

# Notes on Leviticus

2025 Edition  
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## Introduction

### TITLE

The Hebrews derived the title of this book from the first word in it, *wayyiqra'*, translated "Now the LORD called" (1:1).<sup>1</sup> "Now" is a conjunction that shows that what follows in Leviticus is a continuation of the narrative of Exodus. There is no break in the flow of thought. This is the third book of the Torah (Law, Pentateuch).

The English title comes from the Vulgate (Latin version), which called this book *Liber Leviticus*. The Vulgate title came from the Septuagint (Greek version), which had as the title *Leuitikon*, meaning "relating to the Levites." This title is appropriate since the book contains requirements of the Mosaic Covenant that relate to the Levites, though the Levites are mentioned by name in only two verses (25:32, 33). More specifically, the priests, who were a group within the tribe of Levi, are those in view throughout the book.

"It would be wrong, however, to describe Leviticus simply as a manual for priests. It is equally, if not more, concerned with the part the laity should play in worship. Many of the regulations explain what the layman should sacrifice. They tell him when to go to the sanctuary, what to bring, and what he may expect the priest to do when he arrives. Most of the laws apply to all Israel: only a few sections specifically concern the priests alone, e.g., chs. 21—22. The lay orientation of the legislation is particularly noticeable in ch. 23, where the whole

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<sup>1</sup>All quotations of the Bible in these notes are from *The New American Standard Bible*, (NASB) 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

emphasis lies on the days that must be observed as days of sabbath rest."<sup>1</sup>

### DATE AND WRITER

Almost all Jewish and Christian scholars regarded Moses as the writer of all five books of the Law until about 150 years ago.<sup>2</sup> God evidently revealed the material that Moses recorded in Leviticus after He renewed the covenant with Israel (1:1; cf. Exod. 34:1-28). Leviticus is unique in that it is largely a record of God's instructions to Moses. Twenty of the 27 chapters begin: "The LORD spoke to Moses," or a variation of that statement. This phrase also occurs in 14 other places in the book. Yet the book nowhere claims that Moses wrote it.

"There is no book in the whole compass of that inspired Volume which the Holy Spirit has given us, that contains more of the very words of God than Leviticus. It is God that is the direct speaker in almost every page; His gracious words are recorded in the form wherein they were uttered."<sup>3</sup>

"Critical biblical scholarship of the late nineteenth century challenged the traditional dating and authorship of Leviticus. According to that scholarship, which is still influential today, Leviticus was written much later, during the postexilic period. This would be a date after 530 B.C. During the past century, however, our understanding of the history, languages, cultures, and religions of the ancient Middle East including Israel has advanced greatly. Many of the premises on which the late dating of Leviticus was based have been shown to be unreliable."<sup>4</sup>

"... the fact that the Ras Shamra Tablets, dating back to about 1400 B.C., record several laws similar to those of Leviticus

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>See the excellent discussion and critique of the Documentary Hypothesis, which denies Mosaic authorship, in Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, pp. 23-38.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 173.

shows that the liberal has no right to deny the possibility of such a code of sacrificial laws as early as the time of Moses."<sup>1</sup>

"A good case can be made that Leviticus was Moses' first 'publication.' The other books of the Pentateuch seem to presuppose arrival at the plains of Moab, but Leviticus offers hints that its contents were all revealed at Sinai (Lev. 27:34) and before 'the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt' (Num. 1:1, NIV). The date of 1446 B.C. for the Exodus suggests that Leviticus was written about 1444 B.C."<sup>2</sup>

### SCOPE

As noted, Leviticus contains revelation that was particularly appropriate for the priests. While ritual and legal matters predominate in this book, Moses wove them into the historical narrative so, as one reads Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers in order, there is chronological movement forward. As we shall see, the legislation appears in the narrative at logical and significant places.

"The content of Leviticus supplements and completes that of Exodus in the religious and social spheres—and particularly the religious and ritual aspects of the covenant as made, broken and renewed actually at Sinai; this would be reflected by the terminal blessings and curses of Leviticus 26."<sup>3</sup>

"Leviticus enlarges upon matters involving the ordering of worship at the divine sanctuary that are mentioned only briefly in Exodus. Whereas the latter described the specifications and construction of the tabernacle, Leviticus narrates the way in which the priests are to care for the sanctuary and throne room of the Great King. The work is a fundamentally important legal treatise because it contains the regulations by which the

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "Leviticus," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 72. NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. For a fuller discussion of authorship and date, see R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus*, pp. 15-25, Wenham, pp. 8-13; or Allan P. Ross, *Holiness to the LORD*, pp. 33-42.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Kitchen, "The Old Testament in its Context: 2 From Egypt to the Jordan," *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* 60 (1971):3.

religious and civil life of the Hebrew nation was to be governed once the land of Canaan was occupied."<sup>1</sup>

Historically the book fits within the one month between God's occupation of the tabernacle (Exod. 40:17, 34-38) and the taking of the census at Mt. Sinai (Num. 1:1-3). However, because it contains so much legal material, we should read it along with the rest of the Mosaic Law that God began to reveal in Exodus.

"It carries on to its completion the giving of the law at Sinai, which commenced at Ex. 25, and by which the covenant constitution was firmly established."<sup>2</sup>

### PURPOSE

Students of this book have expressed their understanding of the purpose of Leviticus in various ways:

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"The central theme of the book is holiness. The book intends to show how Israel was to fulfill its covenant responsibility to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex 19:6; Lev 26:5 [*sic* 2])."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, pp. 13-14.

<sup>2</sup>C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 2:261.

<sup>3</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup>John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 323.

"The essence of holiness ... lies in relinquishing one's desires about the things of this world. In other words, *holiness is essentially a matter of the human heart*."<sup>1</sup>

"The purpose of the book is to provide guidelines to priests and laypeople concerning appropriate behavior in the presence of a holy God, thus the emphasis is on communicating information, not on subtle or artificial literary plays."<sup>2</sup>

"It was intended for the entire Israelite community, with at least two purposes: (1) that people would know and value their privileges and responsibilities before God; and (2) that priests could not gain oppressive power over the people with any monopoly on the knowledge of how to approach God."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

"How to maintain the vital covenantal relationship between the Israelites and their God is the concern of the book of Leviticus."<sup>5</sup>

## GENRE

Leviticus is essentially a narrative document (a story) that relates the events that transpired in the life of the Israelites while the nation camped at the base of Mt. Sinai. However most of the material in the book is legal in genre (type or kind of composition). The legal sections prepare the reader to understand the narrative sections, not only in Leviticus, but also in Numbers and the rest of the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup>Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup>J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 1:114.

<sup>5</sup>Samuel J. Schultz, *Leviticus: God Among His People*, p. 7.

"The story exists for the sake of the laws which it frames."<sup>1</sup>

There are two clear narrative sections (chs. 8—10; 24:10-23). However, the hinge chapter in the book, chapter 16, reads as narrative—even though it is actually legislative (legal) material. As a whole, this book, like the rest of the Torah, is theological instructional history.<sup>2</sup> The following diagram shows the alternating pattern of legal and narrative material in the book:

- A     Legal chs. 1—7
- B     Narrative chs. 8—10
- A     Legal chs. 11—15
- C     Legal written as narrative ch. 16
- A     Legal 17:1—24:9
- B     Narrative 24:10-23
- A     Legal chs. 25—27

### IMPORTANCE

"... 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."<sup>3</sup>

Leviticus tends to be the last book many Christians study. It has been called the "Bermuda Triangle of the Bible" because many Christians get lost in the book. It is often the place where Christians who have determined to read through their Bible in a year get bogged down and give up. Yet Leviticus is part of Scripture, all of which is "inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or

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<sup>1</sup>D. Damrosch, "Leviticus," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>Longman and Dillard, p. 83. See also Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Moses to Malachi*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup>Rooker, p. 22. The Talmud is a massive collection of Jewish comments on the Hebrew Bible.

woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The New Testament writers referred to Leviticus over 40 times.<sup>1</sup>

"It takes knowledge, discernment, patience, eagerness, and devotion to Christ and God's Word to appreciate and love Leviticus."<sup>2</sup>

"New Testament theology makes full use of the idea of holiness. All Christians are holy, 'saints' in most English translations. That is, they have been called by God to be his people just as ancient Israel had been (Col. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2:9-10; cf. Exod. 19:5-6). But this state of holiness must find expression in holy living (Col. 1:22; 1 Pet. 1:15). Sanctification is expressed through obedience to the standard of teaching (Rom. 6:17-19), just as in Leviticus through obedience to the law. Peter urges his readers to make the motto of Leviticus their own: 'Be holy, for I am holy' (1 Pet. 1:16). The imitation of God is a theme that unites the ethics of Old and New Testaments (cf. Matt. 5:48; 1 Cor. 11:1)."<sup>3</sup>

"Without a basic knowledge of Leviticus, [the Book of] Hebrews will remain a closed book to the Christian."<sup>4</sup>

"... the principles underlying the OT are valid and authoritative for the Christian, but the particular applications found in the OT may not be. The moral principles are the same today, but insofar as our situation often differs from the OT setting, the application of the principles in our society may well be different now."<sup>5</sup>

"... the Levitical rituals are still of immense relevance. It was in terms of these sacrifices that Jesus himself and the early church understood his atoning death. Leviticus provided the theological models for their understanding. If we wish to walk in our Lord's steps and think his thoughts after him, we must attempt to understand the sacrificial system of Leviticus. It

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 1:114.

<sup>2</sup>William R. Newell, *Studies in the Pentateuch*, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>Herbert M. Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*, p. 165.

<sup>5</sup>Wenham, p. 35.

was established by the same God who sent his Son to die for us; and in rediscovering the principles of OT worship written there, we may learn something of the way we should approach a holy God."<sup>1</sup>

"Modern Christians can learn much from Leviticus. The holiness of God, the necessity of holy living, the great cost of atonement and forgiveness, the privilege and responsibility of presenting only our best to God, the generosity of God that enables His people to be generous—these are only some of the lessons. Leviticus reveals the holiness of God and His love for His people in ways found nowhere else in the Bible."<sup>2</sup>

"Theology is what Leviticus is all about. It pervades every chapter and almost every verse. It is not expressed in pronouncements but embedded in rituals."<sup>3</sup>

## **STRUCTURE**

"At first sight the book of Leviticus might appear to be a haphazard, even repetitious arrangement of enactments involving the future life in Canaan of the Israelite people. Closer examination will reveal, however, that quite apart from the division of the work into two basic themes, many of the chapters have their own literary structure. Examples of this can be seen in material patterned after the fashion of a Mesopotamian tablet, with its title, textual content and colophon, as in Leviticus 1:3—7:38. [A colophon is an inscription, usually at the end of an ancient book, giving facts about its production.] Other chapters exhibit a distinct form of construction, which would doubtless prove extremely valuable for purposes of memorizing the contents. Examples of this are to be found in the triadic pattern of the leprosy regulations introduced by the phrase 'The Lord said to Moses'

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 174. See also Ross, pp. 42-58, for discussion of the main theological revelations in Leviticus, and pp. 58-65 for explanation of the interpretation and application of the Mosaic Law in the church.

<sup>3</sup>Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 42.



(Lv. 13:1; 14:1, 33), or the concentric arrangement of propositions (palistrophe) in Leviticus 24:16-22. A particularly attractive literary form is the introverted (chiastic) passage occurring in Leviticus 15:2-30, suggesting considerable artistic ability on the part of the writer."<sup>1</sup>

## OUTLINE

- I. The public worship of the Israelites chs. 1—16
  - A. The laws of sacrifice chs. 1—7
    - 1. The burnt offering ch. 1
    - 2. The grain offering ch. 2
    - 3. The peace offerings ch. 3
    - 4. The sin offerings 4:1—5:13
    - 5. The guilt offerings 5:14—6:7
    - 6. Instructions for the priests concerning the offerings 6:8—7:38
  - B. The beginning of the Aaronic priesthood chs. 8—10
    - 1. The consecration of the priests and the sanctuary ch. 8
    - 2. The entrance of Aaron and his sons into their office ch. 9
    - 3. The sanctification of the priesthood ch. 10
  - C. Laws relating to ritual cleanliness chs. 11—15
    - 1. Uncleanliness due to contact with certain animals ch. 11
    - 2. Uncleanliness due to childbirth ch. 12
    - 3. Uncleanliness due to skin and covering abnormalities chs. 13—14
    - 4. Uncleanliness due to bodily discharges associated with reproduction ch. 15

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, p. 15. A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form, in order to stress the unity of the material, and often to stress its central element or elements.

- D. The Day of Atonement ch. 16
  - 1. Introductory information 16:1-10
  - 2. Instructions concerning the ritual 16:11-28
  - 3. Instructions concerning the duty of the people 16:29-34
- II. The private worship of the Israelites chs. 17—27
  - A. Holiness of conduct on the Israelites' part chs. 17—20
    - 1. Holiness of food ch. 17
    - 2. Holiness of the marriage relationship ch. 18
    - 3. Holiness of behavior toward God and man ch. 19
    - 4. Punishments for serious crimes ch. 20
  - B. Holiness of the priests, gifts, and sacrifices chs. 21—22
    - 1. The priest's purity 21:1-15
    - 2. The priests' physical wholeness 21:16-24
    - 3. The priests' service ch. 22
  - C. Sanctification of appointed times ch. 23
    - 1. The Sabbath 23:1-3
    - 2. The Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread 23:4-14
    - 3. The Feast of Pentecost 23:15-22
    - 4. The Blowing of Trumpets 23:23-25
    - 5. The Day of Atonement 23:26-32
    - 6. The Feast of Tabernacles 23:33-44
  - D. The preparation of the holy lamps and showbread 24:1-9
  - E. The punishment of a blasphemer 24:10-23
  - F. Sanctification of the possession of land by the sabbatical and jubilee years ch. 25
    - 1. The sabbatical year 25:1-7
    - 2. The Year of Jubilee 25:8-55
  - G. Promises and warnings ch. 26
    - 1. Introduction to the final conditions of the covenant 26:1-2

2. The blessings for fidelity to the Law 26:3-13
  3. The warnings for contempt of the Law 26:14-39
  4. The promises of restoration 26:40-45
  5. The conclusion of the statutes and ordinances 26:46
- H. Directions concerning vows ch. 27
1. Laws involving people 27:1-8
  2. Laws involving animals 27:9-13
  3. Laws involving property 27:14-29
  4. Laws involving tithes 27:30-34

### MESSAGE

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.

One 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. According to Leviticus, sin has a threefold character:

First, sin is unlikeness to God. In the Creation we see man made in the image of God, but in the Fall we begin to see man's unlikeness to God. The whole system of worship in Leviticus teaches man's unlikeness to God. God is different from man ethically and morally. The word "holy" (Heb. *kodesh*) occurs over 150 times in Leviticus, more than in any other book of the Bible. The word "holiness" occurs over 80 times. The Hebrew word *kodesh* occurs even in the sections of the book dealing with personal hygiene. "Holy" is a general term for moral excellence.<sup>1</sup>

"Holy" means pure, unblemished, clean, blameless, and set apart. The opposite of "holy" is unclean. It is in contrast with God's holiness that we can understand man's sinfulness. Leviticus reveals the standards by which

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:413.

sinful redeemed Israelites could have fellowship with a holy God. These standards and regulations point out the vast difference between the character of man and the character of God. As Christians, God sees us as He sees His Son (i.e., "in Christ"). Yet in our natural state, we are very unlike God.

Second, sin is essentially the wrong that man does to God. In order to have a relationship with God the wrong that the redeemed sinner had done to God had to be atoned for. The Israelite committed this wrong daily. It was the natural fruit of his sinful human nature. Consequently he had to make payment for his sin to God periodically (daily, monthly, seasonally, and yearly). God specified how the sinners were to pay for the wrong done Him, namely, by the offerings and sacrifices specified in the Mosaic Law.

In Leviticus we also learn that the wrong done to another human being is also a wrong done to God. People belong to God, God gives them their lives in trust, and they bear God's image. When a person violates the basic rights of another human being, he has wronged not only that person but God as well (cf. Gen. 39:9; Ps. 51:4). We Christians also sin daily, but "Jesus paid it all." We could never compensate God adequately for the wrong we do to Him by sinning, but Jesus did.

Third, sin results in distance from God. Because man is unlike God in his character, he is separate from God in his experience. The Israelites could not approach God—except as God made a way and brought them near to Himself. The Levitical system of worship illustrated the distance between man and God due to sin and the need for some provision to bring man back to God. The veil, the curtains, and the priests separated the ordinary Israelite from God. He doubtless sensed his personal separation from God as he participated in the ritual worship. After the Fall, Adam and Eve felt this same separation, and they hid from God. Jesus tore the veil of separation in two and opened access to God for us.

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 one's sin-debt forgiven—albeit pending a final removal of sin through 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.

"The sin was *covered* [by God], but not 'taken away,' pending the foreseen death of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Through atonement men who were sinners could enter into fellowship with a holy God. Three things had to be present to make atonement for sin. These applied to both initial atonement and 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 symbolically transferred the sin 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 sin for the Israelites (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24).

Third, there had to be death. Finally the substitute, to which God had imputed the sinner's sin, had to die. Atonement could not take place without death. The shedding of blood both illustrated and symbolized death, and it 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 explanation comes first in Deuteronomy. God opened the way for sinners to have fellowship with Himself by providing for the removal 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

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:103.

they could be His special possession (Exod. 19:5-6). Leviticus teaches three things about redemption:

First, redemption rests on righteousness. Leviticus reveals that God did what was right—He 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, which redemption makes possible.

Redemption deals with the sinner's relationship to God, whereas atonement deals with his relationship to sin. People experience redemption, which yields freedom and ability to love, know, serve, and worship God. But God is the One who has atoned for their sins. Atonement involves the 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.

"... Leviticus is concerned with fellowship; and it is the supreme Old Testament illustration of that great New Testament truth expressed in I John 1. 7—*'If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.'*"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 1:119.

The sacrificial system in Israel bridged the gap between God and man adequately, but it was only a temporary solution to the problem of human estrangement from God. Jesus Christ provided a superior sacrifice for sin that satisfied God completely (Heb. 10:8-10; 1 John 2:2). Animals could never completely atone for human sin. God required the death of a human being who was a sinless sacrifice to do that. The writer of the Book of Hebrews compared these sacrifices at length in Hebrews 9 and 10.

By way of review, Genesis reveals that God made people in His own image to have fellowship with Himself. Man enjoyed that fellowship as long as he trusted and obeyed God. But when people ceased to trust and obey Him, sin broke that fellowship. God then proceeded to demonstrate to fallen humanity that He is trustworthy, faithful. Those individuals who trusted and obeyed Him were able to enjoy fellowship with God again.

Exodus emphasizes that God is also sovereign. He is the ultimate ruler of the universe who can and did redeem the nation of Israel. He did this so that He could demonstrate, to all people of all time, how glorious it can be to live under the government of God.

Leviticus deals with how redeemed sinners can have fellowship with a holy God. Leviticus clarifies both the sinfulness of man and the holiness of God. The proper response of the redeemed sinner to a holy God is worship. Leviticus explains how Israel was to worship God. The Israelites worshipped God under the Old Covenant. The forms of Christian worship are different, because we Christians live under the New Covenant.

"In the Book of Exodus we see the offer of pardon; Leviticus offers purity. In Exodus we have God's approach to man; in Leviticus it is man's approach to God. In Exodus, Christ is the Savior; in Leviticus, He is the Sanctifier. In Exodus man's guilt is prominent; in Leviticus man's defilement is prominent. In Exodus, God speaks out of the mount; in Leviticus, He speaks out of the tabernacle. In Exodus man is made nigh to God; in Leviticus man is kept nigh to God."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 1:323.

Genesis teaches the importance of faith. Exodus teaches that faith manifests itself in worship and obedience. Leviticus teaches us more about worship.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:1:47-62.



## Exposition

### I. THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF THE ISRAELITES CHS. 1—16

Leviticus deals with the progressive sanctification of the Israelites, not their justification. The laws in Leviticus were God's revealed will for how His already redeemed people should live, not for their salvation. Likewise they help New Testament believers understand what is necessary for sanctification, not justification.

Leviticus continues revelation concerning the second of three elements necessary for any nation to exist. These three elements are: a people (Gen. 12:10—Exod. 19), their law (Exod. 20—Num. 10:10), and their land (Num. 10:11—Josh. 24). Leviticus deals mainly with the Israelites' Law.

The first major section of this book deals with how the Israelites were to conduct their public life as an expression of worship to God. It explains that the ground or basis of fellowship is sacrifice.

"The fact that the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was modeled after those of the ancient Near East in both form and function allows one to understand the myriad of cultic detail in the Pentateuch with unusual clarity. The sacrifices and offerings were designed to demonstrate the subservience of Israel, to atone for her offenses against her Sovereign, Yahweh, and to reflect the harmoniousness and peaceableness of the relationship thus established or reestablished."<sup>1</sup>

"Put differently, the main concern of Leviticus 1—16 is the continuance of the presence of God in the midst of the sinful nation, while Leviticus 17—27 records the effect of the presence of God upon the congregation. Consequently the abiding presence of God in the midst of the nation spans the entire contents of the Book of Leviticus."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the emphasis in Leviticus is from doctrine (chs. 1—16) to practice (chs. 17—27), as in Romans 1 through 11 and 12 through 16, and in Ephesians 1 through 3 and 4 through 6. Similarly, the arrangement of the

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 57. Cf. Wenham, pp. 25-26.

<sup>2</sup>Rooker, p. 42.

content of Leviticus reflects that of the Ten Commandments, where the first four commandments deal with the believer's relationship to God, and the last six his or her relationship to other people.

Usually when God gave instructions to Moses He told him to deliver them to all the people (1:1-2; 4:1-2; 7:22-23, 28-29; 11:1-2; 12:1-2; 15:1-2; 17:1-2; 18:1-2; 19:1-2; 20:1-2; 22:17-18; 23:1-2, 9-10, 23-24, 33-34; 24:1-2; 25:1-2; 27:1-2). In the religions of Israel's neighbor nations, the priests had exclusive knowledge of cultic practices. This made it easy for them to abuse these practices and to take advantage of the people. But in Israel the people knew what the priests were supposed to be doing and how they were to do it. This provided a check on priestly power that was unique in Israel.<sup>1</sup>

"In the present context the term 'cultus' should be taken to mean the expression of religious experience in concrete external actions performed within the congregation or community, preferably by officially appointed exponents and in set forms."<sup>2</sup>

"... the cult can be defined as the visible form of the religious life."<sup>3</sup>

#### **A. THE LAWS OF SACRIFICE CHS. 1—7**

Few historical events are recorded in Leviticus compared to Genesis and Exodus, but the ones that have been are very significant. As mentioned previously, Leviticus is mainly a narrative document containing many ceremonial (religious) and civil (governmental) laws. The legal parts prepare us to understand the narrative parts. For example, the five offerings in chapters 1 through 7 help us understand why Israel behaved as she did in bringing offerings from then on.

"They [chapters 1—7] may be compared to the genealogies in Genesis and those at the beginning of 1 Chronicles, whose

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:98.

<sup>3</sup> A. Noordt, *Leviticus*, p. 16

purpose is to introduce the main characters of the subsequent narratives."<sup>1</sup>

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.

"The sacrifices were in no sense prayers, but rather the preparation for prayer."<sup>2</sup>

"The servant ... had to approach his Sovereign at His dwelling place by presenting an appropriate token of his obedient submission."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

"Where there is conscious opposition between man's will and God's, no offering can avail. For this reason, in contrast to the view of the ancient Near Eastern world, there was to the Israelite mind absolutely no atoning power present in the act of sacrifice itself. The offering was not a magical rite that controlled the will of the deity. The value of the offering depended on the degree to which the spiritual disposition of the person presenting it conformed with what was thereby symbolized (1 Sam. 15:22)."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, pp. 323-24.

<sup>2</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 57.

<sup>4</sup>Ross, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup>Noordtzij, p. 21.

"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*."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

"The rites here detailed were typical; and every type was designed and intended by God to bear resemblance to some spiritual truth."<sup>3</sup>

"Suppose that one to whom you were a stranger was wrapt in a thick veil, so that you could not discern his features; still, if the lineaments were pointed out to you through the folds, you could form some idea of the beauty and form of the veiled one. But suppose that one whom you know and love—whose features you have often studied face to face—were to be veiled up in this way, how easily you would discern the features and form of this beloved one! Just so *the Jews* looked upon a

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<sup>1</sup>Longman and Dillard, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>Bonar, p. 2. J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, emphasized types in his commentary on Leviticus, 1:144-245.

veiled Saviour, whom they had never seen unveiled. *We*, under the New Testament, look upon an unveiled Saviour; and, going back to the Old, we can see far better than the Jews could, the features and form of Jesus the Beloved, under that veil."<sup>1</sup>

"... as one has said, these Levitical sacrifices are perhaps 'the most complete description' of our Saviour's atoning work anywhere given to us."<sup>2</sup>

The regulations that follow do not contain all the detail that we would need to duplicate these sacrifices. Only such information that helps the reader understand and appreciate future references to the offerings appears. In this respect the present section of text is similar to the instructions concerning the tabernacle. Neither section gives us all the information we could want, but both tell us all that we need to know.

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, grain, 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 guilt) 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 these sacrifices, 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 what they have, 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 grain), one dealt with communion with God (the peace), and two dealt with cleansing from God (the sin and the guilt).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Murray M'Cheyne, quoted by Bonar, pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, 1:117. See also Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*, 1:1:209-85.

<sup>3</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Pentateuch*, p. 256.

Each of these five Israelite offerings involved three objects:

1. The offerer (the person bringing the offering)
2. The offering (the animal or other object being offered)
3. The mediator (the priest).

"In the Old Testament the Hebrew word [translated "priest"] helps us to understand the nature of the priestly office. It is that of mediating. The New Testament word reveals the character of those who are to fill the office. They are holy."<sup>1</sup>

There were important differences between the offerings:<sup>2</sup>

1. Each offering was different from the other offerings.
2. For each offering there were different options: of what the offerer could present, and how he could offer them.

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 (not soothing). The first three major offerings were of the first type, and the last two were of the second type.

"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)."<sup>3</sup>

The first three worship offerings were a "soothing aroma" to God, because they were made in communion with, and to celebrate communion with, the

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<sup>1</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>For charts of these differences in more detail, see *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 168-71.

<sup>3</sup>Baxter, 1:124.

LORD. Each of these offerings reveals what is essential for, or what results from, a relationship between a redeemed sinner and a holy God.

The last two expiation offerings (the sin and the guilt) were for sins committed and were therefore not a sweet savor to God. These offerings restored a broken relationship between the redeemed Israelite sinner and his holy God. They were for reestablishing communion with God.

"This is *not* the order in which the sacrifices were usually offered, but is rather a logical or didactic order, grouping the sacrifices by conceptual associations. ..."¹

In the revelation of the first three offerings God described the most valuable (costly) sacrifice first, and then the less valuable. The rules about these sacrifices may have been arranged in logical order in order to make them easier to memorize.²

"The readiest, but perhaps the most superficial, arrangement of the sacrifices is into bloody and unbloody."³

God specified that three kinds of four-footed beasts (bulls, sheep, and goats), and two kinds of birds (doves and pigeons) should be offered as animal sacrifices.

"Canaanite sacrificial ritual was much more diversified than Israelite. Many more animals were employed as offerings."⁴

Another important distinction is that some of the sacrifices that God prescribed were private (i.e., for an individual) and some were public (i.e., for the whole congregation). Furthermore, some sacrifices were voluntary and others were prescribed. That is, they were prescribed under certain circumstances, but it was still up to the Israelite to bring them of his own free will, if it was a private sacrifice. And some were most (or more) holy, while others were less holy. A chart of the basic differences between the first three sacrifices follows:

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¹F. Duane Lindsey, "Leviticus," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 172.

²A. F. Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in OT Ritual Texts," *Biblica* 51 (1970):487.

³Edersheim, p. 109.

⁴W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 92.

Burnt offerings (ch. 1)	Grain offerings (ch. 2)	Peace offerings (ch. 3)
bulls (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)

These laws concerning offerings appear here in the text because they explain the sacrifices and ceremonies that took place at the ordination of Aaron and his sons, which Moses recorded in chapters 8 and 9. Thus this legal material prepares the reader to understand the narrative material that follows.

### 1. The burnt offering ch. 1

The reasons for listing this offering first include: that it was the most common and therefore in one sense the most important one, and because it belonged completely to God. *The New English Bible* translated this offering as a "whole-offering."

#### **Introduction to the offerings 1:1-2**

1:1 This section of Leviticus, which deals with the five major offerings, and the whole book, opens with the statement "the LORD called to Moses." This is the third time that we read of the LORD calling to Moses in this way, the others being the burning bush incident (Exod. 3:4) and on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:3). Having taken possession of the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34-38), God now gave orders to His servant Moses from that audience chamber. Previously God had spoken to the Israelites publicly from Mt. Sinai, and to Moses privately on that mountain and in the temporary tent that was set up outside the Israelite camp (Exod. 33:7). But now that the tabernacle was complete, God spoke to Moses in an audible voice from



above the mercy seat in the holy of holies.<sup>1</sup> All of the revelations that follow these three announcements are very significant.

GOD'S SELF-REVELATIONS TO ISRAEL REFLECTING GRADATIONS OF HOLINESS <sup>2</sup>	
From Mt. Sinai	From the Tabernacle
God spoke from its summit.	God spoke from the holy of holies.
The priests and elders were able to ascend the cloud-covered slopes.	The priests could enter the holy place.
The people had access to the bottom of the mountain.	The people could bring their sacrifices into the courtyard.

"It is my view that 'He is' [the meaning of "the LORD," Yahweh] ... characterizes God as He who is unchanging and can therefore be depended on by His covenant people."<sup>3</sup>

1:2 All of the Israelites were to understand the laws affecting sacrifices ("Speak to the sons of Israel"). This was different from Israel's neighbor nations, in which much of the priestly activity was deliberately kept secret and thought of as magical.<sup>4</sup>

"Anyone of you" probably includes non-Israelites who lived among the Israelites, as well as the Israelites themselves, including women (cf. Num. 15:14, 16, 29).<sup>5</sup> They all had access to the tabernacle courtyard.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup>See Milgrom, pp. 142-43.

<sup>3</sup>Noordtzij, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>See Milgrom, pp. 143-44.

<sup>5</sup>Noordtzij, p. 29; *The Nelson ...*, p. 175.

<sup>6</sup>Milgrom, p. 147.

"Bulls" ("bullocks," AV), "sheep," "goats," "turtledoves," and "young doves" ("pigeons," NRSV, NET2, ESV, HCSB, AV, NKJV, NIV, NEB, CEV) were the acceptable "livestock" for this offering.<sup>1</sup> An offering from "the herd" was a bull (cf. v. 5), and an offering from "the flock" was a sheep or a goat (cf. v. 10).

### The sacrifice of a bull as a burnt offering 1:3-9

"The first case [the burnt offering of a bull] is dealt with in the most detail. The two subsequent ones [the burnt offerings of sheep and goats and of birds] are explained more briefly. But in all three the law makes clear exactly what the worshipper does and what the priest does. The worshipper brings the animal, kills it, skins it or guts it, and chops it up. The priest sprinkles the blood on the altar and places the dismembered carcass on the fire [cf. 2 Chron. 30:17]."<sup>2</sup>

1:3 The "burnt offering" (in Greek, *holokautoma*, from which we get the English word "holocaust") involved the complete burning up of an animal, and it expressed the offerer's complete consecration to Yahweh (cf. Matt. 22:37; Rom. 12:1-2). It also involved God's complete acceptance of the worshiper.

"The requirement that the animal be male was on the one hand related to the fact that these were of greater value than females, as was of course also the case in breeding. On the other hand, it was also based on the thought that, being physically stronger, they had more power."<sup>3</sup>

This offering was to be a male bull without any defect, which was also required in the sin and guilt offerings. This indicated

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<sup>1</sup>AV refers to *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*; NRSV refers to *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, 1989 ed.; NET2 refers to *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed.; ESV refers to *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, 2001 ed.; HCSB refers to *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible*, 2004 ed.; NKJV refers to *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982 ed.; NEB refers to *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*, 1970 ed.; and CEV refers to *The Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*, 1995 ed.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Noordtzi, p. 31.

that the offerer was presenting the best to God, who is worthy of nothing less (vv. 3, 10). The Israelite worshiper offered a whole and spotless (blemish- or defect-free) animal in place of himself.

"Among the Egyptians, a minute inspection was made by the priest; and the bullock having been declared perfect, a certificate to that effect being fastened to its horns with wax, was sealed with his ring, and no other might be substituted. A similar process of examining the condition of the beasts brought as offerings, seems to have been adopted by the priests in Israel (John 6:27)."<sup>1</sup>

"... whatever speaks of Christ Himself must speak of perfection."<sup>2</sup>

The bull was to be offered on the altar of burnt offerings (also called the brazen altar), which was located just west of the entrance into the tabernacle courtyard ("at the doorway of the tent of meeting"; cf. Exod. 40:29). These directions were to be observed so that the offerer would "be accepted before the LORD" (cf. vv. 4, 9). "Before the LORD" means within the sacred tabernacle precincts.

"The sense of God's presence, which permeates the entire book, is indicated forty-two times by the expression 'before the LORD.'"<sup>3</sup>

1:4 The hand-laying requirement probably symbolized the offerer's ownership of the animal, his identification with it, his transference of his sin to it, and possibly his declaration of his purpose or innocence.<sup>4</sup> Milgrom believed that it symbolized the offerer's ownership of the animal primarily.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Bonar, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Schultz, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>See M. C. Sansom, "Laying on of Hands in the Old Testament," *The Expository Times* 94:11 (August 1983):323-26.

<sup>5</sup>Milgrom, pp. 151-52.

Laying on of hands often accompanied prayer (cf. 16:21; Deut. 21:6-9), suggesting that prayer accompanied sacrifice, though prayer is not mentioned.

"The Hebrew verb *samak* means more than a mere 'laying [his hand] on,' [v. 4] for it expresses a certain exertion of pressure as in leaning on or bracing oneself on, and thus as it were, entrusting oneself to. This *samak* therefore involved close contact, and through it the person presenting the offering gave expression to the fact that he could not do without the animal."<sup>1</sup>

"The Hebrew verb *kipper*, which I have translated as 'make atonement' in accordance with the example of the Greek translation, actually means something different from what is expressed by the word atonement. If I understand it correctly, *kipper* contains the ideas of cleansing by means of sweeping away."<sup>2</sup>

God saw the offerer both as a worshiper and as a guilty sinner who needed to have his sins covered (atoned for). This offering provided that atonement as well as presenting the offerer's worship to God.

1:5 The offerer was to slaughter the bull (lit. "son of the herd"). Then the priests were to offer up its blood to the LORD by sprinkling some of it on the brazen altar.

"The animal should be killed by the offerer, not by the priest, for it was not his duty in case of voluntary sacrifices; in later times, however, the office was generally performed by Levites."<sup>3</sup>

"As we will observe, sacrifice often, but not always, focuses on the blood of the victim. Some critical scholars speak of this as a magical

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 85.

understanding of sacrifice, and some evangelical readers of the Old Testament seem to have this idea also when they insist on the translation 'blood' rather than its symbolical referent, death. It is the death of the sacrificial victim that renders the rite effective, and the manipulation of the blood highlights the death that stands in the place of the sinner who offers it."<sup>1</sup>

Whereas both the offerer—and in the case of birds, 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.

God has always claimed life as His own. In slaying this animal the offerer was symbolically saying that he was giving the life that God had given him back to God, who was its rightful owner. Giving one's life to God is not an act of great sacrifice. It is simply giving back to God what already belongs to Him. It is only one's "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1, AV, NKJV, NET2).

1:6 The priest was then to skin the bull and cut the carcass into pieces. The skin went to the priests (7:8). Perhaps God excluded the skin when the carcass was burnt to focus attention on the internal elements of the animal.

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. Covenants were sealed with meals in the ancient Near East, so this procedure symbolized the participants in God's covenant with Israel sharing fellowship with each other. The pagans of that day offered food to their gods to energize them, but this was not the intent of the Israelites when they presented food to Yahweh.

1:7 The priests were to build a fire in the brazen altar. This altar was hollow, and it had a grate half way down that separated the fire below from the offering above (cf. Exod. 38:4).

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<sup>1</sup>Longman and Dillard, p. 86.

1:8 Then the priests were to place the bull, including its head and "suet" (white, hard fat), on the altar.

The Israelites were not to eat the fat of any sacrifice. The fat (or suet) refers "to the layers of fat beneath the surface of the animal's skin and around its organs, which can be peeled off, in contrast to the fat that is inextricably entwined in the musculature ..." <sup>1</sup> This restriction may have symbolized that God was worthy of the best, since the ancients regarded the fat of an animal as its best part (e.g., "the fat of the land" means the best part of the land).

1:9 Before placing the "entrails" (inner organs) and the legs of the carcass on the fire, the priest was to wash them with water. This washing probably symbolized the need for internal purity. All of the carcass was to be burned up (except the skin, cf. v. 6). This would complete the offering, which would be acceptable to the LORD and would please Him ("as a soothing aroma").

It was a "soothing aroma" (or "sweet savor" AV, or "sweet aroma" NKJV, or "soothing odour" NEB, or "pleasing odor" NRSV, or "pleasing aroma" ESV, HCSB, NIV 1984 edition, TNIV, or "a smell that pleases me" CEV), vv. 9, 13, 17).<sup>2</sup> God was "happy" (satisfied, propitiated) to receive this sacrifice, because it was an offering of worship as well as a payment for sin. It gave Him pleasure.

"In the overfed West we can easily fail to realize what was involved in offering an unblemished animal in sacrifice. Meat was a rare luxury in OT times for all but the very rich (cf. Nathan's parable, 2 Sam. 12:1-6).<sup>3</sup> Yet even we might blanch if we saw a whole lamb or bull go up in smoke as a burnt offering. How much greater pangs must a poor Israelite have felt."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>TNIV refers to *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*, 2005 ed.

<sup>3</sup>*Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Food," by Ralph E. Powell, et al., 1:618-28.

<sup>4</sup>Wenham, p. 51.

**The sacrifice of a sheep or a goat as a burnt offering 1:10-13**

1:10        Burnt offerings from the flock as well as from the herd were to be males without blemish.

1:11        The offerer was to slaughter these animals on the north side of the brazen altar. This may have been the place where the bulls and the birds were killed too, though that is not stated in the requirements for the offerings of those animals.

"If a symbolic meaning of this locality [the north side of the altar] is intended, it possibly relates to the north side being on one's left when facing east. [Ancient Near Easterners were East oriented.] If so, slaughtering the smaller ruminants may symbolize their powerlessness because one's left, in the OT, sometimes represents defeat (cf. Jer. 1:14; 4:6; Ezek. 1:4' 9:2; ...)."<sup>1</sup>

Another explanation is that the north side was specified for practical reasons: the ash heap was on the east side (v. 16), the laver on the west (Exod. 40:30), and a ramp on the south.<sup>2</sup> Still another view follows:

"Facing the ark of the covenant, the offerer and the priests would recognize the north side of the altar to be to the right of the symbolic presence of God. Traditionally, the right side is the place of honor—a view that continued into NT times (e.g., Mt 25:34; 26:64)."<sup>3</sup>

1:12-13    The priest was then to offer a sheep and a goat the same way that he offered a bull (cf. vv. 5-9).

**The sacrifice of a dove or a pigeon as a burnt offering 1:14-17**

"The bird ... offerings were, by and large, concessions to the poor (cf., e.g., Lev 5:7-10; 12:8; 14:21-32) and, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup>Richard S. Hess, "Leviticus," in *Genesis-Leviticus*, vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, revised ed., p. 594.

not considered to be one of the primary categories of animal offerings."<sup>1</sup>

- 1:14 Two types of birds were acceptable as burnt offerings: "turtledoves" (doves) and "young doves" (pigeons). The dove was the sacred animal of the fertility goddess Ishtar-Astarte, so offering it would have been regarded as an abomination by Israel's pagan neighbors.<sup>2</sup>
- 1:15 The priest was to pinch off the bird's head and drain out its blood on the side of the altar. Perhaps the draining of the birds' blood on the side of the altar symbolized the covering of the whole altar with blood.<sup>3</sup>
- 1:16 He was also to remove its "craw" (throat) with its feathers and toss them on the pile of fatty ashes that was on the east side of the altar. The pile of fatty ashes was actually in a clean place outside the camp of the Israelites to the far east of the altar (cf. 4:12).
- 1:17 The priest was then to tear the bird by its wings, but not dismember it, and offer the remainder of the carcass on the altar.

Note several distinctives of this offering:

1. It was a "soothing aroma." It was pleasing to Yahweh.
2. It was for acceptance (i.e., so that God would accept the offerer, vv. 3-4). It atoned for the redeemed sinners sins.
3. The offerer gave up a life on the altar (vv. 9, 13, 17). It represented the offerer's personal re-consecration to Yahweh. One writer described this as "the extinction of the offerer's worldly values."<sup>4</sup>
4. The animal perished completely, consumed by the fire on the altar (vv. 9, 13, 17), except for the skin (hide) of the bull, which went to the priest (7:8), and the craw and feathers of the birds. It

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<sup>1</sup> *The NET2 Bible* note on 1:2.

<sup>2</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Hess, p. 595.

<sup>4</sup>Kiuchi, p. 58.



represented the offerer's complete devotion to Yahweh. God deserves the surrender of the entire person, not just a part.

There were also some variations within this offering:<sup>1</sup>

1. The animals acceptable for this offering varied. Some commentators suggested that each type of animal bore a distinct characteristic shared by man that made it an appropriate substitute (e.g., strong, foolish, stubborn, flighty, etc.).

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 would be expected offer. People with greater responsibility would presumably also have had more possessions, and therefore more ability to bring the more expensive sacrifices.

"It is observable that those creatures were chosen for sacrifice which were most mild and gentle, harmless and inoffensive, to typify the innocence and meekness that were in Christ, and to teach the innocence and meekness that should be in Christians."<sup>2</sup>

2. The butchering of the animals also varied. The offerers cut the bulls, lambs, and goats into four parts, but they did not do so with the birds. This difference at least reflects the practical need to divide the larger animal carcasses into more manageable pieces. Moreover, they washed the entrails and legs of some animals in water (vv. 9, 13). They did not wash the birds, however. Perhaps they were regarded as already clean.

The offerer laid his hand on the animals, but not on the birds (cf. Isa. 59:16; Ezek. 24:2; 30:6; Amos 5:19). The offerer personally slew the animals, but the priest slew the birds (vv. 5, 15). As noted above, in later periods of history, the priests slew all the animals.

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

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<sup>1</sup>Hess provided charts of the offerings that helpfully visualize the variations on pp. 586-87, 599, 605-6, 614-15, and 622.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 116.

the offered animal as a substitute for the offerer, and as a symbol of his total personal self-sacrifice and dedication to God. Burnt offerings 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).

This offering also made atonement for the offerer (cf. John 1:29) by covering his or her sins. As such it forms the foundation of the entire sacrificial system of Israel. Some rabbis believed the burnt offering atoned for all sins not covered under the sin offering.<sup>1</sup> Peace with God (having God's enmity removed and being reconciled to God) was the goal of all the sacrifices.

With this offering the worshiper was seeking to please the LORD and to find fellowship in His presence as a redeemed person. In the case of the regular morning and evening burnt offerings, this offering represented the same sentiment on behalf of the redeemed nation. Leviticus thus begins with the good news of the way for redeemed Israelites, who were still sinners, to experience acceptance and fellowship with their holy God.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rooker, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, p. 63.

"It [the burnt offering] could serve as a votive [connected with a vow] or freewill offering (e.g., Lev 22:18-20), an accompaniment of prayer and supplication (e.g., 1 Sam 7:9-10), part of the regular daily, weekly, monthly, and festival cultic pattern (e.g., Num 28-29), or to make atonement either alone (e.g., Lev 1:4; 16:24) or in combination with the grain offering (e.g., Lev. 14:20) or sin offering (e.g., Lev 5:7; 9:7)."<sup>1</sup>

"The clearly stated purpose of the whole burnt offering was for atonement (lekapper in 1:4). But the way that this offering made atonement or expiation was in a slightly different way than the purification [sin] and reparation [guilt] offerings. It was a more general offering than either of them; it did not emphasize the removal of sin or guilt or change the worshiper's nature; but it made fellowship between sinful people and God possible ..."<sup>2</sup>

As the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ offered His life as both an act of worship to God and a payment for sin (Luke 23:46; Eph. 5:2). His life, too, was spotless (John 8:46; 1 Pet. 2:22; Phil. 2:6, 8).

"The *Burnt-offering* typifies Christ's 'offering Himself without spot to God.' It foreshadows Christ on the Cross, not so much bearing sin as *accomplishing the will of God*. We are shown the perfection of Christ's *offering* of Himself, as God sees it."<sup>3</sup>

We who are Christians, too, need to remember our need for daily forgiveness, to confess our sins, and to commit to walk in God's ways in order to maintain our fellowship with Him (cf. 1 John 1:7-9).

"The LORD accepts with pleasure whoever comes into his presence by substitutionary atonement through the shedding of blood."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The NET2 Bible* note on 1:3.

<sup>2</sup> Ross, pp. 92-93.

<sup>3</sup> Baxter, 1:124.

<sup>4</sup> Ross, p. 95.

## 2. The grain offering ch. 2

The grain ("meat" AV) offering was also an offering of worship that brought God pleasure. It evidently symbolized the sacrifice and commitment of one's person and works, himself and his possessions, to God, as well as the worshiper's willingness to keep the Law (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16). Anyone could present this offering: a man or a woman.<sup>1</sup>

"The burnt and grain offerings together represent two basic elements of the offerer's concerns before God: to restore and maintain one's relationship with God and to express thanks and praise for God-given blessings ..."<sup>2</sup>

"... the burnt offering ... speaks of complete self-surrender, and the grain offering ... an acknowledgement of absolute dependence ..."<sup>3</sup>

The grain offering was a type of tribute from a faithful worshiper to his divine overlord. The Hebrew word *minha'*, here translated "grain offering," also means "tribute" (cf. Gen. 32:13; 1 Kings 10:25; 2 Kings 8:8).

"... the purpose of the *minha'* was to confirm and renew the covenantal relationship. I would like to propose 'the loyalty offering' as a translation for *minha'*, since its purpose was to express one's allegiance to the Lord."<sup>4</sup>

### **General directions for offering the grain offering 2:1-4**

2:1 The ingredients of the grain offering were specified by Yahweh, just as the animals that He would accept in the burnt offering were specified (ch. 1). God receives worship only as it is in keeping with how He prescribes it.

"Fine flour" was ground flour as opposed to raw kernels. Flour made into bread then, as now, represented the staff of life. The fine flour in view was wheat, not barley, which was half as expensive as wheat. The fact that the offerer had ground the

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>Hess, p. 597.

<sup>3</sup>Noordtzi, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>Kiuchi, p. 68.

flour fine probably emphasized the human toil represented by the offering.

The "oil" to be added to the flour would have been olive oil. Oil was a symbol of God's enabling Spirit, since it bound and transformed the flour into "unleavened cakes."<sup>1</sup> This consistency made it possible to offer the sacrifice as a cooked dish rather than as a collection of ingredients.

"Oil was to them then in their food what butter is now to us."<sup>2</sup>

Frankincense was a very fragrant spice, but its aroma did not become evident until someone subjected it to fire.<sup>3</sup> The oil and incense made the offering richer and more desirable, and therefore more pleasing to God.

2:2 The offerer was to bring this offering to the priest who would take a handful of it and place it on the brazen altar, where it would burn up. The handful was a memorial or representative portion of the whole offering. This offering would please the LORD (be "a soothing aroma" to Him).

"The idea of a memorial portion given to God goes beyond a simple reminding. The verb often carries the nuance of beginning to act on the basis of what is remembered. The 'memorial portion' thus reminded or prompted worshipers to live according to the covenant obligations, that is, to live as if all they had truly came from the LORD; and it prompted or motivated the LORD to honor and bless those who offered this dedication."<sup>4</sup>

2:3 The remaining part of the offering would go to the priest, who would then presumably eat it with his family. All of this offering

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<sup>1</sup>See John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup>*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Frankincense," by R. K. Harrison, pp. 440-41.

<sup>4</sup>Ross, p. 107.

was to be considered as "most holy" to Yahweh. That is, it was something given exclusively to Him.

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.

2:4 The Israelites were allowed to bring a grain offering in several forms. The first of these that were prescribed were "baked in an oven." They were to be "unleavened cakes" or unleavened "wafers." In the former case the oil and frankincense were to be ingredients in the cake, and in the latter case they were to be poured or spread on the wafer. This was evidently the most common way in which the Israelites prepared their grain offerings.

This sacrifice was "to the LORD" (cf. v. 1). Though it fed the priests, the offerer did not offer it for the priests but for Yahweh (cf. Eph. 6:7; Col. 3:23-24).

#### **Other acceptable ways of preparing the grain offering 2:5-10**

2:5-6 Another way that the Israelites could prepare this offering was to grill it on a griddle. In this case the oil and frankincense were to be poured on it after it had been broken up into pieces.

2:7 An offering cooked in a "pan" (lit. lidded cooking pan) was also acceptable. A griddle (v. 5) had no lid, whereas a pan (v. 7) did.<sup>1</sup>

The offerer cooked the dough at home, first, and then offered it as unleavened bread (like a pita or tortilla) to the LORD—by presenting it in this form to the priest—rather than as batter (vv. 4, 5, 7).

2:8-10 These verse restate (for emphasis) verses 2 and 3.

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, p. 185.

**Regulations involving special ingredients 2:11-13**

2:11 Leaven (yeast) and honey were forbidden ingredients. These ingredients probably were forbidden because they had symbolic significance for the Israelites: leaven being similar to sin (cf. Exod. 12:15), and honey being similar to natural sweetness.<sup>1</sup> Honey is usually connected with milk in the Old Testament, and milk and honey were the epitome of all that was naturally good in the Promised Land.

