

## WRITER

This oracle of God was given to Israel through the inspired hand of Moses. Twenty of the 27 chapters of this book begin with the phrase, “*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying ...*” (See 1:1–3:17; 4:1–5:19). In other cases the Lord spoke to Aaron and his sons (6:9,25; 8:1,2), and at times the Lord spoke to both Moses and Aaron (11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1). It is assumed that during the latter part of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness that Moses inscribed the words of this book for the instruction of Israel throughout their eventual dwelling in the land of promise. The actual giving of the laws of the book was between the erection of the tabernacle in the first month of the second year after Israel’s departure from Egypt (Ex 40:17) and the first day of the second month of that same year (Nm 1:1). We assume that the book, however, was written after Israel left Sinai, but before their arrival at the east boundary of the promised land. The date of the actual writing of the book by Moses, therefore, would probably be somewhere between 1,440 and 1,400 B.C. There is no way we can be certain with these dates. We only assume that Moses was inspired to write them by the Holy Spirit while the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness of Sinai. We are only certain that he wrote the books.

## BOOK

The translators of the Septuagint gave the name “Leviticus” to this book. It is an appropriate name since the book contains the laws, regulations and ordinances that are directed specifically to the tribe of Levi in order that they perform their priestly duties on behalf of Israel. The book also discusses how the nation and individuals are to approach God in order to remain in fellowship with Him. Instructions are given on how to maintain holiness in order to approach God who is holy.

The teaching of this book lays the foundation for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. It does this by explaining the horrible nature of sin, as well as the power of sacrificial

blood that brings man again into fellowship with God.

The key message of Leviticus is that God provides the means by which man can come into His presence. This means is through the atonement of sacrificial blood. Through sacrificial blood men are made holy in order to approach God. The word "holiness" is mentioned 88 times and the word "atonement" 45 times. The key verses would be 17:11, "*For it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul,*" and 19:2, "*You will be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.*"

Since the book of Hebrews serves as a commentary of Leviticus, it is not difficult to understand that the root of holiness in the Christian life is initially explained by God in Leviticus. It is in Leviticus that Christians understand that through holiness God wants His people to remain separate from sin. When they sin, however, He seeks for atoning blood that would restore fellowship between Himself and man. And thus the foundation is laid in the book of Leviticus for the necessity of the gospel. Holiness, or righteousness, can never be accomplished on the foundation of living perfectly according to law, for no one can keep all the law perfectly. For this reason, it was necessary that the righteousness of God be revealed through the sacrifice of the cross, which would come over 1,400 years later. Though the Israelites did not understand this message of the gospel, it would eventually be reveal to them with the coming of the Messiah, and then the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in Acts 2:1-4. At this time, they were only given hope that something was coming

### **PRIESTHOOD**

Though the nation of Israel was a nation of priests to the world (Ex 19:6), God chose the tribe of Levi to function specifically as priests to the nation of Israel. From Aaron's sons, the high priests were chosen. Only the high priest could enter into the holy place of the tabernacle on the day of atonement in order to offer an atoning sacrifice for the nation. The practice of entering into the holy place of the tabernacle would many centuries later be carried out by the crucified Son of God who would enter the

“holy place” of heaven on behalf of all those who became priests through their obedience to the gospel that would be revealed through the incarnate Son of God.

The Levites were given 48 cities in the promise land, but no land possession (Ja 21:1-42). They were thus to be supported by the tithes of the nation and the offerings that were brought in sacrifice by the people. The priests' service in the religious ceremonies was from the age of thirty to fifty. They did not serve in any military capacity. They were God's spiritual leadership for the nation, and thus they functioned to continually focus the minds of the people on God and His law. Not only were they to focus the minds of the Israelites on God, they were to also do the same to all nations.

#### Laws Concerning Worship & Sacrifice

(1:1 – 7:38)

Outline: (1) The burnt offerings (1:1-17), (2) The grain offerings (2:1-16), (3) The peace offerings (3:1-17), (4) The sin offerings (4:1-35), (5) The trespass offerings (5:1 – 6:7), (6) Special instructions for sacrifices (6:8 – 7:38)

### Chapter 1

#### THE BURNT OFFERINGS

Leviticus is linked to Exodus in that God spoke from the mountain in Exodus, and in Leviticus He speaks from the tabernacle. He took the people's attention from Mt. Sinai to the tabernacle that would remain with the nation throughout the wilderness wandering and during their time in the land of promise. Once the tabernacle was dedicated, as recorded in the conclusion of Exodus, God's glory filled it at the beginning of this book. In this move to communicate from the tabernacle, God was preparing Israel for their leaving Mt. Sinai in order to immediately take the land of promise.

**1:1-9 Spoke to him:** The writer wants us to understand that though Moses was the one through whom God gave the laws to Israel, they did not actually originate with Moses because he had some religious inclinations to start a religious nation. Moses was only the mediator through whom the message came. The message was given directly to Moses from God. **Tabernacle:**

This common Hebrew reference would better be translated "tent." While all man-made religions of the world sought to build elaborate temples and shrines to their gods, the God of Israel worked from a tent. If the Israelites would have been given their own choice, they too would, and eventually did, build an elaborate structure. But the evidence that God was the originator of Israel and her beliefs was in the fact that for the first five hundred years of her existence, God worked through a tent to spiritually lead Israel. **Assembly:** Some translations use the word "congregation." But the word "congregation" does not convey the true meaning here because of the modern-day definition of the word. The tabernacle, the tent, was not a place in which the nation assembled. The tabernacle was the place around which the nation assembled, and from which God spoke through Moses to the people. **Brings an offering:** The intent to give is first conceived in the heart of the worshiper. He then brings that which he seeks to give. The point is that the priest does not ask the people to give, but the people ask to give. When the spirit of true faith is within an individual, he does not have to be begged to give. He begs to give (See 2 Co 8:4). **Offering:** The root meaning of the Hebrew word means "to approach" or "to come near." Throughout the book this meaning is attached to the sacrifices that were brought to the Lord. The gesture of making an offering gave one the right to approach unto the Lord. Without the offering, one did not have the privilege of coming near to the Lord. With the use of the word "sacrifice," the meaning is that one did not approach the Lord without an offering that cost him something. Worship involves offering on the part of the one who seeks to draw near to God. Throughout the discussions of the sacrifices in Leviticus, each sacrifice (burnt, meal, peace, sin and guilt) refers to different aspects of one's communion with God in worship. The meaning is that when one comes to God in worship, he does not come empty-handed. There is no such thing in the Bible concerning worship that does not involve sacrifice on the part of the one who worships. **His own voluntary will:** The offering cannot be taken or extracted from the giver by the intimidation

of the priests. The offerings must come from the free-will of the giver. Coerced contributions mean nothing to the Lord. The offerings that the Lord accepts are always free-will offerings. **Burnt offering:** Or literally, "that which goes up." Except for the skin that was given to the priests, this offering was burned completely upon the altar. With the other sacrifices, the offering was eaten by the priests with the one who gave the offering. But the burnt offering was completely consumed by the fire of the altar. The significance is the total self-oblation of the sinner to the Lord. **Without blemish:** Only the animal that was without blemish could be given to the Lord by a sinner who was with blemish. **Hand upon the head:** This practice was prescribed for all the animal offerings (See 3:2; 4:4; 8:22; 16:21; Nm 8:10). The meaning is that the offerer would spiritually connect with that which was offered, as well as with the Lord to whom the sacrifice was to be made. **Make atonement:** The Hebrew word here means "to cover over." In the burnt offering the sin was overcovered by the sacrifice. Since God cannot be approached with the guilt of sin on one's shoulders, then atonement must be made for sin (Hk 1:13). Through the sacrifice, therefore, one is able to approach God. **Fragrant aroma:** It is not that God has a nose with which to smell the sacrifice. The thought is that God "smells" the contrite heart of the one who has been obedient to Him through the offering of sacrifice (See Ph 4:17,18).

**1:10-17 Turtledoves ... pigeons:** A provision in the law was here made for the poor. Mary and Joseph, the mother and earthly father of Jesus, made an offering of birds because of their poverty (Lk 2:24). The simple offering of birds does emphasize the fact that it is not what is offered, but the contrite heart of the one who makes the offering. The act of offering was more important than the value of the gift. We would do well to remember this principle when making large offerings of money for specific works of the church. We must rejoice over the contrite hearts that make the offering, not take glory in the amount of the offering. The contrite heart of a widow who would give her last coins to the Lord is as important as one who would give his millions (See Mk 12:41-44).

Not only does the last coins of the poor mean more, their contribution is truly a sacrifice.

