
LEVITICUS 1-27

Lesson 9, Old Testament, Adult Religion Class, Tuesday, 25 Oct 2011

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OUTLINE

1. The Offerings (1 – 7)
 - a. The Burnt Offering (1)
 - b. The Grain Offering (2)
 - c. The Peace Offering (3)
 - d. The Sin Offering (4:1 – 5:13)
 - e. The Trespass Offering (5:14 – 6:7)
 - f. Additional regulations for the offerings (6:8 – 7:38)
2. The Installation of Aaron and Sons (8 – 10)
 - a. The Ordination of Aaron and his sons (8)
 - b. The Lord accepts their offerings (9)
 - c. The death of Nadab and Abihu and attendant regulations (10)
3. Clean and Unclean (11 – 15)
 - a. Clean and unclean foods (11)
 - b. Purification after childbirth (12)
 - c. Skin diseases and mildew (13-14)
 - d. Unclean discharges (15)
4. The Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur (16)
5. Holiness Code (17 – 26)
 - a. Eating blood prohibited (17)
 - b. Unlawful sexual relations (18)
 - c. Various laws for holy living (19)
 - d. Punishments for sin (20)
 - e. Regulations for priests (21:1 – 22:16)
 - f. Acceptable and unacceptable sacrifices (22:17-33)
 - g. The annual feasts (23)
 - h. Rules for oil and bread in the Tabernacle (24:1-9)
 - i. Punishment for blasphemy (24:10-23)
 - j. The Sabbath and Jubilee years (25)
 - k. Covenant blessings and curses (26)
6. Offerings Vowed to the Lord (27)

INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew name of Leviticus is *vayikrā*, which is the first word, translating to ‘And he called,’ ‘he’ referring to the Lord. The word “Leviticus” comes from the Latin directly but originally the Greek name of the book, *Levitikon*, meaning ‘things pertaining to the Levites.’ The book is written in a somewhat chiasmic structure, with the focal point being the Day of Atonement (though some argue chapter 19 on holiness is the center point: see, for example, an interesting article presenting the complex structure that represents the Tabernacle itself, moving from the least to the most holy place then back out again: [http://chaver.com/Torah/The%20Literary%20Structure%20of%20Leviticus%20\(TBH\).pdf](http://chaver.com/Torah/The%20Literary%20Structure%20of%20Leviticus%20(TBH).pdf)).

Textually, Leviticus fits into a longer narrative that starts at Exodus 19 and goes until Number 10—about a third of *Torah*—the year when Israel was camped at Mount Sinai. It contains greater details on many things first mentioned in Exodus and other information not previously presented. Leviticus provided the details that “shaped Israel’s national and religious experience—the law, the priesthood, the forms of Temple worship and the tribal foundation of the society” (JPS, 203).

A central theme of Leviticus is captured in 10:10, “...that ye may put difference between holy and unholy [normal], and between unclean [impure] and clean [pure]” (see JPS, 2041-2047 for an excellent article by Jonathan Klawans on this topic). In the Law of Moses, to be ‘holy’ is to be separated from the world and

dedicated to God. To be ‘clean’ means to be purified, either ritually or morally. A person or thing became ritually impure without any sin (mostly through contacting natural and even unavoidable sources, such as birth, death, sex, disease, or bodily fluids). Likewise, a person or thing could be returned to ritual purity by an act of cleanliness—a ritual activity or even the passage of time. Moral impurity, on the other hand, came from sin, such as idolatry, adultery, or murder. Resolving it required greater effort and sacrifice—there was usually a punishment and atonement made. Wide-spread moral impurity defiled the land as well as the people and was the ultimate cause of Israel’s loss of land and home as they become ‘polluted’ and an ‘abomination.’ Ironically, moral impurity did not cause ritual defilement, so the sinner could enter the sanctuary when the ritually impure could not.

Purity and holiness were related but not equal. Something could be pure but not holy, though the reverse could not be true; the path to holiness always started with purity. Becoming ritually impure or encountering something else that is impure made a person temporarily unable to contact anything holy. Because ritual impurity was ‘contagious,’ rules were strictly given about avoiding contact with others until pure again, lest the impurity spread like a disease and even impact the Tabernacle itself. Not becoming clean after ritual impurity was a sin (Numbers 19:20) but becoming ritually impure in the first place is not a sin.