One writer suggested that "as blood is the life force of animals, leaven represented the life force of the vegetable kingdom."<sup>2</sup> Others have felt that honey (fruit honey rather than bee honey<sup>3</sup>) and leaven were unacceptable because they cause fermentation, and fermentation suggested corruption.<sup>4</sup>

"Some think the chief reason why these two things, leaven and honey, were forbidden, was because the Gentiles used them very much in their sacrifices, and God's people must not learn or use the way of the heathen. Some make this application of this double prohibition: leaven signifies grief and sadness of spirit (Ps. lxxiii. 21), *My heart was leavened*; honey signifies sensual pleasure and mirth."<sup>5</sup>

This view of the reason for the prohibition is probably incorrect, because the Gentiles also used flour, incense, and oil in their sacrifices.

2:12 If this offering was public, it usually took the form of first fruits, but if it was private, an Israelite could bring it to the tabernacle whenever he or she desired to do so.

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Jukes, *The Law of the Offerings*, pp. 88, 90; Bonar, p. 44; Darby, 1:183.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup>Milgrom, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 2:295; Edersheim, p. 110; J. H. Hertz, *Leviticus*, p. 16; Noordtzi, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup>Henry, p. 117.

2:13 On the other hand, salt was to be added to every grain offering. It signified covenant faithfulness in that nothing in antiquity could destroy salt, including fire and time (cf. Num. 18:19).<sup>1</sup> Salt was also a symbol of friendship.<sup>2</sup> Adding salt to an offering reminded the worshiper that he was in an eternal covenant relationship with his God.

"However, the very command to add salt betrays that one's allegiance to God is easily abandoned."<sup>3</sup>

### Crushed grain as an acceptable offering 2:14-16

The Israelites were also to permitted to offer "crushed grain of new growth" as a grain offering. This was probably not ground flour but crushed kernels of grain that had just come into bud.

The grain in view would have been early barley, in contrast to the wheat mentioned in the preceding verses of this chapter. The English translators have rendered the Hebrew word for this early barley as "grits" (NASB 1971 ed.), "green ears of corn" (AV), "green heads of grain" (NKJV), "crushed kernels" (HCSB), "crushed new grain" (ESV, cf. NEB), "crushed bits of fresh grain" (NET2), and "fresh ears" (NRSV). In short, they were crushed heads of green barley.<sup>4</sup> This may have been an offering that the poorer Israelites could make, like the birds were a burnt offering that the poor could make.

"Another distinction between the raw and cooked cereal offerings is that the former is distributed to the entire priestly corps, while the latter is assigned to the officiating priest (7:9-10)."<sup>5</sup>

The grain offering appears to have been acceptable only when offered along with the burnt offering, and it always followed the official daily burnt offerings (cf. Exod. 29:39-40; Num. 28:3-6). This requirement taught that one's works were acceptable to God only when they accompanied the offerer's consecration of himself or herself to God (cf. Gen. 4:3). A drink offering accompanied every grain offering. The wine used was poured out

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Salt," by R. K. Harrison, p. 1125.

<sup>2</sup> Henry, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Kiuchi, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Milgrom, pp. 193-94.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.



at the base of the altar (Num. 15:1-10).<sup>1</sup> The grain offering 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).

"God having granted forgiveness of sins through the burnt offering, the worshiper responded by giving to God some of the produce of his hands in cereal offering."<sup>2</sup>

"The 'grain offering' ... generally accompanied a burnt or peace offering to supplement the meat with bread (the libation provided the drink; cf. Num 15:1-10), thus completing the food 'gift' to the LORD. It made atonement ... along with the burnt offering (e.g., Lev 14:20) or alone as a sin offering for the poor (Lev 5:11-13)."<sup>3</sup>

"Rabbinic tradition clearly regards the cereal offering as the poor man's burnt offering."<sup>4</sup>

This offering was distinctive from the others in the following respects:

1. It was a soothing aroma (vv. 2, 9). To God the grain offering was pleasing because it was an act of worship based on atonement for sin. In this it was similar to the burnt and peace offerings but different from the sin and guilt offerings.
2. The offering itself was the product of human labor. A possible contrast between the burnt and grain offerings is that one represented what man owes God, and the other what he owes his fellow man.<sup>5</sup> However it seems more likely that the contrast intended was primarily between the offering of the person of the offerer and the offering of his works. The animals offered in the burnt offering were God's creations, but the grain offered in the grain offering was

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>*The NET2 Bible* note on 2:1.

<sup>4</sup>Milgrom, p. 195.

<sup>5</sup>Jukes, pp. 77-78.

the product of man's labor, since the grain was reaped and usually offered as a prepared dish.

God charged mankind with the responsibility of cultivating the earth (Gen. 1:29; cf. 9:4-6). Man cultivates the ground to provide for his own needs and the needs of other people. The grain or flour, from which the "staff of life" 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 made possible by His grace.

3. The priest did not offer the entire grain offering on the altar. He placed only a handful of the uncooked grain or cooked bread ("its memorial portion," v. 9) on the altar and burned it. The priest ate the rest (v. 10).

God permitted various kinds of grain offerings: baked (v. 4), grilled (v. 5), fried, (v. 7), and roasted (v. 14).<sup>1</sup> These constituted the variations in preparing this offering.

Christ fulfilled the requirements of this sacrifice as He fulfilled the requirements of all the other offerings (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.<sup>2</sup>

"The *Meal*-offering (not 'meat,' as in A.V.) exhibits typically the perfect manhood of Christ. The emphasis here is on the *life* which was offered. It sets forth the perfection of character which gave the offering its unspeakable value."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See George Bush, *Notes ... on ... Leviticus*, pp. 24-27, for a description of how the Israelites probably cooked this offering.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 1:330-32.

<sup>3</sup>Baxter, 1:124.

"The LORD expects his people to offer themselves and the best they have as a token of their dedication and gratitude [cf. Col. 3:23; Phil. 4:18]."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The peace offering ch. 3

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

"The burnt offering symbolized the giving of everything back to God, who had given it in the first place, and the reconciliation between God and the sinner. The fellowship offering symbolized participation with God in the sacrifice as God returned part of the offering to the offerer."<sup>2</sup>

#### **The peace offering from the herd 3:1-5**

3:1 An animal "from the herd"—called an "ox" in 4:10—was acceptable as a peace offering, as it was for a burnt offering (cf. 1:3). However, in this case a female cow was acceptable as well as a male bull. Female animals may have been permitted because this offering was to provide meat for the offerers, and limiting it to males would greatly reduce the number of animals available.<sup>3</sup> But whether male or female, the animal had to be "without defect" (cf. 1:3). And it too had to be offered in the tabernacle courtyard ("before the LORD").

"The word *peace* has a different shade of meaning in the Hebrew from what it has in our language. With us it suggests most naturally and legitimately the idea of *reconciliation, the bringing*

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>Hess, p. 609.

<sup>3</sup>Milgrom, p. 204.

*into concord contending parties*,—an idea which is more properly to be associated with the effects of the stated burnt-offering, or the occasional sin and trespass-offering. In the Hebrew the import of *prosperity, of welfare*, is prominent [*sic*] 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."<sup>1</sup>

3:2 This sacrifice was to be conducted in the same way as the burnt offering (cf. 1:3-5).

3:3-4 The parts of this sacrifice to be offered that God specified were a bit different however. They included the fat that covered the entrails (inner organs), the two kidneys, and the lobe of (appendage on) the liver.

Since the Old Testament used the kidneys and entrails to represent the seat of human emotions (cf. Job 19:27; Ps. 16:7; Jer. 4:14; 12:2), these parts apparently represented the worshiper's best and deepest emotions. This view finds support in the fact that Israelites offered the peace offering in intrinsically emotional situations, when they thanked God or requested something from Him.<sup>2</sup> The pagan peoples that surrounded Israel used the livers of animals to predict the future. Perhaps God prescribed burning the lobe of the liver to discourage the Israelites from doing this (vv. 10, 15).

3:5 This sacrifice, like the burnt and grain offerings, was to be burned on the brazen altar, and it would be "a soothing aroma to the LORD."

### The peace offering from the flock 3:6-11

3:6 Here again, as with a peace offering from the herd, a female lamb or goat without defect was acceptable (cf. v. 1).

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>See Wenham, pp. 80-81.

3:7-11 If the sacrifice was a lamb, the same parts of the animal were to be burned on the altar as those of an animal from the herd, plus the fatty tail of the lamb (v. 9).

"The tail of the Palestinian broad-tailed sheep is almost entirely fat and can weigh more than 16 pounds. This explains its special mention in the regulations for offering the fat of the sheep."<sup>1</sup>

3:12-16 If the sacrifice was a goat, the same parts of the animal were to be burned on the altar as those of an animal from the herd and a lamb. Goats did not have fatty tails as sheep did.

"... it may be that two types of human beings (sheep and goats) are seen before God the judge (bull): helpless and dependent sheep, and relatively strong and stubborn goats."<sup>2</sup>

Birds were not acceptable as peace offerings, perhaps because their smaller size was not conducive to dividing them among God, the priest, and the offerer. Or they may have been excluded because they did not have enough fat to burn on the altar.<sup>3</sup>

### Specific prohibitions 3:17

As the Israelites continued to observe these regulations throughout their generations, wherever they lived, they were never to eat any animal fat or any blood.

The reason for the prohibition of eating the fat has been debated. One explanation is that it was the best part of the animal and so represented giving the best to God.

"... the fat was the tastiest item to the Near Eastern palate, but also ... it was of decisive importance for the life of the animal. It protected the vital parts of the body, and insofar as

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 178. See Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.113, or Bush, pp. 35-36, for more on these sheep's large tails; and Milgrom, p. 212, for a picture of one.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup>Bush, pp. 32, 35.

it functioned as an energy reserve, it also maintained the animal's life."<sup>1</sup>

Another view follows:

"... fat symbolizes something the Lord detests. Therefore the offerer must completely destroy it by fire and, of course, its destruction is inevitably pleasing to the Lord. The burning of fat symbolizes the destruction of detestable things within a human's inner being."<sup>2</sup>

The prohibition against eating blood was first given to Noah (cf. Gen. 9:4). The reason for this law is given in 17:10-12: "it is the blood ... that makes atonement" (cf. Exod. 12:13). That is, the blood represented the life of the sacrificial animal poured out (given up) in place of the offerer ("the life of the flesh is in the blood").

There were three major distinctives of this offering:

1. It was a soothing aroma (vv. 5, 16).
2. All the participants fed together on this sacrifice: the offerer, the priest, and God (symbolically).

Eating together had great significance in the ancient Near East. People who ate a ritual meal together often committed themselves to one another in a strong bond of loyalty (cf. 1 Sam. 9:22-24; John 13—16). Eating together also symbolized fellowship, as it still does today. In this sacrifice the offerer got to eat part of the same offering that he had made to God. In the burnt offering God got the whole sacrifice, except for the skin if the offering was a bull (7:8). In the grain offering God and the priest shared the sacrifice. But in the peace offering all three participants shared the roasted animal. Even the priest's children ate part of this offering, but they had to be ceremonially clean to do so (7:20; cf. 1 Cor. 11:28). It was common among Israel's neighbor nations for the god, the priests, and the worshippers to share certain offerings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup>Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, p. 51.

"The slain-offering [peace offering], which culminated in the sacrificial meal, served as a seal of the covenant fellowship, and represented the living fellowship of man with God."<sup>1</sup>

3. A feeling of well-being prompted the giving of this offering. This was an optional sacrifice; an Israelite could bring it if and when he or she desired. Thus it was not one of the offerings that the priests presented daily in the tabernacle, though God did order its presentation at the Feast of Pentecost (also called Harvest and Weeks; 23:19). Because it was voluntary, its offering became a festive occasion.

These varieties are significant:

1. There were several types of animals that God permitted.
2. The offering of birds was not permitted.

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. 7:12-18).

Whenever the Israelites offered thousands of sacrifices at one time they were usually peace offerings (cf. 1 Kings 8:63). They ate only a part of what they offered on these occasions.<sup>2</sup>

Later references to the peace offering in the Old Testament enable us to see that there were three different kinds of peace offerings: One was a *thanksgiving* offering, in which an Israelite expressed thanks for a particular blessing (7:12-15). Another was a *votive* offering, that the Israelites could offer after an acute experience of distress or joy that had elicited a vow from them (cf. Jon. 2:9). The third was a *freewill* offering, that the Israelite could offer as an expression of gratitude to God without reference to any particular blessing (7:16-18).<sup>3</sup>

"A libation [drink] offering (*neseq*) accompanied burnt and fellowship offerings. The priest's portion of the fellowship

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:268.

<sup>2</sup>R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus," in *Genesis-Numbers*, vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 538.

<sup>3</sup>Wolf, pp. 168-69.

offering was symbolically 'waved' before the Lord as his portion and called the 'wave offering' (*tenupa*). Certain portions of it (namely, one of the cakes and the right thigh) were given as a 'contribution' from the offerer to the priests, the so-called 'heave offering' (*teruma*)."<sup>1</sup>

Christ is the peace of believers because of His sacrifice on the cross (Eph. 2:14). All of the animals used in this offering have been thought by some to represent different aspects of the person of Christ: Herd animals represent Christ as our burden-bearer. The lamb stands for Him as our perfect sacrifice, and the goat suggests Him as the One who takes away sin. The inward parts of these animals that were offered suggest that God sees the inner parts of Christ as acceptable to Him.<sup>2</sup>

Christ's death made peace and fellowship possible with God (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20-22). Christ's death also made peace and fellowship possible with our fellowmen (Eph. 2:14).

"The *Peace*-offering speaks of restored communion, resulting from the perfect satisfaction rendered in Christ. God is propitiated. Man is reconciled. There is peace."<sup>3</sup>

"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) [cf. 1 Thess. 5:16-18]."<sup>4</sup>

There are several similarities between this offering and the Lord's Supper: Both celebrations commemorate a covenant, both involve rededication to God, and both feature blood as a symbol of life poured out.

#### **4. The sin offering 4:1—5:13**

The importance of this offering can be seen in the amount of space in the text that is devoted to explaining it: 35 verses. The burnt offering just

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48:2 (Fall 1986):366.

<sup>2</sup>See McGee, 1:334-37.

<sup>3</sup>Baxter, 1:124.

<sup>4</sup>Ross, p. 119.



occupies 17 verses, the grain offering 16 verses, the peace offering 17 verses, and the guilt offering 19 verses.

Moses previously mentioned burnt offerings in Genesis 12:7; 13:4, 18; 22; 26:25; 33:20; and 35:1 through 7, and peace offerings in Genesis 31:54 and 46:1. But the sin and guilt offerings were apparently new when God gave these instructions at Mt. Sinai.

They "... were altogether unknown before the economy of the Sinaitic law."<sup>1</sup>

Ancient Near Easterners offered certain offerings before God incorporated these into the Mosaic Law.

The sin offering was a very important offering, since it made atonement for sin. It was to be offered before the burnt offering (cf. 5:8-10). It also played a key role on the Day of Atonement (ch. 16).

There were two types of occasions that called for the sin offering: unwitting or inadvertent sins, caused by negligence or ignorance (ch. 4), and sins of omission (5:1-13). According to Kiuchi, this whole section deals with self-hiding (cf. Gen. 3:8).<sup>2</sup>

### **Sin offerings for unintentional sin ch. 4**

#### **Introduction to the remaining offerings 4:1-2**

The opening words of this chapter introduce a new section (4:1—6:7; cf. 1:1-2). The sin and guilt offerings were in a class by themselves, while at the same time they shared some of the similarities of the first three.

"... the first three offerings are stylistically associated, and the remaining ones are derivatives of these."<sup>3</sup>

The structure of the chapters dealing with the sin and guilt offerings (4:1—6:7) differs from those that describe the burnt, grain, and peace offerings. In contrast to the preceding offerings, which were voluntary, these sacrifices were mandatory. That is, Yahweh commanded the offering of the sin and guilt offerings, whereas He did not command the offering of the

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:269.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Hess, p. 611.

burnt, grain, and peace offerings—though He did specify how these three sacrifices were to be offered if they were offered.

The first three offerings, which were soothing aroma offerings, speak typically of the person of Christ, and the last two offerings, the non-soothing aroma offerings, speak of His work.

"Where the burnt offering leaves off, the sin offering begins. The burnt offering tells *who* Christ *is*; the sin offering tells *what* Christ *did*. In the burnt offering Christ meets the demands of God's high and holy standard; in the sin offering Christ meets the deep and desperate needs of man. In the burnt offering we see the preciousness of Christ; in the sin offering we see the hatefulness of sin. The burnt offering was a voluntary offering; the sin offering was commanded. The burnt offering ascended; the sin offering was poured out. The one went up and the other went down."<sup>1</sup>

The object offered was the organizing principle in chapters 1 through 3, with revelation about the more valuable animals leading off each chapter. But in 4:1 through 6:7 the most important factor is the type of sin that called for sacrifice, and the status of the sinner—implied by the decreasing value of the things offered, in chapters 1 through 3—is a secondary factor.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

What follows explains what the Israelites were to do if any of them sinned "unintentionally" by doing something that the LORD had commanded them not to do.

### **The sin offering of a priest 4:3-12**

4:3-4        "The anointed priest" was apparently any priest (cf. 6:22; 7:36; 10:7; Exod. 28:41; 29:29; 40:15; Num. 3:3).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 1:338. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>Rooker, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>See Kiuchi, p. 92.

"The normal expression for the high priest is either 'great priest' or 'chief priest.'"<sup>1</sup>

Because the priests represented the people before God, when a priest sinned it brought guilt on the people (cf. 10:6; 22:16). The actions of any leader affect those under his or her authority.

When the priest became aware that he had sinned he had to lay his hands on a bull without defect (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22) and sacrifice it on the brazen altar. The offerer thus ritually transferred the guilt of his sin to the sacrificial animal (cf. Isa. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24). The priest executed God's judgment for sin on the sacrificial substitute by killing it.

4:5-7      Apparently the priest would collect some of the bull's blood in a bowl (not mentioned), because he was then instructed to take this blood into the holy place of the tabernacle, dip his finger in it, and sprinkle some of it seven times in front of the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies.

"Sevenfold sprinkling symbolizes its completeness."<sup>2</sup>

Though the altar of incense stood against this veil, it did not completely prohibit access to the veil on either side of the altar. The priest was then to put some of the blood on the horns of the incense altar. The horns probably represented the powerful divine force behind the altar. He was to pour out the remaining blood at the base of the brazen altar.

"To sprinkle the blood seven times before the veil secured God's relationship with the offender. To put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of incense, the place of prayer, was to restore the privilege of worship to the offender. Our acceptance by God and our worship of Him are dependent upon the blood of Jesus Christ. ... The remainder of the blood was poured out at the

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<sup>1</sup>Rooker, p. 109, footnote 152.

<sup>2</sup>Hess, p. 617.

bottom of the brazen altar. This satisfied the conscience of the sinner and removed the guilt complex."<sup>1</sup>

- 4:8-10 The priest was also to remove the fat from the carcass of the bull along with the two kidneys and the lobe of (appendage to) the liver, and burn them up on the brazen altar. God evidently regarded the fat as the best part of the animal, as ancient Near Easterners in general did.
- 4:11-12 The priest was not to burn the hide (skin) of the bull or its head, legs, entrails (inner organs), or refuse (dung) on the brazen altar. He was to burn these in a clean place outside the camp of Israel where the fatty ashes of the sacrifices were deposited. This may have been to emphasize the exceeding sinfulness of sin.<sup>2</sup> He burned the fat on the altar over a wood fire, which produced the cleanest flame.

#### **The sin offering for the congregation 4:13-21**

- 4:13-14 The meaning of the Hebrew word translated "congregation" is somewhat obscure. Sometimes the whole nation seems to be in view (e.g., Exod. 12:3, 6; 17:1; Num. 20:1-2). If this is the meaning in verses 13 through 21, as seems to be the case, the "congregation" is synonymous with the "assembly" (v. 21). However, in other passages "congregation" seems to describe a representative group within the nation (e.g., Exod. 16:1-2, 9; Num. 8:20; 15:33-36; 27:2; 35:12, 24-25; 1 Sam. 14:32). The context usually helps determine the meaning. In this context "the entire congregation of Israel" probably refers to the Israelites as a corporate entity.

How could the entire congregation commit a sin and not be aware of it? Since this sin was unintentional, it would have been possible for the congregation to forget or overlook something that Yahweh had commanded them to do, or to do something that they had forgotten that the LORD had commanded them to do.

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 1:340. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 1:341.

- 4:15-18 The elders, as representatives of the people, were to lay their hands on the sacrificial bull, and presumably a priest would slaughter it beside the brazen altar ("before the LORD"). Then a priest was to do with the blood of the bull as was specified for the sin offering of a priest (cf. vv. 5-7).
- 4:19-21 Then the priest was to burn the bull on the brazen altar and deal with the rest of the animal as previously ordered (cf. vv. 8-12). The burning of the bull would make atonement for the sin of the congregation ("the assembly").

#### **The sin offering of a tribal leader 4:22-35**

- 4:22-23 The "leader" in view here is a tribal leader (Heb. *nasi'*, translated "ruler" in Exod. 34:31, "leaders of their fathers' tribes" in Num. 1:16, "leaders of Israel" in Num. 1:44, "leader of the sons of Judah" in Num. 2:3, and "leaders of the congregation" in Num. 4:34). If a leader sinned unintentionally, and then discovered his sin, he was to offer an unblemished male goat as his sin offering.
- 4:24 After placing his hands on the head of the goat, the leader, not a priest, was to slaughter the goat in the same place where the other sin offerings were slain: beside the brazen altar.
- 4:25-26 Then a priest was to take some of the goat's blood and put it on the horns of the altar, and then he was to pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. He was then to burn all the fat of the goat on the altar like it was done in the peace offerings (cf. 3:14-16).

#### **The sin offering of an ordinary Israelite 4:27-35**

- 4:27-29 Anyone of the "common people" who committed a sin unintentionally, and then discovered that he was guilty, was to bring a female goat without blemish to the tabernacle, lay his (or her) hands on its head, and slaughter it near the brazen altar.
- 4:30-31 The priest was to then offer this sacrifice in the same way that God instructed him to offer the sacrifice of a tribal leader. This

offering would atone for the offerer's sin and he would be forgiven.

A problem arises in verse 31 where Moses referred to this non-soothing offering as a soothing aroma. One commentator suggested that a copyist accidentally transferred the words from the instructions for the peace offering in chapter 3.<sup>1</sup> Another believed that it was the burning of the fatty tissue, not the whole sin offering, that was the soothing aroma.<sup>2</sup> This second explanation seems more probable to me.

4:32 The ordinary Israelite was also permitted to offer a blameless female lamb as his sin offering. In this case the procedure was the same as for offering a goat. Again the promise was given that this offering would atone for the sin of the offerer and he would be forgiven.

### Offerings for sins of omission 5:1-13

The relationship of 5:1 through 13 to chapter 4 is a problem. I have suggested one solution: The sin offerings described below deal with sins of omission, rather than unintentional sin. Noordtzij also believed that 5:1 through 13 describe sins arising from negligence or thoughtlessness, and those in chapter 4 involve unintentional transgressions.<sup>3</sup> The NASB translators and McGee believed that 5:1 through 13 refer to the guilt offering.<sup>4</sup> Milgrom suggested another explanation:

"Modern critics tend to regard 5:1-13 as the 'poor man's' [sin] 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* [the sin offering described in 5:1-13] is a distinct sacrificial category. It is enjoined [commanded] for failure or inability to cleanse impurity upon its occurrence. This 'the sin

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzij, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Harrison, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>Noordtzij, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup>McGee, 1:343.

of which he is guilty' (5:6, 10, 13) is not the contraction of impurity but its *prolongation*."<sup>1</sup>

Matthew Henry understood this section of instructions (5:1-13) as dealing with the cost of forgiveness:

"... the expense of the sin-offering was brought lower than that of any other offering, to teach us that no man's poverty shall ever be a bar in the way of his pardon. No man shall say that he had not wherewithal to bear the charges of a journey to heaven."<sup>2</sup>

The relationship of 5:1 through 13 to chapter 4 continues to be the subject of some debate. Wenham summarized 4:1 through 5:13 as follows:

"The purification [sin] 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)."<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to chapter 4, which deals with the Israelites doing something that the LORD *had* commanded them *not* to do, 5:1 through 13 deals with the Israelites *not* doing something that the LORD *had* commanded them to do.

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<sup>1</sup>Jacob Milgrom, "The Graduated *Hatta't* of Leviticus 5:1-13," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103:1 (January-March 1983):249-250.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 96.

- 5:1-4 Several actions made it necessary for an Israelite to offer a sin offering: (1) if he (or she) did not give testimony as a witness in a public hearing when commanded to do so, (2) if he touched any unclean animal part, (3) if he touched any unclean part of a person, or (4) if he swore an oath impulsively.
- 5:5 In all of these cases, when the person discovered his sin he was to confess the sin and offer a sin offering to atone for his guilt.
- 5:6 The offering in these cases was to be a female lamb or goat.
- 5:7-10 If the offerer could not afford a lamb or a goat, he was to bring two doves or two pigeons, one bird to be offered as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering. A priest was to offer the sin offering first and then the burnt offering.
- "The fowls were always offered in pairs, and the reason why Moses ordered two turtledoves or two young pigeons, was not merely to suit the convenience of the offerer, but according as the latter was in season; for pigeons are sometimes quite hard and unfit for eating, at which time turtledoves are very good in Egypt and Palestine. The turtledoves are not restricted to any age because they are always good when they appear in those countries, being birds of passage; but the age of the pigeons is particularly marked that they might not be offered to God at times when they are rejected by men [Harmer]."<sup>1</sup>
- 5:11-12 If the offerer could not afford to sacrifice two birds, he was permitted to offer the tenth of an ephah of fine flour. Since it was a sin offering, he was not permitted to put oil or frankincense on it, as was customary in the grain offering (cf. 2:2).
- 5:13 The priest was then to offer a handful of the flour on the brazen altar and to keep the rest for himself, as in the grain offering (2:2-3). Yahweh promised that these offerings would

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 85.



atone for the sin of omission of the Israelite, and it would be forgiven.

The sin offering (Heb. *hatta't*, 4:1—5:13) dealt with unintentional sins, not with sins committed "defiantly" (cf. Num. 15:30). The title of this offering as the "sin offering" is a bit misleading, since the burnt, peace, and guilt offerings also atoned for sin. But the primary focus of this offering was on the sins that the Israelites committed and how they could experience purification from sin's defilement.

"Propitiation of divine anger ... is an important element in the burnt offering. Restitution ... is the key idea in the reparation [guilt] offering. Purification is the main element in the purification [sin] 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."<sup>1</sup>

"The advantage of freeing the *hatta't* from the theologically foreign notion of sin and restoring to it its pristine meaning of purification is that now it is possible to see this sacrifice in its true ancient Near Eastern setting. Israel was part of a cultic continuum which abounded in purifications both of persons and of buildings, especially sanctuaries."<sup>2</sup>

"The root *ht'* for 'sin' occurs 595 times in the Old Testament, and Leviticus, with 116 attestations, has far more occurrences than any other Old Testament book. This section (fifty-three attestations) is the heaviest concentration of the discussion of 'sin' in the Bible."<sup>3</sup>

Like the burnt and grain offerings, this one was to be offered frequently, but the Israelites apparently offered it less frequently as time went by (cf. Num. 28—29). The most important feature of this offering was the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice (cf. 1 John 2:1-2).

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup>Rooker, p. 107.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

Three notable distinctives stand out in these instructions:

1. This offering was not a "soothing aroma to the LORD." It was for expiation, that is, to make amends. In every sin offering an innocent substitute took the sinner's place (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).
2. Smearing blood on the horns of the altar of incense in the Holy Place symbolized purifying the whole sanctuary (4:5-7). Purification of the sanctuary was necessary for the Israelites to have continuing fellowship with their holy God.
3. This offering dealt with most unintentionally committed sins (4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:2-4, 14-16). These oversights demonstrated a sinful nature. Even when people do not intend to sin, they sometimes do so, because it is our nature to sin. Any and every sin committed unwittingly pointed to the need for this offering.

God permitted several varieties of this offering:

1. The LORD permitted the offering of less expensive animals by poorer people—or even flour by the very poor (5:11). However everyone needed to offer this sacrifice, since everyone committed unintentional sins. A flour offering did not express the cost of expiation as well as a blood sacrifice did, but God graciously permitted it for the very poor.

"It is not the greatness of the gift [or sacrifice] but the heart of the giver, which God regards."<sup>2</sup>

People with higher social and economic status had to bring more expensive sacrifices, which illustrates the principle that privilege increases responsibility. Their sins had a more disruptive effect on

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>Bush, p. 57.

God's relationship with His people than did the sins of ordinary Israelites.

"On the one hand this arrangement says that the more influential the person, the costlier the offering that had to be brought—the sins of the prominent were more defiling. But on the other hand it is also saying that the way was open to all. The poor were not excluded because their sins were not so defiling or because they had no animals. God made provision for everyone to find cleansing for reentry into the sanctuary."<sup>1</sup>

2. God allowed procedural differences as well (e.g., where the priest sprinkled the blood, how he burned the fat, etc.), depending on the offerer's position in the nation.

The sin offering only covered sins committed unintentionally. This category included sins done by mistake, in error, through oversight or ignorance, through lack of consideration, negligence, or carelessness. That is, this sacrifice covered sins that sprang from the weakness of the flesh (cf. Num. 15:27-29; Gal. 6:3).

It did not cover sins committed in defiant rebellion against God. Such a sinner was "cut off from among his people" (Num. 15:30-31). Many reliable commentators interpret this phrase to mean the offender suffered death.<sup>2</sup> Others hold that it may or may not have involved death, depending on the situation.<sup>3</sup> Not all deliberate sins were defiant however—only those committed in rebellion against God were.

"A third class of offences were those of a somewhat deeper dye [than unintentional sins, but not defiant]—certain open and wilful [*sic*] injuries and violatioas [*sic*] of law, such as thefts, violence, false-swearing, deceit and fraud."<sup>4</sup>

How were these "third class" sins to be dealt with? I believe the burnt offerings covered them, when the guilty Israelite confessed his sin and

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 1:224; Wenham, pp. 241-2; idem, *Numbers*, p. 131; Noordtjiz, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Kiuchi, p. 382. See Milgrom, pp. 457-60, for further discussion.

<sup>4</sup>Bush, p. 50.

offered a burnt offering to the LORD. The Day of Atonement sacrifices covered all the unconfessed sins of the Israelites not previously dealt with (see ch. 16).

"The sin offerings did not relate to sin or sinfulness in general, but to particular manifestations of sin, to certain distinct actions performed by individuals, or by the whole congregation."<sup>1</sup>

Note the repeated promises that this offering would "make atonement" for these sins (4:26, 31, 35; 5:10). Scholars have understood the meaning of "atonement," from the Hebrew root *kpr*, in three different ways: Most of them have believed that it is related to the Arabic cognate word that means "to cover." A second possibility is that the verb means "to wipe or purge." A third view is that the verb means "to ransom."

Probably the second and third views are best, since they go back to the Hebrew root, rather than to the Arabic cognate. Both of these interpretations are valid, depending on the context. However the idea of "covering" is also frequently present.<sup>2</sup> Atonement makes amends for offenses against God.

"... one hears it being taught that sins in the Old Testament were never fully forgiven or atoned, but merely covered over as a temporary measure. But Scripture says that atonement was made and they were forgiven (Lev. 4:26, 31, 35; Ps. 130:4; 32:1-2 ...)."<sup>3</sup>

Most commentators understand this sacrifice as the principal expiatory (atoning) offering in ancient Israel.<sup>4</sup> But Wenham argued that textual evidence points to the burnt offering as the principal atoning sacrifice in Israel.<sup>5</sup>

The idea that sin pollutes and defiles seems very strange in the modern world. Nevertheless, Leviticus reveals that sins pollute the place where they take place (cf. 18:24-30; Deut. 21:1-9) as well as people. God wanted

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:302-303.

<sup>2</sup>See Rooker, p. 52, for further discussion.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Hertz, p. 22; C. F. Keil, *Manual of Biblical Archaeology*, 1:299.

<sup>5</sup>See Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 93-95.

people to realize that sin is powerful in its defiling and deadly effects, that it almost has a life of its own.

Milgrom provided a helpful diagram that illustrates the three types of polluting agents that this chapter presents and their consequences: Involuntary sin committed by an individual polluted the outer brazen altar, involuntary sin committed by the community polluted the inner incense altar, and brazen and unrepented offenses polluted the ark of the covenant.<sup>1</sup>

"... 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."<sup>2</sup>

Under the New Covenant, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses the believer from all sin (cf. Heb. 9—10; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 John 1:7; Rev. 7:14). Thus this offering is now obsolete for the Christian. However, sin in the believer's life can grieve the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). Furthermore, the New Testament reminds us that judgment is still proportionate to responsibility (cf. Luke 12:48; James 3:1). For Christians, confession is a prerequisite to cleansing for fellowship (1 John 1:9), even though Christ's death has brought purification from sin's condemnation. Confession of particular sins also had to accompany the sin offerings in Israel (5:5).

"God will restore the sinner who appeals to him for forgiveness on the basis of the purifying blood of the sacrifice."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup>Idem, *Leviticus 1-16*, p. 313.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

Christ died as the final sin offering. He was without flaw, sinless (1 Pet. 2:22; 2 Cor. 5:21). He was sinful mankind's Substitute (Isa. 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:24). He died outside the camp (Heb. 13:11-13). And His Father forsook Him for our sake (Matt. 27:47).

"... the *Sin*-offering typifies Christ as Sinbearer—'made sin for us' (2 Cor. v. 21) ..."¹

### 5. The guilt offering 5:14—6:7

The structure of 4:1—6:7 indicates that this offering has a close relationship to the sin offering.

"... the difference between the two offerings lies in the degree of self-hiding."²

The "guilt" (or "trespass" AV, NKJV, or "restitution" HCSB) offering removed the guilt of certain sins that involved trespassing against God. Trespassing means going beyond the limits of what is right. The Hebrew word *'asham*, translated "guilt," also means "reparation" (making amends). It may be helpful to think of this offering as a reparation, or a compensation, to repay God and one's neighbor, since other sacrifices also deal with guilt.

"Guilt in the biblical sense is not just a feeling but a condition. There may be known transgressions that bring feelings of guilt, but there is also the condition of guilt before God, caused by sins known or unknown. Sometimes a hardened sinner has few feelings of guilt when he is the most guilty."³

The distinction between true guilt and feelings of guilt is an important one. A person who sins is guilty before God. Through atonement his sin is forgiven, but the sinner remains guilty—guilty but forgiven. The payment for his sin has been paid by another, and he will not be condemned for that sin. But because of atonement, the guilty forgiven sinner need not feel guilty, because another has paid the penalty for his sin, and he is not in danger of divine condemnation.

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¹Baxter, 1:124.

²Kiuchi, p. 116.

³Harris, p. 551.

This section is divisible into two parts: the guilt offering for unintended sin (5:14-19), and the guilt offering for deliberate sin (6:1-7). There is a further distinction within 5:14 through 19 between trespasses that someone committed with sure knowledge of his guilt (5:14-16), and those trespasses that someone committed with only suspected knowledge of his guilt (5:17-19).

"From all these cases it is perfectly evident, that the idea of satisfaction for a right, which had been violated but was about to be restored or recovered, lay at the foundation of the trespass offering, and the ritual also points to this."<sup>1</sup>

### Unintentional sins against holy things 5:14-16

5:14        The phrase "Then the LORD spoke to Moses" indicates a new section of instructions (cf. 1:1, which introduced the three offerings of worship, and 4:1, which introduced the sin offering). Here this phrase introduces the guilt offering.

5:15        The identity of the "holy things" is problematic. The phrase evidently refers to anything dedicated to God by the Israelites, including the tabernacle, its furnishings, the offerings, houses, lands, and tithes of the people (cf. ch. 27).<sup>2</sup> Violating these holy things would have involved eating holy food (cf. 22:14), taking (stealing or even moving) dedicated things from their rightful places, and perhaps failing to fulfill a dedicatory vow, or failing to pay a tithe.

The guilt offering to be brought was a ram without defect. The value of the ram was to be determined in silver, according to the standard of the shekel used in the sanctuary. The shekel was a weight, an amount of silver, not a coin. It weighed two-fifths of an ounce.

5:16        The offerer would have to pay 20 percent of the value of his ram in addition to the ram. This offering would make restitution

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:316.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob Milgrom, "The Compass of Biblical Sancta," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 65 (April 1975):216.

for the offerer's sin. The priest would then make atonement for the sinner and he would be forgiven.

This policy also applied generally in the ancient Near East, outside Israel, in some cases (cf. Gen. 47:26). God considered the "fifth part" to be a debt the offender owed because of his offense, not a gift to the victim. The victim ended up better off, in one sense, than he was before the offense. Reparation is evidence of true repentance (cf. Matt. 3:8; 5:23-24; Luke 19:8-9).

### Unintentional sins against divine commands 5:17-19

5:17 The situation described in this sub-section evidently involved any Israelite who unintentionally did something that Yahweh had forbidden. Wenham believed that it refers to someone who suspected that he had sinned but did not know exactly how.<sup>1</sup> If so, this sacrifice pacified some oversensitive Israelite consciences. Milgrom believed that it refers to someone who stole sacred property, which was one of the most dreaded sins in antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

Even though the offender may not have been aware of his trespass, he was still guilty. When he became aware of his sin, or even just suspected his guilt, he needed to bring this offering. This repentance reduced the guilt of the crime to that of an involuntary act.<sup>3</sup>

5:18-19 The offering to be brought in this case was a ram without defect. In this case too the priest would make atonement for the sin and the offender would be forgiven.

### Intentional sins against one's neighbor 6:1-7

6:1 Perhaps the phrase "Then the LORD spoke to Moses" occurs again here because, for the first time, Yahweh revealed how

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The "Asham" and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>3</sup>See idem, "The Priestly Doctrine of Repentance," *Revue Biblique* 82 (April 1975):186-205.



the Israelites were to deal with certain intentionally committed sins.

"While the first two cases [5:14-16 and 17-19] are inadvertent, the third [6:1-7] is no doubt deliberate."<sup>1</sup>

6:2-3 Note that the LORD viewed the sins that follow as being against Himself, not just against one's neighbor. The sins named are cheating, robbing, extorting, and lying to one's neighbor. The real offense was not just the taking of the property but trespassing against God's holy name by swearing falsely about one's innocence. Undoubtedly these are only a few select examples of not doing the loving thing for one's neighbor.

6:4-6 In such cases the offender was to restore what was taken, plus 20 percent of its value, to the neighbor, and he was to offer a ram without defect as a guilt offering to the LORD.

6:7 This done, his sin would be atoned for and he would be forgiven.

"It seems likely that atonement for deliberate sins was possible where there was evidence of true repentance, demonstrated by remorse (feeling guilty), full restitution (v. 23 [4] [*sic* 6:4]), and confession of sin (cf. Num. 5:6-8)."<sup>2</sup>

The major distinctives of this offering were these:

1. It was not a "soothing aroma" offering.
2. The Israelites were to offer it when they had wronged someone—either God alone (5:15, 17), or both God and man (6:2). Every trespass against one's neighbor involved a trespass against God, but not every trespass against God involved a trespass against one's neighbor (cf. Ps. 51:1-4).

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 109. Cf. Luke 19:8.

3. The offending Israelite had to pay restitution to the injured party in some cases (5:16; 6:5). The guilty party had to restore whatever the victim of his sin had lost.
4. In addition to restitution, the offender had to add 20 percent ("add to it a fifth part"; 5:16; cf. 6:5).

The only significant variation in this offering was that, for an animal sacrifice, only a ram was acceptable (cf. 5:14-19; 14:12-20; 19:21-22; Num. 6:12). Evidently if a person could not bring a ram, he could substitute the value of the animal in silver.<sup>1</sup> There were more options in most of the other sacrifices.

There is much less description of the ritual involved in presenting this offering compared to the others (cf. 7:1-7).

"The reparation offering thus demonstrates that there is another aspect of sin that is not covered by the other sacrifices. It is that of satisfaction or compensation. If the burnt offering brings reconciliation between God and man, the purification or sin offering brings purification, while the reparation offering brings satisfaction through paying for the sin. ...

"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."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E. A. Speiser, *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, pp. 124-28; B. A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord*, pp. 124-28.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 111.

These various models help clarify why sin is so bad.

We who are Christians do not need to try to compensate God for our offenses against Him, since He has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as full payment for our debt (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:1, 4-5; Col. 2:13). Nevertheless, we have a responsibility to recompense other people against whom we trespass (cf. Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12).

"Anyone who violates the covenant by defrauding the LORD or another person must confess the sin and make full restitution in order to find full forgiveness and restoration."<sup>1</sup>

Christ fulfilled this sacrifice too (2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 2:13).

"... the *Trespass*-offering speaks of sins (plural), and typifies Christ as Expiator, making restitution for the injury caused by our wrong-doing. ...

"And now observe the *order* of these offerings. In our study of the Tabernacle we saw that the furniture of the Tabernacle is given in the reverse order of human approach. God begins with the Ark in the Holy of Holies, moving outward from Himself toward man. The same order is followed in these Levitical offerings. God begins with the *Burnt*-offering and ends with the *Trespass*-offering. He leaves off where we begin. If we take these offerings in their reverse order, therefore, they exactly correspond with the order of our spiritual apprehension of Christ. ...

"When we first come, as awakened and believing sinners, to the Cross, the first thing we see in it (answering to our first-felt need) is forgiveness for our many *trespasses*. But scarcely have we begun to rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins before we realize that there is a further and deeper need, namely, *sin* in our nature. This further need is met by a deeper insight into the meaning of the Cross. Christ not only 'died for our sins'; He bore our *sin*, as typified in the *Sin*-offering. It is then, when we realize that both sins and sin have been dealt with in the Cross, that we enter into wonderful peace with God, as set forth in the *Peace*-offering. Then, still further, we find rest and

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 152.

joy and complete acceptance with God in the glorious perfections of Christ as typified in the *Meal*-offering; while more and more we come into fellowship with God through the fullness of that one perfect Offering to God on our behalf which is set forth in the *Burnt*-offering. Is there not wonderful Divine design in all this?"<sup>1</sup>

## **6. Instructions for the priests concerning the offerings** **6:8—7:38**

This section reviews the offerings from the priests' point of view, though 7:11 through 36 addresses the ordinary Israelite.

"This section [6:8—7:10], together with 7:11-38, deals with various regulations relating to the later stages of the rituals given in Lev. 1—6:7, with a view to safeguarding holy things ..."<sup>2</sup>

"The five basic sacrifices are ... introduced twice, each sacrifice being treated both in the main section addressed to the people [1:1—6:7; cf. 1:2] and in the supplementary section addressed to the priests [6:8—7:38; cf. 6:9]."<sup>3</sup>

The main theme of this section is who may eat which parts of the offerings and where they may be eaten. The particular "law" involved (cf. 6:9, 14, 25; 7:1, 11, 37) has to do with the rites that God prescribed for handling these sacrifices. Generally only the priests could eat the sacrifices, but the offerers could eat part of the peace offering.

In this section, the frequency of the offering determines the order of the material. The regular daily burnt and grain offerings come first, then the less frequent sin (purification) offering, then the occasional guilt (restitution) offering, and finally the optional peace (fellowship) offering.

"To lead the congregation in corporate worship is both a great privilege and an enormous responsibility. In the following

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 1:124-25.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup>Lindsey, p. 172.

passages something of the responsibility concerning the ritual is laid out for the priests."<sup>1</sup>

"To bring a person closer to God is the highest service that one person can render another."<sup>2</sup>

"Ministers must assure repentant worshipers of their restitution when they seek forgiveness based on the atoning blood and show repentance by their desire to make things right."<sup>3</sup>

### The law of the burnt offering for the priests 6:8-13

"This section is not about how to offer the burnt offering (ch. 1), but is a teaching about the burnt offering."<sup>4</sup>

6:8-9 "Then the LORD spoke to Moses" again signals a new subject of revelation. The burnt offering was to remain on the brazen all night after it was burnt up. And fire was to be kept burning on this altar at all times.

6:10 The priest had a duty to perform each morning. He was to put on his linen undergarment and his linen robe. Then he was to approach the altar of burnt offerings, clean out its ashes, and place them beside the altar. Correct clothing was essential so that it would cover his "body" (cf. Gen. 3:21; Exod. 20:26; 28:42-43).<sup>5</sup> McGee saw a symbolic significance in this:

"God is teaching that He *cannot* accept the works of the flesh."<sup>6</sup>

6:11 Then the priest would change his priestly garments and put on other ordinary clothes. The priest could not wear his official robes outside the courtyard, but he did have to wear them whenever he approached the bronze altar. He was then to carry the ashes to a clean place outside the camp of Israel (cf.

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>J. S. Stewart, quoted by D. Tidball, *Discovering Leviticus*, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup>Kiuchi, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup>McGee, 1:349.

4:12). This would have reminded him of the utter pollution of sin.

6:12-13 It was imperative that the wood fire (cf. 1:7) on the brazen altar be kept burning at all times. The reason for this was apparently so that the altar would be ready to accommodate any burnt and peace offering that might be brought. It was the priest's duty to see that the fire never went out—except when the tabernacle was in transit, of course.

The main point in this legislation was that the fire on the altar of burnt offerings was never to go out when the Israelites were encamped. This was fire that God Himself had kindled (9:24). Since the fire represented God's presence, this perpetual burning taught the Israelites that the way of access to God was always ready and available. It also taught them the importance of maintaining close contact with God and of the continuing need for atonement to cover their ever-recurring sins. The New Testament teaches Christians to maintain the same awareness (1 Thess. 5:19; Heb. 7:25).

"Although atonement for sin was provided in each of the blood offerings, atonement was not their basic purpose. Israel's initial relationship with God as His redeemed people had been established through the Passover sacrifice on the night of their deliverance from Egypt. The offerings presented at the Tabernacle were the means of maintaining that relationship between the Israelites and their God."<sup>1</sup>

"Those who minister must take care in personal sanctification and spiritual service to ensure that people may always find access to the holy God."<sup>2</sup>

### **The law of the grain offering for the priests 6:14-18**

These were the priest's duties and privileges when he offered a grain offering (cf. ch. 2).

6:14-15 The priest was to burn up a handful of the offerer's grain offering of fine flour, with its oil and frankincense, on the

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<sup>1</sup>Schultz, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 161.

brazen altar. Presumably he was to do this regardless of the composition of the flour (wheat or barley, cf. 2:14-16).

6:16 The priests were then to eat the remainder of the offering, but only in the tabernacle courtyard: "a holy place." The grain offering was, of course, to be offered without leaven (cf. 2:11).

6:17 God considered the grain, sin, and guilt offerings "most holy" (cf. v. 25; 7:1, 6). This means that they were sacrifices that only the priests could eat. They were called "most holy" because they were to be treated (and distinguished) as more holy after they were offered, not because they were more holy in themselves (when they were offered on the altar).

6:18 Only the priests—who were males—were to eat some of this offering. They could eat it because they had been consecrated to the LORD. The NASB translation "will become consecrated" can be translated better as "shall first be consecrated" or "must be holy" (NIV). Holiness was not contagious, like sin was (cf. Hag. 2:12).

The priests enjoyed special privileges, but they also had to observe high standards of behavior. This is also true of all Christians, who are believer-priests (cf. Luke 12:48; James 3:1; 1 Pet. 4:17).

### **The law of a special grain offering of the priests 6:19-23**

6:19 "Then the LORD spoke to Moses" appears again as a structural marker in this revelation indicating a new subject.

6:20 The new subject is the grain offering that was to be offered when a priest was anointed and began his priestly service. He was to offer a regular grain offering consisting of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour. He was to offer half of it in the morning and half of it in the evening.

6:21 (Olive) oil was to be mixed with the flour, and the batter was then to be baked on a griddle. When it was fully cooked it was to be offered as pieces of cake on the brazen altar as a grain offering to the LORD. It would be "a soothing aroma" to Him.

- 6:22-23 The priest who was being anointed for priestly service was to personally prepare and offer this sacrifice. Unlike other grain offerings, this one was to be burned it up completely on the altar. The priest was not to eat this sacrifice that he offered for himself. This was the only grain offering that was not eaten.

This offering taught the Israelites that the priests were not only to serve God by serving His people, but they were also to worship Him themselves. It is easy to become so involved in serving and ministering to others that Christian believer-priests stop worshipping God ourselves.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

### **The law of the sin offering for the priests 6:24-30**

- 6:24 "Then the LORD spoke to Moses" again. Here the legislation returns to laws regarding the regular offerings.
- 6:25 God specified that the sin offering was to be offered at the same place as the burnt offering was offered: "at the doorway of the tent of meeting" (1:3; 4:4), namely, at the brazen altar. As noted above, this offering was to be regarded as "most holy" after it was offered so that the priests would treat what was left of it with great respect (cf. v. 17).
- 6:26 The priest who offered the sin offering was permitted to eat part of it. He ate most of the meat of the roasted animal (cf. Heb. 13:11-13; Matt. 27:46). This permission was not revealed previously. Again the emphasis is on what the priests could and could not eat (cf. vv. 16, 18). The place where the priest ate this offering had to be holy. The priests were not to confuse the holy (consecrated) and the common ("profane," 10:10; cf. v. 18), but to carefully distinguish them.
- 6:27-28 As in verse 18, "will become consecrated" is better understood as "shall first be consecrated." Only priests who were consecrated were permitted to touch the sacrificial

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 165.



animals. The priests were to wash the sacrificial blood that spattered on their garments in a holy place (i.e., within the tabernacle courtyard). Likewise all the containers that had any contact with the sacrificial animal were either to be broken or thoroughly washed and rinsed with water. These regulations drew attention to the sacredness of the sin offering.

