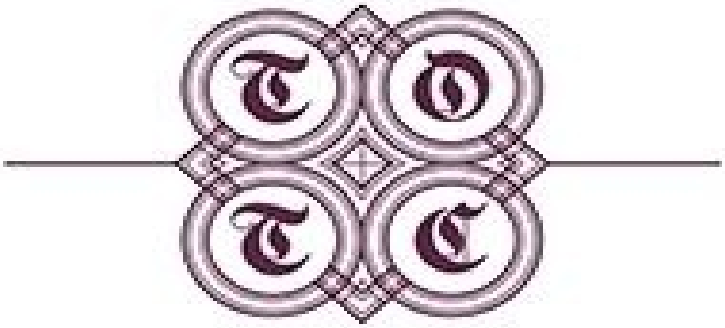
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Leviticus



Jay Sklar

TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 3

SERIES EDITOR: DAVID G. FIRTH

CONSULTING EDITOR: TREMPER LONGMAN III

LEVITICUS

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

JAY SKLAR

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GENERAL PREFACE

The decision completely to revise the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries is an indication of the important role that the series has played since its opening volumes were released in the mid-1960s. They represented at that time, and have continued to represent, commentary writing that was committed both to the importance of the text of the Bible as Scripture and a desire to engage with as full a range of interpretative issues as possible, without being lost in the minutiae of scholarly debate. The commentaries aimed to explain the biblical text to a generation of readers confronting models of critical scholarship and new discoveries from the Ancient Near East, while remembering that the Old Testament is not simply another text from the ancient world. Although no uniform process of exegesis was required, all the original contributors were united in their conviction that the Old Testament remains the Word of God for us today. That the original volumes fulfilled this role is evident from the way in which they continue to be used in so many parts of the world.

A crucial element of the original series was that it should offer an up-to-date reading of the text, and it is precisely for this reason that new volumes are required. The questions confronting readers in the first half of the twenty-first century are not necessarily those from the second half of the twentieth. Discoveries from the Ancient Near East continue to shed new light on the Old Testament, whilst emphases in exegesis have changed markedly. Whilst remaining true to the goals of the initial volumes, the need for contemporary study of the text requires that the series as a whole be updated. This updating is not simply a matter of commissioning new volumes to replace the old. We have also taken the opportunity to update the format of the series to reflect a key emphasis from linguistics, which is that texts communicate in larger blocks rather than in shorter segments such as individual verses. Because of this, the treatment of each section of the text includes three segments. First, a short note on *Context* is offered, placing the passage under consideration in its literary setting within the book, as well as noting any historical issues crucial to interpretation. The *Comment* segment then follows the traditional structure of the commentary, offering exegesis of the various components of a passage. Finally, a brief comment is made on *Meaning*, by which is meant the message that the passage seeks to communicate within the book, highlighting its key theological themes. This section brings together the detail of the *Comment* to show how the

passage under consideration seeks to communicate as a whole.

Our prayer is that these new volumes will continue the rich heritage of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, and that they will continue to witness to the God who is made known in the text.

David G. Firth, Series Editor
Tremper Longman III, Consulting Editor

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

'I believe it is more important for you and me to read Leviticus than it is for us to read the best Christian book ever published, because Leviticus has a quality and produces an effect that no book in the Christian marketplace can compete with' (Platt, 2010: 192).

It seems safe to say that this perspective does not resonate with many people today. Even if we can agree intellectually that Leviticus, as part of God's inspired Word, must be very important, few of us feel that to be true. Indeed, when I tell people that I've spent years studying Leviticus, many respond with the type of smile that says, 'Oh well, at least he's not hurting anyone.'

I never take this personally. In fact, I think I understand why it happens. Both historically and culturally, Leviticus seems very disconnected from our world today. Most of us see no practical need to know about things like sacrifice (Lev. 1 – 7), ordaining priests (Lev. 8), or ritual purity and impurity (Lev. 12 – 15). These are simply not the realities we deal with on a daily basis.

And yet it would be a tragic mistake to overlook this book. In its pages, you will find answers to some of the most pressing questions we ask as human beings: Who are we? Why are we here? What is life about anyway? How can I find meaning and purpose? And you find these answers here, because Leviticus describes a point in human history when the God who gives us meaning came and dwelt in the midst of some of our fellow human beings (the Israelites) and taught them what their purpose in life really was. The goal of this commentary is to make clear what it is that the Lord said to the ancient Israelites and, in so doing, to make clear what the Lord is saying to us today.

I owe sincere thanks to many who have helped me in numerous ways during the course of writing this commentary. At IVP, Philip Duce first invited me to participate in this series, has answered many questions along the way, and has been very patient in waiting for the results. David Firth has provided excellent editorial oversight, not only saving me from many errors and strengthening the work greatly, but doing so with a consistently encouraging spirit.

Several colleagues, students and friends have read and commented on this manuscript (or portions thereof). Special thanks are due to Cheryl Eaton, Aaron Goldstein, Arthur Keefer, Steven Edging, Adam Szabados, Bruce Clark, Ron Lutjens, Carol Kaminski, Christine Palmer and Greg Jewell.

My colleagues at Covenant Theological Seminary have taught me more than

anyone else what it means to worship and love the Lord. I am especially indebted to C. John ‘Jack’ Collins, Michael D. Williams and David Chapman for the ways in which they have shaped my own thinking over the years.

My greatest earthly support is my wife Ski, who has not only willingly engaged in hours of conversation on the topic of Leviticus over the years, but has also gone above and beyond the call of duty in reading through all of the chapter comments and providing tremendously helpful feedback. Her love and support mean more to me than words can express.

This commentary is dedicated with deep affection and esteem to Gordon P. Hugenberger and Gordon J. Wenham. Over fifteen years ago, Gordon Hugenberger suggested to me that the sacrificial system was a possible area for PhD research, setting me on the path that would eventually lead to the writing of this commentary. More importantly, as my pastor and professor during seminary, he modelled for me both godly living and scholarly excellence. Gordon Wenham, who served as my dissertation supervisor, has provided to me the same model of humble piety and scholarly learning. During my time working under him, I was impacted as much by his prayers as by his scholarship. It is a special honour for me that, at the time of writing, this commentary on Leviticus will stand beside his own commentary on Numbers in this series. May the Lord grant it to be a worthy companion.

Jay Sklar
Covenant Theological Seminary
7 September 2013

CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	D. N. Freedman et al. (eds.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* , 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ANET	J. B. Pitchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* , 3rd edn with suppl. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969)
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
EBC	*Expositor's Bible Commentary*
FFB	*Fauna and Flora of the Bible* – prepared in cooperation wih the Committee on Translations of the United Bible Societies, 2nd edn (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980)
GKC	E. Kautzsch (ed.), *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910)
HL	Hittite Laws
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JM	Joüon, P. and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* , revd Eng. edn (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006)
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplementary series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*

LH	Laws of Hammurabi
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NIB	*New Interpreter's Bible*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	W. A. VanGemeren (gen. ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 5 vols.
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
OTL	Old Testament Library
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

Bible versions

AV (KJV)	Authorized (King James) Version
ESV	English Standard Version
LXX	Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament)
NASV	New American Standard Version (1995)
NEB	New English Bible
NET	NET Bible, Version 1.0
NIV (2011)	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNK	JPS Tanakh (1985)

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INTRODUCTION

1. Context and title

In order to understand Leviticus well, it is important to consider it in the context of the story that precedes it. This can be done by reading it in light of its immediate literary and historical context and in light of the story of creation.

The story immediately before Leviticus is one in which the Lord redeems the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exod. 1 – 15) and enters into covenant relationship with them (Exod. 20 – 24). They are to be his 'treasured possession' who are to fulfil a special role: being a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation', and in this way spreading the Lord's kingdom of justice, mercy, goodness and love in all the earth (see Williams, 2005: 134–149). What is more, they are to do this with the Lord himself dwelling in their midst in the tent of meeting (Exod. 25 – 31, 35 – 40). If you were an Israelite, all of this would lead to some burning questions: How in the world can the holy and pure King of the universe dwell among his sinful and impure people? How can he live here, in our very midst, without his holiness melting us in our sin and impurity? And how can we live as his people in such a way that we really do extend his holy kingdom throughout the earth?

Leviticus answers these questions. It begins by explaining the sacrifices that address sin and enable the Israelites to worship this King rightly (Lev. 1 – 7). It provides the people with priests to intercede on their behalf and lead them in worship before the King (Lev. 8 – 10). It gives them laws to teach them how to deal properly with impurity (Lev. 11 – 15). It provides a yearly ceremony to remove every last ounce of sin and impurity from the kingdom (Lev. 16). It provides a whole series of laws in other areas to direct them in living as a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Lev. 17 – 27), that is, in setting up a society where God's character and wishes for humanity can be seen in the corporate life of the nation. In short, while many Christians regard Leviticus as a burden, the Israelites looked on it as a blessing. For them, it was life-giving instruction that answered life's most important questions: How do we live in relationship with the Lord, our covenant King, and how do we reflect his holy character to the watching world?

But Leviticus does more than answer questions raised by its immediate literary and historical context. It also casts a vision rooted in the Bible's larger story and, in particular, in creation. Indeed, God's purpose for his people in Leviticus is in many ways a return to his purpose for humanity in creation. This may be seen in terms of separation, blessing and calling. In the story of creation,

the Lord separates (Heb. *hibdîl*) things into their proper place to bring order to the world (Gen. 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18). At the pinnacle of creation, he makes Adam and Eve, bringing them into this ordered world and blessing them in many ways, whether by shining his favour on them to make them fruitful (Gen. 1:28), placing them in a lush garden in Eden where all their physical needs are met (Gen. 2:8–25), giving them a Sabbath rest (Gen. 2:3), or, most of all, 'walking' (Heb. *hithalēk*) with them as their God (Gen. 3:8a). Along with these blessings is a calling. He has created them in his image, and they are to reflect that image in the earth (Gen. 1:26–28). Practically speaking, this means they will represent him, ruling over the earth in a way that reflects how he rules over it: with justice, mercy, kindness, righteousness, holiness and love (Pss 86:15; 89:14; 96:10; 97:2; 103:8). Their mission is to fill the earth with this kingdom (Gen. 1:28).

Leviticus casts this same vision for God's people. In Leviticus, the Lord once again brings order to the world by 'separating' (Heb. *hibdîl*) things into their proper place and calling his people to do the same (Lev. 10:10; 11:46–47; 20:25). Indeed, he separates his people from the rest of the world (Lev. 20:24, 26) and promises to bless them as he did Adam and Eve, whether by shining his favour on them to make them fruitful (Lev. 26:9; cf. Gen. 1:28), placing them in a lush land where all their physical needs will be met (Lev. 26:4–5, 10; cf. Gen. 2:8–25), giving them Sabbath rest (Lev. 23:3; 25:1–7; cf. Gen. 2:3), or, most of all, 'walking' (Heb. *hithalēk*) with them as their God (Lev. 26:11–12; cf. Gen. 3:8). And, as in creation, the blessings are again accompanied by a calling. He has separated them from the peoples of the earth in order to reflect his image in the world: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy' (19:2; see also 11:44–45; 20:7, 26). The Israelites are the ones who are to represent the Lord in this earth, thus fulfilling the purpose the Lord had for humanity in creation, as well as showing the rest of the world what that purpose is, how to live in keeping with it, and therefore how to experience the abundant life God intended for his creation (cf. at Lev. 26, *Meaning*). Simply put, the Israelites are not only to be a signpost back to Eden; they are to become a manifestation of it and a people who extend Eden's borders to every corner of the earth.

Leviticus: a return to God's purposes in creation

	Creation	**Leviticus**
Separating things into their proper place and bringing order to the world	Gen. 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18	Lev. 10:10; 11:46–47; 20:24–26

Blessing humanity: • Fruitfulness • A lush land where physical needs are met • Sabbath rest • Walking with them as their God	• Gen. 1:28 • Gen. 2:8–25 • Gen. 2:3 • Gen. 3:8	• Lev. 26:9 • Lev. 26:4–5, 10 • Lev. 23:3; 25:1–7 • Lev. 26:11–12
A calling: to reflect God's image in the world	Gen. 1:26–28	Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26

In short, the book of Leviticus not only answers questions raised by its immediate context, it also casts a vision that takes the Israelites back to the Lord's intent for humanity from the beginning of the world: to walk in rich fellowship with their covenant King, enjoying his care and blessing, and extending throughout all the earth his kingdom of justice, mercy, kindness, righteousness, holiness and love. In this way, the vision of Leviticus should actually feel very familiar to the people of God today, since it is the very same vision for which Jesus teaches us to pray: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matt. 6:10). Old Testament or New, the Lord always calls his people to pray for, embody and extend his kingdom in this earth, both for his glory and for their blessing.

The above helps to make clear that 'Leviticus' is an unfortunate title for this book. It derives ultimately from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which entitled it *Leuitikon* ('pertaining to the Levites'), undoubtedly because it addresses many issues involving priests, a group that came from the tribe of Levi. But as the above shows, Leviticus is about far more than priestly matters. It belongs to a grand story in which the holy King of the universe has come to live among his sinful and impure people. In his love for them, he tells them in this book how to address their sin and impurity, and live out their calling

and mission in this world as the holy people of his kingdom. A longer, more fitting title would be: ‘How to live as the holy priestly kingdom of the holy and heavenly King’.

2. Authorship and date

a. Traditional approach

Traditionally, Moses is understood to be the primary source of Leviticus. This is because Leviticus introduces almost all of its content with some variation of the phrase: 'And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying...' (1:1; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1, 8, 19, etc.; thirty-six occurrences in total). Furthermore, he is understood to be the primary author because several passages indicate that Moses recorded at least parts of the Pentateuch at the Lord's command (Exod. 17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27–28; Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9, 22–26). Because some of these texts make clear that the words Moses recorded are the same words he spoke to the Israelites (cf. Exod. 24:4 with 24:7; 34:27–28 with 34:32), it seems natural to assume he followed this same pattern in Leviticus, namely, writing down the words that he was constantly commanded to speak to the Israelites (e.g. 1:2; 4:2; 6:25; 7:23, 28; 11:2; 12:2). This would imply that Moses is the substantial author of much of the book.

The word 'substantial' is used above, because conservative scholars generally agree that Moses did not write his own death notice (Deut. 34:5–9). Other passages also provide descriptions that seem to come from after Moses' time, such as the mention of Dan (Gen. 14:14) and the reference to Israel having already conquered the land (Deut. 2:12b; see further Grisanti, 2001: 582–588).[1] Such editorial work is therefore possible for Leviticus as well, although it is difficult to identify its extent[2] and date.[3] In any case, the presence of editorial work need not detract from the implication of the text that Moses was the primary source through whom the content of Leviticus was given to Israel. This also means that much of Leviticus comes from the time of Moses, that is, between 1440 and 1260 BC (depending on the date of the exodus from Egypt), and that initially it would have been spoken to the first and second generation of Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai.

b. Nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the historical-critical approach

Different from the traditional approach is the historical-critical (or 'higher-critical') approach. Unlike the traditional approach, it does not view the Pentateuch as a cohesive whole, but as a mix of different sources and traditions that are often in conflict with one another and have come together over a long

period of time to give us the final text. The goal of historical criticism is to determine what that process looked like.

While there are various historical-critical approaches to the Pentateuch (see overview in Alexander, 2012: 3–6), the one that has had the greatest impact is source criticism, which seeks to determine the sources from which the current text was formed. As applied to the Pentateuch, the classic expression of this approach was given by Julius Wellhausen (1885).[4] He argued that the Pentateuch consists of four main sources that were edited together: the 'J' source, characterized by reference to God as Yahweh (in German, '**J**ahve'); the 'E' source, characterized by reference to God as **E**lohim; the 'D' source, which consists of most of **D**euteronomy; and the 'P' source, which concerns **p**riestly matters (Leviticus was attributed to the P source). He also followed others in arguing that the P source included an earlier source, found mostly in Leviticus 17 – 26. Scholars labelled this the 'H' source ('**h**oliness' source), due to the frequent mention of holiness in these chapters (19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:6–8, etc.). He further argued that these sources were combined in a certain order: JEDP (P incorporated H). And while Wellhausen himself did not have a firm position on the dates of J and E, those using his approach soon assigned the following dates to the sources: J – c. 840 BC; E – c. 700 BC; D – c. 623 BC; P – c. 500–450 BC (with H coming after D, but before P).[5]

This approach came to be known as the 'documentary hypothesis' (hereafter 'DH'). As the discussion above shows, the DH is in direct conflict with the claims of the text itself, since it places the material of the Pentateuch long after the time of Moses. Nevertheless, it was very quickly accepted among historical-critical scholars – at least in much of Europe and America – as *the* model that explained how the Pentateuch was formed.

c. Twentieth and twenty-first centuries

Today, however, there is a diversity of views about the formation of the Pentateuch. These views may be grouped into three large categories by geographical region (Dozeman, Schmid, Schwartz, 2011: XI–XII). North American scholars tend to accept the broad outlines of the DH, although many argue for much more redactional (editorial) activity than the traditional DH allowed. They are also much more likely to focus on the final form of the text, and analyse it in light of Ancient Near Eastern evidence or its place in the canon.

Israeli scholars also accept the broad outlines of the traditional DH in terms of the sources, but have not argued for as much redactional activity as American scholars have. (For example, some argue that one redactor brought together all

four sources to form the Pentateuch.) Many Israeli scholars have also argued that P dates not only from before the Israelites were exiled to Babylon, but also from before D. This changes the order from JEDP to JEPD.

Finally, among European scholars, the DH is no longer a majority view. While the existence of P is often accepted, it is doubted whether J and E are distinct sources in Genesis–Numbers, and it is argued instead that there is a much higher degree of supplemental and redactional activity.

Given the wide diversity of views concerning the DH, it seems fair to conclude that there is no 'mainstream' view among critical scholars today about the formation of the Pentateuch. This does not mean that arriving at a consensus is impossible, and further research could, over time, begin to favour one of the above approaches over the others (or come up with another approach entirely). But it is also possible that scholars will see the lack of consensus as evidence that a comprehensive and accurate description of the Pentateuch's formation requires information that has been lost to history. Consequently, they may turn increasingly to questions other than how the text was formed.

As for the traditional approach to the DH, those who critique it often argue that its methods of identifying sources are unreliable (see Alexander [2012: 19–25], and esp. Whybray [1987: 17–131], who cannot be dismissed as a theological conservative). But even if it were assumed that the sources have been properly identified, there is the entirely different question of their dating. With regard to P (which includes most of Lev. 1 – 16), there are indicators that at least portions of it can be plausibly dated to the Late Bronze Age (c.1550–1200 BC), the period during which Moses lived according to the biblical account. Most relevant are those indicators that provide some measure of external control in dating a text. For example:

1. 'The details of the form and manufacture of the Tabernacle lampstand [Exod. 25:31–40] do not correspond to those of the lampstands in Solomon's Temple or in later periods. They most closely resemble the design of lampstands of the late Bronze Age' (Milgrom, 1991: 10).
2. 'Israel's camp in the wilderness is square-shaped; in later Israel the war camp was round. The wilderness camp most resembles the war camp of Rameses II [c. 1303–1213 BC], possibly the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Not only is the latter camp square in shape, but its tent sanctuary is in its center' (Milgrom, 1991: 11; see also Kitchen, 2003: 275–283).
3. 'The boundaries of the promised land (Num. 34) do not conform to any historical situation in Israel's national existence, but are congruent with

> Egypt's Asiatic province during the period of the New Empire (fifteenth through thirteenth centuries)' (Milgrom, 1991: 11).

Hess (2008: 810) cites a similar indicator for material assigned to H (Lev. 17 – 26) in his comments on the blessings and curses found in Leviticus 26:

> Only documents from the second millennium BC (and earlier) show clear evidence of both blessings and curses. First millennium legal collections, such as the Neo-Babylonian laws (Roth, 143–149), as well as first millennium treaties, such as the Neo-Assyrian ones (Parpola and Watanabe, xxxv, xli–xlii), do not possess these two elements.[6]

If these examples hold, they do not prove that the entirety of Leviticus 1 – 16 or 17 – 27 came from that time, and debates over the extent and date of later editorial work will no doubt continue. But these examples at least allow for the possibility that an early date extends to other portions of these chapters as well.[7]

d. Conclusion

As the discussion above shows, the Pentateuch itself suggests Moses was the source and author of much of the book of Leviticus, although it may include later editorial work. While the extent and date of editorial work will doubtless remain an area of debate, it is the final form of the text that is canonical, and thus our focus, as we seek to discern what the Lord is saying through this remarkable book to his people today.

3. The Hebrew text of Leviticus and the English version used here

Current editions of the Hebrew Bible are based on the Masoretic Text, the form of the Hebrew Bible that has been 'accepted as authoritative by all Jewish communities from the second century CE onwards' (Tov, 1992: 23). The oldest complete copy of the Masoretic Text is known as the Leningrad Codex B 19^{A}. It dates to AD 1009 and serves as the basis for the standard Hebrew Bible used in academic circles today (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*). Although this codex is relatively late, there are numerous examples of partial texts of the Hebrew Bible written in the Masoretic tradition that date from much earlier times. When these are compared with the codex, they show that the Masoretic Text 'did not change much in the course of more than one thousand years' (Tov, 1992: 30).

This does not mean that the Masoretic Text always has the best reading, and, as with any document copied from antiquity, it must be compared with other textual witnesses. The relevant witnesses for Leviticus are noted in the table below. Of these, the most important are the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch. These witnesses overlap greatly with the Masoretic Text. Where they do contain alternate readings, these readings are often inferior to the Masoretic Text from a text-critical perspective, or, where possibly superior, are so minor that they do not affect the overall meaning. Where an apparent superior reading does affect the overall meaning, it will be noted in the commentary (as at 21:7–8).

Textual witnesses to Leviticus

Copies of Leviticus in Hebrew	Portions of Leviticus in Hebrew	Translations of Leviticus
Masoretic Text Samaritan Pentateuch	Various Dead Sea Scrolls	Septuagint (Greek) Vulgate (Latin) Peshitta (Syriac) Targums (Aramaic)

While the research for this commentary is based on the Masoretic Text, the comments will generally quote from the excellent translation found in the New

International Version (2011, not 1984). When the comments assume a different translation, this will be made clear in the text (as at 21:23).

4. The theology of Leviticus

a. The Lord is their covenant King who dwells among them

In Leviticus, the central image describing the relationship between the Lord and Israel is that of a covenant King (the Lord), dwelling among his covenant people (Israel). This image is rooted in two of the book's central themes: the tabernacle and the covenant.

Leviticus begins with the Lord summoning Moses to the tabernacle (1:1), much as a king would summon a servant to his palace (cf. 1 Kgs 1:28, 32). Indeed, many factors indicate that the tabernacle is not simply a tent, but the palace-tent of the heavenly King, dwelling in the midst of his people:

1. The Israelites bring their tribute here (Exod. 25:1–9), just as a people would bring tribute to a king's palace.
2. They come and 'stand before' the Lord, just as one 'stands before' a ruler or person in authority (1 Kgs 1:28; 3:16; Esth. 8:4; see at Lev. 9:5).
3. The tabernacle's furniture and tapestries are incredibly ornate and unlike those of any other tent in Israel (Exod. 25:10 – 26:37; 30:1–10). This is clearly a tent fit for a king.
4. Just as kings had servants in their palaces who wore special uniforms and ministered before him (1 Kgs 10:5), so too the Lord has servants (the priests) in his palace-tent who wear special uniforms (Exod. 28) and minister before him (Exod. 28:43).
5. The tent has a throne room – the Most Holy Place – in which the Ark of the Covenant is the Lord's royal 'footstool' (1 Chr. 28:2), and the carved cherubim on top of it, his royal 'throne' (2 Sam. 6:2).

In sum, the King (the Lord) dwelt in his earthly palace (the tabernacle) in the midst of his people (Israel).

But this was not just any king and any people; these were a King and people who were in covenant relationship. As noted above (p. 28), Leviticus assumes the covenant relationship established between the Lord and Israel in Exodus 20 – 24. In the Ancient Near East, there were at least two main types of covenant: those between equals (parity covenants) and those between a king and a people (suzerain-vassal covenants). Significantly, the covenant in Exodus 20 – 24 is

structured like a suzerain-vassal covenant, which often had the following elements (see Williams, 2005: 140–143; Richter, 2008: 84):

- a preamble that identified the parties of the covenant (or at least the king) (cf. Exod. 20:2);
- a historical prologue, describing their previous relationship (cf. Exod. 20:2);
- various stipulations of the covenant (cf. Exod. 20:3–17; 21:1 – 23:19);
- the depositing of the text, and a requirement to read it publicly (cf. Exod. 24:7; 25:16, 21);
- a list of witnesses (absent in Exod.; cf. Deut. 30:19–20; 31:28);
- and a series of blessings and curses (cf. Exod. 23:20–31; see also Lev. 26; Deut. 28).

That Exodus 20 – 24 is a suzerain-vassal covenant implies that the Lord is Israel's covenant King and the Israelites are the covenant people of his kingdom. This, in turn, means that the laws he gives them in Leviticus are part of the stipulations of the covenant and are to guide them in kingdom living. That is what this book is about: how the King's covenant people can live as loyal covenant members of his kingdom.

All of this leads to at least two significant implications, one for ancient Israelites and the other for modern readers. Ancient Israelites were to understand that they owed exclusive loyalty to the Lord, their covenant King, and were to show such loyalty by being faithful to his laws. Modern readers are to understand that the royal imagery of a covenant King, dwelling in the midst of a covenant people, functions as an interpretive grid for Leviticus, a set of lenses through which the book must be read if it is to be well understood.

b. The holy covenant King

If the central image of Leviticus is that of a covenant King dwelling in the midst of his covenant people, the central descriptions of that King's character are the words 'holy' and 'redeemer'. We begin by considering the first of these.

The Lord's holiness is evident in the simple fact that those people or things that are his are to be holy (see at 11:41–45) and/or treated as holy (see at 5:15). It is confirmed by the simple declaration repeated throughout the book: 'I am holy' (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8). But what, exactly, is holiness?

i. Holiness defined

To be holy is to be set apart as distinct in some way. Normally, this takes place

when a person or object is set apart as distinct by another person. In Exodus and Leviticus, the Lord himself frequently sets apart various people or objects as distinct. He does this with people either by entering into special relationship with them (Lev. 11:44–45; 20:7–8, 24–26) or by having them go through various rituals that set them apart in a special way (Lev. 8:12, 30). He usually sets objects apart as distinct by means of various rituals as well (Exod. 29:36, 37; Lev. 8:15). The Israelites also set various objects apart as distinct, either by dedicating them to the Lord (Exod. 29:27; Lev. 22:2–3; 27:14–19) or, in the case of the year of Jubilee, by treating it differently from other years (Lev. 25:10–12).

The holiness of these people or objects may be called ‘dependent holiness’, for the simple reason that it is completely dependent on another. All of these people or objects were at one point *not* holy; they became holy only because another person had set them apart as distinct.

The Lord’s holiness, however, does not depend on anyone else. It is completely independent. The Lord is set apart as distinct because of his very nature. True, others are called to set him apart as distinct and treat him as holy (Lev. 22:32). But this is not in order to make him holy; rather, it is in order to recognize the holiness he already has. Unlike anyone or anything else, the Lord is holy by virtue of who he is.

What is it about the Lord’s very nature that sets him apart as distinct? Although there are many aspects to the Lord’s holiness, the Pentateuch focuses on two in particular: his power and his moral purity.

ii. The holy King: powerful and pure

The Lord is distinct from every other being in terms of the greatness of his power. He is a King without equal (Ps. 47:2, 6–8). This is seen in Leviticus when he manifests his ‘glory’ at the inauguration of the tent of meeting (9:23b–24a), a display of power so spectacular that the people responded by falling on their faces in worship (see at 9:23–24). This is clearly a God who is distinct in terms of his power.

But, as history repeatedly teaches, power without moral purity becomes tyranny. Fortunately, the Lord is not only distinct in terms of his power; he is also distinct in terms of his moral purity. He is not simply a powerful King; he is a good King, and his goodness in fact becomes the model for his people Israel. In Leviticus 19, for example, he commands his people to be morally upright in a number of ways, such as caring for the needy (19:9–10), being impartial in justice (19:15), and loving their neighbours as themselves (19:18). Significantly, the chapter begins with these words from the Lord to the Israelites: ‘Be holy, because I, the LORD your God, am holy’ (19:2). The idea is straightforward:

‘Because I, the Lord, am distinct in terms of my moral purity, you, as my people, must be distinct in terms of your moral purity as well. In the situations that follow, you, my people, are to embody my moral purity to the world.’

The Lord, then, is holy – utterly distinct – in terms of his power and moral purity. There is no-one as great as him and no-one as good as him. He is without equal. For Israel, these were not simply abstract theological truths. They were realities they experienced in the most significant event of their history: their redemption.

c. The redeeming covenant King and his holy covenant people

The Lord’s redemption of Israel from Egypt was a past event with current implications. As a past event, redemption was a demonstration of the Lord’s holiness in terms of his distinct power (Exod. 7:4–5; 12:12; 14:4, 17–18; 15:11). But this past event had significant implications for Israel’s current life. The Lord had redeemed them to be *his* people (Lev. 11:45; 19:36), and those who are in relationship with him have a mission to fulfil: embodying his pure character and his holy kingdom in this world (cf. pp. 29–30). Indeed, the Lord most often reminds the Israelites of their redemption in contexts where he is commanding them to be obedient to him (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:36; 22:32–33). It is his way of saying, ‘You are now the redeemed people of the holy covenant King. *Live in keeping with that holy calling*. Show the world what kind of King you follow. Show them I am a holy King – a King of absolute *moral purity* – by following my holy commands.’ (For some of the social implications, see *Meaning*, pp. 253–254, 311–312.)

In short, redemption by this King always implies relationship, relationship with him always implies mission, and that mission is nothing less than spreading his holy kingdom throughout all the earth (cf. Matt. 28:18–20). The Israelites were to do this by embodying the laws of the kingdom their covenant Lord had established.

d. The holy law of the covenant King

In Israel’s world, to enter a covenant relationship with a king was to promise him exclusive loyalty; to obey his covenant stipulations was to demonstrate this loyalty. The laws of Leviticus functioned as the stipulations of the covenant between the Lord and Israel, and the Israelites were therefore to follow them fully (see p. 38).

While many moderns tend to view biblical law negatively (see analysis in

Williams, 2005: 152–157; Keller, 2008: 35–50, esp. 45–47), this was not the case for the faithful in ancient Israel. The longest psalm in the Bible (Ps. 119) models how the faithful should view God's law: as something to thank God for (v. 7), rejoice in (v. 14), delight in (vv. 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 143, 174), long for (vv. 20, 40, 131), cling to (v. 31), love (vv. 47, 48, 97, 119, 127, 140, 159, 163, 167), sing about (v. 54), meditate on (vv. 78, 97, 148) and rejoice over (v. 162; see Wright, 2004: 282). And it must not be forgotten that the psalmist is speaking – at the least – about the Pentateuch, which of course includes Leviticus.

There are at least two reasons for such a positive view of the law. To begin, the laws show the Israelites how to fulfil one of their basic purposes as human beings: to reflect the Lord's good and holy character. Laws always reflect the values of the lawgiver, and since the Lord is holy and good (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8), his laws show Israel how to live out those characteristics in the world, how to embody the Lord's love, justice, mercy, kindness and goodness. This is what we have been created to do.

But we have been created to do this as we live in relationship with our King, to walk with him in his ways. The law explains what those ways are, and therefore how to maintain fellowship with him. (Note in this regard that the law does not *create* relationship with the Lord; it *regulates* an existing relationship; see further at 18:5.) To know the Lord is the greatest good we can experience and the ultimate sign of his favour. It is a good he lavishes on those who walk in his ways, and since the law identifies those ways, it is viewed as very good indeed.

e. Sin: breaking the holy King's covenant laws

The essence of sin is to break the Lord's laws, instead of keeping them. The results of sin are always catastrophic, both for sinners and for the world: for sinners, because their relationship with the Lord, their King and Creator, is now ruptured, and alienation replaces warm fellowship; for the world, because sin destroys the type of community the Lord intended, one in which people experience his love, joy, peace, goodness and justice. Sin is an acid that mars and destroys whatever it touches. The Lord is not being a killjoy by forbidding sin; he is being a loving Saviour.

i. Categories of sin

The books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers identify three general categories of sin: those committed by mistake ('unintentional sins'), those that are clear

signs of rebellion (‘high-handed sins’), and those that appear to fall somewhere between (‘intentional but not [necessarily] high-handed sins’). These may be summarized as follows (see Sklar, 2012: 468–482).

1. Unintentional sin. As its name implies, this category refers to sins committed by mistake, either because sinners are aware of a law, but unaware of breaking it (Num. 35:23; cf. Deut. 19:4–5), or because sinners are not aware of the law to begin with.

Lack of intent does not mean the sinner is automatically excused, just as motorists today who accidentally speed are not automatically excused. But since the sin was unintentional, the Lord provides an automatic means of forgiveness: sacrificial atonement (Lev. 4:20, 26; Num. 15:25, 28). This would restore the sinner’s relationship with the Lord.

2. ‘High-handed’ sin. The second category of sin is identified in Numbers 15:30–31, here translated fairly literally:

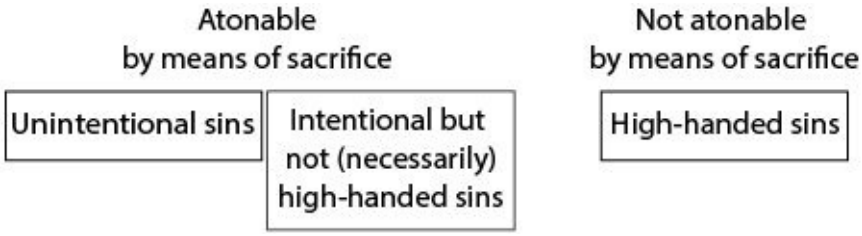
> But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or an alien, he is blaspheming the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his sin will be on him.