While little of the detailed instructions in Leviticus are directly relevant to the Latter-day Saints’ religious practices today, the text is ultimately relevant because it points us to the Atonement of Christ and the grace of God, which was its purpose for the ancient Israelites as well. Kent Jackson called it “the most Christian book in the Old Testament, since it teaches better than any other book the consequences of sin and the redemptive nature of vicarious sacrifice” (Jackson, 155).

Adam learned this from the beginning, after being commanded to offer sacrifice (burnt offering) and not knowing why: “And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth. Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:7-8). Abinadi further taught that “there was a law given them, yeah, a law of performances and ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him. But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come” (Mosiah 13:30-31). The Book of Mormon peoples may have preserved this better than the Old Testament children of Israel, if Jacob’s words are any indication: “And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing out souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son” (Jacob 4:5).

Only five verses in Leviticus have JST changes (12:3-5; 21:11; 22:9).

THE OFFERINGS (1 – 7)

INTRODUCTION

The text opens with a clear statement that this information comes directly from the Lord through his prophet, Moses. It was given to him in the tabernacle (1:1).

The various kinds of offerings and their purposes can be quite daunting to track and analyze, at least in

part because the details are scattered over many chapters and verses in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Student Manual (1:162-163) has an excellent chart that walks through the various offerings, what was used, the purpose of each, and when it was administered (also available here: <https://lds.org/ensign/1973/12/the-priesthood->

ordinance-of-sacrifice?lang=eng. Many of the comments below come from those pages and a short summary is provided below.

Burnt Offering

The most ancient offering practiced since Adam, the burnt offering was a male animal without blemish, probably the most reminiscent of the Savior's sacrifice. It was both a public and private offering for sin, performed twice each day and during the feasts and important holy days. The entire animal was consumed in the fire.

Peace Offering

Though the animal needed to be without blemish, gender did not matter and the animal could be bull, lamb, or goat. Little of the animal was burned, leaving most of it to be eaten by the priests and the offerer. Tied to an expression of thanks or the making or renewal of a covenant, this was a private offering made by individuals.

Sin Offering

Gender did not matter and the animal type depended on the offerer's means, with the meat being consumed by the priesthood. Even grain was accepted if the person was too poor to have an animal. This was for sins of ignorance as well as the violation of covenants or oaths or ceremonial defilement. After true repentance, this sacrifice prepared the offerer for forgiveness through a renewal of covenant, much as the Sacrament functions for us today. The best-known sin offering is on the Day of Atonement.

Trespass Offering

Only a ram was used (though a leper or Nazarite could offer a lamb). This sacrifice was for offenses against others—lying, stealing, disrespect, or acts of passion. After repentance, including restitution, forgiveness could be achieved. These were private or personal offerings but could be tied to feasts.

Grain (Meat) Offering

A gift of unleavened bread—flour, salt, and frankincense—baked or fried, this accompanied and completed a burnt or peace offering and given to the priests.

Heave/Wave Offering

Part of the burnt and peace offering also, this was the portion given to the priests, so named because they were lifted and extended to the priests.

All of these offerings had some things in common. First, they were made from the personal property of the individual or purchased with their money. It has to be owned to be a gift. Second, they were to be the best of the flock or herd, not the sickly animal that was about to die anyway. This took faith to give up the ideal breeders but it was a statement that the Lord was in charge.

One final introductory/textual note: though the language of the KJV says "man" (e.g., 1:2), the Hebrew word is *ʾādām*, meaning mankind. "Opportunities for individual worship are identical for male and female; only the public ritual was confined to males, namely, the Aaronic priesthood" (JPS, 207).

