 and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD; and he shall be forgiven for any one of the things which he may have done to incur guilt.”

R. K. Harrison: In each case the motivating factor was **greed**, coupled with the expectation that God would not notice the transgression. Such behaviour was inappropriate for the household of faith, because the nature of the covenant community was such that if one member suffered, all the others were affected by the situation (cf. **1 Cor. 12:26**). Unfortunately many religious persons seem totally unaware that there are such concerns as ethics in social relationships, and therefore need to observe the New Testament's teachings on topics such as honesty, truthfulness, honourable behaviour, purloining, exploitation and the like, as exemplified in Paul's list of spiritual fruits (**Gal. 5:22**; cf. **Rom. 12:17**; **Eph. 4:25, 32**; **Phil. 4:8**; **Titus 2:10**, etc.).

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is this biblical doctrine of reparations different from the type of reparations demanded today by social justice movements?
- 2) What does the high value of a ram teach us about God's perspective towards the cost of sin and its impact on others?

3) How can we encourage our conscience to bring us to the point of confession and repentance and making reparations?

4) In what ways do people defraud their neighbors today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wenham: The sacrificial system therefore presents different models or analogies to describe the effects of sin and the way of remedying them. The **burnt offering** uses a personal picture: of man the guilty sinner who deserves to die for his sin and of the animal dying in his place. God accepts the animal as a ransom for man. The **sin offering** uses a medical model: sin makes the world so dirty that God can no longer dwell there. The blood of the animal disinfects the sanctuary in order that God may continue to be present with his people. The **reparation offering** presents a commercial picture of sin. Sin is a debt which man incurs against God. The debt is paid through the offered animal.

Mark Rooker: It is also of great Christological significance that the offering of the Suffering Servant in **Isaiah 53** is described as a guilt offering (**Isa 53:10**). Since this passage was interpreted by the New Testament writers to be a prophecy of the suffering of the Christ, Jesus' death must be understood as a guilt offering that has removed the debt we owe to God. This notion is certainly the basis for the proclamation that Jesus "paid" for our sins.

Kaiser: The sin offering represents the passive aspect of the death of Christ in that he met the demands of the law by dying in the place of sinners. But the guilt offering represents the active aspect of the work of Christ in that he carried out the will of God completely by an act of voluntary obedience. It is a payment of a debt to render satisfaction for the reparation of the wrong committed, thus making reinstatement to the covenant family possible.

Roy Gane: Reparation offerings exemplify three principles that the modern people of God will do well to apply.

(1) We are accountable to God for our treatment of things that are dedicated to him. If we misappropriate something holy, such as tithes or offerings, we should restore that which we have wrongfully taken. The Bible indicates that it is not enough to give back the principal. In addition to that, an ancient Israelite was obligated to pay a 20 percent penalty plus offer a ram (**Lev. 5:15–16**). This was only for inadvertent misuse of something holy. Needless to say, the cost would assist a person to pay closer attention in the future! Anyone inclined to the view that Christians are exempt from such carefulness when it comes to dedicated property should reread the story of Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5:1–11**).

(2) A second principle is that we cannot expect God’s acceptance and forgiveness for wronging another person until we have done everything in our power to put things right (Lev. 6:5–6). Jesus affirmed this: *“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23–24).* . .

(3) A third principle is that we can give up our guilt feelings to God. Unidentified Guilt Hangups (UGH) drive people to distraction, despair, drinking, drugs, and divorce. Unresolved guilt is one among many causes of “anxiety disorder,” which is estimated to afflict nineteen million Americans as “the most common mental illness in the U.S.”

Kenneth Mathews: Defrauding the Lord of His rightful due:

First, we defraud the Lord of his rightful due when we withhold or pervert the worship of God. **First Corinthians 11:27** describes the failure of Christians to honor the Lord when they observed the Lord’s Table unworthily. The Apostle Paul warned those who worshiped idols (**2 Corinthians 6:16**) or angels (**Colossians 2:18**). Today the worship of God must be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in a respectful manner. We do not have a “generic god” that we worship; we worship specifically the triune God, *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2, 3).*

Second, we defraud God of his rightful due when we compromise a life of holiness by choosing a lifestyle that betrays the gospel and the claims of Christ on our lives (**James 4:1–10**). When we act as unbelievers do, living for the pleasures of this world, we rob God, for we have been purchased by the blood of Christ and belong exclusively to Jesus (**1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; 1 Peter 1:18–20**). As one person told me, he drives his father’s car with a special awareness that his father has a bumper sticker that proclaims “Jesus is Lord!” He accepts the responsibility of behaving well on the road lest he stain the name of Christ. Misbehavior or defiance by Christians brings disrepute on the Lord Jesus in the eyes of those who would slander him (**1 Timothy 6:1; 1 Peter 3:16**).

Third, we defraud God when we fail to give him our all. Our all means first to give our service to him, for we are to commit ourselves to righteous living and to the expansion of the gospel. And we are to give of our financial resources to enable the ongoing work of the kingdom. Giving ourselves and our monies is a testimony to the lordship of Jesus Christ over our lives: *“For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God” (2 Corinthians 9:12).* The result of giving ourselves and our resources to the kingdom’s work is that it brings glory to our Savior, honoring him as our Lord and recognizing him as our great Provider. If we deny the Lord our lives and monies, we are doing more than shirking the church—we are defrauding the Lord of his rightful due.

Fourth, we can trivialize the name of the Lord, robbing him of his magisterial honor, when we wrongly credit him with some action that is destructive or hurtful, although we are not in a position to make such a judgment. Job’s friends, for example, insisted

that God had punished Job for his sins, which alone in their eyes could explain Job's misery. However, the Lord himself corrected the friends, angrily scolding them: "*you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has*" (**Job 42:7**). It is a precarious position to take on if we assign to God specific responsibility for natural disasters or suffering (e.g., AIDS). It does not advance the cause of God to assign blame, usurping his role as Judge.

Wiersbe: The trespass offering illustrates the solemn fact that it is a very costly thing for people to commit sin and for God to cleanse sin. Our sins hurt God and hurt others. True repentance will always bring with it a desire for restitution. We will want to make things right with God and with those whom we've sinned against. Forgiveness comes only because of the death of an innocent substitute.

TEXT: Leviticus 6:8 - 7:38

TITLE: LEGISLATION FOR THE PRIESTHOOD REGARDING THE OFFERINGS

BIG IDEA:

ALL OF THE SACRIFICES REQUIRE CAREFUL AND HOLY ADMINISTRATION BY THE DIVINELY APPOINTED PRIESTS UNTIL THEY FIND THEIR FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

Roy Gane: Earlier divine speeches in Leviticus concerning voluntary and mandatory sacrifices were directed to the Israelite people as a whole (1:2—voluntary; 4:2—mandatory). Now two speeches by the Lord (6:8–23 and 6:24–7:21) are addressed to “Aaron and his sons” (6:9, 25), that is, the **priests**. Here there are supplementary instructions regarding the same kinds of sacrifices as in 1:1–6:7 and in the same order (burnt, grain, purification, reparation), except that the well-being offering is now placed last (7:11–21). The well-being offering comes at the end because the main organizing principle is apportionment of sacrifices, which distinguishes between most holy offerings accessible only to priests (6:8–7:10), and holy offerings (i.e., well-being offerings), of which laypersons can also receive physical benefit (7:11–21).

Gordon Wenham: These laws underline that scrupulous attention to detail and punctilious obedience to God’s instructions were expected in priest and worshipper, otherwise “*the man who offered it will not be accepted*” (7:18).

Allen Ross: To lead the congregation in corporate worship is both a great privilege and an enormous responsibility. In the following passages something of the responsibility concerning the ritual is laid out for the priests. It is all part of the covenant that the LORD made with Levi, a “*covenant of life and peace*”; and the appropriate response to both the covenant and its administration was reverential fear (Mal. 2:1–9).

Perry Yoder: The previous instructions were addressed to the entire nation because all Israel was to be familiar with these rituals and know their part in them. However, certain aspects of temple worship pertained specifically to the priests and what happened in the sacred area.

The type of language also changes. Previously the instructions were given in the form of **cases**—when this is the case, then do this. Here, however, the language becomes **prescriptive**: this is what you will do. This change is indicated already by the introduction, *Command Aaron and his sons* (v. 9a NRSV). The commands that follow are labeled **regulations** (v. 6:9b). This is the first time the word *torah* (regulations) is used in Leviticus.

Mark Rooker: The primary focus in this section is the role of the priests in partaking of the victims that have been offered for food. It was of preeminent importance for the priest to know exactly what kind and what portion of the sacrificial animal was for his food.

I. (6:8-13) BURNT OFFERINGS – KEEP THE HOLY FIRE BURNING

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 9 ‘Command Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the law for the burnt offering: the burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire on the altar is to be kept burning on it. 10 And the priest is to put on his linen robe, and he shall put on undergarments next to his flesh; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire reduces the burnt offering on the altar, and place them beside the altar. 11 Then he shall take off his garments and put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. 12 And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it. It shall not go out, but the priest shall burn wood on it every morning; and he shall lay out the burnt offering on it, and offer up in smoke the fat portions of the peace offerings on it. 13 Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar; it is not to go out.’”

Robert Vasholz: This **altar** was the only physical object outside the Holy Place that was designated Most Holy. Making atonement for it seven days purified it. In **Exodus 29:37** it reads: *whatever touches it will be holy*. The sentiment that is expressed throughout Leviticus teaches that what this means is that anyone or anything that is not consecrated to the Lord must not come in contact with the altar. Only a Levite could touch the altar. The altar was anointed with oil when the priests were consecrated (**Lev. 8:10–11**) and cleansed once a year with the blood of bulls and goats on the Day of Atonement (**Lev. 16:18–20**). . .

Local shrines would always pose a temptation to forsake the Lord. A singularly approved altar also tended to assure that the Levitical priests would minister sacrifices. This priestly prerogative is highlighted in Leviticus. Leviticus sees no atonement at the altar as effectual without the participation of a Levitical priest.

Roy Gane: **6:8–12** concerns maintenance of the altar fire (cf. **1:7**). A threefold repetition emphasizes that keeping the fire going is of paramount importance (**6:9, 12, 13**). Leviticus 9:24 will later tell us why: The Lord himself lit it! So when the altar fire consumes a sacrifice, it is the Lord consuming it by fire.

Allen Ross: Perpetual fire signified that the way of access to God by the sacrifice of the burnt offering was always ready and available. . . Those who minister must take care in personal sanctification and spiritual service to ensure that people may always find access to the holy God.

Perry Yoder: In preparation for this ritual, the priest dons his linen garments (**v. 10**). These are perhaps a robe and underpants. The latter are to cover his “*nakedness*” and

extend from his waist to his thighs (**Exod 28:42**).

The ritual itself is outlined as follows:

- 1) Each morning the priest approaches the altar, removes the ashes, and places them beside the altar.
- 2) He then changes into different clothes, preparing for duties outside the tabernacle (**v. 11**).
- 3) The priest carries the ashes outside the camp and disposes of them in a clean place. This place is referred to in **4:12**.

The ritual of building up the fire for another day has the following steps (**6:12**):

- 1) wood is fed into the fire to invigorate it;
- 2) a regular whole burnt offering is placed on the fire (**Exod 29:38-39**); and
- 3) the fat of this offering is burned.

The goal of this ritual is stated again: the fire on the altar must burn continuously (**Lev 6:13**).

Mark Rooker: The occasion of bringing the wood for the sacrificial offerings was also the subject of much discussion in Jewish literature, which mentions the hardship and dangers often involved in making this provision by the Israelite people.

Kenneth Mathews: The perpetual fires on Israel's altar and the daily offerings were a continual demonstration of the people's worship of the living God who symbolically had taken up residence in the Tent of Meeting among his people.

II. (6:14-23) GRAIN (CEREAL) OFFERINGS – HOLY FOOD

A. (:14-18) Directions for the Priests Eating the Grain Offerings Brought by Lay People

“Now this is the law of the grain offering: the sons of Aaron shall present it before the LORD in front of the altar. 15 Then one of them shall lift up from it a handful of the fine flour of the grain offering, with its oil and all the incense that is on the grain offering, and he shall offer it up in smoke on the altar, a soothing aroma, as its memorial offering to the LORD. 16 And what is left of it Aaron and his sons are to eat. It shall be eaten as unleavened cakes in a holy place; they are to eat it in the court of the tent of meeting. 17 It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their share from My offerings by fire; it is most holy, like the sin offering and the guilt offering. 18 Every male among the sons of Aaron may eat it; it is a permanent ordinance throughout your generations, from the offerings by fire to the LORD. Whoever touches them shall become consecrated.”

R. K. Harrison: Levitical rituals make it abundantly clear that it is a very responsible matter for persons to stand in the service of the living God. By their initial act of commitment they enter into a relationship of holiness to God, and must fulfil the Lord's will in the manner in which he prescribes it, not as they think it might be done. For the

Christian, holiness is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in the individual life, removing that which is alien to the nature of Christ and enabling the believer to grow in grace (cf. **Eph. 4:15**; **2 Pet. 3:18**, etc.) so that he can begin to match the stature of Christ. Because holiness is a matter of personality, it cannot be conveyed mechanically by contact with 'consecrated' elements, amulets and similar trinkets.

B. (:19-23) Directions for Grain Offerings Brought by Priests

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 20 'This is the offering which Aaron and his sons are to present to the LORD on the day when he is anointed; the tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half of it in the evening. 21 It shall be prepared with oil on a griddle. When it is well stirred, you shall bring it. You shall present the grain offering in baked pieces as a soothing aroma to the LORD. 22 And the anointed priest who will be in his place among his sons shall offer it. By a permanent ordinance it shall be entirely offered up in smoke to the LORD. 23 So every grain offering of the priest shall be burned entirely. It shall not be eaten.'"

Roy Gane: Because the high priest sacrifices his special grain offering on his own behalf, it must be wholly burned up (**v. 22**), with no portion serving as an agent's commission.

Allen Ross: The point of this section is that the high priest, the spiritual leader, offered his own dedicatory offering in the presence of the congregation, beginning with his consecration to ministry and thereafter twice a day. If he was going to exhort people to make the meal offering and if he was going to lead them in the ritual, he had to make this offering himself. The main difference was that the priest's offering was completely burned on the altar—he could not accept his own offering, only the LORD could accept it. . .

Ministers must assure worshipers that God accepts sincere dedication—not only by how they receive the acts of dedication but also by how they themselves live dedicated lives.

Perry Yoder: the text stresses that the scheduled grain offering belongs entirely to God. These verses underline what has already been said. The high priest must be clear that unlike the voluntary grain offering of the laity, eaten mostly by the priests, this offering is to be burned whole. To make this point even more emphatic, a general regulation concludes this unit: every priestly grain offering is to be burned in its entirety. It is never to be eaten (**6:23**).

Kenneth Mathews: Since the priest ate a portion of the offering, the instructions of when, what, and where the portions were to be eaten were crucial. After the priest burned up a small memorial portion of flour (**v. 15**), the remaining flour belonged to all the priests as their stipend for service (**v. 18**). They cooked the flour without leaven into a variety of bread products and ate them in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. Only in this especially holy area could they consume the bread. That the bread was holy can be seen by the last statement in **verse 18**: "*Whatever touches [the food offerings] shall*

become holy” (also v. 27). This means that the holy bread symbolically communicated holiness to whoever ate the bread (for touching the altar, see **Exodus 29:37; 30:29**). For laypeople to eat the bread would put them in peril since the bread was designated for only priests to eat. The priests alone as especially holy servants could legitimately consume the food offerings of the Lord. They were the only authorized persons to represent the Lord, and they therefore alone could eat the Lord’s food. The food offering belonged to the Lord, but he gave of his food to the priests. The warning does not spell out the consequences, but we can surmise from other occasions when the holy things of God were trivialized that the penalty included death (see **10:1, 2**).

III. (6:24-30) SIN (PURIFICATION) OFFERINGS

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 25 ‘Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, This is the law of the sin offering: in the place where the burnt offering is slain the sin offering shall be slain before the LORD; it is most holy. 26 The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. It shall be eaten in a holy place, in the court of the tent of meeting. 27 Anyone who touches its flesh shall become consecrated; and when any of its blood splashes on a garment, in a holy place you shall wash what was splashed on. 28 Also the earthenware vessel in which it was boiled shall be broken; and if it was boiled in a bronze vessel, then it shall be scoured and rinsed in water. 29 Every male among the priests may eat of it; it is most holy. 30 But no sin offering of which any of the blood is brought into the tent of meeting to make atonement in the holy place shall be eaten; it shall be burned with fire.”

Roy Gane: Chapter 4 did not say what happens to the remaining meat of an “*outer altar*” purification offering, which is sacrificed on behalf of a chieftain or commoner (**4:22–35**). **Leviticus 6:24–30** now fills in the blank: It belongs to the officiating priest. Because the meat is “*most holy*” (**6:29**), it carries restrictions: The priest must eat it in the courtyard of the tabernacle, and it can only be shared with males among priestly family members.

Allen Ross: Ministers must assure people who seek forgiveness on the basis of the purifying blood of the holy sacrifice that God has forgiven them.

Perry Yoder: The focus of this passage is on the disposition of the meat after the ritual of forgiveness (Lev 4). Since only a small portion of the animal, the viscera, is burned on the altar, the meat remains (see **4:26, 31, 35**). What happens to this meat? The priest who offers the sacrifice (lit. makes purification) eats it (**6:26**). Since the whole carcass of an animal is too much for one person to eat, the text says, Any male in a priest’s family may eat it; it is most holy (v. 29). This most holy meat must be eaten in the courtyard of the sanctuary, and only by priests who are in a state of purity. Furthermore, because this flesh is most holy, anything that touches it becomes holy (v. 27a). This is another example of **contagious holiness** within the holy realm (very rare overall).

But what happens if a garment is spattered by the blood of a cleansing offering? The spot needs to be washed in a holy place (v. 27). As for pots coming into contact with holy meat, if they are made of clay, they are to be broken: they have become indelibly stained with holiness. If they are metal, they must be scoured and rinsed to remove their contracted holiness so they can be reused.

The text has been referring to the cleansing offering presented on the courtyard altar. The matter is different for those sacrifices whose blood is brought into the tent, as with the cleansing offering for the high priest (4:3-12). The flesh of this animal must not be consumed by the priests but must be entirely burned up. The guilty party cannot profit from their guilt. Also, the increased holiness of the place where the blood is placed causes a corresponding increase in the holiness of the animal's meat.

Kenneth Mathews: Since the offerings typically include the slaughter of animals, an excess of blood had to be dealt with. Blood represented the life force of an animal, and since life is the sole propriety of the Lord, the priests had to be careful in honoring the victim's life. The proper handling of the blood evidenced the priests' recognition that God is the giver of life and that he has demanded the death of the sacrifice to make atonement for the sin of the guilty person or to purify the ritually impure person.

IV. (7:1-10) GUILT (REPARATION) OFFERINGS

“Now this is the law of the guilt offering; it is most holy. 2 In the place where they slay the burnt offering they are to slay the guilt offering, and he shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. 3 Then he shall offer from it all its fat: the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, 4 and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe on the liver he shall remove with the kidneys. 5 And the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar as an offering by fire to the LORD; it is a guilt offering. 6 Every male among the priests may eat of it. It shall be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy. 7 The guilt offering is like the sin offering, there is one law for them; the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it. 8 Also the priest who presents any man's burnt offering, that priest shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering which he has presented. 9 Likewise, every grain offering that is baked in the oven, and everything prepared in a pan or on a griddle, shall belong to the priest who presents it. 10 And every grain offering mixed with oil, or dry, shall belong to all the sons of Aaron, to all alike.”

Kenneth Mathews: After describing what to do with the blood and fat, further instructions followed that clarified when the priests could obtain benefit from a person's burnt offering or grain offering (7:8-10). Although the burnt offering required the burning up of the entire animal, the hide was reserved for the officiating priest as his remuneration for serving at the altar. He presumably could sell the leather or use it for himself. The grain offerings too could be enjoyed by the officiating priest, and in one case the grain offering was provided for all the priests.

V. (7:11-36) PEACE OFFERINGS

“Now this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which shall be presented to the LORD.”

Kenneth Mathews: The peace offerings expressed communion between the worshipper and God. They were the only offerings from which the offerer could eat a portion of the sacrificed animal. The extent of the details in our passage was necessary since the fellowship meal could be eaten by the laity. This meant that the priests were especially needed to oversee that all was carried out according to the right ritual procedures. The priests too enjoyed designated portions, and together the meal was a fellowship feast to which the offerer invited friends and family members. It was a celebratory feast acknowledging the peace that the worshipper and all those who ate of the meal had in joyful fellowship. Unlike all the other sacrifices, the peace offerings entailed three subtypes, each distinguished by the motivation for the gift: the thank offering, the vow offering, and the freewill offering.

Allen Ross: Out of gratitude or devotion to the LORD, the worshiper brings a peace offering to the sanctuary to be eaten within prescribed times in the presence of the LORD and in communion with the priests and the congregation, carefully ensuring the sanctity of the entire process in order to remain acceptable to God. . .

Worshippers who celebrate peace with God—either with praises or vows or freewill offerings -- must do so by bringing to the LORD an offering that can be shared, being careful to avoid defilement.

A. (:12-15) Offered as a Thanksgiving Offering

“If he offers it by way of thanksgiving, then along with the sacrifice of thanksgiving he shall offer unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of well stirred fine flour mixed with oil. 13 With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving, he shall present his offering with cakes of leavened bread. 14 And of this he shall present one of every offering as a contribution to the LORD; it shall belong to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the peace offerings. 15 Now as for the flesh of the sacrifice of his thanksgiving peace offerings, it shall be eaten on the day of his offering; he shall not leave any of it over until morning.”

Perry Yoder: If the motive is thankfulness, then the sacrifice is a thank offering and must be supplemented with a grain offering. This supplement may take three forms:

- 1) baked unleavened bread mixed with oil,
- 2) baked unleavened crackers mixed with oil, or
- 3) fried unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed and moistened with oil.

B. (:16-21) Offered as a Votive or Freewill Offering

“But if the sacrifice of his offering is a votive or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice; and on the next day what is left of it

may be eaten; 17 but what is left over from the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burned with fire. 18 So if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings should ever be eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, and it shall not be reckoned to his benefit. It shall be an offensive thing, and the person who eats of it shall bear his own iniquity. 19 Also the flesh that touches anything unclean shall not be eaten; it shall be burned with fire. As for other flesh, anyone who is clean may eat such flesh. 20 But the person who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings which belong to the LORD, in his uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from his people. 21 And when anyone touches anything unclean, whether human uncleanness, or an unclean animal, or any unclean detestable thing, and eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings which belong to the LORD, that person shall be cut off from his people.”

Mark Rooker: The offerings that accompanied vows or freewill offerings were to be eaten on the day the sacrifice was made. If the entire offering was not to be eaten right away, however, it could be consumed on the following day (**7:16-17**). If the meat was not eaten by the following day, the meat became desecrated. If any portion of this offering remained until the third day, it had to be burned. If a person were to eat of this offering (that had remained uneaten for three days), he would bear its iniquity (“*be held responsible*”). In other words, God would see to it that the offender was punished. These fellowship offerings later may have been accompanied by the singing of a psalm to God (e.g., **Ps 116:17-19**).

Gordon Wenham: The peace offering is the only offering which laymen were allowed to eat. Some parts of the sacrificial animal were given to the priests, but the main part was returned to the worshipper for his own consumption. This section is concerned with regulating this sacred meal, specifying who may eat what, and when. For many Israelites the peace offering was the main, some would say the only, opportunity they had to eat meat. For this reason this section leads into other more general regulations governing the consumption of meat (**vv. 22ff.**).

Perry Yoder: **Leviticus 7:19-21** warns against contaminating the meat of this sacrifice. These instructions can be divided into three groups, answering the following questions:

- 1) What happens if the meat touches something unclean? Such meat is to be treated like meat that is left on the third day: it is to be burned with fire.
- 2) Who may eat the meat of the peace offering? The answer is simple: anyone who is ritually clean (see **chs. 11–15** for the purity rules).
- 3) What happens if someone unclean eats the meat or even touches it? That person will be cut off (**7:20-21**).

C. (:22-27) Prohibition against Eating Fat or Blood

1. (:22-25) Prohibition against Eating the Fat

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, You shall not eat any fat from an ox, a sheep, or a goat. 24 Also the fat of an animal which dies, and the fat of an animal torn by beasts,

may be put to any other use, but you must certainly not eat it. 25 For whoever eats the fat of the animal from which an offering by fire is offered to the LORD, even the person who eats shall be cut off from his people.”

2. (:26-27) Prohibition against Eating the Blood

“And you are not to eat any blood, either of bird or animal, in any of your dwellings. 27 Any person who eats any blood, even that person shall be cut off from his people.”

Kenneth Mathews: The fat was reserved for the Lord and was to be consumed by fire on the altar as his rightful portion. This was likely because the fat was deemed the best part of the meat and served as a fuel that fed the altar fires. An exception to eating the fat was if the animal in question was not a species permitted for a food offering (vv. 22–25). If the beast was a type that could be offered but it had been made unfit by its natural death or torn by wild beasts, the animal’s fat could be used for purposes other than worship, such as oil for lamps. But under no circumstances could the fat be ingested. The blood, too, was owned by the Lord; it was most precious since it represented the life of the animal. All creatures belong to God; he determines life and death. For a person to eat blood would be a false claim on the life of the victim that would usurp the Lord’s sole right as Creator.

Gordon Wenham: The fat of animals that may be sacrificed, oxen, sheep, and goats, belongs to God (v. 23). It must be burned and not eaten. If, however, the animal dies of natural causes, it can no longer be offered in sacrifice, because only unblemished animals are fit for God. In this situation it is not to be wasted. The fat may be used for any purpose apart from being eaten, presumably for lighting, polish, and other household purposes (v. 24). 11:39–40 and 17:15 allow the flesh of such an animal to be eaten, but state that anyone who does so becomes unclean and must wash afterward. Deuteronomy prefers Israel to maintain her holiness unblemished and recommends giving the carcass to the resident alien or selling it to foreigners.

Deut. 14:21

In no circumstances may blood be consumed. Eating blood means eating meat from which the blood has not been drained (e.g., 1 Sam. 14:33). Blood is the means of atonement in all the animal sacrifices and may not be eaten (cf. Lev. 17:10ff.). Both prohibitions were difficult to enforce, but divine retribution is threatened against offenders: that person will be cut off from his people (vv. 25, 27).

Mark Rooker: In this paragraph there are two prescriptions which if violated resulted in the offender “*being cut off*” (7:25, 27). The Israelites were admonished that they were not to eat the fat of sacrificial animals and that they were never to eat the blood since life belonged only to God (cf. Lev 17; Gen 9:4-6). The fear that blood might be consumed even applied to carcasses of animals because there would be uncertainty about whether all the blood was drained (17:24). The fat of the fellowship offering was prohibited to the Israelite because it was this portion that was to be the Lord's (3:17).

The fat laid upon the altar was an expression of offering the best to God. The fact that the eating of blood was universally prohibited while the prohibition of eating fat was restricted to a sacrificial animal may indicate that the fat of a non-sacrificial animal could be eaten (17:13).

D. (:28-36)

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 29 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, He who offers the sacrifice of his peace offerings to the LORD shall bring his offering to the LORD from the sacrifice of his peace offerings. 30 His own hands are to bring offerings by fire to the LORD. He shall bring the fat with the breast, that the breast may be presented as a wave offering before the LORD. 31 And the priest shall offer up the fat in smoke on the altar; but the breast shall belong to Aaron and his sons. 32 And you shall give the right thigh to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifices of your peace offerings. 33 The one among the sons of Aaron who offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat, the right thigh shall be his as his portion. 34 For I have taken the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the contribution from the sons of Israel from the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons as their due forever from the sons of Israel. 35 This is that which is consecrated to Aaron and that which is consecrated to his sons from the offerings by fire to the LORD, in that day when he presented them to serve as priests to the LORD. 36 These the LORD had commanded to be given them from the sons of Israel in the day that He anointed them. It is their due forever throughout their generations.”

Mark Rooker: This section anticipates the next major division of Leviticus, “**The Institution of the Priesthood,**” when the summary statement in vv. 35–36 says these contributions are to take effect when Aaron and his sons are inaugurated. The summary statement thus concludes the section on the “**Disposal of Offerings,**” while the last two verses of Leviticus 7 conclude the entire first seven chapters.

Kenneth Mathews: Supporting the worship of the Lord:

The final directives in this chapter address the ongoing support of the ministry at the tabernacle. If there is to be a worship service with offerings for atonement overseen by God-called ministers, there must be responsibility on the part of the worshipper to contribute to the material aspects of the worship service. The meat of the peace offerings was a vital means for supporting the work of the Lord. An Israelite, when making his offering, gave the breast and thigh of the animal to the priests as their portion of the celebration. The word that appears in **verse 35**, translated “*portion*,” occurs only in this passage in the whole Old Testament. The word was carefully chosen by the author because of its connection to the related word translated “*anointed*” that appears in **verse 36**. That verse refers to the ordination service of the priests who received anointing oil as a sign of their unique role as mediators of the offerings made to the Lord. By this wordplay the text ties the exclusive “*portion*” of the gift to the exclusively ordained ministers.

Robert Vasholz: The wave offering is a derivative from a verb (*√nwʃ*) that means to swing back and forth. This, in fact, is what the priest did: he waved the offering before the Lord. Waving offerings were common practices in Moses' time. The meaning of the symbolism in the ancient world varied. At a minimum, the wave offering signals an offering that extends heavenward to the sanctuary on high.

David Guzik: everything connected to the eating of it had to be holy (ceremonially clean).

- The place had to be holy (**in the court of the tabernacle of meeting**).
- The person preparing or eating the meat had to be holy (**Everyone who touches its flesh must be holy**).
- The blood from the meat was holy (**you shall wash that on which it was sprinkled**).
- The pot it was cooked in was holy (**the earthen vessel in which it is boiled shall be broken.... in a bronze pot, it shall be both scoured and rinsed in water**).

(7:37-38) CONCLUDING REMARKS

“This is the law of the burnt offering, the grain offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering and the ordination offering and the sacrifice of peace offerings, 38 which the LORD commanded Moses at Mount Sinai in the day that He commanded the sons of Israel to present their offerings to the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai.”

R. K. Harrison: The colophon in **Leviticus 7:37–38** marks the termination of an important section of legislative material, authenticates it, and dates it decisively in the second millennium bc. There can be absolutely no question of this colophon being a forgery, or a retrojection by a much later editor to the age of Moses. Like other examples of its kind from Mesopotamia, it testifies to authorship and date, just as the title page of a modern book does. The entire body of legislation gives every indication of antiquity, containing examples of early sacrificial technical terminology, some elements of which had already become obsolete in the time of Moses. The antiquity and continuity of priestly materials is characteristic of the ancient Near Eastern nations, and is thus unexceptional in ancient Israelite circles. Not merely can this section be assigned in its entirety with complete confidence to the Mosaic period, but because of the nature of the material and the degree of veneration accorded to the scribe who compiled it, there must be considerable doubt as to whether any other than the most minor textual modifications were made throughout the entire history of its transmission.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do our NT churches need to give more attention to the orderly arrangement of

worship in light of how specific God lays down these OT sacrificial requirements?

2) How can we increase focus on the holiness of our spiritual leaders and the holiness of the people as we come together to worship our holy God?

3) Are full time ministers receiving their rightful portion of support for their service?

4) How do these specific instructions magnify the nature of Christ's fulfillment of all of this typology relating to sacrifice?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. K. Harrison: Whereas previous sections had dealt with the kinds of sacrifices that God required from his people, the remainder of **chapter 6** and the whole of **chapter 7**, which form a distinct unit in the Hebrew text, comprise a manual of sacrificial procedure addressed to the priesthood. Following normal ancient Near Eastern priestly patterns, this material would be in written form from the very beginning. While the regulations cover the categories of offerings occurring in **Leviticus 1:1–6:7**, they do so with particular emphasis upon the eating of the sacrificial meat, and the extent to which the worshipper could participate with the priest at such meals. Aaron and his sons (**9**), as custodians of the priestly traditions, are instructed in the Law (Heb. *tôrâ*), a term meaning 'direction' or 'instruction' (cf. Lat. *doctrina*), which occurs at the head of passages in **Leviticus 6:8–7:38** dealing with particular laws or groups of laws.

Robert Vasholz: The perpetual burning of incense every morning and every evening upon the altar of incense was to remind Israel that never-ending prayers, as a sweet aroma, are offered up on behalf of God's people. It is a most impressive, and touching, illustration that Christ never lets up praying for His people. He now lives for that very purpose. His prayers are a divine fragrance that never dims: *He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them* (**Heb. 7:25**; cf. **Isa. 53:12**).

Constable: The "*fat*" apparently refers to the best portions of the healthiest animals, not just to what we consider the actual fat (cf. **Gen. 4:4**). "*Blood*" represented life; it was the medium of atonement for humankind, and, as such, was inappropriate for human consumption (cf. **17:10-14**; **Gen. 9:4**; **Acts 15:29**). God deserves the lives and best of His people. There may have also been a hygienic reason for God's prohibiting of the eating of animal fat.

"Animal fats eaten consistently in significant amounts over a lengthy period of time can raise the cholesterol level already present in the blood and, especially in conjunction with hypertension, can result in such conditions as arteriosclerosis and atherosclerosis, both of which cause circulatory accidents. Had the eating of animal fat and suet [the hard, white fat on the kidneys and

loins of cattle, sheep, and other animals] been permitted, such an imbalance of cholesterol might well have been precipitated among the Hebrews, since they were already ingesting such saturated fats as butter (i.e. curds) and cheese. But by restricting the intake of potentially damaging fats, the circulatory system would be enabled to maintain a reasonable blood-cholesterol level, and allow the factor known as high density lipoprotein to protect the arteries and the heart against disease. Some modern cancer researchers also maintain that a diet high in saturated fats can lead to mammary gland and colon cancer in those who are constitutionally (i.e. genetically) predisposed." [R. K. Harrison]

Jesus Christ terminated the Mosaic Law, including its dietary restrictions, by declaring all foods clean (**Mark 7:19**). He meant that from then on, diet would have nothing to do with one's relationship with God, as it did under the Law. He did not mean that the potentially harmful results of eating certain foods would cease. As Christians, our relationship with God is unaffected by the foods we choose to eat. However, God's dietary guidelines for the Israelites can help us identify foods that, for physical reasons, may be wise to avoid. Some of the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law expressed God's concern for His people's physical welfare in addition to their spiritual welfare. . .

The New Testament later revealed that all the Israelite sacrifices and priesthood pointed to Jesus Christ's sacrifice and priesthood (**Heb. 5—10**). Worthy subjects of further study in connection with the five offerings are:

- (1) how Jesus Christ fulfilled each one, and
- (2) what we can learn about our worship of God from these offerings.

"It need scarcely be said, that everything connected with the priesthood was intended to be symbolical and typical—the office itself, its functions, even its dress and outward support. . . . The fundamental ideas which underlay all and connected it into a harmonious whole, were reconciliation and mediation: the one expressed by typically atoning sacrifices, the other by a typically intervening priesthood. . . .

"But there was yet another idea to be expressed by the priesthood. The object of reconciliation was holiness." [Edersheim]

David Guzik: JESUS CHRIST AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. (Hebrews 10:12)

JESUS FULFILLED THE BURNT OFFERING (Leviticus 1)

As Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:2)

JESUS FULFILLED THE GRAIN AND FIRSTFRUITS OFFERING (Leviticus 2)

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:20)

JESUS FULFILLED THE PEACE OFFERING (Leviticus 3)

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)

JESUS FULFILLED THE SIN OFFERING (Leviticus 4)

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

JESUS FULFILLED THE GUILT OFFERING (Leviticus 5)

Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. (Romans 4:25)

You make His soul an offering for sin. (Isaiah 53:10)

Jesus Christ has fulfilled every sacrifice for His people!

“He is the Burnt-offering, the Meat-offering, the Peace-offering, the Sin-offering, and the Trespass-offering for His people. By His one oblation of Himself once offered, He has stood in all these different relations.” (Jukes)

We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:10)

TEXT: Leviticus 8:1-36

TITLE: *INSTALLATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD –
ORDINATION OF AARON AND HIS SONS*

BIG IDEA:

**CONSECRATION TO SERVICE = ELABORATE RITUAL OF
PREPARATION, PURIFICATION, ANOINTING, SANCTIFICATION AND
DEDICATION**

INTRODUCTION:

Allen Ross: With the laws of the sacrifices in place, the next section of Leviticus focuses on who has the right to offer sacrifices in the holy place and in what way such people were qualified to do so. . .

If coming into the presence of the LORD calls for sanctification, then going into his presence on behalf of others requires a special sanctity and a distinct calling. It is as the LORD said, *“I will be sanctified in them who come near me, / and before all the people I will be glorified”* (Lev. 10:3). And so the Book of Leviticus focuses a good deal on the requirements of spiritual leaders who draw near to God on behalf of others: the mediating high priest and the ministering priests.

Leviticus 8 concerns the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. It makes a very useful study on the subject of ordination to the leadership service of the LORD. For ancient Israel this was a momentous occasion, because here the consecration of the Levitical priests began the sacrificial worship in the sanctuary.

The central theme of this chapter is **consecration to service**. Contributing to the development of this major theme are several theological motifs relevant to the qualifications for ministry: purification (washing with water), preparation (vesting with clothing), consecration (anointing with oil), sanctification (applying the blood), dedication (filling the hands), and inauguration (eating the meal). Each of these opens up a significant amount of biblical material for further study. And beyond this the passage has significance for the New Testament emphasis on the eternal high priesthood of Jesus the Messiah. . .

I use the word **consecrated** to express the basic homiletical idea because today it includes the ideas of called, prepared, sanctified, and dedicated. Of course, the exposition of the chapter will detail how this consecration includes being cleansed from sin, equipped for ministry, anointed by the Spirit, sanctified through the blood, and set apart to the full service of the ministry. All this ritual captured the majesty and mystery of the event. . .

R. K. Harrison: Now a major section of Leviticus deals with the consecration of the priests to their important mediatorial office, narrating the way in which the instructions of **Exodus 29** were carried out.

Richard Hess: The anointing of the priest anticipates the high priestly work of Christ in the NT, which is done forever in a heavenly sanctuary (**Heb 7:23–25; 9:11–12**). It illuminates the high priestly role of Christians, whose sacrifices include prayer and praise to God (**Eph 3:14–21; 1Pe 2:9**), as well as offering their own bodies (**Ro 12:1–2**).

Mark Rooker: Structurally **Leviticus 8–10** divides into sixteen sections based on the occurrence of the repeated phrase “*Moses did as the LORD commanded him*” (**8:4, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 34, 36; 9:6, 7, 10, 21; 10:7, 13, 15**). This repeated refrain suggests that Moses typifies Jesus Christ, who as the leader of the people lived an entire life of perfect obedience. The writer to the Hebrews explicitly makes this connection (**Heb 3:1–6**).

Richard Hess: The Levitical performance naturally divides into several sections: the public presentation of the priests and the items (**vv.2–4**), the priestly robing and anointing (**vv.5–13**), the purification offering (**vv.14–17**), the burnt offering (**vv.18–21**), the ordination offering (**vv.22–29**), the consecration (**vv.30–35**), and the conclusion (**v.36**).

I. (:1-9) PREPARATIONS FOR THE ORDINATION CEREMONY

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,”

Robert Coleman: The background of this material is to be found in **Exodus 28; 29**, where the procedure for clothing and anointing the priests is given, followed by the sacrifice to be made at the time of their consecration.

A. (:2-5) Assembling the Participants and Materials for Ceremony of Consecration

1. (:2a) The Candidates = Aaron and His Sons – Divinely Appointed

“Take Aaron and his sons with him,”

Constable: Until now, Israel followed the custom common in the ancient Near East that the father of a family functioned as the priest for his family (Cf. **Job 1:5**). The Levites as a tribe now assumed this role for the families of Israel, under the leadership of Aaron and his sons. The nation as a whole had forfeited the privilege of being a “*kingdom of priests*” at Mt. Sinai, when they worshipped the golden calf. Now this privilege became the portion of the faithful tribe of Levi. The main function of the priests in Israel was to guard and protect the holiness of God.

2. (:2b) The Clothes – Unique Identity

“and the garments”

3. (:2c) The Anointing Oil – Power for Ministry
“and the anointing oil”

4. (:2d) The Choice Offerings – Cost of Sanctification
*“and the bull of the sin offering,
and the two rams
and the basket of unleavened bread;”*

5. (:3) The Congregation – Receptive Flock
*“and assemble all the congregation
at the doorway of the tent of meeting.”*

Allen Ross: Because these men had spiritual authority over the people, it was imperative that the congregation witness their consecration as priests in order to be convinced that they were made priests by God. This is the point of all ordination services: it is God who calls people and consecrates them to his ministry. Both the one entering ministry and the congregation must acknowledge this from the outset if ministry is to function correctly.

6. (:4-5) The Command Carried Out Faithfully – Priority of Obedience
“So Moses did just as the LORD commanded him. When the congregation was assembled at the doorway of the tent of meeting, 5 Moses said to the congregation, ‘This is the thing which the LORD has commanded to do.’”

Pattern of divine command and covenant obedience repeated throughout chaps 8 and 9.

Jamieson: It was manifestly expedient for the Israelitish people to be satisfied that Aaron's appointment to the high dignity of the priesthood was not a personal intrusion, nor a family arrangement between him and Moses; and nothing, therefore, could be a more profound conviction of the divine origin and authority of the priestly institution, than to summon a general assembly of the people, and in their presence perform the solemn ceremonies of inauguration, which had been prescribed by divine authority.

B. (:6) Washing Aaron and His Sons

“Then Moses had Aaron and his sons come near, and washed them with water.”

Allen Ross: Active and ongoing sanctification is an essential part of being set apart for ministry; and the first step in sanctification is removing defilement and sin.

Constable: Physical washing (v. 6) was symbolic of spiritual cleansing. The reference to being *“washed ... with water”* may imply a baptismal washing of full immersion.

John Schultz: The metamorphosis from naked man to priest in full pontifical is described in detail. It is as if we see it happening before our eyes. We can see a

reference to the resurrection in this ritual. Jesus became High Priest on the day of his resurrection. From the nakedness of the cross, He was clothed with glory and honor.

C. (:7-9) Adorning Aaron with High Priestly Vestments

“And he put the tunic on him and girded him with the sash, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him; and he girded him with the artistic band of the ephod, with which he tied it to him. 8 He then placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. 9 He also placed the turban on his head, and on the turban, at its front, he placed the golden plate, the holy crown, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

Constable: God specified certain garments for Aaron that distinguished him from everyone else. A uniform draws attention to a person's office or function, and at the same time, plays down his or her individual personality.

Noordtzij: It may be noted in passing here that the three sections of the sanctuary were reflected in the high priestly attire: the robe [v. 7] corresponded to the courtyard, the ephod [v. 7] to the Holy Place, and the breast-piece [v. 8] to the Most Holy Place."

John Schultz: Since Christ is our great High Priest, the symbols in the ephod may be applied to Him. White linen speaks of His absolute righteousness. Scarlet (the color of blood) symbolizes His atoning work on the cross; purple, His royalty; gold, His divinity. Blue, the color of the sky, signifies Christ's origin with God the Father in heaven.

Allen Ross: these distinctive (“holy”) garments gave the priest dignity and honor by virtue of their being reminders of the glory and honor of the LORD. Wearing these clothes impressed upon the priests the awesome task that they had and reminded the people of the high office they held.

Kenneth Mathews: The dress of the priestly family conveyed important meaning and attracted the respect of the people for what the vestments signified. All priests wore a “coat” (v. 7) made of fine linen, but Aaron's coat possessed distinctive embroidery (**Exodus 28:4, 39; 39:27**). Some vestments were worn exclusively by the high priest, Aaron. These included five special items.

First, a “robe” (v. 7) made of blue cloth possessed an opening at the top so that the priest slipped the garment over his head. Around the bottom hem of the robe were alternating decorative pomegranates made of blue, purple, and scarlet yarns and small golden bells (**Exodus 28:31–34**). Not only did the priest attract attention visually, but his physical activities also created accompanying sounds of tinkling bells. The bells had the practical purpose of preserving the high priest's life when he ministered in the restricted area known as the Most Holy Place on the sacred Day of Atonement. At his entrance and exit the bells assured the people that he had fulfilled his duty and had not been struck dead before the Lord (**Exodus 28:35**). The high priest had an embroidered “sash” (v. 7) of blue, purple, and scarlet yarns that tied the coat at the waist (**Exodus**

28:39; 39:29). The colors of the garments matched the colored threads of the tabernacle’s curtains and veil (**Exodus 26:1, 31**).

Second, the “*ephod*” (v. 7) was a sleeveless garment, made also of fine twisted linen and woven of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarns (**Exodus 28:6–35**). The gold thread gave a brilliant luster to Aaron’s appearance. A waistband made as part of the ephod was of the same material (**Exodus 28:8; 39:5**).

Third, attached to the ephod at the shoulders by a blue cord looped through golden rings was a *breastpiece* (v. 8) made of the same colored yarns as the ephod. On the front of the breastpiece were twelve gemstones in four rows of three, each stone engraved with the name of a tribe (**Exodus 28:29**). It was made in a perfect square of about nine inches and folded over to double its thickness. Consequently, the breastpiece formed a pouch in which was placed the fourth distinctive feature of Aaron’s apparel. The pouch of the breastpiece contained two sacred dice, the **Urim** and **Thummim**. These two stones were instrumental in discerning the will of God (**Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21**), and thus the breastpiece was called “*the breastpiece of judgment*” (**Exodus 28:29, 30**).

A fourth garment unique to Aaron was his *headwear*. It was a linen turban (v. 9) on which at the forehead was tied a “*plate*” of pure gold by a blue cord (**Exodus 28:36; 39:30**). The plate possessed the engraving “*Holy to the Lord*,” which meant that Aaron continually mediated in behalf of Israel whenever he came before the Lord, bearing “any guilt” and securing acceptance for God’s people (**Exodus 28:36–38**).

R. K. Harrison: Elaborate though these vestments were, particularly in view of their wilderness milieu origin, their own function was to remind the Israelites that a powerful, holy and just God was indeed present with them in so far as the wearer of the garments was held to be linked to him. . .

The worship of the God of Sinai was a very serious matter, since he was the only true and living God who could deal swiftly and surely with offenders, as even some members of the priestly line were soon to discover. The prescribed forms of the Hebrew rituals and the attire of the priests served the important purpose of maintaining the distinctiveness of worship among the covenant people, and guarded against the possibility of innovations being introduced from pagan sources. Unfortunately even these precautions were circumvented at later periods in Hebrew history.

II. (:10-13) CEREMONY OF CONSECRATION

A. (:10) Consecrating the Tabernacle and its Contents

“Moses then took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them.”

Kenneth Mathews: The significance of the anointing oil was its symbolic association with the Spirit of God (**1 Samuel 16:13; Isaiah 61:1**). Priests, kings, and prophets

received the Spirit, and in many cases they were simply known as “the anointed.” The oil represented the power of the Spirit that enabled the priests to carry out their duties. The Spirit’s presence distinguished the priests from regular members of the congregation. The same significance is attached to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual Christian and the Christian church as a whole today. John’s first letter tells us that Christians “have been anointed by the Holy One” as their distinguishing mark (1 John 2:20; cf. 2:27).

B. (:11) Consecrating the Altar and its Utensils

“And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them.”

C. (:12) Consecrating Aaron

“Then he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him.”

John Schultz: After the priests were dressed, the anointing took place. First the tabernacle was anointed. The heaviest stress in this ritual is on the burnt offering altar. The same oil that is used for this ceremony is poured out upon the head of Aaron. In this anointing ceremony God, the Holy Spirit, places His hand upon the house and the priest. This means that the Spirit of God fills this house and the priest, which accentuates the unity between the two. It is this anointing that sanctifies; that is the Holy Spirit sets people aside for God. This sanctification or setting apart is at the same time a cleansing.

D. (:13) Clothing Aaron’s Sons

“Next Moses had Aaron's sons come near and clothed them with tunics, and girded them with sashes, and bound caps on them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

R. K. Harrison: Whereas the high priest wore a turban, the lesser priests had a simple cap, probably made from a folded cloth and having ties by which it could be held in place on the head. This small item served a very important practical purpose in protecting the priest’s head from the heat of the sun as he officiated outdoors, sometimes for hours at a time.

III. (:14-23) KEY ANIMAL SACRIFICES AS ORDINATION OFFERINGS

A. (:14-17) The Bull of the Sin Offering

“Then he brought the bull of the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull of the sin offering. 15 Next Moses slaughtered it and took the blood and with his finger put some of it around on the horns of the altar, and purified the altar. Then he poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar and consecrated it, to make atonement for it. 16 He also took all the fat that was on the entrails and the lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and their fat; and Moses offered it up in smoke on the altar. 17 But the bull and its

hide and its flesh and its refuse, he burned in the fire outside the camp, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

Richard Hess: **9 Elements** for the Offerings (not all present for each instance)

- 1) Presentation
- 2) Laying on of hands
- 3) Slaughtering
- 4) Manipulation of blood
- 5) Arrangement of pieces and burning of meat
- 6) Presentation of fat on altar / Presentation of bread and wave
- 7) Burning on altar
- 8) Wave (Elevation offering)
- 9) Remaining materials burnt outside / by divine command

Perry Yoder: As has already been noted, “*sin offering*” (*hatta ’t*) is a misnomer; it should be designated a “*cleansing offering*,” since this is not an offering for sin but an offering for **purification**: Moses slaughtered the bull and took some of the blood, and with his finger he put it on all the horns of the altar to purify [sterilize] the altar (**8:15**). The remaining blood he pours out at the base. This action makes the altar holy so that expiation can be made upon it.

B. (:18-21) The Ram of the Burnt Offering

“Then he presented the ram of the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. 19 And Moses slaughtered it and sprinkled the blood around on the altar. 20 When he had cut the ram into its pieces, Moses offered up the head and the pieces and the suet in smoke. 21 After he had washed the entrails and the legs with water, Moses offered up the whole ram in smoke on the altar. It was a burnt offering for a soothing aroma; it was an offering by fire to the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

C. (:22-23) The Ram of Ordination

“Then he presented the second ram, the ram of ordination; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. 23 And Moses slaughtered it and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.”

Mark Rooker: The word for ordination literally means “*to fill*” and is an abbreviated form of the expression “*to fill the hands*” (see **8:33**). “*To fill the hand*” is limited to the appointment of priests and those involved in carrying out the sacrificial ritual in the Old Testament. It meant to consecrate someone to divine service (**Exod 28:41; 29; 32:29; Judg 17:5, 12; 1 Kgs 13:33; Ezek 43:26**) and required the recipient to be pure (**2 Chr 29:31**).

John Schultz: The next sacrifice was the ram for the ordination. The extraordinary feature of this sacrifice was in what happened to the blood of the animal. Some of its blood was put on the right earlobe of Aaron and his sons, on the thumb of their right

hand and on the big toe of their right foot. The symbolism is clear. The earlobe stands for **hearing and obeying the voice of God**. All misery in this world began when man paid attention to the devil's insinuation: "*Did God really say ...?*" This fundamental act of disobedience had to be atoned for before fellowship with God could be renewed. Priesthood would have been impossible without obedience.

The thumb symbolized **man's acting**, and it played an important part in the process that led from the attitude of disobedience to the sinful act. It would have been difficult for Eve to pick the fruit without using her thumb. It was the act of picking the fruit that made sin irrevocable. This act was atoned for in the application of the blood to the thumb. The thumb with the hand to which it is attached was given back to God who created both and who, consequently, had a right to both.

The big toe governs **man's walk**, and man must walk in God's way. If the thumb stands for man's acts, the big toe stands for his habits. Man does not commit sin as a series of unrelated acts; he walks in the path of iniquity, and that makes him act sinfully.

Kenneth Mathews: The symbolic significance of these acts pertained to the roles of the priests and the altar as the functionaries and the place for atonement. The physical extremities of the ear, hand, and foot were smeared with blood so as to represent their complete cleansing. There was also a connection between the body part and the priests' distinctive role as mediators. The ear indicated the confessions of the people that the priests heard, the hand was involved in the handling and the preparations of the holy offerings, and the foot signified the holy environs in which they served. The central place for their activities was the brazen altar that received the blood for cleansing.

IV. (:24-32) COMPLETION OF THE CEREMONY WITH ADDITIONAL OFFERINGS

A. (:24-29) Dedication for Service

1. (:24) Distribution of the Blood

"He also had Aaron's sons come near; and Moses put some of the blood on the lobe of their right ear, and on the thumb of their right hand, and on the big toe of their right foot. Moses then sprinkled the rest of the blood around on the altar."

2. (:25-27) Wave Offering

"And he took the fat, and the fat tail, and all the fat that was on the entrails, and the lobe of the liver and the two kidneys and their fat and the right thigh. 26 And from the basket of unleavened bread that was before the LORD, he took one unleavened cake and one cake of bread mixed with oil and one wafer, and placed them on the portions of fat and on the right thigh. 27 He then put all these on the hands of Aaron and on the hands of his sons, and presented them as a wave offering before the LORD."

3. (:28) Ordination Offering

“Then Moses took them from their hands and offered them up in smoke on the altar with the burnt offering. They were an ordination offering for a soothing aroma; it was an offering by fire to the LORD.”

4. (:29) Wave Offering

“Moses also took the breast and presented it for a wave offering before the LORD; it was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

B. (:30) Final Anointing for Consecration

“So Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood which was on the altar, and sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, and on the garments of his sons with him; and he consecrated Aaron, his garments, and his sons, and the garments of his sons with him.”

Wiersbe: Aaron had already had the holy oil poured upon him (**Lev. 8:12**), but now both he and his sons were sprinkled with both the oil and the blood of the sacrifices, taken from the altar. This meant that both they and their garments were “sanctified,” set apart by God for His exclusive use. Neither the priests nor what they wore could be used for any “common” purposes. They belonged wholly to God.

C. (:31-32) Celebration of Ordination Meal

1. (:31) Directions for Eating the Flesh and Bread

“Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons, ‘Boil the flesh at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and eat it there together with the bread which is in the basket of the ordination offering, just as I commanded, saying, ‘Aaron and his sons shall eat it.’”

Kenneth Mathews: The last phase of the ordination service was the ordination meal eaten by Aaron and his sons. The meal consisted of cooked meat and baked goods from the ordination offerings. Cooking the meat at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting meant the people could witness the consumption of the meal. The priests’ participation in the eating of the sacred offerings symbolized their fellowship with the Lord by virtue of partaking in the holy sacrifices offered up to him. What they did not consume was burned up that same day so that the food would not spoil and to show that no one else was qualified to eat the ordination meal.

2. (:32) Directions for Burning the Leftovers

“And the remainder of the flesh and of the bread you shall burn in the fire.”

V. (:33-35) SEVEN DAY CEREMONY COMPLETED

A. (:33) Confinement in the Tent of Meeting for 7 Days

“And you shall not go outside the doorway of the tent of meeting for seven days,

*until the day that the period of your ordination is fulfilled;
for he will ordain you through seven days.”*

Jacob Milgrom: Theirs is a seven-day passage. It is inconceivable that after the first day they merely wait out the week at the tabernacle door. Each day’s rites will remove them farther from their former profane state and advance them to the ranks of the sacred, until they emerge as full-fledged priests.

Roy Gane: Completion of the priests’ “rite of passage” required completion of a seven-day period (**8:33–35**). This element of time—seven days, as in the initial process of creation by God (**Gen. 1**) and as in other ritual transitions, including purification from severe ritual impurities (e.g., **Lev. 12; 14–15; Num. 19**)—was essential to elevation of status.⁸ During the week, a purification offering was to be performed each day to purify the outer altar (**Ex. 29:35–37**). Because the priests were in a transitional/liminal and therefore vulnerable state, they were not to leave the sacred precincts (**Lev. 8:33–35**).

B. (:34) Consecration Required Divine Atonement

*“The LORD has commanded to do as has been done this day,
to make atonement on your behalf.”*

Constable: Note that it was God who consecrated the priests. This was His work (“*The LORD has commanded to do as has been done this day* [i.e., the priests’ ordination, and] *to make atonement on your behalf*,” v. 34). The “congregation” witnessed the consecration, but they did not initiate it. The priests were responsible to “wash,” but God cleansed them. Confession of sin is our responsibility, but God provides the cleansing (**1 John 1:9**).

C. (:35) Command of the Lord Established Boundary Between Sacred and Profane

“At the doorway of the tent of meeting, moreover, you shall remain day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of the LORD, that you may not die, for so I have been commanded.”

R. Laird Harris: The whole OT ritual is given without any prescribed prayers except the Aaronic benediction of **Numbers 6:24-26**. It would seem that in those days also God wished his people to pray spontaneously from the heart.

(:36) POSTLUDE – COMPLETE OBEDIENCE TO DIVINE PRESCRIPTION

“Thus Aaron and his sons did all the things which the LORD had commanded through Moses.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How involved is the church congregation in observing and recognizing God's appointed leaders via the process of ordination?
- 2) Should preachers today wear special robes or garments to distinguish them from the rest of the congregation?
- 3) What are the implications of the priesthood of all believers for ministry today?
- 4) How seriously do we take holiness and consecration and dedication as critical to spiritual leadership?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: The three chapters in this section parallel each other, in form and content, as well as containing contrasts. The effect of this triptych is to present an especially impressive panorama of this great event. A "triptych" is a group of three pictures, each of which has its own individual scene and beauty, but when placed side by side, reveal that each one is also part of a larger picture that all three complete.

Allen Ross: **Leviticus 8–10** thus forms a unit on the beginning of the priesthood in the religious service in Israel: the ordination of Aaron and his sons (**8**), the inauguration of the program (**9**), and the rejection of the innovations of Aaron's sons (**10**). **Wenham** (133) gives a helpful discussion of the unit's arrangement and charts the passages to show how each scene parallels the preceding one in form and content and to some extent contrasts with it. It is what he calls a "literary triptych, i.e., three pictures designed to hang together so as to illuminate and enrich the meaning of each other." For example, in **Lev. 8** Moses takes the role of the priest and does all that **Lev. 1–7** says a priest was to do; and Aaron and his sons undertake the jobs laid out in those chapters for the worshipers. In **Lev. 9** Moses can step down from the priestly function as Aaron takes the priestly role; Moses remains as the mediator for divine instructions. **Leviticus 10** forms a contrast: **Lev. 8–9** emphasizes the obedience of Moses and Aaron, but disobedience shows up in **Lev. 10**. The reader is alerted to this because the chapter has no divine directives at the beginning, and the comment is made that what they did was not commanded by the LORD. Whereas in **Lev. 9** the fire of the LORD came and burned the sacrifice as a sign of God's approval, in **Lev. 10** the fire of the LORD consumed the disobedient priests.

Roy Gane: A priest's job description included worship leadership (**Lev. 1–7; 9**), mediation between God and his people (**Ex. 28:36–38; Lev. 1:17; Num. 16:46–47**), teaching and judging in accordance with divine instructions (**Lev. 10:10–11; chs. 13–14; Deut. 17:8–12; 21:5**), religious administration (e.g., **Lev. 27**), guarding the boundaries of the sacred domain (**Num. 3:10; 18:1–7**), and serving as an example of

holiness to the community (e.g., **Lev. 21**). Additionally, the high priest was to obtain divine decisions through the Urim and Thummim kept in his breastpiece (**Num. 27:21; cf. Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8**).

David Thompson: As we come to **Leviticus 8**, we come to a new section which features the inauguration and consecration of the priests and their sacrifices. To this point in the book of Leviticus, the emphasis has been on the various sacrifices. Now the scheme changes and the emphasis is on the priests and not the sacrifices.

It becomes very clear that in order for one to approach God in true worship, one not only needed an offering, but he also needed priestly leadership to lead him into true worship. Since every believer is a priest unto God, every believer needs to lead himself into ways which are pure and clean.

IN ORDER FOR PEOPLE TO WORSHIP GOD AND ENTER INTO A DEEP LEVEL OF HOLINESS, LEADERS ARE NEEDED WHO ARE DEDICATED TO GOD AND WHO ARE PURE AND CLEAN.

Now this is true both corporately and individually. For any group to be holy, it needs dedicated and consecrated leadership. For any individual to be holy, he needs to be dedicated and consecrated to the Lord.