The phrase ‘with a high hand’ (v. 30) can be used to refer to full-scale rebellion against a king: ‘Also, Jeroboam son of Nebat...*rebelled* [lit. ‘raised his hand’] against the king’ (1 Kgs 11:26, italics mine). This is clearly the meaning in Numbers 15, as is evident from the further descriptions of the sinner: ‘he is blaspheming the LORD...he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment.’ This is a description of the defiant sin of an apostate (see further Sklar, 2012: 471–478).

In stark contrast to unintentional sinners, who had access to atonement by means of sacrifice, those who sinned with a high hand had no recourse to sacrificial atonement at all (cf. Num. 15:22–29 with 15:30–31). (For the exceptional nature of the Day of Atonement, see at 16:11–16a.) This does not mean atonement was impossible, but there was no automatic guarantee of it as there was with sacrificial atonement (see Sklar, 2012: 485–490). Instead, high-handed sinners were to be ‘cut off’, implying at the least excommuni- cation from the covenant people and at the most death itself (see p. 64).

3. Intentional but not (necessarily) high-handed sin. The third category of sin may be called ‘intentional but not (necessarily) high-handed’ sin. Leviticus provides at least two examples: choosing not to testify about a crime (Lev. 5:1), and swearing a false oath (6:1–7). The very nature of these sins indicates that they were intentional; it is therefore not surprising that the ‘unintentional’

language that occurs throughout Leviticus 4 – 5 is absent in these two cases. But it is also evident that these sins were not 'high-handed': the high-handed-sin language of Numbers 15:30–31 is also missing here, as is the penalty (being 'cut off'). Most significantly, sacrificial atonement is prescribed to deal with the sin. In short, along with unintentional sins and high-handed sins, there exists this middle category.[8]



While this middle category of sin is recognized, it is strongly discouraged. In fact, Numbers 15:22–31 does not even list it as an option. Perhaps this is to make the contrast between the other two categories – and especially the danger of high-handed sin – all the greater. Black looks blacker when placed beside white, rather than beside grey (so also Gane, 2005: 212). Or perhaps Numbers 15 omits the middle category in order to underscore its danger. It is not the unintentional sinner who is in danger of apostasy, but the intentional one, and the step from intentional sin to apostate sin is deceptively short, and very quick and easy to take. In both cases, the point remains: sin should *never* be intentional, a warning the New Testa- ment underscores equally for the believer today (cf. Matt. 5:29–30; Jude 23b).

f. Ritual states: impure, pure, holy

A discussion of sin leads naturally to a discussion of impurity, since they are related in important ways. Atonement must be made for both on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:16), and both can be treated as a 'thing' that needs to be taken away (16:19, 30). But sin and impurity also differ in important ways. Sin is rooted in moral wrongdoing; impurity is not. What is more, sin is an action; impurity is a state of being. Indeed, to understand impurity better, it is important to talk about the concept of 'ritual states', a concept very familiar to the ancient Israelites and their neighbours (Milgrom, 1991: 932–933) and familiar to many cultures today (Milgrom, 1991: 764–765), even if it is very unfamiliar to many others. So what exactly is a 'ritual state'?

i. The three ritual states

Generally speaking, there were three ritual states in Israel: the impure, the pure

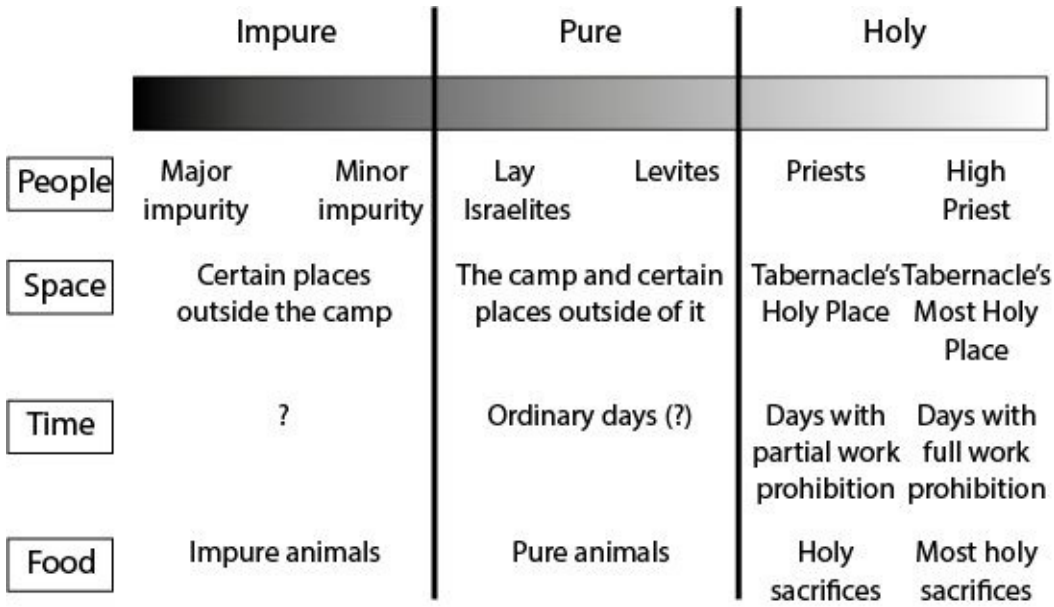
and the holy (sometimes known as the unclean, the clean and the holy). There are gradations within these states (see further below), but the states themselves were distinct.



These are called ‘ritual states’, because they guide the community in understanding which ritual actions a person may (or may not) do or which ritual places a person may (or may not) go. Those who are impure, for example, may not partake of a fellowship offering, while those who are pure may do so (Lev. 7:19–20). A modern analogy is that of physical health and cleanness. A person with the flu may not go into a hospital to hold a newborn baby, while a person who is healthy may. A person who is healthy and sterilized may go into an operating room, but a person who is simply healthy may not. Just as your physical health and cleanness determine what you can do and where you can go in a hospital, the Israelites’ ritual state determined what they could do and where they could go in terms of ritual actions, places and times.

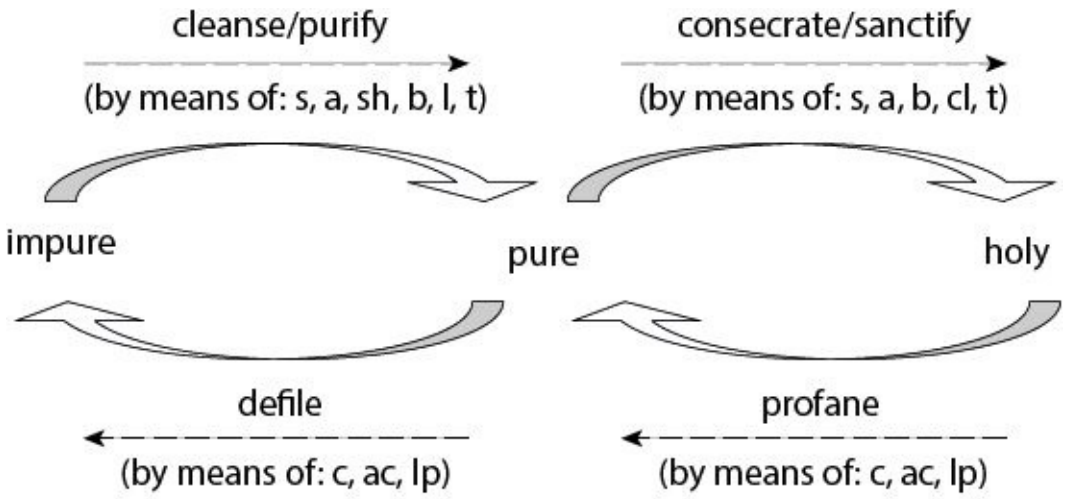
As the chart below shows, there were often gradations within these states. For example, the high priest has a higher degree of ritual holiness than the other priests (cf. Lev. 21:1–7 with 21:10–12), and for this reason, he alone is allowed to enter the Most Holy Place (16:32). Gradations are also evident in terms of people’s ritual impurity, which scholars often place on a continuum between two poles: ‘minor impurities’ and ‘major impurities’. Minor impurities are typically cleansed by bathing and/or laundering, last one day and are not contagious. The impurity that comes from sexual intercourse is an example (Lev. 15:18). By way of contrast, major impurities require several more rites for cleansing, last at least seven days and are contagious. The impurity that comes from an abnormal genital discharge is an example (15:2–15; for a more comprehensive list of major and minor impurities, see Jenson, 1992: 225–226; Wright, 1987: 179–219). As the chart also shows, these gradations occur not only in the context of people, but also in terms of physical space (Exod. 26:33), time (see at 23:3) and food (see at 2:2–3).[9]

Gradations of ritual purity



ii. Moving between the states

By nature, the Israelites were in a state of purity. They transitioned from this state to another by means of certain activities or events. For example, to transition from impurity to purity, or purity to holiness, at least one of the following is involved (although often it is a combination of several): sacrifice (s), anointing with oil or blood (a), shaving (sh), bathing (b), laundering (l), the passage of time (t), or a change of clothing (cl). Similarly, to transition from holiness to purity (or impurity), or from purity to impurity, certain events were involved: contact with impurity (c), natural life processes (lp) (such as birth, death, menstruation and certain diseases), or various activities (ac) (such as sexual intercourse).



iii. Ritual states versus moral states; cautions to take in determining the rationale(s) that explain ritual purity or impurity

It is important to note at this point that these are 'ritual states' and not 'moral states'. That is to say, a person who is in the *ritual state* of holiness is not necessarily more righteous than a person who is simply pure or impure (just as someone who is physically clean or healthy is not necessarily more righteous than someone who is physically dirty or sick). Indeed, it is usually not wrong to *become impure*. For example, an Israelite became impure by having sex with his or her spouse (15:18) or by having a baby (12:2), both of which are good and proper activities (Gen. 1:28)!

But if these things are good and proper to do, why did they result in the person becoming ritually impure? This is one of several related questions often asked about ritual states: What is the rationale behind them? Why is it that certain things are associated with impurity and others with purity or holiness?

A number of different proposals have been offered and surveyed elsewhere (see references in Klawans, 2000: 164, n. 6; 165, nn. 25, 27). In many of these, purity and holiness are associated with life and wholeness, while impurity is associated with death and a lack of wholeness (e.g. Milgrom, 1991: 1001–1003). This approach possibly explains the rationale behind some ritual states, for example, why dead bodies are ritually impure, since a corpse is the ultimate expression of death. But while this approach is *possible* in some instances, it is very difficult to prove that it is the *probable* explanation, since the text itself makes no comment on it one way or the other. What is more, it may not work as well in other situations. Childbirth and sexual intercourse, for example, both result in ritual impurity (Lev. 12:1–8; 15:18), although they are both intimately related to – and in fact the ultimate examples of – the production of life. It could of course be argued that both activities result in the loss of 'life fluids' (semen in the first case and blood in the second), a response which is again possible but speculative. In any case, as a comprehensive explanation of the rationale behind ritual states, this approach has a certain unexplained tension within it: those things most associated with life – and which should thus be most pure – result in that which is associated with death: severe ritual impurity.

The above comments, in fact, lead to two problematic assumptions that must be avoided in this discussion. The first is that there is *one* overarching rationale to explain ritual states. This is not impossible, but it is equally possible that the rationale for corpse impurity and the rationale for the impurity that comes from sex are related to different cultural or historical situations (cf. at 12:5). Indeed, the difficulty in finding a convincing overarching explanation may be due to this very reason.

The second assumption to avoid is that the Israelites themselves knew what the rationale was. The fact is that many cultures have practices for which the members of that culture can give no rationale. I routinely ask my classes, 'How many agree that it is (or at least was) a sign of respect in North America for a man to remove his hat when entering a church?' All the students raise their hands. I then ask, '*Why* is that a sign of respect?' No-one knows (and the research I have done into the question does not provide a satisfactory answer). Eventually, someone usually says, 'That's just the way it is.' Exactly. Members of a culture cannot always explain the *rationale* behind a certain custom, though they can explain the custom's *purpose*.

iv. The purposes of the ritual states

It is possible to identify three purposes served by the ritual states. First, they reinforced the Israelites' understanding of the Lord's holiness. Where did he live? In a ritually holy royal palace (the tent of meeting) in the most holy room in that palace (the 'Most Holy Place'). Who were his servants? The ritually holy priests. What prevented someone from partaking in a fellowship offering made to him? Being ritually impure. All the laws related to ritual states were like the strokes of a pen, underlining again and again the sentence: 'The Lord is holy!'

But these laws also underlined a related sentence: 'The Lord wants his people to reflect his holiness.' To be holy is to be set apart as distinct (p. 39), and the Israelites were now the people of the holy Lord. How could they demonstrate his concern for holiness to the world? By making careful distinctions in the realm of ritual states and, in particular, by respecting and guarding that which was holy.

And this leads directly to the third purpose of these laws: they were to serve as constant reminders to the Israelites that the Lord wanted them to be holy in *all* of life, not just from a ritual perspective, but also from a moral perspective (see at 20:22–26). In other words, as the Israelites made these distinctions between purity and impurity *from a ritual perspective*, they were constantly reminded that they had been set apart to be a people of purity *from a moral perspective* (cf. Matt. 23:25–26 for those who missed the purpose of the reminder). And because they were to make these distinctions in many areas of their everyday life (meals, sickness, bodily processes), all of life became an opportunity for them to remember that they had been set apart as distinct to be the Lord's holy people, reflecting his holy character to the watching world. Wright summarizes well:

> ...ritual cleanness, from the kitchen to the sanctuary, was meant to symbolize God's greater requirement of moral integrity, social justice and covenant loyalty. In fact, as the prophets (and Jesus) vigorously pointed out, if these latter things were lacking, then ritual cleanness of the most scrupulous kind at every level was worthless. If Christians were as serious about moral

> distinctiveness as Israel was about ritual cleanness, then our ‘salt’ and ‘light’ might have greater power in the world.[10]

g. Sacrifice and atonement

As noted above (pp. 27–28), the Israelites faced a burning question at this point in their history: How can the holy and pure King of the universe dwell in our midst, without his holiness melting us in our sin and impurity? The answer is atonement.

i. Atonement as ransom

The key Hebrew term is *kipper*, used whenever sacrificial atonement is being described: ‘In this way the priest will make atonement [*kipper*] for the leader’s sin, and he will be forgiven’ (4:26b). In at least some contexts, it is clear that the term is related to the Hebrew word for ‘ransom’ (*kōper*) (Levine, 1974: 67; Milgrom, 1991: 1082–1083; cf. esp. Exod. 30:12 with 30:15–16). In the Old Testament, a ‘ransom’ has the following characteristics:

1. it is a legally or ethically legitimate payment;
2. it delivers a guilty party from a just punishment that is the right of the offended party to execute or to have executed;
3. it is a lesser punishment than was originally expected;
4. it is up to the offended party whether or not to accept the payment; and
5. its acceptance serves both to rescue the life of the guilty and to appease the offended party, thus restoring peace to the relationship.[11]

This means that, in at least some instances, atonement is characterized by the payment of a ransom (sacrifice) on behalf of the guilty party (the sinner) to the offended party (the Lord).

This understanding seems to work best in contexts of sin, in which the sinner is obviously in danger of the Lord’s wrath and in need of ransoming. It is less clear – at least at first glance – that it works as well in contexts of ritual impurity, in which no sin has been committed (e.g. Lev. 12:7). This leads to a second approach to the term *kipper*.

ii. Atonement as purification

Several authors have proposed that *kipper* refers at times to purification (Levine, 1974: 56–61; Milgrom, 1991: 1040, 1080–1082). Not only does this fit well in contexts where ritual impurity is being addressed; it also finds support in the fact

that the word *kipper* is used alongside other words for purification, such as *ṭihar* ('to purify') and *hiṭṭē'* ('to cleanse') (cf. Lev. 16:30a). Authors following this approach are more likely to translate *kipper* with 'to purify/effect purgation' in contexts where impurity is being addressed, and with 'to atone/expiate' or 'to make atonement/expiation' in contexts where sin is being addressed. In the former case, the focus is on cleansing; in the latter, it is on averting the Lord's wrath (see discussion in Sklar, 2005: 4–7).

While this approach seems straightforward, it turns out that it is not always easy to choose between the two translations. For example, Numbers 35:31–33 states that no act of *kipper* can be made for land defiled by bloodshed, except by shedding the slayer's blood. Milgrom (1991: 1082) understands *kipper* here to refer to the 'ransom' (*kōper*) principle, a view that seems justified on the basis of the word ransom (*kōper*) in verses 31 and 32. And yet the text is also clear that shed blood *pollutes* (v. 33) and *defiles* (v. 34) the land, suggesting that the act of *kipper* must not only ransom, but also cleanse (see esp. v. 33). Indeed, texts such as Numbers 35:31–33 suggest that the ideas of 'ransoming' and 'purification' might be held together in the term *kipper*. It is to this possibility that we now turn.

iii. Atonement as 'ransom-purification'

In order to understand why *kipper* can refer to both ransom and purification, it is vital to understand an important similarity between the two: sin and impurity both endanger (requiring ransom), and both pollute (requiring purification).

	Endangers (requires ransom)	Pollutes (requires purification)
Sin	✔	✔
Impurity	✔	✔

1. Sin endangers and pollutes. It is clear that *intentional* sins endanger: they typically result in the sinner being put to death (Lev. 8:35; 24:16, etc.), being 'cut off ' (Lev. 7:20; 17:4, etc.), or 'bearing [their] sin' (i.e. being punished for it; see at 5:1). But it is also the case that *unintentional* sins endanger the sinner. For example, in Leviticus 4:3 we read that an unintentional sin by the high priest results in the people suffering until it has been properly addressed (see at 4:3), and Leviticus 17:11 makes clear that sacrificial blood, which is presented

primarily in the context of unintentional sin (4:13, 22, 27, etc.), ransoms the sinner's life, thus rescuing it from danger (see at 17:11).

But sin also pollutes. The Israelites are described as being 'cleansed' from their sin on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:30). Furthermore, it appears that sin was viewed as that which defiled the sanctuary in particular, almost as though it were an impure dust that settled on the tent of meeting and its contents, or a defiling dishonour that clung to the home of the sinner's covenant Lord (see at 4:1 – 5:13 [*Context*]; 4:5–7; 8:14–17; 16:11–16a). This in turn suggests that *kipper* in these contexts can refer to an element of cleansing as well as ransom.

2. Impurity pollutes and endangers. The same is true in contexts of impurity. Naturally, there is no question that impurity pollutes and must therefore be cleansed. But not all cleansing rites are the same. In particular, while minor impurities can be cleansed by means of various rites other than sacrifice, the cleansing of a major impurity always involves sacrificial atonement (*kipper* ; see Sklar, 2005: 127–128). Why is this so?

As Milgrom (1976: 391, 394) has argued, those who suffer from a major impurity defile the sanctuary and its contents, even if they have not had direct contact with them. This is suggested by the simple fact that those suffering from a major impurity must bring a purification offering (Lev. 12:6; 14:19; 15:15). As the blood of this offering has a purifying function (Lev. 8:15), and is placed on the sanctuary and its contents, it follows that the sanctuary and its contents have been polluted by the major impurity and are in need of cleansing.

This leads to a second consideration: namely, the defiling of holy objects is a sin of the most serious consequences (7:20–21; 22:3, 9). True, those with a major impurity did not intend to defile the sanctuary or its contents, which is why sacrificial atonement is so readily available: it was an unintentional sin. But even the unintentional defiling of holy things was considered a sin and had to be addressed (cf. Num. 6:9–12). This in turn means that major impurities do not only *defile*; they also *endanger*. Thus the *kipper*-rite must *cleanse* the impurity (purification) and *rescue* the endangered person (ransom).

The implication of the above discussion is straightforward: when the verb *kipper* occurs in contexts of sin or impurity, it has both 'ransom' and 'purification' in view. At times, the aspect of ransom may be emphasized, and at others, that of purification, but the fact that sin and impurity in sacrificial contexts both *endanger* and *pollute* implies atonement must address both of these realities. In short, the verb *kipper* refers to 'ransom-purification': that which rescues the sinful and impure from the wrath of the Lord (ransom), and cleanses their sin and impurity (purification). Both elements are part of sacrificial atonement.

iv. The role of blood in atonement

A natural question arises at this point: How is sacrificial atonement (*kipper*) able to accomplish both ransom *and* purification? The answer is found in the role of sacrificial blood, which has the ability both to purify and to ransom.

For reasons the text does not explain, blood was seen as one of the most powerful cleansing agents available in ancient Israel. This is evident from its use in some of the most important cleansing rites the Israelites had (8:15; 16:19), and in its ability to cleanse fully both sin and impurity (see further at 16:11–16a).

But blood was also seen as that which served as a ransom payment for the guilty. This is especially clear in Leviticus 17:11, which teaches that an animal's lifeblood delivered the sinner from the Lord's justice, because it was accepted as the ransom payment in place of the sinner's lifeblood (see at 17:11). To return to the definition of 'ransom' above (p. 50), the animal's lifeblood was accepted as the payment of a mitigated penalty on the sinner's behalf, graciously accepted by the Lord (the offended party), in this way rescuing the sinner (the offending party) from due punishment, and restoring peace to the relationship between the sinner and the Lord.

In sum, sacrificial blood was able to accomplish both functions of the atonement process, because it had the power both to purify and to ransom.

v. The Lord's role in atonement

As noted at 17:11, the ability of guilty sinners to ransom their lives by means of sacrificial lifeblood was a gracious gift from the Lord. The second phrase of Leviticus 17:11 highlights this in the Hebrew, by emphasizing the first-person 'I': 'and *I myself* have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your lives' (my trans.). This actually turns the idea of sacrifice on its head (Schwartz, 1991: 51). Sacrifice was indeed something the Israelites gave to the Lord, but it was first and foremost something he granted to them, in his grace, as a means of atoning for sin and achieving the forgiveness they so desperately desired. This is the very opposite of the common human impulse to earn salvation from God. It is a bold declaration that salvation comes only when God in his grace grants it to us.

This is seen with even greater clarity in Jesus' sacrifice, for here it is no longer guilty sinners presenting an atoning sacrifice to ransom themselves, but the offended King who has himself provided the atoning sacrifice to ransom guilty sinners, all because of his love for them: 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8; cf. John 3:16). Sinners do not earn this salvation; they receive it from God as a gift of his grace, mercy and love.

h. Putting it all together: a return to Eden

Our discussion of sacrifice and atonement brings us full circle. It has already been noted that Leviticus casts a vision for the people of God in keeping with the Lord's intent for humanity, as seen in Eden: people walking in rich fellowship with their covenant King, enjoying his care and blessing, and extending throughout all the earth his kingdom of justice, mercy, kindness, righteousness, holi- ness and love (see pp. 28–30). As also noted, sin and impurity prevent this vision from being fulfilled, not only because these things interrupt his people's relationship with their holy Lord, but also because those who commit sin are actively undermining the Lord's glorious intent for his creation. This is where repentance and atonement enter the picture. Repentance is the means by which sinners turn from their rebellion and realign themselves with the mission the Lord has given them, and atonement is the means by which sin and impurity are removed, so that fellowship with the Lord can continue and his people can engage fully in his purposes for them.

Naturally, in the case of sin, it would be far better to live in such a way that repentance and atonement were not even needed. Indeed, by following the laws of Leviticus, the glorious vision of Eden would be realized, as the people of God fulfilled their mission of living out his justice, mercy, kindness and love throughout the earth. They would indeed be a covenant people, in close relationship with their holy covenant King, filling the earth with his holy, just and blessed kingdom. It is therefore no wonder that Old Testament believers could look at a book such as Leviticus, and long for it (Ps. 119:20, 40, 131), delight in it (vv. 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 143, 174) and sing and rejoice over it (vv. 54, 162). They understood that it mapped out a way for humanity to experience the riches for which we have been created: close fellowship with our Creator and the spreading of his good kingdom in all the earth.

5. Special issues in Leviticus

a. Accommodation

There are a number of laws in Leviticus that strike many moderns as very strange. Leviticus 19:19b is just one of many examples: ‘Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material’ (see also Lev. 12:1–8; 15:18, etc.). While the strangeness of such a law could make us question the relevance of Leviticus as a whole, this is not a necessary conclusion. Instead, this apparent strangeness begins to make sense in light of the concept of accommodation.

Accommodation refers to the fact that the Lord communicates his values to us in a way that we can understand, namely, by using the cultural realities that exist in our society. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 5:26, the Lord commands through Paul that the Christians at Thessalonica should greet one another ‘with a holy kiss’. In ancient Greek society, as in some modern societies, it was common for men to greet one another this way as a sign of friendship and love. To the Thessalonians, the point would have been clear: the Lord wanted Christian men to show brotherly love to one another. But when this command is read by people in cultures where this is not practised, the law appears very strange indeed. And that brings us back to Leviticus. Many of its laws appear strange to modern readers, because the Lord was speaking to a people who lived in a culture very unlike many cultures today. This in fact leads to two different reasons for the apparent strangeness of various laws in this book.

Some laws will seem strange because the Lord is addressing *practices* that were part of Israel’s culture, but may not be a part of ours. For example, priests were forbidden from mourning and instructed not to ‘shave their heads or shave off the edges of their beards or cut their bodies’ (Lev. 21:5). At that point in Israel’s history, it appears that these activities were connected with pagan rites (see at 19:26–28). It would therefore make good sense to the Israelites for their priests, who are called to be holy, not to engage in such practices. In other words, the Lord values that his people have holy leaders, and this value comes through loud and clear to those he is addressing.[12] That value is much less clear, however, to someone who comes from a culture where these practices are not used in the context of mourning; instead, the law seems strange.

Other laws in Leviticus will appear strange for a different but related reason: the Lord is making use of cultural *concepts* that were part of Israel’s culture, but may not be part of ours. For example, ritual states were a common part of Ancient Near Eastern culture (see pp. 44–45 and at 12:1–4). One way in which

the Lord made use of this cultural concept was to instruct the Israelites to deal properly with their ritual impurities, so that they did not defile his holy home (see at 15:31). This would have clearly communicated to them the value that the Lord puts on his people respecting his distinct and holy character. For those unfamiliar with ritual states, however, these laws might again appear strange.

In short, accommodation means that the Lord expresses his values using cultural realities that the original hearers could understand (see also Ross, 2002: 21–33). But it is equally important to clarify what accommodation does not mean: namely, that the Lord simply adopts the cultural values of the people in question. In fact, the Lord often gives laws *contrary* to the cultural realities of the day. Leviticus 18 and 20 contain a long list of sexually immoral practices that were widespread cultural realities among the peoples of Canaan, yet the Lord could not be clearer that these practices were completely unacceptable (see 18:24–30; 20:22–26). So, while the Lord often communicates his values by using cultural *realities* with which the hearers are familiar (accommodation), he speaks against cultural *values* whenever they do not align with his.

Understanding accommodation is important in trying to answer one of the questions that often confronts us in reading Leviticus: How do the laws of this book apply today?

b. Which laws of Leviticus apply today, and how do they apply?

To answer these questions, it is important to recognize that laws are expressions of the values of the lawgiver. For example, because most societies value life, they have very clear laws prohibiting murder; because they value the right to personal property, they have very clear laws against stealing. So too with the laws the Lord gives in Leviticus: they are an expression of his values. The reason he commands the Israelites not to collect every last bit of the harvest, but to leave some for the needy, is because he values showing generous care to the poor (see at 19:9–10). This connection between the Lord's laws and his values is important for the simple reason that, since his values flow from his character, and his character is perfect and constant (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; Jas 1:17), it should be expected that the values behind these laws will have some application today. Stated differently, these laws give us a window into the Lord's heart, meaning there is much to learn from them for those seeking to reflect his image well.

But there are three reasons that make it necessary to be even more specific. First, from the perspective of redemptive history, the laws of Leviticus belong to

the Sinai covenant, which is no longer in force because Jesus has inaugurated a new covenant (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8:6–13). It would therefore be wrong simply to assume that all these laws are equally valid today. Naturally, some of them are repeated elsewhere (‘Love your neighbour as yourself ’ occurs no fewer than seven times in the New Testament), so it would also be wrong simply to assume that none of them is in equal force today. Still, it should not surprise us if at least some of these laws are no longer in force today.

Secondly, it must also be noted that the laws of Leviticus are an expression of the Lord’s values in a specific historical-cultural context that is often very different from our own (see pp. 55–56). This in turn means that, even when a law is still in force (such as caring for the needy: Gal. 2:10; Jas 1:27), obedience to it might look different today. For example, leaving some of your field unharvested for the needy would do no good if you live far out in the countryside, where the needy have no access to it (cf. Lev. 19:9–10). Caring for the needy will have to manifest itself in different ways today.

Thirdly, because all of these laws are based on the Lord’s unchanging values (see above), even those no longer in force will have something to teach us about the sort of values we are to have if we are to reflect the Lord’s character in this world. Stated differently, these laws still remind us of God’s moral character – who he is – and call us to embody his character in our lives and in the world.

These three observations bring us back to the original questions: Which laws of Leviticus apply today, and how do they apply? We may summarize the above by saying that, while not every law is in force today as it was originally expressed, the values embodied in every law remain valid and should be lived out by the people of God today. To bring further clarity, the laws are grouped here into at least four categories.

	Repeated in the New Testament	Value behind the law still applicable
Category 1	Yes	Yes
Category 2	No, because of cultural reasons	Yes
Category	No, because they have been set aside by Jesus, or	Yes

3	concern rituals which he has fulfilled	
Category 4	No, because they were particularly related to Israel as a theocratic nation	Yes

First, some laws are still in force because they are repeated in the New Testament, for example, laws regarding idolatry (Lev. 19:4; 1 Cor. 10:7), lying (Lev. 19:11; Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9) or loving your neighbour as yourself (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19). Although obeying these laws will sometimes take different shape in different cultures (as when a culture's idols differ from those of ancient Israel), the laws themselves are still in force.

The next three categories are similar in that they involve laws that are not repeated in the New Testament, but are still meant to teach us about faithful covenant living because they reflect the Lord's values. For each of these, there is a different explanation as to why the law is not repeated in the New Testament.

In some instances, laws are not repeated because of cultural changes that have taken place. For example, Leviticus 20:2–5 forbids the Israelites from worshipping Molek. This is not repeated in the New Testament, perhaps simply because Molek worship did not exist among those to whom the New Testament was written. The value behind this law, however, still applies: the Lord is the only one we are to worship, a point Jesus himself emphasizes (Matt. 4:10).

In other instances, laws are not repeated in the New Testament because they have been set aside by Jesus or concern rituals he has fulfilled. As an example of the former, Jesus sets aside the idea of ritual purity and impurity (Mark 7:19; cf. Acts 15; Rom. 14:14; Eph. 2:11–22). As noted above (p. 56), the concept of ritual states was a cultural reality in ancient Israel that the Lord used to communicate his values. The concept itself was neither right nor wrong; it was simply a reality that God could use for his purposes. As such, it was also a concept that could at some point be left behind. The value communicated by means of that concept, however, is one the Lord continues to underscore: the need for moral purity (see context of Mark 7:19; see also Wright, 2004: 299). In keeping with this, the New Testament repeatedly emphasizes the Lord's desire for absolute moral purity in our lives (Matt. 5:8; Phil. 2:14–15; Col. 3:1–17; Jas 3:17). The value he places on this remains unchanged.

As for the rituals Jesus has fulfilled, these centre on his role as both priest and atoning sacrifice. In the Old Testament, one of the key jobs of the priest was to present atoning sacrifice on behalf of the people, so that they could stay in relationship with God (Lev. 4:20; 16:32–33). Naturally, because the priests

themselves were also sinners, they had to present atoning sacrifice on their own behalf as well (Lev. 16:11). Jesus, however, comes as the ultimate High Priest (Heb. 4:14; 10:21), the one without any sin (Heb. 9:14; cf. 9:7), who offers himself as the supreme sacrifice that cleanses all our sin (Heb. 1:3; 7:26–27), and therefore gives us confidence to draw near to God (Heb. 10:19–22). Because Jesus continues in this priestly work to this day, and because his sacrifice was so great and so effective that it dealt fully with our sin, priests and sacrifices are no longer needed (Heb. 7:11–28; 10:11–18), and the laws that relate to them are no longer in force. Still, there is much to learn from the values behind these laws: namely, that sinful people need forgiveness if they are to continue in relationship with God. This is, in fact, the heart of the gospel: Jesus is the one who not only intercedes on our behalf, but also provides himself as the means by which our sins can be forgiven. In this regard, the cross becomes the ultimate expression of how deeply the Lord values that his people be forgiven and remain in relationship with him.

Finally, some laws are no longer in force because they were particularly related to Israel as a theocratic nation: that is, as a place where the covenant people of God (the Israelites) and the state (Israel) were one and the same. For example, idolaters in ancient Israel were to be stoned, because they were committing treason against the Lord as covenant King of the nation. Significantly, however, Israelites were not commanded to stone idolaters they came across outside of the nation. To be sure, the idolatry was still sinful and abhorrent, and those committing it would indeed face the Lord's judgment at some point, but it was not the Israelites' place automatically to execute justice for such things outside the bounds of their own nation-state. In the new covenant, it is the church that is in covenant relationship with the Lord, not modern nations. As was the case with Israel, the church is responsible for bringing justice to bear against one of its members who commits idolatry, but this does not extend to those who are not in its membership. Notably, this justice is expressed differently today from how it was in Israel's day, because corporal punishment is now in the hands of the state (Rom. 13:4), rather than the church. As a result, the idolater is excommunicated (1 Cor. 5:11), not stoned. Once again, however, the value still applies: idolatry is unacceptable among the people of God.[13]

In sum, though not every law in Leviticus is in force today, and though the expression of the laws that are in force may differ, the values embodied in all of these laws are just as applicable today as then.[14] These values are in fact to be embodied by the people of God as a way of showing to the world the holy and gracious character of the Lord, the one who gives these laws so that his people

might prosper in their ways and create a society of goodness, justice, mercy, holiness and love.

c. Law and penalty

At various points, Leviticus identifies penalties for those who break the Lord's laws (pp. 63–65). Some of these penalties – such as stoning an idolater to death (20:2) – may seem overly harsh or even unjust to many moderns, especially to those from cultures where penalties such as capital punishment have been abolished. This cultural difference makes it especially important to begin our approach to law and penalty by considering the original cultural- historical context in which they occur. We can do so by asking a series of questions.

i. What are the goals of penalties in Hebrew law?