COMMENTARY

The Burnt Offering (1:2-17)

The first sacrifice mentioned is the burnt offering which can come from the herd (1:3-9), the flock (1:10-13), or from fowls (1:14-17). The pattern is similar with all three types. First, the person brought the animal to the door of the tabernacle. He "put his hand upon the head" (1:4) of the male, unblemished animal, thereby dedicating it to God and marking the animal as a substitute for the offerer (Student

Manual, 164). It was to be a voluntary offering, killed by the offerer (though the birds were killed by the priest) while the priests captured some of the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. Then the offerer was to prepare the animal as if it were going to be eaten by flaying it (cutting off the skin) and cutting it into pieces (which at least one author says represents serving God with heart, might, mind, and strength; Student Manual, 164). But the priests took all the

parts of the animal and burnt them on the altar—100% of the animal was offered as a sacrifice.

Burnt offerings are recorded in Genesis and the Book of Mormon (e.g., Abel in Genesis 4:4; Noah in Genesis 8:20-21; Abraham in Genesis 22:13; Lehi in 1 Nephi 5:9 and 7:22; and the people of King Benjamin in Mosiah 2:3). These were generally family affairs and representative of atonement, which meant the removal of evil disrupting divine-human relationships (Zondervan, 290). They were offered twice daily as part of the Tabernacle/temple routine, as well as on special occasions, such as the Sabbath (a double portion), with feasts, New Year, and Day of Atonement. Sins were transferred to the animal who became the representative of the offerer, letting the natural man be put to death (cf. Romans 6:1-6) and demonstrating a total commitment to God.

The Meat (Grain) Offering (2:1-16)

Translated “meat offering” in the KJV, the Hebrew word is *minḥāh*, meaning ‘gift’ or ‘tribute,’ especially paid to a superior (JPS, 208). Many translations call it a ‘meal’ or ‘grain’ offering because it involved bread. The bread made from the grain was unleavened and not sweetened with honey, as Israel’s pagan neighbors did with the meal offerings to their gods. It would be baked or fried. The only ingredients were flour, oil, and frankincense; the three represented the word of God, the anointing of the Holy Ghost, and prayer, respectively (Student Manual, 165). Salt was included as part of the offering because eating salt was often part of covenant making. The grain offering was always given with a burnt or fellowship offering. After burning a portion on the altar as a memorial, the rest of the bread was given to the priests for their service.

The Peace Offering (3:1-17)

The peace (also called ‘Fellowship’ or ‘Well-being’) offerings started similarly to a burnt offering; the person put his hands on the head of the animal, killed it at the door, and the priest sprinkled the blood on the altar. But then it was very different, since the animal was not burnt but only certain parts of it—kidneys, fat, and a lobe of the liver (“caul

above the liver” in the KJV). It could be a bull, sheep, or goat. In other words, the animal was offered to the Lord but then the Lord gave most of it back for the benefit of the offerer, taking only parts that the person probably wouldn’t eat anyway and leaving only a small portion for the priesthood.

The purposes of a peace offering included giving thanks to God, taking or renewing a vow, or accepting a covenant. This was the type of sacrifice offered during Passover, such as what Peter and John acquired for the Last Supper (Luke 22:8).

Lehi seems to have offered a peace offering three times during their journey to the Promised Land (1 Nephi 2:7; 5:9; and 7:22).

The Sin Offering (4:1 - 5:13)

This offering was to cover sins committed in ignorance (meaning, unintentionally), not generally known, violating covenants, or those causing defilement or uncleanness. It prepared people to receive forgiveness with a renewal of covenant. This was generally a private offering except on the Day of Atonement. The type of animal offered varied on the person’s station and ability, ranging from a bull to a goat, to birds or even grain for the poorest. This demonstrates that the purpose of the sacrifice was not the death of the animal but the changing of the heart of the giver (Student Manual, 165).

Like the peace offering, just the kidneys and liver lobe with the fat was burnt on the altar. The skin, head, legs, and other organs were burnt outside the camp. (For goats and lambs, just the fat was burned on the altar.) The rest of the animal was for the use of the priests.

The blood that was captured was sprinkled on the veil going into the temple, on the horns of the incense altar in the holy place (to symbolize the power of God to forgive sins; Student Manual, 167), with the rest poured out under the altar in the courtyard.

The bull was taken outside the camp for the final burning, just as Christ’s sacrifice was enacted outside the walls of Jerusalem—in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives and at Golgatha outside the city walls (see Hebrews 13:11-13).