PART #1 – The calling of the priests. **8:1-5**

PART #2 – The cleansing of the priests. **8:6**

PART #3 – The clothing of the priests. **8:7-9, 13**

PART #4 – The consecration of the property and the priests. **8:10-12**

PART #5 – The complete cleansing and consecration of the priests. **8:14-32**

PART #6 – The commandments to the priests. **8:31-36**

PARTING THOUGHTS:

1. Leaders are needed for development in holiness and worship.
2. Leaders need to be recognized by the congregation as leaders.
3. Leaders are sinners and need to continually make certain they are clean—through confession, conscience, Scripture, and yielding to the Holy Spirit.
4. There is no holiness or worship apart from a serious focus on the blood of Jesus Christ.

TEXT: Leviticus 9:1-24

TITLE: INITIAL WORSHIP UNDER THE NEW PRIESTHOOD AFFIRMED BY THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

BIG IDEA:

THE GOAL OF WORSHIP FROM ITS INCEPTION IN THE LEVITICAL OT SYSTEM MUST BE THE APPEARANCE OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD TO HIS REDEEMED AND CLEANSED PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

Kenneth Mathews: Up to this place in Leviticus, all that has gone before was preparatory for this central event—the appearance of God among his people. The sacrifices delineated, the priests ordained, and the cleansing of the sanctuary and of the people made it possible for the Lord to accept the worship of his people. The presence of God was often described as the appearance of the glory of the Lord. The purpose of this inaugural worship was “... *that the glory of the Lord may appear to you* [the people]” (v. 6), and the outcome was just that: “*the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people*” (v. 23). These two passages are the only two places in the book of Leviticus that include the word “*glory*.” By this sign of the fiery glory of the Lord, the people could know that the Lord was present and that he had received their worship.

Allen Ross: The beginning of a new ministry is such a marvelous experience. Years of preparation and planning all come together in an appointed hour when everything finds its fulfillment in the realization of the presence of God. How wonderful it must have been for the ancient Israelites to see the inauguration of their worship. They had been redeemed from bondage in Egypt and formed into the people of God at Sinai by covenant. And now they had a new sanctuary, a new set of rituals for their sacrifices, and a new priesthood. **Leviticus 9** records the beginning of Israel’s worship under the Levitical system. . .

After Aaron obediently offered purification and burnt offerings to make atonement for himself and then purification, burnt, meal, and peace offerings for all the people, and after he blessed the people upon entering and leaving the tent, the glory of the LORD dramatically appeared to all the people, consuming instantly the smoldering sacrifices on the altar and prompting all the people to shout and fall down in worship.

Constable: Ironically, the first sacrifice Aaron was commanded to offer was “*a calf*,” as if to atone for his making of “*the golden calf*” (cf. **Exod. 32**). The sinfulness of man is self-evident, in that Aaron had to offer so many different offerings, in order to cover both his sins and the sins of the people.

Wiersbe: The pagan nations around them had priests and sacrifices, but they didn’t have the glory of God. . .

The glory that dwelt in the tabernacle eventually left the camp because of the sins of the people (**1 Sam. 4:21**). It returned at the dedication of the temple, but then the Prophet Ezekiel watched it depart because the nation had become so sinful (**Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:22-23**). The glory came to earth when Jesus was born (**Luke 2:8-9**) and tabernacle in Him (**John 1:14**), but sinful people nailed that glory to a cross. Today, God's glory dwells in the bodies of His people (**1 Cor. 6:19-20**), in each local assembly of His people (**3:16-17**), and in His church collectively (**Eph. 2:19-22**). One day, we shall see that glory lighting the perfect heavenly city that God is preparing for His people (**Rev. 21:22-23**).

I. (:1-6) COLLECTING THE OFFERINGS IN PREPARATION FOR THE APPEARANCE OF THE LORD

A. (:1-4a) Preparation Sacrifices Staged

1. (:1-2) For the Priesthood

“Now it came about on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel; 2 and he said to Aaron, ‘Take for yourself a calf, a bull, for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, both without defect, and offer them before the LORD.’”

Jacob Milgrom: The **eighth day** marks the inauguration of the regular public cult. During the previous week, the tabernacle was consecrated and the priests were invested, all in preparation for this day. The eighth day is thus the climax of the foregoing seven, as in so many other rituals and events. The eighth day is not like the previous seven. The first seven serve as the investiture of the priesthood (**chap. 8**), and the consecration of the sanctuary (**8:10–12***), whereas the eighth day serves an entirely different purpose—the inauguration of the public cult conducted by its newly invested priesthood. The technical name for this inauguration is *hanukkah*, “*initiation*,” or, more precisely, “*the initiation of the altar*”.

R. K. Harrison: Aaron's mediatorial ministry commences when Moses instructs him to take an unblemished two-year-old male calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering (**2**), and sacrifice them before the Lord. These two animals were to be offered on behalf of Aaron and the priesthood, and it is significant that they were sin offerings. Even the most dedicated and consecrated person still sins and falls far short of God's glory (**Rom. 3:23; 5:12**). The closer one lives to the Lord's will, the more one is aware of this corollary of sheer human existence.

2. (:3-4a) For the Community

“Then to the sons of Israel you shall speak, saying, ‘Take a male goat for a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both one year old, without defect, for a burnt offering, 4 and an ox and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the LORD, and a grain offering mixed with oil;’”

B. (:4b) Promise of the Lord's Appearance

“for today the LORD shall appear to you.”

Mark Rooker: The manifestation of the presence of God had specific relevance to this important day in Israel's history when the sacrificial system officially began; the manifestation of God's presence at the commencement of sacrificial offerings is a reminder that the goal of worship is to encounter God (see **9:22–24**).

C. (:5) Preparation Staging Completed in Obedience

“So they took what Moses had commanded to the front of the tent of meeting, and the whole congregation came near and stood before the LORD.”

D. (:6) Promise of the Lord's Appearance

“And Moses said, ‘This is the thing which the LORD has commanded you to do, that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.’”

Kenneth Mathews: Worship begins with God's instructions, not with the ideas of men and women. When we come before the Lord in the proper way, we will have acceptance. When we come according to human devices, we put at risk the assurance of acceptance. . .

The purpose of the sacrifices was to prepare for the coming of *“the glory of the Lord,”* which occurred in dramatic fashion at the end of the ritual offerings (**vv. 6, 23, 24**). The fire of the Lord broke forth from the Tent of Meeting and consumed the smoldering animal portions that had remained upon the altar. Levitical law required the priests to maintain the fires on the altar perpetually (**Leviticus 6:12, 13**). Our passage shows that the altar's fires came initially from God himself (**Leviticus 9:24**). The expression *“the glory of the Lord”* was a technical expression for the *“manifest presence”* of God among his covenant people, Israel. In essence the glory of the Lord was equivalent to **the person and name of the Lord**. Where his glory appears, he is present. The glory was something that could be seen by the human eye and inhabited a visible cloud (**Exodus 16:10**). God's *“glory”* was associated with a fiery display of blazing majesty. At Sinai the Lord appeared before the people and spoke from the flaming mountain (**Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 5:24**). Also, the Lord's *“glory”* was manifested in a cloud that filled the Tent of Meeting at the completion of its construction (**Exodus 40:34, 35**). When the Lord spoke through his prophet Moses at the Tent of Meeting, the Lord made visible his glory to the congregation (**Numbers 14:10**). By the visible coming of the glory, the people knew that the Lord had taken up residence in the Tent of Meeting.

The Lord's disclosure of himself to his people, however, had its fullest expression in the person of Jesus Christ. By his human incarnation, the glory of God became known to those who believed (**John 1:14; Hebrews 1:3**), and especially through Jesus' death and resurrection the glory of the Lord became manifest (**Romans 6:4; Hebrews 2:9**). But whereas the majesty of God's glory in Old Testament times often instilled fear in those who witnessed his awesome power and heard his thunderous voice, the Lord Jesus

came in humble trappings and preached the grace and truth of the kingdom. Our sure hope in the glory to come sustains us in our present sufferings (**2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 5:10**). The presence of the Spirit among us as we worship assures us of both present and future acceptance with God (cf. **2 Corinthians 6:16** with **Leviticus 26:12**).

R. K. Harrison: The reason why the people have to be cleansed as well as the priests is now apparent. The glory of the Lord is to be revealed to the community, and his presence will add a visible seal of approval to the ceremonies of consecration that have just been concluded.

II. (:7-21) CLEANSING OF THE PRIESTS AND THE COMMUNITY TO PREPARE FOR THE APPEARANCE OF THE LORD

A. (:7-14) Cleansing of the Priests

1. (:7) Summary Instruction

“Moses then said to Aaron, ‘Come near to the altar and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering, that you may make atonement for yourself and for the people; then make the offering for the people, that you may make atonement for them, just as the LORD has commanded.’”

2. (:8-11) Sin Offering

“So Aaron came near to the altar and slaughtered the calf of the sin offering which was for himself. 9 And Aaron's sons presented the blood to him; and he dipped his finger in the blood, and put some on the horns of the altar, and poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. 10 The fat and the kidneys and the lobe of the liver of the sin offering, he then offered up in smoke on the altar just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 11 The flesh and the skin, however, he burned with fire outside the camp.”

R. K. Harrison: This section presents what appears to have been the normal pattern of Israelite sacrificial worship, in which the ritual of the sin offering quite naturally precedes the burnt offering, and indicates the way in which God desires the worshippers to approach him. First and foremost was the need for cleansing from sin, so that the offender could stand spotless before God. The burnt offering symbolized the obedience and submission of the person who had already identified himself manually with his sacrifice as a means of gaining divine favour, while the peace or well-being offering was intended to promote the welfare of the donor as he continued in fellowship with his Lord.

3. (:12-14) Burnt Offering

“Then he slaughtered the burnt offering; and Aaron's sons handed the blood to him and he sprinkled it around on the altar. 13 And they handed the burnt offering to him in pieces with the head, and he offered them up in smoke on the altar. 14 He also washed the entrails and the legs, and offered them up in smoke with the burnt offering on the altar.”

Peter Pett: Then his sons handed him ‘*piece by piece*’ the parts of the sacrifice, including the head. It is clear that the task of skinning it and cutting it up had been left to them due to the necessities of the situation (Aaron could not do two things at once). Thus as each cut off a part they handed it to Aaron. This accurate and unusual description again confirms that we are reading the evidence of an eye-witness. And as he received each piece he laid it on the flames of the altar.

Oswald T. Allis: Thus the three basic ideas are emphasized: first, atonement for sin, then dedication and consecration of life, and finally communion with God in the Eucharistic meal.

B. (:15-21) Cleansing of the Community

1. (:15) Purification (Sin) Offering for the Community

“Then he presented the people's offering, and took the goat of the sin offering which was for the people, and slaughtered it and offered it for sin, like the first.”

2. (:16) Burnt Offering for the Community

“He also presented the burnt offering, and offered it according to the ordinance.”

3. (:17) Grain Offering for the Community

“Next he presented the grain offering, and filled his hand with some of it and offered it up in smoke on the altar, besides the burnt offering of the morning.”

Kenneth Mathews: Additional offerings of grain and peace sacrifices followed, both of which were part of the regular sacrifice system (**Leviticus 2, 3**). Both of these offerings were voluntary gifts as signs of commitment and thanksgiving to God.

4. (:18-21) Well-being Offering for the Community

“Then he slaughtered the ox and the ram, the sacrifice of peace offerings which was for the people; and Aaron's sons handed the blood to him and he sprinkled it around on the altar. 19 As for the portions of fat from the ox and from the ram, the fat tail, and the fat covering, and the kidneys and the lobe of the liver, 20 they now placed the portions of fat on the breasts; and he offered them up in smoke on the altar. 21 But the breasts and the right thigh Aaron presented as a wave offering before the LORD, just as Moses had commanded.”

Richard Hess: The addition in this text is the elevated offering of both the breasts and the thigh. These are presented before the Lord in a manner similar to the ordination offering in **Leviticus 8**. But there is a difference, though the reason for it is not clear. The fat is placed on the breasts rather than on the thigh.

III. (:22-24) CELEBRATION OF THE APPEARANCE OF THE LORD

A. (:22-23b) Aaron's Actions After Completing the Sacrifices

1. (:22a) Aaron Blesses the People

"Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them,"

2. (:22b) Aaron Steps Down from the Altar

"and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings."

3. (:23a) Aaron Enters the Tent of Meeting with Moses

"And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting."

4. (:23b) Aaron and Moses Exit and Bless the People

"When they came out and blessed the people,"

B. (:23c) Appearance of the Lord to All the People

"the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people."

R. K. Harrison: Aaron now exercises his priestly prerogative by invoking God's blessing upon the people. Later Jewish tradition maintained that he used the magnificent phraseology of the priestly benediction in **Numbers 6:24–26**, in which God's power, presence and peace for those being blessed constitute the intent of the pronouncement. After this, both Moses and Aaron entered the holy place of the tent of meeting. Perhaps at this time Moses formally transferred the responsibilities of the sanctuary to Aaron, and instructed him in the performance of those tasks which he himself had undertaken previously. When they came out into the tabernacle court, both of them prayed for God's blessing upon the nation of Israel.

Kenneth Mathews: After the blessing was proclaimed by Aaron and Moses, the Lord responded to the people's worship, dramatically showing his power and majesty. The glory of God "*appeared*" (v. **23b**) to the people as a blazing fire that originated from the tent, presumably from the Most Holy Place where God resided. The fire consumed the smoldering offering and fat on the altar in a fiery blast (cf. **Leviticus 6:9**). The purpose of the inaugural worship (v. **6**) was fulfilled by the appearance of God, proving to the people that the Lord indeed resided among them. This remarkable sight recalled the theophany of God at Mount Sinai where the glory of the Lord "*was like a devouring fire*" (**Exodus 24:17**; cf. **2 Chronicles 7:3**; **Ezekiel 1:27, 28**). The God of the mountain had become the God of the tent in their very midst. A similar occurrence at the inaugural service in Solomon's temple reflects the same purpose (**2 Chronicles 7:1**). God's residence was in the newly built temple. But there the fire that consumed the offerings came down from Heaven itself!

Allen Ross: In order for the ritual to be appropriately presented to God, there had to be a mediator. And so the next step in the working out of the pattern of worship, before the glory appeared, was the intercessory work of the high priest. In the sequence of events

recorded for this inaugural service, Aaron blessed the people when he came down from the altar of the sacrifices, and then Moses and Aaron went together into the tent (the place where the LORD usually communicated with Moses) to apply the blood and to pray for God to fulfill his promise to bless the people by appearing to them. They then came out of the tent and blessed the people. This was instructional not only for Aaron in his high-priestly duties but also for the congregation. Along with the ritual of the sacrifices made for purification and atonement, a mediating high priest was required to take the blood into the innermost shrine and complete the process of its intercessory work. There was no other way for the people to gain access into the presence of God except by this representative. . .

So too in the New Testament the greatest blessing that we have from God is salvation through Christ Jesus. He is the true mediator, the eternal high priest, who has entered the presence of God the Father in heaven to make intercession on our behalf. And because he is our high priest, the Apostle Paul draws on the main points of this high-priestly blessing to begin his epistles: “*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (**Gal. 1:3**).

Mark Rooker: The Hebrew word for glory is from the root *kbd*, which denotes “heaviness” or “weightiness” and hence the extended meaning of “significance, superior value, distinction, splendor.” **Westermann** argues that the reference to the glory of the Lord should be understood here in connection with the occurrence of the phrase in **Exod 24:15b–18; 40:35**. In **Exodus 24** the glory of the Lord rests on the mountain at Sinai. In **Exodus 40** the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle, indicating that the tabernacle has become a portable Sinai. The next appearance of the glory of the Lord in **Leviticus 9** in the context of the inauguration of the priesthood indicates that God has established and approved the sacrificial system.

C. (:24) Awesome Confirmation of God’s Presence

1. Acceptance by the Lord of the Offerings

*“Then fire came out from before the LORD
and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar;”*

Constable: The miracle, that caused the strong reaction of the people (“*shouted and fell facedown*”; v. 24), was not so much that fire fell on the sacrifices and “*ignited*” them. They were already burning. It was that the fire that fell “*consumed*” the sacrifices suddenly (the strong force of the Hebrew verb meaning “*burned up completely*,” “*ate up*,” “*devoured*”).

2. Response of the Congregation

“and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.”

Kenneth Mathews: Such gracious actions resulted in the spontaneous praises of the people at the spectacular confirmation of God’s presence in their midst. Their response was both vocal and visible. At the sight of God’s glory, they shouted, and they humbly bent down (to their knees?) upon their faces. A similar response occurred at the temple

inauguration service, at which the people declared, “*For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever*” (2 Chronicles 7:3). There may be a series of sound plays in the Hebrew language that accentuates the theology of the passage. When the Lord “appeared” (*wayye’ra*) and the people “saw” (*wayyar*) the blazing fire, the congregation “shouted” (*wayyaronnu*). The worship of God resulted in both praise and humility. There was joyful acclamation but also hushed silence. This is the appropriate reaction of those who have witnessed the glory of the Lord. Whether we are in public worship or private devotions, our response to God must be characterized by prudent praise. We must worship enthusiastically and wholeheartedly, but informed by our knowledge of the awe-inspiring God we serve (Psalm 33:1; Habakkuk 2:20). Casual dress in public worship is the trend in our times, but we must not mistakenly think that we are free to treat casually God’s demands for authentic worship.

Peter Pett: “*And when all the people saw it, they shouted, and fell on their faces.*” The appearance of the glory of Yahweh, and the flame coming to consume the whole burnt offering, produced an immediate reaction in the crowd. They yelled out in wonder, awe and fear, and fell on their faces. This was the full prostration offered to a powerful overlord, but it was also the reaction of those who could not bear the sight of what had appeared to them. Like the seraphim in the presence of the glory of God (Isaiah 6:2) they had to hide their faces. Once again they had beheld something that they would never forget (or at least for short time). In the face of this how could there be opposition to the appointment of Aaron and his sons? We will soon see.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why was it so important for the people to have assurance that God approved of their worship system and their new priest and their initial offerings?
- 2) What type of church ceremonies have we witnessed to inaugurate new beginnings?
- 3) Why such a variety of different types of offerings for different purposes? What does this teach us about the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ?
- 4) Should our worship be more spontaneous and exuberant?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kenneth Mathews: For us as Christians we have a more secure acceptance with God since his presence in our lives and in the Universal Church are guaranteed by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews affirmed that the sacrifice and mediatory role of Jesus was perfectly offered and perfectly accepted by the Father (7:22–8:2; 9:11, 12). “*But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for*

sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:12–14). The mystery of God’s regal majesty and awesome authority are sometimes lost today in our worship. Although the fire of God’s glory is not seen by the naked eye today until the Lord bodily returns, the eye of faith affirms the presence of God in Christ who is ever present with his people. When we meet to worship, we meet in the name of the Lord, based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ alone. There is no basis for acceptance apart from the reality of God offering himself in Christ as the purging and reconciling offering for our sins. For this reason all peoples from all different ethnicities, language, and cultures have a common place at the foot of the cross. There is simply no rhyme or reason to a segregated worship in the local body of a church. To exclude someone from a worship service based on such extrinsic criteria as economic standing, racial features, or cultural background flies in the face of the meaning of God’s gracious provision for sinners whereby he unifies his people in his very person. The embodiment of God’s presence among his people is in the body and person of our Lord Jesus Christ, not in any physical building, social stratum, or creedal statement.

Allen Ross: Leviticus 9, then, records the inaugural service for the Israelites’ worship under their newly ordained high priest. This service provided a dramatic beginning for the sacrificial ritual through which they found assurance for their faith in experiencing the presence of the LORD. And God’s blessing was guaranteed to those who saw God—those who by faith came into his courts and worshiped him. On the basis of the direct revelation in **Lev. 9**, people knew that the sanctuary was God’s dwelling place among them. They could look to God in time of need and know that he was with them. Without this truth the Book of Leviticus loses its meaning.

As the inaugural service, it was also the pattern of divine worship. The chapter’s contents should be compared to **Exod. 24**, the earlier ritual of worship at Sinai that confirmed the Sinaitic covenant. In both orders of worship the ritual is designed to achieve the goal of communion with God (**Lev. 9:23–24; Exod. 24:9–11**). The message of this passage could be adapted for a general emphasis on worship or on the ministry:

The high priest’s sacrificial atonement and effectual intercession assure the worshiper of a blessing in God’s presence, now by faith, but in the future in glory by sight.

This statement captures the ritual of the sacrifices and the intercession of the priest, the two priestly services that lead to the blessing of God’s presence.

Mark Rooker: The repeated affirmation (**9:6, 13**) that God would appear to the people once the tabernacle structure and the priestly administration was intact is certainly a high point in the Pentateuchal narrative, particularly from **Exodus 19** when the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai onward. The coming of the presence of God is the focal point of worship for the Old Testament saint as well as the New Testament believer. As **Hartley** states, “The goal of worship in both testaments is to enter into

God's presence.” At its basic nature worship is communion with God. God's presence comes to culminate and thus to confirm the establishment of the Israelite worship system. Moreover, now that atonement is made, God-honoring service may begin.

David Guzik: The Bible gives us seven examples of where God showed acceptance of a sacrifice with fire from heaven:

- Aaron (Leviticus 9:24).
- Gideon (Judges 6:21).
- Manoah (Judges 13:19-23).
- David (1 Chronicles 21:26).
- Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:1).
- Elijah (1 Kings 18:38).

Fire was often associated with God’s presence and work. **Deuteronomy 4:24** tells us, *the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God*. John the Baptist promised Jesus would come with a baptism of the Holy Spirit and with *fire* (**Matthew 3:11**). The Holy Spirit manifested His presence on the day of Pentecost by tongues of fire (**Acts 2:3**). Jesus said: *I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!* (**Luke 12:49**).

David Thompson: GOD WILL REVEAL HIS GLORY AND POWER TO HIS PEOPLE IF THE PRIESTS WILL DEDICATE THEMSELVES TO THE LORD AND FACE SIN IN THEIR OWN LIVES AND IN THE LIFE OF THE ORGANIZATION.

After the priests had faced the sin issue and through their offerings demonstrated to God they wanted to have deep fellowship with Him, Aaron was now in position to pronounce blessings. The fact that God manifested His glory is indicative of the fact that God desires to manifest His glory to His people. But in order to move Him to do this, His people must deal with sin and dedicate themselves to Him.

TEXT: Leviticus 10:1-20

TITLE: *THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD*

BIG IDEA:

PRIESTLY PRESUMPTION MUST BE SEVERELY JUDGED IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

INTRODUCTION:

Keil and Delitzsch: The Lord had only just confirmed and sanctified the sacrificial service of Aaron and his sons by a miracle, when He was obliged to sanctify Himself by a judgment upon Nadab and Abihu, the eldest sons of Aaron (**Ex. 6:23**), on account of their abusing the office they had received, and to vindicate Himself before the congregation, as one who would not suffer His commandments to be broken with impunity.

Constable: Chapter 10 records another instance of failure after great blessing (cf. the Fall, Noah's drunkenness, Abram's misrepresentation of Sarah, the Golden Calf). This incident was significant, because it taught the people the importance of proper worship at the inception of the priesthood. Because God is holy, we must approach Him only as He directs. We will read of a similar event in **Numbers 16** (Korah, et al.).

Mark Rooker: The Israelite priests were not to drink fermented drink, were to distinguish between the holy and profane, and were to instruct the Israelites in the decrees of the Lord. The central position this admonition occupies in the chapter, surrounded by historical narrative regarding the early activities and failures of the priests, suggests that it is the central focus of the chapter.

Calvin: If we reflect how holy a thing God's worship is, the enormity of the punishment will by no means offend us. Besides, it was necessary that their religion should be sanctioned at its very commencement; for if God had suffered the sons of Aaron to transgress with impunity, they would have afterwards carelessly neglected the whole law. This, therefore, was the reason for such great severity, that the priests should anxiously watch against all profanation.

Allen Ross: The LORD judged Nadab and Abihu for their failure to obey the laws of the sanctuary, prompting Moses to warn the priests about respecting the LORD's holiness and to instruct them about the observance of mourning and burial customs, the necessity of making clear decisions, and the laws of the sanctuary. . . Those set aside for service to the holy God must sanctify the LORD before the people by how they conduct themselves in ministry.

I. (:1-7) PRESUMPTION OF NADAB AND ABIHU JUDGED

A. (:1-3) The Sanctity of God's Presence at Stake

1. (:1) The Challenge -- Unauthorized Worship

“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them.”

MacArthur: These were the two oldest sons of Aaron. Though the exact infraction is not detailed, in some way they violated the prescription for offering incense (cf. Ex 30:9, 34-38), probably because they were drunk (see vv. 8, 9). Instead of taking the incense fire from the brazen altar, they had some other source for the fire and thus perpetrated an act, which, considering the descent of the miraculous fire they had just seen and their solemn duty to do as God told them, betrayed carelessness, irreverence, and lack of consideration for God. Such a tendency had to be punished for all priests to see as a warning.

Gordon Wenham: **Incense** was produced by mixing aromatic spices together, which were then vaporized by putting them in a censer containing glowing lumps of charcoal, i.e., “fire.” According to **Lev. 16:12** these coals had to be taken from the altar.

Kenneth Mathews: Our passage characterizes the fire presented by Nadab and Abihu as “*unauthorized*,” meaning that it did not come from the source sanctioned by God. The word “unauthorized” means “strange, foreign.” The same word is used for a person who is a “stranger” to a family, that is, someone who is “outside the family” unit (**Deuteronomy 25:5**); it also names a “forbidden woman” who was outside a person’s marriage (**Proverbs 2:16**).

David Guzik: We don’t know what their motivation was. Perhaps it was *pride*, perhaps it was *ambition*, perhaps it was *jealousy*, perhaps it was *impatience* that motivated them. Maybe they found the seven-day repetition of the sacrifices (8:35) to be tedious and wanted a new thrill to break what they considered boredom. Whatever their exact motivation, it wasn’t holiness unto the LORD.

John Schultz: What, actually, was their sin? It was not only the fire; the cause was something much deeper. Nadab and Abihu ignored had God’s revelation of Himself, and believed that the fire they made was just as good as the fire that had come from the Lord. They did not distinguish between what was the Lord’s and what was man’s effort. They did not distinguish between what was holy and what was not. . . So, their sin consisted of three fatal offences: they had used alcohol, they had made their own fire, and they had entered the Most Holy Place. Each of these actions alone could have cost them their lives.

2. (:2) The Carcasses -- Consuming Wrath

“And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.”

Sailhamer: Just as 'the fire that came from before the LORD' had been a sign of God's approval of the dedication of the tabernacle and the priests in the previous chapter (9:24), so also 'the fire that came from before the LORD' in this chapter (10:2) was a sign of God's disapproval. The writer's clear purpose in putting these two narratives together is to show the importance that God attached to obeying his commands.

Roy Gane: Nadab and Abihu may have had what seemed to them to be a good rationale for doing what they did under the circumstances, just as Uzzah later had a good reason to grasp the ark of the covenant in order to steady it when its cart jolted (2 Sam. 6:6–7). In any case, the reasons of these three individuals were not good enough to prevent their sudden death by divine agency. For those who came this close to the “nuclear reactor” of divine Presence, there was no leeway for deviations from protocol.

Allen Ross: Nadab and Abihu probably had no malice or wickedness when they did this. They may have prepared for this service with sincerity and reverence as they understood it. But all such claims are worthless before God; they are vain and weak to defend against God's wrath for setting aside his plan.

3. (:3a) The Commandment -- Regulatory Principle

“Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘It is what the LORD spoke, saying, By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.’”

Perry Yoder: God's sanctity and honor demanded that God's very presence be approached only at certain times and in certain ways. Just as one does not enter the presence of an earthly king on a whim, so one does not enter the presence of the Sovereign of the universe carelessly.

R. K. Harrison: Moses used this incident to illustrate precisely what God meant by **holiness** and **separation**, in order that the bereaved father and the people as a whole might understand. Whereas for contemporary pagan peoples the concept of holiness meant nothing more than a person or an object being consecrated to the service of a deity, for the Israelites holiness was an ethical attribute of the divine character which had to be reflected in their own lives and behaviour, since they were bound by covenant to the God of Sinai. There are two basic aspects to this relationship which had always to be at the forefront of the Israelites' minds: the first was that the covenant proceeded from God's love (*hesed*); the second, that it demanded a response from the Israelites of unhesitating and unqualified obedience. Since certain members of the priestly line had apparently refused to take the human response to God's covenantal love seriously, everybody had to be taught a lesson which, by its visual nature, would make a lasting impression upon individual minds. Hence Moses' statement that God will demonstrate the nature and significance of holiness.

Douglas Van Dorn: It is at this point in this verse that the Puritan I quoted above spends an entire book on the subject. **Jeremiah Burroughs** (1599 – 1646) wrote Gospel

Worship. **Sproul** once said of this book, “[It] has greatly influenced my understanding of biblical worship. It is one of the most important books I have ever read.” **Tim Challies** explains, “Only a Puritan could write a full book, 300 pages, expositing a single verse of Scripture, or more accurately, a portion of a single verse of Scripture. And only a Puritan could do it successfully. In Gospel Worship **Jeremiah Burroughs** does just that.” The book is 14 sermons on **Leviticus 10:3**’s, “*I will be sanctified in them that come nigh to me.*” (I wanted you to be aware of it for your edification if you so choose to buy and read it.) What is the meaning of him being sanctified? **John Piper** puts it succinctly. “The priests must treat God as holy in their sacrifices, and the result will be that God will be manifested as holy to the people—that is, he will be glorified.” But, I’ll add, even if they do not, he will still manifest his holiness.

4. (:3b) The Compliance -- Silent Restraint

“So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.”

Richard Hess: Aaron’s response of quiet demonstrates that despite earlier failures (cf. **Ex 32**), he is not ignorant of God’s anger and knows that protests will not only be futile but could lead to further judgment. It is difficult to comprehend how someone could remain quiet, but it speaks volumes for the faith that Israel’s priest has in the ways of God. In experiencing the greatest grief imaginable, Aaron does not protest but awaits direction from God.

Jacob Milgrom: Aaron’s silence contrasts starkly with the people’s shouting, only a few moments earlier (**9:24***).

B. (:4-7) The Severity of the Offense Required an Extreme Response

1. (:4-5) Disposal of the Carcasses Outside of the Camp

*“Moses called also to Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, ‘Come forward, carry your relatives away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp.’
So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said.”*

Roy Gane: “*Outside the camp*” is where sacred ashes from the altar and incinerated remains of sacrifices were disposed of (cf. **4:11–12; 6:11; 9:11**).

2. (:6-7) Denial of Normal Mourning Actions

“Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, ‘Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you may not die, and that He may not become wrathful against all the congregation. But your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the burning which the LORD has brought about. 7 You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, lest you die; for the LORD's anointing oil is upon you.’ So they did according to the word of Moses.”

Kenneth Mathews: Moses instructed Aaron and his sons not to engage in mourning rites, such as disheveled hair and torn clothing; these were the customary outward signs of deep grief, as is the dark dress of a mourning widow today. Also, they could not leave the sanctuary to attend the funeral, “*for the anointing oil of the Lord [was upon them]*” (v. 7; cf. **21:10–12**). The significance of the “*sacred anointing oil*” (**Exodus 30:25**) was its symbolic value, designating Aaron and his sons as especially consecrated servants to the Lord (**Leviticus 8:30**). God was not coldhearted about Aaron’s feelings regarding his sons, nor was he punishing Aaron for his sons’ behavior. God was saying that Aaron must put his relationship with him first, above all others. Aaron’s spiritual priority was to remain holy in order to carry out his duties for the sake of the community. With his privileges, however, came solemn, even deadly, responsibility.

John Schultz: Three reasons are given as to why Aaron and his sons were not allowed to attend the funeral: First of all, they were not allowed to leave the sanctuary. Secondly, a priest was not allowed to mourn, and, finally, the touching of a dead body would have made them ritually impure. These stipulations are recorded in **ch. 21**. Death is an insult to God. A priest was not allowed to have a part in it. Of course, the position of a priest who stands before the Lord and his relationship with death should not be seen as a denial of the reality of death. It is not a question of, “if you do not look at it, it will go away.” It should rather be seen as a reaching forward to the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is an expression of the fact that God is the God of the living and not of the dead, as Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew.

Constable: Aaron and his surviving sons were not to demonstrate any dissatisfaction with God's judgment (“*Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes*”; **vv. 4-7**). But God permitted the people (“*your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel*”) to “*mourn*,” because of the loss the nation experienced in the death of these priests, and also so they would remember His punishment a long time.

II. (:8-11) PROTECTING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE HOLY AND THE PROFANE

A. (:8-9) Integrity of Priestly Conduct – Prohibition of Alcohol While Serving

“The LORD then spoke to Aaron, saying, 9 ‘Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you may not die-- it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations—”

Mark Rooker: This new paragraph begins with the common formulaic expression for the Lord's revelation in Leviticus, this time with the recipient being Aaron instead of Moses. This is in fact is the only occurrence in Leviticus where Aaron is directly spoken to by the Lord. This encounter thus places the following instruction in the most solemn terms for the Israelite priesthood because it addresses the role of the priest in the Israelite religion. It also occupies the central section of the chapter, which indicates that this paragraph is of preeminent concern for priestly responsibility.

Constable: The inclusion of this prohibition, in this context, has led some commentators to assume that Nadab and Abihu must have been under the influence of this drink.

Perry Yoder: God provides additional safeguards to prevent such an event in the future. Priests are to refrain from alcoholic drinks before entering the tent. Also, priests are to distinguish between clean and unclean and to teach the Israelites the difference. This instruction is to prevent the unclean from touching the holy.

Allen Ross: The conclusion one could draw from these passages is that the common or regular use of intoxicants is incompatible with spiritual service or spiritual growth. Their use was permissible in ordinary life, especially for great celebrations; but it may not have been wise or advisable. Moses' warning to the priests of his day should be carefully considered today, in an age when alcoholism is rampant.

B. (:10-11) Integrity of Priestly Functions

1. (:10) Maintaining Critical Distinctions

“and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean,”

Mark Rooker: The concept of **holiness** in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is related to the idea of **separation**. In the realm of the “*holy*” are objects or people set apart for God's use, while the profane are confined to that which is common or normal. This function of the priest anticipates the next major section of Leviticus, which has as its primary concern the distinction between the holy/profane and the clean/unclean (**Lev 11–15**).

Gordon Wenham: The essence of the priest's job was to make decisions, as to what constituted the difference between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean (**v. 10**). To make a mistake in these matters provoked God's judgment and could lead to death. So to reduce the risk of such errors, the priests were forbidden to drink before going on duty.

Allen Ross: The principle given in this passage is that God must be glorified and sanctified by those who come into his presence (i.e., the priests). It makes no sense to pray that God's name be hallowed (“*hallowed be your name*”) and then live in such a manner as to make his name or his service common or profane. The priests had the responsibility to make clear decisions about the laws of holiness and to teach the people accordingly. The congregation had to see by their example that entering the presence of the LORD meant being set apart from the profane things of the world.

Peter Pett: Uncleanness covers a wide variety of things and states, from differences between what may be eaten and what may not, and what may be touched and what may not, to bodily imperfections and discharges, to uncleanness resulting from contact with death, and so on, to uncleanness caused by disobedience to God's commandments, and such uncleanness must be removed before men enter the Sanctuary. For God is holy, and it is the priest's duty to discern whether men are clean or unclean, and to instruct

them on all such matters so that they may themselves discern their own state. The stress is on the importance of keeping the Sanctuary and its precincts holy so as to bring home the holiness of God. It meant that the concern for holiness would become a daily concern for all the people, both physically and morally.

2. (:11) Instructing the Israelites to Obey God's Commands

“and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses.”

Gordon Wenham: The priests were not just men who offered sacrifices, but were also teachers. To “*instruct*” (*lehôrôl*) the people involved teaching the law (*tôrāh*), which included both teaching the revealed rules and making decisions about difficult cases not explicitly covered in the Sinai revelation (**Deut. 17:9ff.**).

III. (:12-20) PROPER EATING OF THE OFFERINGS

A. (:12-15) Commands of Moses Regarding Proper Eating of the Offerings

1. (:12-13) The Priests are Instructed to Eat the Grain Offering

“Then Moses spoke to Aaron, and to his surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, ‘Take the grain offering that is left over from the LORD's offerings by fire and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. 13 You shall eat it, moreover, in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due out of the LORD's offerings by fire; for thus I have been commanded.’”

Richard Hess: The repetition of the command to eat the grain offering in the area of the sanctuary repeats the last part of **v.12** and continues the theme of the holiness of the bread. The second part of this verse explains why the priests should eat it and why they should eat it in the sanctuary. The priests eat it because it belongs to them by order of the decree of the Lord (**2:3, 10**). They eat it in a holy place because it is one of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. Thus they have dedicated and consecrated the grain, and it cannot leave the sanctuary or lie in a place and rot.

Roy Gane: In spite of the tragedy, Moses sought to ensure that the surviving priests completed the inaugural sacrifices on behalf of the people by eating their meat portions, which functioned as “agents’ commissions” (**10:12–18**). Life must go on. Even deep personal grief, compounded by horror, must be held in check so that the community can be served.

2. (:14-15) The Priests' Families are Instructed to Eat the Breast and the Thigh of the Wave Offering

“The breast of the wave offering, however, and the thigh of the offering you may eat in a clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you; for they have been given as your due and your sons' due out of the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the sons of Israel.”

The thigh offered by lifting up and the breast offered by waving, they shall bring along with the offerings by fire of the portions of fat, to present as a wave offering before the LORD; so it shall be a thing perpetually due you and your sons with you, just as the LORD has commanded.”

B. (:16-20) Concern of Moses Regarding Apparent Avoidance of Eating

1. (:16-18) Anger of Moses over Apparent Transgression

“But Moses searched carefully for the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it had been burned up! So he was angry with Aaron's surviving sons Eleazar and Ithamar, saying, 17 ‘Why did you not eat the sin offering at the holy place? For it is most holy, and He gave it to you to bear away the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD. 18 Behold, since its blood had not been brought inside, into the sanctuary, you should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary, just as I commanded.”

Roy Gane: In **10:17** the priests must eat purification offering meat to accomplish the following two goals, which would apply to this kind of sacrifice

- to remedy moral fault but not physical ritual impurity:
- to bear the culpability of the community to expiate on their behalf before the Lord

The parallel syntax here indicates that bearing (*ns'*) the peoples' culpability (*'wn*) and expiating for them before the Lord mean basically the same thing. So by participating with God in receiving purification offerings, the priests expiated for the people as the Lord does: He bears culpability (*ns'* *'wn*) when he frees wrongdoers from the consequences of their sins (**Ex. 34:7**), which they would otherwise continue to bear (cf. **Lev. 5:1**). Thus the priests intimately participated in the process through which God extended mercy to sinners!

Peter Pett: His question was specific. Why had they burnt the flesh of the purification for sin offering offered on behalf of the people, and not eaten it. They should have eaten it *‘in the place of the Sanctuary’*, that is, within the tabernacle precincts, for that was all a part of bearing the iniquity of the offeror (**Leviticus 6:26; Leviticus 6:29; Leviticus 7:6**). The purification for sin offering must be mainly burnt on the altar with the flesh eaten by the priests in order to bear the iniquity of the offerer and to make atonement for him. In this case the ‘him’ was the people of Israel. This description reveals how the holiness of the priests renders even the ‘sin’ content holy. It is neutralised through forgiveness and atonement, through ‘covering’.

2. (:19) Argument Offered in Response by Aaron

“But Aaron spoke to Moses, ‘Behold, this very day they presented their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD. When things like

these happened to me, if I had eaten a sin offering today, would it have been good in the sight of the LORD?”

Mark Rooker: Aaron's proper response regarding the non-consumption of the sin offering suggested that he was capable of carrying out the priestly mandate of “*distinguishing the holy and the profane and the clean and the unclean*” (10:10). Aaron was “actually doing the kind of thing that sons of Aaron were responsible for throughout Israel's history.” Even though the refusal to eat of the offering was technically a violation of law, Aaron's attitude does not reflect that **flagrant disobedience** represented by the sin of Nadab and Abihu. Hence, God's response is different. Even though Aaron's sorrow was based on the just judgment of wickedness, God is sympathetic. The Lord comforts those who have lost loved ones even when death comes as a consequence of their own sinfulness.

Robert Vasholz: The meaning of the priests' actions has a two-fold explanation. The wording ... such things as these have happened to me must refer to the judgment and slaying of Aaron's sons. How can Aaron's family perform this sacred duty in light of their family's guilt and disgrace? Would that not appear somewhat hypocritical? Perhaps Aaron could not eat consciously without the full conviction that he felt no remorse for the fate of his sons?

And, secondly, how could Aaron and his sons feast while the congregation who brought the sin offering is mourning and, presumably, fasting? Wouldn't that appear to be unfeeling? While the congregation is mourning and fasting, they are eating. Therefore, when Moses heard Aaron's response, he was satisfied.

Peter Pett: Moses recognised the justice of what Aaron had said. He recognised their dilemma and was satisfied. This had been no rebellion against the will of Yahweh by Aaron and his remaining sons, but a recognition of their own mourning and their own indirect participation in the sin of their son and brothers. The house of Aaron had sinned that day, and were in mourning over the consequences of sin (for in Hebrew thought the sin of one in a family was in some sense the sin of all). How then could Aaron and his sons be seen as partaking of the purification for sin offering of the people, absorbing its holiness and rectifying their sin by ‘covering’ (atonement) and forgiveness? Would it not cause doubt in the people's minds? Surely it was better that the holiness be absorbed by the altar, and the sin be covered and atoned for by God?

3. (:20) Agreement to Not Pursue this Issue

“And when Moses heard that, it seemed good in his sight.”

Richard Hess: In any case, this is not the day for a public display of the purity of the priesthood and its solidarity with God, as would be seen in the eating of the elevation offering. Aaron's words of protest, “*Would the LORD have been pleased,*” translates the same Hebrew as Moses' response, “*he was satisfied.*” The similar language provides an intentional comparison, viz., that the dissatisfaction of God has been averted and this is what led to Moses' contentment at the result. In the end, therefore, the goals of Aaron

and Moses are identical. They both want to do what pleases God. The example of leadership seeking to please God through obedience to him remains a powerful example and a means of instruction for Christians as much as for Israel (**1Th 4:1**).

Roy Gane: Aaron’s abstaining from the meat was not a careless ritual mistake but a choice based on priestly reflection regarding implications of the sin of Nadab and Abihu for the status of Aaron and his surviving sons before the Lord on this occasion. The priests were unworthy to bear the culpability of others on the very day that their family had fallen under divine condemnation. Moses’ approval implies that the sacrifice remained valid despite this departure from the norm.

Kenneth Mathews: Aaron’s response and Moses’ acceptance of his explanation illustrates the discernment that Aaron and his sons were called upon to practice as part of their spiritual assignment (**v. 10**). Aaron recognized that the special circumstances of the day’s offerings by which his older sons had offered unauthorized fire compromised the sin offering. Therefore, he reasoned that it would be unfitting for them to enjoy the meat as a benefit (**Leviticus 6:30**). What is significant here is that although the detail of the Law was altered, Aaron’s decision reflected the purpose of the Law and received divine approval. That Moses “approved” signaled that the Lord had “approved” of the decision (**vv. 19b, 20**).

John Schultz: This brings us to the end of the first part of this book: “**Access to God**,” in which the problem of sin is considered from God’s viewpoint. A sacrifice and a mediator are needed.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Just because some form of worship makes people feel good, does that make it appropriate and something we should adopt?
- 2) When does our loyalty and service for the Lord trump our normal natural affections?
- 3) How does this passage offer a warning about the excesses and errors of the charismatic movement?
- 4) Does this passage support the view that only those forms and patterns of worship authorized in God’s Word are appropriate for worship today? (regulative principle or scriptural approach to worship)?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: The sin offering had not been eaten as prescribed in **6:26**, but rather it was

wholly burned. It was the duty of the priests to have eaten the meat after the blood was sprinkled on the altar, but instead of eating it in a sacred feast, they had burned it outside the camp. Moses discovered this disobedience, probably from a dread of some further judgment, and challenged, not Aaron, whose heart was too torn in the death of his sons, but the two surviving sons in the priesthood to explain their breach of ritual duty. Aaron, who heard the charge, however, and by whose direction the violation had occurred, gave the explanation. His reason was that they had done all the ritual sacrifice correctly up to the point of eating the meat, but omitted eating because he was too dejected for a feast in the face of the appalling judgments that had fallen. He was wrong, because God had specifically commanded the sin offering to be eaten in the Holy Place. God's law was clear and it was sin to deviate from it at all. Moses sympathized with Aaron's grief, however, and having made his point, dropped the issue.

Constable: This incident should warn modern readers against worshipping God in ways that we prefer because they make us feel "good." We must be careful about worship that is designed to produce "special feelings or sensational effects" in the worshipers, rather than true worship that honors God. Some forms of contemporary and traditional worship may reflect the selfish spirits of Nadab and Abihu. Such "self-made worship" often has "*the appearance of wisdom*" (**Col. 2:23**).

R. K. Harrison: With this tragic event the second major section of Leviticus concludes. The priests have been consecrated, and the three family members who are left are by now painfully aware of the stringent behavioural requirements which govern their office. The remainder of Leviticus consists of regulations, ceremonial procedures and ritual laws, which were the responsibility of the priesthood to administer. The character of these ordinances shows that all aspects of life under God are sacred.

Kevin Reed: Biblical Worship --

Christianity rests upon a fundamental premise that God's favor is extended only to those who come to him through the person and work of Christ (John 14:6 Acts 4:12). Yet, while many profess faith in Christ, professing Christians differ widely in the manner in which they conduct their worship.

Such diversity in practice may prompt an inquiry. What means of worship possess the Lord's approval? What pattern of worship does the Lord truly require of his people? Specifically, is there a biblical measure by which we may evaluate various practices of worship? . . .

We maintain that the Bible contains general principles which regulate all matters of worship. First, religious worship must be directed to the Lord God alone; worship must not be given to false deities, humans, or any created thing. Second, the only acceptable means of worship are those established by God.

This latter principle will be at the center of attention throughout our discussion. We will refer to it as the scriptural law of worship, as a reminder that the Lord regulates the

worship of his people by means of his word.

Our premise differs sharply from contemporary attitudes toward worship. Many people claim that Christians are free to employ a variety of practices in worship, as long as the means employed are not specifically forbidden in scripture. (If something is not forbidden, it must be o.k.) When their worship activities are challenged, their response is, “Show us what is wrong with this practice.”

We reject this view as inadequate. Certainly any method of worship which is demonstrably unbiblical should be discarded immediately. But we reject the idea that the burden of proof rests upon us to prove a negative – to show that every new fad in worship violates some particular scriptural prohibition.

We believe that the scriptures contain a general prohibition against all elements in worship besides those which God himself has instituted. In other words, the burden of proof falls upon those who wish to introduce a practice into worship, to prove that God has required it in his word. This is the force of the scriptural law of worship; it guards against man-made innovations in worship.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/51407161528.pdf>

cf. article by **Derek Thomas**: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/regulative-principle-worship>

Kevin Boling: Confronting the Charismatics – Interview with **Phil Johnson** --
Consequences of offering to the Lord strange fire – speaking of conference dealing with some of these charismatic issues related to the Holy Spirit.

Strange Fire [Oct. 16-18, 2013] is a conference that will set forth what the Bible really says about the Holy Spirit, and how that squares with the charismatic movement. We’re going to address in a biblical, straightforward manner what many today see as a peripheral issue. On the contrary, your view of the Holy Spirit influences your relationship with God, your personal holiness, and your commitment to the church and evangelism. (Steve Lawson, R. C. Sproul, etc.)

Charismatic claims undermine the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures.

[cf. books written by MacArthur – [The Charismatics](#) / [Charismatic Chaos](#)]

The danger of offending the Holy Spirit by counterfeit worship.

New generation of church leaders that have not thought very critically on these issues.

They claim to be open to the claims of the charismatics – don’t want to deal with controversy; perhaps lazy about interacting with the issues; etc.

Charismatics much more welcomed in New Reformed/ New Calvinism movement.

Key tenet = The apostolic gifts are still functioning.

Opening message of the conference by John MacArthur --

<https://www.challies.com/liveblogging/strange-fire-conference-john-macarthur-opening-address/>

cf. Together for the Gospel where Dr. MacArthur was involved with C. J. Mahaney.
How does that jive with this Strange Fire conference? Biblical differences still matter
even where we have agreement on the gospel itself.

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=917131233221>

TEXT: Leviticus 11:1-47

TITLE: PURIFICATION LAWS RELATED TO DIETARY RESTRICTIONS

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S PEOPLE MUST IDENTIFY WITH GOD'S HOLINESS IN THE CHOICES THEY MAKE IN THEIR DAILY DECISIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Mark Rooker: The purity laws cannot be isolated from previous laws concerning instruction for bringing sacrifices (1:1 – 6:7), instruction for the priests in carrying out the sacrifices (6:8 – 9:24), and the inauguration of the priesthood (Lev 8–10). The ritual laws assume knowledge of the sacrificial system in that the sacrifices play a vital role in making a ritually unclean Israelite able to enter the camp and to have fellowship with other members of the covenant community. . .

Being in a state of uncleanness was not necessarily due to sin, but it did prohibit an Israelite's contact with the tabernacle (and later the temple) and the cultic (sacrificial) system.

Richard Hess: The structure of **Leviticus 11** focuses on unclean animals more than on clean ones. It begins with land animals, i.e., those animals closest to the Israelites (vv. 1–7). It proceeds to discuss water animals (vv. 9–12) and birds (vv. 13–23). It then returns to land animals and further details unclean ones (vv. 26–30, 41–45). But the major thrust of the second half of the chapter concerns how the uncleanness of the carcasses of both unclean (vv. 24–25, 31–38) and clean animals (vv. 39–40) affects what and who touches them. A conclusion recapitulates the concerns of cleanness in dealing with animals and associates it with God's holiness (vv. 44–47).

MacArthur: Their dietary laws served as a barrier to easy socialization with idolatrous peoples. Dietary and hygienic benefits were real, but only secondary to the divine purposes of obedience and separation.

Allen Ross: The purification laws, then, warned against actions, conditions, or contacts that render a person *tāmē'*—unclean. The faithful Israelite strove toward the standard of the holiness of God; anything leading in the other direction—toward sin, disease, illness, defilement, or contamination—was supposed to be avoided, especially in anticipation of going to the sanctuary. But through the natural course of life, defilement and disease were frequent, almost daily. So the law made provision for these: isolation or quarantine to control contagion that might make others ritually unclean, purification through cleansing ritual, and sanctification through sacrificial ritual. The LORD made the provision for the people to return to his holiness; but the people had to show their faith by complying with his laws and performing the prescribed ritual. . .

Because the holy God redeemed Israel, the Israelites reflected his holiness daily by eating only those creatures that God designated as clean and by avoiding all contact with unclean carcasses that defiled them and required God's purification.

Wenham: Douglas has showed that there is a connection in biblical thinking between wholeness, holiness, and integrity. God demands integrity of character and wholeness of physical form in his worshippers. These rules were symbols of a moral order. Only the normal members of each sphere of creation, e.g., fishes with fins, counted as clean. This definition, which identified "perfect" members of the animal kingdom with purity, was a reminder that God looked for moral perfection in his people. Carrion-eating birds and carnivorous animals were unclean because they also typified a man's sinful, destructive, and murderous instincts. In a real sense, then, Jesus was drawing out the meaning of the symbolism of the Levitical laws in insisting that it was what comes out of man that defiles him, "*evil thoughts, murder, adultery, etc.*" These rules in Leviticus served not only as reminders of redemption but of moral values. With the law of God written on his heart by the Spirit, the Christian ought not to need such tangible reminders of God's will and character. He also has ready access to the Bible, which holds up a mirror to his conduct. Let us follow James' advice to look into that perfect law, the law of liberty, and act (**Jas. 1:25**).

(:1-2a) PRELUDE

"The LORD spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, 'Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, '"

I. (:2B-23) CLEAN AND UNCLEAR FOOD

A. (:2b-8) Larger Land Animals

"These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth. 3 Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, and chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat. 4 Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you. 5 Likewise, the rock badger, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; 6 the rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; 7 and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. 8 You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you."

Mark Rooker: In the first section of Leviticus 11 the land animals that could be consumed by the Israelites were limited to those that had a split hoof and chewed the cud (**11:3**). The animals possessing these qualities may further be described as tame (or domesticated) and herbivorous.

B. (:9-12) Sea Creatures

"These you may eat, whatever is in the water: all that have fins and scales, those

in the water, in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. 10 But whatever is in the seas and in the rivers, that do not have fins and scales among all the teeming life of the water, and among all the living creatures that are in the water, they are detestable things to you, 11 and they shall be abhorrent to you; you may not eat of their flesh, and their carcasses you shall detest. 12 Whatever in the water does not have fins and scales is abhorrent to you.”

Mark Rooker: The categories for creatures from the aquatic world that may be eaten are restricted to those animals that have both fins and scales (**11:9**).

Perry Yoder: These may be saltwater or freshwater creatures.

Kenneth Mathews: Moreover, sea creatures that crawled rather than swam appeared out of place as inhabitants of the sea and thus were inappropriate for consumption.

C. (:13-23) Sky Creatures

1. (:13-19) Birds

“These, moreover, you shall detest among the birds; they are abhorrent, not to be eaten: the eagle and the vulture and the buzzard, 14 and the kite and the falcon in its kind, 15 every raven in its kind, 16 and the ostrich and the owl and the sea gull and the hawk in its kind, 17 and the little owl and the cormorant and the great owl, 18 and the white owl and the pelican and the carrion vulture, 19 and the stork, the heron in its kinds, and the hoopoe, and the bat.”

Mark Rooker: the prohibited birds could be classified as birds of prey.

2. (:20-23) Winged Insects

“All the winged insects that walk on all fours are detestable to you. 21 Yet these you may eat among all the winged insects which walk on all fours: those which have above their feet jointed legs with which to jump on the earth. 22 These of them you may eat: the locust in its kinds, and the devastating locust in its kinds, and the cricket in its kinds, and the grasshopper in its kinds. 23 But all other winged insects which are four-footed are detestable to you.”

Mark Rooker: Flying insects were also detestable and hence could not be a food source for the Israelite (**11:20**). Exceptions to the rule were insects that had jointed legs for hopping. These included the locust, katydid, cricket, and grasshopper (**11:21–22**). The reasons for this distinction are not clear, and it may be remembered that locusts were the diet of John the Baptist in the wilderness (**Matt 3:4; Mark 1:6**).

Perry Yoder: The permitted insects must have knees, or legs with a joint so that they can hop about. The permitted insects in this category are listed. All insects not mentioned as permitted are detestable.

II. (:24-40) POLLUTION BY CONTAMINATION

A. (:24-28) Contact with Four-Footed Carcasses of Forbidden Creatures

“By these, moreover, you will be made unclean: whoever touches their carcasses becomes unclean until evening, 25 and whoever picks up any of their carcasses shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. 26 Concerning all the animals which divide the hoof, but do not make a split hoof, or which do not chew cud, they are unclean to you: whoever touches them becomes unclean. 27 Also whatever walks on its paws, among all the creatures that walk on all fours, are unclean to you; whoever touches their carcasses becomes unclean until evening, 28 and the one who picks up their carcasses shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; they are unclean to you.”

Perry Yoder: Two levels of contamination are mentioned: touching the carcass and carrying it (vv. 24-25). If a person only touches the carcass, the person is impure until evening. Time allows the impurity to dissipate. However, if they have carried the carcass of such an animal, they must first launder their clothes and then wait until evening. Carrying makes garments impure.

Kenneth Mathews: There is one more important aspect to the treatment of creatures that makes for holy living. Sandwiched between the listings of the food laws are the directions pertaining to the **handling of dead bodies**, human and animal. Since God was the God of the living who delivered his people, it was offensive to God that the dead were in his presence. Special steps were needed to remove the offense of a corpse from the sanctuary and from the camp. We remember that the Lord dramatically struck down Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s sons, for unlawful practices in the sanctuary. The removal of their scorched bodies from the sanctuary required Aaron’s Levite cousins. As priests who approached God in behalf of the people, Aaron and his two surviving sons could not attend to their dead bodies or even attend their funeral (**Leviticus 10:1–7**). Holy living meant ridding the camp of anything that pertained to death and disease, the natural imperfections of all creatures. The main point of Moses’ instructions was for the people to avoid touching corpses when possible because dead bodies conveyed ritual contagion through contact. This made the person or thing unfit to remain in the camp. Only after the proper ritual cleansing was the person or item reintegrated into the life of the community. Coming into contact with a creature’s remains would be inevitable, of course, but the Lord’s gift provided a remedy for uncleanness that reunited the offender to the holy camp. The passage addresses three categories of the dead: the four-footed animals forbidden for consumption (vv. 24–28), the swarming creatures on the ground (vv. 29–38), and carcasses of the creatures approved for consumption (vv. 39, 40).

B. (:29-38) Contact with Carcasses of Swarming Creatures on the Ground

1. (:29-31) List of Unclean Swarming Creatures on the Ground

“Now these are to you the unclean among the swarming things which swarm on the earth: the mole, and the mouse, and the great lizard in its kinds, 30 and the gecko, and the crocodile, and the lizard, and the sand

reptile, and the chameleon. 31 These are to you the unclean among all the swarming things; whoever touches them when they are dead becomes unclean until evening.”

Richard Hess: **Verses 31–38** provide the most detailed discussion in Leviticus regarding the carcass of an unclean animal and what it means to touch or be touched by it. There are three general areas this section considers:

- containers (**vv.32–33**),
- food and water prepared for eating and drinking (**vv.34–35**),
- and food and water before it is prepared (**vv.36–38**).

2. (:32-36) Things Potentially Contaminated by Their Carcasses

“Also anything on which one of them may fall when they are dead, becomes unclean, including any wooden article, or clothing, or a skin, or a sack-- any article of which use is made-- it shall be put in the water and be unclean until evening, then it becomes clean. 33 As for any earthenware vessel into which one of them may fall, whatever is in it becomes unclean and you shall break the vessel. 34 Any of the food which may be eaten, on which water comes, shall become unclean; and any liquid which may be drunk in every vessel shall become unclean. 35 Everything, moreover, on which part of their carcass may fall becomes unclean; an oven or a stove shall be smashed; they are unclean and shall continue as unclean to you. 36 Nevertheless a spring or a cistern collecting water shall be clean, though the one who touches their carcass shall be unclean.”

Perry Yoder: If a person touches or carries the carcass of a forbidden animal, that person becomes unclean. What happens if such a carcass or part of it falls on something? This **passive** or **inadvertent** contamination affects different kinds of objects differently. If the object is made of wood or leather or cloth (**v. 32**), it requires immersion in water. The item then becomes ritually clean at evening time.

However, if the carcass should fall into a pot made of clay, the vessel and its contents become impure. The ceramic vessel must be broken. **Verse 34** seems redundant, since **verse 33** declared the contents of a contaminated vessel impure. Perhaps we should understand **verse 34** as applying to wetting food with water coming from a contaminated vessel. The same rule applies to ovens or stoves made of clay, which must be smashed (**v. 35**).

Unlike water in a container, fresh natural water does not contract corpse contamination. Such water remains ritually pure even when a carcass falls into it. However, the person who removes the carcass from the well or cistern does become ritually impure from touching the carcass.

3. (:37-38) Seeds Coming into Contact with Such Carcasses

- a. (:37) If the Seed Remains Dry -- Clean

“And if a part of their carcass falls on any seed for sowing which is to be sown, it is clean.”

b. (:38) If the Seed is Wet -- Unclean

“Though if water is put on the seed, and a part of their carcass falls on it, it is unclean to you.”

Mark Rooker: Seeds that came into contact with a carcass remained clean unless they already had been watered, in which case they became unclean (**11:38**).

Kenneth Mathews: These creatures, such as insects, conveyed contagion through two means: direct contact (v. 31) or indirectly through secondary contact (vv. 33–38). This latter category reminds us today of tobacco’s secondary smoke that is a health risk for bystanders and children in the home. The passage gives everyday scenarios of how this could happen and how to get rid of the uncleanness. Items made of common material, such as wood and cloth, had to be submerged in water until evening (v. 32). Also, generally speaking, any item made of material that absorbed liquid required an extreme response since the corruption could not be removed. A clay pot that was defiled by insects, for example, absorbed polluted water; it had to be smashed since the water could not be completely purged (also **Leviticus 6:28; 15:12**). Food or beverages touched by contaminated water was likewise unclean (vv. 33, 34). Cooking fixtures, such as a stove, had to be busted into pieces (v. 35). If, however, the carcass was in a spring or reservoir, the water was not unclean; it was a permanent body of water surrounded by the ground and was not portable (v. 36). Another exception was seed contacted by an insect. If the seed was dry, it remained clean; contact with seed already wet, however, made it unfit. This was because the seed would absorb the contaminated water (vv. 37, 38).

