

Notes on Leviticus

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Introduction

TITLE

The Hebrews derived the title of this book from the first word in it, *wayyiqra'*, translated "And He [the Lord] called" (1:1). "And" or "then" 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).

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 they are mentioned by name in only two verses (25:32, 33). More specifically, the priests 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 emphasis lies on the days that must be observed as days of sabbath rest."¹

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.² God evidently revealed the material 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.

¹Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 3.

²See the excellent discussion and critique of the Documentary Hypothesis in Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, pp. 23-38.

"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."³

"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."⁴

"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."⁵

SCOPE

As noted, Leviticus contains revelation that was particularly appropriate for the priests. While ritual and legal matters predominate, Moses wove them into the historical narratives 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 significant and reasonable 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."⁶

"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

³Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus*, p. 1. 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.

⁴*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 173.

⁵Eugene H. Merrill, "Leviticus," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 72.

⁶Kenneth Kitchen, "The Old Testament in its Context: 2 From Egypt to the Jordan," *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* 60 (1971):3.

and throne room of the Great King. The work is a fundamentally important legal treatise because it contains the regulations by which the religious and civil life of the Hebrew nation was to be governed once the land of Canaan was occupied."⁷

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 Sinai (Num. 1:1-3). However, because it contains so much legal material, we should consider 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."⁸

PURPOSE

"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."⁹

"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])."¹⁰

"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."¹¹

"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."¹²

⁷Harrison, pp. 13-14.

⁸C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 2:261.

⁹Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 56.

¹⁰John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 323.

¹¹Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 84.

¹²*The Nelson . . .*, p. 173.

"How to maintain the vital covenantal relationship between the Israelites and their God is the concern of the book of Leviticus."¹³

GENRE

Leviticus is essentially a narrative document, 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. 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.

"The story exists for the sake of the laws which it frames."¹⁴

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.¹⁵

- 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."¹⁶

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 "profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

¹³Samuel J. Schultz, *Leviticus: God Among His People*, p. 7.

¹⁴D. Damrosch, "Leviticus," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, p. 66.

¹⁵Longman and Dillard, p. 83.

¹⁶Rooker, p. 22. 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 Law in the church.

"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)."¹⁷

"Without a basic knowledge of Leviticus, Hebrews will remain a closed book to the Christian."¹⁸

". . . 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."¹⁹

". . . 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 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."²⁰

"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."²¹

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

¹⁷Wenham, p. 25.

¹⁸Herbert M. Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*, p. 165.

¹⁹Wenham, p. 35.

²⁰Ibid., p. 37.

²¹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 174.

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' (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."²²

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 meal offering ch. 2
 3. The peace offerings ch. 3
 4. The sin offerings 4:1—5:13
 5. The trespass offerings 5:14—6:7
 6. Instructions for the priests concerning the offerings 6:8—7:38
 - B. The institution 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. Uncleaness due to contact with certain animals ch. 11
 2. Uncleaness due to childbirth ch. 12
 3. Uncleaness due to skin and covering abnormalities chs. 13—14
 4. Uncleaness due to bodily discharges associated with reproduction ch. 15
 - 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

²²Harrison, p. 15.

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 first list of regulations for priests 21:1-15
 2. The second list of regulations for priests 21:16-24
 3. The third list of regulations for priests ch. 22
- C. Sanctification of the Sabbath and the feasts of Yahweh ch. 23
 1. The Sabbath 23:1-3
 2. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread 23:4-8
 3. The Feast of Firstfruits 23:9-14
 4. The Feast of Pentecost 23:15-22
 5. The Feast of Trumpets 23:23-25
 6. The Day of Atonement 23:26-32
 7. 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 blessing for fidelity to the law 26:3-13
 3. The warning for contempt of the law 26:14-33
 4. The objective of God's judgments in relation to the land and nation of Israel 26:34-46
- H. Directions concerning vows ch. 27
 1. Vows concerning persons 27:1-8
 2. Vows concerning animals 27:9-13
 3. Vows concerning other property 27:14-29
 4. The redemption of 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.

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

Exodus. He clarified the nature of man's sinfulness in Leviticus. "Sin" has a threefold character:

First, sin is "unlikeness" to God. 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 occurs even in the sections of the book dealing with personal hygiene.

"Holy" means pure, unblemished, clean, blameless. 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 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. 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 periodically to God (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 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, he has wronged not only that person but God as well (cf. Gen. 39:9; Ps. 51:4). We, too, as Christians, 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 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 sin-debt forgiven, albeit pending a final removal of sin *after Christ's sacrifice*. God removed (covered) the sins of the Israelites until a final, acceptable sacrifice would pay for them completely. Old Testament saints obtained salvation "on credit." God accepted a substitute sacrifice (the

"credit payment") until final payment would be made (by Christ), like a merchant accepts a credit card until final payment is made. Through *atonement*, men who were sinners could enter into fellowship with God. Three things had to be present to make atonement for sin. These applied to both initial atonement and to continuing atonement.

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

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

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

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

A third major revelation in Leviticus is the *nature of redemption*. "Redemption" essentially means "purchase." To "redeem" means to "purchase *for oneself*." When God "redeemed" Israel in Egypt, He "bought the nation *for Himself*." God thereby provided *freedom* for the Israelites, so that they could be His special treasure (Exod. 19:5-6). Leviticus teaches three things about redemption:

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

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

Third, redemption should *produce holiness*. Redemption should lead to a manner of life that is separate from sin. Redemption does not excuse us from the responsibility of being holy. It gives us the opportunity to be holy. *Holiness* of life results from a relationship to God and fellowship (communion) with Him—that redemption makes possible.

Redemption deals with the sinner's relationship to God, whereas *atonement* deals with his relationship to sin. People experience redemption (the positive freedom and *rightness* to love, serve, and worship God), but God has atoned for their *sins* (the negative punishment, destruction and removal of 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.

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. However, when people ceased to trust and obey God, 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. *Our* worship as Christians is different, because we live under the New Covenant.

Genesis teaches the importance of faith. Exodus teaches that faith manifests itself in worship and obedience. Leviticus teaches us more about worship.²³

²³Adapted 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 *us* 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, namely: a people (Gen. 12:10—Exod. 19), *their law* (Exod. 20—Num. 10:10), and their land (Num. 10:11—Josh. 24). The first major section of Leviticus deals with how the Israelites were to conduct their public life as an expression of worship to God.

"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."²⁴

"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."²⁵

Thus the movement in Leviticus is from doctrine (chs. 1—16) to practice (chs. 17—27), as in Romans 1—11 and 12—16, and in Ephesians 1—3 and 4—6. Similarly, the arrangement of the 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.²⁶

²⁴Merrill, "A Theology . . .," p. 57. Cf. Wenham, pp. 25-26.

²⁵Rooker, p. 42.

²⁶*The Nelson . . .*, p. 204.

". . . the cult can be defined as the visible form of the religious life."²⁷

A. THE LAWS OF SACRIFICE CHS. 1—7

Few historical events are recorded in Leviticus compared to Genesis and Exodus, but the ones that are here are very significant. 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—7 help us understand why Israel behaved as she did, in bringing offerings from then on. 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."²⁸

"The servant . . . had to approach his Sovereign at His dwelling place by presenting an appropriate token of his obedient submission."²⁹

"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."³⁰

"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)."³¹

"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

²⁷A. Noordtjij, *Leviticus*, p. 16

²⁸Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 157.

²⁹Merrill, "A Theology . . .," p. 57.

³⁰Ross, p. 73.

³¹Noordtjij, p. 21.

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*."³²

"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."³³

"The rites here detailed were typical; and every type was designed and intended by God to bear resemblance to some spiritual truth."³⁴

"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 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."³⁵

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.

"They [chapters 1—7] may be compared to the genealogies in Genesis and those at the beginning of 1 Chronicles, whose purpose is to introduce the main characters of the subsequent narratives."³⁶

³²Longman and Dillard, p. 85.

³³Edersheim, p. 106.

³⁴Bonar, p. 2.

³⁵Robert Murray M'Cheyne, quoted by Bonar, pp. 8-9.

³⁶Sailhamer, pp. 323-24.

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

Two of the sacrifices dealt with *commitment to God* (the burnt and the meal), one dealt with *communion with God* (the peace), and two dealt with *cleansing from God* (the sin and the trespass).³⁷

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).

There were important differences between the offerings.³⁸

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* (non-soothing). The first three offerings were "soothing aroma" offerings. The last two also go together, because they were not "soothing-aroma" offerings.

The first three were offerings of *worship* that were a "sweet aroma" to God, because they were made *in* communion with, and to *celebrate* communion with, the 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 were offerings of *expiation* for sin, and were therefore not a sweet savor to God. These two offerings reveal how to *restore* a broken relationship between a redeemed Israelite sinner and a holy God; they were *for* (foundational to initial entering into, or 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"³⁹

³⁷Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Pentateuch*, p. 256.

³⁸For charts of these differences in more detail, see *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 168-71.

³⁹F. Duane Lindsey, "Leviticus," in *ibid.*, p. 172.

In the revelation of the first three offerings, each chapter contains three paragraphs. In each chapter, God described the most valuable (costly) sacrifice first, and then the less valuable. The rules about these sacrifices may have been arranged in "logical" order in order to make them *easier to memorize*.⁴⁰

"The readiest, but perhaps the most superficial, arrangement of the sacrifices is into bloody and unbloody."⁴¹

God specified that three kinds of four-footed beasts (oxen, sheep, and goats), and two kinds of birds (turtle-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."⁴²

Another important distinction to observe, 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 it of his own free will, if it was a private sacrifice. And some were *most* (or *more*) holy, while others were *less* holy.

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

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 that *narrative* material later.

1. The burnt offering ch. 1

This section of Leviticus, and the whole book, opens with the statement "the LORD called to Moses" (v. 1). This is the third time that we read of the LORD calling to Moses in this way: in addition to the burning bush incident (Exod. 3:4), and on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:3). Having taken possession of the tabernacle, God now gave orders to His servant from that audience chamber. Previously, God had spoken to the Israelites publicly from Mt. Sinai, and to Moses privately on that mountain, but now that the tabernacle was complete, God

⁴⁰A. F. Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in OT Ritual Texts," *Biblica* 51 (1970):487.

⁴¹Edersheim, p. 109.

⁴²W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 92.

spoke to Moses in an audible voice from above the mercy seat.⁴³ All of the revelations that follow these announcements are very significant.

"It is my view the 'He is' [the meaning of LORD, Yahweh] . . . characterizes God as He who is unchanging and can therefore be depended on by His covenant people."⁴⁴

"Any man of you" (v. 2) probably includes non-Israelites, who lived among the Israelites, as well as the Israelites themselves, including women (cf. Num. 15:14, 16, 29).⁴⁵

The "burnt offering" (in Greek, *holokautoma*, from which we get the English word "holocaust") expressed the offerer's complete consecration to Yahweh (cf. Matt. 22:37; Rom. 12:1-2), as well as God's complete acceptance of the worshiper.

However, this offering also *made atonement* for the offerer (cf. John 1:29), covering his or her sins. As such, it forms the foundation of the entire sacrificial system of Israel. The Hebrew words *olah*, meaning "ascending," and *chalil*, translated "whole burnt offering," point to the mode and meaning of this sacrifice. Some rabbis believed the burnt offering atoned for all sins not covered under the sin offering.⁴⁶ "Peace with God" (having God's enmity removed; being reconciled to God through propitiation) was the goal of all the sacrifices.

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

"The first case is dealt with in the most detail. The two subsequent ones 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]."⁴⁷

"The sense of God's presence, which permeates the entire book, is indicated forty-two times by the expression 'before the LORD [v. 3, *passim*].'"⁴⁸

⁴³Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 84.

⁴⁴Noordtzi, p. 27.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 29; *The Nelson . . .*, p. 175.

⁴⁶Rooker, p. 85.

⁴⁷Wenham, p. 49.

⁴⁸Schultz, p. 30.

With this offering, the worshiper was seeking to please the Lord, and to find acceptance into His presence as a redeemed person, and, in the case of the morning and evening sacrifices, as a redeemed nation. Leviticus thus begins with the good news of "the way" for redeemed Israelites, who were *still sinners*, to find acceptance with God.

"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 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."⁴⁹

Whereas both the offerer and the priest could slaughter the animal sacrifice, only the priest could sprinkle its blood.

"The animal should be killed by the offerer [v. 5], 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."⁵⁰

Note several *distinctives* of this offering.

1. It was a "soothing aroma" (or "sweet savor"; vv. 9, 13, 17). God was "happy" (satisfied, propitiated) to receive this sacrifice, because it was an offering of worship as well as the payment for sin. It gave Him pleasure. The priests presented all three soothing aroma offerings on the brazen altar in the tabernacle courtyard. God saw the offerer as both a worshiper and a guilty sinner. The offering was to be without any blemish, which was also expected in the sin and trespass offerings. This indicated that the offerer was presenting the "best" to God, who is worthy of nothing less (vv. 3, 10).

". . . whatever speaks of Christ Himself must speak of perfection."⁵¹

"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)."⁵²

⁴⁹Longman and Dillard, p. 86.

⁵⁰Jamieson, et al., p. 85.

⁵¹Bonar, p. 13.

⁵²Jamieson, et al., p. 85.

2. It was for "acceptance" (i.e., so that God would accept *the offerer*, that *he* [not *it*] may be accepted," emphasis supplied, vv. 3-4). This offering satisfied God's desire for the love of His redeemed creatures as well as His offended justice. This offering satisfied God by its wholeness—quantitatively and qualitatively. The Israelite worshiper offered a whole (healthy) and spotless (blemish- or defect-free) animal in place of himself. And, as a public offering, the priest offered it in place of the nation.

"The requirement that the animal be male [v. 3] 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."⁵³

"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."⁵⁴

"The Hebrew verb *kipper*, which I have translated as 'make atonement [v. 4]' 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."⁵⁵

3. The offerer gave up *a life* on the altar ("he shall slay the young bull"; v. 5). 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, its rightful Owner. Giving one's life to God is not an act of such great sacrifice. It is simply giving back to God what already belongs to Him. It is only one's "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

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.

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

⁵³Noordtzijs, p. 31.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 33.

"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).⁵⁶ 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."⁵⁷

There were also some *variations* within this offering:

1. The animals acceptable for this offering varied. Bullocks (oxen), lambs, goats, turtledoves, and pigeons were acceptable. Some commentators suggest that each type of animal bore a distinct characteristic shared by man, that made it an appropriate substitute (e.g., strong, foolish, flighty, etc.). Incidentally, 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.⁵⁸

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

"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."⁵⁹

2. The butchering of the animals also varied. The offerers cut the bullocks, 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 animals into more manageable pieces. Moreover, they washed the entrails and legs of the animals in water (vv. 9, 13). This washing probably symbolized the need for internal purity. They did not wash the birds, however. Perhaps they were regarded as already clean.

The offerer "pressed" (Heb. *samek*) his hand on the animals, but not on the birds (cf. Isa. 59:16; Ezek. 24:2; 30:6; Amos 5:19).⁶⁰ "Laying on of hands" often accompanied prayer (cf. 16:21; Deut. 21:6-9), suggesting that prayer accompanied sacrifice. The offerer personally slew the animals, but the priest slew the birds (vv. 5, 15). In later periods of history, the priests slew all the animals.

⁵⁶Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, 1975 ed., s.v. "Food," by Ralph E. Powell.

⁵⁷Wenham, p. 51.

⁵⁸Noordtzi, p. 40.

⁵⁹Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 116.

⁶⁰See M. C. Sansom, "Laying on of Hands in the Old Testament," *The Expository Times* 94:11 (August 1983):323-26.

"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, not considered to be one of the primary categories of animal offerings."⁶¹

"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]."⁶²

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

"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."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)."⁶⁴

⁶¹The NET Bible note on 1:2.

⁶²Jamieson, et al., p. 85.

⁶³Wenham, p. 63.

⁶⁴The NET Bible note on 1:3.

"The clearly stated purpose of the whole burnt offering was for atonement (l^ekapper 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 [trespass] 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 . . ." ⁶⁵

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

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

"The LORD accepts with pleasure whoever comes into his presence by substitutionary atonement through the shedding of blood." ⁶⁶

2. The meal offering ch. 2

The meal ("grain," cereal) "offering" was also an offering of worship that brought God pleasure. It evidently symbolized the sacrifice and commitment of one's person *and works*, his body and property (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).

". . . the burnt offering . . . speaks of complete self-surrender, and the grain offering . . . an acknowledgement of absolute dependence . . ." ⁶⁷

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

"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." ⁶⁸

"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

⁶⁵Ross, pp. 92-93.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 95.

⁶⁷Noordtzi, p. 48.

⁶⁸Wenham, p. 71.

atonement . . . along with the burnt offering (e.g., Lev 14:20) or alone as a sin offering for the poor (Lev 5:11-13)."⁶⁹

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

1. It was a "soothing aroma" (vv. 2, 9). To God the meal offering was pleasing because it was an act of worship based on atonement for sin.
2. The offering itself was the "fruit" (product, "first fruits," "first ripened things") of human labor. A possible contrast between the burnt and meal offerings, is that one represented what man owes God, and the other what he owes his fellow man.⁷⁰ However, it seems more likely that the contrast intended was primarily between the *person* of the offerer and his *works*. The animals offered in the burnt offering were *God's creations*, but the cake or grain offered in the meal offering was the *product of man's labor*.

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

The meal offering appears to have been acceptable only when offered along with the burnt offering. This requirement taught that one's works were acceptable to God only when they accompanied the offerer's consecration of himself to God (cf. Gen. 4:3).

The materials used in this offering undoubtedly had significance to the Israelites. "Fine flour" (v. 1) baked into bread (or cake) represented then, as now, the staff of life. The fact that the offerer had *ground* the flour "fine" probably emphasized the *human toil* represented by the offering.

The (olive) "oil" (v. 1) was a symbol of God's enabling Spirit, since it bound (transformed) the flour of the offering into cake.⁷¹ This consistency made it possible to offer the sacrifice as a finished "dish" rather than as a collection of ingredients.

"Oil was to them then in their food what butter is now to us."⁷²

⁶⁹The NET Bible note on 2:1.

⁷⁰Andrew Jukes, *The Law of the Offerings*, pp. 77-78.

⁷¹See John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 21-22.

⁷²Henry, p. 117.

"Frankincense" (v. 1) was a very fragrant spice, but its aroma did not become evident until someone subjected it to fire.⁷³ The oil and incense made the offering richer and more desirable, and therefore more pleasing to God.

God also specified salt for this offering (v. 13). "Salt" symbolized a "covenant," in that nothing in antiquity could destroy salt, including fire and time (cf. Num. 18:19).⁷⁴ Salt was also a symbol of friendship.⁷⁵ Adding "salt" to an offering reminded the worshiper that he was in an eternal covenant relationship with his God.

God specifically excluded "honey" and "leaven" from the recipe for the meal offering (v. 11). Some writers have suggested that these two ingredients, respectively, represented natural (earthly) sweetness and sin to the Israelites.⁷⁶ Others believe that "as blood is the life force of animals, leaven represented the life force of the vegetable kingdom."⁷⁷ Most have felt that honey and leaven were unacceptable because they cause fermentation, and fermentation suggested corruption.⁷⁸

"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."⁷⁹

A "drink offering" accompanied every meal offering, the "wine" used being poured out at the base of the altar (Num. 15:1-10).⁸⁰

3. Another distinction was that the priest did not offer the entire meal offering on the altar. He placed only a *handful* of the uncooked grain or cooked cake ("its memorial portion") on the brazen altar and burned it. The "priest" ate the rest ("the remainder . . . belongs to Aaron and his sons"; vv. 9-10). The offerer cooked the dough at home, first, and then offered it as "cake" to the Lord (by presenting it in this form to the priest), rather than as batter (vv. 4, 5, 7).

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.

⁷³*The New Bible Dictionary*, 196 ed., s.v. "Frankincense," by R. K. Harrison.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, s.v. "salt," by R. K. Harrison.

⁷⁵Henry, p. 117.

⁷⁶Jukes, pp. 88, 90; Bonar, p. 44.

⁷⁷*The Nelson . . .*, p. 176.

⁷⁸E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 2:295; Edersheim, p. 110; and J. H. Hertz, *Leviticus*, p. 16; Noordtjiz, p. 46.

⁷⁹Henry, p. 117.

⁸⁰Edersheim, p. 138.

"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 come from the LORD; and it prompted or motivated the LORD to honor and bless those who offered this dedication."⁸¹

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

God permitted various kinds of meal offerings: baked (v. 4), grilled (v. 5), fried, (v. 7), and roasted (v. 14).⁸² These constituted the *variations* in preparing this offering. If this offering was public, it usually took the form of "first fruits" (v. 12), but if it was private, an Israelite could bring it to the tabernacle whenever he desired to do so.

Christ fulfilled the requirements of this sacrifice, too (John 8:29).

