



**DAILY BIBLE  
READING:  
*LEVITICUS***

**Chuck Lowe**

# ***LEVITICUS***

***What God said to them...***

***What God is saying to us...***

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Together the images capture themes of Leviticus, including the offering of various sacrifices, and the ministry of the priests in the tabernacle, in obedience to the revelation of God to Moses on Mount Sinai.

# DAY 1

## LEVITICUS AS THE WORD OF GOD

### Leviticus 1-27 Overview

The name 'Leviticus' comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, or LXX): 'pertaining to priests'. The title is roughly accurate: the book deals with tabernacle sacrifices and various religious regulations affecting daily life, though the focus is as much on the laity as on priests, with little mention of Levites.

**What God said to them.** Leviticus continues the storyline that stretches from Genesis through Deuteronomy, broken up into five books because it is too long to fit on a single ancient scroll. To review, after his pristine creation (Genesis 1-2) was corrupted by sin (Genesis 3-11), God begins the long process of restoration, working through the people of Israel. Genesis recounts God's gradual fulfillment of his first promise to Abraham, descendants, in the face of many obstacles (Genesis 12-Exodus 1).

Then he turns to the second promise, a homeland. The first step is to deliver Israel from Egyptian captivity (Exodus 1-15a). Once they reach the wilderness, forward movement pauses while God set out his expectations: he chose Israel entirely by grace, but requires them to reciprocate with worship and obedience (Exodus 15b-24). Additionally, for

God to travel with them on the journey to the new land, they must construct a mobile sanctuary as a buffer between his holiness and their sin (Exodus 25-40). Exodus ends with God taking up residence in the tabernacle.

Leviticus begins with God speaking to Moses from the tabernacle. A double inclusion frames the book. In 1:1-2, the Lord calls to Moses from the tent of meeting, with directives for Israel. The book closes in 26:46, "These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the Lord established at Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses." Following an appendix, the book closes for a second time in 27:34, "These are the commands the Lord gave Moses at Mount Sinai for the Israelites."

In a nutshell, Exodus told Israel where to worship, Leviticus tells them how. Chapters 1-16 detail various requirements related to the tabernacle: sacrifices (chapters 1-7), priestly ordination and duties (chapters 8-10), and purification requirements and rituals (chapters 11-16). Chapters 17-25 broaden the scope of holiness beyond the tabernacle to other areas of life: diet, sex, and so forth. Chapter 26 rounds off the book with covenantal consequences: blessing for obedience, and curse on disobedience. Chapter 27 appends a process for release from impulsive vows. From beginning to end, Leviticus was delivered over the course of one month (Exodus 40:1,17 cf. Numbers 1:1).



**What God is saying to us.** One recurring expression in Leviticus encapsulates both the necessity and the challenge of application: ‘The Lord said to Moses’ [and/or, Aaron] (4:1; 5:14; 6:1,8,24; 7:22,28; 8:1; 10:8; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1,33; 15:1; 16:2; 17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:1,16; 22:1,17,26). ‘The Lord said’: as much as any other biblical text, Leviticus is the Word of God. ‘To Moses’: as much as any other Old Testament text, Leviticus addresses a particular period of biblical history, and particularly, a period before the epoch-changing coming of Christ.

Since the destruction of the (second) Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, not even Judaism has been offering animal sacrifice, so substantial swathes of the book can no longer be implemented as ordered. Furthermore, the New Testament portrays animal sacrifice both as ultimately ineffective and as obsolete after the once-for-all atoning death of Christ. How, then, can we extrapolate some abiding spiritual message from outdated liturgical practices that fit ancient nomadic and agricultural cultures?

The book of Hebrews is especially instructive in this regard. Its opening lines provide perspective for its audience, including us: “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). The relationship between Leviticus and Jesus entails both continuity and contrast. It encompasses not simply what Jesus said, but also who Jesus was and is, and what he did and does.

The relevance of Leviticus for us is best understood in the light of its fulfillment in Christ. So, too, our appreciation of Christ is heightened by viewing him against the backdrop of Leviticus. Confirming this interplay (technically, 'intertextuality'), the New Testament cites Leviticus fifteen times (from eight different passages), along with another ninety allusions (to more than sixty verses). Clearly the early Christians considered that Leviticus had something to say to them, and thus, has something to say to us.

In the readings that follow, application will focus on the historical-redemptive ramifications of Leviticus; that is, how Jesus fulfills and transforms its message. Application will be guided by explicit citations and implicit allusions across the New Testament.



## DAY 2

# OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES

### Leviticus 1-7 Overview

With the tabernacle built, Leviticus provides guidelines for its use. Unlike churches today, which serve primarily for corporate worship, the tabernacle excludes the worshipper, in order to preserve the holiness of God from corruption. Instead of corporate worship, the main activity in the tabernacle is the offering of sacrifice by priests. Earlier, Exodus 29:38-41 mandated twice-daily sacrifices, in morning and evening: a lamb, grain, and wine. To that, Numbers 28-29 will require calendrical sacrifices: weekly, monthly, and annual festivals. In distinction, Leviticus 1-7 covers voluntary sacrifices offered at individual initiative.

**What God said to them.** The limits and cohesion of the section are marked by a thematic frame: the opening and closing verses are repetitive, characterizing the intervening content as ‘regulations from God governing tabernacle sacrifice, for Moses to convey to the people’ (1:1-2 cf. 7:37). Additional cohesion is provided by the content: the passage describes five forms of voluntary sacrifice: burnt, grain, fellowship, sin, and guilt offerings.

Internally, the section divides into two unequal parts, twice working through the list of offerings. Chapters 1-6a direct the laity in preparing and presenting sacrifices. Chapters 6b-7 direct the priests in officiating sacrifices.

Within chapters 1-6a, introductory formula separate the offerings into two categories: "Speak to the Israelites and say to them" (1:2); "Say to the Israelites" (4:1). The first category consists of food offerings; specifically, burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings (1:3-3:17). The second category atones for unintentional violations of the Law; specifically, sin and guilt offerings (4:1-6:7). This is easier to track in outline format:

- regulations governing voluntary sacrifices (chapters 1-7)
  - regulations governing lay offerings (chapters 1-6a)
    - food offerings (chapters 1-3)
      - burnt offerings (chapter 1)
      - grain offerings (chapter 2)
      - fellowship offerings (chapter 3)
    - atonement offerings (chapters 4-6a)
      - sin offerings (chapters 4-5a)
      - guilt offerings (chapters 5b-6a)
  - regulations governing priests officiating (chapters 6b-7).

Even before considering the details of content, the structural overview prompts two takeaways. First, Leviticus is carefully composed. The structural pattern facilitates memorization, and reflects the importance of sacrifice within Old Testament worship. Secondly, these five types of

voluntary offerings, on top of the required daily, weekly, monthly, and annual offerings, underscore the centrality and frequency of sacrifice in the worship of Yahweh.



**What God is saying to us.** Sacrifice is at the heart of Old Testament faith. It featured in the public and private worship of Yahweh, daily, weekly, monthly, periodically throughout the year, and at other times according to individual discretion.

Sacrifice is also at the heart of New Testament faith, but in a different way. The main difference is that the continuous rotation of agricultural sacrifices has been supplanted by the singular self-sacrifice of Christ.

The author of Hebrews makes this point, contrasting Christ with the sacrifices, including those covered in these chapters: “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law (Hebrews 10:8 citing Psalm 40:6).

Prescribed by Scripture, the sacrifices were legitimate. But they did not effectively purify the offerer:

*Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is*

*impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:2-4).*

Purifying sinners is precisely what Jesus does: "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10).

Consequently, the New Testament does not draw individual applications from each of the various Old Testament sacrifices, as though burnt, grain, fellowship, sin, and guilt offerings offer distinct lessons for Christians.

Instead, it collates them all into a single, all-encompassing application: Christ died for us, as a sacrifice to God, once-for-all, obtaining the forgiveness of our sins through his blood, and "where [sins] have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary" (Hebrews 10:18).



***"These, then, are the regulations ... which the Lord gave Moses at Mount Sinai ... on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the Lord" (7:37).***

## DAY 3

# BURNT OFFERINGS

### Leviticus 1

The three food offerings follow parallel protocols:

- the offering must be of highest quality;
- worshipers must bring the offering to the priest at the tabernacle;
- the worshiper and the priest have specific and differing roles;
- the blood and flesh of sacrifices are to be disposed of as directed.

The three offerings also differ in some respects. We consider the burnt offering today, with the grain and fellowship offerings subsequently.

**What God said to them.** The burnt offering is so called because it is burned in its entirety on the altar. While coming first in this list, it is generally not the first sacrifice offered: typically, it is preceded by a sin offering (for example, Leviticus 9; Numbers 6:10-12; 2 Chronicles 29:20-36).

Three sacrifices are acceptable for a burnt offering, in order of decreasing expense: a bull, a lamb or goat, or a bird. The respective instructions unfold largely in parallel. Each

paragraph begins “If...”, and ends with, “It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.”

A bull must have no defect. The worshipper lays a hand on its head, and slaughters it. Then the priest splashes its blood against the altar. The worshipper skins and dismembers the bull. Then the priest places the pieces to burn on the altar fire. The worshipper washes the hind quarters of any dung. Then the priest adds those to the fire (1:3-9).

A more affordable option is to offer a sheep or goat. The process is essentially the same, with the instructions omitting some details, apparently in order to avoid tedious repetition (1:10-13).

The poor may offer a bird, either dove or pigeon. Due to its small size, the priest conducts the entire sacrifice, without participation by the worshipper. He drains its blood against the altar, discards its crop and feathers, then tears open the carcass, and burns it on the altar (1:14-17).

Leviticus focuses on procedure, without explaining meaning. Commonly in religious traditions, the original meaning of a ritual may be lost to history, if an articulated meaning ever existed. Sometimes rituals are intuitive. Other times, it is more about process than meaning. Sometimes worshipers conduct a ritual a certain way simply because “this is the way it has always been done.” In such cases, even asking, “What does this ritual mean?” can create

distortion, pressuring practitioners to invent post hoc explanations.

Caveat noted, some details are suggestive. The worshiper lays a hand on the head of the offering: even if this may not necessarily signify full-fledged substitution, at least it communicates an association between the animal and the offerer. The worshiper takes the lead throughout the ritual, except in those parts which contact the sacred (whether blood or altar): this simultaneously conveys both personal responsibility and sacral limitations.

Records of burnt offerings provide additional clues. After disembarking from the ark, Noah offers burnt offerings: in response God vows that he will never again destroy the earth (Genesis 8:20). Abraham prepares Isaac as a burnt offering, prompting God to confirm the covenant and blessing (Genesis 22:1-19). In the face of Philistine attack, the prophet Samuel sacrifices a burnt offering, and God delivers Israel (1 Samuel 7). King David makes burnt offerings, and the Lord ends his plague against Israel (2 Samuel 24:18-25). In each example, the burnt offering is a costly sacrifice, as an expression of devotion and of serious intent, moving God to action.



**What God is saying to us.** Against this backdrop, Paul's application of the burnt offering to Christ is striking: "Christ loved us and gave himself up on our behalf, an offering and sacrifice to God, as a pleasing aroma" (Ephesians 5:2). The

language comes from Leviticus: 'offering', 'sacrifice', 'pleasing aroma'. Only in this case, instead of our offering an expensive animal sacrifice in appeal to God, Christ offers himself, a priceless sacrifice, on our behalf.

Christ's sacrifice of himself evokes two responses. First, God forgives us: "In Christ, God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Secondly, the forgiveness of God, along with the love of Christ, compel us to forgive and love each other: "Follow God's example ... and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up" (Ephesians 5:2).

Costly sacrifice evokes reciprocation. Only now, it is no longer our costly sacrifice that moves God to respond, but Christ's costly sacrifice that moves both God and us to respond.



***"It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord" (1:9,13,17).***

## DAY 4

# GRAIN OFFERINGS

### Leviticus 2

**B**urnt offerings are generally accompanied by grain offerings, and often by fellowship offerings as well, both in the daily offerings (Numbers 28), and on special occasions (cf. Joshua 22; Judges 13; 1 Kings 8). So the regulations on burnt offerings naturally segue to these other food offerings.

**What God said to them.** From yesterday's reading, similar requirements apply to all food offerings. The offering must be of highest quality. Worshippers may not make offerings wherever and however they wish, but must present them to the priests at the tabernacle. Worshippers prepare the offering, with priests officiating over the sacrifice, blood, and altar. The final disposition of the offering is stipulated in each case. Beyond these commonalities, distinctive instructions apply to each type of offering.

The guidelines for grain offerings develop in three parts, covering raw offerings, cooked offerings, and additional regulations.

The raw offering consists of fine flour mixed with olive oil. The priests combine a small quantity with incense and burn it on the altar as God's share, the 'memorial portion'. The

remainder is reserved for the priests, as 'a most holy part'; it forms the bulk of their food supply (2:1-3).

Alternatively, the worshipper may bring a cooked grain offering, whether baked (thick or thin), grilled, or pan-fried. Whatever the cooking method, the offering consists of fine flour with oil, but without yeast. The priest again burns the 'memorial portion' on the altar for the Lord, and retains the remainder as 'a most holy part' for himself (2:4-10).

The third paragraph adds further instructions governing grain offerings. They are not to include either yeast or honey, but are to include salt. Tangentially, the regulation clarifies that yeast and honey may be included as part of first-fruit offerings. That leads into a final guideline regarding the first-fruit offering: newly harvested heads of grain are to be crushed and roasted with oil. As before, the priest combines the 'memorial portion' with incense, and burns it to the Lord. Though not stated, he presumably retains the remainder as 'a most holy part' for himself (2:11-16).

The combination of grain offerings with burnt/meat offerings raises another possible dimension to the meaning of food offerings: Do they intend in some sense to feed God? Reinforcing the connection with actual meals, drink offerings are often included (e.g., Leviticus 23:13,18,37; Exodus 29:40-41; 30:9). In many ancient and modern animistic cultures, gods and spirits have the same needs as humans, including food and drink. As spirit beings, however, they depend on their worshippers to provide

material supplies, consuming the inner essence of the food offerings. In exchange, the gods reciprocate by blessing and answering prayer.

Theoretically, food and drink offerings could support such an explanation. In fact, later instruction describes food offerings as “the food of ... God” (Leviticus 21:6). Similarly, the accoutrements required for the altar are typical of a royal banquet table: gold plates, dishes, bowls, pitchers (Exodus 37:16). Moreover, on occasion, Old Testament polemic characterizes food offerings in rival religions in this manner (e.g., Deuteronomy 32:37-38).

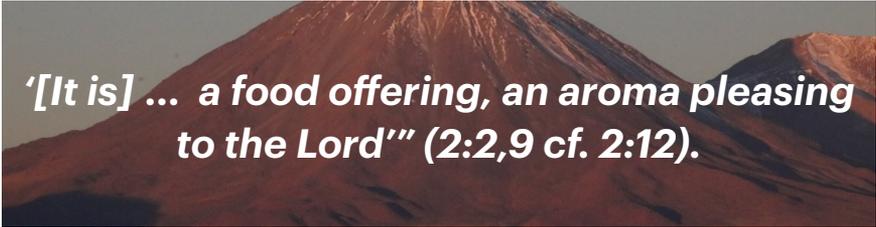
The Old Testament denies this interpretation for its own food offerings, however. God insists, “If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?” (Psalm 50:9-13). All that Leviticus allows is the recurring characterization of food offerings as “an aroma pleasing to the Lord” (2:2,9,12; cf. 1:9,13,17; 3:5,16; 6:15,21; 8:21,28; 17:6; 23:13,18; 26:31). The emphasis on fragrance implicitly excludes any suggestion of God eating the food.

Instead, while offerings may retain their traditional forms, they are repurposed as appeals for God’s intervention: “Sacrifice thank offerings to God, / fulfill your vows to the Most High, / and call on me in the day of trouble; // I will deliver you, ] and you will honor me” (Psalm 50:14-15). Even then, they are not crass bribes, but an expression of respect, necessarily coupled with virtue: “Those who

sacrifice thank offerings honor me, / and to the blameless I will show my salvation'" (Psalm 50:23).