Generally speaking, Israelite law shows a wide range of goals when it comes to its penalties for breaking law. Wright (2004: 310) identifies several of these by considering Deuteronomy 19:18–20 and 25:1–3:

- *Retribution*. The offender was to suffer his just deserts, which should be appropriate to the offence. That is the significance and justification of the *lex talionis* ('an eye for an eye', etc.) principle. Contrary to the popular and quite mistaken use of the phrase to mean unlimited vengeance, this was a simple, and almost certainly metaphorical, way of decreeing proportionality in punishment [see at 24:17–22]. It was a law of limitation, *preventing* excessive or vengeful punishments. It was a handy way of saying that the punishment must fit the crime.[15]
- *Purging*. Guilt had to be 'wiped away' from God's sight.
- *Deterrence*. 'All Israel shall hear *and fear*'; that is, be afraid to do the same.
- *Restoration*. The offender remained a brother and was not to be degraded.
- Compensation. Restitution was made to the injured party – not to the state as a fine.

This list shows that Israelite law is very different from a primitive 'eye-for-an-eye' system of vengeance. Indeed, the penalties it prescribes have the same goals as penalties in many of our modern law systems.

Individual biblical laws, like many modern laws, often have a mix of these goals (although typically not all of them). When the laws of Leviticus are taken together as a whole, each one of the above goals may be seen at one place or another. As the following section will show, the more serious the offence, the

more likely that the first three of these goals is in operation.

ii. What are the penalties listed in Leviticus in particular?

Inadvertent breaches of law and a few intentional breaches were covered by sacrifice (pp. 42–44) and, in relevant cases, required the payment of damages (e.g. Lev. 6:1–5). But for what may be identified as 'high-handed' breaches of law (p. 43), three specific penalties are identified: death, being 'cut off ', and having one's genealogical line come to an end in Israel. Since Leviticus 20 mentions all three, we will use it as the context to describe each penalty.

As an initial observation, it may be noted that, while in some cases the Lord himself became directly involved in carrying out the penalty (see at 20:1–5, 6), in most cases it was carried out by the people of the community (20:2). They were presumably led by their elders, who would gather to hear the evidence before ruling (cf. Deut. 21:18–21; 22:13–19). This ensured that the accused had due access to the law (cf. Num. 35:22–25, 30; Deut. 17:2–6).

The first penalty mentioned is death (20:2–6, 9–16, 27). It was required for wrongs that were either direct treason against the Lord (such as worshipping other gods, 20:2–3), or so contrary to the Lord's design for his holy people that they were considered treasonous (such as various types of sexual immorality, 20:10–16). As is often the case with treason – even in many modern societies – death is the result (1 Sam. 11:12; 1 Kgs 1:52; see further at pp. 65–66).

Two laws specify stoning as the method of death (20:2, 27), and this same method is probably to be assumed for the remaining laws as well (cf. 20:9 with Deut. 21:18–21; see also Lev. 24:14, 16, 23). Such public executions, with community involvement, would not only underscore ethical standards to the community, but also serve as a strong warning against such behaviours (Deut. 13:10–11). The strength of such a warning is lost on many modern societies, where penalties are far removed from the everyday community experience, but in ancient Israel there was an immediacy to the experience that served as a very strong warning indeed.[16]

The second penalty mentioned is being 'cut off ' (20:17–19). As noted at 7:19–21, this refers to being removed from the covenant community, either by death or by exile (for a full discussion, see Hobson, 2010). Either was considered a horrible fate, since even exile was like a living death, a declaration by the covenant community that the sinner was an apostate, who had rebelled against the Lord and should therefore expect the Lord's opposition. Furthermore, the sinner's genealogical line could end, if they did not yet have children (in the case of death) or if their children were young enough to be exiled with them (in the case of exile). This was a severe threat to ancient Israelites, who placed great

value on descendants so that they might have an ongoing presence in the world in general and in their people Israel in particular (cf. Gen. 15:2–3; Deut. 25:5–6).

It is worth noting at this point that, if the fate of exile for the nation as a whole is a model (Lev. 26:40–45; cf. Ezek. 33:10–20), then individual exiled apostates could restore their relationship with the Lord by turning from their sin, and could perhaps at some point even return from exile (cf. Lev. 26:33 with 26:40–45). Sadly, many hearts, once hardened by sin, never become soft again.

The third penalty is to have one's genealogical line come to an end in Israel (20:20–21). The term describing this penalty (*'ărîrî*) sometimes means 'childless' (Gen. 15:2–3) and sometimes 'considered to be childless' (Jer. 22:30). It is not clear whether one or both meanings are in view here. In either case, sinners suffered the fate of their genealogy coming to an end within the people of God. While this is a lesser penalty than being put to death or exiled from the community, it was still considered a horrible fate (see above).

iii. Why are these penalties so serious?

The reason for such serious penalties becomes clear when it is remembered that the very existence of the Israelites depended on their covenant relationship with the Lord, their King, and that the wrongs identified in various places, such as Leviticus 20, were serious enough to threaten that relationship. False worship (20:1–5) and divination (20:6, 27) were direct acts of treason, a repudiation of the Lord's kingship. Likewise, acts that undermined the family could also be considered treasonous, insofar as the family structure was foundational to the covenant:

> The family played a central role in the experience, preservation and transmission of that covenant relationship [cf. Deut. 6:7], and therefore actions which threatened the family, either by serious and flagrant disregard for parental authority [Lev. 20:9], or by sexual deviation and disruption [20:10–17, 19–21], by their very nature also threatened the covenantal foundation of the social system.[17]

These were a threat not only to the covenant relationship between the Lord and the sinner, but also to that between the Lord and the people, who were extremely susceptible to following such negative examples (Deut. 7:3–4).

In short, breaking these laws amounted to serious acts of treason against the covenant King and his covenant people, and were to be dealt with swiftly and seriously, not only because this was the appropriate response to treason against a king and his kingdom, but also for the sake of Israel and the world. For the sake of Israel, because dealing seriously with sin both protected the Israelites from the dangers of rebelling against the King and kept them within the sphere of the

Lord's blessing and favour. For the sake of the world, because Israel's mission was to show the world how to live in fellowship with her Creator, and this could happen only if the Israelites themselves walked in close fellowship with him. This means that the seriousness of these penalties was actually strongly humanitarian: the goal was to protect the people of God so they could be a kingdom of priests to the nations, loving them, praying for them and teaching them what it means to live in relationship with their Creator.

iv. How do these penalties compare with other Ancient Near Eastern collections of law?

This humanitarian emphasis comes into sharper focus when Israelite law is compared with other collections of law from the Ancient Near East. Several such collections have been discovered, for example, the Hittite Laws (HL), the Laws of Hammurabi (LH), and the Middle Assyrian Laws (MAL; for translations, see *ANET*, pp. 159–198). Comparison between Israelite law and these other collections reveals at least three distinctives of Israelite law.

First, crimes against humans are far more serious than crimes against property (24:21; cf. also vv. 17 and 18). This fits well with the biblical teaching that humans are created in God's image and therefore have special worth (Gen. 1:26–27; 9:5–6). It also explains why murder is a capital offence in ancient Israel, although crimes against property are not.[18] This distinction between human life and property contrasts with some Ancient Near Eastern law collections, one of which blurs this distinction by making both attempted murder and theft a capital offence (LH §1–2, 6–11, 21–22, 25), and another of which does the same by imposing fines for both murder and theft (HL §1–6, 57–59).

The second distinctive is the equality of all social classes under the law, while the third is a prohibition against substitutionary punishment. So Wright (2004: 310):

> There is also no trace in Old Testament law of any gradation of penalties according to the social class and rank of the offended party. In Mesopotamian law an injury to a nobleman would commonly entail a far heavier penalty than an identical injury done to a commoner or slave [see LH §196–198]. In Israel, by contrast, equality before the law for all social groups, including aliens and immigrants, is made explicit in Exodus 12:49, Leviticus 19:34 and Numbers 15:16. Furthermore, substitutionary punishment was excluded. For example in the Code of Hammurabi, if a house collapsed and killed the house-owner's son, then the *son* of the house-builder (not the man himself) was to be put to death. Deuteronomy 24:16 forbade this on principle, and in the law of the goring ox...the penalty is clearly stated to be constant, even if the ox killed a son or daughter (Exod. 21:31).

The end result is that the Israelite system was strongly humanitarian in focus, underscoring the value of human life, the equality of all people under the law, and the importance of the guilty parties themselves being held to account for

their actions. This humanitarian focus is important in addressing the next question.

v. Were these penalties required or simply the maximum allowed?

The final question concerns how various penalties were (or were not) applied. Broadly speaking, there are two main approaches, and these may be illustrated with regard to laws on adultery and murder, both of which call for the death penalty (Lev. 20:10; Num. 35:16–21). The first approach argues that the prescribed penalty must be carried out (see Greenberg, 1960; Paul, 1970; Phillips, 1970). The second approach argues that the laws may contain unstated assumptions that would have been well known to the society receiving the law: for example, the offended party could accept a monetary payment from the adulterer, so that the death penalty was avoided (see Jackson, 1973; Loewenstamm, 1980). As a result, the penalty prescribed is comparable to a 'maximum sentence' in modern law: that is, it identified the legally permissible maximum penalty, but did not require that it be carried out.

In favour of the 'maximum sentence' approach, it is pointed out that Proverbs 6:27–35 assumes that monetary payments could be made to husbands whose wives had cheated on them, and that such payments would take the place of any other penalty. Similarly, Numbers 35:31 warns the Israelites not to allow a ransom payment to be made in the case of murder, which again implies that such payments were practised in ancient Israel. 'A legislator does not waste his energy in condemnation of acts which are not done' (Jackson, 1973: 24).

However, the question is not whether these monetary payments were accepted in lieu of greater punishment, but rather whether it was considered ethically legitimate to do so. In both texts cited above, the answer seems to be 'no'. In Proverbs 6:35, the monetary payment is described as a 'bribe' (*šōḥad*), 'the normal Old Testament word for the payment of money to pervert the course of justice' (Phillips, 1981: 17–18). And Numbers 35:31 makes clear that the existing practice of accepting a monetary payment in lieu of the death penalty must no longer be practised (see further Sklar, 2005: 54–58). Indeed, in several places, the book of Deuteronomy warns people not to 'show pity' (*ḥûs*) on those guilty of various crimes, a word used elsewhere to describe the action of withholding harm from another (1 Sam. 24:11; cf. Jer. 13:14). Instead, it exhorts the Israelites to carry out the full penalty of the law when it came to such things as capital punishment for idolatry (Deut. 13:6–10) or murder (Deut. 19:11–13).

It is possible that these penalties were required only in those instances where the text specifies that no pity be shown, whereas in the remaining instances (such as some of the sexual crimes in Lev. 18 and 20) they were maximum penalties

that could be lessened in the presence of repentance. This should not surprise us, since it would follow the Lord's own lead in sometimes applying mitigated penalties, not maximum ones, to those who committed great sin against him but then repented (see Sklar, 2012: 485–490). At this point, however, we do not have enough information to decide the question one way or another. At the least, it seems clear that in instances such as idolatry or murder, the penalty described is the one that was to be carried out. Such strictness was not meant to negate mercy, but to ensure that the well-being of the people was protected. If standards of hygiene in a hospital are not carefully guarded and enforced, sickness and disease spread all the more quickly. So too among the people of God: if standards of holiness are not carefully guarded and enforced, sin and its consequences spread very quickly indeed (cf. Deut. 7:16; 13:6–11; 17:12–13; 19:16–21; 21:18–21; 1 Cor. 5).

d. Ritual

Modern readers are often confused by the various rituals of Leviticus. So it is especially important to explain their purpose and why the Lord would command them. Two questions are relevant here: What does a ritual do, and how should a ritual be read?

i. What does a ritual do?

Most broadly speaking, a ritual identifies a person, a time or an event as being unique in some way. A birthday celebration identifies that a person is turning one year older. Wearing black can identify that it is a time of mourning. A graduation ceremony identifies that students have finished a course of study. Each of these is a ritual that identifies something as unique.

Significantly, the more important the person, time or event, the more elaborate the ritual tends to become. Going on a first date may involve buying flowers or a meal, while getting married may involve the purchase of many flowers, food for our closest family and friends, the presence of fancy clothes and special music, and so on. The first date is certainly special, but the wedding ceremony is much more so and, as a result, involves a very elaborate ritual.

This means at least two things for the study of Leviticus. First, the more elaborate the ritual, the more likely it is that we are reading of something significant. Of the various holy days in ancient Israel, the most significant was the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16); not surprisingly, it is also one of the most complex rituals. Second, it is not necessary to look suspiciously at the Israelites' use of elaborate rituals in the worship of God. In fact, just the opposite: their use

of elaborate rituals demonstrates the high value they placed on worshipping him. (To this day, elaborate protocols often surround meeting a head of state as a way of showing respect to the person's power and authority.) Indeed, by commanding the Israelites to use these rituals, the Lord was helping them understand that worshipping him was an incredibly important matter. They were coming to worship the King of kings and were therefore to treat this time as special.

It remains the case, however, that the meaning of various elements in these rituals is not always clear, and this leads to the second question.

ii. How should a ritual be read?

Leviticus itself usually does not offer explanations about the meaning of individual ritual actions, probably because the meaning was already evident to the Israelites. Even so, the overall purpose of a given ritual is usually clear, such as in Leviticus 8, where the ordination ritual is meant to make priests of Aaron and his sons. Knowing a ritual's overall purpose helps us understand the significance of various events within the ritual.

To use a modern example, the last wedding ceremony I attended was filled with ritual actions: the bride and groom wore special clothing, exchanged rings and made vows. Because I knew the overall purpose of the ceremony was to make this man and woman a married couple, I could make sense of the ritual actions: the clothing set them apart as the main participants in the ceremony, the rings symbolized their commitment of love to one another, and the oaths were public declarations that they would express their love for a lifetime and in very specific ways. The overall purpose of the ceremony made sense of these details. The same is true with the rituals in Leviticus. Knowing that the purpose of the ceremony in Leviticus 8 is to set Aaron and his sons apart as ritually holy priests, it becomes clear that they undergo a special washing to indicate their movement towards a greater state of purity (v. 6), are given special clothes to indicate their new role (vv. 7–10, 13), and offer a purification offering to atone for their sin and impurity so that they could serve before the holy heavenly King (vv. 14–17) (see further at Lev. 8). Furthermore, reading in this way also helps us understand the values being communicated, whether it is that marriage is a serious and lifelong commitment of love, or that those who serve in the presence of the holy Lord must be especially careful about being holy themselves.

While this approach may not answer every question about ritual actions, it will help to protect us from purely subjective readings of these rites and provide insight into the values that various ritual actions were meant to convey. (For further reading, see Wenham, 1987: 15–19; Gane, 2005: 3–24.)

e. What should Israelites have concluded about the Lord from his requirement of sacrifices?

Another question we can ask involves the Israelites' understanding of sacrifice. Psalm 50 implies that at least some ancient Israelites thought of sacrifice as a way of literally feeding God. In this psalm, the Lord says through the psalmist that he has no need of Israelite offerings, because the whole world belongs to him (vv. 9–12). Indeed, he has no need of sacrifice, because he does not feed on it, a fact he expresses with a rhetorical question: 'Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?' (v. 13). The answer is an obvious 'no'.

That the Lord even had to ask this question indicates that at least some Israelites had come to a mistaken conclusion about how sacrifice worked. But that in itself is the point: it was a *mistaken* conclusion, and he corrects it for that reason. This in turn implies that, when he commanded the Israelites to make these offerings, the Lord wanted them to come to very different conclusions about him and his character. What were these?

The answer depends in part on which sacrifice is being discussed. Sometimes the sacrifices and offerings functioned very much like tribute brought to a ruler, as when the Israelites brought burnt or fellowship offerings to fulfil a vow and give praise to their heavenly King (7:12–18; 22:18–21), or when they brought the firstfruits of their crops as a way of acknowledging the Lord's goodness to them (23:9–14). And sometimes, offerings functioned as a shared covenant meal, as with the fellowship offering (Lev. 3), which emphasized the covenant relationship that existed between Israel and the Lord (see at 3:11). At other times, offerings were meant to make atonement, with the lifeblood of the animal being given in place of the lifeblood of the sinner, so that relationship with the Lord could be restored (see at 17:11). Other purposes of sacrifice are identified throughout the commentary. The point of the above is simply to illustrate that each of these was meant to communicate something different: the Lord was King; the Lord was covenant King; the Lord was both holy and the one who provided a way of forgiveness. The point was never: 'The Lord needs food to live'; it was always: 'The Lord is the covenant King who desires relationship with his people.'

f. Did the sacrifices really atone for sin?

Another question involves the relationship between sacrifice and forgiveness. The book of Leviticus makes clear that sacrificial atonement leads to the sinner being forgiven (4:20, 26; 5:10, etc.). However, the book of Hebrews clearly

states that ‘it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins’ (10:4; cf. 10:11). How are these to be reconciled?

Atoning sacrifice in the Old Testament may be compared to writing a cheque (Williams, 2005: 216). The purpose of the cheque was to cover the debt of sin. The form of the cheque was an animal sacrifice, whose lifeblood was given in place of the sinner’s (see at Lev. 17:11). The Lord in his grace received the cheque and declared the debt paid, graciously assuring forgiveness to the offeror. But he did not cash it. In the grand scheme of things, it is not possible for the lifeblood of an animal to fully ransom the lifeblood of a human. To return to the analogy, the cheque would have bounced. So why did the Lord receive it as payment at the time? Because he knew that there would one day be money in the account to cover the debt: namely, when Jesus gave his lifeblood as the perfect and final ransom for the lifeblood of sinners (Heb. 10:10, 12–14). Stated differently, the atoning sacrifices of the Old Testament were pointers to a much greater atoning sacrifice to come, one that would be enough to cover the debt fully and finally. What must not be missed is that it is the one who has been sinned against who covers the debt for the sinner: ‘But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom. 5:8; cf. at Lev. 17:11).

6. Leviticus and the NT: the ‘how much more’ of Jesus

> The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. *How much more*, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!
> *(Heb. 9:13–14, italics mine)*

‘How much more.’ It is a phrase of comparison which assumes two things to be true: the story of Jesus not only corresponds to the story of the Old Testament; it raises it to an entirely new level of meaning and significance. If what we see in the Old Testa- ment is an acorn, what we see in Jesus is a magnificent oak. This is especially true for the themes of Leviticus.

a. Atonement: Jesus as both priest and sacrifice

When it comes to atonement, Leviticus teaches the following four points. First, atonement is made by priests who present sacrifices on behalf of the people (4:26, 31; 5:6) and on behalf of themselves (16:11). Second, these sacrifices both ransom the sinner from judgment and cleanse his or her sin (pp. 51–53). Third, these atoning sacrifices must be continually repeated, whether for individuals throughout the year each time they sin (4:22–35; 5:1–6), or for the community once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Fourth, atonement is not earned by the Israelites; it is granted to them as a gracious gift from the Lord (p. 54).

With Jesus, how much more. First, he is a perfect priest, who makes atonement for the people, but has no need to make atonement for himself (Heb. 7:26–27). Indeed, because of his perfection, he was able to present himself as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of others (Heb. 9:12, 14, 28; 10:19–22; cf. Isa. 53:11–12). Second, his sacrifice served both to ransom sinners from due punishment (Mark 10:45) and to cleanse them of their sin (1 John 1:9). Third, his one sacrifice has made full and final atonement for sin and does not need to be repeated at all (Heb. 7:26–27; 9:25 – 10:10). It was the ultimate Day of Atonement, in which he entered into the heavenly throne room itself to atone for sin, and atoned for it fully (Heb. 9:24–26). Indeed, his followers are described as being able to do that which Old Testament believers would never dare to do: enter into the Most Holy Place itself to enjoy fellowship with God, a sign that Jesus’ sacrifice has cleansed them fully from sin and his priestly work has made a way of full access to God (Heb. 10:19–22). Finally, Jesus’ sacrifice is the ultimate expression of the Lord’s grace, for now it is no longer guilty sinners presenting a sacrifice on behalf of themselves, but the offended King who is

presenting the atoning sacrifice for the guilty sinner. ‘But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom. 5:8; cf. John 3:16).

If Israelite believers felt the burden of their sin lifted because of priests presenting sacrifices on their behalf, how much more so the Christian because of Jesus’ ultimate and far greater sacrifice on the cross!

b. Jesus as God dwelling in the midst of his people

One of the major themes of Leviticus is that the heavenly King, in his love for his people, comes to dwell in their very midst in the tent of meeting (p. 37). This is taken to a whole new level with Jesus. First, Jesus comes as God in the flesh to dwell among us (John 1:1, 14). It is no longer God in a tent, dwelling among a people, yet physically separated from them in the Most Holy Place. It is now God in the flesh, walking among them, touching them, embracing them, suffering with them and ultimately suffering for them – and for us! – all because of his great love for humanity (2 Cor. 8:9; Heb. 2:14–18; 4:15). Second, God’s presence in the Old Testament was especially associated with the tent (Exod. 40:34–35) and then later the temple (1 Kgs 8:10–11). But since Jesus’ death and resurrection, it is especially associated with his followers, who are described as a ‘holy temple in the Lord’, of which ‘Jesus himself [is] the chief cornerstone’ (Eph. 2:20–21). It is among this people, who are connected to Jesus, where God now dwells by his Spirit and where his people can experience him in joyful fellowship and worship (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:22).

c. Jesus and the return to Eden

Leviticus casts a vision for the people of God, a vision to return to God’s purpose for humanity in creation: to be a holy people, reflecting his character, and in this way spreading in all the earth his kingdom of goodness, justice, mercy and love (pp. 28–30, 40–41). In the New Testament, we see Jesus casting this same vision for his followers. He commands us to pray for this kingdom to come, for God’s will to ‘be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt. 6:10). He teaches us what the laws of the kingdom are and what we must do to demonstrate God’s character (Matt. 5 – 7).

But Jesus does not simply teach us about this kingdom; he has been appointed King over it. Just as kings in the Old Testament were anointed and called ‘son’ of God (1 Sam. 16:13; Ps. 2:7), so too was Jesus, whose baptism was like his coronation, with the Spirit of God coming and anointing him, and God proclaiming, ‘This is my Son’ (Matt. 3:16–17; cf. Phil. 2:9–11; Heb. 1:1–13).

Indeed, Jesus ushers in the kingdom in remarkable new ways that clearly demonstrate his power as King. When he preaches and teaches about the kingdom, he also heals those who are sick (Matt. 4:23) and delivers those who are sorely oppressed by the evil one (Luke 11:14–20). It is as though he is already beginning to undo the effects of the fall and restore humanity to Eden. That is what the King of God's kingdom can do. For this reason, we must be connected to him if we are to spread God's kingdom in the world. Jesus is the vine; we are the branches (John 15:1–8). He is the one who strengthens us to live in the way God has intended; we are dependent on him to do this. The call of the New Testament – the call of Jesus himself – is therefore to follow him as King. As Jesus said to his disciples, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matt. 28:18–20). In short, Jesus is the King, and his disciples must not only follow him, but also teach others to do the same, having courage to do so because King Jesus will be with them to the very end.

And this brings us to the end of the story. In the book of Revelation, the Bible concludes by telling us that a day is coming when King Jesus will fill this entire world fully and completely with his kingdom. It is a day in which heaven comes to earth, when we can eat freely of the fruit of the tree of life, when there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, when the curse of Eden will be fully and finally destroyed, and the blessing of Eden will be experienced by all those who follow Jesus as King (Rev. 21:1–5; 22:1–5). This is the day the people of King Jesus work for, long for and pray for (1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:12). It is a day of such glory and grace that they cannot help but cry, 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22:20).

ANALYSIS

With regard to possible sources behind the text, critical scholars divide Leviticus roughly in two: Leviticus 1 – 16 (the P source) and 17 – 27 (the H source).[19] A principal difference between these sections is that chapters 1 – 16 focus more exclusively on ritual matters related to the tabernacle, while chapters 17 – 27 have an increased focus on moral holiness outside of the tabernacle context.

While this difference is true in a very general way, it is not clear that such a sharp division between 1 – 16 and 17 – 27 is warranted in terms of the book's final literary form. In particular, similar themes are spread throughout both sections: how to offer sacrifice properly (Lev. 1 – 7; 17), the right treatment of holy food (7:15–21; 19:5–8; 22:1–7, 10–16, 29–30), special community holy times (Lev. 16; 23; 25) and the importance of living holy lives as the people of God (11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26).[20] Indeed, chapters 21 – 24, with their focus on tabernacle matters (21 – 23) and the story of judgment (24; cf. Lev. 10), would be equally at home in Leviticus 1 – 16. Moreover, there is a diversity of material within 1 – 16 and 17 – 27 that makes it difficult to describe either section convincingly with one overarching title.[21] It is perhaps therefore preferable to avoid forcing a twofold division on the text's final form, focusing instead on those thematic divisions that seem clearest.

Eight such divisions are identified below, along with their major subsections. For the way in which these eight divisions relate to one another, see *Context* discussion at the beginning of each division's opening chapter.

1. LAWS ON OFFERINGS (1:1 – 7:38)

1. Setting: the Lord speaks from the tent of meeting (1:1)
2. Laws for the Israelites on presenting offerings (1:2 – 6:7)

    1. Laws of burnt offerings (1:2–17)
    2. Laws of grain offerings (2:1–16)
    3. Laws of fellowship offerings (3:1–17)
    4. Laws of purification offerings (4:1 – 5:13)
    5. Laws of reparation offerings (5:14 – 6:7)

3. Laws for the priests and the Israelites on presenting offerings (6:8 – 7:38)

    1. Introduction (6:8–9a)
    2. The law of the continual burnt offering (6:9b–13)
    3. The law of the grain offering (6:14–18)
    4. The priests' continual grain offering (6:19–23)
    5. The law of the purification offering (6:24–30)
    6. The law of the reparation offering (7:1–7)
    7. Related matters on portion distribution among priests (7:8–10)
    8. The law of fellowship offering sacrifices (7:11–36)
    9. Summary of Leviticus 6:8 – 7:38 (7:37–38)

2. PUBLIC WORSHIP AT THE TABERNACLE BEGINS (8:1 – 10:20)

1. The ordination of Aaron and his sons (8:1–36)

    1. Preparation to begin the ordination rites (8:1–4a)
    2. Washing of Aaron and his sons; putting the clothing on Aaron (8:4b–9)
    3. Anointing of the tabernacle complex and Aaron; putting the clothing on Aaron's sons (8:10–13)
    4. The purification offering is presented on behalf of Aaron and his sons (8:14–17)
    5. The burnt offering is presented on behalf of Aaron and his sons (8:18–21)
    6. The ordination offering is presented on behalf of Aaron and his sons; Moses presents a wave offering (8:22–29)
    7. Final consecration and instructions (8:30–36)

2. The inauguration of public worship and the Lord's appearance in glory (9:1–24)

    1. Moses identifies the offerings necessary in order for the Lord to appear to Israel (9:1–5)
    2. Aaron presents these offerings on his own behalf and on the people's behalf so that the Lord may appear to them (9:6–22)
    3. The Lord appears and consumes the public offerings of Aaron and the people (9:23–24)

3. The Lord's appearance in judgment on Nadab and Abihu; his warning to Aaron; Aaron's faithfulness (10:1–20)

    1. The Lord judges Nadab and Abihu with death for failing to revere him (10:1–7)
    2. The Lord's direct warning and exhortation to Aaron (10:8–11)
    3. Aaron shows reverence to the Lord by following proper sacrificial procedure (10:12–20)

3. LAWS ON THE CAUSES AND TREATMENT OF RITUAL IMPURITY (11:1 – 15:33)

1. Laws on pure and impure creatures and how Israel is to relate to them (11:1–47)

    1. Introduction (11:1–2a)
    2. Creatures that Israel may and may not eat (11:2b–23)
    3. Defilement that comes from contact with creatures' carcasses, and how to address it (11:24–40)
    4. Israel may not eat swarming land creatures (11:41–45)
    5. Summary and purpose of the laws of this chapter (11:46–47)

2. A – Laws on ritually defiling bodily fluids lost because of childbirth (12:1–8)

    1. First case: regulations for the birth of a male child (12:1–4)
    2. Second case: regulations for the birth of a female child (12:5)
    3. First and second case: joint regulations for the birth of a male or female child (12:6–8)

3. B – Laws on the ritual status and treatment of various skin conditions and garment or house infestations (13:1 – 14:57)

    1. The ritual status of various skin conditions (13:1–46)
    2. The ritual status and treatment of various garment and leather infestations (13:47–59)
    3. Becoming ritually pure after having a ritually defiling skin condition (14:1–32)
    4. The ritual status and treatment of various house infestations (14:33–53)
    5. Summary: these are the laws for ritually defiling skin diseases or infestations (14:54–57)

4. A' – Further laws on ritually defiling bodily fluids (15:1–33)

    1. Introduction (15:1–2a) and the impurity that comes from abnormal

male discharges (15:2b–15)
2. The impurity that comes from normal male discharges (15:16–18)
3. The impurity that comes from normal female discharges (15:19–24)
4. The impurity that comes from abnormal female discharges (15:25–30)
5. Conclusion and summary (15:31–33)

4. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (16:1–34)

1. General directions for Aaron: how to enter the Most Holy Place (16:1–10)

    1. Introduction and warning (16:1–2)
    2. Aaron is told of the animals, clothing and rites necessary for entering the Most Holy Place (16:3–10)

2. Specific outline of the rites Aaron performs on this day (16:11–28)

    1. The purification offerings: atoning for Israel by cleansing their impurities and sins from the sanctuary (16:11–19)
    2. The ‘ăzā’zēl goat: atoning for Israel by removing their sins from the camp (16:20–22)
    3. The burnt offering: atoning for Israel’s sins (16:23–24)
    4. Additional matters related to the above rites (16:25–28)

3. Directions for Israel: how they are to observe this day (16:29–31)
4. Directions for future generations and concluding statement (16:32–34)

5. LAWS ON THE PROPER SLAUGHTERING AND EATING OF ANIMALS AND THE PROPER USE OF THEIR BLOOD (17:1–16)

1. Introduction (17:1–2)
2. Sacrificial animals may be slaughtered only at the tent of meeting and must be offered there to the Lord (17:3–7)
3. Israelites and resident aliens must offer any whole burnt offerings or sacrifices to the Lord at the tent (17:8–9)
4. Israelites and resident aliens must not eat any blood; the rationale for this prohibition (17:10–12)
5. Israelites and resident aliens must not eat the blood of hunted animals; the rationale for this prohibition (17:13–14)
6. Israelites and resident aliens must purify themselves after eating from an animal that has died of natural causes or been torn by wild animals (17:15–16)

6. LAWS ON LIVING AS THE LORD'S HOLY PEOPLE (18:1 – 20:27)

1. A – Laws forbidding various sexual and worship practices (18:1–30)

    1. Introduction: I am the Lord your God, therefore enjoy life under my favour and blessing by practising my statutes, not those of the land's inhabitants (18:1–5)
    2. Laws forbidding various practices of the land's inhabitants: sexual immorality and illicit worship (18:6–23)
    3. Conclusion: I am the Lord your God, therefore avoid my wrath by practising my statutes, not those of the land's inhabitants (18:24–30)

2. B – The Lord's holy practices for his holy people (19:1–37)

    1. Overarching command: Be holy for the Lord is holy (19:1–2)
    2. Specific commands for holy living (19:3–36)
    3. Summary command: Keep and do all the Lord's commands (19:37)

3. A' – Laws forbidding divination and various sexual and worship practices (20:1–27)

    1. Laws against Molek worship (20:1–5) and seeking out divination (20:6)
    2. Exhortation for the Lord's people to be holy (20:7–8)
    3. Laws against dishonouring parents (20:9) and sexual immorality (20:10–21)
    4. Exhortations for the Lord's people to be holy (20:22–26)
    5. Law against those practising divination (20:27)

7. LAWS ON SHOWING DUE REVERENCE FOR THE LORD'S HOLY THINGS AND HOLY TIMES (21:1 – 24:23)

1. Commands for priests to revere the Lord's holy things (21:1 – 22:16)

    1. Commands for priests about mourning and marriage (21:1–8)
    2. A law regarding priests' daughters (21:9)
    3. Commands for the high priest about mourning and marriage (21:10–15)
    4. Descendants of Aaron who may not officiate (21:16–23)
    5. Conclusion (21:24)
    6. Commands and laws for priests about treating sacred offerings properly (22:1–9)
    7. Commands and laws for priests about guarding sacred offerings properly (22:10–16)

2. Commands for priests and lay people to revere the Lord's holy things (22:17–33)

    1. Proper animals for sacrifice (22:17–25)
    2. Proper sacrificial procedure (22:26–30)
    3. Concluding commands to obedience (22:31–33)

3. Observing the Lord's holy times (23:1–44)

    1. Introduction (23:1–2)
    2. The weekly holy time: the Sabbath (23:3)
    3. The seasonal holy times (23:4–43)
    4. Conclusion (23:44)

4. Two continual rites at the Lord's Holy Place (24:1–9)

    1. Lighting the lamp (24:1–4)
    2. Placing the bread of the presence (24:5–9)

5. Revering the Lord's holy name: a case of blasphemy and principles of

justice (24:10–23)

1. A case of blasphemy (24:10–16)
2. Principles of justice (24:17–22)
3. The Israelites obey the Lord (24:23)

8. LAWS ANTICIPATING LIFE IN THE PROMISED LAND (25:1 – 27:34)

1. A – Laws for the Sabbath and Jubilee years, and for redeeming people and property (25:1–55)

    1. Laws for the Sabbath and Jubilee years (25:1–22)
    2. Laws applying redemption and the Jubilee to those who become poor (25:23–55)

2. B – Covenant blessings and curses (26:1–46)

    1. Obedience to the covenant commanded (26:1–2)
    2. Blessings for the obedient (26:3–13)
    3. Curses for the disobedient (26:14–39)
    4. The Lord’s abundant mercy to a repentant people (26:40–45)
    5. Conclusion (26:46)

3. A' – Further laws related to the Jubilee year and to redeeming people and property (27:1–34)

    1. Laws on voluntary offerings (27:1–24)
    2. A law on setting assessment values (27:25)
    3. Laws on non-voluntary offerings and non-redeemable people or objects (27:26–33)
    4. Conclusion (27:34)

COMMENTARY

1. LAWS ON OFFERINGS (1:1 – 7:38)

The first seven chapters of Leviticus contain laws relating to the major offerings. This is no surprise: the tabernacle had just been built (Exod. 40), and public worship could soon begin (Lev. 8 – 10). But since that worship would involve offerings (Lev. 9), and would require consecrated priests whose ordination ceremony involved offerings (Lev. 8), it makes good sense to begin by describing the major offerings (Lev. 1 – 7).