The Trespass Offering (5:14 – 6:7)

Given for offenses against others, the trespass or ‘guilt’ offering was a ram or lamb (for lepers or Nazarites). Few details are given about the sacrifice itself. This was a personal offering but could be tied to one of the feasts. There are two types of trespass offerings: those committed in ignorance (5:15-19) and those committed knowingly, specifically lying or stealing (6:2-7).

Additional regulations for the offerings (6:8 – 7:38)

This section provides extra details specifically to the priests as they administer the sacrifices, divided into five separate speeches by the Lord to Moses that tie back to the types of offerings already discussed. The first one (6:8-18) discusses how the priests were to always keep the burnt offering fire going, then

covers how the grain offering was to be eaten. The second (6:19-23) continues with information about the grain offering, giving instructions about how much, when, and even where the priests were to eat it. The third (6:24 – 7:21) provides additional details on the consumption of the sin offering by the priests; provides details about the parts of the animal the priests were to keep with the trespass offering; and outlines the offering and consumption of the peace offering. The fourth section (7:22-27) is short and does not relate to any specific offering but forbids them from eating fat or blood; finally, the fifth part (7:28-34) returns to the peace offering, discussing the “wave breast and the heave shoulder” parts of that sacrifice in more detail. The final verses (7:35-38) are part of this section (that is, no new speech is mentioned) but act as a summary of the first seven chapters, emphasizing that the Lord revealed all of this to Moses in mount Sinai.

THE INSTALLATION OF AARON AND SONS (8 – 10)

INTRODUCTION

The events of chapter 8 were first described in Exodus 29. Now Moses fulfilled that command upon Aaron and his sons. After a seven-day consecration period, the men began to offer the regular sacrifices in the Tabernacle. However, there are irregularities as they learn their duties. The first one ended with

the death of Aaron’s two oldest sons. The second cause Moses to be angry at first, but Aaron’s words calmed him. All of this was to help teach them the difference between holy/clean and unholy/unclean, the subject of chapters 11-15.

COMMENTARY

The Ordination of Aaron and his sons (8:1-36)

The various articles of clothing were placed on Aaron and his sons after they were washed with water (8:6). Aaron wore the tunic (“coat”), sash (“girdle”), robe, apron (“ephod”), and breastplate with the Urim and Thummim stashed inside. Finally, he received the hat/turban (“mitre”) with a gold plaque on the front that read “Holiness to the Lord.”

Moses anointed with oil all things in the tabernacle—the altar, the laver, and the other utensils. Then finally he anointed Aaron “to sanctify him” (8:12). Anointing changes their status, “infuses

[people and things] with holiness” and “transforms them into God’s personal servants” (JPS, 223). Aaron’s sons were also clothed, though more simply with tunics, sashes, and hats.

The ceremony continued with a sin offering of a bull and a burnt offering of a ram, dealt with as described in the previous chapters. Then a second ram was killed after they put their hands on his head to transfer their sins to him; it was the ram of “consecration,” often translated ordination in other versions, though the Hebrew word literally means ‘filling’ of the hand (JPS, 223). This prepared Aaron and his sons to be the recipients (to have their hands

filled) of the sacrifices people would bring to the Tabernacle. The blood of the ram was daubed on Aaron's and his sons' right ears, right thumbs, and big right toes, perhaps symbolizing their commitment to hearken to the Lord, act correctly in his name, and walk in his paths (Keil, 1:547).

After additional sacrifices and more oil put on Aaron and his sons, Moses instructed them to stay seven days in the courtyard to complete their consecration.

The Lord accepts their offerings (9:1-24)

On the eighth day, Moses directed Aaron and his sons to make a series of offerings. First, sin and burnt offerings for themselves, then sin, burnt, peace, and meat (grain) offerings for the people. The text says that they executed this exactly as described in the opening chapters of Leviticus. The result was that "the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat" (9:23-24). When Israel saw it, the people shouted in rejoicing and fell down in humility.