"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]."⁸³

3. The peace offering ch. 3

The "peace (fellowship [NIV], well-being [NRSV]) offering" is the third sacrifice of worship. It represented the *personal fellowship* between God and each Israelite person that resulted from the relationship that God had established with the redeemed individual (cf. Rom. 5:1). *Peace* and *fellowship* resulted from redemption, and this act of worship highlighted those blessings from God. This was an optional sacrifice; an Israelite could bring it if and when he 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 (Harvest, Weeks; 23:19). Because it was voluntary, its offering became a festive occasion.

"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 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."⁸⁴

⁸¹Ross, p. 107.

⁸²See George Bush, *Notes . . . on . . . Leviticus*, pp. 24-27, for a description of how the Israelites probably cooked this offering.

⁸³Ross, p. 108.

⁸⁴Bush, p. 33.

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 him or her (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).⁸⁵

There were two major *distinctives* of this offering:

1. It was a "soothing aroma" (v. 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 he had made to God. In the burnt offering, God got the *whole* sacrifice. In the meal offering, God and the priest shared the sacrifice. However, in the peace offering, *all three* participants *shared* the roasted animal. Even the priest's children ate of this offering, but they had to be ceremonially clean to participate (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.⁸⁶

"A libation [drink] offering (*nesek*) accompanied burnt and fellowship offerings. The priest's portion of the fellowship 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*)."⁸⁷

The Israelites were not to eat "the fat" of this sacrifice, but to "offer it to the LORD" on the altar. This 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).

". . . 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 it functioned as an energy reserve, it also maintained the animal's life."⁸⁸

⁸⁵Wolf, pp. 168-69.

⁸⁶Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, p. 51.

⁸⁷Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48:2 (Fall 1986):366.

⁸⁸Noordtzij, p. 50.

Another explanation, is that 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 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 from Him.⁸⁹ 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).

"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."⁹⁰

"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."⁹¹

These *varieties* are significant:

1. There were several grades of animals that God permitted. These options were similar to the burnt offering's, but were fewer. Bulls, lambs, and goats were acceptable. *Female* animals were also acceptable for peace offerings, so there were more options than with the burnt offering.

Birds were not acceptable as peace offerings, however, perhaps because their smaller size was not conducive to dividing them among God, the priest, and the offerer; or that they did not have enough fat to burn on the altar.⁹²

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

Whenever the Israelites offered thousands of sacrifices at one time, they were usually peace offerings. They ate only a part of what they offered on these occasions.⁹³ There are many similarities between this offering and the Lord's Supper: Both were celebrations that commemorated a covenant, both were occasions of rededication to God, and both involved blood.

Christ's death made peace and fellowship possible with God (Rom. 5:1). Christ's death also made peace and fellowship possible with our fellow men (Eph. 2:14).

⁸⁹See Wenham, pp. 80-81.

⁹⁰*The Nelson . . .*, p. 178. See Bush, pp. 35-36, for more on these sheep's large tails.

⁹¹Keil and Delitzsch, 2:268.

⁹²Bush, pp. 32, 35.

⁹³R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus," in *Genesis-Numbers*, vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 538.

"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]."⁹⁴

4. The sin offering 4:1—5:13

The "sin offering" was a very important offering, since it was to be offered before any of the others. It also played a key role on the Day of Atonement. Ancient Near Easterners offered certain offerings before God incorporated these into the Mosaic Law. Moses previously mentioned burnt offerings in Genesis 12:7; 13:4, 18; 22; 26:25; 33:20; and 35:1-7, and peace offerings in Genesis 31:54 and 46:1. However, the sin and trespass offerings were new.

They ". . . were altogether unknown before the economy of the Sinaitic law."⁹⁵

The structure of the chapters dealing with the sin and trespass offerings differs from that describing the burnt, meal, and peace offerings. Also, the opening words of this chapter introduce a new section. These differences help us appreciate the fact that these two offerings were in a class by themselves, while sharing some of the similarities of the first three. The *sacrificial victim* was the organizing principle in chapters 1—3, with revelation about the more valuable animals leading off each chapter. In 4:1—6:7, the most important factor is the *type of sin* that called for sacrifice, and the status of the sinner 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."⁹⁶

There were two types of occasions that called for the sin offering: unwitting or inadvertent sins (ch. 4) and sins of omission (5:1-13). We could subdivide this section on the sin offering as follows.⁹⁷

Inadvertent sin ch. 4

Introduction 4:1-2

Blood sprinkled in the holy place 4:3-21

For the high priest 4:3-12

For the congregation 4:13-21

Blood smeared on the brazen altar 4:22-35

For the tribal leader 4:22-26

For the ordinary Israelite offering a goat 4:27-31

For the ordinary Israelite offering a lamb 4:32-35

⁹⁴Ross, p. 119.

⁹⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 2:269.

⁹⁶Rooker, p. 106.

⁹⁷Wenham, p. 87.

Sins of omission 5:1-13

A lamb or goat offering 5:1-6

A bird offering 5:7-10

A flour offering 5:11-13

The "sin" ("purification," Heb. *hatta't*) offering dealt with "unintentional" sins, as opposed to high-handed sins (cf. Num. 15:22-31). The translation "sin offering" is a bit misleading, since the burnt, peace, and trespass offerings also atoned for sin.

"Propitiation of divine anger . . . is an important element in the burnt offering. Restitution . . . is the key idea in the reparation [trespass] 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."⁹⁸

"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."⁹⁹

Like the burnt and meal offerings, this one was compulsory, but the Israelites offered it less frequently (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).

"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."¹⁰⁰

Three notable *distinctives* stand out:

1. This offering was *not* a "soothing aroma." It was for *expiation*, namely, to make amends. The offerer ritually "charged" the sacrificial animal with his sin (imputed or transferred his guilt; cf. Isa. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24). The animal had to be without defect (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22). The offerer executed God's judgment for sin on the sacrificial substitute by slaying it. In every "sin" offering, an innocent substitute replaced the sinner (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).

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 statement from the discussions of the peace offering

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 89.

⁹⁹Rooker, p. 107.

¹⁰⁰Ross, p. 144.

in chapter 3.¹⁰¹ Another believed it was the burning of the fatty tissue, not the whole sin offering, that was the soothing aroma.¹⁰² This second explanation seems more probable.

2. *Smearing* "blood" on the "horns" of the "altar" symbolized purifying the whole sanctuary. The horns represented the powerful divine force of the entire altar. The priest "burned" the skin, and other parts that he did not eat or burn on the altar, "outside the camp." He burned the fat on the altar over a wood fire, which produced the cleanest flame. God evidently regarded the fat as the best part of the animal. The priest ate most of the meat of the animal (6:26; cf. Heb. 13:11-13; Matt. 27:46).
3. This offering dealt with most "unintentionally" committed sins (cf. 5:14-16). These "oversights" demonstrated a sinful nature. *Any* and *every sin* committed *unwittingly* (4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:2-4) pointed to the need for this offering and demonstrated a sinful nature.

God permitted several *varieties* of this offering:

1. The LORD permitted the offering of less expensive animals by poorer people, or "flour" (5:11) by the very poor. However, everyone had 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 permitted it for the very poor.

"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."¹⁰³

"It is not the greatness of the gift but the heart of the giver, which God regards."¹⁰⁴

2. People with higher social and economic status had to bring more expensive sacrifices, illustrating the principle that privilege increases responsibility. Evidently *any sin* that the "high priest" committed, in private or in his public capacity, brought *guilt on the whole nation* (cf. 10:6; 22:16).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹Noordtzi, p. 63.

¹⁰²Harrison, p. 67.

¹⁰³Ross, p. 131.

¹⁰⁴Bush, p. 57.

¹⁰⁵Wenham, p. 97.

3. 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 by 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 with a "high hand," namely, in haughty, 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.¹⁰⁶ Not all deliberate sins were "high handed," however, only those committed in defiant rebellion against God.

"A third class of offences were those of a somewhat deeper dye—certain open and wilful [*sic*] injuries and violatioas [*sic*] of law, such as thefts, violence, false-swearing, deceit and fraud [5:2-3]."¹⁰⁷

"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."¹⁰⁸

The meaning of "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 13-21, as seems to be the case, the "congregation" is synonymous with the "assembly."

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 helps determine the meaning.

Note the repeated promises that this offering would "atone" (make amends) 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 meaning "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 these interpretations are valid, depending on the context. However, the idea of "covering" is also frequently present.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 1:224; Wenham, pp. 241-2; and idem, *Numbers*, p. 131; Noordzij, p. 55.

¹⁰⁷Bush, p. 50.

¹⁰⁸Keil and Delitzsch, 2:302-303.

¹⁰⁹See Rooker, p. 52, for further discussion.

". . . 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 . . .)." ¹¹⁰

Most commentators understand this sacrifice as the principal *expiatory* offering in ancient Israel.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, references to this offering in the text consistently connect it with *purification*. "Sin" *defiles* people and, particularly, God's sanctuary. Animal blood was the means of purification. The defilement (pernicious quality) of sin does not endanger God—but human beings. Textual evidence points to the "burnt offering" as the principal *atonement* sacrifice in Israel.¹¹²

The idea that sin pollutes and defiles seems very strange in the modern world. In any event, Leviticus reveals that sins pollute the place where they take place (cf. 18:24-30; Deut. 21:1-9). God wanted people to realize that "Sin" is *powerful* in its defiling and deadly effects, that it has almost a *life* of its own.

The relationship of 5:1-13 to chapter 4 is a problem. I have suggested one solution above: these sin offerings deal with sins of omission, and certain deliberate sins, rather than inadvertent sin. Noordtzij believed they describe sins arising from negligence or thoughtlessness, and those in the preceding section involve unintentional transgressions.¹¹³ Milgrom suggested another explanation:

"Modern critics tend to regard 5:1-13 as the 'poor man's' offering, the option given to the offender of 4:27-35 who cannot afford the prescribed flock animal. This interpretation, however, is beset with stylistic and contextual difficulties: . . . My own hypothesis is herewith submitted: The graduated *hatta't* [sin offering] is a distinct sacrificial category. It is enjoined for failure or inability to cleanse impurity upon its occurrence. This 'the sin of which he is guilty' (5:6, 10, 13) is not the contraction of impurity but its *prolongation*."¹¹⁴

Matthew Henry was one commentator who understood this section of instructions 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."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰Ross, p. 93.

¹¹¹E.g., Hertz, p. 22; and C. F. Keil, *Manual of Biblical Archaeology*, 1:299.

¹¹²See Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 93-95.

¹¹³Noordtzij, p. 63.

¹¹⁴Jacob Milgrom, "The Graduated *Hatta't* of Leviticus 5:1-13," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103:1 (January-March 1983):249-250.

¹¹⁵Henry, p. 119.

The relationship of 5:1-13 to chapter 4 continues to be the subject of some debate. Wenham summarized this section well:

"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)."¹¹⁶

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 us, *confession* is a prerequisite to cleansing for fellowship (1 John 1:9), even though Christ's death has brought purification from sin's defilement and 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."¹¹⁷

"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."¹¹⁸

Christ died as the final "sin offering." He was without flaw, "sinless" ("blameless"; 1 Pet. 2:22; 2 Cor. 5:21). He was our "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).

5. The trespass offering 5:14—6:7

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

¹¹⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 96.

¹¹⁷Ross, p. 134.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 144.

'*asham*, translated "guilt," also means "reparation." It may be helpful to think of this offering as a "reparation" or a "compensation to repay God," 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."¹¹⁹

This section is divisible into two parts: the trespass offering for inadvertent sin (5:14-19), and the trespass offering for deliberate sin (6:1-7). There is a further distinction within 5:14-19, between trespasses that someone committed with sure knowledge of his guilt (5:14-16), and those 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."¹²⁰

The identity of the "holy things" (v. 15) 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 (cf. ch. 27).¹²¹ Violating these holy things would have involved eating holy food (cf. 22:14), taking (removing, stealing, or moving) dedicated things from their rightful places, and perhaps failing to fulfill a dedicatory vow or failing to pay a tithe.

The situation described in verses 17-19 evidently involved an instance of suspected trespass against sacred property. Someone suspected that he had sinned but did not know exactly how.¹²² This sacrifice pacified oversensitive Israelite consciences. Stealing sacred property was one of the most dreaded sins in antiquity.¹²³

The third type of offense (6:1-7) involved not only stealing property, but lying about it when confronted. 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.

"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]), and confession of sin (cf. Num. 5:6-8)."¹²⁴

¹¹⁹Harris, p. 551.

¹²⁰Keil and Delitzsch, 2:316.

¹²¹Jacob Milgrom, "The Compass of Biblical Sancta," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 65 (April 1975):216.

¹²²Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 108.

¹²³Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The "Asham" and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance*, pp. 76-77.

¹²⁴Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 109. Cf. Luke 19:8.

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). 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.¹²⁵
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; 6:5). 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).

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

The only significant *variations* in this offering were that, for an animal sacrifice, only a ram or a male lamb was acceptable (cf. 5:14-19; 14:12-20; 19:21-22; Num. 6:12). Evidently if a person could not bring a ram or a lamb, he could substitute the value of the animal in silver.¹²⁶ There were more options in most of the other sacrifices.

"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

¹²⁵See Jacob Milgrom, "The Priestly Doctrine of Repentance," *Revue Biblique* 82 (April 1975):186-205.

¹²⁶E. A. Speiser, *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, pp. 124-28; B. A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord*, pp. 124-28.

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."¹²⁷

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 *others* against whom we trespass (cf. Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12).

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

"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."¹²⁸

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

"The five basic sacrifices are . . . introduced twice, each sacrifice being treated both in the main section addressed to the people [1:1—6:7] and in the supplementary section addressed to the priests [6:8—7:38]."¹²⁹

The main theme of this section is *who* may eat *what parts* of the offerings and *where*. 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, frequency of offering determines the order of the material. The regular daily burnt and meal sacrifices come first, then the less frequent sin (purification) offering, then the occasional trespass (reparation) 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 passages something of the responsibility concerning the ritual is laid out for the priests."¹³⁰

"To bring a person closer to God is the highest service that one person can render another."¹³¹

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

Each morning a priest would put on his robes, approach the altar of burnt offerings, and clean out the ashes. Correct clothing was essential so that it would cover his "flesh" (i.e., his private parts, v. 10; cf. Exod. 20:26; 28:42-43).¹³² He would then change his clothes

¹²⁷Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 111.

¹²⁸Ross, p. 152.

¹²⁹Lindsey, p. 172.

¹³⁰Ross, p. 155.

¹³¹J. S. Stewart, quoted by D. Tidball, *Discovering Leviticus*, p. 49.

¹³²Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 119.

and put on ordinary garments, collect the ashes, and take them "outside the camp to a clean place," where he would leave them. The priest could not wear his official robes outside the courtyard, but he *did have to* wear them whenever he approached the brazen altar. Obviously Moses did not record in Leviticus all the details involved in sacrificing.

"*Joseph's new tomb*, hewn out of the very rock of Calvary, is the exact counterpart to the '*clean place*,' at the very spot where the ashes of so many dead men were to be found all around."¹³³

The main point in this legislation was that "the fire" on the altar of burnt offerings was "never (not) to go out" when the Israelites were encamped (vv. 9, 12, 13). 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 by the burnt offering sacrifice 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."¹³⁴

"Those who minister must take care in personal sanctification and spiritual service to ensure that people may always find access to the holy God."¹³⁵

The law of the meal offering for the priests 6:14-18

God considered the meal (grain), sin, and trespass offerings "most (more) holy" (6:17, 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 most (more) holy *after* they were offered, not because they were more holy in themselves (when offered on the altar).

The "layman who touched these most holy things became holy through the contact, so that henceforth he had to guard against defilement in the same manner as the sanctified priests (21:1-8), though without sharing the priestly rights and prerogatives. This necessarily placed him in a position which would involve many inconveniences in connection with ordinary life."¹³⁶

¹³³Bonar, p. 74.

¹³⁴Schultz, p. 67.

¹³⁵Ross, p. 161.

¹³⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 2:319.

These instructions about the meal (grain) offering clarify the priests' rights. They could "eat" this offering, but only "in a holy place," such as the tabernacle courtyard ("court of the tent of meeting"). The priests enjoyed special privileges, but they also had to observe high standards of behavior. This is also true of Christians (cf. Luke 12:48; James 3:1; 1 Pet. 4:17).

The meal (cereal) offering of the priests 6:19-23

The priest was to offer a daily meal (or cereal or grain or cake) offering, every morning and evening, for himself and the other priests. This was just one small offering, half of which he offered with the morning burnt offering, and half with the evening burnt offering. Unlike other meal offerings, he burned it up completely on the altar ("entirely offered up in smoke . . . burned entirely"); he was not to eat a sacrifice that he offered for himself. This was the only "meal (grain) offering" that was not eaten. This sacrifice represented the *constant worship* of the priests as they served God day by day. This 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 we 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."¹³⁷

The law of the sin (purification) offering for the priests 6:24-30

The priests slaughtered the burnt sin offerings "in the [same] place": on the *north side* of the altar of burnt offerings (v. 25).

"'Thereby was figured,' says Ainsworth, 'that Christ, our Sin-offering, should be crucified on Mount Calvary, which was on the north-west side of Jerusalem . . .'"¹³⁸

Again the emphasis is on what the priests could and could not eat. They were not to confuse "the holy (consecrated) and the common" ("profane," 10:10; cf. v. 18), but to carefully distinguish them.

"People need to know that they have been forgiven and that they can enter God's presence with confidence; they need the reality of forgiveness, not simply the hope of forgiveness. If worshipers come away from a worship service unsure of their standing with God, then something has gone terribly wrong."¹³⁹

¹³⁷Ross, p. 165.

¹³⁸Bush, p. 64.

¹³⁹Ross, p. 167.

The law of the trespass (reparation, "guilt") offering for the priests 7:1-10

Here we have more detail concerning the ritual involved in this offering than we read thus far (ch. 5). The procedures for slaughtering the trespass ("guilt") offering and sprinkling its blood were the same as for the burnt offering (1:5). 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.¹⁴⁰ They were to eat the meat of this offering (cf. 6:22).

"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."¹⁴¹

The law of the peace (fellowship) offering for the priests 7:11-36

This is the only offering that ordinary Israelites could eat, but the priests also ate a share.

"The 'leavened cakes' [v. 13] intimate the corruption of the offerer . . ."¹⁴²

This pericope clarifies *who* could eat *what* and *when*. For many Israelites, eating the peace offering was probably the main, and perhaps the only, time they ate *meat*. Consequently this pericope also contains general regulations governing the consumption of meat (vv. 22-27).

"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 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."¹⁴³

One writer summarized the lessons of 7:11-21 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).
 - C. Gratitude needs to be expressed in a group (15).

¹⁴⁰Bush, p. 67.

¹⁴¹Ross, p. 177.

¹⁴²Bonar, p. 133.

¹⁴³Harrison, p. 79.

- 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)."¹⁴⁴

"Celebration of being at peace with God requires the generosity and purity of those who share the common meal."¹⁴⁵

The seriousness of eating while being ceremonially "unclean" is clear from the penalty imposed (vv. 20-21), which was direct divine judgment, usually death.¹⁴⁶ "Clean" in these contexts has nothing to do with being free of dirt or filth; it indicates the conditional state in which participation in the rituals involving communion with God was possible. The phrase "cut off from his people" sometimes refers to *death*, and other times refers to *excommunication* or the *termination of one's line*, depending on the context.¹⁴⁷ Here it may mean "excommunication."¹⁴⁸ God also prescribed this penalty for anyone who ate "the fat" (God's portion, "from which an offering by fire is offered to the LORD," v. 25) or *meat* from which the "blood" had not been drained ("You are not to *eat* any blood," emphasis supplied; v. 26-27; 1 Sam. 14:33).

"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."¹⁴⁹

The "fat" apparently refers to the best portions of the healthiest animals, not just to what we consider the actual fat (cf. Gen. 4:4).¹⁵⁰ "Blood" represented *life*; it was the medium of atonement for humankind, and, as such, was inappropriate for human consumption (cf. 17:10-14; Gen. 9:4; Acts 15:29). God deserves the lives and best of His people. There may have also been a *hygienic* reason for God's prohibiting of the eating of animal fat.

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

¹⁴⁴Brian Rosner, "The Ritual of the Peace Offering: Leviticus 7:11-21," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):85-90.

¹⁴⁵Ross, p. 184.

¹⁴⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 125. See my note on Gen. 17:4.

¹⁴⁷Harris, p. 558; J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, p. 100; and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, pp. 457-60.

¹⁴⁸Bonar, p. 137.

¹⁴⁹Noordtzij, p. 88.

¹⁵⁰Ross, p. 186.

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."¹⁵¹

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

The "wave ('elevation' NRSV) offering" (vv. 30-34) describes one way in which the priest and the offerer presented the offerings of consecration:

". . . 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."¹⁵²

"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."¹⁵³

"In our obligations to give our best to God, we must recognize that a portion of our giving belongs to those who minister [vv. 35-36]."¹⁵⁴

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

This section closes with a summary. This is a common feature of Leviticus (cf. 11:46-47; 13:59; 14:54-57; 15:32-33).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹Harrison, p. 58.

¹⁵²Keil and Delitzsch, 2:328.

¹⁵³Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 126.

¹⁵⁴Ross, p. 193.

¹⁵⁵For a summary chart of the five offerings, see the Appendix at the end of these notes.

"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 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."¹⁵⁶

"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."¹⁵⁷

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—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*."¹⁵⁸

B. THE INSTITUTION OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD CHS. 8—10

The account of the consecration of the priests and the priesthood (chs. 8—10) follows the regulations concerning offerings. This section of Leviticus clarifies how all the various approaches to God were to be mediated under the Old Covenant.

¹⁵⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 2:331-32.

¹⁵⁷Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 128.

¹⁵⁸Edersheim, pp. 84, 85.

"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."¹⁵⁹

"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 Aaron.

"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."¹⁶⁰

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

The 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—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—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. Now this privilege became the portion of the faithful tribe of Levi. The main function of the priests in Israel was to guard and protect the holiness of God.

¹⁵⁹Ross, p. 197.

¹⁶⁰Noordtzi, p. 92.

"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."¹⁶¹

"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."¹⁶²

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

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."¹⁶³

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

God gave a double command to Moses (vv. 1-3), which Moses obeyed (vv. 4-30). Then Moses gave Aaron a command (vv. 31-35), which Aaron obeyed (v. 36). Within the first section (vv. 1-30) there is a chiasmic structure. God commanded Moses to take Aaron and his sons (v. 2) and to assemble the congregation (v. 3). Moses then assembled the congregation (vv. 4-5) and carried out God's orders concerning Aaron and his sons. 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).

¹⁶¹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 132.

¹⁶²Ross, p. 199.

¹⁶³*The Nelson . . .*, p. 186.

"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."¹⁶⁴

The assembling of the congregation 8:1-5

"It was manifestly expedient for the Israelitish people to be satisfied that Aaron's appointment to the high dignity of the priesthood was not a personal intrusion, nor a family arrangement between him and Moses; and nothing, therefore, could be a more profound conviction of the divine origin and authority of the priestly institution, than to summon a general assembly of the people, and in their presence perform the solemn ceremonies of inauguration, which had been prescribed by divine authority."¹⁶⁵

Evidently a representative group of "the [Israelite] congregation," likely *the elders*, responded to Moses' summons to witness Aaron's ordination in the tabernacle courtyard.¹⁶⁶

Aaron's washing and clothing 8:6-9

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, plays down his or her individual personality. *Physical washing* (v. 6) was symbolic of *spiritual cleansing*. The reference to being "washed . . . with water" may imply a *baptismal* washing of full immersion.¹⁶⁷

"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."¹⁶⁸

The high priest's investiture with the garments of glory ("tunic," "sash," "robe," "ephod," "artistic band," "the Urim and the Thummim," "breastpiece," "turban," and "golden plate" ["holy crown"], vv. 7-9) pictured his endowment with the qualities required for the discharge of his duties.

"It may be noted in passing here that the three sections of the sanctuary were reflected in the high priestly attire: the robe [v. 7] corresponded to the courtyard, the ephod [v. 7] to the Holy Place, and the breastpiece [v. 8] to the Most Holy Place."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴Bush, p. 73.

¹⁶⁵Jamieson, et al., p. 89.

¹⁶⁶See my comments on the "congregation" at 4:13.

¹⁶⁷See Rooker, p. 142; and Milgrom, *Leviticus 1—16*, p. 501.

¹⁶⁸Ross, p. 210. Cf. Exod. 30:17-21.

¹⁶⁹Noordtjij, p. 95.

The anointing 8:10-13

The "anointing" of the tabernacle and the priests with the "[holy] anointing oil" (vv. 10-12) signified their "sanctification," whereby God *set them apart* to holy purposes, and *filled* them with the power of His Spirit. *Filling* and *indwelling* are two distinct ministries of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit *did not permanently* "indwell" these priests, as He does all believer-priests today, but He *did temporarily* "fill" them (i.e., control them).¹⁷⁰ The significance of the *sevenfold* sprinkling seems to have been that "seven" was "the covenant number,"¹⁷¹ the guarantee of the completeness of the divine work, as in the seven days of creation.

The leaders anointed the *vessels* ("all that was in [the tabernacle]" because they became the instruments of blessing to the Israelites. The Israelites may have repeated this ritual with each new generation of priests, though Moses did not state this in the text. In addition to Israel's high priests, beginning with Aaron here, Israel's kings (1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13), and at least one of her prophets were also anointed with oil (1 Kings 19:16).

The procedure for consecrating consisted of two parts:

1. The priests experienced consecration to their office by washing, clothing ("tunics," "sashes," and "caps"), and anointing (vv. 6-13).

"They were clothed with the holy garments, Aaron with his (v. 7-9) which typified the dignity of Christ our great high priest, and his sons with theirs (v. 13), which typified the decency of Christians, who are spiritual priests."¹⁷²

"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."¹⁷³

2. Israel's leaders then "consecrated" the *sacrificial rites* (the "ordination" ceremonies) by which the priests experienced consecration (vv. 14-36).

The ordination offerings 8:14-30

Moses, as the "mediator of the covenant," performed the sacrificial ceremony recorded in these verses. He presented three offerings:

1. He offered a young ox ("bull") as a sin (purification) offering (vv. 14-17).
2. He offered a "ram" as a burnt offering (vv. 18-21).
3. Then he offered a "second ram" as a peace (fellowship) offering (vv. 22-30).

¹⁷⁰See Walvoord, pp. 70-73.

¹⁷¹Keil and Delitzsch, 2:336.

¹⁷²Henry, p. 121.

¹⁷³Ibid.

Moses applied "blood" from the peace offering to Aaron's "right ear" (earlobe), "right hand" ("thumb"), and "right foot" ("big toe," v. 23).

". . . 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."¹⁷⁴

The *sprinkling* of the priests and their "garments" with "blood" and "[holy] anointing oil" (v. 30) 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, 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."¹⁷⁵

Further instruction to Aaron 8:31-36

A *meal* ("eat it [the meat of the ordination sacrifice] there [at the doorway of the tabernacle] together with the bread") concluded the consecration ("ordination") of the priests, because with *it* the priests entered into more intimate fellowship with God. This relationship entitled them to very special blessings and privileges that God did not grant the other Israelites. 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).

The consecration/ordination lasted "seven days." During this time, the priests were not to leave the tabernacle courtyard ("doorway of the tent of meeting") "day [or] night" ("remain . . . keep the charge"; v. 35). Their role during their seven-day ordination was that of *worshippers* rather than "priests." Evidently Moses repeated the consecration ritual on each of these seven days ("he will ordain you through seven days"; v. 33). This would have emphasized its importance to the Israelites.

"A man may defile himself in a moment, but sanctification and the removal of uncleanness is generally a slower process."¹⁷⁶

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

¹⁷⁴Keil and Delitzsch, 2:340.

¹⁷⁵Henry, p. 121.

¹⁷⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 144.

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, and the enablement that made the priests acceptable in their service. Likewise, He provides all that *we* as His New Testament priests need also.

"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 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]."¹⁷⁷

"Those who lead the congregation in spiritual service must be fully consecrated to the LORD."¹⁷⁸

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

This chapter explains how the priests carried out the duties associated with their *induction* into their various offices. The events recorded took place on the "eighth day" (v. 1), 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.

As noted previously, the structure of chapter 9 is 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" from God *fell* ("came out from before the LORD"), symbolizing His acceptance of the sacrifices by *consuming* them (vv. 22-24).

Moses' commands to Aaron and the congregation and their obedience 9:1-6

Ironically, the first sacrifice Aaron was commanded to offer was "a calf," *as if* to atone for his making of "the golden calf" (cf. Exod. 32). The *sinfulness* of man is self-evident, in that Aaron had to offer *so many* different offerings, in order to cover both his sins and the sins of the people. 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). The purpose of these sacrifices was so that "the glory of the LORD" might "appear to" His people (vv. 4, 6; cf. Exod. 16:10). 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) among His people (cf. Exod. 24:16-17).

¹⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 144-45.

¹⁷⁸Ross, p. 214.

Moses' command to Aaron and his obedience 9:7-21

Aaron first offered a "sin offering" (vv. 8-11), and then a "burnt offering," for himself (vv. 12-14). By offering them publicly "for himself," he was acknowledging publicly that he was a *sinner*, and needed forgiveness.

Then Aaron presented four offerings for the Israelites (vv. 15-21): sin, burnt, meal, and peace. The *variety* of both categories of the sacrifices and types of sacrificial animals stands out even more than their quantity. This probably indicates that the purpose of these sacrifices was not to atone for specific sins. It was rather for the general sinfulness of the people, to dedicate the people to the worship of Yahweh as He specified, and to pray for God's blessing on them.¹⁷⁹

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 was now giving Aaron a second chance.

Fire from the Lord 9:22-24

After offering these sacrifices, Aaron "blessed" the people (v. 22). He "stepped down," perhaps from a ramp near the altar of burnt offerings, on which he may have been standing to address the people. When they "entered" the tabernacle, probably Moses *took* Aaron into the *holy place* in order to *present him to the Lord* and to *pray for God's blessing* with him (v. 23).

"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 praises of God's spiritual priests are more pleasing to God than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices."¹⁸⁰

"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]."¹⁸¹

The *miracle*, that caused the strong reaction of the people ("shouted and fell facedown"; v. 24), was not so much that fire fell on the sacrifices and "ignited" them. They were *already* burning. It was that the fire that fell "consumed" the sacrifices *suddenly* (the strong force of the Hebrew verb meaning "burned up completely," "ate up," "devoured").

¹⁷⁹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 149.

¹⁸⁰Henry, p. 122.

¹⁸¹Keil and Delitzsch, 2:348.

In this way, God manifested His satisfaction with this first sacrifice that the newly consecrated priests offered. This is the first of five times, that the Old Testament records, that God "sent fire from heaven"—in this case "out from before the LORD's presence," 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 Hebrew word *ranan*, translated "shouted," means "to shout for joy." This is the first occurrence of a word for "joy" in the Bible.

"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."¹⁸²

Essentially "worship" is "communion with God."¹⁸³

"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."¹⁸⁴

"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."¹⁸⁵

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 before the congregation, as one who would not suffer His commandments to be broken with impunity."¹⁸⁶

"Holiness is dangerous unless approached by the proper persons and according to the proper rules."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸²Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 151.

¹⁸³See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Leviticus," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1:1067.

¹⁸⁴Sailhamer, p. 330.

¹⁸⁵Ross, p. 227.

¹⁸⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 2:350.

¹⁸⁷Norman H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, p. 58.

"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)."¹⁸⁸

Chapter 10 records another instance of failure after great blessing (cf. the Fall, Noah's drunkenness, Abram's misrepresentation of Sarah, the Golden Calf). This incident was significant, because it taught the people the importance of proper worship at the inception of the priesthood. Because God is *holy*, we must approach Him *only* as He directs. We will read of a similar event in Numbers 16 (Korah, et al.).

Fire from the Lord again 10:1-7

Moses did not explain Nadab and Abihu's exact offense in the text. However, the "strange fire" 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), or offering incense at a time or in a way contrary to God's prescription.¹⁸⁹ Josephus wrote that they did not bring the sacrifices that Moses told them to bring, but sacrifices that they had formerly brought.¹⁹⁰

The incident 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 it was, their action constituted disobedience to God's word—regardless of how good its "ends," or their own motives, might have seemed to them. They acted in "the holy things of God" without first seeking the will of God.

This incident should warn modern readers against worshipping God in ways that we prefer because they make us *feel* "good." We must be careful about worship that is designed to produce "special feelings or sensational effects" in the worshipers, rather than worship that honors God. Some forms of contemporary and traditional worship may reflect the selfish spirits of Nadab and Abihu. Such "self-made worship" often has "the appearance of wisdom" (Col. 2:23).

"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 holding up the incense of vain worship to the Lord."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 153.

¹⁸⁹Noordtzi, p. 108. See Rooker, p. 157, for other theories.

¹⁹⁰Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3:8:7. Josephus reflects some traditional Jewish opinions.

¹⁹¹Bonar, p. 195.

The *same* source of consuming "fire," that had sanctified Aaron's service, now brought destruction on Nadab and Abihu—because they "offered strange fire" (v. 1), and had not sanctified God ("treated [Him] as holy," vv. 2-3; cf. Exod. 24:17; Num. 11:1; 16:35; Deut. 5:22; 1 Sam. 15:22; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; Heb. 12:29).

"Men's punishments are often marked by a striking analogy with their sins."¹⁹²

Previously the fire had fallen only after all the sacrifices had been offered (killed, prepared, and placed on the altar), but now it fell instantly. Then it had signified God's blessing, but now it manifested His judgment. Then the people had rejoiced, but now they were silent.

"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."¹⁹³

Moses then explained God's judgment to Aaron ("By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy"; v. 3). Aaron did not reply ("kept silent"), apparently because he accepted the rightness of God's action in judging his sons' sin.

"If we reflect how holy a thing God's worship is, the enormity of the punishment will by no means offend us. Besides, it was necessary that their religion should be sanctioned at its very commencement; for if God had suffered the sons of Aaron to transgress with impunity, they would have afterwards carelessly neglected the whole law. This, therefore, was the reason for such great severity, that the priests should anxiously watch against all profanation."¹⁹⁴

The "fire" had not "consumed" (incinerated) Nadab and Abihu, but simply killed them. Aaron and his surviving sons were not to demonstrate any dissatisfaction with God's judgment ("Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes"; vv. 4-7). But God permitted the people ("your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel") to "mourn," because of the loss the nation experienced in the death of these priests, and also so they would remember His punishment a long time. The "anointing oil" symbolized "the Spirit of God" who gives life. For this oil to have any contact with death was inappropriate.

"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 secondborn resulted in God passing over them for blessing. They disqualified themselves from some of the inheritance that could have been theirs had they remained faithful.

¹⁹²Bush, p. 91.

¹⁹³Sailhamer, p. 330.

¹⁹⁴John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, 3:431, cited by Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 156-57.

The Lord's commands to Aaron 10:8-11

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.

The "strong drink" referred to (v. 8) was a specific intoxicating drink. The commentators differ in their understanding of its composition. It was inappropriate for the priests to drink this concoction *on duty* ("when you come into the tent of meeting"). 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.¹⁹⁵ 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).¹⁹⁶

"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."¹⁹⁷

For the Old Testament Jew, everything in life was either "holy" or "common," and what was "common" was either "clean" (approved, usable) or "unclean" (prohibited, unusable).¹⁹⁸

Leaders of the Christian church should also be temperate in their use of "drink" (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 2:2-3).

"The conclusion one could draw from these passages is that the common or regular use of intoxicants is incompatible with spiritual service or spiritual growth. Their use was permissible in ordinary life, especially for great celebrations; but it may not have been wise or advisable. Moses' warning to the priests of his day should be carefully considered today, in an age when alcoholism is rampant."¹⁹⁹

"Those set aside for service to the holy God must sanctify the LORD before the people by how they conduct themselves in ministry."²⁰⁰

"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."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵E.g., Harrison, p. 114; and Bush, pp. 83, 88.

¹⁹⁶E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 2:354.

¹⁹⁷Merrill, "A Theology . . .," pp. 57-58.

¹⁹⁸Wiersbe, p. 254.

¹⁹⁹Ross, pp. 236-37.

²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 238.

²⁰¹Wiersbe, p. 265.

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.

". . . here they are assured that all their privileges remain to them as full as ever."²⁰²

"Afflictions should rather quicken us to our duty than take us off from it."²⁰³

"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."²⁰⁴

Aaron had not finished eating his portion of the sin offering, however, because of God's judgment of his eldest sons. Perhaps the awesome *holiness* of God had so impressed Aaron, that he felt unworthy to eat what he had offered as a sin offering. He may have also had a nagging guilty conscience over the golden calf incident, further augmenting his sense of unworthiness. He probably concluded that mourners should not take part in sacrificial meals (When things like these happened to me, if I had eaten a sin offering today, would it have been good in the sight of the LORD?" cf. Deut. 26:14).²⁰⁵ The latter explanation is preferable to the one that suggests Aaron refused to eat simply because he was grief-stricken by the death of his sons. The "grief" motivation probably would not have been as acceptable to Moses as the former. Moses gave Aaron permission to leave the rest of the sin offering uneaten. God is more gracious with those who fear Him—and yet make mistakes—than He is with those who do not fear Him as they should.

"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*.'"²⁰⁶

²⁰²Bonar, p. 201.

²⁰³Henry, pp. 123-24.

²⁰⁴Jacob Milgrom, "Two Kinds of Hatta't," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976):337.

²⁰⁵Sailhamer, p. 332.

²⁰⁶Bonar, p. 205.

"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."²⁰⁷

"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 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*."²⁰⁸

This concludes the narrative of the *induction* of Aaron and his sons into the priestly office (chs. 8—10). The events of these eight days in Israel's history made an indelible impression on the people, and pointed out the necessity of worshipping their *holy* God exactly as He specified.

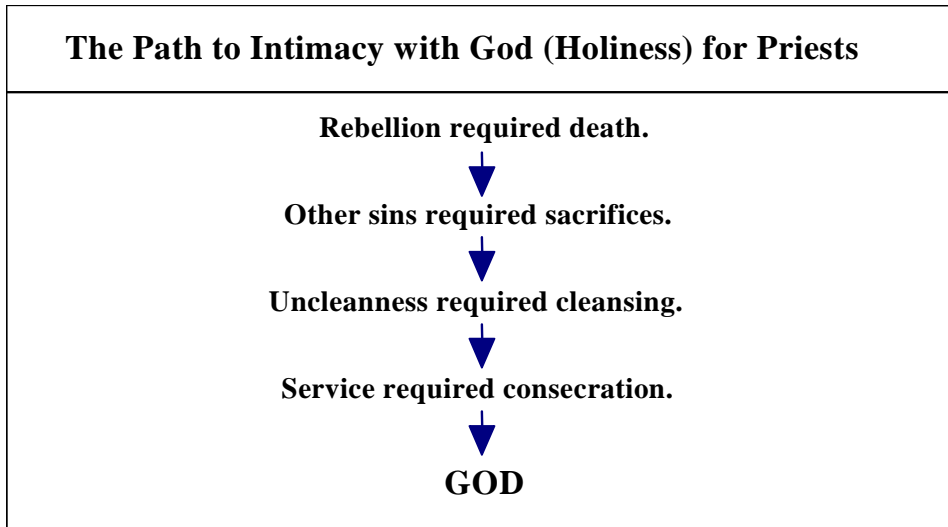
Holiness is a concept that we can learn a lot about from Leviticus. By definition, "holy" means "set apart," or "different." God is *holy* because He is *different* from sinful man. He is at one end of the purity spectrum, and we are at the other. If we want to "draw near to God," that is, enjoy an intimate relationship with Him, we must become *more holy*, and He enables us to do this. "Without holiness . . . no one" will "see" God (Heb. 12:14; cf. Matt. 5:8).

God has made us 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 sanctification."

The following diagram shows the path that Israel's priests had to follow, in order to enjoy intimacy with God, or *practical holiness*. This suggests what *we* also need to do, as New Testament believer-priests, to draw near to God.

²⁰⁷Bush, p. 90.

²⁰⁸Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 159-60.



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 narrative to more legislation.

"Whereas the first two sections [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."²⁰⁹

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)

²⁰⁹Noordtzi, p. 116.

These five chapters, 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 on purity (11—15) help explain what uncleanness means, and teach 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."²¹⁰

"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."²¹¹

The rationale behind the *order* of these various laws seems to be based on the length of time for uncleanness: Violation of *dietary* laws (ch. 11) resulted in uncleanness for hours; *childbirth* uncleanness (ch. 12) left the woman unclean for months; and *skin and covering* (clothing and shelters) uncleanness (chs. 13—14) could mean uncleanness for years. *Genital discharges* (ch. 15) resulted in uncleanness for hours, weeks, or years.²¹²

1. Uncleanness due to contact with certain animals 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 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)."²¹³

"Uncleanness" was not all the same under the Old Covenant; 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

²¹⁰Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 467.

²¹¹Keil and Delitzsch, 2:357.

²¹²Hartley, p. 137.

²¹³Sailhamer, p. 332.

defiling things caused required *more involved rites*. 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.²¹⁴

"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."²¹⁵

Many ancient nations and religions observed lists of "clean" and "unclean" foods. These lists differed from one another, but undoubtedly 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. This recognition shows that the Fall has affected the whole creation, not just humankind (Rom. 8:19-22).

There have been at least six major different explanations for the rationale behind the clean and unclean distinctions in the Mosaic Law.²¹⁶ 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.²¹⁷ The problem with this approach is that it is negative; it offers no explanation that human beings can understand. Nevertheless this explanation may be the best one. 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 deities. Avoidance of these unclean animals then was a mark of the Israelites' fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant.²¹⁸ 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.

²¹⁴G. Bare, *Plants and Animals of the Bible*, p. iii.