C. (:39-40) Contact with Carcasses of Creatures Approved for Consumption

“Also if one of the animals dies which you have for food, the one who touches its carcass becomes unclean until evening. 40 He too, who eats some of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; and the one who picks up its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.”

III. (:41-45) SWARMING GROUND CREATURES

“Now every swarming thing that swarms on the earth is detestable, not to be eaten. 42 Whatever crawls on its belly, and whatever walks on all fours, whatever has many feet, in respect to every swarming thing that swarms on the earth, you shall not eat them, for they are detestable. 43 Do not render yourselves detestable through any of the swarming things that swarm; and you shall not make yourselves unclean with them so that you become unclean. 44 For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. 45 For I am the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; thus you shall be holy for I am holy.”

Kenneth Mathews: These are creatures that were the least favorable because of their mode of locomotion and their lowly position in deference to humans who stand erect. They have unbroken contact with the ground: “swarming things that swarm on the ground” (vv. 29, 41, 42). None of these varmints were accepted for consumption. Snakes, rodents, and creeping things were among these.

R. K. Harrison: The rationale of these laws concerning cleanness and uncleanness is now made explicit. The Israelites are instructed not to have any dealings with anything that would make them impure. Instead, they were to concentrate upon a positive approach to living, the principal feature of which was a conscious attempt to imitate the holiness of the covenant God. In a characteristically propositional manner the Lord informs his people of his high moral and ethical character, and demands that they consecrate themselves accordingly to his service. He also reminds them of the great deliverance which he achieved for them at the time of the exodus, and makes it clear that the Israelites are to be a distinctive spiritual body, of which he is the undisputed head. Holiness must therefore be the watchword of personal and national life alike.

(:46-47) CONCLUSION

A. (:46) Four Categories Targeted in the Instructions

1. Larger Land Animals (cf. :2b-8)

“This is the law regarding the animal,”

2. Sea Creatures (cf. :9-12)

“and the bird,”

3. Sky Creatures (cf. :13-23)

“and every living thing that moves in the waters,”

4. Swarming Ground Creatures (cf. :41-45)

“and everything that swarms on the earth,”

B. (:47) Purpose of the Instructions

*“to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean,
and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten.”*

Roy Gane: Apparently because all land swarmers are prohibited without exception, this class in general is reserved for the end of **Leviticus 11** as a potent contrast to holiness (vv. 41–45). The conclusion in **verses 43–45** emphasizes the most important point of the chapter: Observing the Lord’s dietary regulations has the purpose of emulating the Lord’s holiness, which is antithetical to impurity. If God’s people make themselves odious by what they eat, they misrepresent him. So living according to the dietary distinctions outlined in **chapter 11** is vital for maintaining the health of the divine-human relationship.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you think that Christians today are missing out on some hygienic value by not continuing to observe some of these dietary restrictions?
- 2) How do we protect ourselves in our culture today from losing the distinction between the sacred and the profane?
- 3) Are we too cavalier in our approach today to death and to the touching of dead carcasses?
- 4) How does the Lord assert His holiness today as the standard for all believers in the everyday affairs of life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kenneth Mathews: We will discover that the food laws achieved two purposes for Israel. First, the dietary laws were tied to creation, indicating that the taking of created life was the Creator's province and prerogative. Second, the food laws distinguished Israel from the neighboring nations and made Israel uniquely the Lord's possession. By resisting the foods of the nations, the Israelites had a built-in safeguard against assimilation and taking up the religious life of pagan cultures. That there was religious consideration given to proper food for worship and consumption can be seen even before the Mosaic legislation. God instructed Noah to house in the ark "clean" and "unclean" specimens, and upon disembarking he presented the clean to the Lord in worship (**Genesis 7:2, 8; 8:20**). Evidently there was an intuitive awareness of what was appropriate for an offering presented to the Lord.

David Thompson: IN ORDER TO HAVE CLOSE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, WE MUST DESIRE AND PURSUE PURITY AND HOLINESS NOT ONLY IN OUR WORSHIP, BUT IN OUR DAILY, PRACTICAL LIVES BY MAKING CLEAN VERSUS UNCLEAR CHOICES.

To live a life of holiness to the LORD meant to live in personal wholeness and in accordance with the design of the Creator. To live among the confusion and chaos of the world encourages failure to recognize the higher standard of holiness. These distinctions still stand today, although the specifics of how they work out have changed.

Holiness, then, becomes the basic priority in all aspects of living, even in matters of eating and drinking. Here the foundational principle of the new covenant is the same as

that of Israel's dietary laws: God's people must live blamelessly before the holy God in order to make a distinction between themselves and the corrupt world in which they live. They must live above the fallen world and in harmony with the Creator's design. So how and what they eat is no small matter; rather, it is most often a great opportunity to display redemptive holiness.

Allen Ross: Christians have been sanctified or made holy by the blood of Christ and so may rightly profess to be a holy nation (**1 Pet. 1:2; 2:9–10**). But their profession must be confirmed by the reality of holy living (**Col. 1:22; 1 Pet. 1:15**). In fact, Peter drew upon Leviticus to urge Christians to *be holy, because the LORD is holy* (**1:16**). To be free from the regulations of the law is not a license to be free from obeying what the law revealed. The New Testament makes this very clear: moral imperfections and Impurities — that is, the sinful activities that rendered a person unclean in the Old Testament — are still sinful in the new covenant and still require repentance and confession and forgiveness in order to comply with God's standard of holiness. It is folly — it is dishonest—to argue that because the purification regulations of Old Testament Israel were fulfilled by the death of Christ, the sins listed in Leviticus are no longer sins.

First, what was done away with in Christ was

- (1) the classification of defilements and diseases that prevented people from coming into the sanctuary and
- (2) the ritual that removed uncleanness.

In the New Testament all sins of inadvertence and ignorance as well as premeditated and intentional sins are still called sins and require forgiveness and amendment of life before participation in the worship and service of the LORD.

Second, human defilements like skin diseases or bodily emissions were not sins; they were physical (earthly) conditions. When the ritual was prescribed for bodily emissions and defilements, confession of sin was never required nor did the priest speak a word of forgiveness. The only requirement was separation from the sanctuary until the time of purification.

Third, what required confession and forgiveness were sins that also rendered a person unclean, but only the less blatant sins (inadvertent or from ignorance) could be rectified with the purification offering.

Fourth, major sins that people committed (premeditated, deliberate violations of the law, such as violations of the moral code) were never covered by a purification offering in Israel but required divine intervention for forgiveness.

So in no way did sin—whether sins of ignorance or grave offenses—cease being sin when the ritual was fulfilled by the death of Christ. To argue that because the laws of the sacrifices came to an end, then what they covered is no longer a violation, sounds profound but it is wrong.

Mark Rooker: Numerous proposals have been brought forth regarding the criteria for determining whether a particular animal was clean or unclean. The most commonly proposed reasons for making these categorical distinctions among the animals involve symbolic, ethical, aesthetic, hygienic, morphological, and theological criteria.

The symbolic view, that the animals represent something else of a more practical or spiritual nature, is based on an allegorical interpretation. **Philo**, the great allegorist, advocated such a view. For him, for example, chewing the cud indicated contemplation and reflection while parting the hoof referred to making distinctions. This interpretation was not made in the New Testament, but it is evident in the early church in the *Letter of Barnabas* and is echoed by other more recent interpreters. This view should be dismissed because there is nothing to indicate an allegorical or typological interpretation in the text or in the rest of Scripture.

The ethical explanation is based on the notion that the dietary laws would reduce the culinary possibilities for the Israelite and thereby reduce the number of times an animal would be slain. This restriction would consequently curb animal slaughter and thus teach the inviolability of all life. This view, which has been adopted by **J. Milgrom**, seems difficult to support from the textual data in **Leviticus 11** and **Deuteronomy 14**, where reverence for life does not in any way appear to be an issue in the contexts.

The aesthetic criterion for the dietary laws is based on the quality of an animal's appearance. A clean animal would be one that is aesthetically pleasant, while an unclean animal's appearance would so repulse anyone that it would could create disgust if found on an Israelite's dinner plate. **Eichrodt** concedes that this may be the explanation about why some animals are considered to be unclean. This argument would also be difficult to explain from the context, so it seems entirely subjective.

The hygienic explanation is based on the view that the Israelite dietary laws are God's way of protecting the Israelite from certain diseases. Foods that are harmful to personal health are unclean. This view is supported, it is argued, by God's promise that "*none of the diseases of Egypt*" would be visited upon the Israelites (**Exod 15:26**). Although many evangelicals have suggested that this is the valid reason animals were considered to be unclean, it faces a major difficulty when we explore how the dietary laws are dealt with in the New Testament. In the New Testament the dietary laws are rendered ineffective (**Mark 7**; see also **1 Tim 4:4–5**). **Calvin** explains: Those who imagine that God here had regard to their health, as if discharging the office of a Physician, pervert by their vain speculation the whole force and utility of this law. I allow, indeed, that the meats which God permits to be eaten are wholesome, and best adapted for food; but, both from the preface,—in which God admonished them that holiness was to be cultivated by the people whom He had chosen,—as also from the (subsequent) abolition of this law, it is sufficiently plain that this distinction of meats was a part of that elementary instruction under which God kept His ancient people. "*Let no man therefore judge you (says Paul) in meat or in drink, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ*" (**Col. ii. 16, 17**). If the hygienic law is the proper explanation for rendering foods unclean, one would have to ask why God is no longer concerned with

the believer's health, for he has now determined that these unhealthy foods may be consumed if one desires. Moreover, the assumption that the clean foods are in fact more healthy than the unclean ones is not decisive scientifically. The hygienic argument thus does not bear up under scrutiny.

The morphological explanation is a fairly new proposal that many modern commentators have endorsed as the proper explanation for distinguishing between the clean and the unclean in **Leviticus 11**. **M. Douglas**, in her work *Purity and Danger*, is credited with popularizing this view. The morphological explanation focuses on the information in the biblical text regarding the locomotion and digestive procedures of certain animals and concludes that the unclean animal is one that would depart from the normal locomotive and digestive habits of ordinary animals and thus be anomalous. Since these animals exhibited characteristics different from the more customary habits established in creation, the Israelites were to avoid them and abstain from eating them. This view also does not bear up, especially when one considers the fact that the clean and unclean animals were created by God. Therefore it would be difficult to suggest that his perfect design was to create these beings with anomalies.

The theological explanation suggests that unclean animals were those that were known to have played a role in pagan religion. Rendering this type of an animal as unclean would be in effect a polemical statement against pagan beliefs. Moreover, observance of these laws of uncleanness would have a role to play in distinguishing the Israelite from the Gentiles. This argument appears to have merit, for the biblical writers often employ polemics in their writings that are sometimes concealed to modern readers. Further archaeological discoveries perhaps could support this view, but presently not enough is known to say confidently this explanation is the criteria for all the animals considered to be unclean. One difficulty that must be solved is the fact that some animals, such as the bull, were worshiped among Canaanite and Egyptian peoples and yet in the Bible were deemed clean animals for sacrifice and for food.

Gordon Wenham: The works of social anthropologist **Mary Douglas** appear to avoid these dangers. She argues that the uncleanness laws do have **symbolic significance**, but her interpretation is based on a comprehensive reading of all the laws and a reliance on the distinctions emphasized in Leviticus itself, not on points that fascinate the modern reader.

In our Introduction it was suggested that the notion underlying holiness and cleanness was **wholeness** and **normality**. The priests, for example, had to be free from physical deformity (**21:5–6, 17ff.**). Mixed crops, mixed clothing, and mixed marriages are incompatible with holiness (**18:23; 19:19**).

The same insistence on wholeness underlies the uncleanness laws in this chapter. The animal world is divided into three spheres: those that fly in the air, those that walk on the land, and those that swim in the seas (cf. **Gen. 1:20–30**). Each sphere has a particular **mode of motion** associated with it. Birds have two wings with which to fly, and two feet for walking; fish have fins and scales with which to swim; land animals have hoofs to run with. The clean animals are those that conform to these standard pure

types. Those creatures which in some way transgress the boundaries are unclean. Thus fish without fins and scales are unclean (**Lev. 11:10; Deut. 14:10**). Insects which fly but which have many legs are unclean, whereas locusts which have wings and only two hopping legs are clean (**Lev. 11:20–23**). Animals with an indeterminate form of motion, i.e., which “swarm,” are unclean (**Lev. 11:41–44**). “Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong.” Insofar as some animals do not conform, they are unclean.

This analysis explains the main divisions between clean and unclean, but it does not explain why pigs are unclean, but sheep and goats are reckoned to be clean. Douglas thinks a rationale for this differentiation may be discerned if the social background to the laws is borne in mind. Sheep and goats would have been the standard meat of pastoralists, so it was natural for them to be regarded as clean. But pigs and camels did not conform exactly to the norms of behavior defined by sheep and goats and were therefore unclean. They transgress the boundaries of clean animals in not chewing the cud or in lacking cloven feet. In other words, there is a parallel between the holiness looked for in man and the cleanness of animals: man must conform to the norms of moral and physical perfection, and animals must conform to the standards of the animal group to which they belong.

Further analysis demonstrates that each sphere of the animal realm is similarly structured. Water creatures divide into the clean and the unclean, but land and air creatures further subdivide into clean animals that may be eaten and clean animals that may be sacrificed as well as eaten. This threefold division of animals—unclean, clean, and sacrificial—parallels the divisions of mankind, the unclean, i.e., those excluded from the camp of Israel, the clean, i.e., the majority of ordinary Israelites, and those who offer sacrifice, i.e., the priests. This tripartite division of both the animal world and the human realm is no coincidence, as is demonstrated by various laws in the Pentateuch, which apply similar principles to man and beast (**Gen. 1:29–30; Exod. 13:2, 13; 20:10; 21:28ff.; 22:28–29 [Eng. 29–30]; Lev. 26:22**). Once it is admitted that the animals symbolize the human world, the uncleanness of the birds of prey becomes intelligible: they are detestable because they eat carrion and flesh from which the blood has not been drained properly, acts that make men unclean (**Lev. 11:13–19; cf. 11:40 and 17:10ff.**).

Douglas therefore contends that there was a system underlying the uncleanness regulations and their symbolism was consciously felt in ancient Israel. They expressed an understanding of holiness, and of Israel’s special status as the holy people of God. The division into clean (edible) foods and unclean (inedible) foods corresponded to the division between holy Israel and the Gentile world. Among those animals that were clean there were a few types that could be offered in sacrifice. Similarly there was a group of men within Israel who could offer sacrifice, namely the priests. Through this system of symbolic laws the Israelites were reminded at every meal of their redemption to be God’s people. Their diet was limited to certain meats in imitation of their God, who had restricted his choice among the nations to Israel. It served, too, to bring to mind Israel’s responsibilities to be a holy nation. As they distinguished between clean

and unclean foods, they were reminded that holiness was more than a matter of meat and drink but a way of life characterized by **purity** and **integrity**.

The strongest argument in favor of Douglas' interpretation of the food laws is its comprehensiveness and coherence. Additional support may be found in the earliest explanation of these laws for a Greek audience in the second century B.C., the Letter of Aristeas. He says that men must behave like the clean birds which eat grain, not like the wild and carnivorous unclean birds. These regulations teach Israel to act "with discrimination according to the standard of righteousness—more especially because we have been distinctly separated from the rest of mankind."

Finally it may be noted that the NT appears to regard the food laws as symbolic of the division between Jew and Gentile, and their abolition under the New Covenant is of a piece with breaking down the wall of partition.

Allen Ross: Picking up on the emphasis of making distinctions based upon the order of creation, **Kass** suggests that the main point is **separation**. If Israel was holy, separate from the world to the LORD, then it had to learn to make the same distinctions that the LORD had made in creation.

Using the principles of place, kind, motion, and form from **Gen. 1**, **Kass** analyzes the contents of Lev. 11 according to the following classifications:

1. creatures that have no proper or unambiguous place (e.g., amphibians)
2. creatures that have no proper form (e.g., incompletely cloven-footed animals)
3. creatures that violate proper locomotion (e.g., water animals that walk)
4. creatures that violate the original dietary code, showing no respect for life (e.g., carnivorous ones)

In other words, any creatures that **violate a principle of creation** are not permitted for food. **Israel had to live in harmony with the LORD's order of creation.**

TEXT: Leviticus 12:1-8

TITLE: *UNCLEANNES DUE TO CHILDBIRTH*

BIG IDEA:

RITUAL PURITY MUST BE REESTABLISHED AFTER CHILDBIRTH VIA THE REQUIRED PERIOD OF SECLUSION AND THE APPROPRIATE SACRIFICES

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Hess: Turning from foods to childbirth, **ch. 12** continues the theme of **impurity**. Indeed, this change signals what the rest of the section on impurities will consider. **Ch. 11** dealt with the whole of the animal kingdom; **chs. 12–15** focus on people. Even in this section there is a pattern, for **chs. 12** (childbirth) and **15** (genital discharges) consider uncleanness related to sexual matters; between these sections, **chs. 13** (diagnosis) and **14** (cleanness) deal with skin diseases. . .

The major questions that arise in this section are:

- (1) Why is the woman unclean?
- (2) What differences exist between the male and female child as far as the cleanness of the mother is concerned?
- (3) Why is there a difference between the number of days of uncleanness for a boy and a girl?

These questions are interrelated.

Kenneth Mathews: How does the Leviticus requirement of purification after childbirth square with the Bible's high view of children and motherhood? We will find that the ritual of cleansing testifies to the sacredness of life and the importance of birth and motherhood and conveys the spiritual message of birth into the family of the Lord. We will come away from this passage with a renewed devotion to God as the source of all life who through his Son Jesus Christ has redeemed fallen humanity.

Allen Ross: It will be very helpful if, from the outset, people can get past the English term unclean and think more in terms of the contextual usage in Leviticus. Basically, we are dealing with ritual purity: what was clean was free to participate in the ritual in the sanctuary where the ark was; what was unclean had to wait. . .

The physical discharge after the birth of a child prevented a woman from entering the holy place and required a period of purification (interrupted only by the rite of circumcision) followed by ritual sacrifice to restore full participation in the sanctuary. . .

God's holy nature demands that all who experience the physical aspects of this life (here the process of childbirth) must be sanctified to enter his presence.

I. (:1-5) REALITY OF UNCLEANNESS REQUIRING PURIFICATION AFTER CHILDBIRTH

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying,’”*

A. (:2b-4) For a Male Child

1. (:2b) Unclean for 7 Days

“When a woman gives birth and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean.”

Kenneth Mathews: First, we must clarify what is meant in the text by a new mother being deemed “*unclean*” (v. 2b). The word “unclean” is not a term that refers to immorality; rather, it speaks of **ritual impurity**. A ritual is a symbolic act or series of acts designed to convey a message. When a mother gives birth to a child, there is a flow of blood that follows the baby’s birth.¹ This is a natural function of the birth cycle. At this critical moment in the life of the mother and child, in the life of the family, and in the life of the community, the passing of blood provided a powerful image of the significance of life and its opposite, the loss of life. The flow of blood conveyed to the parents that life and death are in view. The emission also sent the message that human life is **imperfect**. The Bible tells us that God is the only true perfect One. He is flawless in his personal attributes, such as his love, moral purity, and faithfulness. Therefore, anything or anyone that had a physical disorder could not be admitted into the house of worship. The thought that a woman giving birth could be viewed as a **disorder** is difficult for us to understand since giving birth was and is considered a divine blessing, a cherished experience valued by Hebrew society. But further reflection on what we mean by the word disorder helps us accept this idea. A disorder technically means what is **not the normal, regular experience of life**, a change whether for good or bad. The stages of conception, pregnancy, and birth require extensive changes in the body and are not the usual daily condition of a woman’s body. This means a woman’s pregnancy and childbirth reflect an **unusual condition**, not her typical healthy, whole state. . .

The second clarification is that Israelite women were not the only ones to have a disorder. Men, who had physical irregularities such as emissions or skin diseases (**chapters 13–15**), also were deemed ritually impure. Also, our passage does not teach that the newborn child was considered “unclean.” There is no instruction given regarding the cleansing of the child. The ritual of circumcision was not a ritual of purification (v. 3); it was a ritual of covenant initiation that declared the child’s acceptance into the community of Israel. If it were a purification rite, making the child pure, then females remained in a perpetual state of uncleanness since there was no comparable rite for the daughter. The children then were not considered inherently impure.

2. (:3) Circumcision on the 8th Day = Covenant Initiation

“And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.”

Allen Ross: An interruption on the eighth day of purification allowed for the circumcision of a boy baby. Here we see that a higher law (the positive command for circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant) was preferred over the law of uncleanness. The point is included here because the Israelites needed to know how the two commands were harmonized.

3. (:4) Seclusion for 33 Days

“Then she shall remain in the blood of her purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary, until the days of her purification are completed.”

Mark Rooker: The real disadvantage to being in a state of impurity was that the individual would not be able to enter into the tabernacle, so the person would be prevented from worshiping God with the covenant community.

Robert Vasholz: Again, that women were not excluded from the Tent-Sanctuary is confirmed in **Leviticus 12:4**. There, the woman is excluded from the sanctuary during her time of uncleanness, a restriction that assumes that she was not normally excluded (cf. **1 Sam. 1:7**). The woman herself is to bring her offerings according to **Leviticus 12:6, 8**.

B. (:5) For a Female Child

1. Unclean for 2 Weeks

“But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her menstruation;”

2. Seclusion for 66 Days

“and she shall remain in the blood of her purification for sixty-six days.”

David Guzik: The longer period of ceremonial uncleanness for the birth of a daughter should not be understood as a penalty. Instead, it is linked to the idea stated in the previous verses – that the time of impurity is for the symbolic responsibility of bringing other sinners into the world. When giving birth to a female, a mother brings a sinner into the world who will bring still other sinners into the world.

Kenneth Mathews: What may be at work here is the presence of two females; the mother and the daughter require twice as many days as the birth of a boy. If this is the case, then the assignment of the additional forty days for the daughter may be explained by the potential she has to be a child-bearer.

II. (:6-8) RESTORATION OF CLEANNESS BY OFFERING FOR ATONEMENT AFTER CHILDBIRTH

A. (:6-7) Customary Offering

1. (:6) The Offering

“And when the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting, a one year old lamb for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering.”

2. (:7) The Atonement

“Then he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, whether a male or a female.”

Mark Rooker: Though the passage states that the new mother presents these offerings to the priest to receive atonement, we should not consider the act of giving birth to be in any case a sinful act. This is supported from our passage in two ways. First of all, in the order of the offerings the burnt offering was offered first and then the sin offering followed. The order was reversed when sin was at issue. When an offering was made in response to the commission of sin, the sin offering preceded the burnt offering. The order of the offerings in **Leviticus 12** suggests that the personal sin of the mother is not the issue. Moreover, the result of the sacrifice renders the mother “clean”; it does not say that she is forgiven (see **4:20, 26, 31, 35**). The issue is thus not the sinfulness of the mother or of the process of giving birth; rather the issue seems to be that of the issuance of blood. Because life is in the blood (**17:11**), the loss of blood required some purification to acknowledge the sanctity of life.

Kenneth Mathews: The sin offering, however, did not address some specific sin in the life of the mother. No sin had been committed by the mother. Rather, the sin offering was a **purification offering**, a shedding of blood whereby the ritual impurity that had compromised the purity of the altar in the sanctuary might be removed. The new mother’s physical discharge of blood had brought impurity to the sanctuary and required purgation. This is what the text means by “*atonement*” (v. 7). The Hebrew word for “*atone*” can have various meanings, depending on the context. In the case of sin, the word means to “expiate,” that is, to make amends for sin. The outcome is that the Israelite was “forgiven” by God (e.g., **Leviticus 4:20**). For physical impurities, however, there was no sin involved (**Leviticus 12–15**); the blood in such cases wiped away ceremonial corruption. By carrying out the ritual, the mother had full acceptance once again in the sanctuary and had the freedom to touch holy things, such as food dedicated to the Lord (e.g., **Deuteronomy 26:14**).

Wiersbe: The burnt offering symbolized her dedication to God as she returned to her normal life, and the sin offering took care of the defilement involved in the birth process.

B. (:8) Discounted Offering

1. The Offering

“But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering;”

Mark Rooker: After the birth of the Lord in the New Testament, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. Following his circumcision Mary offered two birds to declare her days of purification were completed. What is of interest here is not only that Mary carried out the prescription of the Law in perfect obedience but that she rendered the offering of the poor (**Luke 2:21–24**). This indicates that the Savior of the world, who created all that exists, not only humbled himself in becoming a man but was born in the most meager of circumstances in ancient Israel. Yet even for the poor like Jesus' parents, God was gracious, for the less expensive offerings achieved the same result—the new mother was atoned for and became clean.

2. The Atonement

“and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.”

John Schultz: The sacrifice to be brought at the end of the period of purification consists of two parts: a **burnt offering** and a **sin offering**. The sin offering refers to the corrupted nature of man. The burnt offering points to the divine love that gives itself and that is the “raison d’être” for man.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) With the Creator making such a sharp distinction between the two sexes in these regulations, why does society today want to obliterate all distinctions and expand the spectrum of sexual orientation?
- 2) What were the benefits for the mother of this enforced period of seclusion after birth?
- 3) What is the relationship, if any, between circumcision and NT baptism?
- 4) How does the offering of Mary and Joseph at the birth of Jesus point to their lack of economic standing and enhance our understanding of the humbling nature of the birth of Jesus?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: The ritual purification of the mother of a newborn son lasted a total of 40 days. For the first "seven" of these, she was physically or medically impure, contagiously "*unclean*." Even though she had not entered the sanctuary after the birth of her child, her presence in the camp had still contaminated the altar (cf. **15:31**). That is why she had to offer a sin (purification) offering. Her ritual uncleanness evidently

resulted from the woman's bodily discharge that followed the baby's delivery (cf. **vv. 4, 5, 7**). The lochia is a discharge from the vagina that continues for several weeks after childbirth. For the remaining "33 days," she was to remain separate from the sanctuary and anything holy. This second period served the double purpose: of

- (1) allowing the new mother to regain her health and strength, and
- (2) restoring her ritual purity.

The Law did not regard the newborn child as unclean, however, and "circumcision" was not a purification rite for the child. The most extensive discussion of circumcision is in **Genesis 17:9- 14**, not **Leviticus 12:3**.

David Thompson: Why a longer time for purification for a girl? Possible reasons:

- 1) The formation of the embryo is longer for females than males.
- 2) The blood discharges from a woman last longer and have greater toxicity with a girl than a boy.
- 3) The pain of childbirth is a judgment from God on a woman and therefore, the woman who gives birth to a girl doubles the time for purification because another girl has been born.
- 4) A baby girl would eventually be associated with blood herself (eventual menstruation) and, therefore, the purification took longer.
- 5) God gave this as a protection for the mother and baby to keep them somewhat isolated to be free from infection and disease. This was a time before shots were given to babies.
- 6) The normal time for bonding between a mother and son is less time needed than a mother and a daughter.

The truth is we don't know. But this was God's Law. It was His system. If one is to be clean before God, it must be on His terms!

Peter Pett: So in every case of childbirth there was no avoiding uncleanness. It was not a question of choice. It was something that had to be endured. Birth inevitably involved sin because the birth process had been affected by sin, and the child being born into the world was now subject to sin. Indeed he or she would be a sinner (compare **Romans 5:14; Psalms 51:5; Psalms 58:3**). And therefore the very process of birth came short of 'perfection and must be 'unclean'. And that is why the woman, being in the process of producing a sinner, was during that process prevented from being able for a while to approach the holiness of God.

And men and women saw this as being made visibly quite clear. When the child was born it was covered with blood and mucus. It came out 'unclean'. (This does not contradict the statement that every child which opens the womb shall be called holy to Yahweh (**Luke 2:23**). The latter means that it is seen as set apart for Yahweh's service, not that it is 'ritually holy' at that point. In the mercy of God while it enters the world 'unclean' it is, if an Israelite, also set apart as His).'

But because of the grace of God it was recognised that that uncleanness would be temporary and not permanent, and therefore that through following due processes the

woman and the child could come out of their period of uncleanness in childbearing, back into cleanness and the light of God's holiness, with all traces of sin being put behind them. That is the process described here.

This uncleanness in childbirth includes a woman's discharges after childbirth, indeed they were a main part of it. They are seen here in Leviticus as the next example of uncleanness. They are seen as part of the consequences of that same foolish act that had rendered so much of the world unclean. That woman was to suffer in childbearing had been determined then, and she was aware that that suffering would in childbearing continually bring her down from her life of cleanness and fellowship with God, into the realm of uncleanness, that she might remember continually what had been done. She was, as it were, continually to relive the fall.

If she was to produce children this uncleanness was something that she would have to undergo. There was no avoiding it. In order to produce new life she must be willing to go through the uncleanness of childbirth. It was intended to bring home to all the awfulness of sin.

So the woman's problems after birth were to be seen as part of God's indictment of the first woman (**Genesis 3:16**) from whom she was descended. She was to recognise that the reason that she was no longer in the sphere of painless and untroubled birth, and that her body would manifest that fact during the process of birth and after, was both because of the sin that was past, and because even more sin was by it seen as coming into the world, and even more death by sin. Every unclean new birth shouted out and proclaimed the sinfulness of man, and stressed that God does judge sin, even though that judgment might have been partially delayed. It was the explanation of all the pain and unpleasantness that the woman went through.

Roy Gane: **Leviticus 12** is the shortest chapter in Leviticus. It provides instructions regarding a mother's period of physical ritual impurity following childbirth and her ritual purification at the end of this time. References to her flow of blood in **verses 4, 5, 7** show that the impurity results from a normal discharge that normally lasts for two to six weeks after a woman gives birth. Since this is a pelvic/genital discharge that begins bright red, the first week or two, depending on the sex of the child, are treated like the regular ritual impurity of a menstrual period (**vv. 2, 5**). Therefore this impurity is communicable to persons by touch (**15:19**), and whatever she lies or sits on conveys impurity to those who contact them (**15:20–23**).

During the following period of thirty-three or sixty-six days of postnatal blood purification (lit., "bloods of purification"), the mother's impurity is not communicable by touch, and she is only restricted from contacting anything sacred or entering the sanctuary compound (**12:4**). She is free to contact anything in the common sphere, including her husband by resuming sexual relations.

Gordon Wenham: It is not the birth itself that makes the woman unclean. There is no mention of the baby being unclean, but it is the **discharge** (lochia) that follows

childbirth that make the woman unclean. Three times her blood or discharge of blood is mentioned in this law (vv. 4, 5, 7). For the first few days after delivery this discharge is bright red, then it turns brown and later becomes paler. It may last from two to six weeks. Because the first phase of lochia resembles the menstrual discharge, it is consistent for the woman to be treated as contagiously unclean as she is when she menstruates. Since the postnatal discharge lasts longer than a week, the woman continues to be unclean for an additional 33 or 66 days, making a total of 40 or 80 days.

On the more fundamental question of why any discharge should make a person unclean, the Bible gives no explicit answer. Keil suggests that because decaying corpses discharge and cause pollution, so every bodily discharge is a reminder of sin and death. For Douglas, a bleeding or discharging body lacks wholeness and is therefore unclean. Loss of blood can lead to death, the antithesis of normal healthy life. Anyone losing blood is at least in danger of becoming less than perfect and therefore unclean. Thus blood is at once the most effective ritual cleanser (“*the blood makes atonement,*” 17:11) and the most polluting substance when it is in the wrong place. This is profound. Our greatest woes result from the corruption of our highest good, e.g., speech, sex, technology, atomic power.

Wiersbe: In ancient days, other nations practices circumcision; but God gave this rite to Abraham as a special mark of the covenant He had with the people of Israel (**Gen. 17:10-14**). Each male child became a “*child of the covenant*” when he was circumcised and named eight days after his birth. The operation also symbolized the “spiritual surgery” that God wants to perform on the human heart (**Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4**). Unfortunately, the Jewish people ignored the spiritual aspect of the ceremony and considered the physical operation alone a guarantee that the Jews were saved and accepted by God (**Matt. 3:7-10; Rom. 2:25-29**). A similar idea emerged in the early church and had to be strongly refuted (**Acts 15; Rom. 4:1-12**).

Some people equate infant baptism with circumcision; but as **R. K. Harrison** wisely states it, “The parallels are too superficial and narrow to be entirely convincing or valid.” The true believer has experience an inner spiritual circumcision through the Holy Spirit, the “*true circumcision*” that changes the heart and imparts new life (**Gal. 6:12-16; Phil. 3:1-3; Col. 2:10-11**). Because the sinful nature of the believer has been “*put off,*” he or she can walk in newness of life and does not have to yield to the desire of the flesh.

Oswald T. Allis: The only adequate explanation of the seeming anomaly presented by the command to be fruitful, the joy attending the realization of parenthood, and the uncleanness which is associated with it and which finds its most pronounced expression the prolonged purification required of the mother after she has performed the high function of womanhood, must be found in the fact of the Fall and the curse pronounced on woman immediately after it. Pain and suffering were to be the accompaniment of motherhood (**Gen. 3:16**). . .

From this it follows that, although the birth of a child is a joyous event, it is also a solemn one. For the birth of the child will inevitably be followed ultimately by its death, and by eternal death unless the child is made an heir of life through the redemption which is in Christ. . . . Consequently, according to the law, everything connected with parenthood is treated as **unclean**, and especially as rendering the person unfit for the performance of religious duties. . . .

For the Christian of today this ancient law has special significance. . . . They may not like to be told that their children are sinful and unclean. But they need to remember that this is so. The view is widely held today that children are born good, that they should be allowed to develop naturally, that self-expression should be encouraged, and discipline and restraint reduced to the minimum. Christian parents who realize the truth set forth here will pray earnestly that the children who have been born in sin may be “born again”, may be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They pray that they as parents may be enabled to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Guidance, restraint, discipline and religious instruction are quite as essential as self-expression, in most cases far more essential.

TEXT: Leviticus 13:1-59

TITLE: *UNCLEAN DUE TO BLEMISHES ON THE SKIN AND ON GARMENTS --
DIAGNOSIS*

BIG IDEA:

**GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE DEPENDS ON
RESTRICTING CONTACT WITH SKIN OR GARMENTS WITH
SIGNIFICANT BLEMISHES**

INTRODUCTION:

Constable: Before proceeding, we need to note that by "treatment," we do not mean that God medically prescribed a way by which people or objects afflicted with "leprosy" would necessarily recover. Rather, the "treatment" dealt with how people were to relate to God and the sanctuary in view of these problems. He was not dealing with them here as a Physician, but as a Public Health Inspector. God's objective was not so much their physical recovery, in this legislation, but their proper participation in worship. Symbolically, sin kept them from fellowship with God. . .

Typically, in each case, we read four things:

- (1) a preliminary statement of the symptoms,
- (2) the priestly inspection,
- (3) the basis of the priest's diagnosis, and
- (4) the diagnosis itself and the consequences.

Roy Gane: Because we are dealing here with the world of religious ritual rather than medicine, scientific identification of "scale disease" is not crucial for understanding the biblical message.

Richard Hess: **Leviticus 13** and **14** discuss skin diseases. **Ch. 13** describes symptoms that render a person diseased and therefore unclean. It also delineates evidence of change that can lead to the healing of the person and the pronouncement of him or her as clean. **Ch. 14** discusses the offerings necessary for the full reentry into the holy community of Israel. Thus **ch. 13** concerns the disease and **ch. 14** considers the means of acceptance by God and Israel after recovery from the disease. There is no discussion of either a treatment or a cure of the skin disease. The biblical material does not advance human medical knowledge beyond what was known at the time.

Peter Pett: For the world having been affected by man's fall, it was inevitable that disease would raise its head, and disease is regularly seen in the Old Testament as the punishment on the world due for sin. And certain special types of disease, as outlined in this chapter, were seen as marking the sinner off as outside the 'perfection' of God. The disease that resulted from sin was seen to have laid its visible mark on those involved. The diseases were a diminishing of the life that was in that person. They rendered him

‘unclean’. There were thus always going to be those whose sickness drew attention to the deserved consequence of the fall, to the fact that unwholeness excluded men from God. It may be that this was seen as illustrating the ‘*mark of Cain*’ (**Genesis 4:15**). Some have seen that as referring to some terrible skin disease. He was the one who was ‘*cast out of the camp*’ and then formed his own camp. . .

The central thought was not that they were infectious and might pass the disease on, although that was often true, it was that they in themselves came short of God’s required ‘perfection’, and were thus excluded from holy places, and in the worst cases from the holy camp. In this they were not being punished, or even treated medically, they were being judged religiously. Their presence would defile holiness. This brought home the terrible nature of the judgment it expressed. The sin that was responsible for such diseases excluded men from the presence of God.

David Thompson: IN ORDER FOR ONE TO WORSHIP GOD, HE MUST BE CLEAN AND THAT REQUIRES THAT GOD’S PRIESTS MAKE AN ACCURATE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF ANY DISEASE.

Allen Ross: The first part provides the diagnosis and isolation of skin diseases (**13:1–46**); the second part does the same for mold and mildew (**13:47–59**); attention is then paid to restoration, first for skin diseases (**14:1–32**) and then for mold and mildew (**14:33–57**). . .

In Israel’s laws we have revelation of the pattern of perfection, the quintessential illustration of the required condition of all who come into the presence of the Holy One: they must be perfect. Believing Israelites could worship the LORD if they were sick or leprous—they simply could not go into the actual presence of the Holy One. To go into God’s presence one had to be whole. This necessarily meant that some never went in because of chronic disease; it was as if they belonged to the realm of the dead, cut off from the community in the sanctuary. Their hope lay in the world to come, in a future resurrected body without corruption, and so they are like some today who have chronic and contagious diseases and must remain separate from the congregation, mainly for practical reasons.

Kenneth Mathews: This passage describes human infirmities of two kinds: an individual’s skin disorders and moldy defects in garments and houses. Clothing and houses are the trappings of daily human existence. That these two kinds of irregularities should disqualify a person from worshipping at the Tent of Meeting is surprising to us since in our world today these are relatively benign problems that can be easily remedied. To understand the severity of the diseases, however, we must recognize the ceremonial significance of the conditions, not the hygienic aspect. The symptoms of skin decay and the discoloration of the garments and of stone walls were external signals of the inherent problem all of us face—the decay of human bodies and the decay of the things of this world.

I. (:1-46) UNCLEAN DUE TO BLEMISHES ON THE SKIN

A. (:1-8) Skin Eruptions

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 2 ‘When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons the priests. 3 And the priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of leprosy; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean. 4 But if the bright spot is white on the skin of his body, and it does not appear to be deeper than the skin, and the hair on it has not turned white, then the priest shall isolate him who has the infection for seven days. 5 And the priest shall look at him on the seventh day, and if in his eyes the infection has not changed, and the infection has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall isolate him for seven more days. 6 And the priest shall look at him again on the seventh day; and if the infection has faded, and the mark has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a scab. And he shall wash his clothes and be clean. 7 But if the scab spreads farther on the skin, after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again to the priest. 8 And the priest shall look, and if the scab has spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is leprosy.’”

Richard Hess: in its form it represents something of a **logical flow chart**, with the response of the priest determining what happens next. At each step there are two possibilities, clean or unclean.

B. (:9-17) Chronic Skin Disease

“When the infection of leprosy is on a man, then he shall be brought to the priest. 10 The priest shall then look, and if there is a white swelling in the skin, and it has turned the hair white, and there is quick raw flesh in the swelling, 11 it is a chronic leprosy on the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean; he shall not isolate him, for he is unclean. 12 And if the leprosy breaks out farther on the skin, and the leprosy covers all the skin of him who has the infection from his head even to his feet, as far as the priest can see, 13 then the priest shall look, and behold, if the leprosy has covered all his body, he shall pronounce clean him who has the infection; it has all turned white and he is clean. 14 But whenever raw flesh appears on him, he shall be unclean. 15 And the priest shall look at the raw flesh, and he shall pronounce him unclean; the raw flesh is unclean, it is leprosy. 16 Or if the raw flesh turns again and is changed to white, then he shall come to the priest, 17 and the priest shall look at him, and behold, if the infection has turned to white, then the priest shall pronounce clean him who has the infection; he is clean.”

C. (:18-23) Boils / Scars

“And when the body has a boil on its skin, and it is healed, 19 and in the place of the boil there is a white swelling or a reddish-white, bright spot, then it shall

be shown to the priest; 20 and the priest shall look, and behold, if it appears to be lower than the skin, and the hair on it has turned white, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is the infection of leprosy, it has broken out in the boil. 21 But if the priest looks at it, and behold, there are no white hairs in it and it is not lower than the skin and is faded, then the priest shall isolate him for seven days; 22 and if it spreads farther on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is an infection. 23 But if the bright spot remains in its place, and does not spread, it is only the scar of the boil; and the priest shall pronounce him clean.”

Mark Rooker: The affliction of boils was experienced by Job and also was one of the ten plagues upon Egypt (**Job 2:7; Exod 9:9–11**).

D. (:24-28) Burns

“Or if the body sustains in its skin a burn by fire, and the raw flesh of the burn becomes a bright spot, reddish-white, or white, 25 then the priest shall look at it. And if the hair in the bright spot has turned white, and it appears to be deeper than the skin, it is leprosy; it has broken out in the burn. Therefore, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is an infection of leprosy. 26 But if the priest looks at it, and indeed, there is no white hair in the bright spot, and it is no deeper than the skin, but is dim, then the priest shall isolate him for seven days; 27 and the priest shall look at him on the seventh day. If it spreads farther in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is an infection of leprosy. 28 But if the bright spot remains in its place, and has not spread in the skin, but is dim, it is the swelling from the burn; and the priest shall pronounce him clean, for it is only the scar of the burn.”

E. (:29-37) Sores in Scalp or Beard

“Now if a man or woman has an infection on the head or on the beard, 30 then the priest shall look at the infection, and if it appears to be deeper than the skin, and there is thin yellowish hair in it, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a scale, it is leprosy of the head or of the beard. 31 But if the priest looks at the infection of the scale, and indeed, it appears to be no deeper than the skin, and there is no black hair in it, then the priest shall isolate the person with the scaly infection for seven days. 32 And on the seventh day the priest shall look at the infection, and if the scale has not spread, and no yellowish hair has grown in it, and the appearance of the scale is no deeper than the skin, 33 then he shall shave himself, but he shall not shave the scale; and the priest shall isolate the person with the scale seven more days. 34 Then on the seventh day the priest shall look at the scale, and if the scale has not spread in the skin, and it appears to be no deeper than the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean; and he shall wash his clothes and be clean. 35 But if the scale spreads farther in the skin after his cleansing, 36 then the priest shall look at him, and if the scale has spread in the skin, the priest need not seek for the yellowish hair; he is unclean. 37 If in his sight the scale has remained, however, and black hair has

grown in it, the scale has healed, he is clean; and the priest shall pronounce him clean.”

Richard Hess: Two reasons may exist for shaving the area around the wound but not the wound itself: (1) to enable identification of the color of the hair growing in the wound; and (2) to determine if the infection has grown to the area shaved.

F. (:38-39) Rashes

“And when a man or a woman has bright spots on the skin of the body, even white bright spots, 39 then the priest shall look, and if the bright spots on the skin of their bodies are a faint white, it is eczema that has broken out on the skin; he is clean.”

G. (:40-44) Baldness

“Now if a man loses the hair of his head, he is bald; he is clean. 41 And if his head becomes bald at the front and sides, he is bald on the forehead; he is clean. 42 But if on the bald head or the bald forehead, there occurs a reddish-white infection, it is leprosy breaking out on his bald head or on his bald forehead. 43 Then the priest shall look at him; and if the swelling of the infection is reddish-white on his bald head or on his bald forehead, like the appearance of leprosy in the skin of the body, 44 he is a leprous man, he is unclean. The priest shall surely pronounce him unclean; his infection is on his head.”

Mark Rooker: Although baldness in itself does not render anyone unclean (13:40–41), baldness that resulted from reddish-white sores rendered an individual unclean (13:42–44). Baldness was often associated with mourning in the Old Testament (Lev 21:5; Deut 14:1; Isa 3:24; 15:2; Jer 16:6; 47:5; 48:37; Ezek 7:18; 27:31; Amos 8:10; Mic 1:16).

(:45-46) Conclusion Regarding Skin Disorders

“As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' 46 He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.”

Wenham: The holiest area, where one was closest to God, was the tabernacle. It was here that the holy men, the priests, worked. The tabernacle was surrounded by the camp where Israel the holy people of God lived. This in turn was encircled by the area outside the camp, which was populated by non-Jews, sinners, and the unclean. To live outside the camp was to be cut off from the blessings of the covenant. It is little wonder that when a man was diagnosed as unclean he had to go into mourning. He experienced a living death; his life as a member of God's people experiencing God's blessing came to an end. **Gen. 3** presents a similar picture. ... As Adam and Eve experienced a living

death when they were expelled from Eden, so every man who was diagnosed as unclean suffered a similar fate.

Peter Pett: Theirs was a terrible fate, a terrible predicament. They could no longer enjoy the normal society of men, they could not enter the camp, and of course they had no opportunity to approach the tabernacle. Theirs was a living death.

Kenneth Mathews: The key to understanding the message of the passage is that disease made a person unfit to enter into the presence of God who was the God of life and of holy perfections. Since the earthly Tent of Meeting was a copy of the spiritual heavenly sanctuary (**Hebrews 8:5; 9:1; 10:1**), it would be wrong to expose the symbols of death and decay in the place of worship. Although we live in a fallen world, the world for which Christians are destined, Heaven, will not have decay, disease, and death. Our place will be secure.

II. (:47-59) UNCLEAN DUE TO BLEMISHES ON GARMENTS = FUNGUS

A. (:47-52)

“When a garment has a mark of leprosy in it, whether it is a wool garment or a linen garment, 48 whether in warp or woof, of linen or of wool, whether in leather or in any article made of leather, 49 if the mark is greenish or reddish in the garment or in the leather, or in the warp or in the woof, or in any article of leather, it is a leprous mark and shall be shown to the priest. 50 Then the priest shall look at the mark, and shall quarantine the article with the mark for seven days. 51 He shall then look at the mark on the seventh day; if the mark has spread in the garment, whether in the warp or in the woof, or in the leather, whatever the purpose for which the leather is used, the mark is a leprous malignancy, it is unclean. 52 So he shall burn the garment, whether the warp or the woof, in wool or in linen, or any article of leather in which the mark occurs, for it is a leprous malignancy; it shall be burned in the fire.”

Constable: Material objects do not "contract" illnesses, or spread infections like people do, but they do occasionally become contaminated—and can transfer through bodily contact a skin disease or fungus—due to mold, mildew, or some other invasive agent. Mosaic law did not view these abnormalities to be as great a threat, for example, as a communicable disease or plague would be, to the health of the Israelites. They did, however, represent deviation from a proper condition. . .

A person's clothing and housing represent the things closest to him, how he expresses himself, the things that he chooses to surround himself with. These things can be effected by and can manifest his sinful egocentric condition. If tainted by sin they too must be dealt with for fellowship with God and others to be intimate.

Allen Ross: Decay or corruption [in and of the environment] is incompatible with the holiness of the LORD and must be removed.

Milgrom: The discussion of mildew (vv.47–58) reveals that this infection symbolizes sin but does not contain sin. The fabric with mildew is not guilty of any sin. Thus the connection between sin and disease is severed.

B. (:53-58)

“But if the priest shall look, and indeed, the mark has not spread in the garment, either in the warp or in the woof, or in any article of leather, 54 then the priest shall order them to wash the thing in which the mark occurs, and he shall quarantine it for seven more days. 55 After the article with the mark has been washed, the priest shall again look, and if the mark has not changed its appearance, even though the mark has not spread, it is unclean; you shall burn it in the fire, whether an eating away has produced bareness on the top or on the front of it. 56 Then if the priest shall look, and if the mark has faded after it has been washed, then he shall tear it out of the garment or out of the leather, whether from the warp or from the woof; 57 and if it appears again in the garment, whether in the warp or in the woof, or in any article of leather, it is an outbreak; the article with the mark shall be burned in the fire. 58 And the garment, whether the warp or the woof, or any article of leather from which the mark has departed when you washed it, it shall then be washed a second time and shall be clean.”

(:59) Conclusion Regarding Clothing Blemishes

“This is the law for the mark of leprosy in a garment of wool or linen, whether in the warp or in the woof, or in any article of leather, for pronouncing it clean or unclean.”

Perry Yoder: **Chapter 13** ends with a summary statement that applies only to blemished clothing (v. 59). This summary marks **verses 47-59** as a self-contained unit that was attached to regulations concerning human blemishes. The insertion breaks the continuity of **13:1-46**—the diagnosis of defiling blemishes—with **chapter 14**, which gives the purification rituals for those pronounced defiled in **chapter 13**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What was the purpose of isolating people who had been diagnosed with significant blemishes and not allowing them access to the worship sanctuary?
- 2) What was the role of the priest in this process of diagnosis?
- 3) How seriously do we take the threat of spiritual corruption and defilement?
- 4) Are we anticipating the type of perfection we will experience in glorified bodies?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: The Greeks, however, used a different term for human leprosy: *elephantiasis*, not *lepra*. That *tsara'at* does not mean leprosy, becomes especially clear in **chapter 14**, where we read that *tsara'at* appeared as mold and mildew in clothes and houses, something modern leprosy does not do. What *tsara'at* does describe is a variety of abnormalities that afflicted human skin, as well as clothing, fabrics, and houses, namely coverings of various types. *Lepra* etymologically refers to "scaliness," and *tsara'at* may also. **Milgrom** translated *tsara'at* "scale disease." Evidently there was enough similarity between these various abnormalities for God to deal with all of them together in this section of Leviticus. Since **coverings** of various kinds are in view, it is easy to see how the corruption of a covering would symbolize the breakdown of attempts to cover one's sinful (egocentric) condition in the spiritual realm. Thus the connection with Genesis 3 continues in this chapter and the next.

The section contains three parts. Moses, in Leviticus, frequently divided various material into three subsections. Each part in this section begins, "*The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron*" (**13:1; 14:1, 33**), and it closes, "*This is the law for*" (**13:59; 14:32, 54**). "Leprosy" (abnormal skin disease) typifies indwelling sin, and this chapter shows its horrid features (cf. **Matt. 15:19**).

Peter Pett: The whole lesson for us from the above is quite clear. Our moral lives are regularly looked at in terms of garments. Isaiah could say, '*all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment*', menstrually unclean, something similar to fungoid garments (**Isaiah 64:6**). Joshua the High Priest after the Exile had his '*filthy garments*' (befouled with man's uncleanness) removed from him (**Zechariah 3:3-4**), in readiness for God's coming action. And in contrast the bride of the Lamb is to be clothed in linen clean and white, which represents the righteousnesses of God's people, God's '*holy ones*' (**Revelation 19:8**). Compare also **Ezekiel 16:10** and **Zechariah 3:5**. Thus we have in this passage a warning that we must deal quickly and severely with any sin, especially such as has a tendency to spread. If our moral garments become plagued they must be destroyed, and we must put on new garments of righteousness. Sin must not be dallied with, it must be cast off and burnt.

It is especially a reminder that by nature we are all clothed in polluted garments, which must be cast off, destroyed, and replaced by the righteousness of Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:21**), as a man puts on a wedding garment when invited to a wedding (**Matthew 22:11-12**). Our only hope is to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ (see **Ephesians 5:26-27**).

David Guzik: Leprosy is like sin in many ways. There are some good reasons why many ancient rabbis considered a leper as someone already dead. Leprosy is like sin in that:

- It begins as nothing.

- It is painless in its first stages.
- It grows slowly.
- It often remits for a while and then returns.
- It numbs the senses – one cannot feel in the afflicted area.
- It causes decay and deformity.
- It eventually gives a person a repulsive appearance.

Gordon Wenham: The modern mind sees little in common between human skin diseases and mold affecting garments or other household articles. The ancient Israelites saw things differently. They used the same word for both, *tsāra ‘at*, which we have translated “*serious skin disease*.” From the standpoint of appearance, there are areas of resemblance between the two complaints. Both are abnormal surface conditions that disfigure the outside of the skin or garment. Both cause the surface to flake or peel. These verses draw out other points of similarity in the diagnostic tests that are applied to distinguish clean from unclean fungal infections. . .

The symptoms that led to a verdict of uncleanness were as follows. The “*skin disease*” had to be long and lasting. It had to be old (v. 11) or last at least a week or two (vv. 4ff., 26ff., 33ff., 50ff.). It had to be deeper than the skin (vv. 3, 20, 25, 30) or irremovable by washing (v. 55). It was something that affected only part of a person. It was patchy. If it covered the whole body, it did not defile (vv. 12–13). With garments and articles it is clear that only part of the object was affected, since v. 56 speaks of tearing out the affected spot.

This last observation perhaps gives the clue as to why certain diseases were regarded as unclean and others were not. Holiness in Leviticus is symbolized by **wholeness**. Animals must be perfect to be used in sacrifice. Priests must be without physical deformity. Mixtures are an abomination. Men must behave in a way that expresses wholeness and integrity in their actions. When a man shows visible signs of lack of wholeness in a persistent patchy skin condition, he has to be excluded from the covenant community. Temporary deviations from the norm do not attract such treatment, but if the symptoms last for more than two weeks, he must go to live outside the true Israel. These laws on skin diseases are again eloquent testimony to the importance of purity and holiness in ancient Israel. Anyone might fall victim to these complaints and face the prospect of being cut off from his family and friends for the rest of his days. Yet it was considered so important to preserve the purity of the tabernacle and the holiness of the nation that individuals and families might be forced to suffer a good deal. Individual discomfort was not allowed to jeopardize the spiritual welfare of the nation, for God’s abiding presence with his people depended on uncleanness being excluded from their midst (cf. Isa. 6:3–5).

R. K. Harrison: The law did not make an artificial distinction between physical well-being and spiritual vitality, exalting one at the expense of the other, but required that the true Israelite should be an integrated person whose spirituality involved all areas of his life. Holiness was thus expressed negatively in the avoidance of those things that might defile a person, and positively in the concentration of the personality upon a

relationship with God that was marked by obedience and faith. Unless both aspects of holiness were being exemplified, the Israelites could not expect God to dwell in their midst, for his presence was incompatible with uncleanness of any kind. Christian life makes the same demands upon the believer, with the added difference that defilement can result from the motive as well as the act (**Matt. 5:28; 15:10–20**). The pursuit of holiness under the guidance of God's Spirit is mandatory if the Christian is to grow truly into the fullness of Christ.

TEXT: Leviticus 14:1-57

TITLE: *UNCLEAN DUE TO BLEMISHES ON THE SKIN OR ON HOUSES -- RESTORATION*

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE DEPENDS ON A PROCESS OF CLEANSING AND RESTORATION IN SITUATIONS WHERE THERE HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT BLEMISHES ON SKIN OR HOUSES

INTRODUCTION:

Kenneth Mathews: Chapter 14 continues the discussion of dealing with skin and garment abnormalities. The rituals described in this chapter were purification rites that provided ceremonial cleansing, restoring the affected person or item to ceremonial normalcy. It is important to observe that the ritual was not a therapeutic remedy for the disease. The ritual always followed after the diseased person or item had experienced "healing." The priest was not a doctor who prescribed a medical procedure. Any healing that occurred was the result of God's activity. The ritual only enabled the once unclean person or item to undergo a ceremonial reinstatement so the person could once again enter the sanctuary or the restored piece of clothing could be used again.

Jacob Milgrom: Thus the entire purification process is nothing but a symbolic ritual, a rite of passage, marking the transition from death to life. As the celebrants move from the realm of impurity outside the camp, and are first restored to their community, then to their home, and finally to their sanctuary, they have passed from impurity to holiness, from death to life. In so moving, they are reinstated with their families and are reconciled with their God.

Allen Ross: If Lev. 13 is bleak, speaking of separation from the holy presence, Lev. 14 is full of **hope**, for in it the sufferer is restored to the covenant community. The Israelite learned even more about the nature of the holy God through these provisions for restoration to fellowship in the community. . .

To reinstate the worshiper who was declared clean by the priest, two elaborate sets of ritual were followed: in the first part, the worshiper brought two live birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop so that the priest could sprinkle the worshiper with blood from one bird and release the other and thus allow the worshiper to reenter the camp; in the second, the worshiper brought one ewe lamb, two lambs (or birds), fine flour, and oil so that the priest could anoint the worshiper and offer the sacrifices appropriate for atonement. . .

God requires that anything that has been defiled be cleansed and then reconsecrated to its full use based on the prescribed ritual of the faith.

I. (:1-32) RESTORATION FROM SKIN BLEMISHES

A. (:1-9) Admission of Unclean Back Into Camp

1. (:1-7) Re-examination and Cleansing Ritual

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 ‘This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest, 3 and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp. Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper, 4 then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. 5 The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. 6 As for the live bird, he shall take it, together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. 7 He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird go free over the open field.’”

Jacob Milgrom: The birds had to be **wild**, else the ever-present fear would remain that the live bird dispatched to the open country would return to the settlement and bring back the very impurity it was supposed to eliminate. Birds are chosen not because they are favored by chthonic deities or even by celestial deities. They are chosen because they transport the assumed freight of impurity upward and outward, to far-off distances whence the impurity cannot return. That the function of the birds is to carry off the impurity as far as possible is graphically depicted by the two women who *“had wings like those of a stork” (Zech 5:9*)* for the purpose of carrying the tub of wickedness to far-off Babylonia (**Zech 5:5–11***).

R. K. Harrison: The fact that the former ‘leper’ was now free of his disease was announced to the priest, who then went outside the camp to verify the situation by conducting his own examination. Nothing must be allowed to compromise the ceremonial purity of the congregation; hence the first stages of the ceremony take place at some distance from the community proper. Once the priest was satisfied that the disease had in fact been cured, he could then order the purification rituals to be initiated. The ceremony lasted for eight days, and involved elements of the four principal forms of Hebrew sacrifice as well as symbolic procedures reminiscent of the consecration of priests and of the annual day of atonement ceremony. . .

At the end of this part of the ceremony the other living bird was released into the open countryside, presumably so that it could return to its nest. This has been seen as symbolic of the new life which the cured ‘leper’ would now experience, and which would enable him to resume his former existence. Some interpreters have also understood the ritual in the less arcane sense of release and cleansing. Other authors have drawn a parallel between the release of the bird and that of the scapegoat in the day of atonement ceremonies (**Lev. 16:21–22**). The latter carried in a token fashion the

national sins of inadvertence and omission away from the people to the outside world, and thus preserved the purity and integrity of the encampment. At the very least it points to the removal of a disability, and to the consequent new beginnings.

Constable: "*Cedar wood*" had antiseptic qualities, and was slow to decay, so it probably represented the continuance of life. Some interpreters have compared it to the humanity of Christ. The "*scarlet*" color of the thread looked like blood, and symbolized sacrificial blood. The "*hyssop*" represented purification from the corruption of death, since the priests used this spongy plant for purification in Israel's rituals. The "*blood-water*" ("*blood of the bird that was slain over the running water*"), that was used to sprinkle the leper being cleansed, probably signified life and purification. Washing his clothes, shaving his hair, and bathing in water (v. 8) all could have been done at the same time.

2. (:8-9) Washing and Shaving

"The one to be cleansed shall then wash his clothes and shave off all his hair, and bathe in water and be clean. Now afterward, he may enter the camp, but he shall stay outside his tent for seven days. 9 And it will be on the seventh day that he shall shave off all his hair: he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and be clean."

R. K. Harrison: Before the former sufferer can be declared clean, he must wash all his clothes so as to remove any lingering traces of infection, shave off all his hair, and wash his body. If shaving involved the removal of all bodily hair and any accompanying lice, the person awaiting a declaration of cleanness would be comparable to a newborn baby, ready to enter upon a fresh phase of existence. Once these procedures, which resemble modern pre-operative preparations, had been followed, the person concerned was permitted to enter the camp, but could not go directly to his dwelling for another week. At the end of this period all the hair had to be removed from the head, while the person's clothes and body were washed once more. The shaving and washing were undertaken as preliminaries to the consecration ritual, and this was comparable to the shaving which the Levites underwent prior to their ministry at the tent of meeting (**Num. 8:7**).