The death of Nadab and Abihu and attendant regulations (10:1-19)

Just when things looked like they were going marvelously, Aaron's two oldest sons had a tragic experience. They took their fire pan ("censer" in the KJV) used to hold hot coals or incense, and "offered strange fire before the Lord" (10:1). It is not clear

what this phrase means; it could be they prepared the incense incorrectly, or did not get the coals from the altar as prescribed, or that they came to the performance of their duties drunk (which some read into the story based on what is told Aaron afterwards). Whatever it was, it was serious enough to merit their immediate death, and "there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them" (10:2), taking their lives.

After disposing of the bodies, Moses told Aaron and his two remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, that they were not to mourn (uncover their heads or rend their clothing) because to mourn the dead would make them unclean and the Lord needed them to serve in the Tabernacle. But the people were allowed to mourn. Aaron and his sons were instructed (reminded?) not to "drink wine nor strong drink" (10:9) when they functioned in their duties in the Tabernacle. This was to let them know the "difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean" (10:10), the key message of the next five chapters.

Then there is another incident where the Lord's law appears to have been violated. Aaron and his family were to eat the sin offering but instead burnt it completely on the altar. Moses was at first angry that they had ignored the Lord's command for the sacrifice, but Aaron said, in essence, 'Under the circumstances, we just didn't feel like celebrating.' His assurance that it was a one-time occurrence satisfied Moses' concern.

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN (11 - 15)

INTRODUCTION

Holiness means separation or consecration, something apart from the world and focused on the Lord. The point of the laws of clean and unclean is to

make the distinction between them. Discernment is important to maintain holiness.

COMMENTARY

Clean and unclean foods (11:1-47)

The list of unclean food is divided into beasts (11:1-8), marine life (11:9-12), birds (11:13-19), flying

insects (11:20-23), and small animals (11:41-43). The list is detailed and long and determines that is "kosher" and what is not for Jews today. Some argue

that the foods deemed “unclean” by the Lord pose a health risk to the Israelites. While some of that may be true, it is also clear that other cultures ate such foods without problems. The issue is really setting Israel apart from its neighbors and providing a them a daily reminder of that status with God. By restricting their diet, they stood out from others around them, just as the Word of Wisdom makes LDS people stand out today.

The section sums up the reason for the restrictions nicely: “ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (11:44). The last phrase is repeated in 11:45, emphasizing its importance.

Purification after childbirth (12:1-8)

Childbirth itself did not render a person sinful in any way, but it did make a woman ritually unclean as she was dealing with normal post-partum discharges. The number of days fit the normal pattern of recovery, rounded to the standardized important numbers of seven and forty. It is not known why the

length of time for a female baby is twice that of a male.

Skin diseases and mildew (13:1 - 14:57)

Though “leprosy” is the term used (13:2), most of what is discussed here is not that disease but rather various kinds of skin rashes or other skin problems such as psoriasis. The key point of this section is that the priest was to determine the person’s status—clean or unclean. But the priests were not trained as doctors, so going to them was a spiritual effort, not a physical one. Likewise today, when we struggle with impurities in our lives, can go to our priesthood leaders and work with them to become clean. Shaving off all the hair (14:9) is perhaps like being born again—naked and smooth like a newborn.

Unclean discharges (15:1-33)

Bodily functions, such as menstruation or sexual relations, or some discharges, rendered a person ritually unclean. Chapter 15 addresses these and how to become clean again.

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT—YOM KIPPUR (16)

INTRODUCTION

With the list of things that make a person or the congregation unclean, the text shifts to a discussion of an annual act designed to deal with those impurities collectively, called *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement.

We might think that the Day of Atonement was to purge Israel of her sins, but that is not fully the case. In fact, that is not the case for most of the sacrifices outlined in Leviticus. Forgiveness was attained by personal and collective repentance, including acknowledging sin, forsaking it, and making amends where possible. But sin and even ritual impurity had an impact on the community as a whole and on the

Tabernacle/temple. The offerings, especially the ones made on the Day of Atonement, were thus to cleanse the sacred space which had been defiled by collective disobedience to God’s laws or inadequate efforts to address impurities in the community (not following the Law precisely in every case). The offering on *Yom Kippur* was designed to be the annual cleansing of the Tabernacle or the temple, to purge it of the sins of the people for another year. Of course, in the process of cleansing the sacred space, the people by default are also cleansed because it is only through their group purification that the place of the worship of God can be truly cleansed.