**What God is saying to us.** Yesterday we saw that the apostle Paul applied the language of sacrifice to Christ who gave himself on our behalf as "an offering and sacrifice to God, a pleasing aroma" (Ephesians 5:2). He calls us to reciprocate in like fashion: "I urge you ... in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). No longer does barbecued offering serve as a symbol of devotion, bringing pleasure to God. Instead, he draws pleasure from the reality over the symbolic, from humans over animals, and from the living over the dead.



*'[It is] ... a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord'" (2:2,9 cf. 2:12).*

## DAY 5

# FELLOWSHIP OFFERINGS

### Leviticus 3

This chapter continues the directions for food sacrifices, moving on to fellowship offerings (sometimes translated, 'peace offerings').

**What God said to them.** Both the literary structure and the content are similar to the preceding burnt and grain offerings. This chapter continues the pattern of three sections, based on the animal sacrificed. Given that the remains of the offering are shared in a communal meal, birds make unsuitable sacrifices. So, to preserve the tripartite structure, the passage discusses sheep and goats separately: cattle (verses 1-5); sheep (verses 6-11); and goats (verses 12-16).

The internal structure of the paragraphs is largely parallel. Each begins with 'if', identification of the animal sacrifice, either male or female, without defect (verses 1,6-7,12). Each paragraph ends similarly: 'an offering made by fire', followed by some variation on 'an aroma pleasing to the Lord' (verses 5b,11b,16b). As with previous sacrifices, the mid-section of each paragraph differentiates the duties of worshipper and priest. The worshiper lays a hand on the offering, and slaughters it. The priest splashes its blood against the altar. The worshipper presents the internal organs and fat. Then the priest burns them on the altar (verses 2-5a,7-11a,13-16a).

The conclusion declares a binding ordinance, valid forever: no one may eat God's portions, the fat and the blood (verse 17).

As previously, the instructions focus on procedure, and omit any discussion of either occasion or meaning. We can, however, fill in these elements from fellowship offerings elsewhere in the Old Testament. The fellowship offering is generally voluntary and optional. Unlike the burnt and grain offerings, it is not a required part of the daily morning and evening sacrifices. It is, however, a standard part of the array of sacrifices offered on various special occasions (e.g., the initial installation of priests in Leviticus 9; the Feast of Weeks – or 'Pentecost' – in Leviticus 23; and the completion of Nazirite vows, in Numbers 6).

The name 'fellowship offerings' derives from its final disposition: unlike the burnt offering, which is devoted to God, or the grain offering, which goes to the priest, the fellowship offering is shared in a meal among the worshipers (Leviticus 7). This is its distinctive purpose: to provide the meat for a religious feast in celebration of a notable occasion (for example, the making of the covenant, Exodus 24; the crossing of the Jordan, Deuteronomy 27; the enthronement of King Saul, 1 Samuel 10-11; and the dedication of the temple, 1 Kings 8).

In short, the fellowship offering follows mostly the same process as the burnt and/or grain offerings, with two exceptions. For one, the sacrifice may use either male or female animals. For the other, the bulk of the offering is

consumed in a feast shared among the worshippers. The fellowship sacrifice is not exclusively a private act between a worshiper and God; through the shared feast, it also has communal dimensions.



**What God is saying to us.** Without referencing the fellowship offerings in particular, the apostle Paul appeals to the meals associated with sacrifice to resolve controversy in the Corinthian church.

Some Corinthian Christians argued for the right to attend feasts even when the food derived from sacrifices to Greco-Roman gods and spirits. They reasoned: “We are not participating in the worship, only joining the meal.” In response, Paul insists that the spiritual and social dimensions of the meals cannot be neatly separated. In support, he cites biblical precedent: “Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?” (1 Corinthians 10:18). By analogy, the same applies to Greco-Roman feasts: meals derived from sacrificial offerings have inseparable religious dimensions; they cannot be sanitized to purely social functions.

Paul applies the same principle to meals associated with Christian worship. Following the pattern Jesus instituted, the earliest Church celebrated Holy Communion in conjunction with a communal meal. As a result, the meal has inseparable spiritual associations: “The cup ... [is] a participation in the blood of Christ... [and] the bread that

we break [is] a participation in the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:16). Scandalously, prosperous members of the Corinthian church were sitting down to eat, and consuming all the food, before the working poor were free to join. Such behavior goes beyond rude, Paul warns; it is not only sin against fellow Christians, but also sacrilege against the body and blood of Jesus. Their misconduct brings divine judgment in the form of illness, even death (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

Thus, the spiritual dimensions of worship extend beyond the explicit liturgies, to include the meals and the relationships shared in the context of worship. This has implications for church life even beyond the scenarios Paul addresses.



***From the fellowship offering you are to bring a food offering to the Lord'"  
(3:3,9 cf. 3:14).***

## DAY 6

# SIN OFFERINGS

### Leviticus 4:1-5:13

**A** new section begins just as the book did, with God giving Moses a message for Israel: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites’” (4:1 cf. 1:1-2). Topically, chapters 1-3 outlined procedures for voluntary food offerings in honor of God much as a dignitary would be fêted (cf. Genesis 18). Now the focus shifts to sacrifices that atone for sin: sin offerings (4:1-5:13), and guilt offerings (5:14-6:7).

The focus of this section is evident from vocabulary statistics: ‘sin’ appears some fifty times in little more than two chapters. Every paragraph begins or ends with a reference to sin (4:2-3; 4:13-14; 4:22-23,26; 4:27-28,35; 5:1,5-7,10-11,13; 5:15,17; 6:2,3,4). Additional references to guilt occur throughout (4:3,13,22,27; 5:2,3,4,5,17,19; 6:4,7).

In their various forms, sin offerings and guilt offerings share a common purpose: “The priest will make atonement for them for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven” (4:35 cf. 4:20,26,31; 5:6,10,13,16,18; 6:7). An important caveat qualifies this promise: these sacrifices atone only for inadvertent, unintentional sin (4:2,13,22,27; 5:15,18).

**What God said to them.** The passage provides directions for sin offerings. In the first part, the offering process varies according to the status of the sinner (4:3-35). In the second part, sacrifices vary according to two factors: the sin committed and the ability to pay (5:1-13).

Regarding the former, spiritual and social status affect the sacrifice required and the area of the tabernacle that needs cleansing.

When the high priest sins, the most stringent requirements apply: he must sacrifice a bull, and sprinkle its blood to cleanse the curtain that separates the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place, as well as the incense altar just outside the curtain. Apart from that, the process largely follows the fellowship offering, with one notable exception: he brings the hide, flesh, and organs of the bull outside the camp for burning (4:3-12).

When the entire community sins, the elders likewise must offer a bull, which is sacrificed and disposed in the same way as the priest's offering (4:13-21).

When a community leader sins, he is to offer a male goat, a less costly sacrifice. The priest sprinkles the blood and burns the fat on the altar at the entrance of the tabernacle. Instead of burning the flesh outside the camp, the priests retain it for their own consumption (4:22-26 cf. 6:17).

Finally, when a routine member of the community sins, they bring a female goat or lamb, as an offering. As with the

previous case, the priest sprinkles its blood on the altar of burnt offering, burns its fat on the altar, and retains the meat for himself and his colleagues (4:27-35 cf. 6:17).

At this point, the passage shifts to identifying specific sins and the offerings required to atone for them. Four sins are listed: withholding evidence in a legal proceeding, uncleanness contracted through touching an unclean animal, uncleanness contracted through touching unclean people, and making a rash vow (5:1-4). The remedy for any of these sins is to confess, and offer a sacrifice. The appointed sacrifice depends on what the transgressor can afford: a female lamb or goat, two doves or pigeons, or two quarts of flour without the usual olive oil or incense (5:5-13).

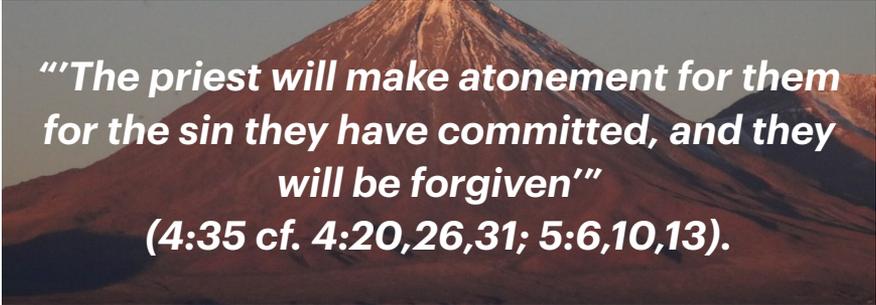
So sin offerings include several distinctives. Central is its role in atonement: sin requires both forgiveness and cleansing; the sin offering achieves both (4:20,26,31,35; 5:6,10,13). The area of the tabernacle that is defiled and in need of cleansing varies according to the religious stature of the transgressor. The cost of the sacrifice also varies, according to both religious status and ability to pay. Also notable is the requirement that in specific cases – when it is the high priest or the entire community that transgresses – the sin offering is burned in its entirety, outside the camp.



**What God is saying to us.** The author of Hebrews picks up this last distinctive as an analogy for what Christ has done:

*The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood (Hebrews 13:11-12).*

Earlier, the author of Hebrews noted that as high priest, Jesus cleanses us with his blood in the heavenly tabernacle (cf. Hebrews 9:11-14,23-26). Now the parallel extends further: as sin offering, his body is brought outside the city gate, to Golgotha, for the atonement of our sin. He urges his audience, in like fashion, resolving to face social humiliation and persecution for Christ: “Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore” (Hebrews 13:13).



***“The priest will make atonement for them for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven”  
(4:35 cf. 4:20,26,31; 5:6,10,13).***

## DAY 7

# GUILT OFFERINGS

Leviticus 5:14-6:7

The directions for sacrifice conclude with guilt offerings. Both sin and guilt offerings atone for sin, and the difference between them is uncertain. But a couple distinctions arise here: guilt offerings require the sacrifice of a ram (no other animal is acceptable); and, atonement for financial sin requires full restitution, plus an extra 20%.

**What God said to them.** This passage is clearly structured, in three parallel paragraphs. The first and third paragraphs begin with the familiar introduction: “The Lord said to Moses” (5:14; 6:1). The middle portion of each paragraph identifies a sin, and its remedy. While the sins vary, the remedy remains the same, in virtually the same words: a ram without defect, of full value (5:15,18; 6:6).

Additionally, the first and third paragraphs require full restitution for financial misdeeds at a premium of twenty percent. Each paragraph ends with the same promise, in nearly identical wording: “The priest will make atonement for them with the ram as a guilt offering, and they will be forgiven” (5:16 cf. 5:18; 6:7).

Where the paragraphs differ is in the sin that they target. The first paragraph takes aim at unintended offenses against ‘the Lord’s holy things’ (5:14-16). The passage does

not explain this phrase, but its meaning can be inferred from other texts. Earlier, the priests' share of the grain offerings is called 'the holy of holy things'; in colloquial English, 'the most holy things' (2:3,10). So are the twelve loaves of bread that are placed on the tabernacle table each Sabbath (24:9). Because these offerings are sacred, only priests may eat them, and only within designated sacred spaces, away from the masses gathered in the tabernacle courtyard (Ezekiel 42:13,14; 46:20). So the first use of the guilt offering is to atone for inadvertent violations of the sanctity of offerings and tabernacle furnishings.

The second paragraph continues the topic of inadvertent sins, this time against 'the Lord's commands' (5:17-19). Again, the phrase is not explained, though its meaning can be inferred from other passages. Presumably the Ten Commandments are not in view, for violations of those generally meets with harsh penalty. Elsewhere in the Pentateuch, a guilt offering is necessary if someone under a Nazirite vow inadvertently comes into contact with a dead body (Numbers 6:1-12). During Ezra's reform, each priest who had married a foreign wife had to make a guilt offering (Ezra 10:19). These incidents provide some illustration of unintentional sin against 'the Lord's commands'.

The third paragraph requires guilt offerings for what are most likely intentional sins, such as breach of trust, stealing, cheating, pilfering, lying under oath, and extortion. These sins not only violate others; they are also offenses against the Lord (6:1-7).

With all three categories, once those at fault realize their culpability, they are to make restitution, and sacrifice a ram as a guilt offering. The priest makes atonement for them before the Lord, and they are forgiven.



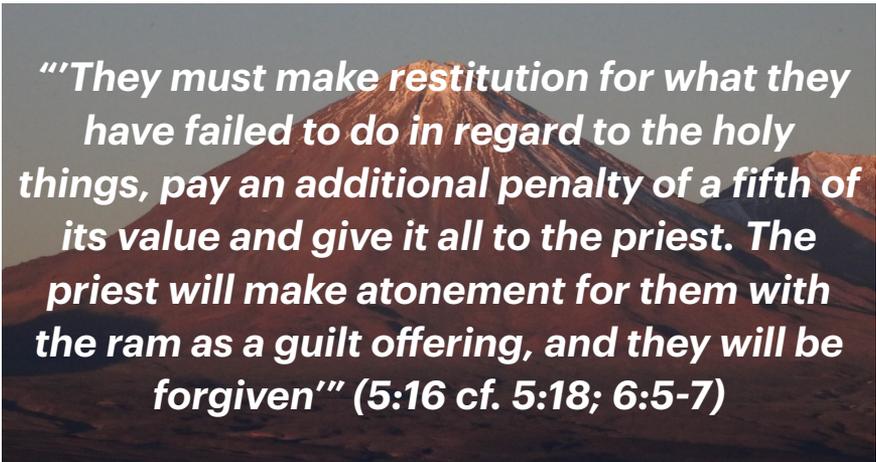
**What God is saying to us.** Hebrews 9 invokes the atonement which came through Old Testament sacrifice to explain the atonement which comes through Jesus. Both continuities and discontinuities exist between the two methods of atonement.

Just as Leviticus requires the animals to be without flaw, so Christ is unblemished, sinless (Hebrews 9:14). Similarly, just as the law requires the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sin, so Christ's blood was shed in death (Hebrews 9:22). In these respects, Old Testament sacrifices prefigure the atonement that comes through Jesus, bringing forgiveness.

At the same time, discontinuity – or actually, heightening – occurs. Jesus combines all three sacrificial roles in himself: as worshipper, he offers not an animal, but himself; as sacrifice, he willingly dies; as high priest, he officiates not in an earthly tabernacle, but in its heavenly prototype (9:11-12a). The atonement he secures is not temporary, to be repeated daily, weekly, monthly, and periodically throughout the year. Instead, he offers himself once-for-all to redeem us forever (9:12b). Animal sacrifice cleanses the outward body; the cleansing Christ performs purifies the

inner conscience, rescuing us from death, and empowering us to serve God (9:13-14). In all these ways, Jesus mediates a new and better covenant, dying to ransom us, and to secure for us the long-promised eternal inheritance (9:15).

Old Testament sacrifices point forward to Christ, but as a telescope points toward a star, providing a dim reflection of distant glory.



***“They must make restitution for what they have failed to do in regard to the holy things, pay an additional penalty of a fifth of its value and give it all to the priest. The priest will make atonement for them with the ram as a guilt offering, and they will be forgiven” (5:16 cf. 5:18; 6:5-7)***

## DAY 8

# SACRIFICES: FINAL DISPOSITION

### Leviticus 6:8-7:38

This section surveys the same sacrifices a second time, in largely the same order as chapters 1-6a. The distinction between the two is that the earlier passage focuses on the offering of sacrifices; this one, on the disposition of the remains. Like the entire book to this point, this passage is detailed, reflecting God's concern that they do just what he commands (6:8,19,24; 7:22,28), in just the way he commands (6:9,14,25; 7:1,11,37). The detail of these two chapters is no longer directly relevant to the church, and so need not be put to memory. Nonetheless, the passage offers at least one lesson that is readily grasped and still pertinent today.

**What God said to them.** The passage easily subdivides. Recurring formulae introduce each new paragraph ("The Lord said to Moses"; and, "These are the regulations"). Thematically, the paragraphs scroll through the sacrifices in turn, in basically the same order as chapters 1-6a.

The burnt offering again comes first. Five times the priest is commanded to keep the altar fire burning all night. This generates a substantial amount of ash. He is to change out

of his ceremonial robes in order to dispose of the ash outside the camp (6:8-13).

A modest portion of the grain offering goes to God. The remainder is for the priest to eat. Since the offering is sacred, he must eat it inside the tabernacle courtyard (6:14-18). In contrast, the grain offering that is part of the priestly ordination ceremony, he does not eat but offers as a burnt sacrifice (6:19-23).