²¹⁵Harrison, p. 27. E.g., Henry, pp. 124-25.

²¹⁶See 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*, "Clean and Unclean," by Charles L. Feinberg, pp. 238-41; Rooker, pp. 170-75.

²¹⁷See Hertz, p. 93; Merrill, "A Theology . . .," p. 58; *ibid.*, "Leviticus," p. 81; and Rooker, pp. 173, 174.

²¹⁸See Martin Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies*, pp. 56-59; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1—11:26*, p. 157; and Ross, p. 255.

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.²¹⁹ This view has gained popularity in recent times, as many readers have become increasingly concerned about health care and medical science.²²⁰ 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."²²¹

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 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" 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. The unclean animals represented sinful people.²²² Some commentators have adopted this view, but 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.
5. The distinction is *aesthetic*, based on the animal's appearance.²²³ This view seems entirely subjective.
6. The distinction is *ethical*. This view is similar to view 4 above. The animals chosen taught reverence for life.²²⁴ This view also seems highly subjective, and is impossible to prove.²²⁵

Probably a combination of these reasons is best, though the basic idea underlying holiness and cleanness seems to have been wholeness and normalcy.²²⁶ From studying

²¹⁹See Samuel Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus*.

²²⁰See Sim McMillan, *None of These Diseases*; and Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990)270-85.

²²¹Harris, p. 569.

²²²See Edersheim, p. 343; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; Bonar, pp. 214-15; and Keil and Delitzsch, 2:372.

²²³Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:136.

²²⁴Jacob Milgrom, "The Biblical Diet Laws as an Ethical System," *Interpretation* 17 (1963):291

²²⁵See 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.

²²⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 18-25, 169; Rooker, p. 192; Ross, p. 253; and Longman and Dillard, p. 90.

these lists, it appears that God may have regarded *imperfection* or *abnormality* in the animal world as conditions that define an animal as "unclean."

"Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong."²²⁷

This does not explain all the cases, however. For example, why did God declare sheep and goats "clean," but pigs and camels "unclean"? 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.²²⁸ One problem with this "normalcy" view is that it seems to run counter to the fact that God declared all animals, including pigs and camels, "good" after He created them (Gen. 1:25).²²⁹

"Further analysis demonstrates that each sphere of the animal realm is similarly structured. Water creatures divide into the clean and the unclean, but land and air creatures further subdivide into clean animals that may be eaten and clean animals that may be sacrificed as well as eaten. This threefold division of animals—unclean, clean, and sacrificial—parallels the divisions of mankind, the unclean, i.e., those excluded from the camp of Israel, the clean, i.e., the majority of ordinary Israelites, and those who offer sacrifice, i.e., the priests. This tripartite division of both the animal world and the human realm is no coincidence, as is demonstrated by various laws in the Pentateuch, which apply similar principles to man and beast (Gen. 1:29-30; Exod. 13:2, 13; 20:10; 21:28ff.; 22:28-29 [Eng. 29-30]; Lev. 26:22). Once it is admitted that the animals symbolize the human world, the uncleanness of the birds of prey becomes intelligible: they are detestable because they eat carrion and flesh from which the blood has not been drained properly, acts that make men unclean (Lev. 11:13-19; cf. 11:40 and 17:10ff.)."²³⁰

It seems to me that the basis for these distinctions is the *character* of God, specifically a combination of the "holiness" and the "love" of God.

Because God is "holy" (separate from all forms of impurity and commonality), He required that His people make distinctions that separated them from these things. 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 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.

²²⁷Douglas, p. 53.

²²⁸Ibid., pp. 54-55.

²²⁹Wolf, p. 177.

²³⁰Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 170.

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 ("barrier of the dividing wall") that separated Jews and Gentiles for so long (Eph. 2:11-22).

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."²³¹

Rashi, quoted 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, from the Hebrew initials of his name, as Rashi, did more to popularize Biblical and Talmudic learning than any other commentator in Jewish history."²³²

11:1-8 Note that God began positively: He told the Israelites what they *could* eat ("whatever divides the hoof . . . *and* chews the cud . . . that you may eat"; vv. 2-3; cf. Gen. 1:29-30; 2:16-17). Then He gave them a list of "unclean" *land* animals (vv. 4-8).

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.²³³

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], conies [rock hyraxes], and hares). However, these animals *do appear* to chew their food thoroughly *before* swallowing, so this may be what the Israelites thought of as "chewing the cud."²³⁴

²³¹Sailhamer, p. 39.

²³²Abram Sachar, *A History of the Jews*, p. 185.

²³³G. S. Cansdale, *Animals of the Bible*, p. 43.

²³⁴Robert O. Coleman, "Leviticus," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 93.

Any *dead* animal was "unclean," perhaps because death was not the normal condition of an animal.

"Sheep, goats, and oxen were the standard sacrificial animals of pastoralists. They have in common cloven hoofs and rumination. 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)."²³⁵

- 11:9-12 Perhaps the Israelites could eat "water" creatures with "fins and scales," because these are the normal means of propulsion among fishes. As has already been observed (v. 3), the means of locomotion (the hooves on land animals) and the mode of eating were the two types of tests used to distinguish between clean and unclean animals. Water creatures without fins and scales, correspondingly, do not have the normal means of locomotion for their element.
- 11:13-19 Moses distinguished various kinds of birds in these verses. God prohibited 20 "abhorrent" varieties. Again 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 (ch. 17).
- 11:20-23 These verses deal with "insects." Perhaps the fact that certain insects "swarmed," rather than flew in a more direct and "natural" way, made them unclean. "Locusts" that hopped may have been clean, since this is the normal form of locomotion for birds on land, which they resembled. The varieties of locusts that *crawled* were unclean, perhaps because their crawling appeared to be an abnormal movement for this insect.²³⁶

Pollution by animals and its treatment 11:24-47

The rest of this chapter addresses questions arising from human contact with unclean animals. Only "dead" animals polluted human beings ("whoever touches their carcass becomes unclean," 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).

²³⁵Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 172-73.

²³⁶Douglas, p. 56.

11:24-28 In this section, Moses passed along more specific directions concerning defilement from carrion (animal carcasses). Walking on "paws," which look like *hands walking*, appears unnatural (to some). This may be the reason why land animals that move that way were considered unclean.

11:29-38 These verses deal with "swarming" creatures and the contamination they create. "Swarming" may have been regarded as an unnatural, chaotic means of locomotion—swarming through the air; crawling, slithering, scurrying on land. The norm would have been orderly progress. Anything on which a swarming insect fell or landed became contaminated ("unclean," v. 32). Those objects that water would cleanse could be reused, but those that water would not cleanse, such as an "earthenware vessel," could not be reused, and had to be destroyed.

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 impure ("shall be clean"), only the person who fished the dead animal out would be "unclean." God may have granted this exception, since *declaring* water supplies and large containers "unclean," would have had drastic consequences in the arid regions where the Israelites lived. There was also apparently a distinction between "seed for sowing," which was "clean," and *seed for eating*, which was pronounced contaminated (vv. 37-38).

11:39-47 God gave further directions about the contaminating effects of *even clean* animals that died (vv. 39-40). In a concluding exhortation (vv. 41-45), He called on His people to "be holy for I am holy" (vv. 44, 45; cf. 19:2; 20:7, 26; 1 Pet. 1:16). These may be the key verses in the book.²³⁷ Our highest duty is to imitate our Creator.

"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."²³⁸

"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, ever present One. Every aspect of daily life was affected by the reality of the presence of God."²³⁹

A final summary states the purpose of these laws: "to distinguish (make a distinction) between the unclean and the clean" (vv. 46-47).

²³⁷Wiersbe, p. 252.

²³⁸Ibid., p. 308.

²³⁹Schultz, pp. 30-31.

". . . 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 . . ." ²⁴⁰

"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." ²⁴¹

"Those who have been redeemed by the holy, sovereign God must demonstrate his holiness in their everyday lifestyles (notably in eating)." ²⁴²

2. Uncleaness due to childbirth ch. 12

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 this 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. Contamination 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). ²⁴³

"The purification enjoined was wholly of a *ceremonial*, and not at all of a *physical*, kind." ²⁴⁴

". . . 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 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." ²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰Bonar, p. 216.

²⁴¹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 183.

²⁴²Ross, p. 261.

²⁴³Bonar, p. 235.

²⁴⁴Bush, p. 115.

²⁴⁵Sailhamer, p. 39. He offered charts comparing the laws in Leviticus with the Flood and Babel stories in Genesis on pp. 40-41 and pp. 338-39.

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."²⁴⁶

The ritual purification of the mother of a newborn son lasted a total of 40 days. For the first "seven" of these, she was *physically* or *medically* impure, *contagiously* "unclean." Even though she had not entered the sanctuary after the birth of her child, her presence in the camp had still contaminated *the altar* (cf. 15:31). That is why she had to offer a sin (purification) offering. Her ritual uncleanness evidently resulted from the woman's bodily discharge that followed the baby's delivery (cf. vv. 4, 5, 7). The *lochia* is a discharge from the vagina that continues for several weeks after childbirth. For the remaining "33 days," she was to remain separate from the sanctuary and anything holy. This second period served the double purpose: of (1) allowing the new mother to regain her health and strength, and (2) restoring her ritual purity. The Law did not regard the newborn child as unclean, however, and "circumcision" was *not* a purification rite for the child. The most extensive discussion of circumcision is in Genesis 17:9-14, not Leviticus 12:3.

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."²⁴⁷

According to this explanation, the strengthening of the new mother's faith was the purpose for the 40-day recovery period.

²⁴⁶Noordtzijs, p. 131.

²⁴⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 2:161. Cf. Exod. 34:28; Deut. 8:2; 1 Kings 19:8; Matt. 4:2.

These purification periods were twice as long ("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."²⁴⁸ Advocates see support for this viewpoint, in the fact that the redemption price of women was about *half* that of men in Israel (27:2-7).

A third possibility is that the distinction resulted from the curse on Eve and *her sex*, that followed the Fall.²⁴⁹

Fourth, there is some medical evidence that the postnatal discharge (*lochia*) lasts longer in the case of a girl.²⁵⁰ If this was true in ancient Israel, this explanation may explain the difference.²⁵¹

A fifth 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."²⁵²

Why should a bloody discharge make someone "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 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."²⁵³

". . . blood is at once [(the same time)] 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."²⁵⁴

"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

²⁴⁸Bush, p. 114.

²⁴⁹Bonar, pp. 236-37.

²⁵⁰D. I. Macht, "A Scientific Appreciation of Leviticus 12:1-5," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933):253-60.

²⁵¹See Sprinkle, p. 644, for several other explanations, and the NET Bible note on 12:5.

²⁵²Wiersbe, p. 269.

²⁵³Douglas, p. 51.

²⁵⁴Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 188.

regarded as a circumstance that was sinful, and therefore needed atonement. The legislation, however, deals with the secretions that occur at parturition, 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."²⁵⁵

"It was the sense of the sacredness of the tabernacle and temple space that made purification from moral and ritual impurity essential."²⁵⁶

"Circumcision" (v. 3) 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, people believed that circumcision was a *hygienic* practice. However, 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.²⁵⁷

Some of Israel's neighbor nations also practiced circumcision. However, 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 conveyed a spiritual message about the faith of the parents.²⁵⁸

"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 worshiping 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."²⁵⁹

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 (v. 8). It also shows that she was a *sinner*, since she offered a *sin offering* (v. 8). 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."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵Harrison, pp. 133-34.

²⁵⁶Sprinkle, p. 654.

²⁵⁷See L. Holt Jr. and R. McIntosh, *Holt Pediatrics*, pp. 125-26.

²⁵⁸See Harris, p. 574.

²⁵⁹Sailhamer, p. 334. This author proceeded to point out parallels between the creation account and this chapter.

²⁶⁰Ross, p. 273.

3. Uncleaness due to skin and covering abnormalities chs. 13—14

Many translations and commentaries have regarded the legislation in these chapters as dealing with *leprosy*, but this is misleading. The confusion has arisen because the term "leprosy" appears in most English texts in these chapters, and English readers automatically think that what we know as modern leprosy is in view. However, as the chapters unfold, it becomes increasingly clear that what is in view is not *modern leprosy* (called "Hansen's disease").²⁶¹ The solution to the problem involves recognizing that the Septuagint version (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 the English translations have simply transliterated this Greek word because of similarities with modern leprosy.

The Greeks, however, used a different term for human leprosy: *elephantiasis*, not *lepra*. That *tsara'at* does not mean *leprosy*, becomes especially clear in chapter 14, where we read that *tsara'at* appeared as mold and mildew in clothes and houses, something modern leprosy does not do. What *tsara'at* does describe is a variety of *abnormalities* that afflicted human skin, as well as clothing, fabrics, and houses, namely coverings of various types. *Lepra* etymologically refers to "scaliness," and *tsara'at* may also.²⁶² Evidently there was enough similarity between these various *abnormalities* for God to deal with all of them together in this section of Leviticus.

The section contains three parts. Moses, in Leviticus, frequently divided various material into three subsections. Each part in this section begins, "The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron" (13:1; 14:1, 33), and it closes, "This is the law for" (13:59; 14:32, 54). "Leprosy" (abnormal skin disease) typifies indwelling sin, and this chapter shows its horrid features (cf. Matt. 15:19).²⁶³

"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*."²⁶⁴

Some commentators have concluded that the Israelites contracted the seed causes of leprosy in Egypt.²⁶⁵ There does not seem to be any Scriptural basis for this view.

²⁶¹See 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.

²⁶²See Hulse, p. 93; and Browne, p. 5.

²⁶³Bonar, p. 239.

²⁶⁴Bush, p. 125.

²⁶⁵E.g., Jamieson, et al., p. 93.

The diagnosis and treatment of abnormalities in human skin and clothing ch. 13

We can further divide this chapter into two parts: (1) the diagnosis and treatment of abnormalities in human skin (vv. 1-46), and (2) the diagnosis and treatment of abnormalities in clothing and similar articles (vv. 47-59). A more detailed outline of the chapter follows.²⁶⁶

Introduction v. 1

First set of tests for skin disease vv. 2-8

Second set of tests for skin disease vv. 9-17

Third set of tests for skin disease in scars vv. 18-23

Fourth set of tests for skin disease in burns vv. 24-28

Fifth set of tests for skin disease in scalp or beard vv. 29-37

A skin disease that is clean vv. 38-39

Baldness and skin disease vv. 40-44

Treatment of those diagnosed as unclean vv. 45-46

Diagnosis and treatment of skin disease in clothing vv. 47-58

Summary v. 59

"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)."²⁶⁷

Rooker saw seven types of infectious skin diseases in verses 1-44: skin eruptions (vv. 1-8), chronic skin disease (vv. 9-17), boils (vv. 18-23), burns (vv. 24-28), sores (vv. 29-37), rashes (vv. 38-39), and baldness (vv. 40-44).²⁶⁸

Before proceeding, we need to note that by "treatment," we do not mean that God *medically* prescribed a way by which people or objects afflicted with "leprosy" would necessarily recover. Rather, the "treatment" dealt with how people were to relate to God and the sanctuary *in view of* these problems. He was not dealing with them here as a Physician, but as a Public Health Inspector. God's objective was not so much their physical recovery, in this legislation, but their *proper participation in worship*.

Furthermore, we should remember that the Jews regarded "leprosy" as a punishment for sin, as, indeed, they generally regarded *any* physical abnormality as a punishment for sin (cf. John 9:1). Whereas all abnormalities are ultimately the result of the Fall, it is a mistake to connect every abnormality with some *specific sin*. Sometimes the connection cannot be discovered, because of the complexity of sin.

²⁶⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 194.

²⁶⁷Noordtzi, p. 134.

²⁶⁸Rooker, pp. 186-92.

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, (4) and 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.²⁶⁹ Some authorities believe that an exact identification, of the various forms of scaly skin disorders described in this chapter, is impossible today.²⁷⁰ Others feel more confident. One authority suggested the following identifications.²⁷¹

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>Leucoderma</i> : a slightly disfiguring condition in which patches of otherwise normal skin lose their natural coloring and become completely white.

13:1 The priests had the responsibility of distinguishing between the clean and the unclean, plus they had to teach the people the difference (10:10-11).

13:2-8 Serious skin diseases apparently began with some sort of swelling or scab or a shiny patch ("bright spot") "on the skin" (v. 2). If the symptoms were serious, this resulted in a diagnosis of uncleanness, but less important conditions might not. Early detection was important, as is also true when it comes to dealing with sin. The priest could pronounce the leper "clean" (v. 6), but he could not pronounce him "cured."

13:9-17 These inspections were appropriate when "raw flesh" (an open sore) appeared in an infected area of the skin. "White hair" in the open sore area was a sure sign of a serious skin disease ("chronic leprosy").

If the afflicted person became completely covered in "white" skin, rather than blotchy infected skin with open sores, the priest was to "pronounce"

²⁶⁹Harris, p. 577.

²⁷⁰Browne, pp. 5-6.

²⁷¹Hulse, pp. 96-97.

him or her "clean." 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 disease was over or not contagious.²⁷² In either case, this was not a case of true leprosy, if the body's whole skin surface was affected and turned white.²⁷³

- 13:18-28 Similarly, "white hair" in a deep infection or scar, that formed following a "boil" or a "burn," indicated a serious skin disease. *Psoriasis* can occur on scars, or at sites of burns and other previous injuries.²⁷⁴
- 13:29-37 "Yellowish hair" indicated another serious skin abnormality: "scale." "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 scaly skin kept spreading, with yellow hair remaining, and no black hair showed up, the person was still infected and "unclean."
- 13:38-39 Patches of skin ("bright spots") go completely white ("white bright spots") when a person contracts *leucoderma* ("eczema"). The law did not regard this type of skin disorder as serious enough to render the afflicted person unclean.
- 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.²⁷⁵
- 13:45-46 *Tearing* one's "clothes," messing the hair ("head uncovered," disheveled), and covering the upper lip ("cover[ing one's] mustache")—were all signs of *mourning* (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?"²⁷⁶

Not every place outside the camp was unclean; there were clean places outside the camp (e.g., 4:12). However, the "unclean" person was to live in an *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 center of the camp.

²⁷²Bush, p. 119; Keil and Delitzsch, 2:380.

²⁷³Edersheim, pp. 357-58.

²⁷⁴Hulse, p. 98.

²⁷⁵Ibid.

²⁷⁶Bush, p. 126.

"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."²⁷⁷

". . . 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.

"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.'"²⁷⁸

"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.

²⁷⁷Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 201.

²⁷⁸Sailhamer, p. 337.

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)."²⁷⁹

The Israelites evidently regarded "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 can enter the presence of the holy God they must be free of all disease. . . . Bodily diseases are incompatible with the holy presence of the LORD."²⁸⁰

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to enter God's presence (cf. Isa. 53:5: "By His scourging we are healed [spiritually now but also physically in the future, at our resurrection]").

"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."²⁸¹

Abnormalities in clothing 13:47-59

God mentioned three different cases of diseased garments in this part of the chapter: a "reddish" or "green spot," indicating a breakout of contamination, in a "linen" or "woolen" piece of clothing, or in any "leather article."

Material objects do not "contract" illnesses, or spread infections like people do, but they do occasionally become contaminated—and can transfer through bodily contact a skin disease or fungus—due to mold, mildew, or some other invasive agent. Mosaic law did not view these *abnormalities* to be as great a threat, for example, as a communicable disease or plague would be, to the health of the Israelites. They did, however, represent deviation from a proper condition.

"Decay or corruption [in and of the environment] is incompatible with the holiness of the LORD and must be removed."²⁸²

²⁷⁹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 203.

²⁸⁰Ross, p. 282.

²⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 283.

²⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 297.

"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."²⁸³

The ritual cleansing of abnormalities in human skin 14:1-32

"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."²⁸⁴

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," ceremonies in which people in abnormal social conditions experience reintegration into ordinary society. Shaving, washing, and offering sacrifices are regular parts of such rites.²⁸⁵ The ritual involved two acts separated by an interval of seven days.

14:1-9 The first act took place outside the camp, and 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 was to "go out" to where the leper was (v. 2).

"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."²⁸⁶

Clean animals, including clean birds, represented Israel.²⁸⁷ *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 enter the covenant fellowship again. These two birds

²⁸³Bonar, p. 259.

²⁸⁴Ross, p. 285.

²⁸⁵See E. R. Leach, *Culture and Communication*, pp. 78-79.

²⁸⁶Bush, p. 135.

²⁸⁷Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 208.

served a symbolic function similar to that of the two goats on the Day of Atonement (ch. 16).²⁸⁸

"Cedar wood" had antiseptic qualities, and was slow to decay, so it probably represented the continuance of life. The "scarlet" color of the thread looked like blood, and symbolized sacrificial blood. The "hyssop" represented purification from the corruption of death, since the priests used this spongy plant for purification in Israel's rituals. The "blood-water" ("blood of the bird that was slain over the running water"), that was used to sprinkle the leper being cleansed, probably signified life and purification.