## Chapter 2

### THE GRAIN OFFERINGS

**2:1-3** This offering consisted of giving finely ground grain (See Gn 4:3; 33:10; Jg 3:15-18). In bringing the grain before the Lord as an offering, the offerer was bringing the fruit of his labors. The offering was produced by the work one did in his fields, and thus the offering was truly a “worship service” to the Lord. The meaning is that one participates in worship to God while preparing with his labor that which is brought to the Lord as a contribution (See comments Ph 4:17). The totality of one’s life, therefore, is a “worship service” that is given to God (See comments Rm 12:1,2). When the Christian works, he or she works as unto the Lord (Ep 6:5-8). **Frankincense:** This light colored, yellow and aromatic resin was bitter to taste. However, its burning produced a very sweet-smelling aroma. It was used in various ceremonial practices in order to produce a sweet-smelling environment in which the priest and worshipers prepared the sacrifices (See Ex 30:34; Lv 24:7; Jr 6:20; Ss 3:6; Mt 2:11). **Its memorial portion:** When one offers anything to the Lord as a sacrifice, he remembers the covenant that God has established with him (Compare Lk 22:19; 1 Co 11:24,25). What is remembered is God’s covenant and the conditions that men must keep in order to maintain the covenant relationship. **A most holy thing:** This was something that was reserved for the priests alone. Since the Levites had no inheritance in the land, other than the cities that were given to them, the Levite families had to be preserved with the free-will offerings of the people. The principle of this law was behind the “corban” (*qorbanim*) gift that was willed for the maintenance of the temple upon the death of the owner, and thus was not available to the real needs of the deceased’s family. The Pharisees selfishly extracted the corban gift regardless of the real needs of a family, which thing God never intended in the meaning of a gift to be reserved for the Levites.

**2:4-11 Leaven ... honey:** It is significant that these

could be offered as firstfruit offerings, but not as any offering that would be burned. The fermentation of sweet honey would signify something that was corrupted, and thus unclean. The leaven was often used by the Hebrew writers to refer to something that corrupts. Jesus used the term "leaven" to refer to the evil influences of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt 16:6; Lk 12:1). Paul referred to the "unleavened bread" of sincerity and truth, the opposite of that which is leavened (1 Co 5:7,8).

**2:12-16 Gift of the firstfruits:** The first cuttings of the harvest were given to the Lord in support of the Levites. The meaning is in the fact that what comes first from man's labors is given to the Lord. When the firstfruits were given, then the laborer had a right to the remainder of the harvest. When one first gives in gratitude to the Lord, then he feels blessed by what is left. The principle is that since God is the provider of all things, then before we consume upon our own lusts what He has given, we must first signal to Him that He is first (See Mt 6:33). God wants firstfruits, not leftovers. He must be first, not an afterthought. Sincere giving comes from those who put God first in all things. **Salt:** Salt preserves, and thus the meaning here is to the permanence of resistance to corruption.

## Chapter 3

### THE PEACE OFFERINGS

**3:1-5** The significance of this offering is given in greater detail in 7:11-34. Unlike the burnt offering that was to be totally consumed by the fire as a sin offering to the Lord, the peace offering was a fellowship meal between the worshiper, his family and the priests. The meat of the offering was to be consumed by both priests and worshipers. In most of the offerings a fellowship meal was conducted between the priests and the people who gave the offering. Though the primary purpose of the offering was to bring something before the Lord, the secondary purpose was that God wanted the people to stay in contact with the priests, the religious leaders of the nation. In eating the offering, therefore, priests and people stayed in contact with one another. The meal was

an occasion for discussion about religious matters. It was a time for counsel and fellowship with the spiritual leaders of the nation. **Gift:** The offering was a gift, or present to the priests, but the offerer received the blessing of being in the presence of spiritual leaders. Those who neglect the opportunity of having fellowship meals with their spiritual leaders, have forgotten their spiritual roots. We must guard against our offerings becoming legalistic ceremonial acts with no opportunity for spiritual encounters with spiritual leaders.

**3:6-17 Fat:** The fat of the animal signified that which was stored up for famine times. The metaphorical meaning is to the best that is stored for times of famine must be offered to God. The giving of the fat thus symbolized one's total dependence on God for the future. Cutting away of the fat also had health benefits. The ancient world knew nothing about cholesterol, but God did. In the sacrifices, therefore, the practical reason for cutting away the fat was for their own health. **Peace offering:** Since the peace offering was a fellowship meal, then we would assume that peace existed with the worshiper in his relationship with God, as well as between himself and the ones with whom he ate the offering. In 7:11,16 it is explained that the peace offering could also be a praise, vow or free-will offering. The meaning would be that the worshiper expressed his dependence on God in every aspect of life in his relationships with others. **Perpetual statute:** Since the fat of the offering was to be consumed on the altar, the perpetuity of the command signified the total dependence of Israel upon God throughout the history of Israel. They could not depend on their stores of grain, but only on God for preservation. **Your generations:** God was serious about Israel's keeping the ordinances of the offerings. The exhortation of verse 17 here is repeated seventeen times throughout the book of Leviticus. God gave these instructions because He knew that they would eventually turn from His commandments to follow after their own desires.



**4:1-35 The Lord spoke:** This statement is made throughout the book of Leviticus. What the Holy Spirit wants us to understand is that when it came to sacrifices and offerings, it was the Lord who made the rules. The worshiper did not have the right to determine what the Lord wanted in reference to those things that were necessary for sin offerings and worship. As God was strict with Israel in reference to this matter, so the Christian must be strict today. Throughout the New Testament we understand what God requires for salvation and worship. These requirements are not the choice of the worshiper.

**Unintentionally sins:** The Hebrew verb that is used here in reference to sin means "to miss" or "to fall short." The sacrifices were to cover those sins that were committed through ignorance, and thus were not intentional. On the other hand, there were no sacrifices for willful sin (See Nm 15:30; Ex 14:8). Sin that was committed with a haughty spirit in defiance of the will of God, was rebellion against God. But the sin that was committed through ignorance was sin that resulted from the fallibility of man. In this context, the Lord introduced the sin and trespass offerings that were offerings in reference to expiation for sin. God stipulated when these offerings were to be made.

**Anything that should not be done:** These offerings must take place when any of the following people sinned: (1) the priest (vss 3-12), (2) the assembly of Israel (13-21), (3) a ruler of the people (22-26), and (4) any person (27-35). The animal that was to be sacrificed varied from one group to another, thus the seriousness of the sin of each party was signified by the animal that was offered. For example, the sin of the priest, or the religious leader, was more serious than the sin of the common people, or even the ruler. The blood of the offering for the religious leaders was to be placed on the horns of the altar with sweet incense (vs 7), whereas the blood of the sacrifice of the ruler or the common person was to be placed on the horns of the altar of burnt offering (vss 25,30).

**The blood:** The use of the blood of the sacrificed animal illustrated what later happened in history in reference to the blood of Jesus (See comments Hb 9:10-23; 10:19-22). The sprinkling of the blood became a type of that which

was to come. The priest here sprinkled the blood before the Lord, smeared it on the horns of the altar, and then poured out the rest at the foot of the altar.

## Chapter 5

### THE TRESPASS OFFERINGS

**5:1-19** In this context there were three cases where a sin offering was needed. (1) **Does not speak up:** The first case was when one did not produce testimony of truth when called upon by a magistrate. The sin offering, however, would not relieve the guilt of the one who committed this offense. In order for atonement to occur, there had to be a confession of the sin, as well as restitution in some cases (See 6:5; compare Ja 7:19; Jg 17:2; Mt 26:63; Jn 9:24). (2) **Touches any unclean thing:** The second offense refers to one who had come into contact with something that was unclean (See chs 12-15). In this case, someone unknowingly touched something that was unclean, and thus had to offer a sin offering because he had neglected the rites of purification (11:24-31). Once he discovered that he had touched an unclean thing, then the sacrifice was needed in order for him to be restored to fellowship with God. (3) **If a soul swears:** If one makes an oath to do something that is right, but does not do it, then he is guilty of violating that which he said he would do. If one made a foolish oath, then it would be wrong for him to keep such an oath. In either case, before one was to make a sin offering, he had to confess his wrong. **Trespass offering:** The sin offering in the case of the one who swore foolishly, or did not keep a good oath, was referred to here as a trespass offering. He had to bear the guilt of his trespass against another, for the oath was made in reference to another. The word "trespass" comes from a root Hebrew word that means "to act unfaithfully" or "to act treacherously." The trespass offering, therefore, was an offering that related to human relationships between people. A bad relationship that one had with another affected his relationship with God. One can trespass against one's fellow man by making vain oaths. But one can also trespass against God by withholding the holy things that belong to God, such as tithes, offerings

and firstfruits. Since the Israelites were in a covenant relationship with God, there could be no relationship with God if one destroyed his relationship with a fellow citizen of the nation of Israel that was in a covenant relationship with God. The provision for the offering in reference to vain oaths, therefore, was necessary in view of the fact that one could not maintain a covenant relationship with God if he acted either unfaithfully or treacherously against his fellow man. **He will make restitution:** If the trespass was against one's fellow man, then there was more to the atonement than saying, "I'm sorry." Restitution was in order before atonement could be granted. The trespass cost the guilty party something. These "fruits of repentance" were necessary in order to demonstrate to the offended, whether God or another person, that there was true remorse over the trespass. The sinner had to do something to show remorse for his actions. It was more than a verbal confession.