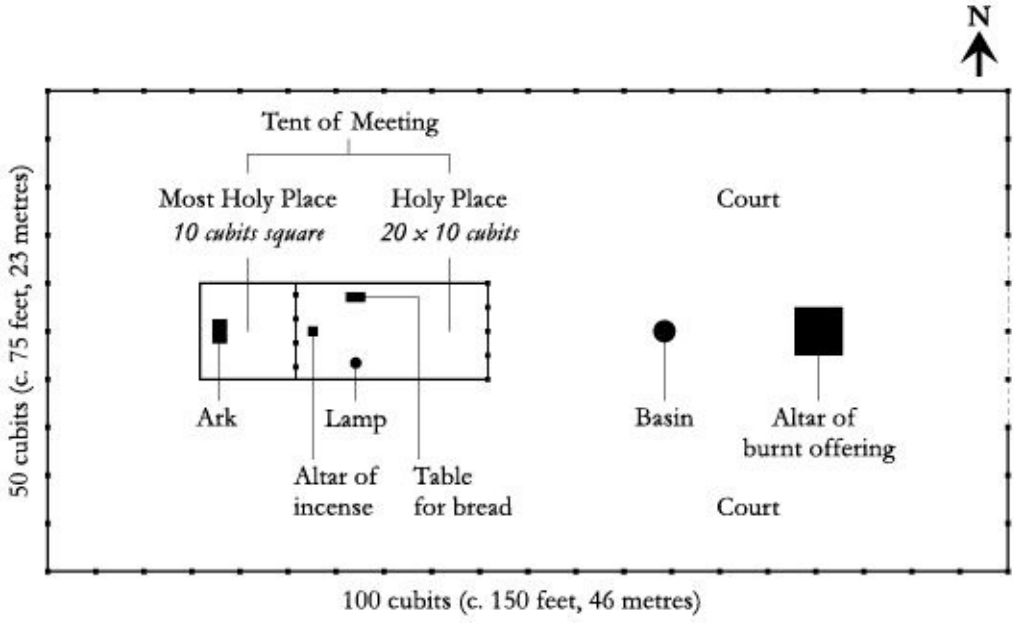
A. Setting: the Lord speaks from the tent of meeting (1:1)

Context

The setting must be kept clearly in mind. The Israelites had just entered into covenant relationship with the Lord, the King of heaven (Exod. 20 – 24). This King has now descended into their midst to take up residence in his 'palace', the tent of meeting (Exod. 40:34). As Leviticus begins, he summons Moses to the palace and gives him covenant laws to pass on to the covenant people. It is these covenant laws that Leviticus is about to describe.

Comment

1. The Lord's glory descends on Mount Sinai twice in Exodus (Exod. 19:16–20; 24:15–17). Each time, the Lord summons Moses (Exod. 19:20; 24:16) and gives him laws for the Israelites. The pattern now repeats itself: the Lord's glory descends on the *tent of meeting* (Exod. 40:34), and the Lord calls Moses (Lev. 1:1) in order to give him laws for the people (Lev. 1:2 – 27:34). The *tent of meeting* is thus a 'portable Sinai', a place of the Lord's presence (Exod. 29:43) and revelation (Exod. 25:22) that will travel in the Israelites' midst.



The *tent of meeting* is described in Exodus 25 – 27. It stood within the tabernacle complex (see diagram) and was ornately designed, with interior linen walls

embroidered with angelic cherubim (Exod. 26:1–2).[22] Such a heavenly setting was appropriate, since it was here that the Lord, the King of heaven, would meet with Moses and the people (Exod. 29:42–43; 30:6, 36). The tent's royal overtones should also not be missed: like a palace, it was decorated with costly materials (cf. 1 Kgs 7:1–12); the ark within the Most Holy Place was the Lord's royal 'footstool' (1 Chr. 28:2), while the carved cherubim on top of the ark served as his royal 'throne' (2 Sam. 6:2); and the people came here to 'stand before' him, just as one came to 'stand before' a king (Lev. 9:5; see further at Introduction, p. 37). In sum, the covenant King (*the LORD*) has come to dwell in his earthly palace (the *tent of meeting*) in the midst of his covenant people (the Israelites).

Meaning

In biblical times, a king who entered into covenant relationship with a people would give them laws that helped them to know how to live as members of his kingdom. The Lord does the very same in Leviticus: he gives covenant laws to his covenant people so that they can be faithful members of his covenant kingdom (see further at Introduction, pp. 37–38). These laws helped them to manifest faithfulness in two ways. First, they let the Israelites know how to maintain covenant fellowship with the King now dwelling in their midst. For example, Leviticus 1 – 5 explains the types of sacrifices to present before him, and Leviticus 12 – 15 teaches how to avoid defiling his holy palace (cf. Lev. 15:31). Second, they let the Israelites know how to reflect the holiness of their covenant King (Lev. 11:44–45), so that they could fulfil their covenant mission: being 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' to 'all the earth' (Exod. 19:4–6). In both instances, the goal was relational: to guide the Israelites in their relationship with their covenant King, as well as with those who live in his world. As Jesus would later affirm, the Lord's laws always have this dual goal in mind (Matt. 22:37–40).

B. Laws for the Israelites on presenting offerings (1:2 – 6:7)

Context

Leviticus 1:2 – 6:7 is addressed to lay Israelites (v. 2; cf. 6:8–9). It contains laws describing how to present the five main offerings (see chart below). Each law is presented as a 'case law', a literary form common in the Ancient Near East (and in many societies today). A case law first states the condition in which the law will apply (the 'protasis') and usually begins with 'if ' or 'when'. The law then states what should happen if the condition is met (the 'apodosis'). Leviticus 1:3 provides a good example:

> If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd (protasis),
> you are to offer a male without defect (apodosis).

Each law in 1:2 – 6:7 follows this basic structure.

Offering	Animals (or materials) used	Use of blood	Priestly portions	Lay portions	Purpose
Burnt (1:3–17)	Cattle, sheep, goats, birds	Splashed on altar sides	No	No	Atonement and/or underscores prayers of petition or praise
Grain (2:1–16)	Fine flour, olive oil, frankincense, salt	[–]	Yes	No	Often mirrors purpose of offering it accompanies
Fellowship (3:1–17)	Cattle, sheep, goats	Splashed on altar sides	Yes	Yes	Underscores covenant fellowship with the Lord and fellow Israelites
Purification (4:1 – 5:13)	Cattle, sheep, goats,	See at Lev. 4:1 – 5:13	Usually	No	Atonement for specific types of sin;

	birds, flour	*Comment*			metaphor of purification
Reparation (5:14 – 6:7)	Cattle, sheep, goats, birds	Splashed on altar sides	Yes	No	Atonement for specific types of sin; metaphor of compensation for wrongdoing

i. Laws of burnt offerings (1:2–17)

This section contains an introduction (v. 2), followed by three case laws about burnt offerings: burnt offerings from the herd (vv. 3–9), burnt offerings from the flock (vv. 10–13) and burnt offerings of birds (vv. 14–17).

Comment

2. Introduction. Just as in Exodus, the Lord commands his prophet Moses to *speak* the following laws *to the Israelites* (Exod. 19:6; 30:31; see also Lev. 4:2; 6:8–9, etc.). Leviticus is thus a divinely communicated word from the Lord to the Israelites, through his servant Moses.

3–9. Burnt offerings from the herd. When presenting a *burnt offering* from the herd or flock, the worshipper brought a *male* animal, *without defect*, to *the entrance of the tent of meeting* (v. 3), and *laid* a *hand on the head* of the animal so that it was *accepted on* his or her *behalf* (v. 4). The animal was then *slaughtered* (v. 5a), and *the priests* collected *the blood* and brought it to *the altar* of burnt offering, on which they *splashed* the blood all around (v. 5b). The animal was then *skinned* and butchered (v. 6; cf. 7:8), and certain pieces of it were *washed* (v. 9a). During this time, the priests were to ensure that there was a suitable *fire on the altar* (v. 7) and then burn the entire animal there (vv. 8, 9b).

3. The Hebrew word for this sacrifice (*‘ôlâ*) is variously translated: ‘burnt offering’ (RSV, NIV, etc.), ‘whole offering’ (NEB), ‘whole burnt offering’ (LXX). The last translation does especially well in conveying that the entire animal was burned up on the altar.

The chapter begins with animals of greatest economic value, namely, *herd* animals. The herd animal was to be a *male* that was ‘without blemish’ (NIV *without defect*), that is, without physical blemishes (see Lev. 22:22–24). Animals with a blemish would be of less economic value and thus not worthy to present to the covenant King (cf. Mal. 1:8). It is less clear why the animal had to be a *male* for burnt offerings (cf. 3:1). It may simply be that this was already the

custom (cf. Gen. 22:13).

The offeror was to bring the animal inside the courtyard and present it at the *entrance to the tent of meeting*, that is, the area in front of the tent's entryway (cf. 2 Sam. 11:9a for this use of the word 'entrance'; it is impossible to know just how close the offeror came to the tent). The reason was so that *it* – or perhaps better 'he' (the offeror) – might be 'acceptable before the LORD' (ESV). The word translated *acceptable* (*rāṣôn*) and the verb *to accept/be accepted* (v. 4; *rāṣâ*) refer to experiencing the Lord's 'favour' and 'pleasure' (see Ps. 30:5a; cf. Mal. 1:10). In sum, the offeror desired the Lord to look on this offering – and any accompanying request – with favour.

4. Having brought the animal, the offeror would *lay* – or perhaps better 'lean' – a *hand* on the animal's head. This part of the ritual has come to be known as the 'hand-leaning rite' and was a regular part of sacrifices (Exod. 29:10; Lev. 3:2; 4:4, etc.).

A basic purpose of this rite was to establish some sort of relationship between the offeror and the animal, so that the animal would *be accepted on* the offeror's *behalf*. This relationship would result in the benefits of the sacrifice – such as *atonement* – being credited to the offeror (cf. Lev. 7:18). It may also have been at this point that the offeror indicated the specific purpose of the offering. In Numbers 5:11–28, for example, the offering is placed in the hands of the woman (v. 18), its purpose is stated (vv. 19–24), and then it is brought by the priest to the altar (vv. 25–26).

The animal was accepted by the Lord to *make atonement* for the offeror. The verb *to make atonement* (*kipper*) has been much discussed. In general, it communicates two ideas: ransoming and purifying. On the one hand, sin or impurity puts the offeror at risk of the Lord's judgment. As a result, the offeror needs ransoming. On the other hand, sin and impurity are defiling. As a result, the offeror also needs purifying. The verb *kipper* refers to both of these: it is a 'ransom-purification', taking place by means of the animal's lifeblood. At times the emphasis might be more on ransoming, and at other times on purifying (just as Jesus' death is at times described as 'ransoming' sinners and at other times as 'purifying' them; cf. Matt. 20:28; Titus 2:14). But in both instances, making atonement results in ransom from the Lord's judgment, as well as purification from sin and impurity (see further at Introduction, pp. 50–53). For atonement and the burnt offering, see *Meaning* below.

5. Atonement is accomplished by means of the animal's lifeblood (see Introduction, pp. 53–54). In order to obtain this blood, the animal had to be *slaughtered*. The NIV translates: *You are to slaughter the...bull*, suggesting that the offeror conducted this part of the ceremony. Other versions and

commentators translate: ‘The bull shall be slaughtered...’ (NRSV; Milgrom, 1991: 33). The Hebrew could be translated either way.[23] Support for the second translation is found in 4:15, which is less ambiguous grammatically, and is most commonly translated ‘...the bull will be slaughtered’ (NIV, ESV, etc.). Slaughtered by whom? Perhaps by the person who brought the offering, though perhaps also by priests or Levites (see at vv. 6–8).

After the bull had been slaughtered, *Aaron’s sons the priests* would *bring the blood* to *the altar*. All rites directly connected to the altar are assigned to the priests (vv. 5, 7, 8, 9). This is because ministering at the altar was a sacred duty and could be performed only by those set apart as holy (Exod. 28:1; Num. 16:40). The *altar* in this instance was the altar of burnt offering, which stood outside *the entrance to the tent of meeting* (see diagram, p. 86). It was a hollow wooden box, overlaid with bronze, and appropriately large for burning large pieces of meat, measuring approximately 7.5 ft × 7.5 ft × 4.5 ft (2.3m × 2.3m × 1.4m).

The priests would take the *blood* – perhaps collecting it in a bowl (Exod. 24:6–8; 27:3) – and *splash* it on the altar. The verb *splash* (*zāraq*) appears to refer to larger amounts of liquid being ‘thrown’, compared with smaller amounts of liquid that were ‘sprinkled’ (*nāzâ*) (cf. Exod. 29:20 [*zāraq*] with 29:21 [*nāzâ*]).

The Hebrew of verse 5b reads literally: ‘And the sons of Aaron...will throw the blood on the altar...’ The Lord echoes these words in Leviticus 17:11, where he states the main purpose of sacrificial blood: ‘And I myself have given [the blood] to you *on the altar* to atone for your lives...’ Thus, in placing the blood ‘on the altar’, the priest presents the animal’s lifeblood to the Lord, accomplishing atonement for the offeror (see further at 17:11.)

6–8. The burnt offering was now *skinned* and *cut into pieces*, that is, butchered into various cuts of meat. (The *head and the fat* [v. 8] are best understood as separate from the cuts of meat [cf. 8:20], and *fat* is better translated here as ‘suet’ [NASV].) Again, we are not told who does this (see v. 5). Skinning and butchering a carcass properly, however, involve great skill, so it would not be surprising if this was done by those who could practise it regularly (such as the priests or Levites; cf. Ezek. 44:11). In any case, the *priests* were clearly responsible to *put* a *fire on the altar* (perhaps live coals) *and arrange wood* on it. (Anyone who has built a fire knows that the wood must be carefully arranged to burn well.) They were then to *arrange the pieces* of the animal on the *burning wood* so that all could ascend as holy smoke to the Lord.

9. Verse 9 introduces an important qualification: certain pieces of the animal were to be *washed with water* before being burned, namely, the *internal organs*

and the legs. Why? It has been suggested that the *internal organs* would include the intestines, which might contain fecal matter, and the legs – or at least the hind legs – could have come in contact with fecal matter as well. Such filth had to be removed before presenting these things to the Lord.

The first section (vv. 3–9) concludes by describing the offering in three ways: *a burnt offering* (see at v. 3), a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. The word translated as *food offering* (*'iššeh*) often describes what is burned up on the altar and thus presented to the Lord as food (3:9, 11; cf. comments at 3:11). The words translated *an aroma pleasing* (*rēaḥ nîḥôaḥ*) occur frequently with *food offerings* (Lev. 2:2; 3:5, etc.). They indicate that a *food offering*'s general purpose was the same as that of all offerings: the Lord's favourable acceptance (see above at 1:3).

10–13. Burnt offerings from the flock. This section considers how to make a burnt offering from the *flock*. It assumes knowledge of verses 3–9, and thus does not repeat every command (such as the hand-leaning rite, v. 4).

10. The *flock* consisted of *sheep* and *goats*. The term for *sheep* (*keśeb*) is understood to refer to the broad-tailed sheep (see at 3:7–9). Both sheep and goats had to be at least eight days old to be suitable for sacrifice (Lev. 22:27).

11. The animal was to be slaughtered at the altar's *north side*. This could have been for practical reasons: the ashes were put somewhere to the altar's east (1:16), and it appears that the laver for washing was somewhere to its west (Exod. 30:17–21); this meant the northern and southern sides were the only places left for slaughtering.

14–17. Burnt offerings from the birds. This final section considers a burnt offering of birds. This was a gracious concession to those too poor to bring a herd or flock animal (Lev. 5:7; 12:8); no-one was to be held back from worshipping the Lord.

14. Two types of *birds* were acceptable for sacrifices: *doves* (or 'turtledoves', RSV) and *young pigeons*. According to Cansdale (1970: 170), both belong to the pigeon family (*Columbidae*). It is not clear why the *pigeon* was to be *young*. Some have suggested that pigeon meat becomes tougher as the bird ages, whereas turtledove meat does not (Milgrom, 1991: 168–169). Others have suggested that adult turtledoves are easily caught, while adult pigeons are not (Cansdale, 1970: 172–173). In either case, *doves* or *young pigeons* would have been much more affordable for the poor.

15. After *wringing off the head and burning it on the altar, the priest* would then *drain the blood* of the bird *on the side of the altar*, in this way presenting it to the Lord (see at v. 5).

16. The first part of this verse is difficult to translate (it uses very rare words).

The overall picture, however, is clear: just as the *internal organs* had to be removed from the herd or flock animal (cf. v. 9), they must also be removed from the bird.[24] Unlike a herd or flock animal, however, the bird's inner parts did not have to be washed, since they were not burned up, but were *thrown east of the altar where the ashes are*. The text does not explain the reason for this difference (probably because the Israelites already understood it).

The *ashes* of the burnt offering – and no doubt all offerings – were placed *east of the altar* (cf. Lev. 6:10). These ashes were to be carried outside the camp to a ritually pure place (4:12; 6:11). Although we cannot be sure why the ash heap was on the east, this placement is logical, since the ashes would then be closest to the courtyard doorway and hence most easily carried out.

17. Finally, the bird's meat is to be *burned on the altar*. It is not clear why the priest *tears* the bird, but does not *divide it completely*. This might help the bird to burn better or make the offering look larger.

Meaning

The burnt offering was the most costly sacrifice: it had to be burned up completely on the altar (vv. 8–9). Unlike grain, purification and reparation offerings (of which the priests ate), and unlike fellowship offerings (of which the priest and the offeror ate), no-one ate any of the burnt offering: it was all given to the Lord.

The reason becomes clear once we understand the burnt offering's purposes. At least two may be identified. The first is atonement (v. 4). For specific instances of sin, Leviticus usually requires a purification or reparation offering (e.g. Lev. 4 – 5). For more general human sinfulness, however, a burnt offering was required (Lev. 8:18–21, 34; 9:7; 16:24; Num. 8:12). In these instances, the burnt offering atoned for sinful offerors, as they came before the Lord's holy presence (see at v. 4). By giving the whole animal to the Lord, offerors acknowledged that their sinfulness before a holy God was so great that only a full and costly ransom payment would suffice. This in fact explains why the death of Jesus on behalf of sinners is described with the language of the burnt offering (cf. 1:9 with Eph. 5:2). Jesus is the ultimate burnt offering that ransoms guilty sinners once and for all, that they might be reconciled to God (Heb. 10:1–10; cf. Introduction, pp. 73–74).

The burnt offering's second purpose was to underscore the offerors' prayers, a type of exclamation point to what they were saying. In some instances, the offerors were underscoring the seriousness of a prayer request (1 Sam. 7:9; 13:8–12; Ps. 20:1–5); by offering the whole animal, they were acknowledging their total dependence on the Lord's help. In other instances, the offerors were

emphasizing prayers of praise and thanksgiving for what the Lord had done (Ps. 66:13, 15); by offering the whole animal, they were acknowledging that the Lord was the one worthy of all praise and glory (cf. 2 Sam. 24:24). In either case – whether petition or praise – the burnt offering served as an exclamation point. Paul picks up on this idea in the context of praise when he exhorts Christians: 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship' (Rom. 12:1). God's mercies in Jesus are so great (Rom. 9 – 11), that the only appropriate response is one of wholehearted devotion (Rom. 12:1).

ii. Laws of grain offerings (2:1–16)

Context

Grain offerings frequently accompanied burnt offerings (Lev. 14:20, 31; 23:12–13, etc.). It is therefore no surprise that the laws of burnt offerings (Lev. 1) are followed by the laws of grain offerings (Lev. 2).

The fact that the two occurred together so frequently should perhaps be expected: Israelites often thought of sacrifices as meals (see at 3:11), and it was common in ancient Israel to serve bread with a meal of meat, especially when the meat was for an honoured guest (Gen. 18:6–7; Judg. 6:19; 13:15–19). Grain offerings, which were often prepared as breads, were thus a very natural accompaniment to burnt offerings, which were given as a 'meal' of meat to the Lord. This also suggests that, when grain offerings accompanied burnt offerings, both offerings were thought of as a single unit that accomplished the same goal.

Leviticus 2 explains the contents and presentation of grain offerings in four main sections: uncooked grain offerings and general overview (vv. 1–3); cooked grain offerings (vv. 4–10); specifications on grain offering ingredients (vv. 11–13); and grain offerings of firstfruits (vv. 14–16).

Comment

Grain offerings could be uncooked flour (vv. 1–3), baked bread (vv. 4–10) or roasted grain (vv. 14–16). They were always to contain salt (v. 13) and oil (vv. 1, 4–7, 15) and would sometimes contain frankincense (vv. 1, 15). The worshipper would take the offering to the priest (2:1–2a), who would bring it to the front of the altar (6:14), take a handful of the edible items (flour/bread/grain, oil, salt), along with all the inedible frankincense (where applicable), and burn them on the altar as a memorial portion (2:2, 9, 16). The rest of the grain offering belonged as food to the priests (2:3, 10; see at 6:19–23 for an exception). Since it was considered most holy, the priests were to eat it in the tabernacle courtyard

(6:16–17).

1–3. Uncooked grain offerings and general overview. The law of verses 1–3 addresses uncooked grain offerings and identifies three common components: *fine flour*, *olive oil* and frankincense.

1. The main component was *flour*. The amount is not specified here, although other texts most commonly require a tenth of an ephah (Exod. 29:40; Lev. 5:11, etc.). The modern equivalent is difficult to identify, with proposals ranging anywhere from 8.8 to 16.3 cups (8.3 to 15.4 metric cups), weighing between 2.8 and 5.1 lb (1.3 and 2.3 kg; Cook, 1988: 1051). Most authorities lean towards the lower end of this scale. In any case, it was far more than a handful.

The flour would have come from either wheat or barley (Ruth 2:23; Joel 1:11). It appears to have been especially well ground, since the term that describes it (*sōlet*) refers to *fine flour* in particular. This is no surprise: the Israelites were presenting it to their covenant King and would thus bring him their very best.

The second component was *olive oil*. The offeror would pour it on the grain offering, before presenting it to the priest (see 5:11 for a rare exception). When the amount of oil is specified, it is always a quarter of a hin (Exod. 29:40; Num. 15:4), that is, anywhere from 0.24 to 0.4 gallons (0.9 to 1.6 litres; Cook, 1988: 1051). Again, most authorities lean towards the lower end of this scale.

The third component was ‘frankincense’ (ESV; the NIV’s *incense* is too broad). The Hebrew term (*lĕbōnâ*) refers to a type of incense made from ‘the gum-resin from various species of the genus *Boswellia*’, a tree found in Southern Arabia (Nielsen, 1986: 60; cf. Jer. 6:20). It is mentioned alongside gold in Isaiah 60:6, suggesting that it was costly. (Centuries later, the magi brought this as a gift fit for a king; Matt. 2:11.) Frankincense not only enhanced the *pleasing aroma* (v. 2); as a costly gift, it also served to acknowledge the Lord’s greatness. Since frankincense is not edible, the offeror would place it *on* the grain offering, but not mix it in, so the priest could take all of it in his hand and burn it as part of the *memorial portion* (v. 2).

A final component, *salt*, was assumed for all offerings (and perhaps for this reason not even mentioned here). See at 2:13.

2–3. The offeror would bring the prepared grain offering to the priests, probably in some sort of vessel (Num. 7:13; Isa. 66:20). A priest would then take a *handful of the flour and oil*, which would have been mixed together, and *all the* frankincense, and burn them as a *memorial portion on the altar* of burnt offering (no grain offering could be made on the incense altar; Exod. 30:9).

What exactly was the function of the *memorial portion*? It was not only to serve as a token of the offering itself, but also, as its name implies, to bring the offeror to the Lord’s ‘remembrance’. This language does not imply that the Lord

had forgotten the offeror. Rather, Israelites used such language to describe the Lord's favour and care towards his people. This could be in a very broad sense, as when the psalmist asks,

> What is man that you *remember him,*
> and the son of man that you *care for him*?
> *(Ps. 8:4, my trans.)*

It can also be used to describe the Lord delivering a person from a specific trial, such as sickness (Isa. 38:3), oppression from enemies (Num. 10:9), or the inability to have children (Gen. 30:22). In short, to be 'remembered' before the Lord was to experience his favour. The grain offering's *memorial portion* was therefore burned on the altar as *a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the* LORD, serving as the offeror's request to be remembered with favour when presenting praise or petition (see at 1:9; cf. Ps. 20:2–3; Luke 23:42).

After the memorial portion was burned, the *rest of the grain offering* would go to *Aaron and his sons* as food (cf. 7:9–10). The Lord had assigned various portions of the offerings to the priests as their share (6:17–18; 7:34; Num. 18:8). This enabled them to focus their efforts on ministering in the tabernacle. Indeed, when such provision was not made, the worship of God could suffer (cf. Neh. 13:10–11). It was therefore vital for the people to provide for those who ministered (a principle that Paul applies to ministers of the gospel: see 1 Cor. 9:13–14; Gal. 6:6).

It may finally be noted that offerings were divided into two categories: holy and *most holy* (see 21:22). Holy offerings – such as the fellowship offering (19:5, 8) – could be eaten in a ritually pure place by priests and their families (10:14), as well as by worshippers (7:15–18; 19:5–6). *Most holy* offerings – such as the remainder of the grain offering – had to be eaten in a holy place (10:12–13) and only by ritually holy people (*Aaron and his sons*, although not their families; 6:16–18). The text does not explain why some offerings are holy and others most holy, but it does identify which category an offering belongs to, so that it is treated properly.

4–10. Cooked grain offerings. Cooked grain offerings were unleavened (vv. 11–12) and could be prepared in three different ways: in an *oven* (v. 4), on a *griddle* (vv. 5–6) or in a *pan* (v. 7).

4. *Ovens* in ancient Israel were made of clay and were 'about 70–100 cm. (27–39 in.) high and 50–60 cm. (20–24 in.) wide...' (Howard, 1986: 622). Bread was made in an oven as follows: 'A fire was first built on a layer of small stones on the oven floor. Then the coals were raked or scooped out so that the bread dough could be placed against the hot inner walls (though occasionally outside as well),

or on the hot stones, and peeled off when done' (Howard, 1986: 622). The resulting breads were apparently soft (van Selms, 1979: 542; cf. vv. 5–6).

Two types of breads were prepared in (or on) an oven: *thick loaves* and *thin loaves*. A *thick loaf* was to be made of flour and oil (cf. 1 Kgs 17:12). It is not clear whether the flour of a *thin loaf was mixed with oil or water, although it was brushed with olive oil when baked.*

These two breads occur together throughout sacrificial texts from Exodus to Numbers. Interestingly, they were included on especially holy occasions (Exod. 29:2; Lev. 8:26; Num. 6:15), suggesting that these grain offerings might have been some of the choicest that could be offered.

5–6. A second type of unleavened bread was made on an iron or clay *griddle*: 'It is a flat bowl, put with the convex side up over a fire, and the cakes are thrown on the outside' (van Selms, 1979: 542). Griddle cakes were 'hard and thin' (van Selms, 1979: 542) and were to be *crumbled* before being presented to the priest, perhaps to allow him to take a handful as the memorial portion (vv. 2, 9). After crumbling it, the offeror would *pour oil on it* and probably place frankincense on it as well (v. 1).

7. Finally, breads could also be made *in a pan*. 'Softer and thicker [than the cakes made on the griddle] are those made with the help of the frying pan...(Lev. 2:7; 7:9), a deeper bowl which may have a lid', which presupposes 'the use of oil' (van Selms, 1979: 542).

8–10. With minor variations in phrasing, these verses basically repeat verses 2–3. Although not mentioned here, it is likely that the offeror also placed oil and frankincense on the offering (v. 1b). (Note that when grain offerings are not to contain these things, they are specifically prohibited; cf. Num. 5:15.)

11–13. Specifications on grain offering ingredients. These verses now give further specifications on ingredients, prohibiting *yeast* and *honey* (vv. 11–12), and requiring *salt* (v. 13).

11–12. Grain offerings could not contain *yeast* or *honey*. *Yeast* perhaps refers here to a sourdough 'starter' that already contained wild yeast cells (the Israelites did not have the commercial yeast we use today). *Honey* could refer to the honey of bees (Judg. 14:8) or perhaps to the 'honey' (i.e. 'nectar') of fruits such as dates (cf. 2 Chr. 31:5) (Milgrom, 1991: 189). In either case, it may be mentioned here because it is rich in sugars and might have been used to speed the leavening process. (Yeast causes breads to rise by producing gases, as it consumes the flour's natural sugars.)

Yeast and honey are clearly prohibited from being burned on the altar (the prohibition is stated twice in vv. 11–12). Why? Proposals include: 1. as leavening agents, they were associated with corruption and were thus prohibited

from the altar (Keil, 1988: 295); 2. leavening agents cause ‘changes’ in the dough and were thus ‘suspect’, since change was not in keeping with the emphasis in Leviticus on ‘order’ and keeping ‘each in its proper place’ (Budd, 1996: 60); and – with reference to yeast in particular – 3. it was ‘a living organism and only dead things could be burned on the altar in sacrifice’ (Wenham, 1979: 71). There is no reason to deny any of these proposals, although the text itself provides no further clues as to which – if any – might be correct. At this point in our knowledge we cannot move beyond the realm of speculation.

Verse 12 clarifies that yeast and honey could be brought as an offering of *firstfruits* (presumably because firstfruits were not burned on the altar). The Israelites had been commanded to offer the first of their harvest to the Lord (Exod. 23:16; cf. Lev. 23:15–21); these would go in turn to support the priests (Lev. 23:20; Num. 18:12–13).

13. While grain offerings could not have yeast or honey (vv. 11–12), *all grain offerings* were to have *salt* (v. 13a). Indeed, *all offerings* were to have salt (v. 13b; cf. Ezek. 43:24). The salt is called *the salt of the covenant of your God*. In covenantal contexts, *salt* underscored the covenant’s permanence (see Num. 18:19; 2 Chr. 13:5). The *covenant* in mind here is that which the Israelites had just entered into with the Lord in Exodus (Exod. 20 – 24). The *salt* served as a constant affirmation of this covenant relationship (for the implications of which, see *Meaning* below).

14–16. Grain offerings of firstfruits. The chapter’s final section addresses a grain offering of *firstfruits*.[25] This was to consist of *roasted* grain, a food commonly enjoyed in ancient Israel (Lev. 23:14; Josh. 5:11, etc.). One method of preparation was as follows: ‘The ears are...burnt along with the stalks before they are quite ripe, and then rubbed out in a sieve...’ (Keil, 1988: 296). This seems to be the preparation method indicated in verse 14: the *heads* (or ‘ears’) were *roasted in the fire* and then rubbed in order to get the grain. The reasons for presenting firstfruits are discussed at 23:9–14.

Verses 15–16 summarize the instructions of verses 1b–2 above. Although not mentioned here, it is likely that the priests ate the remainder of the offering (v. 3).

Meaning

As noted under *Context*, grain offerings often accompanied burnt offerings and would have shared the same purpose (for the burnt offering’s possible purposes, see *Meaning* ; p. 87). This chapter, however, highlights an element not mentioned in Leviticus 1, an element that would have been full of meaning to an ancient Israelite: *the salt of the covenant* (v. 13).

As noted at verse 13, salt represented the permanence of the covenant that the Israelites had just entered into with the Lord (Exod. 20 – 24). By requiring the Israelites to add salt to their offerings, the Lord provided a way for them constantly to affirm their covenant relationship with him. This affirmation would have greatly encouraged the people, by reminding them of the Lord's steadfast commitment to be their covenant King. They especially needed this encouragement as they prepared to enter the Promised Land and establish God's kingdom there. Only the presence of their covenant King in their midst could give them confidence in the success of their mission. (It is no different for the Christian today; this is no doubt why Jesus assures us of his presence when giving us our covenant mission; Matt. 28:18–20.)