- 6:29-30 Any priest—they were all males—was allowed to eat some of the sin offering even though it was "most holy." But animals brought to the tabernacle as sin offerings were to have the blood drained out of them before they were brought (1:15; 3:17; 5:9). Any animal that was brought for sacrifice with the blood still in it was to be completely burned up. The priest was not to eat any of this sacrifice.

This legislation emphasized the sanctity of the sin offering while at the same time showing that it benefited the priest who offered it. Similarly, the offering up of Christ as the final offering for sin benefits the person who participates in that offering by faith.

#### **The law of the guilt offering for the priests 7:1-10**

- 7:1 The chapter division is misleading. This pericope (section of text) continues the revelation of God's will for the priests, this time when they offered a guilt offering. The guilt offering, as well as the grain and sin offerings, were to be considered "most holy" after they were offered (cf. 6:17, 25; 7:6).
- 7:2-5 The priests were to sacrifice the guilt offerings at the same place they sacrificed the burnt offerings: "at the doorway of the tent of meeting." In both of these offerings they were to sprinkle some of the sacrificial animal's blood on the brazen altar. Then the priest was to burn up its fat, kidneys, and the lobe of its liver on the altar (cf. ch. 3). The priests burned only the fatty parts on the altar (cf. 3:9; 4:8), that is, the fat that was in a detached state, rather than mixed with the muscles.<sup>1</sup> They were permitted to eat the meat of the guilt offerings.
- 7:6-10 Here God specified what portions of this offering, and the other offerings, the priests could eat in a holy place. The priests'

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, p. 67.

portion from the sin and guilt offerings was the same: part of the sacrificial animal that had its blood drained out (cf. 6:25-26, 30). The priests' portion from the burnt offering was the hide (skin) of the animal. The priests' portion of the grain offering was all but the handful that was burnt up on the altar. Instructions regarding the priests' portion of the peace offering will follow in the larger section of directions concerning that offering.

### **The law of the peace offering for the priests 7:11-36**

Probably there is more legislation specified for the offering of the peace offering than for the others because the Israelites participated more in this sacrifice than in the others. This is the only offering that ordinary Israelites could eat, but the priests also ate part of it. Consequently this pericope contains general regulations governing the consumption of meat (vv. 22-27).

#### **The special peace offering for thanksgiving from some deliverance 7:11-14**

- 7:11      This is a topic sentence that introduces all the revelation that will follow through verse 36.
- 7:12      The Hebrew word *toda* means "confession" or "acknowledgement." So the "thanksgiving" in view is an acknowledgement of gratitude to Yahweh for some particular deliverance that the Israelite had experienced from Him.<sup>1</sup> When an Israelite wanted to thank the LORD for delivering him from some bad situation, he was to bring a regular peace offering, but he was to add to it three other offerings: unleavened "cakes" (or "loaves") mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and cakes of fine flour well mixed with oil.
- 7:13      In addition, he was to offer cakes of "leavened" bread. This is unusual, since normally leaven was excluded from the offerings (cf. 2:12). Since leaven often symbolized sin, leaven was not normally permitted to be offered to God. But here the leaven seems to represent the offerer who was characterized by sin.

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 138.

"The 'leavened cakes' intimate the corruption of the offerer ..."<sup>1</sup>

Thus this offering expressed fellowship between the sinful offerer, whom Yahweh had delivered from some bad situation, and his holy God.

7:14 The Israelite would then present his offerings to the LORD. They would then become the property of the priest who paved the way for this offering by sprinkling the blood of the sacrificial animal on the altar (cf. 3:2, 8).

7:15 The meat of this thanksgiving peace offering was to be eaten on the day of the offering. This command was probably intended to help the offerer view his offering as something special, not just as food to be eaten normally.

**The special peace offerings for the completion of a vow and for God's goodness 7:16-21**

7:16 Here two other special peace offerings come into view. A votive peace offering was offered when an Israelite completed a vow that he have made to God. These offerings often celebrated an answer to prayer (cf. Ps. 22:25; 50:14; et al.).

The "voluntary" or freewill offering was offered when the offerer voluntarily and freely brought the peace offering for no other reason than his love for the LORD (cf. Ps. 54:6).

These types of offerings were to be eaten on the day they were offered or on the next day. The reason may have been because these offerings were more pleasing to the LORD, so He allowed the offerer to celebrate longer.

"The thanksgiving ... gift [v. 12] represented the donor's acknowledgement of God's mercies to him, while the votive ... [v. 16] comprised an offering in fulfillment of a vow. The freewill ... offering [v. 16] consisted of an act of homage and obedience to the Lord where no vow had been

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<sup>1</sup>Bonar, p. 133.

made, and with the other categories of well-being sacrifices lent substance to the conviction in Israel that God valued a tangible response to His blessings more than a mere verbal profession of gratitude, which might or might not be sincere."<sup>1</sup>

7:17-18 Any remnants of the food of these offerings that remained to the third day were to be burned up. Yahweh would not accept this offering if the offerer ate any of the leftover meat on the third day, and he would punish the offerer if he did. What this punishment would be is unspecified.

7:19 Not only was the meat that was left over on the third day ritually unclean, but meat that touched anything unclean was unclean, and was not to be eaten. Meat that had not touched something unclean could be eaten by any Israelite who was clean.

Ritual uncleanness was not the same as physical or spiritual uncleanness. Ritual uncleanness was a condition in the life of the Israelites that rendered them unfit to participate in tabernacle worship. It was how Yahweh viewed them if and when they violated His will. When applied to animals and objects, ritual uncleanness was a condition that rendered them unfit (through no fault of their own) to enter God's presence. The rationale behind ritual uncleanness—why something was placed in this category—is not always clear. But contact with sin, or a symbolic connection with sin, seems to be at the root of most ritual uncleanness.

7:20 An unclean person who ate meat from the peace offering "which belongs to the LORD" was to be "cut off from his people." As explained elsewhere—see my comments on Genesis 17:14 and Exodus 12:15—this phrase sometimes appears to refer to being excommunicated from the camp of Israel, and at other times it seems to refer to being put to death (either by the people or by the LORD). In this context it

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, p. 79.

is difficult to tell what was intended. But a severe penalty is clearly in view.

"This is the first occurrence of the *karet* penalty in Leviticus. It is the penalty associated with a breach of the covenant (Gen. 17:14), yet how it was practically executed is not mentioned. While it is sometimes related to the death penalty, the presence of the *karet* penalty without mention of death leaves room for the supposition that it is something other than the death penalty ...

"Thus the reference to individuals or individual groups may suggest that as a penalty he is to be cut off from every member of the people to whom he belongs, not to mention from the covenantal community as a whole. He becomes absolutely isolated, cut off from any humans he may have recourse to in time of need. Thus this penalty is virtually no different for the offender from the death penalty."<sup>1</sup>

7:21 But the danger of uncleanness went further. Any person who touched anything unclean was forbidden from eating the peace offering on penalty of being "cut off."

One writer summarized the lessons of 7:11 through 21 as follows:

- I. Believers are to celebrate their peace with God (11).
- II. Those at peace with God should express material and public gratitude for divine assistance (12-15).
  - A. Gratitude demands a generous material response (12-13).
  - B. Gratitude must be directed to God (14).

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 140. See also Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 125; Harris, p. 558; J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, p. 100; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, pp. 457-60; Bonar, p. 137. Hess, p. 641, believed it always refers to death.

- C. Gratitude needs to be expressed in a group (15).
- III. Those at peace with God may obligate themselves to undertake acts of tribute to God (16a).
- IV. Those at peace with God want to perform free acts of homage in appreciation to God (16b-18).
- V. Maintaining peace with God is to be taken very seriously (19-21)."<sup>1</sup>

"Celebration of being at peace with God requires the generosity and purity of those who share the common meal."<sup>2</sup>

### **The importance of the fat and the blood 7:22-27**

7:22-23a "Then the LORD spoke to Moses" indicates another shift in emphasis. In contrast to the preceding paragraphs (6:8—7:26), God told Moses to tell all the Israelites something, not just the priests. What follows is further instruction regarding the fat and the blood of the peace offering animals.

7:23b-25 The people were not to eat any of the fat of the animals that they brought for peace offerings, nor were they to eat the fat of animals that died naturally, or the fat of animals that died because they had been wounded by another animal and then died.

"The objection may be raised that animal suet ["fat," v. 23] is inedible. Still, it must never be forgotten that biblical suet (*heleb*) also comprises certain edible portions (cf. 3:9-10), and that suet was used in the preparation of food."<sup>3</sup>

There may have also been a hygienic reason for God's prohibiting of the eating of animal fat.

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<sup>1</sup>Brian Rosner, "The Ritual of the Peace Offering: Leviticus 7:11-21," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):85-90.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 184.

<sup>3</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 427.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

The penalty for violating this law was to be "cut off" from the Israelites. This prohibition highlighted the importance of the fat as a symbol of the best part of the animal that was to be offered to Yahweh in the peace offering (cf. Gen. 4:4).<sup>2</sup>

7:26-27 Likewise the people were never to eat the blood of any animal or bird at any time (cf. 17:10-14; Gen. 9:4; Acts 15:29). The blood, of course, represented life poured out, and it had special significance because of the blood that was applied on the doorframes when the Israelites left Egypt. It represented an atoning sacrifice. The penalty of this offense was the same: to be "cut off."

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 186.

"In spite of the strictness of this prohibition, the eating of meat with the blood still in it occurred repeatedly in Israel (1 Sam. 14:32-34; Ezek. 33:25). This was related to the idea, also found elsewhere in the ancient Near Eastern world, that the consumption of blood fortifies life, or leads to ecstasy and communion with the deity."<sup>1</sup>

Obviously whenever anyone eats meat it is inevitable that he eats some of the blood in the meat. But prohibitions about eating blood refer to eating the blood alone. Blood has long been recognized as the life force in a body (cf. 17:11). As such it has been thought that to eat blood (in its coagulated form) or to drink blood (in its liquid form) was to gain power. This is why eating and/or drinking blood was, and still is in some cultures, practiced.

### **The importance of the breast and the right thigh 7:28-36**

- 7:28-29a Moses received another law that he was to communicate to all the Israelites.
- 7:29b-30a These instructions seem redundant, but they may have been repeated so that the offerer would be impressed with the fact that he himself should bring the offering and that he should remember that it was an offering "to the LORD" and not just an opportunity for him to eat meat.<sup>2</sup> It may be that the only time the Israelites ate meat was when they brought a peace offering to Yahweh, since their animals were valuable possessions.
- 7:30b Along with the fat, the offerer was to be careful to also offer the breast of his sacrificial animal, which was the best meat. He was to "wave" the breast before the LORD as part of the ritual of making his peace offering. The "wave ["elevation" NRSV, or "presentation" HCSB] offering" was not waved from side to side but toward the altar and away from it (cf. Exod. 29:26; Lev. 8:29). The wave offering was one way in which the priest and the offerer presented his best to the LORD:

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzij, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 143.



"... the priest laid the object to be waved upon the hands of the offerer, and then placed his own hands underneath, and moved the hands of the offerer backwards and forwards in a horizontal direction, to indicate by the movement forwards, i.e., in the direction towards the altar, the presentation of the sacrifice, or the symbolical transference of it to God, and by the movement backwards, the reception of it back again, as a present which God handed over to His servants the priests."<sup>1</sup>

This procedure may have been intended to symbolize the ambiguity that the offerer felt as he parted with the best part of his sacrificial animal.

7:31-33 The fat was to be burned up on the altar, but the breast was to be given to the priest. Likewise the right thigh (hindquarter), another choice piece (cf. 1 Sam. 9:24), was to be the priest's portion of this offering. The priest who offered this sacrifice was to receive the right thigh. It went directly to him, in contrast to the breast, which was first waved back and forth before the LORD

"According to traditional Jewish exegesis 'contribution' (or heaving) was effected by a vertical, up-and-down action, whereas 'dedication' (waving) was done with a sideways action."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the right thigh was given directly to the priest may have symbolized the resolution (determination) of the offerer to give his best to Yahweh.

7:34-36 The priests' portion of the peace offering (vv. 11-34) was the LORD's gift to them from the day of their official appointment as priests (ch. 8) as long as the Israelites offered this offering ("forever").

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:328. See also Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, pp. 461-73.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 126.

"In our obligations to give our best to God, we must recognize that a portion of our giving belongs to those who minister."<sup>1</sup>

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 Mosaic 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.

### **Summary of the laws of the offerings for the priests 7:37-38**

This section of Leviticus that deals with Instructions for the priests concerning the offerings (6:8—7:38) closes with a summary. This is a common feature of Leviticus (cf. 11:46-47; 13:59; 14:54-57; 15:32-33).<sup>2</sup> Mention is made too of the "ordination offering," which was the peace offering just referred to ("on the day that He anointed them," v. 36).

The reference to God giving these laws to Moses "on Mount Sinai" (v. 38) may seem to contradict 1:1, which says that "the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting." But since the tent of meeting (the tabernacle) was located at Mount Sinai, these are probably synonymous references: God spoke to Moses specifically from the tent of meeting, which was on Mount Sinai (cf. 25:1; 26:46; 27:34).

"The sacrificial law, therefore, with the five species of sacrifices which it enjoins, embraces every aspect in which Israel was to manifest its true relation to the Lord its God. Whilst the sanctification of the whole man in self-surrender to the Lord was shadowed forth in the burnt-offerings, the fruits of the sanctification in the meat-offerings, and the blessedness of the possession and enjoyment of saving grace in the peace-offerings, the expiatory sacrifices furnished the

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup>For a summary chart of the five offerings, see the Appendix at the end of these notes.

means of removing the barrier which sins and trespasses had set up between the sinner and the holy God, and procured the forgiveness of sin and guilt, so that the sinner could attain once more to the unrestricted enjoyment of the covenant grace."<sup>1</sup>

"Jesus said that God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. And it has become commonplace to contrast spirit and form as if they were incompatible in worship. 'The letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life' is a text that out of context (2 Cor. 3:6) can be used to justify slapdash leading of services and other Christian activities. Spontaneity and lack of preparation is equated with spirituality. Lev. 6—7 denies this: care and attention to detail are indispensable to the conduct of divine worship. God is more important, more distinguished, worthy of more respect than any man; therefore we should follow his injunctions to the letter, if we respect him."<sup>2</sup>

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. See the scriptural cross references on the pages of these notes dealing with chapters 1 through 7 for a start.

"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*."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:331-32.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, pp. 84, 85. Paragraph division omitted.

**B. THE BEGINNING OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD CHS. 8—10**

The account of the commencement of the Aaronic priesthood follows the regulations concerning offerings. Having received instructions about what they were to do and how they were to do it, regarding the ritual aspects of Israel's worship, Aaron and his sons were now prepared to begin to function as Israel's priests. This section of Leviticus clarifies how all the various approaches to God were to be mediated under the Old Covenant.

"The point of it [this section] is that if fellowship between the redeemed and their holy God is to be maintained, there must not only be a *sacrifice* (as in chapters i.—vii.), but a *priest* (as in these chapters viii.—x.). Besides absolution from guilt there must be *mediation*. Thank God, the Lord Jesus is both sacrifice and priest in one, to His believing people so that we have access to God by 'a new and living way' (Heb. x. 20) ..."¹

"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."²

"As was the case with all ancient peoples, religion did not exist in Israel apart from external, cultic forms. Offerings and priests everywhere occupied the central position in religious life. A fundamental difference nevertheless appears in the fact that outside of Israel, the priests, although there were physical or bodily conditions they had to satisfy, were recruited from among the people at large, and a person could thus become priest without having to be entitled to this by birth or by his position within society. In contrast, once the Israelites had become a nation and the covenant of the Lord had taken definite form as the pattern for their life, only members of the tribe of Levi were authorized to function as temple servants, while the right of serving in the Lord's offerings was reserved exclusively to members of the family of Aaron. ...

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¹Baxter, 1:125.

²Ross, p. 197.

"There is also a second point of difference. Whereas outside of Israel the priest primarily offered the sacrifices that sought to bring peace between human beings and the mysterious forces by which they imagined themselves to be surrounded, within Israel the tasks of counselor and teacher stood at the center of the priestly functions. The priest's foremost duty was to give direction to the Israelites in the subjection of their life to the ritual and ethical requirements of the service of the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

We have a change in literary genre here from legal to narrative material. The legal material in chapters 1 through 7 has prepared the reader to understand the narrative in chapters 8 through 10. Moses moved from a discussion of sacred *things* to a discussion of sacred *persons*.

The priests' consecration ceremonies involved many of the sacrifices just described. The institution of the Aaronic priesthood constituted the fulfillment of God's commands recorded in Exodus 28 and 29 and 40. Almost every verse in chapter 8 is a quotation or allusion to commands first given in Exodus 29. Chapter 9 contains freer (less detailed) summaries of the laws in Leviticus 1 through 7. Thus we learn that Moses adhered strictly to God's instructions.

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 (Exod. 32:19). Now this privilege became the portion of the faithful tribe of Levi (Exod. 32:26-29). The main function of the priests in Israel was to guard and protect the holiness of God.

"Of all the qualities attributed to the divine nature there is one which, in virtue both of the frequency and the emphasis with which it is used, occupies a position of unique importance—namely, that of holiness."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Eichrodt, 1:270.

"God's grace and forgiveness are such that even a sinner like Aaron [who apostatized by building the golden calf] may be appointed to the highest religious office in the nation. Perhaps the closest biblical parallel to Aaron's experience was that of Peter. In spite of his threefold denial of his Lord at Christ's trial, he was reinstated as leader of the apostles after the resurrection."<sup>1</sup>

"Kings ... sometimes offered sacrifices: David, when he transferred the ark of the covenant, offered burnt and peace offerings and blessed the people (2 Sam. 6:17); and Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, did likewise (1 Kings 8:5, 62-66). But these were exceptions, as these kings were actively involved in establishing temple worship in the nation. ...

"On the other hand, Saul (1 Sam. 13:8-14), Adonijah (1 Kings 1:9), Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16-21), and Ahaz (2 Kings 16:13-14; 2 Chron. 28:1-5) also performed the priestly ritual of offering sacrifices—but without the LORD's approval as some of the prophetic responses indicate."<sup>2</sup>

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, they reveal that each one is also part of a larger picture that all three complete.

The phrase "Moses did as the LORD commanded him" occurs 16 times in this section (8:4, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 34, 36; 9:6, 7, 10, 21; 10:7, 13, 15). It stresses Moses' faithfulness to God (cf. Heb. 3:1-6). It also emphasizes the contrast with the statement in 10:1, that Nadab and Abihu did something "which He had not commanded them."

"It was important that God's instructions for worship be carried out meticulously. Sloppy, careless, or thoughtless worship did not honor God."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 199.

<sup>3</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 186.

## 1. The consecration of the priests and the sanctuary ch. 8

In the first main section of this chapter (vv. 1-30) God gave a double command to Moses (vv. 1-3), which Moses obeyed (vv. 4-30). In the second main section (vv. 31-36) Moses gave Aaron a command (vv. 31-35), which Aaron obeyed (v. 36). The second main section (vv. 31-36) acts as a transition by bridging the gap between Aaron's ordination and its completion a week later (cf. 9:1).

"Most of the rites, however, peculiar to this occasion, are the same with those commanded [in] Ex. 29, and which are there explained at length."<sup>1</sup>

### **The assembling of the congregation 8:1-5**

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses" (v. 1) again signals a new revelation from Yahweh. The rest of this pericope was written as a chiasmus:

- A God commanded Moses to prepare Aaron and his sons and the items necessary for the coming ceremony (v. 2).
- B God commanded Moses to assemble the congregation at the entrance to the tabernacle (v. 3).
- C "Moses did just as the LORD commanded him" (v. 4a).
- B' The congregation assembled at the entrance to the tabernacle (v. 4b).
- A' Moses anticipated to the congregation what the coming ceremony would consist of (v. 5).

This structure highlights Moses' obedience to the LORD's commands.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, p. 73.

assembly of the people, and in their presence perform the solemn ceremonies of inauguration, which had been prescribed by divine authority."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps a representative group of the Israelite congregation, likely the elders, responded to Moses' summons to witness Aaron's ordination in the tabernacle courtyard.<sup>2</sup>

### **The washing of the priests 8:6**

Physical washing was symbolic of spiritual cleansing (cf. Exod. 19:10; 29:4). The reference to being "washed ... with water" may imply a baptismal-type of washing with full immersion.<sup>3</sup> 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).

"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."<sup>4</sup>

"A great many people today say that they are qualified for service because they are saved. Now it is true that salvation is the prime requisite, but for service one must also be cleansed. You must be cleansed to be used [cf. John 13:10; Heb. 10:22; 1 John 1:9]!"<sup>5</sup>

### **The clothing of the high priest 8:7-9**

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 it plays down his or her individual personality. Moses dressed Aaron in special garments: a tunic, a sash, a robe, an ephod, an artistic band, a breastpiece, the Urim and the Thummim, a turban, and a golden plate or holy crown (cf. Exod. 28:5-7). These garments pictured Aaron's endowment with the qualities required for the discharge of his duties.

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>See my comments on the "congregation" at 4:13.

<sup>3</sup>See Rooker, p. 142; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 501.

<sup>4</sup>Ross, p. 210. Cf. Exod. 30:17-21.

<sup>5</sup>McGee, 1:356.



"It is important to emphasize that the purpose of the priestly investiture is sanctification (*qds*, vv 12, 30), in contrast to the purpose of the levitic investiture, which is purification (*thr*, Num 8:6, 7, 21)."<sup>1</sup>

"It may be noted in passing here that the three sections of the sanctuary were reflected in the high priestly attire: the robe corresponded to the courtyard, the ephod to the Holy Place, and the breast-piece to the Most Holy Place."<sup>2</sup>

### The anointing of the tabernacle and Aaron 8:10-12

The anointing of the tabernacle, and everything that was in it, and Aaron with "the anointing oil" accomplished and signified their consecration. God set them apart to holy purposes. The significance of the sevenfold sprinkling of the bronze altar and its utensils, and the basin and its stand, seems to have been that seven was "the covenant number."<sup>3</sup> By sprinkling these objects seven times Moses illustrated their complete consecration to Yahweh.

"The tabernacle, and all its utensils, had some of the anointing oil put upon them with Moses's finger (v. 10) ...; but he poured it out more plentifully upon the head of Aaron (v. 12), so that it ran down to the *skirts of his garments*, because his unction was to typify the anointing of Christ with the Spirit, which was not given by measure to him."<sup>4</sup>

In addition to Israel's high priests, the first of which was Aaron, Israel's kings (1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13), and at least one of her prophets were also anointed with oil (i.e., Elisha, 1 Kings 19:16).

### The clothing of the other priests 8:13

These instructions also repeat those given previously (cf. Exod. 29:8-9).

"They were clothed with the holy garments, Aaron with his (v. 7-9) which typified the dignity of Christ our great high priest,

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 519.

<sup>2</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:336.

<sup>4</sup>Henry, p. 121.

and his sons with theirs (v. 13), which typified the decency of Christians, who are spiritual priests."<sup>1</sup>

### **The ordination offerings 8:14-30**

Moses, as the mediator of the Mosaic Covenant, performed the sacrificial ceremony recorded in these verses. He presented three offerings.

#### **The sin offering 8:14-17**

Moses first offered a young bull as a sin offering (cf. 4:1—5:13; 6:24-30; Exod. 29:10-14). It was appropriate that the offering was a strong bull since the priests carried great responsibility, which was a heavy burden, in Israel. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull symbolizing their association with it. Moses then slaughtered the bull and applied some of its blood to the horns of the brazen altar thus purifying it. He poured the rest of the bull's blood at the base of the altar thus consecrating it. Then he burned the bull's fatty entrails, liver lobe, and two kidneys on the altar. The rest of the bull, its hide, flesh, and refuse, Moses burned outside the camp of Israel as the LORD had commanded.

#### **The burnt offering 8:18-21**

Moses then offered a ram as a burnt offering (cf. ch. 1; 6:8-13; Exod. 29:15-18). Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the ram of the burnt offering. Moses slaughtered the ram and sprinkled its blood on the altar. He then cut up the ram and burned its head and its other parts, including its suet (fat), on the altar. After he washed the entrails and legs with water, he also burned up all the remaining parts of the ram. Moses did this all as the LORD had commanded, and the sacrifice was pleasing to Him, because it was an offering of worship.

#### **The peace offering 8:22-30**

8:22 Finally Moses offered a second ram as a peace offering (cf. ch.3; 7:11-36; Exod. 29:19-21). Apparently this ram was called "the ram of ordination" because this was a special offering made only during the ordination of priests.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

"This sacrifice, repeated continually in the biblical period, had the specific purpose of ordaining the priest for his office. ... 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 be pure (2 Chr 29:31)."<sup>1</sup>

Again Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the animal.

8:23-24 Then Moses slaughtered the ram and put some of its blood on Aaron's right earlobe, his right thumb, and the big toe of his right foot. He did this to Aaron's sons as well.

"In the Bible [i.e., the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament], the right side is the preferred side."<sup>2</sup>

"... the *ear*, because the priest was always to hearken to the word and commandment of God; the *hand*, because he was to discharge the priestly functions properly; and the *foot*, because he was to walk correctly in the sanctuary."<sup>3</sup>

Moses then sprinkled some of the blood on the altar.

8:25-27 Next Moses handed several things to Aaron and his sons: the fat, the fat tail, the fat on the entrails, the lobe of the liver, the two kidneys with their fat, and the right thigh of the ram. To these items he added one unleavened cake, one (leavened) cake mixed with oil, and one wafer. All this Aaron and his sons presented as a wave offering to the LORD.

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<sup>1</sup>Rooker, pp. 146-47.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 528.

<sup>3</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:340.

8:28 Then Moses took all these items from Aaron and his sons and burned them up along with the burnt offering that was already on the altar. This ordination offering was also pleasing to the LORD.

8:29 Moses then offered the breast of the ram as a wave offering.

"... Moses receives the waved breast on the assumption that he is like the priest who receives both the breast and right thigh from the offerer on ordinary occasions ..."<sup>1</sup>

8:30 The sprinkling of the priests and their garments with blood and anointing oil represented endowment with the benefits of atoning blood and the Spirit of God's power.

"Ministers, that are to declare the remission of sins to others [John 20:23], should give diligence to get it made sure to themselves in the first place that their own sins are pardoned. Those to whom is *committed the ministry of reconciliation* must first be reconciled to God themselves."<sup>2</sup>

#### Further instruction to the priests regarding their ordination 8:31-36

8:31-32 A meal in the tabernacle courtyard was the last part of the ritual consecration of the priests. Aaron and his sons were to boil the remaining flesh of the second, peace offering ram, and eat it along with the bread that had been given them, near the brazen altar. The rest of the flesh and bread was to be burned up on the altar. With this meal—which was probably regarded as a covenant meal between the priests and the LORD—they entered into more intimate fellowship with God. That is, this relationship entitled them to very special blessings and privileges that God did not grant the other Israelites.

8:33 The priests were not to leave the tabernacle precincts for seven days. This would have made even more clear the solemnity of the priestly office. Their role during their seven-day ordination ritual was evidently that of worshipers more

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 121.

than offerers. Moses repeated the consecration ritual on each of these seven days ("he will ordain you through seven days").

"A man may defile himself in a moment, but sanctification and the removal of uncleanness is generally a slower process."<sup>1</sup>

8:34        Moses explained that the ritual prescribed for the ordination of the priests was, in part, to atone for their sins.

Note that it was God who consecrated the priests. This was His work. The congregation witnessed the consecration, but they did not initiate it.

8:35        The penalty for leaving the tabernacle courtyard "day or night," through "the doorway of the tent of meeting" during this seven-day period, was death.

8:36        Aaron and his sons did everything that the LORD commanded with regard to their ordination, as He had commanded them to do through Moses.

It was a special privilege for an Israelite to be a priest, and it likewise is a special privilege for every Christian to be a priest (cf. Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:5).

God did not demand perfection of the priests. He even graciously appointed the man most responsible for the golden calf incident, Aaron, to the office of high priest! God provided the clothing (covering), the atonement (cleansing), and the enablement that made the priests acceptable in their service. Likewise He provides all that Christians, who are His New Testament priests, need also.

"In the type-teaching of this chapter, Aaron, the High Priest, prefigures the Lord Jesus, while his sons typically anticipate the believer-priests of the present dispensation."<sup>2</sup>

"In this section one doctrine emerges very clearly: the universality and pervasiveness of sin. The men chosen to minister to God in the tabernacle pollute the tabernacle and

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, 1:126.

therefore purification offerings have to be offered. Their clothes and bodies are stained with sin and they must be smeared with blood to purify them. These sacrifices are not offered just once; they have to be repeated, because sin is deep-rooted in human nature and often recurs. There is no once-for-all cleansing known to the OT. It is the incorrigibility of the human heart that these ordination ceremonies bring into focus [cf. Ps. 14:3]."<sup>1</sup>

"Those who lead the congregation in spiritual service must be fully consecrated to the LORD."<sup>2</sup>

"Leaders need to be called by God and, like Aaron and his sons, must go through the process of sanctification—unless all selfish motives (egocentricity) are removed, such people are unlikely to be used as God's instruments."<sup>3</sup>

## **2. The entrance of Aaron and his sons into their office** **ch. 9**

This chapter explains how the priests carried out the duties that their induction into their respective offices made possible. The events recorded took place on the day after the seven days of consecration. After a week of cleansing, Aaron could now begin to offer sacrifices himself; he no longer had to rely on Moses to offer sacrifices for him.

The structure of chapter 9 is somewhat similar to that of chapter 8. Moses commanded Aaron and the congregation (vv. 1-4), so the congregation obeyed (v. 5). Then Moses commanded Aaron (v. 7), and Aaron obeyed (vv. 8-21). Finally, the glory of the LORD appeared, and fire came out from His presence and consumed the sacrifices, symbolizing His acceptance of them and the priesthood (vv. 22-24).

### **Moses' commands to prepare for the LORD's appearance 9:1-6**

9:1           At the end of the week-long ordination of the priests (cf. 8:33-35), on the next ("eighth") day, Moses assembled Aaron, his

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 144-45.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup>Kiuchi, p. 162.

sons, and the elders of Israel, evidently in the tabernacle courtyard.

9:2 He commanded Aaron to offer a calf and a bull, both unblemished, as a sin offering, and an unblemished ram as a burnt offering. Ironically, Aaron's first sacrifice as Israel's high priest was a calf for his own sin offering. Recall that his first attempt at being a priest had involved making a golden calf for Israel to worship (Exod. 32). God had given Aaron a second chance, as He often does with His servants—even those who lived under the Mosaic Law. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20).

9:3-4 Moses instructed Aaron to command the Israelites (probably their elders) to offer a male goat as a sin offering, a calf and a lamb (each a year old and without a blemish) as a burnt offering, an ox and a ram as peace offerings, and a grain offering mixed with oil. After these sacrifices were offered Yahweh would appear to them, Moses promised.

"The sequence of offerings in vv. 2-4—purification, burnt, fellowship, and grain—reflects the theological need first to achieve forgiveness, then to consecrate oneself, then to enjoy fellowship with God, and finally to present what one has achieved through personal efforts. For Christians, the need for atonement (Ro 3:23; 6:23) leads to dedication (Ro 12:1-2), fellowship (1 Jn 1:7), and a life of service (Ro 12:4-13). This leads to a full and true worship of God (see Kellogg, 223-28; Rooker, 151). Thus the apostolic understanding of Christian discipleship is based on the OT sacrificial system."<sup>1</sup>

"The qualification of 'one year old' [v. 3] is often found for animals offered on occasions suggestive of new beginnings (Exod. 12:5; Lev. 12:6; 23:12, 18-9; Num. 6:12, 14 etc.). This seems in harmony

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<sup>1</sup>Hess, p. 658.

with the inaugural nature of this occasion as well."<sup>1</sup>

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. Aaron now had to bring even more offerings—in addition to all those that Moses had offered the previous seven days. This illustrated again that the Levitical offerings did not provide a permanent covering for sin (cf. Heb. 10:1).

9:5 The leaders obeyed Moses. Evidently the whole congregation of the Israelites drew near to the tabernacle.

9:6 The purpose of these sacrifices, Moses explained, was so that the glory of the LORD might appear to His people (cf. Exod. 16:10; 24:16-17). The "glory of the LORD" is His visible presence (in symbol: a bright light, or pillar of fire, or smoke, or cloud, or lightning, to give some examples).

"The importance of the theophany in the newly consecrated Tabernacle cannot be exaggerated. It renders the Tabernacle the equivalent of Mount Sinai. ... The Tabernacle, in effect, becomes a portable Sinai, an assurance of the permanent presence of the deity in Israel's midst."<sup>2</sup>

### **Aaron's sacrifices for himself and for the Israelites 9:7-21**

9:7 Having explained to Aaron what he was to do, Moses now told him that it was now time to offer the sacrifices that the LORD had prescribed to make atonement for himself and for the people. Aaron was to offer sacrifices to cover his own sins first (vv. 8-14), and then he was to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people (cf. vv. 15-21).

9:8-14 Aaron first offered a sin offering (vv. 8-11) and then a burnt offering for himself (vv. 12-14). By offering them publicly for

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 574. Paragraph division omitted.



himself he was acknowledging publicly that he was a sinner who needed forgiveness.

- 9:15-21 Then Aaron presented four offerings for the Israelites: sin (v. 15), burnt (v. 16), grain (v. 17), and peace (vv. 18-21). The variety of both categories of the sacrifices (soothing and non-soothing), and the types of sacrificial animals used, stands out in this account even more than their quantity. This probably indicates that the purpose of these sacrifices was not to atone for specific sins but for the general sinfulness of the people. The purpose was also to dedicate the people to the worship of Yahweh as He specified, and to pray for God's blessing on them.<sup>1</sup>

### The climax of the dedication of the priests 9:22-24

- 9:22 After offering these sacrifices Aaron blessed the people. Lifting up the hands suggests that prayer accompanied this blessing (cf. Exod. 17:12). Aaron stepped down, perhaps from a platform on which he may have been standing to address the people.

"... it is probable that by blessing the people on this occasion, Aaron presents himself as the divinely ordained priest entitled to convey the Lord's blessing to them."<sup>2</sup>

- 9:23 This is the first time that we read that Moses and Aaron entered the tabernacle. They probably entered the holy place in order to present Aaron to the LORD and to pray for God's blessing on him and the Israelites. When they came out, they blessed the people. Then "the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people."

"Note, God's manifestations of himself, of his glory and grace, are commonly given in answer to prayer. The glory of God appeared, not while the sacrifices were in offering, but when the priests prayed, which intimates that the prayers and

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 171.

praises of God's spiritual priests are more pleasing to God than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices."<sup>1</sup>

9:24 The glory appeared as fire that went out from the LORD. This fire burned up what was on the brazen altar. This is the first of five times that the Old Testament records that God sent fire from heaven—in this case "out from the LORD," namely, from the most holy place—as a sign that He accepted a sacrifice (cf. Judg. 6:21; 1 Kings 18:38; 1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1).

"The appearance of the glory of Jehovah is probably to be regarded in this instance, and also in Num. 16:19; 17:7 [*sic* 8]; and 20:6, as the sudden flash of a miraculous light, which proceeded from the cloud that covered the tabernacle, probably also from the cloud in the most holy place, or as a sudden though very momentary change of the cloud, which enveloped the glory of the Lord, into a bright light, from which the fire proceeded in this instance in the form of lightning, and consumed the sacrifices on the altar [cf. Judg. 6:20-24; 13:15-23; 1 Kings 18:38-39; 1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1-3]."<sup>2</sup>

When all the people saw what had happened they shouted and fell face down. The Hebrew word *ranan*, translated "shouted," means "to shout for joy." This is the first occurrence of a word for joy in the Bible. The people also fell face downward in worship. Walter Kaiser defined worship as essentially communion with God.<sup>3</sup>

The miracle of the appearance of the LORD's glory 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 and completely. The intensive form of

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:348.

<sup>3</sup>See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Leviticus," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1:1067.

the Hebrew verb means "burned up completely," "ate up," or "devoured."

By intervening in this dramatic way, God demonstrated His satisfaction with the sacrifices that the newly consecrated priests offered, and with the priests who offered them.

"This chapter brings out very clearly the purpose and character of OT worship. All the pomp and ceremony served one end: the appearance of the glory of God."<sup>1</sup>

"The pattern was hereby established: by means of the priests' proper entry into the tabernacle, the nation was blessed. The next chapter (Lev 10) gives a negative lesson of the same truth in the example of Nadab and Abihu: the blessing of God's people will come only through obedience to the divine pattern."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

### **3. The sanctification of the priesthood ch. 10**

One of the remarkable features of chapters 8 and 9 is the immediate and full obedience of Moses and Aaron to God's commands (cf. 8:4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 36; 9:5, 7, 10, 21). In chapter 10 there is a notable absence of these references. The careful reader notices at once that something is wrong.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>Sailhamer, p. 330.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 227.

before the congregation, as one who would not suffer His commandments to be broken with impunity."<sup>1</sup>

"Holiness is dangerous unless approached by the proper persons and according to the proper rules."<sup>2</sup>

"Tragedy and triumph go hand in hand in the Bible and in life. On the very first day of Aaron's high-priestly ministry his two eldest sons died for infringing God's law. In the life of our Lord his baptism by the Spirit was followed by temptation in the wilderness, his triumphal entry into Jerusalem by his crucifixion six days later. In the early Church the healing of the lame man was succeeded by the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 3—5)."<sup>3</sup>

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, people must approach Him only as He directs. We will read of a similar event in Numbers 16 (Korah, et al.). We need to be especially careful to walk closely with the Lord just after a great victory or blessing.

### **The disobedience of Nadab and Abihu 10:1-7**

10:1        Moses did not explain Nadab and Abihu's exact offense in the text. However the "strange fire" that they offered seems most likely to have included an incense offering that somehow violated God's will. It may have involved assuming the role of the high priest (cf. Heb. 5:4), but it definitely involved offering incense at a time or in a way contrary to God's direction.<sup>4</sup> Josephus wrote that they did not bring the sacrifices that Moses told them to bring, but sacrifices that they had formerly

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:350.

<sup>2</sup>Norman H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 153.

<sup>4</sup>Noordtzij, p. 108. See Rooker, p. 157, for other theories.

brought.<sup>1</sup> Darby observed that they were "acting as men in nature in their relationship with God."<sup>2</sup>

The incident evidently took place on the eighth day of the priests' inauguration (ch. 9; cf. 10:12, 16). Perhaps Nadab and Abihu wanted to add to the festivities by offering an additional, yet unauthorized, and therefore unholy, incense offering. Whatever their motive was, their action constituted disobedience to God's commands regarding offering incense. They must have acted without first seeking the will of God.

10:2 Again fire came out from the LORD's presence (cf. 9:24) and consumed, not what was on the alter, but Nadab and Abihu, so that they died there in the temple courtyard "before the LORD." Since Nadab and Abihu offered fire, God judged them with fire.

"Men's punishments are often marked by a striking analogy with their sins."<sup>3</sup>

This incident should warn modern readers against worshipping God in ways that we prefer because they seem good to us. 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 religion" often has only "the appearance of wisdom" (Col. 2:23).

"It is like the events that will attend Christ's second coming, when from *Himself* (the mercy-seat itself), fire shall consume His foes, and their cry, though the Lamb Himself hear it, shall be in vain. He consumes all that have defied Him; and many among these shall be found in the act of

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<sup>1</sup>Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3:8:7. Josephus reflects some traditional Jewish opinions.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, 1:210.

<sup>3</sup>Bush, p. 91.

holding up the incense of vain worship to the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

Previously (9:24), the fire had fallen only after all the sacrifices had been killed, prepared, and placed on the altar, but now it fell as soon as Nadab and Abihu sinned. Then it had signified God's blessing, but now it manifested His judgment.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

Milgrom believed that the consuming fire that had sanctified Aaron's service was different from the fire that now brought destruction on Nadab and Abihu—because they offered "strange fire" and had not sanctified God (treated Him as holy, v. 3; cf. Exod. 24:17; Num. 11:1; 16:35; Deut. 5:22; 1 Sam. 15:22; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; Heb. 12:29).<sup>3</sup> However the descriptions of fire as coming "from the LORD" (9:24), and as coming "from the presence of the LORD" (10:2), are so similar that the fire was probably the same in both instances.

10:3 Moses explained God's judgment to Aaron. Aaron did not reply, apparently because he accepted the rightness of God's action in judging his sons' sin. Previously (9:24) the people had rejoiced, but now Aaron kept silent.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Bonar, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>Sailhamer, p. 330.

<sup>3</sup>See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, pp. 597, 599.

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."<sup>1</sup>

- 10:4 The fire had not burned Nadab and Abihu up, though it had killed them. The place where Moses commanded Mishael and Elzaphan to carry the corpses of their second cousins was "outside of the camp." Previously God had told Moses and Aaron to carry the unacceptable parts of the offerings "outside the camp" (Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 6:11; 8:17; 9:11).
- 10:5 Mishael and Elzaphan obeyed Moses. They carried the two corpses, still wrapped in their priestly tunics, outside the camp, "just as Moses had said." Their tunics would have reminded the other Israelites who were watching that these men were priests, and that the priests were just as responsible to obey God as the ordinary Israelites.
- 10:6 Aaron and his surviving two sons were not to demonstrate great remorse over God's judgment—by uncovering (lit. unbinding) their heads (i.e., removing their headgear, cf. Exod. 28:4; 39:28) or by tearing their priestly garments—or God would put them to death and become angry with the whole congregation. But God permitted Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar to mourn, because of the loss that they and the nation had experienced in the death of Nadab and Abihu—and also so that they would remember His punishment a long time.
- 10:7 Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar were not even to leave the tabernacle enclosure on penalty of death. The anointing oil symbolized the Spirit of God, who gives life. For this oil to have any contact with death was inappropriate. The oil also symbolized the priests' unique vocation, which they could not abandon even temporarily by leaving the tabernacle enclosure

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, 3:431, cited by Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 156-57.

on this occasion. To their credit, Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar obeyed Moses.

Eleazar and Ithamar replaced their older brothers, Nadab and Abihu, in a way similar to the way Judah and Levi replaced their older brothers, Reuben and Simeon (Gen. 49:2-7). In both families, Jacob's and Aaron's, the sins of the firstborn and second-born resulted in God passing over them for blessing. They disqualified themselves from some of the inheritance and blessing that could have been theirs had they remained faithful.

### **The LORD's commands to Aaron 10:8-11**

10:8 This is the only time that Leviticus records God speaking directly to Aaron by himself. This shows the importance of what followed, and that God still approved of Aaron as the high priest.

10:9 The "strong drink" referred to was a specific intoxicating drink. The commentators differ in their understanding of exactly what it was. It was inappropriate for the priests to drink this concoction, and wine, when they were on duty ("when you come into the tent of meeting"). If they did so, God would put them to death. This was a permanent law for the priests.

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.<sup>1</sup> This is a possibility. Other students of the passage see the tie as being any rash behavior exemplified by Nadab and Abihu's presumptuous offering.<sup>2</sup>

"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

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Harrison, p. 114; Bush, pp. 83, 88.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 2:354.



carefully considered today, in an age when alcoholism is rampant."<sup>1</sup>

Leaders of the Christian church should also be temperate in their use of drink (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 2:2-3).

"Those set aside for service to the holy God must sanctify the LORD before the people by how they conduct themselves in ministry."<sup>2</sup>

10:10-11 For the Old Testament Jew, everything in life was either "holy" or common ("profane"), and what was common was either "clean" (approved, usable) or "unclean" (prohibited, unusable).<sup>3</sup> These distinctions were to help the Israelites understand God's will for them.

"The essence of the priestly ministry is articulated in Leviticus 10:10-11. ... Israel, then, was a people separated to Yahweh from among all the nations of the earth. Her lifestyle and, indeed, her very character must advertise to all peoples the meaning of that identity and mission."<sup>4</sup>

"No amount of fleshly zeal or 'false fire' can substitute for Spirit-filled devotion to the Lord. Be sure the 'fire' of your ministry comes from God's altar and not from this world."<sup>5</sup>

### **Moses' commands to Aaron and Aaron's response 10:12-20**

Following the judgment on Nadab and Abihu, Moses instructed Aaron and his other sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, to finish eating the rest of their portion of the sacrifices that they had offered for the nation on the day that Nadab and Eleazar died.

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, pp. 236-37.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 254.

<sup>4</sup>Merrill, "A Theology ...," pp. 57-58.

<sup>5</sup>Wiersbe, p. 265.

"... here they are assured that all their privileges remain to them as full as ever."<sup>1</sup>

"Afflictions should rather quicken us to our duty than take us off from it."<sup>2</sup>

- 10:12-13 They were to eat the remaining grain offering, which was "most holy," because it had been offered to the LORD, beside the brazen altar, because that was a "holy place," as their allotted portion from Yahweh. This offering consisted of unleavened bread.

"... the sanctuary as a whole represents the human heart and soul."<sup>3</sup>

- 10:14-15 Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar were to eat the breast and thigh of the peace offering, but they were to eat it in any clean place, presumably within the tabernacle precincts, along with their family members. The breast and the thigh were waved before they were eaten (cf. 9:21).

- 10:16-18 Moses discovered that the goat meat of the sin offering had been totally burned up. This made him angry, because Aaron and his sons were to have eaten some of this meat before it was burned up (cf. 6:24-26). The priests should have recognized that they were to eat the meat, since the goat's blood had not been taken into the holy place. The priests were guilty of burning the meat that they should have eaten.

"In the case of purification [sin] offerings priests did not have an automatic right to the meat. It depended on what was done with the blood of the sacrifice. If the blood was smeared inside the tent of meeting, the animal's carcass was burned outside the camp (4:1-21). If, however, the blood was smeared on the altar of burnt offering outside the tent of meeting, the priests were entitled to eat the meat (6:11ff. [Eng. 25ff.]). Ch. 9

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<sup>1</sup>Bonar, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, pp. 123-24.

<sup>3</sup>Kiuchi, p. 175.

mentions two purification offerings, one for Aaron (9:8ff.) and one for the people, namely, a goat (9:15). Moses' anger is aroused because they have not followed the rules with the second offering. They have burned the meat instead of eating it themselves as they were entitled to (vv. 16-18). Since the blood was not brought into the *holy place*, i.e., the outer part of the tent of meeting, *you ought to have eaten it.*"<sup>1</sup>

"When the P [Priestly] code prescribed that every hatta't [sin offering] except that brought for severe sins should be eaten by the priests ... it took a giant step towards eviscerating the magical and demonic elements from Israelite ritual. For it must be assumed, in keeping with the evidence from the ancient Near East, that ritual detergents were always destroyed after they were used lest their potent remains be exploited for purposes of black magic. By requiring that the hatta't be eaten, Israel gave birth to a new and radical idea: the sanctuary is purged not by any inherent power of the ritual but only by the will of God."<sup>2</sup>

10:19 Aaron responded to Moses by saying that the sad events of that day made it inappropriate for him (and his sons) to enjoy eating the sacrificial meat. He believed that the LORD would not have been pleased if he had eaten the meat. Aaron realized that Yahweh looks beyond obeying the letter of the law to observing its spirit—in this case grieving over his son's sin rather than simply obeying the laws of sacrifice.

Aaron probably concluded that mourners should not take part in sacrificial meals (v. 19; cf. Deut. 26:14).<sup>3</sup> This explanation is preferable to the one that suggests that Aaron refused to eat simply because he was grief-stricken by the death of his

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob Milgrom, "Two Kinds of Hatta't," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976):337.

<sup>3</sup>Sailhamer, p. 332.

sons. The grief motivation probably would not have been as acceptable to Moses as the appropriateness motivation.

"Aaron's service was not formality; it was a worship done in the spirit; and where the spirit could not accompany the rite, he left the rite undone. Herein he glorified God,—he gave Him the honour due unto His name! He felt that it was not worship at all if his soul was not engaged; for '*God is spirit.*'"<sup>1</sup>

"So in other cases the letter of the law was dispensed with from the pressure of circumstances, as when David ate the show-bread, and Hezekiah admitted some that were not duly cleansed, to eat of the Passover. 2 Chron. 30. 18-20."<sup>2</sup>

10:20 Aaron's explanation satisfied Moses. Even though Aaron's refusal to eat the offering was a violation of the Law, it was not flagrant disobedience, as was the sin of Nadab and Abihu. Therefore Moses approved of Aaron's actions. God is more gracious with those who fear Him, as Aaron did, than He is with those who do not fear Him as they should, as Nadab and Abihu did.

This concludes the narrative of the induction of Aaron and his sons into the priestly office (chs. 8—10). The events of these special eight days in Israel's history made an indelible impression on the people, and they pointed out the necessity of worshipping their holy God exactly as He specified.

Holiness is a concept that we can learn a lot about from Leviticus. By definition, holy means "set apart," or "different." God is holy because He is different from sinful man. He is at one end of the purity spectrum, and we are at the other. If we want to draw near to God, that is, enjoy an intimate relationship with Him, we must become more holy, and He enables us to do that (cf. Heb. 12:14; Matt. 5:8).

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<sup>1</sup>Bonar, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>Bush, p. 90.

God has made Christians holy in our position before Him because He sees us as He sees Christ. He imputes Christ's righteousness to our spiritual account. This is justification. But in our practice we must pursue holiness in order to enjoy intimate fellowship with God. This is progressive (practical) sanctification.

The following diagram shows the path that Israel's priests had to follow in order to enjoy intimacy with God—practical holiness. This suggests what Christians also need to do, as New Testament believer-priests, in order to draw near to God.

THE PATH TO INTIMACY WITH GOD (HOLINESS) FOR PRIESTS UNDER THE OLD COVENANT					
<b>Sinful priest</b>	Rebellion required death.	Other sins required sacrifices.	Uncleanness required cleansing.	Service required consecration.	<b>Holy God</b>

### C. LAWS RELATING TO RITUAL CLEANLINESS CHS. 11—15

A change of subject matter at this point indicates another major division in Leviticus. We move now from a narrative to more legislation. The structure of Exodus 14 through Leviticus 25 is as follows: After each failure by the Israelites, God gave them more laws.