### Chapter 6

**6:1-7** In this section, not only is the right to ownership of property assumed, but also the responsibility of fellow citizens to one another's property is taught. Every citizen was to protect the ownership of his fellow citizen. The laws here given refer (1) to deceit concerning property that was left with a neighbor as a security, (2) the robbery of property, (3) the unjust gain from dealing with another's property, and (4) the appropriation of finding and keeping something that did not belong to the finder. In each case it was the offender who had to disclose the offense, and thus had to suffer the punishment (See also Ex 22:7-13). **Trespass against the Lord:** The point is that though the offenses of this context are in reference to a neighbor trespassing against another neighbor, the trespass is actually against the Lord. One cannot expect to have a covenant relationship with God if he trespasses against his neighbor who also is in a covenant relationship with God. **Fellowship:** Reference here could be to a partnership between two parties, both having responsibility for the assets of the partnership. **One-fifth:** The offender was to add one-fifth to the capital value of the

property in his restitution to the owner. Only then would the atonement for the sin be completed. We must not assume in the cases where there was a trespass of one against another that atonement could be secured on the basis of confession only. The trespass offering brought atonement only when the offending brother brought forth fruits of repentance, which in this case was restitution to the one who was wronged. The reconciliation of the two parties, therefore, was more than words.

### SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR SACRIFICES

**6:8-13** To this point in the book of Leviticus, the message was directed to the people. Now the message is directed to Aaron and his sons who would be responsible for carrying out the ceremonies of the sacrifices. They were the spiritual leaders of the nation, and thus God gave instructions concerning their duties that were necessary for them to remain in contact with the people. **Kept burning:** The fire of the burnt offering was to be continually burning. This symbolized that God continually sought their offerings for sin and that the priest was on duty (See Ex 29:38,39). When an offering was brought to the priest, the fire was already burning for the sacrifice to be made. There is a continual welcome from God for the sin offerings of His people. Through Jesus, the same prevails today as Jesus functions before the throne of God as a perpetual priest for the saints (See Hb 5:6; 7:25).

**6:14-23** *It is most holy:* Aaron and his sons were to eat of the grain, sin and trespass offerings. Only the burnt offering was to be entirely consumed in sacrifice upon the altar. The "offerings," therefore, were brought in order to support the priesthood of Aaron and his sons who functioned to carry out the priestly duties of the nation. Many of the offerings involved the eating of the grain or meat in a fellowship meal between the offerer and the priests. This practice kept the people in contact with the spiritual leaders of Israel. **Everyone who touches them ...:** Though this statement is not clear as to what reference is made, the probable meaning is that only those who were holy should touch holy things (Compare Is 52:11).

**Offering of Aaron and ... sons:** The remainder of the grain offering was not to be shared by Aaron or his sons with the offerers. It was an offering that was to be completely used in the offering, and thus, completely burned. This offering was to be carried out every morning and evening throughout the time of their priesthood. For this reason, they were to always have a supply of grain for the offering.

**6:24-30 In the court:** This offering was to be eaten in the outer courtyard of the tabernacle structure. It was to be eaten only by those whom God had separated for the priesthood. The blood and fat of the sacrificed animal were not to be eaten, but burned with fire. This action signified total dependence on God since that which was stored by the animal (the fat) was used as oil for the continual burning of the sacrificial fires. As the holy priesthood, Aaron and his sons were to partake of the meat of this offering in order that they function in bearing the sins of the people before the Lord. They were the holy (the separated ones) who ministered the sacrifices for the people in order that atonement for sin be realized. Because they were appointed for this function among the people, God intended that they be supported by the offerings of the people. The nation of Israel was a community of priests to the world (Ex 19:6). However, this community of priests needed the ministry of an inner priesthood. God thus established the inner priesthood of Aaron and his sons to minister to the nation as a whole. In their ministry, they were to function full-time, and thus were to be supported by the nation as a whole. Since there was only one tabernacle to which sacrifices were to be brought, and a great number of people who had to make sacrifices, the priests who were officiating had to be supported full-time in order to carry out all the ceremonies surrounding the sacrifices. It was the obligation of the people, therefore, to support the priesthood of Israel.

## Chapter 7

**7:1-10** These ritual instructions emphasize the exactness by which God wanted the priests to carry out their

duties in reference to the offerings. In this context, emphasis is placed on the portion that was dedicated to the priests for their work as priests. The priests were to have the meat of the offerings, but the skin and fat were not to be eaten. The flour of the grain offerings and parched grains could be kept in storage by the priests, but any meat of the offerings was to be consumed soon after the sacrificial animal was killed. If the meat was kept over, it would spoil.

**7:11-38** The peace offerings were communal. They were offerings in which the worshiper was allowed to partake of the offering with the priests and others. The peace offerings consisted of three offerings: (1) thanksgiving offering (vs 12), (2) votive offering (vs 16), and (3) freewill offering (vs 29). **Thanksgiving:** This offering was made in reference to what God had blessed the worshiper (Compare Ps 107:22). This offering was to be eaten the same day it was offered, and thus the communal participation of others is assumed (See Dt 12:12). One's friends and family were invited to partake of this offering in order to express thanks together for God's blessings. The thanksgiving offering cost the worshiper something in order to be a true thanksgiving to God who provides us with all things. Because the offering was communal, the worshiper sought to share in his thanksgiving with friends and family. **Vow:** In this offering one made a vow to give something to God because of his appreciation for the gracious blessings of God (See Ps 66:13,14; 116:1-19). This offering was free-will in the sense that the worshiper chose to make the offering in gratitude for all that God had done for him. This was as the "purposed giving" of the early church, and the free-will giving that was made in the building of the tabernacle (See Ex 35:5,21). The fact that this offering was accompanied with cakes and unleavened bread indicated that the offering was a communal meal that was shared between priests, friends and the one who made the offering. **Gift:** In the peace offering, one was to bring his offering as a gift. No payment could be made for the offering, lest the gift be cancelled because the offerer would be receiving a reward for that which was brought. It was thus a free-will offering that

cost the worshiper something. The nature of the peace offering was manifested in the fact that unless there was sacrifice on the part of the worshiper, the offering meant nothing. There could be no gift if compensation was given to the one who brought the offering. The offering had to be a sacrifice by the one who brought it. No one else could pay for another's sacrifice.

### **Consecration Of The Priests Of Israel**

**(8:1 - 10:20)**

**Outline:** (1) Priesthood of Aaron and his sons (8:1-36), (2) Beginning of the priesthood ministry (9:1-24), (3) Disobedience of Nadab and Abihu (10:1-20).

## **Chapter 8**

### **PRIESTHOOD OF AARON & HIS SONS**

Chapters 1-7 of Leviticus deal with the rituals and ceremonies surrounding the sacrifices of the nation of Israel. In chapters 8-10 Moses wrote concerning the responsibilities of the priests in their role as mediators for the nation. Throughout these instructions there is great emphasis placed on obedience to the directions of how God wants the priests to function in their ministry (See 8:4,5,9,13,17,21,29,34,36). In chapter 8 the priests were designated as the spiritual leaders of Israel and in chapter 9 the tabernacle was inaugurated. In chapter 10 the example of Nadab and Abihu is given in order to stress the importance of doing everything according to the will of God. Since God would have difficulties with Israel throughout their history in reference to obedience to His law, He had to give some very vivid illustrations that obedience must be maintained in their lives.

In the context of the designation of Aaron and his sons, it must be noted that God worked through Moses in order to designate them before Israel. Aaron and his sons did not designate themselves as priests. They were directly chosen by God (See Hb 5:4,5). Also keep in mind that the duties of the priests were to administer the ceremonies and rites that God instituted for Israel. Nowhere is there instruction given that they should control the people.

**8:1-9 Gather all the assembly:** There was no secret ceremony to designate the priests. The procedures de-

scribed in the following scriptures took place before all the assembly of Israel. **Washed:** From this day forward, Aaron and his sons were set apart from the rest of the nation. They were no longer ordinary Israelites. They were under strict command to maintain their priesthood uniqueness in Israel lest they pay for their sin with the penalty of death (Ex 30:19-21). As the special spiritual leaders of Israel, they were given great responsibility to perform their work according to the will of God. The performance of their duties as God's representatives gave Israel an example of obedience. **Ephod:** See Ex 39:22-26. **Urim ... Thummim:** In some way these were used to declare the will of God in matters of judgment (Nm 27:21; Dt 33:8,10). It could be that they were used to receive "yes" or "no" answers from God in reference to decisions that had to be made.

**8:10-13 The anointing oil:** The Hebrew word for "anoint" is the root word for which we derive the word "messiah." The Old Testament prophets (1 Kg 19:16), kings (1 Sm 9:16; 10:1), and priests were anointed with oil. In the ceremony of anointing, the anointed one was separated from the people. The anointed person was separated from the people for a special work for the people. Once anointed, the anointed one was given the responsibility to carry out a special work and function for the Lord.