"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."²⁸⁹

14:10-32 The second act of cleansing took place before the altar of burnt offerings, and restored the former leper to fellowship with the sanctuary and God. First, the leper was to offer a trespass ("guilt") offering (v. 12). This offering compensated God for all the sacrifices, tithes, and firstfruits that the afflicted person could not present during his uncleanness.²⁹⁰ Another view is that the law prescribed a trespass offering because some sickness resulted from sin (cf. Num. 12:9-15; 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Chron. 26:17-21).²⁹¹ The priest then applied blood from this sacrifice to the ("right") ear ("lobe"), ("right") hand ("thumb"), and ("right") foot ("big toe") 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]."²⁹²

The priest then consecrated the "oil" to God by sprinkling it "seven times" before the Lord. He next applied some of the oil to the cleansed leper's "right" earlobe, hand ("thumb"), foot ("big toe"), and "head"—representing his anointing with the power and gifts of God's Spirit. Then the priest performed sin, burnt, and meal offerings for the cleansed leper.

²⁸⁸D. J. Davies, "An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977):397; and J. R. Porter, *Leviticus*, p. 108.

²⁸⁹Bush, p. 135.

²⁹⁰Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 210.

²⁹¹Milgrom, *Cult and . . .*, p. 80.

²⁹²Bush, p. 136.

The "sin offering" cleansed the sanctuary, the "burnt offering" brought reconciliation and represented rededication, and the "meal offering" was a pledge of allegiance.

"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. Therefore, cleansing the diseased person required sacrifices (cf. Luke 5:12-15)."²⁹³

"The steps in the leper's cleansing and restoration picture to us what Jesus Christ has done for sinners."²⁹⁴

"The LORD provided the way for someone restored to health to enter full participation in the covenant community through the ritual of sacrificial atonement. . . .

"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."²⁹⁵

The ritual cleansing of abnormalities in houses 14:33-53

The fact that certain abnormal conditions afflicted houses as well as persons 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."²⁹⁶

"Sin, where that reigns in a house, is a plague there, as it is in a heart."²⁹⁷

²⁹³Harris, p. 582.

²⁹⁴Wiersbe, p. 272.

²⁹⁵Ross, pp. 291-92.

²⁹⁶Bonar, p. 278.

²⁹⁷Henry, p. 128.

This law anticipated life in Canaan, when the Israelites would live in "stone" and "plaster" houses rather than tents. God would "put" the abnormal condition ("mark of leprosy") "on a house," as He likewise did on a person. It did not just pass from person to dwelling by contagion (v. 34). God prescribed the same *rite of purification* (using "two birds," "cedar wood," "scarlet string," and "hyssop") for a house as for a person (vv. 49-53). He did not require sacrifices, because buildings simply have to be clean, not being morally culpable like people. The bird going free (v. 53) suggests Christ's resurrection to some readers.²⁹⁸

". . . 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."²⁹⁹

Wholeness and holiness are not the same, but wholeness reflects holiness.

Summary of these ordinances 14:54-57

The final four verses of this section draw to a conclusion the instructions concerning abnormalities in skin and other coverings (chs. 13—14), by summarizing them and explaining the purpose of the collection. The emphasis in this whole section has been on God's provision for *cleansing*—explaining how something corrupt could be consecrated to use again.

"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."³⁰⁰

"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."³⁰¹

". . . 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."³⁰²

²⁹⁸E.g., Bonar, p. 284.

²⁹⁹Keil and Delitzsch, 2:391.

³⁰⁰Ross, p. 302.

³⁰¹Sailhamer, p. 338.

³⁰²Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 213-14.

4. Uncleanness due to bodily discharges associated with reproduction **ch. 15**

This chapter concludes the regulations on 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."³⁰³

Moses described four cases of secretions from the reproductive organs, in this chapter, 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.³⁰⁴

This chapter may typify "the secret flow of sin from the natural heart" (cf. Rom 7:18).³⁰⁵ The chapter opens with an introductory statement (v. 1), and closes with a summary (vv. 32-33)—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."

The first two cases concern *continuing* and *occasional* emissions of the male. Moses followed these with the last two cases, that 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, mentions sexual intercourse, the most profound expression of the unity and interdependence of the sexes.

"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?"³⁰⁶

³⁰³Ibid., p. 216.

³⁰⁴E.g., Jamieson, et al., p. 96.

³⁰⁵Bonar, p. 287.

³⁰⁶Ibid.

15:1-15 The first case is the secretion ("discharge") caused by some *disease* affecting a man's sexual organs. The Hebrew word *basar*, translated "flesh" (v. 2, et al.), has a wide range of meanings. In this chapter's context, it clearly refers to a woman's "vagina" (v. 19), and likewise apparently to a man's "penis" in verses 2-3. 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), or to a discharge of pus from the urethra.³⁰⁷ In either case, this was a fairly long-lasting ailment (v. 3).

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. However, the structure of the chapter and the references to the sexual organs argue against this view.

Note that the objects that the man sat on during his defilement, those things under him (bed, chair, saddle), became "unclean"—and a source of defilement *themselves*. Also, any direct contact with an unclean man resulted in *uncleanness* for those who touched him (v. 7). Here *basar* evidently refers to any part of the man's body.

"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 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."³⁰⁸

Nevertheless, the uncleanness that these discharges caused was less serious *ritually* (requiring fewer purification rituals) than those associated with skin disease. The man could live at home; he did not need to move outside the camp. He only had to "wash his clothes," "bathe," and wait "until evening" (to be ritually "clean"; vv. 16, 18); he did not need to go through a more elaborate ritual, such as shaving his body, or going through the purification involving two birds, cedar wood, scarlet thread and hyssop. He did, however, have to offer only two inexpensive sacrifices (v. 14; cf. 14:10-20).

³⁰⁷Harrison, p. 160.

³⁰⁸Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 218.

15:16-18 The second case deals with a non-diseased, *voluntary* "emission" of semen. Note that it was not *sexual intercourse*, generally, that produced the uncleanness, but specifically the "seminal emission" in coitus or at other times (cf. Exod. 19:15; 1 Sam. 21:5-6; 2 Sam. 11:4).

"The intent was to keep a legitimate but 'unclean' biological function from defiling that which was [otherwise] holy."³⁰⁹

One writer pointed out that this passage does not condemn masturbation, though he did not argue for the practice.³¹⁰

The purification process involved no sacrifice(s), but only washing and waiting until evening to become "clean" again (vv. 16, 18).

"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."³¹¹

"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."³¹²

"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 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 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."³¹³

³⁰⁹Harrison, p. 162.

³¹⁰James 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.

³¹¹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 219.

³¹²Schultz, p. 78.

³¹³Harrison, pp. 165-66.

"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."³¹⁴

15:19-24 The third case deals with the woman's menstrual cycle ("menstrual impurity"; cf. 2 Sam. 11:4).

"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 duties, and gave her an opportunity of renewing her energy."³¹⁵

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. 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.³¹⁶ 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 passions of the young.

15:25-33 The fourth case involved a woman who experienced continuing menstrual problems beyond her normal 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).

Verse 31 explains the reason for these regulations. God gave them so the Israelites would not fall into serious sin—and punishment ("so that they will not die . . . by . . . defiling My tabernacle")—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 private morality—where legal sanctions are not as effective as in public life.³¹⁷

³¹⁴Ross, p. 307.

³¹⁵Harrison, p. 164.

³¹⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 224.

³¹⁷Douglas, p. 124.

"The sexual processes thus make men [and women] unclean, but that is not the same as saying they are sinful. Uncleanness establishes boundaries of action, but as long as these are not transgressed no guilt is incurred."³¹⁸

What made these secretions "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) caused ritual uncleanness, because they have connection with what is abnormal in terms of regularity. Alternatively, 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, and therefore had no business being anywhere near His holy presence in the tabernacle community camp. They were not unclean because "sex" itself is *sinful*. It is not (Gen. 1:28).

Note the slightly different views of two other 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 (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 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."³¹⁹

"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 . . ."³²⁰

"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.

Jesus' attitude toward the laws about bodily uncleanness 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 Mosaic Law authority, 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

³¹⁸Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 220.

³¹⁹Gordon J. Wenham, "Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev. 15:18)?" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95:3 (1983):434.

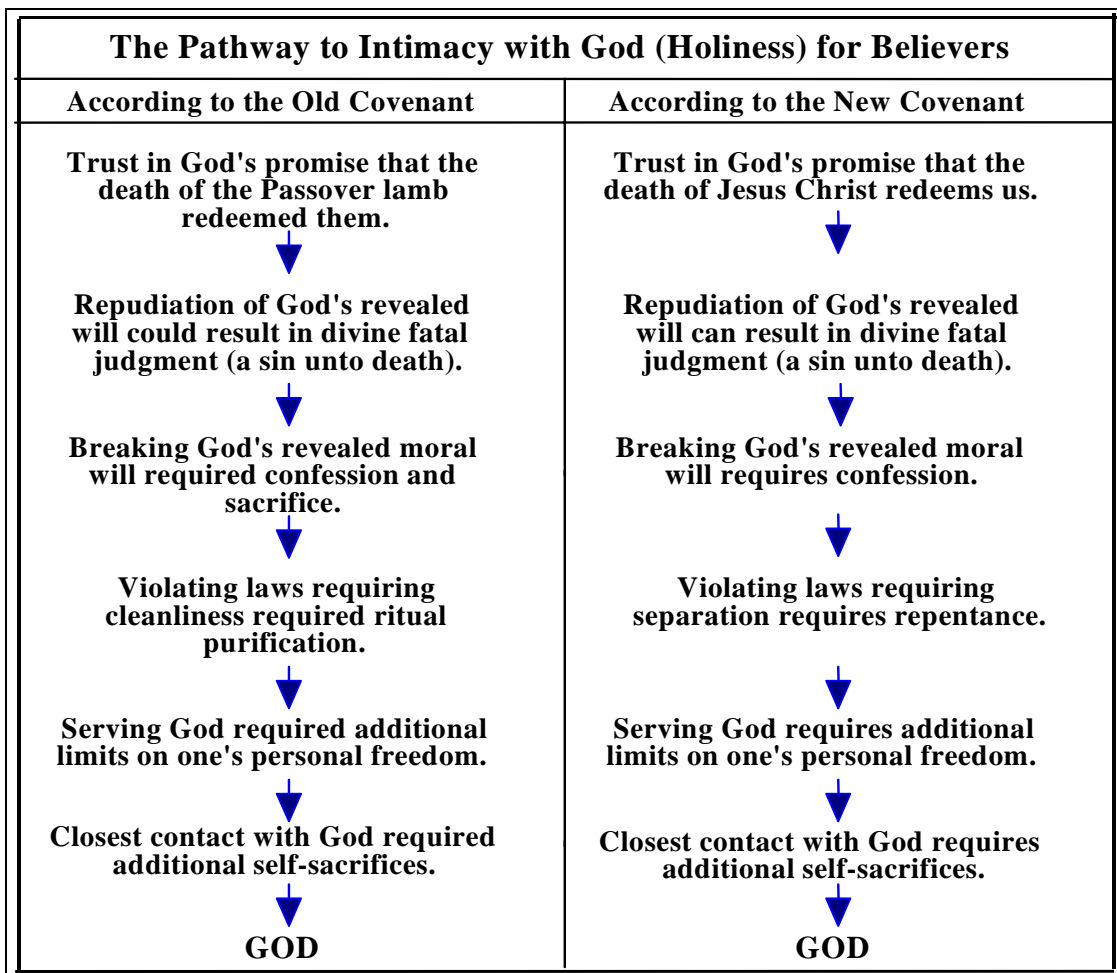
³²⁰Ross, p. 311.

"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.³²¹

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.

D. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT CH. 16

The sacrifices and offerings that Moses described thus far in the Law were not sufficient to cleanse all the defilements of the people. Much sinfulness and uncleanness still needed removing. Therefore God appointed a yearly sacrifice to cleanse all the sins and impurities, not covered by the other sacrifices, that 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.



³²¹See Rooker, pp. 207-10, for a longer explanation of how Jesus Christ fulfilled and ended these laws.

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 reveals the private worship of the Israelites (chs. 17—27).

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 prescribed shortly after, and in view of, that apostasy. 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, contained in chapters 11—15. It is another block of legal material, though the style is quite discursive (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."³²²

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 16:1-2

We learn from verse 1 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—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 (ch. 10). There is also continuity in the emphasis on the importance of *holiness when entering the presence* of Yahweh (ch. 16).

As usual, God revealed these laws to Moses, not directly to the priests or even the high priest, Aaron (v. 2). 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. Later in Israel's history, the prophets continued to communicate instructions from God, not only to the priests, but also to the kings.

³²²Wiersbe, p. 277.

Even "Aaron," for that matter any high priest, was not to enter the presence of God in the *holy of holies* ("holy place inside the veil"), symbolized by the cloud over the mercy seat, "at any time." If he did, he would die, as Nadab and Abihu did. What follows is instruction about *when* and *how* he could enter. 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 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).

Basic requirements for the ceremonies 16:3-5

The high priest had to make elaborate preparations for entering the *holy of holies*, by cleansing himself both spiritually and physically. The offerings he made were a "bull" as a "sin offering" and a "ram" as a "burnt offering," both to cover his own sins (cf. Heb. 5:3). He also had to wear a special uniform, not the ornate garments that he usually wore to carry out his regular duties. This uniform consisted of four white garments ("linen tunic," "linen undergarments," "linen sash," "linen turban"), and 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]."³²³

". . . elaborate garments might have detracted from the somberness of the occasion, when atonement for sin was the basic concern."³²⁴

Aaron had to "wash (bathe) his body in water" symbolizing his moral cleanness. He also offered "two goats" as a "sin offering," and another "ram" as a "burnt offering," for the Israelites. The high priest entered the *holy of holies* ("the holy place inside the veil," v. 2), only once each year, on the Day of Atonement, to make ("with," v. 3) these special sacrifices (cf. Heb. 9:7).

An outline of the ceremonies 16:6-10

Aaron first offered the "bull" as a "sin (purification) offering," to cover his own sins and the sins of the other priests (v. 6). Then he "cast lots" to decide which of the "two goats" would die, as a "sin offering" for the people, and which one would be sent as "the scapegoat" into the wilderness (vv. 7-8).³²⁵ Then he sacrificed "the goat" that was to die ("on which the lot fell"; v. 9). Finally, he brought the other goat ("the scapegoat") "before

³²³Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 230.

³²⁴Schultz, p. 85.

³²⁵Cf. Jamieson, et al., p. 97.

the LORD" (in front of the mercy seat in the holiest place), and then dispatched it into the wilderness (v. 10).

2. Instructions concerning the ritual 16:11-28

More detail follows in this section, that helped Aaron know exactly how to conduct the cultic ritual, and that helps the reader appreciate the implications of atonement.

The blood-sprinkling rites 16:11-19

Verses 11-14 describe the purification offering that Aaron was to offer for himself and the other priests. The act of offering "incense" represented the act of offering the specific prayer (petition, plea) that God would mercifully accept the sacrifices offered to cover the nation's sins and uncleanness.

"The purpose of the incense-smoke was to create a screen which would prevent the High Priest from gazing upon the holy Presence."³²⁶

The second stage of the ceremony, the casting of lots over the goats, was rather simple and required little explanation. The third stage was the sacrificing of one of the goats as a sin offering for the people (vv. 15-19). This sacrifice cleansed (made "atonement for") the sanctuary ("tent of meeting") from the defilement that the sins of the people had caused, making it possible for a holy God to continue to dwell among sinful people ("in the midst of their impurities"; vv. 16, 19-20).

The sprinkling of the blood "on the mercy seat" once (*one time* is understood, since no number of repetitions is mentioned; v. 15) was for the removal of the sins of "the people."³²⁷ The sprinkling of the blood "before (in front of) the mercy seat seven times" (v. 19) was for the cleansing of the sanctuary ("tent of meeting," tabernacle) from the people's sins. The high priest then sprinkled blood on and before the altar of burnt offerings, and on its "horns" and "sides" (vv. 18-19)—"seven times," to cleanse it "from the impurities" of the Israelites.

The scapegoat 16:20-22

These verses describe the fourth and most striking phase of the Day of Atonement's ceremony. The second goat symbolically bore the sins of the people ("all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins"), taking them to an unclean place ("solitary land") far from God "in the wilderness." There is much difference of opinion among the authorities about what "Azazel" means (vv. 8, 10, 26). The etymology of this Hebrew word is obscure. Some believe it means a rocky precipice or wilderness, or some other place where the goat died, or that it may refer to the goat's

³²⁶Hertz, p. 156.

³²⁷See 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."

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.³²⁸ Another view is that it 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.³²⁹ The modern English meaning of "scapegoat" is a person who gets blamed for something he or she did not do, or someone who willingly takes the blame in order to spare someone else.³³⁰

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* 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 guilt (cf. 14:4-7). The word "scapegoat" comes from the AV description of the goat that "escaped" into the wilderness. In Hebrew "scapegoat" is *azazel*. Some interpreters see Christ represented *typically* in the two goats: one as *dying* for our sins, and the other as *rising again* for our justification.³³¹

There were two forms of "laying on of hands" in the Old Testament. The Jews performed one by placing two hands on persons in non-sacrificial contexts. They performed the other by placing one hand on the animal about to be sacrificed (v. 21). The two-handed form emphasized who the recipient of the ritual action was. The one-handed form drew attention to the person who put his hand on the animal.³³² Another view is that the laying on of two hands intensified the idea of *transferring guilt*, specifically for intentional sins.³³³

The cleansing of the participants 16:23-28

The rituals for cleansing those who had had contact with the sacrifices conclude this section.

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.

³²⁸E.g., Bush, p. 149.

³²⁹See Edersheim, pp. 323-24.

³³⁰Wiersbe, p. 278.

³³¹E.g., Bush, p. 152.

³³²See 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; and Sansom, pp. 323-26.

³³³Noam Zohar, "Repentance and Purification: The Significance and Semantics of *ht't* in the Pentateuch," *Journal of Biblical Studies* 107:4 (1988):615, n. 31.

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 ("permanent statute . . . once every year"; cf. Heb. 9:7-12).

All the Israelites ("you") were to "humble [their] souls" (fast and repent), and refrain from ("not do any") "work" in preparation for this event. This self-affliction included 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."³³⁴

The promise of God in verse 30 ("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 efficacy of the sacrifices that He provided and prescribed.³³⁵

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 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 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."³³⁶

³³⁴Noordtzijs, p. 42.

³³⁵For 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.

³³⁶Ross, p. 323.

"Tradition has it, that on the Day of Atonement [in Jesus' time] no less than five hundred priests were wont to assist in the services."³³⁷

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*).³³⁸

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. . .

"In chapter 17, the emphasis shifts to the affairs of the everyday life of the Israelites as God's holy people."³³⁹

In critical circles, scholars are fond of referring to chapters 17—26 as the Holiness Code.³⁴⁰ August Klostermann gave these chapters this name in an article that he wrote in 1877.³⁴¹

"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')."³⁴²

"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

³³⁷Edersheim, p. 139.

³³⁸See further, *ibid.*, The Temple, pp. 302-29.

³³⁹Schultz, p. 91.

³⁴⁰E.g., Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, pp. 127-28.

³⁴¹August Klostermann, "Beiträge zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Pentateuchs," *Zeitschrift für Lutherische Theologie und Kirche*, 38 (1877):416.

³⁴²R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, p. 130.

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."³⁴³

"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.' 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."³⁴⁴

Note how the three major law collections in the Pentateuch fit into the Sinai narrative.³⁴⁵

<u>COVENANT</u>	<u>STIPULATION</u>	<u>FAILURE</u>	<u>COVENANT</u>	<u>STIPULATION</u>	<u>FAILURE</u>	<u>STIPULATION</u>	<u>COVENANT</u>
Covenant Established	<u><i>Decalogue</i></u> <u><i>Covenant Code</i></u> <u><i>Tabernacle</i></u>	Golden Calf	Covenant Renewed	<u><i>Priestly Code</i></u>	Goat Idols	<u><i>Holiness Code</i></u>	Covenant Renewal
Exod. 19; 20:18-21; 24	Exod. 20:1-17; 20:22—23:33; 25—31	Exod. 32	Exod. 33—34	Exod. 35—40; Lev. 16	Lev. 17:1-9	Lev. 17:10— 25:55	Lev. 26

"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."³⁴⁶

³⁴³Harris, p. 592.

³⁴⁴Sailhamer, pp. 49-50.

³⁴⁵The following chart was adapted from *ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 59.

God was dealing with the Israelites on two levels, namely: corporately as a nation, and individually as redeemed individuals. God had distinct purposes for the nation and for the individual. His purpose for the nation comes out clearly in such passages as Exodus 19:5-6 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 doors.

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 28:19-20. 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—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.)."³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 240.

This section of the book begins with a brief narrative section, 17:1-9, dealing with the people's sacrificing to "goat idols" (demons)," that is similar to the golden calf incident in Exod. 32. The high priest was responsible for the golden calf apostasy, but the ordinary Israelites were responsible for the goat idol apostasy. God gave further laws designed for the people, in response to their idolatry, on both occasions.