Perry Yoder: The person now enters the camp but cannot go home. They must sit outside their house for seven days. The person is in a liminal state—in between classifications. They are no longer unclean but are not yet fully purified and integrated into the community. Being shaved shows that the person belongs to a group that is easily identified as "outsider" in the process of transformation to full membership within the camp. The end of this seven-day transition period echoes its beginning. Again the person shaves their hair, but in a very scrupulous fashion: they must shave all their hair, including beard and eyebrows. Once again they are clean. The person has now completed their in-between state and are ready to finish the ceremony of purification and be restored to full membership in the community.

Wiersbe: Why wash when the priest had already pronounced him clean? Because he had to apply personally what God said was true positionally. The man was ceremonially clean and had the right to live in the camp, but he needed to be made personally and practically clean so he would be fit to live in the camp. “*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean*” (Isa. 1:17, NKJV). “*Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness in the fear of God*” (2 Cor. 7:1). Perhaps Paul had **Leviticus 14** in mind when he compared the new life in Christ to a change of clothes (Col. 3:1-14).

B. (:10-20) Purification Offering for Cleansed Skin Infection

1. (:10-11) Presentation of the Man with His Offerings

“Now on the eighth day he is to take two male lambs without defect, and a yearling ewe lamb without defect, and three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil; 11 and the priest who pronounces him clean shall present the man to be cleansed and the aforesaid before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting.”

2. (:12-18) Offering of the First Male Lamb

“Then the priest shall take the one male lamb and bring it for a guilt offering, with the log of oil, and present them as a wave offering before the LORD. 13 Next he shall slaughter the male lamb in the place where they slaughter the sin offering and the burnt offering, at the place of the sanctuary-- for the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest; it is most holy. 14 The priest shall then take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. 15 The priest shall also take some of the log of oil, and pour it into his left palm; 16 the priest shall then dip his right-hand finger into the oil that is in his left palm, and with his finger sprinkle some of the oil seven times before the LORD. 17 And of the remaining oil which is in his palm, the priest shall put some on the right ear lobe of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the guilt offering; 18 while the rest of the oil that is in the priest's palm, he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD.”

3. (:19-20) Offering of the Second Male Lamb

“The priest shall next offer the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Then afterward, he shall slaughter the burnt offering. 20 And the priest shall offer up the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean.”

Jacob Milgrom: The battery of all four expiatory sacrifices—reparation, purification, burnt, and cereal offerings—thereby assures the scale-diseased person that all possible

inadvertent misdemeanors have been covered. The wrong is expiated; the disease will not return.

C. (:21-32) Purification Offering of the Impoverished

1. (:21-23) Presentation of the Poor Man with His Offerings

“But if he is poor, and his means are insufficient, then he is to take one male lamb for a guilt offering as a wave offering to make atonement for him, and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and a log of oil, 22 and two turtledoves or two young pigeons which are within his means, the one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering. 23 Then the eighth day he shall bring them for his cleansing to the priest, at the doorway of the tent of meeting, before the LORD.”

Roy Gane: Since the eighth-day sacrificial process involves three animals—two male lambs and a yearling ewe—it is expensive. Thus, for those who cannot afford it, **14:21–32** outline a parallel procedure with two birds substituted for the purification and burnt offering animals. There is no substitute for the male lamb of the reparation offering, which is the first and most important sacrifice on this occasion.

2. (:24-29) Offering of the Lamb

“And the priest shall take the lamb of the guilt offering, and the log of oil, and the priest shall offer them for a wave offering before the LORD. 25 Next he shall slaughter the lamb of the guilt offering; and the priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. 26 The priest shall also pour some of the oil into his left palm; 27 and with his right-hand finger the priest shall sprinkle some of the oil that is in his left palm seven times before the LORD. 28 The priest shall then put some of the oil that is in his palm on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the place of the blood of the guilt offering. 29 Moreover, the rest of the oil that is in the priest's palm he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed, to make atonement on his behalf before the LORD.”

3. (:30-32) Offering of the Bird

“He shall then offer one of the turtledoves or young pigeons, which are within his means. 31 He shall offer what he can afford, the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, together with the grain offering. So the priest shall make atonement before the LORD on behalf of the one to be cleansed. 32 This is the law for him in whom there is an infection of leprosy, whose means are limited for his cleansing.”

Allen Ross: Christians do not have such a ritual, but they can learn something from the principle. Any time they are healed and restored to full participation in life and worship,

it is appropriate to offer the sacrifice of praise, even a thank offering (**Heb. 13:15**). They should at least acknowledge that it is God who has given them life and they will not now die (Ps. 118:17), that they have been restored to life for the purpose of serving and praising God (**Isa. 38:9-20**), that their restoration from sickness is a foretaste of how in some glorious future day they will be set free like a bird from all physical diseases and distress when the curse is lifted, and that all this was made possible through the shed blood of Christ.

II. (:33-53) RESTORATION FROM HOUSE BLEMISHES (MILDEW)

A. (:33-42) Restoration of a House with Mildew

1. (:33-35) Identification of a House with Mildew

“The LORD further spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 34 ‘When you enter the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a mark of leprosy on a house in the land of your possession, 35 then the one who owns the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, Something like a mark of leprosy has become visible to me in the house.’”

Allen Ross: The laws of scaly skin disease and contamination of tents and fabrics are now expanded to include houses, an emphasis that certainly looked forward to the sedentary occupation in the land. It thus forms a separate unit in applying the original laws to those circumstances. Because this passage forms part of the wider unit of **Lev. 13–14**, the same point should be made here: corruption and contamination of this present world necessitated cleansing and sanctification if worshipers wanted full participation in God’s service. . .

When signs of mildew in a dwelling were reported, the priest determined by inspection or quarantine if it was unclean mildew, prescribed its remedy through the replacement of contaminated materials or the total destruction of the house, and reconsecrated the purified place to service by the sprinkling of the blood of a slain bird and the release of a live bird (signifying the removal of uncleanness).

2. (:36-38) Inspection by the Priest and Seven Day Quarantine

“The priest shall then order that they empty the house before the priest goes in to look at the mark, so that everything in the house need not become unclean; and afterward the priest shall go in to look at the house. 37 So he shall look at the mark, and if the mark on the walls of the house has greenish or reddish depressions, and appears deeper than the surface; 38 then the priest shall come out of the house, to the doorway, and quarantine the house for seven days.”

Jacob Milgrom: There are a number of significant presuppositions ensconced in this verse.

(1) Impurity of “scale-diseased” houses, like that of scale-diseased persons, contaminates by overhang, for if even a single stone be certified by the priest as

“leprous,” then everything within the house is contaminated.

(2) The impurity is not retroactive. Only those objects found in the house when the priest condemns it are declared impure, but if these same objects are removed before the priest arrives they are considered pure.

(3) Those persons who were in the house before the priest declares the quarantine are also pure, including the investigating priest! Thus there can be no lingering doubt that this impurity is wholly symbolic.

To be sure, formal laws and procedures must be followed: the impurity is transmitted by overhang and it must be eliminated by the same bird rite employed for persons. But, in reality, the impurity of the infected stone has not been transmitted to the persons and objects in the house. Transmission occurs only if and when the priest so declares.

3. (:39-42) Re-inspection by the Priest and Remediation

“And the priest shall return on the seventh day and make an inspection. If the mark has indeed spread in the walls of the house, 40 then the priest shall order them to tear out the stones with the mark in them and throw them away at an unclean place outside the city. 41 And he shall have the house scraped all around inside, and they shall dump the plaster that they scrape off at an unclean place outside the city. 42 Then they shall take other stones and replace those stones; and he shall take other plaster and replaster the house.”

Kenneth Mathews: The priest employed the same measurement for determining the severity of skin disease—discoloration of the stone and the depth of the patch below the surface of the stone (vv. 35–38). As in the case of the skin disease, examinations at seven-day intervals revealed to what extent the affliction had spread in the walls of the house. In the most severe case, the whole structure was dismantled and carried outside the camp. The residents washed themselves and their clothing (vv. 39–47). The best outcome was the cessation of the outbreak, which would be repaired by replacing stones and plaster. After the repair of the structure, the priest performed the same elaborate ritual of the two birds called for in the case of a person healed of skin disease (vv. 48–53). The same result too occurred; the priest made “*atonement*” for the house (v. 53), meaning that the ritual uncleanness had been removed and the house had been restored to its full acceptance in the community. The ritual for the house differed from the case of a diseased person at one significant point—the absence of animal sacrifices at the sanctuary’s altar. This was because a house did not have a covenant relationship with God. What was it about mildew that could be so important to the community? The scaly discoloration of the stonework indicated that the house was deteriorating, which meant the house was in decay. Because the people as members of a holy community lived in these dwellings, they could be ritually contaminated by the mildew, making them unfit to enter the Lord’s sanctuary.

B. (:43-53) Dealing with Reoccurrence of Mildew

1. (:43-45) Destruction of the Re-infected House and Removal of its Ruins

“If, however, the mark breaks out again in the house, after he has torn out the stones and scraped the house, and after it has been replastered,

44 then the priest shall come in and make an inspection. If he sees that the mark has indeed spread in the house, it is a malignant mark in the house; it is unclean. 45 He shall therefore tear down the house, its stones, and its timbers, and all the plaster of the house, and he shall take them outside the city to an unclean place.”

R. K. Harrison: Just as the remission of symptoms in the unclean person could be followed by a resurgence of the disease (**Lev. 13:7–8**), so the possibility of a fresh outbreak of scaly incrustations on previously affected property had to be recognized, and appropriate procedures prescribed. When such an eventuality occurred, the house was declared unclean. Since previous measures had obviously proved ineffective, the priest had no alternative but to order the demolition of the property. In the case of termite infestation or the presence of dry rot, the premises would pose the danger of collapse at points where the infestation was well advanced. The entire fabric of the dwelling had then to be taken to an unclean place, from which the materials would not be salvaged and re-used, thereby spreading the particular condition. The uncleanness of the house extended under such conditions to people who had entered it while it was closed. Anyone who had taken up residence in it had to wash his clothes (**47**), which were also defiled by contact, and be unclean until the evening.

2. (:46-47) Purification of the Inhabitants

“Moreover, whoever goes into the house during the time that he has quarantined it, becomes unclean until evening. 47 Likewise, whoever lies down in the house shall wash his clothes, and whoever eats in the house shall wash his clothes.”

Perry Yoder: But what about people who enter a quarantined house? If they merely enter a sealed house, they are unclean until the evening. Waiting is enough for this level of impurity. If, however, they sleep or eat in the house, they must launder their clothes as well.

3. (:48-53) Cleansing of the Healed House

“If, on the other hand, the priest comes in and makes an inspection, and the mark has not indeed spread in the house after the house has been replastered, then the priest shall pronounce the house clean because the mark has not reappeared. 49 To cleanse the house then, he shall take two birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop, 50 and he shall slaughter the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. 51 Then he shall take the cedar wood and the hyssop and the scarlet string, with the live bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird, as well as in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times. 52 He shall thus cleanse the house with the blood of the bird and with the running water, along with the live bird and with the cedar wood and with the hyssop and with the scarlet string. 53 However, he shall let the live bird go free outside the city into the open field. So he shall make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean.”

(:54-57) SUMMARY

“This is the law for any mark of leprosy-- even for a scale, 55 and for the leprous garment or house, 56 and for a swelling, and for a scab, and for a bright spot-- 57 to teach when they are unclean, and when they are clean. This is the law of leprosy.”

R. K. Harrison: The repetition of the title in this section (*‘this shall be the law of the leper’*) recapitulates the entire body of material (**Lev. 13:1–14:53**) relating to unnatural exterior conditions of people’s bodies, their clothing, and their dwelling-places. A distinct legislative unit is thus indicated, which is dignified by the designation of *tôrâ* or law. The regulations governing the subject of the section are thus authoritative because they have been revealed by God. There is not one element of the enactments that is even remotely connected with folklore, magic, or any form of paganism. The diagnostic procedures are thoroughly rational, and suited to the conditions under which the nation would be living. The instructions were not of an esoteric order, known only to the priests, but were the property of the people, as all of God’s law was. The clinical situations involved were described in such a manner that the priest-physician would have no ultimate doubt about the diagnosis.

Richard Hess: These verses conclude the two chapters that address manifest infections in a person, clothing, and houses. This review of these areas serves to signal the end of the discussion and to emphasize that everything relevant to issues of cleanness in these matters has now been considered. The description of infections in garments and houses was considered in **13:47–59** and **14:33–53**. The use of the threefold description of skin infections in **v.56** (*“a swelling, a rash or a bright spot”*) recalls the same description at the beginning of the discussion in **13:2**. It thus forms an *inclusio* for all the material in the two chapters.

Furthermore, the common word *tôrâ* (GK 9368), here translated as “regulations,” has already occurred three times in these two chapters (**13:59; 14:2, 32**), both at summaries and at introductions to the legislation. Here it occurs twice (**vv.54** and **57**), again tying the whole summary together by appearing in its first and last verses. In addition the same root (*yrh*, GK 3723) forms the basis for the verb “to determine” (*lehôrôt*) in the last verse. Thereby the author reveals the true nature of these chapters and the “regulations.” It is “to determine” or to discover the uncleanness and to understand what recognizes it as clean.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of financial impact would there be if your house was basically condemned and destroyed?

2) Why does God take special care to make provision for less expensive offerings for those who could not afford the normal offerings?

3) What is the significance of the priest applying the blood to the person's extremities (similar to the procedure detailed for the ordination of priests)?

4) How do these regulations make even more surprising the type of contact and compassion that Jesus demonstrated towards lepers in His earthly ministry?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Allen Ross: The focus of the exposition must be on the restoration to the covenant community of the sufferer. The procedure was not curative, but concerned purification; and here is the major difference between the Levitical law and ancient Near Eastern practices. Israel's priests did not attempt to cure the sufferer, either with magic or with exorcism, as the pagans did (**Wenham**, 207). The point is that the individual had now completely recovered, and so the focus of the lengthy ritual was on readmission. The emphasis was on restoration for the person who had been delivered from death to life, from outside the camp to inside the camp, and so half of the ritual takes place outside and the other part inside.

Perry Yoder: The **process** of purification and restoration of a person banished for impurity (**13:46**) proceeds in three stages. After the first ritual, they are clean enough to enter the camp but not to enter their home. After the second ritual, they become clean enough to approach the entry of the tabernacle. Finally, at the end of the purification ceremony, they are fully restored.

Gordon Wenham: Holiness, as we have already seen, is defined in Leviticus in terms of **wholeness**. Skin diseases disfigured the surface of things and thereby destroyed their wholeness. Only the perfect and holy could enjoy the presence of the holy God, therefore the unclean were expelled from the camp. In the case of material objects this meant destruction either by fire or by dumping outside the city in an unclean place. In the case of persons they were compelled to live outside the camp and ipso facto out of contact with the tabernacle through which God's grace was made present with men. As outcasts they were dead to the community and cut off from divine grace. Such persons could be readmitted only if their complaint cleared up. As was usual in ancient Israel, their ritual cleansing and sanctification was secured by the offering of sacrifice.

Peter Pett: In order to appreciate the significance of this we need first to recognise what precisely is involved. The purpose behind the idea of cleanness and uncleanness is not mainly hygiene or moral uncleanness. Rather it emphasises in a general way the holiness and perfection of God, and our need to escape from and avoid and rise above degradation and death. We have already seen that sacrifices and offerings are to be 'perfect' or 'without blemish'. This is a pointer to the concept involved. In emphasising

what is clean and unclean God seeks only what is totally 'perfect', what is wholly right, for Himself and for His people. What is clean is best. What is not clean is not best.

But we must not confuse holiness and 'cleanness'. Holiness goes much further than cleanness. Things can be clean and not holy. And there are degrees of holiness within the area where all is 'clean'. For holiness is to do with what God is, and what man's attitude towards Him is, while cleanness has to do with what man is and with his attitude to his environment. This clearly impinges on holiness, but it is looking at it from a very different angle.

In order to be 'holy' enough to enter the tabernacle court men needed to be ritually 'clean', but being clean did not render them 'most holy'. Yet the constant awareness of the need to avoid what was 'unclean' in God's eyes did bring God's Law very much into the daily lives of the common man. This included both its moral and its ritual requirements. It constantly made them think of what was for their good in accordance with God's commands, what was 'clean', what was wholesome for those who were holy. But there can be no doubt that God also used these distinctions in order to keep them healthy, to let them see that in the uncleanness and decay of much of nature lay unknown dangers, to test their obedience, and to remind them constantly of His holiness.

TEXT: Leviticus 15:1-33

TITLE: *UNCLEAN DUE TO BODILY DISCHARGES FROM GENITAL ORGANS*

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE DEPENDS ON BOTH MEN AND WOMEN ADDRESSING THE UNCLEANNESS DERIVING FROM BODILY DISCHARGES (WHETHER HEALTHY OR DISEASED) FROM THEIR GENITAL ORGANS

INTRODUCTION:

Mark Rooker: **Leviticus 15**, which deals with the purity laws regarding bodily discharges, divides into four sections, each beginning with the formula (“*when [any] man/ woman*”; **15:2, 16, 21, 25**). The sections of the chapter include abnormal discharges of men (**15:2–15**), normal discharges of men (**15:16–18**), normal discharges of women (**15:19–24**), and abnormal discharges of women (**15:25–30**). The chapter forms an inclusio with an AB-BA pattern with natural discharges occupying the central position. A final summary marks the unit and closes the chapter (**15:32–33**).

Allen Ross: **Leviticus 15** focuses on those things in human life that are incompatible with the holiness of God. The chapter makes no judgments about the bodily emissions, except to indicate that they suspend intimate relations in marriage and make communion with God in the sanctuary impossible. Normal bodily functions are minor difficulties of life, requiring only washing; prolonged diseases are more serious, requiring washing and sacrifices for restoration. In no case is confession of sin necessary. Here again the expositor must focus on the theology of the fallen condition of the human race and explain how this must be treated before one can enter the presence of the Holy One.

God demanded that those defiled by chronic discharges or seminal or menstrual discharges separate themselves until their condition changed, bathe for ritual purification, and bring the appropriate sacrifices for the ritual, in order that the people might not die by defiling the tabernacle with their impurity.

Roy Gane: Discharges from genital organs are private matters. Thus, in **Leviticus 15**, determination of ritual impurities from these sources requires no examination by priests (contrast **chs. 13–14**). Individuals are responsible and accountable before the Lord to take proper precautions, notify each other as necessary, and avail themselves of any required ritual remedies.

Wiersbe: The key word in this chapter is “*issue*,” used twenty-four times. It simply means a flow of liquid, whether water in nature or a fluid discharged from the human body. The human discharge may be natural (**vv. 16-1, 25-30**) or unnatural (**vv. 1-15, 19-24**), but it’s still considered unclean and must be dealt with according to the law of

God. Personal hygiene and God's concern for women are certainly involved in these regulations, but the main thrust seems to be that of enforcing personal sanctity. Not everybody is a leper, but all of us have occasion "discharges" that defile us and could defile others.

I. (:1-18) MALE BODILY DISCHARGES FROM GENITAL ORGANS

*"The LORD also spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,
2 'Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them,"*

A. (:2b-15) Abnormal (Chronic / Diseased) Male Discharges

1. (:2b-10) Scope of Uncleanness

a. (:2b-3) Result = Uncleanness

"When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean. 3 This, moreover, shall be his uncleanness in his discharge: it is his uncleanness whether his body allows its discharge to flow, or whether his body obstructs its discharge."

R. K. Harrison: From the information given it is far from easy to be certain about the nature of the emission. The most obvious diagnosis would be that of gonorrhea, which is an infection of the genital tract by the organism *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. The disease is acquired normally through sexual contact with an infected person, although ophthalmia neonatorum results when the newborn baby comes into contact with its mother's gonorrhoeal discharge. A purulent secretion follows an incubation period varying from two to ten days, and unless the condition is treated it can result in arthritis of one or two joints. Other complications such as endocarditis and skin lesions are rare, and the mortality from the disease is negligible. Spontaneous recovery can occur in an otherwise healthy male within a period ranging from a few months to a year. Another form of secretion or 'issue' which must be borne in mind is that of infectious pus from a tubercular lesion.

Constable: According to **Hess**, gonorrhea did not exist before the 15th century A.D., so a parasitical infection of the urinary tract is probably in view here.

b. (:4-6) Uncleanness Spreads to Items Contacted

"Every bed on which the person with the discharge lies becomes unclean, and everything on which he sits becomes unclean. 5 Anyone, moreover, who touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening; 6 and whoever sits on the thing on which the man with the discharge has been sitting, shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening."

c. (:7-8) Uncleanness Spreads to People Contacted

"Also whoever touches the person with the discharge shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening."

8 Or if the man with the discharge spits on one who is clean, he too shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.”

d. (:9-10) **Uncleanness Spreads to Items Contacted**

“And every saddle on which the person with the discharge rides becomes unclean. 10 ‘Whoever then touches any of the things which were under him shall be unclean until evening, and he who carries them shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.”

2. (:11-12) **Special Circumstances**

“Likewise, whomever the one with the discharge touches without having rinsed his hands in water shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. 12 However, an earthenware vessel which the person with the discharge touches shall be broken, and every wooden vessel shall be rinsed in water.”

3. (:13-15) **Process of Purification**

“Now when the man with the discharge becomes cleansed from his discharge, then he shall count off for himself seven days for his cleansing; he shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in running water and shall become clean. 14 Then on the eighth day he shall take for himself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and come before the LORD to the doorway of the tent of meeting, and give them to the priest; 15 and the priest shall offer them, one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD because of his discharge.”

Mark Rooker: The fact that the offerings were birds, often the offering of the poor who could not offer the larger animals, indicated that the uncleanness from a discharge was a less severe uncleanness than an uncleanness caused by an infectious skin disease.

B. (:16-18) **Normal (Intermittent / Healthy) Male Discharges**

1. (:16-17) **Seminal Emissions**

“Now if a man has a seminal emission, he shall bathe all his body in water and be unclean until evening. 17 As for any garment or any leather on which there is seminal emission, it shall be washed with water and be unclean until evening.”

R. K. Harrison: Temporary male discharges were discussed in terms of the emission of semen, principally in relationship to sexual activity, though other situations including spontaneous nocturnal emissions (cf. **Deut. 23:10**) could have been envisaged.

Wenham: The practical effect of this legislation was that when a man had religious duties to perform, whether this involved worship or participation in God's holy wars,

sexual intercourse was not permitted.

2. (:18) Intercourse

“If a man lies with a woman so that there is a seminal emission, they shall both bathe in water and be unclean until evening.”

This verse is at the center of the chiasmatic structure.

R. K. Harrison: A final touch of literary artistry has been seen in the mention of coition at the central point of the case discussions. In this act both male and female can express their sense of physical and emotional unity as they demonstrate the oneness of their humanity.

Mark Rooker: The declaration of semen as unclean in this passage illustrates the sharp distinction between Israelite religion and the pagan religions of the ancient Near East. In pagan religion sexual activity among worshipers was believed to activate the gods into fertilizing the soil with rain. This activity was often performed within the sacred precincts of the pagan god's shrine (see **Hos 4:12–14**). This practice and the mythological role of sex was shown to be ungodly by this legislation because sexual activity in fact placed one in the category of uncleanness. Thus it would be an abomination to engage in sexual activity in the tabernacle precinct (see **15:31**). This demythologizing of sex thus has a polemical role; the legislation does not indicate that sex was sinful and without value.

II. (:19-30) FEMALE BODILY DISCHARGES FROM GENITAL ORGANS

A. (:19-24) Normal (Intermittent / Healthy) Female Discharges

1. (:19) Duration of Uncleanness Due to Menstruation

“When a woman has a discharge, if her discharge in her body is blood, she shall continue in her menstrual impurity for seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.”

Mark Rooker: The prohibition of sexual intercourse during menstruation would certainly be one way of indicating that sexual involvement should not be an obsession in life. Restraint would have to play a part in sexual activity. The laws would also provide the woman a break from housework, caring for children, and marital relations.

2. (:20-23) Spread of Uncleanness

“Everything also on which she lies during her menstrual impurity shall be unclean, and everything on which she sits shall be unclean. 21 And anyone who touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. 22 And whoever touches anything on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. 23 Whether it be on the bed or on the thing on which she is sitting, when he touches it, he shall be unclean until evening.”

3. (:24) Special Circumstance of Sexual Intercourse

“And if a man actually lies with her, so that her menstrual impurity is on him, he shall be unclean seven days, and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean.”

F. Duane Lindsey: Since sexual intercourse was forbidden during a woman’s period (18:19; 20:18), 15:24 probably means that if a woman’s period commenced while she was having intercourse with her husband, he would be unclean like her and would also be a source of secondary pollution (as in vv. 2-12).

B. (:25-30) Abnormal (Chronic / Diseased) Female Discharges

1. (:25-27) Scope of Uncleanness

“Now if a woman has a discharge of her blood many days, not at the period of her menstrual impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond that period, all the days of her impure discharge she shall continue as though in her menstrual impurity; she is unclean. 26 Any bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her like her bed at menstruation; and everything on which she sits shall be unclean, like her uncleanness at that time. 27 Likewise, whoever touches them shall be unclean and shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.”

2. (:28-30) Process of Purification

a. (:28) Duration

“When she becomes clean from her discharge, she shall count off for herself seven days; and afterward she shall be clean.”

b. (:29-30) Offerings

“Then on the eighth day she shall take for herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and bring them in to the priest, to the doorway of the tent of meeting. 30 And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. So the priest shall make atonement on her behalf before the LORD because of her impure discharge.”

Mark Rooker: The reason offerings had to be made for these discharges and not for the discharges of semen and menstruation was because they were considered abnormal.

Kenneth Mathews: The parallel between the male and female conditions and their ritual purifications show that the woman’s discharges were not viewed as any more unclean than that of the man.

(:31-33) CONCLUSION ON DISCHARGES

A. (:31) Purpose of the Regulations

“Thus you shall keep the sons of Israel separated from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by their defiling My tabernacle that is among them.”

Mark Rooker: This verse provides the theological underpinning for the understanding of the issue of clean and unclean. The verse indicates that it is not uncleanness brought about by discharges that evokes God's punishment but failure to rectify the condition by which individuals would be permitted to enter God's presence. These conditions were thus not evil in themselves; they only prevented one from entering into the worship of God with other members of the covenant community. The presence of uncleanness in the tabernacle precinct would defile the dwelling place of God.

B. (:32-33) Target of These Regulations

“This is the law for the one with a discharge, and for the man who has a seminal emission so that he is unclean by it, 33 and for the woman who is ill because of menstrual impurity, and for the one who has a discharge, whether a male or a female, or a man who lies with an unclean woman.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How are these regulations compatible with the teaching that the marriage bed is pure and holy?
- 2) In what sense is ritual uncleanness contagious under the Old Covenant?
- 3) What circumstances determined whether or not an offering was required?
- 4) Why is masturbation not specifically addressed in this passage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Allen Ross: In the process of time, ritual baths were dug all over the land so that people preparing to go to worship could immerse in them. The wealthy had their own private baths built in their houses, but the common people did not. Access to fresh water baths became an automatic part of preparation for attendance in the sanctuary because of these purity laws. In later times ritual baths were built at the approach to the temple and near the synagogues. . .

Because bodily functions are incompatible with the holiness of God, purification and sanctification are absolutely essential before entering the presence of God. God was teaching the household of faith the distinction between the physical and the holy. Anything connected with sexual function was part of the physical world; it was categorized as common, not holy. Sex could never be brought into the sanctuary, for unlike the Canaanite view, sexual activity was not a way to enhance spirituality or commune with God (**Hartley**, 214).

This law kept sex and sexuality in its proper place. It stigmatized irregularities in sexual functions and behavior and encouraged restraint and care in marriage (Wenham, 225). It taught Israel that sex had to be respected and taken seriously. But it also taught them that sexual passion and physical conditions had to be controlled. If they were careful to curtail diseases and infections and follow the proper hygienic procedures, they would most likely have healthy and productive marriages (Hartley, 214). In this way the spiritual meaning behind the law works to develop the physical wholeness of the community.

Perry Yoder: Paul's insight that moral impurity is contagious may well serve individuals and congregations. First, the congregation is a spiritual community in which the individual's own spiritual welfare is linked to the community as a whole. A community that seeks God's presence in worship is a necessary resource in an individualized society. How congregations define moral purity and cultivate the sense that their sanctuary is a place of God's presence may be unclear and may vary in different contexts, but in light of the biblical witness it is not an insignificant issue. In this perspective, the community is not about keeping the impure out, but as portrayed by Paul, it is about becoming a community for whom each individual is important for the spiritual well-being of the whole. If this process of transformation stalls, the community will likely decline in value as a place to experience God.

Roy Gane: While monthly menstruation was undoubtedly inconvenient, an ancient Israelite woman was not ritually impure and therefore barred from participation in worship at the sanctuary as often as we might suppose. Women married young and generally had as many children as they could. There would not have been a market for contraceptives even if they had been invented. In other words, during much of her childbearing phase of life, a woman was in a state of pregnancy, which interrupts menstruation, or breast-feeding, which can suppress it. Furthermore, it appears that the onset of menstruation at puberty was later and its termination at menopause earlier than in modern times, when the menstruating years have expanded because of a richer diet.

MacArthur: in all these instructions, God was showing the Israelites that they must have a profound reverence for holy things; and nothing was more suited to that purpose than to bar from the tabernacle all who were polluted by any kind of uncleanness, ceremonial as well as natural, physical as well as spiritual. In order to mark out His people as dwelling before Him in holiness, He required of them complete purity and didn't allow them to come before Him when defiled, even by involuntary or secret impurities. And when one considers that God was training a people to live in His presence, it becomes apparent that these rules for the maintenance of personal purity, pointing to the necessity of purity in the heart, were neither too stringent nor too minute.

TEXT: Leviticus 16:1-34

TITLE: PURIFICATION OF THE TENT OF MEETING – DAY OF ATONEMENT

BIG IDEA:

TO MAINTAIN GOD’S HOLY PRESENCE WITH HIS COVENANT PEOPLE, ATONEMENT FOR SIN AND CLEANSING MUST BE ACCOMPLISHED ANNUALLY BY THE HIGH PRIEST ON THIS VERY SPECIAL DAY ACCORDING TO A VERY STRICT RITUAL

INTRODUCTION:

F. Duane Lindsey: Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire from the presence of the Lord because they approached Him in an unauthorized manner (**10:1-2**). By contrast **chapter 16** sets forth the **proper** occasion, manner of self-preparation, and prescribed ritual by which the high priest was to approach the Lord and **not** die.

Kenneth Mathews: This chapter’s message is critically important for three reasons.

- First, the chapter occurs in the center of the book of Leviticus. Like a **bridge** it connects the two halves of the book. **Chapters 1–15** describe the rituals of sacrifice and the purity regulations. **Chapters 17–27** describe the characteristics of holy living by the covenant community. The effect of the Day of Atonement made sacrifice, purity, and holy living a possibility for another year.
- Second, the Day of Atonement is the ritual that on the whole best illustrates the theological teaching of Israel’s worship of its covenant Lord. It teaches the essentials for appropriate worship, which are what God demands of worshippers, the steps that God instructs the Israelites to perform so their worship is acceptable, and the spiritual benefits that worship brings to the people.
- Third, the theological message portrayed through the rites performed on this most sacred day serve as a template for understanding the message of Christianity. The centerpiece of Christianity is the cross where Jesus’ death resulted in the forgiveness of sins through the shedding of his blood for all who repent and express faith in Christ as Savior. The rituals that happened on the Day of Atonement provided an explanation through “moving pictures” of what happened in God’s eyes when Jesus died at Mount Calvary.

Perry Yoder: **Leviticus 16** is the **capstone** of the first part of Leviticus, **chapters 1–15**. The central question in these chapters is, How do we worship the God in whose presence we live? First, this meant bringing freewill offerings expressing joy and thanksgiving to God (**chs. 1–3**). Second, it meant performing purification rituals in order to receive forgiveness from sin, thus enabling and sustaining a relationship with God (**chs. 4–7**). Third, since only the pure may contact the holy, individuals coming to the tent needed to be cleansed from their impurities in order to approach God’s presence (**chs. 11–15**). Lack of purity within the community affects the entire community: *You*

shall put the Israelites on guard against their uncleanness, lest they die through their uncleanness by defiling My Tabernacle which is among them (15:31 NJPS).

R. K. Harrison: This chapter comprises the ceremonial and theological **pivot** upon which the entire book of Leviticus turns. Previous legislation has dealt with the different kinds of sacrifices and the conditions under which they were to be offered, the emphasis being upon the provision for individual needs. Now the focus is upon the making of atonement for all the uncleannesses and sins of inadvertence of the entire Israelite congregation, beginning with the priesthood. Six months after the passover had been celebrated, the people were instructed to '*afflict themselves*', after which the high priest would make atonement for them. Like the passover, this ceremony had to be observed annually, and it marked the occasion when the entire religious community was mobilized before God in a joint act of confession and atonement. It was a time of great solemnity, unlike the annual feasts, and if fasting was involved in the preparatory self-discipline, as many interpreters think, it was the only ceremony that demanded such a communal exercise. By its nature it was a distinctive religious observance and was central to the worship-life of the nation. The importance of the high priest is made clear in the position which he holds in the rituals as the mediator between God and man. The ritual is given in its entirety, which is fitting in a manual of public worship.

Jacob Milgrom: All year long, Israel's sins have been polluting the sanctuary. True, the pious have been bringing purification offerings, which prove effective because their impurity was caused inadvertently. However, what of the advertent, brazen sinner? Their sins have penetrated into the adytum, the inner sanctum, polluting the very seat of the Godhead, threatening the destruction of the community. Since the brazen sinners are barred from offering sacrifice, how then is the sanctuary purified? The answer is Yom Kippur, the annual **Day of Purgation**, when the high priest risks his life by entering the adytum—to which entry is forbidden to mortal humans—and purifies the adytum through a smoke screen. The high priest emerges, transfers the removed pollution plus all the sins of the people, which he confesses, onto the head of a live goat, and dispatches the goat to the wilderness.

Allen Ross: The central idea of this passage is God's gracious provision to provide complete atonement. God made a way to cleanse and sanctify people for every sin and every defilement, so that they might retain their relationship with him. Full atonement means even more than this: it means that God provided access into his presence. In the person of the high priest the people entered the holy of holies. This particular aspect of the day is fraught with significance, not only for Israel's relationship with God but also for the atoning work of Christ.

The revelation of the removal of sin and defilement is also clearly presented here in the scapegoat. All the sins of the people were confessed and transferred to the victim, which was then led outside the camp. All sin was completely removed by this substitute.

The final theological truth found in this passage is that the people were responsible to humble themselves. To receive atonement from God, the people had to show evidence of repentance and genuine spiritual concerns. . .

The only way of access into the presence of the LORD is by the application of the atoning blood on the mercy seat and the removal of the sins of the penitent by placing them on a scapegoat.

Mark Rooker: The offerings on this day included two rams as burnt offerings for the high priest and the congregation, a bull for the sin offering of the high priest, and two goats as sin offerings for the people.

Perry Yoder: Outline:

Prologue, **16:1-2**

The Restoration Ceremony, **16:3-28**

16:3-11 Preparation

16:12-19 The Cleansing Rituals

16:20-22 The Elimination Ritual

16:23-28 Concluding Rituals

Epilogue, 16:29-34

I. (:1-10) PREPARATIONS FOR THE RITUAL OBSERVANCE

A. (:1-2) Sacredness of the Holy Place Inside the Veil

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they had approached the presence of the LORD and died. 2 And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.’”

MacArthur: Common priests went every day to burn incense on the golden altar in the part of the tabernacle sanctuary outside the veil, where the lampstand, table, and bread of the Presence were. None except the High Priest was allowed to enter inside the veil (cf. v. 12), into the Holy Place, actually called the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant rested. This arrangement was designed to inspire a reverence for God at a time when his presence was indicated by visible symbols.

B. (:3-5) Sacrifice of Sin and Burnt Offering Prepared

1. (:3) Holy Access via Sin and Burnt Offerings

*“Aaron shall enter the holy place with this:
with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.”*

Robert Vasholz: In preparation for the Day, Aaron has been told to bring a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering (**Lev. 16:3**). In concert with the sobriety of the rest of the chapter, **Leviticus 16:3** begins with an emphatic demonstrative adjective meaning: In this manner Aaron is to enter.... Aaron is also to bring two male goats and

a ram provided by the congregation for a sin offering and a burnt offering for the community.

2. (:4) Holy Attire

“He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and the linen undergarments shall be next to his body, and he shall be girded with the linen sash, and attired with the linen turban (these are holy garments). Then he shall bathe his body in water and put them on.”

R. K. Harrison: Before he could enter the holy place, the high priest had to sacrifice as a prerequisite a sin offering and a burnt offering to the Lord, the former to be presented in order to secure atonement for himself and his family. Elaborate preparations were needed before the high priest could be considered fit to appear before God at the mercy seat. He had to bathe his body completely, thereby cleansing himself symbolically of all impurity, but instead of wearing the highly decorated garments of his consecration ceremony he was to be attired in simple duty clothes, comprising a coat, breeches, a linen girdle and a turban. . . This ritual furnishes a dramatic contrast between the holiness and purity of God and the sin of man, emphasizing the need for atonement if the people are to be holy as God is holy.

3. (:5) Holy Atonement via Sin and Burnt Offering

“And he shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering.”

MacArthur: One animal would be slain to picture substitutionary death and the other sent to the wilderness to represent removal of sin.

C. (:6-10) Securing Atonement

1. (:6) Atonement for the High Priest

“Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household.”

2. (:7-10) Atonement for the Community

“And he shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 8 And Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. 9 Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the LORD fell, and make it a sin offering. 10 But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat.”

Kenneth Mathews: Embedded in the chapter is a summary paragraph in **verses 6–10** that conveniently captures the main features of the ritual—a microcosm of the whole chapter’s account.

II. (:11-28) PROCEDURES FOR THE RITUAL OBSERVANCE

A. (:11-14) Offerings of the High Priest in the Holy Place

1. (:11) Slaughtering the Bull of the Sin Offering

“Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his household, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering which is for himself.”

2. (:12-13) Offering of Incense Behind the Veil

“And he shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil. 13 And he shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, lest he die.”

3. (:14) Sprinkling the Blood of the Bull Sin Offering on the Mercy Seat

“Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.”

B. (:15-19) Purification for the Tabernacle

1. (:15) Sprinkling the Blood of the Goat Sin Offering on the Mercy Seat

“Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.”

2. (:16-17) Purification for Holy Place and Tent of Meeting

“And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel, and because of their transgressions, in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities. 17 When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel.”

Robert Vasholz: No one is to go into the Tent-Sanctuary until the High Priest is finished effecting atonement for himself, the community of Israel, the Tent-Sanctuary and the altar. The Lord is very near. The solemnity of the event demands that no one impede the ritual until the High Priest goes out into the sanctuary courtyard.

3. (:18-19) Purification for the Altar

“Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar on all sides. 19 And with his finger he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it seven times,

and cleanse it, and from the impurities of the sons of Israel consecrate it.”

C. (:20-22) Scapegoat Procedures

1. (:20-21) Laying Hands on the Live Goat for Transfer of Transgressions

“When he finishes atoning for the holy place, and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat. 21 Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness.”

2. (:22) Releasing the Goat into the Wilderness to Carry Away Iniquities

“And the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.”

D. (:23-28) Concluding Rituals for Cleansing

1. (:23-25) Aaron Disrobes and Bathes before Completing the Offerings

“Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting, and take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there. 24 And he shall bathe his body with water in a holy place and put on his clothes, and come forth and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people. 25 Then he shall offer up in smoke the fat of the sin offering on the altar.”

2. (:26-28) Additional Cleansing Procedures

a. (:26) For the One Who Released the Goat

“And the one who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water; then afterward he shall come into the camp.”

b. (:27-28) For the One Who Burns the Hides of the Bull and Goat

“But the bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp, and they shall burn their hides, their flesh, and their refuse in the fire. 28 Then the one who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water, then afterward he shall come into the camp.”

R. K. Harrison: After the goat had been dispatched to the wilderness, Aaron had to take off his linen attire and wash his entire body in a specially reserved area of the tabernacle court. He was then required to wear his normal priestly vestments while he offered burnt sacrifices for himself and the people (24). The person who had conducted the goat into the wilderness was ceremonially unclean as a result of contact with the sins of the

people, and he had to bathe and wash his clothes before being readmitted to the community (26). The same was true of the individual who carried out the carcasses of the bull and goat sacrificed for a sin offering. The rituals of the sacrifices are not described in detail here, since they followed the normal pattern. As always, all the fat was reserved as God's special portion (25). Through the entire ceremony the emphasis is upon the holiness of God as contrasted with the sin of man, and the necessity for the worshipper, whether high priest or not, to follow scrupulously the directions for approaching God in worship. Only when all has been done in accordance with God's will can forgiveness be expected to follow. The ritual of the day of atonement contained a definite sense of drama, as indeed all ancient Hebrew rituals did, but it also made clear the responsibilities of the worshipper in the whole process of cleansing from sin, especially at the climactic moment when the high priest entered the most holy place and stood in God's presence.

III. (:29-34) PERMANENT MEMORIAL OF THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

A. (:29-31) Stated Purpose of Annual Day of Atonement

1. (:29) Humbling Your Souls via Day of Rest

“And this shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls, and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you;”

R. K. Harrison: This section confirms that this special day shall be an institution amongst the Israelites forever. The ceremony was to be observed on the tenth day of the seventh month, that is to say, six months after the passover had been celebrated. The permanence of the statute is indicated by the fact that to the present day this solemn ceremony, with appropriate modifications, is conducted on the tenth day of the seventh month, following the traditional calendar.

2. (:30) Holy Atonement and Cleansing from Sin

“for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you shall be clean from all your sins before the LORD.”

3. (:31) Humbling Your Souls via Day of Rest

“It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute.”

B. (:32-34) Summary of Annual Day of Atonement

1. (:32-33) Priest Makes Atonement

“So the priest who is anointed and ordained to serve as priest in his father's place shall make atonement: he shall thus put on the linen garments, the holy garments, 33 and make atonement for the holy sanctuary; and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar. He shall also make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.”

2. (:34a) Permanent Statute

*“Now you shall have this as a permanent statute,
to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins
once every year.”*

3. (:34b) Perfect Obedience

“And just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so he did.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What does it mean to “*afflict one’s soul*”? Should we be doing this today?
- 2) What can we learn about the **Mediator** from the attire of the High Priest?
- 3) Why were so many different **washings** employed during this special day?
- 4) What can we learn from the High Priest making atonement **for himself** and his own family before making atonement for the community of believers?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Perry Yoder: The second step is the removal of the sin itself from the holy. The ceremony in **chapter 16** cleanses the tabernacle and altars of all sin and restores them to their initial state. This cleansing is done by the application of blood to parts of the tent, the ark, and the altars. Once all sins have been purged from the holy things, they must be removed from the sacred precinct and from the camp. This is the function of the live goat. Unlike the blood of the animals that are killed in the forgiveness and cleansing rituals, here a living goat carries away the actual sins.

Wiersbe: The priest placed his hands on the head of the sacrifice, symbolizing the transferring of the nation’s sins to the innocent victim who died in their place. Atonement means that a price is paid and blood is shed, because life must be given for life (**17:11**). **John Stott** says it magnificently: “We strongly reject, therefore, every explanation of the death of Christ which does not have at its center the principle of satisfaction through substitution, indeed divine self-satisfaction through divine self-substitution. . .

Remember that the two goats were considered one sin offering (**Lev. 16:5**). One goat died because there must be blood sacrifice before there can be forgiveness. The other goat lived but was “lost” in the wilderness, having “carried away” the nation’s sins.

Roy Gane: The high priest ritually cleansed the sanctuary by means of two special purification offerings: a bull on behalf of the priests (16:11–14) and a goat for the non-priestly community (16:15–19). Whereas “outer sanctum” purification offerings took blood into the outer apartment of the sacred Tent (4:6–7, 17–18), the Day of Purgation sacrifices extended blood manipulations all the way into the inner sanctum and further expanded the significance of blood with additional applications in the outer sanctum and on the outer altar. Each of these purification offerings was supplemented by a burnt offering: a ram each for the priests and for the laity (16:3, 5, 24).

Purging moral faults and ritual impurities out of the sanctuary was not enough. The sins had to be permanently banished from the Israelite camp in which the Lord dwelt. So the high priest used a live goat, the so-called “scapegoat,” as a ritual “garbage truck” to haul the moral faults of all Israelites, both priests and laity, into the desert and leave them there (16:10, 20–22).

MacArthur: The following sequence describes the activities of the High Priest and those who assisted him on the Day of Atonement.

- 1) The High Priest (HP) washed at the basin in the courtyard and dressed in the tabernacles (v. 4).
- 2) The HP offered the bull as a sin offering for himself and his family (vv. 3, 6, 11).
- 3) The HP entered the Holy of Holies (HH) with the bull’s blood, incense, and burning coals from the altar of burnt offering (vv. 12, 13).
- 4) The HP sprinkled the bull’s blood on the mercy seat 7 times (v. 14).
- 5) The HP went back to the courtyard and cast lots for the two goats (vv. 7, 8).
- 6) The HP sacrificed one goat as a sin offering for the people (vv. 5, 9, 15).
- 7) The HP reentered the HH to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat and also the Holy Place (cf. Ex 30:10; vv. 15-17).
- 8) The HP returned to the altar of burnt offering and cleansed it with the blood of the bull and goat (vv. 11, 15, 18, 19).
- 9) The scapegoat was dispatched to the wilderness (vv. 20-22).
- 10) Afterward, the goatkeeper cleansed himself (v. 26).
- 11) The HP removed his special Day of Atonement clothing, rewashed, and put on the regular HP clothing (vv. 23, 24).
- 12) The HP offered two rams as burnt offerings for himself and the people (vv. 3, 5, 24).
- 13) The fat of the sin offering was burned (v. 25).
- 14) The bull and goat sin offerings were carried outside the camp to be burned (v. 27).
- 15) The one who burned the sin offering cleansed himself (v. 28).

Mike Miller: The 10th day of the 7th month was the Day of Atonement.

- A. It was the one and only day of the year that high priest went within the veil to the holy of holies.
- B. It was a day set aside as a Sabbath day where they did no work and all the business of life came to a standstill.
- C. It was a special holiday when their sin was remembered, confessed, and atoned for.
- D. It was a most important day, and the significance of it was vital to keeping the hearts

and minds of the people right in regard to their sin, their God, and his mercy.

E. Without special things like the Day of Atonement sin becomes less and less of a thing, and so does forgiveness and atonement.

1. If sin is not made an issue of and is not thought to be of any consequence, then there is no concern or interest in forgiveness or atonement.

F. It was a day to “*afflict your souls.*”

1. That is, to think upon your sins against one another, against the holy place, the holy altar, and against God himself.
2. It was NOT a day to feast, party, rejoice, fellowship, and have a wonderful time.
3. Anyone who did not afflict his soul on this day was to be cut off from among his people, which was a severe punishment.
4. This shows the seriousness and importance God placed on observing this Day of Atonement.

G. When our sins stop being a part of the preaching and teaching and conversation of the churches we have failed to deal with it as God intended.

1. Although we are not obligated now to observe a “*Day of Atonement*” every day should be one for us.
2. If we have a right view of sin, of God, and of ourselves, we will “*afflict our souls*” more often than once a year.
3. Our souls should be afflicted about how the house of God is neglected.
4. Our souls should be afflicted about how the altar and the holy things of God are set at naught and neglected or forgotten altogether.
5. Our souls should be afflicted about how God is mistreated and falsely accused by not only ungodly people, but those who claim to wear his name.

H. The Day of Atonement set things in order again.

1. It was like a reset that brought everyone back to where they needed to be in their minds and attitudes.
2. It was a day that was meant to affect the hearts and soften the hardness that a year of living surrounded by sin had caused.
3. It was a day set apart to begin anew and do things better and right.
4. A day like this is important because it offers hope where there would be none without it.
5. The Day of Atonement marked the Jubilee ever 50th year – on this day everything was reset, all debt was forgiven, all who were in bondage went free.
6. It was a day to be reminded of the things that really matter, and what is most important in life – we need that, also.

I. And since it was the Day of Atonement it was a day of forgiveness.

1. If God forgave sins, then so did everyone who was forgiven.
2. Conflicts and strifes were settled.
3. Sins and wrongs against one another were pardoned and forgiven.
4. People got right with one another and began anew.
5. The Day of Atonement was the most wonderful day of the year.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/105190564933.pdf>

Matt Basel: Day of Atonement

Proposition: The Day of Atonement is the great climax of Leviticus and integrates all the teaching on the sacrificial system, the priesthood, and cleanliness into one great day on which Israel is made clean before God calling us to look forward to one great day when these things were fulfilled in Christ.

- A. First, the Day of Atonement reminded God's people that they were contaminated.
- B. Second, the Day of Atonement reminded God's people that God was infinitely holy.
- C. Third, the Day of Atonement reminded God's people that they needed to have their filth carried away.
- D. Fourth, the Day of Atonement reminded God's people that they needed a mediator to intercede for them.
- E. Fifth, the Day of Atonement reminded God's people that their mediator needed to be perfect.
- F. Sixth, the Day of Atonement reminded God's people that they needed to rest and to wait with repentance.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/124181235110.pdf>

TEXT: Leviticus 17:1-16

TITLE: HONOR GOD IN HOW YOU DEAL WITH SACRIFICES, LIFE AND DEATH

BIG IDEA:

THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM ORDAINED FOR OT WORSHIP REVOLVED AROUND THE LINK BETWEEN BLOOD AND LIFE

INTRODUCTION:

Allen Ross: The main theological theme, then, is the sanctity of blood. The basis for this emphasis forms the second significant idea: life is in the blood. To pour out blood is to pour out life. Third, the punishment for violating these laws was premature death. This theme of judgment for sin surfaced a few times before in the book, but it is now brought out forcefully.

Because life is in the blood and belongs to God, the people of Israel had to demonstrate their loyalty to the LORD by bringing all sacrificial blood to his tent exclusively, by not eating any blood, and by pouring out the blood of hunted animals to the LORD, thereby avoiding the punishment of death.

Roy Gane: Addressed to all Israelites, both priests and laity, **chapter 17** issues three sharp warnings against violation of divine commands recorded earlier in Leviticus. These commands concern offering sacrifices at the sanctuary (nowhere else) to the Lord (not to anyone else) throughout the year and related matters of diet:

- (1) not eating blood with meat, and
- (2) ritual purification when eating meat from animals not slaughtered by human beings.

In this chapter the warnings are formulated according to the casuistic pattern: “*Anyone who . . . [does a certain offense] is condemned to . . . [receive a corresponding penalty].*” . . .

In any case, because there are affinities of content and terminology between **chapters 17** and both the preceding and following materials in Leviticus, this chapter is clearly **transitional**.

Peter Pett: With the emphasis that God has placed on the need for the careful regulation of the shedding of blood which represented God-given life (**Genesis 9:2-6**), it was necessary at some stage that Israel be carefully instructed in how to deal with situations where such questions arose. God wanted them to recognise that life was sacred, and that all life belonged to Him. And this is now the basis of what we find in this chapter, combined with definitions as to the significance of the blood which are of importance to us all.

But there is more to it than that. It will have already been noted that pivotal to this Book is the idea of sacrifice. The first seven chapters centralised on it. The priests were anointed in order to be able to perform it. Severe uncleanness required it. The Day of Atonement focused on it. And now this chapter introduces the remainder of the Book, stressing that underlying the whole covenant lies the idea of sacrifice. Without the shedding of blood there could be no forgiveness of sin, no atonement, no covenant. All is based on **sacrifice**.

(:1-2) PROLOGUE – DIVINE COMMANDS

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
2 ‘Speak to Aaron and to his sons, and to all the sons of Israel, and say to them,
This is what the LORD has commanded, saying,’”*

R. K. Harrison: An introductory formula indicates that this material, like other sections before it, bears the authority of divine revelation. It is to be part of the priestly corpus of teaching, and has to be communicated to the entire nation as a commandment from God. If kept, the injunctions will ensure the continuity of Israel’s distinctive way of life; but if they are disregarded, the nation is warned of the punishment that will follow.

I. (:3-9) HONOR GOD BY WORSHIPPING EXCLUSIVELY AT HIS ALTAR -- SLAIN SACRIFICES MUST BE BROUGHT TO THE TABERNACLE

A. (:3-4) Sacrificed Animals Must be Offered up to the Lord at the Tabernacle

“Any man from the house of Israel who slaughters an ox, or a lamb, or a goat in the camp, or who slaughters it outside the camp, 4 and has not brought it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguiltiness is to be reckoned to that man. He has shed blood and that man shall be cut off from among his people.”

Kenneth Mathews: All of the instructions of **Leviticus 1–16** presupposed that legitimate worship of God would only occur at the authorized place of worship. Our passage commands the people of Israel to bring their animals for offerings to the Tent of Meeting. The text’s use of the word “kills” in **verse 3** clarifies that the killing in mind is **sacrifice for worship**, not hunting for meat. The word in the original language is the most common Hebrew term for ritual sacrifice. Here the animals specified were domesticated animals named as the proper beasts for sacrifice—ox, lamb, or goat (cf. **Leviticus 1–7, 11**). If a person wanted to eat meat from these animals, he brought his animal to the tabernacle as a peace offering made to the Lord (**Leviticus 3**). The peace offering provided meat for the priest and for the offerer. One’s family and the poor were also invited to enjoy the feast of thanksgiving. Eating meat had a special connotation of blessing because it was not a common part of the Israelite’s diet. It was a delicacy that was available to the upper class. . .

The reasoning behind this condemnation arose from acknowledging the ownership of the life of the animal. The life of the animal belonged to God, and he had given its

blood to the Israelite as a means for securing the person's atonement. The unlawful taking of the animal's life, that is, using its blood, meant that the Israelite had illicitly killed the beast. The guilty person had taken the blood for his own purposes, usurping God's right to the life of the animal. In the ceremony of atonement, the blood of the animal was returned symbolically to the Lord by pouring or tossing the blood at the altar in the tabernacle courtyard (**Leviticus 1-7**). Failure to return to God his due meant that the guilty person had seized from God control over the life of the animal.

Constable: God did not permit the Israelites to slaughter certain sacrificial animals (i.e., oxen, lambs, or sheep without blemishes) anywhere except before the altar of burnt offerings ("*doorway of the tent of meeting*"; **vv. 3-5**). They could slaughter animals not used as sacrifices elsewhere (cf. **Deut. 12:15-16, 20-27; 1 Cor. 10:31**).

B. (:5-7) Specific Reasons for This Exclusivity of Worship

1. (:5) So the Lord Gets His Due

"The reason is so that the sons of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they were sacrificing in the open field, that they may bring them in to the LORD, at the doorway of the tent of meeting to the priest, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the LORD."

Perry Yoder: introduces reasons why all slaughter of flock and herd animals must be done at the tent of meeting. The slaughter of these animals is a holy action.

Peter Pett: The reason for this provision was so that any clean domestic animal which was slaughtered was brought as a peace sacrifice to the door of the tent of meeting to be offered up by the priests. This would then ensure that the blood was properly dealt with, that the fat was offered to Yahweh, and that the life was offered back to God, and from this it would be made quite clear to them that they had received its benefits from Him. They could then themselves partake of its meat, once the priest had had his portion, the fat and vital parts having been offered to God. Every animal slaughtered for meat thus also became a sacrifice of peace offering, confirming peace and wellbeing before Yahweh.

2. (:6) So the Blood and Fat are Properly Handled

"And the priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and offer up the fat in smoke as a soothing aroma to the LORD."

3. (:7a) So Idolatry Can be Avoided

"And they shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons with which they play the harlot."

Ken Mathews: The passage indicates by the parallel language in **verses 5 and 7** that the offerings made in "*the open field*" were understood as "*sacrifices to goat demons*." The worship of other gods was a constant threat. A sacrifice in an unauthorized place, even

if offered in the name of the Lord, was tantamount to the worship of the gods. God, centuries later, by the prophet Jeremiah condemned the people of Judah for their “*abominations [of false worship] ... on the hills in the field*” (Jeremiah 13:27).

R. K. Harrison: If all sacrifices were to be performed within the sanctuary area, there could be no possibility of a person making a private, idolatrous offering to some imagined denizen of the countryside. This legislation was timely, for even from the beginning of the wilderness wanderings idolatrous tendencies were never very far from the minds of the Israelites (cf. **Exod. 32:1–6**).

4. (:7b) So There Will be No Deviation Down thru the Ages

“This shall be a permanent statute to them throughout their generations.”

C. (:8-9) Severe Penalty for Any Violation

“Then you shall say to them, ‘Any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, 9 and does not bring it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to offer it to the LORD, that man also shall be cut off from his people.’”

Peter Pett: Note the continued stress on **resident aliens**. They were not to be free to outwardly practise their own religion or worship as they pleased. If they wished to do so they must go elsewhere. While they lived in Israel, or in the camp, there must be no danger of their leading Israel astray. While they lived in Yahweh’s land they must worship and make offering to Yahweh alone.

R. Laird Harris: The expression “*must be cut off from his people*” (v. 9; cf. v. 4) is not easy to identify. It usually refers to ceremonial offenses (Passover, **Exod 12:15, 19; Num 9:13**), uncircumcision (**Gen 17:14**), eating of unclean foods, or failing to be cleansed after defilement (**Lev 17:4, 9, 10, 14; Num 19:13, 20** et al.). The times when it may refer to judgment on moral matters are **Leviticus 18:29**, where it refers to all the previous matters of incest; **Numbers 15:30**, the unpardonable sin; **Exodus 31:14**, Sabbath desecration; and **Leviticus 20:3, 5-6**, idolatry and spiritualism. It is hard to think that all these instances involve capital punishment – though some may. Another view is that they involve excommunication. **Wenham** (p. 242) may be right in saying that it involves divine rejection, which was tragic indeed, but which might be averted by repentance.

II. (:10-14) HONOR GOD BY RESPECTING THE SANCTITY OF LIFE -- EATING OF BLOOD PROHIBITED

A. (:10) Prohibition against Eating the Blood

“And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people.”

Allen Ross: Throughout the Bible blood is not only the symbol of life—it is the life. When blood is shed, life is relinquished. Draining blood from an animal formed a graphic picture for the worshiper that the lifeblood was taken. God had designed it this way so that the people were confronted with the loss of life and reminded of the sacrifice every time the blood of an animal was shed. Therefore, to eat blood denigrated life and disregarded its divinely intended purpose.

It is this higher use for shed blood that greatly enhanced the prohibition against eating blood. Since God had designed blood for atonement, it had to be brought to God. Eating it made common or profane something that God had intended for the sanctuary. Consequently, anyone who ate the blood was cut off. **Genesis 9** first set the tone for this divine judgment by saying that God demanded an accounting for the crime. Here, the bold expression is that God set his face against the guilty, a stern expression of judgment.

B. (:11) Principle: Connection between the Blood and the Life

*“For the life of the flesh is in the blood,
and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls;
for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.”*

Ken Mathews: If the people ate the blood of sacrifice, it was a denial of the blood as God’s gift for their atonement. **Verse 11** is central to the passage since it presents the clearest statement of the theological reason for proscribing the ingestion of blood. Superstition regarding blood was rampant in the ancient world. It has its counterparts today too in various cults, especially those associated with the occult. Blood was thought to possess power inherently; by eating the blood, the person appropriated the spiritual power of the blood. Drinking or eating blood was a part of ancient rituals. The Bible adamantly opposes this understanding and prohibits the eating of blood in any form, whether directly or in meat not properly drained (**Deuteronomy 12:23; 1 Samuel 14:32–34**). The blood is a gift from God that had to be presented to the altar in worship if it was to have the effect of atonement. *“I have given it for you”* announces that the blood is God’s to give, and by that gift forgiveness is achieved. The gift must be honored by the recipients by proper handling of the blood. To drink the blood would be tantamount to spurning the Giver and using the blood for the individual’s own purpose.

Richard Hess: The first clause associates life in some way with the blood. The word for *“life”* (*nepes̄*, GK 5883) describes the basic desire for life in the person and expresses that desire as it enlivens the physical body. In the second clause, the blood becomes the ransom or atonement for the sins of people. This is God’s gift to Israel. Instead of demanding their lives for their sins, God allows the people to substitute animals and place their blood on the altar. Thus the lives of the animals take the place of the lives of God’s people. Since the blood is intimately and inseparably associated with the life of the living being, it forms the means of ransom or atonement. That is the point of the third clause. This blood cannot be consumed because (1) it belongs to the animal as the symbol of its God-given life, and (2) God possesses it at the altar in order to redeem Israel from her sin and alienation from fellowship with God.