**8:14-29** Throughout all the ceremonies to consecrate the priests and the tabernacle for service to God, the Levitical writer here goes into great detail. He goes into detail in order to emphasize the fact that God's designated ministers and ministries are to be committed to Him. They are to be committed to the Lord for the sake of the nation in reference to service to Him. **Ear ... thumb ... toe:** It was the duty of the consecrated priests to continually hear (ear) the word of God, occupy his hands (thumb) for the ministry of the people, and walk (toe) in the holiness of their calling.

**8:30-36 Consecrations:** Or, designation. The designation of the priests meant that they were not to own property, neither were they to support themselves. They were to be entirely supported by the people in their ser-



vice to carry out the ceremonial duties of the tabernacle on behalf of the people. They were the spiritual leaders of the people. **Seven days:** To seal the ceremony of consecration, for seven days Aaron and his sons were not to go outside the environment of the tabernacle. The seriousness of this command was in the fact that if the instructions were violated, they would suffer the penalty of death. They were to minister the sacrifices of the tabernacle, and thus they were to learn how to be confined to the premises of the tabernacle.

## Chapter 9

### BEGINNING OF THE PRIESTHOOD MINISTRY

**9:1-24** This chapter is a record of the beginning of the work of the officially designated priests of Israel. As the newly designated spiritual leaders of Israel, one of the first things that Aaron did was to offer both a sin offering and burnt offering for himself and his sons. There may be significance in what was offered on this day. The ram could have been in remembrance of the sacrifice provided by God to Abraham instead of his son (Gn 22:9). The goat may have been a reminder of the goat that was killed by Joseph's brothers in order to deceive their father (Gn 37:31). The offering of the calf may have brought to remembrance the sin of Israel in making the golden calf (Ex 32:4). The bound lamb would remind them of Isaac's sacrifice in Genesis 22:7. Regardless of any possible significance in reference to the particular animal that was offered, it is assumed that God wanted Israel to know that they needed the offering of the sacrifices as well as Aaron and his sons. Aaron was imperfect in himself as their priest (Hb 7:27). Only in Christ would there be a high priest who would be without sin and able to enter in before the presence of God on behalf of the spiritual Israel of God. The inability of the Levitical priests to live sinless lives was a continual reminder of the Messianic priest to come.

At the conclusion of all the proceedings of this chapter, God appeared in all His glory in order to put a stamp of approval on what transpired. He also wanted to mark the day as the beginning of a new era for Israel in reference

to the function of the priests, as well as His fellowship with Israel. On this day the function and work of Moses changed from himself being the center of reference as a mediator between Israel and God. It was changed to the work of Aaron and his sons in their ministry of the rites of the offerings and the sacrifices.

## Chapter 10

### DISOBEDIENCE OF NADAB & ABIHU

**10:1-7 Nadab and Abihu:** This incident emphasizes the strictness by which God wanted His laws obeyed. **Strange fire:** We do not know exactly what law was violated in this case. Several assumptions have been proposed: **(1)** The incense was not made according to instructions (See Ex 30:34-38). **(2)** Fire other than the fire from the altar of burnt offerings was used (See Lv 16:12). **(3)** The offering was not according to the set time for offerings (See Ex 30:7,8). **(4)** The wrong censers were used. **(5)** The two priests assumed the work that was reserved exclusively for the high priest. The violation of any one law would constitute Nadab and Abihu working presumptuously, and thus sinning against what God had commanded. Their death at the hand of God illustrated that obedience was more important than the sacrifice (1 Sm 15:22). **Do not uncover your heads:** Though the house of Israel could mourn the death of the two priests, Aaron and his other sons were forbidden to do so lest their mourning in any way be interpreted as condoning the actions of Nadab and Abihu. Moses knew that obedience must be manifested in the lives of the religious leaders of Israel. The death of Nadab and Abihu illustrated this fact. Their deaths was an extreme measure in order to impress on the minds of the people that God must be obeyed. God knew that Israel would eventually forsake His law when they came into the land of promise.

**10:8-11 Distinguish between the holy and unholy:** Religious leaders must be able to determine what is right and wrong. The use of strong drink while officiating in the tabernacle service would impair the judgment of the priest. The priest was thus forbidden to use strong drink while on duty. Since disciples are in perpetual service of

God today, it goes without saying that they should not be intoxicated with strong drink that would impair their thinking.

**10:12-20** Out of the peace offerings, the shoulder and breast were to be reserved for the priests and their families. Other than the sin offering that was made by the priests on behalf of themselves, it was to be eaten by the priests and their families in a clean place. In this way the offerings were the support for the priests and their families as they officiated in the religious rites on behalf of Israel. On this particular day when the sons of Aaron died, Aaron did not eat of what was rationed to him. Lest it be perceived that he was walking in violation of the commandments of God, Moses questioned his actions. However, after Aaron explained himself, Moses was satisfied with his answer.

### **Laws Concerning Uncleanliness**

**(11:1 – 16:34)**

**Outline:** (1) Instructions on clean and unclean foods (11:1-47), (2) Purification of women after childbirth (12:1-8), (3) Instructions concerning leprosy and mildew (13:1 – 14:57), (4) Cleanliness concerning bodily emissions (15:1-33), (5) The day of atonement (16:1-34)

## **Chapter 11**

### **INSTRUCTIONS ON CLEAN & UNCLEAN FOODS**

**11:1-47** This chapter deals with foods that may (clean) or may not be eaten (unclean) (vss 1-23). Included also are things that makes one unclean by physical contact (vss 24-47). The chapter is written in order to instruct Israel concerning what is clean and unclean, which instructions have no moral or ethical meaning with reference to personal relationships, nor is the concept of “clean” and “unclean” unique in these chapters (See Gn 7:2). The reader must not miss an important point in reference to these instructions. When God gave these laws there were health reasons behind them. He did not have to tell the Israelites why a particular thing was unclean. He often pronounced something as unclean in order to preserve the health of the people. However, in making the pronouncement that something was clean or unclean, the pronouncement became a command,

and thus godliness was determined by one's obedience to the command. From this came the commonly used phrase, which is not in the Bible, "Cleanliness is next to godliness." For the Israelites, keeping the "cleanliness" commands of the law was manifesting one's godliness in obedience to the will of God. The cleanliness laws were from God, and thus subject to be obeyed.

## Chapter 12

### PURIFICATION OF WOMEN AFTER CHILDBIRTH

**12:1-8** When considering the instructions of this chapter we must not assume that there is something unclean about childbirth. In the beginning, childbirth was God's command for the populating of the world (Gn 1:28). Bearing children was considered a blessing from God (Gn 33:5). Children were a prize to the marriage of a man and woman (Ps 127,128). In fact, in ancient culture the woman who had no children was perceived to be under some curse. The instructions given here, therefore, must not be viewed as some supposed dim view of God upon childbirth. On the contrary, an understanding of modern medicine helps us to understand the instructions that God gives. This is also true of chapter 15 where instructions are given to guard the health of both child and mother in the process of childbirth and the mother's recovery immediately thereafter. **Circumcised:** At this time in the history of Israel circumcision became a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. However, the command for circumcision predated this event by several centuries when God commanded Abraham to circumcise his offspring (Gn 17; see Ex 4:25). Though here given as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel, modern medicine has since demonstrated that a circumcised male is less likely to contract sexual diseases. In this one rite that is given, the point is illustrated that God did not arbitrarily give laws to prove the obedience of Israel. The laws in reference to clean and unclean things had a deeper purpose, the purpose of establishing health practices for the people. Though Israel did not understand the health reasons behind the laws, they did understand that these practices had to be obeyed in order to mani-

fest obedience to God. As the years passed in Israel, the people surely saw some of the health benefits of the laws when they observed the violation of these laws in the nations around them. They certainly saw the same consequences within themselves when the procedures of dealing with unclean things were violated. They did not know about viruses and germs, but they could witness the evidence of sickness when unclean behavior was practiced.

### Chapter 13

#### INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING LEPROSY & MILDEW

We get the word “leprosy” from the Greek word *lepra* which was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *tsara'at* in this context. In many English translations, the word “leprosy” is used to refer to a number of things to which the Hebrew word referred. Since the word “leprosy” is commonly used to refer to a disease of human flesh, it does not fully apply to the “leprosy” that was found in clothing and houses. The word “mildew” would better give the meaning of what the writer wanted to convey when reference was made to physical things other than human flesh. In this context, if a person had leprosy, he was to be excluded from the camp (vss 45,46). But if a garment was contaminated with “leprosy” (mildew), it was to be burned (vss 52,57). If the contamination of mildew was in a house, the contaminated stones were first to be removed (14:40). If this did not solve the problem, then the house was to be destroyed (14:45). When reading the text in reference to physical things, the meaning of mildew should thus be understood. When reference was to human flesh, the word “leprosy” should be understood since leprosy was a disease of the flesh.