As well as being an encouragement, the requirement of the salt of the covenant served to remind the Israelites of their covenant obligations. The Lord had chosen them to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exod. 19:6), and the covenant laws he had given them had to be followed in order to show to the nations the Lord's wisdom, righteousness and holiness (Lev. 20:24b–26; Deut. 4:5–8). Jesus picks up on the same principle when he tells his disciples, 'In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven' (Matt. 5:16). To follow the King's commands is to reflect the King's character. Believers are to do this in such a radical way that people end up knowing the King's character by seeing how his servants live.

iii. Laws of fellowship offerings (3:1–17)

Context

Leviticus 3 gives the laws of *fellowship offerings* (traditionally 'peace offerings'; see note at 3:11). Like burnt offerings, fellowship offerings were frequently accompanied by grain offerings (Num. 15:1–10; for rationale, see *Context* of Lev. 2). This may explain why fellowship offering laws (Lev. 3) come directly after grain offering laws (Lev. 2).

The chapter's structure is straightforward. It begins with two main laws: fellowship offerings from the herd (3:1–5), and fellowship offerings from the flock (3:6–16). These are followed by a conclusion that prohibits the eating of fat or blood (3:17). This conclusion is no surprise: since this was the only sacrifice from which Israelites could eat, it was important for them to know what parts of the sacrifice they could not eat, namely, the fat and the blood.

Comment

The presentation of a *fellowship offering* was very similar to that of a burnt

offering. The offeror brought an *animal without defect* to the *entrance to the tent of meeting* and performed the hand-leaning rite (vv. 1–2a; cf. 1:4). The animal was then *slaughtered* and butchered, and *the priests* would *throw* the animal's *blood* on the altar and *burn* the sacrificial meat (vv. 2b–5). There was, however, a very important difference: the burnt offering was entirely consumed on the altar, whereas the fellowship offering was not. Instead, only *the fat of the fellowship offering* – the very best part of the meat (see at vv. 3–4) – was *burned on the altar* (vv. 3–5). The rest of the animal was divided between priest (7:31–34) and offeror (7:15–21). So, while the burnt offering was entirely consumed by the Lord, the fellowship offering was consumed by three parties: the Lord, the priest and the offeror. This difference highlights the main way in which the fellowship offering functioned: as a covenant meal, expressing covenant fellowship between the offerors and the Lord (see at 3:11).

1–5. Fellowship offerings from the herd. Not surprisingly, many of the instructions here are similar to those for burnt offerings (Lev. 1). As a result, the following notes will mainly expand on the new elements.

1. While a burnt offering had to be a *male* animal (1:3), a fellowship offering could be either *male* or *female*. The reason for the difference is not stated, though whether *male* or *female*, the very best part of the animal was presented to the Lord (see at vv. 3–4). For the rest of the verse, see at 1:3.

2. The blood rite is the same as that of the burnt offering (1:5). While the fellowship offering's purpose as a whole does not focus on atonement, the blood rite in this verse suggests that atonement is still taking place (cf. Lev. 17:11). This is no great surprise, since the sinful offeror would still need atonement when approaching a most holy God. For the rest of the verse, see at 1:4 and 1:5.

3–4. Unlike the burnt offering, which was entirely burned on the altar, the only part of the fellowship offering to be burned was the *fat*. The rest of the meat was to be split between the priest (7:31–34) and the offeror (7:15–21).

Why was all the *fat* to be burned? Apparently, it represented the best part of the meat – the filet mignon – and was thus the most worthy of giving to the Lord. This is in contrast to many modern cultures, which take a negative view of consuming fat. In ancient Israel, however, meat was a rarity, and the sweet fat was considered the very best portion. Eli's wicked sons, for example, demanded to have the sacrificial meat *before* the fat was burned (1 Sam. 2:15). Indeed, Israelites used the word 'fat' to describe the very best of something, such as the 'finest [lit. fat] of wheat' (Ps. 147:14; see also Gen. 45:18). By presenting the *fat* to the Lord, the Israelites were giving him the very best part and so acknowledging him to be the one most worthy of praise. To present anything less to a king would be an insult. See further at verses 11, 16.

The *fat* of a herd animal consisted of three elements. The first was ‘all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them’ (v. 3b, NIV 1984). This refers to a ‘large net of fat’ spreading over an animal’s innards, as well as the ‘lumps of fat which form themselves between the guts or intestines and are easily detached from them’ (Kalisch, 1867: 491). The second was *both kidneys*, which are covered in fat (Kalisch, 1867: 491; cf. Isa. 34:6) and found *near the loins* (v. 4a), that is, near the back flanks of the animal. The third consisted of the *long lobe of the liver* (v. 4b), that is, ‘the *lobus caudatus* or *processus pyramidalis*, a fingerlike projection from the liver’ that ‘protrudes conspicuously’ and is located ‘close to the right kidney’ (Milgrom, 1991: 208). Its closeness to *the kidneys* could explain why it was to be removed *with* them.[26]

5. The priests are to burn the fat *on top of the burnt offering*, that is, the daily burnt offering (6:12; cf. Exod. 29:38–42). The fat of the fellowship offerings would no doubt aid in burning up the burnt offerings and maintaining the altar fire. For the rest of the verse, see at 1:9.

6–16. Fellowship offerings from the flock. The second law consists of an introduction (v. 6) and a description of two types of flock offerings: those from the sheep (vv. 7–11) and those from the goats (vv. 12–16).

7–9. The Hebrew word *keśeb* refers to a *sheep* (3:7). Since the term is not age-specific, it is better translated as ‘sheep’ (so NRSV), not *lamb* (so NIV, ESV), since most English speakers use the term *lamb* to refer to very young sheep in particular.

As noted at 1:10, the type of sheep referred to here is understood to be the broad-tailed sheep (*Ovis laticaudata*) (FFB, 75). Unlike other sheep, which have a short tail, ‘that of the broad-tailed is long and broad, containing a mass of fat which may weigh up to 13 kg [c. 28 lb]’, and is mentioned in several places as part of the sacrifice (Exod. 29:22; Lev. 3:9; 7:3; 8:25; 9:19) (FFB, 75). It is considered a delicacy in many parts of the world today. This *entire fat tail* was to be burned along with the rest of the *fat*.

11. The fat is to be burned on the altar ‘as food, a food offering to the LORD’ (my trans.). The word *food* is not used because the Lord is ‘hungry’ (see Introduction, p. 71). Rather, its use underscores that this offering functioned like a meal, one in which the Lord, the priests and the offeror(s) all partook.

In ancient Israel, the meal was then, as now, something to be shared with guests, as a sign of hospitality (Gen. 24:32–33, 54; Judg. 19:21). But it could signify much more. On the one hand, it could serve as an occasion to honour others, especially by giving them the very best part of the meal (1 Sam. 9:23–24). In this context, giving the *fat* to the Lord was a way of acknowledging that he was the one most worthy of honour (see at vv. 3–4, 16).

On the other hand, sharing a meal often functioned to confirm a covenant relationship. (Other cultures accomplish the same goal by shaking hands to confirm a deal, or more formally, by signing a contract.) This could take place between two people, as when Isaac and Abimelech entered into a covenant (Gen. 26:28–29), and then confirmed their covenant relationship by feasting together (Gen. 26:30; cf. Gen. 31:44–46, 53–54). It could also take place between the people and the Lord. After the Israelites had entered into covenant relationship with the Lord (Exod. 20 – 24), Moses and several of Israel's leaders went up Mount Sinai to appear before him and to eat a meal (24:9–11), in this way confirming the covenant relationship. Significantly, the meal they ate most likely came from the fellowship offerings that had just been presented (Exod. 24:5; cf. Gen. 31:44–46, 53–54; Deut. 27:1–8).

In short, the fellowship offering meal was a way for Israelites to honour the Lord by giving him the very best of the meat, as well as to reaffirm and celebrate the covenant relationship they enjoyed with him and with one another (see further at *Meaning*, p. 106).[27]

12–15. For *goat*, see at 1:10; for description, see also Genesis 31:12.

16. All three sections of this chapter have stipulated that the fat of the animal is to be burned up on the altar (vv. 3–5, 9–11, 14–16). This verse makes the reason crystal clear: *All the fat is the LORD's. This is in keeping with the above observations: since the fat represented the very best part of the meat (see at vv. 3–4), it had to be given to the person of honour at the meal, namely, the Lord (see at v. 11). Indeed, Eli is rebuked for doing just the opposite: he honoured his sons above the Lord by allowing them to have the fat of the sacrifices (and also partook of the fat himself) (1 Sam. 2:15–17, 29).*

17. Prohibition against consuming fat or blood. *This prohibition fits very logically at this point: since the fellowship offering was the one offering from which the offeror ate, the chapter ends by underscoring the two parts of the animal that the offeror must never eat, namely, the fat and the blood.*

The *fat* prohibition has been commented on above (v. 16). The Israelites are also prohibited from eating *blood*, that is, eating meat that is raw with blood (cf. Gen. 9:4; Deut. 12:23; Milgrom, 1983: 99). Why? One of the main reasons is that the blood represented the animal's life and thus belonged to the Lord, the Creator of all life (Lev. 17:10–12). Israelites were thus prohibited from eating an animal's *blood* – that is, its life – as though it belonged to them instead of to the Lord. Stated positively, by abstaining from the blood, they were acknowledging that the Lord is sovereign over every life (see further at 17:11; for how this applies today, see *Meaning* at Lev. 17).

This law applied to the Israelites *wherever [they] lived* (NIV), or more literally,

‘in all [their] dwellings’ (NASV). The word for ‘dwelling’ (môšāb) is the Hebrew equivalent of ‘home’, and could refer to a house (cf. Exod. 12:19 with 12:20), or to a place where someone was staying temporarily (Lev. 13:46). In either case, the prohibition against eating *fat or blood* applied not only to meals eaten at the tabernacle, but also to meals eaten at home (and thus presumably to the fat and blood of any edible animal, whether sacrificial or not; cf. 17:13–14). As a result, whenever Israelites ate meat, they would be reminded that the Lord was most worthy of honour (by refusing to eat the *fat* as though they deserved honour), and that he was sovereign over every life (by refusing to consume the *blood* as though it belonged to them).

Meaning

In ancient Israel, the closest relationship that could exist between non-relatives was a covenant relationship. By entering into a covenant, two parties were making their relationship official, as well as pledging faithfulness to certain responsibilities. Modern wedding ceremonies provide a helpful parallel: the bride and groom make their relationship official, while pledging faithfulness to their marital responsibilities.

As noted above, Israelites often confirmed a covenant relationship by sharing a meal with the other covenant partner(s). The fellowship offering functioned as this type of meal (see at v. 11), serving as a celebration of the covenant relationship and a rededication to covenant responsibilities.

As a celebration, the offering underscored for Israelites that their covenant partner was none other than the Lord, their redeeming God, who had rescued them from Egypt and was now dwelling in their very midst. Israelites were to honour him as their King with great joy, giving him the very best of the meal and acknowledging his sovereignty over all of life (see at vv. 16, 17). This type of worship is the natural reflex of all those who understand the Lord’s character (Pss 29:2; 96:8; 115:1; Rev. 4:11; 5:9–14).

As a rededication, the offering underscored the Israelites’ call to reflect this great King’s holiness for all to see (Exod. 19:4–6), a holiness that would shine forth as they obeyed his covenant commands (Deut. 4:5–8). These commands would guide the Israelites in loving both their covenant King (Deut. 6:1–9) and their covenant brothers and sisters (Lev. 19:18). Indeed, the fellowship offering was typically eaten with one’s household and other members of the covenant community (Deut. 12:7, 17–19), thus reminding the Israelites that they belonged to a covenant family who were to love and care for one another (Deut. 12:18–19).

The concept of the covenant meal was not just for ancient Israel; it is the very

concept Jesus employs when he establishes the Lord's Supper for members of the new covenant (cf. Luke 22:20 with Exod. 24:8). Like the fellowship offering, the Lord's Supper serves as a time for believers to celebrate the redemption the Lord has won for them, in this instance through the sacrificial death of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26). And, like the fellowship offering, such remembrance propels believers to reaffirm their commitment to their covenant Lord and to their fellow covenant brothers and sisters (1 Cor. 10:17; cf. 11:20–22). Remembering the Lord's redemption is the spring from which a life of wholehearted faithfulness gratefully flows.

iv. Laws of purification offerings (4:1 – 5:13)

Context

The Israelites had five standard offerings. The first three were described in Leviticus 1 – 3: burnt, grain and fellowship offerings. The last two are now described in Leviticus 4:1 – 6:7: the purification offering (traditionally *sin offering*) (4:1 – 5:13) and the reparation offering (traditionally *guilt offering*) (5:14 – 6:7). These last two belong together very naturally, since both focus on making atonement for the offeror.

The purification offering is described first (4:1 – 5:13). This offering addressed either ritual impurity (Lev. 12:6; 14:19, etc.) or, as here, various sins. Leviticus 4 describes these sins generally, saying only that they are unintentional. Leviticus 5:1–13 then describes specific sins – both unintentional (5:2–4) and intentional (5:1) – that this offering addressed.

In order to understand how the purification offering functions, it is important to remember that the Bible often uses the metaphor of impurity to describe sin (Lev. 16:30; 20:3; Ezek. 36:17). The psalmist, for example, cries out to the Lord: 'Wash away all my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin' (Ps. 51:2). We can identify with these words: sin often makes us feel dirty.

But to the Israelites, sin's defiling effects made an impact not only on the sinner, but also on those associated with the sinner. In this way, sin was like dishonour. For example, when children do wrong, they bring dishonour on themselves, as well as on their family, especially their parents. In a similar way, Israelites who committed certain wrongs brought a defiling dishonour on themselves, their nation (their covenant family) and especially on their covenant Lord. This dishonour clung to the Lord's 'home', the tent of meeting (16:16, 19), just as the dishonour of a child's wrong can cling to the parent's home. It was like an unholy dust that arose from their act and settled on the Lord's sanctuary.

How was it to be removed? This section provides the answer: by the purification offering's cleansing blood.

Comment

Broadly speaking, purification offerings from the herd or flock were presented in this way: the offeror brought an animal *without defect* to *the entrance to the tent of meeting* and performed the hand-leaning rite (4:3–4a). The animal was then *slaughtered* (v. 4b), the *priest* performed the *blood* rites (vv. 5–7) and then *burned the fat on the altar* (vv. 8–10). (For bird or grain purification offerings, see at 5:7–10, 11–13.)

More specifically, there were two presentation methods: one for the high priest or congregation (4:3–21) and another for the leader or regular citizen (4:22–35). Four important differences may be observed:

	High priest or congregation (vv. 3–21)	*Leader and regular citizen (vv. 22–35)*
Animal required[28]	Bull	Flock animal (male animal for leader, female animal for citizen)
Blood	Brought into Holy Place; sprinkled 7 times before veil; put on horns of incense altar; remainder poured out at base of burnt offering altar	Put on horns of burnt offering altar; remainder poured out at base of burnt offering altar
Officiant	High priest	Priest
Disposal of meat	Fat burned on burnt offering altar; remainder of meat burned outside the camp	Fat burned on burnt offering altar; remainder of meat eaten by priests (6:24–30)

As noted below, some of these differences underscore the fact that leaders have the greatest responsibility when it comes to following the Lord's commands (see at 4:24–26).

4:1–2. Introduction. Verses 1–2 introduce a new section (vv. 3–35) that

addresses what to do when someone *sins unintentionally* by doing *what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands*.[29]

Sinning unintentionally could involve two possible scenarios. In the first, sinners are aware of a law, but unaware of breaking it (cf. Gen. 20:2–7). For example, Israelites might not realize that they were ritually impure, and eat fellowship offering meat (cf. Lev. 7:20). A modern parallel would be 'overlooking signs and so unwittingly driving the wrong way down a one-way street' (Gane, 2004: 98).

In the second scenario, sinners are not aware of the law to begin with. In either scenario, however, they are held responsible. (The same is true in modern law: one can be liable for breaking the speed limit, even if it is done unintentionally.) In order to atone for their wrong, sinners must bring a purification offering (or in some cases, a reparation offering; see 5:14–19).

3–12. Purification offering of the high priest. Leviticus 4 contains five purification offering laws, each for a different person or group: the high priest (4:3–12); the Israelites as a whole (4:13–21); a leader (4:22–26); a citizen bringing a goat (4:27–31); and a citizen bringing a sheep (4:32–35). The list appears to go from those bearing the most responsibility (high priest) to those bearing the least (citizen).

3. The *anointed priest* was the one on whose head the holy anointing oil had been poured (Lev. 21:10). This act set him apart as the priests' leader (see at 8:10–12), that is, as the 'high priest'.

As is often the case for leaders, the high priest's sin had serious consequences for the entire community. The beginning of this verse is best translated: 'If the anointed priest sins so that the people *suffer guilt's consequences*...' (my trans.).[30] The picture is one in which the high priest commits an inadvertent sin of which he remains unaware (4:2), for example, failing to deal properly with ritual impurity (cf. 5:2–3). Because of his elevated status, his sin's consequences are more serious, and the Lord could withhold his favour from the entire nation (which they might experience in terms of defeat before enemies [cf. Josh. 7:3–5] or lack of blessing on crops [cf. 2 Sam. 21:1]; see further at 10:6–7). This would, in turn, prompt the priest (and the Israelites!) to try to discover whether a wrong had been committed (see further at vv. 13–14a).

When the high priest discovers his sin, he brings a 'bull of the herd' (NRSV; see n. 7, p. 109, for possible rationale). The bull is offered as a 'purification offering' (*ḥaṭṭā't*). Most English versions translate *ḥaṭṭā't* with *sin offering* (NIV, ESV, etc.), no doubt because the word *ḥaṭṭā't* often refers to 'sin' (Lev. 4:14, 23), and the offering clearly addresses sin in some contexts (Lev. 4:20, 26). But this offering also occurs in impurity contexts (Lev. 12:7–8; 14:19–20). In addition, the word

ḥaṭṭā't is built on the same root as a verb which means 'to cleanse, purify' (*ḥiṭṭē'*). Finally, sin and impurity share one important characteristic: both defile (16:19, 30). For these reasons, it seems best to follow many commentators who now label this offering as the 'purification offering': that is, the offering that cleanses defilement, whether sin or impurity (Wenham, 1979: 88–89; Milgrom, 1991: 232; NIV margin).

For *without defect*, see at 1:3.

4. See at 1:3, 4, 5.

5–7. The high priest takes the bull's blood, enters into the Holy Place inside *the tent of meeting* (see diagram, p. 86) and performs two rites: the first to cleanse the Most Holy Place (vv. 5–6) and the second to cleanse the Holy Place (v. 7). In this way, the entire *tent of meeting* will be cleansed.

In the first rite, the high priest *sprinkles* some of the blood *seven times in front of the curtain* that stood before the Most Holy Place (Exod. 26:33). The *sprinkling* of blood, oil or water is often associated with cleansing or consecrating (Lev. 8:11, 30; 16:14–19; Num. 8:7). In this context, cleansing is clearly in view: the high priest's sin had defiled the Lord's home (see *Context*), and was now removed by the sacrifice's cleansing *blood* (cf. 8:15; 16:11–14).

The blood is sprinkled *seven times*. The number *seven* has connotations of completeness and thoroughness in Leviticus: to cleanse a 'major' impurity often required a seven-day waiting period, that is, a thorough wait (12:2; 14:8), and a thorough punishment is one that is carried out seven times (26:18, 21). Sprinkling the blood seven times thus represented a thorough and complete cleansing, while sprinkling it *before the* LORD was to acknowledge that the sin was against him.

The priest was also to *put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense* (for a description of the altar, see Exod. 30:1–10). This altar stood within the Holy Place (see diagram, p. 86), and in this context appears to represent the Holy Place as a whole. Both it and the *altar of burnt offering* had *horns*, that is, 'projections at each of the four corners...[that] were to be of one piece with the altar' (Ball, 1982: 758; see Exod. 27:2; 30:2). Horned altars have been found at several sites in Israel (e.g. Gezer, Dan). The horns represented the altar as a whole, so that by placing the blood on them the priest was cleansing the entire altar (cf. 8:15). (This is known as the *pars pro toto* ['part for the whole'] principle, where an action done to one part of a person or object applies to the person or object as a whole. Cf. 8:23–24.)

Having finished the main cleansing rite, the priest now had to dispose properly of the *rest of the blood*. Since things were given to the Lord by means of the *altar*, and since the blood was the Lord's (see at 3:17; 17:10–12), the

priest now takes *the rest of the bull's blood* and pours it *out at the base of the altar of burnt offering*.

8–10. See at 3:3–4.

11–12. When the purification offering blood was not brought into the Holy Place (4:22–35), the priests would eat the meat (6:24–30). But when it was brought into the Holy Place (4:3–21), then all the meat – along with *the rest of the bull*, including the *hide* – was burned *outside the camp*.

Why? Perhaps because in these latter instances, the priest himself was the sinner (4:3–12) or among the sinners (4:13–21). For him to eat the meat would mean he was in some way profiting from his sin (comparable to a person robbing a bank, turning himself in and then receiving a reward). He is therefore forbidden from eating it.

There was a place *outside the camp* set aside as 'ceremonially pure' (NIV *ceremonially clean*). Since the *ashes* of other sacrifices were brought here (6:11; Num. 19:9), it was logical to burn the remainder of the purification offering bull here as well.

13–21. Purification offering of corporate Israel.

13–14a. The entire *Israelite community* could *sin unintentionally* if they were *unaware* of some material fact (lit. 'a matter was hidden from the eyes of the assembly').[31] The deception of the Israelites by the Gibeonites is a possible example (Josh. 9:15; so Wenham, 1979: 99).

If the fact was hidden, how do they learn that they have sinned? They begin to 'suffer guilt's consequences' (see at 4:3; NIV *realize their guilt*). As a result, they are prompted either to think back over what they might have done wrong or to seek the Lord directly (for the latter, cf. 2 Sam. 21:1; Ps. 139:23–24). Either way, the community eventually becomes aware of *the sin* and makes the appropriate sacrifice. The judgment they experience is thus a mercy that enables them to address their sin and restore fellowship with the Lord.

14b–21. The sacrificial rite here is basically the same as in verses 3–12, although two differences may be noted.

First, the hand-leaning rite is performed by *the elders* (v. 15), who would participate in various ceremonies as the people's representatives (Exod. 18:12; Deut. 21:1–9). As such, the elders' actions stood for the actions of the entire nation.

Second, verse 20 makes explicit what verses 3–12 assume: the priest *makes atonement* for the offerors, and they are *forgiven*. Atonement and forgiveness go hand in hand (4:20, 26; 5:10, etc.). This is because *atonement* can refer to giving a lesser penalty (a ransom) in place of the one deserved (see Introduction, p. 50), while forgiveness can refer to allowing a lesser penalty in place of the one

deserved (cf. Num. 14:11–12 with 14:20 and 14:21–23; see Sklar, 2005: 80–88). In sum, the purification offering serves as a ransom payment, with the animal's lifeblood taking the place of the sinner's. The Lord accepts this payment and extends forgiveness to the offeror. As a result, the blood functions not only to cleanse sin, but also to ransom life (see Introduction, pp. 51–53).

22–35. Purification offerings of leaders (22–26) and citizens (27–35). See *Comment* above for how these offerings differ from those of 4:3–21.

22–23. The *leader* was at the head of various social divisions within Israel, occupying a place of special importance (Num. 1:16; 3:24, 30) and perhaps explaining why he brings a *male goat* (see n. 7, p. 109).

The beginning of verse 23 is best translated with 'or' (AV, ESV): the leader brings his offering either when he 'suffers guilt's consequences' (and subsequently figures out what sin he has committed, v. 22b) or *the sin he has committed becomes known* to him by some other means (v. 23a). This also applies to verses 27–28.

24–26. In this case, the rest of the animal's meat is not burned outside the camp (see at vv. 11–12), but is eaten by the priests (6:24–30), to whom the Lord has given it to provide for their needs (see *Meaning* at 7:8–10, p. 133).

The remaining rites are similar to those of verses 3–21, except that a lesser animal is used (a *male goat*, not a bull), and the blood is not brought as near to the Lord's throne room (it is put on the *horns of the altar of burnt offering*, which was in the courtyard, not on the horns of the incense altar, which was in the Holy Place). These differences are probably due to the fact that, while the leader's sin is serious, the sins of the chief spiritual leader (the high priest) or the congregation as a whole are even more so, therefore calling for a greater animal and an act of cleansing that penetrates even more deeply into the Lord's royal home.

27–35. Ordinary citizens could bring either a *female goat* (vv. 27–31) or a *female* sheep (vv. 32–35; cf. at 3:7–9). See at n. 7, p. 109, for possible rationale. Otherwise, the sacrificial rite was the same as that of the leader.

5:1–13. Further laws on purification offerings of citizens. This section begins by identifying three specific sins that require a purification offering: failing to give testimony (5:1), failing to deal properly with ritual impurity (5:2–3) or failing to fulfil an oath (5:4). It then describes three different items that could be presented as a purification offering, going from most to least expensive: flock animals (5:5–6), birds (5:7–10) and grain (5:11–13).

1–6. Purification offering from the flock.

1. The phrase *a public charge to testify* (NIV) is more literally translated 'a proclamation of an imprecatory oath' (cf. TNK). An imprecatory oath (*'ālâ*) is a

sworn statement with a threat of harm to a guilty party (Num. 5:16–22; cf. 1 Kgs 8:31–32). In 5:1, this means that the threat was made either against any witnesses who failed to testify (cf. NRSV, NIV), or against the person who had committed the crime. (There is a biblical example of the second option [Zech. 5:3], though not of the first.) In either case, the sin is essentially the same: a witness hears an imprecatory oath related to a crime about which he or she has knowledge, but fails to come forward.

The text does not say why the witness fails to come forward. Suggested answers include 'complicity' (Prov. 29:24), being 'influenced by friendship or shame or fear', or 'indifference' (Milgrom, 1991: 294). In any case, failure to testify was a serious sin, because it led to the denial of justice (or at least to its delay). It is thus no surprise that such sinners would 'bear their punishment for iniquity' (*nāśā' 'āwōn*) (NET; the NIV's *will be held responsible* is too weak here). The phrase *nāśā' 'āwōn* is literally 'to bear sin', but the Bible frequently uses terms for 'sin' to refer to sin and its resulting punishment (cf. NASV margin of Gen. 19:15; Zech. 14:18–19). In fact, many verses using the phrase *nāśā' 'āwōn* give explicit descriptions of what the punishment will be (e.g. Lev. 20:20; 24:14–15). To avoid such punishment here, the sinner must confess the sin and bring a purification offering (5:6). (For sacrificial atonement for intentional sin, see Introduction, pp. 43–44.)

2–3. The Hebrew of these verses is challenging. The following comments use the ESV, which has met some of these challenges better than the NIV.

These verses address those who fail to deal properly with ritual impurity. Generally, those who become ritually impure enter into a state that disqualifies them from participating in certain ritual activities (such as the fellowship offering [7:20]; see further at Introduction, p. 45). In 5:2, a person has 'become unclean' by *touching the carcass* of an *unclean* animal (see 11:24–38), and in 5:3, by *touching* some form of *human uncleanness* (see 15:2–12).

Normally, it was not wrong for people to become ritually impure (cf. 11:24–28 and 15:2–12, neither of which prohibit the actions of 5:2–3). But it was wrong for them to leave their impurity unaddressed, because they then risked committing a very serious sin: defiling the Lord's tabernacle (Lev. 15:31) or holy items associated with it (Lev. 7:20–21).

In this instance, impure people have not dealt properly with their impurity because it has been *hidden*, meaning either that they were unaware of having contracted the impurity (so NIV), or, more likely, they had forgotten about it.[32] As in Leviticus 4, they become aware of their sin by suffering guilt's consequences, allowing them to reflect on what they might have done wrong, or to seek an answer from the Lord (see at 4:3, 13–14a).

4. Verse 4 addresses those who *thoughtlessly took an oath*. When Israelites swore *an oath*, they invoked the Lord's name, asking him to bring judgment on them if they were lying or failed to keep a promise (Gen. 31:53; Num. 5:12–27). Failure to keep an oath was thus to profane the Lord's name (Lev. 19:12), since it was tantamount to saying that the Lord was unable to judge effectively. Godly Israelites therefore kept their oaths, whether it benefitted them (their *good*) or was costly to them (their 'harm'). (NIV's *evil* is too strong, making it sound as though the Lord would want someone to keep a sinful vow, which is surely not the case; cf. Ps. 15:4b, where NIV's *even when it hurts* better communicates the idea behind this word [it is the same word as found in this verse].)

In this case, however, the oath has been 'hidden' (ESV), meaning that the sinner forgot it and thus failed to keep it (cf. at vv. 2–3). This is no surprise: rash oaths are often spoken in the heat of the moment and can quickly (and easily) be forgotten. Once again, the sinner becomes aware of the wrong after suffering guilt's consequences (cf. at vv. 2–3).

5–6. Now aware of the wrong, the sinner is to *confess* it. Biblically speaking, confession goes beyond acknowledging the wrong to correcting it where possible (cf. Exod. 22:1; Num. 5:7). In the cases of 5:1–4, the sinner must not only admit the sin, but do whatever possible to make it right. In addition, he or she must seek full reconciliation from the Lord, bringing a *female* animal *from the flock* as a purification offering to *make atonement* (cf. 4:27–35).

7–10. Purification offering from the birds. Those unable to *afford* a flock animal could bring *two doves or two young pigeons*, one as a *purification offering* and the other as a *burnt offering* (see at 1:14–17 for burnt offerings of birds). Regular purification offerings consisted of three main elements: blood on the altar, fat on the altar, and meat for the priests. Birds, however, were not large enough to provide enough fat to burn on the altar, leading some to suggest that the first bird was to provide the blood and the meat, while the second was to serve as the equivalent of the fat (Kleinig, 2003: 120). Whatever the case, these two offerings worked together in the same way as a regular purification offering did, and therefore led to the same results: *atonement* and *forgiveness* for the sinner.

11–13. Purification offering of grain. Sinners who could not *afford* two birds could bring a purification offering of *a tenth of an ephah of the finest flour* (see at 2:1). This is the only instance of a non-animal purification offering, a gracious provision for the poor, many of whom would have been unable to afford two birds. The Lord wanted to make sure that all his people, rich or poor, could worship him equally. (Although there is no record of it, it would be no surprise if the same type of provision was also made for burnt and reparation offerings.)

The offeror made clear that this was a purification offering by not adding the normal ingredients for grain offerings (*oil* and 'frankincense' [NIV *incense*]; see at 2:1) and undoubtedly by stating its purpose when he or she brought it to the priest. The priest offered a *handful* of the grain as a *memorial portion*, that is, as the offeror's request to be remembered with favour when presenting praise or petition to the Lord (see at 2:2–3). In this context, the petition would have been for forgiveness.

The priest would *burn* this memorial portion with the *food offerings presented to the* LORD, for example, the burnt offering (1:9) or the fat portions of the fellowship offering (3:3–5) or reparation offering (7:5). (Since it had no oil, this offering would not have burned as well on its own.) The *rest of the offering* then went *to the priest* (2:2–3).

Meaning

This section underscores the fact that the sin of those in authority is viewed as more serious than that of those they lead (see at 4:3, 24–26). This is no surprise: leaders have the greatest potential to lead others astray (see 1 Kgs 12:28–33; 14:16) and to bring dishonour on the Lord's name (2 Sam. 12:14; see further at *Meaning* for Lev. 10, p. 162). Moreover, since leaders have been entrusted with much, much more is required of them: captains always bear more responsibility than passengers for the safety of the ship (cf. 2 Sam. 12:7–9; Luke 12:47–48). Indeed, because the Lord knows that sheep follow the shepherd, he continually emphasizes the need for shepherds to be 'examples to the flock' (1 Tim. 3:1–13; 4:12; Jas 3:1; 1 Pet. 5:3).

Even more than its emphasis on a leader's responsibility, however, this section underscores both the purity and the mercy of the Lord. Ancient Israelites thought of sin as something that was defiling, not only to themselves, but also to the Lord's holy dwelling place, the tent of meeting (see *Context*). Because of the Lord's great purity, he could not permit such defilement to exist in the midst of his holy camp (cf. Lev. 15:31). But because of his great mercy, he could not help but provide a way for his people to deal with this defilement: the purification offering. With this offering, the animal's lifeblood served to ransom sinners from the Lord's just punishment, as well as to cleanse the defilement of their sin (see at 4:5–7, 14b–21). Such mercy is seen in even greater depth in the New Testament, which speaks of Jesus' death as the ultimate purification offering (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 1:3; 13:11–12), one that was powerful enough to cleanse all our sins (Heb. 9:28; 10:10, 12, 14). Indeed, it is by means of Jesus' lifeblood that the Lord can 'forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9; see further at Introduction, pp. 73–74).

v. Laws of reparation offerings (5:14 – 6:7)[33]

Context

This section describes the reparation offering (traditionally *guilt offering*; see at 5:15). Like the purification offering of the previous section (4:1 – 5:13), the reparation offering is also an atoning sacrifice. But whereas the purification offering focuses on sin as that which defiles (therefore requiring purification), the reparation offering focuses on sin as that which betrays covenant loyalty (therefore requiring reparation).

This section addresses breaches of covenant loyalty related to the Lord's property in particular. To show disrespect to someone's property is to show disrespect to its owner (as our own feelings attest when our property has been disrespected). If ancient Israelites disrespected the Lord's property in some way, such as by treating it as an everyday item (5:14–16) or by using it for a wicked purpose (6:1–7), they were disrespecting the Lord himself. Not surprisingly, this was viewed as a serious act of *unfaithfulness* against the covenant (see at 5:15). In the Ancient Near East, one could atone for a breach of covenant loyalty by acknowledging the wrong and paying an appropriate penalty (cf. 2 Kgs 18:7, 13–14). The penalty served as a ransom payment: a mitigated penalty in place of the one deserved (see Introduction, p. 50). In this case, the reparation offering served as just such a payment.

This section (see chart overleaf) describes three different acts of unfaithfulness in which holy property is profaned.

Comment

The reparation offering ritual differed in two ways from the purification offering ritual. First, lay Israelites brought a more costly animal: a *ram* (see at v. 15). This is in keeping with the nature of the offence: to commit a breach of loyalty was a serious sin indeed. Second, the blood of a purification offering was put *on the horns of the altar* to cleanse it (see at 4:5–7), whereas the blood of a reparation offering was 'thrown round about on the altar' (7:2), perhaps emphasizing the idea of ransom more than cleansing (see at *Context* above).