Wenham: By refraining from eating flesh with blood in it, man is honoring life. To eat blood is to despise life. This idea emerges most clearly in **Gen. 9:4ff.**, where the sanctity of human life is associated with not eating blood. Thus one purpose of this law is the inculcation of respect for all life.

C. (:12) Prohibition against Eating the Blood

“Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood.’”

D. (:13-14) Procedure Regarding Blood from Hunted Game

1. (:13) Disposing of the Blood

“So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.”

2. (:14a) Identifying the Blood with the Life

“For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life.”

Robert Vasholz: Eating blood, therefore, is an act of disdain for the means that God provides for atonement. Eating blood flies in the face of the symbol that blood serves as the ransom for life which provides atonement on the altar of God. Therefore, anyone eating blood, both native and alien, shall be *cut off*.

3. (:14b) Summarizing the Prohibition / Principle / Penalty

“Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.’”

Perry Yoder: The blood of sacrificial animals is placed on the altar, but the blood of wild animals cannot be so placed. Instead, the animal’s blood is drained and covered over. Now their meat may be eaten. But why should their blood be given this special treatment of being buried? It does not play a role in purification. The reason given in **verse 14** is because the life of every creature is its blood. No less than sacrificial animals, the blood of all living animals, as life, needs to be treated respectfully. This is why God said to Israel, You must not eat the blood of any creature (**v. 14**). To ensure this obvious point is clear, the reason is stated once more: *because the life of every creature is its blood*.

Richard Hess: This law also applies to both Israelites and aliens resident in the land. It considers the case of the hunter’s killing of wild game. Since the animal has already been killed, the question arises as to what should be done with its blood. In such cases, the blood should be poured out on the ground and covered with dirt. This eliminates any possible use of the blood for ceremonies involved in worshiping deities of the underworld. It also affirms that the blood of every animal is the concern of God, not just that of the potential sacrificial animals that may be offered to the Lord.

III. (:15-16) HONOR GOD BY AVOIDING CONTAMINATION -- CLEANSING FROM CONTAMINATION OF DEAD CARCASSES

A. (:15) Process of Cleansing

“And when any person eats an animal which dies, or is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or an alien, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he will become clean.”

Peter Pett: With regard to beasts' carcasses, where the death had occurred naturally, or as a result of one beast killing another, so that some of the blood would have drained out, then to eat of them was to render the eater unclean. The blood had not been properly dealt with. But still the blood and the fat must not be consciously eaten of, although the problem now arose as to how to remove the blood. Nevertheless the blood and fat were sacred to Yahweh. In fact elsewhere the Israelite was discouraged to eat of such animals at all (compare **Leviticus 11:39-40**; **Leviticus 22:8** of priests) because as the people of God they were 'holy' (**Deuteronomy 14:21**). If they did eat of them they became unclean, although, once they had washed their clothes and washed themselves thoroughly, their uncleanness only lasted until the evening. Once the evening came they would be clean again.

(It will be apparent to all that the total removal of all blood was not practical even with sacrificially slain animals. It was the principle that was important, the avoidance of the deliberate imbibing of blood).

B. (:16) Pronouncement of Guilt

“But if he does not wash them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt.”

Mark Rooker: If an Israelite or an alien ate an animal that had died naturally or had been killed by other beasts, he had to wash his clothes and be unclean until evening (**17:15**). The blood of a dead animal would certainly have coagulated; thus it would be impossible to avoid consuming blood if one were to eat of an animal that had died. This law is identical to **Lev 11:40**. The violator of this law bore his own guilt or responsibility (**17:16**).

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did God place such an importance on the **blood**?
- 2) What caused the Israelites to be tempted to offer sacrifices to other gods?
- 3) How much freedom was given to the resident aliens in the camp of the Israelites to worship whoever and however they pleased?

4) What does the penalty of being “*cut off*” involve?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: There are four special holiness themes in the next four chapters.

Chapter 17 – The sanctity of blood or life/blood.

Chapter 18 – The sanctity of sex.

Chapter 19 – The sanctity of law.

Chapter 20 – The sanctity of judgment.

Jacob Milgrom: **Chapter 17** comprises five laws concerning the prohibition against ingesting blood. The prohibition itself is confined to the third (middle) law (**vv. 10–12***). The rest of the chapter, however, either leads up to it (**vv. 1–9***) or depends on it (**vv. 13–16***).

The common denominator of all five laws is the ritual procedure in the slaughter and consumption of meat. The first law (**vv. 3–7***) mandates that permitted domesticated quadrupeds must be sacrificed at a legitimate sanctuary. The quadrupeds permitted for the human table are the very ones permitted for God’s table, the altar. The second law (**vv. 8–9***) prohibits both the Israelite and the resident alien from sacrificing to other gods. The third law (**vv. 10–12***) lays down the absolute prohibition against ingesting blood, incumbent on Israelite and resident alien alike. The fourth law (**vv. 13–14***) prescribes that the blood of game killed by the Israelite and resident alien alike must be buried, and the fifth law (**vv. 15–16***) states that the Israelite or resident alien who eats of an animal that has died must be purified. The first, third, and fourth laws contain rationales (**vv. 5–7***, **11–12***, **14***). They take the form of asides to Moses and are not intended to be repeated to Israel.

Perry Yoder: While **chapter 16** provides the capstone for the first fifteen chapters, it has left us with three sets of questions that **chapter 17** attempts to answer.

- First, what is it about blood that gives it the power to cleanse and purify holy things? How can its application to holy things wash away the blotches of sin?
- Second, where must domestic animals be killed and their blood deposited? Since blood has such power, can domesticated animals be slaughtered for meat away from the sanctuary and priests? If so, what should be done with the blood, since no priest or altar is available for its disposal? Or must all slaughter of domestic animals be done by priests at the tabernacle? (See **ch. 3** for the peace offering that supplied meat for the owner and his family.)
- Third, is all blood equal in its power to cleanse? What about game animals that cannot be brought to the sanctuary and offered as a sacrifice?

F. Duane Lindsey: vv. 13-16 – The subject now changes from the blood of domestic animals suitable for sacrifice to the blood of clean game caught in the hunt. Since wild game was not acceptable for sacrifice (it cost the worshiper nothing), only the prohibition against eating blood was applicable, not those regarding slaughter at the Tent of Meeting. (It would have been difficult to chase a wild antelope or gazelle into the sanctuary court before killing it!?)

Oswald T. Allis: It is noteworthy that while for the modern Jews the ritual of sacrifice has lost all meaning, they still adhere strictly to the requirement concerning eating with the blood. Blood is still sacred for them as the symbol of life and the sacredness of life, but not for the reason so emphatically stated in the OT – its connection with atonement for sin. A strict Jew will eat only *kosher* meat, i.e. meat “*rightly*” and “*properly*” prepared.

TEXT: Leviticus 18:1-30

TITLE: HONOR GOD IN THE REALM OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR –
CALL TO COVENANT OBEDIENCE

BIG IDEA:

**INSTEAD OF FOLLOWING WORLDLY PATTERNS OF IMMORALITY,
BELIEVERS MUST HONOR GOD IN THE REALM OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR**

INTRODUCTION:

R. K. Harrison: The attention of the enactments now shifts from the matter of ceremonial defilement and its removal to the question of moral impurity and its consequences. Being a holy nation is not just a matter of obeying mechanically certain cultic prescriptions or following elaborate ceremonial procedures. Holiness is a moral attribute, and thus affects behaviour and character. Jesus warned against the kind of pharisaism that made persons appear attractive outwardly, whereas within they were full of hypocrisy and wickedness (**Matt. 23:28**). In the same way Paul reminded his readers that the real Jew is one who has a special kind of character, not one who depends upon external appearances (**Rom. 2:28**). A life of holiness involves moral purity as one of its aspects, and the rules given in this section are guidelines for holy living in the midst of an evil and adulterous generation.

Perry Yoder: The moral instructions for living a holy life are found in **chapters 18–22**. These chapters are shown to be a unit by the similarity between the beginning in **chapter 18** and the ending in **chapter 22**. In both we have an allusion to or mention of the exodus, the declaration that *I am the LORD*, and the command *to keep or guard the commandments* (**18:3-5; 22:31, 33**). . .

Sexual practices are the focus of this chapter and are bracketed by an introduction and a closing statement that echo each other and point to the unity of the whole. These sexual transgressions are not labeled as sins but are sources of impurity. This provides a link with the purity regulations in **chapters 11–15**.

Merrill: Fundamentally God is holy because He is unique and incomparable. Those whom He calls to servanthood must therefore understand their holiness not primarily as some kind of 'spirituality' but as their uniqueness and separateness as the elect and called of God. But holiness must also find expression in life by adhering to ethical principles and practices that demonstrate godlikeness. This is the underlying meaning of being the *'image of God.'*

Roy Gane: In Leviticus 18, incest is defined more broadly than our modern understanding in that relatives by marriage, to whom a man would have easy access within the household, are off limits in addition to blood relatives.

Gordon Wenham: Israel's sexual morality is here portrayed as something that marks it off from its neighbors as the Lord's special people. **Ch. 17** also stressed that Israel was not to compromise her witness by worshipping demons, or eating blood. This chapter insists that certain standards of sexual morality are equally decisive marks of religious allegiance.

Peter Pett: The chapter is in twelfth century BC **treaty form**. It begins with the declaration of the overlord, '*I am Yahweh your God*', goes on with the preamble about their required behaviour, followed by the promised blessing that those who did His commands would live in them, details the further requirements, and finishes up with the final warnings for disobedience.

(:1-2a) PROLOGUE – DIVINE COMMAND

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
2 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them,’”*

I. (:2b-5) CALL TO COVENANT OBEDIENCE – EXCLUSIVE LOYALTY

A. (:2b) Refrain – Reminder of Covenant Connection

“I am the LORD your God.”

R. K. Harrison: Any indulgence in the immoral practices of the land from which God had delivered them would result in punishment, as would an espousal of the abhorrent cultic worship current in the land which God was about to give them. The comprehensiveness of this legislation shows that for the covenant people there was no aspect of their existence that could be regarded as being out of God's control, a proposition already made clear by earlier enactments. The people of faith and holiness obtained their behavioural precepts and standards from God, unlike the pagan nations of antiquity who were guided as much by self-interest as anything else. Paul summarized the approach which the Christian should adopt towards the new covenant and its obligations in the phrase, not I but Christ (**Gal. 2:20**). He knew that to be carnally minded resulted in death, but to be spiritually motivated issued in life and peace (**Rom. 8:6**). In this important respect both the old and new covenants are one.

Perry Yoder: It is not surprising, then, that the section of Leviticus concerning the behavior of the Israelites should be peppered with a reminder of their God's identity and grace. This identification of Yahweh as their God (and not any other), occurs more than thirty times in **chapters 18–22!**

Gordon Wenham: The terseness of the phrase disguises the rich association of ideas that it evoked in ancient Israel. It occurs in three main types of context.

First, it looks back to the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt. When God revealed the full meaning of his name Yahweh to Moses, he linked this revelation to a promise that he would save his people from slavery in Egypt and bring them into the

land of Canaan. *“I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage ... and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God”* (**Exod. 6:6–7**). This short phrase, *“I am the Lord your God,”* was a reminder of what God had done for Israel and how he had chosen to make them his people.

Second, Israel, as the people of God, was expected to imitate God, to be holy. *“For I am the Lord your God, and you must sanctify yourselves and be holy, because I am holy”* (**Lev. 11:44**).

Third, this phrase often provides the motive for observing a particular law. Under the covenant the people of God were expected to keep the law, not merely as a formal duty but as a loving response to God’s grace in redemption.

In this very short formula the Israelites were reminded constantly who they were and whom they served.

Constable: The statement *“I am the LORD”* reminded the people of their covenant relationship with—and responsibility to—Yahweh. It was because He is who He is (*“I am who I am”*) that they were to be who He wanted them to be (*“My own special treasure ... a people for My possession ... My peculiar people”*). It was a constant reminder to the Israelites of who they were and Whom they served.

B. (:3) Call to Separation

1. From the Practices of Egypt = Your Past Home

“You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived,”

2. From the Practices of Canaan = Your Future Home

“nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes.”

Roy Gane: The Lord contrasts his approach to sexuality with that of Egypt, where incest was common, and Canaan, which was a hotbed of promiscuity.

C. (:4-5) Call to Obedience

1. (:4a) Obey Your God

“You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them;”

2. (:4b) Refrain – Reminder of Covenant Connection

“I am the LORD your God.”

3. (:5a) Obey Your God

“So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them;”

Mark Rooker: A nation cannot exist if the family unit is not well defined, for the family is the foundation of society. Sexual impulse is a potent desire. If gratified incestuously within the family, it blurs family lines and leads to the destruction of the family unit.⁵⁵ Proper response to these laws and the other legislations handed down to the Israelites holds the promise of providing an abundant life (**18:5**).

4. (:5b) Refrain – Reminder of Covenant Connection
“I am the LORD.”

II. (:6-18) SEXUAL PROHIBITIONS REGARDING FAMILY MEMBERS

A. (:6) General Sexual Prohibition Regarding Family Members

“None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness; I am the LORD.”

Gordon Wenham: The basic principles underlying the rules in **vv. 6–18** are therefore clear: a man may not marry any woman who is a close blood relation, or any woman who has become a close relative through a previous marriage to one of the man’s close blood relations. All the relationships prohibited here can be seen to be out-workings of these two basic principles.

B. (:7-18) Specific Sexual Prohibitions Regarding Family Members

1. (:7-8) Father’s Wife

“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, that is, the nakedness of your mother. She is your mother; you are not to uncover her nakedness. 8 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.”

2. (:9) Sister or Half Sister

“The nakedness of your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether born at home or born outside, their nakedness you shall not uncover.”

3. (:10) Granddaughter

“The nakedness of your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for their nakedness is yours.”

4. (:11) Step Sister

“The nakedness of your father’s wife’s daughter, born to your father, she is your sister, you shall not uncover her nakedness.”

Kenneth Mathews: **Verses 6–11** name the closest blood relatives: mother, stepmother, half-sister, granddaughter, and stepsister. The explanation for the restriction on the stepsister in **verse 11** gives us insight into the reasoning behind the prohibitions in this group. Although she is a stepsister, she is treated as a blood sister because she was

reared in the same household. Marriage among relatives closely connected as blood relations was outlawed.

5. (:12-13) Aunt

a. (:12) On Your Father's Side

"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's blood relative."

b. (:13) On Your Mother's Side

"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's blood relative."

6. (:14) Paternal Uncle's Wife

"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother; you shall not approach his wife, she is your aunt."

7. (:15) Daughter-in-Law

"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness."

8. (:16) Brother's Wife

"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness."

9. (:17) Step-Daughter or Step-Granddaughter

"You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, nor shall you take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; they are blood relatives. It is lewdness."

10. (:18) Wife's Sister

"And you shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness."

Mark Rooker: As mentioned the need to understand the appropriate guidelines for sexual union among the Israelites was acute since the Israelites were forbidden to marry foreigners (e.g., **Deut 7:3; Num 36**). The group of relatives the Israelite was forbidden to marry would largely coincide with the relatives who would have lived in a single household in ancient Israel.

Peter Pett: In all these prohibitions we see God's concern that non-sexual, loving relationships and responsibilities within families were of prime importance, that lines of authority should be clearly maintained, that inheritance questions must not be complicated unduly, and that these things must come before all others, so that lust especially must not be in a position to destroy them. They reveal a deep sense of the current and counter-currents that sexual feelings could cause within close family units, and provided the standards by which they should be assessed and dealt with.

However, they also served another purpose. The inter-marriage of relatives who are in too close a relation to each other can also be the cause of an increase in birth defects and, if continued in through the generations, can result in a lack of vitality and vigour in the strain. That also is therefore not something to be advised.

III. (:19-23) SEXUAL PROHIBITIONS REGARDING SPECIFIC ABOMINATIONS OF THE CANAANITES

A. (:19) Menstrual Impurity

“Also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity.”

Roy Gane: Intercourse with a menstruating woman is absolutely forbidden in **verse 19**, and in **verse 29** the consequence of this and other offenses is the divine penalty of being “cut off,” that is, extirpation (cf. **20:18**). So how do we explain the fact that in **15:24** a man having sexual relations with a menstruant only incurs a seven-day impurity? Since **15:24** deals with ritual consequences irrespective of intention, it covers situations of accidental violation in which a couple has intercourse without knowing that the woman is menstruating, but they learn this after the fact. In chapters **18** and **20**, by contrast, the divine penalty is for deliberate violation; it would be pointless to forbid an accident. . .

Perhaps a moral rationale for the prohibition can be found in **20:18**, which describes a woman with any genital flow as *dawah* (“faint,” i.e., in a state of malaise; see also **12:2**; cf. **Lam. 1:13**; **5:17**). If so, this is a women’s rights issue: The law protects the woman from unwanted advances by her husband during her period of weakness.

B. (:20) Neighbor’s Wife

“And you shall not have intercourse with your neighbor’s wife, to be defiled with her.”

C. (:21) Idolatrous Practices

1. Prohibition

“Neither shall you give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God;”

2. Refrain -- Reminder of Covenant Connection

“I am the LORD.”

Mark Rooker: Noting that the context deals with sexual activity, many scholars have advocated a position reflected in Jewish tradition that what is involved here is Jewish parents offering their children to Molech to grow up as temple prostitutes. This may be an attempt, however, to avoid the utter horror of what seems to be the face value reading of the text, since it is well known that the worship of Molech involved human sacrifice.

D. (:22) Homosexuality

“You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.”

Kenneth Mathews: We have the reasoning of why homosexuality is unlawful provided in **Romans 1** when the Apostle Paul addressed the universality of human sin and guilt (vv. 18–30, esp. 26, 27). The Gentiles had rejected the testimony of nature and chose sinful idolatry and sexual perversions to honor their gods. The sexual practices of the Gentiles were a great affront to God because they were a rejection of God as Creator. He made men and women to play their appropriate sexual roles whereby they would propagate and dominate the world as stewards of the Lord’s creation (**Genesis 1:28**). Heterosexuality outside the bounds of marriage is no less a sin, but the nature of homosexuality has more serious repercussions since it is a repudiation of the Lord’s claim on his created order.

Hess: This law forbids homosexuality, specifically that between two males (cf. **20:13**). The practice of female homosexuality is not specified, but it may be inferred, given the male-oriented nature of the legislation and the assumption that both practices involve the sexual use of a human partner of the same sex as though they were of the opposite sex.

E. (:23) Bestiality

“Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.”

IV. (:24-30) CALL TO AVOID DEFILEMENT AND SUBSEQUENT BANISHMENT FROM THE LAND

A. (:24-25) Defilement Leads to Punishment

“Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. 25 For the land has become defiled, therefore I have visited its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.”

Mark Rooker: The land will vomit Israel out of the land just as the fish vomited Jonah upon the seashore (**Jonah 2:11**); in other words, Israel will go into exile (**18:25**). This imagery indicates that nature itself takes vengeance upon crass moral deviation. The use of the word “vomit” to describe the people’s expulsion from the land particularly stressed the Lord’s repulsion at the people’s activity since vomiting is probably the most violent of all bodily reactions. The reaction of the land to the nation’s moral obedience suggests an interdependence of the people and the land.

B. (:26-29) Covenant Obedience Required

“But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you 27 (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); 28 so that the land may not

spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. 29 For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people.”

C. (:30a) Loyalty to the Lord Commanded

“Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them;”

D. (:30b) Refrain -- Reminder of Covenant Connection

“I am the LORD your God.”

Perry Yoder: The last verse in **chapter 18** is a negative echo of the beginning of the chapter. The one who practices God’s commandments will find life by doing them (v. 5). The one who does not keep God’s regulations for life will be cut off, and the nation will be expelled by the land. This speech ends as it began: *I Yahweh am your God* (v. 30 AT).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is avoiding sexual defilement so critical to pursuing holiness?
- 2) How do Christians today protect themselves against the pressure from contemporary pagan practices of immorality?
- 3) What type of grace and forgiveness is available to those who will repent of sexual sins?
- 4) Is there any ambiguity in either the OT or the NT regarding how God views homosexuality?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Guzik: In radical contrast to the thinking of much of the modern western culture, Christianity has the important message: *sexual activity has profound meaning for people and before God*. The broader culture has emptied sex of all meaning and has reduced it to only a way to experience personal pleasure. God’s desire is that people should experience sexual fulfillment not only in pleasure, but in the fulfillment of the highest purpose for sex: as part of what bonds together a man and a woman in a one-flesh relationship in their covenant of marriage (**Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6**).

David Thompson: HOLINESS, IN THE SIGHT OF GOD, DEMANDS THAT HIS PEOPLE DO NOT INVOLVE THEMSELVES IN THINGS THAT ARE SEXUALLY ABOMINABLE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

PARTING THOUGHTS:

1. Sexual purity in God's sight has to do with who we are physically intimate with, not what we are physically doing with our mate. The marriage bed is undefiled (**Heb. 13:4**).
2. Our personal holiness is connected to our personal sexuality.
3. As we near the end of the age, sexual perversion and activity will intensify (II Tim. 3:3-4).
4. If we have been guilty of any of these things—confess it and repent of it and receive cleansing.
5. God's blessings are directly linked to what we are doing sexually.

Adam Niess: Walk in Purity

Main Point: Enjoy a blessed life by heeding the call of God and walking in purity.

1. God calls you to be sexually pure.
2. Because He is the LORD your God.
3. Because impurity is what characterizes the world.
4. Because impurity is wicked, defiling, and condemning.
5. Therefore, walk in purity and enjoy a blessed life.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/103211510161709.pdf>

Matt Basel: God's People Have a Different Measure

What did this teach the ancient Israelites about God?

- A. First, God's people cannot reflect this world.
- B. Second, sexual practices are often a bellwether of worldliness.
- C. Third, God's limits are designed to lead us to life.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/22518104970.pdf>

TEXT: Leviticus 19:1-37

TITLE: HONOR GOD IN THE REALM OF HOLINESS AND LOVE

BIG IDEA:

BECAUSE GOD IS HOLY, HIS COVENANT PEOPLE MUST CONFORM TO HIS HOLY NATURE BY KEEPING HIS COMMANDS AND SHOWING LOVE AND JUSTICE TOWARDS OTHERS

INTRODUCTION:

Kenneth Mathews: Holy living before God and honest living before our neighbors are the two pillars upon which the whole of God's demands rest. By holy living I mean our fidelity to God, and by honest living I mean our integrity toward other persons. . .

Chapter 19 addresses both dimensions—holy living and honest living. The chapter entails admonitions that teach we must love and obey God and admonitions that teach we must love others. There is an important connection between holiness and love. We see it reflected here in our chapter but also in the New Testament (**1 Timothy 6:11**). Love for one's brother in the Lord is a part of godly behavior (**2 Peter 1:7**). The centerpiece of the chapter is **verse 18**: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" Around this pivotal verse are collections of commandments that emphasize holy living or honest living.

R. K. Harrison: The concluding words of the preceding chapter, *I am the Lord your God*, serve as a natural transition to this particular body of legislation, which also regulates the holiness of community life. Although this section deals with a wide variety of moral, legal, ceremonial and spiritual precepts in such a way as to appear disorganized, it is actually arranged in terms of sixteen distinct paragraphs, each of which ends with the phrase, *I am the Lord (your God)*. These passages are arranged in three principal sections (**2b–10; 11–18; 19–37**) of four, four, and eight units respectively. Jewish scholars have seen in the material a counterpart of the Ten Commandments, the precepts of which are recapitulated as follows: I and II in **verse 4**; III in **verse 12**; IV and V in **verse 3**; VI in **verse 16**; VII in **verse 29**; VIII and IX in **verses 11 to 16**; and X in **verse 18**.

Robert Vasholz: The following laws vary in kind. They represent a merging of ceremonial, ethical, social, civil, moral and anti-pagan prescriptions. Grouping laws into like categories was not a priority. In a theocracy, there is a very real sense that all laws are sacred.

Allen Ross: This collection of laws develops several clear theological themes. The goal of the sum of them is holiness; this is the basic command in the chapter. But the chapter shows what holiness should look like: devout worship, honesty, integrity, justice, charity, and love.

Unique to this chapter of the law, though, is the double call for the covenant members to love other people. Their love for God was already the inspiration for obedience to him; but the means by which they fulfilled their covenant duties to one another and to strangers was also love—which does not refer to feelings but actions.

Holiness and **love** are the two motifs from this chapter applied most clearly to Christians in the New Testament. These motifs are expressed differently today, but the fundamental truths remain the same. . .

It looks like the subject matter falls into four sections:

1. The first section (**19:3–10**) focuses on loyalty to the covenant in general by selecting several religious obligations as representative of the law.
2. The second section (**19:11–18**) looks at rulings concerning responsibilities toward other Israelites and ends with a call for love.
3. The third section (**19:19–31**) emphasizes distinctives to maintain, especially with a view to settlement in the land of Canaan.
4. The last section (**19:32–37**) reminds Israel that in remaining separate from the world they were still to show love and kindness to all people.

God’s people must conform to his holiness by keeping his commandments (the letter of the law), by dealing with others in love (the spirit of the law), by living according to his standards of separation in the world, and by demonstrating kindness and justice to others.

Gordon Wenham: The diversity of material in this chapter reflects the differentiation of life. All aspects of human affairs are subject to God’s laws.

(:1-2a) PROLOGUE

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
2 “Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them,”*

I. (:2b-10) RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS

A. (:2b) Commitment to Holiness

“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”

Kenneth Mathews: The chapter’s preamble gives a variation of the title, *“I am the Lord.”* It reads, *“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy”* (v. 2). This sets the tone for the whole chapter and is repeatedly brought to the reader’s attention. The passage declares that the exhortations in this chapter are rooted in the very character of God. God is holy in two senses. First, he is inherently distinctive in line with the very definition of what holy means. In other words, if a person wants to

define holy, he must look to God as the standard. Second, the Lord is morally pure. In every way he is inherently pure without sin or corruption. He is complete in all his perfections. For Christians the incarnation of Jesus provides us with a living portrait of a “*holy servant*” (**Acts 4:27, 30**). We can look to Jesus as the standard of holy living.

Mark Rooker: The reason the Israelites are to be holy is because God himself is holy. Those who identify with the Lord are thus to represent him to the world by emulating this attribute. Thus every statement about the moral nature of God in the Bible carries the implied demand that the believer exhibit this same quality in daily living. It is thus not possible to divorce ethics and theology, since human morality is justified by the nature of God.

David Guzik: The idea behind the word **holy** is “*separate*.” As it is applied to God, it describes God’s *apartness*. It means that God is different than man and from all others; different in His being and different in the greatness and majesty of His attributes. He has a righteousness unlike any other; a justice unlike any other; a purity unlike any other – and love, grace, and mercy unlike any other.

B. (:3-4) Commitment to Obey the Ten Commandments

1. (:3a) Honor Father and Mother

“Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father,”

Kenneth Mathews: The first collection of exhortations in **verses 3–8** begins with a command to obey parents. At first glance we might scratch our heads, wondering why this command would be at the head of the chapter, coming even before the demand to worship only the Lord, avoiding idolatry (**vv. 3, 4**). The nature of parental authority, “*revere [your] father and mother,*” is an ordinance that reflects a person’s loyalty to God. Parents have received delegated authority from the Lord, and when we rebel against their moral instruction, we rebel against the authority that the Lord has over the family. When we are loyal to God, we will be respectful of our parents’ teaching. The flip side of this is that parents must be ever-conscientious in their instruction and modeling of godly living, since they shoulder the responsibility that God has committed to them.

Constable: Respect for parents and Sabbath observance (**v. 3**) were the foundations for moral government and social well-being respectively.

2. (:3b) Observe the Sabbaths

“and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God.”

Robert Vasholz: The use of the plural ‘*my Sabbaths,*’ in you shall keep my Sabbaths, encompasses more than the seventh day of the week. Every observance in which Israel is commanded not to work is a Sabbath. That includes annual feasts and sabbatical years. The Fourth Commandment received more attention than any of the Ten Commandments. It is a sign of the covenant that perpetuates Israel’s identity as God’s people with the land (**Exod. 31:13; Ezek. 20:12**).

3. (:4) Reject Idolatry

“Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the LORD your God.”

David Guzik: The word for **idols** literally means *nothings*. Idols represent gods that are not real and are really *nothings*. . . The attraction was not so much to the **molded gods** themselves, as to what they represented – financial success, pleasure, and self-worship.

C. (:5-8) Commitment to Worship in an Acceptable Fashion

“Now when you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. 6 It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and the next day; but what remains until the third day shall be burned with fire. 7 So if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an offense; it will not be accepted. 8 And everyone who eats it will bear his iniquity, for he has profaned the holy thing of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from his people.”

R. K. Harrison: Christians should be scrupulous in ensuring that their forms of worship are thoroughly scriptural, and are not contaminated by superstition or purely human values. Otherwise what is holy to the Lord will be profaned, and punishment will follow instead of blessing (8).

D. (:9-10) Commitment to Be Generous Towards the Needy and Strangers

*“Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. **I am the LORD your God.**”*

Just as God is good towards us; we should respond by showing graciousness and generosity towards others – even those who are strangers to us.

Perry Yoder: The peace offering was a time of generosity and celebration, and the meat from this sacrifice was shared with others. While sharing the meat of the peace offering is not commanded here, we learn from **Deuteronomy 26:11-13** that the less fortunate were to enjoy the bounty of the harvest at the time of the first-fruits offering and from the tithe. Generosity seems built into the sacrificial system.

Now generosity is extended from worship into secular life. The Israelite farmer may not harvest his entire crop. The corners must be left. Likewise, what remains after harvesting should be left for gleaners (v. 9; see **Ruth 2**). With vineyards, the vines should not be picked clean, nor should grapes that fall to the ground be picked up (v. 10). These parts of the harvest must be left for the poor and for the immigrant.

Allen Ross: God's people must ensure that the poor have a full share in the covenant life (**19:9–10**). . .

Here, then, was one of the most specific tests of spirituality: care for those less fortunate (see **Lev.23:22; Deut. 24:19–22**). This concern is central to the Bible, but why is it listed right here? The main answer is it naturally follows the ruling on the peace offering. To offer the peace offering was to claim to be at peace with God; it was a thanksgiving offering. But if the offerer did not provide for the poor it was a hollow claim. In other words, if the test of gratitude was generosity, then someone who claimed the former but lacked the latter was a hypocrite. Jesus likewise showed that not caring for the poor was evidence that the person claiming to have kept the commandments had not done so at all (**Matt.19:16–22**).

II. (:11-18) COMMUNITY OBLIGATIONS

A. (:11-12) Deal Honestly and Truthfully with Others

1. (:11) Deal Honestly with Your Neighbor

“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.”

2. (:12) Deal Truthfully with Others

“And you shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.”

Allen Ross: Here the demands for holiness are directed to one's neighbor, referred to by various terms throughout **19:11–18**: associate, brother, citizen, countryman, friend, neighbor, and person. The pattern builds in the section so that all relationships within the community are drawn into the focus of the laws.

This idea of the neighbor/friend stresses community responsibilities. The laws may have specific reference to those close at hand in society, those with whom one lives and works, but ultimately they apply to anyone with whom one comes in contact or with whom one has dealings. It was always considered righteous to be a good neighbor, not just to have good neighbors.

Peter Pett: vv. **11-13** -- Three aspects of honesty are in mind here, avoiding stealing, avoiding cheating and avoiding deceit. There are not many societies where people can be trusted but Israel's was to be one of them. Avoiding stealing, and avoiding dealing falsely, reflected the eighth commandment (**Exodus 20:15**). They were not to take other people's property, nor to cheat them in their dealings. Not to lie to one another meant that all should be able to believe what they said (compare **Psalms 15:4**). It was to be an open and honest society.

B. (:13-15) Pursue Justice

1. (:13) Don't Exploit Your Neighbor

“You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him.”

The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.”

2. (:14) Don't Take Advantage of the Vulnerable

*“You shall not curse a deaf man,
nor place a stumbling block before the blind,
but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.”*

Robert Vasholz: Oppression can come in the form of a lack of sensitivity to those afflicted with a physical malady. Cursing the deaf may seem like good sport. Likewise, placing an obstacle before a blind person may bring a laugh. Ancient society did not hesitate to perform for its own amusement with little regard for one's feeling.

David Guzik: This law also sought to correct bad theology. It was common then (and still exists today) for people to think that if someone had a physical disability (such as being **deaf** or **blind**), then that person was specially cursed by God. They thought it had to do with some special or specific sin from that person or their ancestors. They thought if God had so cursed them, then they could also curse them. With this command, God corrected that bad thinking.

3. (:15) Don't Act Unjustly

*“You shall do no injustice in judgment;
you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great,
but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.”*

David Guzik: This specific command speaks against a popular philosophy in the modern western world. An aspect of what is sometimes known as “**critical theory**” basically divides everyone into one of two categories: the *oppressors* and their *victims*. Their idea is that all who are **mighty** are oppressors, and all who are **poor** are victims – and that preference should always be given to the **poor** whom they understand to be victims. This goes against what God commands; this is to do **injustice in judgment**.

C. (:16-18) Love Your Neighbor

1. (:16) Don't Seek to Harm Your Neighbor

*“You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people,
and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor;
I am the LORD.”*

2. (:17) Don't Hate Your Neighbor

“You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him.”

Richard Hess: The need to rebuke provides a legitimate and honorable means of dealing with revenge and grudges. Without honest and open communication, hatred can remain buried deep inside. If all people can express their grievances and listen honestly, there is

the possibility of reconciliation (Ge 21:25; Pr 9:8; 15:12; 19:25; 27:5; Mt 18:15–22; Gal 6:1; cf. **Wenham**, 268).

Constable: The second part of **verse 17** has been interpreted in two ways. It could mean that one should rebuke ("*reprove*") his neighbor without hating him in one's heart (NASB). This is explicitly stated in the first part of the verse. And or it could mean that one should rebuke his neighbor so that one might not become guilty of the same sin himself (NIV). This is probably the intent of the second part of the verse.

3. (:18) Don't Take Vengeance but Love Your Neighbor

*"You shall not take vengeance,
nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people,
but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."*

John Schultz: **Vs. 16** mentions two kinds of murder: slander and endangering the life of a neighbor. God places the emotional and physical destruction of life on the same level. Every form of death goes against the character of God. God is the God of the living. God is love. These two go together, just as **vs. 17** goes together with **vs. 16**. Read this: "*Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD. Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people.*" The rebuke mentioned in the last verse presupposes that there could be feelings of hatred or revenge which are not tolerated by God. The rebuke may be private or public. Obviously, our relationship with our fellow human beings should be determined by our relationship with God. The Lord Jesus emphasizes this when He says: "*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*" We cannot have fellowship with God if something is lacking in our fellowship with people. The verse concludes with the words, "*Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.*"

III. (:19-37) MISCELLANEOUS OBLIGATIONS

(:19a) Summary Obligation to Obey God's Laws

"You are to keep My statutes."

A. (:19b) Maintain Proper Distinctions

*"You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle;
you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed,
nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together."*

R. K. Harrison: The holiness and purity of the congregation were to be enhanced by observing the principle of **separateness**, embodied in the divine statutes. . . The chosen people had been taken out of all the other nations to be God's special possession, and if

they were to fulfil their destiny it was incumbent upon them to maintain their spiritual, moral and social distinctiveness.

Roy Gane: In other words, the laws regarding mixtures seem intended to protect the distinction between the ordinary domain of laypersons and the sacred sphere of the sanctuary. For this reason Israelites were also prohibited from manufacturing or using oil or incense like the sacred anointing oil and incense of the sanctuary (**Ex. 30:32, 37, 38**). Today there is no earthly ritual system with reference to which we can make distinctions in this way, so the applicability of these laws has ceased to exist.

Peter Pett: But the principle to be got over by all these regulations was that God did not favour the blurring of distinctions. Distinct things should be kept separate. His purpose then was that this would pass over into the religious and moral realm, so that again distinctions might not be blurred. No one is better than man at blurring distinctions to his own benefit in order to get his own way. His people therefore had to recognise from daily life that this was not pleasing to God, either in religious practise or in practical living.

B. (:20-22) Pursue Repentance, Forgiveness and Reparations for Indiscretions

“Now if a man lies carnally with a woman who is a slave acquired for another man, but who has in no way been redeemed, nor given her freedom, there shall be punishment; they shall not, however, be put to death, because she was not free. 21 And he shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD to the doorway of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. 22 The priest shall also make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin which he has committed, and the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him.”

David Guzik: This is the situation described: A slave girl is engaged to marry a free man, and then a different man has sex with her. Normally, the penalty was death; but because the woman was a slave and was presumed to be not free to resist (or guarded by a father), the penalty was not death. Yet, because of the rape, she was not marriable to her fiancée, so he must be reimbursed (the punishment mentioned). Then the moral guilt would be settled by sacrifice, and presumably the man who had sex with her would be obliged to marry her.

C. (:23-25) Pursue Sound Horticulture Principles

“And when you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it shall not be eaten. 24 But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. 25 And in the fifth year you are to eat of its fruit, that its yield may increase for you; I am the LORD your God.”

Richard Hess: This practice not only reaffirms the offering of the first-fruits of all that God gives to his people but also aids in fulfilling the creation mandate that life should become fruitful (**Ge 1:11–12, Ge 1:11–28**). It does this by increasing the fruitfulness of

the trees. Such a picture anticipates the images Jesus uses in encouraging his disciples to be fruitful and suggests the need for proper preparation for any such fruit bearing (**Mt 3:10; 12:33; Lk 3:9; 6:43–44; Jn 15:5–16**).

Bush: Perhaps a moral intimation to the effect that men were to restrain their appetites, and not to indulge in premature gratifications, was designed at the same time to be conveyed in this precept.

Peter Pett: When they arrive in the land and begin to plant trees they are to allow them to grow for three years without picking their fruit. They are to look on them as though they were like uncircumcised babes, not yet a part of the covenant, and therefore not available for their use.

Then in the fourth year they were to be seen as now within the covenant, but with all their fruit seen as holy and available for giving praise to Yahweh. It was His, and still not to be eaten. It was to be seen as an offering of praise and gratitude and a recognition that the trees, like everything else in the land, were His.

D. (:26-32) Wide Range of Miscellaneous Commands

1. (:26) Avoid Defilement of All Types

*“You shall not eat anything with the blood,
nor practice divination or soothsaying.”*

Perry Yoder: The second half of the verse (**26b**) prohibits seeking or using supernatural forces to get around God or to bend God to someone’s will. The practice of divination, seeking omens, or foretelling the future bypasses God, who alone determines the future and reveals it to humans. Divination practices were followed by the nations around them. But God has appointed prophets for communicating to the people when and what God wants them to know (**Deut 18:14-15**).

2. (:27-29) Avoid Pagan Practices

a. (:27) Avoid Pagan Mourning Rituals

*“You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads,
nor harm the edges of your beard.”*

R. K. Harrison: The shaping of the hair on the temples and beard (**27**), or the incising of patterns on the skin, formed part of pagan mourning practices and as such were prohibited.

Milgrom: In some ancient societies, including Israel, the beard was the prized symbol of manhood, and its mutilation [v. 27] was considered the greatest disgrace and punishment (**2 Sam 10:4-5; Isa 7:20**).

b. (:28) Avoid Pagan Body Mutilation

*“You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead,
nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD.”*

Mark Rooker: The tattoo indicated that one was a slave to a particular deity.

c. (:29) **Avoid Pagan Cult Prostitution**

“Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot, so that the land may not fall to harlotry, and the land become full of lewdness.”

Robert Vasholz: means not to force one’s daughter to be a cult prostitute. The Canaanites incorporated prostitution as part of their worship.

3. (:30) Keep the Sabbaths

“You shall keep My sabbaths and revere My sanctuary; I am the LORD.”

4. (:31) Avoid the Occult

“Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.”

R. K. Harrison: **Necromancy**, which is the attempt to gain contact with the spirits of the deceased, is specifically prohibited to the Israelites. The medium was usually a woman who was able to obtain a materialization of certain deceased persons on request. . . The word translated wizards (Heb. *yiddē‘ōnî*; *neb ‘spirits*) comes from a root ‘to know’, perhaps referring to the occult information which the practitioner of necromancy purported to have. Contact with such persons resulted in spiritual defilement, partly because they had been in touch with the dead, but also because of the superstitious and demonic influences attending necromancy.

Clarke: The attempt to know what God has not thought proper to reveal, is a sin against his wisdom, providence, and goodness. In mercy, great mercy, God has hidden the knowledge of futurity from man, and given him *hope* – the *expectation of future good*, in its place.

5. (:32) Honor the Aged

“You shall rise up before the grayheaded, and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.”

E. (:33-34) Love Resident Strangers

“When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. 34 The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

F. (:35-36) Pursue Integrity in Business Dealings

“You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. 36 You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt.”

(:37) Summary Obligation to Obey God’s Laws

*“You shall thus observe all My statutes, and all My ordinances, and do them:
I am the LORD.”*

Mark Rooker: The chapter closes with a call to obedience, which summarizes the essence of the entire chapter (19:37). Although obedience is not the means to God's favor, it is the proper and necessary response to God's benevolence.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Which of these commands might not have a direct bearing on our life today? But are there underlying principles that we can still appreciate?
- 2) Why are these commands not organized in some more obvious fashion?
- 3) Where is our surrounding pagan culture impacting our walk of holiness the most?
- 4) How are many of these commandments repeated or mirrored in the New Testament?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Perry Yoder: The instructions for holy living are given in the form of a list of topics. Usually the commands are short, and the topics change frequently. The transition from one subject to the next may be quite abrupt, which gives the chapter a feeling of incoherence. The instructions concern attitudes and feelings as well as behavior. The form in which they are given also varies. Some commands are in apodictic form—“You shall not ...”—like in the Ten Commandments. Some are in case form—“When this happens, then ...” This difference in style is illustrated by **verses 3-4**, which are apodictic law, while **verses 5-8** are case law. For these reasons it is hard to see an overall structure or coherence in **chapter 19**. Although coherence has been sought among the short paragraphs, one is left wondering why this follows that.

Roy Gane: Verse 30 repeats the reminder to keep the Lord’s Sabbaths (see v. 3). Observe the **chiasmic relationship** between these two verses:

respect	(<i>yr'</i>)	mother and father
keep	(<i>šmr</i>)	the Lord’s Sabbaths (v. 3).
keep	(<i>šmr</i>)	the Lord’s Sabbaths
respect	(<i>yr'</i>)	the Lord’s sanctuary (v. 30).

In this pattern, the structural equivalence between *mother and father* (v. 3) and the Lord's *sanctuary* (v. 30), representing his worship system officiated by Aaronic priests, suggests a tight conceptual linkage between them. They represent divine and human authority that derives from Creation, which is continued through human reproduction. Keeping Sabbaths encapsulates the core message of the chapter: The holy Creator makes his people holy (cf. Ex. 31:12–17) by teaching them how to emulate him.

Wiersbe: In **chapter 19**, the Ten Commandments are applied to various areas of life; in **chapter 20**, the penalties are stated that must be imposed on those who disobey His commandments. God expected His people to take His law seriously and to apply the penalties obediently and without favoritism.

The regulations given in **chapter 19** aren't arranged in any discernible order, but the one thing that ties them together is their relationship to the Ten Commandments (**Ex. 20:1-17**), which is the basis for all Jewish law and should be the basis for all moral law. Perhaps the easiest way to classify these laws is to see them in their relationship to God, to others, and to things.

Robert Coleman: This is one of the greatest chapters in the OT. It is a Mosaic anticipation of the very spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. The contents are closely related to the Ten Commandments with the assertion, *I am the Lord your God*, which frequently recurs as a refrain. The Book of the Covenant (**Ex 21-23**) likewise reveals several of the commands to be found herein. *Ye shall be holy*. The motive and inspiration for obedience to the commands which follow were to be the holiness of God. The Hebrew people were to measure their own holiness by that of God. Obedience to God's commands would insure that they would remain a separated, peculiar people of God.

TEXT: Leviticus 20:1-27

TITLE: *PENALTIES FOR SPECIFIC OFFENSES (MAINLY CAPITAL CRIMES)*

BIG IDEA:

THESE SEVERE PENALTIES FOR COVENANT INFRACTIONS AND SEXUAL OFFENSES SHOULD HELP US TO TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY

INTRODUCTION:

Roy Gane: Holy living is not optional for those who wish to live as God's people. So **Leviticus 20** lays out terminal penalties for serious moral offenses, paralleling **chapter 18** by prohibiting sexual practices and Molech worship.

Allen Ross: **Leviticus 20** continues the emphasis on holiness with exhortation to avoid both pagan religious practices and violations of God's created order. The material included here is similar to that in **Lev. 18**, except that here the penalties for disobedience are included. The nature of these penalties shows the seriousness of the sins and underscores that the moral principles of the covenant had to be safeguarded in a wicked world. . .

God warned Israel that various pagan religious and sexual practices received the death penalty in order that Israel might pursue a life of holiness and obedience to the LORD and avoid the judgment such abominations brought.

Sailhamer: This selection of laws consists of fourteen (7x2) laws, concluded by an extended appeal for holiness on the part of the nation when they take possession of the land of Canaan (**vv. 22-26**). After the conclusion, one of the laws, the prohibition of mediums and spiritists (**v. 6**), is restated (**v. 27**).

Mark Rooker: Although the content of **Leviticus 18** and **20** is virtually identical, it is possible to make a distinction between the intended audiences of the chapters. Whereas **Leviticus 18** addresses the would-be offender of a God-given decree, **Leviticus 20** addresses the Israelite community, which was responsible for seeing that violations of Law receive their just reward.

Gordon Wenham: Structure

- 1-2a** Introduction
- 2b-6** Sins against Religion
- 7-8** Exhortation to Holiness
- 9-21** Sins against Family
- 22-26** Exhortation to Holiness
- 27** Sins against Religion

(:1-2a) PRELUDE

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
2 ‘You shall also say to the sons of Israel,’”*

I. (:2b-8) SANCTUARY DEFILEMENT

A. (:2b-5) Worship of Molech Condemned

1. (:2b-3) Sacrificing a Child to Molech

a. (:2b) Execution by Stoning

“Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens sojourning in Israel, who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones.”

Roy Gane: Though capital crimes have previously appeared, the Bible here introduces the punishment of **stoning** for the first time. The whole community participates and therefore symbolically makes a statement that it has removed the unclean from its midst.

Allen Ross: The worship of Molech seems to be linked with the cult of the dead, some sort of ancestral worship that involved crude rituals. While normal Canaanite religion posed a serious threat to the faith of Israel, this Molech cult was simply cruel and base. Perhaps it was singled out because everything associated with it—death, decay, degeneracy—was in direct conflict with the life that God had prepared for his people. It represented pagan religion in its most loathsome state (cf. **2 Kings 3:26–27**).

b. (:3) God Opposes and Cuts Off

“I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given some of his offspring to Molech, so as to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name.”

2. (:4-5) Failing to Execute the Offender

a. (:4-5a) God Opposes

“If the people of the land, however, should ever disregard that man when he gives any of his offspring to Molech, so as not to put him to death, 5 then I Myself will set My face against that man and against his family;”

Gordon Wenham: Prosecution was left to individual initiative, and it was always easiest to ignore an offense and let sleeping dogs lie. Indeed, those most likely to know about someone’s apostasy to Molech would be close neighbors and members of the family, who would naturally be most loath to prosecute. But loyalty to God must override ties of blood and friendship (cf. **Deut. 13:7–12 [6–11]; Luke 14:26**). If a man puts family loyalty before devotion to God, *“I myself shall set my face against that man and his family”* (v. 5).

R. K. Harrison: The punishment is severe because the offender has defiled the sanctuary and profaned God’s holy name. Those of the *‘am hā’ āreṣ* who condone the atrocities of Molech worship are as guilty as the ones who commit the crime, being accessories to it. By overlooking the offence they imply a certain sympathy towards it, and such an attitude would demoralize the covenant community very quickly. Stern sanctions are therefore needed as reinforcement for the ideal of holiness.

b. (:5b) God Cuts Off

“and I will cut off from among their people both him and all those who play the harlot after him, by playing the harlot after Molech.”

Mark Rooker: The death penalty was also the punishment for consulting mediums and spiritists. By seeking mediums and spiritists the Israelites would be imitating a pagan lifestyle, which is described as “prostituting oneself” (20:5–6). The root meaning “commit fornication,” “prostitute oneself,” is *z nā*, which is used in sexual contexts for marital infidelity but is used here and elsewhere in the Old Testament as a metaphor for the infidelity that results from the worship of other gods (see 19:9). The metaphor is particularly meaningful because the relationship of Israel to the Lord is one of a covenant relationship. The Hebrew word (“covenant”), which defines Israel's relationship to God, is used in fact for the marriage relationship (Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14). The same imagery is used in the New Testament in reference to Christ's relationship to the church (1 Cor 6:15–20; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22–23).

Peter Pett: It is interesting that at this stage Molech is seen as the great enemy they will face in the land. This may be because he was particularly objectionable, or because at this stage they were close to Moab and Ammon where his worship was prevalent.

B. (:6) Consulting the Occult Condemned

1. God Opposes

“As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person”

2. God Cuts Off

“and will cut him off from among his people.”

C. (:7-8) Consecration and Obedience Commanded in Pursuit of Holiness

1. (:7) Consecration

“You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.”

2. (:8) Obedience

“And you shall keep My statutes and practice them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”

R. K. Harrison: The demand for personal and communal holiness is reiterated here. Individual consecration to the ideals of the covenant will establish a standard of holy living which will be specifically moral as well as ceremonial in character. Unswerving obedience to God's commands is one indication of a sanctified life in both the Old and New Testaments.

II. (:9-21) SEXUAL PRACTICES CONSTITUTING CAPITAL CRIMES

A. (:9) Cursing Parents

“If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him.”

Mark Rooker: The first commandment in this passage that required the death penalty, the cursing of parents, is repeated by Jesus in the New Testament in his interaction with the Pharisees (**Matt 15:4; Mark 7:10**). Under Roman law Israel could not carry out this punishment. Since it is part of Israel's civil law, this punishment is no longer applicable for the Christian today. The moral principle and the respect one should have for one's parents is not abrogated, however, and is reinforced by the Lord and by Paul (**Eph 6:2**). As moral laws the sexual offenses are still applicable during the age of the church, though like the crime of cursing of parents the capital punishments for these offenses were limited to the time when God's people constituted a redeemed theocratic nation (**John 8:1–11**). Thus the capital punishments for these sexual offenses were not intended to be executed beyond Israel.

Perry Yoder: The word translated curse can have the connotation of treating with contempt (**1 Sam 3:13**) and is the opposite of honoring father and mother (**Exod 20:12**). This command may occur here because some of the sexual acts listed below would show contempt toward father and mother.

John Schultz: According to **vs. 9**, our relationship with our parents is an important factor in the process of our sanctification. It is also important for our emotional balance and our inner health. In God's perfect plan of creation the relationship of a child to his father and mother is the natural channel through which he learns of the love of God. It is also through our parents that we can trace our existence back to God Himself. According to the Gospel of Luke, Adam was the son of God. Sin distorted and ruined much of this relationship. If we do not recognize the reality of our relationship and we if curse our parents, if we hate them instead of loving them, if we do not receive forgiveness and forgive, we forfeit our lives. God puts this kind of curse on the same level as murder.

B. (:10) Committing Adultery

“If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”

C. (:11) Incest with Stepmother

“If there is a man who lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death, their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

D. (:12) Incest with Daughter-in-law

“If there is a man who lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed incest, their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

E. (:13) Homosexuality

“If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

Peter Pett: For a man to have sexual relations with another man is an abomination. No other relationship is always described specifically as an abomination in this way, so it is clearly particularly hateful to God. And being in the midst of a passage dealing with sexual matters this refers to any practising homosexual relationship, not just to cultic practise. It is saying that there is no such thing as a Christian practising homosexual. This has nothing to do with whether a man has homosexual tendencies, it is speaking of a deliberate giving way to those tendencies. Those who do so shall ‘*surely be put to death*’. Again they have brought their blood on their own heads.

F. (:14) Incest with Mother-in-law

“If there is a man who marries a woman and her mother, it is immorality; both he and they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no immorality in your midst.”

David Guzik: **Adam Clarke** believed the phrase **shall be burned with fire** did not refer to execution. “It is very likely that the crime mentioned in this verse was not punished by *burning alive*, but by some kind of *branding*, by which they were ever after rendered infamous.... *Branding* with a hot iron would certainly accomplish every desirable end both for punishment and prevention.”

G. (:15) Bestiality by a Man

“If there is a man who lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death; you shall also kill the animal.”

H. (:16) Bestiality by a Woman

“If there is a woman who approaches any animal to mate with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

I. (:17) Incest with a Sister

“If there is a man who takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, so that he sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness,

it is a disgrace; and they shall be cut off in the sight of the sons of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he bears his guilt.”

J. (:18) Sex during Menstruation

“If there is a man who lies with a menstruous woman and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow, and she has exposed the flow of her blood; thus both of them shall be cut off from among their people.”

K. (:19) Incest with Aunt

“You shall also not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for such a one has made naked his blood relative; they shall bear their guilt.”

L. (:20) Incest with Uncle's Wife

“If there is a man who lies with his uncle's wife he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness; they shall bear their sin. They shall die childless.”

M. (:21) Incest with Sister-in-law

“If there is a man who takes his brother's wife, it is abhorrent; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness. They shall be childless.”

Roy Gane: Each one of these prohibitions has its parallel in **ch. 18**. It remains to observe the significance of the duplication of these prohibitions in the heart of the Holiness Code. Clearly, they provide an insight into the value God places on holiness in sexual relations. They also remind the reader how sexuality lies at the heart of the divine covenant not only with Israel but with all humanity as well. As **Genesis 1:26–28** contends, the fruitfulness, multiplication, and filling of the earth by humanity is part of the divine will and creation order. Sexuality is the key component to realizing this command. It is apparent from these verses that neither the incestuous use of sex, which threatens not only to inbreed genetic traits but also to upset the role of the family and home in maturing its young and preserving its elderly, nor any practice of sex outside of a committed heterosexual marriage, can guarantee the proper use of this most powerful force in humanity.

III. (:22-27) SEPARATION FROM PAGAN PRACTICES IN CONFORMITY WITH COVENANT RELATIONSHIP TO A HOLY GOD

A. (:22-24) Covenant Promise Regarding Possession of the Land

1. (:22) Prevention of being Expelled from the Land via Obedience

“You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out.”

2. (:23) Pagan Practices Must be Rejected

“Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I shall drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have

abhorred them.”

3. (:24) Promise of Possession of the Land

“Hence I have said to you, ‘You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples.”

Gordon Wenham: In this short paragraph Israel is reminded of the basis of her whole existence. It is through the divine promises (v. 24; cf. Gen. 15:7–8; 28:4) that she now stands poised to enter Canaan and to expel its inhabitants (v. 23). God has chosen Israel to be his holy people. He has separated them from the nations (vv. 24, 26); therefore they must distinguish between the clean and unclean animals, as set out in ch. 11. In distinguishing between the different kinds of creatures they are imitating God, who chose Israel from all the nations to be a people for his own possession (vv. 25–26).

Peter Pett: For God’s purpose for His people is that they might inherit the land and receive it as a gift from God, as their own possession. An inheritance is something freely given and undeserved. Thus He is giving it to them freely. It is a land flowing with milk and honey, having plenteous sustenance and sweetness. And He, Yahweh their God, has separated them from the peoples that they might be holy to Him and live in holiness in the land that He has cleansed. They are His and must reveal that they are His separated ones by the way that they live and the way they behave.

R. Laird Harris: The expression “*flowing with milk and honey*” is used fourteen times in the Pentateuch and five times in the rest of the OT. It is, of course, symbolic of the agricultural plenty of Palestine. Palestine today is far from attractive, agriculturally speaking; the rainfall is seasonal, and the summers are dry. It is probably that a similar climate obtained in Moses’ day, though the subject is debated. A little more rain would have made a great difference. At present Palestine is deforested and badly eroded. Even if the climate was similar in ancient days, a cover of trees would have better conserved the winter rains; and careful irrigation would have made the hills and western slopes of the mountains quite productive. The mention of honey is perhaps lost to modern ears. To us honey is a dispensable condiment. Then it was the only sweetener at hand.

B. (:25-26) Commitment to Holiness Requires Distinguishing between Clean and Unclean

1. (:25) Making Distinctions

“You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean.”

2. (:26) Maintaining Holiness

“Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.”

David Guzik: This demonstrates that God wants more than robotic obedience from His people. God wants relationship with His people, and their loyalty within that relationship (**that you should be Mine**). Both relationship and obedience are important, but God doesn't want our obedience to Him apart from relationship.

C. (:27) Capital Punishment for Occultist

“Now a man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones, their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

Roy Gane: With v.6, the prohibition against divination by mediums and spiritists begins and ends the major section of this chapter. In addition, v.27 adds the punishment of death by stoning for anyone who practices it. This prescribes the same punishment as those who worship Molech through child sacrifice. Thus the attempt to consult the dead equals the worst practices of idolatry in God's eyes. Both require complete eradication from the community.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we teach our children that choices have consequences?
- 2) Why is dabbling in the practices of the occult such an abomination to God?
- 3) What does it say about our society that we would judge most of these penalties to be too harsh?
- 4) What type of culpability lies with those who observe such evils and fail to speak out against them or take any action?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Roy Gane: Framing Structure

- Penalty of stoning (for Molech worship; v. 2)
- Prohibition of occult (v. 6)
- Be holy because God is holy (v. 7)
- “Keep my decrees” (v. 8)
- “Keep all my decrees” (v. 22)
- Be holy because God is holy (v. 26)
- Prohibition of occult (v. 27)
- Penalty of stoning (for mediums; v. 27)

Gordon Wenham: Cutting Off

The law refers a number of times to God cutting off an offender, or the guilty person being cut off from among his people (e.g., **Exod. 12:15, 19; Lev. 7:20–21, 25, 27; 17:4, 9, 14; 18:29; 19:8; 20:3, 5–6, 17–18; Num. 15:30–31**). It is a punishment generally reserved for religious and sexual offenses. Since some of these offenses may also attract the death penalty, “cutting off” could conceivably be an alternative way of describing capital punishment (e.g., **Lev. 20:6 and 27**). However, since cutting off is contrasted with judicial execution in **Lev. 20:2ff.** (the man who escapes stoning must still face the possibility of being cut off), something different must be meant. For one case of incest Babylonian law demands expulsion from the community, whereas biblical law speaks of the guilty man being “cut off” (LH 154; cf. **Lev. 20:17–18**). It could be argued that “cutting off” means excommunication from the covenant community. But this treatment is reserved for the unclean rather than for criminals (**Lev. 13:45–46; Num. 5:1–4**). It seems best, therefore, to retain the traditional interpretation of “cutting off”: it is a **threat of direct punishment by God usually in the form of premature death**. Insofar as many of the offenses punishable by “cutting off” would easily escape human detection, a threat of divine judgment would have been the main deterrent to committing them.

Wiersbe: Fifteen offenses in Israel were capital crimes: striking or cursing a parent (**Ex. 21:15, 17; Deut. 21:18–21**); breaking the Sabbath (**31:14; Num. 15:32–36**); blaspheming God (**Lev. 24:10–16**); engaging in occult practices (**Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:6**); prophesying falsely (**Deut. 13:1–5**); adultery (**Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22**); rape (**Deut. 22:25**); unchastity before marriage (**vv. 13ff**); incest (**Lev. 20:11–12**); homosexuality (**v. 13**); bestiality (**vv. 15–16; Exod. 22:19**); kidnapping (**Ex. 21:16**); idolatry (**Lev. 20:1–5**); false witness in a case involving a capital crime (**Deut. 19:16–21**); killing a human intentionally (**Ex. 21:12**).

Allen Ross: God enumerated the penalties for sins that violated his order (**20:9–21**).

A. Some violations brought the **death penalty** outright:

1. Cursing one’s parents (**20:9**).
2. Adultery (**20:10**).
3. Unnatural sexual relations such as incest (**20:11–12**), homosexuality (**20:13**), sex with a woman and her daughter (**20:14**), or bestiality (**20:15–16**).