**13:1-44** It was the duty of the priests to make judgments concerning the presence of leprosy or mildew. In reference to human flesh, there were six different cases of leprosy: (1) a scab (vss 2-8), (2) a spot on the flesh after a boil (vss 18-23), (3) a burn (vss 24-28), (4) a rash in the hair or beard (vss 29-37), (5) spots on the skin (vss 38,39), and (6) a sore on a man's bald head (vss 42-44). If the

sore was pronounced leprous, then the individual was to be shut up for seven days. If the sore did not spread, then the individual was confined for another seven days. If the sore again did not spread, then the individual was pronounced clean. The person was to wash himself and his clothes and go forth as clean.

**13:43-46** If a person was determined to be leprous, he was to be separated from society. His clothes were to be torn, his hair allowed to grow long, and his upper lip was to be covered. These were all signs of a leprous person. If someone approached a leprous person, the leprous person must pronounce himself as leprous. The leprous person was essentially dead to society. The medical reason for these procedures was that the type of leprosy that was contagious would not be spread to the rest of society. Though the people knew nothing of the medical reasons for these laws, they were to obey them in order to demonstrate their obedience to the commandments of God.

**13:47-59** Reference here is to different types of mildew that would affect clothing. If such mildew was found on any garment, the garment was to be removed, and then isolated for seven days. If the mildew spread further throughout the garment, then it was to be pronounced unclean and burned. If the mildew had not spread throughout the garment after seven days, then the garment was to be washed and set aside for another seven days. If the infected areas did not change in color, then only the affected areas were to be removed and burned. If the spots had changed color, then the spots were to be torn from the garment. If the spots had spread after the second seven days, then the whole garment was to be burned. If the spots disappeared after the garment was washed, then the garment was washed again and pronounced clean.

## **Chapter 14**

**14:1-20** The instructions concerning the restoration of the leper to the community was for the purpose of making a public announcement that the leprous person was no longer to be shunned. The formerly leprous

person was first brought to the priest outside the camp. When the priest found that the person no longer had the disease, then the healed person was to take two birds, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop in order to perform the ceremony of cleansing. Once the priest declared the person to be clean, the bird was released to freedom, thus indicating that the healed person was free to rejoin the community. Once he washed himself, shaved all the hair off his body, and washed his clothes, he was to come to his tent and remain outside for seven days. After this seven days, and there was still no sign of the disease, then he was to shave his head and beard and eyebrows. He was then to wash his clothes and body. He could then rejoin his family and the community. The ceremony of sacrifices was a series of fellowship meals celebrating that the formerly leprous person was healed. The ceremony was similar to the inauguration of the priest, thus signifying that the person was brought back into society (See 8:23,24).

**14:21-32** In all of the laws concerning requirements for sacrifice, the poor were never marginalized. In the case of the proclamation of the leper being cleansed, two turtledoves or young pigeons took the place of the animals for the burnt offering and the sin offering. A tenth of an ephah served for the grain offering. However, the requirement for the trespass offering was not reduced. Since the trespass offering was relational in the sense that it was given for the reconciliation of individuals, the celebration for restoring the formerly leprous person to the fellowship of the family and community was to be joyous.

**14:33-57** In this section the writer turns to mildew or lichen that is found in physical things as the house. The instructions here are given in reference to Israel's coming into the land of Canaan, and after they had built houses for themselves. We would also understand from these instructions that when Israel did possess the land, they would possess many of the houses of the Canaanites they conquered. Lest they move into infected houses, these instructions are given in order that they cleanse every house they possessed when they came into the

land. **I put the mark of mildew:** That is, God would allow the normal course of the work of mildew to happen within the structure of a house. God wanted the Israelites to know that there was no such thing as evil spirits cursing people or houses when they came into the land. Such superstitious beliefs were harbored by the Canaanites, and thus in these instructions God wanted His people to know that there is no such thing, and thus they were not to be superstitious about such in reference to physical things. **Tell the priest:** As in leprosy, so in the case of mildew. The priest was to function as the authority to make judgments concerning the mildew. The first step taken in an infected house was that the contents of the house were to be removed and the house shut up for seven days. If the mildew spread during the seven days, then the infected stones of the house were to be removed to a place outside the city that was designated unclean. The house was then rebuilt. However, if the mildew returned, the house was to be destroyed. If the house was declared clean, then there was a public ceremony that made it known to everyone that the house could be entered as a dwelling. The public proclamation made it known that the house was not to be shunned by anyone, and thus the inhabitants could invite others into the house.

## Chapter 15

### CLEANLINESS CONCERNING BODILY EMISSIONS

**15:1-15** Instructions concerning bodily emissions involved pronouncements that one was unclean. The bodily emissions included both the primary sexual organs, as well as any unhygienic emission that is here considered unclean. If one touched a person who was considered unclean, he also became unclean, and thus would have to go through the purification rites that are herein given. The earthen vessels that were used for purification were to be broken. The one who had an issue was to wash himself and his clothes seven days from the cessation of the emission. After being cleansed, he or she was to offer for atonement a sin offering and a burnt offering of two turtledoves or two young pigeons. Since



the one who was unclean was out of fellowship with the religious community, after the offerings he was again restored to the religious community.

In reference to clean and unclean concerning physical things as emissions, it is difficult in the Old Testament to distinguish between the two in reference to one coming before God in worship. The total life of the individual could not be separated into a secular or religious life. What affected one, affected the other. If one were physically unclean, he or she could not approach God. One's physical cleanliness was necessary for one to approach God. The Old Testament rites concerning hygiene, therefore, were important in reference to one's relationship with God in worship.

**15:16-18** The point here is that the holy must not be defiled. Uncleanness in reference to sexual fluid emissions was not sinful, though one was to wash his body and clothing in order to remove the uncleanness. In reference to sexual intercourse, the only defilement would be for a man to have intercourse with a menstruate woman.

**15:19-24** As in the preceding rites of cleanliness, time, bathing and the cleaning of one's garments removes the uncleanness. No sacrifices were to be made to restore a state of being clean simply because no sin was involved in this natural sexual activity of life. Again, one was guilty of uncleanness if he had sexual intercourse with a woman during her time of menstrual impurity.

**15:25-33** A woman must wash herself on the eighth day after waiting seven days. It is on the eighth day that an offering of two turtledoves is to be offered in order to restore her cleanliness and fellowship with society. These commands in reference to Israel's cleanliness separated them from the nations around them. The surrounding nations did not obey such strict laws of cleanliness, and thus their uncleanness separated them from Israel. It is not that Christians are under the Sinai law of the Old Testament, but it is wise to lead a life of cleanliness. When Christians keep themselves clean, they give a testimony to others that their cleanliness is in honor of God. And if they keep themselves clean according to the

Sinai law, this does not mean that they are being subject to the law.

## Chapter 16

### THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Chapter 16 is introduced by the seriousness of the subject of atonement with the death of Nadab and Abihu. This high point of the book of Leviticus is a discussion of atoning sacrifices that reconciled two parties together, specifically the continued reconciliation of Israel who was in a covenant relationship with God. The rites given in this chapter are to make it possible for the high priest to approach God without suffering his own death as a result of violating the laws of God. The high priest could not approach God whenever he so chose, neither at any time he might choose.

Understanding the language of this chapter is aided by Hebrews 9 where the atoning work of Jesus is explained in reference to His high priesthood for the Christian. Though the high priesthood of Aaron is a figure of that which Christ would do for the redeemed, Christ's high priesthood explains the inadequacy of the high priesthood of Aaron. The rites and ceremonies explained in this chapter were only a shadow of the greater to come, the substance, who was Christ.

**16:1-19 So that he not die:** These instructions are given to preserve the life of Aaron, lest he act presumptuously by entering the holy place of his own will and at a time he might choose. Before entering the holy place, Aaron was to be dressed correctly. He was to present a sin offering for himself and his family. He was to offer incense that would form a cloud to cover the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. Once in the holy place, he was to sprinkle the mercy seat with blood, and the area before the mercy seat. He was to do this in atonement for himself and his family. He was to make atonement for the people by sprinkling the blood of the sin offering. In this ceremony, atonement was also made for the altar and the tabernacle. All the rites of this ceremony were to be done for the atonement of Israel because of their inability to live perfect lives before God. The rites

for atonement, therefore, were based on the fact that no man can live perfectly before God (See comments Rm 3:9,10,23).

**16:20-34** The term “scapegoat” finds its origin in comments on this text that William Tyndale used to explain what transpired in the action of sending a goat out of the camp of Israel with the sins of Israel. However, this is not a term that would translate the Hebrew word for goat that is used in this text. The word “scapegoat” is only an interpreter’s definition of what transpired with this rite. In the text, two goats were chosen, from which one was selected to be the “scapegoat” for the people. Aaron was to cast lots to select the goat that would be offered as a sin offering for the people, while the other would be sent out of the camp. **The head of the live goat:** After Aaron had put his hands on the head of the live goat, this goat was sent out in order to symbolically take the sins of Israel outside the camp. **The goat will bear on him all their iniquities:** This figure was later applied to Jesus as He bore our sins on the cross (Jn 1:29). The figure is used throughout the Old Testament as a reference to the sin of the individual being taken away in forgiveness (See Ps 32:1; Is 53:4,12). In order for sin to be forgiven, it must be taken away by another. In this context, the sin was symbolically carried away by the goat. In the context of the Christian’s salvation, the sin is carried away by Jesus Christ. This is the good news to come that was indicated by the sacrifice.