The disposition of the sin offering varies. In cases when protocols require blood to be sprinkled within the tabernacle – i.e., sin offerings on behalf of the high priest or congregation, and sin offerings on the Day of Atonement – the sacrifices are burned in their entirety. When protocols call for blood to be sprinkled on the courtyard altar – offerings on behalf of community leaders or other individuals – the sacrifices are for the priest to eat, within the tabernacle. Given the sanctity of the sin offering, anything that comes in contact with it – such as a priest's garment or a bronze cooking pot – must be scrubbed clean before it reverts to common use (6:24-30).

The guilt offering is another of the 'most holy' sacrifices. Once the fat and viscera are burned as an offering to God, the priest and his male relatives may eat the remainder of the animal, within the holy sanctuary (7:1-6). This prompts another aside, differentiating offerings which are allotted exclusively to the officiating priest, from those which are shared among all priests (7:7-10).

The fellowship offering is the one sacrifice which appears in a different order than previously. It comes last because it is the only sacrifice which worshippers may consume. This paragraph differentiates which portions they may eat from those which they must not, and how many days they may keep leftovers (7:11-18).

The time limit on eating sacrificial leftovers leads to another restriction: only clean meat may be consumed, and only by those who are themselves ritually clean (7:19-21). That, in turn, segues into a detailed prohibition against eating the fat from any offering, or consuming blood under any circumstance (7:22-27). A final note delimits which of the portions that are prohibited to the worshipper belong to the Lord (the blood and the fat), and which portions belong to the priest (the breast and the right thigh) (7:28-36).

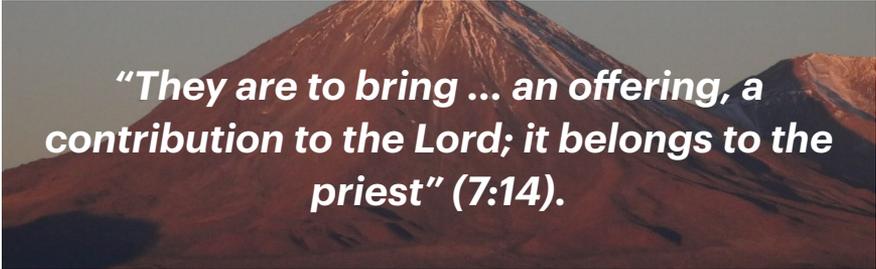
A brief conclusion forms a bookend with 1:1-2, enclosing chapters 1-7 (7:37-38).



**What God is saying to us.** Why does the final disposition of sacrificial remains receive so much attention? Likely for three reasons. First, the sacrifice is sacred, so its remains must be treated properly. Secondly, within animistic and ritualistic contexts, the sacred is often imbued with spiritual – even magical – power. Leviticus guards against this by allowing no leftovers; the sacrifices are to be consumed in full, either burned on the altar, or eaten by priests or worshippers. Finally, there is the pragmatic consideration:

priests need to eat. While these offerings belong in some sense to God (7:20,21), seven times the passage affirms that they also 'belong' to the priest (7:7,8,9,10,14,31; cf. 7:35).

Within the New Testament, it is the third consideration which receives attention. In 1 Corinthians 9, the apostle Paul insists that those who serve the church vocationally properly receive financial support, just as the priests did in the temple (and tabernacle) (1 Corinthians 9:1-14). This is not a benefaction granted by a generous congregation to their servants, nor a salary paid by employers to employees. It is the right of vocational clergy, commanded by God, in reciprocation for ministry rendered.



***“They are to bring ... an offering, a contribution to the Lord; it belongs to the priest” (7:14).***

## DAY 9

# PRIESTS: SELECTION AND ORDINATION

### Leviticus 8

**F**rom the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-40), and instructions about sacrifice (Leviticus 1-7), the focus now shifts to the priests who officiate within the former and at the latter. Taken individually, chapter 8 reports the ordination of Aaron and his sons. Chapter 9 records their inaugural service in the tabernacle. Chapter 10 recounts the divine punishment of two prominent priests. Taken together, the three panels validate, and set limits for, the Aaronic priesthood.

Chapters 8-9 legitimize the priesthood. Chapter 8 invokes the endorsement of both God, who orders Aaron's ordination, and Moses, who carries it out, precisely following the detailed process that God established in Exodus 29. Chapter 9 reports Aaron and his sons performing their first sacrifices, strictly in accordance with the detailed directions that God set out in Leviticus 1-7. The narrator underscores the detailed correspondences with a frequent, explicit refrain: "as the Lord commanded" (8:4,5, 9:13,17,21,29,34,35,36; cf. 9:6,7,10; 10:13,15). Both Moses and Aaron follow every detail, exactly as God commanded, validating the Aaronic priesthood.

Until chapter 10. There two of Aaron's sons make unsanctioned offering, and are struck dead for it. The text does not identify their specific infraction; clearly the specifics are not the point. Their transgression provides a case study of the general point. Moses had warned them about this risk: "Do what the Lord requires, so that you will not die" (8:35). They violate what the Lord requires, and suffer the consequences. While God has appointed the Aaronic priesthood, he does not grant them *carte blanche*.

So the Aaronic priesthood is certified by God. Along with this prestige comes a responsibility: they must carefully obey his directives. Otherwise, they suffer his wrath. The authority of the Aaronic priesthood, and the limitations on it, are the collective message of the three chapters. Now to the specifics of each chapter.

**What God said to them.** As part of the directions for constructing the tabernacle, Exodus 29 gave directions for the consecration of priests. In Leviticus 8, Moses carefully follows the prescribed process. This includes:

- assembling the necessary items for the ordination (Exodus 29:1-3), which Moses does 'as the Lord commanded' (Leviticus 8:1-4);
- cleansing and clothing the candidates (Exodus 29:4-6), which Moses does 'as the Lord commanded' (Leviticus 8:5-9);
- anointing the candidates (Exodus 29:7-9), which Moses does 'as the Lord commanded' (Leviticus 8:10-13);

- slaughtering the sin offering (Exodus 29:10-14), which Moses does 'as the Lord commanded' (Leviticus 8:14-17);
- slaughtering the burnt offering, as a pleasing aroma (Exodus 29:15-18), which Moses does 'as the Lord commanded' (Leviticus 8:18-21);
- presenting the combined ordination/wave offering (Exodus 29:19-30), which Moses does 'as the Lord commanded' (Leviticus 8:22-30);
- preparing a sacred meal for Aaron and his sons (Exodus 29:27-34), which Moses does as he 'was commanded' (Leviticus 8:31-32);
- all repeated for seven days (Exodus 29:35-37), which Aaron and his sons do because 'the Lord commanded' (Leviticus 8:33-36).

Like the centralized tabernacle and the regulated sacrifices, a formal priesthood supplants previous traditional structures. The new form requires legitimization when replacing the old. It obtains legitimacy through divine appointment and the careful implementation of mandated procedures. The Aaronic priesthood is authorized by God, and installed by Moses.



**What God is saying to us.** The book of Hebrews comments on the Aaronic priesthood: "No one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was." The same is true of Jesus: "In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But

God said to him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’” (Hebrews 5:5 citing Psalm 2:7; cf. Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Yet he is greater than any previous high priest, because “he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). Updating its original function, this passage encourages us to trust in Jesus, our divinely appointed high priest.

With Jesus as high priest, we need no priest today. Contemporary pastors serve a fundamentally different function, and while they commonly undergo ordination, the process has little correlation with Leviticus 8.

The New Testament does, however, affirm the continued need for church leadership (typically called elders, a hybrid of what today are widely known as pastors and elders). Rather than a process for appointment, it sets out a list of qualifications, including character, morality, theology, experience, gifts, and reputation (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:14). Just as Moses follows exactly the process that God set out for the ordination of priests, so we must carefully screen for the qualifications that God prescribes for church leaders.



***“Aaron and his sons did everything the Lord commanded through Moses” (8:36).***

## DAY 10

# PRIESTS: INAUGURAL SERVICE

### Leviticus 9

**A**s soon as Aaron's week-long ordination is complete, Moses – and God – set him to work.

**What God said to them.** The structure of this passage is both clear and instructive. A preface outlines the remainder of the passage. Moses summons the newly ordained priests, Aaron and his sons, along with the leaders of Israel. He directs the former to bring animals for their sin offerings and burnt offerings, required in preparation for serving. He directs the latter to bring offerings for four sacrifices: sin, burnt, fellowship, and grain. Both parties do so, as the entire assembly gathers at the tabernacle. Moses promises that the glory of the Lord will manifest (9:1-6).

The process unfolds as anticipated. Moses directs Aaron to sacrifice his own sin and burnt offerings, to make atonement for himself, and then to sacrifice the offerings for the people, to make atonement for them (9:7). Aaron complies, with his sons' assistance. First he sacrifices for himself: sin offering followed by burnt offering (9:8-14). Then he sacrifices for the people: sin offering, burnt offering, grain offering, and fellowship offering. His task completed, Aaron blesses the people (9:15-22). At this point, Moses

brings him into the Tent of Meeting for the first time. Upon their exit, two portents greet the people: the glory of the Lord manifests, and fire from the Lord consumes the burnt offering on the altar (9:23-24).

The theme of the passage is evident: Aaron and his sons take up their duties, closely follow the stipulated protocols, and receive divine approval. The narrator underscores each of these three elements.

First, Aaron and his sons take up their duties. In chapter 8, prior to the installation of the priesthood, Moses leads the sacrifices, while Aaron is the worshipper. Aaron and his sons lay their hands on the head of the animals, then Moses slaughters, splashes the blood at the altar, burns the fat, and disposes of the hide, flesh, and offal according to divine directives. In chapter 9, Aaron now leads the sacrifices, and is the subject of most verbs: he slaughters the animal, manipulates the blood at the altar, burns the fat, disposes of the hide and flesh and offal according to divine directives, and so forth. The two chapters are largely repetitive in actions and vocabulary; the main difference is that Moses is the subject of most verbs in chapter 8; Aaron, in chapter 9. Aaron and his sons relieve Moses of the priestly duties.

In so doing, secondly, Aaron and his sons adhere strictly to the divine instructions, as Moses did before them. In describing their initial sacrifices, the narrator largely repeats his earlier account of God's directives. They follow the stipulated protocols for sin offering (9:8-11 cf. 4:3-12), burnt

offering (9:12-14 cf. 1:3-9), fellowship and wave offerings (9:18-21 cf. 3:2-5; 7:30-34). Aaron and his sons carefully follow the stipulated protocols.

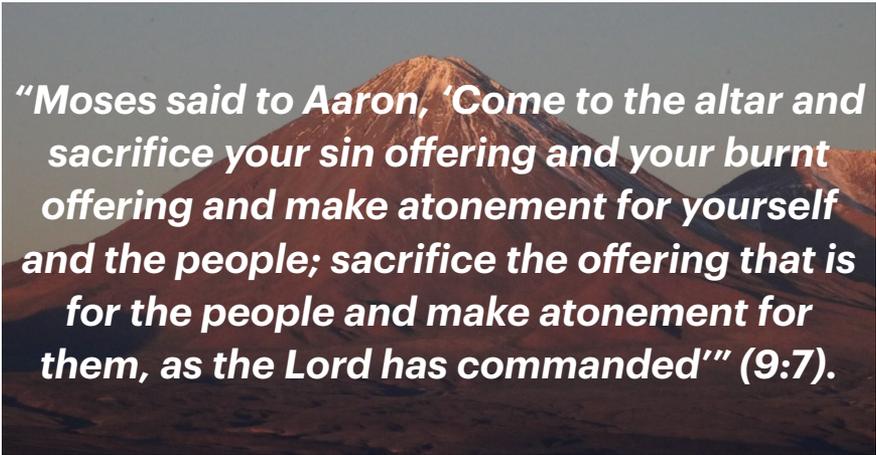
Thirdly, God confirms the legitimacy and authority of their ministry with fire and glory. Fire and glory from God signal pinnacles of salvation history. Divine fire guides Israel through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22). The Lord descends on Sinai in fire, and his glory appears among the people both on the mountain and in the tabernacle (Exodus 16:7-10; 19:18; 24:16-17; 29:43; 33:18-22; 40:34-38). The dedication of the temple under Solomon manifests in both fire and glory (2 Chronicles 7:1-3). Fire famously descends from heaven at Mount Carmel, when Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:36-39). Similarly, as the Aaronic priesthood begins, God stamps his approval, with fire and glory.



**What God is saying to us.** The New Testament alludes to the events of this chapter to proclaim the superiority of Christ over the Aaronic priesthood:

*Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices ... first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people (Hebrews 7:26-27).*

The Aaronic priesthood was divinely appointed for its era, but it was nonetheless, a priesthood of sinners. Jesus is the great high priest, tempted as we are, yet without sin. From his experience of temptation, we have confidence that he is sympathetic toward us, and will intercede for us before God (Hebrews 4:14-16). These convictions motivate us not only to worship Christ, but also to be confident in God’s mercy and grace when we face temptation or endure persecution.



## DAY 11

# PRIESTS: SIN AND JUDGMENT

### Leviticus 10

**A**t this point, the narrative pivots abruptly, though, in hindsight, it is evident that the narrator has been planning the plot shift from the beginning of this section. Chapter 8 covered the selection and ordination of the priests. Chapter 9 reported their inaugural service. At every step the refrain recurs: they do “as the Lord commanded” (8:4,5,9,13,17,21,29,34,35,36; cf. 9:6,7,10; 10:13,15). Additionally, at one point, Moses warns the priests, “Do what the Lord requires, so you will not die” (8:35). Yet the foreshadow is discrete, so its significance is easily missed until two sons of Aaron sin during priestly service, and die under divine judgment.

**What God said to them.** The narrative is carefully structured, in three episodes. Two of Aaron’s sons sin in performing priestly service, and God kills them (verses 1-7). Then Moses warns priests against other behaviors pertaining to drinking alcohol and eating sacrifices (verses 8-15). In the third episode, Aaron’s surviving sons violate protocols around sacrifice, but escape execution (verses 16-19). The message of the narrative comes not just in the first episode, but in the interplay among all three.

The reader never learns what specifically was inappropriate about the incense offering by Moses' eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu. Apparently the narrator does not consider this detail necessary to his point. All that matters is that they violated God's instructions regarding priestly duties. Consequently, he kills them. God explains his rationale: "Among those who approach me I will be proved holy."

Their punishment matches their sin. For the unauthorized use of fire, the two are killed by fire. At the end of the previous chapter, "fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed" the inaugural sacrifices, signaling God's approval, prompting the people to shout with joy (9:24). Now, at the beginning of the next chapter, "fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed" the priests, signaling divine judgment, and Aaron remains silent.

The pathos of their death is deepened by their funeral. Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, are on priestly duty. Contact with the dead is defiling, so they may not participate in the funeral. They are not even allowed to mourn publicly, on threat of execution. God has already killed two of Aaron's sons, and now twice threatens to kill him and his other sons, if they disobey him by leaving the tabernacle in order to participate in the funeral. The honor of priestly duty carries with it grave penalty for disobedience (verses 1-7).

At this point, Moses lists additional ministry-related warnings for the priests. They must not be drunk while

serving in the tabernacle, or they will die. Only authorized people may eat food from the sacrificial offerings, and only in designated sacred spaces (verses 8-11).

In the third episode, Moses reviews regulations for the disposition of sacrifices: the priests may share the grain offering with male descendants (cf. 6:14-18); they may share the wave offering with both genders. When he checks on the disposition of the previous day's sacrifices, Moses discovers that instead of eating their share of the sin offering, Aaron and his sons burned it in its entirety. He reproaches them for violating protocol. Aaron explains their rationale: they should not sit down to a nice meal while grieving over the death of two sons/brothers. Moses accepts the explanation, and God does not destroy them (verses 12-20).