17:1-2 These directions in chapter 17 pertained to both the priests and the people. The laws in chapters 18—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—22.

17:3-7 God did not permit the Israelites to slaughter certain sacrificial animals (i.e., oxen, lambs, or sheep without blemishes) anywhere except before the altar of burnt offerings ("doorway of the tent of meeting"; vv. 3-5). They could slaughter animals not used as sacrifices elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). Another, less likely view, in my opinion, is that the animals in view were not those intended as sacrifices, but those to be eaten as food.³⁴⁸ 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 we do.

"Meat was eaten only occasionally, except perhaps for the rich, who may have had it regularly."³⁴⁹

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 for sacrifice, anywhere except before the altar, would *die* ("be cut off"; 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."³⁵⁰

"It appears . . . that this phrase ["cut off"] may not only refer to premature death at the hand of God, but hint at judgment in the life to come."³⁵¹

³⁴⁸Bush, pp. 165-66.

³⁴⁹*The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Food," by R. P. Martin.

³⁵⁰Bush, p. 167.

³⁵¹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 242

Similarly, the Christian who commits a "sin unto death" (1 John 5:16; cf. 1 Cor. 11:30) dies prematurely at God's hand. The reasons for so severe a penalty were two. First, each slaughter was to be an offering to God, an act of worship (v. 5). God was the one who owned the animal, since He had given it life. Second, killing animals was commonly part of a pagan ritual connected with worship of the "goat demon" (v. 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 women votaries.³⁵² The Israelites were at this time committing idolatry with this Egyptian god (v. 7). 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.³⁵³

"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 examples of Israel's falling away after 'other gods.'"³⁵⁴

17:8-9 Verses 8-16 contain three laws that relate to each other, and were binding on both the Israelites and the foreigners who lived among them. Apparently God permitted resident aliens to preserve some of their traditional customs (like "hunting," v. 13).

The same prohibition against slaughtering sacrificial animals applied to the offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings. The Israelites were to offer these sacrifices only at the brazen altar, for the reasons already explained.

17:10-14 God also prohibited the ingesting 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

³⁵²Harrison, p. 180.

³⁵³See Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, p. 60; and idem, *Demons in the World Today*.

³⁵⁴Sailhamer, p. 343.

resulted in *kosher* (meaning "fit" or "proper") meat.³⁵⁵ The incidence of *blood disease* in livestock was much higher in ancient times than it is today.³⁵⁶ 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 value and represented life.

"By refraining from eating flesh with blood in it, man is honoring life. To eat blood is to despise life. This idea emerges most clearly in Gen. 9:4ff., where the sanctity of human life is associated with not eating blood. Thus one purpose of this law is the inculcation of respect for all life."³⁵⁷

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). What is in view is not simply eating "rare" meat (pink or red meat with a little blood in it), but larger quantities of blood, either separately, or as a kind of side dish. Eating raw, uncooked meat was also inappropriate.

17:15-16 God extended the *sacredness of life*, in this third prohibition, by forbidding the eating of clean animals that had died without slaughter. 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, His people were to respect the symbol of life.

"The faithful worshiper of the living God must preserve the sanctity of sacrificial blood, recognizing that life (signified by blood) belongs to God."³⁵⁸

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.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵Harrison, p. 181.

³⁵⁶Fawver and Overstreet, p. 275.

³⁵⁷Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 245. Cf. Hertz, p. 168.

³⁵⁸Ross, p. 336.

³⁵⁹E. S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, pp. 243-44.

Chapter 17 introduces the laws that follow in chapters 18—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* (demon), just as the Israelite priests had earlier committed idolatry with the *calf idol* (Exod. 32). In the golden calf incident, the priests led the people in idolatry, but here they *opposed* the idolatry of the people. The priests had evidently learned from their error, and the legislation that God gave following that first national failure. 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, 17:10—25:55).³⁶⁰

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). 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—20 may be significant. They set out foundational principles of social morality. Marriage is the cornerstone of all human society.

"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 abandonment of one's body to various sensual pleasures a religious obligation."³⁶¹

This chapter reflects the basic structure of a suzerainty treaty, with some omissions. It begins with a warning concerning the vile practices of the Egyptians and Canaanites, as well as an exhortation to *obey* God ("perform My judgments and keep My statutes"; vv. 1-5). It concludes by alluding to consequences that would overtake the Israelites if they disobeyed Him ("land will . . . spew you out . . . the persons who do [their abominations] shall be cut off"; vv. 24-30).

"There is a strong polemical 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)."³⁶²

The phrase "I am the LORD" becomes a characteristic refrain in Leviticus at this point (18:2, 4, 5, 6, 21, 30). It also appears frequently in Exodus and Numbers.

³⁶⁰See Sailhamer, pp. 343-45, for further development of these parallels.

³⁶¹Noordtzi, pp. 180-81.

³⁶²Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 250.

18:1-5 The statement "I am the LORD" reminded the people of their covenant relationship with—and responsibility to—Yahweh.³⁶³ It was because *He is who He is* ("I am who I am") that they were to be *who He wanted them to be* ("My own special treasure . . . a people for My possession . . . My peculiar people"). It was a constant reminder to the Israelites of who they were and Whom they served.

"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 king [*sic*] 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.'"³⁶⁴

The promises of "life" for *obedience* ("keep My statutes . . . by which a man may live," v. 5) held out a positive motivation for 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)."³⁶⁵

18:6-18 "To uncover nakedness" means to have sexual intercourse (cf. Gen. 20:12).

"The phrase covers intercourse within marriage and outside it."³⁶⁶

"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)."³⁶⁷

Note the parallels between this legislation and the story of Ham *looking on* his father Noah's "nakedness" (Gen. 9:20-27): Both acts (uncovering nakedness and sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse) resulted in a curse ("whoever does . . . these abominations . . . shall be cut

³⁶³Cf. Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, pp. 2-5.

³⁶⁴Merrill, "A Theology . . .," p. 58.

³⁶⁵Harris, p. 598.

³⁶⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 253.

³⁶⁷Ross, p. 345.

off"; 18:24-28; Gen. 9:24-27). Both acts also connect with drinking wine (10:9; Gen. 9:21). 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—20 to guard the Israelites from what humankind did at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).³⁶⁸

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."³⁶⁹

Moses mentioned twelve different situations in these verses. What about other similar situations? The initial prohibition, in verse 6, seems intended to be a general one, designed to include every "blood relative." The specific prohibitions identified in verses 7 through 18 seem, then, to be the most commonly violated, or possibly they are sample cases, rather than the only ones that the Lord condemned.

"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."³⁷⁰

"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."³⁷¹

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. If this translation is correct, the verse explicitly prohibits polygamy and implicitly prohibits

³⁶⁸Sailhamer, p. 346.

³⁶⁹Jamieson, et al., p. 99.

³⁷⁰Harrison, p. 186. Cf. Hertz, p. 172.

³⁷¹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 257.

divorce.³⁷² Thus the Mosaic Law forbade some things that the patriarchs practiced: marrying one's sister (v. 11; cf. Gen. 20:12) and marrying two sisters (v. 18; cf. Gen. 29:30).

"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 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."³⁷³

18:19-23 God also condemned other kinds of unacceptable sexual behavior, including adultery (v. 20), homosexuality (v. 22, cf. 20:13), and bestiality (v. 23).³⁷⁴ All of these were fairly common practices in the ancient Near East. The Mesopotamians and Hittites generally condemned incest and bestiality, with some exceptions, but not homosexuality.³⁷⁵

"Molech" (or "Moloch," v. 21) 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).³⁷⁶

"The fire-worshippers asserted that all children who did not undergo this purifying process would die in infancy . . ."³⁷⁷

The Talmud, and some modern commentators, prefer a translation of verse 21 that prohibits parents from giving their children for training as temple prostitutes.³⁷⁸

³⁷²See 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; and Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, p. 189. John Murray also preferred this interpretation in Appendix B of *Principles of Conduct*, pp. 250-56.

³⁷³Ross, p. 345. Cf. Hartley, p. 287.

³⁷⁴See Sherwood A. Cole, "Biology, Homosexuality, and Moral Culpability," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:615 (July-September 1997):355-66.

³⁷⁵See 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.

³⁷⁶Some Velikovskians have identified Molech with Saturn. See Dwardu Cardona, "The Rites of Molech," *Kronos* 9:3 (Summer 1984):20-39.

³⁷⁷Jamieson, et al., p. 99.

³⁷⁸E.g., Norman Snaith, "The Cult of Molech," *Vetus Testamentum* 16 (1966), pp. 123-24; and 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.

"To 'profane' means to make something unholy. The object of the verb is always something holy, 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."³⁷⁹

"Homosexual acts [v. 22] 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."³⁸⁰

"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

³⁷⁹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 259.

³⁸⁰Harris, p. 601. Cf. Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2:25, 31.

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 avoidance of drugs are no longer just good morals. Now, they are good medical science.'³⁸¹ 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."³⁸²

18:24-30 Sexual immorality "defiled . . . the land" as well as the people who practiced it (vv. 25, 27).

"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."³⁸³

The punishment for these abominations was *death* ("shall be cut off"; v. 29). This section closes with a reminder that the basis for these laws was the character of Israel's God ("keep My charge . . . do not practice any of the abominable customs . . . to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God"; v. 30).

"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."³⁸⁴

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. Furthermore, they cause diseases. By prohibiting them, God was guarding His people from things that would destroy them. 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.³⁸⁵

³⁸¹Otis R. Bowen, "Safer Behavior against AIDS Reiterated for Minorities," *American Medical News*, December 11, 1987, p. 59.

³⁸²Fawver and Overstreet, pp. 283, 284.

³⁸³Noordtzij, pp. 188-89.

³⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 189.

³⁸⁵J. Daniel Hays, "Applying the Old Testament Law Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):21-35, explained and advocated "principlizing" as a method of application in this helpful article.

"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."³⁸⁶

3. Holiness of behavior toward God and man ch. 19

Moses grouped the commandments 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 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."³⁸⁷

"Here are duties to be inculcated that for the most part depend upon the man's inward feeling."³⁸⁸

"Leviticus 19 has been called the highest development of ethics in the Old Testament.³⁸⁹ 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."³⁹⁰

"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."³⁹¹

"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."³⁹²

³⁸⁶Ross, p. 348.

³⁸⁷Ronald E. Clements, "Leviticus," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, 2:51.

³⁸⁸Bonar, p. 343.

³⁸⁹J. West, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 156.

³⁹⁰Rooker, p. 250.

³⁹¹Noordtzij, p. 189.

³⁹²Douglas, p. 531. This writer compared Israel's ancient laws and modern tribal customs.

"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 doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God—is everyday life transfigured."³⁹³

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), and one's possessions (vv. 19-29).

This chapter contains quotations from or allusions to all ten of the Ten Commandments.³⁹⁴ Its structure is chiasmic. 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).³⁹⁵ 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.³⁹⁶

"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."³⁹⁷

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)."³⁹⁸

The clause "I am the LORD" reminded the Israelites that God was their ultimate Judge.

19:1-10 Respect for parents and Sabbath observance (v. 3) 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 reverence" ("fear," Heb. *yare'*) your parents.

³⁹³Hertz, p. 192.

³⁹⁴See the charts in Rooker, p. 252, and Ross, p. 355.

³⁹⁵Jonathan Magonet, "The Structure and Meaning of Leviticus 19," *Hebrew Annual Review* 7 (1983):166.

³⁹⁶Ross, pp. 354-55.

³⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 355.

³⁹⁸Sailhamer, p. 349.

"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')."399

Idolatry and image-making (v. 4) broke the first and second commandments. This verse recalls the golden calf incident (Exod. 32; cf. Deut. 4:15-18).

Regarding the sacrifices, the main expression of worship, as "holy (things)" (vv. 5-8), 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 could be treated as regular food, rather than as a holy sacrifice to the Lord.

The preceding ideas deal with respect for God. Those that follow emphasize love for one's neighbor—that flows from love for God.

The Israelites were not to harvest their fields and vineyards so thoroughly that there would be nothing left (vv. 9-10). 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).400

"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)."401

19:11-18

"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."402

God commanded proper attitudes as well as correct actions (vv. 17, 18; cf. Matt. 18:15-17; 19:19).403 Compare Lev. 19:2 and James 4:4-5; Lev. 19:13

³⁹⁹Noordtzi, p. 193.

⁴⁰⁰See 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.

⁴⁰¹Ross, p. 360.

⁴⁰²G. D. Fee and D. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, p. 155.

⁴⁰³See Luke Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1982):391-401.

and James 5:4; Lev. 19:15 and James 2:1 and 9; Lev. 19:16 and James 4:11; Lev. 19:17b and James 5:20; Lev. 19:18a and James 5:9; and Lev. 19:18b and James 2:8.

"To take the name of God in vain (KJV [v. 12]) 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."⁴⁰⁴

A "slanderer" was not just a gossip, but someone who actively sought to destroy another person's reputation. Verses 17 and 18 show that the Mosaic Law did not just deal with external behavior. The second part of verse 17 has been interpreted in two ways. It could mean that one should rebuke ("reprove") his neighbor without hating him in one's heart (NASB). This is explicitly stated in the first part of the verse. And or it could mean that one should rebuke his neighbor so that one might not become guilty of the same sin himself (NIV). This is probably the intent of the second part of the verse.

In the New Testament, verse 18 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, that 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.⁴⁰⁵

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)."⁴⁰⁶

19:19-32 The opening words of this section indicate a change of subject. God called on His people to honor the order of nature by *not mixing* things ("cattle," "seed," "material") that God had separated in creation (v. 19).

"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

⁴⁰⁴Harris, p. 604.

⁴⁰⁵For refutation of this view, see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, pp. 130-31.

⁴⁰⁶Sailhamer, p. 351.

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.)⁴⁰⁷

God probably intended these practices (livestock breeding, planting trees and sowing seed, and weaving material) to distinguish the Israelites from the Canaanites too.⁴⁰⁸

"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)."⁴⁰⁹

Yahweh upheld the rights of slaves (vv. 20-22). A man was not to "mix" with a female "slave" engaged to another man, by having sexual intercourse ("sleep") with her. The Israelites considered engaged people virtually married.

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 (vv. 23-25). 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," they could "eat of its 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."⁴¹⁰

God's people were to avoid pagan practices that characterized the Canaanites (vv. 26-32). These included eating blood (meat "with blood in it"; v. 26), trimming their hair ("heads" or "beard") in the style of the pagan priests (v. 27), and disfiguring their bodies that God had created ("not make any cuts . . . any tattoo marks"; v. 28).

"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."⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel*, p. 181.

⁴⁰⁸See Calum Carmichael, "Forbidden Mixtures," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:4 (September 1982):394-415.

⁴⁰⁹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 269-70.

⁴¹⁰Bush, p. 208.

⁴¹¹Henry, p. 133.

"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] . . ."412

They were not to disfigure the divine likeness in them by scarring or tattooing their bodies. These foreign practices also included devoting one's daughter to prostitution (v. 29), seeking knowledge of the future from a medium (v. 31), and failing to honor the aged (v. 32).

". . . there are indications of ancestor worship in Old Testament times but there was no ancestor worship in Israel."⁴¹³

That is, God did not permit it, though some of the Israelites may have practiced it to a limited extent, as a result of pagan influence.

Verse 31 prohibits 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).

19:33-37 This list concludes with commands to practice honesty in judicial matters. Verse 37 is a summary exhortation.

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, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). Application of the imperatives in this chapter is different for Christians, 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."⁴¹⁴

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—19 already discussed most of the subjects dealt with in this chapter.

⁴¹²Jamieson, et al., p. 101.

⁴¹³Andrew Chiu, "Is There Ancestor Worship in the Old Testament?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 8:2 (October 1984):221.

⁴¹⁴Ross, p. 365.

"The difference between the laws in this chapter and previous ones 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."⁴¹⁵

"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."⁴¹⁶

"This selection of laws consists of fourteen (7x2) laws, concluded by an extended appeal for holiness on the part of the nation when they take possession of the land of Canaan (vv. 22-26). After the conclusion, one of the laws, the prohibition of mediums and spiritists (v. 6), is restated (v. 27)."⁴¹⁷

20:1-8 *Idolatry* and *spiritism* are the focus of this section. The people were to execute a community "Molech" worshiper ("any" of "the sons of Israel or . . . aliens"), who would offer Molech one or more children for human sacrifice, by *stoning*.⁴¹⁸ If they ("the people of the land") failed to put a Molech worshiper to death, God Himself would judge the guilty person *and his family* with death ("I Myself will set My face against that man and against his family, and I will cut [them] off").

God would also do this to the person who resorted to mediums or spiritists, since this practice involved seeking information about the future—from *evil spirits*—rather than from God (cf. King Saul's fate).

". . . a turning to other lovers is virtually a declaring that there is no satisfying love in God toward us."⁴¹⁹

20:9-21 Cursing one's parents was also punishable by *stoning* ("he shall surely be put to death").

Stoning ". . . was the usual punishment appointed in the law for cases in which death was inflicted . . ."⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁵Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 277.

⁴¹⁶Rooker, p. 265.

⁴¹⁷Sailhamer, p. 353.

⁴¹⁸See Bush, p. 215, for a description of the stoning process.

⁴¹⁹Bonar, p. 363.

⁴²⁰Keil and Delitzsch, 2:426.

Several sexual sins described here drew this penalty. The Mosaic Law banned the incestuous unions alluded to—despite the fact that some form of "marriage" is implied ("man who *marries* a woman and her mother . . . man who *takes* his sister . . . man who *takes* his brother's wife," emphasis added)—in verses 14, 17, and 21. Consequently these verses may be referring to common-law marriages, in which people lived, in this case relatives (man with a mother and her daughter, brother with his sister, man with his sister-in-law), together as husband and wife without a wedding ceremony.⁴²¹

Burning the criminals ("they shall be burned with fire," 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.⁴²²

God would judge these sexual sins, not only by withholding children from the guilty parties ("they will be childless," v. 20), but by regarding any children born of such unions 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).⁴²³

"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."⁴²⁴

"Fifteen offenses in Israel were capital crimes: striking or cursing a parent (Ex. 21:15, 17[; Deut. 21:18-21]); breaking the Sabbath (31:14[; Num. 15:32-36]); blaspheming God (Lev. 24:10-16); engaging in occult practices (Ex. 22:18[; Lev. 20:6]); prophesying falsely (Deut. 13:1-5); adultery (Lev. 20:10[; Deut. 22:22]); rape (Deut. 22:25); unchastity before marriage (vv. 13ff); incest (Lev. 20:11-12); homosexuality (v. 13); bestiality (vv. 15-16[; Exod. 22:19]); kidnapping (Ex. 21:16); idolatry (Lev. 20:1-5); false witness in a case involving a capital crime (Deut. 19:16-21); killing a human intentionally (Ex. 21:12)."⁴²⁵

⁴²¹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 280.

⁴²²Ross, p. 386.

⁴²³See *ibid.*, p. 377; Hartley, pp. 328-29.

⁴²⁴Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 179. This author wrote a helpful excursus on "Principles of Punishment in the Pentateuch," pp. 281-86.

⁴²⁵Wiersbe, p. 282.

20:22-27 This chapter, like chapter 18, concludes with an exhortation and warnings to obey God's ordinances. In view of Israel's unique vocation in the world, the nation was to live *differently* from other peoples ("You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy . . . I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine," 19:2; 20:26). The Israelites would "possess" the Promised Land ("you are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it," v. 24), *to the extent* that they maintained their holiness ("you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy," v. 26).

No matter how lightly the Israelites may have regarded the type of conduct reflected 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."⁴²⁶

"God's people must avoid the world's false religious systems and immoral practices and follow after the LORD's holy plan."⁴²⁷

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."⁴²⁸

"A priest must have feelings of deep emotion; he must resemble *Jesus*, the Antitype, weeping over His own kindred most of all . . ."⁴²⁹

This section also contains the requirements for sacrificial animals, because the sacrificial animals were the "priests" of the animal world. Many of the human deformities that kept a priest from *offering* sacrifices (21:18-20), in the list of priest deformities, are the same as those that kept an animal from qualifying *as a sacrifice* (22:20-24), in the list of animal deformities. Symbolically, *sacrificial* animals corresponded to the *priests*, *clean* animals to the *Israelites*, and *unclean* animals to the *Gentiles*.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 342-43.

⁴²⁷Ross, p. 378.

⁴²⁸Harris, p. 616.

⁴²⁹Bonar, p. 372.

⁴³⁰Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 290.

A formulaic statement, "For I am the LORD who sanctifies them," or a similar affirmation, closes each of the six subsections (21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32). These chapters should help us who are Christians appreciate that our service—as *priests*—requires careful attention and conformity to God's will.