### Laws Concerning Holy Living

(17:1 – 20:27)

**Outline:** (1) Laws concerning food (17:1-16), (2) Laws concerning holy behavior (18:1-30), (3) Laws for community relationships (19:1-37), (4) Laws concerning punishment (20:1-27)

## Chapter 17

### LAWS CONCERNING FOOD

**17:1-9 To the door of the tabernacle:** The purpose for the instructions concerning the slaughter of animals for offerings and food before the tabernacle, whereupon the priest would sanctify the offering, was that Israel not be led astray to superstitious beliefs. By bringing the ani-

mal "before the Lord" at the tabernacle, the priest could sanction the slaughter in the name of God. The offerer would thus be reminded of the one true and living God. We must keep in mind that the laws concerning the bringing of sacrifices to the priest were also given to bring the offerer to the priest. This kept the people in touch with their spiritual leaders, and thus in contact with direction from God through the priests. **Sacrifices to devils:** These were the superstitious beliefs in demons and spirits that prevailed throughout the pagan nations surrounding Israel. In order that Israel be guarded against belief in the existence of such figments of the imagination of men, they were to bring the animals before the presence of the Lord in order to slaughter them for offerings and food. This was God's system to guard Israel from being carried away into idolatry. If the people brought their sacrifices to those who believed in the one true and living God, then their minds' attention would always be focused toward God's representatives to Israel.

**17:10-16 It is the blood that makes atonement:** Because it was the blood that was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people, their life depended on the blood. For this reason the blood of the animal was a most holy thing in Israel. If one ate blood, therefore, he was cut off from Israel for he violated that which was sacred in reference to atonement. **Cover it with earth:** In respect of the blood, even the blood that came from a wild animal in a hunt was to be covered with dirt. **It is the life of all flesh:** In these instructions God is certainly preparing Israel for the eternal sacrifice of blood that would come from the Son of God. Since the life of the animal was in the blood, then eternal life in the future would be purchased by the blood of the Son. He would give His blood that we might live as the animals gave their blood in the Old Testament that atonement might be acquired. However, there was no true forgiveness through the blood of animals (Hb 10:1-4). The realization that it was impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins prepared the people for a sacrifice that would take away sins permanently. That sacrifice would come about 1,440 years from the time these laws were given, and it would come

through the sacrificial blood of Jesus. The giving of law, therefore, made people conscious of their inability to keep law perfectly (Rm 7:7). It made them conscious of their need for mercy and grace from God.

## Chapter 18

### LAWS CONCERNING HOLY BEHAVIOR

**18:1-5** The law of God applies to the most intimate matters of human existence and experience. Israel's separation from the nations around them meant that their behavior would be different from the nations who had created a god after their own imagination and religious behavior after their own desires. The Israelites were to be different in their behavior because they belonged to the Lord. The whole of their lives, therefore, was to be governed by the will of God. The Israelites were promised that if they kept the will of the Lord they would live and continue to reside in the land of promise.

**18:6-23** It is difficult to determine if this context refers exclusively to marriage relationships, or to men and women in general. It does, however, at least refer to the relationships between men and women. For this reason, many marriage concepts of today are taken from this context. **To uncover his nakedness:** That is, to have sexual intercourse. Contrary to the nations around Israel, incest was strictly forbidden in Israel. **Your brother's wife:** This is not a prohibition of the levirate law (See Gn 38:8). Reference is to taking one's brother's wife while he was still alive. **Her sister as a rival:** In other words, while one's wife is alive, the husband is not to marry her sister. **Molech:** Some translations read, "pass through the fire to Molech." However, the words "the fire" are not in the Hebrew text. Reference is probably to giving their children to the temples of the false god Molech wherein they would be used as prostitutes for illicit sexual activities. The Canaanites morally digressed because of illicit sexual practices, and for this reason they were expelled from the land (See Gn 15:16). Since God knew that Israel would be affected by the moral degradation of the Canaanites, whom they would not drive completely out of the land, He placed this law here in order that they be reminded of

their violation of God's will. They could read these passages when they marched as conquered people into the captivity of the Assyrians and Babylonians. They could not blame God for God had warned them.

**18:24-30** God had promised that He would give the land of the Canaanites to Israel (Gn 15:16; 50:24,25). However, the promise was conditional. It was conditioned on their obedience to His law. If Israel would allow themselves to be influenced by the Canaanite culture, and thus digress into the immorality of the people they were to dispossess, then they would give up their right to the land. They would give up their right to the land because they, through their disobedience, would prove that they had no right to take the land from a disobedient people, the Canaanites.

## Chapter 19

### LAWS FOR COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

**19:1-4** *You will be holy for I am holy:* Leviticus is given in order to establish Israel as a holy nation that was separated in behavior from the nations around them. Throughout this chapter various laws are given that would identify the Israelites as a nation that did not create a religion after their own human instincts. Their holy behavior would be a witness to the world that their laws for morals and civil relationships were not from man, but from God. The very nature of the laws would identify them as being from God, not man.

**19:5-10** In order to maintain their separateness from the surrounding nations, Israel was to respect the peace offerings that dealt with human relationships. They were to be concerned for the poor and the aliens by allowing portions of their fields to be harvested by both the poor and the aliens.

**19:11-37** In order to maintain human relationships, stealing was forbidden, as well as bearing false witness and lying. They were not to make false oaths to their neighbor, nor speak the name of God in vain. They were not to take advantage of the handicapped as the deaf and blind. They were forbidden to make unfair judgments, be the bearer of false tales, hate their neighbor, take ven-

geance, or mix breeds (producing hybrids, see Dt 22:9-11), seeds and fabrics. They were not to eat the fruit of newly bearing trees. (Reference here could be to an agricultural principle that allowed the trees eventually to produce more fruit, or reference could be that the first produce of the tree was inferior, and thus not acceptable as an offering to the Lord). They were not to eat blood, or cut off the flesh of the dead (cannibalism). They were not to give their daughters into prostitution, or be involved in crooked business dealings. They were to respect their elders, and love their neighbors and strangers as themselves. All these laws were necessary in order that each person be a part of society as a whole. If any of these laws were violated, relationships with one's neighbor would be either harmed or destroyed. By following these principles of moral behavior and ethics, one could live peacefully in the society of Israel. When the principles were practiced as a whole, then the nations around Israel would perceive that the laws of the society were given by God and not determined by the desires of fallible men. ***Out of the land of Egypt:*** Because God had taken Israel out of Egyptian bondage, the Israelites were obligated to keep His commandments. Their freedom came with responsibility. In order to retain their freedom, they had to remain within the limits of His will. Since there is no real freedom without law, Israel, through obedience, had to learn that unless they kept the law of God, they would bring themselves into the bondage of their own misguided beliefs.

## Chapter 20

### LAWS CONCERNING PUNISHMENT

**20:1-5** Because we are several centuries removed from the religious culture of Molech, we do not understand everything that surrounded the worship of this god that was conceived after the imagination of misguided religionists (See 2 Kg 23:10). It was spiritual adultery for any Israelite to give his children to the worship of such cults. God was serious about this matter in that He commanded the Israelites to stone to death any of their number who would involve themselves in such a cult. The public

stoning was to be a public warning.

**20:6-8** Efforts to receive help in this world from a supposed world of spirits and demons was considered by God a deviation from His sovereignty. The condemnation of occultism in Israel was not evidence that the spirits that were believed by the cults existed and that they influenced the living. The prohibition against practicing such occult matters only affirmed that God made our minds very creative. We have the creative mentality to conjure up all sorts of fictitious spirit nonsense in our efforts to stray from the sovereignty of God in our lives. Men who have little knowledge of the word of God will create supposed supernatural beings from which they run in fear. In all biblical exhortations to stay away from occult beliefs and practices, there is a warning by God to stay close to Him by meditating on His word day and night.

**20:9-21** The penalty for cursing one's parents was death by stoning (See Ex 21:17). We assume that the rebellious child that cursed either mother or father was of the age of accountability, and thus responsible for his actions against his parents. **Adultery:** The practice of illicit sex was punishable by death (18:6-20,22,23). Sexual acts that were prohibited were sexual relations with another man's wife, one's father's wife (a stepmother), his own daughter-in-law, a person of the same sex (homosexuality), an animal (bestiality), a mother and her daughter, a sister or half sister, a menstruate woman, an aunt, an uncle's wife, and a brother's wife. **They will be childless:** Reference is probably to one's death before he is able to have children of his own. If this statement is taken in the context of rebellious youth who would curse their mother and father, then reference would be to those who are not yet married, but are living a riotous life in rebellion to God.