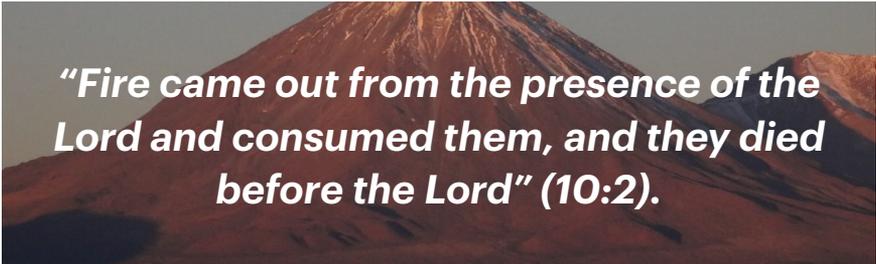


**What God is saying to us.** The passage offers two lessons. Within the context of chapters 8-10, the message is that no one is exempt from the obligation to obey God, not even the highest echelon of religious leaders. In fact, leaders are subject to more stringent judgment. The New Testament applies this lesson to pastors and elders (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Within the storyline of Scripture to this point, the incident adds another episode to the continuing theme. Thus far, every salvation-historical advance has been debilitated by sin. In Eden, Adam and Eve disobey God. Abram receives the promise of a child, then prostitutes his wife, twice.

Jacob cheats Esau. Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery. God delivers Israel from Egypt, yet they complain against him in the wilderness. While Moses is on Mount Sinai, the people – with Aaron's assistance – worship the golden calf. Now, with the tabernacle constructed, sacrifices instituted, and priests ordained, two of the first five priests violate their duties and are struck dead.

Spiritual advance contains the seed of its own failure, in so far as it involves fallen human beings. This incident provides a premonition that the tabernacle system, too, will ultimately fail.



***“Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (10:2).***

## DAY 12

# PURIFICATION FROM UNCLEAN ANIMALS

### Leviticus 11

Overall, the book of Leviticus consists of two complementary parts: chapters 1-10 call for holiness inside the temple; chapters 11-27, for holiness outside. The latter further divides in two: chapters 11-16 discuss various forms of defilement; chapters 17-27 cover other aspects of holiness.

**What God said to them.** An inclusion frames Leviticus 11, and provides its theme (verses 2,46-47). The chapter coheres around the contrast between clean and unclean animals; in practical terms, between those which may be eaten and those which may not.

The chapter has two main parts. The first distinguishes animals which may be eaten, from those which may not (verses 1-23). Originally, Genesis 1 divided all non-human life into the categories of sea creatures, birds, land animals, and ground-dwelling creatures. The lists in this chapter largely retain those categories, though not the same order.

The second part of the chapter gives directions for purification after coming into contact with an unclean animal (verses 24-40). Passing contact dissipates by

evening, without further action. Prolonged contact – for example, carrying or eating the carcass of an unclean animal – also requires the washing of contaminated clothes. Objects are also polluted by contact: some may be cleaned by washing; others must be destroyed.

An exhortation to obedience wraps up the chapter, calling twice for Israel to ‘be holy, because I am holy’ (verses 41-45).

A concluding summary drives the point home one last time: they are to distinguish the unclean from the clean, the edible from the inedible (verses 46-47).

This passage mostly explains process. Three deeper issues warrant exploration: the criterion for distinguishing clean from unclean; the motivation for observing the distinction; and, the function of the distinction.

Clean land animals combine two traits: they chew cud and have divided hoofs (verses 2-8). Clean water creatures share two attributes: fins and scales (verses 9-12). Clean insects have two characteristics: wings to fly and knees to hop (verses 20-23). Animals, fish, and insects which possess only one of these features are off-limits. The criterion seemingly presupposes an ideal, complete type: those animals which fulfill both attributes are clean and may be eaten; those which have only one are defective, and, therefore, inedible.

This proposal explains all but one category: birds (verses 13-19). The apparent characteristic shared by the unclean birds is that they are predators and feed on carrion. Contact with blood and death is likely what renders them unclean (as it does people).

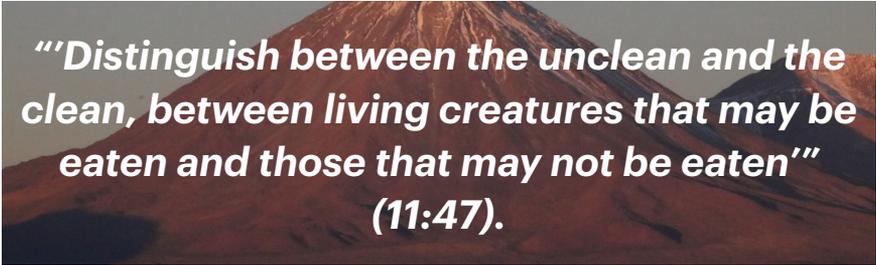
Toward the end, the chapter offers two motivations for observing the distinction between clean and unclean. Twice God exhorts: "Be holy, because I am holy" (verses 44,45 cf. 19:2; 20:7,26). Additionally, he reminds Israel of his claim on them as their liberator from Egypt (verse 45). So, once again, purity does not earn salvation; it aligns their behavior with God's character, in reciprocation for his saving intervention.

Which leads to the most fundamental question: Why is the distinction between clean and unclean animals related to holiness? The differentiation is not inherent in creation: God created all these life forms, and declared them good (Genesis 1). Instead, the distinction carries symbolic meaning. Israel has just left Egypt, and is about to enter Canaan, both inhabited by unclean peoples under divine judgment. God is concerned that his people not intermarry with the local population, which would lead to worshipping their gods, taking on their lifestyle, and coming under his judgment. So every meal on every day reminds Israel that people, like food, exist in two varieties: clean and unclean. Just as they cannot eat these foods, or touch these carcasses, so they cannot mingle with these people. Their diet is to be holy, unique before God; so are they.



**What God is saying to us.** This distinction between clean and unclean animals, correlating to the distinction between clean and unclean peoples, was at the center of a revolution in the earliest Church. Three times in Acts 10, Peter has a vision of a tarp descending from heaven, full of unclean animals, birds and reptiles. “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat,” proclaims a voice from heaven. Three times, Peter refuses: “Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” The voice insists, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:13-16). As the vision ends, gentiles arrive at the door, wanting to hear the gospel. No longer are foods or peoples unclean: the worldwide mission of the Church has begun (Acts 10:17-48).

In contrast to Leviticus, in Acts and still today, God calls his people not to exclude the unclean, but to extend the purifying gospel to all peoples in all places.

A photograph of a large, reddish-brown volcano, likely Mount Fuji, under a clear sky. The volcano is the central focus of the background image.

***“Distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten”  
(11:47).***

## DAY 13

# PURIFICATION FROM POSTPARTUM DISCHARGE

### Leviticus 12

Leviticus continues the discussion of purification, as the prompting occasion shifts to childbirth. As previously, the focus remains on process rather than explanation, so this passage does not address all our questions, though some answers can be inferred.

**What God said to them.** This reading is shorter and simpler than most. Nonetheless, it deserves separate treatment because it deals with a single and separate topic: ‘lochia’, the uterine discharge of blood and tissue that typically occurs over a period of up to six weeks after childbirth. As with the other purification texts, this passage consists of two parts: verses 1-5 identify the cause and duration of defilement; verses 6-7a explain the process of cleansing. After a short conclusion in verse 7b, a postscript offers a concession for the poor in verse 8.

Like all irregular bodily discharges, lochia renders the mother unclean. The duration of her impurity depends on the sex of the child. The birth of a son renders the mother unclean technically for seven days, though forty days must pass before her purification at the tabernacle. (The distinction allows for the son’s circumcision on the eighth

day.) The birth of a daughter renders the mother unclean twice as long: fourteen days, with purification at eighty days (verses 1-5).

At the stipulated time, the mother she presents two sacrifices: a yearling lamb as a burnt offering, and a pigeon or dove as a sin offering. The priest offers the animals to make atonement for her, and she is cleansed (verses 6-7a).

After a brief conclusion, a postscript permits mothers who cannot afford a lamb to offer a second dove or pigeon as a burnt offering (verses 7b-8).

The brevity of this passage provokes several questions. For one, what is defiling about childbirth? Neither copulation nor procreation, because God institutes and blesses both (Genesis 1:28). Instead, the passage repeatedly compares lochia to menstruation, another defiling flow of blood and bodily fluids (verses 2,5; cf. verses 4,5,7).

Other questions prove harder to answer. Why does the birth of a daughter require twice as much time for purification as the birth of a son? In the absence of data, speculation abounds but certainty eludes.

Why does purification require burnt and sin offerings, in particular, rather than grain, fellowship, or guilt offerings? The text does not explain, though it may be suggestive that these are the two types of offering that provide no leftovers to either worshipper or priest.



**What God is saying to us.** The Gospel of Luke quotes this passage in reporting the dedication of the baby Jesus in the temple: on the eighth day, he is circumcised; on the fortieth, Joseph and Mary take him to Jerusalem to consecrate him to the Lord, and offer the requisite sacrifice, “a pair of doves or two young pigeons” (Luke 2:21-24 quoting Leviticus 12:8).

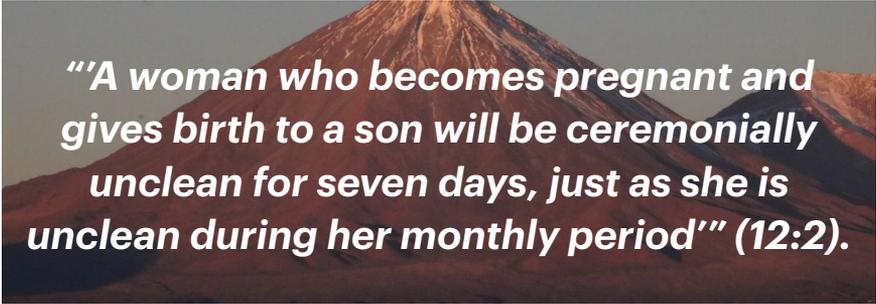
In the Gospel of Luke, the incident serves primarily two purposes. First, it portrays Jesus’ parents as observant Jews, traveling to Jerusalem and consecrating their son to the Lord. Their visit to the temple, in turn, provides opportunity for two prescient acknowledgements of Jesus’ epochal role in salvation: one by the righteous and prophetic Simeon; the other, by the devout prophet Anna (Luke 2:25-38).

Leviticus 12 offers a third message for us: for the incarnation, God chose not a socially or economically elite couple, but the working poor, a couple who could not afford the default sacrifice of a yearling lamb. In Mary’s words, “he has been mindful of [my] humble state” (Luke 1:48). This is a recurring emphasis for Luke: God’s prioritization of the poor in his saving work. Were our churches to be shaped by that priority, it could significantly alter how we do ministry.

Another observation may be relevant today. While neither copulation nor procreation is sinful, it is instructive that the deepest fulfillment of marriage and family life is temporarily defiling, with cleansing that is both inconvenient and

expensive. In a fallen world: our deepest joys are tinged with sorrow. The elation of childbirth is mitigated by the intensity of its pain. The partnership of marriage is threatened by prolonged power struggle. The satisfaction of work is undercut by frustrations (Genesis 3:16-19).

This need not be depressing. In the midst of judgment, God's blessing remains: 'Eve' becomes 'mother of all the living' (Genesis 3:20). But, at the very least, the defilement of childbirth is forewarning that we must not expect our children to bring us unqualified fulfillment or continual joy. Christ is in the process of renewing the world, but his work is not yet complete.



***“A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period” (12:2).***

## DAY 14

# PURIFICATION FROM SKIN CONDITIONS AND HOUSEHOLD FUNGUS

### Leviticus 13-14

The shortest reading in Leviticus is followed by the longest. Theme and structure combine these two chapters. While the various conditions differ scientifically, they are similar in appearance: all are visible blemishes on exterior surfaces. The connection is even stronger in the Hebrew original, where the same word is used of all these conditions.

**What God said to them.** The two chapters develop in synonymous parallelism (a,b,a',b'), with an unusual variation between the two parts. The first unit diagnoses skin conditions; the third gives directions for cleansing skin conditions. The second unit covers both the diagnosis and cleansing of fungus on clothing, while the fourth unit covers both the diagnosis and cleansing of fungus on house walls. Thus:

a	13:1-46	Diagnosis of skin conditions
b	13:47-59	Diagnosis and cleansing of fungus on clothes
a'	14:1-32	Cleansing of skin conditions
b'	14:33-53	Diagnosis and cleansing of fungus on house walls

Skin conditions receive lengthier discussion, likely because they are more threatening and socially embarrassing.

Looking more closely, 13:1-46 consists of various case-studies following the same pattern: symptom, inspection by the priest, diagnostic criteria, and diagnosis. Among the symptoms considered are: swelling, rash and bright spots (13:2-8); raw flesh (13:9-17); boils (13:18-23); burns (13:24-28); scalp or chin infections (13:29-37); white spots (13:38-39); and baldness (13:40-44). Those deemed to be unclean must broadcast their condition through unkempt appearance and explicit self-denigration: "Unclean! Unclean!" They must also self-isolate, living outside the boundaries of the social and religious community (13:45-46).

In case of fungus on the surface of clothing, the priest must assess the condition. If the fungus cannot be removed by washing, the material must be burned (13:47-59).

Chapter 14 returns to the topic of skin conditions, specifically, to the restoration of the victims to social and religious life once the condition resolves. Restoration occurs in two stages. First, the afflicted person brings two birds; the priest kills one and sprinkles the worshipper, then releases the other. The worshipper then cleans from head to toe, washes their clothes, and shaves all body hair. At this point, they may reenter the community, though they must live outside their tent for the first week.

After the first week, they again shave all hair, and wash body and clothes, then make four offerings: grain, guilt, sin, and

burnt. The priest anoints the worshipper with blood, making atonement for them (14:1-20).

Once again provision is made for the poor: those who cannot afford three lambs for the required sacrifices may offer one lamb and two birds, following the same procedure (14:21-32).

This section ends with a discussion of the diagnosis and treatment of fungus on walls in private homes. Again a priest serves as diagnostician. Initial treatment removes the affected stones and plaster. If the condition recurs, the house is torn down. If the condition resolves, the priest offers one bird in sacrifice, and releases another. (14:33-53).

A summary statement closes the two chapters (14:54-57).

The stance against skin disease and household fungus is consistent with the rest of the Law's teaching on clean and unclean: only wholeness is acceptable before God. Sacrificial animals must be flawless. Disabled humans may not serve as priests. Fungus on skin, clothing, and walls renders them unfit. Wholeness and cleanness were not only literal but also symbolic: God's physical standards are indicative of his spiritual standards. To enter his presence, one must be not only physically, but also spiritually, sound.

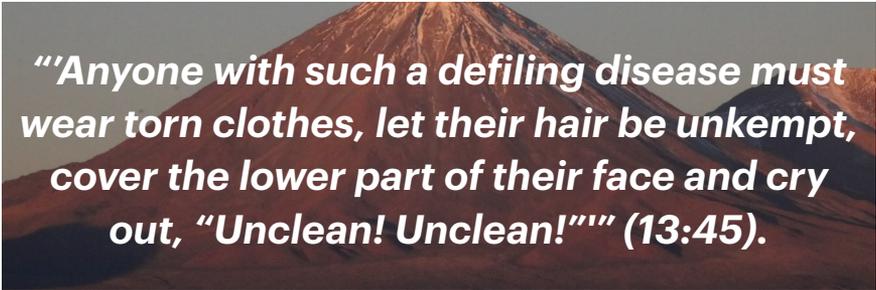


**What God is saying to us.** Jesus does not reject these laws, but he does render them redundant. Notably, Leviticus

13-14 merely establishes diagnostic criteria for distinguishing clean and unclean conditions, and the priests merely adjudicate specific cases by applying the diagnostic criteria. Both Law and priest are diagnosticians, without power to cure.

Jesus, in contrast, is a healer. A man suffering from skin disease comes to him and begs, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus does what the Law precludes: he touches the unclean man. He also does what the Law cannot: "I am willing," he replies, "Be clean!" Immediately the [skin condition] left him and he was cured" (Mark 1:40-45).

With Jesus, it is no longer contamination which is contagious, but wholeness. The unclean do not defile him; he purifies them. Moreover, his healing ministry is equally symbolic: he cures not only physical disqualification, but also its spiritual equivalent. Leviticus 13-14 is an invitation for the disqualified to come to Jesus for purification.



***"Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!"" (13:45).***

## DAY 15

# PURIFICATION FROM GENITAL DISCHARGES

## Leviticus 15

So far, Leviticus has covered defilement contracted from unclean animals, from postpartum discharge, from skin conditions, and from household fungus. Now it turns to genital discharges.

**What God said to them.** This chapter develops in chiasm, distinguishing abnormal and routine discharges, male and female:

a	vv2-15	Abnormal penile discharge, and cleansing;
b	vv16-18	Routine seminal discharge, and cleansing;
b'	vv19-24	Routine menstrual discharge, and cleansing;
a'	vv25-30	Abnormal vaginal discharge, and cleansing.