B. God punished some violations by **premature death**:

1. Having intercourse with one’s sister (**20:17**).
2. Having intercourse during menstruation (**20:18**).
3. Having intercourse with one’s kin (**20:19**).

C. Some violations resulted in **childlessness**:

1. Having intercourse with an uncle’s wife (**20:20**).
2. Marrying a brother’s wife (**20:21**).

David Thompson: PARTING THOUGHTS:

1. God’s people are to be holy people.
2. Holiness means making concrete choices not to do certain things.

3. Holiness means making concrete choices to do certain things.
4. There are consequences for God's people for the choices they make.
5. If you have committed any of these sins, you can be set free from law violations by Jesus Christ (**John 8:1-11**).

TEXT: Leviticus 21:1-24

TITLE: HOLINESS FOR PRIESTS – PART I

BIG IDEA:

**THE STANDARD OF HOLINESS REQUIRED FOR PRIESTS SPECIFIED
DEFILING PROHIBITIONS AND DISQUALIFYING DEFECTS**

INTRODUCTION:

Mark Rooker: These two chapters differ from the other chapters of this section in that the regulations given are primarily directed toward the priests. This section thus supplements **Leviticus 8–10**. The primary issues addressed are the qualifications of the priesthood and the proper eating by the priests of the donations given by the Israelites. . The major structural divider, however, is the introductory formula “*The LORD said to Moses,*” which indicates the beginning of each section.

Kenneth Mathews: Most are familiar with the expression raising the bar. The expression is derived from athletics, specifically the high jump or pole vault. The athlete must clear the bar with his jump in order to continue in the next round of attempts. At each new round the bar is raised, making the level of difficulty greater and greater. Raising the bar means raising the standard of conduct or achievement to a more demanding expectation. **Leviticus 21, 22** effectively does this for Christian ministry. The standard for a Christian leader is higher than for others. The reasons for this are evident since the leader sets a pattern that influences others. Also, a leader can only qualify as a successful leader if he shows he is worthy of the position. . .

What does God say to the religious leaders of the community? In essence in both chapters he commands the priestly leadership to maintain ritual and moral purity. Since they represent the Lord as the intermediaries between God and the people, they must avoid any compromise in their conduct in religious and social matters as well as in personal moral purity. Although in these two chapters a number of the instructions sound strange to us, they have a logical explanation when we remember that the main issue is the adequacy of the priests to function in their assigned roles. What was at stake was nothing less than the spiritual survival of the people they served. If the priests failed to obey the Lord and to represent God to the people or failed to represent the people to God in the proper manner, the ongoing spiritual vitality of the relationship between the Lord and his redeemed people was threatened. A holy God cannot be misrepresented to his people, and the people cannot depend on a priesthood that is ritually unclean and morally compromised.

Allen Ross: By delineating the physical and spiritual qualifications and conduct of the priestly leaders, God claimed the totality of their lives. The point was that the priesthood was not an occupation but a life. By giving these rulings for ancient Israel

the LORD was also saying something about the holy nature of the ministry that warranted such standards.

The two main subjects addressed in the chapter concerning the priests' conduct—funerals and marriages—provide the opportunity for further theological reflection. Reading the rulings about funerals provides a better understanding of dealing with the problem of death in the eternal program of God. Likewise, the standard that the priests exemplified in their marriages also reveals a good deal more of what God intended for that institution.

Those whom God set apart for spiritual service could not defile themselves by mourning the dead or by entering unholy marriages, were disqualified from service if they had serious physical defects, and if unclean or unqualified were barred from offering and eating sacrificial food.

I. (21:1-15) DEFILING PROHIBITIONS FOR PRIESTS

A. (:1-9) Prohibitions for All Priests

(:1a) Address to Moses

*“Then the LORD said to Moses,
‘Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them,’”*

Kenneth Mathews: The various regulations for the priests in **Leviticus 21:1–9** were designed to restrain the people of God from diluting their sole allegiance to God. The temptation was to accommodate the religious life of their Canaanite neighbors whose religion was polytheistic and immoral. Since the priests were leaders of the people, their practices were especially scrutinized. They were called to instruct the people in the way of the Lord and to model the proper way to approach God in worship.

Among the instructions for the priests was a prohibition concerning their association with the dead. Contact with the dead, whether layperson or priest, resulted in ceremonial uncleanness (**Numbers 19:11–22**). The priests were restricted from attending funeral services except for their closest relatives, what we would call the nuclear family (**vv. 1b–3**). Why? The people of the ancient Near East regularly promoted family shrines where religious cults of the dead flourished. The cults of the dead involved celebratory meals following the formal funeral in which the family maintained their connection with the dead by keeping them alive, so to speak, by providing them food, drink, and sex. Orthodox Biblical religion condemned the cults of the dead because they denied the gulf between the living and the dead. There is no co-equal power or deity with the Lord God in the realm of the dead. And God is God of the living. Some mourning rites were permissible for the people and the priests, such as weeping, tearing of garments, wearing sackcloth, and loosening the hair. But any trimming of the hair's edges on the head or mutilating the body was strictly outlawed, probably due to their association with pagan cult practices (**Leviticus 19:27, 28; 21:5**).

The high priest was prohibited from any association with the dead, including his parents (**v. 11**). The reason for this extreme measure was because of the ritual status of

the high priest who had been especially consecrated to God's service in the eyes of the people.

1. (:1b-6) Regarding Dealing with Death

a. (:1b-4) Regarding Defilement from Contact with the Dead

“No one shall defile himself for a dead person among his people, 2 except for his relatives who are nearest to him, his mother and his father and his son and his daughter and his brother, 3 also for his virgin sister, who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may defile himself. 4 He shall not defile himself as a relative by marriage among his people, and so profane himself.”

R. K. Harrison: His young unmarried sister was included in this select category, since she would not have a husband to attend to the funeral rites, and perhaps not even parents. There is no mention of the priest's own wife, but defilement for her sake would be expected since they were one in marriage.

b. (:5-6) Regarding Mourning Rituals

1) (:5) Prohibition of Pagan Practices

“They shall not make any baldness on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts in their flesh.”

2) (:6) Pursuit of Holiness

“They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they present the offerings by fire to the LORD, the bread of their God; so they shall be holy.”

2. (:7-9) Regarding Marriage and Family

a. (:7) Marriage Restrictions

“They shall not take a woman who is profaned by harlotry, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for he is holy to his God.”

b. (:8) Consecration – Pursuit of Holiness

*“You shall consecrate him, therefore, for he offers the bread of your God; he shall be holy to you; for **I the LORD**, who sanctifies you, am holy.”*

c. (:9) Sexual Purity of Daughters – Prohibition of Pagan Practices

“Also the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by harlotry, she profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.”

R. K. Harrison: The mention of a harlot is intended to remind the Israelites that cultic prostitution of the Canaanite variety had no place whatever in the life of the covenant community, since such behaviour would profane God's holy name. Because the priests present the holy offerings on behalf of the congregation, they are to be given the respect appropriate to such an exalted position. The holiness of the priests extends to the members of their families also, so that if a daughter indulges in immorality she profanes her father as well as herself. The punishment for so grave an offence was death by burning.

Roy Gane: A priest's family members participate in his holiness. This is true both because they are related to him and because he shares with them the holy (but not most holy) portions of sacrificial food (cf. **Lev. 22:12–13**). For a priest's daughter the good news is that she enjoys an elevated status of holiness. But this privilege carries moral responsibility. The bad news is that if she profanes/desecrates herself by promiscuity (so-called "harlotry," but not limited to prostitution), she not only shames her father (cf. **Deut. 22:20–21**); she also profanes his priestly holiness. Since this is a particularly grave evil, which affects all Israelites by morally sullyng the priesthood, the penalty is harsh even if she is not betrothed or married: She is to be burned (**Lev. 21:9**; cf. **Gen. 38:24**; **Lev. 20:14**).

John Schultz: In our eyes, it seems that the burning of a priest's daughter who lived an immoral life was a cruel and unusual punishment. It does not say, however, that she was to be burned alive. The execution was usually carried out by stoning. I suppose that the burning was in place of a burial. The implication is that holiness is not a private affair but that it pertains to the whole family.

B. (:10-15) Prohibitions for the High Priest

1. (:10-12) Regarding Dealing with Death

a. (:10) Regarding Mourning Rituals

*“And the priest who is the highest among his brothers,
on whose head the anointing oil has been poured,
and who has been consecrated to wear the garments,
shall not uncover his head, nor tear his clothes;”*

Richard Hess: This is the first occurrence of the term “high priest” (*hakkōhēn haggādōl*, GK 3913, 1524) in the Bible and its only occurrence in Leviticus. Thus the regulations that follow pertain only to the high priest. The implication of a specific priest to serve as high priest has already been suggested, especially in **Leviticus 16**, where this figure performs the ceremonies on behalf of the nation. When Aaron and his sons were anointed (**Lev 8–9**), theirs was a unique experience. Afterwards, priests would not need to be anointed to their office (as suggested by **Ex. 29:9** and especially **40:15**; **Milgrom, Leviticus 1–16**, 555). But each new high priest would go through the anointing ceremony of **Leviticus 8–9** (cf. **6:22**); therefore, the high priest as “*the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head*” describes a unique individual among the priests, the only one in each succeeding generation after the first who has gone through the ceremony of anointing. In addition, the distinctive clothing of

the high priest (for Aaron, cf. **8:6–9** and comments) sets him off from the remainder of the priestly group.

Kenneth Mathews: Especially important to the religious life of Israel was the role of the high priest. He was special as the chief mediator between God and his people, Israel. The standards for the high priest even excelled those of the priests. Before the Lord continued addressing the priests in general, the Lord focused in **verses 10–15** on the requirements demanded of the high priest. The high priest had to be discriminating in making choices pertaining to the crucial times of life—the death of loved ones and marriage to a loved one, his wife. We said above that the high priest under no circumstances could be associated with the dead, lest he become unfit to carry out his duties in the worship of God. The explanation for this uncompromising prohibition is implied by the text’s acknowledgment that he bore *“the anointing oil of his God”* (**v. 12**). This refers to the rite of Aaron’s investiture as high priest and of his sons in which they received the oil of consecration (**Leviticus 8:30**). These servants of the Lord stood out from the people because of the special anointing that they received. This was the gracious act of God that chose Aaron and his descendants to lead the congregation in the worship of God. In the event of a death in his family or of anyone else for that matter, Aaron was not to venture from the sanctuary to attend the funeral or its mourning rituals. For him to be in the presence of death while specially bearing the oil of holiness would profane the house of God. This shows that the behavior of the priestly leadership had an impact on the life of the community at large. Disobedience by the priests brought impurity upon the whole people.

Allen Ross: In the exposition, both of these first sections make the point that God put very high standards on those who represented him to the people. The people had to be reminded of the holiness and the hope of their covenant even in times of bereavement. After all, God was the God of the living; he created life, he preserved life, and he would restore it. The priests—of all people—could not weep and mourn as the world mourns. For them to do so made the covenant profane.

- b. (:11) Regarding Defilement from Contact with the Dead
*“nor shall he approach any dead person,
nor defile himself even for his father or his mother;”*
- c. (:12) Regarding Maintaining Sanctuary Service
*“nor shall he go out of the sanctuary,
nor profane the sanctuary of his God;
for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him:
I am the LORD.”*

Mark Rooker: The high priest was held to an even higher standard than an ordinary priest. The high priest, who is described as one having the anointing and special garments (**8:30**), was not to allow his hair to become unkempt or to tear his clothes (**21:10**; see **10:6**). He was not even able to come into contact with the corpse of his

father or his mother but had to be committed to maintaining the service of the tabernacle (21:11–12).

2. (:13-15) Regarding Marriage and Family

a. (:13) Marriage Requirement

“And he shall take a wife in her virginity.”

Kenneth Mathews: We can reason that the restrictions again are related to the symbolic role that the high priest played in the life of the congregation. The idea of a virgin woman was a symbol of purity in the ancient world. This tradition was carried over in our own times by the symbolic gesture of the new bride whose gown is flowing white. The mention of prostitution shows that the issue was not marriage so much as the sexual purity of the woman. It would be possible for a prostitute to have not been married before and thus could technically be available to the high priest. But the practice of prostitution, whether it was street or temple prostitution, defaced the picture that the high priest was to portray to the people. The conduct of the high priest and the character of his family life conveyed by symbolic portraits the holy character of God. If he were to have a child by a non-virgin it would have implications for his descendants who were to follow him in the priestly vocation.

John Schultz: In this case, God considered all forms of sexual relations, within the bond of marriage and outside, as impure. The virginity of the church is proof of her pure dedication to the Lord, both in the spiritual and in the moral sense. It is difficult to explain the physical proof of virginity. It is a strange phenomenon. If one adheres to the theory of evolution, the virginal membrane must be a complete mystery that, actually, refutes the theory. If it does not have a moral connotation, it is senseless, and human life is not senseless. Sometimes young Christians struggle with the question as to why pre-marital sex is morally wrong. We see only the right perspective if we understand the reality of which marriage is the image. Just as the marriage of a High Priest had to be the expression of the spiritual reality, so should the marriage of every child of God be. Marriage is holy matrimony because God is holy and the relationship between God and man is holy. Our relationship with God sanctifies us and our marriage and our children.

b. (:14) Marriage Restrictions

“A widow, or a divorced woman, or one who is profaned by harlotry, these he may not take; but rather he is to marry a virgin of his own people;”

c. (:15) Protection of Sanctification of His Offspring

*“that he may not profane his offspring among his people: for **I am the LORD** who sanctifies him.”*

II. (21:16-23) DISQUALIFYING DEFECTS FOR ALL PRIESTS

(:16-17a) Address to Moses

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 17 ‘Speak to Aaron, saying, ”

Kenneth Mathews: The animal and grain offerings were offered by the worshippers as “*food offerings*” to the Lord at his house, that is, the Tent of Meeting. Since God is complete and perfect in all his attributes and actions, it would be unfitting to approach God through anyone or with anything that would manifestly appear imperfect or incomplete. Therefore, the priests who served the Lord were to be whole in appearance, not having any obvious physical disorder. The word “*blemish*” repeatedly occurs in the passage, describing the disqualification of the priest.

A. (:17b-21) Physical Defects Disqualify Priests from Offering Bread in the Sanctuary

1. (:17b) Command Stated

“No man of your offspring throughout their generations who has a defect shall approach to offer the bread of his God.”

2. (:18-20) Command Detailed with Examples

“For no one who has a defect shall approach: a blind man, or a lame man, or he who has a disfigured face, or any deformed limb, 19 or a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, 20 or a hunchback or a dwarf, or one who has a defect in his eye or eczema or scabs or crushed testicles.”

3. (:21) Command Repeated

“No man among the descendants of Aaron the priest, who has a defect, is to come near to offer the LORD's offerings by fire; since he has a defect, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God.”

R. K. Harrison: The person who approaches the sanctuary as God’s priest must be as free from physical imperfections as the sacrificial animal that he offers. A priest who is blemished physically is prohibited from presenting sacrificial offerings, but can still partake of sacrificial meat (cf. **Lev. 2:3, 10; 6:17–18, 29**). The imperfections listed included blindness, facial mutilations, limbs of uneven length such as could result from poliomyelitis, hunchback, whether a congenital deformity or the product of some ailment such as spinal tuberculosis, achondroplasia or dwarfism, and itching diseases of various kinds. A castrate, or a man suffering from orchiotrophy (**20**), was also blemished and therefore unfit for sanctuary duties. Genetic mutations such as polydactyly would also exclude a person from the priesthood, and although such conditions were rare they undoubtedly existed in Old Testament times (cf. **2 Sam. 21:20**). Physical normality and ceremonial holiness are closely associated here, the inference being that the priests can be most effective in God’s service only when they are in ordinary health and free from physical imperfections. These prerequisites are very important, if only because of the emotional and sometimes physical strain that the conscientious servant of God experiences in ministering the things of eternal life. In all things God must be glorified, and his holiness is profaned by anything that is obviously less than perfect, whether it be sacrificial animal or a sacrificing priest.

Wiersbe: Another reason for this requirement, may have been that the priests typified the coming Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, in whom was "*no defect.*"

B. (:22-23) Physical Defects Do Not Disqualify the Priests from Eating the Bread

1. (:22) Permission to Eat the Bread

"He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy,"

Peter Pett: They were not excluded from the privileges of priesthood, only from the carrying out of its ministry in the sanctuary. Thus they could partake of the priestly offerings, even those which were most holy of which only the priests could partake. But they were excluded from the Holy Place, from approaching the veil, and from approaching the altar to minister on it. They could, however, presumably carry out the teaching and judicial functions which were incumbent on the priests. . .

Thankfully for us it is not blemishes like this which will in our case prevent our full approach to God. Rather are we restricted by the blemishes in our hearts. Spiritual crookedness, blindness, deafness, dumbness, smallness, distortedness, are all things which prevent us from being heard by God and from serving Him.

2. (:23a) Prohibition from Profaning the Holy Things

*"only he shall not go in to the veil or come near the altar
because he has a defect,
that he may not profane My sanctuaries."*

Allen Ross: Disqualified priests still participated in other priestly functions and could still eat the portions given them in the sanctuary. They just could not serve as sacrificing priests in the holy place. These laws concerned the requirements for those entering the actual presence of God with the sacrificial blood. How could a priest require purification from defilement and disease if he himself was defiled? The restrictions were meant to teach that physical defects, illness, and disease were incompatible with the holiness of God.

Wiersbe: We have no reason to believe any disqualified priest was treated like a second-class citizen in the camp of Israel. While priests with physical defects couldn't serve at the altar or in the holy place, they were still considered priests and were allowed to share with their families in the sacrificial means (**Lev. 2:3, 10; 6:14-18**) and the other material benefits that the tribe of Levi enjoyed.

3. (:23b) Principle Involved

*"For **I am the LORD** who sanctifies them."*

(:24) POSTLUDE

"So Moses spoke to Aaron and to his sons and to all the sons of Israel."

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does God hold spiritual leaders to a higher standard of character and conduct?
- 2) How does the high priest serve as an appropriate type for our great High Priest – Jesus Christ?
- 3) Since we are now all a kingdom of priests, what type of moral and spiritual deformities must we guard against?
- 4) How is the Lord presently sanctifying us and making us more holy?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Baxter: The section [**chapters 21 and 22**] is in three parts: first, prohibited practices (**xxi. 1-15**), concerning the priest's social relationships; second, prohibited persons (**xxi. 16—xxii. 16**), concerning personal disqualifications from serving in or eating the things of the Tabernacle; third, prohibited sacrifices (**xxii. 17-33**), concerning defective animals which must not be offered upon the Lord's altar. In other words, these chapters tell us what the priest **must not do, must not be, must not offer**.

Mark Rooker: The threefold degree of holiness among the Israelites – the people, the priests, and the high priest – corresponds to the graduation of holiness in the tabernacle – the outer court, the Holy Place, the Most Holy Place.

David Thompson: GOD'S LEADERS ARE TO BE EXAMPLES OF MEN WHO ARE HOLY AND CONSECRATED TO THE LORD AND THEY ARE NOT TO DEFILE OR PROFANE THEMSELVES BY DOING CERTAIN THINGS GOD FORBIDS.

The word “*defile*” is used four times in this chapter (v. **1, 3, 4, 11**). The word “*profane*” is used eight times in this chapter (v. **6, 7, 9** (twice), **12, 14, 15, 23**). It is obviously possible for a priest to do something that is defiling and profaning in the sight of God. The Hebrew word “*defile*” means to do something God views as unclean, impure, polluted (**Gesenius**, p. 322). The Hebrew word “*profane*” means to do something that will pierce God's people and property and will lay it open to wounds and destruction (**Gesenius**, p. 281). It is possible for priests to do things that pollute God's place of worship and actually bring about God's judgment.

Mark Gladwell: Standards for Service

1. The personal life of the priests (:1-15)

This set of laws concerns priests when they are off duty with their families at home. Two issues are highlighted:

Mourning (:1-6; 10-12)

A corpse was a source of uncleanness and touching one would defile a priest for seven days. However, a concession was made for the ordinary priests who were allowed to attend the funerals of close blood relatives. No concession was made for the H.P. The priests were to distance themselves from the pagan mourning rites of the heathen and demonstrate unswerving loyalty to God (see **Luke 9:59, 60; 14:26**).

Marriage (:7-9; 13-15)

The priests were consecrated to God and their wives must be of good character. They must not marry prostitutes, raped or divorced women. They must choose either a virgin or a widow. The High Priest could only marry a virgin, this was to safeguard the purity of the priestly line.

2. The physical fitness of the priests (:16-24)

The unblemished lifestyle of the priests had to be matched by their unblemished bodies. A list of twelve physical disabilities which would disqualify a priest from service is given. These things have nothing to do with the worth or value of people. It was a temporary visual aid teaching the church in this kindergarten stage that holiness equates to wholeness and to give us a preview of the perfection of Jesus Christ our great High Priest.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/10140795522.pdf>

TEXT: Leviticus 22:1-33

TITLE: HOLINESS FOR PRIESTS – PART 2

BIG IDEA:

THE STANDARD OF HOLINESS REQUIRED FOR PRIESTS SPECIFIED PARTICIPATION RULES AND ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICES

INTRODUCTION:

David Guzik: All the ceremonies and rituals of the Old Covenant pointed towards a perfect fulfillment by Jesus the Messiah under the New Covenant (**Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 8:4-5; 10:1**). Therefore, the idea that a priest could not serve in a ceremonially defiled (unclean) condition was important. Fellowship with God had to be done on the basis of being declared clean and righteous by God.

Peter Pett: So people and priests together are to keep Yahweh's commandments and do them. His holy Name must be honoured by their lives, and by their behaviour, and by their obedience so that His holiness is recognised and acknowledged. That is why He has made them holy, setting them apart as His people and delivering them and giving them His instruction (torah - Law). That is why He requires them to be holy. For they are His covenant people whom He has brought out of Egypt so that He could be their God. He is Yahweh. (There is no other).

I. (:1-16) WHO MAY EAT THE SACRIFICIAL FOOD?

(:1) Address to Moses

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,”

Allen Ross: The final section of this unit warns against priests' eating the bread or sacrificial meat while they were defiled by ceremonial uncleanness. The passage details the standard types of uncleanness: skin diseases, contact with corpses, bodily emissions, unclean animals, and the like. The priests were human; they had times of uncleanness like everyone else. And if uncleanness barred common worshipers from the sanctuary, it certainly barred priests as well.

Violation of this ruling carried the penalty of being cut off from God's presence. Priests had to be separated from the sanctuary because they were disqualified from the priesthood; but they very likely also died.

Beginning with **22:10** the text rules on who may eat of the holy food in the sanctuary (“*food*” or “*bread*” means the sacrifices as in **3:11, 16; 21:6**). **Leviticus 22:10** prohibits anyone outside the priestly family, any guest of the priests, and any hired hands from eating. But **22:11** allows those whom the priest might have acquired as slaves or those born in his house to eat. It then adds that if a daughter married an outsider she could

not eat, unless through widowhood or divorce she returned to the father's house (22:12–13). If people ate the holy food by mistake, they had to bring the reparation offering (22:14–15).

This section began with the general instruction that the priests had to treat the sacred offerings with respect so that they did not profane the holy name (22:2). The sanctity of the divine name then was the motivation for their obedience. The name of the LORD is the LORD himself—all that he is known to be through his attributes. When the priests were set apart to serve the LORD God in all the aspects of the life of the community, they were essentially called to preserve the faith in all its purity and holiness.

A. (:2-9) Unclean Priests -- Priests Must Avoid Profaning God's Holy Name by Unclean Eating

1. (:2) General Principle

“Tell Aaron and his sons to be careful with the holy gifts of the sons of Israel, which they dedicate to Me, so as not to profane My holy name; I am the LORD.”

Kenneth Mathews: Holy service (22:1–9). **Verses 2–9** repeatedly implore the priests to be ceremonially “*clean*” in carrying out their duties. Again, the passage speaks of the priests’ relationship to “*the holy things*” of worship (v. 3). The priests were the recipients of portions of the offerings, their income for serving at the house of God. Since the offerings were dedicated to God, the offerings were the Lord’s to share with his appointed ministers. They, however, had to maintain the proper relationship to the food offerings by keeping themselves ritually and morally pure.

R. K. Harrison: The Aaronites are reminded in this section that they, too, can become defiled ceremonially, just like any other member of the congregation. Purity is mandatory for those officiating at the sacrifices, so if they become defiled in any way they must keep away from (2) the sacrificial offerings of the people, lest the name of God be made unholy. Any priest who undertakes sanctuary duties while unclean in any way has polluted the sacred area, and will be cut off (3) as a punishment. Uncleanness can result from a number of situations, ranging from discharges to contact with unclean creeping species. Where such a condition exists, it lasts until the evening, and the priest has to wash his body completely before he can regain his ritual purity. He must be scrupulous in observing food laws (8), lest by transgressing in such matters he dies or profanes God’s sacred name. The holiness of the priest must be marked by a high degree of ceremonial and moral rectitude, as an example to the congregation.

Gordon Wenham: The previous paragraph dealt with permanent physical impediments to priestly office. These nonfunctioning priests were still allowed to eat priestly food. But this paragraph sets out under what circumstances priests may neither officiate at the sacrifices nor eat priestly food. Whenever they are unclean, whether through skin disease (cf. chs. 13–14), discharges (ch. 15), or contact with dead men or animals (11:39), they may not eat priestly food on pain of being cut off, because it is holy (vv. 2–3). The holy and the unclean must be kept apart.

2. (:3-8) Specific Examples of Addressing Uncleanness

“Say to them, ‘If any man among all your descendants throughout your generations approaches the holy gifts which the sons of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from before Me. I am the LORD. 4 No man, of the descendants of Aaron, who is a leper or who has a discharge, may eat of the holy gifts until he is clean. And if one touches anything made unclean by a corpse or if a man has a seminal emission, 5 or if a man touches any teeming things, by which he is made unclean, or any man by whom he is made unclean, whatever his uncleanness; 6 a person who touches any such shall be unclean until evening, and shall not eat of the holy gifts, unless he has bathed his body in water. 7 But when the sun sets, he shall be clean, and afterward he shall eat of the holy gifts, for it is his food. 8 He shall not eat an animal which dies or is torn by beasts, becoming unclean by it; I am the LORD.’”

Mark Rooker: Verses 4–8 delineate the ways the priest may become unclean and the process of being restored.

David Guzik: In verse 3 it is commanded that no one can come near the holy things while ritually impure. Here are some specific things that could make a person ritually impure **until evening**.

- It could be by disease or evidence of illness (**a leper or has a discharge**).
- It could be something connected with death (**unclean by a corpse**).
- It could be a normal function that made one temporarily unclean (**an emission of semen**).
- It could be by contact with something unclean (**whoever touches any creeping thing**).

3. (:9) Summary Exhortation

“They shall therefore keep My charge, so that they may not bear sin because of it, and die thereby because they profane it; I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”

Kenneth Mathews: Only after undergoing the proper rituals of purification could the priests participate in the partaking of the offerings. Failure to render their holy service, however, came with the sternest penalty. The priests had to obey the Lord in the handling of holy things or they faced the penalty of death: “[The priests] shall therefore keep my charge, lest they bear sin for it and die thereby when they profane it” (v. 9a).

B. (:10-16) Unqualified Guests -- Only the Priests and Their Families May Eat the Sacrificial Food

1. (:10) No Non Family Members May Partake

“No layman, however, is to eat the holy gift; a sojourner with the priest or a hired man shall not eat of the holy gift.”

Mark Rooker: This section [vv. 10-12] deals with the question of who may eat of the food offerings dedicated to the priests (Lev 6–7). No one outside the priest's family could partake of the offerings made to the Lord, except for an acquired slave or a slave born in the priest's household (22:10–11). Otherwise, those outside a priest's family were prohibited from eating.

David Guzik: The command against giving the priest's portion to a visitor in the priest's home went somewhat against the strong custom of hospitality in that culture, which normally insisted on giving guests the very best the home had to offer.

Constable: Another list of seven laws guarded the offerings. No non-priest ("layman") could eat part of the sacrifices the priests ate, except those who had become members of a priest's household. This ruling principle appears at the beginning and at the end of the list (vv. 10, 13b), with a brief statement following, regarding restitution for accidentally eating an offering (*"he shall add to it a fifth of it"*; vv. 14-16). All of these regulations guarded the holiness of the LORD, by treating the people and things most closely associated with Him as special.

2. (:11) Exceptions = Slaves and Those Born in His House

*"But if a priest buys a slave as his property with his money,
that one may eat of it,
and those who are born in his house may eat of his food."*

David Guzik: The issue of slavery will be dealt with in greater detail in **chapter 25**. Yet, **Adam Clarke's** comments are helpful: "We see that it was lawful, under the Mosaic economy, to have *slaves* under certain restrictions; but these were taken from among the heathen, and instructed in the true religion; hence we find, as in the above case, that they were reckoned as *a part of the priest's own family*, and *treated as such*. They certainly have privileges which did not extend either to *sojourners* or to *hired servants*."

3. (:12-13) Special Rules for a Priest's Daughter

"And if a priest's daughter is married to a layman, she shall not eat of the offering of the gifts. 13 But if a priest's daughter becomes a widow or divorced, and has no child and returns to her father's house as in her youth, she shall eat of her father's food; but no layman shall eat of it."

Mark Rooker: [vv. 13-16] -- A daughter of a priest who was widowed or divorced and childless could return to the home of her father and be qualified to partake of the sacred meals (22:13). The daughter would have the legal status she had before marriage, living under her father's roof and dependent on her father for her livelihood (22:13). The daughter's change of status indicated that the holiness of a priest extended throughout his household.

4. (:14) Restitution for Unintentional Unauthorized Eating

“But if a man eats a holy gift unintentionally, then he shall add to it a fifth of it and shall give the holy gift to the priest.”

Gordon Wenham: Sometimes an outsider might unwittingly eat the holy things, and in effect rob the priest. In this case he had to replace it and add 20 percent (v. 14).

5. (:15-16) Summary Principles

“And they shall not profane the holy gifts of the sons of Israel which they offer to the LORD, 16 and so cause them to bear punishment for guilt by eating their holy gifts; for I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”

II. (:17-25) WHAT MAKES A SACRIFICE DEFECTIVE?

(:17-18a) Address to Moses

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
‘Speak to Aaron and to his sons and to all the sons of Israel, and say to them, ’”*

Jacob Milgrom: There are three recipients of Moses’ speech: Aaron, his sons, and the new component—Israel. The significance is clear: both the priesthood and the laity are held responsible for detecting sacrificial blemishes by the offerer, when the animal is chosen, and by the priest, when the animal enters the sanctuary grounds.

Allen Ross: In order to be accepted by the holy LORD God, worshipers had to demonstrate their reverence for the LORD by bringing animals without defect, by paying attention to the laws of age and humaneness in sacrificing animals, and by ensuring that the thank offering was entirely consumed on the day it was offered.

A. (:18b-20) The Burnt Offering

“Any man of the house of Israel or of the aliens in Israel who presents his offering, whether it is any of their votive or any of their freewill offerings, which they present to the LORD for a burnt offering-- 19 for you to be accepted-- it must be a male without defect from the cattle, the sheep, or the goats. 20 Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it will not be accepted for you.”

Perry Yoder: At the very beginning of Leviticus, the Israelites were told that their offerings must be *tamim*, whole or intact (1:3). However, this word is usually translated with a negative—without defect or without blemish (NRSV, NJPS). The problem seems to be how to describe a pure or whole animal. It is easier to describe the imperfect than to indicate the perfect.

David Guzik: Unfortunately, this law was abused in the days of Jesus, where priests sometimes disqualified an animal for an insignificant reason. Then, the corrupt priest might require the purchase of an approved sacrificial animal at a dishonest high price (Matthew 21:12-13).

B. (:21-25) The Peace Offerings

“And when a man offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a special vow, or for a freewill offering, of the herd or of the flock, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it. 22 Those that are blind or fractured or maimed or having a running sore or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the LORD, nor make of them an offering by fire on the altar to the LORD. 23 In respect to an ox or a lamb which has an overgrown or stunted member, you may present it for a freewill offering, but for a vow it shall not be accepted. 24 Also anything with its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut, you shall not offer to the LORD, or sacrifice in your land, 25 nor shall you accept any such from the hand of a foreigner for offering as the food of your God; for their corruption is in them, they have a defect, they shall not be accepted for you.”

R. K. Harrison: The priests are instructed to ensure that all offerings are unblemished, and the catalogue of physical disabilities which disqualified the descendants of Aaron from sanctuary service is applied to sacrificial animals (22, 24). The only exception is that of animals which apparently exhibit genetic damage (23), and even these can be sacrificed only as freewill offerings. Castrated or similarly mutilated animals, whether of native or imported stock, were prohibited for sacrifice, since they were less than perfect physically and thus would not reflect divine holiness adequately (25). No animals younger than eight days are to be offered in sacrifice (cf. **Exod. 22:30**), nor is a cow or a ewe to be killed with her young on the same day, whether for sacrificial purposes, as in some pagan cults, or for ordinary food consumption.

Richard Hess: vs. 23 -- In the center of this section lies an exception to the general prohibition. Freewill offerings (*nedābā*, GK 5607) allow animals to be offered even though “deformed” or “stunted.” The word for “deformed” (*śr’*, GK 8594) occurs only three times in the Bible (21:18 and **Isa 28:20**, where it describes a bed that is too short to “stretch” out on). Thus a likely understanding of the phrase here may be “too long or too short”—in other words, animals that have a part longer or shorter than the norm. Such a defect does not achieve the ideal sense of balance required for sacrifices involving the perfect fulfillment of a vow, but neither does it call into question the wholeness of the animal as the other “defects” do. Hence these animals can be used for sacrifices that are freewill offerings, free expressions of gratitude for God’s goodness.

III. (:26-30) WHEN AND HOW SHALL YOU OFFER APPROPRIATE SACRIFICES?

(:26) Address to Moses

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,”

A. (:27) Proper Timing

“When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be accepted as a sacrifice of an offering by fire to the LORD.”

B. (:28) Prohibition – Don’t Kill the Animal and its Young on the Same Day

*“But, whether it is an ox or a sheep,
you shall not kill both it and its young in one day.”*

Peter Pett: A mother and its young should not be slain in sacrifice on the same day. This may have been due to certain pagan practises, or may simply be on the basis of what is seemly. We can compare how a bird and its eggs should not both be taken on the same day (**Deuteronomy 22:6-7**). Having taken the eggs the bird should be allowed to go free. His people were not to be greedy or callous or thoughtless. So must they not kill a cow/ewe and its young on the same day.

C. (:29) Purpose of Sacrifice of Thanksgiving = Acceptance

*“And when you sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD,
you shall sacrifice it so that you may be accepted.”*

D. (:30) Prohibition – No Leftovers

*“It shall be eaten on the same day, you shall leave none of it until morning:
I am the LORD.”*

(:31-33) CONCLUDING EXHORTATION TO OBEDIENCE

A. (:31) Positive Command – Keep God’s Commandments

“So you shall keep My commandments, and do them: I am the LORD.”

B. (:32-33) Negative Command – Don’t Profane God’s Holy Name

*“And you shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the
sons of Israel: I am the LORD who sanctifies you, 33 who brought you out from
the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD.”*

Robert Vasholz: Disobedience in Leviticus is tantamount to a confusion of God’s holy character. Disobedience brings reproach on the name by which He identified Himself and by which He identifies Himself to His people. To bring significance to His name, He sets aside a people by redeeming them from bondage and giving them His laws. The wording above, who brings you out of Egypt, demonstrates that the redemption out of Egypt is still in process. Israel has not yet reattached final deliverance until the nation rests in Canaan. It is this redemptive motif, like the motif for the Ten Commandments, which undergirds the reason for keeping these statutes.

Mark Rooker: The final section of **Leviticus 22** functions as the conclusion for the entire section regarding the priests (**21:1–22:30**). The warning against profaning God's name is repeated from **Lev 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2**. The foundation and motivation for obedience is the deliverance from Egypt, the formative saving event in the Old Testament.

Roy Gane: A concluding exhortation (22:31–33) contains elements that parallel ingredients of exhortations in chapters 18–21:

- summary command to keep the Lord’s regulations
- reminder that “*I am the LORD*” (in each verse)
- warning against profaning God’s holy name
- warning that the Lord must be treated as holy among the Israelites
- reminder that it is the Lord who makes Israel holy
- reminder that the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt to be their God

David Guzik: **Therefore you shall keep My commandments, and perform them:** Here God gave Israel – especially the priests – four reasons to keep His **commandments** and to honor His name.

- Because of *who* God is (**I am the LORD**).
- Because of *what* He is (**My holy name**).
- Because of what He *is doing* (**I am the LORD who sanctifies you**).
- Because of what He *has done* (**who brought you out of the land of Egypt**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In our capacity as NT priests how do we protect against spiritual defilement and deformity?
- 2) How do the perfections of the Messiah enhance His role as our great High Priest?
- 3) What are ways in which we can profane God’s holy name today?
- 4) What encouragement can we take from the message that the Lord is the one sanctifying us?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: There is nothing that will kill our spiritual life quicker than thinking lightly of and treating lightly the sacred things of God. When God’s people lose sight of what is sacred, when they begin to treat disrespectfully things that are very important to God, they set themselves up for serious judgment.

GOD’S PEOPLE MUST MAKE CERTAIN THEY DO NOT DO THINGS THAT PROFANE GOD’S NAME; SPECIFICALLY, BY TREATING GOD’S HOLY THINGS DISRESPECTFULLY OR THEY WILL RECEIVE A JUDGMENT FROM GOD.

Treating sacred things lightly is something God notices. It is something God judges. It is no light matter in God's sight to do things that minimize or secularize His sacred things. . .

In this great passage of Scripture there are at least five reasons why God's people should obey God's Word and be holy:

1. Because these are commandments of God. **22:31a**
2. Because He is the LORD. **22:31b, 33b**
3. Because we do not want to profane God's name by not living according to His Word. **22:32a**
4. Because it is God's will that He be sanctified by His people. **22:33**—We show we are set apart as people of God when we obey God's Word.
5. Because He delivered His people. 22:33a

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO OBEY GOD AND BE VERY CAREFUL TO OFFER ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICES TO GOD.

There are things that God's people can do under the auspices of religious ceremony and worship that may be accepted by people which are totally unacceptable to God. Just because people are emotional and seemingly worshipful does not mean it is acceptable to God. To be acceptable to God, it must be in accordance with His Word. Anything not in accordance with His Word is not acceptable, regardless of appearance.

Kit Swartz: OUR PERFECT SACRIFICE
(**Heb.5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 9:6f, 12-14; 10:5f; see 2Cor.5:21**)

A. Perfect in Quality

1. No sin (**1Pt.1:19; Heb.4:15 w/Lk.4:1f; 22:42f**)
2. All righteousness (**Heb.5:8f; 7:26; 9:14; 1Pt.1:19; Jn.1:29**)
3. For the blessed exchange (**2Cor.5:21; see Lev.16:21**)

B. Perfect in Kind: Human for Humans (**Heb.9:12-14; 10:4-10**)

C. Perfect in Value: One for Many (**Heb.5:9; 10:12, 14; Lev.16:21; see Rom.5:15f; 10:11, 13; see Heb.1:3; Jn.1:14, 34(29, 36); Col.1:19; 2:9**)

D. Perfect in Accomplishment: Once for all (**Heb.7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:2, 10, 18; 1Pt.3:18; Rom.6:10; see Lev.1-7, 23; Num.28, 29 w/16:21**)

E. Perfect in Application: Cleanse & Sanctify (**Lev.10:10; 8:6&10; see 22:32, 33; Eph.2:5f&10; 5:25-27; see Heb.10:10&19; 1Cor.11:24, 25; Jn.6:54; Lev.3:17; see 2Cor.5:21; 1Cor.6:9-11**)

F. Perfect in Extension: Follow in His Steps (**1Pt.1:19 & 2:21f; 3:9; Rom.12:1f; see 2Pt.2:13; see Lk.9:23; 6:27, 35**)

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/351781699.pdf>

Wiersbe: The phrase “*separate themselves from the holy things*” (v. 2) sets the theme for the chapter. It means “to treat with regard and respect” or “to be careful in handling.” The priests offered sacrifices all day long, all year long; it would be easy for them to develop an attitude of “professionalism” that would turn a sacred ritual into a shallow routine. Novelist **George MacDonald** said, “Nothing is so deadening to the divine as an habitual dealing with the outsides of holy things.” That’s what this warning is all about. . .

Carelessness and professionalism at the altar would show itself in three ways:

- Unclean priests (**Lev. 22:3-9**)
- Unqualified guests (vv. **10-16**), and
- Unacceptable sacrifices (vv. **17-33**).

The priest would end up defiling himself, the sacrifices, and the very altar where he was supposed to serve God.

TEXT: Leviticus 23:1-44

TITLE: ANNUAL RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S PEOPLE AS A COMMUNITY MUST TAKE TIME ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS TO CEASE FROM WORK AND REJOICE IN GOD'S REDEMPTIVE AGENDA AND PROVISION FOR OUR NEEDS

INTRODUCTION:

Allen Ross: Through the observance of the festivals in the holy calendar, the Israelites were taught that time in all its demarcations and with all its events belonged to God, and that they, the members of the covenant, should honor God by observing these sacred days and seasons and by giving thanks in them for his bounty. . .

The festivals in the year charted the essential aspects of God's redemptive work. Year by year God's saving acts were reenacted, beginning in the spring with the deliverance from bondage by the blood of the lamb, followed by the purging of corruption for a life of purity, the celebration of a new life given to God, and the guidance and instruction given to that life. At the end of the year came the summons to enter his presence, followed by the removal of all sin by full atonement, and then finally entering the fulfillment of the promises with great joy.

Kenneth Mathews: The question for the church today is not what to do or what not to do on Sundays so much as it is to rediscover the significance of a gathered body of believers who set aside special times for worship. The Lord instructed the Israelites to observe special days and celebratory feasts as days of worship. The early church followed a similar pattern that recognized certain days for special times of worship. . .

There were three pilgrim convocations, also called feasts, when the men of the household appeared before the Lord at his sanctuary (**Exodus 23:14; 34:18–23; Deuteronomy 16:16**). These included the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks (also known as Pentecost), and the Feast of Booths (also known as Tabernacles). These three were weeklong celebrations. **Psalms 120–134**, called the Songs of Ascents, were sung by the pilgrims on their journey to Jerusalem. **Psalm 122:1**, for example, reads, "*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!' "*

The two holy days listed are daylong convocations—the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. Attendance at the sanctuary for these two days was not required of the people, but they were to observe the days in their homes.

Richard Hess: A cultic calendar in the Bible is a passage that presents the annual major (and sometimes minor) festivals of God's people in chronological sequence. It normally

designates the name of the festival and includes details about the month and days when it takes place, the particular offerings involved, and other significant elements regarding its celebration. It can also describe the purpose of each festival as well as the requirements or expectations of lay participation in the event. Indeed, some of these festivals concern lay involvement, with few or no notes of priestly responsibilities.

Merrill: There must be days set apart from the calendar of 'secular,' self-serving activity so that the servant people might ponder the meaning of their existence and of the holy task to which they had been called.

I. (:1-4) INTRODUCTION TO THE RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

(:1-2a) Address to Moses

*“The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying,
2 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them,’”*

A. (:2b) Appointed Times for Holy Convocations

*“The LORD’s appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations--
My appointed times are these:”*

Kenneth Mathews: The convocations were called “*holy*” because they were consecrated to the Lord’s service. They were not family or community potlucks with a bit of religion thrown into the mix. They were celebratory remembrances of their God that called for the people to consecrate themselves to the holy task of worshipping the Lord. Yes, worship was an assignment for God’s people to obey, as it is for us as his Church. The community at worship, both during the regular cycle of gatherings and during special seasons of the sacred year, is a holy task that demands all that we are and the best of what we are. **Hebrews 10:24, 25** exhorts us “*to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together.*”

R. K. Harrison: The celebrations are described as appointed feasts (Heb. *mō‘ed*), the term used in the expression ‘tent of meeting’ (*‘ōhel mō‘ed*). They are thus assemblies of the people taking place at set times, and as holy convocations they are celebrated at the tabernacle. The description of these events as feasts (*ḥag*) indicates their joyful character, and shows that not all the gatherings within the sanctuary precincts were necessarily solemn or filled with foreboding.

Perry Yoder: The wording is repeated in **verse 4**. This repetition forms an envelope around **verse 3**, which concerns the Sabbath, and sets it off from the annual festivals in the following verses.

B. (:3) Sabbath as Foundational

“For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings.”

Allen Ross: The text makes the point of reminding Israel that the day belongs to the LORD: “*It shall be a Sabbath to the LORD.*” The preposition *to* here connotes possession—it was the LORD’s Sabbath. That is why the people were not permitted to pursue their own affairs, but gave themselves to godly matters (**Isa. 58:13–14**). Because he is the “*LORD of the Sabbath*” in all their dwellings, he would decide what could and could not be done on this day. And because the day was his, he graciously invited his people to share his Sabbath rest. . .

The fourth commandment is not, however, a binding law for the church. Or, to put it another way, the church is not to go back under the law to make that command active. Christians are not merely to give one day in seven to God, but all seven. Since they have entered the rest of God, every day should be sanctified. But they have to set apart some time to be used in voluntary gratitude for worship and ministry and for the rest of body, soul, and spirit.

Kenneth Mathews: In addition to naming the weekly Sabbath rest (**Exodus 31:15; 35:2**), this phrase describes two other special times. It depicts the Day of Atonement, which occurs in the seventh month, that is, the Sabbath month (**Leviticus 16:31; 23:32**). It also describes the sabbatical year when cultivation of the land was prohibited each seventh year (**Leviticus 25:4**). And the number seven occurs in the calculation of the Year of Jubilee, the fiftieth year after seven Sabbaths of years, equaling forty-nine years (**Leviticus 25:8–10**). There is a link between the seventh day, the seventh month, and the seventh year, giving the people a sense of symmetry and wholeness in their worship of God throughout their lives.

Why is the number seven and multiples of seven so key to calculating sacred periods of worship? The number seven in the Bible is the number of perfection and symbolizes perfection. This is the appropriate number for the worship of God who alone is complete in his perfections.

Robert Vasholz: Keeping the Sabbaths expressed Israel’s regard for their covenant with God. It measured Israel’s fidelity to the God who created Israel by redemption from Egypt. The Sabbath was a sign between the nation and the God of the Exodus: *This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come ...* (**Exod. 31:13; Ezek. 20:12, 20**). While circumcision was a sign that Israelites were the elect children of Abraham (**Gen. 17:10–14; Rom. 4:11**), the Sabbaths were signs that they were a redeemed nation under Moses. Failure to respect the Sabbaths was a repudiation of the covenant relationship between God and His people.

The importance of observing Sabbaths is emphasized:

(1) by the judgment announced for failing to observe the Sabbaths; and
(2) by the blessings promised for observing them. If God’s people fail to honor the Sabbaths, the Sabbaths, nevertheless, will be observed. Exile is strongly linked to violating the Sabbaths: *I will scatter you among the nations.... Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths* (**Lev. 26:33–35**).

Roy Gane: Because **Leviticus 23** is about holy occasions, it logically begins with the foundation of all sacred time: the weekly Sabbath (v. 3), which the Lord instituted at creation by his archetypical cessation (Qal of *šht*) from work (**Gen. 2:2–3**). While nothing in **Genesis 2** explicitly tells us that the Sabbath has been made for human beings or is a cyclical event, these factors are clear from the context. By blessing the seventh day and making it holy (**Gen. 2:3**), God has bestowed on it a special relationship to himself, who alone is intrinsically holy (cf. **1 Sam. 2:2**). Elsewhere in the Creation story, it is clear that God set up Planet Earth for the benefit of his creatures, not to make human beings work while he rested (contrast the Old Babylonian epic *Atraḥasis*). This implies that the blessing of Sabbath was for the benefit of human beings from the beginning, as Jesus explicitly declared (**Mark 2:27**). In order to receive the blessing, human beings made in God’s image (**Gen. 1:26–27**) emulate him by consecrating the day as he did: by altering their behavior.

C. (:4) Appointed Times for Holy Convocations

“These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them.”

Gordon Wenham: Through sheer familiarity the weekly sabbath could come to be taken for granted. But these festivals and sabbatical years constituted major interruptions to daily living and introduced an element of variety into the rhythm of life. In this way they constantly reminded the Israelite what God had done for him, and that in observing the sabbath he was imitating his Creator, who rested on the seventh day.

II. (:5-22) THE SPRING RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

A. (:5) Passover

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD’s Passover.”

Robert Vasholz: The scarcity of references to the observance of the Passover in the Old Testament must not discount the importance Leviticus directs toward it. The Passover feast in the Old Testament is explicitly both a rehearsal and reminder that God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. Ten times in Leviticus the Lord reminds Israel that He redeemed them from Egypt.

Allen Ross: Passover commemorated the deliverance from bondage, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread reminded everyone that a life of holiness should be pursued.

B. (:6-8) Unleavened Bread

1. (:6a) Timing

“Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD;”

Perry Yoder: Notice the lack of transition from the Passover to Unleavened Bread, both literally and chronologically. The Festival of Unleavened Bread begins the very next day after Passover and is called a festival or feast, in contrast to Passover, which is not so titled. In fact, Unleavened Bread could include Passover since only unleavened bread was allowed at Passover. . . Passover became the name for the combined spring festival of Passover/Unleavened Bread. It remained a pilgrimage festival in theory, taking over this characteristic from the Festival of Unleavened Bread (see Josiah's reform in **2 Kings 23:21-23**). This combined festival celebrated the deliverance from Egypt and was the most important spring festival.

2. (:6b) Duration and Defining Characteristic

“for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.”

3. (:7) First Day

“On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.”

4. (:8a) Entire Week of Offerings

But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.”

5) (:8b) Seventh Day

“On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.”

C. (:9-14) Presentation of First Fruits (First Sheaf)

(:9-10a) Address to Moses

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
10 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, ”*

Kenneth Mathews: The ritual of firstfruits entailed presenting the first sheaf of the barley harvest to the priest at the sanctuary, who on behalf of the worshipper lifted it up before the Lord, indicating that the worshipper offered thanksgiving to God as the source of his livelihood. It was the first evidence of the coming months of spring harvest. The memorial included animal sacrifice and grain offerings. The people were not to indulge in the grain of the land until God had received his due first (v. 14). This was God's harvest; he was the owner of the land, and its produce was his to do with as he pleased. He graciously shared the land and its harvests with the people to farm as tenants. By their offering of firstfruits the people acknowledged that theirs was a bounty that had come from the Lord. The benefit of the land remained theirs as long as they lived as good tenants, keeping the agreements made with the divine Landowner (**Leviticus 26:3-13**).

Robert Vasholz: In the Old Testament era, both First Fruits and Weeks would have served as a repudiation of the Canaanite religion. The chief god of the Canaanites was Baal. He was their god of fertility and the inhabitants of Canaan sacrificed to him (as did the Israelites on occasion), believing such behavior was responsible for agricultural

prosperity. The Feast of Weeks provided a strong statement that it was the God of the Exodus who provided for Israel's welfare and not Baal. The contest between God and Baal is especially highlighted in the Book of Hosea (cf. **Hos. 2:8-9 [10-11]**).

1. (:10) Timing and Defining Characteristic

“When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.”

Allen Ross: The prophetic purpose of the feast has to do with its typology of the resurrection of Jesus, the firstfruits from the dead (**1 Cor. 15:20**).

Perry Yoder: The offering of the first sheaf (v. 10) is an anomaly. It is not one of the three pilgrimage festivals, nor is it a holy convocation and day of rest, nor is it even called a festival (*hag*). It has no fixed date, since the time of the barley harvest varied from year to year and from region to region. This implies that it is not national in scope but is the offering of the individual farmer at the beginning of his harvest. Like the great pilgrimage festivals, it has an agrarian basis, since the offering of the first sheaf marks the beginning of the harvest season (**Exod 9:31-32**).

2. (:11) Waving of the Sheaf

“And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.”

3. (:12-13) Burnt Offering and Grain Offering

“Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the LORD. 13 Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the LORD for a soothing aroma, with its libation, a fourth of a hin of wine.”

4. (:14a) First Fruits Belong to the Lord

“Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth.”

Perry Yoder: the first Sabbath after the farmer has begun to harvest his grain . . . from the time the farmer harvests his first sheaf until it is presented to God by the priest, they must not eat from the new harvest.

5. (:14b) Perpetual Statute

“It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.”

B. (:15-22) Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)

1. (:15-16a) Timing

“You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath,

from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. 16 You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath;”

R. K. Harrison: The festival of pentecost (weeks) occurred at the termination of the harvest season, and was regarded by later Jewish authorities as the complement or conclusion of the passover celebrations, since it followed the latter by seven weeks. This interval gave rise to the name ‘pentecost’ or ‘fiftieth’. The celebration lasted for one day only (**Deut. 16:9–12**), and was a joyous occasion in which the entire nation gave thanks to a provident heavenly Father for his abundant gifts of food. . . It was on the feast of pentecost that the Holy Spirit was first poured out upon the apostles (**Acts 2:1–4**).

Constable: This festival had several names: "Harvest," "Weeks" (Heb. Shabua') . . . and "Pentecost" (Gr. Pentekostos). The Contemporary English Version translated it the "Harvest Festival." It fell at the end of the spring harvest, 50 days after Passover, namely: the day after the end of the seventh week. "Pentecost" means "fiftieth" day. This "feast" was a thanksgiving festival, and it lasted one day.

2. (:16b) Grain Offering

“then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD.”

Allen Ross: The emphasis in this passage about the Feast of Weeks is once again on gratitude for God’s bounty, but in this case the gratitude extends to what the harvest produced—bread. Thus in two festivals the Israelites commemorated the beginning and end of the grain harvests: they celebrated at the first sign of God’s provision, and they celebrated when they had the finished product.

3. (:17-19) Variety of Offerings

“You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the LORD. 18 Along with the bread, you shall present seven one year old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd, and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their libations, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord. 19 You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two male lambs one year old for a sacrifice of peace offerings.”

Kenneth Mathews: This festival focused on the grain crops. Special loaves of bread were baked and waved before the Lord at the sanctuary. Unlike the Feast of Unleavened Bread, these loaves were made with leaven, indicating the season of joyful gladness at God’s provision. Additional animal offerings accompanied the bread, making a full meal, so to speak, in which the Lord partook.

4. (:20) Wave Offering

“The priest shall then wave them with the bread of the first fruits for a wave offering with two lambs before the LORD; they are to be holy to the Lord for the priest.”

5. (:21a) Proclamation of Holy Convocation

“On this same day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation. You shall do no laborious work.”

6. (:21b) Perpetual Statute

“It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.”

7. (:22) Provision for the Needy and Alien

“When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the LORD your God.”

Perry Yoder: A note is attached to each of these harvest festivals, reminding the Israelites of their social responsibility at harvest time. Individual farmers are not to maximize their harvest. Rather, they are to leave grain standing at the sides of their fields, and bundles of grain left behind by the harvesters are not to be retrieved. This grain is for the impoverished and the non-Israelite (*ger*). This reinforces the harvest restrictions given in **19:9-10**. Additional recipients, the orphan and the widow, are mentioned in **Deuteronomy 24:19-21**.

Richard Hess: God commands the farmers to leave something of their harvest for those who are unable to acquire food for themselves. This repeats the injunction of **19:9-10**. Here, however, it reminds the Israelites that they do not work for themselves, but for God. God’s concern for the poor must be respected and his ability to provide for the farmers must be trusted, even though this may require missing a valuable day of work during the harvest season and refusing to take advantage of the whole harvest. For the Israelite farmers, this teaches the dangers of greed and extols the principle of a generous spirit—generous toward God and toward one’s needy fellows. God is in control and will bless whom he will.

III. (:23-43) FALL RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

(:23-24a) Address to Moses

*“Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
24 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying,’*

Kenneth Mathews: The Feast of Trumpets inaugurated the call to worship. Although trumpets were sounded at the beginning of each month, this month was special, and the trumpets sounded a summons to a sacred convocation. The people turned aside from their work and gathered for a full day of sacrifice and worship (**Numbers 29:1-6** gives

the details). . . The point of this day of rest and sacrifice was to prepare the people for the momentous events to follow. The key idea for us when considering the Feast of Trumpets is the importance of spiritual preparation for worship. Spiritual preparation must accompany worship. We convene to lift up the Savior in prayer, praise, and proclamation.

A. (:24b-25) New Year's Festival (Feast of Trumpets – Rosh Hashanah)

*“In the seventh month on the first of the month, you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.
You shall not do any laborious work,
but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.”*

Wiersbe: According to **Numbers 10:1-10**, the priests blew the silver trumpets for three occasions, to call the people together, to announce war, and to announce special times, such as the new moon.

Significance:

- New beginnings
- Regathering of God's scattered people

B. (:26-32) Day of Atonement (Day of Cleansing – Yom Kippur)

(:26) Address to Moses

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,”

Kenneth Mathews: The Day of Atonement was the only day in the calendar of worship that entailed fasting and contrition because it was a day of sorrow, a day of repentance for sin. The Day of Atonement was a special holy day that occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month. On this one day a year the high priest was permitted to enter into the most sacred place in the tabernacle, before the ark of the covenant, where he bore the blood of a slaughtered animal and sprinkled the blood on the seat of atonement (**Leviticus 16:1–34; Hebrews 9:7**). The ark of the covenant symbolically represented the presence of God among his people, Israel. The word atonement means a reconciliation of a relationship that has been broken. Reconciliation is achieved through removing an offense suffered between two parties. The people had offended God by their sin throughout the year, and this was the means for settling the issue of the nation's sins with God.

1. (:27-28) Timing and Distinctive Characteristic

“On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. 28 Neither shall you do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God.”

2. (:29-30) Punishment for Violators

“If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he

shall be cut off from his people. 30 As for any person who does any work on this same day, that person I will destroy from among his people.”

3. (:31-32) Perpetual Statute as a Sabbath of Humbling and Complete Rest

“You shall do no work at all. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. 32 It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath.”

C. (:33-43) Feast of Tabernacles (Booths - Sukkoth)

(:33-34a) Address to Moses

“Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 34 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ”

Kenneth Mathews: The Feast of Booths brought together two reasons for Israel to remember the Lord. The reason cited in our text is, “*when [the people] have gathered in the produce of the land*” (v. 39). This ingathering was a joyous occasion, a blessing that urged the people to thank God for the autumn month’s harvest of fruit (**Deuteronomy 16:13–15**). It concluded the agricultural year, rounding out the provision that God had given for the year. The second reason for the Feast of Booths explains why the festival was called “Feast of Booths.” During the wilderness period after their liberation from Egypt, the people lived in temporary huts (v. 43). God provided for the people’s needs during the travail of this time, including miraculous provisions of food, water, and shelter.

The feast not only looked back but also was a portent of the future when the Lord would bring his people back from their exile among the nations. Zechariah spoke of this future age, describing how the nations would join with the returning Jews in the land to worship God in his temple (**14:16, 17**). One of the signs of the nations’ repentance and assent to the God of Israel as their own God would be their celebration of the Feast of Booths. The message of the feast spoke of this inclusiveness, for the Jews and foreigners both benefited from the harvest and could join their voices in joyful celebration at the Lord’s goodness.

1. (:34b-36) Timing and Duration

“On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD. 35 On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. 36 ‘For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work.”

Robert Vasholz: The Feast of Booths was the highlight of the year, the number of sacrifices alone marking it as special (**Num. 29:12–38**). On the first of the seven

days, thirteen bulls were sacrificed and, on each of the following days, one less bull, until, on the seventh day, seven bulls were offered up.

2. (:37-38) Part of the Overall Calendar of Worship

“These are the appointed times of the LORD which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, to present offerings by fire to the LORD-- burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and libations, each day's matter on its own day-- 38 besides those of the sabbaths of the LORD, and besides your gifts, and besides all your votive and freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD.”

3. (:39-41a) Schedule of Events for the Festival

“On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. 40 Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. 41 You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year.”

4. (:41b) Perpetual Statute

“It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month.”

5. (:42-43) Significance of the Booths

“You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, 43 so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

Allen Ross: Israel was instructed to keep the Feast of Booths, the last of the LORD's appointed times, by bringing to the LORD produce from trees in a joyful harvest, by living in temporary shelters for a week to remember their dwellings in the wilderness, and by observing Sabbath rests on the first and eighth days of the feast. . .

when the people dwelled in the land and enjoyed God's bounty, they could not forget the hardships of the temporary dwellings in the wilderness.