14–16. Reparation offering for inadvertently profaning a holy item. In this case, sinners have mistakenly taken from the Lord's *holy things*, thereby profaning the item(s). As a result, they must repay the item(s) in full, along with a twenty per cent penalty, and bring a *ram* as a *reparation offering* so that the priest can *make atonement for* them.



	Sin	*Repayment*	*Sacrificial animal*	*Result*
5:14–16	Inadvertent taking from *holy things*, thus profaning them	120%	Ram	Atonement made with ram; result is forgiveness
5:17–19	Sin is unknown, but profaning of holy item is suspected	[None, because sin is unknown]	Ram	Atonement made with ram; result is forgiveness
6:1–7	Swearing a false oath after defrauding another, thus profaning the Lord's holy name	120%	Ram	Atonement made with ram; result is forgiveness

15. The sinner is described as being *unfaithful*. This is strong language, referring to the treachery involved in breaking faith with a covenant partner. In the relationship between husband and wife, this language can describe the ultimate act of treachery: adultery (Num. 5:12). In the relationship between the Israelites and the Lord, it describes Israel's treacherous acts of worshipping different gods (1 Chr. 5:25), 'abandoning' the Lord's law (2 Chr. 12:1–2), or 'turning away' from him (Josh. 22:16, 31) and 'rebelling' against him (Josh. 22:18–19, 22).

In this instance, the sinner has committed a treacherous act *in regard to any of the LORD's holy things* (*qodāšîm*). The word *qodāšîm* refers elsewhere to various food items that had been given to the Lord and were therefore *holy* (see at 22:2). The Lord then designated these items exclusively for the priests or their households (Lev. 22:10–16; Num. 18:19). Lay Israelites probably *were unfaithful in regard to* these *holy things* by *unintentionally* eating some of them (22:14), thus treating them as everyday items, instead of as the Lord's holy property (cf. 22:15–16). This was a serious sin, since it was equivalent to profaning the Lord's own holiness (see *Context*, p. 119).

Israelites who sinned in this way brought *a ram* to sacrifice. Apparently, adult male sheep were particularly valuable animals. Psalm 66:15, for instance, describes sacrifices of great thanksgiving, listing rams as one of the offerings. As

noted above, the animal's costliness underscored the severity of the offence.

This ram would serve as the 'reparation offering' (*'āšām*). Older versions translate *'āšām* as 'trespass offering' (AV), newer versions as *guilt offering* (RSV, NIV), and most recent commentators as 'reparation offering' (Hartley, 1992: 72; Kleinig, 2003: 125). The last of these is supported by two factors. First, the word *'āšām* is used elsewhere to refer to a 'penalty' that must be paid for the consequences of guilt (5:6; cf. n. 9, p. 110), that is, to a 'reparation for guilt'. Second, a breach of faith has been committed, and sinners must 'repair' the breach by payment of a penalty (see *Context*, p. 119). The translation 'reparation offering' does justice to both these factors.

The ram was to be *of the proper value in silver*, that is, the current 'going rate' (cf. 27:3). And since at this point in history it was more difficult to standardize weights and measures, the text mentions which standard to use: the *sanctuary shekel* (cf. 2 Sam. 14:26). (Archaeological evidence suggests that a shekel in general would have been approximately 4 oz [11–12 g]; see Cook, 1988: 1054.) The overall sense might be that the ram was bought at the sanctuary for the going rate (a practice that held true in later Israel; 2 Kgs 12:16).

16. Before offering the *ram*, the sinner had first to *make restitution*.[34] In the case of a holy food item, this would involve replacing the item and adding twenty per cent (cf. 22:14), a percentage far less than penalties for other sins. For instance, if a thief was caught before confessing, repayment penalties could range from 200 per cent to 500 per cent (cf. Exod. 22:1; 22:4, 6). The lesser penalty in this instance could be due to the fact that the item was taken by mistake and the sinner confessed. Since the item had been taken from the *holy things*, and since these belonged to the priest (see at v. 15), the sinner naturally gives the payment to the one who has been wronged: *the priest* (22:14; cf. 6:4; Num. 5:7).

After *restitution* has been made, the priest *makes atonement with the ram*, so that the sinner may be *forgiven*.

Meaning

This law reminded Israelites of the importance of showing due respect to their holy King by showing due respect to his holy property. To do so was to demonstrate covenant loyalty; to do otherwise was to demonstrate utter disregard for the covenant King (see at v. 15). Paul picks up on this same principle when he exhorts Christians to lives of sexual purity, thus acknowledging that their bodies are the Lord's holy property, his temple (1 Cor. 6:18–20), and when he warns them not to harm the church as a whole, since it too belongs to the Lord (1 Cor. 3:16–17).

17–19. Reparation offering for unknown sin. There are two different understandings of this law. In the first, sinners do not know they have sinned, but then learn of their wrong and deal with it properly (so ESV at 5:17). This approach is possible, although it is not clear why repayment would not be mentioned.

In the second understanding, sinners suspect that they have sinned, but never learn what the sin is. This is the standard rabbinic approach and is followed by many commentators (Wenham, 1979: 107–108; Levine, 1989: 31–32, etc.). It has the advantage of explaining why this case does not mention repayment: the sinner never learns what the sin is and therefore does not know what the repayment should be. It also fits well with the fact that Israelites were fearful of inadvertently committing sins that remained unknown (Ps. 19:12), a fear common to others in the Ancient Near East (Milgrom, 1991: 361–363). This law would address that fear.

A natural question then arises: How do sinners know to bring a sacrifice if they do not know what their sin is? The understanding of the root *'šm* presented earlier provides the answer: they experience some type of misfortune and conclude that they must be suffering guilt's consequences (*'āšēm*) (see at 4:3, 13–14a). Verses 17b–18a are in fact best translated: '...and he does not know [what he has done], but he suffers guilt's consequences and bears his punishment, then he will bring to the priest as a reparation offering a ram from the flock...'

In short, the person has sinned, but is unaware of what the sin is. The sinner therefore assumes the worst (the profaning of a holy item) and brings the costly *reparation offering* for *atonement* and *forgiveness*.

Meaning

This second law underscores that even an inadvertent and unknown sin could be very serious, so much so that it could result in the Lord's discipline by means of suffering (v. 17). This certainly served as an exhortation to the Israelites to avoid sin at all costs, an exhortation also given in the New Testament (Jude 23). But it also highlighted to the Israelites the Lord's grace, in that he provided a way for his people to address such sin (vv. 18–19) and so put their hearts at ease.[35] Believers today whose hearts are repentant before the Lord also can have peace, knowing Jesus' sacrifice atones for all their sins, even those that remain unknown to them (cf. Heb. 10:12).

6:1–7. Reparation offering for misuse of the Lord's name in a false oath. In this final case, sinners have not only defrauded someone; they have then lied about it in a false oath, profaning the Lord's holy name. As a result, they must

repay what was stolen, along with a twenty per cent penalty, and make atonement by offering a ram.

2–3. Even though the guilty party has defrauded another person, it is still an act of *unfaithfulness* against *the* LORD (see at 5:15). While some have argued that this is because sinning against another person is equivalent to sinning against the Lord (Harrison, 1980: 73), it is better to understand that the sin is an act of *unfaithfulness* against *the* LORD, because the guilty party has misused the Lord's holy name by swearing a false oath. Two factors support this approach.

First, the primary way in which ancient Israelites maintained their innocence was by taking an oath (cf. Exod. 22:10–11). In so doing, they would swear their innocence and invite the Lord to bring some sort of calamity or punishment on them if they were guilty (Num. 5:16–22, esp. 21–22; see also 1 Kgs 8:31–32). Naturally, this could be abused, and people could lie under oath (Hos. 10:4). This law is for just such a case.

Second, since the Lord's holy name was invoked in the oath (Jer. 5:2), to swear falsely was to profane it: that is, to treat it as a very common thing that could be used however one pleased (even for evil), instead of as a very holy thing to be deeply respected (see further at 19:11–12; cf. Exod. 20:7).

In short, swearing falsely was not simply one sin among many here (so NIV), but the major act of *unfaithfulness* against *the* LORD that called for the reparation offering. The NRSV captures the sense well: 'When any of you sin and commit a trespass against the Lord by deceiving a neighbour in a matter of a deposit or a pledge, or by robbery, or if you have defrauded a neighbour, or have found something lost and lied about it – *if you swear falsely regarding any of the various things that one may do and sin thereby –...*' (vv. 2–3, emphasis added).[36]

The case describes four ways in which sinners could commit fraud against a *neighbour* (i.e. any person they dealt with in the course of their day; see at 18:20):

1. taking something that had been entrusted to them, for example, wrongly keeping a 'deposit or a pledge' (NRSV) given to them for safekeeping (Exod. 22:7, 10) or as collateral for a debt (Exod. 22:26);
2. 'robbery' (NRSV): that is, seizing another's goods by force (cf. Mic. 2:2);
3. withholding that which belongs to another, for example, *cheating* others by not giving them due wages (Deut. 24:14–15); and
4. *finding lost property and lying about it*, effectively stealing the item from its rightful owner (cf. Deut. 22:2–3).

4–7. If sinners have got away with the crime, what prompts them to admit their wrongdoing? The Lord holds them accountable, and they begin to ‘suffer guilt’s consequences’ (v. 4; see at 4:3). Sinners would be wrong to assume that their sins went unnoticed (or would remain unaddressed!) (cf. Pss 90:8; 101:5; Acts 5:1–11).

Significantly, sinners must first correct the wrong against their fellow countryman: repayment is made in full, along with a twenty per cent penalty (v. 5). Only after this is done can they bring a reparation offering *to the* LORD for *atonement* and *forgiveness* (v. 6).[37]

Meaning

This law addresses two sins. First, an Israelite has committed an act of *unfaithfulness* against *the* LORD by using his holy name in a false oath (vv. 2–3). This was a serious act of disloyalty, showing utter disregard for the holy covenant King. Repairing such a breach of faith involved a two-step process of repentance: full acknowledgment of the wrong to the offended party (the Lord), and the payment of an appropriate penalty to him: the reparation offering.

At the same time, the Israelite has also been unfaithful to a fellow covenant brother or sister through fraud (vv. 2–3). Significantly, the same two-step process of repentance is called for. First, the sinner was to acknowledge fully the wrong to the offended party (vv. 4–5). Israelites learned by this that their sin against others must not only be confessed to the Lord, but also to those they had wronged. Jesus emphasizes the same (Matt. 5:23–24), knowing that true spirituality involves a proper posture to the Lord, as well as to those around us (Matt. 22:37–40). Second, the sinner had to correct the wrong in full (and even add extra compensation, v. 5). True repentance goes beyond saying, ‘I’m sorry’; it extends to correcting the wrong as fully as possible (cf. Luke 19:8–9).

C. Laws for the priests and the Israelites on presenting offerings (6:8 – 7:38)[38]

Context

The first major section in Leviticus (1:1 – 6:7) is addressed to lay Israelites (1:2) and consists of basic laws involving the five major offerings: burnt, grain, fellowship, purification and reparation. This next major section (6:8 – 7:38) also consists of laws on the five major offerings, but is addressed at times to priests (6:9, 25) and at other times to lay Israelites (7:23, 29). It differs in three further ways from the first section.

First, it focuses more specifically on the proper handling of the various offering portions, such as the ritual state necessary for touching or eating the offerings (6:25, 27, 29; 7:6, 19–21), how to distribute offering portions among the priests (6:16, 18, 26; 7:6–10) and how to dispose of any remainders (6:10–11, 22–23). Such laws were crucial, because these offerings were the Lord's holy property and had to be treated with due reverence; to do otherwise would be to disrespect the Lord himself (see at 5:15).

Second, this section introduces categories among the major offerings, such as the continual burnt offering (6:9b–13), the priests' continual grain offering (6:19–23) and three different types of fellowship offerings (7:12–18). The inclusion of these offerings is related to the first difference above, since each had unique requirements for their proper handling, distribution or disposal.

Finally, this section orders the sacrifices differently: the fellowship offering moves from the middle of the section to the end (see chart below). This implies that the organizing principle for each section was different. The first section (1:1 – 6:7) may have grouped offerings according to whether they could be voluntary (Lev. 1 – 3) or were always obligatory (Lev. 4 – 6:7), while the second (6:8 – 7:36) may have grouped offerings according to whether they were 'most holy' (6:8 – 7:7) or simply 'holy' (7:11–36). Certainty on this point is difficult.

What is clear, however, is that Leviticus 1 – 7 provides the information necessary to perform the offerings properly. Such information is foundational for many of the ceremonies later in the book that make use of these offerings, such as the ordination ceremony (Lev. 8) or the Day of Atonement ceremony (Lev. 16).

Laws on offerings: general	*Laws on offerings: further instructions for*

instructions for lay people (1:1 – 6:7)	*priests and lay people (6:8 – 7:38)*
Burnt offering (1:3–17)	Continual burnt offering (6:9b–13)
Grain offering (2:1–16)	Grain offering (6:14–18) Priests' continual grain offering (6:19–23)
Fellowship offering (3:1–17)	
Purification offering (4:1 – 5:13)	Purification offering (6:25b–30)
Reparation offering (5:14 – 6:7)	Reparation offering (7:1–7)
	Fellowship offering (7:11–36)

Comment

i. Introduction (6:8–9a)

Here, for the first time in Leviticus, the Lord tells Moses to address the priests directly. As noted above, Moses gives them *commands* focusing on the proper handling, distribution and disposal of the offerings. Such commands were vital to the priests, who, as the very attendants of the holy King, needed to treat his holy property with due reverence (see at 10:3; cf. at 5:15).

ii. The law of the continual burnt offering (6:9b–13)

This 'law' (RSV) concerns the continual *burnt offering* (6:9b).[39] The offering is first described in Exodus 29:38–42 and consisted of two one-year-old lambs, along with their grain and drink offerings. One lamb would be offered in the morning and the other in the evening. By presenting them as burnt offerings, the Israelites acknowledged their need of atonement (Lev. 1:4) and requested that the Lord shine his favour on them (see at 1:9).

This law addresses two practical consequences of such an offering. First, since the offering would be smouldering *throughout the night*, the priest would have to clear the *ashes* in the *morning* (vv. 9–11). To do so, he had to wear his holy priestly *clothes*, so that he could have contact with the holy altar (v. 10a; cf. Exod. 28:42–43). After placing the ashes *beside the altar* on the east (v. 10b; cf.

1:16), the priest would change into regular clothes, since he was about to leave the tabernacle area (cf. Ezek. 44:17, 19). He would then *carry the ashes outside the camp to a place that* was *ceremonially pure* (NIV *ceremonially clean*, v. 11), an appropriate location for ashes from the holy altar (cf. 4:12; Num, 19:9).

The second practical consequence of this offering was the need for a fire to be *kept burning on the altar continuously* (v. 13). The priest was therefore to build up the fire *every morning* and lay the burnt offering on it (v. 12a). He would also add *the fat of the fellowship offerings* throughout the day, thus feeding the fire and aiding in the burning of the burnt offering (v. 12b).

Meaning

The text mentions three times the need for a continual fire (vv. 9b, 12, 13), emphasizing that this offering was to be burning continually. And since the offering's purpose was to seek the Lord's favour, this law taught the priests that they and the Israelites were to have a posture of continual dependence and worship before him (cf. Ps. 127:1; Deut. 6:5), a posture that the modern believer is also to have (cf. Matt. 22:37; 2 Cor. 12:9–10; Phil. 4:13).

At the same time, in order for the fire to burn continually, the priests would need to perform their duties diligently. If they did not, the worship of God would suffer (cf. 1 Sam. 2:12–36). This passage is therefore a strong exhortation to priestly faithfulness (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12–16) and, specifically, to intercede on Israel's behalf for the Lord's favour and help (cf. Eph. 1:15–23; Phil. 1:3–4; Col. 1:3–5). Israel's priests did this by means of an animal offering, but Jesus, our great High Priest, does this by means of the perfect sacrifice of himself, by which he has eternally secured the Lord's favour for 'those who come to God through him' (see Introduction, pp. 73–74; see also Heb. 7:25–27; 10:11–14; cf. Rom. 8:34–39).

iii. The law of the grain offering (6:14–18)

This *grain offering* law begins with a brief review of matters covered in Leviticus 2: a priest was to present the offering *before the* LORD and burn *a handful* as a *memorial portion* (6:14–15; cf. at 2:2–3).

The law then elaborates on a matter briefly mentioned in Leviticus 2: namely, that the *rest* of the grain offering was to go to Aaron and his sons (6:16–18; cf. 2:3, 10). This was because it was *most holy* (v. 17b; see at 2:2–3). As a result, it was to be eaten by holy people (*Aaron and his sons*), *without yeast* (which was prohibited on the holy altar; see at 2:11–12), 'in a holy place' (ESV; NIV *in the sanctuary area*), namely, *the courtyard of the tent of meeting*. Verse 18

underscores the offering's holiness, by making clear that it was only for priests. First, only *male descendants of Aaron* could *eat it* (since only they had been anointed as priests into the ritual state of holiness). Second, it was to be their *perpetual share*, that is, the special allotment the Lord granted to priests (cf. 7:34). Third, *whoever touched* it *must be holy* [40] (NIV margin), that is, anointed as a priest.

Meaning

This law is a strong exhortation to treat this most holy offering with due reverence: it could be eaten only by holy priests in a holy place. Since this law is addressed to priests in particular (6:9), it implies that they were to be especially careful to treat this offering properly. Once more, it is a call to priestly faithfulness (cf. *Meaning* at 6:9b–13) and, in particular, to model for the Israelites that the Lord's holiness must always be respected (see at 5:15; 6:8–9a). Those who lead the Lord's people are always to be the first to 'hallow' his name.

iv. The priests' continual grain offering (6:19–23)

Like the people's grain offering, the priests' 'continual grain offering' (6:20, NET; NIV *regular grain offering*) was to be an *aroma pleasing to the* LORD (6:21). It differed, however, in three important ways.

First, this offering was to be made throughout Israel's generations by the *anointed priest* (6:22) – that is, the 'high priest' (see at 4:3) – who no doubt offered it as the priests' representative.

Second, it was to commence at the inauguration of the priesthood (on the day they were *anointed*) and was to be a 'continual' offering (6:20a; NIV *regular* offering). As such, it was to be offered daily: *half of it in the morning and half in the evening* (6:20b). Each day would begin and end with the high priest making supplication for the Lord's favour on the priests' behalf (see at 2:2–3).

Third, it could *not be eaten* (v. 23). The text does not explain why. On the one hand, it is similar to the purification offering, from which priests ate when offering it for others but not for themselves (cf. 6:24–29 with 4:3–12; 6:30). On the other hand, it is similar to the regular burnt offering, which was also offered in the morning and evening, and entirely burned on the altar (Exod. 29:38–42). Whatever the rationale, it is clear that the continual grain offering (6:22) – as well as *every grain offering of a priest* (6:23) – was to be *burned completely*.

Meaning

Each day, morning and evening, the high priest would offer the priestly grain offering to seek the Lord's favour on the priests' behalf. This constantly

reminded the priests that, although they differed from the rest of the Israelites in terms of function, they were exactly the same in terms of their desperate need for the Lord and his favour. The priests who remembered this need would be protected from one of the strongest temptations faced by those who lead God's people: spiritual pride.

v. The law of the purification offering (6:24–30)

Traditionally known as the *sin offering*, the 'purification offering' served to purify away sin and impurity (see at 4:3). This section instructs *Aaron and his sons* on specific matters connected to the offering, most of which will focus on its *most holy* status.

First, as a *most holy* sacrifice, the purification offering had to be *slaughtered* in a holy place, namely, *the place* where *the burnt offering is slaughtered* (6:25), on the north side of the burnt offering altar (1:11).

Second, its *most holy* status meant that its meat and blood had to be treated very carefully: after the fat had been removed and burned (4:26a), the remaining meat had to be eaten in a holy place (*the courtyard of the tent of meeting*) by holy people (either *the priest who offered it* [6:26] or *any males in a priest's family* [6:29]). Indeed, *anyone who touched* its *meat must be holy* (6:27a; see n. 19, p. 129).

The holiness of the meat and blood also explains the regulations about the *garment* and *pots* (vv. 27–28). A *garment spattered* by sacrificial *blood* had to be *washed* 'in a holy place' (6:27; NIV *in the sanctuary area*); this ensured that the blood of a *most holy* sacrifice did not enter the profane realm. It is also possible that the blood consecrated the garment, which was washed in order to deconsecrate it before it left the Holy Place.[41] These same explanations can be applied to a *bronze pot* in which a sacrifice was 'boiled' (RSV) and which also was to be washed *with water* (6:28b). A *clay pot* was treated differently: it was to be *broken* (6:28a), perhaps because it was porous and could have absorbed some of the sacrifice. Breaking the pot would have prevented it (and any of the sacrifice it retained) from re-entering the non-holy sphere of everyday use.

Finally, the passage ends with a reminder: if the *blood* rites of the purification offering took place within *the tent of meeting* – as they did for the sin of the high priest (4:3–12) or of the congregation (4:13–21) – then none of the meat was to be *eaten* (6:30; see at 4:11–12).

Meaning

As with the grain offering law above, the purification offering law emphasizes

the great holiness of this offering, and the respect with which it must be treated. See at *Meaning* of 6:14–18.

vi. The law of the reparation offering (7:1–7)

Traditionally known as the *guilt offering*, the 'reparation offering' atoned for sinners by repairing a breach of faith committed against the covenant King (see at 5:15). Earlier passages addressed when to bring a reparation offering (5:14 – 6:7); this passage explains how to offer it.

In many ways, it was similar to the purification offering: it was *most holy* (v. 1) and was to be *slaughtered in* a holy place (the north side of the burnt offering altar, v. 2; cf. 1:11; 6:25). Moreover, its meat was to be eaten by holy people (*priests*) in a holy place (v. 6; cf. 6:26), emphasizing again that most holy sacrifices were to be treated with the greatest respect (see *Meaning* at 6:14–18). Finally, the priest was to offer *all its fat...as a food offering presented to the* LORD (vv. 3–5; cf. 4:8–10, and see at 3:16).

But the blood of this offering was treated differently. While the priest put purification offering blood *on the horns of the altar* to purify it (see at 4:5–7), he took the reparation offering *blood* and 'threw it on the altar round about' (RSV) (7:2). The language of *on the altar* is the same as that of the 'ransom' language in Leviticus 17:11, suggesting that atonement here focuses more on ransom than purification. See further at *Context* of 5:14 – 6:7.

vii. Related matters on portion distribution among priests (7:8–10)

Verse 8 continues the theme of how to distribute offering pieces among priests, stating that the *hide* of the *burnt offering* goes to the *priest who offers* the sacrifice. Israelites used hides for vessels and containers (Lev. 11:32; Num. 31:20). Since priests did not have large flocks from which to obtain hides, receiving the sacrifice's hide would have been a great help.

Verses 9–10 then address how to distribute *grain offerings* among priests. A cooked grain offering, which had been made into bread (v. 9; cf. 2:4–10), belonged primarily *to the priest who offered it* (7:9), while an uncooked grain offering, which was still raw flour (v. 10; cf. 2:1–3), *belonged equally to all* priests (7:10). The reason for this difference is not given. Uncooked grain offerings may have been stored together and used by priests as needed, while cooked grain offerings, which would quickly become stale, were eaten by the officiating priest immediately. Whatever the case, verses 8–10 once again make clear how to handle the elements of a most holy offering.

Meaning

While these verses continue the theme of handling most holy offerings properly (see *Meaning* at 6:14–18), they also introduce a new theme: providing for the priests' practical needs. This provision freed the priests to focus on their duties of leading the Lord's people in worship and teaching them his laws (cf. Neh. 13:10–11). This principle of providing for the leaders of the Lord's people is continued in the New Testament as well (1 Cor. 9:13–14; Gal. 6:6). The Lord is fully aware that if the needs of the shepherds are not met, they will not be able to care well for the sheep.

viii. The law of fellowship offering sacrifices (7:11–36)

7:11. Introduction. This verse begins a long section that addresses *fellowship offerings* (traditionally *peace offerings*; see at 3:11). This is a *holy* (not *most holy*) offering, portions of which lay Israelites could handle (see at 2:2–3). As a result, the text switches attention from the priests in particular to the Israelites in general. As above, however, it addresses the proper handling, distribution and disposal of various offering portions.

12–15. Praise fellowship offerings and proper handling of their meat. There were three types of fellowship offerings: *praise*, *vow* and *freewill*. They differed in terms of purpose and when the meat could be eaten.

Type of fellowship offerings	*When eaten*	*Purpose*
Praise	On first day (any meat remaining to be burned)	To give thanks for specific acts that the Lord had done on the offeror's behalf
Vow	On first or second day (any meat remaining on third day to be burned)	To fulfil a vow in response to answered prayer
Freewill	As immediately above	Voluntary offering to the Lord

This section addresses an offering brought as an expression of 'praise' (*tôdâ*) (NJB; NIV *thankfulness*). The term *tôdâ* refers to acknowledging the Lord

worshipfully for his deeds (Pss 26:7; 105:1). When such praise was expressed by means of an offering, it was because the Lord had answered a specific prayer: 'I will present my praise offerings to you, for you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling' (Ps. 56:12b–13a; see also Ps. 107:19–22).

Offerors would bring along various breads, some made *with yeast* (v. 13) and others *without* (v. 12).[42] The presence of bread here is no surprise: the fellowship offering was a shared meal (see at 3:11), and it was common for ancient Israelites to eat bread with their meat (Gen. 18:6–7; Judg. 6:19). Indeed, verse 14 directs that *one of each* of the breads was to go to the priest, implying that the rest went to the offeror. Thus, both priest and offeror would have bread to eat with the meat of this covenantal meal (see further at 3:11). Significantly, the praise offering seems to require a more elaborate set of breads than other fellowship offerings (cf. Num. 15:1–10), perhaps suggesting that it was the most sacred of the three.

The bread given to the priest is described as a 'contribution offering [*tĕrûmâ*] to the LORD' (v. 14, NET; NIV *contribution to the* LORD). The term *tĕrûmâ* elsewhere describes various items given to the Lord by the Israelites to support the work of the tabernacle. These often included food items (Lev. 7:32; 22:12), which the Lord then gave to the priests and Levites to provide for them and their families (Num. 18:8–19). In this case, the bread was given *to the priest who splashes the blood* (i.e. who took the lead in making the sacrifice). This provision again ensured that priests were freed from other tasks to focus on priestly duties (cf. at *Meaning* of 7:8–10).

As for the sacrificial meat, the offerors were to eat it *on the day it was offered* (v. 15); any remaining meat was to be burned up that same day, perhaps to guard it from being ritually defiled (see at vv. 16–18). It is interesting that this requirement is stricter than that of other fellowship offerings, whose meat could be eaten on the second day (v. 16). This stricter requirement implies that defiling this meat would be an even greater offence, suggesting again that praise fellowship offerings were the most sacred of the three (cf. Kleinig, 2003: 170). Whatever the case, the offerors were to follow this procedure exactly, or their sacrifice did not count and they would be subject to punishment (cf. v. 18). Like the meat of most holy offerings, that of holy offerings was to be treated with the utmost respect (see *Meaning* at 6:14–18).

16–18. Proper handling of meat from vow or freewill fellowship offerings. Israelites sometimes offered fellowship offerings to fulfil a *vow* they had made. When Israelites made a vow, they promised the Lord to carry out a certain task if or when he answered their prayer (see 1 Sam. 1:11). This was not a way of buying the Lord's help (the Lord's help is not for sale; it is something he

graciously gives to his people). Rather, such a promise both underscored the seriousness of their prayer and ensured that they would give an appropriate expression of thanksgiving and praise when their prayer was answered. (Since thankfulness vanishes so quickly, this was a helpful safeguard indeed!) Significantly, a sacrificial vow was fulfilled publicly, so that offerors could share the Lord's praises with their covenant brothers and sisters: 'I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfil my vows to you...Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me' (Ps. 66:13, 16; see also Ps. 116:14, 17–18; cf. 1 Sam. 1:24 – 2:10).

A *freewill* (*nědābâ*) fellowship offering differed in that it was not brought because of a vow. The word *nědābâ* is used elsewhere to describe offerings of precious materials that Israelites gave voluntarily for the tabernacle (Exod. 25:2; 35:29), or, in sacrificial contexts, to describe fellowship offerings (7:18) or burnt offerings (22:18) that Israelites voluntarily presented, perhaps as general expressions of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord for his character and deeds.

In sum: *praise* offerings were given for the Lord's specific acts on the offeror's behalf (although the offeror had not vowed to bring an offering); *vow* offerings were given for the Lord's specific acts on the offeror's behalf (and the offeror had vowed to bring an offering); and *freewill* offerings were simply presented voluntarily.

The meat of *vow* and *freewill* offerings could be eaten on the first or second day of the sacrifice (v. 16), but any *left over till the third day* was to be *burned* (v. 17). This may have been to protect it from ritual defilement (cf. 7:19), which was more likely to happen the longer it was left around.

If this regulation was not followed, the Lord would *not accept* the offerors or their offering: that is, he would not look on them with favour (see at 1:3). The text explains that the meat was *impure* (*piggûl*) on the third day (v. 18), that is, out of bounds for consumption. The term *piggûl* is rare, but appears to refer to meat that must not be eaten because it is ritually defiling (cf. 'unclean meat' in Ezek. 4:14). Those who did eat it – whether the offerors themselves or their family members – would 'bear their punishment for iniquity' (NET; see at 5:1). Once again, holy meat had to be treated with utmost respect (see *Meaning* at 6:14–18).

19–21. Further laws on the proper handling of fellowship offering meat. These verses identify two more instances when fellowship offering meat must not be eaten. In the first, the meat itself *touches* something 'ritually impure' (v. 19a; NIV *ceremonially unclean*). It is now defiled and no longer suitable for its intended use; it must therefore be *burned*.

In the second, worshippers are prohibited from eating the meat because they

are *impure* (vv. 20–21). This impurity could come from various activities or health conditions (v. 20; cf. Lev. 13:3; 15:18), or from contact with something impure (v. 21; cf. at 5:2–3).

Those who ate sacrificial meat while impure would be *cut off* [*karet*] *from their people*. This was a very serious penalty indeed, with two different forms. Sometimes it refers to being exiled from the covenant community (see at 18:26–29), while in other instances it refers to premature death (Exod. 31:14; Num. 4:18–20; cf. Num. 15:30–31 with 15:32–36). In either case, the sinner was removed from the covenant community and regarded as the Lord's enemy (see further at Introduction, p. 64).

The *karet* penalty could be carried out by the Israelite community (Exod. 31:14; Num. 15:30–35) or directly by the Lord (Lev. 20:4–5). As a result, Israelites could not take comfort in secret sin: even if they ate sacrificial meat while impure and hid this from their fellow Israelites, the Lord himself would be sure to bring about the appropriate penalty (see at 6:4–7; cf. Acts 5:1–11). Israelites were again well warned to treat holy meat with proper respect (see *Meaning* at 6:14–18).

22–27. Prohibition against eating fat or blood. Since Israelites were able to eat fellowship offering meat (vv. 11–21), this next section reminds them of two parts of the animal that they must never eat: the *fat* (vv. 22–25) and the *blood* (vv. 26–27).

As noted at 3:16, Israelites are prohibited from eating the *fat*, because it is the very best part of the meat and must therefore be given to the one at the meal who is most worthy of honour: the Lord. To take the fat for oneself would be to dishonour him.

Verse 24 provides one qualification: if an animal dies naturally (is *found dead*), or is killed by another animal (*torn by wild animals*), then its fat may be used *for any other purpose*. Since the animal was not presented to the Lord in sacrifice, there was a bit more freedom in the use of its fat. There are no biblical examples of how fat was used, although it may have served 'for lighting, polish, and other household purposes' (Wenham, 1979: 125). Whatever the case, the text makes clear that even this fat must not be eaten; those who did so would be *cut off* from their people (v. 25; see at 7:19–21).

The Israelites are also prohibited from eating any *blood* (v. 26): that is, eating meat that is raw and therefore has the blood in it (cf. Gen. 9:4; Deut. 12:23; Milgrom, 1983: 99). For the rationale, see at 17:11.

Meaning

This section's strong prohibitions emphasize two truths about the Lord: he is the

one most worthy of honour (and thus the fat must go to him), and he is sovereign over all life (and thus the blood must go to him). Christians acknowledge these same truths today by presenting their very bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord (Rom. 12:1), in this way giving him their best and acknowledging that their very lives belong to him.

28–36. The portions of fellowship offering meat consecrated for priests. Since Israelites could eat portions of their fellowship offerings, they only needed to *bring part of it* to present to the Lord (v. 29). Aside from *the fat* and blood, these parts included the *breast* (as a *wave offering*, vv. 29–31) and the *right thigh* (as a 'contribution offering' [NET; NIV *contribution*], vv. 32–33).

'Contribution offerings' have been discussed above (vv. 12–15). These often consisted of food gifts which Israelites gave to the Lord, who in turn gave them to the priests or Levites and their families. In this case, the gift is the *right thigh of the fellowship offering (v. 32). The thigh was considered a special cut of meat (cf. 1 Sam. 9:22–24), and since Israelites viewed the right side of the body as especially important (cf. Gen. 48:13–20; 1 Sam. 11:2), the right thigh was no doubt particularly valuable. It belonged to the officiating priest and his family (v. 33; cf. 10:14).*

Like a contribution offering, a *wave offering* (v. 30) also consisted of various food items that Israelites gave to support the tabernacle and its personnel (Lev. 23:17–20). These items were *waved* before the Lord: this seems to have been a ritual action, indicating that the items were being dedicated to him (cf. Num. 8:15–16). In practice, the priest appears to be the one who actually waved the items (cf. Lev. 23:11 with 23:12), although he did so on the offeror's behalf.[43] The wave offering in this case was the *breast*, no doubt also considered to be a good cut of meat, as demonstrated by the fact that the Lord gave this portion to Moses during the ordination ceremony (8:29). The breast was to go to all the priests and their families (v. 31; cf. 10:14), not just to the officiating priest.