Another commonality links the parallel units: purification for a routine discharge is simpler than for an abnormal discharge.

Many commentators, ancient and modern, assume that the abnormal penile discharge is due to venereal infection, though it could be attributable to urinary tract infection or other causes. Either way, the discharge creates contagion by extension: defilement transfers from the man to anything he comes into contact with, and from there to others. In

case of fleeting or minimal contact, the cure involves washing and waiting until evening. After extended or close contact, the cure requires washing clothes and bathing on the seventh day, and on the eighth day sacrificing two doves or pigeons as sin and burnt offerings to make atonement (verses 2-15).

Routine seminal discharge – including sexual intercourse – also defiles, but only minimally. Purification requires only bathing and waiting until evening. The same process applies to any clothing or leather that is tainted with routine discharge (verses 16-18).

Routine menstrual discharge renders a woman unclean for seven days. Passing contact with her has only minimal consequence; defilement lasts only until evening. Most substantial contact, direct or indirect, necessitates bathing, washing clothes, and waiting until evening. Anyone who has sex with her during her menstrual flow becomes unclean for seven days, and the impurity also passes to his bed (verses 19-24).

Abnormal vaginal discharge also creates contagious defilement for as long as the discharge persists. Anyone who comes into contact with her bed or chair must bathe, wash clothes, and wait until evening. As with abnormal penile discharge, after symptoms cease, the afflicted woman remains unclean for seven days. On the eighth day, she must present two doves or pigeons as sin and burnt offerings, for the priest to make atonement for her (verses 25-30).

In closing, the passage underscores the seriousness of these directives. To participate in tabernacle worship while defiled would pollute God's dwelling, bringing death upon the perpetrator (verses 31-33).

This passage, like its predecessors, describes more than explains, so it is clear what causes impurity and how to cleanse it, but not why these particular conditions are problematic. Once again, though, the rationale can reasonably be inferred. The stipulations regarding genital emissions are comparable to preceding regulations. The usual state is considered clean, and the irregular, unclean. Moreover, the more severe a condition, the more rigorous its purification.

While all of this seems odd to modern sensibilities, the extended discussion of defilement through reproductive organs likely serves as polemic against rival ancient Near Eastern religions. Fertility rites and temple prostitution were widespread among Israel's neighbors, based on the assumption that sacred sex would prompt the gods to render fields, herds, and families fertile. By portraying genital emissions and child birth as unclean (not sinful), these chapters disavow the fertility cults, and the magical powers they assign to the sex act and associated rites.

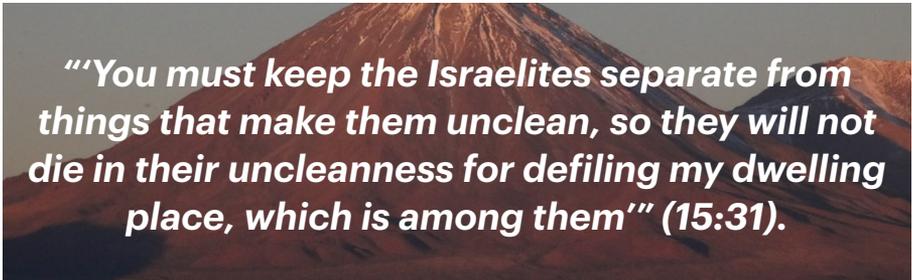


**What God is saying to us.** Jesus cancels at least some stipulations of Leviticus 15 when the woman with a vaginal discharge violates the teaching of this passage in order to

touch him. Remarkably, she does not defile him; he heals her (Mark 5:25-34; Matthew 9:20-22; Luke 8:43-48).

The remainder of the New Testament shows no concern over routine or abnormal genital discharges, as such. It does, however, show deep concern over the proper use of genitalia. In the highly sexualized environment of Corinth, Paul makes two points clearly and emphatically: sexual immorality is a grave sin against God and one's own body (1 Corinthians 6:12-20); and, sex between spouses is a gift from God (1 Corinthians 7:1-7). So the New Testament shifts the focus from genital discharges to sexual activity. Notably, the sex act is not inherently defiling; the identity of the sexual partner is determinative.

So while Leviticus 15 has little direct application to us today, when its thread is traced into the New Testament, this passage provides opportunity to address issues of deep concern and widespread confusion in contemporary culture and in the Church.



***“You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them” (15:31).***

## **DAY 16**

# PURIFICATION AND THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

## Leviticus 16

The first section of Leviticus instituted various sacrifices, and assigned priests to officiate over them (chapters 1-9). Then an interlude recounted God's execution of Aaron's eldest two sons, Nadab and Abihu, for unauthorized entrance into the presence of God (chapter 10).

The second section of Leviticus has identified various causes of ritual contamination, paired with corresponding purifying sacrifices (chapters 11-15). Now, another interlude warns Aaron to avoid the sin that killed his sons: "The two sons of Aaron ... died when they approached the Lord. The Lord said to Moses: 'Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place ... or else he will die'" (verses 1-2). The remainder of the chapter elaborates the one occasion in the year when Aaron, as high priest, is authorized to enter the Most Holy Place: the Day of Atonement.

**What God said to them.** The chapter unfolds step by step. Aaron is to prepare by gathering the animals required for his own sacrifices: a bull as a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. He must also bathe and change from his usual ornate vestments into simple linen garments. For their part, Israel supplies two goats for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering (verses 3-5).

The process of sacrifice begins with presenting the animals before God. Aaron presents the bull for his sin offering. Then he presents the goats for Israel's sin offering, drawing lots to identify which goat will be sacrificed, and which will be released alive in the wilderness (verses 6-10).

Then comes the slaughter of the animals. First, Aaron sacrifices the bull for his own sin offering. He burns a cloud of incense to shroud the ark of the covenant from direct view, as he sprinkles blood on the mercy seat covering the ark. Next, he sacrifices the goat as a sin offering for Israel, because of their uncleanness and rebellion. Then he works his way out of the tabernacle, sprinkling the blood of the goat as he goes, in order to purify each section: the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting in the Holy Place, and the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard.

Finally, the high priest lays hands on the live goat, to transfer the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the nation. The goat is led out of the community, and released in the wilderness (verses 11-22).

God also mandates the cleanup process. Aaron bathes and changes back to his usual elaborate priestly garb. He offers one ram as burnt offering for himself, and a second as burnt offering for the nation. The man who released the goat in the wilderness washes his clothes and bathes. The carcasses of the bull and goat offerings are burned outside the camp, then the man who burned them washes his clothes and bathes before returning to camp (verses 23-28).

The narrative closes by institutionalizing the sacrifice as an annual observance, in perpetuity, to make atonement for the tabernacle, the priests, and the community (verses 29-34).



**What God is saying to us.** As we have noted previously, the book of Hebrews invokes the rituals of sacrifice – including the Day of Atonement – to highlight the saving work of Christ. We have identified some of these comparisons already. Unlike a typical high priest, Jesus need not first sacrifice for himself (Hebrews 7:26-27). Jesus ministers in the immediate presence of God, within the glorious heavenly prototype of the earthly tabernacle (Hebrews 9:11). Jesus makes atonement with his own blood, not the blood of animals (Hebrews 9:13-14). All these contrasts reappear in this passage.

Two additional comparisons derive particularly from the Day of Atonement ritual. First, Jesus does not enter the sanctuary annually, forever, to cleanse from sin. Instead, he enters once, for all time, to put an end to sin: “Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year ... [H]e has appeared once for all ... to do away with sin” (Hebrews 9:25-26).

Secondly, and astoundingly, Christ does not merely make atonement in the Most Holy Place on our behalf. As a result of his purifying work, we ourselves – not some priest on our

behalf and in our place! – may now enter the most holy presence of God: “We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ... [L]et us draw near to God with a sincere heart ... having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience” (Hebrews 10:19,22).



***“Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites” (16:34).***

## DAY 17

# HOLINESS AND MEAT

### Leviticus 17

**A** new section begins with the introductory formula used throughout the book: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to ... all the Israelites and say to them: “This is what the Lord has commanded”’” (verses 1-2). Setting out permanent Law, Leviticus repeatedly claims divine authority.

The overall theme persists: “Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (19:2). So far, the book has legislated tabernacle sacrifice (chapters 1-7), the priesthood (chapters 8-10), and ritual purity (chapters 11-16). The remainder of the book explains various other practices related to holiness.

Chapter 17 regulates the eating of meat. The issue is not the ethics of meat eating, because God authorized that in the aftermath of the flood (Genesis 9:1-6). Nor is the issue related to global warming: their herds are not large enough to harm the climate. Instead, two practices come under criticism: private sacrifice and the consumption of blood.

**What God said to them.** Thematically, the passage divides into two parts. Verses 3-9 requires that all animals of the sorts used in sacrifice – cattle, lambs and goats – be slaughtered at the tabernacle, under the supervision of a priest. Private slaughter of such animals renders the violator

'guilty of bloodshed', a charge elsewhere leveled against murder (Genesis 9:1-6).

The stated rationale assumes some background knowledge. Given the expense and lack of refrigeration, animal slaughter and meat eating would have been infrequent, typically only for feasts, and commonly in conjunction with religious festivals. Private slaughter would allow families to make offerings to household spirits or local gods, including the then popular, though now obscure, 'goat spirit'. The centralization of animal slaughter at the tabernacle under the supervision of priests was a crucial step in the process of combating polytheism and animism in favor of monotheism. Otherwise, the guilty would come under divine judgment.

Verses 10-16 prohibit another potential abuse of animal slaughter: the consumption of blood. When God first authorized the eating of meat, he attached a prohibition against the consumption of blood (Genesis 9:1-4). This passage explains the underlying rationale for the prohibition, and elaborates its application.

Regarding the rationale, blood is sacrosanct both as the life of the animal, and as the means of atonement for human sin. The remainder of the passage applies the general principle in two case studies outside tabernacle supervision. Hunters, when field-dressing game, must drain the blood into the soil. An animal found dead, however, can no longer be bled. It may be eaten, though it renders the eaters unclean. They must wash their clothes and bathe,

and will remain unclean until evening; otherwise, they will be held culpable.

The propositional content of this chapter is quite simple: “Do not offer private sacrifice. Do not eat blood.” The dominant feature of the passage is its emotion. The first paragraph matches positive commands with negative prohibitions to make the same point eight times (verses 3-4,5a,5b-7,8-9). The second paragraph supports a principle with repetition, underlying rationale, and two case studies, making the same point fourteen times (verses 10a,b,11a,b,12a,b,13,14a,14b,14c,14d,15a,15b,16). The regulations apply to ‘any’ and ‘all’ Israelites (verses 1,3,8,10,12,13,14,15), and equally to ‘any’ and ‘all’ foreign residents (verses 8,10,12,13,15); which provides thirteen opportunities to say ‘everyone’.

Six threats of punishment intensify the seriousness of this law (verses 4,9,10[2x],14,16). Also notable are the pejoratives, equating violators to murderers (verse 4[2x]) and prostitutes (verse 7). This is the rhetorical equivalent of shouting through a bullhorn.



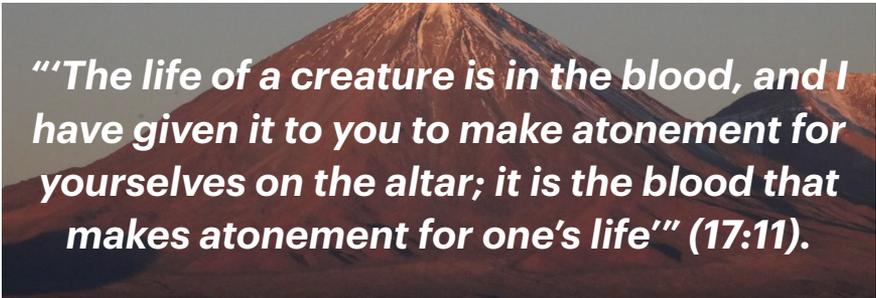
**What God is saying to us.** Both prohibitions relate to meat consumption, though in different directions.

The first prohibition opposes food sacrifices to other gods. This practice continues in much of the world. The New Testament repeats and applies this ban at length in 1

Corinthians 8-10, so the discussion is best postponed until then.

The second prohibition forbids the consumption of animal blood. This practice, too, continues in much of the world, including British black pudding, German *blutwurst*, and Chinese *xue doufou*. Whether Christians may eat these foods is a complex question. The New Testament addresses the issue directly in Acts 15:23-29, so discussion is best left until then.

For the moment, it suffices to note one redemptive-historical application. The second prohibition is part of the background to the New Testament emphasis on the 'blood' of Jesus, referencing his life poured out in death for the atonement of sin: "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood" (Romans 3:25). This background also accounts for the dire warning against those who abuse the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).



***“The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” (17:11).***

## DAY 18

# HOLINESS AND SEX

### Leviticus 18

The next three chapters form a coherent unit within this section of the book. This chapter focuses narrowly on sexual holiness. Chapter 19 broadens the scope, portraying holiness as all-encompassing. Chapter 20 warns of the consequences of sin, drawing examples from the sins of chapters 18-19.

**What God said to them.** The focus of this chapter could not possibly be clearer. “Do not have sex with....” followed by a remarkably detailed list of prohibited sexual relationships. The beginning and end of the chapter also deserve attention as they shed light on the intervening prohibitions.

The introduction and conclusion to the chapter situate the teaching about sex in the context of the surrounding culture. “You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices” (18:3). “All these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled” (18:24,27). Instead of following the sexual mores of the dominant culture, Israel is to obey God’s laws because, “I am the Lord your God.” Otherwise he will deal with his people as he dealt with the Egyptians and Canaanites (18:1-5,24-30).

These exhortations sandwich a detailed list of sexual relationships that would constitute incest for a man: mother, step-mother, sister, paternal or maternal half-sister or step-sister, granddaughter or step-granddaughter, paternal or maternal aunt or aunt by marriage, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, as well as any woman and her daughter, granddaughter, or sister (18:6-18).

Additionally, sex during menstruation is forbidden (though this restriction relates as much to blood as to sex). Adultery is outlawed. So are homosexuality and bestiality. Somewhat tangentially, in the midst of all these sexual prohibitions, Israelites are also forbidden to offer their children in sacrifice to the Canaanite (or Ammonite) god Molech (18:19-23).

If Israel descends into these sins, God will expel them from the land, as he did the Canaanites. Individuals who violate these sanctions must be kicked out of the community. The grace and mercy of God provide no safety from his judgment. Though they are the people of God, Israelites receive the same punishment for the same sins as Canaanites (18:24-30).



**What God is saying to us.** The norms of our culture are increasingly at odds with Scripture. Difference in practice reflects difference in underlying values. Biblical mores purport to be of divine origin; cultural mores prioritize moral autonomy, and the emotional fulfillment and sexual

satisfaction of consenting adults. Space does not permit a defense of either the general concept of divine revelation, or the sexual mores of Scripture. The point is simply that if we do not concur with our culture on foundational principles, then we will not agree on practices.

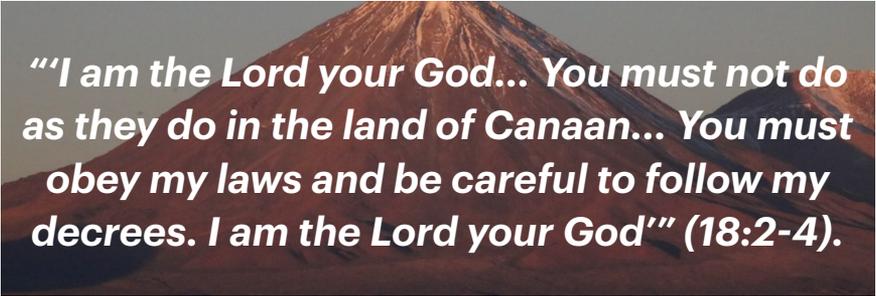
For those who claim the name of Christ, the point of this passage is stark: copulate like the surrounding culture and face the same consequences. Invoking 'grace' does not evade this reality. The New Testament concurs with the Old: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery ... those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:18,21). The apostle Paul affirms the same correspondence as Leviticus: live like the world in this life; spend eternity with the world.