(:44) EPILOGUE

“So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the LORD.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is it important for believers to break up the daily routine of life with special commemorative events?
- 2) What type of faith in God’s provision was required for the Israelites to forego work on so many special days (the sabbath each week and then these annual events). How did this help them keep a spiritual rather than material focus?
- 3) Since this calendar seems to be directed more towards the people than the priests, why such severe penalties for not observing the feasts in the right way?
- 4) What do you see as the Christological focus of each of these feast events?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. K. Harrison: Calendar of Jewish Feasts

MONTH				OCCASION	REFERENCE
Early Designation	Later Name	Modern Name	Date		
'Abīb First month	Nīsān	April	14	Passover	Lev. 23:5 Deut. 16:2
			15	Unleavened bread	Exod. 23:14-17
	Sīwān	June	6	Pentecost First fruits and harvest	Deut. 16:9-12 Exod. 23:16 Lev. 25:8-9
Seventh month	Tīšrī	October	1-2	Trumpets	Lev. 23:24
			10	Day of atonement	Lev. 23:27
			15-21	Tabernacles	Lev. 23:34 Deut. 16:13

Wiersbe: God gave Israel a calendar that was tied to the rhythm of the seasons and the history of the nation. It was an unusual calendar because it not only summarized what God had done for them in the past, but it also anticipated what God would do for them in the future. The salvation work of Jesus Christ, the founding of the church, and the future of the people of Israel are all illustrated in these seven feasts.

In this chapter, these special days are called “*feasts*” nine times and “*holy convocations*” ten times. “Feasts” have nothing to do with eating. In fact, on the Day of Atonement, the people fasted. The word simply means “appointed times.” “Convocation” gives the idea that during each of these feast, all the people met together as a congregation, but this also was not true. There were special gatherings on some of the special days, but the word basically means “proclamation” or “announcement.” The Lord “appointed and announced” these events, which the people faithfully had to celebrate.

Robert Vasholz: Atonement achieves **acceptance, forgiveness, consecration and purification**. The first benefit mentioned in connection with atonement is **acceptance (Lev. 1:4)**. Acceptance of an atonement meant acceptance of the worshipper. This succeeds because the offering is a substitution for the worshipper: He [the worshipper] is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. The laying of hands on the head of the sacrifice implies substitution. By the laying on of hands, one symbolically transfers one’s identity to another. The idea of substitution has been anticipated in **Exodus 13:11–16** with the redemption of the firstborn, where something is presented in place of them. Likewise, the ram offered in place of Isaac anticipated substitutionary atonement.

Atonement also achieves **forgiveness**. Forgiveness implies that some wrong needs righting and that atonement is required to placate the One offended. In terms of the covenant relationship between God and Israel, it is the Lord who is offended. It hardly needs to be documented that ancient Israel had a history of rebellious acts toward God.

Atonement also **consecrates**. The verb to consecrate (\sqrt{qds}) means to be or make holy. It appears in concert with to make an atonement in Leviticus 8:15, where atonement consecrates the altar by purifying it: So he consecrated it by making atonement for the altar.¹⁰ In this way he [the High Priest] will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness of the Israelites.

Atonement is effective for forgiveness and **purging**, whether it is a person or object, because atonement is a ransom. The idea of atonement as a ransom is by use of the same verb root, to make atonement, in **Exodus 30:12, 16**: *When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom [i.e. atonement money, nasb] for his life at the time he is counted.* A ransom is paid in order to rescue someone or something, usually from an ill fate. In **Exodus 30:11–16**, a requisite payment, ransom, or atonement of a half-shekel was required for each male over 20 years old in the census. The amount for each was the same, both rich and poor. This ransom rescued the man from death at the time he was numbered. Thus, atonement inherently is associated with rescue from some kind of threat.

The idea of **substitution** also is inherent in ransom. That is highlighted in **Isaiah 43:3–4**: *The Lord said to Israel, I have given Egypt as your atonement (\sqrt{kpr}), (or, as rendered by the nasb, your ransom) Cush and Seba in your place. ... I give men in your place and peoples in place of your life.* This verse has reference to the Lord’s recent

redeeming of Jerusalem from the Assyrian menace (**Isa. 37:35–37**). These three nations were requisite payment to the Assyrians when the Lord rescued Jerusalem from the Assyrians. The same idea is seen in **Ezekiel 29:17–20**, where God hands over Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar in payment for sparing Tyre.

Gordon Wenham: In the preceding chapters “*I am the Lord (your God)*” often served to highlight the structure of the material. It does so again in this chapter (**vv. 22, 43**), dividing the chapter into two main sections—the spring festivals (**vv. 5–22**) and the autumn festivals (**vv. 26–43**). These are further subdivided by another phrase that is infrequent outside this chapter, “*This is a permanent rule for your descendants wherever you dwell*” (**vv. 14, 21, 31, 41**).

Other key words and phrases in this chapter are “*the Lord’s meetings (appointed seasons)*” (**vv. 2, 4, 37, 44**), “*holy conventions*” (**vv. 2, 4, 7, 8, 21, 24, 27, 35, 37**), and “*do not do any (heavy) work*” (**vv. 7, 8, 21, 25, 28, 30–31, 36**).

Clarke: The major theme in all these feasts is *gratitude*, for what God has done and what God continues to give. Special displays of the mercy, kindness, and providential care of God should be particularly remembered. When we recollect that we deserve nothing at his hands, and that the debt of gratitude is all the debt we can pay, in it we should be cheerful, fervent, and frequent. An ungrateful heart is an unfeeling, unloving, unbelieving, and disobedient heart. Reader, pray to God that he may deliver thee from its influence and its curse.

David Guzik: The prophetic significance of the feasts of Leviticus 23.

1. On Israel’s calendar, the four spring feasts were grouped together, and the three fall feasts were also grouped. There was a separation of time between these two groups of feasts.

2. As a group, the first four feasts point to the work of Jesus in His **first coming** – His earthly ministry as recorded in the New Testament accounts.

a. The feast of *Passover* clearly points to Jesus as our Passover (**1 Corinthians 5:7**). He was the Lamb of God who was sacrificed, and whose blood was received and applied, so the wrath of God would pass us over.

b. The feast of *Unleavened Bread* points to the time of Jesus’ burial, after His perfect, sinless sacrifice on the cross. In this time Jesus was received by God the Father as holy and complete (the *Holy One* who would not *see corruption*, **Acts 2:27**), perfectly accomplishing our salvation.

c. The feast of *Firstfruits* points to the resurrection of Jesus, who was the first human to receive resurrection, never to die again. He is the *firstborn from the dead* (**Colossians 1:18**) and *has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.... Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.* (**1 Corinthians 15:20, 23**)

d. The feast of *Pentecost* points to the birth of the Church and the harvest of souls that came from it (**Acts 2**). Significantly, in the ritual at the feast of Pentecost, two *leavened* loaves of bread were waved as a holy offering to God, speaking of the bringing of “leavened” Gentiles into the church.

3. Between the first set of four feasts and the second set of three feasts, there is a **significant time gap** – almost four months. This was a time of *harvest* in Israel, even as our current age is a time of harvest for the church, *until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.* (**Romans 11:25**)

4. The second group of the last three feasts points to events associated with the **second coming** of Jesus.

a. The feast of *Trumpets* points to the ultimate holy convocation of God’s people at the sound of a trumpet – the rapture of the Church (**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**). It also points to God’s gathering of Israel for His special purpose in the last days.

b. The *Day of Atonement* not only points to the ultimate, perfect atonement Jesus offered on our behalf, but also of the affliction – and salvation – Israel will see during the Great Tribulation.

i. It will truly be a time when the soul of Israel is afflicted, but for their ultimate salvation. **Jeremiah 30:7** says regarding that period: *Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it, and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.*

c. The feast of *Tabernacles* points to the millennial rest and comfort of God for Israel and all of God’s people. From its beginning to its end, it is all about peace and rest.

i. The Feast of Tabernacles is specifically said to be celebrated during the millennium (**Zechariah 14:16-19**).

5. There is at least some evidence that each of the four feasts pointing to the first coming of Jesus saw their prophetic fulfillment on the exact day of the feast.

a. Jesus was actually crucified on the Passover (**John 19:14**). It is probably best to regard the meal He shared with His disciples (**Matthew 26:17-19**) as the Passover meal, but eaten the day before the actual Passover.

b. The body of Jesus was buried, and His holy and pure sacrifice acknowledged by God the Father during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

c. Jesus rose from the dead on the celebration of firstfruits, the day after Passover’s Sabbath.

d. The church was founded on the actual day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:1**), and a great harvest of souls for God’s kingdom followed, including a harvest of Gentiles.

6. For this reason, some suggest that it would be consistent for God to gather His people to Himself on the day of the feast of trumpets, the Jewish holiday of *Rosh Hashanah*. This event is described in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** and is commonly called the rapture of the church.

TEXT: Leviticus 24:1-9

TITLE: *PROVISION OF OIL AND BREAD IN THE SANCTUARY*

BIG IDEA:

MAINTAINING THE OIL AND BREAD IN THE SANCTUARY SERVED AS ONGOING REMINDERS OF THE LORD'S PRESENCE AND PROVISION

INTRODUCTION:

Mark Rooker: The logical connection between **Leviticus 23** and **24:1–9** has been advocated by **Gispen**. According to **Gispen** the laws of **24:1–9** regarding the Holy Place come on the heels of the legislation regarding the festivals as a reminder of the fact that the worship of God through the regular sacrifices was to be carried out at all times, not just during the momentous occasions of the national festivals.

Constable: The connection of these instructions with what precedes is this: The Israelites were not only to offer themselves to Yahweh on special days of the year, but they were to worship and serve Him every day of the year. The daily refueling and burning of the lamps, and the uninterrupted presentation of the showbread to Yahweh, represented the daily sanctification of the people to their God (cf. **1 Tim. 3:15**). These were the priest's "private official duties."

Kenneth Mathews: The golden lampstand and gold table of the bread of the Presence were fixtures in God's home. The olive oil derived from the autumn olive ingathering was necessary for the fueling of the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting and for the anointing oil for the priests and the holy sanctuary. The bread of the Presence consisted of baked loaves of grain that was derived from the wheat harvest and was remembered during the weeklong celebration of the Feast of Weeks. These two images, the light and the bread, tell us about the sanctity of God's presence.

Allen Ross: The provision of oil for light and the presentation of bread for the table were part of the worshippers' contribution to the sanctuary. Making sure that the lamp was lit every day and that bread was brought every week stresses the day-in-day-out service of the holy place, for these activities might not have been so carefully attended during the year as they were during the great festivals. As the people harvested olives and gathered summer crops they were reminded to set aside what they needed for oil and bread through the months to come. . .

The Israelites had to bring pure oil to keep the lampstand burning as a reminder of the LORD'S presence and their access to him and fresh loaves of bread made of fine flour to be set on the table every Sabbath as a reminder of the LORD's provision and portion.

(:1) ADDRESS TO MOSES

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,”

I. (:2-4) REMINDER OF THE LORD’S PRESENCE – MAINTAINING OIL FOR THE LAMPS TO BURN CONTINUALLY

“Command the sons of Israel that they bring to you clear oil from beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually. 3 Outside the veil of testimony in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD continually; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations. 4 He shall keep the lamps in order on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD continually.”

Perry Yoder: The luminary in the tabernacle is to provide a constant night light before the curtain that screens the ark from view. The stand, or candlestick, has six branches, three on each side, with a central stem. Today such a candlestick is called a menorah. Aaron as high priest is to arrange oil lamps on the each of the six branches of the menorah and its central stem. The blueprint for this lampstand is given in **Exodus 25:31-37**.

Roy Gane: **Verses 2–4** remind the Israelites of their ongoing duty to supply olive oil as fuel for the lamps on the golden lampstand so that the priest can keep them burning regularly (*tamid*) every night from evening to morning (**Ex. 27:20–21**). Every morning he is to trim the lamps and fill them with fresh oil, and every evening he is to kindle them (**30:7–8; cf. 25:37; Num. 8:2–3**). By burning through the night, the lamps parallel the evening regular burnt offering on the outer altar (**Lev. 6:2**).

Within the Israelite ritual system, the lampstand, table, and incense burner served as the Lord’s furniture in his dwelling place (cf. **Ex. 25:8**). The complex of rituals performed regularly by the priest in the outer sanctum, such as tending the lamps (**27:20–21; Lev. 24:1–4**) and burning incense (**Ex. 30:7–8**), constituted the work of a servant for his Lord, who was enthroned behind the curtain in the Most Holy Place.

The regular rituals had the purpose of maintaining an existing order, that is, the Presence of God dwelling among his people in the sanctuary. Thus in **F. Gorman’s** taxonomy of rituals, these are rituals of “maintenance” (cf. **Num. 28–29**), in contrast to rituals of “founding” that create a normative state (**Lev. 8–9**: consecration and inauguration) or rituals of “restoration” that accomplish return to the normative state (e.g., purification and reparation offerings).

Richard Hess: The purest oil was used in the Israelite cult for the worship of God. The word translated “pure” (*zāk*, GK 2341) derives from the Hebrew root for “clean, pure” (*zkh*, GK 2342) and appears elsewhere to describe either the purity of incense (**Ex 30:34; Lev 24:7**) or the righteousness of a believer’s life and faith (**Job 8:6; 11:4; 16:17; 33:9; Pr 16:2; 20:11; 21:8**). This reflects the twofold purpose of the oil: to prevent impurities that would block the oil from the fire of the lamp and extinguish it,

and to symbolize the righteousness of God's people, who would appear before him at the sanctuary (**Pr 13:9; 20:27; 24:20**). . .

The permanent maintenance of the light of the golden lamps (cf. **Ex 25:31–40** for their construction) before God represents the presence and revelation of God as one of light against all the darkness of sin (e.g., **Isa 2:5; 9:2; 51:4; 58:8; Pss 4:6; 13:3; 18:28; 27:1; 31:16; 36:9; 56:13**).

Wiersbe: The commandment in **Leviticus 24:1-4** emphasized two essentials; (1) the people of Israel had to provide the olive oil regularly, and (2) it had to be beaten and pure (**Ex. 27:20-21**). There was a method of extracting olive oil by heat, but beating or crushing the olives and straining out the impurities produced the best olive oil. And the God of Israel deserves the very best.

Kenneth Mathews: The shape of the candlestick in the form of a budding tree symbolized life and with its lamps communicated that God is the source of both life and light. The lamp was, however, not for the Lord. He has no need of light since he is the embodiment of light. The lamps were positioned to shine in front of the candlestick into the Holy Place where the priests functioned (**Numbers 8:2**). The priests needed the light as they ministered inside the tent. The lamps were lit each evening and burned until morning, when they were extinguished (v. 3). The responsibility of Aaron as high priest was to ensure that the lamps had sufficient oil each evening to burn through the night hours. Three times in our short passage of four verses, the text's instructions insist that the lighting of the lamps was to be done "regularly" (vv. 2, 3, 4; cf. v. 8). The importance of this practice was its teaching value for the Israelites. It conveyed that the Lord was ever-present in the Tent of Meeting. In other words, the Lord kept the lights burning in his home. It communicated that he was the constant overseer of the welfare of his people.

II. (:5-9) REMINDER OF THE LORD'S PROVISION – MAINTAINING TWELVE CAKES ON THE GOLD TABLE

"Then you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. 6 And you shall set them in two rows, six to a row, on the pure gold table before the LORD. 7 And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be a memorial portion for the bread, even an offering by fire to the LORD. 8 Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually; it is an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel. 9 And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD's offerings by fire, his portion forever."

Constable: The addition of incense to the bread ("pure frankincense"; v. 7) represented the spirit of prayer (dependence) that accompanied the Israelites' sacrifice of work.

David Guzik: God wanted the people of God to actually receive, enjoy, and be nourished by the bread – which symbolized their relationship and fellowship with Him.

Perry Yoder: None of the loaves were burned, but they represented food placed before God as an offering. In this offering God's token amount includes all twelve loaves. But if they were burned up, the priests would have had no share in this grain offering, as was normally their due (see the grain offerings in ch. 2). We might guess that God gives the entire offering to the priests as their portion; as in the case of the peace offering, God's share goes to the priests (**7:34**).

Wiersbe: God was present with His people and they were in His presence in the tabernacle. No matter where the Jews were in the camp, they needed to remind themselves that their tribe was represented in the holy place on the golden table.

Richard Hess: This short section reflects the concern to present the most important element of Israel's diet continually before God as an offering. These twelve loaves remind Israel that all the harvest is a blessing of God and they represent a token of that divine gift that Israel weekly returns to God. The harvest is not an end in itself, nor is some other deity responsible for the harvest; rather, the Lord God of Israel alone supplies all the nation's needs.

Kenneth Mathews: That there were "*twelve loaves*" also symbolized an important message. The twelve loaves were arranged into two groups of six each, symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel. The twelve loaves indicated that all Israel had given to the Lord. All the people in covenant with God could claim a share in the blessing of God as loyal covenant members. They collectively as a community were the recipients of God's redemption and provision. The priest placed pure frankincense on the bread, which was also a common feature for the regular daily grain offerings (**Leviticus 2:1, 2, 15, 16**). The bread of the Presence was replaced every Sabbath day on a weekly basis by freshly baked bread. . .

The manna and the bread of the Presence pointed forward to the time when God would be present among his people in a way that was not symbolic but actual. This occurred at the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus claimed to be the light of the world, he also claimed to be the bread of the world. "*I am the living bread,*" Jesus said, "*that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh*" (**John 6:51**). The bread that Moses provided could spoil; it was not a permanent solution to the people's hunger.

The audience that Jesus addressed was made up of common persons whose lives were dependent on daily bread. We say this in the recitation of the Lord's Prayer: "*Give us this day our daily bread*" (**Matthew 6:11**). We today in the Western world rarely face a daily deprivation of food, but ordinary people in ancient times had a daily grind to obtain the food to sustain their families. Jesus, however, spoke more profoundly of their deepest spiritual need—a heavenly bread that would satisfy their souls. Jesus urged the people to receive him as their satisfying bread of life: "*Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal*" (**John 6:27**). This is what God would have us know from the bread of the Presence and from the manna of long ago: Jesus is

the bread from God that satisfies and is permanent. This bread does not spoil and does not need replacement. Partake of the Lord Jesus, and our hungry souls will be satisfied with the dynamic, living presence of the Lord. The Lord taught his disciples, “*Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied*” (**Luke 6:21**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What helps to remind you of God’s constant presence?
- 2) How do you keep your focus on your daily spiritual responsibilities?
- 3) Do you see any relationship between this bread on the gold table and the Lord’s Supper?
- 4) What degree of faithfulness do you show in your daily routine tasks?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mark Rooker: The two symbols of light and bread in **Lev 24:1–9** were preparatory for the coming of Christ, for Jesus referred to himself as the Light of the world and the Bread of life (**John 8:12; 9:5; 6:35, 48**).

Peter Pett: So the stress with regard to the lampstand and the showbread is on their continual nature day by day and Sabbath by Sabbath before Yahweh, representing Yahweh’s presence with His people as their covenant God and His continual dealings with them over time as His covenant people, and His continual provision for them, into the far distant future. But both depend on His people’s response.

John Schultz: God does not need human hands to keep His lamps burning. Yet, this is the topic of these verses. The lampstand in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, was an earthly image of a heavenly reality. It is man’s task to keep the image pure. What we do on earth has to be the perfect shadow of the original in Heaven. There is a heavenly antitype of all human relationships and responsibilities-- beginning with our birth, our marriage, our procreation, our relationships with our children and with our fellow human beings to our actions and responsibilities. All we do on earth is an expression of a heavenly antitype. It is our responsibility to see to it that our type does not become a caricature but that it is a pure expression of the heavenly reality. So it is with the lampstand. The Israelite who picked and crushed the olives and who brought the oil to the tabernacle and the priest who filled the lamps and trimmed the wicks, did work on earth that had eternal significance. What he did was meaningful, and it made him a human being who had meaning.

Matt Basel: God's People Serve in God's Power

A. The bread and oil were the results of the harvest which had been given God.

1. As I said a moment ago, the first part of **Leviticus 24** is very closely related to **Leviticus 23**
2. So last week we looked at the festivals in **Leviticus 23** and saw how they were arranged around the agricultural calendar with spring festivals and fall festivals that celebrated the harvest that God gave every year and the even greater acts of redemption that God had accomplished for His people
3. At the end of **Leviticus 23**, we've gone through a complete agricultural season, the harvest has been brought into the storehouses and God's bounty has been celebrated, so what now?
4. This is where **Leviticus 24** fits in - God has provided, now what do we do with God's provision?
5. So it's not an accident that the objects of **Leviticus 24** are the results of **Leviticus 23** - harvest would have provided grain and grain and olives which the people could use to make bread and new oil.
6. The bread and oil were the result of harvest - God had provided bountifully and now the people had bread and oil

B. The bread and oil were given in service of God.

1. So God had given bountifully, the people had bread and oil, but what should they do with the bread and oil?
2. **Leviticus 24** says, what God has given, use in service of God - God gave the oil, God gave the bread, now give it back to Him in worship.
3. So, in **Leviticus 23**, the people are constantly called to rest, to observe a solemn sabbath, to afflict themselves and do no work, **Leviticus 23** emphasized that the people could do nothing, the supply must come from God.
4. But **Leviticus 24** turns and says, once God has supplied, go and do - so the people are commanded to work
 - a. **Leviticus 24:2** - Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly.
 - b. The people were to rest as God provided for them, but once God provided they were to work to use God's provision - God had given olives, now go and beat out the oil.
5. And this provision was to be used to serve God - so the oil and the bread came back to the temple
 - a. God's bounty wasn't to be used to serve their own passions, but to serve God - God had given so that they could serve Him - they could not serve Him on their own, but God had provided so that they could
 - b. And we see that the oil and bread became continual symbols of serving God, so earlier we read **II Chronicles 13:10-11** - But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him. We have priests ministering to the LORD who are sons of Aaron, and Levites for their service. They offer to the LORD every morning and every evening burnt offerings and incense of sweet spices, set out the showbread on the table of pure gold, and care for the golden lampstand that

its lamps may burn every evening. For we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken him.

c. Judah had continued in God's service while Israel quickly fell away and this was symbolized by the continual provision of oil and bread before God

6. So God had supplied and that supply was to be used to serve God

C. The oil gave light to light the way to God.

1. Now I want to consider what the two acts of service were about - the first was daily oil for the lamps

2. And this was very practical - the Holy Place was the inside of a tent with very thick fabric on the outside - naturally it would have been very dark inside, especially at night - without lamps there would be no way for anyone to approach God and to serve in His presence.

3. So the oil was given to fuel the lamps, something that must happen continually, and this is the listed purpose of the lamps over and over again - to give a light in the Holy Place.

a. So, in the earlier commands to build the lampstand, we see in **Exodus 25:37** - You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it.

b. And in our passage this morning it is also very clear, **Leviticus 24:2** - Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly.

4. God had provided so that the way to God's place could be lighted - the way would be made plain and God's people could serve in His presence.

D. The bread gave food with which to fellowship with God.

1. The second act of service was to provide bread every week - twelve loaves, one loaf for each of the tribes of Israel representing enough for all of the people of God.

2. This bread was set out in the Holy Place, literally before the face of God, and the bread was intimately associated with God's presence, so it is called, in **Exodus 25:30** - And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.

3. But God's presence wasn't there to be separate from the people, but so that the people could fellowship with God

a. So we see in **Leviticus 24:9** - And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due.

b. The priests were welcomed to come and eat - now remember there are 12 loaves for the 12 tribes and that the priests represent the people - so through this act of eating all the people celebrated fellowship with God and received provision in the presence of God.

4. So God had provided so that God's people could seek Him in fellowship through their high priest.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/51318105510.pdf>

TEXT: Leviticus 24:10-23

TITLE: CAPITAL PUNISHMENT COMMANDED BY GOD WHERE APPROPRIATE

BIG IDEA:

FOR THE PROTECTION OF SOCIETY, GOD'S STANDARD FOR CIVIL JUSTICE IS THAT THE PUNISHMENT MUST FIT THE CRIME

INTRODUCTION:

Constable: God evidently preserved the record of this significant incident involving a blasphemer, in Scripture, not only because it took place at the time God was revealing these standards of sanctification. It also illustrates how God regarded those who despised the very standards He was giving. This event was a warning to the people of the seriousness of sanctification, just as the death of Nadab and Abihu (**ch. 10**) was a similar warning to the priests.

Kenneth Mathews: Why, we might ask, was cursing the name of God so troubling that the man had to “*be put to death*” (**v. 16**)? The importance of God’s “*Name*” is not a mere word, and the blasphemy was not a matter of a ghastly four-letter word. Rather, in the Bible the existence of the Lord’s “*Name*” constituted the personhood and presence of the Lord (cf. **Deuteronomy 12:5**). “*The name of the Lord*” (**v. 16**) was also indicative of his authority. For a prophet or priest to speak or minister in the name of the Lord meant that the person was claiming the approval and authority of God (**Deuteronomy 18:15–22**). This is why the church baptizes “*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (**Matthew 28:19**). The authority that the church possesses is derived from the Lord God himself, and the actions we take must be in accord with the will of the Lord. By cursing “*the Name*,” the man was dishonoring the person and presence of the Lord as the Covenant Lord.

Wiersbe: It may seem strange to us that the Book of Leviticus is interrupted at this point to tell about a blasphemer who was judged, but the narrative is an illustration, not an interruption. The basis for obedience to the law is the fear of the Lord, and people who blaspheme His holy name have no fear of God in their hearts.

I. (:10-12) THE FEAR OF GOD IS THE BEGINNING OF JUSTICE

A. (:10) The Incident – Ethnic Brawling

“Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the sons of Israel; and the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel struggled with each other in the camp.”

B. (:11a) The Infraction – Clear Attack on God’s Character and Authority

“And the son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed.”

R. Laird Harris: The man may have engaged in some curse procedure to injure his opponent by a kind of hex in the name of the Lord, or it may have been an angry cursing of the Israelite man and his God.

Roy Gane: It is not that the half-Israelite invokes the name “YHWH” to curse his human antagonist, as the prophet Elisha did (**2 Kings 2:24**; cf. **Josh. 6:26**). Rather, he assaults the Lord by cursing him personally, as shown by the way the following legislation begins: “*If anyone curses [Piel of qll] his God, he will be held responsible; anyone who blasphemes [Qal of nqb] the name of the LORD [yhwh] must be put to death*” (**Lev. 24:15–16**). This reiterates the command of **Exodus 22:28**: “*You shall not curse [Piel of qll] God, nor curse [Qal of ’rr] a ruler of your people*” (NASB). Because a curse was regarded as a real and potent weapon in ancient times, such an attack was not merely figurative. There is a closer connection between blasphemy against God and assault on humans and animals, the topics of the legislation in **Leviticus 24:15–22**, than we thought!

Constable: Maybe since his father was an Egyptian (v. 10), he did not have the proper respect for Yahweh, and did not sanctify Him in thought and speech as God required.

David Guzik: By some accounts, only the Jewish high priest was allowed to pronounce the holy name of God (*Yahweh*). He was allowed to say it only once a year – on the Day of Atonement. Some say that the proper pronunciation of the name would be passed on from the high priest to his successor, with the former’s last breath. This is why there was confusion for many years about the exact pronunciation of the four letters that state the name of the covenant God of Israel (YHWH). The letters have been pronounced differently over the years. For some time, the letters YHWH were mistakenly pronounced as “Jehovah” instead of “Yahweh” (*Yah-veh*). **Adam Clarke** wrote in his day (1830): “The Jews never pronounce this name, and so long has it been disused among them that the true pronunciation is now totally lost.”

R. K. Harrison: The holiness of God is reinforced by the drastic penalty prescribed for blasphemy. In the Near East the name of a person was bound up intimately with his character, so that in the case of God, blasphemy was in effect an act of repudiation.

C. (:11b) The Inquiry before Moses – Foreign Complications

“So they brought him to Moses.”

David Guzik: The issue was unclear because the man was a **foreigner**. The laws of Israel were not necessarily applied to foreigners as well as Israelites. The question was, “Does the law against blasphemy apply the same way against a foreigner in our midst?” The Law of Moses protected the foreigner (**Exodus 23:9**), but they needed guidance to understand to what extent the laws of Israel applied to foreigners among them.

D. (:11c) The Identification of the Offender’s Mother

“(Now his mother’s name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.)”

Richard Hess: The genealogy of the man’s mother raises the question as to the omission of his own name. The Sabbath breaker in **Numbers 15:32–36**, who was also killed, has no name either. This anonymity seems to reflect the judgment that such people are cut off from their family and nation. They no longer will be remembered and their names are forgotten.

E. (:12) The Internment – Seeking the Judgment of God

*“And they put him in custody
so that the command of the LORD might be made clear to them.”*

Wiersbe: If a Jew had committed the awful sin of blasphemy, Moses would have known what to do, but this man was part Jewish and part Egyptian, and the law had nothing to say about this. Taking the wise approach, Moses put the man in custody and waited for the Lord to tell him what to do. . .

Immature Christians want the Lord to give them rules and regulations to cover every area of life, and this explains why they’re immature. If we never have to pray, search the Scriptures, counsel with other believers, and wait on the Lord, we never will use our ‘spiritual muscles’ and grow up. The Bible gives us precepts, principles, promises, and personal examples that together are adequate to guide us in the decisions of life. The motor club will give its members detailed maps for their trips, but the Bible is more of a compass that keeps us going in the right direction without spelling out every detail of the trip. *“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).*

II. (:13-16) THE VERDICT OF GOD IS THE APPLICATION OF JUSTICE

(:13) Address to Moses

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,”

A. (:14) Revelation of the Verdict of Capital Punishment

1. Justice Protects against Pollution

“Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp,”

Roy Gane: to avoid polluting the camp with a corpse.

2. Justice Aligns with the Truth

“and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head;”

Richard Hess: The blaspheming has created a guilt in the community that affects all who heard it. Not only must the blasphemer be punished, but also the guilt of those who heard it must be returned symbolically to the responsible individual so that his destruction ends the impurity in the land.

More likely interpretation:

David Guzik: This was done in accord with a principle later specifically stated

in **Deuteronomy 17:6-7**. Two or three of the witnesses publicly laid **hands** on the accused, as a sure testimony to his guilt. This also meant that the guilty man knew his accusers and could not be condemned by secret accusers.

The accusation had to be established as **true**. **Deuteronomy 19:16-19** says that a false witness was to suffer the same punishment that would be given to the one against whom he made the accusation.

“By **laying their hands upon his head** they gave public testimony that they heard this person speak such words, and did in their own and in all the people’s names desire and demand justice to be executed upon him.” (Poole)

3. Justice Supported by the Community

“then let all the congregation stone him.”

R. K. Harrison: The precise method is not mentioned, but perhaps the offender was made to lie down, after which his head was crushed with large stones and the remainder of his body covered with smaller ones to form a cairn. This procedure would prevent anyone incurring accidental ceremonial defilement, and as long as the congregation remained in the area the heap of stones would serve as a reminder of the crime that had been committed.

B. (:15-16) Explanation of the Severe Verdict of Capital Punishment

1. (:15) Universal Personal Accountability

*“And you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying,
‘If anyone curses his God, then he shall bear his sin.’”*

2. (:16) Vindication of Capital Punishment

- a. Seriousness of the Crime = Blaspheming the Name of the Lord
“Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death;”
- b. Support of the Society = Participation in the Stoning
“all the congregation shall certainly stone him.”
- c. Standard of Punishment the Same for Everyone = Alien and Native
“The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.”

F. Duane Lindsey: Those aliens who lived in Israel and so enjoyed certain covenant blessings were not to repudiate the Author of that covenant.

III. (:17-22) KEY JUDICIAL PRINCIPLE: THE SEVERITY OF THE PUNISHMENT MUST MATCH THE SEVERITY OF THE CRIME

A. (:17-18) Fundamental Distinction Between Killing a Human and an Animal

1. Killing a Human Merits the Death Penalty

“And if a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death.”

F. Duane Lindsey: This digression prescribed other situations which applied alike to Israelite and alien, another connecting link being the application of the death penalty in the case of murder (**vv. 17, 21**).

2. (:18) Killing an Animal Merits Only Restitution

“And the one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life.”

B. (:19-20) Lex Talionis – An Eye for an Eye

“And if a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him.”

Gordon Wenham: It seems likely that this phrase *eye for eye*, etc. was just a formula. In most cases in Israel it was not applied literally. It meant that compensation appropriate to the loss incurred must be paid out. Thus if a slave lost an eye, he was given his freedom (**Exod. 21:26**). The man who killed an ox had to pay its owner enough for him to buy another (**Lev. 24:18**). Only in the case of premeditated murder was such compensation forbidden (**Num. 35:16ff.**). Then the principle of life for life must be literally enforced, because man is made in the image of God (**Gen. 9:5–6**).

Wiersbe: Because this principle has been misunderstood, many people have called it cruel and unjust. They have questioned how a God of love and mercy could enunciate it. But this law was actually an expression of God’s justice and compassion, because it helped restrain personal revenge in a society that had not police force or elaborate judicial system. Apart from this law, the strong could have crushed the weak at the least offense.

C. (:21) Fundamental Distinction Between Killing a Human and an Animal

“Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death.”

Peter Pett: This now summarizes the two main principles above to make clear the differences in punishment for different deaths. It differentiates quite clearly between capital punishment for a human death and some other form of punishment for a beast’s death. It is to stress that no one must be slain because of the death of a beast, but that human life is sacred so that the murder of a human being must result in death for the perpetrator. Both these were something on which there must be no doubt. Death for death only applies to when a man is slain.

D. (:22) One Standard for All People

“There shall be one standard for you;

it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God.”

Mark Rooker: The central theme of this section is that of commensurate punishment for a crime, what has been called *lex talionis*. Retribution was to be fair, not arbitrary (**Judg 1:6–7** may be an example).

John Schultz: In our contemporary society, we tend to emphasize the rights of the offender. While this can be good, this Scripture portion stresses the rights of society. The keyword is found in **vs. 22**, “*You are to have the same law for the alien and the native-born.*” Both the alien and the native had the same right to be protected against evil, violence, and those influences that can unhinge society.

(:23) EPILOGUE – OBEDIENT APPLICATION OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

“Then Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, and they brought the one who had cursed outside the camp and stoned him with stones. Thus the sons of Israel did, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

Richard Hess: The conclusion of the narrative brings about the execution of the blasphemer through stoning. The act of stoning provides an execution that is swift (and therefore as merciful as any execution may be expected), and in which the people participate. In this manner, Israel as a whole affirms the justice of the act and wipes the sin from their national responsibility.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we improve our judicial system in terms of the punishment fitting the crime?
- 2) What is the point in this passage of so much focus on the non-Israelite ethnicity of the offender?
- 3) What are your views on capital punishment and how does this passage play into your understanding of why God commanded it for certain crimes?
- 4) Should our judicial system focus more on restitution and reparations rather than on incarceration?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mark Rooker: In the Old Testament blasphemy can result from a flagrant act (**Num**

15:30), an insulting remark (**Isa 37:6**), or from cursing God (**1 Sam 2:17; Neh 9:18**). Although this was a violation of the earlier command (**Exod 22:28[27]**), this narrative reports the community's response to this scurrilous crime (similarly, **Exod 21:17**). The man was secluded until Moses learned from the Lord how he should deal with this situation (**24:12**), since the man was the son of a foreigner, not an actual member of the covenant community (**Deut 23:7–8**). The alien was protected by the Law (**Exod 23:9**), but he was also subject to it.

Wenham: vv. 16-22 -- Chiastic Structure

A resident alien and native Israelite (v. 16)
B take a man's life (v. 17)
C take an animal's life (v. 18)
D whatever he did, must be done to him (v. 19)
whatever ..., must be done to him (v. 20)
kill an animal (v. 21a)
kill a man (v. 21b)
resident alien and native Israelite (v. 22)

Jacob Milgrom: **Lund's** *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, with examples from the Hebrew Bible, was the first major work that treated seriously Scripture's large, widely attested chiasmic structures, alternately called introversions or palistrophes, as one of the preeminent organizational devices employed by the biblical authors. They have proved to be more than literary artifices. By the use of repeated words and inner chiasms, and, above all, by the choice of the center or fulcrum around which the introversion is structured, the ideological thrust of each author is revealed. In a word, **structure is theology** . . .

To recapitulate: on one level, the structure emphasizes that the blasphemy prohibition applies to the alien. But on a deeper level, indicated by the true center of the structure (X), H makes the point that talion for permanent injuries is justified theologically because just as blasphemy is an offense against God, so are injuries that disfigure God's image—the human being. Thus we see that the episode of the blasphemer bears a secondary role. The talion laws for blemishes are H's primary objective; it attaches the case of blasphemy only to provide a *Sitz im Leben* for the legislation.

David Thompson:

GOD'S WORD IS TO BE LITERALLY APPLIED TO REAL LIFE SITUATIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES EVEN WHEN THE SITUATION DEMANDS JUDGMENT; AND THOSE WHO ARE BECOMING HOLY WILL DO THIS.

This point is getting lost today, but a key prerequisite for being holy is making judgments. In other words, we cannot be holy if we are not making judgment calls concerning a variety of things. God expects us to know His Word to the point that we may make judgment calls in every area of life and the more we are doing this the holier we are. . .

In a God-honoring society there is no such thing as “no-fault insurance.” There is fault, there is blame, there is responsibility and there is restitution.

Kenneth Mathews: Verses 17–22 establish two important principles governing the community’s policy of capital punishment. First, there was a difference between the murder of a human being and the killing of an animal. Although the killing of an animal was important, the killing of a human being was far more egregious. . .

The second principle to be followed regarding the death sentence was just as important. It must be practiced with evenhanded justice by matching the severity of the punishment with the severity of the crime.

Oswald T. Allis: With regard to this *lex talionis*, three things are to be noted.

- First, it was intended to be a law of exact justice, not of revenge.
- Secondly, it was not private vengeance but public justice.
- Thirdly, by excluding murder from the crimes for which ransom is permissible (**Nu. 35:31f.**) it makes it probable that compensation for injuries was often or usually allowed to take the form of a fine.

Robert Coleman: This law of retaliation, *lex talionis*, was mentioned by Jesus Christ in **Mt 5:38ff.**, when he condemned, not the principle of civil law involved here, but the spirit of retaliation and revenge which was most likely to be found in association with it.

Wiersbe: The Bible doesn’t present capital punishment as a “cure-all” for crime. It presents it as a form of punishment that shows respect for law, for life, and for humans made in the image of God. To take a pragmatic or sentimental approach to the subject is to miss the point completely.

TEXT: Leviticus 25:1-55

TITLE: SABBATH REST AND YEAR OF JUBILEE

BIG IDEA:

REDEMPTION OF BOTH LAND AND PEOPLE PATTERNED AFTER THE GENEROSITY OF THE GOD WHO OWNS BOTH THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Hess: This text follows directly from the cultic calendar of **Leviticus 23**. Whereas that text considered the Sabbath (vv. 1–3) and the annual feasts (vv. 4–44), this chapter expands the study to include the larger category of the festival years that occur every seven and every fifty years. Thus the sabbatical year is examined (vv. 1–7), followed by the Year of Jubilee (vv. 8–13). . .

God’s design for Israel is to rescue all his people from the bonds of debt servitude and to guarantee each family land and a fresh start every half century. Freedom from crushing debt and possession of land, the basic source of wealth, provide a form of social justice built into the economic system that will guarantee most a fair opportunity in life. This is the prophetic “*year of release*” (**Isa 61:1–2**) that Jesus had in mind when he read that phrase in the synagogue at Nazareth (**Lk 4:16–30**).

Perry Yoder: **Leviticus 25** is about **ownership**. Who owns land and who owns people? Answers to these questions are set out here and are based on Israel’s beliefs about God.

Robert North: Social Justice

The jubilee was intended to prevent the accumulation of the wealth of the nation in the hands of a very few. Every Israelite had an inalienable right to his family land and to his freedom. If he lost them through falling into debt he recovered them in the jubilee. The biblical law is opposed equally to the monopolistic tendencies of unbridled capitalism and thorough-going communism, where all property is in state hands. By keeping land within a particular family, the jubilee also promoted family unity.

Mark Rooker: The laws of the sabbatical year and the law of Jubilee in one sense provided both a spiritual and social control for the Israelites, for they would be reminded of their total dependence upon God and the Lord's ultimate ownership of the land each time they observed this law. Moreover, these laws would restrain one's desire to accumulate wealth at his brother's expense and thus place something other than God as most important in one's life. . .

The Law was to prevent the accumulation of ownership of property by a wealthy few and to legislate against a collective nationalism that usurped others' property. Also, since the land ultimately belonged to God, the law of Jubilee puts a check on a selfish

estimation of the rights of property. The private ownership of the land, however, was and still is a stabilizing factor for the unifying of the family unit. These laws herald a recognition of God as sovereign over time, nature, and possessions. And since the sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee called for a complete trust in God, New Testament believers are also to recognize that the material gifts essential to life come from God. It is the believer's responsibility to trust, be obedient, and seek the rule of God in every arena of life (**Matt 6:25–34**). Believers look to God for our sustenance in due season (**Ps 104:27**).

Allen Ross: The Jubilee Year came after seven “weeks” of years or after forty-nine years. It provided a general overhaul of economic and social life to restore people and properties to their rightful conditions. It was meant to be a new beginning, a time when all who had failed to maintain their place in society were given a chance to start over and when all who had benefited from such failures released what they had gained. Israel periodically had to put its social order right. . .

The Jubilee Year, as with other sabbatic-type elements in the book, provided Israel with a delightful prospect after a time of labor and perhaps drudgery. But the Jubilee Year was the crowning point of all the festive occasions because of its length and its impact. It was a time of release from bondage of all that were oppressed, enslaved, or bound. Thus, it was another festival of freedom—not one that commemorated any historical deliverance in the past but one that looked forward to the future. . .

The acceptance of God’s sovereignty over his people and all their possessions leads to the magnanimous and compassionate treatment of the poor and the destitute, because at the end of the age everyone will be released from bondage.

R. K. Harrison: The jubilee legislation had as its basic theme the **liberation** of that which was bound. As a result it reminded the Israelites every fifty years of the fact that once the people of God had been bound in Egypt, victims of an oppressive native regime, but that they had been liberated at the time of the exodus by a miraculous display of divine power. They were now free citizens, living in their own land, which itself was a gift of God, but being bound to him by a covenant relationship they were only free to serve him to the exclusion of all other gods. As a holy nation, their hearts and minds were to be set upon God and his holiness, and they were not to think in terms of accumulating vast holdings of property over periods of time lest they succumbed to the materialism of the surrounding nations. The prescribed interruption in the normal course of national life once each half-century would furnish an opportunity for reflection upon covenant values, and remind the nation that man does not live by bread alone.

Kenneth Mathews: In all the cases of our passage, the motivation for obedience was the Israelite’s “*fear*” of God (**vv. 17, 36, 43**). Obedience to God’s Word was the reason why Israel would agree. The Bible presents a **theology of economics**, and our passage contributes to our understanding of the proper role of money in the context of our obligations to our fellow humans in and outside our family community. As Christians

we do not observe the sabbatical year or Year of Jubilee, but they set forth the proper attitude that we must have toward our financial resources. The money that God has bestowed on us is but a tool to carry out the kingdom mandate of the gospel. The overarching teaching that should guide our attitude is best stated by the Lord Jesus himself: *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). Our devotion to Christ who himself gave up his heavenly riches to be poor in spirit in our behalf is the motivation for our Christian charity (2 Corinthians 8:9).

(:1-2a) ADDRESS TO MOSES

*“The LORD then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying,
2 ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them,’”*

I. (:2b-22) INTRODUCTION TO SABBATH REST AND JUBILEE

A. (:2b-7) Year of Sabbath Rest for the Land

1. (:2b-5) Privilege of Sabbath Rest Every Seventh Year

“When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to the LORD. 3 Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, 4 but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. 5 Your harvest's aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year.”

Kenneth Mathews: What was the primary lesson that the sabbatical rest taught the people? The land itself is said to *“keep a Sabbath to the Lord”* (vv. 2, 4). The land was expected, as were the people who inhabited it, to acknowledge the Lordship of God. As the community set aside a weekly Sabbath (Exodus 31:13–17), the people had to permit the land to recognize its divine Owner. The people were the servants of the Lord; the land too was subservient to the Lord (v. 23). By this connection of people and land, there was an inextricable linkage between them. They were to work in concert to benefit mutually under the sovereign rule of God. The people were to respect the land as God’s possession and work it in a responsible way. God had created the land and had promised the land to his people for their benefit, but never for wanton pillage. The land in turn by God’s enablement produced for the needs of the community.

2. (:6-7) Provision of Food for Both People and Animals

“And all of you shall have the sabbath products of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. 7 Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat.”

B. (:8-12) Year of Jubilee for the Land

1. (:8) Interval Specified

“You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven

times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years.”

2. (:9) Inauguration via Trumpet Blast on Day of Atonement

“You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land.”

Mark Rooker: The Year of Jubilee began with a trumpet blast on the Day of Atonement (25:9), thereby proclaiming liberty to all the inhabitants of the land (25:10). On this high holy day, when reconciliation with God was to become a national petition, the Israelites were likewise reminded to be properly restored to their brothers. Personal holiness must be carried out on the social plane on behalf of the disadvantaged. All Jews who for some reason or another had become enslaved to another Jew or were forced to sell personal property to someone in the preceding forty-nine-year period were automatically emancipated, and sold property was restored to its original owner.

Constable: The Year of Jubilee did for the land what the Day of Atonement did for the people. This Year removed the disturbance or confusion of God's will—for the land—that eventually resulted from the activity of sinners. During this Year, God brought the land back into the condition that He intended for it. The fact that the priests announced the Year of Jubilee on the Day of Atonement (v. 9), confirms this correspondence.

3. (:10-12) Intention of the Observance

“You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. 11 You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in from its untrimmed vines. 12 For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its crops out of the field.”

Mark Rooker: Also as in the sabbatical year, the people could eat only what was taken from the fields. This year followed immediately after the seventh sabbatical year, which meant that the land lay fallow in the seventh sabbatical year as well as in the following Year of Jubilee. Two fallow years in succession would have been a severe test of faith. The Israelites were called upon to trust totally in God and acknowledge in a profound way that he was the provider of the basic necessities of life.

Kenneth Mathews: The sabbatical year described above is foundational to understanding the importance of the Year of Jubilee, which is the focus of our passage. The passage gives far more attention to its observance because of its greater implications for the life of the community. The word “*jubilee*” is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *yobel*, not a translation. The word either refers to the trumpet horn sounded at the initiation of the Year of Jubilee (v. 9) or refers to the act of the land bringing forth its produce. The essential principle underlying the Year of Jubilee is

spelled out in **verse 23**, where God says, *“The land is mine.”* This is a striking statement because the land was divinely distributed to the tribes upon their entrance into the land of Canaan. Its distribution among the people was decided by the casting of lots (perhaps like stones or dice) for each tribe, clan, and family (**Joshua 19:51**). Casting lots was one way that the will of God was made known to the people (cf. **Acts 1:26**). Although the original allotment of territory was handed down from generation to generation within the family, this was actually a lease because ownership was retained by God. The people were only tenants on the land, and they enjoyed the benefits at the pleasure of the divine Owner (v. **23**).

C. (:13-17) Restoration of Property Rights on Equitable Basis

1. (:13) Key Principle Regarding Property Ownership

“On this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his own property.”

2. (:14-17) Key Principle Regarding Equity in Property Transaction

a. (:14) Do No Wrong

“If you make a sale, moreover, to your friend, or buy from your friend's hand, you shall not wrong one another.”

b. (:15-16) Prorate the Price on Equitable Basis

“Corresponding to the number of years after the jubilee, you shall buy from your friend; he is to sell to you according to the number of years of crops. 16 In proportion to the extent of the years you shall increase its price, and in proportion to the fewness of the years, you shall diminish its price; for it is a number of crops he is selling to you.”

c. (:17) Do No Wrong but Fear the Lord

*“So you shall not wrong one another, but you shall **fear your God**; for I am the LORD your God.”*

D. (:18-22) Trust the Lord for Gracious Provision of Food

1. (:18-19) Obedience Essential for Material Security

a. (:18) Requirement of Obedience

“You shall thus observe My statutes, and keep My judgments, so as to carry them out, that you may live securely on the land.”

b. (:19) Promise of Provision

“Then the land will yield its produce, so that you can eat your fill and live securely on it.”

2. (:20-22) Anxiety Alleviated by Divine Assurance

a. (:20) Natural Anxiety Question

“But if you say, ‘What are we going to eat on the seventh year if we do not sow or gather in our crops?’”

- b. (:21) Supernatural Provision
“then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it will bring forth the crop for three years.”
- c. (:22) No Gap in God’s Gracious Provision
“When you are sowing the eighth year, you can still eat old things from the crop, eating the old until the ninth year when its crop comes in.”

Mark Rooker: Acknowledging that ultimately God owns the land should have motivated the Israelites to refrain from cultivating the land in obedience to God. Taking a year off from work in the sabbatical year and two successive years when the seventh sabbatical year was followed by the Year of Jubilee would force the Israelite to reflect upon the Lord as provider of all. The provision of crops did not depend on man's labor but upon God as the sustainer. Work is relative, for if needs are to be met in life, God must provide.

II. (:23-34) THE REDEMPTION OF PROPERTY

A. (:23-24) The Principle

1. (:23) God Owns the Land and Leases it to His People

“The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.”

Mark Rooker: Acknowledging that ultimately God owns the land should have motivated the Israelites to refrain from cultivating the land in obedience to God. Taking a year off from work in the sabbatical year and two successive years when the seventh sabbatical year was followed by the Year of Jubilee would force the Israelite to reflect upon the Lord as provider of all. The provision of crops did not depend on man's labor but upon God as the sustainer. Work is relative, for if needs are to be met in life, God must provide. . . The Israelites do not possess the land because of their military prowess, neither may they dispose of the land at their own discretion. Land sales in Israel were thus not final but were more like leases.

Gordon Wenham: The theological principle underlying the jubilee is enunciated: The land must not be sold off permanently, for the land is mine. Time and again the Pentateuch reiterates that it is God who gives Israel the land (e.g., **Gen. 15:7; 17:8; 24:7; Exod. 6:4; Lev. 20:24; 25:2, 38; Deut. 5:16**). Every tribe and every family within each tribe is allotted a portion of the land by divine decree (**Num. 32; Josh. 13ff.**). By insisting that the land could not be alienated from the family to whom God has assigned it (cf. **1 K. 21:3**), this law aims to preserve the idea that the land ultimately belongs to God. His people are but resident aliens and settlers in the land. In other words it does not really belong to them; they inhabit it thanks solely to the mercy and favor of their God, the great landowner (cf. **1 Chr. 29:15; Ps. 39:13 [Eng. 12]; Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11**).

2. (:24) Redemption is the Process for Property Restoration

*“Thus for every piece of your property,
you are to provide for the redemption of the land.”*

B. (:25-28) The Practice

1. (:25) Best Option = Redemption by Nearest Kinsman

“If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold.”

Mark Rooker: The “kinsman,” “near relative” was a close relative (25:48–49) who was under obligation to reclaim the land sold by his impoverished family member (25:25) and to redeem a relative who due to difficult times found himself enslaved to someone else (Lev 25:47–49). The kinsman redeemer also had the responsibility of carrying out the role of the avenging of blood (Num 35:12–19). Illustrations of the application of this law of redeeming property of an impoverished relative in Israel's history may be found in Ruth 4 and in Jer 32:7–14.

2. (:26-27) Next Option = Personally Refund the Balance

“Or in case a man has no kinsman, but so recovers his means as to find sufficient for its redemption, 27 then he shall calculate the years since its sale and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and so return to his property.”

3. (:28) Last Resort = Land Reverts Back to Original Owner at the Jubilee

“But if he has not found sufficient means to get it back for himself, then what he has sold shall remain in the hands of its purchaser until the year of jubilee; but at the jubilee it shall revert, that he may return to his property.”

R. K. Harrison: Although in theory the land belongs to God, situations will arise in which the tenant-owner has to dispose of his property. Only extreme hardship would prompt such a course, since family inheritances were greatly treasured (1 Kgs 21:3). Under such conditions a close family member was expected to buy it, so that it would not pass into alien hands (25). Where a man is able to repurchase his property, the cost of redemption is governed by the length of time the holdings have been under different control. The overpayment (27) represented the excess of the sale price over the total value of the crops obtained from the land. If a person could not afford to redeem his property, he had to wait until the jubilee year, when it would revert to him by law (28).

C. (:29-34) Two Exceptional Circumstances

1. (:29-31) Houses in a City

a. (:29-30) Houses in a Walled City

*“Likewise, if a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city,
then his redemption right remains valid until a full year from its sale; his right of redemption lasts a full year.”*

But if it is not bought back for him within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city passes permanently to its purchaser throughout his generations; it does not revert in the jubilee.”

b. (:31) Houses in a Village without Walls

“The houses of the villages, however, which have no surrounding wall shall be considered as open fields; they have redemption rights and revert in the jubilee.”

Perry Yoder: An addendum makes clear which houses fall under this exception. Houses that are found in a settlement without an encircling wall are like open fields. These are villages in the open countryside, with arable land around them. The farmers who tilled the soil around the settlement presumably lived in these houses. A list of such villages can be found in **Nehemiah 11:25-30**. Such houses can be redeemed at any time and are restored to their owners at the Jubilee Year just like land.

2. (:32-34) Cities of the Levites

“As for cities of the Levites, the Levites have a permanent right of redemption for the houses of the cities which are their possession. 33 What, therefore, belongs to the Levites may be redeemed and a house sale in the city of this possession reverts in the jubilee, for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the sons of Israel. 34 But pasture fields of their cities shall not be sold, for that is their perpetual possession.”

Perry Yoder: The inheritance portion of the Levites is described in **Numbers 35:1-8**. The Levitical city sits in the center of their holdings, with pastureland surrounding it. The houses in a Levitical city, as well as the surrounding land, represent the inheritance granted them instead of land like other Israelites. Like land, these city houses can be redeemed at any time. If not redeemed before the Jubilee, they must be returned to their owners in the Jubilee Year—contrary to the law just given that allows redemption for only one year for city houses. Also, the pastures that go with their towns cannot be sold, because they represent their permanent portion as a collective.

III. (:35-38) THE REGULATION OF LOANS TO FELLOW COUNTRYMEN

A. (:35) Resource (Support) Your Poor Countryman in Mutual Living

“Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.”

B. (:36-37) Refrain from Financial Exploitation in Mutual Living

*“Do not take usurious interest from him, but **revere your God**, that your countryman may live with you.
37 You shall not give him your silver at interest, nor your food for gain.”*

Perry Yoder: If the destitute person borrows money or receives food, presumably for his support and that of his family, such loans are given without interest. Two types of interest are forbidden. The first is discounted interest, a bite (*nešek*; NIV, interest) taken out of the loan (vv. 35, 36). The borrower does not receive the full sum of the loan. The second type, increase (*tarbit*, marbit; NIV, profit), is accrued interest that adds an amount to the sum owed (vv. 36, 37). Generosity toward each other is encouraged because of the generosity they have received from God. . .

The scope of this law is quite circumscribed. If the above conditions are met, then such a loan would be made. These personal loans for support would not include commercial loans or loans taken for investment purposes.

C. (:38) Reflect on God's Gracious Intentions for His People

1. God's Redemption from Egypt

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt"

2. God's Gracious Provision of the Land

"to give you the land of Canaan"

3. God's Sovereign Lordship

"and to be your God."

IV. (:39-55) THE REDEMPTION OF SLAVES

A. (:39-46) Slaves Bought by Jews

1. (:39-43) Treatment of Jewish Slaves

*"And if a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's service. 40 He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. 41 He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers. 42 For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are not to be sold in a slave sale. 43 You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to **revere your God.**"*

2. (:44-46a) Treatment of Gentile Slaves

"As for your male and female slaves whom you may have-- you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you. 45 Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession. 46 You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent slaves."

Richard Hess: This text makes a radical distinction between Israelites and those outside the covenant faith. The latter may be treated as slaves just as other nations treat slaves. They can be bought, sold, and passed on as part of the household property. They and their families have no rights in Israel. Why did God allow such slavery? Is this accommodation to the practices of the surrounding nations? If so, how does one draw the line between what is cultural and what is essential to the faith? Clearly there are few practices as abhorrent to the modern mind as slavery. In earlier periods, Christians sometimes led the fight to ban it; nevertheless, this text implies that it is acceptable. [See Notes below]

3. (:46b) Treatment of Jewish Slaves

“But in respect to your countrymen, the sons of Israel, you shall not rule with severity over one another.”

B. (:47-54) Jewish Laborers Bought by Gentiles

1. (:47-49) Right of Redemption

“Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger's family, 48 then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him, 49 or his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself.”

Richard Hess: The final section considers an Israelite sold into debt servitude to an alien or sojourner residing in the land of Israel. Such a person has no ties of kinship or perhaps even of religion (though cf. **16:29; 17:8–10**). Yet they will be responsible to treat this slave just as other Israelites did when they bought their fellow Israelite's labor (**vv.8–13, 35–43**). The Israelite will always be liable to redemption by a kin at a fair price. This must be calculated with the understanding that, whatever happens, the servitude will end at the Year of Jubilee. Though the same principles have previously been described, their greater detail here may reflect a concern to guarantee that the Israelite receives proper treatment at the hands of a foreigner despite the desperate condition of debt servitude.

2. (:50-52) Refund the Equitable Prorated Amount

“He then with his purchaser shall calculate from the year when he sold himself to him up to the year of jubilee; and the price of his sale shall correspond to the number of years. It is like the days of a hired man that he shall be with him. 51 If there are still many years, he shall refund part of his purchase price in proportion to them for his own redemption; 52 and if few years remain until the year of jubilee, he shall so calculate with him. In proportion to his years he is to refund the amount for his redemption.”

3. (:53) Respect Him Like a Valued Hired Worker

“Like a man hired year by year he shall be with him; he shall not rule over him with severity in your sight.”

4. (:54) Release Him in Year of Jubilee

“Even if he is not redeemed by these means, he shall still go out in the year of jubilee, he and his sons with him.”

Mark Rooker: The Israelite could not be treated as a slave but only as a hired man or day laborer (**Deut 24:14–15**).

C. (:55) Rationale

*“For the sons of Israel are My servants;
they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt.
I am the LORD your God.”*

Robert Vasholz: The expression *I brought them out of the land of Egypt* is the language of **redemption**. The Israelites foremost were the servants of the God who redeemed them. Here, God explicitly identified Himself as Israel’s kinsman and redeemer. The role of the redeemer was to excise his kinsmen from servitude and, by these restrictions, that was what He is insuring. He delivered His people from bondage and they were not to return to slavery by the hand of anyone, whether a neighbor or an alien. Indeed, in Israel, both master and servant belonged to the Lord.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How difficult would it have been for the Jews to trust God for His provision during those years they were not supposed to till the ground?
- 2) How should we treat fellow believers who find themselves in a state of poverty – given our common family identity as the people of God?
- 3) Why did God promote such a rigid program of private ownership of the land rather than some type of government-run socialism?
- 4) How important is it for people to have some tangible hope when they find themselves in conditions of severe financial hardship?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Roy Gane: The starting point for consideration of Israelite ownership of the land is the premise that it was all “crown property” in the sense that it belonged to the divine King (25:23). He gave it to the Israelites (25:38) to be subdivided equitably among their clans (Josh. 13–17; Num. 34:24). To protect this distribution from permanent alienation of ancestral land by sale, the Lord decreed that nobody outside the clan to which a given property was attached could hold more than a temporary interest in it (Lev. 25:23–24; cf. 1 Kings 21:3). In the event that a piece of such land was “sold” (i.e., really leased), its value was to be prorated according to the number of years remaining until the next Jubilee (Lev. 25:13–18). So it was **use of the land**, not the land itself, that was sold.

The Jubilee law is concerned with ancestral real estate necessary to maintain an agricultural livelihood. This includes houses in unwalled villages, which are zoned with open country, but not urban dwellings in walled cities (25:29–31). For ensuring that the land of a clan would be kept for the support of its members, the Jubilee release was the remedy of last resort. If a person became poor and “sold” part of his land, his kinsman should redeem it (25:25), that is, buy it back. If he had no redeemer but his situation later improved, he could redeem the property himself at a price that was prorated until the next Jubilee year (25:26–27). Failing the above options, the land would revert to the original owner at the Jubilee (25:28).