Since contribution and wave offerings were so similar in terms of function, it is not clear why some items went through the extra ritual action of waving. Because this action indicated that the item was being dedicated to the Lord (see above), it may mean that certain items were in extra need of such an indication.[44] In any case, it is clear that the Lord himself had assigned the *breast* and the *right thigh* to the priests and their families (v. 34; cf. 10:14), and these portions would be their *perpetual share for the generations to come* (v. 36).

Meaning

The importance of providing for the priests' material needs has already been noted (see *Meaning* at 7:8–10). In this case, however, the Lord commands that

some of the very best portions be given to the priests (vv. 31–32, 34). This would have taught the Israelites to honour those who led them in worship: if the Lord honoured the priests by assigning the very best cuts of meat to them, surely the Israelites were to honour them as well. The New Testament carries on this principle, commanding Christians to honour church leaders (1 Tim. 5:17) and to be generous to them (Gal. 6:6), in this way acknowledging that these leaders bear the heavy responsibility of watching over eternal souls (Heb. 13:17).

ix. Summary of Leviticus 6:8 – 7:38 (7:37–38)

These last two verses summarize Leviticus 6:8 – 7:36 in particular, not Leviticus 1 – 7 as a whole. This is evident from the sacrificial order, which follows Leviticus 6:8 – 7:36 (but not Lev. 1:1 – 6:7), and from the use of the word 'law' (RSV, v. 37; NIV *regulations*), which occurs in Leviticus 6:8 – 7:36 (but not Lev. 1:1 – 6:7).

The mention of the *ordination offering* in verse 37 seems out of place, as it is not described until 8:22–29. But since this was simply a type of fellowship offering, it may have been mentioned here because some of the fellowship offering regulations in 6:8 – 7:38 would also have applied to it (see at 8:22–29).

The commands of 6:8 – 7:36 were given to Moses 'on Mount Sinai' (ESV, v. 38; NIV *at Mount Sinai*), possibly at the same time as the priestly ordination instructions of Exodus 29, which were also given 'on Mount Sinai' (Exod. 31:18), and which also mention the ordination offering (Exod. 29:22–25) (Wenham, 1979: 117, citing Hoffmann, 1905: 70ff.). Why place them here, after the commands of 1:1 – 6:7, which were given at a later point in the tent of meeting (1:1)? Perhaps simply out of a desire to group similar commands together where possible, thus placing these laws on offerings together with those of 1:1 – 6:7 (cf. chart in *Context*, p. 127). Whatever the reason, it must not be forgotten why these laws were being given: the Lord, as covenant King, was giving covenant laws to his covenant people so that they could be faithful members of his covenant kingdom (see Introduction, pp. 37–38). In the case of 6:8 – 7:38 in particular, he has used these laws to teach his people their continual dependence on his favour and grace (6:9b–13, 19–23), the high regard they must have of his holiness (6:14–18, 24–30; 7:12–27), and the priority they must put on ensuring that his worship continues (6:9b–13; 7:8–10, 28–36). If the Israelites learned these lessons well, they would be able to fulfil their covenant mission: being 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' to 'all the earth' (Exod. 19:4–6). This is the mission that the Lord consistently calls his covenant children to fulfil (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9).

2. PUBLIC WORSHIP AT THE TABERNACLE BEGINS (8:1 – 10:20)

Now that the tabernacle has been built (Exod. 40) and the offerings have been described (Lev. 1 – 7), the Israelites are able to begin public worship (Lev. 8 – 10). Since public worship was directed by priests, this section's opening chapter will describe the ceremony by which Aaron and his sons are ordained (Lev. 8).

A. The ordination of Aaron and his sons (8:1–36)

Context

To understand this chapter, it is important to identify how ceremonies function. Generally, a ceremony brings about a change in status for the main participants through a series of rites directly related to the ceremony's purpose. The purpose of a wedding ceremony, for example, is to change the status of the bride and groom from being single to being married, and this is done through a series of rites directly related to this purpose: exchanging rings as a symbol of their love, taking vows of lifelong faithfulness, and so on. In this chapter, the purpose of the ordination ceremony is to set Aaron and his sons apart as ritually holy priests, which is also done through a series of rites directly related to this purpose: giving them special clothing to set them apart as ritually distinct, having them undergo purification rites that move them into a higher level of ritual purity, and so on.

The description of the ordination ceremony is divided into seven sections, each ending with the refrain that Moses, or Aaron and his sons, did just *as the* LORD *commanded Moses* (vv. 4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 36). This refrain presents Moses and Aaron as models of obedience in matters of worship, a model the Israelites must follow (cf. 10:1–3).

Comment

i. Preparation to begin the ordination rites (8:1–4a)

The ordination ceremony was to take place *at the entrance to the tent of meeting* (v. 3), that is, the area in front of the tent's entryway (see at 1:3). This ensured that it would take place before the Lord (cf. 1:3).

The Lord commanded Moses to gather the following to this area: those being ordained (*Aaron and his sons*), the items necessary for the ceremony (*garments*, *anointing oil* and various offerings) and the *entire assembly* (to witness the ceremony). Owing to the size of the *assembly*, the elders probably gathered on Israel's behalf in the courtyard (cf. 4:15), with the rest of the people filling out the courtyard and gathering in front of the tabernacle complex.

Moses did as the LORD *commanded him* (v. 4a), and the ceremony could now proceed.

ii. Washing of Aaron and his sons; putting the clothing

on Aaron (8:4b–9)

6. The ceremony's purpose was to move Aaron and his sons into the highest state of ritual purity: holiness. Therefore, the first step was for them to go through a rite frequently associated with ritual purification: being *washed with water* (14:9; 15:5–8, etc.; cf. Exod. 30:18–21).[45]

7–9. The second step was for special clothing to be put on them. In the Ancient Near East, special clothing indicated that a person had entered into a specific state (such as mourning; 2 Sam. 14:2), or had a specific role (such as ruler; Gen. 41:42). The same is true today, as witnessed by the soldier's uniform, the bride's wedding dress or the mourner's black clothing. The priests' special clothing therefore identified them as having been set apart by the Lord into a specific state (ritual holiness) to carry out a specific role (to approach his holy altar and to minister in his holy tabernacle) (Exod. 28:3, 40–43; 39:41). It also signalled to the Israelites to give the priests the dignity and honour due to those who bore such a weighty responsibility (Exod. 28:2; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17).

The priestly clothing is described more fully in Exodus 28 and 39. The following tables provide a summary, listing the clothes in the order they were put on.

High priest's clothing

Item	Material
Undergarments (assumed; cf. Exod. 28:42–43)	Fine twisted linen (Exod. 28:42–43; 39:28)
Tunic: often the primary garment in ancient Israel, suggesting it decently covered the body (cf. Gen. 3:21, which uses this word)	Fine woven linen (Exod. 39:27)
Sash: tied around the tunic, perhaps to help keep it in place	Fine twisted linen, woven with costly blue, purple and scarlet threads (Exod. 39:29)
Robe: featuring a hole in the top for the head and a woven collar to prevent tearing (Exod. 28:32; cf.	Costly blue material (Exod. 28:31)

John 19:23–24); its hem was decorated with colourful pomegranates alternating with golden bells (Exod. 28:33–34)	
Ephod: a piece of clothing tied around the torso (whether at the waist or above is not clear), with two shoulder pieces, each with an attached onyx stone engraved with the names of the twelve tribes (six on each stone) (Exod. 28:9–12)	Fine twisted linen, embroidered with expensive blue, purple and scarlet threads, as well as costly threads of gold (Exod. 28:6, 8; cf. 39:3)
Breastpiece: a square cloth pouch, somewhat less than 18 in. (45 cm) per side, it held the Urim and Thummim. Worn on the chest, it was tied to the ephod by four golden rings and featured twelve precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes (Exod. 28:15–30).	Same as ephod (Exod. 28:15)
Urim and Thummim: used to receive specific information from the Lord (Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 28:6); probably some sort of 'lots' (see esp. 1 Sam. 14:41, NIV)	It is not clear what these were made of.
Turban: the word's root suggests it was wrapped around the head	Fine linen (Exod. 28:39)
Gold plate, holy crown (ESV): tied to the front of the turban with a blue cord and engraved with the words: 'HOLY TO THE LORD' (Exod. 28:36–37)	Pure gold (Exod. 28:36)

Regular priest's clothing

Item	Material
Undergarments (see above)	Fine twisted linen (Exod. 28:42–43; 39:28)

Tunic (see above)	Fine woven linen (Exod. 39:27)
Sash (see above)	Not identified; assumed to be fine twisted linen (cf. Exod. 39:29)
Headbands (or ‘caps’): different from the turban of the high priest, although the exact shape is not clear	Fine linen (Exod. 39:28)

The more elaborate clothing of the high priest set him apart as leader of the priests (in much the same way as the more elaborate uniform of a general sets him apart as leader of the soldiers). It is also significant that his clothing had royal overtones: *robes* are identified elsewhere as the clothing of princes (1 Sam. 18:4) and kings (1 Sam. 24:4, 11); *blue* was associated with the clothing of a kingdom’s lead administrators (Ezek. 23:6); *turbans* are associated with crowns (Ezek. 21:26); and the word translated *emblem* (v. 9, NIV) elsewhere describes a king’s ‘crown’ (2 Kgs 11:12). Such royal clothing would have reminded the Israelites that the high priest was part of a royal administration. In short, he led the royal attendants (the priests) of the heavenly King (the Lord), who was dwelling in the midst of his kingdom people (the Israelites) in his holy palace (the tent of meeting; see further at Introduction, p. 37).

iii. Anointing of the tabernacle complex and Aaron; putting the clothing on Aaron’s sons (8:10–13)

10–12. The *anointing oil* consisted of olive oil and spices (Exod. 30:23–25). It was made for tabernacle use and thus especially holy; whatever it touched became *consecrated* (set apart as ritually holy, Exod. 30:25–30). It was used here to consecrate the entire tabernacle complex in order to prepare it as a place of worship.

Moses began by anointing the *tabernacle* [*miškān*] *and everything in it* (see Exod. 30:26–27 and diagram at Lev. 1:1, p. 86). The term *miškān* is used elsewhere to refer to a dwelling place (Num. 16:24); this highlighted that the tent of meeting was the Lord’s dwelling (Exod. 29:44–46; 40:35), thus explaining why it had to be consecrated.

Having finished with the tent (v. 10), Moses next anointed the objects in the courtyard. This included *the altar* of burnt offering (see at 1:5) *and all its utensils* (see Exod. 27:3), which he *sprinkled...seven times* to consecrate them thoroughly (see at 4:5–7). It also included *the basin with its stand*, that is, the bronze basin that stood between the burnt offering altar and the tent (Exod. 30:18–21). At this point, the tabernacle complex was now consecrated and ready for use in public worship.

Turning to Aaron, Moses *poured some of the anointing oil on* his *head*. This act not only consecrated him for the ordination ceremony; it also set him apart as the priests' leader (Lev. 21:10; cf. 1 Sam. 10:1).

13. The section finishes with Moses clothing *Aaron's sons*, setting them apart as those who are to become priests in this ceremony (see at vv. 7–9; cf. n. 1, p. 142).

Everything was now in place to offer the ordination ceremony's three main sacrifices: *the purification offering* (vv. 14–17), *the burnt offering* (vv. 18–21) and *the ordination offering* (vv. 22–29).

iv. The purification offering is presented on behalf of Aaron and his sons (8:14–17)

The first offering to be presented was the *purification offering* (traditionally *sin offering*; see at 4:3), which normally preceded burnt or fellowship offerings (cf. 8:14 and 8:18; 9:8 and 9:12, etc.). This order is logical, since cleansing sin and impurity (purification offering) naturally precedes expressions of general worship or atonement (burnt offering) or expressions of covenant fellowship (fellowship offering/ordination offering).

Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the offering (v. 14), indicating that it was made on their behalf (see at 1:4). Priests were as sinful and impure as other Israelites, and equally in need of atonement (cf. Heb. 5:1–3). Because sin and impurity defiled the Lord's dwelling place (see at 4:5–7), Moses took the sacrificial *blood*, the most powerful cleansing agent available (see Introduction, p. 53), and went to the burnt offering *altar* (which perhaps represented the tabernacle as a whole). He placed the blood on the altar's *horns*, in this way *purifying* it (see at 4:5–7), and thus perhaps the entire tabernacle as well. In doing so, he was *making atonement for it* – that is, removing the sin and impurity from it – and thus 'consecrating it' again for sacred use (v. 15) (so NJB; the NIV is unlikely here, since atonement leads to consecration, not vice versa).

For further details on the purification offering, see comments at 4:3–12.

v. The burnt offering is presented on behalf of Aaron and his sons (8:18–21)

Moses next presented a *burnt offering* for Aaron and his sons. The burnt offering could atone for the offerors' general sinfulness, as well as serve as a way for them to acknowledge the Lord as the one worthy of all praise (see *Meaning* at 1:2–17). It would not be surprising if it functioned in both ways here.

For further details on the burnt offering, see comments at 1:3–9.

vi. The ordination offering is presented on behalf of Aaron and his sons; Moses presents a wave offering (8:22–29)

The *ordination offering* was a type of fellowship offering, as suggested by their many similarities: the *blood* is 'thrown upon the altar round about' (v. 24, RSV; cf. 3:2); *the fat is burned* up *on the altar* (vv. 25, 28; cf. 3:3–5); most of the meat is split between the officiant (*Moses*; v. 29) and the offerors (the priests; v. 31; cf. 7:15–21, 29–34); and any meat not consumed within a certain amount of time must be *burned up* (v. 32; cf. 7:15–18).

It is appropriate that the ordination offering is a type of fellowship offering, for fellowship offerings served as meals which confirmed a covenant (see at 3:11), and the priesthood was a covenantal promise to Aaron and his sons (Num. 18:19; 25:13; cf. Jer. 33:21; Mal. 2:4).

In short, after making atonement for their sin and impurity (purification offering, burnt offering), and acknowledging the Lord as the one worthy of all praise (burnt offering), the priests now confirmed the covenant of priesthood that the Lord was bestowing on them (ordination offering).

23–24. Just as *blood* was placed on the extremities of the altar to make it holy (v. 15), it was also placed on the extremities of *Aaron* and his *sons* – from top to bottom – to make their whole body holy (cf. at 4:5–7). The *right* side was the favoured side (see at 7:28–36).

25–28. Next, Moses presented some of the best *ordination offering* portions as a *wave offering* on the priests' behalf.[46] In this way, the priests dedicated these objects to the Lord (see at 7:28–36), thereby acknowledging his greatness. Moses then *burned* these portions *on the altar* as *a pleasing aroma*, that is, as a way for Aaron and his sons to seek the Lord's favourable acceptance at their ordination (see at 1:9).

For some of the breads being offered, see at 2:4.

29. A *share* of the fellowship offering normally went to the supervising priest

(7:31–32). Since Moses was functioning as the priest, he received *the breast as his share*, and presented it as a *wave offering* according to the Lord's command (cf. 7:29–31).

vii. Final consecration and instructions (8:30–36)

Finally, *Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood* and *sprinkled them* on all the priests and their *garments* as one last act of *consecration* (v. 30). By having these actions repeated (cf. 8:12, 23–24), the Lord was signifying the deep extent of this consecration.

Attention now switches to what remained for Aaron and his sons to do. First, they had to *cook* and *eat* the holy *meat* and *bread at the entrance to the tent of meeting* (v. 31), that is, the area of the courtyard in front of the tent (see at 1:3). The idea is straightforward: holy meat must be eaten by holy people in a holy place. If any was left over, it was to be burned up (v. 32), perhaps to reduce the risk of defiling it (see at 7:16–18).

It was also important that Aaron and his sons did *not leave* this area during their *ordination* (vv. 33, 35). If they left this holy place and went out to a non-holy place (anywhere outside the tabernacle complex), they were disregarding the holiness of the ordination process and so risking death (v. 35; see further at 10:6–7).

The process itself took *seven days* (vv. 33, 35), indicating again that the consecration was thorough and complete (see at 4:5–7). Moreover, the first-day events – especially the atoning sacrifices – were to be repeated each of the seven days (cf. Exod. 29:35–37), underscoring that the *atonement* made for Aaron and his sons was fully accomplished, thus bringing them into a state of ritual holiness so that they could minister in the holy palace of the holy King.

Meaning

When Israelites engaged in public worship, they came before the very presence of their holy King in his holy palace. But this presented an immediate problem, for the Lord's holiness destroys impurity and sinfulness in the same way that light destroys darkness. How, then, could impure and sinful Israelites come safely before him? Through the work of holy priestly mediators. By having the ordination ceremony take place before all the Israelites (v. 3), the Lord made clear to them that they needed ritually holy people to act as their representatives before him. And by providing such mediators, the Lord assured the Israelites that he desired them to enter his presence and enjoy covenant fellowship with him. This is the Lord's heart for his entire creation, for 'he desires all people to be

saved' and has now provided the ultimate mediator – Jesus Christ, the righteous one – to save us and bring us into covenant fellowship with himself (1 Tim. 2:4–5; Heb. 7:25; 10:19–22; 1 John 2:1).

To the priests, the ordination ceremony communicated the weightiness of their calling. To be set apart as holy in order to stand and minister in the presence of such a holy King was a great responsibility, requiring them to show full respect for their ritually holy state (v. 35; cf. 1 Tim. 3:2–6; Jas 3:1). The ceremony also emphasized that they could not enter into this state proudly. The elaborate series of rites they went through to become ritually holy indicated that they were not holy in and of themselves; they were just as sinful and impure as the other Israelites and just as much in need of atonement. This underscores the contrast between these priests and Jesus Christ, our great High Priest (Heb. 4:14; 10:21). Instead of needing atonement for a sinful life, he makes perfect atonement by his holy life, offering himself as the ultimate atoning sacrifice for sinners (Heb. 7:26–27; 9:12, 14, 26; 1 Pet. 3:18; see Introduction, pp. 73–74).

B. The inauguration of public worship and the Lord's appearance in glory (9:1–24)

Context

The tent of meeting was the earthly palace of the covenant King (the Lord) who had come to dwell in the midst of his covenant people (the Israelites) (see at 1:1). As such, the tent was the place where the Lord's people came before him, bringing him their offerings and enjoying covenant fellowship with him. Leviticus begins by identifying how these offerings were to be presented (Lev. 1 – 7) and then describes the ordination of the priests who would present them on the Israelites' behalf (Lev. 8). Now that the priests are ordained, the Israelites could begin their public worship of the Lord (Lev. 9).

The inauguration of this worship was a highly significant event, so the day was marked by a special ceremony in which all the Israelites gathered at the King's palace where the priests presented offerings on their behalf. Since the King himself was to appear, the entire chapter focuses on the priests and the Israelites preparing themselves for the *appearance of the* LORD (vv. 4, 6, 23). This involved gathering before him at the palace (vv. 1–5) and making the appropriate sacrifices (vv. 6–22). The chapter reaches its climax with the King appearing in all his glory and accepting their sacrifices (vv. 23–24). This made clear that he was dwelling in their midst and they were welcome to draw near to him in worship.

Comment

i. Moses identifies the offerings necessary in order for the Lord to appear to Israel (9:1–5)

Israel's public worship started *on the eighth day*, that is, the day after the priests had completed their seven-day ordination ceremony (Lev. 8). The chapter begins with *Moses summoning* the appropriate people: *Aaron and his sons* would be performing the sacrifices, while the *elders of Israel* would be performing rites on behalf of all Israel (such as the hand-leaning rite; cf. 4:15).

Moses identified the appropriate offerings *to sacrifice before the* LORD (vv. 2–4). There were two sets: the first made on behalf of *Aaron* (and his household; cf. 16:6, 11), and the second on behalf of the *Israelites*. Such sacrifices were necessary because *today the* LORD would *appear* (v. 4), and one must always

prepare properly for a king's arrival. The sacrifices followed the usual order (cf. at 8:14–17). Because of the Lord's holiness, the sacrifices began with *purification offerings* (traditionally *sin offerings*; see at 4:3), which atoned for sin and impurity (see again at 4:3), and *burnt offerings*, which atoned for general sinfulness, as well as acknowledged that this King – the Lord – is worthy of all worship (see *Meaning* at Lev. 1:2–17). The sacrifices ended with *fellowship offerings*, which served as a covenant meal, affirming and celebrating the fact that Israel's covenant Lord was now in her midst receiving her worship (see at 3:11). (For the animals required, see below.)

Aaron, his sons and the elders obediently *took the things Moses had commanded to the front of the tent of meeting* (v. 5a). In addition, *the entire assembly* of Israel *came near and stood before the* LORD (v. 5b; see at 8:1–4a). This is royal language. One *stands before* a ruler or person in authority (1 Kgs 1:28), often to seek his favour and/or await his decision (Gen. 43:15; Num. 27:2; cf. Deut. 19:17). Similarly, the Israelites now stood before the Lord, their covenant King, to offer him sacrifice and to await his favourable response.

ii. Aaron presents these offerings on his own behalf and on the people's behalf so that the Lord may appear to them (9:6–22)

6. With everyone now gathered, Moses begins to tell them *what the* LORD *has commanded* in order *that the glory of the* LORD *may appear* : that is, in order that the Lord may demonstrate his presence in a spectacular way (see at vv. 23–24; cf. Exod. 19:16–20; 40:34–35). Such a display of his presence is described as *the glory of the* LORD for the simple reason that those who beheld it ascribed glory and greatness to him (cf. 1 Kgs 18:36–39). When mortal people see the power of the immortal God, they cannot help but offer him praise.

7. The *altar* in view here is the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard (not the incense altar in the Holy Place, which was for incense only; Exod. 30:9).

Moses gives Aaron the basic command he must follow in order for the Lord's glory to appear: offer sacrifices of *atonement for yourself and the people*. Aaron's ability to make these sacrifices – the first he will ever offer – demonstrated that he was now a fully functioning priest. Aaron's need to begin with sacrifices of *atonement* also demonstrated that the sin and impurity of himself and the people had to be dealt with before the holy King would appear.

8–14. Aaron first presented offerings on behalf of himself (and his household). At various points he received help from his sons, who are also now fully

functioning priests (vv. 9, 12, 13).

Aaron followed the usual order: *purification offering* (NIV *sin offering*) (vv. 8–11), followed by *burnt offering* (vv. 12–14; see at vv. 1–5). Aaron's need to atone for priestly sin demonstrated that the priests were just as sinful as the other Israelites (a point the New Testament underscores when contrasting these priests with Jesus, the great High Priest who was without sin; Heb. 7:26–27).

Aaron offered the *purification offering* (vv. 8–11) in general accordance with the prescriptions given for the high priest in 4:3–12 (see there for details). There were two exceptions. First, Aaron was commanded to offer a bull *calf* rather than a *bull* (v. 8; cf. 4:3). This may be because of the occasion. Since the Israelites were preparing for the Lord's special appearance, sacrificial animals especially fit for a king were required. And since calves 'were considered a culinary delicacy' (Borowski, 1998: 77–78; cf. Gen. 18:6–8; 1 Sam. 28:24–25), it was the perfect animal to offer on such a grand occasion.

Second, Aaron put *the blood on the horns of the altar* of burnt offering (see at v. 7) instead of the horns of the incense altar (v. 9; cf. 4:5–7). The reason for this difference is not clear, although Leviticus 4 and 9 should not be expected to overlap in every detail, since their contexts are different. In Leviticus 4, the high priest is atoning for a specific unintentional sin he has committed, while in Leviticus 9, Aaron is atoning more generally for his sin and impurity in preparation for the Lord's appearance.

Aaron next offered the *burnt offering* (vv. 12–14), following the prescriptions of 1:10–13. A *burnt offering* had to be a male animal (1:3, 10). In this case, it was a costly *ram* (v. 2), another appropriate animal to present to a king (see at 5:15).

15–21. Having presented offerings on behalf of himself and his household, Aaron presented offerings on behalf of Israel. He again followed the usual order: *purification offering* (v. 15), *burnt offering* (v. 16), *grain offering* (v. 17) and *fellowship offering* (vv. 18–21; cf. at vv. 1–5).

Aaron presented the people's *purification offering* (v. 15) in the same way as he had presented *the first one*: that is, by following the prescriptions of Leviticus 4, except for the placement of the blood and the type of animal offered. In this case, the animal was a *male goat* (9:3), probably an adult (unlike the other animals in v. 3, the goat is not said to be young). If an adult male goat was comparable to a ram, it too was a costly animal and thus again appropriate for such a special occasion.

Aaron then presented *the burnt offering...in the prescribed way* (v. 16), that is, in accordance with Leviticus 1. The animals included a *calf* and a *lamb*, both at least one *year old* (9:3). The value of calves has been addressed above. Lambs in

the first year were also probably valued since they would have young (and thus tasty) meat.

Aaron next presented the *grain offering* (v. 17) in accordance with the prescriptions of Leviticus 2 (see there for details). This offering was *in addition to the morning's burnt offering*, that is, in addition to the grain offering that accompanied the daily burnt offering of the morning (Exod. 29:38–41; cf. 40:29).

Finally, Aaron presented the *fellowship offering* (vv. 18–21) in accordance with Leviticus 3:1–11 and 7:30–34 (see there for details).[47] The animals included an *ox and a ram* (v. 4). The value of the *ram* has been noted above. The term for *ox* (*šôr*) can refer to a member of the herd in general, male or female. These were the largest animals that could be offered, and therefore the most costly. In light of the other animals offered this day, it would not be surprising if an especially fine ox was chosen.

22. With the offerings now complete, *Aaron lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them*. To *bless* the people was the specific duty of the priest (Deut. 10:8; 21:5a; see Num. 6:24–26 for an example of a priestly blessing). Although the priest said the blessing, it is important to note that the one who carried out the blessing was the Lord (Num. 6:24–27; Deut. 28:8, 12, etc.). This is because a blessing was really a prayer, as implied here by Aaron *lifting his hands*, an action typical in the Old Testament of those who were praying (Milgrom, 1991: 586–587; 1 Kgs 8:22–23, 38, 54; Pss 28:2; 141:2). As a result, the priest's words of blessing *to* the people were actually a prayer *for* the people (cf. 2 Chr. 30:27). In short, these are blessing-prayers.

The exact blessing for which Aaron prayed is not specified. Guesses include: asking the Lord to accept Israel's offering favourably; asking him to bless Israel with general well-being and favour (Num. 6:24–26); or asking him to bless Israel with such things as fruitfulness (Gen. 12:2), land (Gen. 26:3) and success over enemies (Gen. 24:60). Whatever the case, Aaron was clearly asking the Lord to shine his favour on his covenant people.

Aaron then *stepped down* from the altar, which had an approximate height of 4.5 ft (1.4 m, see at 1:5). On account of this height, it probably had an earthen ramp that allowed priests easy access to the top (cf. Exod. 20:26; 1 Sam. 2:28).

iii. The Lord appears and consumes the public offerings of Aaron and the people (9:23–24)

Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. The text does not tell us why. At the least, Aaron's entering the tent was a sign to the Israelites that the

Lord had accepted him as their mediator. But it may also be noted that Moses often went into the tent to speak directly to the Lord and/or for the Lord to speak directly to him (Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89). The same may be true here, with Moses and Aaron entering the tent to pray that the Lord would receive these offerings and be pleased with Israel's worship.

Whatever the case, after *they came out* and *blessed the people, the glory of the* LORD *appeared*. If other appearances of the Lord are a guide, then the picture in view is of a fiery cloud descending on the tent (cf. Exod. 19:18; 24:15–18; 40:34–35; Num. 16:42; 1 Kgs 8:10–11), with *fire* coming forth from the cloud and *consuming* the offerings still burning on the altar. Whatever its exact appearance, it was spectacular enough that *all the people saw it*.

The people responded by *shouting for joy* and *falling face down.* To *shout for joy* is a common response to the activity of the Lord (Isa. 12:6; 24:14; 49:13, etc.), which in this context is the appearance of his powerful presence in their midst. The shouts undoubtedly consisted of words of praise that underscored the Lord's greatness (cf. 2 Chr. 7:1–3). To *fall face down* before someone was to acknowledge that person to be of far superior social rank, and worthy of your honour and respect (2 Sam. 9:6; 1 Kgs 18:7). It is therefore not surprising that this phrase – and its parallel, 'to bow low and worship' – frequently describe people's response to the ultimate superior: the Lord himself (Gen. 24:26; see esp. Exod. 34:8; 1 Kgs 18:39). By crying out with shouts of joy and falling humbly before him, the Israelites were indeed giving him glory (see at v. 6).

Meaning

For the Israelites, the Lord's spectacular display of his presence demonstrated that he was dwelling in their midst and receiving their worship. This had two implications. First, it meant that the priesthood was working. The Lord's fire had consumed the offerings presented by the priests on the Israelites' behalf, indicating that he had accepted these offerings – and the Israelites – with favour (cf. Rom. 5:1–2; Heb. 10:19–22). Second, it demonstrated that the Lord desired the Israelites to know him as their covenant King (cf. Exod. 29:45–46) and to experience the blessing for which they had been created: relationship with the Lord himself. The Lord's desire for us to know him as our King shines through all the more clearly when Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, comes to dwell in our midst, revealing to us afresh the glory of God (John 1:14; 2:11), and providing a way for us to enter into relationship with him (John 1:12; 14:6).

Naturally, the Lord's spectacular display of his presence also demonstrated to the Israelites his awesome power and might. Such a display is for this reason called *the glory of the* LORD (v. 6), since those who see it cannot help but give

him glory and honour, shouting out with joy at the Lord's goodness and greatness (v. 24). But such a display was not simply for the purpose of eliciting worship from the Israelites; it was also to instil in their hearts a proper reverence for – and even fear of – the Lord (cf. Exod. 20:18–19 with 20:20). It is for good reason that the Scriptures teach 'the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge' (Prov. 1:7). When we keep the Lord's awesome power and majesty clearly before us, we are quick to obey him, holding fast to his life-giving paths as we bow in reverential worship before our heavenly King (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1).

C. The Lord's appearance in judgment on Nadab and Abihu; his warning to Aaron; Aaron's faithfulness (10:1–20)

Context

This chapter stands in strong contrast to the previous two. Leviticus 8 – 9 repeatedly note that Moses and Aaron did everything *as the LORD commanded* (8:9, 13; 9:10, etc.), but this chapter begins by declaring that Nadab and Abihu presented an offering the Lord 'had not commanded' (RSV) (10:1). Moreover, Leviticus 9 ends with a sign of the Lord's favour (*fire comes out from* before him and *consumes* the offerings; 9:24), while this chapter begins with a sign of judgment: *fire comes out from* before the Lord and *consumes* Nadab and Abihu (10:2)! The fact that these events happened on the very same day – the inauguration of Israel's public worship (cf. 10:19 with 9:8–14) – only underscores the tragic contrast.

But despite such a negative beginning, Leviticus 10 does end positively. The chapter consists of three sections. In the first, the priests Nadab and Abihu greatly disrespect the Lord in the context of worship, and experience his judgment as a result (vv. 1–7). In the second, the Lord warns Aaron, the high priest, to avoid the errors of his sons and to carry out his priestly duties faithfully (vv. 8–11). In the third, Aaron demonstrates his reverence for the Lord by faithfully following his commands in the context of worship (vv. 12–20). Thus, the negative example set by Nadab and Abihu at the beginning of the chapter is replaced by their father's positive example at the end, emphasizing the importance of priestly faithfulness.

Comment

i. The Lord judges Nadab and Abihu with death for failing to revere him (10:1–7)

1–2. *Nadab and Abihu* were the oldest of Aaron's four sons (Exod. 6:23). As the story begins, they bring an *incense* offering *before the LORD* in their *censers* (vessels in which incense and coals of fire could be carried; cf. 16:12). But since the Lord had not *commanded* this offering, it is described as *unauthorised fire*.[48]

Leviticus 16 provides further insight into the nature of the offence. The chapter begins by referring to Nadab and Abihu 'who died when they

approached the LORD' (v. 1). The Lord then warns Aaron 'not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place...or else he will die' (v. 2). These verses imply that the sin of Nadab and Abihu was twofold. First, they approached the Lord's presence at a time he had not authorized (and so Aaron is warned not to enter '*whenever he chooses* into the Most Holy Place'). Second, they tried to enter a place that the Lord had not authorized: the Most Holy Place itself (and so Aaron is warned not to enter 'whenever he chooses *into the Most Holy Place*'). In short, the *unauthorised fire* was an incense offering which they presented at an unauthorized time (one of their own choosing) and at an unauthorized place (attempting to barge into the very throne room of the Lord!). This was considered a severe breach of royal protocol (cf. Esth. 4:11) and thus a sign of gross disrespect to the Lord (cf. v. 3 below).

The Lord's judgment comes swiftly. In a dramatic reversal, the *fire* that had *consumed* the offerings (9:24) now consumes those presenting the offering: Nadab and Abihu (10:2)! In a single day, the story moves from triumph (Lev. 9) to tragedy (Lev. 10).

3. To explain why Nadab and Abihu have been killed, *Moses* turned to *Aaron* and proclaimed to him a message from *the LORD* consisting of two parallel lines:

Among those who approach me,
in the sight of all the people,

I will show myself holy;
I will display my glory.[49]

The first half of each line explains where the Lord will show himself holy and display his glory. *Those who approach* him are the priests, who approached the Lord's presence to perform various worship rites on Israel's behalf (9:7; Ezek. 40:46), while *all the people* refers to the Israelites. The Lord does not display his holiness and glory secretly, before a chosen few, but publicly, for all to see.