Failures	Laws
Complaining from Egypt to Sinai (Exod. 14—19)	
	The Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 25—31)
The golden calf incident (Exod. 32)	

	The Priestly Code (Tabernacle) (Exod. 33—Lev. 9)
The Nadab and Abihu incident (Lev. 10)	
	More Priestly Code (Lev. 11—17)
The goat idol incident (Lev. 17)	
	The Holiness Code (Lev. 17—25)

"Whereas the first two sections [of Leviticus, chs. 1—7 and 8—10] focused on the sanctuary, we are now brought within the sphere of Israel's everyday life, with all its possibilities of defilement. It is thereby made clear that, in Israel, everything was placed in a religious light, and that the Lord's instruction, with all of its regulations pertaining to what could not be handled, tasted, or touched (Col. 2:21), had no other aim than the sanctification of the life of every member of the chosen people."<sup>1</sup>

The first five chapters in this section (11—15) pick up the idea introduced in 10:10: "... make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean." This section of legislation culminates in chapter 16, the cleansing of the nation on the Day of Atonement.

"These chapters [11—16] tell us that God's people must be a *clean* people. They must be clean both inwardly and outwardly. There must be physical cleanliness; and there must also be ceremonial cleansing from that which defiles them morally and spiritually in the eyes of God. They are to be both sanitarily clean and sacrificially cleansed."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzij, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, 1:128.

The chapters on purity (11—15) helped the Israelites—and they help us—to understand what uncleanness means, and they reveal how the holiness of God requires both cleansing and continual purification from the contaminations of this life.

"The Hebrew word *tahor* (traditionally, 'clean') indicates ritual purity. Purity/'clean' does not refer to hygiene but is contrasted with mixed or mongrel."<sup>1</sup>

"The regulations of the sacrifices and institution of the priesthood, by which Jehovah opened up to His people the way of access to His grace and the way to sanctification of life in fellowship with Him, were followed by instructions concerning the various things which hindered and disturbed this living fellowship with God the Holy One, as being manifestations and results of sin, and by certain rules for avoiding and removing these obstructions."<sup>2</sup>

The rationale behind the order of these various laws seems to be based on the length of time of the uncleanness: Dietary uncleanness (ch. 11) resulted in uncleanness for hours; childbirth uncleanness (ch. 12) left the woman unclean for months; coverings uncleanness (including skin, clothing, and shelters, chs. 13—14) could mean uncleanness for years; and genital uncleanness (ch. 15) resulted in uncleanness for hours, weeks, or years.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Dietary uncleanness ch. 11

"This chapter contains a selected list of creatures that divides each type of creature into various classes of purity [cf. Deut. 14:3-20]. According to the final verse in the chapter, the decisive question was whether a class of animals was unclean or clean. The goal of the distinctions was to determine whether an animal could be eaten. The notion of uncleanness and cleanness is specifically applied in this chapter to the question of holiness. Violating any of the regulations relating to clean and unclean animals rendered one unclean (i.e., profane or

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 467.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:357.

<sup>3</sup>Hartley, p. 137. See also W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Through the Pentateuch Chapter by Chapter*, p. 120.

common, 11:44-45) and thus unable to enter into community worship (12:4). The purpose of the chapter is to tie the concept of holiness to God's own example of holiness (11:45)."<sup>1</sup>

"Leviticus divides the animal world into three kinds: unclean animals that cannot be eaten; clean animals that can be eaten; clean animals that can be eaten and also serve as animals for sacrifice. Chapter 11 discusses the first two categories. The last was reviewed in chs. 1—9."<sup>2</sup>

Unclean conditions were not all the same under the Old Covenant. That is, there were degrees of uncleanness. The uncleanness that certain defiling things caused required simple purification, for example, washing and waiting a short time. The uncleanness that other defiling things caused required more involved rituals. Not all uncleanness involved sin, but all sin resulted in uncleanness.

The reason or reasons for the distinction between a clean and an unclean animal are still somewhat unclear. Even the identity of some of the animals is obscure.<sup>3</sup>

"Many attempts have been made by scholars and expositors over the centuries to interpret the catalogue of abominable creatures in the book of Leviticus, but with uncertain results."<sup>4</sup>

Many ancient nations and religions observed lists of clean and unclean foods. These lists differed from one another, but undoubtedly they had their origin in the clean/unclean distinction that God specified at the Flood (cf. Gen. 7:2-3). The presence of this distinction in the ancient Near East points to a common recognition of the inadvisability of eating certain foods—for various reasons. This recognition shows that the Fall has affected the whole creation, not just humankind (Rom. 8:19-22).

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 332.

<sup>2</sup>Hess, p. 673.

<sup>3</sup>See G. Bare, *Plants and Animals of the Bible*, p. iii; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, pp. 645-84.

<sup>4</sup>Harrison, p. 27. E.g., Henry, pp. 124-25.



There have been at least six major different explanations of the rationale behind the clean and unclean distinctions in the Mosaic Law.<sup>1</sup> Some of these views have very ancient pedigrees.

1. The distinction is *arbitrary*. God simply told the Israelites what to do to test their obedience (cf. Gen. 2:16-17). They had no idea what the reasons for these distinctions were.<sup>2</sup> The problem with this approach is that it is negative. That is, it offers no explanation that human beings can understand. This is the explanation that most scholars who despair of understanding a single principle that explains all cases take.
2. The distinction is *cultic*. The reason the Israelites were to regard some animals as unclean, according to this view, was that the pagans used them in their worship and/or associated them with their gods. Avoidance of these unclean animals then was a mark of the Israelites' fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant.<sup>3</sup> The problem with this view is that it explains very little of the evidence. The Israelites may have associated certain unclean animals with pagan cultic practices, but scholars have not been able to explain all the prohibitions on this basis alone.
3. The distinction is *hygienic*. Those who hold this view believe that the unclean animals were unfit to eat because they carried diseases or were unhealthful.<sup>4</sup> This view has gained popularity in recent times, as many readers have become increasingly concerned about health care

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<sup>1</sup>See Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 166-71; Kim-Kwong Chan, "You Shall Not Eat These Abominable Things: An Examination of Different Interpretations On Deuteronomy 14:3-20," *East Asia Journal of Theology* 3:1 (1985):88-106; Joe M. Sprinkle, "The Rationale of the Laws of Clean and Unclean in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:4 (December 2000):637-57; *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Clean and Unclean," by Charles L. Feinberg, pp. 238-41; Rooker, pp. 170-75; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, pp. 718-36.

<sup>2</sup>See Hertz, p. 93; Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 58; *ibid.*, "Leviticus," p. 81; Rooker, pp. 173, 174.

<sup>3</sup>See Martin Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies*, pp. 56-59; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1—11:26*, p. 157; Ross, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup>See Samuel Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus*.

and medical science.<sup>1</sup> One advocate of this view expressed it as follows:

"In general it can be said that the laws protected Israel from bad diet, dangerous vermin, and communicable diseases. Only in very recent days have better laws of health been possible with the advance of medicine. These were rule-of-thumb laws that God gave in his wisdom to a people who could not know the reason for the provision."<sup>2</sup>

There are good reasons, however, for believing that the Israelites did not view these provisions as merely hygienic: First, hygiene can explain only some of the distinctions. Second, there is no hint in the Old Testament that God regarded all the animals that He proscribed as dangerous to health. Third, this view fails to explain why God did not also forbid poisonous plants in addition to dangerous animals. Fourth, if these animals were dangerous to eat, why did Jesus Christ pronounce them "good" (i.e., fit for consumption) later (Mark 7:19)?

4. The distinction is *symbolical*. This view sees the behavior and habits of the clean animals as illustrating how the Israelites were to behave, and the unclean animals represented sinful people.<sup>3</sup> Some commentators have adopted this view, but they have applied the symbolic criterion subjectively without careful regard to the text of the whole Mosaic Law. However, when one views the data in the Mosaic Law comprehensively, and seeks to understand the distinctions on that basis, this view seems to make sense. One advocate of this view wrote the following:

"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,

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<sup>1</sup>See Sim McMillan, *None of These Diseases*; Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990)270-85.

<sup>2</sup>Harris, p. 569.

<sup>3</sup>See Edersheim, p. 343; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; Bonar, pp. 214-15; Keil and Delitzsch, 2:372.

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.)."<sup>1</sup>

The problem with this view is its subjectivity. Whereas one interpreter may see symbolic significance in one thing, another interpreter may not. Unless the Bible itself identifies something as symbolic it is up to the interpreter to decide what is symbolic and what is not.

5. The distinction is *aesthetic*, based on the animal's appearance.<sup>2</sup> This view seems entirely subjective.
6. The distinction is *ethical*. This view is similar to view 4 above. Advocates believe that the animals chosen taught reverence for life.<sup>3</sup> This view also seems highly subjective, and is impossible to prove.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup>Eichrodt, 1:136, stated that this is *one* of the factors that determined uncleanness.

<sup>3</sup>Jacob Milgrom, "The Biblical Diet Laws as an Ethical System," *Interpretation* 17 (1963):291

<sup>4</sup>See David P. Wright, "Observations on the Ethical Foundations of the Biblical Dietary Laws: A Response to Jacob Milgrom," in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, p. 197.

7. The distinction is based on *normalcy*.<sup>1</sup> Advocates claim that God regarded imperfection or abnormality in the animal world as conditions that rendered an animal unclean.

"Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong."<sup>2</sup>

This does not explain all the cases, however. For example, why did God declare sheep and goats clean, but pigs and camels unclean? It was probably not that sheep and goats are normal but pigs and camels are abnormal. One explanation is that sheep and goats conform to the norms of behavior that are typical of grass-eating, pastoral animals (chewing their cud and/or having cloven feet). Pigs and camels do not.<sup>3</sup> One problem with this view is that it seems to run counter to the fact that God declared all animals, presumably including pigs and camels, good after He created them (Gen. 1:25).<sup>4</sup>

Many scholars believe that a combination of the above reasons is the best explanation.<sup>5</sup> That is, in some cases one explanation is correct and in other cases another one is correct.

It seems to me that the *symbolical* explanation is usually the best one. I believe that the LORD gave these instructions to the Israelites to teach them about holiness, and that the animals mentioned represented (symbolized) certain things concerning holiness or unholiness. What did they represent? I believe the key to understanding Leviticus 11 is Genesis 3. There we read that, because of the Fall, God cursed the serpent and the ground. All of the unclean animals mentioned in Leviticus 11 have some symbolic connection with the serpent and/or the ground. That is, they bear the characteristics of, or have close contact with, those cursed things. So by prohibiting those animals, the LORD was reminding the Israelites to avoid what He had cursed. Furthermore, each unclean animal has some similarity to some characteristic or characteristics of sinful human beings.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 18-25, 169; Rooker, p. 192; Ross, p. 253; Longman and Dillard, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>4</sup>Wolf, p. 177.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 371.

<sup>6</sup>See Kiuchi, pp. 207-10, for further explanation of this view.

Because God is holy (separate from all forms of impurity and commonality), He required that His people make distinctions that separated them from unholy things.<sup>1</sup> This would account for the laws that required separation—morally, ethically, and even symbolically—from anything associated with pagan life and worship.

Because God is love, He desires the best for His people in every area of their lives. This would also account for the distinctions that ruled out physically and spiritually unhealthful objects and practices, and things contrary to the purposes for which God created them.

As late as New Testament times, the Jews appear to have regarded their food laws as symbolic of the division between themselves and Gentiles (Cf. Acts 10:14, 28). The abolition of these laws under the New Covenant illustrates the fact that by His death, Jesus Christ has broken down the wall of partition that separated Jews and Gentiles for so long (Eph. 2:11-22). However, God has preserved these laws in the Bible so that Christians can also learn lessons concerning holiness.

### **Distinctions between clean and unclean animals 11:1-23**

We have here the same threefold division of animals—that inhabit the land, sea, and air—as the one that appears in the story of creation (Gen. 1:20-23).

"It has long been recognized ... that the order of the purity laws in Leviticus 11 follows that of the creation of animal life in Genesis 1 (Rashi). Moreover, just as in Genesis 1 God distinguished 'good' and 'evil' in his new creation, so also in Leviticus 11 God distinguished the 'clean' from the 'unclean.' In addition, Leviticus 11—16 has numerous parallels to the pattern of Genesis 1—11."<sup>2</sup>

Rashi, referred to within the above quotation, was a Jewish exegete who lived about A.D. 1040-1105.

"In ... [A.D.] 1040, the outstanding Jewish scholar in Christian Europe was born. Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, familiarly known,

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<sup>1</sup>See Michael A. Harbin, "Holiness: Moral Purity between the Persons of the Trinity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175:697 (January-March 2018):17-33.

<sup>2</sup>Sailhamer, p. 39.

from the Hebrew initials of his name, as Rashi, did more to popularize Biblical and Talmudic learning than any other commentator in Jewish history."<sup>1</sup>

### God's gracious provision 11:1-2

The LORD gave the following instructions to both Moses and Aaron. It was important that Aaron understood them since they had implications for the sacrifices and offerings. Moses and Aaron were to pass this information on to all the Israelites. Note that God began positively: He told the Israelites what they *could* eat (cf. Gen. 1:29-30; 2:16-17).

### Land animals 11:3-8

11:3 This section of instructions deals with the larger land animals that the Israelites could eat. They could eat any land animal that had a "divided" (cloven or "split") hoof and chewed the cud.

Apparently the technical definition of chewing the cud that we use today is not what the Hebrews understood by chewing the cud. Today we use this term to describe animals that do not initially chew their food thoroughly—but swallow it, and later regurgitate it—and then chew it thoroughly, as cattle do. Some of the animals described in Leviticus as chewing the cud do not actually do that (e.g., camels [one-humped dromedaries], rock hyraxes, and hares). However these animals do appear to chew their food thoroughly before swallowing it, so this may be what the Israelites thought of as chewing the cud.<sup>2</sup> Snakes do not chew the cud but swallow their prey without chewing it.

11:4-7 Next God gave a list of land animals that were unclean because they did not *both* have a divided hoof and chewed the cud: camels, rock hyraxes, rabbits, and pigs. Hyraxes (conies) are small herbivorous mammals that have compact bodies and very short tails and live in arid countries. A "coney" in North

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<sup>1</sup>Abram Sachar, *A History of the Jews*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>Robert O. Coleman, "Leviticus," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 93.

America refers to a pica, in Britain it refers to a rabbit, but in the Bible it refers to a hyrax.

Perhaps some of the animals with cloven hooves were unclean because they had only two digits instead of the basic five, and were therefore thought of as abnormal.<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps their cloven hooves were intended to remind the Israelites of the serpent's cloven tongue.<sup>2</sup>

11:8 These animals were not to be eaten nor their carcasses touched on penalty of uncleanness. Any dead animal was unclean, perhaps because death was not the normal condition of an animal. Death was the result of the Fall, and the Fall was the result of sin. So any contact with anything dead should have reminded the people to avoid contact with sin.

"Sheep, goats, and oxen were the standard sacrificial animals of pastoralists. They have in common cloven hoofs and rumination [i.e., chewing the cud]. Interpreting this theologically one might say that as God had limited his 'diet' to these animals, so must his people. It is man's duty to imitate his creator (vv. 44-45). When the Israelite restricted his food to God's chosen animals, he recalled that he owed all his spiritual privileges to divine election. As God had chosen certain animals for sacrifice, so he had chosen one nation 'out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth' to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Deut. 7:6; Exod. 19:6)."<sup>3</sup>

### Water animals 11:9-12

11:9 God permitted the Israelites to eat creatures that lived in the water—either "seas" (bodies of water) or "rivers" (running water)—if they had fins and scales. Perhaps the Israelites could

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<sup>1</sup>G. S. Cansdale, *Animals of the Bible*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>See Kiuchi, pp. 204-5.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 172-73.

eat them because fins and scales are the normal means of propulsion and the normal skin among fishes.

- 11:10-12 The basis of God's prohibition may have been that fish with fins and scales did not resemble serpents, whereas other water creatures did. As has already been observed, the means of locomotion (contrary to serpentine locomotion) and the mode of eating (contrary to serpentine feeding) were the two types of tests used to distinguish between clean and unclean animals. As with the proscribed land animals, the Israelites were not to eat the forbidden water animals, or touch their carcasses, but to detest them.

### **Birds 11:13-19**

In this list of animals God did not mention what the Israelites could eat (cf. vv. 2, 3, 9) but went straight to the prohibitions. He prohibited 20 abhorrent varieties of birds. As with the land animals, their feeding habits seem to be the key to their uncleanness. The unclean birds ate flesh with the blood still in it—something that God also forbade among His people (Gen. 9:4; Exod. 23:18; Lev. 17:10-14; et al.). Blood symbolized life, specifically fallen sinful human life, as well as being the physical life fluid that keeps people alive.

### **Insects 11:20-23**

Insects are, of course, a particular sub-group of land animals. The former instructions concerning land animals (vv. 3-8) dealt with the larger land animals, and these instructions deal with the smaller ones.

Perhaps the fact that certain insects swarmed, rather than flew in a more direct and "natural" way, made them unclean. Their close physical connection with the cursed earth is another possibility. Locusts that hopped may have been clean, since this is the normal form of locomotion for birds on land, which they resembled. Locusts also are less earth-bound, because of their ability to jump. The varieties of locusts that crawled, specifically, were unclean.

Kiuchi observed that sinful human beings tend to swarm together for protection from God and other people (cf. Gen. 11:1-9).<sup>1</sup> Perhaps swarming

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 208.



insects were to remind the Israelites of this sinful human tendency so they would avoid it.

### **Pollution by animals and its treatment 11:24-45**

The rest of this chapter addresses issues arising from human contact with unclean animals. Only dead animals polluted human beings (vv. 24, 27, 31, 39). No living unclean animal did so. Death is an abnormal condition for living beings, and it causes pollution (contamination, uncleanness, defilement, infection, disease). Death also has a direct connection with sin (cf. Rom. 6:23).

- 11:24-26 In these verses Moses passed along more specific directions concerning defilement that resulted from touching the carcasses of unclean land animals. The defiled person was to wash his clothes, and he remained unclean until the "evening" (until the sun went down).
- 11:27-28 Walking on paws, which look like hands walking, appears unnatural (to some). This may be the reason why land animals that move on paws were considered unclean. Another explanation is that these animals appear to have a very close connection with the cursed ground—more so than creatures that walk on only two feet.
- 11:29-31 Verses 29 through 38 deal with several kinds of swarming creatures and the uncleanness they created for the Israelites. Swarming may have been regarded as an unnatural, chaotic means of locomotion—swarming through the air; crawling, slithering, scurrying on land (like a serpent). The norm would have been orderly progress.
- 11:32-35 Anything on which a swarming insect fell or landed became unclean. Those objects that water would cleanse could be reused, but those that water would not cleanse completely, such as an earthenware vessel, could not be reused and had to be destroyed. Or perhaps earthenware vessels were contaminated because they were made out of (cursed) earth.
- 11:36 However, if one of these creatures fell or landed in a spring or cistern, an exception was made. Neither the container nor the water would become unclean, only the person who fished the

dead animal out would be unclean. God may have granted this exception because declaring water supplies and large containers unclean would have had drastic consequences in the arid regions where the Israelites lived. More probably, water was recognized symbolically, as well as literally, as life-giving.<sup>1</sup>

- 11:37-38 There was also apparently a distinction between seed for sowing, which was clean, and seed for eating, which was pronounced unclean.
- 11:39-40 God gave further directions about the contaminating effects of even clean animals that died. It was apparently the person's contact with death that made him unclean.
- 11:41-45 In a concluding exhortation God called on His people to "be holy, because I am holy" (v. 45; cf. 19:2; 20:7, 26; 1 Pet. 1:16). These may be the key verses in the book.<sup>2</sup> Our highest duty is to imitate our Creator by being as He is.<sup>3</sup>

"Holiness is a general term denoting that quality in God whereby he is right (rectus) in himself, and in all his actions."<sup>4</sup>

"Since only God can make a person holy, a godly life is a trophy of His grace and a tribute to His power. Teachers can take credit for instructing us, pastors for mentoring us, and friends for encouraging us, but only God gets the glory when people see Christ reproduced in us."<sup>5</sup>

"The solemn statement 'I am the LORD' occurs forty-six times throughout Leviticus [vv. 44, 45, *passim*], identifying Israel's God as the ever living,

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<sup>1</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 252.

<sup>3</sup>See John N. Oswalt, "Holiness: God's Goal for Human Life," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 66:2 (June 2023):267-78.

<sup>4</sup>William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 1:364.

<sup>5</sup>Wiersbe, p. 308.

ever present One. Every aspect of daily life was affected by the reality of the presence of God."<sup>1</sup>

### The purpose of these laws 11:46-47

A final summary states the purpose of these laws: "to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten" (v. 47).

"... they [the Israelites] could never gaze on these [creatures] merely with the feelings of one admiring a *creating* God; they were led to think of them as connecting them with a holy God ..."<sup>2</sup>

"The NT teaches that the OT food laws are no longer binding on the Christian. These laws symbolized God's choice of Israel. They served as constant reminders of God's electing grace. As he had limited his choice among the nations to Israel, so they for their part had to restrict their diet to certain animals."<sup>3</sup>

"Those who have been redeemed by the holy, sovereign God must demonstrate his holiness in their everyday lifestyles (notably in eating)."<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Childbirth uncleanness ch. 12

Chapter 11 deals with animals that the Israelites contacted, and chapters 12 through 15 deal with the Israelites themselves. Note the progression in thought in chapters 11 through 15: from laws affecting the human environment or world (ch. 11), to laws affecting human birth (ch. 12), to laws affecting human conditions within life (chs. 13—15). This is parallel with God's comments after the Fall: to the serpent, then to the woman, and then to the man. This structure is further evidence that the legislation in these chapters was given with Genesis 3 in mind. Another view is that

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<sup>1</sup>Schultz, pp. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>Bonar, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup>Ross, p. 261.

this order proceeds from the longest to the shortest length of time required for purification.<sup>1</sup>

There is a somewhat chiasmic arrangement of the material in chapters 12 through 15:

A     Reproduction: childbirth (ch. 12)

    B     Skin diseases: diagnosis (ch. 13)

    B'    Skin diseases: cleanness (ch. 14)

A'    Reproduction: genital discharges (ch. 15)

The laws of purification begun in this chapter connect in principle with the preceding ones that deal with unclean food and animals. The defilement dealt with in the following group of laws (chs. 12—15) proceeded from the human body. Pollution could come from within the Israelite, as well as from his or her environment. Uncleaness resulted in separation from the fellowship of the sanctuary (tabernacle worship and environs), and/or from fellow Israelites.

Chapter 12 deals with "original sin: what has been transmitted to us" (cf. Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:19).<sup>2</sup> We move now from a discussion of dietetics, in the previous chapter, to one of obstetrics and pediatrics, in this chapter.

"The purification enjoined was wholly of a *ceremonial*, and not at all of a *physical*, kind."<sup>3</sup>

"... at first sight no reason or rationale is apparent for the material selected in Leviticus 12. The subject matter of this chapter deals solely with the question of the impurity of childbirth. What was the 'logic' of focusing on this particular topic at this point in the collection of laws? Many consider its placement here completely arbitrary. However, the details of the text as well as the larger structural patterns provide helpful clues about its purpose. For example, the terminology of Leviticus 12 alludes to the curse involving childbirth in Genesis 3. This suggests that beyond the parallels in Leviticus 11, the

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 743.

<sup>2</sup>Bonar, p. 235.

<sup>3</sup>Bush, p. 115.

further arrangement of topics in Leviticus may also fit within the pattern of Genesis 1—11. If this be the case, then the purpose behind the narrative's present structure may be to portray the spread of ritual defilement in Israel's camp as a reversal of God's original plan of blessing."<sup>1</sup>

Two different situations caused uncleanness: moral transgression and ceremonial defilement. Moral transgressions caused spiritual defilement (moral uncleanness). However ceremonial defilement (ritual uncleanness) did not necessarily mean that the defiled person had sinned. Some practices that resulted in ceremonial uncleanness were not morally wrong in themselves, such as childbearing. Therefore we must not think "sinful" whenever we read "unclean." Unclean does not mean sinful—it means impure. Impurity restricted the Israelite from participating in corporate worship at the tabernacle.

"In order to rightly understand these regulations, it is necessary to bear in mind that, because of her menstruation and the miraculous and secret formation of a human being within her womb, woman was always regarded in ancient times as a more or less mysterious being, and that her motherhood in particular was thought to be an indication that she possessed supernatural powers. For this reason it was almost universally believed that the blood of menstruation had special, magical properties. Ideas of this sort can be found in, e.g., Flavius Josephus (*War* IV 8, 4). The Ancient person generally considered sickness and death to be the work of demons, and since it was not uncommon for a woman to die in childbirth, it was inevitable that she should be regarded especially during the days of her pregnancy and delivery as a favorite object for a variety of demonic attacks that sought her death. Because of this, many peoples would quarantine menstruating and childbearing women."<sup>2</sup>

"... in the Israelite mind, blood was the archsymbol of life (17:10-14; Deut 12:23 ...). Its oozing from the body was no longer the work of demons, but it was certainly the sign of

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 39. He provided charts comparing the laws in Leviticus with the Flood and Babel stories in Genesis on pp. 40-41 and pp. 338-39.

<sup>2</sup>Noordtzij, p. 131.

death. In particular, the loss of seed in vaginal blood ... was associated with the loss of life. Thus it was that Israel—alone among the peoples—restricted impurity solely to those physical conditions involving the loss of vaginal blood and semen, the forces of life, and to scale disease [biblical leprosy], which visually manifested the approach of death ... Why ... does not the Bible label human feces impure, as do the Indians ..., Persians ..., and Essenes ...? The answer is clear. The elimination of waste has nothing to do with death; on the contrary, it is essential to life."<sup>1</sup>

12:1-2 Yahweh spoke the instructions in this chapter to Moses and commanded him to pass them on to the Israelites.

The ritual purification of the mother of a newborn son lasted a total of 40 days. For the first seven of these she was ritually and contagiously unclean. Women were also ritually unclean when they were menstruating (cf. 15:18). Even though she did not enter the tabernacle courtyard after the birth of her child, a new mother's presence in the camp still contaminated the brazen 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 discharge from the vagina that continues for several weeks after childbirth is called the lochia.

12:3 On the eighth day following the boy's birth he was to be circumcised. This was a medical procedure that involved the cutting off of the foreskin of the boy's penis. This operation was normally performed by the boy's parents in their home.

"Circumcision on the eighth day marks the initiation of the newborn baby into the God-Israel covenantal community. The practice was already established in Gen. 17:11, 14. That the eighth day marks a new stage permeates various ceremonies in Leviticus (see 9:1; 14:10, 23; 15:14; 23:36). The point of the circumcision ceremony relates to

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 767.

the fact that the newborn baby becomes a member of the covenantal community, before which he is assumed to be unclean."<sup>1</sup>

Circumcision was an act of obedience to God, by the parents, that demonstrated their faith in God's promises to Abraham (Gen. 17). For many years, many people believed that circumcision was simply a hygienic practice. But some medical experts now dispute this theory, claiming that the practice has little value in promoting good health. On the other hand, other medical studies have shown that the eighth day after birth is the best time to circumcise a boy because his blood clots best on that precise day in his early development.<sup>2</sup>

Some of Israel's neighbor nations also practiced circumcision. But they did so as a puberty rite, mainly on adolescents. Apparently infant circumcision was peculiar to Israel. It precluded and circumvented any licentious puberty ritual that the other nations may have observed, and at the same time it conveyed a spiritual message about the faith of the parents: that they were careful to obey the LORD.<sup>3</sup> The most extensive discussion of circumcision, by Yahweh, is in Genesis 17:9 through 14.

12:4 For the remaining 33 days of the new mother's purification (cf. v. 2) 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.

Keil and Delitzsch believed that the number 40 "... refers to a period of temptation, of the trial of faith, as well as to a period of the strengthening of faith through the miraculous support bestowed by God."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 216.

<sup>2</sup>See L. Holt Jr. and R. McIntosh, *Holt Pediatrics*, pp. 125-26.

<sup>3</sup>See Harris, p. 574.

<sup>4</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:161. Cf. Exod. 34:28; Deut. 8:2; 1 Kings 19:8; Matt. 4:2.

According to this explanation, the strengthening of the new mother's faith was the primary purpose for the 40-day recovery period.

"It was the sense of the sacredness of the tabernacle and temple space that made purification from moral and ritual impurity essential."<sup>1</sup>

"This narrative tells us that as long as the woman was unclean, 'she must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary' (12:4). This statement defines impurity with respect to the sanctuary (the tabernacle) and, more importantly, in terms of one's acceptability within the worshipping community. Impurity is not defined in terms of a vague notion of taboo but in terms of acceptance or restriction from worship. The sense of impurity is thus defined with respect to the goal of the covenant and the goal of Creation ... , that is, the worship of God."<sup>2</sup>

12:5 The purification periods (seven and 33 days) were twice as long (i.e., 14 and 66 days, totaling 80 days for the entire purification time) if the woman bore a female child. One explanation for this difference is that, in the case of a female child, the mother had given birth to a sinner, who would very possibly bring forth another sinner herself, eventually.

A second explanation is that God designed this distinction since "the superiority of their [male's] sex ... pervades the Mosaic institutions."<sup>3</sup> Advocates of this view see support for it in the fact that the redemption price of women was about half that of men in Israel (27:2-7). These values reflect the importance ("superiority") of males in that culture—as the responsible leaders of their families.

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<sup>1</sup>Sprinkle, p. 654.

<sup>2</sup>Sailhamer, p. 334. This author proceeded to point out parallels between the creation account and this chapter.

<sup>3</sup>Bush, p. 114.



A third explanation is that the number of days was doubled since the daughter was not circumcised.<sup>1</sup>

A fourth possibility is that the distinction resulted from the curse on Eve and her sex that followed the Fall.<sup>2</sup> I favor this interpretation.

"Although this regulation is often taken as reflecting childbirth's problematical nature, the occasion is actually appointed by the Lord as one to remind the mother of her spiritual condition, through birth pain and her period of alienation from the sanctuary. Thus the prescription reaffirms the reality of the fall and its ongoing nature, which tends rarely to be considered by humanity."<sup>3</sup>

Fifth, there is some medical evidence that the postnatal discharge (lochia) lasts longer in the case of a girl.<sup>4</sup> If this was true in ancient Israel, this explanation is said to explain the difference.

A sixth view follows:

"Perhaps God established these regulations primarily for the health of the mother and her 'bonding' to her daughter. The social structure of Israel was decidedly masculine, and sons were more welcome than daughters."<sup>5</sup>

Why should a bloody discharge make someone ritually unclean? If we apply the normalcy principle already observed to this legislation, we could conclude that bleeding suggested an unnatural condition to the Israelites. Loss of blood leads to

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<sup>1</sup>Hess, p. 688.

<sup>2</sup>Bonar, pp. 236-37.

<sup>3</sup>Kiuchi, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup>D. I. Macht, "A Scientific Appreciation of Leviticus 12:1-5," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933):253-60.

<sup>5</sup>Wiersbe, p. 269. See Sprinkle, p. 644, for several other explanations, and *The NET2 Bible* note on 12:5.

death, the antithesis of a healthy normal life. Anyone losing blood is at least potentially in danger of becoming less than physically perfect and is, therefore, unclean.<sup>1</sup>

"... 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."<sup>2</sup>

"Some commentators have found difficulty with this section of purification laws, since it appears to designate as unclean the act of childbirth that resulted from God's command to be fruitful and multiply (Gn. 1:28). Since children were regarded as a divine heritage and gift (Ps. 127:3), and a fruitful woman was esteemed as blessed of God (cf. Ps. 128:3), it would appear somewhat surprising for the birth of a child to be regarded as a circumstance that was sinful, and therefore needed atonement. The legislation, however, deals with the secretions that occur at parturition [childbirth], and it is these that make the mother unclean. Thus the chapter should be read within the context of chapter 15, which also deals with bodily secretions."<sup>3</sup>

12:6-7      At the end of the time of her ritual purification, whether 40 days or 80 days, the mother was to bring to the tabernacle a burnt offering of a one-year-old lamb, and a sin offering of a young pigeon or a young dove. These offerings would make atonement for her and make her ritually clean from the polluting effect of childbearing.

12:8        If she could not afford a lamb, God permitted her to offer two young pigeons or two young doves.

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 188.

<sup>3</sup>Harrison, pp. 133-34.

The fact that Mary, the mother of Jesus, brought the two birds for the offerings specified here (Luke 2:22-24), indicates that she and Joseph were poor. It also shows that she was a sinner, since she offered a sin offering. God graciously made a provision for the poor, so that they could offer birds instead of a lamb for the burnt offering (cf. 1:14-17; 14:21-22).

"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."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Coverings uncleanness chs. 13—14

Many translations and commentaries have regarded the legislation in these chapters as dealing with modern leprosy, but this is misleading. The confusion has arisen because the term "leprosy" appears in many English texts in these chapters, and English readers automatically think that what we know as modern leprosy is in view. But as the chapters unfold it becomes increasingly clear that what is in view is not modern leprosy (called "Hansen's disease").<sup>2</sup> The Septuagint version (abbreviated "LXX") has overly influenced the English translation of the Hebrew word used here: *tsara'at*. In the Septuagint, the Greek word *lepra* translates *tsara'at*, and some English translations have simply transliterated this Greek word because of the similarities between biblical leprosy and modern leprosy.

The Greeks, however, used a different term for human leprosy: *elephantiasis*, not *lepra*. That *tsara'at* does not refer to modern "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

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup>See S. G. Browne, *Leprosy in the Bible*; E. V. Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy' and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 107 (1975):87-105; John Wilkinson, "Leprosy and Leviticus: The Problem of Description and Identification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1984):153-69; Rebecca A. and E. Eugene Baillie, M. D., "Biblical Leprosy as Compared to Present-Day Leprosy," *Christian Medical Society Journal* 14:3 (Fall 1983):27-29.

scale, and *tsara'at* may also refer to scale.<sup>1</sup> Milgrom translated *tsara'at* "scale disease."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Thus the connection with Genesis 3 that occurs in the two previous chapters continues in chapters 13 and 14.

Chapters 13 and 14 contain three parts. Moses, in Leviticus, frequently divided various material into three subsections, as we have already seen in previous chapters. Each part in this section begins, "The LORD spoke to Moses" (13:1; 14:1, 33), and it closes, "This is the law for" (13:59; 14:32, 54).

Abnormal skin disease is similar to sin, and this chapter shows its horrid features (cf. Matt. 15:19).<sup>4</sup>

"Nothing that entered into the Levitical system, which we are now considering, was more remarkably fraught with symbolical import than the portion concerning the treatment of the leper. Other parts of the ritual taught impressively the *fearful effects* of sin; this taught its *defiling nature*."<sup>5</sup>

Some commentators have concluded that the Israelites contracted the causes of leprosy in Egypt.<sup>6</sup> There does not seem to be any Scriptural basis for this view, though it may be true.

### **The diagnosis and treatment of abnormalities in human skin and clothing ch. 13**

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

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<sup>1</sup>See Hulse, p. 93; Browne, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, pp. 768-826.

<sup>3</sup>See Kiuchi, pp. 227-28.

<sup>4</sup>Bonar, p. 239.

<sup>5</sup>Bush, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup>E.g., Jamieson, et al., p. 93.

conditions. God was not dealing with them here as a Physician, but as a Public Health Inspector. His objective was not so much their physical recovery in this legislation—though He was, of course, compassionate and loved them—but their proper participation in the worship of their holy God. Sin kept them from fellowship with God, and these abnormalities had some connection with sin, if only symbolically—though not in an immediate cause and effect relationship necessarily.

Furthermore we should remember that the Jews regarded leprosy as a punishment for sin, as, indeed, they generally regarded any physical abnormality (cf. John 9:1-2). Whereas all abnormalities are ultimately the result of the Fall, it is a mistake to connect every abnormality with some specific sin (cf. John 9:3). Sometimes the connection cannot be discovered because of the complexity of sin.

"In the ancient Near Eastern world, where the hideous character of leprosy and the suffering it produced were well known, this disease more than any other was ascribed in [*sic* to] the influence of demonic powers, and it was feared as much as death itself (see 2 Sam. 3:29)."<sup>1</sup>

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.

### **Abnormalities in human skin 13:1-46**

God dealt with 21 different cases of skin diseases in this pericope. Some of these may have included measles, smallpox, scarlet fever, and other diseases characterized by a skin rash.<sup>2</sup> Some authorities believe that an exact identification of the various forms of scaly skin disorders described in this chapter is impossible today.<sup>3</sup> Others feel more confident. One authority suggested the following identifications:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzi, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Harris, p. 577.

<sup>3</sup>Browne, pp. 5-6.

<sup>4</sup>Hulse, pp. 96-97.

The swelling, scab, or bright spot (vv. 2-28)	<i>Psoriasis</i> : a chronic, non-infectious skin disease characterized by the presence of well-demarcated, slightly raised reddish patches of various sizes covered by dry grayish-white or silvery scales.
An infection on the head or beard (vv. 29-37)	<i>Favus</i> : a much more severe and damaging infection in which the fungus invades both the hair and the full thickness of the skin.
Bright spots on the skin (vv. 38-39)	<i>Leukoderma</i> : a slightly disfiguring condition in which patches of otherwise normal skin lose their natural coloring and become completely white.

13:1 Yahweh gave the following laws, in chapter 13, to Moses and Aaron. The priests had the responsibility of distinguishing between the clean and the unclean, and they had to teach the people the differences (cf. 10:10-11). Aaron and his sons represented God to the Israelites.

13:2-8 Serious *skin eruptions* apparently began with some sort of swelling or scab or shiny patch ("bright spot") on the skin. Anyone with these symptoms was to come before a priest for examination (v. 2). Early detection of leprosy was important, as is also true when it comes to dealing with sin. If the hair in the infected area had turned white, and if the infected area was deeper than the surrounding skin, the priest was to pronounce the person unclean. (v. 3)

"First, by appearing deeper than the skin, *sara'at* fittingly expresses how the human egocentric nature is ordinarily hidden within a person (under

the skin) but in due course manifests itself outwardly."<sup>1</sup>

If the person had a bright spot on his body and it was white, but the hair in the infected area had not turned white, and the infected area was not deeper than the surrounding skin, then the priest was to put the effected person in quarantine for seven days (v. 4).

The text does not specify the place of isolation, but since Miriam was put out of the camp (Num. 12:14-15), and King Uzziah had to live in separate quarters (1 Kings 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:21), the place of isolation was probably a structure erected outside the camp.

On the seventh day the priest was to examine the person again. If there did not seem to him to be any change in the person's condition, the priest was to extend the quarantine period for an additional seven days (v. 5).

On the fourteenth day of the quarantine the priest was to examine the person again. If the infected area had faded or not spread on the man's skin, the priest was to pronounce him clean. He only had a skin rash, not leprosy. The priest could pronounce the leper clean, but he could not pronounce him cured of his disease. He was a priest, not a dermatologist. The man could then wash his clothes and get on with his life in a ritually clean condition (v. 6).

But if the man's rash continued to spread on his skin, he was to return to the priest. When the priest verified the spread of the rash he would declare that the man was unclean and a leper (vv. 7-8).

13:9-17     A second set of tests was appropriate when "raw flesh" (v. 10, an open sore) appeared in cases of *chronic skin disease*. When this infection became apparent the Israelite was to appear before a priest. This was evidently leprosy that remained on the skin for some time and would not heal.

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 229.

A white swelling on the skin, with white hair in it, were signs of a serious skin disease ("chronic leprosy," or "old leprosy" AV, NKJV, v. 11). The priest was to declare the infected person unclean and quarantine him.

If the afflicted person became completely covered in white skin—rather than having blotchy, infected skin with open sores—the priest was to pronounce him clean (vv. 12-13). It was the patchy open-sore condition of the skin that made the person unclean. A totally white skin condition, without any open sores, indicated that the person no longer had the disease and/or that it was not contagious.<sup>1</sup> In either case, this was not a case of true leprosy, if the body's whole skin surface was affected and turned white.<sup>2</sup>

"... patchy whiteness on a person is pronounced unclean, but a body completely covered with sara'at is pronounced clean. Thus, since a person completely covered with sara'at is clean, the whiteness symbolizes cleanness."<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, if a person uncovers his sinful condition only partially to God, God regards him as guilty, but if he uncovers it completely, God considers him forgiven.

Raw flesh indicated leprosy and rendered the Israelite who had it unclean (vv. 14-15). But if the infected raw flesh turned white, the priest was to declare the leper clean—even though the leper's skin was white (vv. 16-17).

13:18-23 A third test of a slightly different form of skin disease follows. White hair in a deep infection or scar, which formed following a *boil*, indicated a serious skin disease. The procedures for determining if the person had leprosy and was unclean, or if he did not have it and was clean, are the same as in the previous two cases.

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, p. 119; Keil and Delitzsch, 2:380.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, pp. 357-58.

<sup>3</sup>Kiuchi, p. 228.



"There is always the danger of old sins spreading and becoming malignant."<sup>1</sup>

"... the flesh [sinful human nature] must be kept under close observation, for it can break out in the most alarming manner."<sup>2</sup>

13:24-28 A fourth case follows. Psoriasis can occur on scars or at sites of *burns* and other previous injuries.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, we are weakest spiritually in those areas of our lives where we have previously failed. Again, the procedure was to be the same as in the previous three cases.

13:29-37 A fifth case of suspected leprosy on the head or beard follows. Yellowish hair indicated another serious skin abnormality: *sore*s ("scale" or "itch" NIV, ESV, NRSV, or "defiling skin disease" TNIV, or "scall" AV, NKJV, NET2, or "scurf" NEB, v. 30). Black hair in the suspected area indicated that there was no serious skin disease there, in which case the person was pronounced clean. However, if the sore kept spreading, with yellow hair remaining, and no black hair showed up, the person was still infected and unclean. In this case the suspected leper was to shave himself (or herself, cf. v. 29), but not the scale, at the end of the first week of his or her quarantine (vv. 31-32).

"Leprosy [like sin] could break out in the most unlikely spots. If it were hidden by the hair of the head or beard, it might not be discovered for some time."<sup>4</sup>

"Contrary to the previous case [in verses 24-28], the potential problem is to be known not just by the afflicted person but also by others. In that there is no way his disease can be hidden from the public, the case is more threatening to him. ... Symbolically it appears that the egocentric nature may manifest itself in such a way that it destroys

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 1:383.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Hulse, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup>McGee, 1:383.

a person's public dignity. However, is it not ultimately good to be deprived of such a thing?"<sup>1</sup>

- 13:38-39 Patches of skin ("bright spots," v. 38) go completely white when a person contracts leukoderma ("eczema," v. 39). The law did not regard this type of skin disorder as serious enough to render the afflicted person unclean. These verses deal with *rashes*.

"Thus more than the preceding cases, this prescription demands self-examination."<sup>2</sup>

- 13:40-44 *Baldness* by itself did not result in uncleanness, but serious skin disease, indicated by a reddish-white infection and swelling on the bald area, did. Psoriasis may be in view here as well (cf. vv. 24-28).<sup>3</sup>

- 13:45-46 These verses deal with the treatment of those people who were diagnosed as unclean. Tearing one's clothes, messing one's hair, and covering one's upper lip were all signs of mourning in the ancient Near East (cf. 10:6; 21:10; Gen. 37:34; Num. 14:6; 2 Sam. 1:11; 2 Kings 11:14; 19:1; 22:11, 19; Ezra 9:5; Ezek. 24:17, 22; Mic. 3:7). The leper was also to cry out publicly: "Unclean! Unclean!"

"Who does not see in this the manner in which we are to acknowledge and bewail the corruption of our nature?"<sup>4</sup>

Not every place outside the camp was unclean; there were clean places outside the camp (cf. 4:12; et al.). However the ritually unclean person—though not necessarily physically unclean—was to live in a ritually unclean area, alone and isolated, outside the camp. The idea was that he or she could not come close to God, who resided in the tabernacle at the

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 234. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>3</sup>Hulse, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup>Bush, p. 126.

center of the camp. His unclean condition also damaged his fellowship with other people, as sin does.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

"Many sinners comfort themselves by saying they will have plenty of company in hell. Notice that the leper was alone."<sup>2</sup>

But living "alone" probably means living apart from the clean Israelites, not living completely isolated from every other person (cf. 2 Kings 7:3-14; Luke 17:12-14).

"... as human skin was the focus of guilt and shame in the beginning, so now diseases of the skin provide an occasion to demonstrate the need for human cleansing. In other words, just as the effects of the first sin were immediately displayed in human skin ('And their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked,' Ge 3:7), so the writer uses the graphic horror of skin diseases found in these texts to depict the human state of uncleanness before a holy God. ...

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 1:385.

"According to the regulations in Leviticus, if one were found to be unclean, 'As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp' (13:46). In the same way, the Genesis narratives show that when Adam (and Eve) sinned, 'the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. And he drove Adam out' (Ge 3:23-24). Like the unclean person in Leviticus, they had to live 'outside the camp.'"<sup>1</sup>

"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. ... 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)."<sup>2</sup>

The Israelites evidently regarded biblical leprosy as representing sin. It resulted in the leper's separation both from God and from other people. In many respects leprosy and sin were similar in both their character and consequences.

"Before the people of God [i.e., the Israelites] can enter the presence of the holy God they must be free of all disease. ...

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 337.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 203.

Bodily diseases are incompatible with the holy presence of the LORD."<sup>1</sup>

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ has made it possible for Christians to enter God's presence (cf. Isa. 53:5).

"In the church today no rule prevents people with skin diseases from entering the place of worship, because it is simply an assembly of believers and not the sanctuary with the holy of holies and the actual dwelling of the glory of the LORD. Yet common sense should tell someone with a contagious illness to remain at home or in the hospital. That is the practical side of Leviticus. Nevertheless, the theological understanding behind any illness is that it is part and parcel of the fallen condition of human life in this world."<sup>2</sup>

### Abnormalities in clothing 13:47-59

God mentioned three different cases of diseased garments in this part of chapter 13: a reddish or green spot indicating a breakout of contamination in a *linen* or *woolen* piece of clothing, or in any *leather* article.

"Since the clothes made of animal skin were, in Gen. 3:21, a sign of the Lord's grace, it is surmised that here in Lev. 13, by expanding the areas of infection not just to garments but to articles made from animal skin, the destructive power of *sara'at* ["scale," or biblical leprosy] over against grace is stressed ..."<sup>3</sup>

13:47-52 When an Israelite suspected that one of his garments had been infected with leprosy, he was to bring it to a priest. The priest was then to put the garment in quarantine for seven days. On the seventh day the priest was to examine the garment. If the suspicious mark on the garment had spread, he was to burn the garment, because it was leprous and unclean.

13:53-55 If the suspicious mark on the garment had not spread, the priest was to wash the garment and put it in quarantine for

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>3</sup>Kiuchi, p. 239.

another seven days. At the end of the second seven-day period the priest was to wash the garment again. If the evidence of leprosy was still in the clothing, even if it had not spread, the priest was to burn it.

13:56-58 But if the leprosy had faded by the end of the second seven-day quarantine, the priest was to wash the garment and tear the faded part that showed signs of leprosy out of the garment. If signs of leprosy reappeared in the garment it was to be burned up. But if signs of leprosy did not appear the garment was to be washed again and was pronounced clean.

13:59 The ritual explained in verses 47 through 58 was how the priest was to determine if clothing had leprosy in it, and how he was to deal with it. This ritual is obviously similar to the ritual used in dealing with suspected leprosy in people (vv. 2-46).

Material objects do not become ill, but they do occasionally become contaminated due to mold, mildew, or some other invasive agent. And they can transfer a skin disease through contact. The Mosaic Law did not view leprosy in clothing to be as great a threat to the health of the Israelites as a communicable disease or a plague were. Leprosy in garments could, however, infect a person, and leprous garments represented deviation from a proper wholesome and normal condition.

"Decay or corruption [in one's immediate environment] is incompatible with the holiness of the LORD and must be removed."<sup>1</sup>

"This *leprosy in garments* is to represent something quite different from leprosy in the man himself. It is to be a type of sin and defilement, not in his person, but in *the things around him*. Anything *round about the man* is this *garment*; the circumstances in the midst of which he is placed, the business he engages in, the comforts that impart a warmth to his person, the occurrences that affect his daily feeling."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 297.

<sup>2</sup>Bonar, p. 259.

A person's clothing (13:47-59) and housing (ch. 14) 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 in order for fellowship with God and others to be intimate.

"... the common denominator of all the skin ailments described in Lev 13 is that the body is wasting away."<sup>1</sup>

"The whole thrust of the prescription in this chapter ironically insinuates that all humanity is incorrigibly unclean, and in a state of hiding before the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

### **The ritual cleansing of abnormalities in human skin and houses ch. 14**

Whereas chapter 13 dealt with the diagnosis and treatment of abnormalities in human skin (13:1-46) and clothing (13:47-59), chapter 14 deals with the ritual cleansing of abnormalities in human skin (14:1-32) and houses (14:33-53).

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"Symbolically the closer a person approaches the Lord, the more spiritually uncovered he or she must become."<sup>4</sup>

The procedures described here were not curative but ritual. God prescribed no treatment for the cure of "leprosy" here, but He explained how the priests and the Israelites could recognize healed skin, so that formerly afflicted individuals could resume worship in the community. Anthropologists refer to such rites as "rites of aggregation." These are ceremonies in which people in abnormal social conditions experience reintegration into ordinary society. Shaving, washing, and offering sacrifices

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 819.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 285.

<sup>4</sup>Kiuchi, p. 251.

are regular parts of such rites.<sup>1</sup> The ritual involved two acts separated by an interval of seven days.

### The ritual cleansing of abnormalities in human skin 14:1-32

14:1-2 Yahweh again spoke to Moses, and presumably Aaron (cf. 13:1), about people with "leprosy." This time He specified the procedure that was to take place so that the infected person could be declared ritually clean. He was to be brought to a priest at the tabernacle. Someone needed to bring the leper to the priest just like someone needs to bring a sinner to the Savior. Presumably the leper could bring himself to the priest if he was able to do so.