Perry Yoder: Social Justice and Mission

Jubilee values are an important strand in the Bible. Certainly the prophets preached these values. On the accumulation of land, Isaiah proclaimed, “*Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land*” (Isa 5:8). The concentration of resources can result in a few having much and many having little or nothing. This accumulation affects the marginalized: “*The LORD says, ‘Do what is just and right. Deliver those who have been robbed from those who oppress them. Do not exploit or mistreat foreigners who live in your land, children who have no fathers, or widows. Do not kill innocent people in this land’*” (Jer 22:3 NET).

Jesus picks up this theme when John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask Jesus whether he is the messiah. Jesus replies, “*Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor*” (Luke 7:22). This verse is sometimes spiritualized to say that Jesus is not talking about lame people walking but about spiritually lame people. However, the context shows otherwise. In the preceding verse Luke reports, “*At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind*” (v. 21). In this context, John’s disciples can see for themselves what Jesus is doing and report back to him.

Jesus ends his reply to John the Baptist’s disciples with “*Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me*” (Luke 7:23 NET). What is there in what Jesus is doing to cause

offense? Surely everyone would be glad to see people healed and freed from their infirmities. It is the last item, “*good news is proclaimed to the poor,*” that is problematic for some. Jesus was clearly referring to actual poor people, and good news for poor people might be offensive to others. . .

Foreign missions and overseas aid gets high priority, but home missions—work with disadvantaged people in our midst—is a poor stepchild. Overseas relief to orphans and widows draws our attention, sympathy, and support. It is hard to get excited about helping needy children from single-parent homes in our own towns or communities.

A major stumbling block is that poverty and disease are insoluble problems. We may be tempted to think, “Since we can’t solve it, let’s not get too excited. All we can do is apply bandages to a few, in any case.” We might even quote Jesus, “*You will always have the poor among you*” (**John 12:8**). However, Jesus is quoting from **Deuteronomy 15**, where we find a law for the Sabbatical Year. After commanding the release of debts in the Sabbatical Year, God tells the Israelites, “*There shall be no needy among you*” (v. 4 NJPS). However, if despite keeping the commands of the Sabbatical Year, there are yet poor, “*Do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them*” (v. 7). Then comes Jesus’ quote, “*There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land*” (v. 11).

Generosity in the face of need, even incurable need, is perhaps the best way to practice Jubilee values in our time.

Kenneth Mathews: Although the methods of assisting the disadvantaged today are different from Biblical times, the message is the same. Both individually and collectively, we must set in place opportunities for the poor to succeed financially. We must never be a roadblock or support any roadblocks to a deprived person’s escape from poverty. It is presumptuous for us to think that what we have gained in this world’s goods came by our own doing. A good God gave us the advantages of intellectual capability, health, and marketable skills that enable us to provide for our families. Christian communities have taken this seriously in our times. They are more involved than ever in providing low- or no-interest loans to the poor in Third World countries where capital for small business entrepreneurship is unavailable. By economic development in poverty-stricken communities, many social ills can be alleviated, such as disease, homelessness, education, and the selling of family members for slave trade. There are many innovative ways that we can be involved; there is no shortage of opportunities. The only shortage is a Christian’s will to do it.

Roy Gane: Why did God tolerate slavery in biblical times?

This question hits a nerve because of our revulsion for the degrading, racist type of servitude practiced in the United States until the Civil War. For us the term slavery instantly evokes images of tobacco plantations, cotton fields, abusive masters drawing blood with whips, and separated family members sold on the auction block. Our reaction is horror and anger at this kind of moral leprosy.

When we read the Bible, however, we find laws regulating slavery to mitigate its worst effects (**Ex. 21; Lev. 25; Deut. 15**), but we do not find what we want: a law totally banning slavery. So we are likely to ask: What is the matter with God? Why aren't his moral sensibilities as keen as ours? . . .

In his Second Treatise of Government (1690), **John Locke** recognized the difference between servitude in the biblical law codes and the kind of slavery practiced in his day:

I confess we find among the Jews, as well as other nations, that men did sell themselves; but it is plain this was only to drudgery, not to slavery; for it is evident the person sold was not under an absolute, arbitrary, despotal power; for the master could not have power to kill him at any time whom, at a certain time, he was obliged to let go free out of his service; and the master of such a servant was so far from having an arbitrary power over his life that he could not, at pleasure, so much as maim him, but the loss of an eye or tooth set him free (**Ex. 21**).

While we will never feel comfortable with the biblical servitude laws, we should take the following factors into account.

(1) God did not institute slavery. Nor did he like it any more than he liked polygamy or divorce, which he also regulated to prevent their worst effects (**Ex. 21:10–11; Lev. 18:18; Deut. 21:15–17; 24:1–4**). Through Jeremiah, the Lord excoriated the people of Jerusalem who took back the slaves they had released (**Jer. 34:12–22**), and in **Revelation 18:13**, trafficking in human lives is one of the sins for which eschatological “Babylon” is destroyed.

(2) The revelation of God's principles is progressive. For example, he tolerated Jacob's marrying two sisters although he later outlawed this practice (**Lev. 18:18**). Already within the Pentateuch, we see advancement in the requirements for humane treatment of servants. By comparison with **Exodus 21**, Deuteronomy stipulates release of female slaves (**Deut. 15:12**) and introduces the command for a master when he frees a servant: “Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress” (**15:14**).

(3) It appears that in the context of Israelite tribal society, which was almost completely dependent on agriculture and lacked a state welfare system, God tolerated debt servitude as the lesser of two evils to keep people alive who would otherwise starve if they could not get help from relatives in times of distress (see above).

The biblical release laws benefited Israelite slaves/servants. Non-Israelites could be held in perpetuity, whether they were acquired through purchase (**Lev. 25:44–46**) or conquest (**Deut. 20:10–15**). This is much more difficult for us to deal with. Why did God allow his people to do this, and how does it differ from slavery in America? Without attempting to arrive at a definitive answer, we can make some preliminary

observations in the following paragraphs. For one thing, without the release legislation, the default situation would have allowed perpetual slavery for Israelites. What is exceptional is not that non-Israelites could be held in perpetuity, but that Israelites could not. God elevated their status in accordance with their election and redemption. They had already served their time in Egypt (**Lev. 25:42; Deut. 15:15**)!

God's intention for other nations was to bless them through the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18), not to exploit them. The Israelites were to be a channel for revealing divine principles so that other peoples would want to join them in serving God; they were not to be an elite, exclusive caste. Nonetheless, the Israelites came in conflict with a number of other peoples. When hostilities broke out between Israel and a city not located in their Promised Land, the Israelites were to make an offer of peace. *"If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it"* (**Deut. 20:11–13**).

Here we see the usual ancient Near Eastern alternatives: slavery or death. At first glance it is simply the law of the jungle, with the strong preying on the weak. However, in the book of Numbers we will find that on a number of occasions the Israelites were up against enemies who wanted to destroy them (**Num. 21–22; 25; 31**). In the absence of a "United Nations," Israel could only survive by eviscerating such threats through controlling or destroying enemy males, who posed military danger. To go on the offensive was the only viable defense.

In biblical Israel there seems to be no hint of the racist attitude associated with American slavery, namely, that a person is inferior because of his or her skin color, so that it is legitimate to hold that individual as a slave. In spite of the pseudo-exegetical acrobatics of southern white ministers before the Civil War, there is no biblical justification for subhuman slavery as it was practiced in America.

Exodus 21:20–21, 26–27 appears to protect all slaves, whether Israelite or not, from injury because of physical abuse by their masters. These laws lack the qualification "Hebrew" (see **21:2**) and are separated from the part of the chapter dealing with Hebrew slaves (21:1–11). That God did hold Israel responsible for treatment of at least one group of non-Israelite slaves (i.e., the Gibeonites; cf. **Josh. 9**) is graphically illustrated in 2 Samuel 21:1–14.

According to the New Testament, ethnic divisions, slave or free status, and gender are irrelevant to participation in the new covenant (**Gal. 3:26–29**). The New Testament does not attempt to attack slavery in a political manner (see **Philemon**) because the new covenant community is not a political group. Christ repeatedly stressed that the purpose of his kingdom of grace (before he returns to earth) is not to right all wrongs in the world by force. The church was not to become another Spartacus revolt against Roman slavery, which would end similarly with thousands of crosses lining the Appian Way. Rather, the converting power of the gospel would undermine evils such as slavery by

drawing human beings of varying social statuses into spiritual fellowship with each another.

Sailhamer: The central theme of this last set of instructions is that of **restoration**. Israel's life was to be governed by a pattern of seven-year periods, Sabbath years. After seven periods of seven years, in the Year of Jubilee, there was to be total restoration for God's people.

MacArthur: The Year of Jubilee involved a year of release from indebtedness (vv. **23-38**) and bondage of all sorts (vv. **39-55**). All prisoners and captives were set free, slaves released, and debtors absolved. All property reverted to original owners. This plan curbed inflation and moderated acquisitions. It also gave new opportunity to people who had fallen on hard times.

TEXT: Leviticus 26:1-46

TITLE: EXHORTATION TO OBEY THE LAW: BLESSINGS AND CURSES

BIG IDEA:

TEMPORAL BLESSINGS OR CURSINGS BASED ON COVENANT LOYALTY TO GOD'S COMMANDS CAN NEVER NEGATE GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS ULTIMATE RESTORATION AGENDA FOR THE NATION OF ISRAEL

INTRODUCTION:

Roy Gane: **Leviticus 26** provides a dramatic climax to the book of Leviticus, after which the concluding rules of **chapter 27** are anticlimactic.

Mark Rooker: Although **Leviticus 26** begins without any introduction or introductory formula, the contents of the chapter suggest such a dramatic shift in subject matter that it is permissible to view the chapter as a self-contained section of **Leviticus 17–26**. The chapter is united by the phrase “*I am the LORD [your God]*,” which occurs in **26:1, 2, 13, 44, 45**. The chapter naturally divides on the basis of the subject matter of its contents, for **26:3–13** addresses the rewards for obedience, **26:14–39** pertains to the judgments for disobedience, and the final section, **26:40–46**, describes God's faithful and merciful response to his people in exile. The first two verses of the chapter address the issue of appropriate worship, both negatively and positively. . .

The occurrence of a section on blessings and cursings after the laws have been given plays a critical role in the structure of the entire book, since they occur at the end of the book as a promise and a warning. **Deuteronomy 28**, a parallel listing of cursings and blessings, plays the identical role in the Book of Deuteronomy, as may **Exod 23:20–33** in **Exodus 20–23**. The blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience reflect the principle of the *lex talionis*, that a person should be justly recompensed for his actions.

McGee: This is an 'iffy' chapter. 'If' occurs nine times and it has to do with the conditions on which they occupy the land. God says 'I will' twenty-four times. God will act and react according to their response to the 'if.'

Perry Yoder: The pros and cons of keeping this contract with God are listed in **Leviticus 26**. This reminds us that a relationship with God is a two-way street. God's responses are affected by how one responds to God's regulations for maintaining accord with God. At the end of the chapter we will find that failure and punishment are not the final word, but God's grace continues despite disobedience. . .

The language of **Leviticus 26** indicates the connection of Leviticus with covenant making and keeping. The primary word for “covenant” (*berit*) has occurred only twice previously in Leviticus (**2:13; 24:8**), but it appears eight times in **chapter 26** (three times in v. 42). The covenant connection is confirmed by **verses 42 and 45**, in which

God promises to remember the covenant made with Israel even though Israel has not kept it.

Allen Ross: The main idea of the first half of **Lev. 26** is the blessing of God. A blessing is some gift, some enrichment of life, or some enablement for prosperity that comes from God. By usage it most often represents a physical benefit, such as wealth, prosperity, children, success, or peace; but the blessing may also be spiritual, such as grace and peace from God (**Num. 6:22–27**) or communion with God (**Ps. 144:15**). Both physical and spiritual blessings are found in **Lev. 26**.

I. (:1-2) FUNDAMENTALS OF COVENANT WORSHIP

A. (:1) Refrain from Idolatry

*“You shall not make for yourselves idols, nor shall you set up for yourselves an image or a sacred pillar, nor shall you place a figured stone in your land to bow down to it; for **I am the LORD your God.**”*

Mark Rooker: This fourfold description of the making of idols is the most comprehensive concentration of references to image making in the Bible, thus ruling out any type of idol worship.

Richard Hess: “*Idol*” is found previously only in **19:4**, which also forbids its erection. “*Image*” occurs in the Decalogue (**Ex 20:4**) as the word used to prohibit the worship of other deities in the form of anything in nature. “*Sacred stone*” appears as an idolatrous object previously only in **Exodus 23:24**, but it will be used repeatedly in **Deuteronomy** to forbid idolatry (**7:5; 12:3; 16:22**). The “*carved stone*” is a unique term used only here. Though these objects are found in the land in which Israel will settle, they were also present in the wilderness, where Israel remained for an entire generation.

Robert Vasholz: Moses knew that the keeping of the conditions of the covenant was an essential prerequisite for the preservation of any covenant relationship. He presented both covenant blessings and curses of that relationship as a powerful motivation for obedience.

Merrill: In terms reminiscent of the inauguration of the covenant at Sinai (**Ex. 21:1-4**), Yahweh speaks of His uniqueness and exclusivity (**Lev. 26:1**), a fact that demanded unquestioning loyalty (**26:2**).

B. (:2) Reverence God’s Sabbaths and Sanctuary

*“You shall keep My sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary; **I am the LORD.**”*

Kenneth Mathews: “*Reverence*” means “to stand in awe” of God. The word occurs only three times in the book of Leviticus, and each time it is tied to the observance of Sabbath. The point is to honor God by showing obedience, as in the exhortation, “*Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father*” (**19:3**).

C. Relationship Must be Honored

“I am the Lord your God”

Roy Gane: The brief unit of **26:1–2** forms a structural tie with the same commands in **19:4, 30**, where the theme is holy living because the Lord is holy. Staying away from idolatry, keeping Sabbath, and reverencing the Lord’s sanctuary are basic ways that the Israelites can show loyalty to him.

Richard Hess: These two verses thus summarize inappropriate and correct access to God. They provide the basic standard by which God’s people will be assessed for blessing or cursing.

II. (:3-13) BLESSINGS OF COVENANT OBEDIENCE

(:3) Introduction: Blessings Issuing from Obedience

“If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out,”

Roy Gane: The blessings in **26:3–13** touch the major aspects of life that are dear to an ancient Israelite: agricultural prosperity, plenty of food, peace and safety from human and animal enemies, military victory against overwhelming odds, and freedom with dignity under the beneficence of a resident covenant deity. The Israelites can trust the Lord’s goodwill toward them because he has already definitively proven it by delivering them from the heavy burden of Egyptian oppression (v. **13**).

Kenneth Mathews: The blessings listed are four. First, the Lord promises the seasonal rains that will produce dependable harvests. Second, the Lord will grant the people peace in the land. This peace is achieved by driving out harmful beasts that otherwise would prowl the land, mauling people and robbing animal herds. Also, this peace is secured by the Lord’s granting Israel victory over her national enemies. The third blessing is the promise of population increase, which was evidence of God’s covenant commitment to Israel (cf. **Genesis 1:28; 9:1; 17:20; Deuteronomy 28:11**). The last blessing is the promise of God’s enduring presence among his people. *“I will walk among you,”* he says (v. **12**), indicating the continuance of the covenant. In summary the blessings regard security and prosperity.

A. (:4-5) Prosperity and Security

“then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. 5 Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land.”

Richard Hess: The promise of **rain** is essential to Palestine for the fruitfulness of the land. Unlike Egypt or Mesopotamia, where rivers served as the primary source of water, in Palestine this was not possible. Instead the people depended on the rains to provide

sufficient water to grow crops. Baal was considered the god that provided Canaan with rain.

**B. (:6-8) Peace in the Land and Protection –
Deliverance from both Human Enemies and Harmful Animals**

“I shall also grant peace in the land, so that you may lie down with no one making you tremble. I shall also eliminate harmful beasts from the land, and no sword will pass through your land. 7 But you will chase your enemies, and they will fall before you by the sword; 8 five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall before you by the sword.”

C. (:9-10) Population Increase

*“So I will turn toward you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will confirm My covenant with you.
10 And you will eat the old supply and clear out the old because of the new.”*

D. (:11-13) Presence of the God of Redemption Who Gives Liberty

*“Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. 12 I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people. 13 **I am the LORD your God**, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you should not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.”*

Mark Rooker: Verses 11–13 reiterate the essential nature of Israel's relationship with God. This special relationship with God is the goal of the covenant, for the Lord takes up residence among the Israelites in the same way he does in the tabernacle. The apostle Paul cites the language of 26:12 to describe what it means for believers in the church to be marked as the temple of the living God (2 Cor 6:16). This intimate relationship with God is the primary blessing of life (Pss 4:8; 16:2, 5; 63:3). Here this reality is expressed in the imagery of enslavement: “I broke the bars of your yoke” (26:13). Bars were a symbol of oppression, as is illustrated by the fact that bars were often tied to the neck of work animals (Jer 5:5; 26:2; 28:10–13). Thus the text offers the image of a slave bowed by an enormous burden. He suddenly has the weight removed, which expresses the establishment of Israel's special relationship with God. The promise is similar to Adam's experience in the garden and is used of God's relationship with Enoch (Gen 5:22–24) and Abraham (Gen 17; see Jer 30:22; Ezek 11:20; Hos 2:23; Rom 9:26).

R. K. Harrison: The mention of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt is a guarantee that the Great King who has initiated the covenant with the people is able to perform all that he has promised. He will be no absentee deity, but will be with the Israelites, directing their lives and providing for all their needs.

III. (:14-39) CURSES OF COVENANT BREAKING

(:14-16a) Introduction: Curses Issuing from Covenant Breaking

“But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, 15 if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you.”

R. K. Harrison: The sections of ancient Near Eastern treaties containing the curses were much longer than those describing the blessings that would accrue to the vassal consequent upon obedience to the Great King, and this pattern is seen here also.

Allen Ross: The curses in **Lev. 26** have five stages, increasing with a persistent refusal to be warned and repent: sickness and defeat in battle (**26:16–17**), drought and famine (**26:18–20**), overrun by wild beasts (**26:21–22**), war and siege (**26:23–26**), and total destruction and exile with cannibalism (**26:27–32**).

David Thompson: DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD WILL RESULT IN A SYSTEMATIC, PROGRESSIVE WITHDRAWAL OF GOD’S BLESSINGS AND A POURING OUT OF HIS CHASTISING PUNISHMENT.

A. (:16b-17) First Wave of Curses – Disease and Defeat

1. (:16b) Sickness

“I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away;”

Mark Rooker: The verb translated “*I will bring*” (*pqd*) in the expression “*I will bring upon you*” is a technical term referring to divine intervention in response to obedience or disobedience to the covenant (**26:16**). The latter is clearly intended in this usage. . . The punishments will increase in intensity if Israel fails to respond.

Richard Hess: The expressions of God’s judgment are unusual. The “*sudden terror*” (*behālā*, GK 988) of the promised destruction occurs elsewhere three times (**Ps 78:33; Isa 65:23; Jer 15:8**), where it always refers to unforeseen destruction and premature death. The term for “*wasting diseases*” (*šahepet*, GK 8831) occurs elsewhere only in the curse of **Deuteronomy 28:22**, where the context of the term may also refer to physical maladies. The same is true of the word “*fever*” (*qaddaḥat*, GK 7707); its root refers to fire.

2. (:16c) Sowing in Futility

“also, you shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies shall eat it up.”

3. (:17) Subjugation to Enemies

“And I will set My face against you so that you shall be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you.”

David Guzik: They would be so confused and afraid that they would **flee when no one pursues**.

B. (:18-20) Second Wave of Curses – Drought and Famine

1. (:18) Intensification of Punishment

*“If also after these things, you do not obey Me,
then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.”*

Richard Hess: “*Sevenfold*” describes the punishment as far greater than what preceded and as a kind of full or complete punishment.

Gordon Wenham: These judgments are described as **discipline**. Throughout the Bible divine discipline is referred to: God punishes his people not merely because they deserve it, but because he loves them and wants to correct their foolish ways (**Deut. 8:5; Jer. 30:11; 31:18; Ps. 38:2 [Eng. 1]; 94:12; Prov. 3:11–12; Heb. 12:5–11**). Amos laments that, despite judgments of famine and drought, disease and defeat, “*yet you did not return to me*” (**Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11**).

2. (:19) Independent Pride of Power Broken

*“And I will also break down your pride of power;
I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze.”*

Mark Rooker: If the Israelites fail to respond to the first series of punishments, God will plague the nation's agricultural output. The sky will become like iron and the ground like bronze (**26:18–20**). These metals, which represent the hardest metals, speak of the austere conditions of the sky and the ground. Conditions would be so severe that they would result in a lack of produce and a severe drought.

David Guzik: The core problem with chronic, continued disobedience is **pride** in one's own **power**. This pride must be broken.

3. (:20) Investment of Agricultural Cultivation Futile and Fruitless

*“And your strength shall be spent uselessly,
for your land shall not yield its produce
and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.”*

C. (:21-22) Third Wave of Curses – Ravaging by Wild Beasts

1. (:21) Intensification of Punishment

*“If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me,
I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins.”*

2. (:22) Invasion of Ravaging Wild Beasts

*“And I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which shall
bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your
number so that your roads lie deserted.”*

D. (:23-26) Fourth Wave of Curses – War, Pestilence and Scarcity

1. (:23-24) Intensification of Punishment

“And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you seven times for your sins.”

2. (:25a) Wars

“I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant;”

3. (:25b) Pestilence

“and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands.”

4. (:26) Scarcity and Famine

“When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied.”

Bush: . . . there shall be such a scarcity of bread that one ordinary oven shall answer for the baking of ten, that is a great many families, whereas in common circumstances one oven would serve for one family.

E. (:27-39) Final Wave of Curses – Total Destruction and Exile

1. (:27-28) Intensification of Punishment

“Yet if in spite of this, you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, 28 then I will act with wrathful hostility against you; and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins.”

Roy Gane: The next unit that begins with “*if*” is much longer (26:27–39) and constitutes one of the most frightful warnings in the entire Bible. The dam restraining retributive justice bursts open with a vengeance, disclosing the ultimate horrors of starvation during siege (“*You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters,*” v. 29), appalling devastation of the land (vv. 30–32), and scattering of the people into exile (vv. 33–35).

2. (:29) Humiliation of Cannibalism

“Further, you shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you shall eat.”

3. (:30) Destruction of Idolatrous Places of Worship

“I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols; for My soul shall abhor you.”

4. (:31-32) Desolation of Cities and Land

*“I will lay waste your cities as well,
and will make your sanctuaries desolate;
and I will not smell your soothing aromas.
32 And I will make the land desolate
so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled over it.”*

5. (:33-35) Scattering into Exile

“You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. 34 Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35 All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it.”

Mark Rooker: Exile, the ultimate judgment, will allow the land to enjoy the sabbath years, which it would not have experienced when Israel was in a state of rebellion against God (26:34–35).

6. (:36-39) Terror and Disintegration of Any Survivors in the Land

“As for those of you who may be left, I will also bring weakness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies. And the sound of a driven leaf will chase them and even when no one is pursuing, they will flee as though from the sword, and they will fall. 37 'They will therefore stumble over each other as if running from the sword, although no one is pursuing; and you will have no strength to stand up before your enemies. 38 'But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies' land will consume you. 39 'So those of you who may be left will rot away because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies; and also because of the iniquities of their forefathers they will rot away with them.”

Perry Yoder: How will the survivors fare in foreign lands? Not so well. Even in exile the curses will follow them. They will be filled with despair, and at the sound of a windblown leaf they will take flight as if threatened by a sword. In their flight they will fall over one another without the strength to face their enemies (v. 37). Israel will disappear among the nations who have devoured them (v. 38). There they will rot away on account of their own and their ancestors' covenant breaking (v. 39). Israel will be at an end.

**III. (:40-45) GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS ULTIMATE RESTORATION
AGENDA FOR THE NATION OF ISRAEL**

A. (:40-41) Confession is the Pathway to Restoration

1. (:40) Historical Unfaithfulness Must be Confessed

“If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me—“

Roy Gane: That’s all—only **confess**. No elaborate ceremonies. Only humbling themselves before the Lord, admitting they have made bad choices and putting themselves at his mercy, where they really have been all along but wouldn’t admit it.

2. (:41a) Hostility of God was Justified

“I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies—“

3. (:41b) Humbling of Uncircumcised Heart Required

“or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity,”

Kenneth Mathews: Restoration was promised, but only after repentance and confession of their sins. Yet, how could they change their “*uncircumcised*” hearts (**v. 41**) toward God since they were so spiritually incorrigible? The description “uncircumcised” meant that the people were not in right relationship with God, for the covenant required the people to commit themselves to God by spiritually circumcising their hearts (**Deuteronomy 10:16**). Only God could regenerate their hearts. **Verse 41** reflects this spiritual regeneration of the human heart: “*if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled.*” The text does not read, “if the people humble their hearts”; rather, the passive construction occurs in the passage, “*is humbled.*” God humbles them; he is the one who spiritually circumcises his people (**Deuteronomy 30:16**). Christian regeneration of the heart can only be achieved through Christ who circumcises our hearts: “*In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ*” (**Colossians 2:11**; cf. **Philippians 3:3**). It is incumbent upon all people today to repent of their sins and place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior who has taken away our sins by his death on the cross (e.g., **Acts 17:30b**; **Colossians 2:14**). In the future New Jerusalem there will be no “*accursed*” thing, only the blessing of the Lamb: “*No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him*” (**Revelation 22:3**).

B. (:42-43) Covenant Breaking Required Discipline

1. (:42) Israel’s Unfaithfulness Did Not Cause God to Forget His Covenant Commitments

“then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.”

Gordon Wenham: Yet the judgments are still described as “*discipline*” (**v. 28**, cf. **v. 18** above). They are not God’s last word to his erring people. Judgment does not prove that

God has rejected his people. Rather he punishes them because they are his own (**Amos 3:2**). So if they confess their sin and humble their hearts, God will remember his covenant with the patriarchs (vv. **42–45**). What this remembering will mean in practice is not spelled out here, but **Deut. 30**, a similar passage in a similar context, explains that it will mean restoration to the land of promise and prosperity there. This would seem to be implicit in this Leviticus passage too.

2. (:43a) Sabbath Breaking Led to the Abandonment and Desolation of the Land

*“For the land shall be abandoned by them,
and shall make up for its sabbaths
while it is made desolate without them.”*

3. (:43b) Process of Discipline Required

*“They, meanwhile, shall be making amends for their iniquity,
because they rejected My ordinances
and their soul abhorred My statutes.”*

C. (:44-45) Commitment to Remember the Covenant

1. (:44) The Covenant-Keeping Lord Will Not Reject Forever

*“Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies,
I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them,
breaking My covenant with them; for **I am the LORD their God.**”*

Peter Pett: But of one thing they could be certain. He would not forget them forever. While they had broken the covenant, He would not. He therefore would not totally reject them, or hate them, or destroy them utterly. He would not break His covenant with them. And this was because of Who He Is. He is Yahweh, the One Who will be what He wants to be, Who does what He wants to do, Who brings into being what He wants to bring into being.

2. (:45) The Covenant-Keeping Lord Will Ultimately Restore His People

*“But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors,
whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations,
that I might be their God. **I am the LORD.**”*

Roy Gane: In **26:45** is the forty-ninth and last instance of “*I am the LORD*” in the book of Leviticus. Is it coincidence that this key expression is used the same super-sabbatical (7 × 7) number of times as the seven weeks of days between the elevated sheaf and the Feast of Weeks (**23:15**) and the seven weeks of years between Jubilees (**25:8**), as well as the number of separate applications of purification offering blood by which the sanctuary is restored on the Day of Purgation (**16:14–19**), when the Jubilee year begins (**25:9**)? Associated as this multiple of the sacred number seven is with the Lord’s identity and sacred occasions, the number forty-nine carries a connotation of high holiness. Thus, we find that Leviticus, like other great artistic works such as Bach’s St. Matthew Passion, makes connections by patterns under as well as on the surface.

(:46) EPILOGUE – CONCLUSION TO THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

“These are the statutes and ordinances and laws which the LORD established between Himself and the sons of Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai.”

Richard Hess: The references to God’s speaking on Mount Sinai through Moses to the Israelites parallel the same statements in **25:1–2** and thus form a special envelope construction linking together **chs. 25** and **26**. This explains the references to the sabbatical years (**vv.44–45**) and assigns a special priority to this aspect of care for the land. But it is as a conclusion to the entire book of Leviticus that these verses serve their purpose. They demonstrate that all the words of the book must be understood as bearing the authority of God’s word given through Moses.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How are these biblical “*curses*” different from the popular usage of the concept of cursing someone or something?
- 2) Why does the Promised Land of Israel need to observe sabbath rests?
- 3) Can the church today count on these same types of blessings that we see promised for obedience to those Israelites who obey God’s commandments?
- 4) What do we learn about the faithfulness of God from His commitment to still show grace and mercy to the restored nation of Israel despite their track record of unfaithfulness and covenant breaking?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kenneth Mathews: In **chapter 26** the Lord sets before the people the choice between obedience and disobedience and describes the consequences that will ensue in each case. If the people choose to obey, the consequences are wonderful blessings. If they choose to disobey, the consequences will be calamitous. But the Lord reveals that the people in the days to come will choose disobedience, and their persistent recalcitrance will result in eventual exile from the land. The history of Israel proved that God was right. Although deserving final annihilation, the Lord promised that in their exile the people would come to their senses and repent. They would be restored to their land, and the blessings of God would flow once again. Why did the Lord relent on his judgment? we may ask ourselves. The passage ends on the Lord’s last word on the matter: God’s

faithfulness to his promises incites him to show grace to the repentant. God himself will change the hearts of the people, and he will restore them.

The chapter conveniently falls into four units. The first unit is **verses 1, 2**, which refer to two crucial commandments that call for loyalty to God. The final unit is **verses 40–46**, in which the Lord promises his loyalty to the Israelites. These two units border and encircle the two middle units that dominate the chapter. **Verses 3–13** describe the blessings of God, and **verses 14–39** describe the curses of God.

David Thompson: Before we look at these blessings, we want to remember that this is the O.T. and it is for Israel. There are ministers today who love to claim these blessings for the Church. Well, if one is going to claim the blessings, then one must also claim the cursings and penalties. There are certainly **applications** we may make to our lives and to our church, but we must never fall into the trap of thinking that covenant blessings of Israel are covenant blessings of the Church. There are many faithful people of God today who do not appear to be blessed of God. There are faithful people of God who hurt, who suffer, who experience many attacks from their enemies. . .

There are some very practical lessons to be learned here:

1. God blesses us or punishes us in direct connection to how serious we are in obeying His Word.
2. Once we sense God is doing negative things to us because of our rebellion, the best thing to do is immediately and honestly repent.
3. With God there may always be an appeal made to grace even in the midst of judgment. If we confess our sin and turn from it, we will again experience God's blessings.

Mark Rooker: One may note the **symmetry** between the blessings and cursings in this chapter:

<u>Blessings</u>	<u>Cursings</u>
Fertile land (vv. 4–5, 10)	Unproductive land (vv. 16, 19–20, 26)
Live in safety (v. 5)	Live in foreign nation (v. 33)
Savage beasts removed (v. 6)	Beasts will devour (v. 22)
Sword removed (v. 6)	Sword avenges (v. 25)
Victory over enemies (v. 7)	Defeated by enemies (vv. 17, 25)
God's favor (v. 9)	God's disfavor (v. 17)

The blessings and curses are presented in an ascending order, beginning with fruitfulness of the soil and terror of disease on one hand to experiencing the very presence of God or exile from the land and hence from God's presence on the other.

Christlieb (quoted by **Baxter**): We point to the people of Israel as a perennial historical miracle. The continued existence of this nation up to the present day, the preservation of its national peculiarities throughout thousands of years, in spite of all dispersion and oppression, remains so unparalleled a phenomenon, that without the special providential

preparation of God, and His constant interference and protection, it would be impossible for us to explain it. For where else is there a people over which such judgments have passed, and yet not ended in destruction?

Gordon Wenham: Categorizing the Curses

14–17 General curses—illness, famine, defeat

18–20 Drought and bad harvest

21–22 Wild animals

23–26 War, leading to plague and famine

27–39 War, leading to cannibalism, devastation and deportation from land

40–45 Promise of restoration

John Schultz: The consequences of obedience are evident on three levels:

a - in man's relationship to nature;

b - in man's relationship to his fellow men; and

c - in man's relationship to God.

a - The Consequences of Obedience in Man's Relationship to Nature

Obedience to the laws of God influences the climate of the land. This seems to us, modern men, like a primitive concept of natural phenomena. It could be, though, that modern man would do well to modify his scientific approach to those phenomena. As a matter of fact, there is no scientific explanation for bad weather. We can explain the "how," but not the "why" of these phenomena. We call certain occurrences "An Act of God." Why can we then not see the hand of God in the pattern of normal seasons and good weather? . . . In a secular society the relationship between human moral behavior and the weather seems to have lost its meaning. The fact that it cannot be proved in no way annuls the principle. There is no doubt in my mind that the devil can manipulate weather, but God is the Creator who directs the wind, the sun and the clouds. Several times God has changed weather as an answer to prayer in biblical records and in other historical events. . .

b - The Consequences of Obedience in Man's Relationship to His Fellow Men

A second blessing is **security**. God protects us against attacks by other men who are out to destroy us. "*The sword will not pass through your country.*" God has the answer to the arms race. In this respect we face the same problem as with the weather: secularization. Then, there are the wild animals. In most parts of our modern world the problem has been reversed. Man needs no longer protection against wild animals, animals have to be protected against man. Man is no longer an endangered species, but the lion and the tiger are in danger of extinction. This law was issued when Israel was a pioneer nation to whom God promised protection at the opening and development of the promised land. This does not mean that there would not be any enemies left, or that Israel would never be attacked. They would be a minority against an overwhelming foe. This we conclude from the words: "*Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.*" The relationship to the enemy is given in a ratio of 20:1 and 100:1. That sounds frightening enough. But God tells them that a minority plus God is an overwhelming majority,

against which no enemy will be able to stand. The Lord Jesus applies this principle to weak Christians when He says: *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”*

The following promise is **fertility**. Fertility, in modern times, is at best considered a mixed blessing. In Israel of old, birth control had not yet appeared on the horizon. The topic is a very complicated one to which we cannot do real justice in the context of this study. The perspective has changed throughout the ages. For Israel of old, having children was a matter of vital importance for the realization of the promise of possessing the land. The Roman Catholic Church has maintained that large families are a means to get souls into heaven. In some situations people may want large families for political reasons. In Irian Jaya, Indonesia, the Mountain Papua tribes endeavor to procreate large families in order to combat the transmigration of Javanese people into their area. In China and the USA birth control is practiced for economic and psychological reasons. The psychological factor plays, probably, a larger role in the USA than it does in China. It remains true, however, that when married couples decide not to have children, they lose one of God’s greatest blessings. In Sheldon VanAuken’s book *A Severe Mercy*, **C. S. Lewis** discusses this point in the strongest terms. Fertility is a gift from God, but infertility does not always mean a curse or even a withholding of blessing. Physical fertility is mentioned in the same breath with the confirmation of God’s promise to Israel, because the fertility of the people meant the increase of the nation and the realization of the occupation of the land. This principle is expressed by the psalmist when he says: *“Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.”* We may certainly draw spiritual lessons from this. Spiritual fertility in the New Covenant is, undoubtedly, more important than physical procreation, because it means victory over the real enemy. Just as God promised the land to Israel, so He assured us that He would build His church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Spiritual fertility, the multiplication of spiritual offspring, is an important factor in the realization of this promise. The more spiritual sons and daughters we beget, the stronger the church will grow. God links the fulfillment of His promise to our fruitfulness. In **vs. 9** we read: *“I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you.”* We need such confirmation.

c - The Consequences of Obedience in Man’s Relationship to God

The last promise concerns God’s **fellowship** with His people. God spoke these words to Moses on Mount Sinai, according to **ch. 25:1**. At that point the tabernacle had not yet been built, and the plans for the construction had not yet been revealed. God reaches forward to the time when He will enjoy this fellowship with men. Fellowship with God is not a one-way street. We are always amazed when we realize that God’s desire for fellowship with us is stronger than our desire for fellowship with Him. The consummation of God’s desire is found in the promise John hears pronounced in the book of Revelation. He says: *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and*

God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” The keyword in those words is consolation, as symbolized in the wiping away of tears. Considering the condition of man, it would have seemed understandable to us if God had abhorred man. As soon as man shows an inclination to obey God, however, as the prodigal son who set out to return to his father’s house, the attraction of God’s image in man to its original becomes so strong that God runs toward us, as did the father of the prodigal, even if we are still far away. If it is so wonderful when fellowship between God and one single person is restored, how much more glorious will it be when God dwells among His people! It will mean a triangle of fellowship: a horizontal relation and a vertical one. The basis of this relationship is redemption. God reminds His people of this fact in **vs. 13**: *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.”* Obedience is only possible for redeemed people, and fellowship cannot be detached from obedience.

TEXT: Leviticus 27:1-34

TITLE: VOWS -- THEIR VALUATION AND REDEMPTION

BIG IDEA:

THE DEDICATION OF PEOPLE, ANIMALS OR PROPERTY TO THE LORD INVOLVES FAITHFUL PERFORMANCE OF VOWS WITH STRICT REGULATIONS FOR REDEMPTION

INTRODUCTION:

Constable: The "*blessings and curses*" (**ch. 26**) were, in a sense, God's vows to His people. This chapter deals with His people's vows to Him. . . the emphasis in the first and the last chapters of Leviticus is self-dedication to the Lord, an emphasis that runs through the entire book. . .

A vow was a promise to give oneself, or another person (as in a dedication of someone), or one's possessions to God, either so He would bestow some blessing, or because He had already bestowed a blessing. People made vows to do something or not to do something. Vows were normally temporary. When a person wanted to get back what he had vowed to God, he had to pay a certain price to the sanctuary to buy back what he had given to God. This constituted "redeeming" what the person had vowed.

R. K. Harrison: Leviticus began with regulations concerning sanctuary offerings, and it is appropriate that it should conclude on the same theme.

Perry Yoder: The final chapter of Leviticus shows us how Israel supported their worship and their priests. It discusses how the system of vows and dedications worked. **Leviticus 27** begins with persons and animals who have been vowed or dedicated to God. If the person making the vow wants to retain ownership of who or what is vowed, then they can convert the vow to money and pay that instead. . .

The dedication of property to God begins with **verse 14**. These dedications are made by declaring something holy. In these cases the valuation is set by the priest, depending on the worth of what is dedicated. The person making the dedication can buy back their property by paying its value plus 20 percent. There are **exceptions**. What already belongs to God cannot be dedicated to God. What cannot be used by the priests must be bought back or sold. The firstborn of unclean animals illustrates this principle (**vv. 26-27**). Such an animal cannot be sacrificed, so its monetary value is paid instead.

Gordon Wenham: It may well be part of the purpose of this chapter to discourage rash swearing by fixing a relatively high price for the discharge of the vows, and penalizing those who change their minds. If a man tries to substitute a different animal for the one he has promised, he forfeits both animals (**vv. 10, 33**). If he wishes to redeem the property he vows, he must pay 20 percent extra (**vv. 13, 15, 19, 27, 31**).

Allen Ross: Unfortunately over the years vows have been greatly abused, either deliberately or inadvertently, both in their making and paying. On too many occasions people have vowed to do things only to find later that they could not or did not want to fulfill them; or, they made vows and promises that they should not have made in the first place. But God provided a way out of the dilemma; he graciously allowed his people to redeem any vows that they had unwisely or rashly spoken or that were made for them. . .

In order to curb the abuse of vows and to specify alternate payment for those made unwisely, God allowed the specific monetary equivalent to be substituted for people who were vowed; he allowed certain possessions to be redeemed at a higher penalty price, but he did not allow redemption on other possessions vowed or on things that already belonged to him.

Kenneth Mathews: **God's people must be true.** If God is true, then his people too must be true. The faithfulness of God made it incumbent upon the Israelites to respond in kind, faithfully carrying out their vows to God and to others. The psalmist declared, *"Make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them; let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared"* (**Psalm 76:11**). Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, *"Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil"* (**Matthew 5:37**). Being honest in our response to God and in our dealings with others is Jesus' expectation of a kingdom citizen.

L. Goldberg: [Re placement of **chap. 27** at this point] No true worship can end without presenting ourselves and our substance to the Lord, Who provides all our benefits.

(:1-2a) ADDRESS TO MOSES

*"Again, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
2 'Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them,'"*

I. (:2b-8) VOWS REGARDING THE DEDICATION OF PEOPLE TO THE SERVICE OF THE LORD

A. (:2b) Introduction to the Valuation of Persons

*"When a man makes a difficult vow,
he shall be valued according to your valuation of persons
belonging to the LORD."*

Mark Rooker: The prices (values) of the individuals should be understood as representing either the wage of a worker (which was a shekel a month in the biblical period) or the relative worth of the value of the person's services in the tabernacle. If the services included heavy manual labor in working with sacrificial animals or in transporting the tabernacle, it is easy to see why young men would be given higher value.

Perry Yoder: How do we convert vowed or dedicated persons or objects to money in order to pay our vows? The short answer is that the exchange rate for persons is fixed, whereas the monetary worth of animals and land is determined by the priests.

B. (:3-4) People from 20-60 Years Old

1. (:3) Male = 50 Shekels of Silver

“If your valuation is of the male from twenty years even to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary.”

2. (:4) Female = 30 Shekels of Silver

“Or if it is a female, then your valuation shall be thirty shekels.”

C. (:5) People from 5-20 Years Old

1. Male = 20 Shekels

“And if it be from five years even to twenty years old then your valuation for the male shall be twenty shekels,”

2. Female = 10 Shekels

“and for the female ten shekels.”

D. (:6) People from 1 Month – 5 Years Old

1. Male = 5 Shekels

“But if they are from a month even up to five years old, then your valuation shall be five shekels of silver for the male,”

2. Female = 3 Shekels

“and for the female your valuation shall be three shekels of silver.”

E. (:7) People from 60 Years Old and Up

1. Male = 15 Shekels

“And if they are from sixty years old and upward, if it is a male, then your valuation shall be fifteen shekels,”

2. Female = 10 Shekels

“and for the female ten shekels.”

F. (:8) Concession for a Poor Person

“But if he is poorer than your valuation, then he shall be placed before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to the means of the one who vowed, the priest shall value him.”

Perry Yoder: But what if someone has pledged a person whose worth is more than they can afford? They present their pledged person to the priest, and the priest decides the value of the pledge according to how much he estimates the vowed person can afford.

Wenham: These figures are very large. The average wage of a worker in biblical times was about one shekel per month. It is little wonder that few could afford the valuations set out here (v. 8).

II. (:9-13) VOWS REGARDING THE DEDICATION OF ANIMALS TO THE SERVICE OF THE LORD

A. (:9-10) Clean Animals

1. (:9) Acceptable Animal Offerings Must be Holy

*“Now if it is an animal of the kind which men can present as an offering to the LORD,
any such that one gives to the LORD shall be holy.”*

Kenneth Mathews: Since the Lord delivered and abundantly blessed them, individuals expressed vows of thanksgiving by dedicating their material assets. This meant giving animals, houses, and tracts of land.

2. (:10) No Substitutions or Exchanges

a. Prohibition

*“He shall not replace it or exchange it,
a good for a bad, or a bad for a good;”*

b. Penalty

*“or if he does exchange animal for animal,
then both it and its substitute shall become holy.”*

B. (:11-13) Unclean Animals

1. (:11) Unacceptable Animals for Offerings May Still be Given in a Vow

*“If, however, it is any unclean animal of the kind which men do not present as an offering to the LORD,
then he shall place the animal before the priest.”*

2. (:12) Priest Determines the Valuation

*“And the priest shall value it as either good or bad;
as you, the priest, value it, so it shall be.”*

3. (:13) Redemption Requires a Premium of 20%

*“But if he should ever wish to redeem it,
then he shall add one-fifth of it to your valuation.”*

Gordon Wenham: unclean animals could be vowed even though they could not be sacrificed. They could be used by the priests, or if the priests had no need of them, sold for their profit. If, however, the man preferred to keep his animal, he could redeem it for 20 percent more than the priest’s valuation (v. 13).

III. (:14-25) VOWS REGARDING THE DEDICATION OF HOUSES AND FIELDS TO THE SERVICE OF THE LORD

A. (:14-15) Houses

1. (:14) Priest Determines the Valuation

“Now if a man consecrates his house as holy to the LORD, then the priest shall value it as either good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall stand.”

2. (:15) Redemption Requires a Premium of 20%

“Yet if the one who consecrates it should wish to redeem his house, then he shall add one-fifth of your valuation price to it, so that it may be his.”

B. (:16-24) Fields

1. (:16-21) Fields Part of Family Property

a. (:16) Valuation Proportionate to Potential Agricultural Yield

“Again, if a man consecrates to the LORD part of the fields of his own property, then your valuation shall be proportionate to the seed needed for it: a homer of barley seed at fifty shekels of silver.”

Kenneth Mathews: The **dedication of land**, however, was a more complicated matter and required further explanation. Without going into too many details, we can summarize by observing that the rules of depositing land were influenced by three factors. First, the rules were adjusted based on the **custody of the property**—whether the land belonged to the donor presently or if it had been sold or purchased (v. 22)—in other words, the custody of the land. Second, the custom of **Jubilee** took precedence in evaluating the worth of the land. In the Year of Jubilee, land reverted to the original family ownership (**Leviticus 25:8–55**). This meant that the priest’s evaluation included calculating the number of harvests that remained until the Year of Jubilee. And third, the **monetary measure** of the assessed value was consistently the same, specifically here called “*the shekel of the sanctuary*” (v. 25).

b. (:17-18) Valuation Adjusted According to Timing of Year of Jubilee

“If he consecrates his field as of the year of jubilee, according to your valuation it shall stand.

18 If he consecrates his field after the jubilee, however, then the priest shall calculate the price for him proportionate to the years that are left until the year of jubilee; and it shall be deducted from your valuation.”

Roy Gane: Unlike a house, ancestral land cannot be permanently sold, but it reverts to its original owner in the Jubilee year. Therefore, the value of a piece of land is based on its potential agricultural yield—as indicated by the amount of seed required to sow it—until the next Jubilee.

c. (:19-21) Regulations Regarding Redemption

“And if the one who consecrates it should ever wish to redeem the field, then he shall add one-fifth of your valuation price to it, so that it may pass to him.

20 Yet if he will not redeem the field, but has sold the field to another man, it may no longer be redeemed; 21 and when it reverts in the jubilee, the field shall be holy to the LORD, like a field set apart; it shall be for the priest as his property.”

Roy Gane: As **M. Haran** has shown, the key to understanding this passage is the tense of the verb *“has sold”* (Qal of *mkr*) in **verse 20**. Whereas the other verbs in the same verse are imperfect, this one is perfect, indicating the pluperfect sense of prior action: The owner who inherited the land **consecrated it after having sold it**. Ordinarily the land would simply revert to the owner at the Jubilee. But by dedicating it to the sanctuary after already selling its use to someone else until the Jubilee, the original owner indicates his intention to dedicate something over and above that which he has already sold, namely, **permanent ownership**. Therefore at the next Jubilee, when the property would normally revert to him, it instead becomes the permanent property of the priesthood. It is like **herem property**—something irrevocably *“banished”* to the sphere of holiness.

John Schultz: **Vs. 20** is not too clear in most translations. TLB adds between parentheses: *“and has given to the Lord his rights to it at the Year of Jubilee.”* This would mean that a person could sell his property to someone else, but that the right of heritage would be surrendered to the Lord. In that case, the field would not revert to the original owner, but become the property of the temple. That sounds logical.

2. (:22-24) Fields Not Part of Family Property

“Or if he consecrates to the LORD a field which he has bought, which is not a part of the field of his own property, 23 then the priest shall calculate for him the amount of your valuation up to the year of jubilee; and he shall on that day give your valuation as holy to the LORD. 24 In the year of jubilee the field shall return to the one from whom he bought it, to whom the possession of the land belongs.”

C. (:25) Value of the Shekel

“Every valuation of yours, moreover, shall be after the shekel of the sanctuary. The shekel shall be twenty gerahs.”

IV. (:26-33) DEALING WITH EXCEPTIONS = UNREDEEMABLE THINGS

A. (:26-27) First-born Animals

1. (:26) Already Belongs to the Lord – Cannot be Offered as a Vow

“However, a first-born among animals, which as a first-born belongs to the LORD, no man may consecrate it; whether ox or sheep,

it is the LORD's."

Robert Vasholz: The firstborn among animals do not qualify as payment for a vow, since it is already consecrated to the Lord (**Exod. 13:2; 22:29–30; 34:19–20; Num. 3:13; 8:17–18; 18:15**).

2. (:27) Regulations for Redemption or Sale of Unclean Animals

a. Redemption Requires a Premium of 20%

"But if it is among the unclean animals, then he shall redeem it according to your valuation, and add to it one-fifth of it;"

b. Regulations Regarding Sale

"and if it is not redeemed, then it shall be sold according to your valuation."

B. (:28-29) Anything Devoted to the Lord

1. (:28a) Not Eligible for Redemption or Sale

"Nevertheless, anything which a man sets apart to the LORD out of all that he has, of man or animal or of the fields of his own property, shall not be sold or redeemed."

2. (:28b) Already Most Holy to the Lord

"Anything devoted to destruction is most holy to the LORD."

Perry Yoder: A person could declare a ban on animals, property, or people. As in the cases of the firstborn (see **vv. 26-27**), the banned items would belong to God and were most holy. They were irretrievably lost and could not be bought back or redeemed (**v. 28**). What happened to the banned objects and persons is not said. Presumably, they were given for the use of the priests and support of the sanctuary.

David Guzik: To **devote** something to the LORD was a further step than consecration by a vow; it often had the meaning of destroying the item (or executing the person) so that it could not be used by anyone else, and all of its value was given to God.

Therefore if something was already declared a **devoted offering**, it could not be given in a vow. It already belonged to God and was **most holy to the LORD**.

3. (:29) Death Penalty for Attempting to Redeem a Banned Person

"No one who may have been set apart among men shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death."

Gordon Wenham: Banning or devoting was a more solemn and irreversible vow than ordinary dedication. Anyone or anything that was devoted to the Lord could not be ransomed. It was usual to invoke the ban in wars against the native inhabitants of Canaan. In divine judgment all Israel's enemies and their property were devoted to the Lord (e.g., **Num. 21:2; Deut. 7:2; 1 Sam. 15**). It could also be used as a judicial sentence against idolaters (**Exod. 22:19 [Eng. 20]; Deut. 13:16 [15]**). It seems unlikely

that ordinary Israelites could pronounce such vows; only the recognized leaders had authority to declare a death sentence.

C. (:30-33) Tithes

1. (:30-31) Tithes of Land Holy to the Lord but Eligible for Redemption

a. (:30) Holy to the Lord

“Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD.”

Kenneth Mathews: The people were commanded to offer up a tithe of all their land's produce and of all their herds as the portion belonging to the service of the Lord's sanctuary (**Numbers 18:21–29; Deuteronomy 14:22–29**). Since tithes were already set aside as holy, they could not be offered again in the case of a vow. An exception permitted here is the tithe of agricultural products that could be translated into money. In this case the Israelite must add a fifth to the valuation as in the ordinary vows. Animals, however, destined for the sanctuary could not be redeemed.

b. (:31) Eligible for Redemption

“If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it.”

2. (:32-33) Tithes of Animals Not Eligible for Redemption

“And for every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD. 33 He is not to be concerned whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; or if he does exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. It shall not be redeemed.”

Mark Rooker: There were three tithes for the ancient Israelites:

- (1) the general tithe (**Lev 27**),
- (2) the tithe of the sacred meal with the Levite (**Deut 14:22–27**), and
- (3) the tithe paid every three years to the poor (**Deut 14:28–29**).

This text addresses the general tithe. Apparently the tithe was determined by counting every tenth animal that passed under the shepherd's rod (**27:32**). This counting method appears to be the basis of **Jer 33:13** and **Ezek 20:37**. The tithe was taken to maintain the Levites (**Num 18:21–24**), who in turn tithed their gifts to the priests (**Num 18:25–32**). The subject of tithes is addressed in **Neh 10:38–39; 13:5, 12; 2 Chr 31:5–6, 12**. In **Amos 4:4** the people placed an imbalanced value on the giving of the tithe, while in **Mal 3:8–10** they neglected it. As with vows, the tithed items could be repurchased based on the value of the object plus 20 percent (**27:31**).

(:34) EPILOGUE – CONCLUDING SUMMARY

“These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses for the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai.”

Perry Yoder: Scrolls could only be of a certain length to remain practical for regular use. Consequently, a decision had to be made as to where one scroll ended and another began. By the end of Leviticus, there was enough material for a scroll, and there was a clear disjunction between **Leviticus 27** and **Numbers 1**. **Leviticus 27** ends with God speaking to Moses at Mount Sinai, whereas **Numbers 1** begins with God speaking to Moses in the tent of meeting located in the Sinai desert and with a date for the speech. The speech itself begins with a command, in the plural, to take a census. While Moses is the recipient of this speech, who will carry out the command is only mentioned later. For all of these reasons, it made sense to begin a new scroll with **Numbers 1:1**.

David Guzik: These were not mere traditions and customs, though men began to attach traditions and customs to these commandments; these were – and are – the **commandments** (not suggestions) of the LORD.

David Thompson: Leviticus has been a book designed to make God’s redeemed people holy. Carefully notice how the book ends—totally focused on the written Word and commandments of God. No one will ever be holy from God’s classification until God’s Word is taken seriously. God expected these people to carefully apply every verse of Leviticus to their lives. The holier we are becoming the more we will see the importance of the written Word of God and if one book in the Bible communicates that theme, it is Leviticus!

Gordon Wenham: With these laws on vows and tithes Leviticus closes. On first reading it seems a strange point at which to end. But the theme of vowing is in fact closely related to the principal concerns of the whole book. Men who dedicate themselves to God become as it were God’s slaves, **holy to the Lord**. . .

Thus this chapter in effect recapitulates and reminds us of the great themes that have engaged our attention in the rest of the book. **Lev. 27** points out that holiness is more than a matter of divine call and correct ritual. Its attainment requires the total consecration of a man’s life to God’s service. It involves giving yourself, your family, and all your possessions to God.

“Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How careful are we to avoid rash promises to God and to faithfully perform all that we have promised?
- 2) Do we mirror God’s concern to properly provide for the material needs of those ministering full-time?

3) How do you relate the commandment to tithe to the principles informing giving in the church age?

4) How has our commitment to holiness been transformed by this study of the book of Leviticus?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mark Rooker: The last chapter of the Book of Leviticus deals with vows and dedications made to the Lord (see **Num 30:1–16**). These vows were above and beyond the normal sacrificial offerings as described in **Leviticus 1–7**. They were not commanded in the Law since the decision to make a vow was a personal one (**Ps 50:14**), expressing willing devotion. These gifts would be vowed to the Lord as a special offering of thanksgiving (cf. **1 Sam 1:28; Pss 50:14; 61:9; 65:1; 66:13; 116:14, 18; Jonah 2:9**). It was not a sin to refrain from making a vow (**Deut 23:22**), but once a vow was made, it had to be kept (**Deut 23:21–23; Num 30:2; Eccl 5:4–6**). Substitutions could be made, however, and it was this possibility of making a substitution that distinguished the vow from the sacrificial offering made on the altar. Money, often the value of the offering plus a fifth, could be provided in place of the vow if the original vow was to be revoked. Vows were made throughout Israel's history (**Gen 28:20–22; Num 21:2; Judg 11:30–40; 2 Sam 15:7–8**), often in times of distress. They were a means whereby the tabernacle was to be funded.

Perry Yoder: The case of a field is much more complicated, and understanding what takes place is not certain. If a person dedicates a field belonging to his inherited portion, the land will be returned in the Jubilee Year. The price for such a field is determined by the amount of seed needed to sow it. Each homer of barley seed needed to sow the field raises its price by fifty silver shekels. The larger the field, the more seed is needed and the higher the price. If two homers are needed, then the price of the land is one hundred shekels. However, since we do not know the exact amount of seed in a homer, we cannot determine how much land a homer might seed (see NIDB, s.v. “Weights and Measures”). All we do know is how the price was set for dedicated land.

Not only the **amount of land pledged** needs to be determined but also the **time** it will be used. If the person dedicates the field from the Year of Jubilee onward, it has its full value. If the field is dedicated after the Jubilee Year has begun, the priest calculates its price according to the years remaining to the next Jubilee release of the land (**vv. 17–18**). For example, if twenty-five years are left, then the person pays half of what the land would cost for the full Jubilee period of fifty years.

Two questions naturally arise. First, **who receives the money?** And second, **who retains use of the field?** In a regular case, the seller receives the money and the buyer receives ownership and works the land, accruing any money coming from its use. Yet for pledged land, who might buy it? Do the priests pay for the land? In this case they

are the new owners until the Jubilee Year. A field sold from an inheritance, according to Jubilee law, can be bought back at any time by the seller (**Lev 25:26-27**). Here the seller can buy back his field but must add 20 percent to its price (**27:19**).

So far so good. But with **verse 20** things become unclear.

Roy Gane: If **chapters 25–27** of Leviticus constitute a **concluding unit**, their order is logical. In **chapter 25** the sabbatical (**25:1–7**) and then Jubilee provisions (**25:8–55**) provide the basis for later references to sabbatical (**26:34–35**) and then Jubilee years (**27:17–24**). **Chapters 25–26** form a subunit framed by an *inclusio*: reference to Mount Sinai at the beginning of **chapter 25** (**v. 1**) and again at the end of **chapter 26** (**v. 46**). So **chapter 27** must come after this subunit rather than immediately following **chapter 25**. Placement of the dramatic climax in **chapter 26** at the center of **chapters 25–27** rather than at the very end of the book may disturb us, but it would be artistically satisfying from the viewpoint of ancient Hebrews, who often put their most weighty literary expressions at the **centers** of literary structures. Because **chapter 27** is the real end of the book, it requires a concluding summary (**27:34**), echoing the earlier summary in **26:46**.

Gordon Wenham: It is a puzzle why **ch. 27**, which deals with vows, should appear in its present position, since **ch. 26** with its blessings and curses would have made a fitting conclusion to the book. Generally commentators offer a historical explanation for the chapter's position: either that it comes here because this was the law that was revealed next at Sinai (the **conservative** view), or that it was a later addition to the holiness code in **Lev. 17–26** (the **liberal** view).

Neither view, though, really explains why the law-giver or editor put the laws on vows here rather than somewhere else. It could be an **association of ideas**. The blessings and curses (**ch. 26**) are in a sense God's vows to his people, his promises as to what he will do for them in the future. It could be that this prompts consideration of how men make vows to God (**ch. 27**). Alternatively, men frequently make vows in times of stress, and more rarely in times of great prosperity. **Ch. 26** first deals briefly with times of blessing and then at length with times of cursing. The latter is followed immediately by a section (**ch. 27**) which shows how vows should be honored.

R. K. Harrison: The intent of this legislation is to outline the conditions under which persons and property could be devoted to divine service. Because God's holiness was at the heart of every votive offering, stringent regulations were necessary to prevent acts of profanation. Individual motivation is therefore of prime concern in this chapter, so that irrational, frivolous, or overenthusiastic acts will be minimized, if not excluded altogether. The experience of those who have made vows seems to indicate in general that the passing of time alters the original motivation or the circumstances under which the vows were made. The levitical law takes cognisance of this matter, and is sufficiently humane and flexible to allow, under certain conditions, for the redemption of what was vowed.

The seriousness of making a vow to God ought to be understood as clearly by the modern Christian as it was by the ancient Hebrew. The New Testament does not make any kind of vow mandatory, but implies clearly that any undertakings or promises to God are solemn affairs which must be honoured, whether they are baptismal vows, marriage pledges, or other similar commitments. Breaking a vow is analogous to putting one's hand to the plough and looking back (**Luke 9:62**). To keep the vow of a life dedicated to the service of Christ is the most acceptable means of worshipping a holy and perfect God.

Wiersbe: The major lesson of this chapter is that God expects us to keep our commitments to Him and be honest in all our dealings with Him. We must not try to negotiate "a better deal" or to escape responsibilities. It's good to give money to the Lord, but giving money isn't always an acceptable way to express our devotion to God. That money might be a substitute for the service we ought to be rendering to the Lord.

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