**20:22-26** See 18:24-30. As in chapter 18, the condition for Israel's remaining in the land was their obedience to the law of God. If they were disobedient, then there would be no reason why they should enjoy the privilege of a land wherein they were to be morally preserved for the coming of the Messiah. Obedience was the condition for keeping the land.



## Holiness In Priests &amp; Holy Seasons

(21:1 – 25:55)

**Outline:** (1) Regulations for the priests (21:1 – 22:33), (2) Regulations for holy days and seasons (23:1-44), (3) The lampstand and showbread (24:1-9), (4) Punishment for blasphemy (24:10-23), (5) The sabbatical year and Jubilee (25:1-55)

## Chapter 21

## REGULATIONS FOR THE PRIESTS

**21:1-24** Since the priests stood between God and the people, they were to be holy and separated from the world for the purpose of performing their duties. Except for the death of relatives, they were to keep themselves from contact with the dead. **Wife:** The wives of the priests must also be holy before God. A priest could not marry a harlot. The daughter of a priest was to be put to death if she were guilty of harlotry. **High priest:** The regulations concerning the high priest were more strict than those regulations that applied to the rest of the priests. He was not to uncover his head or tear his clothes in the act of mourning. Since he was the symbol of the highest purity of Israel, he was to marry only a daughter of Israel who was a virgin. **Go out of the sanctuary:** It was not that he could not leave the tent of meeting, but that he should not go out of the tent for mourning. His primary place of work was the tabernacle. **Blemish:** As the sacrificial animals were to be without blemish, so also was the priest to be without blemish. Only the most pure and perfect were to be representatives before God. This regulation probably referred only to the high priest since reference is made to barring the priests from approaching the veil and altar. **Unclean:** When a priest was unclean, he could not touch any holy thing (See 22:1-9). **Sanctify them:** It was the Lord who set the priests apart as a special people to minister to the religious needs of the people.

## Chapter 22

**22:1-16** The entire family of the priest had a right to share in the offerings that were brought before the Lord. However, a stranger, sojourner, or hired servant could not eat at the priest's table. A priest's daughter who was a widow or was divorced could also participate with the

offerings. A legal bondservant could have a part in the priest's table. If a daughter of a priest was married to another man, the husband's family could not eat at the priest's table. The importance of these regulations was in the fact that the holiness of the priest must be protected since he was the official representative that stood before God on behalf of the people of Israel.

**22:17-33** God did not want the people bringing as an offering that which they did not want themselves. That which was to be offered was to be the best of the flock. An important point is made here in reference to contributions. That which was without blemish would be breeding stock among their herds. The offering, therefore, would touch their livelihood. A true sacrifice would be made in order to make the offering. God does not want the donations of those things that one does not want. He wants what we want, and thus the sacrifice is acceptable. We cannot come to the Lord without a sacrifice, without something for which we have given a great deal of time. The very nature of the definition of the word "sacrifice" means that it costs us something.

## Chapter 23

### REGULATIONS FOR HOLY DAYS & SEASONS

**23:1,2 Holy convocation:** The Hebrew word here means "appointed time." These were the appointed times of the feast when the people were to appear before God. There were three annual feasts to which the people were to go. These were times of holiday, joy and celebration.

**23:3 The Sabbath:** The Sabbath was not one of the celebration feasts, but was kept as a sign of the covenant between Israel and God (Ex 20:8-11; 31:12-17). The keeping of the Sabbath was a sign that signaled to the rest of the world that Israel was in a covenant with their God. The fact that the Sabbath was a sign indicates that since the time of creation no other people kept the Sabbath as a special day (Gn 2:1-3). If Israel were keeping the Sabbath before this day, then there would have been no significance in their keeping it after this day as a sign of the covenant. The sign of the Sabbath was in the fact that

they started keeping it at Mt. Sinai while no other nation kept it. On this day, the Sabbath, Israel was to cease from all work. While the nations around Israel worked on the Sabbath, the Israelites meditated in rest in remembrance of their covenant that they had with God.

**23:4-8 The Passover:** The first of the celebration feasts was the feast of unleavened bread and the Passover. This was independence day for the Israelites. On this day they were to celebrate their deliverance from Egyptian captivity. This was the most important of all of Israel's feasts. For Christians, this feast has significance in that Jesus is our Passover Lamb. As Israel was redeemed from Egyptian captivity, so the Christian has been redeemed from sin by the sacrificial Passover Lamb of God. When Christians remember their redemption by the Lamb, therefore, it is a time of celebration for their deliverance from the bondage of sin.

**23:9-14 The firstfruits:** This was the first of four specific laws that God gave Israel that they were to keep when they came into the land of promise (See also 14:34; 19:23; 25:2). This law is in reference to the first cuttings of the harvest. The first fruits signified the fact that all nourishment came from God, and thus the offering of the firstfruits was a thanksgiving to God for His provision. The firstfruits also indicated the rest of the harvest to come which was a blessing from God. Throughout the New Testament, there is a great deal of metaphorical reference to the firstfruit offering (See Rm 8:23; 11:16; 16:5; 1 Co 15:20,23; 16:15).

**23:15-22 The feast of weeks:** This is the feast of harvest. The feast of firstfruits was at the beginning of the harvest and this feast came at the end. It was a feast to celebrate the grace of God in providing the harvest. **The very corners:** It would only be natural to remember the poor after a harvest. Therefore, during the harvest they were to leave the grain standing in the corners of the fields for the poor and sojourners. It is noteworthy that if the poor were to receive food, they also had to work for it. It was not given to them without labor. They had to also work in harvest for their food.

**23:23-25** The feast of trumpets was a sabbath rest in

that no work was to be done on this first day of the seventh month. The blowing of the trumpets marked the month in which the day of atonement took place and also the celebration of the feast of tabernacles.

**23:26-32** In chapter 16 emphasis was placed on the duties of the high priest on the day of atonement (16:29-34). Here emphasis is placed on what the people must do on the day of atonement. **Afflict your souls:** This was not a day of celebration, but a serious day in which the people were to consider their sin. The following feast of tabernacles was the most joyous feast. The order of these two feasts teaches that celebration comes after repentance over sin, and God's atonement for our sin. This is indicative of the Lord's Supper for the Christian. Atonement was made at the cross, and the eating of the Supper is to be a time of celebration for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. The atonement has taken place. It is now time for celebration.

**23:33-44** **The feast of tabernacles:** As the Passover and feast of unleavened bread, this feast lasted for eight days (See Nm 29:12-38; Dt 16:13-15; 31:10-13; Er 3:4; Ne 8:18). **Solemn assembly:** There was to be no work during this feast. It was a time of offering sacrifices in feasts to the Lord. This feast celebrated the end of the agricultural year when all the fruits of the harvest had been gathered into storage. The feast, therefore, was meant to manifest gratitude to God for all His blessings. **Booths:** One of the practices during this feast was that they made dwellings from bush branches in order to commemorate their wandering in the wilderness. Though at this time they had wandered only two months from the time of their freedom from Egypt to the foot of Sinai, they would spend another forty years in the wilderness because of their sin. However, during all this time God provided for them, and thus during this feast they were to remember the continual care of God for their physical needs. They must remember that God will take care of them if they will remain faithful to Him.

## Chapter 24

### THE LAMPSTAND & SHOWBREAD

**24:1-4 *Candlestick:*** This was the lampstand of seven bowls that gave light for the tabernacle (Ex 25:31-40; 27:20,21). It was always to be burning, indicating that the work of God on behalf of the people never ceased. The vision of Zechariah 4 would indicate that the perpetual burning of the lampstand was symbolic of Israel's continual priesthood before the nations (Compare Rv 1:12-20).

**24:5-9** See Ex 25:23-30. The purpose for the showbread was nourishment for the priest while functioning within the tabernacle. Placed on the showbread was frankincense that signified it to be a memorial before the Lord for His provision for all men.

### PUNISHMENT FOR BLASPHEMY

**24:10-23** In order to emphasize the seriousness of obedience to the will of God, this event was inserted. ***Blasphemed:*** This son was evidently still influenced by the false gods of his father who was an Egyptian (See Ex 12:38). Since this was probably the first time this type of incident had happened, the man was remanded in custody until Moses could go before the Lord for advice. The Lord responded that any verbal sin against God and His laws for Israel, who were in this case a people in a covenant relationship with God, was punishable by stoning. Reverence for God is the foundation upon which our beliefs stand. Our values and behavior are a reflection of our beliefs. Disrespect for God and His word, therefore, are the foundation upon which the name of God is blasphemed before the community. ***Stone him:*** The seriousness of the punishment illustrated the seriousness of the sin. The punishment applied to both Israelite and alien. ***Eye for an eye:*** This principle is mentioned in this context in order to establish the law for punishment of both Israelite and alien. It is a law of public justice, not the justification for personal retaliation and revenge. One must not misunderstand Jesus' reference to this law in the Sermon on the Mt. (Mt 5:38-42). What Jesus was condemning was the Pharisees' misapplication of the principle of this law. They were using the principle as a justification for personal revenge. They misunderstood

the principle of the law. That principle is that there is a punishment for the violation of law, and the punishment must match the crime. In other words, the death penalty would not be given for one who told a lie. The principle of the law would be that the death penalty would be given to those who voluntarily murdered another person. If one voluntarily took the life of another, he had his right to life taken from him.