14:3-5 The first part of the ritual took place outside the camp. It restored the formerly unclean person to the fellowship of the other Israelites, from whom he had experienced separation due to his skin disease. The priest and the leper were to "go out" to a place outside the camp.

"The ministers of righteousness are to be always ready to meet the returning penitent, who would fain be cleansed from the defilement of sin, or who hopes he has been, and welcome him back to the fold of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

The priest was to examine the leper and, if he determined that his leprosy had been healed, he was to assemble two live clean birds, cedar wood, a scarlet string, and some hyssop. Then he was to order that one of the birds be slaughtered in an earthenware vessel over running water. Who did the slaughtering is not specified. Perhaps it was the offerer.

Cedar wood had antiseptic qualities, and it was slow to decay, so it probably represented the continuance of life. Some interpreters have compared it to the humanity of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The scarlet color of the string looked like blood, and it probably symbolized sacrificial blood. The hyssop represented

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<sup>1</sup>See E. R. Leach, *Culture and Communication*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>2</sup>Bush, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., McGee, 1:387.



purification from the corruption of death, since the priests used this spongy plant for purification in some of Israel's other rituals. The blood of the bird that was slain over the running water probably signified life, and the running water purification.

14:6-7 Next the priest was to dip the live bird, the cedar wood, the scarlet string, and the hyssop in the blood of the bird that had been slaughtered. Then he was to sprinkle the former leper seven times with the blood of the slain bird. Then he was to set the live bird free so that it could fly away.

Both of the birds used in this ritual evidently symbolized the Israelite who was about to reenter the covenant community. The bird that was killed probably represented the formerly unclean person, whose fate was death but for God's mercy. The bird that was released stood for the same person, now cleansed, and released from the bondage of his disease, endowed with new life, and at liberty to reenter the covenant fellowship. These two birds served a symbolic function similar to that of the two goats on the Day of Atonement (ch. 16).<sup>1</sup>

"As on the Day of Atonement when two goats were required to fulfill the entire picture of Christ's death, so two birds are required in the cleansing of leprosy—the type of sin. The first bird slain speaks of Christ 'delivered for our offences,' while the second bird, dipped in the blood of the first bird and released, speaks of Christ 'raised again for our justification' (Rom. 4:25)."<sup>2</sup>

14:8-9 The former leper was then to wash his clothes, shave off all of his hair, and bathe in water. This would result in his being ritually clean, and he could reenter the camp of Israel. But he could not enter his own tent for seven days. On the seventh day of the ritual he was to shave off all his hair again, wash his clothes, and bathe in water. Washing his clothes, shaving his hair, and bathing in water all could have been done at the same

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<sup>1</sup>D. J. Davies, "An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977):397; J. R. Porter, *Leviticus*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>Chafer, 3:122.

time.<sup>1</sup> All of these steps were necessary for him to become ritually clean after being a leper.

"Undoubtedly these rites are not so much hygienic as symbolic. The rites function to remind the person of the disease he no longer has: his spiritual hiding of himself from the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

"A very remarkable difference marks the vast superiority of *our* great High Priest over the high priest of the Jews. ... But the Lord Jesus *heals* the leper."<sup>3</sup>

- 14:10-11 The next act of cleansing took place before the altar of burnt offerings on the eighth day of the ritual, and it restored the former leper to fellowship with the sanctuary and God. First, the leper was to offer a guilt offering that consisted of two male ewe lambs without defect, and a yearling ewe lamb without defect. This offering compensated God for all the sacrifices, tithes, and first-fruits that the afflicted person could not present during his uncleanness.<sup>4</sup> Another view is that the law prescribed a guilt offering because some sickness resulted from sin (cf. Num. 12:9-15; 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Chron. 26:17-21).<sup>5</sup>

The former leper was then to offer, as a grain offering, three-tenths of an ephah (about 1 cubic foot) of fine flour mixed with oil, and one log (about half a pint) of oil. The priest then presented the former leper and his offerings to the LORD at the altar of burnt offerings.

- 14:12-13 Then the priest was to wave one of the male lambs, with the log of oil, before the LORD as a guilt offering. He would then kill this lamb beside the brazen altar. Part of this guilt offering would become the priest's portion, as was true also of the

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 841.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup>Bush, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 210.

<sup>5</sup>Milgrom, *Cult and ...*, p. 80.

burnt offerings. That portion was to be treated as "most holy" because it had been offered to the LORD.

- 14:14 The priest was then to apply blood from this guilt offering to the right earlobe, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot of the former leper—symbolizing the sanctification of his hearing, serving, and walking by the atoning blood.

"The application of the blood and oil to the ear, the thumb, and the toe of the leper, seems to intimate that every member of the body, and every faculty of the soul, needs a *special* purification from guilt and corruption, and a *special* consecration in the renewed man to the service of God [cf. Rom. 6:13]."<sup>1</sup>

- 14:15 The priest would also pour some of the log of oil onto the palm of the former leper's left palm. Perhaps this symbolized the offerer's desire to receive the LORD's presence.<sup>2</sup>

- 14:16-18 The priest was then to consecrate the oil to the LORD by sprinkling it seven times before Him (vv. 16-17). He next was to apply some of the oil to the cleansed leper's right earlobe, right hand thumb, right foot big toe, and head—representing his anointing with the power and gifts of God's Spirit. He also was to put some of this oil on the guilt offering.

- 14:19-20 Then the priest was to offer sin, burnt, and grain sacrifices for the cleansed leper. This entire ritual made atonement for the former leper.

"The priests were the public health officers, but they served in their priestly capacity. Israel was a holy nation, and even her cleansing from sickness was done with religious ceremony. Sickness was symbolic of sin, and even now it should not be forgotten that sickness and death are part of God's curse on the sin of Adam and his race.

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 257.

Therefore, cleansing the diseased person required sacrifices (cf. Luke 5:12-15)."<sup>1</sup>

14:21-32 Accommodations were made for the poor lepers in Israel who could not afford to bring the regular offerings, but the ritual, which is described in these verses, was very similar.

"The steps in the leper's cleansing and restoration picture to us what Jesus Christ has done for sinners."<sup>2</sup>

"The LORD provided the way for someone restored to health to enter full participation in the covenant community through the ritual of sacrificial atonement. ...

"... with the coming of Christ, God himself sought out the 'lepers' and healed them. Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost. His outreach to the lepers was on a par with his ministry to other sick people and social outcasts, such as tax-collectors and prostitutes. ... Jesus' ministry and that of his disciples (Matt. 10:8) was one which brought reconciliation between God and man. Therefore the old laws isolating men because of their unsightly appearance had become inappropriate and out of date."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harris, p. 582.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 272.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 213-14.

<sup>4</sup>Ross, pp. 291-92.

### The ritual cleansing of abnormalities in houses 14:33-53

The fact that certain abnormal conditions afflicted houses, as well as people, reminded the Israelites that their dwelling places as well as their bodies needed to be holy.

"To teach that *this earth* is under a curse, God sent this leprosy on *houses*; just as to teach that men are under a curse He sent leprosy on their bodies."<sup>1</sup>

"Sin, where that reigns in a house, is a plague there, as it is in a heart."<sup>2</sup>

- 14:33 This introductory verse ties what follows in with what precedes.
- 14:34-35 This law anticipated life in Canaan, when the Israelites would live in houses of stone (v. 40) and plaster (v. 41) rather than in tents. God would put the abnormal condition ("a spot of leprosy," v. 34) on a house, as He likewise did on a person. It did not just pass from person to dwelling by contagion. All that God's people experience ultimately comes from Him. The Israelites were expected to take the initiative and report a suspected case of leprosy in a house to a priest.
- 14:36-38 The priest was to order that everything in the house be removed from it so that he could examine it thoroughly. If he found evidence of leprosy—a spot on a wall the was reddish or greenish and appeared deeper than the wall—he was to quarantine the house for seven days.
- 14:39-42 At the end of the quarantine, if the priest found that the spot had spread, he was to remove any stones that were effected, plus all the plaster on the walls, and order them to be taken to an unclean place outside the city. Then the house was to be repaired with new stones and plaster.

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<sup>1</sup>Bonar, p. 278. Cf. McGee, 1:390; Kiuchi, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 128.

- 14:43-45 If leprosy recurred in such a house, after its initial cleansing, the whole building was to be torn down and its materials carried to an unclean place.
- 14:46-47 Anyone who entered the house during its quarantine became ritually unclean until evening, and whoever lay down in it or ate in it had to wash his clothes.
- 14:48 If the spot did not reappear after the re-plastering, the house was declared clean.
- 14:49-53 God prescribed the same rite of purification—using two birds, cedar wood, scarlet string, and hyssop—for a house as for a person. He did not require sacrifices, because buildings simply have to be clean. They were not morally culpable (blameworthy) like people are. The bird set free (v. 53) has suggested Christ's resurrection to some readers.<sup>1</sup>

"... although it is primarily in the human body that sin manifests itself, it spreads from man to the things which he touches, uses, inhabits, though without our being able to represent this spread as a physical contagion."<sup>2</sup>

Wholeness and holiness are not the same, but wholeness reflects holiness.

### **Summary of these ordinances 14:54-57**

The final four verses of this chapter conclude the instructions concerning abnormalities in the Israelites' skin, their garments, and their houses (chs. 13—14) by summarizing them and explaining the purpose of these regulations. The emphasis in this whole section has been on God's provision for cleansing—explaining how something unclean could be consecrated to use again. God's great desire since the Fall has been the restoration of all things affected by it to fellowship with Himself and usefulness to Himself and to humankind. This is as evidence of His gracious character.

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Bonar, p. 284.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:391.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

"As the Flood was once necessary to cleanse God's good creation from the evil that had contaminated it, so the ritual washings were a necessary part of checking the spread of sin and its results in the covenant community."<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Genital uncleanness ch. 15

This chapter concludes the regulations that deal with the purification of uncleanness (chs. 11—15).

"The uncleanness laws start with uncleanness that is permanent: that associated with various animals and food (ch. 11). Then they deal with the uncleanness of childbirth, which may last up to eighty days (ch. 12). Chs. 13 and 14 deal with uncleanness of indefinite duration; it all depends how long the serious skin disease persists. Finally, ch. 15 deals with discharges associated with reproduction, pollutions which usually only affect a person for up to a week. Whatever the explanation of the order of the material within chs. 11—15, these laws illuminate the day of atonement rituals, which are designed to cleanse the tabernacle 'of the uncleannesses of the Israelites' (16:16). Without these chapters we should be at a loss to know what was the purpose of the ceremonies described in ch. 16."<sup>3</sup>

In chapter 15 God dealt with four cases of secretions from the reproductive organs that resulted in ritual uncleanness. Two of these cases arose from disease, and two from natural causes. There does not seem to be any basis for concluding that all four of these cases involved licentiousness, as some commentators have asserted.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 302.

<sup>2</sup>Sailhamer, p. 338.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 216.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Jamieson, et al., p. 96.

"The choice of male and female reproductive organs seems to be related to the fact that these are the parts of the body humans try to hide as much as possible. Thus the liquids or pus that come from these seem to be symbolically viewed as what comes from the innermost part of the human heart. They are evaluated as unclean, and thus the object of the Lord's wrath ..."<sup>1</sup>

This chapter may thus typify "the secret flow of sin from the natural heart" (cf. Rom 7:18).<sup>2</sup> The chapter opens with an introductory statement (v. 1), and closes with a summary (vv. 31-33)—which we have come to recognize as typical in this part of Leviticus. In the four central sections there is a definition of the type of contamination, a description of its consequences, and an explanation of the appropriate rite of purification. The rite usually involved simply washing and waiting until evening.

"Thus a number of directions for cleansing in the event of defilement, primary or secondary, function primarily to uncover the true condition of the person's most secret inner parts."<sup>3</sup>

The first two cases concern continuing and occasional emissions of the male. Moses followed these with the last two cases, which reverse this order and deal with the female. The writer apparently used this chiasmic literary structure in order to reflect the unity of humankind in having two sexes. Verse 18, the center of the chiasm, deals with sexual intercourse, which is the most profound expression of the unity and interdependence of the sexes.

- A Introduction (vv. 1-2a)
- B Abnormal male discharges (vv. 2b-15)
- C Normal male discharges (vv. 16-17)
- D Marital intercourse (v. 18)

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Bonar, p. 287. Cf. McGee, 1:392.

<sup>3</sup>Kiuchi, p. 277.



- C' Normal female discharges (vv. 19-24)
- B' Abnormal female discharges (vv. 25-30)
- A' Conclusion (vv. 31-33)

### Introduction to the regulations regarding genital discharges 15:1-2b

"Moses and Aaron are both addressed, as in the case of the disease of leprosy (xiii. 1). Wherever there is only *a law* laid down, Moses alone hears the voice. God speaks only to the *lawgiver*. But, in cases where disease is prescribed for by special rules, Aaron is joined with Moses. Is this because a priest—a high priest—ought to have much compassion, and might be more likely to learn compassion while hearing the tone of pity in which the Lord spoke of man's misery?"<sup>1</sup>

"A priest must have feelings of deep emotion; he must resemble *Jesus*, the Antitype, weeping over His own kindred most of all ..." <sup>2</sup>

### Abnormal male discharges 15:2b-15

#### The description and consequences of an abnormal male discharge 15:2b-12

- 15:2b-3 The first case is the "discharge" (or secretion) caused by some disease that affected a man's sexual organs. The Hebrew word *basar*, translated "body" (v. 2b, et al.), has a wide range of meanings. In this chapter it clearly refers specifically to a woman's vagina (v. 19). Likewise it apparently refers specifically to a man's penis (vv. 2b-3).

The writer did not describe the physical problem in detail. The description of the discharges seem to refer to either a diseased flow of semen (gonorrhea; though *zera'*, "seed," is never used in this pericope),<sup>3</sup> or to a discharge of pus from the urethra (the duct through which urine is expelled).<sup>4</sup> In either

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<sup>1</sup>Bonar, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>3</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 907.

<sup>4</sup>Harrison, p. 160.

case, this was a fairly long-lasting ailment. According to Hess, gonorrhea did not exist before the fifteenth century A.D., so a parasitical infection of the urinary tract is probably in view here.<sup>1</sup>

Another, less likely possibility, is that this first case describes some affliction that both men and women suffered, such as diarrhea. The Hebrew words translated "any man" (v. 2) permit this interpretation. However, the structure of the chapter and the references to the sexual organs argue against this view. Whatever these discharges were—whether the body allowed them to flow freely or resisted them by obstructing their release—they rendered the man unclean.

- 15:4      The objects that the unclean man laid on or sat on during his defilement (e.g., a bed, a chair, a saddle, etc.) became unclean—and they became a source of defilement themselves.
- 15:5-9    If any person touched anything that the unclean man had touched, or if he touched the unclean man himself, that person was to wash his clothes and bathe in water, and he would remain unclean until that evening. Even the spittle of a man with a discharge, if it contacted another person, would render that other person unclean.
- 15:10-11   Not only did touching anything that a man with a discharge sat on render a person unclean, but so did carrying those things that he touched, and being touched by his unwashed hands, have the same effect. Washing one's clothes, bathing in water, and remaining unclean until the evening were the penalties for becoming defiled in these ways.
- 15:12      Earthenware vessels that the man with the discharge touched were to be broken, but wooden vessels that he touched were to be washed and could be used again.

"It is the uncleanness of the man and its consequences that are the main concern of this section. The striking thing about the uncleanness associated with these discharges is that not only the affected person becomes unclean, but also people and

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<sup>1</sup>Hess, pp. 708, 710.

objects that come in contact with him, and these in their turn can become secondary sources of uncleanness. In this regard the uncleanness described here is much more 'infectious' than the uncleanness of skin diseases dealt with in chs. 13—14. ... In this respect, then, gonorrhea in men and menstrual and other female discharges are viewed as much more potent sources of defilement than others."<sup>1</sup>

### **The ritual for cleansing a man with an abnormal discharge 15:13-15**

The uncleanness that these discharges caused was less serious ritually—requiring fewer purification rites—than those associated with skin disease.

For each of seven days the unclean man was to wash his clothes and bathe in running water. Apparently he could live at home; he did not need to move outside the camp. Perhaps because his impurity was less public, his response to it could also be less public. Similarly, secret sin requires confession to God, but not necessarily public confession—unless the secret sin has affected someone else, in which case confession—and possibly restitution—needs to be made to the offended person as well.

On the eighth day the man was to bring two doves or two young pigeons to a priest at the tabernacle. The priest was then to offer one of the birds as a sin offering and the other bird as a burnt offering. This would make atonement for the man's uncleanness and he would be ritually cleansed from his discharge. He did not need to go through a more elaborate ritual, such as shaving his body, or going through the purification rite involving two birds, cedar wood, scarlet string, and hyssop. He did, however, have to offer two inexpensive sacrifices (v. 14; cf. 14:10-20).

### **Normal male discharges 15:16-17**

The second case involving male bodily discharges deals with a non-diseased emission of semen. Note that it was not sexual intercourse in itself that produced the uncleanness, but specifically the "seminal emission" either in intercourse or at other times (cf. Exod. 19:15; 1 Sam. 21:5-6; 2 Sam. 11:4).

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 218.

"The intent was to keep a legitimate but [ritually] 'unclean' biological function from defiling that which was [otherwise] holy."<sup>1</sup>

One writer pointed out that this passage does not condemn masturbation, though he did not argue for the practice.<sup>2</sup> The Mosaic Law nowhere dealt specifically with masturbation. It did, however, condemn impure thoughts (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21; cf. Matt. 5:28).

The purification process involved no animal or vegetable sacrifice, but only washing and waiting until evening to become clean again. This applied to anything that the semen touched as well as to the man himself.

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"The banning of the sexual and the sensual from the presence of God (Ex. 19:15, 20:26; Lev. 15:16-18) may have been one of the most noteworthy characteristics of Israel's religion, uniquely distinguishing it from the other religions of the ancient Near East."<sup>4</sup>

### Marital intercourse 15:18

"One valuable feature of this legislation that had an important bearing upon Israel's cultic and social life was the rule which made partners in coition [sexual intercourse] unclean for the whole day. This contingency separated sexual activity from cultic worship in a unique manner, and this precluded the orgiastic fertility rites that were so much a part of religion among peoples such as the Canaanites. Furthermore, the continuous state of ceremonial uncleanness experienced by

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup>James R. Johnson, "Toward a Biblical Approach to Masturbation," in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 10:2 (Summer 1982):137-146. See also Clifford L. Penner, "A Reaction to Johnson's Biblical Approach to Masturbation," in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 10:2 (Summer 1982): 147-149; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, pp. 1567-68.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup>Schultz, p. 78.

the prostitute in Israel would remove any possibility of her participation in Hebrew worship, and take away anything approaching respectability from her way of life, if, indeed, she was at all sensitive to the requirements of the sanctuary."<sup>1</sup>

"God was saying very clearly that sex, any aspect of sex, any bodily functions connected with sex, had to be kept completely apart from the holy place. He was not saying that sex and bodily functions were dirty or sinful, as some see in this passage."<sup>2</sup>

### Normal female discharges 15:19-24

15:19 The third case of bodily discharges deals with the woman's menstrual cycle (cf. 2 Sam. 11:4). Menstruation resulted in an Israelite woman being ritually unclean for seven days. Anyone who touched her during this week-long period became unclean until evening.

This law appears very harsh to the modern reader. It appears to consign virtually every woman in Israel to a state of being "untouchable" (unclean) for one week every month. Some authorities, however, believe that women in ancient Israel had menstrual periods far less frequently than modern women normally do. They believe that the youthful, early marriages of Jewish women delayed weaning (up to the age of two or three) of their babies, and the prevalence of large families made these unclean periods far more infrequent.<sup>3</sup> Those most affected by this law were probably unmarried teenage girls. The result would have been that God-fearing young men would have been wary of making physical contact with them. This law, therefore, would have had the effect of curbing the sexual passions of the young.

"By placing the woman in what amounted to a state of isolation, the legislation made it possible for her to enjoy some respite from her normal

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, pp. 165-66.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 307.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 224; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 953.

duties, and gave her an opportunity of renewing her energy."<sup>1</sup>

15:20-23 Everything on which the woman would lie or sit would become unclean. Anyone who touched her bed or any object on which she sat would have to wash his clothes, bathe his body, and be unclean until evening.

15:24 Likewise any man who had sexual intercourse with her would be unclean seven days, and any bed on which he might lie would be unclean, probably until evening.

"... it may be concluded that here the idea of 'completely hiding oneself' before the Lord is expressed by illicit sexual union, as well as by the absence of purification measures."<sup>2</sup>

### **Abnormal female discharges 15:25-30**

The fourth case of bodily discharges involved a woman who experienced continuing menstrual problems beyond her normal menstrual period. Her purification ritual was the same as the one prescribed for a man with an extended sexual malady (case one above, vv. 13-15; cf. Mark 5:25; Luke 8:43).

### **Conclusion of the regulations regarding genital discharges 15:31-33**

15:31 This verse explains the reason for these regulations: God gave them so the Israelites would not fall into serious sin—and die—due to ignorance of how they should behave when unclean. The rules about bodily discharges helped the Israelites appreciate the seriousness of intermarriage with the Canaanites, and the prohibitions against foreign customs and religion, which conflicted with Israel's holy calling. God discouraged certain acts by designating them as resulting in uncleanness, which undoubtedly proved helpful in the area of

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 282.

private morality—where legal sanctions are not as effective as in public life.<sup>1</sup>

"The sexual processes thus make men [and women] unclean, but that is not the same as saying they are sinful. Uncleanliness establishes boundaries of action, but as long as these are not transgressed no guilt is incurred."<sup>2</sup>

15:32-33 These verses summarize the contents of this chapter.

What made these fluid discharges unclean was, perhaps, their association with unnatural or unusual (irregular, not routine or "everyday") bodily functions. Childbearing (ch. 12) and the bodily fluids involved in procreation (ch. 15) may have caused ritual uncleanness because they have connection with what is abnormal in terms of regularity. Another explanation is that these bodily fluids are associated with human life-giving powers or qualities, but they are tainted by sin and the Fall—and are therefore incompatible with the holy, life-giving power and qualities that God alone possesses. They therefore had no business being anywhere near His holy presence in the tabernacle. Probably the discharges symbolize that anything that comes out of the sinful heart of humans is unclean (cf. Mark 7:20-23). The fluids were not unclean because sex itself is sinful. It is not (Gen. 1:28).

Note the slightly differing views of three writers. Their emphases may be part of the total answer as to why these practices rendered an Israelite unclean:

"Within this framework it becomes clear why the conditions described in Lev. 12 and 15 are polluting. They all involve the loss of 'life liquids.' 'Life is in the blood' (Lev. 17:11, 14). Thus a woman suffering from any bloody discharge, whether it be the puerperal discharge ([which occurs after a woman gives birth to a child] Lev. 12:4-5), menstruation (15:19-24), or some other malady (15:25-30), is presumed to be losing life. Bleeding may eventually lead to death. So the discharging woman is regarded as unclean in that she evidently does not enjoy perfect life: indeed unchecked her condition could end in

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 220.

her death. Similarly too we presume that male semen was viewed as a 'life liquid.' Hence its loss whether long-term (15:1-15) or transient (15:16-18) was viewed as polluting."<sup>1</sup>

"The emission of semen is defiling, not because it symbolizes the loss of 'life', but because it is symbolically viewed as what comes from the innermost part of the human heart."<sup>2</sup>

"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 ..."<sup>3</sup>

"Sin" is wrong done to God, but "ritual uncleanness" was a condition that, while related to sin, was not itself sinful. Sin separated the person further from God than uncleanness did. These unclean conditions did not result in the sinfulness of the Israelite, but only in his or her disqualification from public worship in the nation. Of course, if the Israelite did something that was sinful that resulted in these conditions, he or she would have to deal with that as well.

"Although the genitals of man and woman are the most hidden parts of their bodies, may it not be true that they look at them every day? The prescription thus exhorts man and woman to check regularly whether they are hiding themselves from the Lord. To uncover oneself means to expose oneself to shame, and sometimes to give up all kinds of earthly treasures, such as fame, wealth and humanistic concerns—in a word, all of one's selfishness. This chapter is thus not far from the exhortation of Jesus, who said, 'If anyone would come after

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, "Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev. 15:18)?" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95:3 (1983):434. See also Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 1002.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 311.



me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me' (Luke 9:23 ESV; Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34)."<sup>1</sup>

By the way, "... there is no biblical term for genitals, only euphemisms: ... (15:2), ... (Judg. 3:24), ... (Lev 18:20), ... (Deut 23:2)."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus' attitude toward the laws about bodily uncleanness (as distinguished from physical dirtiness) was the same as His attitude toward the food laws (cf. Matt. 15:17-20). When Jesus came on the scene, He announced the end of the authority of the Mosaic Law as a rule of life for His followers, because God would inaugurate the church and make entrance into it, and participation in it, available to Jews and Gentiles equally (cf. Mark 7:19; Eph. 3:6; Col. 1:19-23). The church is not governed by the Mosaic Law, but the "law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). The Israelite laws separated Jews from Gentiles by illustrating Israel's unique function in God's program, which ended temporarily (until the Millennium) with the death of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Is there a category of unclean things for Christians today? I think there is not, at least not in the sense that there was under the Mosaic Covenant. Under the New Covenant, there are only sinful and non-sinful things, though there are some unwise non-sinful things for the Christian. In other words, even though something is not sinful, there may be good reasons to avoid it. The New Testament contains many such warnings. Because of the work of Christ, believers may come directly into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19-22) having been cleansed by His blood.

THE PATHWAY TO INTIMACY WITH GOD (HOLINESS) FOR BELIEVERS	
Under the Old Covenant	Under the New Covenant
Trusting in God's promise that the death of the Passover lamb redeemed them.	Trusting in God's promise that the death of Jesus Christ redeemed us.

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1534.

<sup>3</sup>See Rooker, pp. 207-10, for a longer explanation of how Jesus Christ fulfilled and ended these laws.

Repudiation of God's revealed will could result in divine fatal judgment (a sin unto death).	Repudiation of God's revealed will could result in divine fatal judgment (a sin unto death).
Breaking God's revealed moral will required a sacrifice and confession.	Breaking God's revealed moral will required Christ's sacrifice and the sinner's confession.
Violating laws requiring cleanliness required ritual purification.	Violating laws requiring separation from sin requires repentance.
Serving God required additional limits on one's personal freedom.	Serving God requires additional limits on one's personal freedom.
Closest contact with God required additional self-sacrifices.	Closest contact with God requires additional self-sacrifices.

#### **D. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT CH. 16**

The sacrifices and offerings that Moses described thus far in the Mosaic Law were not sufficient to cleanse all the defilements of the people. Much sinfulness and uncleanness still needed to be removed. Therefore God appointed a yearly sacrifice to cleanse all the sins and impurities not covered by the other sacrifices, which the Israelites committed ignorantly (Heb. 9:7). The sacrifice of the Day of Atonement was, in this sense, the most comprehensive of the Mosaic sacrifices.

This chapter is a theological pivot on which the whole Book of Leviticus turns. It is the climax of the first part of the book that deals with the public worship of the Israelites (chs. 1—16). The second major part of Leviticus begins at the end of this chapter, and it reveals the private worship of the Israelites (chs. 17—27). Of the 37 statements introducing divine speech in Leviticus, this is the nineteenth or central one.<sup>1</sup> The structure of this chapter is chiastic.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 16 begins with a reference back to chapter 10: the judgment of Nadab and Abihu (v. 1). The material in chapter 16 is legislation that God

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<sup>1</sup>See Hess, p. 717.

<sup>2</sup>See A. M. Rodriguez, "Leviticus 16: Its Literary Structure," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 34 (1966):269-86.

prescribed shortly after, and in view of, that apostasy (abandonment or renunciation of a religious belief). Chapter 10 showed how important it was for priests to approach God with due care and self-preparation. Those who did not died. Chapter 16 contains information about how the high priest must behave in order to preserve himself from a similar fate. There is this tie to the narrative of Israel's history, but chapter 16 is also a continuation of the legislation designed to differentiate between clean and unclean, which is contained in chapters 11 through 15. It is another block of legal material, though the style is narrative.

The Day of Atonement took place six months after the Passover. These two great festivals were half a year apart. Whereas the Passover was a day of great rejoicing, the Day of Atonement was a time of great solemnity in Israel. The Contemporary English Version (CEV) translators rendered the Day of Atonement as the "Great Day of Forgiveness."

"Many see in the annual Day of Atonement a picture of Israel's future cleansing when their Messiah appears to deliver them, cleanse them, and establish them in their kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Introductory information 16:1-10**

This section contains a general introduction to what follows in the chapter (vv. 1-2), information about the animals and priestly dress used in the ceremonies (vv. 3-5), and an outline of the events of the day (vv. 6-10).

#### **Introduction to the Day of Atonement legislation 16:1-2a**

16:1 We learn from this verse that Moses received instructions regarding the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, immediately after the judgment of Nadab and Abihu (ch. 10). Obviously he inserted chapters 11 through 15 in the chronological narrative for a purpose. He probably did so because of the connection between the clean and unclean distinctions, in those chapters, and the emphasis on priestly purity that ended with the judgment of Nadab and Abihu. There is also continuity in the emphasis on the importance of holiness when entering the presence of Yahweh.

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 277.

"According to this initial verse [v. 1], chap. 16 follows upon chap. 10. Thus chaps 11—15 are an insert specifying the impurities that can pollute the sanctuary (15:31), for which the purgation [cleansing] rite of chap. 16 is mandated."<sup>1</sup>

- 16:2a As usual, God revealed these laws to Moses, not directly to the priests or even the high priest, Aaron. Moses was the great mediator between God and the Israelites, superior even to the high priest. Moses served in the role of a prophet when he did this, acting as God's mouthpiece. Later in Israel's history the prophets continued to communicate instructions from God, not only to the priests, but also to the kings.

#### Aaron's clothing 16:2b-4

- 16:2b Aaron (and every high priest who succeeded him) was not to enter the presence of God in the holy of holies ("the holy place inside the veil") "at any time [of his own choosing]." If he did, he would die—as Nadab and Abihu did. The reason was that Yahweh's presence would appear in the cloud over the mercy seat, and to enter His presence without an invitation meant certain death, as it did for many people who entered the presence of their king without an invitation (cf. Esth. 4:11).

- 16:3 What follows is instruction about when and how Aaron could enter the holy of holies. The only way anyone could approach God, when He manifested Himself on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19), was also exactly as He specified. God was just as holy, and He demanded just as much reverence when He was dwelling among His people as when He dwelt away from them. Now He dwells within each Christian (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13).

The high priest had to make elaborate preparations for entering the holy of holies. He first had to offer a bull as a sin offering, and a ram as a burnt offering, on the brazen altar.

- 16:4 He had to cleanse himself physically as well as spiritually. He also had to wear a special uniform, not his regular high priestly

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 1011.

garments (cf. Exod. 28; Lev. 8:7-9). This uniform consisted of four white garments (a "linen tunic," "linen undergarments," a "linen sash," and a "linen turban"). These garments made him appear more like a slave than a king. This dress was even simpler than that worn by the other priests (cf. Exod. 39:27-29).

"Among his [Aaron's] fellow men his dignity as the great mediator between man and God is unsurpassed, and his splendid clothes draw attention to the glory of his office. But in the presence of God even the high priest is stripped of all honor: he becomes simply the servant of the King of kings, whose true status is portrayed in the simplicity of his dress [cf. Ezek. 9:2-3, 11; 10:2, 6-7; Dan. 10:5; 12:6-7; Rev. 19:8]."<sup>1</sup>

"... elaborate garments might have detracted from the somberness of the occasion, when atonement for sin was the basic concern."<sup>2</sup>

### An outline of the ceremonies 16:5-10

- 16:5-6 Aaron also had to offer two male goats as a sin offering, and he was to offer one ram for a burnt offering. The bull that he was to offer as a burnt offering (cf. 3) was to make atonement for himself and for his household (cf. Heb. 9:7). The high priest entered the holy of holies only once each year, on the Day of Atonement, after making these special offerings (cf. Heb. 9:7).
- 16:7-10 He was to cast lots to determine the fate of the two goats. One would be killed as a sin offering. The other ("the scapegoat," the goat that escapes), after being presented to the LORD, would be sent away into the wilderness.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup>Schultz, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Jamieson, et al., p. 97. See J. E. Jennings, "Ancient Near Eastern Religion and Biblical Interpretation," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, pp. 19-20, for information about the scapegoat in other ancient Near Eastern civilizations.

Seventh-Day Adventists base their belief that Christ did not fully atone for sin by His sacrifice upon the cross on an incorrect interpretation of verse 8.<sup>1</sup>

There is much difference of opinion among the authorities about what the Hebrew word *'aza'zel*, translated "scapegoat" in verses 8, 10, and 26, means. The etymology of this Hebrew word is obscure. The NRSV, NET2, ESV, CEV, and HCSB translators simply transliterated the word as "Azazel," implying that it is a name. Some believe it means a rocky precipice (NEB) or wilderness, or some other place where the goat died, or that it may refer to the goat's function. Others think it refers to a demon, either real or imagined, to whom the Israelites' sins were returned so the demon would not accuse them.<sup>2</sup> Another view is that *'aza'zel* means "the goat that departs" or "is banished."

Whatever its exact meaning, the symbolism is clear enough. The live goat symbolically removed the sins of the Israelites from God's presence.<sup>3</sup> The modern English meaning of "scapegoat" is a person who gets blamed for something that he or she did not do, or someone who willingly takes the blame in order to spare someone else.<sup>4</sup> The English word "scapegoat" comes from the AV description of the goat that "escaped" into the wilderness.

The two goats used in the ritual represented two aspects of the atonement that God provided. Both animals taught the Israelites that a sinless agent was removing their sins by vicarious (something done by one entity for another) atonement. The slain goat represented the judgment on sin that resulted in death, which was necessary for atonement. The goat sent off into the wilderness, with the sinner's guilt imputed to it, symbolized the removal of punishment (cf. 14:4-7). Some interpreters see Christ represented typically in the

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<sup>1</sup>See Jan Karel Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults*, pp. 212-16.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Bush, p. 149; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 1021.

<sup>3</sup>See Edersheim, pp. 323-24.

<sup>4</sup>Wiersbe, p. 278.

two goats: one as dying for our sins, and the other as rising again for our justification.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Instructions concerning the ritual 16:11-28**

More detail follows in this section, which helped Aaron know exactly how to conduct the ritual. It also helps the reader appreciate the implications of atonement.

### **The blood-sprinkling rites 16:11-19**

16:11        Aaron was to slaughter the bull of the sin offering for himself and the other priests.

16:12-13    The act of offering incense represented the act of offering the specific prayer that God would mercifully accept the sacrifices that were offered to cover the nation's sins and uncleanness. The offering of this incense was especially important. Aaron was to offer it "otherwise he will die" (v. 13).

"The purpose of the incense-smoke was to create a screen which would prevent the High Priest from gazing upon the holy Presence."<sup>2</sup>

16:14        Aaron was also to sprinkle some of the blood of the bull with his finger on the east side and on the front of the mercy seat ("the atoning cover") seven times.

16:15-16    Aaron was next to slaughter one of the goats as a sin offering for the Israelites, bring some of its blood into the holy of holies, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat, as he had done with the blood of the bull. This rite would atone for the sins of the people and would purify the tabernacle from its pollution caused by their sins.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Bush, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>Hertz, p. 156. See also Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 1031.

<sup>3</sup>See Douglass Judisch, "Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48:2-3 (April-July 1984):221-43, which deals with the Hebrew words translated "cover."

16:17 No one else was to be in the tabernacle when Aaron preformed these rites. This highlighted the sacredness of what he was doing.

16:18-19 Then Aaron was to make atonement for the altar of burnt offerings by sprinkling some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the slain goat on all four horns of the altar ("on all sides").

"Aaron enters the adytum [most holy place] three times during the course of the ritual: to create the cloud of incense (vv 12-13), to asperse [sprinkle] the adytum with the blood of his purification bull (v 14), and then to asperse it with the blood of the people's purification goat (v 15)."<sup>1</sup>

### The scapegoat 16:20-22

These verses describe the fourth and most unusual phase of the Day of Atonement's ceremony. The second goat symbolically bore the sins of the people, taking them to an unclean place ("isolated [infertile] territory," v. 22) far from the localized presence of God.

There were two forms of laying on of hands (v. 21) in the Old Testament, and there are two ways of explaining the reason for the difference. One explanation is that the Jews placed two hands on persons in non-sacrificial contexts, and they placed one hand on an animal about to be sacrificed. According to this view, the two-handed form emphasized who the recipient of the ritual action was, and the one-handed form drew attention to the person who put his hand on the animal.<sup>2</sup> The other explanation is that the laying on of two hands intensified the idea of transferring guilt, specifically for intentional sins.<sup>3</sup> Since Aaron was to lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, the second explanation seems preferable.

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 1015.

<sup>2</sup>See Rene Peter, "L'Imposition des Mains dans L'Ancien Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 27:1 (1977):48-55; David P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and Hittite Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106:3 (July-September 1986):433-46; Sansom, pp. 323-26.

<sup>3</sup>Noam Zohar, "Repentance and Purification: The Significance and Semantics of *ht't* in the Pentateuch," *Journal of Biblical Studies* 107:4 (1988):615, n. 31.



**The cleansing of the participants 16:23-28**

The rituals for cleansing those who had come in contact with the sacrifices conclude this section.

16:23-25 Aaron was to enter the tabernacle, take off his special Day of Atonement clothes (cf. vv. 2b-4), bathe his body with water, and put on his normal high priestly garments. Then he was to offer two more burnt offerings at the brazen altar, one for his own atonement, and the other for the atonement of the people. Next he was to burn up the fat of the sin offering on the brazen altar.

16:26-28 The man who had taken the scapegoat into the wilderness was to wash his clothes and bathe his body, and then he could reenter the camp as a clean person. The whole bull and the whole goat of the sin offerings were to be burned outside the camp. The man who burned them was also to wash his clothes and bathe his body, and then he could reenter the camp as a clean person.

This entire ceremony pointed out very clearly the holiness of God and, in contrast, the sinfulness of man. Those involved in procuring atonement had to scrupulously follow the directions God gave for approaching Him in worship.

**3. Instructions concerning the duty of the people 16:29-34**

These verses also contain instructions for the yearly celebration of the Day of Atonement. The fact that the Israelites repeated it year by year points to the non-finality of the atonement that animal sacrifices made (cf. Heb. 9:7-12).

16:29 All the Israelites were to humble their souls and refrain from work in preparation for the annual Day of Atonement. This self-affliction was to include spiritual humbling as well as going without food (cf. Isa. 58:3). Fasting was an indication that the practitioner regarded his need to seek God as more pressing than his need to eat. It often accompanied prayer (cf. Ps. 35:13). Refraining from work resulted from the same sense of

priority. No human activity was necessary, nor did God permit any work in addition to the sacrifice that He provided to atone for sin.

"It must be remembered here that the Israelite concept of the soul did not correspond to our view of this as the spiritual side of a person. In their understanding, the human being does not *have* a soul, but rather *is* a soul, and this soul has two sides: visible and invisible. The latter side is a person's life, whereas the former is the physical body. Because humans stand guilty in the totality of their existence, it is not sufficient that the life-giving blood be poured out, for the physical body must also be given over to death. It was the entire person, and thus also the entire animal, which like the person is a living soul (see Gen. 1:20-21; 9:10, 12; Lev. 11:10), that was to enter into the offering."<sup>1</sup>

16:30-31 The promise of God: "you will be clean from all your sins" was one that the Israelite was to believe, and by which he could enjoy assurance of his fellowship with God. It is very clear from this verse and similar statements (cf. vv. 16, 22) that God was promising forgiveness and cleansing to all who trusted in the effectiveness of the sacrifices that He provided and prescribed.<sup>2</sup>

16:32-34 Yahweh specified that the Israelites were to observe this special day once a year "as a permanent statute" (v. 34). Even after Aaron had died his descendants were to observe it exactly as the LORD had specified and as Moses had commanded.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews saw the Day of Atonement as prefiguring Jesus' crucifixion (Heb. 9). Though the Day of Atonement is not something

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>For a survey of the attitudes of American Jews over the last century regarding the meaning of the Day of Atonement, and regarding death and the afterlife, see Eric Friedland, "The Atonement Memorial Service in the American Mahzor," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984):243-82.

most Christians observe, we can learn about the nature of sin, the need for atonement, and the superiority of Christ's sacrifice, by reflecting on this Jewish ritual in the light of Calvary (cf. Heb. 10:22-25). Some Christians practice self-affliction during Lent for essentially the same reason that the Israelites afflicted themselves before the Day of Atonement.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

"Tradition has it, that on the Day of Atonement [in Jesus' time] no less than five hundred priests were wont [used] to assist in the services."<sup>2</sup>

After the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70, the rabbis wanted to preserve the rituals of the Day of Atonement for future generations. They could not, of course, continue to practice *Yom Kippur* as the Mosaic Law specified without the temple. So they substituted prayer, repentance, and giving to charity for the sacrifices and rituals that they could no longer practice. They also preserved the descriptions of the former rituals of *Yom Kippur* (now called the *Avodah*) in the *mahtzor* (the special prayer book used on *Yom Kippur*).<sup>3</sup>

## II. THE PRIVATE WORSHIP OF THE ISRAELITES CHS. 17—27

The second major division of Leviticus deals with how the Israelites were to express their worship of Yahweh in their private lives. These exhortations to holiness show that every aspect of the life of God's people must be consecrated to God.

"The first sixteen chapters of Leviticus are concerned primarily with establishment and maintainance [*sic*] of the relationship between Israel and God ...

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>See further, *ibid.*, *The Temple*, pp. 302-29.

"In chapter 17, the emphasis shifts to the affairs of the everyday life of the Israelites as God's holy people."<sup>1</sup>

In critical circles, scholars are fond of referring to chapters 17 through 26 as "the Holiness Code."<sup>2</sup> August Klostermann gave these chapters this name in an article that he wrote in 1877.<sup>3</sup>

"Leviticus 17—26 has been called the Holiness Code because of the frequency of the occurrence of the phrase, attributed to Yahweh: 'You shall be holy because I am holy,' which corresponds to the theological theme of the other priestly laws but here receives a special emphasis. One other phrase is characteristic of these chapters: 'I am Yahweh' (sometimes 'I am Yahweh your God')."<sup>4</sup>

"The section is not as distinctive as some scholars imagine; but it is characterized by moral and ethical instruction (with one chapter on the annual feasts), and it does base moral obligation in the nature of God. This last point is not unique, however. The Ten Commandments are prefaced by the statement 'I am the Lord your God' (Exod 20:2), and a typical 'Holiness Code' phrase has already been pointed out in Leviticus 11:44 ["be holy, because I am holy"]."<sup>5</sup>

"The unique feature of the Holiness Code is the fact that in its introduction and throughout its laws, the audience it addresses is not the priests as such but the whole of the congregation. It calls the entire people of God to holiness. As has long been observed, the Holiness Code is not attached directly to the Priestly Code [Exod. 35—Lev. 16]. Between these two legal codes lies a striking account of Israel's offering sacrifices to 'goat idols' (Lev 17:1-9). Though brief and somewhat enigmatic, this short fragment of narrative, usually taken to be the work of the final composer, portrays the Israelites forsaking the tabernacle and sacrificing 'outside the camp.'

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<sup>1</sup>Schultz, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, pp. 127-28.

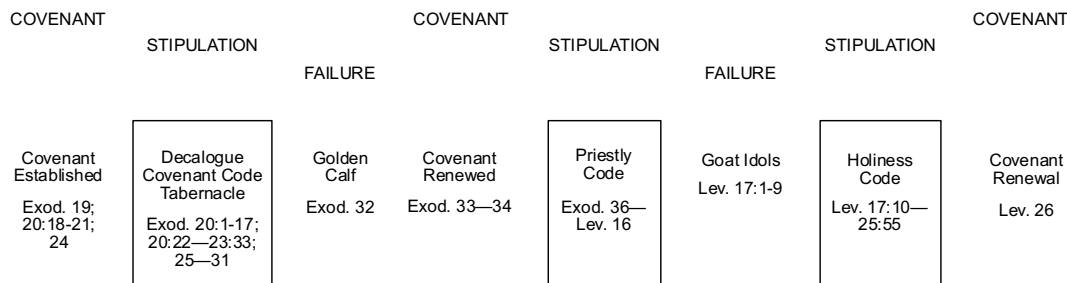
<sup>3</sup>August Klostermann, "Beiträge zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Pentateuchs," *Zeitschrift für Lutherische Theologie und Kirche*, 38 (1877):416.

<sup>4</sup>R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup>Harris, p. 592.

The content of the narrative is similar to the incident of the golden calf: the people forsook the Lord and his provisions for worship and followed after other gods—in this case, the 'goat idols.' Unlike the narrative of the golden calf, however, which places the blame on the priesthood, this narrative of the goat idols makes the people, not the priests, responsible for the idolatry. Thus within the logic of the text, the incident of the people's sacrificing to the goat idols plays a similar role to that of the priests' involvement in the golden calf. Just as the narrative of the golden calf marked a transition in the nature of the covenant and its laws, so here also the incident of the goat idols marks the transition from the Code of the Priests to the additional laws of the Holiness Code."<sup>1</sup>

Note how the three major law collections in the Pentateuch fit into the Sinai narrative:<sup>2</sup>



"The placement of the Holiness Code (Lev 17—26) at this point in the narrative, then, plays an important role in the author's strategy. It aptly shows that God gave further laws designed specifically for the ordinary people. These laws are represented in the Holiness Code. Thus, as is characteristic of the Holiness Code, its laws pertain to specific situations in the everyday life of the people."<sup>3</sup>

God was dealing with the Israelites on two levels, namely, corporately as a nation, and individually as redeemed individuals. God had distinct purposes

<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, pp. 49-50.

<sup>2</sup>The following chart was adapted from *ibid.*, p. 50. Sailhamer ended the section dealing with goat idols with 17:9, but I have dealt with it as ending at 17:7.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59.

for the nation Israel and for the individual Israelite. His purpose for the nation comes out clearly in such passages as Exodus 19:5 and 6 and Isaiah 42:6. His purpose for individual Israelites was their personal salvation in the same three phases that Christians experience it: justification, sanctification, and glorification.

The Exodus event redeemed the whole nation, but it did not redeem every individual Israelite. It only redeemed those Israelites who believed God's promise that judgment was coming and that the only way of avoiding that judgment was to appropriate His designated means of escaping it. They had to believe that God would accept the life of their Passover lamb in place of their lives, and show that faith by applying the blood of their substitute to their doorframes.

Similarly, God has a purpose for the church corporately, but He also has a purpose for individual Christians. His purpose for the church as a whole is found in such passages as Matthew 16:18 and 28:19 and 20. His purpose for individual Christians is essentially the same as it was for individual Israelites: justification, sanctification, and glorification.

While God's *purpose* for individuals under the Old and New Covenants is identical, His *procedures* for the bodies of believers (local churches) to fulfill their corporate purposes are different. Israel and the church consist of two different ethnic groups. They exist in two separate periods of history. They operate under two different covenants. The Holy Spirit's ministry in each corporate group is different. And there are two different priesthoods, two different sanctuaries, and two different sacrificial systems.

#### A. HOLINESS OF CONDUCT ON THE ISRAELITES' PART CHS. 17—20

All the commandments contained in chapters 17 through 20 relate to the holiness of the life of every Israelite. Yahweh had brought the Israelites into covenant fellowship with Himself through atonement. Consequently they were to live as holy people, different from all other peoples, especially the Canaanites.

##### 1. Holiness of food ch. 17

We move from public regulations in chapter 16 to intimate regulations in chapter 18, with chapter 17 providing the transition. In contrast to the

first sixteen chapters, chapter 17 says very little about the role of the priests. The emphasis is rather on mistakes that the ordinary Israelite could make that would affect his or her relationship to God. Food and sacrificial meals were a prominent part of heathen worship. Therefore what the Israelites ate, and how they ate it, demonstrated their consecration to Yahweh.

"The laws in this chapter deal with various problems connected with sacrifice and eating meat. These matters have already been discussed in chs. 1—7 and 11 (cf. 7:26-27 with 17:10ff. and 11:39-40 with 17:15-16). This chapter draws together themes that run through the previous sixteen: in particular it explains the special significance of blood in the sacrifices (vv. 11ff.)."<sup>1</sup>

### **The sacrifices to goat idols 17:1-7**

This section of the book begins with a brief narrative section that deals with the people's sacrificing to goat idols (demons). It is similar to the golden calf incident in Exodus 32 in that these were sins that all the Israelites committed. However, this narrative section is presented in a legal setting. That is, we only learn of the people's practice of sacrificing to goat idols by reading this law forbidding the practice. Therefore the sacrifices to goat idols were not as serious as the sacrifices to the golden calf, which resulted in God withdrawing His presence from the people—temporarily. The high priest was responsible for the golden calf apostasy, but the ordinary Israelites were responsible for the goat idolatry.

17:1-2      These directions in chapter 17 pertained to both the priests and the people. The laws in chapters 18 through 20 governed the lives of the common people only (cf. 18:2; 19:2; 20:2). Other laws specifically for the priests are in chapters 21 and 22.

17:3-4      God did not permit the Israelites to slaughter certain sacrificial animals (i.e., oxen, lambs, or goats) anywhere except before the altar of burnt offerings, which was near "the doorway of the tent of meeting." They could slaughter animals not used as sacrifices elsewhere (cf. Deut. 12:15-16, 20-27; 1 Cor.

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 240.

10:31). Another, less likely interpretation, in my opinion, is that the animals in view were not those intended as sacrifices, but those to be eaten as food.<sup>1</sup> This may seem to us to have created logistical problems. How could the priests handle all those sacrifices? However, most of the Israelites and other ancient Near Eastern people rarely slaughtered animals. They did not eat as much meat as most modern Westerners do.