On the other hand, though God expects those who own his name to live as he commands, we cannot legislate for those who do not claim his name. In times past, Christians could expect laws and public norms to be outwardly sympathetic toward biblical values. Those days have passed. But we need not be anxious about it. The New Testament church thrived without being able to control the laws or values of their surrounding culture. Our energy is better expended on supporting one other in the effort to channel our own sexual drives.

While we do not seek to control the laws or values of our country, we can still challenge its logic. Given the cultural

standard endorsing emotional and sexual fulfillment for consenting adults, what justifies legalizing same-sex marriage while prohibiting incest, polygamy, or polyamory? The underlying question also deserves to be asked: By what authority do we establish that the fulfillment of consenting adults is sufficient criterion for establishing the legality – or morality – of behavior?

Ultimately, though, we are not required to convince our culture. It is required only that we obey our God.



***“I am the Lord your God... You must not do as they do in the land of Canaan... You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God” (18:2-4).***

## DAY 19

# HOLINESS AND THE TOTALITY OF LIFE

### Leviticus 19

In the wake of the singular focus in chapter 18, the diversity of this chapter is striking. The first question for the interpreter is: Does Leviticus 19 have a central point – other than that holiness is all-encompassing – or is it a collection of loosely-related regulations?

**What God said to them.** This much is clear: all of the directives legitimately and deliberately collect under the introductory exhortation, “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (verse 2). This point of cohesion is reinforced by the conclusion: “Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the Lord” (verse 37). Yet as a focus for the chapter, this is too broad to clarify much. However, no tighter coherence is evident, nor any thematic development.

Some commentators suppose that individual paragraphs are marked by the closing line: “I am the Lord (your God)” (verses 2,3,4,10,12,14,16,18,25,28,30,31,32,34,36,37). Yet when divided into these sixteen smaller units, the paragraphs vary widely in length, and in theme. At best, “I am the Lord” serves as a broad unifying point through all the diversity: Israel is to live a certain way – or a great many

particular ways – because: (a) their God tells them to do so; and, (b) by doing so, their behavior reflects his virtues and values.

A second possibility is that this diversity is itself the intended theme: to live like God includes a great variety of activities beyond what we traditionally consider ‘spiritual’. Godly living encompasses: family life, daily schedule, exclusive worship, dietary habits, care for the poor, honesty, integrity in business, protection of the disabled, just courts, forgiveness, rebuking sin, monoculture farming, treatment of slaves, rejection of animistic magical practices, respect for the elderly and for foreigners, and fair trade. Even then, the themes weave in and out, without apparent transition or coherence. If the author constructs this chapter to make this point, the conclusion is apt: “‘Keep *all* my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the Lord” (verse 37 *emphasis added*).

A third possibility argues against the preceding. A common conclusion in scholarly literature is that ancient Near Eastern codes of conduct tended to consist of a loose collection of ideas: thematic cohesion was not a necessary feature of the genre.

Whichever – if any – of the foregoing explanations is right, one conclusion is apparent: holiness is far more comprehensive for God than it typically is for us. The Ten Commandments provide a high-level summary. Most recur here: honoring parents (verse 3), keeping Sabbath (verse 3), rejecting idolatry (verse 4), prohibition against stealing

(verse 11), and respectful use of the name of God (verse 12). Yet the details take us much wider, including: sacrifice (verses 5-8), the poor (verses 9-10), financial integrity (verse 13), the disabled (verse 14), the courts (verse 15), social relationships (verses 16-18), sexual predation (verses 19-22), agriculture (verses 23-25), spiritism (verses 26-32), elder care (verse 32), immigrants (verses 33-34), and business ethics (verses 35-36). The scope of holiness is remarkable, and its detail is intimidating.

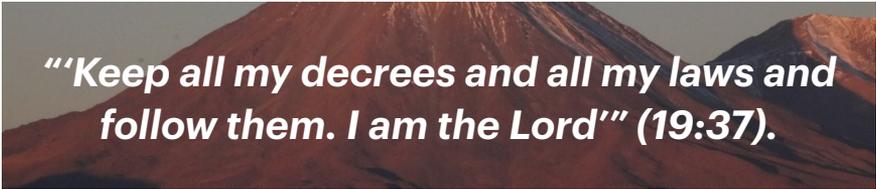


**What God is saying to us.** The diversity of this chapter cautions us against single-issue ethics. By God's design, each Christian has particular spiritual concerns and ministry strengths. One may have a deep concern for moral purity; another, for the disabled; a third, for modeling Christian values in the business world; some for evangelism; others, for discipleship; yet others, for environmental stewardship; another, for orphans or for the elderly; some, for raising and distributing money to those in need; still another, for the spread of the gospel among the unevangelized; others, for the transformation of the national political or judicial system; someone else, for deeds of hospitality.

All of this matters to God. But none of us can do it all. One common response is to prioritize whatever issue grips us the most intensely, and to affiliate with others of like mind, to pursue that agenda above – and sometimes, to the neglect of – all others. The alternative that the apostle Paul advocates is to gather in diverse communities, with respect

for varied contributions, to pursue a wide range of activities, with each person contributing their own particular passion and gifts to the shared life of the community (1 Corinthians 12:4-31).

As the people of God, we must model his values. We must not violate any of them. But it is impossible for any one of us to make meaningful contributions to all, or even to many at once. Yet as the diverse people of God serving together, we can honor the full range of his commands, and model the wide range of his concerns.



***“Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the Lord” (19:37).***

## DAY 20

# HOLINESS: INCENTIVES

### Leviticus 20

This passage censures much the same sins as the preceding two chapters. The primary development is that this text gives greater attention to the corresponding penalties. Overall, punishment comes in two forms: execution by the community, and exclusion by God. The recurring threat of death gives coherence to the passage, appearing thirteen times (verses 2,3-4,5,6,9,10,11,12,13,14, 15,16,27). In addition to these negative consequences, the passage more briefly offers positive motivation for holiness, based on God's character and his election of Israel.

**What God said to them.** The first set of prohibitions takes aim at two Canaanite religious practices: child sacrifice and spirit mediums. Those who sacrifice their children are to be stoned by the community and will be cut off by God. If the community abdicates its responsibilities, God will intervene to punish both the offenders and their supporters. God will also exclude from the elect those who consult spirit mediums (verses 1-6).

An interlude offers positive motivations for virtue: God himself is holy, and calls his people to be holy (verses 7-8).

The second set of prohibitions is diverse. It begins by calling for the execution of those who curse their parents.

Its focus, though, is on sexual sins: adultery, incest, homosexuality, incestuous polygamy, bestiality, and, sex during menstruation. The early items are punishable by execution; later items, by exclusion from the community or by childlessness (verses 9-21).

Positively, Israel is to obey God, so that they can retain possession of the land God allotted them. Otherwise, if they live like Canaanites, God will expel them, as he did the Canaanites (verses 22-24).

The third set of prohibitions is briefer. It recalls the laws differentiating clean and unclean creatures, and urges Israel to avoid defilement from the latter (verse 25).

Another interlude repeats the earlier exhortation: they are to be holy because God is holy, and has set them apart to be his special people (verse 26).

Finally, the closing verse forms a bookend to the opening paragraph ('inclusion'), demanding the execution of spirit mediums (verse 27).

In summary, this chapter provides both negative and positive motivations for holiness. Negative: so that they may escape execution by the community and judgment by God. Positive: so that their behavior conforms to God's character and his calling.



**What God is saying to us.** Contemporary application of this passage can explore either of two themes: motivations for holiness, or sins which carry the threat of execution. Since the former is the overarching point of the chapter, we consider it here. Future readings will provide opportunity to explore the latter.

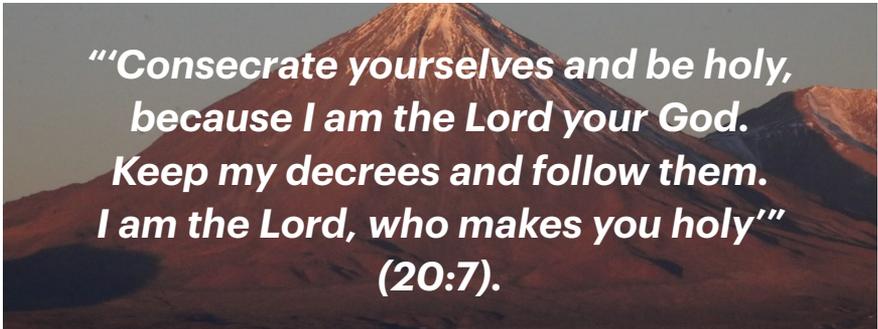
In his first epistle, Peter offers at least three incentives to holy living, two of which derive from Leviticus, with the third being distinctly Christian.

Positively, like Leviticus, the apostle urges his audience to be holy because God is holy: “Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15-16 citing Leviticus 20:26 cf. 11:44,45; 19:2). The moral codes of both Testaments reflect the character and conduct of God, who calls his people to model their values and behavior after his.

Negatively, also like Leviticus, Peter warns about the consequences of sin. In an era before the concepts of heaven and eternal life were fleshed out, the worst consequences that Leviticus can imagine are execution and exclusion from God’s people. Centuries later, Peter sees further, to the more distant horizon of the final judgment and the eternal state. He warns: “Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear” (1 Peter 1:17). His characterization of God as an impartial judge of human conduct implicitly warns his audience that if they live like

the unbelieving world, they can expect the same verdict at the final judgment, and the same destiny for eternity.

To these motivations, Peter adds a third, distinctively Christian consideration, though it is articulated in language redolent of Leviticus: "You were redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18-19). In the era of Leviticus, redemption from sin required the blood of lambs without blemish or defect. The animal sacrifice of that era anticipated the future sacrifice that would effectively atone for sin: the blood of the holy Christ shed on the cross. In an extraordinary reversal, our sin is atoned not by a lamb that we sacrifice to God, but by the Son who sacrifices himself to God.



## DAY 21

# HOLINESS AND PRIESTS

### Leviticus 21

The discussion of holiness shifts focus at this point. Chapters 17-20 dealt with the holiness of daily life for the people: eating meat (chapter 17), sex (chapter 18), the rest of life (chapter 19), and finally, incentives for holiness (chapter 20). Now focus shifts to holiness in the sacred domain: priests (chapter 21), sacrifice (chapter 22), religious festivals (chapter 23), the tabernacle (chapter 24), and sabbath years (chapter 25). The usual literary signal anticipates thematic shifts: “The Lord spoke to Moses” (e.g., 21:1,16).

Chapters 21 and 22 cover related topics: priests and sacrificial offerings, respectively. Chapter 21 is concerned to preserve the purity of priests, because they enter the presence of the Lord when making offerings (21:6,8,17,18, 21[2x],23). Chapter 22 is concerned to protect the purity of the offerings, both by restricting who can eat the leftovers (22:1-16), and by restricting which animals can be sacrificed (22:17-30). The two topics are parallel in another respect: physical defect prevents a priest from making offerings (21:16-24), and an animal from being offered (22:17-25).

At the same time, the two chapters are distinct. Each has its own introduction: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the priests...’” (21:1); “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron and his

sons...” (22:1). Each chapter also has its own conclusion (21:24; 22:31-33). So the reading today covers chapter 21, and tomorrow, chapter 22.

**What God said to them.** This chapter discusses priestly disqualifications. It makes no effort to be comprehensive. Instead, it focuses on two particular disqualifications: defilement through family connections (verses 1-15), and ineligibility due to disability or disfigurement (verses 16-23).

The passage prohibits various family interactions as defiling for priests. Because contact with the deceased renders mourners unclean, priests must not participate in funerals or mourning rituals for anyone outside their immediate family. Nor may priests marry a prostitute or a divorcée. If a daughter of a priest becomes a prostitute, she must be executed (verses 1-9).

The standard for a high priest is even stricter. He may not participate in funerals even for immediate family. As for marriage, his wife must be a virgin; he may not marry a widow (verses 10-15).

The rationale for these restrictions is stated over and over: because priests minister before the Lord, they must be both ceremonially clean and morally holy (verses 1-2,3,4,6,7,8,9, 11,14-15).

The passage also disqualifies disabled priests from making offerings in the sanctuary. After stating the general principle, the text surveys a wide range of exclusionary

conditions: blind, lame, disfigured, deformed, crippled foot or hand, hunchback or dwarf, running sores, damaged testicles, and more. Though afflicted priests are disqualified from officiating over sacrifices, they are permitted to share in the sacrificial leftovers distributed to priests. The rationale for exclusion is the same, though stated in the inverse: the presence of disabled priests would desecrate the sanctuary and the altar (verses 16-23).

Two values underlie this chapter. For one, it assumes three tiers of holiness: the people, the priests, and the high priest. For the other, while some of the specifics offend our sensibilities, the requirement that a priest be ceremonially clean and physically whole are subsets of the full-orbed perfection characteristic of God, and therefore required in his representatives.



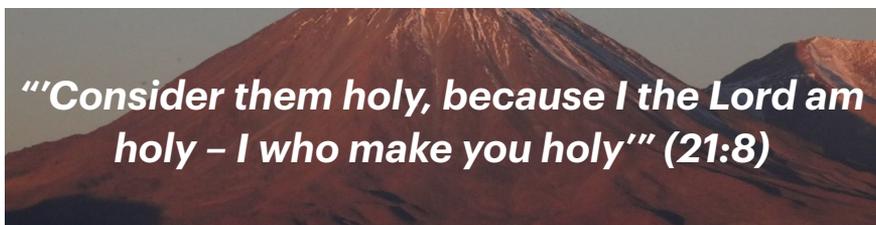
**What God is saying to us.** The New Testament concurs that holiness is essential, without endorsing the specifics of this chapter. Jesus initiates important developments. In one notable example, his attendance at funerals does not render him unclean or profane the name of God; instead, he raises Lazarus to the glory of God (John 11, especially verse 4). On another occasion, he does not regard physical blindness as defiling; instead, he cures it (John 9).

Similarly, when the New Testament addresses the qualifications of church leaders, it never requires symbolic

purity and physical wholeness. Instead, it focuses on spiritual traits and sound character (1 Timothy 3:1-12).

In another adjustment, the New Testament mostly levels the standard of holiness, and does so by leveling up, not down. Thus, the apostle John writes to the entire church, not just to its leaders, when he issues a call to holiness. On the one hand, perfection is a future hope: “When Christ appears, we shall be like him.” On the other hand, that promise motivates the drive for purity now among the entire people of God: “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”

Finally, in another discontinuity with Leviticus, purity is not simply commanded. It is empowered by the prior and continuing transformative work of God: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God” (1 John 3:1-3,9).



## DAY 22

# HOLINESS AND OFFERINGS

### Leviticus 22

**B**ased on theme and literary features, this chapter arguably contains three distinct units. The usual introduction, “The Lord said to Moses,” appears three times (verses 1,17,26), each time in conjunction with a change of topic: the priests’ share of offerings (verses 2-9), the animals eligible as sacrifice (verses 17-25), and miscellanea (verses 26-30). A recurring refrain also concludes most units: “I am the Lord who makes them holy” (verses 9,16 cf. verse 32). The units are thematically related, however: each addresses some aspect of the priests’ role in sacrificial offerings. So it is sensible to combine them in a single reading.

**What God said to them.** The first issue concerns the portion of offerings donated to priests (e.g., grain, sin, and guilt offerings; cf. 7:7-10). The pressing concern, bookending the passage (‘inclusion’), is that the offerings be treated as sacred, that they not be desecrated and the name of the Lord profaned. Toward this end, successive paragraphs lay down two stipulations.

The first stipulation is that priests must be ceremonially clean when eating the offerings; otherwise, God may kill them. Rehearsing the earlier regulations on purity (cf. chapters 11-21), this disqualifies those priests with skin conditions, who recently had a bodily discharge, or who

touched a corpse, an unclean or dead animal, or an unclean person. The priest must be purified before sharing in the sacrificial leftovers (verses 2-9).

The second stipulation is that only members of the priests' families may share the offerings. This includes immediate family members, but excludes any guest or hired worker. It includes slaves, whether bought or born into the household. It excludes a married daughter, but includes any subsequently widowed or divorced daughter who returns home to live. Any ineligible person who mistakenly eats a sacred offering must make restitution at 120%. The priest bears responsibility for guarding the offerings and preventing such accidents (verses 10-16).

The second issue concerns animals offered in sacrifice. The main stipulation is that the animals be without defect. Those with a defect – the blind, injured, or infected – will not be accepted. This standard applies to burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, particularly those that are mandated and those that fulfill a vow. Freewill offerings are subject to a looser standard: these animals may be deformed or stunted, provided their testicles are not damaged (verses 17-25).