## Chapter 25

### THE SABBATICAL YEAR & JUBILEE

**25:1-7 Six years:** After six years of sowing the fields, the seventh was a year of rest (See Ex 23:10,11; Dt 31:10; 2 Kg 10:29; Ne 10:31). That which grew in the fields on its own could be harvested. Not only is there religious significance to the principle, but there is also a practical reason for the law. The land would produce better if it were given a year of rest. During the year of rest, the bacteria of undisturbed soil could do its work in breaking down the organic material of the soil in order to produce a better crop once planting resumed. The Israelite farmers did not understand the work of bacteria, and thus they would reap the benefits of their obedience to the will of God.

**25:8-34 Jubilee:** This was a year of rejoicing. Every man's possession was to be returned to him. If one had given himself into the bondage of another because of debt, he was to be set free. **Years of the fruits:** The land was to be valued before the year of Jubilee according to the crops that it would produce, not according to any inflationary value or location in reference to a city. **The land is Mine:** The original owner of the land was God because He had given it to the Israelites. He entrusted portions to each family, who then took stewardship of the partials allotted to them. If for some reason the land had to be sold to cover debt, then during the year of Jubilee it was to be restored to the family to whom God had given it. The purpose of the year of Jubilee was to emphasize the principle that the land could never be sold permanently. The returning of the land to the original owners also prevented individuals from becoming owners

of vast portions of land, and thus bringing into poverty the majority of the nation. **House in a walled city:** A different law applied to possessions within the city walls. If the house was sold, the original owner had one year to buy it back. If he did not, then it remained with the new owner indefinitely. **Levites:** A house that was sold by the Levites could be redeemed at any time. There was no one-year restriction placed on the Levites for buying back their houses within the walled cities. However, during the year of Jubilee the house would be returned to the Levite who had sold it. **May not be sold:** The fields of the Levites that were attached to the cities could not be sold.

**25:35-55 Poor:** The year of Jubilee was also a time for the release of those who had given themselves into the servitude of another. In reference to the poor, under the law of God the community of Israel was to help in aiding the survival of the poor. When money was given in loan to the poor, no interest (usury) was to be charged. When food was given, no excess food was to be returned for gain. **Brought ... out of ... Egypt:** Israel was poor in Egypt, but was brought out of bondage and given the land of milk and honey. In reference to the poor, therefore, Israel was to do as God had done for them. **Not ... as a bond-servant:** When a fellow Hebrew had to give himself to the service of another because of debt, the one to whom he gave himself could not treat him as a slave. He was to be considered a hired servant until the year of Jubilee. In the year of Jubilee he was released from his debt, and thus released from the one to whom he had given himself as a servant. **Possession:** Because the Israelites had been redeemed by God out of Egyptian bondage, they were His possession. The laws given in this section assume God's ownership of the Israelites. Therefore, they were not to be possessed by one another in reference to debt. They could not take possession of one another as slaves as the nations around them took slaves for possession and considered them property. Two fundamental principles that are behind all the laws that were given to Israel are the principles for respecting human life and the freedom of the individual.

## Priestly Holiness, Obedience &amp; Vows

(26:1 – 27:34)

**Outline:** (1) Blessings for obedience (26:1-13), (2) Punishment for disobedience (26:14-39), (3) Affirmation of God's faithfulness (26:40-46), (4) Vows and tithes (27:1-34)

## Chapter 26

## BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE

**26:1-13** As with the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, Leviticus ends with exhortations to be obedient to the law of God (See Ex 23:20-33; Dt 28:1-68). **Idols:** In order to be obedient to the laws of God, one must not create in his mind a concept of how God should behave. The spirit of idolatry is in the heart of those who seek to rebel against the will of God. Once one has conceived his god, he then forms an idol or image to remind him of his god, or to add concrete existence to his god. Idolatry always leads one away from God. It is fitting, therefore, that a book that was written to instruct the religious leaders of God's people should end with an exhortation that the religious leaders, the priests, guard the people against creating gods after their own imagination. **Rain ... peace:** If Israel continued to be obedient to the will of God, God would bless them in the land. If the people remained faithful, they would eat food from old storage, clear the storage bin, and then prepare storage for the future. Faithfulness gives one hope for the future, and society must have hope. Without hope there is no encouragement in the present to prepare for the future. Israel had come out of the land of Egypt wherein it was assumed that the gods had protected the people. In this context, however, God wanted Israel to understand that it would be the only true and living God who will supply all their needs. Through their own ingenuity they would not be able to stay in the land. Only through the blessing of God would they be able to produce and remain in the land.

## PUNISHMENT FOR DISOBEDIENCE

**26:14-39** The condition for Israel's remaining in the promised land was their continued obedience of the will of God. One could not assume God's blessing when at the same time there is a refusal to be obedient to the will of



God. **If:** Throughout this context there is a series of “ifs” which places conditions on Israel’s remaining in the land. If they did not keep the will of God, there would first come chastening, then judgments, and finally destruction or severance from the land. Their disobedience would lead them through a series of afflictions: sicknesses (16), famines (16,26), wars and oppression by their enemies (17), plagues (21), pestilence (25), devastation (30-33), and finally the terror of their enemies and captivity (33).

### AFFIRMATION OF GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

**26:40-46 Confess ... are humbled:** If the afflictions God would bring on them for their disobedience to His will produced confession of their sins and humility before God, then there would be restoration. Confession and humility cause one to remember the will of God and His covenant. A remorseful heart will subsequently repent and return to obedience of the conditions that were established by God to maintain the covenant.

## Chapter 27

### VOWS & TITHES

**27:1-15 A special vow:** Outside the requirements of the law one could place himself under “law,” that is, under a vow to make an offering to the Lord. Hannah placed herself under her own law (vow) by making a commitment that if God gave her a son, then she would give the son to the Lord (1 Sm 1:11; see also Jg 11:30,31). This would be a vow offering, and thus a binding obligation that one would place upon himself. Making vows to give offerings to the Lord, therefore, was very serious (See Dt 23:21-23). **Valuation:** This was the worth of the thing that was promised to God. The valuation of the thing was according to sex and age. In reference to possessions, the value was determined in reference to the year of Jubilee. **Poor:** As with other laws, there was always consideration for the poor. In the case of making a valuation of that which was promised to the Lord, the priest had the final say in determining the worth of something in reference to the poor. **Animal:** If an animal had been promised in a

vow, then there could be no substitution of money for the animal. The animal had to be offered. Making a vow offering of an animal meant that the animal had become holy. If the animal that was given in a vow to be offered was unclean, then the priest could place a valuation on it and have it sold. If the owner wanted to redeem the animal, then he could for the price of the valuation, plus one fifth the value of the animal. The same rule applied to houses that were offered to the Lord.

**27:16-25 A field:** Laws concerning land varied, depending on whether the land was inherited or had been purchased. Land was valued according to the amount of seed that was necessary to sow it. The valuation was made in reference to the time before the year of Jubilee. Inherited land could be bought back for the value of the land, plus one fifth the value. **Devoted:** If the land was not bought back, then it became the permanent property of the priests. **Not of his possession:** If one dedicated property that he had bought, then after the valuation, this land could go back to the original owner during the Jubilee, but only if the valuation was paid to the priests for the land.

**27:26-34 Firstborn of the animals:** The firstborn could not be given to the Lord since they were already His (Ex 13:2; 34:19). The firstborn of unclean animals, however, could be valued and redeemed for the valuation, plus one fifth. If it was not bought back, it had to be sold since the priest could not possess an unclean animal. **Devoted thing:** When something was devoted to God, it could not be sold. It was something that was totally given to God and could not be redeemed. The devoted thing was destroyed from among men in the sense that men could not use it for themselves. **Tithe:** A tithe of the land, the herd, or the flock could be redeemed if the valuation, plus one fifth, was paid. **Passes under the rod:** This was the action of the shepherd giving the tithe of the animals that passed under his staff. Every tenth animal that passed under his staff was to be given in tithe. He could not be selective by choosing either good or bad animals.

The principle concerning those things that were given to the Lord was that the giver could not benefit from his

contribution. Giving of things where the giver enjoyed the result of the gift was not considered a contribution. Giving an offering to the Lord meant that the giver released himself from all use of the gift, plus any benefits that the gift might generate. In other words, one could not give his house to the Lord, and yet remain in it. He could not give a field, and yet use the field for his own profit. Giving an offering to the Lord was sacrificial, and thus one relinquished his right of control over that which was given. In this way, the sacrifice was worship to God. In worship, one must come to God with an offering.

**Commentary by Roger E. Dickson**

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### **ABBREVIATIONS**

#### **OLD TESTAMENT**

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

#### **NEW TESTAMENT**

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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