COMMENTARY

The text starts off saying that it was given shortly after the death of Aaron’s two sons, discussed back in chapter 10. Aaron is first reminded not to come

into the Most Holy Place (here called “the holy place within the veil,” 16:2) except under certain conditions (not until the last verse of the chapter do

we learn that it is only once a year). He was to bring a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, then put on simple clothes more like what the priests normally wore (not his normal, more elaborate clothing) to show his humility. He also brought two goats into the equation. After offering a bull for a sin offering for himself, the high priest took the two goat and presented them to the Lord. Lots were cast, with one goat going to the Lord and the other getting the William Tyndale-created name of “scapegoat” (16:8), which translates the Hebrew *azazel*, which means literally ‘fierce god’ and represents a demon that lived in the wilderness (JPS, 245). The Lord’s goat was offered on the altar as a sin offering, while the scapegoat had a different fate.

After the sacrifices were over, the high priest collected blood from the animals, got burning coals from the altar’s fire and some incense, and entered the Holy Place (the main room in the Tabernacle). He put the hot coals and incense on the altar there before the veil, then passed through the veil into the

Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies). In that cube-shaped room, he sprinkled blood from the bull and the goat on the mercy seat seven times, then exited and sprinkled blood on the incense altar in the Holy Place.

Returning to the courtyard, the High Priest laid both hands on the scapegoat’s head and did “confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins” (16:21). Then the goat was taken into the wilderness, casting the sins of the people outside of the camp and to the demon. That done, Aaron washed the clothing he was wearing and put on his ‘normal’ high-priestly garments. Concluding with a sin offering, he burned the fat on the altar, then took the rest outside of the camp and burned it up.

This Day of Atonement was a “Sabbath of rest” (16:31) and was to be repeated forever by the high priest or his successor once each year on the seventh day of the tenth month (this year—2011—it was 7-8 Oct).

HOLINESS CODE (17 – 26)

INTRODUCTION

These chapters are concerned with holiness, which comes from God and transforms everything it contacts. It invites Israel as a whole to be holy, not just the Tabernacle area and not just the priests. It extends the idea in the earlier chapters that any

individual’s behavior impacts the community, and thus regulates many daily behaviors as well as collective feasts and celebrations.

COMMENTARY

Eating blood prohibited (17)

All animals had to be brought to the door of the Tabernacle to be slain at this time (17:1-7). This was to prevent any chance of sacrifices to other gods by giving the blood, symbolic of atonement, to these other gods. Later this requirement was ended and replaced with the pouring out of blood into the ground (Deuteronomy 12:20-25).

The chapter prohibits the eating of blood, “the life of the flesh” (17:11), since blood is the symbol and means of atonement.

Unlawful sexual relations (18)

Various types of sexual relationships were prohibited, such as various family members (“near of kin,” 18:6), neighbors, any woman menstruating, other men, or animals. Sacrificing of children was also prohibited in this chapter. Doing any of these things would defile the land itself, causing it to “vomiteth out her inhabitants” (18:25).

Various laws for holy living (19)

The reason for the command to Israel to “be holy” is that God is also holy (19:2) and man was to strive to be like God. Thus they were not to worship idols and were to make sacrifices “at your own will” (19:5).

To help care for the poor, they were to leave “gleanings” from the harvest (19:9) so others could gather some of the crop. Other concepts of proper behavior were given—don’t steal or swear falsely, don’t defraud another, curse the deaf (who wouldn’t hear it), trip up the blind (who wouldn’t see it coming), gossip, avenge wrongs (outside of the Law), but the corners of hair and beards, cut flesh or get tattoos. They were to keep the Sabbaths, honor old people, be kind to strangers, and use just balances and weights in transactions.

Jesus’ summary of the Law (Matthew 22:35-40) quoted from both Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, “...thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” As with many commandments in the Law that pertain to feelings and inner thoughts, the reason for doing it is simply, “I am the Lord”—it was God’s command.