"Meat was eaten only occasionally, except perhaps for the rich, who may have had it regularly."<sup>2</sup>

The Israelites in the wilderness lived primarily on manna (cf. Num. 11:6). They kept animals mainly for producing milk, wool, bearing burdens, and doing hard work. Any Israelite who slaughtered an animal that was used for sacrifice anywhere except before the altar would "be cut off from among his people" (v. 4; cf. vv. 9, 10, 14).

"The intimation here undoubtedly is, either that the sentence of death should be passed upon the offender by the magistrate, or that God would directly interfere and cut him off from among the living, though not, we presume, in a miraculous manner, but by so ordering his providence, as to ensure that result."<sup>3</sup>

"It appears ... that this phrase ["cut off from among his people"] may not only refer to premature death at the hand of God, but hint at judgment in the life to come."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the Christian who commits a "sin leading to death" (1 John 5:16; cf. 1 Cor. 11:30) dies prematurely at God's hand.

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, pp. 165-66.

<sup>2</sup>*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Food," by K. A. Kitchen and R. P. Martin, pp. 429-33.

<sup>3</sup>Bush, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 242



- 17:5 The reasons for so severe a penalty were two: First, each slaughter of these particular animals was to be an offering to God, an act of worship. Second, killing these animals was commonly part of a pagan ritual connected with worship of the "goat demons" (v. 7).
- 17:6 When the Israelite brought his sacrifice of an ox, a lamb, or a goat to the tabernacle, the priest was to sprinkle its blood and burn its fat on the brazen altar as a soothing aroma to the LORD.
- 17:7 The goat demon was a so-called "god" that the Egyptians and other ancient Near Easterners worshipped. It was supposedly responsible for the fertility of the people, their herds, and their crops. They believed it inhabited the deserts. In the pagan ritual, selected goats each represented this demon (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20), and part of its abhorrent rituals involved goats copulating with its devout female worshippers.<sup>1</sup>

The Israelites were at this time committing idolatry with this Egyptian god. They continued to worship Egyptian deities for many generations (cf. Josh. 24:14) in spite of commandments like this one that should have ended this practice. Even today the goat is a demonic symbol in Satan worship.<sup>2</sup>

"Just as the narrative about the incident of the golden calf revealed the imminent danger of Israel's falling into idolatry, so the present narrative demonstrates the ongoing threat. These two narratives play an important role in the composition of this part of the Pentateuch. ...

"The two narratives showing the threat of idolatry bracket the detailed legislation dealing with the office of the priest—legislation primarily directed toward preventing further idolatry. The narratives provide the priestly legislation with two vivid

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup>See Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, p. 60; idem, *Demons in the World Today*.

examples of Israel's falling away after 'other gods.'"<sup>1</sup>

### Laws guarding the sanctity of the sacrifices 17:8-16

Verses 8 through 16 contain three laws that relate to each other and were binding on both the Israelites and the foreigners who lived among them.

"The 'alien' ["stranger," v. 8] describes anyone who is not an Israelite but is living in the community of Israel."<sup>2</sup>

17:8-9 The Israelites, and any other people who were living among them, were to offer all of their burnt offerings only at the bronze altar, for the reason already explained (v. 5).

17:10-14 God also prohibited the eating of blood (v. 11; cf. 3:17; 7:26-27; 19:26; Gen. 9:4; Deut. 12:15-16, 23-24; 15:23). From this law, the Jews developed methods of draining or washing the blood out of meat, that resulted in *kosher* (meaning "fit" or "proper") meat.<sup>3</sup> The incidence of blood disease in livestock was much higher in ancient times than it is today.<sup>4</sup> Careful observance of this law would have resulted in healthier Israelites as well as obedient Israelites.

Blood is the life-sustaining fluid of the body (vv. 11, 14). It is inherently necessary to maintain animal life, thus the close connection between blood and life. Life poured out in bloodshed made atonement for sin. Consequently the eating or drinking of blood was inappropriate, since blood had expiatory (atoning) value and represented life.

"The animal slayer is a murderer unless he offers its blood on the altar to ransom his life (v 11)."<sup>5</sup>

"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.,

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup>Hess, p. 734.

<sup>3</sup>Harrison, p. 181.

<sup>4</sup>Fawver and Overstreet, p. 275.

<sup>5</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 417.

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."<sup>1</sup>

The animals in view here seem to be those slain in hunting; they were not sacrificial animals (v. 13; cf. Deut. 12:15). However, the restriction about eating blood applied to all animals that the Israelites ate. Since God forbade eating blood before the Mosaic Law (Gen. 9:4), which Christ terminated, people today should also refrain from eating it, especially when it is associated with pagan worship (cf. Acts 15:29). In Moses' day, the pagans superstitiously linked blood consumption with acquiring divine life.<sup>2</sup> What is in view is not simply prohibiting eating rare (lightly cooked) meat, but larger quantities of blood, either separately, or as a kind of side dish. Eating raw, uncooked meat was also inappropriate, because much of the blood remained in it.

"The faithful worshiper of the living God must preserve the sanctity of sacrificial blood, recognizing that life (signified by blood) belongs to God."<sup>3</sup>

17:15-16 God extended the sacredness of life, in this third prohibition, by forbidding the eating of clean animals that had died without being slaughtered. He did so because the blood remained in them. The penalty (purification rite) for the offending Israelite was not as demanding for this violation, because the life had departed from the animal. Nevertheless, Yahweh's people were to respect the symbol of life.

In an interesting irony, Jesus taught that His blood gives eternal life, and commanded His disciples to drink it (symbolically; cf. John 6:54). Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to receive blood transfusions because of the commands about blood in this chapter.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 245. Cf. Hertz, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>Hartley, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 336.

<sup>4</sup>E. S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, pp. 243-44.

Chapter 17 introduces the laws that follow in chapters 18 through 26. Yet chapter 17 is also important in the larger context of the Pentateuch. It presents the Israelite people committing idolatry with the goat idol ("demons," v. 7), just as the Israelite priests had earlier committed idolatry with the calf idol (Exod. 32). Additional legislation designed to regulate the priests' behavior followed the priests' failure with the golden calf (i.e., the priestly code, Exod. 35—Lev. 16). Now additional legislation designed to regulate the people's behavior followed the people's failure with the goat idol (i.e., the holiness code, 17:8—25:55).<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Holiness of the marriage relationship ch. 18**

Emphasis shifts in this chapter from ceremonial defilement (ch. 17) to moral impurity (cf. 1 Thess. 4:5-7).

"From this chapter onwards the moral nature of the Lord's commandments comes to the fore."<sup>2</sup>

The LORD wanted His people to be holy in their behavior and character as well as in less important ritual observances (cf. Matt. 23:28; Rom. 2:28-29). The order of the laws in chapters 18 through 20 is probably significant. They set out foundational principles of social morality. Marriage is the cornerstone of all human society, so perhaps that is why laws affecting marriage come first.

"Marriage as a social institution is regarded throughout Scripture as the cornerstone of all other structures, and hence its purity and integrity must be protected at all times."<sup>3</sup>

"The fact that sexual life would be an extremely important subject of this demand is readily understandable in terms of the conditions that prevailed in the ancient Near Eastern world, for the latter had no notion whatsoever of the sacredness of marriage, especially since the immoral worship of the fertility goddesses negated all conception of purity by making the

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<sup>1</sup>See Sailhamer, pp. 343-45, for further development of these parallels.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 340.

<sup>3</sup>Harrison, p. 186. Cf. Hertz, p. 172.

abandonment of one's body to various sensual pleasures a religious obligation."<sup>1</sup>

"Sexual desire is not evil by itself, but since the fall such a desire has lost its proper control due to the fact that humans became like gods: they became the centre of their world and assumed the authority to do what they liked."<sup>2</sup>

This chapter reflects the basic structure of a suzerainty treaty, with some omissions.<sup>3</sup> It begins with a warning concerning the vile practices of the Egyptians and the Canaanites, as well as a command to obey God (vv. 1-5). It concludes by alluding to consequences that would overtake the Israelites if they disobeyed Him (vv. 24-30).

"There is a strong polemical [critical] thrust in these laws. Seven times it is repeated that the Israelites are not to behave like the nations who inhabited Canaan before them (vv. 3 [2x], 24, 26, 27, 29, 30). Six times the phrase 'I am the Lord (your God)' is repeated (vv. 2, 4, 5, 6, 21, 30)."<sup>4</sup>

The phrase "I am the LORD" becomes a characteristic refrain in Leviticus at this point, occurring nearly 50 times in chapters 18 through 27, in the AV, according to Baxter.<sup>5</sup> It also appears frequently in Exodus and Numbers.

### **A warning and a basic command 18:1-5**

18:1-2      The statement "I am the LORD" reminded the people of their covenant relationship with—and responsibility to—Yahweh (cf. v. 30).<sup>6</sup> It was because He is who He is ("I am who I am," Exod. 3:14) that they were to be who He wanted them to be ("My own possession ... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," Exod. 19:5-6). The statement ("I am the LORD your God") was a constant reminder to the Israelites of who they were and Whom they served (cf. Acts 27:23).

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzijs, pp. 180-81.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 342.

<sup>3</sup>Suzerainty treaties were those involving a ruler (suzerain) and his vassals (subjects). See my notes on Exodus 19:16-25 for more information.

<sup>4</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 250.

<sup>5</sup>Baxter, 1:133.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, pp. 2-5.

"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 [*sic* 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.'"<sup>1</sup>

18:3 "Both Egypt and Canaan practiced or tolerated forms of incest, adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality."<sup>2</sup>

18:4-5 In contrast to keeping the laws of the Egyptians and the Canaanites ("walk[ing] in their statutes"), the Israelites were to obey Yahweh's judgments and statutes and live in accord with them. The promise of life for obedience held out a positive motivation to obey what follows.

"No, Lev 18:5 does not teach salvation by works. It teaches that the OT believers who trusted God and obeyed him from the heart received life abundant both here and hereafter. Actually, Paul was saying, 'The Pharisees and the Judaizers teach that the law offers salvation by works, but that is a misuse of the law that cannot contradict the promise of grace' (cf. Gal 3:12, 17)."<sup>3</sup>

The importance of what God commanded the Israelites in verses 2 through 5 was underlined by His bracketing statement "I am the LORD" at the beginning and at the end of this section of verses.

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Hess, p. 737.

<sup>3</sup>Harris, p. 598.

## Laws guarding the sanctity of marriage 18:6-23

"The laws in vv. 6-23 mandate the making of strict distinctions between man and woman, and between humans and beasts, thus highlighting the created order."<sup>1</sup>

### The general policy 18:6

To "uncover nakedness" means to have sexual intercourse (cf. Gen. 20:12). The Israelites were to have no sexual intercourse with any blood relative. This initial prohibition seems intended to be a general one designed to include every blood relative.<sup>2</sup>

"The phrase covers intercourse within marriage and outside it."<sup>3</sup>

"Though both man and woman were naked in their pre-fallen condition (Gen. 2:25), they desperately attempted to hide their genitals after the fall (Gen. 3:7). Therefore in terms of the fall, the act of uncovering nakedness is first of all a negation of the reality of human fallenness."<sup>4</sup>

"In the unfallen world, nakedness was a symbol of integrity and sinlessness (Gen. 2:25), but in the fallen world, it became a sign of exploitation, captivity, abuse, and shame (3:7, 11)."<sup>5</sup>

Note the parallels between this legislation and the story of Ham looking on his father Noah's nakedness (Gen. 9:20-27): Uncovering nakedness and sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse both resulted in a curse (18:24-28; Gen. 9:24-27). God was guarding His people from falling into the same type of sin and its consequences that Ham experienced. One writer suggested that God designed the legislation in chapters 18 through 20 to guard the Israelites from what humankind did at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 330.

<sup>2</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 253.

<sup>4</sup>Kiuchi, p. 331.

<sup>5</sup>Ross, p. 345.

<sup>6</sup>Sailhamer, p. 346.

**Specific types of unlawful sexual intercourse 18:7-18**

18:7-16 These verses specify who the Israelites were not to have sexual intercourse with: one's father (v. 7), one's mother (v. 7), one's stepmother, v. 8), one's sister (v. 9), one's granddaughter (v. 10), one's half sister (v. 11), one's aunt (vv. 12-13), one's uncle (v. 14), one's daughter-in-law (v. 15), or one's sister-in-law (v. 16).

"After the death of her husband a woman may not marry her brother-in-law [v. 16]. Deut. 25:5ff. states an exception to this principle. Should a woman be widowed before she has borne a son, her brother-in-law has a duty to marry her 'to perpetuate his brother's name' (v. 7). This custom of Levirate, attested elsewhere in Scripture and the ancient Orient, illustrates the paramount importance of having children in ancient times. Heirs prevented the alienation of family property and ensured the parents' support in their old age, in times when pensions and other welfare services were unknown."<sup>1</sup>

God prohibited intercourse with married or unmarried individuals outside marriage. In Israel, engaged couples were considered as good as married, though they had not yet consummated their marriage with intercourse.

"Very great laxity prevailed amongst the Egyptians in their sentiments and practice about the conjugal relation, as they not only openly sanctioned marriages between brothers and sisters, but even between parents and children."<sup>2</sup>

"What has troubled biblical scholars for some time are the two major omissions from the list: father-daughter incest and brother-sister incest. Economic reasons might have made these two

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 257.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 99.



violations rare in the ancient Israelite world. A virgin daughter brought a good bride-price. If a father violated her, he lost that. A corrupt father more likely turned his attentions elsewhere than to his daughter. This might also apply to a brother, as seen in the case of Laban, the brother of Rebekah, who actually became the head of the family and negotiator for marriage in the place of his father."<sup>1</sup>

18:17 Neither were the Israelite men to have intercourse with both a woman and her daughter.

18:18 Israelite men were also forbidden from marrying their wives' sisters while their wives were still alive.

Translators have made a fairly strong case from philological, literary, and historical considerations for translating verse 18 as follows: "And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to another." The Qumran community, for instance, translated it this way.<sup>2</sup> If this translation is correct, the verse explicitly prohibits polygamy and implicitly prohibits divorce.<sup>3</sup> Thus the Mosaic Law forbade some things that the patriarchs practiced: marrying one's half-sister (vv. 9, 11; cf. Gen. 20:12) and marrying two sisters concurrently (v. 18; cf. Gen. 29:30).

Moses mentioned 12 different situations in verses 7 through 18. What about other similar situations? The specific prohibitions identified in verses 7 through 18 seem to be the most commonly violated, or possibly they are sample cases, rather than the only ones that the LORD condemned. The spirit of the law is to maintain purity in one's marriage by marrying only one person of the opposite sex and by having sex with only that one person.

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 345. Cf. Hartley, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup>The community that inhabited Qumran is generally identified with the Essenes, a religious sect, which lived in isolation in this region west of the Dead Sea.

<sup>3</sup>See Angelo Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (April 1984):199-214; Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 259; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, p. 189; John Murray *Principles of Conduct*, Appendix B, pp. 250-56.

### Other practices that weakened the family 18:19-23

18:19-20 God also condemned other kinds of unacceptable sexual behavior, including having sex with a woman during her menstrual period (v. 19) and adultery (v. 20). Evidently having marital or extramarital intercourse during a woman's period was prohibited because it rendered the couple ritually unclean (cf. 15:19-24; 20:18; 2 Sam. 11:4).<sup>1</sup>

18:21 Child sacrifice was also outlawed. Molech (sometimes spelled Moloch or Molek) was a Canaanite god, often represented by a bronze image with a bull's head and outstretched arms. The idol was usually hollow, and devotees kindled a fire in it, making it very hot. The Canaanites then would pass their young children through the fire (cf. 2 Kings 23:10) or place them on the hot, outstretched arms of the idol as sacrifices (Ezek. 16:20).<sup>2</sup>

"The fire-worshippers asserted that all children who did not undergo this purifying process would die in infancy ..."<sup>3</sup>

"... the enormity of the sin of Molek worship [was]: ascribing to Molek the attributes of a deity who can demand child sacrifice and, at the same time, averring [claiming] that Molek is an agent of YHWH and carries out his will."<sup>4</sup>

The Talmud, and some modern commentators, prefer a translation of verse 21 that prohibits parents from giving their children for training as temple prostitutes.<sup>5</sup>

"To 'profane' means to make something unholy. The object of the verb is always something holy,

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup>Some writers have identified Molech with the planet Saturn. See Dwardu Cardona, "The Rites of Molech," *Kronos* 9:3 (Summer 1984):20-39.

<sup>3</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 99.

<sup>4</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus* 17–22, p. 1565.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Norman Snaith, "The Cult of Molech," *Vetus Testamentum* 16 (1966), pp. 123-24; Geza Vermes, "Leviticus 18:21 in Ancient Jewish Bible Exegesis," in *Studies in Aggadah, Targum, and Jewish Liturgy in Memory of Joseph Heinemann*, pp. 108-124.

e.g., God's sanctuary, 21:12, 23; the holy foods (22:15); the sabbath, Isa. 56:2, 6; Ezek. 20:13, 16, etc. Profaning God's name occurs when his name is misused in a false oath (Lev. 19:12), but more usually it is done indirectly, by doing something that God disapproves of (e.g., by idolatry, Ezek. 20:39; by breaking the covenant, Jer. 34:16; by disfiguring oneself, Lev. 21:6). By these actions Israel profanes God's name; that is, they give him a bad reputation among the Gentiles (Ezek. 36:20-21). This is why they must shun Molech worship."<sup>1</sup>

18:22      Homosexuality was likewise condemned.

"Homosexual acts are clearly denounced here as hateful to God. [An "abomination" (vv. 22, 26, 27, 29, 30) is something that God hates and detests (cf. Prov. 6:16; 11:1).] The penalty given at 20:13 is capital punishment. They are denounced also in Romans 1:26-27. ... It is hard to understand how 'gay churches,' where homosexuality is rampant, can exist. Clearly it is possible only where people have cast off biblical authority and teaching."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"The addressee is a male, so homosexuality is at issue. One cannot, however, infer from the

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup>Harris, p. 601. Cf. Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2:25, 31.

<sup>3</sup>Hess, p. 742.

absence of a reference to lesbianism that lesbianism is permissible."<sup>1</sup>

"... the difference between the biblical legislation and other Near Eastern laws must not be overlooked: the Bible allows for no exceptions; all acts of sodomy are prohibited, whether performed by rich or poor, higher or lower status, citizen or alien. Many theories have been propounded to provide a rationale for this prohibition. One must surely exist, since this absolute ban on anal intercourse is unique not only in the Bible but ... in the entire ancient Near Eastern and classical world."<sup>2</sup>

"Prohomosexual writers attempt to downplay the clear prohibition of these passages [18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:18] by trying to distinguish between ritual commands and moral commands. They say that the laws concerned ritual purity; that is, they had to be obeyed in order to be acceptable in performing the rituals of the Mosaic worship but do not relate to moral purity. To maintain such a distinction is wishful thinking, for ritual and moral purity often overlap. Otherwise, one could conclude that sins mentioned in the same context concern only ritual purity and are therefore not immoral. Such sins include adultery, child sacrifice, and bestiality (Lev. 18:20, 21, 23). Just as it would be unthinkable to consider these solely matters of ritual purity, so it would be unthinkable to conclude that homosexuality was only a ritual concern and not a sin in God's sight.

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"Some prohomosexual writers attempt to nullify the force of these commands by stating that the Mosaic law has been done away. As a code of

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 338.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1566. Paragraph division omitted.

conduct for the Israelites it has been done away (2 Cor. 3:7-11). But it still has a use, and that use clearly includes the fact the homosexuality is morally wrong. ... (1 Tim. 1:8-19)."<sup>1</sup>

"The biblical injunctions against homosexuality are clear and repeatedly declared. It must be remembered that AIDS is a *virus*, which is not limited to or caused by homosexuality or drug abuse, since 12 percent of people with AIDS have not practiced these acts. However, the statistics indicate that these disorders are significantly contributing to the epidemic. ...

"Psychiatrists are not supposed to call homosexuality a 'disorder.' In 1979 the American Psychiatric Association, to which most psychiatrists in the United States belong, voted by a simple majority that homosexuality is no longer a perversion. This vote was prompted by a powerful gay lobby within the association, thought to consist of at least 10 percent of its members. Homosexuals have subsequently used this APA revision to claim that 'even psychiatrists feel that homosexuality is normal.' ...

"Homosexual activity is anatomically inappropriate. The sadomasochistic nature of anal intercourse leads to tears in the anal and rectal linings, thereby giving infected semen a direct route into the recipient's blood supply. In a similar manner a prostitute is more likely to contract AIDS due to tears in her vaginal wall because of repeated intercourse from numerous sexual partners, frequently within the same day. ...

"Otis R. Bowen, MD, the former Secretary of Health and Human Services on President Reagan's Cabinet, stated, 'Abstinence, monogamy, and

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<sup>1</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Answers to Tough Questions*, pp. 146-47.

avoidance of drugs are no longer just good morals. Now, they are good medical science.<sup>1</sup> His statement is consistent with the biblical theme of preventive medicine, which emphasizes prohibitions that can curtail the epidemic, rather than stressing the directed *treatment* of the illness."<sup>2</sup>

- 18:23 Having sex with an animal (bestiality) was also prohibited. The Mesopotamians and Hittites generally condemned incest and bestiality, with some exceptions, but not homosexuality.<sup>3</sup>

### The consequences of disobedience 18:24-30

- 18:24 The practices listed above defiled (spoiled, debased, degraded) those who practiced them. All of them were fairly common practices in the ancient Near East, and especially in Canaan.

- 18:25 God personified the land of Canaan as having been defiled by the sins of the Canaanites. Sexual immorality defiled the land as well as the people who practiced it. Therefore, He said, He would punish it so that it would vomit out its inhabitants. This promise anticipated the Israelites' conquest of the land of Canaan.

"The people and land became defiled because, when sexual life was separated from love and marriage, it degenerated into an animal activity that was an affront to human dignity."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Otis R. Bowen, "Safer Behavior against AIDS Reiterated for Minorities," *American Medical News*, December 11, 1987, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>Fawver and Overstreet, pp. 283, 284. See also Sherwood A. Cole, "Biology, Homosexuality, and Moral Culpability," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:615 (July-September 1997):355-66.

<sup>3</sup>See Harry A. Hoffner, "Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality in the Ancient Near East," in *Orient and Occident. Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, pp. 81-90.

<sup>4</sup>Noordtzij, pp. 188-89.

18:26 Again the LORD emphasized that these regulations applied to the strangers who lived among the Israelites as well as to the native Israelites (cf. 17:8, 10).

"Herein is presented a clear principle that the observance of the Lord's statutes must be universal, not just for the Israelites, but for foreigners too for as long as they dwell in the Promised Land."<sup>1</sup>

18:27 This verse restates for emphasis the point made in verses 24 and 25.

18:28 If the Israelites practiced these abominations in the land it would vomit them out just as it would vomit the Canaanites out.

18:29 The punishment for any of these abominations was to "be cut off from among their people." This probably means excommunication from the nation at least, and possible death.

18:30 Yahweh and Israel had entered into a covenant, and the Israelites had promised to do all that the LORD commanded them to do (cf. Exod. 19:8; 24:3, 7). This chapter closes by Yahweh calling on the people to honor their commitment to Him and with a reminder that He was their God: "I am the LORD your God" (cf. vv. 2, 5).

"The holy nature of the Lord, the God of Israel, would not allow Him to leave unpunished such a disruption of the norms that He himself had set."<sup>2</sup>

The sexual sins to which Moses referred break down the structure of society by breaking down the family. Moreover, they evidence a lack of respect for the life and rights of others. They put the lives of others in danger of divine judgment, and they violate the right of others to preserve their own lives. Furthermore, they cause diseases. By prohibiting these practices God was guarding His people from things that would destroy

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 189.

them—physically and spiritually. Destruction and death are always the consequences of sin (Rom. 6:23).

The New Testament writers restated the laws on incest (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-5), adultery (cf. Rom. 13:9), idolatry (cf. 1 Cor. 10:7-11; Rev. 2:14), and homosexuality (cf. Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9). These commands are equally binding on believers who live under the New Covenant.<sup>1</sup>

"... in these days when the laws covering marriage and divorce are decided by a 'majority vote,' regardless of the law of God, there is an urgent call for Christians to stand up for the sanctity of the marriage bond and family relationships!"<sup>2</sup>

"The people of God must remain loyal to their covenant God and not become involved in the abominable practices of the world that God will judge."<sup>3</sup>

### **3. Holiness of behavior toward God and man ch. 19**

Moses grouped the laws in this section together by a loose association of ideas, rather than by a strictly logical arrangement. They all spring from the central thought in verse 2: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." This sentence is the motto or catchphrase of Leviticus (cf. 11:44-45; 20:26; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16).

"Every biblical statement about God carries with it an implied demand upon men to imitate Him in daily living."<sup>4</sup>

"Here are duties to be inculcated that for the most part depend upon the man's inward feeling."<sup>5</sup>

"All the laws in chap. 19 are unenforceable in human courts; hence, the emphatic '*ani* ["I am"] YHWH: God will enforce

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<sup>1</sup>J. Daniel Hays, "Applying the Old Testament Law Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):21-35, explained and advocated "principalizing" as a method of application in this helpful article.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, 1:134.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 348.

<sup>4</sup>Ronald E. Clements, "Leviticus," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, 2:51.

<sup>5</sup>Bonar, p. 343.



them. Note that this formula is absent in vv. 5-8 because in the law the divine punishment *karet* ["cut off"] is specified."<sup>1</sup>

"Leviticus 19 has been called the highest development of ethics in the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> This chapter perhaps better than any other in the Bible, explains what it meant for Israel to be a holy nation (Exod 19:6). The chapter stresses the interactive connection between responsibility to one's fellow man and religious piety, the two dimensions of life that were never meant to be separated."<sup>3</sup>

"We are disposed to regard life as composed of various realms that, to our way of thinking, have little or no connection with one another. The perspective of the ancient Near Eastern world was more unified, however, for not only were the cultic and moral spheres considered to be two sides of the same concern ... but civic and political life were also controlled by a religious outlook."<sup>4</sup>

"Developing the idea of holiness as order, not confusion, this list upholds rectitude and straight-dealing as holy, and contradiction and double-dealing as against holiness. Theft, lying, false witness, cheating in weights and measures, all kinds of dissembling such as speaking ill of the deaf (and presumably smiling to their face), hating your brother in your heart (while presumably speaking kindly to him), these are clearly contradictions between what seems and what is."<sup>5</sup>

"Holiness is thus not so much an abstract or mystic idea, as a regulative principle in the everyday lives of men and women. ... Holiness is thus attained not by flight from the world, nor by monk-like renunciation of human relationships of family or station, but by the spirit in which we fulfill the obligations of life in its simplest and commonest details: in this way—by

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1612.

<sup>2</sup>J. West, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>Rooker, p. 250.

<sup>4</sup>Noordtzi, p. 189.

<sup>5</sup>Douglas, p. 531. This writer compared Israel's ancient laws and modern tribal customs.

doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God—is everyday life transfigured."<sup>1</sup>

Holiness involves integrity, namely, being what one should be and professes to be in relationship to one's God (vv. 3-8), one's neighbor (vv. 9-18), one's possessions (vv. 19-29), and one's community (vv. 30-36).

One scholar saw this chapter as chiastic: The first and last sections deal with a person's relationship to God (vv. 3-8, 32-36), and the second and fourth with one's relationship to his fellow man (vv. 9-18, 30-31). The central section deals with man's relationship to himself (vv. 19-29).<sup>2</sup> I do not think that this is the best outline of the chapter. Ross also believed that the structure of this chapter is chiastic: The first half of the chapter contains positive (vv. 3-10) and negative (vv. 11-18) commands, and the second half reverses this order with negative (vv. 19-31) and positive (vv. 32-37) commands.<sup>3</sup> This chapter contains quotations from or allusions to some, if not all ten, of the Ten Commandments.<sup>4</sup>

"It is ... best to view this chapter as a speech to the community—similar to a covenant-renewal message—that draws upon all the main parts of the law to exhort the people to a life of holiness. Its basic principle is the responsibility of love."<sup>5</sup>

"Like the Decalogue, these laws provide a summary of critical areas of concern as well as exemplary models for the whole of life. They are not intended to be comprehensive but to provide the student with a guide for understanding the priorities of the Lawgiver and for obtaining the principles that may be applied to other situations in life."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hertz, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Magonet, "The Structure and Meaning of Leviticus 19," *Hebrew Annual Review* 7 (1983):166.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, pp. 354-55.

<sup>4</sup>See the charts in Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, p. 1600; Rooker, p. 252, and Ross, p. 355, for various views of how these injunctions connect with the Decalogue.

<sup>5</sup>Ross, p. 355.

<sup>6</sup>Hess, p. 746.

**Holiness precepts 19:1-18**

"This section ... consists of a list of twenty-one (3x7) laws. These laws are broken up into smaller units by the sevenfold repetition of the phrase 'I am the LORD (your God)' (19:3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18)."<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction to the laws concerning holy conduct 19:1-2**

The clause "I am the LORD" reminded the Israelites that Yahweh was their Suzerain (Lord) and therefore their ultimate Judge within their covenant relationship. Because He is holy, they were to be holy. This is the reason for all the laws that follow (cf. James 4:4-5).

**Holy conduct in relation to God 19:3-8**

19:3      Respect for parents and Sabbath observance were the foundations for moral government and social well-being respectively. Compare the fourth and fifth commandments. The fifth commandment is to "honor" (Heb. *kibbed*) one's parents (Exod. 20:12). Here the command is to "revere" ("fear," Heb. *yare*) your parents.

"'To fear' means to acknowledge someone as master and to humbly subject oneself in moral obedience to such a person's will (cf. Josh. 4:14; KJV, 'fear'; NIV, 'revere')."<sup>2</sup>

19:4      Idolatry and image-making broke the first and second commandments. This verse recalls the golden calf incident (Exod. 32; cf. Deut. 4:15-18).

19:5-8    Regarding the peace offerings as holy things revealed true loyalty to God, contrasted with the idolatry of verse 4. Allowing sacrificial meat to remain uneaten created two possible outcomes: it might become contaminated and rot (and could possibly be eaten by vermin or scavengers), or it

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 349.

<sup>2</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 193.

could be treated as regular food, rather than as a holy sacrifice to the LORD.

Obedience to these sample moral commandments and this ritual ordinance illustrate what holy conduct before God looks like.

### **Holy conduct in relation to one's neighbor 19:9-18**

The laws that follow emphasize love for one's neighbor, which flows from love for God.

19:9-10     The Israelites were not to harvest their fields and vineyards so thoroughly that there would be nothing left. Farmers in the Promised Land were to leave some of the crops ("gleanings") in the field so that the poor could come in and "glean" what remained. This showed both love and respect for the poor (cf. 23:22; Job 29:12-13; Isa. 10:2; Zech. 7:9-10)—love by providing for them, and respect by allowing them to work for their food rather than simply giving it to them as charity.<sup>1</sup>

"Unfortunately, much activity and much excitement in modern religious activities has a general disregard for the poor and needy. One cannot legitimately give God thanks and praise while ignoring the poor and needy (Heb. 13:15-16)."<sup>2</sup>

19:11-12     Stealing from, lying to, and swearing falsely in Yahweh's name to one's neighbor were violations of the eighth, ninth, and third commandments (Exod. 20: 16, 16, 7).

"To take the name of God in vain (KJV) is not merely to use it as a curse word but to invoke the name of God to support an oath that is not going to be kept."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Donald E. Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 41:4 (October 1987):341-53, for a study of the plight of the widow, the orphan, and the sojourner in Israel.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 360.

<sup>3</sup>Harris, p. 604.

- 19:13-14 The Israelites were not to oppress their neighbors nor rob them of what was rightfully theirs, such as withholding wages instead of paying them on time. Not only withholding payment, but delaying payment was wrong (cf. James 4:5).

"The statements in the law were intended as a reliable guide with general applicability—not a technical description of all possible conditions one could imagine. ... The 'deaf' and the 'blind' are merely selected examples of all persons whose physical weaknesses demand that they be respected rather than despised."<sup>1</sup>

- 19:15-16 All forms of injustice were also forbidden. The Israelites were to treat their neighbors fairly (cf. James 2:1, 9). They were not to make false statements about their neighbors that would damage their reputations ("slander"; cf. James 4:11). A slanderer is not just a gossip but someone who actively seeks to destroy another person's reputation. Nor were they to do anything that would put their neighbors in mortal danger.

- 19:17 God commanded proper attitudes as well as correct actions (cf. Matt. 18:15-17; 19:19). The Mosaic Law did not just deal with external behavior. Hatred of a neighbor was forbidden.

"This warning is aptly illustrated by the case of Absalom, who hated his half brother Amnon for raping Tamar, Absalom's sister and Amnon's half sister. His hatred was so deep that 'Absalom didn't utter a word to Amnon good or bad' (2 Sam 13:22). Two years later, Absalom's repressed but mounting anger caused him to have Amnon murdered (vv. 28-29)."<sup>2</sup>

The second part of this verse has been interpreted in three ways: It could mean that one should rebuke his neighbor without hating him in one's heart. Or it could mean that one should rebuke his neighbor so that one might not become

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<sup>1</sup>G. D. Fee and D. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1646.

guilty of the same sin himself. The third option is that it means both things:

"Reproof of the neighbour ought to be done in such a way that you should not bear guilt because of him (cf. JPS)."<sup>1</sup>

19:18 Taking vengeance and holding a grudge were also prohibited. On the contrary, the Israelites were to love their neighbors (cf. Matt. 19:19; James 2:8).

In the New Testament, the last part of this verse is quoted more often than any other verse in the Old Testament. When Jesus Christ commented on it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43), He did not invest it with a new spiritual meaning. He corrected the Pharisees' misinterpretation of it. They limited it to external action. A common modern perversion of this "second greatest commandment" is that it implies that we must learn to love ourselves before we can love others.<sup>2</sup>

"How can love be commanded? The answer simply is that the verb '*ahab*' signifies not only an emotion or attitude, but also deeds."<sup>3</sup>

### Statutes and judgments 19:19-37

"This section is introduced with the admonition 'You shall keep my statutes' (v. 19a) and concludes with a similar admonition, 'You shall keep all my statutes and all my judgments' (v. 37a), and the statement 'I am the LORD' (19:37b). Like the preceding section of laws, it consists of a list of twenty-one (3x7) laws. These laws also are broken up into smaller units by a sevenfold repetition of the phrase 'I am the LORD (your God)' (19:25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36)."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 353. JPS refers to the Jewish Publication Society translation.

<sup>2</sup>For refutation of this view, see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, pp. 130-31.

<sup>3</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1653.

<sup>4</sup>Sailhamer, p. 351.

**Statutes regarding one's possessions 19:19-29**

19:19 The opening words of this section indicate a change of subject. "Statutes" were laws governing the Israelites' civil life, as opposed to "commandments," which governed their moral life, "ordinances," which governed the ceremonies and rites of their religious life, and "judgments," which governed their social life.

God called on His people to honor the order of nature by not mixing certain things ("cattle," "seed," "materials") that God had separated in creation.

"Most of the ancient Near Easterners believed that all things that came into being were *born* into being. This was a major tenet of their belief system. They believed that not only animals were born, but also plants. (This is the reason that they 'sowed their field with two kind of seed,' i.e., male and female seed as they thought of it; see Lev. 19:19.)"<sup>1</sup>

God probably also intended these practices (livestock breeding, planting trees and sowing seed, and weaving material) to distinguish the Israelites from the Canaanites.<sup>2</sup>

"As God separated Israel from among the nations to be his own possession, so they must maintain their holy identity by not intermarrying with the nations (Deut. 7:3-6)."<sup>3</sup>

Since God prescribed a mixture of certain materials in the tabernacle and in the priests' clothing, Milgrom concluded that mixtures belonged to the sacred sphere, and that the common sphere was to be characterized as different.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel*, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>See Calum Carmichael, "Forbidden Mixtures," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:4 (September 1982):394-415.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 269-70.

<sup>4</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, pp. 1658-65.

19:20-22 Yahweh upheld the rights of slaves, which were regarded as possessions. A man was not to "mix" with a female slave engaged to another man ("acquired for another man"), by having sexual intercourse with her. The Israelites considered engaged people to be virtually married. If he did have sex with her he was to bring a ram as a guilt offering to the tabernacle, and the LORD would forgive him.

19:23-25 By allowing four years to pass before someone ate the fruit on a tree, the tree could establish itself and be more productive in the long run. For the first three years the fruit of the tree was forbidden, and in the fourth year the tree and all its fruit were "holy, an offering of praise to the LORD." Finally, in the fifth year, the owner could eat the fruit.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

19:26-28 God's people were to avoid pagan practices that characterized the Canaanites. These included eating meat with the blood not drained out of it (v. 26), practicing divination or soothsaying (v. 26), trimming the hair on their heads (v. 27), and cutting or tattooing their bodies (v. 28).

Divination is the practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown by supernatural means. Soothsaying is very similar to fortune telling. It is supposedly saying the truth—"sooth" is Old English for "truth"—usually about the future.

"Those that worshipped the hosts of heaven, in honour of them, cut their hair so that their heads might resemble the celestial globe; but, as the custom was foolish in itself, so, being done with respect to their false gods, it was idolatrous."<sup>2</sup>

"In some ancient societies, including Israel, the beard was the prized symbol of manhood, and its

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 133.



mutilation was considered the greatest disgrace and punishment (2 Sam 10:4-5; Isa 7:20)."<sup>1</sup>

"It it [*sic* is] probably that a strong propensity to adopt such [tattoo] marks in honor of some idol gave occasion to the prohibition in this verse [v. 28] ..."<sup>2</sup>

"In general, humans find it extremely difficult to refrain from modifying their souls and bodies (leaving them as they were created by God), but attempt to show others and themselves that they are something special. This is a further manifestation of the egocentric nature."<sup>3</sup>

19:29      These foreign practices also included devoting one's daughter to prostitution. There is some disagreement among scholars as to the practice of cultic prostitution in the ancient Near East. Some passages of Scripture refer to it (Gen. 38:21, 22; Deut. 23:17). But some scholars deny its existence, as the following quotation illustrates:

"Cultic prostitution, meaning intercourse with strangers as a sacred rite to increase fertility, is nonexistent in the ancient Near East."<sup>4</sup>

### Judgments regarding communal living 19:30-36

19:30      Keeping the Sabbath was important because it was a uniquely Israelitish practice that distinguished the Jews from their neighbors. It also affected the way they worked: abstaining from all work for one day of the week.

Showing respect for the tabernacle also distinguished the Israelites from their neighbors and affected how they treated their food and sacrifices.

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, p. 1691.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 101.

<sup>3</sup>Kiuchi, p. 358.

<sup>4</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, p. 1695.

19:31 The Israelites were prohibited from seeking special knowledge, either from the dead in general, or from dead relatives ("familiar spirits," using "mediums" or "spiritists" to contact supposedly human "spirits"—with whom the one praying had previous personal acquaintance).<sup>1</sup>

"Necromancy [the practice of communicating with the dead] was as pervasive in Israel as in the ancient Near East. Because it was associated with ancestor worship, it was deemed a form of idolatry in the biblical codes (H[oliness] and D[euteronomic]) and therefore banned. Obviously, idolatry in any form detracted from the holiness of God and would block Israel's attempt to strive for holiness."<sup>2</sup>

But the practice of ancestor worship in Israel has been disputed:

"... there are indications of ancestor worship in Old Testament times but there was no ancestor worship in Israel."<sup>3</sup>

God did not permit ancestor worship, though some of the Israelites may have practiced it to a limited extent, as a result of pagan influence.<sup>4</sup>

19:32 The Israelites were to show respect for the elderly. "Elders" here refers to the old, literally. The leaders of Israel are not the elders in view here, though most of them were probably elderly. The elderly were considered to be a treasure, not only in Israel but also throughout the ancient world. They had much to contribute to a nation because of their years of experience.

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<sup>1</sup>For an exposé and critique of Spiritualism (v. 27) written by a former Spiritualist minister and medium, see Raphael Gasson, *The Challenging Counterfeit*. See also Unger, *Demons in ....*

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1700.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew Chiu, "Is There Ancestor Worship in the Old Testament?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 8:2 (October 1984):221.

<sup>4</sup>See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, pp. 1772-85.

Showing them respect was a way of honoring the eternal God as well as maintaining unity in the community.

19:33-34 The Israelites were to treat non-Israelites who lived among them the same as they treated fellow Israelites. They were to remember that they too had been strangers in Egypt. This is a concrete example of treating others the way one would want to be treated: the golden rule (Matt. 7:12).

19:35-36 This list of laws concludes with commands to practice honesty in commercial transactions, an obvious necessity in any community.

### **A final command 19:37**

This verse is a summary exhortation and a final reminder that Yahweh was the Israelites' Lord.

Since the church contains people of every nation, it is no longer necessary for Christians to observe the laws that typified Israel's uniqueness among the other nations. Nevertheless, God still calls Christians to imitate Himself (cf. Matt. 5:48; 1 Cor. 11:1), to be holy, because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). Application of the imperatives in this chapter is different for Christians than it was for the Israelites, but the fundamental principles of holy living remain the same.

"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 the standards of separation in the world, and by demonstrating kindness and justice to others."<sup>1</sup>

"Holiness refers to the essential nature of the Lord. Though God's holiness is distinct from human holiness, each is characterized by selflessness. Practically this manifests itself in an independence of spirit and an unwillingness to damage either oneself or others—to live the command to love oneself and one's neighbour. Love and justice emanate from this condition of holiness. They are, so to speak, the fruit of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 365.

egocentric nature's destruction, analogous to the NT's 'fruit of the Spirit'."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. Punishments for serious crimes ch. 20

The preceding two chapters specify correct behavior. This one sets forth the punishments for disobedience. It helps the reader appreciate how seriously God regards sin (cf. Eph. 5:11-13). Chapters 18 and 19 already discussed most of the subjects dealt with in this chapter. Chapter 20 summarizes chapters 18 and 19, like chapter 15 summarizes chapters 12 through 14.

"The difference between the laws in this chapter and previous ones [18 and 19] lies in their form. Those in chs. 18—19 are apodictic in form; that is, they forbid or command certain types of behavior but they rarely indicate what the consequences of disregarding these rules would be. In contrast, the laws in this chapter are casuistic; that is, they state what must be done should one of the apodictic rules be broken. They set out what will befall a law-breaker in such a case. In this way they supplement and reinforce what is found in earlier chapters."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

Hess believed that chapter 18 stresses punishment for disobedience, whereas 20 emphasizes achievement of holiness.<sup>4</sup>

"This selection of laws consists of fourteen (7x2) laws, concluded by an extended appeal for holiness on the part of

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 364.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 277.

<sup>3</sup>Rooker, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup>Hess, p. 759.

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)."<sup>1</sup>

### The punishment for idolatry 20:1-5

After the customary introduction that signals a new revelation that Moses was to communicate to the Israelites (vv. 1-2a), God spoke about idolatry. The people were to execute, by stoning, a Molech worshiper—whether an Israelite or an alien—who would offer one or more children as a human sacrifice.

Stoning "... was the usual punishment appointed in the law for cases in which death was inflicted ..."<sup>2</sup>

If the Israelites failed to put a Molech worshiper to death, God Himself would judge the guilty person, and his family, with death.

Milgrom believed that this passage proves conclusively that *karet* ("cut off") cannot be excommunication but must refer to direct, divine punishment by death.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars have argued that in some other contexts being "cut off from among his people" may imply simply removal from the community of Israel. In this case (vv. 1-5) it seems that death by divine intervention is in view.

### The punishment for spiritism 20:6-8

God would also "cut off" the person who resorted to mediums or spiritists. This practice involved seeking information about the future from the dead and/or evil spirits rather than from God (cf. King Saul's fate).<sup>4</sup>

"... a turning to other lovers is virtually a declaring that there is no satisfying love in God toward us."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 353.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:426. See Bush, p. 215, for a description of the stoning process.

<sup>3</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1737.

<sup>4</sup>See Van Baalen, pp. 20-50; Kurt E. Koch, *Between Christ and Satan*, for discussions of mediums and spiritists.

<sup>5</sup>Bonar, p. 363.

Verses 7 and 8 summarize all of God's concerns in Leviticus: that the Israelites would consecrate themselves to Yahweh and be holy, and that they would obey His statutes.

### **The punishment for cursing one's parents 20:9**

Cursing one's parents was also punishable by death. Parents stand in the place of God for their children. Therefore to curse one's parents, and repudiate their authority, was virtually to curse God for a child.

### **The punishment for certain sexual sins 20:10-21**

Several sexual sins described here drew the death penalty under the Mosaic Law.

20:10-13 In cases of adultery, both the man and the woman were to be put to death (v. 10). Likewise if a man slept with (had consensual sex with) his step-mother, both of them were to die (v.11). Sleeping with one's step-mother was regarded as violating one's father. Other similar cases involved sleeping with one's daughter-in-law (v. 12) and sleeping with someone of the same sex (v. 13). Homosexuality was a capital offense in Israel, though in other societies it was permitted.<sup>1</sup>

20:14-16 A man who married a woman and her mother concurrently was to be put to death with the two women. Burning the man who married a woman and her mother (v. 14) took place after their execution, in order to heighten the general perception of the wickedness of their sin (cf. Gen. 38:24; Lev. 21:9; Josh. 7:15, 25). This cremation also symbolically cleansed the camp of defilement by removing their remains from view and memory.<sup>2</sup> Men and women who had sex with animals were to die as well as the animals (vv. 15-16).

20:17-21 If a brother and his sister had sex they were to be stoned (v. 17). This case was not mentioned in chapter 18, which indicates that the list of sins in that chapter was representative and not comprehensive. A man who slept with a menstruous woman, and the woman, were also to be "cut

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<sup>1</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1749.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 386.

off" (v. 18). Having sex with one's aunt, or with one's sister-in-law, also drew the death penalty (vv. 19-21). To "bear their guilt" and "die childless" are perhaps not lesser penalties but synonyms for execution.

Another view is that God would judge these sexual sins by withholding children from the guilty parties. Perhaps this would happen if the Israelites failed to put the offenders to death. Any children that were born of these illicit unions would be regarded as illegitimate. Such children would not benefit their families, which was a great calamity in Israel's world (cf. 1 Chron. 3:17-18; Jer. 22:30; 36:30).<sup>1</sup> McGee interpreted verse 21 to mean that the children born to these people would die before their parents, not that the parents would bear no children.<sup>2</sup>

The Mosaic Law banned the sexual unions alluded to despite the fact that some form of "marriage" is implied in verses 14, 17, and 21 ("a man who *marries* a woman and her mother ... a man who *takes* his sister ... a man who *takes* his brother's wife," emphasis added). Consequently these verses may be referring to common-law marriages in which people—in this case relatives—lived together as husband and wife without a proper wedding ceremony.<sup>3</sup>

"Whereas in certain respects OT penal law was much more lenient than that of neighboring contemporary cultures, it was more strict with regard to offenses against religion and family life."<sup>4</sup>

"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.

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<sup>1</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 377; Hartley, pp. 328-29.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 1:419.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 280.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 179. See his helpful excursus on "Principles of Punishment in the Pentateuch," pp. 281-86.

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)."<sup>1</sup>

"No maudlin pity for the individual wrongdoer must be allowed to jeopardise [*sic*] the moral safe-guarding of the whole community. Here, too, is a lesson which many sentimental pitiers of criminals in our own day would do well to ponder."<sup>2</sup>

### **The reason for these punishments 20:22-26**

This chapter, like chapter 18, concludes with an exhortation and warnings to obey God's laws. In view of Israel's unique vocation in the world, the nation was to live differently from other peoples (cf. 19:2; 20:26). The Israelites would occupy the Promised Land (v. 24), but they needed to maintain their holiness (v. 26). Otherwise the land would "vomit" them out; they would not be able to continue to live there.

No matter how lightly the Israelites may have regarded the type of conduct required in this chapter, in God's sight it constituted serious sin and deserved the severest punishment.

"This theme runs through chs. 11—20: the elect people of God must visibly embody the character of God. In their choice of food, in sickness and in health, in their family life, in their honest and upright dealing, and in their love of neighbor, they show the world what God is like."<sup>3</sup>

Note the evidences of God's love for the Israelites in these verses: "I myself will give it [the Promised Land] to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey" (v. 24), and "I have singled you out from the peoples to be Mine" (v. 26).

### **The punishment for mediums and spiritists 20:27**

Especially the Israelites were to avoid contact with demonic spirits (v. 27; cf. v. 6; 19:31; Deut. 18:10-11). Perhaps this word about stoning mediums

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, 1:134.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 342-43.



and spiritists to death was restated (cf. v. 6) at this unusual place because mediums and spiritists would be a special problem when the Israelites entered Canaan. All the other capital offenses mentioned in this chapter involved Israelites personally, but this one involved foreigners—and possibly Israelites as well.

"God's people must avoid the world's false religious systems and immoral practices and follow after the LORD's holy plan."<sup>1</sup>

#### **B. HOLINESS OF THE PRIESTS, GIFTS, AND SACRIFICES CHS. 21—22**

All the people were to maintain holiness before God, but the priests had higher standards because of their privileges in relationship to God (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2). Moses explained these higher regulations in this section of two chapters.

"The thrust of this section [21:1—22:16] is twofold: the office of a priest is holy, and the office is above the man. A priest must be holy in body, upright in conduct, and ceremonially clean; for he is the representative of God."<sup>2</sup>

This section also contains the requirements for sacrificial animals, because the sacrificial animals were the "priests" of the animal world. That is, they represented the Israelites before God. Many of the human deformities that kept a priest from offering sacrifices (21:18-20) are the same as those that kept an animal from qualifying as a sacrifice (22:20-24). Symbolically, sacrificial animals corresponded to the priests, clean animals to the Israelites, and unclean animals to the Gentiles.<sup>3</sup>

Baxter saw the logical divisions of this section as follows:

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 378.