1. The first list of regulations for priests 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."⁴³¹

21:1-6 The priest was "not [to] defile himself" ceremonially by touching a corpse, except in the case of his "nearest . . . relatives." Shaving the head, probably above the forehead (Deut. 14:1), shaving the edges of the beard, and self-mutilation, were practices of pagan priests who demonstrated mourning in these ways (cf. 1 Kings 18:28).⁴³²

"As in other parts of the ancient Near East [besides Sumeria] priests' heads were normally shaved and no beard was worn."⁴³³

Defacing the human body was unacceptable, because physical perfection symbolized holiness. The priests of Israel were neither to physically resemble nor to behave as pagan priests.

21:7-9 The priests' marriages and home life were to be in keeping with their holy vocation.

"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."⁴³⁴

Priests could not marry prostitutes ("a woman profaned by harlotry") or "divorced" women, but only virgins or widows of spotless character. One scholar argued that the prohibition against priests marrying non-virgins had to do with contracting ceremonial impurity, not morality.⁴³⁵ But marrying a non-virgin did not necessarily render a man ceremonially unclean.

⁴³¹Sailhamer, p. 354.

⁴³²See M. Bayliss, "The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylon," *Iraq* 35 (1973):115-25.

⁴³³G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*, p. 107.

⁴³⁴Bonar, p. 375.

⁴³⁵Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (December 1997):540-41.

"However innocent the divorced woman was in fact, her reputation was likely to have been affected by the divorce."⁴³⁶

The bride of a priest could not be a *Canaanite* or an idolater, but she could be a foreigner (e.g., a Midianite, an Egyptian, or a Babylonian). The priests' children were to lead upright lives, too ("if . . . the daughter of any priest . . . profanes herself by harlotry . . . she shall 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]."⁴³⁷

21:10-15 It was inappropriate for the "high (highest) priest" to "uncover his head" in mourning, since the *holy* "anointing oil" had anointed it. He was not to "tear his clothes," either (cf. Matt. 26:65). He could not marry a "widow" or a foreigner, as the other priests could, but only "a virgin of his own people" (an Israelite virgin). He was not to abandon his duties ("go out of the sanctuary") to conduct other business—even temporarily. He was not to "profane his offspring" (v. 15) by marrying someone unsuitable to his position before God.

2. The second list of regulations for priests 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."⁴³⁸

Certain restrictions applied to priests who were physically defective; they could not enter the holy place, or offer sacrifices at the altar of burnt offerings. Physically inferior priests—"blind," "lame," "disfigured," "deformed," with "broken foot" or "hand," "hunchback," dwarf," with "eye defect," "eczema," "scabs," or "crushed testicles"—were not necessarily inferior spiritually, but the priest's duties and office required completeness—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."⁴³⁹

⁴³⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 291.

⁴³⁷Bonar, p. 376.

⁴³⁸Sailhamer, p. 355.

⁴³⁹Harrison, p. 211.

The priests' physical condition, 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. 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)."⁴⁴⁰

"It was for the credit [honor] of the sanctuary that none should appear there who were any way disfigured, either by nature or accident."⁴⁴¹

Another reason for this requirement, may have been that the priests typified the coming Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, in whom was "no defect."⁴⁴²

3. The third list of regulations for priests ch. 22

The previous section (21:16-24) named physical impediments that prohibited some priests from offering sacrifices. This one identifies the circumstances under which priests could neither officiate at the sacrifices, nor eat priestly food (cf. Isa. 52:11). Twenty-eight selected laws (7 x 4) compose this section.

Things that profane a priest 22:1-9

A selection of seven laws appears between a brief introduction (vv. 1-2) and a conclusion (v. 9). The priests could, of course, become defiled like any other Israelites, but no priest who had become ceremonially unclean was to "touch" or "eat" the "holy *things*" (the tabernacle furniture, "holy *objects*," Exod. 28:38; Lev. 5:15; Num. 4:15; sacrifices, "holy *gifts*," vv. 2-4, 7).

Sloppy service could result from just going through the motions of priestly service repeatedly. The Lord warned the priests against this possibility here ("be careful with the holy *gifts*"; vv. 1-2).

"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)."⁴⁴³

Persons who could not eat the sacred offerings 22:10-16

Another list of seven laws guarded the offerings. No *non-priest* ("layman") could eat part of the sacrifices the priests ate, except those who had become members of a priest's household. This ruling principle appears at the beginning and at the end of the list (vv. 10, 13b), with a brief statement following, regarding restitution for accidentally eating an

⁴⁴⁰Noordtzi, p. 219.

⁴⁴¹Henry, p. 135.

⁴⁴²Wiersbe, p. 285.

⁴⁴³Ibid., p. 286.

offering ("he shall add to it a fifth of it"; vv. 14-16). All of these regulations guarded the holiness of the LORD, by treating the people and things most closely associated with Him as special.

"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."⁴⁴⁴

"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."⁴⁴⁵

The offerings of the priests 22:17-25

Another list of seven selected laws appears, this one with the principle stated only at the end ("for their corruption is in them, they have a defect, they shall not be accepted," i.e., any defective animal is already unacceptable to God for sacrifice, because of its inherent "corruption," its "flawed essence," which is evident from its defects; v. 25). 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 (e.g., the "votive" or "freewill"), the higher were the requirements for the sacrificial 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).

"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*."⁴⁴⁶

The time intervals of sacrifices 22:26-33

Seven additional laws specified the time periods (age specifications) that governed the offering of some sacrifices. The Israelites were not to offer oxen, sheep, and goats as sacrifices before these animals were eight days old ("from the eighth day on it shall be accepted"; v. 27). It took these animals "seven days" to attain the strength and maturity necessary for them to represent the offerer adequately. Also, the people were not to slay parent animals on *the same* ("in one") "day" as their offspring (v. 28). The reason may have been ". . . to keep sacred the relation which God had established between parent and

⁴⁴⁴Ross, p. 388.

⁴⁴⁵Wiersbe, p. 287.

⁴⁴⁶Henry, p. 136.

offspring."⁴⁴⁷ Another possible explanation for this, is that this regulation simply conserved the animal stock, that would have become depleted otherwise.⁴⁴⁸

"It seems to me that it would be cruel to kill the mother and her young on the same day, for 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.'"⁴⁴⁹

Moses repeated the reasons for these regulations again (vv. 31-33), so that 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)."⁴⁵⁰

"Those who worship the redeeming, sanctifying LORD God must come into his presence with acceptable offerings."⁴⁵¹

C. SANCTIFICATION OF THE SABBATH AND THE FEASTS OF YAHWEH 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; Heb. 10:25). This chapter contains a list of seven festal days and periods of the year, plus the weekly Sabbath, when the Israelites were to celebrate holy events. These were normally convocations (v. 2) when the Israelites assembled around the tabernacle area. However, in some cases the people did not assemble. The Hebrew word translated "convocation" basically means "proclamation" or "announcement." Likewise the word "feast," which implies eating, simply means "appointed times." There was not always a feast on a feast day (e.g., the Day of Atonement).⁴⁵² The recurring phrases "holy convocations" and "rest days" indicate that this calendar was primarily for the benefit of the ordinary Israelites rather than for the priests.

⁴⁴⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 2:437.

⁴⁴⁸Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 296; and Ross, pp. 393-94.

⁴⁴⁹Wiersbe, p. 287.

⁴⁵⁰Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 296.

⁴⁵¹Ross, p. 394.

⁴⁵²Wiersbe, p. 288.

"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."⁴⁵³

The Israelites observed a lunar year, which contains 354 days. *Lunar months* have 29 and 30 days alternately. 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. All three civilizations made up the difference between 12 lunar months and one solar year by inserting another month after several years.⁴⁵⁴

The chapter begins with an introduction (vv. 1-2) that bears repetition at the end (v. 44).

1. The Sabbath 23:1-3

"The Sabbath" (v. 3) was, of course, a *weekly* observance ("appointed time"), in contrast to the other "feasts" that occurred only *once a year*. Moses introduced the annual "holidays" in verse 4. God had prescribed Sabbath observance earlier (Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17; 35:2-3; Lev. 19:3). Evidently Moses included "the Sabbath" in this chapter's list because, like the feasts, it was a day set apart to God for holy purposes. The Sabbath was a "convocation," in that the people assembled *in spirit* to remember God's work for them, that resulted in their being able to rest. For this time of "proclamation," the Israelites did not assemble around the tabernacle, but observed the day in their own dwellings (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26).

The Sabbath was *the heart* of the whole system of annual appointed times in Israel. The other "feasts" as well all 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.⁴⁵⁵

"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

⁴⁵³Merrill, "A Theology . . .," p. 59.

⁴⁵⁴See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, Part I, Chapter 2: "Divisions of Time"; and Edersheim, pp. 200-202.

⁴⁵⁵See Timothy K. Hui, "The Purpose of Israel's Annual Feasts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:586 (April-June 1990):143-54.

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)."⁴⁵⁶

"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."⁴⁵⁷

"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."⁴⁵⁸

2. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread 23:4-8

Verse 4 introduces the seven annual *festivals* ("appointed times"). Whereas the Sabbath could be observed anywhere, the other feasts required attendance at the central sanctuary for participation. These nationwide convocations had the effect of counteracting the dividing tendency of the nation, to separate too much into tribes and clans, and they provided opportunities for commercial interaction among the tribes.⁴⁵⁹

"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 says and does is complete and dependable. Nothing can be added to it."⁴⁶⁰

In one sense, the "Passover" (Heb. *Pesah*, v. 5) was the most important feast (cf. Exod. 12:1-28). This 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 were allowed to cook the Passover meal (cf. vv. 7, 21, 25, 35).⁴⁶¹

Jesus died as the Paschal Lamb on Passover Day in the year He died for our sins (John 19:14; Matt. 26:17-29; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).⁴⁶²

The Passover was primarily a time when Israel commemorated the Lord's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Similarly, our worship should include a *commemoration* of our past salvation from the bondage of sin (cf. Matt. 26:26-29).

⁴⁵⁶de Vaux, 2:483.

⁴⁵⁷Ross, p. 405. Cf. Wiersbe, p. 288.

⁴⁵⁸Ross, p. 403.

⁴⁵⁹Bush, p. 232.

⁴⁶⁰Wiersbe, p. 291.

⁴⁶¹Bush, p. 235.

⁴⁶²For the prophetic significance of all of these feasts, 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."⁴⁶³

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; and Josephus, on one occasion, even describes it as 'a feast for eight days.'"⁴⁶⁴

Passover was one of the three feasts that all the adult males in Israel had to attend, along with the feasts of Firstfruits and Tabernacles (Exod. 23:17; Deut. 16:16). It was 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."⁴⁶⁵

This combined feast (Passover/Unleavened Bread) reminded the believing Israelite that he needed to live a clean life, since God had redeemed him by the blood of the Passover lamb (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:9).

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 "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; 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 life (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."⁴⁶⁶

"God requires his people to preserve their spiritual heritage through the commemoration of their redemption and the life of purity to follow."⁴⁶⁷

3. The Feast of Firstfruits 23:9-14

The "Feast of Firstfruits" included the presentation of the "first fruits" of the spring barley harvest in the Promised Land. The Israelites also offered "a male lamb," "fine flour," and "wine," all representative of God's provisions of spiritual and physical food and drink for

⁴⁶³Lindsey, p. 165.

⁴⁶⁴Edersheim, p. 208. Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 2:15:1.

⁴⁶⁵Wiersbe, p. 292.

⁴⁶⁶Edersheim, p. 250.

⁴⁶⁷Ross, p. 413.

His people (vv. 9-14). They presented this offering on the day after the festival. "Sabbath" here, as elsewhere (vv. 15, 23, 39), refers to the feast, which was to be observed as a Sabbath.⁴⁶⁸ The ancients regarded the "first fruits" (Heb. *bikkurim*) as a kind of down payment with more to follow.

Jesus arose from the grave on this day as the "Firstfruits" of those who sleep in death (1 Cor. 15:20).

In modern times, it is customary for observant Jews to stay up the entire night of *Shavuot*, 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.

"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."⁴⁶⁹

4. The Feast of Pentecost 23:15-22

This festival had several names: "Harvest," "Weeks" (Heb. *Shabuoth*), and "Pentecost" (Gr. *pentekostos*). The Contemporary English Version translated it the "Harvest Festival." It fell at the end of the spring harvest, 50 days after Passover, namely: the day after the end of the seventh week. "Pentecost" means "fiftieth" day. This feast was a thanksgiving festival, and it lasted one day. The people offered God the "first fruits" of the spring harvest, as a *thank offering* for His provision of their physical and spiritual needs.

"It was because this idea of festive rest and sanctification was so closely connected with the weekly festival 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."⁴⁷⁰

The "loaves of bread" that the Israelites offered to God (v. 17), on this occasion, contained "leaven."

". . . in them their daily bread was offered to the Lord, who had blessed the harvest . . ."⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁸Edersheim, pp. 257-58.

⁴⁶⁹Ross, p. 418.

⁴⁷⁰Edersheim, pp. 175-76.

⁴⁷¹Keil and Delitzsch, 2:443.

These were common loaves of ordinary daily bread. The Israelites did not cook them specifically for holy purposes. They also presented other accompanying offerings, animal sacrifices with meal offerings, for burnt, sin, and peace offerings (vv. 18-19). The evidence of true gratitude is generosity, so the Israelites were to leave the corners of their fields unharvested, so that the poor could glean some of the crops (cf. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-21).

"It [this feast] also taught them that the joy of harvest should express itself in charity to the poor."⁴⁷²

God sent the *Holy Spirit* to indwell believers *permanently*, as the "firstfruits" 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."⁴⁷³

5. The Feast of Trumpets 23:23-25

During the seventh month of Israel's religious calendar, three festivals 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*.

The Jews celebrated the Feast of Trumpets (Heb. *Rosh Hashana*) on the first day of this month. The Israelites blew trumpets on the first day of every month, but on this month, the trumpets signaled the Feast of Trumpets *in addition to* the beginning of a new month. After the Babylonian Captivity, the Jewish civil year began 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 (*shophars*) that the priests blew on this occasion were quite large, and produced "a dull, far-reaching tone."⁴⁷⁴ They called the congregation to turn their attention again to God, and to prepare for the other two festivals of the month and the 12 months ahead. They also signaled God's working anew on behalf of His people (cf. Ps. 89:15).

⁴⁷²Henry, p. 137.

⁴⁷³Ross, p. 424.

⁴⁷⁴Keil and Delitzsch, 2:444.

"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."⁴⁷⁵

A trumpet will sound, calling Christians to meet the Lord in the air (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). It 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 Feast of Trumpets (in which the feast 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."⁴⁷⁶

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 the responsibilities of the ordinary Israelite.

This day was a "fast" ("you shall humble your souls"), rather than a feast. The people were to "humble" or "deny" themselves (v. 29), which involved fasting and abstaining from their normal pleasures and comforts (cf. 16:29). God permitted no ordinary ("you shall not do any") "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).

The sacrifices which 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 of the Day of Atonement lasted for only one year.

"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 that, sin can only be removed eternally through the sacrifice of Christ made once and for all—not annually."⁴⁷⁷

Prophetically, this day will find fulfillment at the Second Coming of Christ. *Then* God will purify His 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).

⁴⁷⁵Bonar, p. 413.

⁴⁷⁶Ross, p. 427.

⁴⁷⁷Ibid., p. 431.

"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."⁴⁷⁸

"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."⁴⁷⁹

7. The Feast of Tabernacles 23:33-44

This feast (Heb. *Sukkot*) was another very joyous occasion for the Israelites. It was the third fall festival. 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 people built booths out of branches, and lived under these for the duration of this eight-day festival, as a reminder of their life in the wilderness. They presented many offerings during this holiday (Num. 29:12-38). During this feast, the Israelites' looked *backward* to the land of their slavery, and *forward* to the Promised Land of blessing. The feast opened and closed with a Sabbath. It was primarily a time of *joy* because they remembered that God had provided atonement. It was the only festival in which God *commanded* the Israelites to "rejoice," and it revolved around the harvest of grapes and other fall "field" (agricultural) products.

". . . in the later postexilic period [it] took on something of a carnival atmosphere."⁴⁸⁰

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). *Then* the Jews in the millennial kingdom will be *believers* in "Jesus," the "one whom they pierced," and therefore 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, our worship as Christians should include the element of anticipation, as we look forward to entering into all that God has promised us in the future. The Puritans patterned their Thanksgiving Day feast in New England after this Jewish festival.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁸Samuele Bacchoicchi, "Sabbatical Typologies of Messianic Redemption," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17:2 (December 1986):165.

⁴⁷⁹Ross, p. 432.

⁴⁸⁰Harrison, p. 220.

⁴⁸¹Harris, p. 629.

FEASTS & FASTS IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF ISRAEL						
Season	Month			Day(s) of Month	Feast or Fast	Attendance by Adult Males
	Sacred	Civil	Modern			
Spring	1	7	March/April	14	<i>Passover</i>	Optional
Spring	1	7	March/April	14-20	<i>Unleavened Bread</i>	Required
Spring	1	7	March/April	The day after the Sabbath following Passover	<i>Firstfruits</i>	Optional
Spring	3	9	May/June	4	<i>Pentecost</i> (a.k.a. Harvest, Weeks)	Required
Fall	7	1	September/October	1	<i>Trumpets</i>	Optional
Fall	7	1	September/October	10	<i>Day of Atonement</i> (the only fast)	Optional
Fall	7	1	September/October	15-21	<i>Tabernacles</i> (a.k.a. Booths, Ingathering)	Required

"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."⁴⁸²

"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."⁴⁸³

The purpose of 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:

⁴⁸²Ross, p. 437.

⁴⁸³Kenneth Kitchen, *The Bible In Its World*, p. 86.

Sabbath - God's creation of the cosmos and Israel; God's rest from all *His* Creation work

Passover - God's redemption of Israel

Unleavened Bread - The need to live holy in view of redemption

Firstfruits - God's initial provision of material blessings

Pentecost - God's full provision of material blessings

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 trials 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."⁴⁸⁴

Leviticus does not mention the "Feast of Purim" (lit. "lots"), that 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" 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.⁴⁸⁵ 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 Feast of Purim (Esth. 9:18-32)
- The Sabbatical Year (Exod. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7)
- The Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-55; 27:17-24; Ezek. 46:17)

⁴⁸⁴Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 306.

⁴⁸⁵For 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.

Relative Intimacy with God (Holiness) under the Old Covenant			
People	Time	Space	Tabernacle Materials
Gentiles ↓ Rebellious Israelites ↓ Sinful Israelites ↓ Unclean Israelites ↓ Clean Israelites ↓ Levites ↓ Nazirites ↓ Imperfect Priests ↓ Normal Priests ↓ High Priest ↓ GOD	Ordinary Days ↓ First day of New Month ↓ Optional Attendance Feasts ↓ Required Attendance Feasts ↓ Sabbath ↓ Day of Atonement ↓ GOD	Outer Gentiles ↓ Buffer Gentile Nations ↓ The Holy Land ↓ Camp of Israel ↓ Tabernacle Courtyard ↓ Holy Place ↓ Holy of Holies ↓ Ark of the Covenant ↓ GOD	Bronze ↓ Badgers' Skins ↓ Rams' Skins ↓ Goats' Skins ↓ Scarlet Fabric ↓ Fine Linen ↓ Silver ↓ Gold ↓ GOD

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).⁴⁸⁶ These were the priest's "private official duties."⁴⁸⁷

The Israelites donated the "clear oil" for the lamps (vv. 1-4). *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.⁴⁸⁸ This best olive oil symbolized the

⁴⁸⁶For 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.

⁴⁸⁷Bonar, p. 426.

⁴⁸⁸Wiersbe, p. 292.

Israelites ". . . as a congregation which caused its light to shine in the darkness of this world . . ."489 These "lamps," which were "on the pure gold lampstand" in the holy place, 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" (v. 4) 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."⁴⁹⁰

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: 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).

The "fine flour" for the twelve loaves ("cakes") of showbread, one for each of the tribes of Israel, was likewise a gift of the people, that represented their sanctification to God (vv. 5-9). 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 their fresh studies in the scripture, that *their proficiency may appear to all*, II Tim. iv. 1, 5."⁴⁹¹

The addition of *incense* to the bread ("pure frankincense"; v. 7) represented the spirit of *prayer* (dependence) that accompanied the Israelites' sacrifice of work. The priests placed fresh loaves on the table of showbread each Sabbath day. Josephus wrote that there were two piles of six loaves each.⁴⁹²

"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."⁴⁹³

"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."⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁹Keil and Delitzsch, 2:451.

⁴⁹⁰Bush, p. 244.

⁴⁹¹Henry, p. 138.

⁴⁹²Josephus, *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; and Schultz, p. 116.

⁴⁹³Wiersbe, pp. 293-94.

⁴⁹⁴Bush, p. 245.

"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."⁴⁹⁵

The "lamps" and "showbread" 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 showbread (24:1-9). This fact indicates that Leviticus is essentially a narrative work. God gave the legal information at *specific times* and *places* in order to meet particular situations in Israel's national life.⁴⁹⁶ This is how case law developed in Israel.

This is the first of four occasions in which Moses 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).