The final paragraph appends a couple other stipulations governing sacrifice. For one, a newborn animal may not be offered in sacrifice until its eighth day; prior to that, it stays with its mother. For another, a thank offering to the Lord must be fully consumed on the same day (verses 26-30).

No rationale is presented in support of these guidelines and distinctions beyond that they are commands from the Lord. To breach his directives is to profane his name. The holy God is to be treated as holy by those whom he makes holy. Israel should honor God both because he chose them to be his people, and because he delivered them from Egypt (verses 31-33).



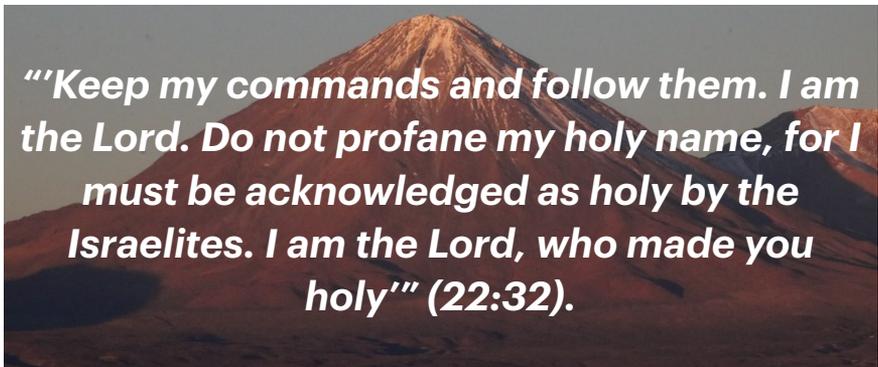
***What God is saying to us.*** While animal sacrifice no longer has a place after the atoning death of Christ, the New Testament does draw analogical application from Old Testament sacrifice.

The admonition here that priests treat their share of the sacrifices reverentially, under threat of death, shares affinity with New Testament warnings regarding participation in the Lord's Supper. Whoever treats communion like just another private meal, Paul warns, "will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord... Those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves," resulting in illness and even death (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

On a more pedestrian level, but no less urgent in our current climate, those who make their living from the gospel do well to heed the admonitions of this chapter. God authorizes us to live off the donations of God's people to his work. Yet their offerings remain sacred. We do well to live modestly and respectfully, neither luxuriously nor

carelessly, lest we “become guilty and die for treating it with contempt.”

The other major point of this passage – that sacrificial animals should be without defect or deformity – also remains relevant. The apostle Paul notes that while it is no longer animals which we offer, but ourselves, the standard persists: “Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).



## DAY 23

# HOLINESS: ANNUAL FESTIVALS

### Leviticus 23

So far, the discussion of sacral holiness has covered the priests who offer sacrifice, their meals derived from sacrifice, and the animals offered in sacrifice. The focus now turns to annual religious festivals.

**What God said to them.** Literary bookends ('inclusion') signal the limits of this passage, as well as its theme. The chapter actually has a double introduction and a double conclusion, with all four referring to 'the appointed festivals of the Lord' (verses 2[2x],4,37,44). Reinforcing the theme are numerous occurrences of the virtual synonym, 'sacred assemblies' (verses 2,3,4,7,8,21,24,27,35,36,37). Other related repetitions include, 'the Lord said to Moses' (verses 1,9,23,26,33), and, 'lasting ordinance for the generations to come' (verses 14,21,31,41). From vocabulary alone, the theme of the chapter is unmistakable: Israel's religious festivals are divinely mandated, to be observed in perpetuity.

The structure of the chapter, like the festivals, follows the agricultural calendar. After a brief note on the Sabbath (verse 3), the passage divides into three parts: roughly speaking, spring harvest (verses 5-14); summer harvest

(verses 15-22), and fall harvest (verses 23-43). There are seven festivals:

1. *The Passover*, on the fourteenth day of the first month, commemorates the deliverance from the final plague in Egypt (verse 5);
2. *The Festival of Unleavened Bread*, from the fifteenth through twenty-first days of the first month, commemorates the exodus from Egypt: it begins and ends with a sacred assembly, and includes daily food offerings to the Lord; as the name indicates, the festival features unleavened bread (verses 6-8);
3. *The Festival of Firstfruits*, on the sixteenth day of the first month, celebrates the early grain harvest (barley): it includes burnt, grain and drink offerings; the festival is celebrated before eating the new crop (verses 9-14);
4. *The Festival of Weeks* (a.k.a., Pentecost), on the fiftieth day after the previous festival, celebrates the second grain harvest (wheat): it requires a sacred assembly, and includes burnt, grain and drink offerings, as well as sin and fellowship offerings (verses 15-22);
5. *The Festival of Trumpets*, on the first day of the seventh month, celebrates the fall harvest (small fruits: grapes, figs, olives): it requires a sacred assembly, and includes a food offering (verses 23-25);
6. *The Day of Atonement*, on the tenth day of the seventh month, celebrates the forgiveness of sin (cf. chapter 16): it requires a sacred assembly, and includes fasting and penitential acts (verses 26-32);

7. *The Festival of Tabernacles*, from the fifteenth through the twenty-first days of the seventh month, commemorates the wilderness journey: it begins and ends with a sacred assembly, and includes burnt, grain and drink offerings all eight days; celebrants live in temporary shelters made from branches (verses 33-43).

Overall, the chapter speaks to worshippers, not to priests. The content includes only the requirement to observe each festival, its date and duration, a prohibition against work, and brief mention of the requisite offering. The level of detail that priests need comes in Numbers 28-29.



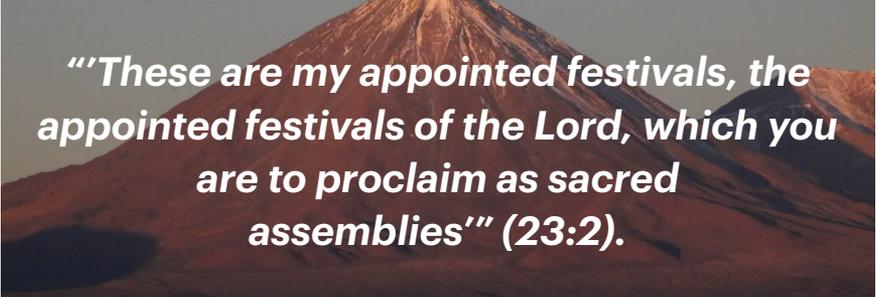
**What God is saying to us.** Leviticus 23 insists on the commemoration of these seven religious holidays: ‘the Lord said’, ‘appointed festival’, ‘lasting ordinance’. The language alone is emphatic, let alone the eleven commands to observe the sacred assemblies. God’s intention for ancient Israel is self-evident. The question is whether and how the festivals apply to Christians.

Christ fulfills at least some of the festivals. Every Gospel links the crucifixion of Jesus with the slaughter of the Passover lamb (Matthew 26:2,17-30; Mark 14:1,12-26; Luke 22:1-2,7-20; John 13:1; 19:14-16). Paul extends the correspondence to include the related Festival of Unleavened Bread: “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with

the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Analogically, the Old Testament festivals could address controversies swirling around the commemoration of foundational Christian events. Multi-cultural and secular perspectives push back against public celebration of distinctively Christian holidays. Some meticulous Christians resist celebrating any holiday not explicitly endorsed in Scripture: they observe the Sabbath, but neither Christmas nor Easter. Mainline denominations, on the other hand, tend to follow a liturgical calendar, which commemorates many feast days within the Church, mostly derived from Church history rather than from the Old Testament.

Jesus asserted personal authority over the Sabbath, and demonstrated flexibility in its observance (Matthew 12:11-13). The apostle Paul extended that precedent, deeming the celebration of festivals days to be a matter of personal conviction and individual choice (Romans 14:1-15:13; Galatians 4:8-11; Colossians 2:16-23). So liturgical calendars remain legitimate, but optional, expressions of Christian devotion.



***“These are my appointed festivals, the appointed festivals of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies” (23:2).***

## DAY 24

# HOLINESS AND TABERNACLE SUPPLIES

### Leviticus 24:1-9

**T**he challenge with chapter is understanding its placement: How does it fit here? How do its two parts fit together?

Context is a key narrative technique within the Old Testament. Sometimes juxtaposed accounts initially appear to have little in common, but further reflection reveals a subtle link between them that guides interpretation. Other times, no link is evident, and the passages read independently.

In this instance, connections exist, but they appear to be relatively loose. Internally, the chapter consists of two parts. Each is introduced with the familiar assertion of divine authority: “The Lord said to Moses” (24:1,13; cf. 4:1; 5:14; 6:1,8,24; etc.). The double use of this introductory formula is the first indication of two separate passages.

The difference in topic confirms that assessment. Verses 1-9 discuss routine tabernacle supplies: oil for the lamps, and bread for the table. Verses 10-23 provide a case study of capital punishment, that simultaneously illustrates the application of law to both Israelite and foreigner.

The main connection between the two paragraphs is that both add to earlier discussions. Verses 1-9 continues the treatment of holiness within the tabernacle. So far, topics have included: the priests who make sacrifices (chapters 21-22a), the animals which qualify as sacrifices (chapter 22b), and the special events which require sacrifice (chapter 23). Now, the focus shifts from special arrangements for special days, to ongoing needs for routine use: oil for the lamps (verses 1-4), and bread for the table (verses 5-9).

Verses 10-23 connects with preceding teaching at three points. Leviticus repeatedly prohibits misuse of the name of the Lord (19:12 cf. 18:21; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2; 22:32). Additionally, many regulations in Leviticus explicitly apply both to Jews and to foreigners residing among them (e.g., 16:29; 17:8,10,12,13,15; 18:26; 20:2; 22:18,24-25). Thirdly, chapter 20 identifies several sins that carry the death penalty. Now, a case study illustrates all three points: the execution of a man of mixed-ethnicity for (mis)using the name of God in a curse.

The modest connections between the two passages, and between each passage and the wider context, coupled with the internal cohesion of each passage, marks them as distinct but parallel addendums to previous discussions. Consequently, in spite of their brevity, it is clearer to treat them separately. Today's reading considers verses 1-9; tomorrow's, verses 10-23.

**What God said to them.** Verses 1-9 calls for the contribution of supplies needed to sustain the tabernacle: oil for the

lamps (verses 1-4), and bread for the table (verses 5-9). The lampstand and table were previously paired in Exodus, both in design (Exodus 25:23-30,31-40), and in construction (Exodus 37:10-16,17-24). Here, the pairing extends to the vocabulary used of each: 'take' (verses 2,5); 'tend' (verses 3,4,8); 'continually' (verses 2,3,4,8); and, 'before the Lord' (verses 3,4,6,8). The pairing is unsurprising, given that the lampstand and table are situated across from each other in the Holy Place within the tabernacle, the former on the south side, and the latter, on the north.

The thrust of this passage is equally unremarkable: the Israelites are to donate supplies to keep the lamps burning and the table stocked. At the same time, these are likely case studies of a broader point: the people are to donate all routine supplies needed for the ongoing ministry of the tabernacle.



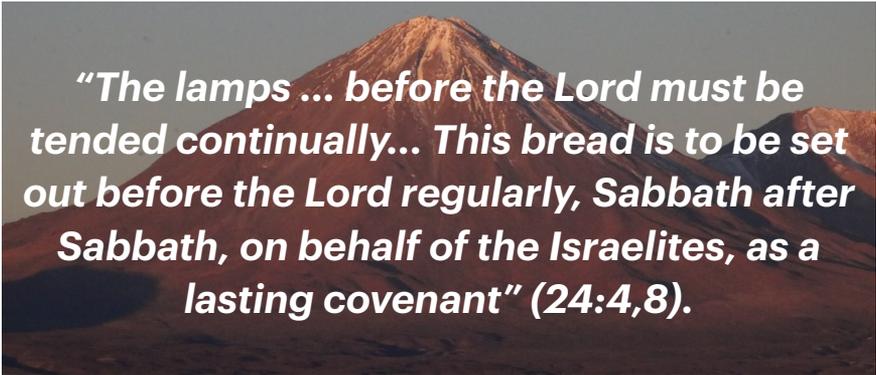
**What God is saying to us.** Space constraints do not permit discussion of the role of buildings in Christian worship and ministry. Suffice it to say that once we have buildings – whether for theological, or merely pragmatic, reasons – they incur operating expenses. Some of these needs are directly related to core functions of worship and ministry. Others are entirely pedestrian, such as heat and lighting. Either way, they require ongoing financing.

This passage establishes three parameters for the financing of church operating expenses. First, they should be

sustained by routine member giving. It should not fall upon pastors and elders to run fund-raising drives to keep the doors open and the lights on.

Secondly, donations for operating expenses have a deeper significance. The contributions are presented to God. They support the worship of God. These offerings are spiritual, not merely pragmatic. This is the Word of God. These are perpetual ordinances from God.

Thirdly, the tabernacle accoutrements are of high standard. The lampstand and table are constructed of pure gold. The bread is made of the finest flour. The incense is pure, not adulterated. While such texts must never be used to fleece the people of God for personal use, God is not honored when the church is maintained at a standard below the homes or businesses of its members.



***“The lamps ... before the Lord must be tended continually... This bread is to be set out before the Lord regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant” (24:4,8).***

## DAY 25

# HOLINESS: A CASE STUDY

### Leviticus 24:10-23

This brief passage provides a case study, in two senses. In structure, it is a notable example of Hebrew parallelism. In content, the incident applies previous legislation regarding several recurring themes: blasphemy (e.g., 18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2,32); resident foreigners (e.g., 16:29; 17:8-16; 18:26-28; 19:10,33-34; 20:2-5; 22:18,25; 23:22; 25:35,47-48); and, capital offenses (cf. chapter 20).

**What God said to them.** Parallelism structures the entire passage. It develops in four parts, the genre alternating between narrative and Law:

a	vv10-12	Narrative: A man of mixed ethnicity gets into a fight, and uses the name of God to curse an Israelite.
b	vv13-16b	Law: God calls for the community to execute anyone who blasphemes.
b'	vv16c-22	Law: God sets the call for execution within a broader framework: harming a human is punished with retribution; harming an animal, with restitution.
a'	v23	Narrative: The community stones the blasphemer, as God commanded.

Simultaneously, the middle two units use parallelism internally. The former (b) has four elements, in inverse order (chiasm):

$\alpha$	v14	The community is to stone the blasphemer;
$\beta$	v15	whoever curses God must bear responsibility.
$\beta'$	v16a	Anyone who blasphemes the name of God must die;
$\alpha'$	v16b	the entire community must stone them.

The latter (b') has eight elements, also in inverse order:

$\gamma$	v16c	This law applies to both foreign-born and native-born.
$\delta$	v17	Killing a human requires execution.
$\epsilon$	v18	Killing an animal requires restitution.
$\zeta$	vv19-20a	Injuring a human requires retribution: bone, eye, tooth.
$\zeta'$	v20b	Injuring a human requires retribution.
$\epsilon'$	v21a	Killing an animal requires restitution.
$\delta'$	v21b	Killing a human requires execution.
$\gamma'$	v22	This law applies to both foreign-born and native-born

In summary, the passage makes both primary and secondary points. Primarily, it commands Israel to execute anyone in their midst who blasphemes. Whether Israelites, or foreigners who worship other gods, all must be respectful of God.

Imbedded within this primary point, the passage expands on the notion of commensurate punishment. Blasphemy is the most severe offense. Merely speaking against God warrants execution. Killing humans comes next: murderers are to be executed. Killing animals is a lesser evil: it requires

compensation in kind or equivalent. Injuring humans requires – and is limited to – retribution in kind.



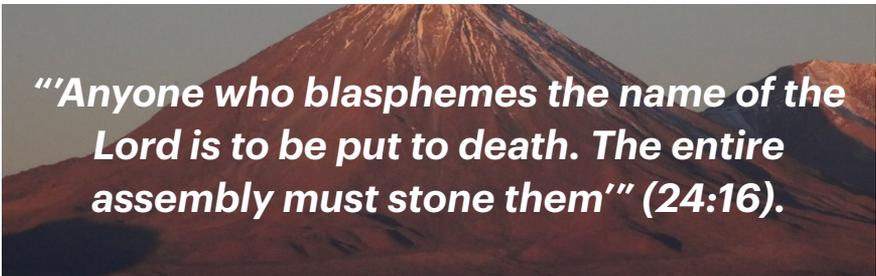
**What God is saying to us.** Within the New Testament, blasphemy is the false charge lodged against both Jesus and Stephen to justify execution (Matthew 26:62-65; Acts 6:11-15). Were Jesus not the son of God, his claims would be blasphemous, and their execution, legitimate. As it is, of course, it is their execution which is blasphemous.