<sup>2</sup>Harris, p. 616.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 290.

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*."<sup>1</sup>

"The absolute necessity for the strictest separation of the priest from all possibility of defilement is vividly set forth in the laws here enunciated."<sup>2</sup>

### 1. The priests' purity 21:1-15

"The list has a brief introduction (v. 1) and ends with the introduction to the next list (v. 16). There are fourteen (7 x 2) laws in the list."<sup>3</sup>

#### **Regulations for all the priests 21:1-9**

21:1-4      A priest was not to defile himself ceremonially by touching a corpse, except in the case of his nearest relatives. Most of the commentators assume that the "person" in view in verse 1 is a dead person, but "dead" has been inserted by some translators. The Hebrew text reads simply *nepesh*, which means "soul" in most other places in Leviticus. This led Kiuchi to conclude that it was not touching a dead person that was prohibited but contact with the sinful nature of a person that defiled the priest. He wrote:

"This commandment is not so much concerned with prohibiting a priest's participation in a funeral as with the condition of his heart: he must not sympathize with the death of people ..."<sup>4</sup>

But the following verses seem to favor the view that touching a dead body is meant.

21:5-6      Shaving the head, probably above the forehead (Deut. 14:1), shaving the edges of the beard, and self-mutilation ("cuts in their flesh"), were practices of pagan priests who

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 1:135.

<sup>2</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup>Sailhamer, p. 354.

<sup>4</sup>Kiuchi, p. 393.

demonstrated mourning and zeal in these ways (cf. 1 Kings 18:28).<sup>1</sup>

"As in other parts of the ancient Near East [besides Sumeria] priests' heads were normally shaved and no beard was worn."<sup>2</sup>

"Since hair continues to grow throughout life (and appears to do so for a time after death), it was considered by the ancients to be the seat of a man's vitality and life force, and in ritual it often served as his substitute."<sup>3</sup>

Cutting the human body was unacceptable because physical perfection (wholeness) symbolized holiness. The priests of Israel were neither to resemble physically nor to behave like pagan priests. Doing so would "profane the name of" Yahweh. That is, it would make Yahweh seem like other gods.

The sacrifices were like "food" to Yahweh in the sense that they were edible gifts to Him. Israel's pagan neighbors believed that their sacrifices actually nourished their gods, as mentioned earlier.<sup>4</sup>

21:7-8     The priests' marriages and home life were to be in keeping with their holy vocation. Priests could not marry prostitutes or divorced women, but only virgins (v. 14). One scholar argued that the prohibition against priests marrying non-virgins had to do with contracting ceremonial impurity, but not morality.<sup>5</sup> But marrying a non-virgin constituted disobedience to Yahweh.

"However innocent the divorced woman was in fact, her reputation was likely to have been affected by the divorce."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See M. Bayliss, "The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylon," *Iraq* 35 (1973):115-25.

<sup>2</sup>G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 17—22*, p. 1802.

<sup>4</sup>See my comment on 1:6.

<sup>5</sup>Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (December 1997):540-41.

<sup>6</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 291.

"Very awful is your responsibility if you diminish your zeal, love, spirituality, by marrying one who has more of earth and a present world in her person and spirit, than of heaven and a coming eternity."<sup>1</sup>

Verse 8 ends with the clause "I the LORD, who sanctifies you, am holy." This clause, or its equivalent, also concludes verses 15, 23, 22:9, 16, and 32. This recurring clause reminded the priests that Yahweh had set them aside for a special holy purpose, and that they were to obey Him in view of their unique privileged calling. These chapters should help us who are Christians, whom God has sanctified and is sanctifying, appreciate that our service—as priests—requires careful attention and conformity to God's will.

21:9 The priests' daughters, and presumably their sons, were to lead upright lives, too. If a priest's daughter became a prostitute, she was to be stoned and then her corpse was to be burned.

"... the conduct of the family is noticed by the world, and they lay the blame of their [the children's] misdeeds at the door of their parents. ... they [the children] hinder the usefulness of their father, who loses influence in the eyes of the world if his counsels and walk have not succeeded in drawing his own family to God [cf. 1 Tim. 3:11; Titus 1:6]."<sup>2</sup>

### Regulations for the high priest 21:10-15

21:10-12 It was inappropriate for the high priest to uncover his head in mourning, since it had been anointed with holy oil. He was not to tear his clothes either (cf. Matt. 26:65). Neither could he approach (probably touch) any dead person, thus defiling himself. He was not to leave the sanctuary or profane it, presumably when he should be serving there.

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<sup>1</sup>Bonar, p. 375.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

- 21:13-15 He could not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a prostitute, but only a virgin of his own people (an Israelite virgin). Violating this command would profane his children (make them common as contrasted with holy: different).

## **2. The priests' physical wholeness 21:16-24**

"This list is introduced by the expression 'And the LORD spoke to Moses saying, Speak to Aaron' (v. 16), and is concluded by the expression 'And Moses spoke to Aaron' (v. 24). There are fourteen (7 x 2) laws in the list."<sup>1</sup>

- 21:16-17 Certain restrictions applied to priests who were physically defective (abnormal). They could not enter the holy place or offer sacrifices at the altar of burnt offerings. Physically abnormal priests were not necessarily inferior spiritually, but the priest's duties and office required completeness (wholeness)—since the priest stood between God and people.

"... the priests can be most effective in God's service only when they are in ordinary health and free from physical imperfections."<sup>2</sup>

- 21:18-21 The priests' physical condition, in order to qualify for service, had to display the perfection of God's creation, just like the animals' condition had to meet standards to qualify for the animal sacrifices. The fact that there are 12 disqualifying conditions listed for priests (vv. 18-20), and 12 disqualifying conditions listed for sacrificial animals (22:22-24), points to a similar need for wholeness for both groups. Physical wholeness symbolized spiritual holiness.

"The body of the priest was to give expression to the fullness of life, for he served the living God (Deut. 5:26; 2 Kings 19:4; Ps. 42:2)."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 355.

<sup>2</sup>Harrison, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup>Noordtzij, p. 219.

"It was for the credit [honor] of the sanctuary that none should appear there who were any way disfigured, either by nature or accident."<sup>1</sup>

Another reason for this requirement may have been that the priests typified the coming Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, in whom was no defect.<sup>2</sup>

21:22-24 Aaron's descendants who were disqualified from offering sacrifices could, however, eat the food that the Israelites brought to the tabernacle as offerings to the LORD. But they could not enter the sanctuary or offer sacrifices to Yahweh.

### 3. The priests' service ch. 22

The previous section (21:16-24) named physical impediments that prohibited some priests from offering sacrifices. This section identifies the circumstances under which priests could neither officiate at the sacrifices, nor eat priestly food (cf. Isa. 52:11). Sailhamer listed 28 selected laws (7 x 4) in this section.<sup>3</sup>

#### **The importance of ritual cleanliness 22:1-9**

A selection of seven laws appears between a brief introduction and a conclusion in this pericope. Sloppy service could result from just going through the motions of priestly service repeatedly. The LORD warned the priests against this possibility.

22:1-3 The priests could, of course, become defiled like any other Israelite, but no priest who had become ceremonially unclean was to touch or eat the holy things (the tabernacle furniture: the holy objects, Exod. 28:38; Lev. 5:15; Num. 4:15; or the sacrifices: the holy gifts, vv. 2-4, 7). The penalty for doing so was being "cut off" from Yahweh's presence.

22:4-7 Here the uncleanness referred to above is specified: leprosy, a discharge, touching anything defiled by contact with a dead person ("corpse"), a seminal emission, touching any swarming

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 285.

<sup>3</sup>Sailhamer, pp. 356-58.

things, or touching any unclean person. The uncleanness would last until evening. The only way that the priest could eat during this period of uncleanness was to bathe his body in water before eating. After sunset he could eat without bathing.

22:8-9 He was not to eat any animal that died a natural death or had been killed by another animal. Again, the penalty for violating these laws was death.

"How clearly we need to grasp the difference—as illustrated in this section—between our standing and our state as the Lord's priests! All the sons of Aaron, whether young or old, defective or normal, were priests to Jehovah, by virtue of their birth and life-relationship with Aaron; and nothing could break that relationship: yet those among them who were physically defective were not allowed to officiate at the altar or to enter within the veil of the sanctuary (xxi. 21-[2]3); and those who were in any way defiled were not allowed even to eat of the priest's portion (xxii. 6-7). Even so, every true believer is a priest by virtue of life-giving union with the Lord Jesus, and nothing can break that union where it really exists; but all Christians do not enjoy the same intimacy of fellowship, or exercise the same ministry within the veil! Union is one thing: communion is another. Life is one thing: ministry is another."<sup>1</sup>

"The greatest protection against professionalism and hypocrisy in ministry is the fear of the Lord as revealed in a tender conscience (2 Cor. 1:12; 4:2; 5:11)."<sup>2</sup>

### **The importance of treating the offerings as holy 22:10-16**

Another list of seven laws guarded the sacredness of the offerings.

22:10-11 No non-priest ("layman")—for example a foreign resident or a hired worker—could eat part of a sacrifice to Yahweh ("the holy gift") that the priests ate except those who had become members of a priest's household.

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 286.

- 22:12-13 Likewise the daughter of a priest who had married a "layman" (lit. "stranger") could not eat sacrificial food unless she became widowed, or divorced, and was childless, and she returned to live in her father's household.
- 22:14 If a non-priest happened to eat holy food unintentionally, he was to add a fifth part of it to what was taken and return it to the priest.
- 22:15-16 These laws would guard "the holy gifts" (the offerings to the LORD) from being treated as ordinary food (profane) and would protect the Israelites from God's judgment. All of these regulations guarded the holiness of the LORD by treating the people and things most closely associated with Him as special.

"Those whom God has called to be spiritual leaders must reflect the holiness of the LORD in all they do and exemplify the faith in the eyes of the congregation."<sup>1</sup>

"One of the most difficult things in Christian ministry is having to say no, but to keep our fellowship pure before God, we must sometimes do it. The pastor who refuses to marry a believer to an unbeliever often makes enemies, especially among their relatives, but he keeps his conscience pure before God. Parents who forbid their children to cultivate damaging friendships are misunderstood and sometimes maligned, but they know they're doing the will of God. Churches that refuse to receive into membership people who give no evidence of saving faith in Christ are often called 'holier than thou,' but they have the courage to say no."<sup>2</sup>

### **The importance of offering acceptable animals as sacrifices 22:17-25**

Another list of seven selected laws follows. Certain animals were not acceptable as sacrifices under any circumstances. Other animals were acceptable for some sacrifices but not for others. Generally, the more important the offering the higher were the requirements for the sacrificial

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 388.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 287.



animal. Only the best sacrifices were suitable for presentation to the LORD, since He is worthy of only the very best (cf. 1 Pet. 4:11).

22:17-20 Every burnt offering to the LORD had to be "a male without defect." Anything other than this would not be accepted by Him.

22:21 Likewise every peace offering had to be "without defect."

22:22-25 These verses give a sample list of impairments and deformities that precluded an animal's acceptability as an offering, whether the animal belonged to an Israelite or a foreigner. There was an exception, however. Oxen or lambs with a deformed member were permitted as voluntary (freewill) offerings but not as votive offerings.

"If our devotions are ignorant, and cold, and trifling, and full of distractions, we offer *the blind, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice*."<sup>1</sup>

### The time requirements for some sacrifices 22:26-31

Seven additional laws specified the time periods that governed the offering of some sacrifices.

22:26-27 The Israelites were not to offer oxen, sheep, and goats as sacrifices before these animals were eight days old. It took these animals seven days to attain the strength and maturity necessary for them to represent the offerer adequately.

22:28 Also, the people were not to slay parent animals on the same day as their offspring. The reason may have been "... to keep sacred the relation which God had established between parent and offspring."<sup>2</sup> Another possible explanation for this rule is that it simply conserved the animal stock, which would have become depleted otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

"It seems to me that it would be cruel to kill the mother and her young on the same day, for

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:437.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, The Book ..., p. 296; Ross, pp. 393-94.

whatever purposes. In fulfilling our religious duties, we must be careful not to be heartless and uncaring in the way we use what God provides for us. More than one social critic has pointed out that the way people treat animals gradually becomes the way they treat humans. 'For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man,' said Native American Chief Seattle. 'All things are connected.'"<sup>1</sup>

22:29-31 Thanksgiving (peace) offerings were to be totally eaten on the same day that the animals were offered. This law may have been intended to help the offerer view his offering as special, and not just meat. Another reason may have been to avoid the meat going bad and making the offerer sick.

### **The reason for these regulations 22:32-33**

Moses repeated the reasons for these regulations once again so the Israelites would know why God instructed them as He did (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2).

"These chapters like many others in this book form the background to much NT teaching. Christ is both perfect priest (21:17-23; Heb. 7:26) and perfect victim (22:18-30; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22). His bride (cf. 21:7-15) is the Church, whom he is sanctifying to make her 'without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:27; cf. Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2)."<sup>2</sup>

"Those who worship the redeeming, sanctifying LORD God must come into his presence with acceptable offerings."<sup>3</sup>

### **C. SANCTIFICATION OF APPOINTED TIMES CH. 23**

God considered the Israelites (chs. 17—20), the priests, the holy gifts, and the sacrifices (chs. 21—22), as set apart to Him as holy. He regarded certain days and times of the year in the same way (ch. 23; cf. Acts 2:42;

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 394.

Heb. 10:25). This chapter contains a list of six "appointed times" (v. 2) during each year that the Israelites were to observe as holy (set apart from the others as special). (Other descriptions of the festivals in the Pentateuch appear in Exodus 23:10-19; 34:18-26; Numbers 28:16—29:40; and Deuteronomy 16:1-17.) These were "holy convocations" (v. 2) when the Israelites assembled to observe a special event. However, in some cases the people did not assemble at the tabernacle, but in their own homes.

The Hebrew word translated "appointed times" (v. 2, *mo'ad*) basically means "appointed time," "appointed meeting," or "appointed place." The word translated "convocations" (v. 2, *miqera*) means "sacred assembly." And the Hebrew word translated "feast" (v. 6, *hag*), which implies eating, means "feast" or "festival gathering." It is important to distinguish the meanings of these words because by doing so we learn that not all of the "appointed times" or "convocations" involved "feasts." Only three of them did, namely, the Passover/Unleavened Bread convocation, the Pentecost (Harvest, Weeks, First-fruits) convocation, and the Tabernacles (Booths, Ingathering) convocation. There was not always a feast on a special day or during a special week. The Israelites were commanded to fast on the Day of Atonement, not to feast. And the "Blowing of Trumpets" convocation did not involve feasting either.

The recurrence of the words "holy convocations" and "rest" in this chapter indicate that this calendar was primarily for the benefit of the ordinary Israelites rather than for the priests. The priests were quite busy at most of these times.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

The Israelites observed a lunar year, which contains 354 days. Lunar months have 29 and 30 days alternately, and they begin with the appearance of the new moon. The Egyptians followed these alternations carefully, giving them six months of 29 days and six months of 30 days. The Israelites followed the Mesopotamians, however, who observed 12 months of 30 days each. All three civilizations made up the difference

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill, "A Theology . . .," p. 59.

between 12 lunar months and one solar year (365 days) by inserting another month after several years.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter begins with a narrative introduction (vv. 1-2) and ends with a narrative conclusion (v. 44). The rest is legislation.

### **1. The Sabbath 23:1-3**

The Sabbath was, of course, a weekly convocation, in contrast to the other convocations that occurred only once a year. God had prescribed Sabbath observance earlier (Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17; 35:2-3; Lev. 19:3). Evidently God included the Sabbath in this chapter's list of "appointed times" because, like the other convocations, it was a period of time set apart to Him for holy purposes. The Sabbath was a convocation in that the Israelite families assembled in their dwellings to remember God's work for them that resulted in their being able to rest. For this day of physical rest the Israelites did not assemble around the tabernacle. They observed the day in their own dwellings, in contrast to the nation's other special convocations (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26).

"In a word, 'doing no ordinary work' symbolizes the rejection and negation of one's selfishness and any concern about worldly affairs."<sup>2</sup>

"Above all, the sabbath stood out from all other holidays by its egalitarian character [i.e., relating to the principle that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities]. All laborers, regardless of status, even animals, rested on this day."<sup>3</sup>

The Sabbath was the heart of the whole system of "appointed times" in Israel. The other convocations also related to the central idea of "rest" that the Sabbath epitomized. They focused the Israelites' attention on other Sabbath-like blessings that Yahweh provided for them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, Part I, Chapter 2: "Divisions of Time"; Edersheim, pp. 200-202.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 421.

<sup>3</sup>Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, p. 1961.

<sup>4</sup>See Timothy K. Hui, "The Purpose of Israel's Annual Feasts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:586 (April-June 1990):143-54.

"Jesus claimed that 'the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath' (Mk 2:28); he could therefore abolish the sabbath, and he did in fact do so, for the New Covenant which he brought abrogated the Old Covenant, of which the sabbath was the sign. The Christian Sunday is not in any sense a continuation of the Jewish sabbath. The latter closed the week, but the Christian Sunday opens the week in the new era by commemorating the Resurrection of our Lord, and the appearances of the risen Christ, and by directing our attention to the future, when he will come again. And yet Sunday does symbolize the fulfillment of those promises which the sabbath foreshadowed. Like all the other promises of the Old Testament, these promises too are realized not in an institution, but in the person of Christ: it is he who fulfills the entire Law. Sunday is the 'Lord's Day,' the day of him who lightens our burdens (Mt 11:28), through whom, with whom and in whom we enter into God's own rest (He 4:1-11)."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

"God's people witness to their participation in the covenant [Old or New] by ceasing their labors and joining the believing community in the celebration of the LORD's Sabbath rest."<sup>3</sup>

## **2. The Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread 23:4-14**

Verse 4 introduces the *annual* "appointed times" (or "convocations"). Whereas the Sabbath was to be observed in the Israelites' homes, three special occasions required the males (and their families, if possible) to gather at the central sanctuary (the tabernacle) for participation (cf. Exod. 23:14-16; Deut. 16:16). These nationwide convocations had the effect of counteracting the dividing tendency of the nation—the tendency to

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<sup>1</sup>de Vaux, 2:483.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 405. Cf. Wiersbe, p. 288.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 403.

separate too much into tribes and clans—and they provided opportunities for commercial interaction among the tribes.<sup>1</sup>

"All five of these *mo'adim*, or appointed seasons ... have this in common, that they were occasions of special Sabbaths, or rests; and they were all times of holy convocation, or assemblings together of the people for worship and joyous thanksgiving."<sup>2</sup>

### The Passover 23:4-5

The Passover meal was to be held "at twilight" on the fourteenth day of the first month in Israel's calendar. The Israelites counted the beginning of each new day as beginning at twilight, not at midnight as we do today.

In one sense the Passover (Heb. *Pesah*) was the most important convocation (cf. Exod. 12:1-28). This "appointed time," which involved a feast, commemorated God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery by a powerful supernatural act, and His preparation of the nation for adoption as His special treasure. The Israelites were not permitted to do any "laborious work" on this day, but they were allowed to prepare the Passover meal the day before.<sup>3</sup> That is, in the afternoon before twilight.

"The event and the ritual symbolize that Israel as a nation owes everything to the Lord, even their existence."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus died as the Paschal Lamb on Passover Day in the year that He died for our sins (John 19:14; Matt. 26:17-29; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).<sup>5</sup>

The Passover was primarily a time when the Israelites commemorated the LORD's deliverance of them from bondage in Egypt. Similarly, Christian worship should include a commemoration of our past salvation from the bondage of sin (cf. Matt. 26:26-29).

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, p. 232.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, 1:137. The five in view are Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles.

<sup>3</sup>Bush, p. 235.

<sup>4</sup>Kiuchi, p. 422.

<sup>5</sup>For the prophetic significance of all of these convocations, see Terry Hulbert, "The Eschatological Significance of Israel's Feasts" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965).

"It is noteworthy that the object of faith was not the typology of the sacrifices ... or a consciousness of the coming Redeemer, but God Himself."<sup>1</sup>

### The Feast of Unleavened Bread 23:6-8

The day after the Passover marked the beginning of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (or "Festival of Thin Bread," CET, vv. 6-14; cf. Num. 28:16-25).

"But from their close connection they are generally treated as one, both in the Old and in the New Testament [cf. Exod. 23:15; 34:18; et al.]; and Josephus, on one occasion, even describes it as 'a feast for eight days.'"<sup>2</sup>

During the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread the Israelites were to eat unleavened bread. On the first and seventh days they were to have holy convocations and do no laborious work. On each of the seven days they were to present "an offering by fire" to the LORD. Numbers 28:16 through 25 give further details about this offering. There burnt, grain, and sin offerings are commanded to be offered.

Passover/Unleavened Bread was one of the three feasts that all the adult males in Israel had to attend, along with the feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles (Exod. 23:17; Deut. 16:16). It involved a holy "convocation," or gathering together of the nation, around the sanctuary.

"These three feasts remind us of the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the return of Christ to establish His kingdom."<sup>3</sup>

This combined feast (Passover/Unleavened Bread) reminded the believing Israelite that he needed to live a clean life, free of sin, which leaven symbolized, since God had redeemed him by the blood of the Passover lamb.

The New Testament continues the figurative use of leaven. Christians are warned of the "leaven of the ... Sadducees" (i.e., unbelief; Matt. 16:6); the

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<sup>1</sup>Lindsey, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, p. 208. Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 2:15:1.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 292.

"leaven of Herod" (i.e., pride and worldliness; Mark 8:15); the "leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1); the "leaven of malice and wickedness" (1 Cor. 5:8; cf. Eph. 4:31-32); and the leaven of false doctrine (Gal. 5:7-9). We are to "clean out the old leaven" that marked our pre-conversion lives (1 Cor. 5:7; cf. 1 Pet. 4:1-5).

"The Passover ... was not so much the remembrance of Israel's bondage as of Israel's deliverance from that bondage, and the bread which had originally been that of affliction, because that of haste, now became, as it were, the bread of a new state of existence."<sup>1</sup>

"God requires his people to preserve their spiritual heritage through the commemoration of their redemption and the life of purity to follow."<sup>2</sup>

### **The presentation of first-fruits 23:9-14**

Some scholars and translators understand what follows to be a description of the Feast of First-fruits. Others, including myself, think it is not.

"What we have here is simply a supplementary provision concerning future observances of the Passover when Israel has entered Canaan (v. 10)."<sup>3</sup>

This presentation should not be confused with the Feast of First-fruits (also called Pentecost, Harvest, and Weeks), which occurred 50 days after this presentation, the instructions for which follow in this chapter (vv. 15-22). Evidently this section (vv. 9-14), which does not describe one of Israel's annual feasts, was included to enable the Israelites to know what God expected them to do when they entered the Promised Land and reaped their spring harvest, which was a barley harvest. That harvest enabled them observe the Feast of First-fruits 50 days later.

23:9-11     The Israelites were to bring a sheaf of the first fruits of their spring harvest to the priest. The priest and the offerer then would wave the sheaf, as a wave offering, to the LORD. This was probably to be done on the day after the Sabbath that

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, p. 250.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 413.

<sup>3</sup>Baxter, 1:138.



occurred during the Passover/Unleavened Bread convocation. One view is that "Sabbath" here, as elsewhere (vv. 15, 23, 39), refers to the whole feast, which was to be observed as a Sabbath.<sup>1</sup> Another, more probable view, is that the Sabbath in view was the Sabbath that fell during the Feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread.<sup>2</sup>

23:12-13 On the same day that the wave offering was presented, the Israelite was also to offer a one-year-old male lamb without defect as a burnt offering, and a grain offering with its accompanying drink offering—all representative of God's provisions of spiritual and physical food and drink for His people.

23:14 Until the Israelites offered these sacrifices they were to abstain from eating bread, roasted grain, or fresh (uncooked) grain.

The ancients regarded the "first fruits" (Heb. *bikkurim*) as a kind of down payment with more to follow. By presenting the first fruits of their harvest the Israelites were acknowledging that their whole harvest, not just the first fruits, was a gift from Yahweh.

"The eighth day symbolizes a new beginning. So in conformity with the nature of the first fruits, the priest's waving of the sheaf before the Lord on the first day of the week symbolizes a total dedication of that year's produce to the Lord."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus arose from the grave on this day as the "first fruits" of those who sleep in death (1 Cor. 15:20).

"In order to acknowledge that the LORD provides the needs of their life, God's people must present the first of their income to him as a token of their devotion."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, pp. 257-58.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>Kiuchi, p. 424.

<sup>4</sup>Ross, p. 418.

### 3. The Feast of Pentecost 23:15-22

This festival had several names: "Harvest," "Weeks" (Heb. *Shabua'*), "First fruits," and "Pentecost" (Gr. *Pentekostos*). The Contemporary English Version (CEV) translated it as "Harvest Festival."

23:15 This feast fell at the end of the spring harvest, 50 days after they presented their sheafs to the priests (vv. 9-15). This was also 50 days after the Passover/Unleavened Bread Feast, specifically, 50 days from the day after the Sabbath that fell during that feast. There were to be seven Sabbaths between the offering of the sheafs and the Feast of Pentecost. "Pentecost" means "fiftieth" day.

"It was because this idea of festive rest and sanctification was so closely connected with the weekly festival [the Sabbath] that the term Sabbath was also applied to the great festivals (cf. vv. 15, 24, 32, 39). [Footnote 2:] The term 'Sabbath' is also applied to 'a week,' as in Lev. xxiii. 15; xxv. 8; and, for example, in Matt. xxviii. 1; Mark xvi. 2; Luke xxiv. 1; John xx. 1. This seems to indicate that the Sabbath was not to be regarded as separate from, but as giving its character to the rest of the week, and to its secular engagements. So to speak, the week closes and is completed in the Sabbath."<sup>1</sup>

23:16-17 Fifty days after the seventh Sabbath the Israelites were to offer a new grain offering to the LORD. This began the feast. They were also to bring to the tabernacle two baked loaves of leavened bread (made with yeast) and wave them as a grain offering. The loaves of bread that the Israelites offered to God on this occasion contained leaven. These were common loaves of ordinary daily bread. The Israelites did not cook them specifically for holy purposes. They represented the normal food of the people.

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, pp. 175-76.

"... in them their daily bread was offered to the Lord, who had blessed the harvest ..."¹

23:18-19 In addition, they were to offer seven year-old male lambs without defect, a bull, and two rams as a burnt offering, along with drink offerings. Plus, they were to bring a male goat as a sin offering and two year-old male lambs as peace offerings.

23:20-21 The priest then was to wave the peace offerings and the loaves of bread, which symbolized the first fruits. Someone (probably a priest, perhaps the high priest) was to then make a proclamation, presumably that this was a holy convocation and that no one was to do any work on that day. The LORD repeated, as He often did, that this convocation was to be observed from then on (cf. 16:29, 31, 34; 17:7).

"It is comforting ... to see that with the two leavened wave-loaves a *sin*-offering and *peace*-offerings were to be offered as well as the sweet-savour offerings, typifying that, despite the presence of evil in the nature, there is acceptance and communion through the Divinely provided sacrifice of Christ."²

23:22 This legislation closes with a reminder that when the Israelites harvested their crops they were to leave some for the needy and the stranger who lived among them (cf. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-21). The evidence of true gratitude is generosity, so the Israelites were to leave the corners of their fields unharvested, in order that the poor could glean some of the crops. Note that love for one's neighbor was to be demonstrated as well as love for the LORD.

"It [this feast] also taught them that the joy of harvest should express itself in charity to the poor."³

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¹Keil and Delitzsch, 2:443.

²Baxter, 1:143.

³Henry, p. 137.

"The seven full weeks and 'fiftieth' recalls the Jubilee year [cf. 25:8-55]. Therefore the day is like a small Jubilee within a year, and it is consequently no wonder that the day should be observed with the spirit of generosity."<sup>1</sup>

This feast was a thanksgiving festival, and it lasted one day. The people offered God the first fruits of the spring harvest as a thank offering for His provision of their physical and spiritual needs.

In modern times it is customary for observant Jews to stay up the entire night of *Shabua'*, studying and discussing the Torah. The tradition that the Israelites had fallen asleep the night before God gave them the Torah, and that Moses had to awaken them, is the basis of this custom.

God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers permanently, as the first fruits of God's blessings on Christians, on the Pentecost following our Lord's death and resurrection (Acts 2).

This feast was primarily a time of expressing appreciation for God's present provisions and care. Our worship as Christians, similarly, should include appreciation for these mercies.

"In thanksgiving for God's bounty, God's people must give him a token of what his bounty has produced and make provision for the needs of the poor."<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. The Blowing of Trumpets 23:23-25**

During the seventh month of Israel's religious calendar three holy convocations took place. This reflects the importance that God attached to the number seven in the Mosaic economy. Not only was the seventh day special (v. 3), but so were the seventh week (vv. 15-22), the seventh month, the seventh year (25:1-7), and the forty-ninth (seven times seven) year (25:8-55). This "appointed time" did not include a feast.

The Jews celebrated the blowing of trumpets (Heb. *Rosh Hashana*) on the first day of the seventh month. The Israelites blew trumpets on the first

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 425.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 424.

day of every month, but on this month the trumpets signaled a special convocation in addition to the beginning of a new month. The Hebrew word *qara'*, translated "proclaim" (vv. 2, 4, 21) indicates a loud sound. But the Hebrew word *teru'a*, translated "blowing of trumpets" here means a louder and more powerful sound.

"This particular day makes them [the Israelites] prepare for these coming feasts by way of abstinence and self-dedication."<sup>1</sup>

After the Babylonian Captivity the Jews celebrated the beginning of their civil year on this day. It became a new year's celebration in Israel's calendar. We can calculate the Jewish year number at *Rosh Hashana*, by adding 3761 to the Christian year number.

The ram horns (*shopbars*, "trumpets") that the priests blew on this occasion were quite large, and they produced "a dull, far-reaching tone."<sup>2</sup> They called the congregation to turn their attention again to God, and to prepare for the other two festivals of the seventh month, and the 12 months ahead. They also signaled God's working anew on behalf of His people (cf. Ps. 89:15).

"In Leviticus, the term '*memorial*' ["reminder," v. 24] does not anywhere mean the keeping in *memory of a thing past*. Many have erred from overlooking the sense of the term. It is, in fact, a ceremonial or tabernacle term, signifying something done in order to call attention to something yet remaining. It should be rendered '*a reminding*' of something present, or of something just at hand, rather than '*memorial*,' which suggests the past."<sup>3</sup>

Another trumpet will sound and call Christians to meet the Lord in the air (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). A trumpet will also assemble the Israelites and herald the Day of the LORD—when God will again resume His dealings with His people Israel in Daniel's seventieth week (Jer. 32:37). Some commentators have felt that this heralding will prove to be a prophetic fulfillment of the Blowing of Trumpets (in which the convocation

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 426.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:444.

<sup>3</sup>Bonar, p. 413.

was intended to have a prophetic significance, pointing forward to the Lord's return).

"God calls his people away from their earthly labors to join the saints in his presence where they may worship him wholeheartedly."<sup>1</sup>

## **6. The Day of Atonement 23:26-32**

Moses described this day (Heb. *Yom Kippur*) more fully in chapter 16 for the priests' benefit. Here he stressed, more briefly, the responsibilities of the ordinary Israelite.

23:26-27 The Day of Atonement was to be observed on the tenth day of the seventh month. This day was a fast day ("you shall humble yourselves") rather than a feast day, though it too was a convocation. The people were to humble themselves by fasting and abstaining from their normal pleasures and comforts (cf. 16:29).

The sacrifices that the priests made on this day atoned for all the remaining sins of the believing Israelites that the other sacrifices did not cover. However, the benefits (atonement) of the Day of Atonement lasted for only one year (cf. ch. 16).

23:28-32 God permitted no ordinary work on this day (vv. 28, 30-32). By this requirement He taught the Israelites that the yearly removal of their sins was entirely His work, to which they contributed absolutely nothing (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). Any Israelite who did not humble himself was to be cut off from his people. And God Himself would "eliminate" anyone who did any work on this day.

"The principles taught by the Day of Atonement are valid for the New Testament believer: sin must be regularly removed in order for spiritual service and fellowship to take place. Beyond

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 427.

that, sin can only be removed eternally through the sacrifice of Christ made once and for all—not annually."<sup>1</sup>

Prophetically, this day will find fulfillment at the Second Coming of Christ. Then God will purify His Chosen People who have returned to Him in repentance and self-affliction as a result of His chastening during the Tribulation period (Zech. 12:10; 13:1; cf. Heb. 9:28).

"The release from the pressure of work and social inequalities, experienced on and through the Sabbath and its sister institutions, could effectively epitomize both past and future divine deliverance."<sup>2</sup>

"In order to find spiritual renewal, people must cease their works, humble themselves before God, and draw near to him on the merits of the atoning sacrifice."<sup>3</sup>

## **7. The Feast of Tabernacles 23:33-44**

23:33-36 This feast was to be held on the fifteenth through the twenty-second days of the seventh month. On the first and eighth days the Israelites were to do no laborious work. The feast itself was considered to be a seven-day feast, and the eighth day was considered to be a special convocation. On the first seven days the Israelites were to offer many sacrifices (cf. Num. 29:12-38).

23:37-38 These verses summarize the sacrifices that the Israelites were to offer, which are explained in more detail in Numbers 29.

23:39-44 On the first day of this feast the Israelites were to take branches of various trees in their hands. All native-born Israelites were to live in booths or shelters made out of these branches for seven days. The purpose of "camping out" was to remind the Israelites that their ancestors lived in booths

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>2</sup>Samuele Bacchoicchi, "Sabbatical Typologies of Messianic Redemption," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17:2 (December 1986):165.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 432.

<sup>4</sup>Hess, pp. 791-93, believed that verses 37-38 describe "other feasts" and that verses 39-44 describe "The Feast of Yahweh."

when God brought them out of Egypt. This was to be a time of rejoicing for them (v. 40).

This feast was another very joyous occasion for the Israelites, along with Passover/Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. It was the third fall "appointed time." It commemorated the Israelites' journey from Egyptian bondage to blessing in Canaan. Its other names were the Feast of Booths and the Feast of Ingathering (CEV: the Festival of Shelters). The Jews call it *Sukkot*.

During this convocation the Israelites who had left Egypt in the Exodus looked backward to the land of their slavery and forward to the Promised Land of blessing. It was primarily a time of joy because the Israelites remembered that God had sustained them. It was the only festival in which God commanded the Israelites to "rejoice" (v. 40), and it involved the harvest of grapes and other fall agricultural products.

"... in the later postexilic period [it] took on something of a carnival atmosphere."<sup>1</sup>

The Israelites will enjoy a similar prolonged period of rejoicing in the Millennium, when they will enjoy national blessing as a result of Jesus Christ's atoning work for them (Zech. 14:16). All the Jews living in the early years of the millennial kingdom will be believers in Jesus. They will be redeemed, restored, and re-adopted as His chosen people. However there will be greater blessings on ahead for them in the Eternal State.

God designed this feast primarily as a time of anticipation, not just reflection. Similarly, Christian worship should include the element of anticipation, as we look forward to entering into all of what God has promised us in the future. The Puritans patterned their Thanksgiving Day feast in New England after this Jewish festival.<sup>2</sup>

"The people of God must preserve in memory how the LORD provided for them throughout the year and how he provided for their ancestors as he led them to the fulfillment of the promises."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup>Harris, p. 629.

<sup>3</sup>Ross, p. 437.



"The dozen feasts of the Hebrew calendar [counting those added later in Israel's history] are pitifully few when compared with the fifty or sixty religious festivals of ancient Thebes, for example."<sup>1</sup>

This fact illustrates the fact that God did not put heavy requirements on the Israelites, as far as their annual times of corporate worship were concerned. God has always wanted His people to worship Him from hearts full of gratitude, not because He commanded their worship.

FIVE ANNUAL APPOINTED TIMES IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF ISRAEL						
Season	Month			Day(s) of Month	Event	Attendance by Adult Males
	Sacred	Civil	Modern			
Spring	1	7	March/April	14	Passover	Required
				15-21	Unleavened Bread	
Spring	3	9	May/June	4	Pentecost (a.k.a. Harvest, Weeks, First fruits)	Required
Fall	7	1	September/ October	1	Blowing of Trumpets	Optional
Fall	7	1	September/ October	10	Day of Atonement (the only fast)	Optional

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Kitchen, *The Bible In Its World*, p. 86.

Fall	7	1	September/ October	15-21	Tabernacles (a.k.a. Booths, Ingathering)	Required
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The purpose of all these special times was to provide rest for the people, and to encourage them to focus their attention on some aspect of God's goodness to them:

Sabbath	God's creation of the cosmos and Israel, and His rest from all His Creation work.
Passover	God's redemption of Israel.
Unleavened Bread	The need to live holy lives because of redemption.
Pentecost	God's full provision of material blessings.
Blowing of Trumpets	God's activity on behalf of His people.
Day of Atonement	God's provision of forgiveness for His sinning people.
Tabernacles	God's faithfulness in bringing His people through their trials and into rest.

These are all major reasons for God's people to worship Him even today, though God does not require Christians to do so by keeping these feasts.

"When we celebrate Good Friday we should think not only of Christ's death on the cross for us, but of the first exodus from Egypt which anticipated our deliverance from the slavery of sin. At Easter we recall Christ's resurrection and see in it a pledge of our own resurrection at the last day, just as the firstfruits of harvest guarantee a full crop later on (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). At Whitsun (Pentecost) we praise God for the gift

of the Spirit and all our spiritual blessings; the OT reminds us to praise God for our material benefits as well."<sup>1</sup>

Leviticus does not mention the Feast of Purim, which the Jews added to their calendar later in their history (cf. Esth. 9:20-32). Neither does the Old Testament refer to the Feast of Dedication (Heb. *Hanukkah*), because the Jews instituted it much later in their history. Purim (lit. "lots") celebrates the Jews' deliverance from the Persians in Esther's time. Hanukkah, often called The Feast of Lights, commemorates the revolt and victory of the Maccabees (Hasmoneans) against Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria, and the rededication of the temple in 165 B.C.<sup>2</sup> During the Babylonian Captivity the Jews began to celebrate other fasts as well (cf. Zech. 7:1-8).

Other sacred times in Israel's year, not mentioned in this chapter, were the following: The New Moon festival (Num. 28:11-15; Ps. 81:3), The Sabbatical Year (Exod. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7), and The Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-55; 27:17-24; Ezek. 46:17).

RELATIVE INTIMACY WITH GOD (HOLINESS) UNDER THE OLD COVENANT			
People	Time	Space	Tabernacle
Gentiles			
Rebellious Israelites			
Sinful Israelites		Other nations	Bronze
Unclean Israelites		Israel's neighbor nations	Badgers' skins
Clean Israelites	Ordinary days	The Holy Land	Rams' skins
Levites	First of each month	The camp of Israel	Fine leather

<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup>For an interesting article giving the historical background, institution, and customs of this feast, plus suggestions for using it as an opportunity to witness to Jews, see Charles Lee Feinberg, "Hanukkah," *Fundamentalist Journal* 5:1 (December 1986):16-18.

Nazirites	Optional feasts	The tabernacle courtyard	Scarlet fabric
Imperfect priests	Required feasts	The holy place	Fine linen
Normal priests	The Sabbath	The holy of holies	Silver
The High Priest	The Day of Atonement	The ark of the covenant	Gold
<b>GOD</b>	<b>GOD</b>	<b>GOD</b>	<b>GOD</b>

#### **D. THE PREPARATION OF THE HOLY LAMPS AND SHOWBREAD 24:1-9**

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).<sup>1</sup> These were the priest's "private official duties."<sup>2</sup>

24:1-4      The LORD told Moses to command the Israelites to bring to him clear olive oil as fuel for the golden lamps on the golden lampstand in the holy place of the tabernacle. Beating or crushing olives, and straining the oil, produced better oil than could be obtained by the heating process, which was also used on other occasions.<sup>3</sup> This best olive oil symbolized the Israelites "... as a congregation which caused its light to shine in the darkness of this world ..."<sup>4</sup> Another view is that the oil

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<sup>1</sup>For other explanations of the placement of chapter 24 in Leviticus, see John R. Master, "The Place of Chapter 24 in the Structure of the Book of Leviticus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:636 (October-December 2002):415-24.

<sup>2</sup>Bonar, p. 426.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 292.

<sup>4</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:451.

represented God, and the flame represented the manifest presence of God.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps both views are correct.

Aaron was to make sure that fire in these lamps was always burning. The lamps evidently burned continually throughout the night, and the priests refilled them daily (cf. 1 Sam. 3:3; 2 Kings 25:30). Another view is that "continually" means from night to night, rather than without intermission (cf. 2 Sam. 9:7, 13).

"The priests, therefore, were to look after the lamps from very early in the morning to late at night."<sup>2</sup>

In this offering Israel offered its life to God daily for consumption in His service of bringing light to the nations (cf. Zech. 4; Isa. 42:6). The lampstand is also a symbol of several things in Scripture: the Word of God, which brings light to a dark world (Ps. 119:105, 130; 2 Pet. 1:19), Jesus Christ (Luke 2:32; John 1:4, 9; 8:12; 9:5), and local churches (Rev. 1:12, 20; cf. Matt. 5:16; Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15).

24:5-9      Moses was also to bake 12 loaves of bread, each made with "about four quarts" (NIV) of fine flour. He was to set them in two rows on the pure gold table of showbread in the holy place. Then he was to put frankincense on each row of loaves. Every Sabbath he (Aaron) was to put fresh bread on the table, and he and his sons were to eat the old bread in a holy place.

The fine flour for the twelve loaves ("cakes") of bread, one for each of the tribes of Israel, was likewise a gift of the people that represented their sanctification to God. The flour represented the fruit of the Israelites' labors, their good works. It lay before God's presence continually in the holy place.

"Christ's ministers should provide new bread for his house every Sabbath day, the production of

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, kp. 437.

<sup>2</sup>Bush, p. 244.

their fresh studies in the scripture, that *their proficiency may appear to all*, II Tim. iv. 1, 5."<sup>1</sup>

The addition of incense to the bread ("pure frankincense") represented the spirit of prayer (dependence on God) that accompanied the Israelites' sacrifice of work. Josephus wrote that there were two piles of six loaves each.<sup>2</sup>

"The twelve loaves reminded the priests that all the tribes were represented before God and were God's people. All of this should have made the priests more appreciative of the tribes and more anxious to serve them in the best way."<sup>3</sup>

"The frankincense stood in a golden saucer upon the bread during the whole week: on the Sabbath the bread was taken away to be eaten, and the frankincense was burnt in lieu of it."<sup>4</sup>

"The devoted service (i.e., faithfully and rightly bringing offerings) of God's people (i.e., people with their offerings, leaders with their actions) ensures that the way to God is illuminated and that provisions from him will continue."<sup>5</sup>

The lamps and bread also represented God to the Israelites as their Light and Nourishment.

#### **E. THE PUNISHMENT OF A BLASPHEMER 24:10-23**

This is another narrative section of Leviticus (cf. chs. 8—10). Its position in the book must mean that it took place after God had given Moses the instructions about the holy lamps and bread (24:1-9). This fact further indicates that Leviticus is essentially a narrative work. God gave the legal

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 3:6:6. See also Bill Mitchell, "Leviticus 24:6: The bread of the Presence—rows or piles?" *The Bible Translator* 33:4 (October 1982):447-48; Schultz, p. 116; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, p. 2096; Hess, p. 796.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, pp. 293-94.

<sup>4</sup>Bush, p. 245.

<sup>5</sup>Ross, p. 442.

information at specific times and places in order to meet particular situations in Israel's national life.<sup>1</sup> This is how case law developed in Israel. Situations arose that demanded and resulted in new laws. (Case law is sometimes called common law, in contrast to statute law.) As such this section of text is similar to the incident involving the Israelites' worship of the goat idols (17:1-9).

24:10-11 The incident that resulted in the law that follows is clear enough to the reader. The offender's sin was evidently blaspheming "the name of the LORD" (cf. v. 16). The "name" referred to was Yahweh, the name by which God manifested His nature to His people. Blasphemy is speech that is disrespectful of God and sacred things. Cursing involves uttering offensive words in anger or annoyance. The man's blasphemy may have consisted of his cursing Yahweh, cursing Yahweh in the name of Yahweh,<sup>2</sup> or using Yahweh's name in a curse.<sup>3</sup> Maybe, because his father was an Egyptian, he did not have the proper respect for Yahweh and did not sanctify Him in thought and speech as God required.

"The guilty person here therefore did not pronounce a curse in our sense of the word, but rather attacked the Lord's holy nature and declared this to be without content or significance."<sup>4</sup>

The Jews interpreted this blasphemy, whatever form it may have taken, as a flippant use of the name "Yahweh." The desire to avoid using the name of Yahweh "in vain" eventually led them to omit the name "Yahweh" from their vocabulary completely. They substituted "the Name" in its place, in conversation and in composition.<sup>5</sup>

Normally when Scripture writers recorded the name of a person, and especially when they gave his or her ancestry, it

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 308-9.

<sup>2</sup>Dennis Livingston, "The crime of Leviticus XXIV 11," *Vetus Testamentum* 36:3 (July 1986):352-53.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 311.

<sup>4</sup>Noordtzij, p. 245.

<sup>5</sup>See Keil and Delitzsch, 2:453.

was to draw attention to that person. Here perhaps Moses wanted to preserve the identity of Shelomith because she was to some extent responsible for her son's behavior. The fact that the offender's name does not appear in the story probably reflects Moses' (and God's) desire that his personal identity would not be remembered but disgraced (cf. Num. 15:32-36).<sup>1</sup> This is sometimes the case in other places in Scripture where a bad person's name is omitted, or he is referred to derogatorily simply as "the son of" so and so (e.g., Ruth 4:1).

24:12 This is the first of four occasions in which Moses presumably asked the LORD for guidance in dealing with a special problem. The second one involved a man who had been defiled by contact with a corpse and could not celebrate the Passover (Num. 9:6-14). The third involved a man who violated the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36). And the fourth concerned the inheritance of the five daughters of Zelophehad (Num. 27:1-11).

24:13-15 The punishment that God prescribed was public execution by stoning outside the Israelite camp. When the witnesses placed their hands on the head of the blasphemer (v. 14), they were symbolizing the transference of his curse, which had entered their ears, back onto his head.

"The emphasis of the narrative is that the 'whole congregation' was responsible for stoning the blasphemer (v. 14). This may be the reason why there is a reminder of the penalty for murder (*lex talionis*) just at this point in the narrative. The narrative thus sets up a contrast between the whole congregation's acting to take the life of a blasphemer and a single individual's (acting as an individual) taking 'the life of a human being' (v. 17). Thus the writer has made an important distinction between capital punishment and murder. Capital punishment was an act of the

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<sup>1</sup>Hess, p. 797.



whole community, whereas murder was an individual act."<sup>1</sup>

"The Bible doesn't present capital punishment as '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."<sup>2</sup>

24:16 God further specified that anyone, native Israelite or stranger, who cursed Him or blasphemed His name should be dealt with this way in the future.

24:17-18 God proceeded to give Moses more direction concerning the punishment of offenders. The principle involved in the laws in these verses is that human life is more valuable than animal life, and so punishment for taking a human life should be greater than punishment for taking an animal's life. The punishment for taking a human life was death in Israel. The punishment for taking an animal's life was to make restitution by replacing the animal killed with another live animal.

24:19-21 The legal principle of limiting retaliation to retribution in kind ("fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth"), the so-called law of retaliation (Lat. *lex talionis*, lit. "law of the talon" or "claw"), is another evidence of God's grace. In ancient Near Eastern culture people commonly took excessive revenge (e.g., Gen. 4:23). For example, a person who damaged another person's eye usually suffered death in return. In the Mosaic Law God limited the amount of retaliation that His people should take. Verse 20 is the center and focal point for verses 13 through 23, which Moses wrote in a chiastic form.<sup>3</sup>

"The 'eye for an eye' legal policy ... is paralleled in the Code of Hammurabi [an eighteenth century B.C. king of Babylon], but there it operated only in the same social class. For a slave to put out a noble's eye meant death. For a noble to put out a slave's eye involved [only] a fine. In Israel its basic

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, pp. 360-61.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, pp. 295-96.

<sup>3</sup>See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, pp. 2128-45.

purpose was to uphold equal justice for all and a punishment that would fit the crime. The so-called law of retaliation was intended to curb excessive revenge due to passion and to serve as a block against terror tactics."<sup>1</sup>

"In the code of Hammurabi, property was often considered more important than person; property offenses such as theft were capital crimes. In Israelite law, sins against the family and religion were most serious."<sup>2</sup>

"Retribution is a principal goal of the penal system in the Bible. 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."<sup>3</sup>

Christians should not live on a "tit-for-tat" (eye for eye) basis, which is not too different in principle from a revenge basis. For example, the Waorani (formerly Auca, meaning "savage") tribe of Ecuadorian natives, no longer live "tit-for-tat" after being converted to Christ.<sup>4</sup> Rather, totally selfless love should typify our interpersonal relationships (cf. Matt. 5:38-42). However, in public life the punishment should match the crime (cf. Acts 25:11; Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:14, 20). This is how God will judge humankind (Luke 12:47-48; 1 Cor. 3:8).

24:22      God forbade the Israelites from using a double standard of justice: one for themselves and another for strangers. There was to be equal justice for all in Israel.

24:23      Verses 17 through 22 contain principles that the Israelites were to observe in executing justice. That this section of revelation fell within the incident just described is clear in that

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<sup>1</sup>G. Herbert Livingston, pp. 176-77.

<sup>2</sup>Schultz, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 312. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>4</sup>Illustration supplied by Mark Farstad, who grew up among the Waorani.

verse 23 records the Israelites' obedient execution of the offender, which the LORD commanded in verses 13 through 16.

God evidently preserved the record of this significant incident not only because it took place at the time God was revealing these standards of sanctification, but also because it illustrates how God regarded those who despised the very standards that He was giving. This event was a warning to all the people of the seriousness of sanctification, just as the death of Nadab and Abihu (ch. 10) was a similar warning to the priests.