Punishments for sin (20)

This chapter outlines punishments for certain sins, most of which are quite serious and defile the community and the land; thus many of them are punishable by death. But the steady reminder is there: “And ye shall be holy unto me, for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (20:26).

Regulations for priests (21:1 - 22:16)

Because priests worked in the temple, they had additional requirements to stay holy and clean. They should not touch the dead, except closest relatives; they were not to shave off their hair or marry a prostitute or a woman “put away from her husband” (21:7); even a divorced or widowed woman was forbidden; physical blemishes disqualified a priest from serving in the temple, such as being blind, lame, or even a “flat nose” (21:18, ‘mutilation’). Other health issues were included, such as broken feet, crooked back, or various injuries.

Acceptable and unacceptable sacrifices (22:17-33)

The Lord outlined how the “holy things” (22:7) were to be eaten by the priests and their families.

The annual feasts (23)

Leviticus 23 revisits the feasts first presented in Exodus. The Student Manual does an excellent job summarizing the feasts of Israel as outlined here (Student Manual, 181-183). Suffice it here to say that the holy days (or as we say today, holi-days) included the weekly Sabbath, the Passover (early spring), The Feast of Weeks (known as Pentecost in the New Testament, late spring), the Day of Atonement (fall), and The Feast of Tabernacles (late fall).

Rules for oil and bread in the Tabernacle (24:1-9)

Inside the tabernacle was the table of bread (“showbread” in the KJV) and the menorah. That lamp was never to go out, burning pure olive oil. The bread was to be in two stacks of six each, representing the tribes. The bread was replaced each Sabbath and eaten by the sons of Aaron.

Punishment for blasphemy (24:10-23)

Moving away from general laws, this incident describes a specific case brought to Moses of a man who had blasphemed. The nature of his sin is not explained in more detail, but Moses found him guilty and sentenced him to be stoned. He also explained that a murderer should be put to death and outlined some other punishments as well. In verse 20 are punishments called *lex talionis* (law of retribution), such as “eye for eye, tooth for tooth.” Sometimes these seem harsh but compared to other cultures of that day were quite equitable. In other legal texts, the punishment varied based on the class of the two people involved. For a noble who hurt a commoner, for example, the punishment was less typically monetary. In the Law of Moses, the punishment is the same regardless of class. In addition, these laws limited the punishment. If someone lost one eye, the offender couldn’t lose both eyes, just one. This checked the tendency toward revenge.

The Sabbath and Jubilee years (25)

The day of Jubilee was a chance to free the slave. Six years of slavery was following by the seventh,

representing holiness and completeness. So Israelite slavery could only last until the next Jubilee. There was also a Jubilee year after the 49th year (7 x 7), making the fiftieth year a grand celebration. It was a time to remind all that they were dependent on God and needed to trust him for their lives and sustenance. In turn, it was a reminder of their eternal inheritance and ultimate reward. It is significant that a Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement; as God had forgiven them, they were to forgive each other.

Covenant blessings and curses (26)

This chapter is really the pinnacle of Leviticus. In verses 3-13, the Lord outlined the amazing blessings he is ready to bestow on Israel if they “walk in my statutes” (26:3), including fruitful harvests, crops that last year-round, peace and safety from enemies and even beasts, children, and the presence of the Lord. He concluded: “And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (26:12).

Then follows what will happen is if they “will not hearken unto me” (26:14). Penalties are generally the opposite of the blessings already listed, with some powerful differences, such as, “I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart” (26:16). Four times the cursing includes the idea that something will happen “seven times,” meaning it would be multiplied greatly.

In the end, though, the Lord leaves it up to them. “If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary to me;...if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land...that I might be their God: I am the Lord” (26:40-45).

OFFERINGS VOWED TO THE LORD (27)

COMMENTARY

Leviticus concludes with some passages about “when a man shall make a singular vow” (27:2). These are special dedications to the Lord for either a person or a thing. This chapter outlines how such vows are handled, including how they might be redeemed (freed from the vow). The Lord shows his mercy by giving amounts for the various

circumstances but then stating that if the person is too poor for those amounts, they can meet with the priest who “shall value him; according to his ability [to pay] that vowed shall the priest value him” (27:8). In other words, the person could only be asked to pay what they could afford.

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