Contemporary culture flagrantly violates this proscription against blasphemy, sometimes seriously, often frivolously. It is not obvious how Christians should respond. Leviticus spoke within the context of a theocracy, and could justifiably impose biblical standards on those who resided within the country. That is not our setting. Demonstrations against blasphemous books or films tend to provide free advertisement and additional profits. Objecting when people use the name of God either in curse or in conversation may simply alienate those whom we hope to influence for Christ.

The responsibility that this passage gives the Church is less to oversee society's abuse of the name of God, than to supervise behavior within the Church that results in abuse against the name of Christ (cf. 2 Peter 2:1-3; Titus 2:5; 1 Timothy 6:1). When Christian leaders engage in sexual trysts, when they exploit donations for personal gain, or when they compromise biblical standards in order to cozy

up to political power, their behavior blasphemes God. Scripture calls out such sin, and commands the Church to discipline those who engage in it (e.g., 1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

As for the secondary point of this text, the most obvious New Testament reference comes in the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus heightens various Old Testament and traditional ethical norms, including some from this passage. The prohibition against murder extends to anger; against adultery, to lust; against breaking oaths, to making oaths. The permission for retribution in kind becomes an exhortation to accept even worse treatment without retaliation. Non-retaliation models the character of our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:21-48).



***“Anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord is to be put to death. The entire assembly must stone them” (24:16).***

## DAY 26

# HOLINESS: RESTRICTING EXPLOITATION

### Leviticus 25

Reading this passage, it is easy to get distracted by chronology, and miss the main point. Chronology features conspicuously, with regulations governing the Sabbath (seventh) year (verses 1-7), and the Jubilee (fiftieth) year (verses 8-53). Yet chronology is merely the means to an end. The driving concern of the chapter – including the two special years – is the effort to limit exploitation. The regulations protect the land (verses 2-22), the poor (verses 23-38), and the destitute (verses 39-55).

**What God said to them.** The chapter opens with a twist on a common introduction: “The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai” (verse 1). “The Lord said” is an assertion of divine authority throughout Leviticus. Three other times, the text adds, “at Mount Sinai”: once, with respect to the entire sacrificial system (7:38); once, in conjunction with the threat of blessing and curse (26:46); and, at the end, encapsulating the entire book (27:34). This chapter includes an additional repeated assertion of authority: “I am the Lord your God” (verses 17,38,55). There is no evading the divine authority of this teaching.

The bulk of the chapter protects three entities from exploitation. First, the land receives two layers of protection: the Sabbath year and the Year of Jubilee. One year in seven, the fields and vineyards are to lie fallow, as a Sabbath for the land. The people are to eat whatever the land produces in its original, uncultivated state (verses 1-7).

Additionally, one year in fifty, they are to celebrate an extra Sabbath year, with an additional feature: possession of the land returns to its original owners. In effect, land is never sold; it is merely leased until the coming Jubilee. To be equitable, the 'selling price' of the land is to reflect the years remaining until ownership reverts (verses 8-17). If Israel allows the land these two rests, God will grant them safety and prosperity, and he will provide during the fallow years (verses 18-22).

The Jubilee also protects the poor. In an agrarian culture, land ownership is a key financial asset. If poverty forces anyone to sell their land, it remains redeemable by a prosperous relative, or by the original owner. If neither buys it back, ownership reverts at no cost during the Jubilee (verses 23-28). Homes within walled cities are an exception, and Levite homes within Levitical cities are an exception to the exception (verses 29-34). As additional support for the poor, God calls the prosperous to grant interest-free loans. He offers a double motivation: he commands it as their Lord; and, when they were landless immigrants, he gave them land (verses 35-38).

Finally, the Jubilee protects the destitute. Once the poor have sold their land, if hard times continue, they may have no other recourse than to sell themselves. This slavery is not the antebellum American brutality: they are to be treated as employees, not as chattel. Moreover, they are to be freed at no cost during the Jubilee (verses 39-43). The same protection, though, does not apply to foreign slaves (verses 44-46). When a prosperous foreigner purchases Israelite slaves, however, these protections do apply (verses 47-55).

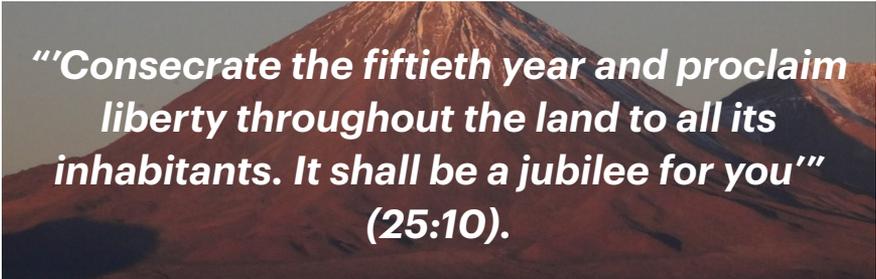


**What God is saying to us.** God prohibits exploitation of the land, of the poor, and of the destitute. Industrialized agriculture has vastly increased our ability to exploit the land through farming (and mining is even worse). Advanced capitalism has vastly increased opportunity to exploit the poor, exemplified in the housing loan crisis of 2008, or in payday loans and credit-card terms. Worst of all, a globalized economy, and the unending quest for consumer goods at ever cheaper prices, has made it vastly more difficult for those in developed countries to avoid exploiting economic slaves in under-regulated countries.

God provided two protections for the environment: the Sabbath year and the Jubilee. He also provided protection for the poor and the enslaved: land and people could not be permanently sold, only temporarily leased. The Year of Jubilee was designed to redistribute wealth to the poor, in order to prevent entrenched poverty and the accumulation of perpetual wealth within a privileged class. We will need

different mechanisms today, but the same goal must remain.

God offers us the same two motivations that he offered Israel: he is our Lord; and, he has rescued us, though not from foreign slavery, but from spiritual bondage. Our gratitude should express itself in protecting the environment, the poor, and the destitute. The historical record indicates that ancient Israel rarely observed either the Sabbath year or the year of Jubilee, and they suffered exile, in part, because of it (Leviticus 26:34-35,43; cf. 2 Chronicles 36:21). If we fail to protect the environment, or the poor and destitute, will we fare any better?



***“Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you”  
(25:10).***

## DAY 27

# THE BOTTOM LINE: BLESSING OR CURSE

### Leviticus 26

**F**rom beginning to end, this chapter makes only one point, from two directions: those who obey God, he will bless; those who disobey, he will curse. Yet blessing is not salvation by works. Nor is curse necessarily final.

**What God said to them.** The passage begins with a summary of Israel's obligations toward God in terms of worship, Sabbath and tabernacle (verses 12). Then, in keeping with biblical and ancient Near Eastern convention for legal documents, the book draws to a close by promising blessing for those who obey, and threatening curses against those who disobey (cf. Exodus 23:20-33, and Deuteronomy 28).

The blessings are of three types (verses 3-13). As befits an agrarian context, the first blessing is agricultural: the land will produce all the food they can use (verses 3-5). The second blessing will ensure peace and safety in their homeland: neither wild beast nor violent enemy will harm them (verses 6-8). Finally, in fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham, their numbers will increase, their land will be fertile, and God will dwell in their midst (verses 9-12).

The covenantal framework precludes any notion that obedience earns blessing. The making of the covenant with Abraham was unconditional, but to enjoy its blessings is conditioned upon obedience. Verse 13 underscores God's gracious initiative as the foundation for their reciprocal obligation: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians."

In anticipation of their dismal response and cataclysmic history, the curses for disobedience are longer and more detailed. The same refrain introduces each paragraph, encapsulating the thrust of this section: "If you will not listen to me, I will punish you" (verses 14,18,21,23,27). If Israel is disobedient, God will bring on them disease, famine, and military conquest (verses 14-17).

Yet the purpose of the punishment is less retributive than rehabilitative. After each threatened punishment, God continues, "If after all this you will not listen to me, I will ..." (verse 18 cf. verses 21,23,27). He will afflict them with drought (verses 18-20), attack by wild animals (verses 21-22), war, plague and famine (verses 23-26), leading ultimately to cannibalism, mass deaths, the razing of their cities and sanctuaries, and exile (verses 27-35). Those who survive will live in terror (verses 36-39).

Despite their persistence in sin, and his frightful punishments, God does not give up on his people. Once in exile, if they confess their sin, he will remember his covenant, and restore them to his favor and to their land

(verses 40-45). The final sentence aggregates all the teachings of Leviticus as the word of God, and the terms of his covenant with Israel (verse 46).



**What God is saying to us.** This chapter is especially important for correcting widespread misunderstanding regarding grace, faith, obedience, and salvation. Several earlier readings have already touched on these issues. Yet the confusion is so deep-rooted and resilient that it benefits from reinforcement.

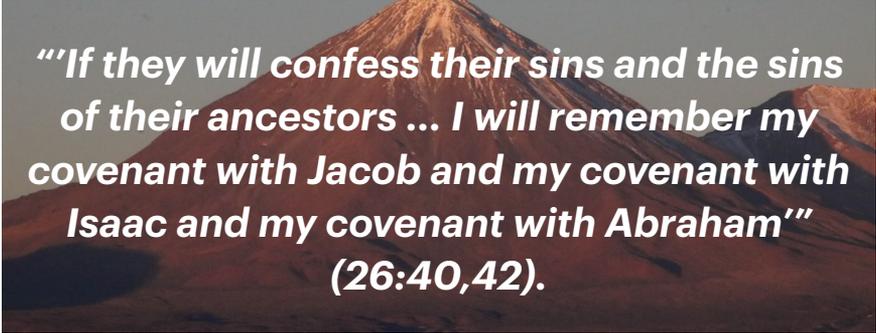
The difference between the Old and New Testaments is not salvation by works versus salvation by grace. Even in a passage like this, where obedience plays a decisive role, grace is always present, is always undeserved, and always precedes obedience. By his own free initiative, God chose Israel's ancestors and made covenant with them, without any preconditions. Bestowal of blessing or curse is, however, conditional upon their response, whether they obey or disobey.

Nor is the difference between the Old and New Testaments that the former requires worship and obedience, whereas the latter requires only faith. True, Jesus offers salvation to all who believe (John 1:12; 3:16-18). At the same time, he insists that those who genuinely believe will also obey him (John 14:15-21). In agreement with Leviticus 26, both Jesus and the apostles affirm that those who persistently and

egregiously disobey will fall under divine judgment (Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21).

The difference between the Old and New Covenants is not related to this underlying framework of grace and obedience, but as promise to fulfillment. Fundamentally, the difference is three-fold. For one, the death of Christ supplants the sacrifice of animals, so that our sin is decisively atoned (Romans 3:21-26). For another, the powerful Spirit supplants the impotent Law, so that fundamentally – if still imperfectly – we obey God (Romans 6,8). Finally, the required reciprocation includes the worship of Christ, and the imitation of his lifestyle (Romans 10,12).

In due course, New Testament readings will explore these differences more adequately. For now, it suffices to observe that, as in Leviticus, still now, God bestows grace and requires obedience. Consequently, our way of life still has eternal consequence.



***“If they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors ... I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham”  
(26:40,42).***

## DAY 28

# APPENDIX: RENEGOTIATING VOWS

### Leviticus 27

**A**s noted yesterday, the last verse of chapter 26 feels like the end of the book. Yet the book continues for one more chapter. Chapter 27 begins in a familiar way, “The Lord said to Moses” (27:1). The chapter brings the book to a close in much the same way as its predecessor: “These are the commands the Lord gave Moses at Mount Sinai for the Israelites” (27:34). Why would the book have a double ending?

Structurally and thematically, chapter 27 is an appendix. It differs from all that went before in this sense: chapters 1-26 report activities which God requires; chapter 27 addresses voluntary vows, above and beyond what is required (technically, ‘acts of supererogation’).

The Old Testament provides several examples of vows, either in an effort to influence God to grant some benefit (Genesis 28:10-22; Numbers 1:1-3; Jonah 2:9; 2 Samuel 15:7-8), or in thanks for a benefit already granted (1 Samuel 1:21-28). The chief characteristic is this: making a vow is entirely voluntary; though, once made, a vow must be kept (Deuteronomy 23:21-23).

Thus, Scripture warns against hasty vows (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6), as Jephthah learned the hard way, when he sacrificed his daughter in fulfillment of an imprudent vow (Judges 11:29-40). Basically, Leviticus 27 solves that sort of problem by monetizing vows, providing an alternative way to fulfill them.

**What God said to them.** The chapter advises how much compensation must be paid if someone decides to retain what they previously promised to God. The fee structure presupposes a three-fold distinction: (1) required sacrifices; (2) voluntary vows; and, (3) consecrated or 'devoted' items (Hebrew, *herem*). Chapters 1-26 dealt with the first; most of chapter 27, with the second; and verses 28-29, briefly with the third.

Verses 2-13 cover vows that dedicate the living, human and animal. The set price for redeeming a person varies by gender, age, and wealth, basically in line with values in the slave market (verses 2-8). A 'clean' animal, once dedicated to the Lord, cannot be redeemed or substituted (verses 9-10). An unclean animal may be redeemed for twenty percent above market value, as assessed by the priest (verses 11-13).

Verses 14-24 cover the redemption of property, with the priest continuing as appraiser. To redeem a house costs twenty percent above market value (verses 14-15). Redeeming family land also costs twenty percent above market value, though the calculation is complicated by the Jubilee laws (verses 16-21). To redeem other land, the

current owner pays market price up to the year of Jubilee, when the land reverts to its original owner (verses 22-24).

Given regional variations in the value of currency, prices are set in terms of the sanctuary shekel (verse 25).

Verses 26-33 present a number of other regulations related to dedication and redemption. Since first-born clean animals already belong to God, they may not be dedicated to him. First-born unclean animals may be both dedicated and re-purchased by the owner at twenty percent markup, or sold on the open market (verses 26-27). Consecrated or 'devoted' items (*herem*) – whether people, animals, family land, or P.O.W.s – may not be redeemed (verses 28-29). Israelites must donate a tithe of all produce to the Lord: produce may be redeemed for the standard twenty percent above market value; animals may not be redeemed or substituted (verses 30-33).



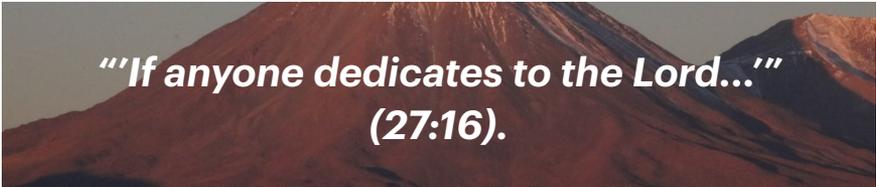
**What God is saying to us.** This passage reflects a delicate synthesis of two values that are sometimes in tension: the obligation to fulfill promises made to God, and mercy toward those who make enthusiastic, but rash, vows. The resolution permits substitution of most vows with payment of a twenty percent surcharge.

The New Testament is generally wary of making vows. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus alludes to the proscription of Leviticus 19:12, "Do not swear falsely by my name and so

profane the name of your God.” He goes a step further, discouraging vows altogether, and especially casuistic distinctions that allow some vows to be broken. Better a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, followed through to fulfillment (Matthew 5:33-37; 23:16-22; cf. James 5:12). Elsewhere, he insists that a voluntary vow does not trump a financial responsibility, such as financial support of parents (Matthew 15:39).

At the same time, the book of Acts reports the apostle Paul keeping a vow (Acts 18:18). He also pays the expenses incurred by other Jewish Christians in fulfillment of their vows (Acts 21:20-26 cf. chapters 22-28).

So the New Testament perspective on vows is nuanced, though simple: it discourages making vows, but, with Leviticus, expects vows, once made, to be fulfilled. Notably, this simplicity knows nothing of the complexity that has developed across history to support the practice of monastic and clerical vows in some Christian traditions.



***“If anyone dedicates to the Lord...”  
(27:16).***