"God's people must sanctify the name of the LORD (i.e., ensure that the LORD's holy and sovereign character is preserved in the world) because the LORD's righteousness demands that the blasphemer be judged."<sup>1</sup>

#### **F. SANCTIFICATION OF THE POSSESSION OF LAND BY THE SABBATICAL AND JUBILEE YEARS CH. 25**

Chapter 25 concludes the revelation of the laws that God gave the Israelites on Mt. Sinai. It contains the only legislation on the subject of land ownership in the Pentateuch.

"The common denominator of all the sections of chap. 25 (except the interpolation on houses, vv. 29-33) is land, a word that occurs twenty times."<sup>2</sup>

These laws regarding the Promised Land correspond to the laws Moses previously gave regarding the people of Israel. God owned both the Israelites and the land that He was giving them. God taught them that He had authority over their space as well as their time and their lives. The land they were to possess belonged to God, just as they did. Therefore they were to deal with it as He specified. The laws in this chapter, which deal with the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years, focus on the restoration of the land to fruitfulness after periods of use. Thus these laws, too, are positive, designed for the welfare of the Israelites. In fact, all of God's laws are for the welfare of His people.

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 448.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, p. 2151.

"God is concerned about ecology and the way we treat His creation. Like the ancient Jews, we today are but stewards of God's gifts; we must be careful not to abuse or waste them."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

### **1. The sabbatical year 25:1-7**

25:1 Leviticus opens with the statement that "the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting" (1:1). Here we read that "the LORD then spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai." Probably the LORD continued to speak to Moses from the tent of meeting that was on Mount Sinai (cf. 26:46; 27:34).

25:2-5 As God ordered the people to rest every seventh day, so He ordered them to let the land rest every seventh year ("sabbatical year," v. 5; cf. Exod. 23:11). By resting, the people renewed their strength and rejuvenated their productivity in His service. By resting, the land's strength likewise revived, and its productivity increased.

Modern agronomists have supported the practice of allowing land to lie fallow (left unsown) periodically. God did not want the Israelites to work the land "to death" (i.e., to "rape their environment"). It belonged to God. Ecologists have argued for the same careful use of the environment that God required of His people. By using the land properly, the Israelites sanctified their possession of it: They set it apart to God.

"The key to the seventh-year sabbath is the word 'rest' (verse 4). It was to be a rest in three ways—

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, pp. 296-97.

<sup>2</sup>Sailhamer, p. 361.

(1) for the land, (2) from manual toil, (3) from debt (see Deut. xv. 1-11)."<sup>1</sup>

25:6-7      The people were to regard the crops that grew up during the sabbatical year as an offering to Yahweh. God told them not to harvest them. However, He permitted the landowners, the slaves, hired people, foreign residents, aliens, cattle, and animals to eat freely of what was His.

"From this, Israel, as the nation of God, was to learn, on the one hand, that although the earth was created for man, it was not merely created for him to draw out its powers for his own use, but also to be holy to the Lord, and participate in His blessed rest; and on the other hand, that the great purpose for which the congregation of the Lord existed, did not consist in the uninterrupted tilling of the earth, connected with bitter labour in the sweat of his brow (Gen. iii. 17, 19), but in the peaceful enjoyment of the fruits of the earth, which the Lord their God had given them, and would give them still without the labour of their hands, if they strove to keep His covenant and satisfy themselves with His grace."<sup>2</sup>

"In its overall plan, the Sabbath year was to be a replication of God's provisions for humankind in the Garden of Eden. When God created human beings and put them into the Garden, they were not to work for their livelihood but were to worship ... So also in the Sabbath year, each person was to share equally in all the good of God's provision (Lev 25:6). In the Garden, God provided for the man and woman an eternal rest (cf. Gen 2:9, the Tree of Life; 3:22b) and time of

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 1:148.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:457. See N. P. Lemche, "The Manumission of Slaves - The Fallow Year - The Sabbatical Year - The Jubel Year," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (January 1976):38-59; Don Blosser, "The Sabbath Year Cycle in Josephus," *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1981):129-39.

worship, the Sabbath (Gen 2:3). The Sabbath year was a foretaste of that time of rest and worship. Here, as on many other occasions, the writer has envisioned Israel's possession of the 'good land' promised to them as a return to the Garden of Eden."<sup>1</sup>

"God's people must order their lives to harmonize with their belief that the bounty of the earth they share is from the sovereign Creator of the earth."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Year of Jubilee 25:8-55

"The Jubilee legislation found in Leviticus 25 presents a vision of social and economic reform unsurpassed in the ancient Near East."<sup>3</sup>

The word "jubilee" probably comes from the Hebrew *yabal*, meaning "to bring [forth]," as in the bringing forth of produce.<sup>4</sup>

"... spiritually, the year of Jubilee corresponds to the Lord's deliverance of them from Egypt."<sup>5</sup>

The Year of Jubilee was intended to do for the land what the Day of Atonement did for the people.<sup>6</sup> This Year was designed to remove the disturbance or confusion of God's will, for the land, that eventually resulted from the activity of sinners. During this year God intended to bring the land, and those who inhabited it, back into the condition that He desired for them. The fact that the priests announced the Year of Jubilee on the Day of Atonement (v. 9) confirms this correspondence.

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 453.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Gnuse, "Jubilee Legislation in Leviticus: Israel's Vision of Social Reform," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15:2 (April 1985):43.

<sup>4</sup>See Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>5</sup>Kiuchi, p. 452.

<sup>6</sup>See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, p. 2166.

"The main purpose of these laws is to prevent the utter ruin of debtors."<sup>1</sup>

This law was also designed to remedy the evils of slavery, destitution, and exhausting toil, as well as to remind the Israelites of the Exodus.

The system of land ownership in Israel prevented complete capitalism or complete socialism economically. There was a balance between state (theocratic) ownership and private ownership.<sup>2</sup>

### Fundamental aspects of the Year of Jubilee 25:8-12

25:8        The Israelites were to observe the Year of Jubilee every fiftieth year, the year following seven seven-year periods. Wenham believed that the Jubilee was a short year, only 49 days long, inserted into the seventh month of the forty-ninth year.<sup>3</sup> This is a minority view.<sup>4</sup>

25:9        On the Day of Atonement of that year ("the tenth day of the seventh month"), a priest was to blow a ram's horn (*shophar*) to announce the beginning of the Year of Jubilee. The use of a ram's horn was significant. With this *shophar* God, at an earlier time, announced His descent on Mt. Sinai, called Israel to be His people, received them into His covenant, united them to Himself, and began to bless them (Exod. 19:13, 16, 19; 20:18). The Year of Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement "... to show that it was only with the full forgiveness of sins that the blessed liberty of the children of God could possibly commence."<sup>5</sup>

25:10       The year was then considered consecrated to Yahweh—His in a special sense. Leaders, presumably, would proclaim freedom ("a release") throughout all the land to all the inhabitants. The people were commanded then to return to their own property

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 317.

<sup>2</sup>See Michael A. Harbin, "Jubilee and Social Justice," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:4 (December 2011):685-99.

<sup>3</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 319.

<sup>4</sup>See the discussion in Ross, pp. 458-59.

<sup>5</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:458.

and families. Probably many of them would have moved away from their earlier homes.

"The key to the year of Jubilee is the word 'liberty' (verse 10 ["release"]). It brought liberty in three ways—(1) to the slave, (2) to property, (3) to the ground itself ..."¹

This verse is the motto on the Liberty Bell—"Proclaim liberty throughout the land"—that hangs in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Though these laws were given to the Israelites for life in the Promised Land, they do express a noble humanitarian spirit.

25:11-12 No sowing or reaping was to take place during this year. God promised to provide for His people as they rested in response to His gracious promise (cf. vv. 18-22). They were to enjoy the produce that He would allow to grow from previous years, and they would find it sufficient for their needs.

"As Israel is God's servant, so the land is Israel's servant. As Israel must cease from her daily work and be restored, so the land must cease from its annual work and be restored. Thus there is a horizontal implementation of the vertical covenant relationship; the redemption of Israelites who lost their freedom and property comes in the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:8-12, 28), the fiftieth year."²

### **Specifics for the celebration of the Year of Jubilee 25:13-19**

#### **The command to return to one's inherited land 25:13**

On this year the people were to return to their own property, if they had been living elsewhere. For example, if an Israelite family had moved from the tribal territory of Judah to the tribal territory of Ephraim, they were to return to their original home in Judah.

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¹Baxter, 1:148.

²Herold H. P. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, pp. 30-31.



**Directions for buying and selling land 25:14-19**

25:14-17 The people were to buy and sell property in view of the upcoming Year of Jubilee, since in that year all property would revert to its original owners. The sale of a field, therefore, was really the sale of a certain number of its harvests before the Year of Jubilee. Twice the LORD warned the people not to cheat each other (vv. 14, 17).

25:18-19 Obedience to Yahweh's laws would result in physical security for the Israelites. Obedience and physical security (freedom from invasions and wars) would result in bountiful crops. Bountiful crops would enable them to live off the land without cultivating it during the Year of Jubilee.

**The promise of blessing for obedience 25:20-22**

God promised the people that, if they obeyed Him, He would give them so much food to eat during the sixth year that they would have enough to eat for the seventh (Jubilee) year and the eighth year, the first year of the new cycle in which they would be planting but not reaping.

Christians who live under the New Covenant also have a promise from God, that if we put His will first, He will provide for our physical needs (Matt. 6:25-33).<sup>1</sup>

**The reason for these laws 25:23-24**

This special year was designed to remind the Israelites that they did not really own the land but were tenants of Yahweh, the True Owner. Therefore they were not to sell property permanently (or, as we say, "in perpetuity"). In Egypt, under Joseph, all the land eventually belonged to Pharaoh (Gen. 47:13-26). But "the [whole] earth is the LORD's and all it contains" (Ps. 24:1).

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<sup>1</sup>See North, pp. 213-31, for additional lessons regarding social justice, social worship, personal virtues, and messianic typology that Christians may learn from Israel's jubilee legislation.

**Four cases involving poor Israelites 25:25-54**

The rest of this chapter contains directions concerning how poor Israelites could escape destitution and regain their property. This was one of the major practical values of the Year of Jubilee.

**The basic principle 25:24**

All property in Israel was to be subject to redemption. That is, it was to be available for re-purchase by the original owner.

**Rules for selling or leasing land or houses 25:25-34**

25:25-28 If an Israelite landowner became so poor that he had to sell his property to continue living, he could get it back in one of three ways: (1) His closest relative (lit. male relative) could buy the property back for him (lit. to act in his behalf; v. 25). (2) The seller himself could re-purchase the property, if he was able to raise the funds to pay for it. The price that he would have to pay was determined by the number of years that remained before the next Year of Jubilee (vv. 26-27). (3) The Year of Jubilee would return it to him if he or his kinsman were not able to redeem it (v. 28).

The provision of redemption by a kinsman (v. 25) has great significance in the Book of Ruth (cf. Ruth 4:3-10; also Jer. 32:7-15). Boaz fulfilled the responsibility of a kinsman-redeemer by buying Mahlon's land for Naomi. Furthermore, he fulfilled the duty of levirate marriage by marrying Ruth.<sup>1</sup>

Bible students sometimes confuse the "levirate marriage" custom with the "kinsman-redeemer" custom. Levirate marriage involved the marriage of a widow and her (unmarried) husband's brother or nearest relative. This provision existed so God could raise up a male heir who could perpetuate the family line of the widow's former husband (cf. Gen. 38).

25:29-30 If an Israelite owned a house in a walled city and sold it, he had the right to redeem (re-purchase) it for one year. If he did not

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<sup>1</sup>See Mike Mitchell, "The Go'el: Kinsman Redeemer," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):13-15.

redeem it within that year he could not redeem it. It remained the property of the person who purchased it as long as he wanted to own it.

25:31 If an Israelite owned a house in an unwallled village, the house was to be considered the same as land and was subject to the three conditions for redemption mentioned above (vv. 25-28).

25:32-34 Property given by God to the Levites fell under special laws. Houses in these cities that had been bought by non-Levites could be redeemed by the Levites at any time. If they were not redeemed before the Year of Jubilee they would automatically revert to Levite ownership in the Year of Jubilee. The Levites were prohibited from selling the pasture fields that surrounded these cities to non-Levites. God gave these cities and their pastures to the Levites as permanent possessions.

"The relationship of land and people under God is of fundamental importance for understanding the Old Testament and the Jewish people. ... The Promised Land was a gift from God, not an inalienable right of anyone's to sell or incorporate as they wished."<sup>1</sup>

### Rules for loaning to poor Israelites 25:35-38

The Israelites were not to take advantage of one another in view of these Year of Jubilee regulations.

Specifically, if one of their countrymen became poor, his neighbors were to sustain him, whether he was a stranger or a resident, so that he could continue to live among them. Nor were the Israelites to charge their fellow Israelites any kind of interest (cf. Exod. 22:25; Deut. 23:19-20). This policy would have helped a poor farmer buy enough seed for the next year. This law was evidently unique among the ancient Near Eastern nations, though not among smaller tribal groups.<sup>2</sup> Nor were they to sell their poor neighbor anything to make a profit for themselves. They were to remember how

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Riggans, *Numbers*, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup>See Edward Neufeld, "The Prohibitions Against Loans at Interest in Ancient Hebrew Laws," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 26 (1955):355-412.

Yahweh had freely brought them out of Egypt and given them the land of Canaan so that they would make these sacrifices graciously.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

### Rules involving slaves 25:39-46

25:39-40a When poor Israelites sold themselves as servants to wealthier Israelites, their masters were to treat them as foreign hired workers and not as slaves.

"... the original law in the Book of the Covenant [Exod. 21:1-6 and Deut. 15:12-18] had to do with the 'Hebrew' in the social, not ethnic sense, i.e., with the landless man who survived by selling his services to an Israelite household. Lev. 25:39ff., by contrast, deals with the man who is an Israelite landholder but who has been forced by poverty to mortgage it and then to sell his family and himself into the service of a fellow-Israelite."<sup>2</sup>

25:40b-41 The Year of Jubilee would liberate these Israelite hired workers and their "sons," who presumably worked with their fathers, so that they could return to their families and their original property.

25:42-43 The rationale behind this law was that the Israelites belonged primarily to Yahweh, who had redeemed them. Therefore their fellow Israelites were not to sell them as slaves or rule over them with severity. Obedience would show reverence (fear) of Yahweh.

25:44-46 God permitted the Israelites to acquire slaves from the pagan nations around them and from among the foreign residents

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<sup>1</sup>Ross, p. 463.

<sup>2</sup>Christopher Wright, "What Happened in Israel Every Seven Years?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 56:3 (October 1984):196.

who lived in Israel and their descendants. They could even pass them on to their sons as an inheritance. That they were not to mistreat them goes without saying (cf. 19:18). And they were not to treat their fellow Israelite slaves harshly.

"The jubilee release does not apply to foreign slaves (vv. 44-46). A theological reason underlies this discrimination: God redeemed his people from Egyptian slavery, to become his slaves (vv. 42, 55). It is unfitting, therefore, that an Israelite should be resold into slavery, especially to a foreigner (cf. Rom. 6:15-22; Gal. 4:8-9; 5:1). The jubilee law is thus a guarantee that no Israelite will be reduced to that status again, and it is a celebration of the great redemption when God brought Israel out of Egypt, so that he might be their God and they should be his people (vv. 38, 42, 55; cf. Exod. 19:4-6)."<sup>1</sup>

"Slavery was widespread in the ancient Near East, including Israel ..."<sup>2</sup>

Slavery in itself, as the Mosaic Law regulated it, did not violate basic human rights, but the abuse of slaves did.

"During the Civil War era, some Americans used passages like these [vv. 44-46] to prove that it was biblical and right for people to own and sell slaves. But it must be noted that God's laws didn't *establish* slavery; they *regulated* it and actually made it more humane. Slavery was an institution that had existed for centuries before Moses gave the law, and the Law of Moses forbade the Jews to enslave one another. ...

"If the early church had launched a militant crusade against slavery, it would have identified Christianity as a political movement, and this

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, pp. 322-23.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, p. 2213.

would have hindered the spreading of the Gospel in the Roman world. Since there were no democracies or popular elections in those days, the church had no vehicle for overthrowing slavery. When you consider how difficult it's been for the contemporary civil rights movement even to influence the Christian church, how much more difficult it would have been to wage such a war in the days of Caesar!"<sup>1</sup>

"In the first place, for one people or person to enslave another is, by that very act, to claim the other as *one's own*; it is in a fundamental sense to claim another's life as *belonging* to oneself. Such a claim, however, flies in the face of the biblical story that we have heard thus far. If the creation narratives of Genesis tell us anything, they tell us that the sovereign source and lord of life is God—and God alone. It is in just that sense that to God—and God alone—all life, 'the work of his hands,' ultimately rightly belongs. Therefore, from the standpoint of these biblical narratives, anyone besides God laying such ultimate claims to another's life would in effect be arrogating to oneself another's prerogatives. In essence, such a one would be making the most presumptuous claim any human being could make—the claim to be God."<sup>2</sup>

#### Rules involving Israelites held by foreigners and strangers 25:47-55

Israelites could also buy back ("redeem") their countrymen who had sold themselves as slaves to non-Israelites who were living in the land.

25:47-52    An Israelite who, because of his poverty, had sold himself to a non-Israelite in the land could be redeemed from his condition.

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, pp. 299-300.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Goldberg, "Expository Articles: Exodus 1:13-14," *Interpretation* 37:4 (October 1983):390-91.

Either a relative of his could redeem him, or he could redeem himself, if he had sufficient funds to do so (cf. vv. 25-26). In such cases the Israelites were to calculate the cost of redemption in view of the coming Year of Jubilee, when all slaves in the land went free anyway (cf. v. 27).

25:53-55 If the Israelite slave could not redeem himself and did not have a relative who could, he was to be set free in the Year of Jubilee. Strangers living in Israel were subjects to the laws of Israel. So even though a foreigner living in Israel might claim that he did not have to set his slave free in the Year of Jubilee, he was under obligation to do so for two reasons: he had to abide by the laws of the land, and the Israelites were Yahweh's servants whom He had redeemed from the land of Egypt (v. 55).

"The Year of Jubilee is not mentioned in the Old Testament outside the Pentateuch. There is no direct biblical evidence regarding its observance in Israel's history, but if its practice was normal, there might have been no occasion to mention it. On the other hand, the apparent failure of Israelites to keep the sabbatical years during the monarchical period (cf. 26:34-35, 43; 2 Chron. 36:20-21) suggests that the Jubilee might also have been violated."<sup>1</sup>

In summary, there were seven set seasons (excluding the weekly Sabbath) that the Israelites were commanded to observe: The Feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread (23:5-14); The Feast of Pentecost (Harvest, Weeks, First-fruits; 23:15-22); The Blowing of Trumpets (23:23-25); The Day of Atonement (23:26-32); The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths, Ingathering; 23:33-44); The Sabbatical Year (25:1-7); and The Jubilee Year (25:8-55).

"The Hebrew word for 'seven' comes from a root word that means 'to be full, to be satisfied.' It's also related to the word meaning 'to swear, to make an oath.' Whenever the Lord 'sevens' something, He's reminding His people that what He

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<sup>1</sup>Lindsey, p. 211. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, p. 2247, agreed. See Finegan, pp. 580-87, for more information about the calendar of Jubilees.

says and does is complete and dependable. Nothing can be added to it."<sup>1</sup>

### G. PROMISES AND WARNINGS CH. 26

Chapter 26 continues the emphasis on life in the Promised Land by spelling out the blessings and curses that Israel could expect for obedience and disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Deut. 28). Such an emphasis was typical at the end of ancient Near Eastern treaties.

"The present chapter may be said to be a solemn practical conclusion to the main body of the Levitical law, containing a general enforcement of all its precepts by promises of reward in case of obedience on the one hand, and threatenings of punishment in case of disobedience on the other."<sup>2</sup>

"The people of Israel were but children in their faith (Gal. 4:1-7), and you teach children primarily through rewards and punishments. You can't give children lectures on ethics and expect them to understand, but you can promise to reward them if they obey and punish them if they disobey."<sup>3</sup>

"Covenant texts of the ancient Near Eastern world invariably contained blessing and curse sections that outlined what the subordinate party could expect as he or she conformed or failed to conform to the covenant stipulations. Leviticus, though not in itself such a text, is part of the covenant document introduced in the Book of the Covenant of Exodus 19—24. Furthermore, the term 'covenant' (Hebrew, *berit*) occurs frequently in this chapter (Lev. 26:9, 15, 25, 42, 44-45), a fact that makes the connection between covenant and the blessing and curse language here inescapable."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 291.

<sup>2</sup>Bush, p. 263.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 302

<sup>4</sup>Merrill, "Leviticus," p. 91.



"While Leviticus is not primarily about suffering, suffering will occur when God's people sin or when they refuse to recognize the means by which their sins can be covered."<sup>1</sup>

Two basic commandments, one negative and one positive, introduce this chapter (vv. 1-2.) Then follow blessings that the Israelites could expect for fidelity to the covenant (vv. 3-13), warnings for contempt of the covenant (vv. 14-33), and, finally, God's reasons for giving Israel these laws (vv. 34-46).

God explained that, if His people were disobedient to the covenant, He would discipline them in order to bring them to repentance and to return them to Himself (cf. Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6). This chapter proved to be prophetic in Israel's history: The Israelites proved to be disobedient, and God disciplined them. They have yet to return to Him, but they will do so in the future (cf. Rom. 9—11).

"This is an 'iffy' chapter. 'If' occurs nine times and it has to do with the conditions on which they [the Israelites] occupy the land. God says 'I will' twenty-four times. God will act and react according to their response to the 'if.'"<sup>2</sup>

"In the ancient Near East it was customary for legal treaties to conclude with passages containing blessings upon those who observed the enactments, and curses upon those who did not. The international treaties of the second millennium BC regularly included such sections as part of the text, with the list of curses greatly outnumbering the promises of blessing. In the Old Testament this general pattern occurs in Exodus 23:25-33, Deuteronomy 28:1-68, and Joshua 24:20. The maledictions of Mesopotamian legal texts or the curses in the treaties of the Arameans, Hittites and Assyrians were threats uttered in the names of the gods which had acted as witnesses to the covenants. That these threats could be implemented was part of the superstitious belief of people in the ancient Near East, and could have had some coincidental basis in fact. For the Israelites, however, there was no doubt that the God

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Pentateuch," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 1:442.

who wrought the mighty act of deliverance at the Red Sea will indeed carry out all that He has promised, whether for good or ill. Obedience to His commands is the certain way to obtain a consistent outpouring of blessing, whereas continued disobedience is a guarantee of future punishment."<sup>1</sup>

The blessings and curses in Exodus 23 dealt with the conquest of Canaan, but the blessings and curses in this chapter deal with Israel settled in Canaan.

"... more than just setting out blessings and curses, this chapter demonstrates that the condition of the people's hearts is all that matters."<sup>2</sup>

### **1. Introduction to the final conditions of the covenant 26:1-2**

Two fundamental commandments, one negative and one positive, introduce this section of blessings.

"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)."<sup>3</sup>

Idols represented gods that Israel's pagan neighbors worshipped. But these gods were nonentities—they did not actually exist—and so God commanded His people not to make carved images of them, as their pagan neighbors did. A "memorial stone" or standing stone was a commonly used object in Canaanite Baal worship, and it implied that a deity was tied to one specific place. A "figured stone" was sometimes used to mark boundaries, and indicated that a particular deity guarded the property.<sup>4</sup>

"The repetition of the term *covenant* in this chapter shows that the author intends it as a summary of the conditions for the covenant reestablished after the incident of the golden

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, pp. 230-31.

<sup>2</sup>Kiuchi, p. 487.

<sup>3</sup>Merrill, "A Theology ...," p. 59.

<sup>4</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 263.

calf. Thus, as has been the form throughout God's address to Israel on Mount Sinai, the statement of the conditions of the covenant is prefaced by a reminder of two central laws: the prohibition of idolatry (v. 1) and the call to observe the Sabbath (v. 2). It was through idolatry that Israel first broke the covenant at Sinai. By contrast the Sabbath was to be a sign of Israel's covenant relationship with God."<sup>1</sup>

"All declension and decay may be said to be begun wherever we see these two ordinances despised—the *Sabbath* and the *Sanctuary*. They are the *outward* fence around the *inward love* commanded by ver. 1."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The blessings for fidelity to the Law 26:3-13

26:3 This section begins with a clear statement of the condition that was necessary for the Israelites to experience the blessings that follow: It was that they walk in Yahweh's statutes (obey His laws) and keep His commandments.

"When you leave the 'ifs' out of Leviticus 26—27, you may miss the meaning; for 'if' is used thirty-two times. The history of Israel can't be fully understood apart from the 'ifs' contained in God's covenant. When it comes to Jewish history, 'if' is a very big word."<sup>3</sup>

26:4-5a The first promised blessing was fertility. God would give the people plenty of rain at the proper times for their crops. Their harvests would be so abundant that they would be constantly busy harvesting the land.

26:5b-8 The second promised blessings was peace. The Israelites would be able to lie down without being afraid of wild beast or enemy armies, because God would eliminate and subdue them. When

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 364.

<sup>2</sup>Bonar, p. 473.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 301.

they did engage in war, God would give them victory, even though they faced forces that far outnumbered their own.

26:9a The third promised blessing was many children. Their numbers would multiply.

26:9b The fourth and central promised blessing was the confirmation of the covenant with the people. Vassals periodically (often annually) presented themselves before their suzerains in the ancient Near East in order to reaffirm their loyalty. The suzerain would then renew the covenant for a stated period of time. This guaranteed the continuation of the previous arrangements made in the covenant. This is probably what is alluded to here.

26:10 The fifth promised blessing was an abundance of food. The Israelites would eat their older food, for one reason, because more food was coming in that they would have to make room for.

26:11 The sixth promised blessing was the LORD's uninterrupted presence among them. The Hebrew word translated "dwelling" (*miskan*) is the source of the word "Shekinah." Later Jews described God's presence in the most holy place as the Shekinah (cf. Exod. 40:34-38).<sup>1</sup> Because of the Israelites' disobedience His presence departed from them when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Israel (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-25). But it will return in the future (Ezek. 43:1-5).

26:12 The seventh promised blessing was Yahweh's intimate fellowship with His people. "I will be your God, and you will be My people," or the equivalent, is a clause that describes intimate fellowship between God and people, which is the greatest blessing that human beings can experience (cf. Jer. 31:33; 32:38; Ezek. 37:23, 27; Zech. 8:8; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10).

26:13 "All covenant-blessings are summed up in the covenant-relation (v. 12): *I will be your God, and you shall be my people*; and they are all grounded

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<sup>1</sup>Harris, p. 644.

upon their redemption: *I am your God, because I brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, v. 13.*"<sup>1</sup>

The fact that there are seven blessings indicates that Yahweh intended the Israelites to enjoy His full and complete blessings, as in the seven days of Creation. This is the essence of what *shalom* means: Yahweh's full and complete blessing. These blessings were both material (vv. 3-10) and spiritual (vv. 11-13). Israel enjoyed them in her years in the land to the extent that she remained faithful to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. They are reminiscent of God's original blessings in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 1:26, 28, 29; 2:8; 3:8).

"But how many of the people in the nation had to live obediently, or how much obedience was expected before the blessings were poured out? The only information that we have to go on is the Old Testament itself. For example, in the case of the city of Sodom (Gen. 18:24-33), God was willing to spare the cities of the area for ten righteous men. We do not know the population involved, but this number suggests that as long as a remnant had an influence for righteousness, judgment would not fall."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The warnings for contempt of the Law 26:14-39

#### **The warnings proper 26:14-33**

These punishments would come upon the Israelites, not for individual errors and sins, but for a settled contempt for the whole Mosaic Covenant. The people would manifest such contempt in presumptuous and obstinate rebellion against the Law (vv. 14-15).

"In the curses the converse of the blessings is spelled out. It was usual in legal texts for the curses to be much fuller and longer than the blessings section (cf. Deut. 28 ...). But this disproportion has a positive didactic [instructive] purpose as well. It is very easy to take the blessings of rain, peace, and even God's presence for granted. It is salutary [beneficial] to

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 468.

be reminded in detail of what life is like when his providential gifts are removed."<sup>1</sup>

Moses revealed five levels, series, or waves of punishment that He would send on His people. If Israel did not turn back to God after the first series of penalties, God would bring the second set against them, and so on.

26:14-17 These first punishments were disease ("consumption and fever," v. 16a), lack of food (v. 16b), and defeat by their enemies (v. 17). The sudden terror spoken of (v. 16) is probably a description of the Israelites' general feeling of panic in their response to the particular calamities that God would send.

26:18-20 The second punishment would be the humbling of the people ("break down your pride of power") by making their land unfruitful (one curse; cf. 1 Kings 17:1). Punishing "seven times more" (v. 18) probably indicates a great increase in punishment (cf. vv. 21, 24, 28).

26:21-22 The third punishment would be the divine extermination of their cattle and children by wild animals (two curses).

26:23-26 If the people still remained hostile to Yahweh He would then send war ("a sword"), plague, and famine (three curses) on them. The people would gather together in their cities to hide and defend themselves from their attacking enemies.

"... 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."<sup>2</sup>

26:27-33 The final phase of punishment would be the destruction of the Israelites' families. They would eat their own children because they would be starving (v. 29). Yahweh would destroy their

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 330.

<sup>2</sup>Bush, p. 268.

idolatrous places and practices. He would pile their dead bodies on their dead idols (v. 30).

"Those that will not be parted from their sins by the commands of God shall be parted from them by his judgments; since they would not destroy their high places, God would."<sup>1</sup>

He would destroy their cities and sanctuaries where they had offered sacrifices to Him (v. 31). And He would drive them out of the land (scatter them among the nations) and give the land to their enemies to inhabit (vv. 32-33; four curses).

In their history in the land the Israelites experienced all of these curses because they despised the Mosaic Law by not obeying it. The record of this failure is not consistent, because there were periods of revival and consequent blessing. Nevertheless, the general spiritual course of the nation proceeded downward.

"In order to prevent sin and bring about salvation, God warns people that he will bring judgment upon them for unbelief and disobedience, both in this life and in the life to come."<sup>2</sup>

### **A preview of dispersion conditions 26:34-39**

These verses explain further what would happen to the Promised Land and to the Israelites if Yahweh scattered them among the nations (v. 33).

26:34-35 The land would have rest. It would enjoy the rest that it should have received by the Israelites not working it on their Sabbaths. This assumes that the Israelites would fail to rest on the Sabbath as Yahweh had commanded them to do.

Wolf took verse 34 as a prophecy that the Israelites would not obey the instructions given in chapter 25 about observing the sabbatical years (cf. vv. 40-45).<sup>3</sup> The length of the Babylonian Captivity was 70 years, because the Israelites failed to observe

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 482.

<sup>3</sup>Wolf, p. 183.

70 sabbatical years in the land (2 Chron. 36:21; cf. Jer. 29:10)—between about 1406 and 586 B.C.

- 26:36-39 The Israelite themselves would despair and be fearful. Many of their fears would be irrational; they would fear when they did not need to fear because they would imagine threats to their safety that did not exist. Their fears would rob them of the strength that they would need to stand before their enemies. Many of them would die outside the land, and those who did not die would "rot away" (go from bad to worse).

#### 4. The promises of restoration 26:40-45

- 26:40-42 If the disbursed Israelites humbled themselves and confessed their wrongdoing in violating the Mosaic Covenant, the LORD promised to remember His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning the land. He had promised to give the land of Canaan to their descendants as a permanent possession. Confession springing from humility would restrain God's hand of discipline on Israel.

"... it is the Lord who initiates the confession. It is He who will lead His people to repentance (Rom. 2:4)."<sup>1</sup>

Israel's apostasy and consequent judgment would not invalidate God's promises to Abraham. Discipline would be a stage in God's dealings with Abraham's seed, but He would not utterly reject His people, or cut them off as a nation, or take back His gift of the land. These verses are a strong witness to the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant.

"When Israel was in Egypt and was humbled under the hand of Pharaoh, God remembered his covenant with Abraham and delivered them (Ex 2:24). Similarly, in the future when Israel would

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill, "Leviticus," p. 93.



humble themselves, God would remember his covenant and deliver his people."<sup>1</sup>

- 26:43 The Israelites' departure from the Promised Land would be necessary because of their apostasy, and the land would consequently experience rest because of its resulting desolate condition. Meanwhile the Israelites would be making amends for their wrongdoing by being scattered among the nation. Note that Yahweh here predicted what would happen: "the land *will be* abandoned by them," "they *will be* making amends for their wrongdoing" (italics added for emphasis).
- 26:44 The prophecies continue. The Israelites would be in the land of their enemies, and Yahweh would not reject them or destroy them because He loathed them. He would not break His covenant with them. The covenant in view here is the Abrahamic Covenant, and the particular promise in that covenant that is in view is the promise of the land of Canaan (cf. vv. 42, 45). God strengthened these promises by affirming again that "I am the LORD their God."
- 26:45 When the Israelites repented and turned back to Him, while scattered among the nations, Yahweh would remember "the covenant with their ancestors." As usual in Scripture, "remembering" does not simply mean to call to memory; it means to act on what is remembered. God promised to honor His promises to His peoples' forefathers and to bring them back into the Promised Land. The "ancestors" in view in this verse are the Israelites whom God "brought out of the land of Egypt ... so that I might be their God." They too were the recipients of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob regarding the land. The LORD reminded His people nine times, in Leviticus, that He had delivered them from Egypt—and therefore deserved their obedience (11:45; 19:36; 22:33; 23:43; 25:38, 42, 55; 26:13, 45). Yahweh promised to do this because "I am the LORD," that is, because He is who He is: the faithful, covenant-keeping God.

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<sup>1</sup>Sailhamer, p. 365.

"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?"<sup>1</sup>

"The New Testament shows that the blessings and curses are still applicable to Israel. Because the people rebelled against the LORD and his Messiah, judgment would fall once again on the holy city of Jerusalem; many of the threatened curses recorded in the law would again fall on the nation (Matt. 24—25; Mark 13; Luke 21). The wars, famines, and scattering of the people announced by Jesus all harmonize with the curses of Lev. 26. Scholars who take a 'replacement' view of the covenant promises made to Israel are satisfied that such curses applied to the nation after the death of Jesus, but they do not also see any fulfillment of the blessings for believing Jews at any time in the future, apart from sharing in the spiritual blessings of the church. There is more to it than that. Biblical scholars must also consider that if only the judgments of God—and not the blessings—are poured out on Israel, then the purpose of the judgments would be lost, and God would be unjust. Romans 11:29 makes it clear that the covenant was not invalidated by Israel's unbelief. They suffered the severest of punishments, but those who turn to the LORD will find salvation (11:26). God can bring nations to repentance and may very well do so with surviving Israel before the end of the age as part of the new creation. The message of the apostles to Israelites (at first) was to repent so that the seasons of refreshing might come (Acts 3:19)."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Christlieb, quoted by Baxter, 1:150.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, pp. 482-83.

## 5. The conclusion of the statutes and ordinances 26:46

This verse concludes all the legislation of the Mosaic Covenant that began in Exodus 25, though more specifically it summarizes the material in Leviticus thus far (cf. 27:34). What follows in chapter 27 is supplementary.

## H. DIRECTIONS CONCERNING VOWS CH. 27

The "blessings and curses" (26:1-33) were, in a sense, God's vows to His people. This chapter deals with His people's vows to Him. Another connection between these chapters is that in times of divine discipline (26:14-39) people tend to make vows to God. Chapter 27 shows how God wanted the Israelites to honor their vows.<sup>1</sup> The previous section of Leviticus (26:40-45) records Yahweh making promises to the Israelites. This chapter deals with the Israelites making promises to Yahweh.

"The connection of this concluding chapter with all the preceding has been considered a difficulty with many. But most obviously the connection is one of *feeling*. No wonder God takes up the subject of self-dedication and the devoting of all that a man has; for might not any one expect that the preceding views given of God's mind and heart would be constraining?"<sup>2</sup> ...

"The directions concerning vows follow the express termination of the Sinaitic lawgiving (chap. xxvi. 46), as an appendix to it, because vows formed no integral part of the covenant laws, but were a freewill expression of piety common to almost all nations, and belonged to the modes of worship current in all religions, which were not demanded and might be omitted altogether, and which really lay outside the law, though it was necessary to bring them into harmony with the demands of the law upon Israel."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup>Bonar, p. 493.

<sup>3</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, 2:479.

"No true worship can end without presenting ourselves and our substance to the Lord, Who provides all our benefits."<sup>1</sup>

Thus 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.

"Just as the whole of the giving of the Law at Sinai began with ten commandments, so it now ends with a list of ten laws. The content of the ten laws deals with the process of payment of vows and tithes made to the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

The ten vow laws, which I have combined somewhat for convenience, are in verses 1-8, 9-13, 14-15, 16-21, 22-25, 26-27, 28, 29, 30-31, and 32-33.

God did not command the Israelites to make vows or to promise anything to Him. But vowing is a natural desire of people who love God or want things from God. Therefore God gave the Israelites regulations that were to govern their vowing and dedicating (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Though God did not command vows, He expected that, once His people made the vows, they would keep them (cf. Prov. 20:25; Eccles. 5:3-5).

"A vow to God placed a person or property in a special consecrated relationship which stood outside the formal demands of the law."<sup>3</sup>

A vow was a promise to give (or dedicate) oneself, or another person, or one's possession(s), 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; that is, they were not normally lifelong. When a person wanted to get back what he had vowed to God, he had to pay a certain price at the sanctuary to buy back (redeem) what he had given to God. This constituted redeeming what the person had vowed.

Old Testament examples of people who made vows are Jacob (Gen. 28:20), the Israelites (Num. 21:1-3), Jephthah (Judg. 11:30-31), and Hannah (1

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Goldberg, *Leviticus: A Study Guide Commentary*, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>Sailhamer, p. 365.

<sup>3</sup>Harrison, p. 235. See also *The Theological Wordbook*, s.v. "Vows," by Donald K. Campbell, pp. 369-71.

Sam. 1:11; see also Ps. 50:14; 65:1; 132:2). Votive offerings were offerings made in payment of vows (cf. 7:16; 22:21-23; 22:18; 23:38).

In general the rules in this chapter move from what is redeemable to what is not redeemable.<sup>1</sup> There is a strong emphasis on assessing the value of what was offered and what was required in payment of a vow.

### 1. Laws involving people 27:1-8

27:1-7 The amount of money that a person had to pay at the end of a vow depended on the age and sex of the individual. Some people were worth more, in this respect, than others (cf. Judg. 11:30). Perhaps this was because God expected more of some than of others.<sup>2</sup>

20 to 60 years	Male	50 shekels	v. 3
	Female	30 shekels	v. 4
5 to 20 years	Male	20 shekels	v. 5a
	Female	10 shekels	v. 5b
1 month to 5 years	Male	5 shekels	v. 6a
	Female	3 shekels	v. 6b
60 years and more	Male	15 shekels	v. 7a
	Female	10 shekels	v. 7b

"These figures are very large. The average wage of a worker in biblical times was about one shekel per month.<sup>3</sup> It is little wonder that few could afford the valuations set out here (v. 8)."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kiuchi, p. 494.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 496.

<sup>3</sup>I. Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 338.

27:8 However, if a person could not afford the normal assessment, the priest could reduce the amount he owed based on his economic condition.

"Two ways in which persons were dedicated to the deity elsewhere in the ancient Near Eastern world could naturally not be allowed in Israel: the dedication of persons by means of death (human sacrifice), and the dedication of sons and daughters by means of cultic prostitution."<sup>1</sup>

"For the Christian the section on people dedicated to God suggests the great importance of 'redeeming the time.' Worth is not determined by measuring amounts of shekels, nor is it based on the gender or age of a person (Gal 3:28; Ac 2:17). Everyone has been given gifts by God to use within the church. These talents and abilities should be dedicated to Christ and used for service with liberality (1 Co 12; Eph 4:7-16). ...

"Also Christians must be careful when making vows to God. In the modern age, when one's word seems to carry little weight, promises made to God are not considered to be light (Gal 6:7; Jas 4:13-15)."<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Laws involving animals 27:9-13**

The Israelites could offer any animals in payment for a vow, clean or unclean.

27:9-10 Acceptable animals used in the sacrifices could be presented in payment for a vow. But once the animal had been given to the LORD it could not be exchanged for another one of a greater or lesser value. If someone wanted to do this, both animals would be taken in payment of the vow. This rule was apparently made to discourage people from making rash

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzij, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup>Hess, p. 823.

promises.<sup>1</sup> It was important that they gave their animal with a pure heart, rather than professing to make a great sacrifice only to substitute it for another one.

- 27:11-13 Unclean animals were not to be offered to the LORD. But if an Israelite needed to pay for his vow, and he had no clean animal to offer, or if he could not afford to give one, he could bring an unclean animal to the priest. The priest was then to assess its value. If it was sufficiently valuable, the priest would accept it as payment for the vow, but he would not offer it as a sacrifice to Yahweh. It would become the priests' property. If the offerer would at a later time want the animal back, he would have to pay the priest its assessed value plus 20 percent in order to obtain it.

"Lev 27 discloses a consistent criterion for all consecrations: offerable animals must be consumed on the altar; all other sancta [holy things], being unofferable, are therefore redeemable."<sup>2</sup>

The priests probably used the unclean animals for various purposes other than sacrifice, or they could sell them for a profit.

### **3. Laws involving property 27:14-29**

- 27:14-15 An Israelite could consecrate (vow) his house (in the Promised Land) to the LORD. If he did so, it was considered the LORD's property. Presumably it would then be used for some holy purpose other than as a residence for the donor. If the donor wanted the house back, he could buy it back (redeem it) by paying the price that the priest had determined it was worth plus 20 percent (cf. v. 13).
- 27:16-21 An Israelite could also vow part of a field that he had inherited to the LORD, again presumably to be used for some holy purpose. The priest's valuation in this case was to be based on

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 337.

<sup>2</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 23—27*, p. 2402.

the productivity of the field and the number of harvests that would be expected before the next Year of Jubilee. As with a house, the vower could redeem the land by paying the evaluated price plus 20 percent. However, if he thereafter sold the land to another person, he could not redeem it. On the Year of Jubilee it would not revert back to him but to the LORD, and it would become the priests' property.

- 27:22-24 An Israelite could also vow a field that he had bought that was not part of his inheritance. In this case the priest would assess the value of the field, and presumably the process for redeeming it would be the same as in the former case (vv. 16-21). But in this case the land would revert to the seller on the Year of Jubilee.
- 27:25 God specified that assessments were to be made using the official shekel weight of the sanctuary.
- 27:26-27 The Israelites could not vow firstborn animals, because these already belonged to God. Unclean animals could be donated or redeemed, as explained above (vv. 11-13), or sold at the assessed value.
- 27:28-29 Anything that had been set apart for destruction (Heb. *herem*), that is, anything that was not to be used by the Israelites but given to Yahweh (such as the spoils taken in the battle at Jericho, cf. Josh. 6:17-19), whether a person, an animal, or one's property, was not to be sold or redeemed. The Israelites could not vow things that had already been assigned as God's, either good things (e.g., the spoils of Jericho) or bad things (e.g., a condemned murderer).

#### **4. Laws involving tithes 27:30-34**

"As in Israel, the presentation of tithes was a very ancient custom in other nations of antiquity, where they were given not only as a sign of respect to one's superiors (Gen. 14:20), but also as a gift to the deity (Gen. 28:22). The tithe took on a different character in post-Mosaic Israel, however, since it then became subject to the thought that the people were no



more than tenants and that the bounty of their crops and cattle formed an expression of the Lord's goodness."<sup>1</sup>

This tithe was a commonly recognized obligation to God, and for this reason it was not part of the Mosaic Law (cf. Gen. 14:20; 28:22). It was an annual tax (Deut. 14:22) that the Israelites were to pay to the LORD that was used to support the Levites (Num. 18:21).

God claimed as His possession one tenth of the crops ("the seed of the land"), "the fruit of the tree[s]," and the livestock ("herd or flock") of the Israelites. If the owner wished to pay his tithe with money in place of his crops and fruit, he had to pay God the value of what he kept back plus 20 percent. Every tenth animal that the owner passed "under the rod" (the rod under which the owner made his animals pass when he counted them), whether good or bad, was to be tithed. If the owner wanted to exchange a good animal that he had tithed for a bad one, both animals would become the LORD's property. The Israelites could not redeem animals as they could their crops and fruit.<sup>2</sup>

This was one of two tithes that the Israelites had to pay (cf. Deut. 14:22-27), the other being the tithe that they paid every three years to support the poor (Deut. 14:28-29). Probably Moses included these tithing instructions in this section of Leviticus because this tithe was another thing that the Israelites owed God as their Suzerain. Also, assessments and redemption were involved.

The Israelites were to devote the Sabbath entirely to God, as a reminder that all their days belonged to Him. Likewise they were to tithe their income as a reminder that all their possessions belonged to Him. The tithe was not simply the part the Israelites owed God; it was a reminder that they owed everything to God.<sup>3</sup>

"Lev. 27 points out that holiness is more than a matter of divine call and correct ritual. Its attainment requires the total

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<sup>1</sup>Noordtzijs, p. 279.

<sup>2</sup>See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Tithes," by J. G. S. Thomson, p. 1284; and *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Tithe," pp. 1102-3.

<sup>3</sup>James Philip, *Numbers*, p. 212.

consecration of a man's life to God's service. It involves giving yourself, your family, and all your possessions to God."<sup>1</sup>

God has given quite different directions to guide the giving of Christians under the New Covenant (cf. 1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor 8—9; Phil. 4). He has not specified a percentage that His people must give. But He wants us to give joyfully, sacrificially, proportionately, and as He has prospered us. Teaching Christians to give as God instructed the Israelites, under the Old Covenant, often has the effect of limiting their giving, rather than increasing it. Many Christians erroneously think that when they have given 10 percent they have discharged their obligation God.

"In order to reflect God's faithfulness, God demands that his people be faithful to do all that they vow or promise and be careful that their vows and promises are appropriate."<sup>2</sup>

The major lesson of this chapter is: Keep your promises. The New Testament emphasizes keeping our word more than keeping our vows. All our words should be trustworthy and reliable (Matt. 5:37). This is an important aspect of personal integrity.

"In this chapter, after the Lord had unfolded his system of truth, the impression left on every true worshipper is supposed to be, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?'"<sup>3</sup>

The last verse of the book (v. 34) signals the conclusion of "the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses for the sons of Israel on Mount Sinai."

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<sup>1</sup>Wenham, *The Book ...*, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup>Ross, p. 495.

<sup>3</sup>Bonar, p. 494.

## Conclusion

Genesis reveals how people can have a relationship with God. This comes through trust in God and obedience to Him. Faith is the key word in Genesis. God proves Himself faithful in this book.

Exodus reveals that God is also sovereign. He is the ultimate ruler of the universe. The sovereign God provided redemption for people so they could have an even deeper relationship with Himself. Man's response should be worship and obedience.

Leviticus reveals that God is also holy. He is different from people in that He is perfectly 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 as a nation (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 and promising to keep His promises to their forefathers (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)."<sup>1</sup>

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 value of the book as divine revelation 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).

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 1:151.

## Appendix

THE OFFERINGS <sup>1</sup>		
Offering	Purpose	What was offered
Burnt (1:3-17; 6:8-13)	It signified: (1) atonement for sin (1:4), and (2) the complete dedication of a person to God.	According to wealth: (1) an unblemished bull (1:3-9), (2) an unblemished male sheep or goat (1:10-13), or (3) doves or pigeons (1:14-17).
Grain (2:1-16; 6:14-18; 7:12-13)	It accompanied all burnt offerings. It signified: (1) thanksgiving to God, and (2) the complete dedication of a person's work to God.	Three types: (1) fine flour mixed with oil and frankincense (2:1-3); (2) unleavened cakes made of fine flour mixed with oil and baked in an oven (2:4), in an open pan (2:5), or in a covered pan (2:7); and (3) fresh heads of roasted grain mixed with oil and frankincense (2:14-15).
Peace (or Fellowship; 3:1-17; 7:11-21, 28-34)	It expressed fellowship between the worshiper and God. Three types: (1) Thank offerings expressed gratitude for an unexpected blessing. (2) Votive offerings expressed gratitude for a blessing granted when a vow had been made while asking for the blessing. (3) Freewill offerings expressed gratitude	According to wealth: (1) from the herd, an unblemished male or female (3:1-5), or (2) from the flock, an unblemished male or female (3:6-11), or (3) from the goats (3:12-17). Minor imperfections were permitted when it was a

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from *The Nelson ...*, p. 197, with some changes.

	to God without regard to any specific blessing.	freewill offering of a bull or a lamb (22:23).
Sin (4:1—5:13; 6:24-30)	It was for atonement of sins committed unknowingly (unintentionally), especially where no restitution was possible. It was of no avail in cases of defiant rebellion against God (Num. 15:30-31).	(1) For the high priest: an unblemished bull (4:3-12). (2) For the congregation: an unblemished bull (4:13-21). (3) For a ruler: an unblemished male goat (4:22-26). (4) For an ordinary citizen: an unblemished female goat or lamb (4:27-35). (5) For the poor: two doves or two pigeons (one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering) could be substituted (5:15-16). (6) For the very poor: fine flour could be substituted (5:11-13).
Guilt (5:14—6:7; 7:1-7)	It atoned for sins committed unknowingly (inadvertently, 5:14-19), and some sins committed deliberately (intentionally, but not in rebellion against the covenant, 6:1-7), especially where restitution was possible.	(1) For offenses against the LORD: an unblemished lamb for sacrifice. The priest calculated the restitution due on the basis of the value of the offense plus one-fifth (5:15-16). (2) For offenses against another person: an unblemished ram for sacrifice. The priest calculated the restitution due on the basis of the value of the offense plus one-fifth (6:4-6).

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