God evidently preserved the record of this significant incident involving a blasphemer, in Scripture, not only because it took place at the *time* God was revealing these standards of sanctification. It also illustrates how God regarded those who despised the very standards He was giving. This event was a warning *to the people* of the seriousness of sanctification, just as the death of Nadab and Abihu (ch. 10) was a similar warning *to the priests*.

The "Name" referred to (vv. 11, 16) was "Yahweh," the name by which God manifested His nature to His people. The man's blasphemy may have consisted of his cursing Yahweh (v. 11), cursing Yahweh in the name of Yahweh,⁴⁹⁷ or using Yahweh's name in a curse (as a curse expression).⁴⁹⁸ Maybe since his father was an Egyptian (v. 10), he did not have the proper respect for Yahweh, and did not sanctify Him in thought and speech as God required.

"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."⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁵Ross, p. 442.

⁴⁹⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 308-9.

⁴⁹⁷Dennis Livingston, "The crime of Leviticus XXIV 11," *Vetus Testamentum* 36:3 (July 1986):352-53.

⁴⁹⁸Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 311.

⁴⁹⁹Noordtzi, p. 245.

The Jews interpreted this blasphemy 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.⁵⁰⁰

When the witnesses placed "their hands on [the] head" of the offender (v. 14), they were symbolizing the *transference* of the blasphemer's "curse," which had entered their ears, back onto the blasphemer's 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 whole community, whereas murder was an individual act."⁵⁰¹

The legal principle of limiting retaliation to retribution in kind ("an eye for an eye," lit. "eye for eye," vv. 19-21, the *lex talionis*, or "law of retaliation," Lat. "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). A person who took another person's eye, for example, usually suffered *death* in return. In the Mosaic Law, God limited the amount of retaliation that His people could take.

"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 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."⁵⁰²

"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."⁵⁰³

"Retribution is a principal goal of the penal system in the Bible.

⁵⁰⁰See Keil and Delitzsch, 2:453.

⁵⁰¹Sailhamer, pp. 360-61.

⁵⁰²G. Herbert Livingston, pp. 176-77.

⁵⁰³Schultz, p. 118.

"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."⁵⁰⁴

Christians should not live on a "tit-for-tat" basis, which is not too different in principle from a revenge basis (cf. the Waorani, formerly Auca [savage], tribe of Ecuadorian natives, who no longer live "tit-for-tat" after being converted to Christ). 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).

"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."⁵⁰⁵

"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."⁵⁰⁶

F. SANCTIFICATION OF THE POSSESSION OF LAND BY THE SABBATICAL AND JUBILEE YEARS CH. 25

Chapter 25 concludes discussion 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. 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* 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.

"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."⁵⁰⁷

"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."⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 312.

⁵⁰⁵Wiersbe, pp. 295-96.

⁵⁰⁶Ross, p. 448.

⁵⁰⁷Wiersbe, pp. 296-97.

⁵⁰⁸Sailhamer, p. 361.

1. The sabbatical year 25:1-7

As God ordered the people to rest every *seventh day*, so He ordered them to let the land rest every *seventh year* ("sabbatical year"; 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" 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 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 (vv. 6-7) to eat freely of what was His ("all of you shall have the sabbath *products* of the land for food").

"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."⁵⁰⁹

"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 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."⁵¹⁰

"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."⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹Keil 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; and Don Blosser, "The Sabbath Year Cycle in Josephus," *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1981):129-39.

⁵¹⁰Sailhamer, p. 361.

⁵¹¹Ross, p. 453.

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."⁵¹²

The word "jubilee" probably comes from the Hebrew *yabal*, meaning "to bring [forth]," as in the bringing forth of produce.⁵¹³ The Year of Jubilee did for the land what the Day of Atonement did for the people. This Year removed the disturbance or confusion of God's will—for the land—that eventually resulted from the activity of sinners. During this Year, God brought the land back into the condition that He intended for it. The fact that the priests announced the Year of Jubilee *on the Day of Atonement* (v. 9), confirms this correspondence.

"The main purpose of these laws is to prevent the utter ruin of debtors."⁵¹⁴

However, this law also remedied the evils of slavery, destitution, and exhausting toil.

The observance of the Year of Jubilee 25:8-12

The Israelites were to observe the Year of Jubilee every "fiftieth" year, the year following seven seven-year periods ("seven sabbaths of years"; v. 11). Wenham believed the "jubilee" was a *short year*, only 49 days long, inserted into the seventh month of the forty-ninth year.⁵¹⁵ This is a minority view.

On the Day of Atonement of that year, a priest was to blow the ram's horn (*shophar*) to announce the beginning of the Year of Jubilee. The use of the ram's horn was significant. With this *shophar* horn: God 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 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."⁵¹⁶

No sowing or reaping was to take place *this* sabbatical year, which normally continued during the other sabbatical years (v. 11). God promised to provide for His people, as they rested in response to His gracious promise (vv. 18-23).

"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

⁵¹²Robert Gnuse, "Jubilee Legislation in Leviticus: Israel's Vision of Social Reform," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15:2 (April 1985):43.

⁵¹³See Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 96-97.

⁵¹⁴Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 317.

⁵¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 319. See the discussion in Ross, pp. 458-59.

⁵¹⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 2:458.

their freedom and property comes in the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:8-12, 28), the fiftieth year."⁵¹⁷

"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."⁵¹⁸

Verse 10 is the motto on the Liberty Bell—"Proclaim liberty throughout the land"—that hangs in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The effects of the Year on the possession of property 25:13-34

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 tribal leasees. The sale of a "pasture (agricultural) field," therefore, was nothing more than the sale of a certain number of its harvests (vv. 13-18, 23-28). And the sale of a "dwelling house" (vv. 29-34) amounted to *renting it* for a specified period of time.⁵¹⁹

"This is something like buying the unexpired term of a lease among us; the purchase being always regulated by the number of years between the time of purchase and the expiration of the term."⁵²⁰

This special year reminded the Israelites that they did not really "own" the land—but were "tenants" of God, the True Owner (v. 23). In Egypt, under Joseph, all the land belonged to Pharaoh (Gen. 47:13-26).

"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."⁵²¹

Only extreme hardship was to force a "poor" tenant-owner to sell or release "a piece of property" (so he would have to "redeem" or "buy [it] back," v. 25). Moses gave three cases—in verses 25, 26-27, and 28—that explain how the people were to do this: A "kinsman redeemer" (a relative) could recover (redeem, buy back) the property; the "seller" himself could do so; or the Year of Jubilee would return it to him. God granted exceptions to the normal rules of release, in the cases of property in "a walled city" (vv. 29-30) and property of "the Levites" (vv. 32-34). An Israelite could buy a fellow

⁵¹⁷Herold H. P. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, pp. 30-31.

⁵¹⁸Lindsey, p. 211. See Finegan, pp. 580-87, for more information about the calendar of jubilees.

⁵¹⁹Noordtzi, p. 252.

⁵²⁰Bush, p. 257.

⁵²¹Walter Riggans, *Numbers*, p. 200.

Israelite's *services*, but not his body ("himself"), because the Lord already owned every Israelite (vv. 39-43).

There are three Old Testament references to the responsibilities of a human kinsman redeemer (Heb. *goel*) in Israel. Additionally, the psalmists and other prophets also referred to *Yahweh* as Israel's "Redeemer" (or "Kinsman-Redeemer").

1. When a person sold himself or his property, because of economic distress, his nearest kinsman should "buy back" ("redeem") the person, and or his property, if he could afford to do so (25:25).
2. Perhaps an Israelite could not even afford to pay the ransom price to keep a firstborn "unclean animal" for his own use. In this case, his nearest kinsman could do so for him if he could afford it (27:11-13).
3. When someone killed a person, and was suspected of murder, the victim's kinsman-redeemer could pursue and take the life of the killer—under certain circumstances (Num. 35:10-29).

Bible students sometimes confuse the "levirate marriage" custom with the "kinsman-redeemer" custom. Levirate marriage involved the marriage of a *widow* and her *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).

The effects of the Year on the personal freedom of the Israelites 25:35-55

The Israelites were not to exploit one another (vv. 35-38). Specifically they were not to charge one another "interest" on loans ("not give . . . silver at interest"; v. 37; cf. Exod. 22:25; Deut. 23:19-20). This policy would have helped a poor farmer to buy enough seed for the next year. This law was evidently unique among the ancient Near Eastern nations, though not among smaller tribal groups.⁵²²

When poor Israelites "sold" themselves *as servants* to wealthier Israelites, their masters were to treat them as brothers ("a hired man," an employee or fellow-worker, a fellow-Israelite) and not as "slaves" ("not subject him to a slave's service"; vv. 39-43).

". . . 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."⁵²³

⁵²²See Edward Neufeld, "The Prohibitions Against Loans at Interest in Ancient Hebrew Laws," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 26 (1955):355-412.

⁵²³Christopher Wright, "What Happened in Israel Every Seven Years?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 56:3 (October 1984):196.

God permitted the Israelites to own "slaves" from the "pagan nations around" (vv. 44-46). That they were not to mistreat them goes without saying. *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 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!"⁵²⁴

"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."⁵²⁵

Israelites could also "buy back" ("redeem") their countrymen, who had sold themselves as slaves to non-Israelites living in the land (vv. 47-55). An Israelite slave could also buy his own freedom, "if he prosper[ed]" and could later afford it. In such cases, the Israelites were to "calculate" the cost of redemption ("his [adjusted] purchase price"), in view of the coming Year of Jubilee, when all slaves in the land went free anyway.

"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

⁵²⁴Wiersbe, pp. 299-300.

⁵²⁵Michael Goldberg, "Expository Articles: Exodus 1:13-14," *Interpretation* 37:4 (October 1983):390-91.

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)."⁵²⁶

The provision of redemption by a kinsman (vv. 47-55) is a very important legal point in the Book of Ruth (cf. also Jer. 32:7-15). Boaz fulfilled the responsibility of a "kinsman-redeemer" by buying Mahlon's land for Ruth. Furthermore, he fulfilled the duty of a "levir" by marrying Ruth.⁵²⁷

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.⁵²⁸

We 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).⁵²⁹

"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."⁵³⁰

G. PROMISES AND WARNINGS CH. 26

Chapter 26 continues the emphasis on life in the land, by spelling out the blessings and curses that Israel could expect for obedience and disobedience to the 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."⁵³¹

"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

⁵²⁶Wenham, *The Book . . .*, pp. 322-23.

⁵²⁷See Mike Mitchell, "The Go'el: Kinsman Redeemer," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):13-15.

⁵²⁸See Michael A. Harbin, "Jubilee and Social Justice," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:4 (December 2011):685-99.

⁵²⁹See 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.

⁵³⁰Ross, p. 463.

⁵³¹Bush, p. 263.

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."⁵³²

"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."⁵³³

Two basic commandments, one negative and one positive, introduce this chapter (26:1-2.) Then follow: blessings 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 He would discipline His people in order to bring them to repentance and return them to Himself. This chapter proved to be prophetic in Israel's history.

"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 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."⁵³⁴

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 the land.

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 (vv. 1-2).

⁵³²Merrill, "Leviticus," p. 91.

⁵³³Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Pentateuch," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 95.

⁵³⁴Harrison, pp. 230-31.

"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)."⁵³⁵

"Idols" (gods) were nonentities, not being real, and so proscribed (v. 1). "Images" implied that the Lord belonged to the world, since an image of a "god" represented an entity that must fall short of representing the true God adequately. A "sacred pillar" or standing stone was a commonly used object in Baal worship, that implied that God was tied to one specific place. "Figured stones" were sometimes used to mark boundaries, and implied that a particular deity guarded the property.⁵³⁶

"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 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."⁵³⁷

"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."⁵³⁸

2. The blessing for fidelity to the law 26:3-13

The benefits of faithful obedience to the law of God ("if you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments") would be: fruitful harvests (vv. 4-5, 10), and security and peace (v. 6), including victory in battle (vv. 7-8) and numerical growth as a nation (v. 9; cf. Gen. 17:7). The obedient would also experience increasing enjoyment of God's presence and fellowship (vv. 11-12).

"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."⁵³⁹

The Hebrew word translated "dwelling" (v. 11, *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).⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁵Merrill, "A Theology . . .," p. 59.

⁵³⁶Noordtzi, p. 263.

⁵³⁷Sailhamer, p. 364.

⁵³⁸Bonar, p. 473.

⁵³⁹Wiersbe, p. 301.

⁵⁴⁰Harris, p. 644.

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."⁵⁴¹

"God promises to reward his people with both spiritual and physical blessing if they are faithful to the requirements of the covenant."⁵⁴²

"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 upon their redemption: *I am your God, because I brought you forth out of the land of Egypt*, v. 13."⁵⁴³

3. The warning for contempt of the law 26:14-33

These punishments would come upon the Israelites, not for individual errors and sins, but for a settled contempt for the whole covenant. They manifested 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 purpose as well. It is very easy to take the blessings of rain, peace, and even God's presence for granted. It is salutary to be reminded in detail of what life is like when his providential gifts are removed."⁵⁴⁴

Moses revealed five levels, series, or waves of punishment. 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 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 follow. These first punishments were disease, lack of agricultural fruitfulness, and defeat by their enemies.

⁵⁴¹Ross, p. 468.

⁵⁴²Ibid., p. 473.

⁵⁴³Henry, p. 140.

⁵⁴⁴Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 330.

- 26:18-20 The second stage of barren land ("your land will not yield its produce") might follow (one curse: "make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze"; cf. 1 Kings 17:1). "Seven times" occurs figuratively here indicating a great increase (cf. vv. 21, 24).
- 26:21-22 The third stage would be divine extermination of their "cattle" and "children" from "beasts of the field" (two curses).
- 26:23-26 The fourth stage would be war ("sword"), plagues ("pestilence"), and famine ("break your staff of bread . . . eat and not be satisfied"; three curses).
- ". . . 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."⁵⁴⁵
- 26:27-33 The fifth stage would be the destruction of the Israelites' families ("you will eat the flesh of your sons and . . . daughters"); their idolatrous practices ("your incense and altars" and "idols") and places ("your high places," "sanctuaries"); their land and "cities"; and their nation ("you . . . I will scatter among the nations") through dispersion (four curses).

In her history in the land Israel, experienced all of these curses, because she eventually despised the Mosaic Law. The record of this failure is not consistent, because there were periods of revival and consequent blessing. Nevertheless, the general course of the nation proceeded downward.

4. The objective of God's judgments in relation to the land and the nation of Israel 26:34-46

In this section, God explained that His discipline for disobedience would be to produce repentance in the Israelites, and their return to Himself (cf. Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6).

"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."⁵⁴⁶

- 26:34-39 The length of the Babylonian Captivity was 70 years, because the Israelites failed to observe 70 sabbatical years in the land (2 Chron. 36:21; cf. Jer. 29:10), between about 1406 and 586 B.C. 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).⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁵Bush, p. 268.

⁵⁴⁶Henry, p. 140.

⁵⁴⁷Wolf, p. 183.

26:40-46 *Confession* springing from humility would restrain God's hand of discipline on Israel (vv. 40-41).

"The point to be noted especially is that it is the Lord who initiates the confession. It is He who will lead His people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Scarcely any passage in the Bible is more clear in asserting that conversion is in itself an act of divine grace."⁵⁴⁸

Apostasy and consequent judgment would not invalidate God's promises to Abraham (vv. 42-45). 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. 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 humble themselves, God would remember his covenant and deliver his people."⁵⁴⁹

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).

"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

⁵⁴⁸Merrill, "Leviticus," p. 93.

⁵⁴⁹Sailhamer, p. 365.

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)."⁵⁵⁰

Verse 46 concludes all the legislation of the Mosaic Covenant that began in Exodus 25, though more specifically it summarizes the material in Leviticus. What follows in chapter 27 is supplementary.

"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."⁵⁵¹

"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."⁵⁵²

H. DIRECTIONS CONCERNING VOWS CH. 27

The "blessings and curses" (ch. 26) were, in a sense, *God's vows* to His people. This chapter deals with *His people's vows* to Him. Another connection between these chapters, is that in times of divine discipline (26:14-33), people tend to make vows to God. Chapter 27 shows how God wanted the Israelites to honor their vows.⁵⁵³

"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? . . .

"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?'"⁵⁵⁴

"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

⁵⁵⁰Ross, pp. 482-83.

⁵⁵¹Ibid., p. 482.

⁵⁵²Wiersbe, p. 302.

⁵⁵³Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 336.

⁵⁵⁴Bonar, pp. 493, 494.

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."⁵⁵⁵

"No true worship can end without presenting ourselves and our substance to the Lord, Who provides all our benefits."⁵⁵⁶

"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."⁵⁵⁷

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 32-34.

God did not command the Israelites to make vows or to promise anything to Him. However, 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). It may be that part of the purpose of these regulations was to discourage rash swearing, by fixing a relatively high price on the discharge and changing of vows.⁵⁵⁸

"A vow to God placed a person or property in a special consecrated relationship which stood outside the formal demands of the law."⁵⁵⁹

A vow was a promise to give oneself, or another person (as in a dedication of someone), or one's possessions to God, either so He would bestow some blessing, or because He had already bestowed a blessing. People made vows *to do* something or *not to do* something. Vows were normally *temporary*. When a person wanted to get back what he had vowed to God, he had to pay a certain price to the sanctuary to buy back what he had given to God. This constituted "redeeming" what the person *had vowed*. Old Testament examples of people who made vows are Jephthah (Judg. 11:30-31) and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:11). Votive offerings were offerings made in payment of vows.

1. Vows concerning persons 27:1-8

The amount of money that a person had to pay at the end of a vow, in which he had pledged himself or another person, depended on the age and sex of the individual. Some people were worth more in this respect than others (cf. Judg. 11:30).

⁵⁵⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 2:479.

⁵⁵⁶Louis Goldberg, *Leviticus: A Study Guide Commentary*, p. 143.

⁵⁵⁷Sailhamer, p. 365.

⁵⁵⁸Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 337.

⁵⁵⁹Harrison, p. 235.

"These figures are very large. The average wage of a worker in biblical times was about one shekel per month.⁵⁶⁰ It is little wonder that few could afford the valuations set out here (v. 8)."⁵⁶¹

"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."⁵⁶²

2. Vows concerning animals 27:9-13

The Israelites could offer a choice of animals—that the Mosaic Law classed as clean ("holy") or "unclean"—to God in payment for a vow. The priests probably used the unclean animals for various purposes other than sacrifice, or they could sell them for a profit.

3. Vows concerning other property 27:14-29

God treated "houses" (vv. 14-15) the same as "unclean" cattle (cf. vv. 11-12). He calculated land value in relationship to the "year of jubilee." The people evidently were to pay for land ("fields") they *had inherited* and then vowed (pledged to God), *year by year* (vv. 16-21). However, they normally were to pay for land they *purchased* and then vowed, in *one payment* (vv. 22-25). They could not vow "firstborn" animals, because these already belonged to God (vv. 26-27). Neither could they vow people or objects that had already been dedicated to God—either for good purposes (e.g., the spoil of Jericho) or for bad purposes (e.g., a condemned murderer; vv. 28-29).

4. The redemption of 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."⁵⁶³

God claimed as His possession "one tenth" of the "seed," "fruit," and livestock ("herd or flock") of the Israelites. If the owner wished to keep some of this "property tithe" for himself, he had to pay God the value of what he kept plus 20 percent. 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). This was one of two tithes the Israelites had to pay (cf.

⁵⁶⁰I. Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, p. 118.

⁵⁶¹Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 338.

⁵⁶²Noordtzi, p. 274.

⁵⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 279.

Deut. 14:22-27), the other being the tithe 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 a gift to God.

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.⁵⁶⁴

"Lev. 27 points out that holiness is more than a matter of divine call and correct ritual. Its attainment requires the total consecration of a man's life to God's service. It involves giving yourself, your family, and all your possessions to God."⁵⁶⁵

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* (being offered as a "Christian tithe"), they have satisfied 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."⁵⁶⁶

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.

⁵⁶⁴James Philip, *Numbers*, p. 212.

⁵⁶⁵Wenham, *The Book . . .*, p. 343.

⁵⁶⁶Ross, p. 495.

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix

THE OFFERINGS⁵⁶⁷		
Offering	Purpose	What was offered
Burnt (1:3-17; 6:8-13)	It signified: (1) atonement for sin (1:4), and (2) complete dedication of a person to God (hence the name "whole burnt offering").	According to wealth: (1) an unblemished bull (1:3-9), (2) an unblemished male sheep or goat (1:10-13), or (3) turtledoves or young pigeons (1:14-17).
Meal (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) cakes made of fine flour mixed with oil and baked in an oven (2:4), in a pan (2:5), or in a covered pan (2:7); and (3) green heads of roasted grain mixed with oil and frankincense (2:14-15).
Peace (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 to God without regard to any specific blessing.	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 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 turtledoves or two young 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).

⁵⁶⁷Adapted from *The Nelson . . .*, p. 197, with changes.

Trespass (5:14—6:7; 7:1-7)	It atoned for sins committed unknowingly (inadvertently, 5:14-19), and some sins committed deliberately (intentionally, 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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