But what does it mean for him to 'show himself holy' and 'display his glory'? The words are used elsewhere in the context of a miracle that displays his power so clearly that it sets him apart as distinct from any other being (*holy*), and causes those who behold it to acknowledge him as the God worthy of all *glory* (cf. Exod. 14:17–18). As in Leviticus 10, such displays occur elsewhere as miracles of judgment: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I am against you, O Sidon, and *I will display my glory* within you. They will know that I am the LORD, when I inflict punishment on her and *show myself holy* among her' (Ezek. 28:22, my trans.; cf. Exod. 14:4, 17–18; Ezek. 39:11–13). The Lord is therefore

issuing a very strong warning to the entire priestly family: if you do not set me apart by your actions as the God worthy of reverence, I will use your death as an opportunity to remind all the people that I am indeed the God who is to be revered above all (cf. 16:2).

In response, Aaron was *silent* : that is, he accepted what the Lord had done (cf. Lam. 3:28). Although undoubtedly deeply grieved, Aaron recognized that there was no objection to make when the Lord brought justice to bear on those who failed to revere him properly.

4–5. Having explained to Aaron why his sons had died, Moses turned his attention to an urgent issue: removing the dead (and ritually polluting) corpses *from the front of the sanctuary*, that is, from in front of the Most Holy Place where the ark was kept.[50] As noted above (vv. 1–2), Nadab and Abihu had tried to enter the Most Holy Place itself and had died as a result. Their bodies were now lying in front of it, so Moses *summoned* their *cousins*, *Mishael and Elzaphan*, to come and *carry* the bodies *outside the camp*. (Presumably, bodies were typically taken outside the camp to avoid defiling it.)

6–7. With the corpses of Nadab and Abihu gone, Moses turned his attention to the remaining priests: *Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar*. After the death of a loved one, it was normal for ancient Israelites to enter into a period of formal mourning in which they became ritually impure (perhaps because they would have had close contact with the ritually defiling corpse; 21:11). But since Aaron and his sons have had *the LORD's anointing oil* placed on them, they had been set apart into a special status of holiness (8:12, 30). This status was especially strong during the ordination period, which appears to have extended beyond the seven-day ordination ceremony (Lev. 8) to the eighth-day inauguration service (Lev. 9). The priests were therefore forbidden from engaging in the ritually defiling mourning process (21:1, 3, 4). Specifically, they were prohibited from such mourning rites as letting their hair *become unkempt* or *tearing* their *clothes* (v. 6; cf. Gen. 37:29; Lev. 21:10), and from leaving *the entrance* area in front of the *tent of meeting* to go and mourn (v. 7). If they did, they would face the Lord's judgment and *die*. And no wonder. To desecrate what the Lord sets apart into his holy realm is to show great disregard for the Lord himself (cf. *Context* at 5:14 – 6:7). If Aaron and his sons desecrated their holy status, they would be doing the same thing that Nadab and Abihu had done (disrespecting the Lord himself), and so face the same judgment (death itself).

But Aaron and his sons could endanger much more than themselves. To desecrate the Lord's holy property was such a serious sin that the Lord could become *angry with the whole community*, just as he did when Achan stole from his holy property (Josh. 7:1; 22:20; cf. at Lev. 4:3). This was not the capricious

response of a quick-tempered deity. Rather, it was meant to underscore to the Israelites his holy hatred of sin, and also to alert them to the presence of evil in their midst, so that they could address it properly and maintain life-giving fellowship with him. Naturally, once the situation had been addressed, the Lord's presence would return, and the Israelites would again enjoy his favour (cf. Josh. 7:16–26 with Josh. 8). But this verse stands as a strong reminder to the priests of the great responsibility they bear as the people's leaders. When a captain makes a mistake, the entire ship is endangered.

Finally, it should be noted that the prohibition against mourning does not mean that Aaron and his sons could not be sad, or that everyone had to act as if this tragedy had never happened. Indeed, *all the Israelites* were allowed to *mourn* on behalf of the priestly family. The issue here is whether Aaron and his remaining sons would show regard for the Lord's holy character above all else (cf. Luke 14:26). Verse 7 ends by informing us that this was indeed their desire, for *they did as Moses said*.

ii. The Lord's direct warning and exhortation to Aaron (10:8–11)

At this point, for the only time in Leviticus, *the* LORD speaks directly to *Aaron* alone, perhaps to emphasize that the priests in particular must pay attention to the following commands.

The Lord begins with a warning. Aaron and his sons are forbidden from drinking *wine or other fermented drink* before going on duty in the *tent of meeting*. Three reasons are given.

First, so that they would not *die*. *Wine* and *fermented drink* were alcoholic enough to make people drunk (1 Sam. 1:14–15; Prov. 20:1), and drunken priests were more likely to err in their duties. Since these duties included weighty matters – such as having frequent contact with the Lord's holy things (Lev. 22:2) and rendering legal decisions (Deut. 17:8–13; cf. Isa. 28:7) – drunken priests could quickly and easily commit acts of desecration or great miscarriages of justice. Indeed, the placement of this law so closely to the story of Nadab and Abihu (priests who *died* by erring greatly in their duties) could imply that they had been drunk.

Second, so that they could properly *distinguish between* ritual categories (v. 10). As noted in the Introduction (pp. 45–46), there were three basic ritual categories in Israel: the 'holy', the 'pure' and the 'impure' (NIV *holy, clean, unclean*). (The word *common* is not a separate category; it simply refers to that which is non-holy [1 Sam. 21:4], whether pure or impure.) It was vitally

important for priests to distinguish between these so that the impure did not defile the holy, and especially so that the Israelites did not defile the holy tabernacle of the Lord with their impurities (cf. Lev. 15:31).

Third, so that they could clearly *teach the Israelites the decrees* of *the* LORD (v. 11). The priests in Israel did not simply perform rituals; they were also responsible for teaching the Lord's law (Deut. 17:9–11; Mal. 2:7). They could not do this rightly if they were drunk, and the Lord's people would suffer as a result.

iii. Aaron shows reverence to the Lord by following proper sacrificial procedure (10:12–20)

12–15. After the Lord's warning and exhortation, *Moses* turns to *Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar*, and gives them instructions on how to handle the remaining portions of the *grain* and *fellowship offerings*. The main idea is that the entire priestly family (*Aaron* and his *children*) could eat the holy offering (the *fellowship offering*) in a *ceremonially clean place*, but only priests (*Aaron* and his *sons*) could eat the most holy offering (the *grain offering*) and only in a holy place (*beside the altar*). Since most of these instructions have been given earlier (see 2:3, 9–10; 6:16; 7:28–34), Moses may be repeating them here for emphasis: 'In light of what just happened to Nadab and Abihu, make sure you perform all ritual matters exactly as the Lord commanded!'

16–18. Moses fears, however, that the priests have not done so. According to his earlier commands (6:24–30), the *goat* that had been offered as a 'purification offering' (NIV *sin offering*) for the people (9:15) should have been *eaten* by the priests. Instead, Moses *found that it had been burned*, apparently under the direction of *Eleazar and Ithamar*. Understandably, Moses *was angry with* them, since it looked as if they were repeating their brothers' mistake: disobeying the Lord's commands.

Moses begins his rebuke by returning to the theme of verses 12–15: the priests should have *eaten* this *most holy* offering (the *purification offering*) in a holy place (*the sanctuary area*). If this did not happen, proper protocol had been broken, and the offering and offeror would not be accepted by the Lord (cf. 7:18). This acceptance was especially important, because the purification offering was *given to* the priests in order *to take away the guilt of the community*: that is, to remove the community's guilt and its consequences by performing the sacrifice. In short, this sacrifice was meant to *make atonement* for Israel; it was vitally important, therefore, that it be offered properly, so that atonement would indeed take place.

19–20. In order to understand this interaction between Moses and Aaron, it must be remembered that Moses' main concern was whether proper sacrificial procedure had been followed. If the priests were making the purification offering on behalf of others, the priests were to eat the meat (see 6:24–29), but if they were offering it on behalf of themselves as well, they could not eat the meat (cf. 4:3–5 with 6:30). Moses assumes that they were offering it simply on behalf of the people (and thus should have eaten it), while Aaron assumes that they were offering it on behalf of themselves as well (and thus should have burned it). The text does not explain the basis of Aaron's assumption. If the priests in some way shared in the guilt of Nadab and Abihu's sin (either because of their corporate solidarity with them or because they failed to guard the tabernacle in the way they were supposed to [cf. Num. 18:1]), and if this sin occurred after the priests had made their own atoning sacrifice (9:12–14), then they might have considered the people's sacrifice to be one that atoned for their own sin as well, thus making it inappropriate for them to eat the meat. Whatever the reason, Aaron is arguing that he and his sons actually did follow proper sacrificial procedure by not eating the meat – a point to which Moses eventually agrees (v. 20). In contrast to Nadab and Abihu, Aaron and his remaining sons showed due reverence to the Lord by following his commands exactly.

Meaning

A major theme of this chapter is the awesome responsibility of the priesthood, which manifests itself in two related ways. First, the priests are to follow the Lord's commands exactly and so honour him as their King. While this was true for all Israelites, it was especially true for the priests, who were the Lord's royal attendants, serving in his palace. It is bad enough for a subject to show disregard for a king by breaking his laws; it is an outright act of treason for his closest attendants to do so. This is why Nadab and Abihu suffered such a fate. Treason must be met with swift justice, so it is plain to all that the king is to be revered. Such reverence is modelled by Aaron, who understood the Lord's greatness and responded by obeying him exactly. Leaders who wish to follow Aaron's example must be sure to keep the Lord's greatness clearly before their eyes (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1).

Second, the priests are responsible for leading the Israelites spiritually, guiding them in maintaining proper covenant relationship with their covenant King by following his covenant laws (10:10–11). If the priests were to err here – either by example (see at vv. 1–2, 6–7) or by failing in their duties (see at vv. 8–11) – then all Israel would be at risk of falling away from her King. This was another reason why the punishment of Nadab and Abihu was swift and severe.

Captains bear more responsibility than passengers for the ship's safety, and face stricter punishments when they fail in their duties. This is not for the sake of being hard on the captains; it is for the sake of protecting the passengers. For this reason, the New Testament affirms that those who teach God's people are held to higher account (Jas 3:1). This story serves as a strong exhortation to pastors and preachers in particular to be diligent in their duties and faithful in their lives (1 Tim. 4:12–16), crying out for help and strength to Jesus, our great High Priest, 'who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin' (Heb. 4:15).

3. LAWS ON THE CAUSES AND TREATMENT OF RITUAL IMPURITY (11:1 – 15:33)

The Lord was now dwelling in the Israelites' midst in his holy palace (Exod. 40; Lev. 9), and it was important that they did not disrespect him by defiling his dwelling with their ritual impurity (Lev. 15:31). As a result, the priests were responsible for teaching them how to distinguish between various ritual states (*impure*, *pure*, *holy*; Lev. 10:10), and especially, how to address their ritual impurity. Leviticus 11 – 15 meets this need, describing the causes of ritual impurity and how to address it properly. (For how laws on ritual impurity apply to the believer today, see *Meaning* below.)

A. Laws on pure and impure creatures and how Israel is to relate to them (11:1–47)

Context

Leviticus 11 addresses issues of ritual purity and impurity related to various creatures, identifying the ritually pure (and therefore edible) and the ritually impure (and therefore inedible) (vv. 2–23, 41–45). It also describes how to become ritually pure after touching a creature's carcass (vv. 24–40; for ritual purity and impurity, see pp. 45–46).

In order to understand the chapter, it is important to note that every culture has its own way of dividing the animal world. In fact, some do this in multiple ways, dividing the animal world sometimes in terms of the animal's main diet (carnivores eat meat) and sometimes in terms of its main habitat (marine animals live in water). These divisions help to answer different questions. In terms of diet, what type of animal is a shark? A carnivore. In terms of habitat, what type of animal is a shark? A marine animal.

The Israelites also divided the animal world in various ways, two of which are found in Leviticus 11. One addresses the question: 'What type of animal is this in terms of habitat?' There are three possible answers: animals of the land (vv. 2b–8, 29–30, 41–42), of the waters (vv. 9–12) and of the sky (vv. 13–23).

A second division addresses the question: 'What type of animal is edible?' There are two possible answers: animals that are ritually pure (and therefore edible) and animals that are ritually impure (and therefore inedible; see Additional note below for possible explanations of what makes an animal pure or impure). As verses 43–45 make clear, this division was especially important for the Israelites to heed in order to honour their holy Lord (see at vv. 41–45).

The animal world in ancient Israel

Animals	***Land (vv. 2b–8, 29–30, 41–42)***	***Waters (vv. 9–12)***	***Sky (vv. 13–23)***
Pure (edible)	Larger animals: those that have a completely divided hoof and chew the cud (cows, sheep, goats, deer; vv. 2b–3)	Animals with fins and scales (most fish; v. 9)	Birds: none listed, although turtledoves and pigeons were pure (Lev. 1:14; cf. 1 Kgs 4:23; Neh. 5:18) Insects:

			certain ones that had jointed legs, such as locusts (vv. 21–22)
Impure (inedible)	Larger animals: those that do not have a completely divided hoof or do not chew the cud (camels, coneys, hares, pigs; vv. 4–7)Smaller animals: see list in vv. 29–30; creatures such as snakes are also included (v. 42)	Animals without fins and scales (molluscs, eels; vv. 10–12)	Birds: see list in vv. 13–19 Insects: most (v. 20)

Comment

i. Introduction (11:1–2a)

In Leviticus, the Lord addresses *Moses and Aaron* together on four separate occasions, all in the context of Leviticus 11 – 15 (11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1). Aaron is perhaps specifically mentioned, since these chapters deal with distinguishing between the pure and the impure, the very thing a priest was to do (10:10; cf. Hoffmann, 1905: 302, cited by Wenham, 1979: 171).

ii. Creatures that Israel may and may not eat (11:2b–23)

2b–8. Land creatures that Israel may and may not eat. The first animals described are *animals that live on land* (v. 2) and, in particular, those that are rabbit-sized (the *hyrax* and ‘hare’) and larger.

2b–3. In order to be edible, a land animal must meet two qualifications. First, it must have a *hoof* that is completely *divided*, as do cattle, sheep and goats (but not, for example, horses). Second, it must *chew the cud*. Herd and flock animals met both qualifications, as did some game animals, such as deer (cf. Deut. 14:4–5).

4–7. By way of contrast, the Israelites could *not eat* any land animal *that only chews the cud or only has a divided hoof* (v. 4). The *camel* (v. 4), the *hyrax* (v. 5) and the ‘hare’ (so RSV, v. 6; NIV *rabbit*) all *chew the cud* but *do not have a divided hoof*.[51] The *pig* does *have a divided hoof* but *does not chew the cud* (v. 7). As a result, all four were ‘impure’ (NIV *unclean*) and inedible.

8. The Israelites could *not eat* the *meat* of these four animals, nor *touch their carcasses*: that is, they could not touch their carcasses without recognizing that they would become impure and would need to address the impurity properly (cf.

vv. 24–26, which make clear that touching the carcasses was allowed). By restricting this regulation to carcasses, the verse also implies that impurity did not result from touching these animals while they were living (no-one became impure, for example, by riding a camel).

Additional note: Pure and impure animals in Leviticus

On what basis were animals classified as pure or impure? This is a matter of some debate (for a full overview, see Houston, 1993: 68–123). Generally, however, there are four main views.

1. The hygienic explanation holds that animals are classified as impure because they can potentially cause disease when eaten (undercooked pork, for example, can cause trichinosis). But many of the pure animals are equally dangerous if not cooked properly (undercooked beef, for example, can transmit salmonella). Moreover, the New Testament allows these animals to be eaten (see *Meaning* below), and yet there is no evidence that cooking techniques were safer by this time. If health were the Lord's concern, he would surely not have allowed this change.
2. The cultic explanation holds that animals were declared impure because they were used in pagan worship or represented pagan gods. This may have been true in some instances, but this view fails as a comprehensive explanation, for the simple reason that cattle, sheep and goats were pure in Israel, even though they were commonly used as sacrificial animals by her pagan neighbours (Houston, 1993: 72).
3. The moral-symbolic explanation holds that an animal's behaviour symbolically represents goodness (making the animal pure) or evil (making the animal impure). Wenham (1979: 168) explains: 'Aristeas [second century BC] suggested that chewing the cud made an animal clean, because it reminded men to meditate on the law. Bonar [nineteenth century AD] argued that...the dirty habits of the pig spoke of the "filth of iniquity".' As Wenham (1979: 168) notes, however, these explanations 'are at best partial, covering only part of the data, and at worst whimsical and capricious. There seems to be no criterion for preferring one interpretation to any other.'
4. Finally, various explanations have been given that make use of the insights gained from modern anthropology (see the survey in Houston, 1993: 93–122). One is that some animals appear to be classified as impure because they do not conform to certain standards, standards that appear to express the norm. (See esp. Douglas, 1966: 55; she is rightly critiqued by Houston [1993: 102–111] for the way in which she applies this explanation, although

the explanation itself is still plausible.) To an Israelite, for example, the standard edible land animals were cattle, sheep and goats, each of which chews the cud and has a split hoof (11:3). Animals that conform to this standard are pure (such as deer and gazelle), while animals that do not are impure (such as the camel and pig; 11:4, 7). The same logic could apply to marine creatures and insects: those that the Israelites were used to eating were considered normal and therefore pure (11:9, 21); those that did not match these creatures closely enough were considered abnormal and therefore impure (11:10, 23).

It is less clear how this final understanding would apply – if at all – to the flying creatures of 11:13–19. It is possible that they were impure because they are birds of carrion: that is, birds that eat meat that still has blood in it, an act that was strongly forbidden (Gen. 9:4–6; Lev. 3:17). This explanation is a conjecture, however, and one that is difficult to apply to all the creatures in verses 13–19 for the simple reason that we are unsure how to translate at least half the terms on the list (see at vv. 13–19).

As the above indicates, there is no single explanation that accounts for all the data, perhaps because some animals were classified as pure or impure for one reason, and others for another (cf. Gorman, 1997: 70; naturally, there could be other explanations, not listed above, that we have no way of even guessing; cf. at 12:5). As the above also indicates, all explanations remain guesses at best, since the text itself does not provide the full rationale for its classifications (for dangers to avoid in trying to determine the rationale behind ritual states, see Introduction, pp. 47–48). What is clear, however, is the function these laws were to have in the community: setting the Israelites apart as a holy people of the Lord (see at vv. 41–45; see also Introduction, pp. 48–49).

9–12. Marine creatures that Israel may and may not eat.

9. The Israelites would have been familiar with marine animals from their time in Egypt living near the Nile (cf. Exod. 7:18, 21 and esp. Num. 11:5). This verse describes the type of marine life that was edible, namely, whatever had *fins and scales*. (See Additional note above for possible rationale.)

10–12. The Israelites were to consider any marine *creatures...that did not have fins and scales* – such as molluscs or eels – ‘to be detestable’ (ESV; NIV *unclean*), that is, ‘detestable’ as a food source. This certainly meant that these animals were to be considered impure and thus inedible (cf. Deut. 14:10), although the strong words ‘detest’ and ‘detestable’ might also emphasize that these creatures were to be completely rejected as a food source. The reason for this is not given, but clearly their meat was absolutely prohibited for consumption, and their

carcasses were to be avoided (cf. v. 8).

13–23. Flying creatures that Israel may and may not eat.

13–19. The same is true of the creatures in verses 13–19. These verses list twenty different 'flying creatures'.[52] Unfortunately, many of the Hebrew terms used are very rare, and less than half can be identified with certainty (see Houston, 1993: 44–45; Firmage, 1992: 1154–1155). Some of those we are most confident identifying – such as the *eagle* (v. 13) and the *raven* (v. 15) – are carnivorous, which might explain why they, at least, are impure (see Additional note above). In any case, the Israelites would have understood all the terms and known from this list which flying creatures they were to 'detest' (ESV) as a source of food (v. 13; cf. at vv. 10–12).

20–23. Verses 20–23 now turn to address smaller flying creatures, namely, *flying insects that walk on all fours*.[53] On the whole, the Israelites were to treat insects in the same way as the creatures of verses 13–19: they were to 'detest' them (ESV) as a food source (vv. 20, 23). There were, however, some exceptions: certain insects that had *jointed legs for hopping* were edible, such as *locusts* (vv. 21–22). See Additional note above for possible rationale.

While eating insects does not appeal to every culture, many cultures, both ancient and modern, have enjoyed them as part of their diet (see Cansdale, 1970: 243). Not only are insects readily available, many of them also have nutritional value. *Locusts*, for example, are 'a valuable source of protein, fat and calories', and 'also have a fair amount of mineral salts...' (Cansdale, 1970: 244).

iii. Defilement that comes from contact with creatures' carcasses, and how to address it (11:24–40)

Whereas verses 2–23 focused on which animals could or could not be eaten, verses 24–40 concentrate on the ritual *impurity* that comes from various animal *carcasses*, and how to address it. (For the importance of addressing impurity, see at 5:2–3.)

24–28. Impure land creatures.

24–25. These verses identify two different situations: touching and handling (see also vv. 27–28, 31, 39–40). Those who simply *touch* the *carcass* of various animals *will be impure till evening* (v. 24). In ancient Israel, as in many cultures, a person had to wait a certain period of time to transition from one state (such as impurity) to another (such as purity). In this case, the person had to wait until *evening* to become pure again.

But those who *pick up one of* these animal *carcasses* will be *impure till evening* and must also *wash their clothes* (v. 25), an act often required to cleanse

impurity (Lev. 13:6; 14:8, etc.). This extra requirement is no doubt given because the person has handled the carcass more thoroughly.

26–27. With these general rules in place, verses 26–27 identify impure land animals whose carcasses make one impure. Verse 26 describes those already identified in verses 2–8, while verse 27 makes a logical clarification: land animals that have *paws* instead of split hooves are impure as well (e.g. dogs or lions).

29–38. Impure swarming land creatures. These verses address ritual impurity resulting from contact with the carcasses of smaller land animals that 'swarm' (NASV; NIV *move*) (vv. 29, 31, 41–44, 46), that is, that multiply very quickly into groups (cf. Exod. 1:7). Eight examples are listed (vv. 29–30). As with the flying creatures (vv. 13–19), many of the Hebrew terms are difficult to identify, although clearly the list includes both reptiles and small mammals (Houston, 1993: 51).

The carcasses of these animals not only make people ritually impure (v. 31); they also make various objects ritually impure (vv. 32–38). These objects were everyday items on which – or in which – a person might find the body of a reptile or small mammal.

There were different ways of addressing the impurity, depending on the object. Some could be ritually purified by being *put* – or perhaps better 'dipped' (NRSV) – *in water*, for example, items made of *wood* (such as axe handles) or *cloth* (v. 32). Others had to be discarded, including *clay* objects such as storage *pots* (v. 33), *ovens* or *cooking pots* (v. 35). (This would have been inconvenient, but no great hardship, since pottery was inexpensive and easy to make.) Any *food* prepared with *water* from one of these storage *pots* was also impure, as was any type of *liquid* found in the pot itself (v. 34). Still other things did not become impure at all, including water sources (such as *springs* and *cisterns*, v. 36) and piles of *seeds* that were yet *to be planted* (v. 37).[54] While these regulations underscored the seriousness of impurity, they were sensitive to the realities of daily life, allowing the Israelites to retain those items that were the most time-consuming to produce (v. 32) or the most essential for the community's survival (vv. 36–37).

39–40. Pure land creatures. These verses refer to the land *animals* described in verse 3 (the same Hebrew word, *bĕhēmâ*, is used in both places). If these animals were slaughtered for sacrifice, they would not cause impurity. If they *died* a natural death, they could be eaten,[55] although their carcasses made one impure, and the normal purification procedures had to be followed (cf. vv. 24–25).

iv. Israel may not eat swarming land creatures (11:41–45)

Verses 41–42 make clear that the *swarming creatures* listed above (vv. 29–38) may *not be eaten*, whether they *move on their bellies* (such as snakes), *walk on all fours* (such as those listed in vv. 29–30) or *walk on many feet* (such as caterpillars) (v. 42). All of these were to be considered 'detestable' (ESV) as sources of food (vv. 41–42).

Verses 43–45 then form a highly structured unit in which the second half mirrors the first and thus emphasizes the importance of obeying these commands.

A – Prohibition against 'making themselves detestable' (ESV) to the Lord by disobeying him and eating these creatures (v. 43)	A' – Prohibition repeated (v. 44b)
B – Rationale: the L ORD is their *God* (v. 44a)	B' – Rationale repeated (v. 45a)
C – Command: *be holy* (v. 44a)	C' – Command repeated (v. 45b)
D – Rationale: the Lord *is holy* (v. 44a)	D' – Rationale repeated (v. 45b)

The prohibitions are stated emphatically. The Israelites would not simply contract ritual impurity by eating these animals, but would also 'make themselves detestable' (ESV) to the Lord by their disobedience (v. 43). This was not the position they were to be in, as the Lord makes clear with the rationale: *I am the LORD your God*. Variations of this phrase occur frequently in the Old Testament and bring to mind a whole range of related ideas: 'For I am the Lord your God, who has redeemed you (Exod. 20:2; Lev. 11:45), and so set you apart to be mine (Exod. 19:4–6; Lev. 11:45; 20:24; 22:32b–33), so that I might dwell among you and be your God (Exod. 29:46).'

The Lord underscores this point by repeating the command positively: *Be holy*, that is, obey my commands in terms of your diet. The Lord expresses the rationale simply: *because I am holy* (vv. 44a, 45b), and so the very opposite of that which is impure. Because the Israelites are in covenant relationship with this *holy* God, they must avoid *defiling themselves* in terms of their diet. Holiness and impurity are incompatible.

In short, the Lord is saying to the Israelites, 'As an act of reverential worship to the holy one who has redeemed you and set you apart to be my holy ones, set yourselves apart to me by obedience to my holy commands, in this way acknowledging and reflecting my own holiness to the watching world.'

v. Summary and purpose of the laws of this chapter (11:46–47)

The chapter closes appropriately by summarizing its 'law[s]' (RSV, v. 46; NIV *regulations*), and the reason they have been given (v. 47).

Meaning

This chapter has two primary functions. First, it tells the Israelites of the different ways they could contract ritual impurity from animal carcasses, and explains how they could purify themselves from it. Such information was crucial if the Israelites were to avoid defiling the holy palace of the King who was now dwelling in their midst (Lev. 15:31).

Second, this chapter provides an official list of which animals were ritually pure (and thus edible) and which were ritually impure (and thus inedible). The concept of ritual purity and impurity existed in Israel long before Leviticus was given (cf. Gen. 35:2), and it should not surprise us if the Israelites had already applied this concept to the animal world while living in Egypt. If so, it would imply that they would have already thought of some (all?) of these animals as either ritually pure or impure. Whatever the case may be, the Lord provided these laws about ritually pure and impure animals as a way of accomplishing at least three goals.

First, these laws set the Israelites apart as his people. If people do not eat meat today, they are identified as vegetarians; if people did not eat these impure animals in those days, they were identified as the Lord's followers.

Second, they underscored the Lord's holiness to the Israelites. Impurity is the opposite of holiness and incompatible with it. Every time Israelites avoided eating impure animals, they would be reminded that these animals were forbidden because their God was holy.

Third, these laws served as a reminder to seek purity in all of life. The Old Testament regularly uses the language of *ritual* purity and impurity to describe the *moral* purity the Israelites are to have and the *moral* impurity they are to avoid (cf. Ps. 24:2–3; Isa. 1:16; Jer. 4:14, etc.). This suggests that laws on ritual purity and impurity were to provide the Israelites with a constant reminder: just as you seek *ritual* purity in all of life, so do likewise in terms of *moral* purity. (See further at Introduction, p. 49, and at 20:22–26.)

The New Testament leaves behind the cultural concept of *ritual* purity and impurity (Mark 7:19; Acts 15; Rom. 14:14; Eph. 2:11–22; see Introduction, pp. 55–62, esp. p. 59). Nonetheless, it vigorously maintains that believers are to seek moral purity – and avoid moral impurity – in every aspect of their lives. As it was for the Israelites, this is to be a response of worshipful obedience to the Lord's redeeming activity in our lives (Eph. 1:3–4; cf. 1 Pet. 1:3–12 with 1 Pet. 1:13–16) and a way of acknowledging and reflecting his own holiness to a watching world (2 Cor. 6:16 – 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:14–16; 2:9, 12).

B. Laws on ritually defiling bodily fluids lost because of childbirth (12:1–8)

Context

While Leviticus 11 addresses ritual impurity arising from matters related to animals, Leviticus 12 – 15 addresses ritual impurity arising from matters related to the human body. These chapters are structured as a chiasm, a favourite Hebrew literary device in which opening and closing sections mirror one another.

A – Impurity resulting from the loss of bodily fluids (namely, blood lost in childbirth) (Lev. 12)

B – Impurity resulting from ritually defiling disease (Lev. 13 – 14)

A' – Impurity resulting from the loss of bodily fluids (namely, various genital discharges because of disease, sex or menstruation) (Lev. 15)

This type of arrangement adds literary beauty to the text, helps to identify which sections belong together, and aids in memorization, an especially important tool in aural cultures.

As the above indicates, Leviticus 12 addresses the impurity experienced by the mother who has just given birth. The text makes clear that her impurity is not because of the child's arrival (an event of great joy in Israel), but because of the blood lost during and after the birth process (see under *Comment* immediately below).

The chapter's outline is straightforward. After a brief introduction (vv. 1–2a), it identifies the purification procedures unique to a boy's birth (vv. 2b–4), then those unique to a girl's birth (v. 5), and concludes with the final purification procedures, which are the same for boys and girls (vv. 6–8). During these procedures, the mother goes through a three-stage process: an initial purification lasting either seven or fourteen days (vv. 2, 5a), a second purification of thirty-three or sixty-six days (vv. 4, 5b), and a series of offerings that complete the purification (vv. 6–8). Since performing an action three times was a way of underscoring it (cf. 1 Sam. 20:41; 1 Kgs 17:21 [Hess, 2008: 703]), this three-stage process may have served to assure all that the impurity had been fully addressed. (For a similar three-stage process, cf. at Lev. 14:1–32.)

Comment

i. First case: regulations for the birth of a male child (12:1–4)

The first case considers what a mother must do to become ritually pure after giving birth to a *son*. For many, this raises an immediate question: Why would a woman become ritually impure by giving birth? Certainly not because childbirth was viewed negatively. The Lord had commanded humankind to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1:28; 9:7), and Israelites universally saw children as a gift from the Lord (Gen. 33:5; Ps. 127:3). So why the impurity? Because of the loss of blood involved: *Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding* (v. 4; see also vv. 5, 7).

This leads to a second question: Why would losing blood cause impurity? In many cultures, both ancient and modern, the loss of bodily fluids is ritually defiling (cf. Lev. 15:16–18).[56] Some cultures have their own explanations for why this is the case, although others simply assume it as fact, without providing a rationale. (This is not uncommon with cultural practices; in many Western cultures, it has been customary for men to take off a hat when entering someone's home as a sign of respect, although most Westerners could not explain *why* it was a sign of respect to do so; see also Introduction, pp. 47–48.) The Bible nowhere states whether the Israelites had a specific rationale for why losing blood caused impurity, but it does make clear that the presence of impurity did not diminish their positive view of a child's birth: 'Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward' (Ps. 127:3 ESV; see also at 15:18).

2. When a *son* was born, the mother's initial impurity lasted *seven days*. In ancient Israel, as in many cultures, a person had to wait a certain amount of time in order to transition from one state to another (such as from impurity to purity). For Israelites, 'minor' impurities lasted just until evening (cf. 11:24), while 'major' impurities – as here – required *seven days* or longer (see at Introduction, pp. 45–46). Since the number *seven* was associated with completeness and thoroughness (cf. 26:18, 21), *seven days* represented a thorough wait.

On account of the loss of blood, the mother's impurity was like that of *her monthly period*. This meant that the impurity lasted seven days, was communicable to whoever touched her or came into contact with anything on which she had sat (15:19–23), and made sexual relations with her off-limits (18:19). As noted at 15:19–23, the communicability of her impurity does not mean that family and friends were prevented from extending physical comfort to

her (it is usually not wrong to become impure, as long as one dealt with it properly). As also noted there, such laws had the practical benefit of providing women with a socially acceptable way of withdrawing from others in order to rest and recuperate, which may have been especially welcome in a world without medication to help with pain and discomfort.

3. Verse 3 turns briefly to an issue of the *eighth day*: the son's circumcision. This practice was rooted in Genesis 17:11–12, where the Lord commands Abraham to circumcise his sons as the covenant 'sign'. This sign was to serve as a visible symbol of the covenant, a perpetual reminder in their flesh that the Lord was their God (Gen. 17:7, 11, 13b). When Israelites applied this covenant sign to their sons, they were expressing their faith in their covenant Lord and proclaiming that this child was now a covenant member, responsible for responding to his covenant privileges with faith and faithfulness.

4. On this same day, the mother's second process of purification began. During this time she was prohibited from *touching anything sacred* (such as fellowship offering meat; cf. 7:20) *or going to the sanctuary* (the Lord's sacred dwelling; cf. Exod. 25:8). These prohibitions would have also applied to the first process of purification described in verse 2. The fact that they are specified here might suggest that they are the only restrictions placed on the mother during this time, and that the impurity is therefore less severe (i.e. she did not make other people ritually impure through contact; cf. v. 2).

Nonetheless, since those who were impure could profane that which was holy, these prohibitions were to be followed diligently. The Hebrew makes this clear by placing the words *anything sacred* and *sanctuary* in the emphatic position: '*anything sacred* she must not touch and *to the sanctuary* she must not go.' This under-scored the importance of respecting the Lord by respecting those things associated with his holiness (see also 15:31; cf. *Context* at 5:14 – 6:7).

The second process of purification lasted *thirty-three days*, bringing the total to forty days.[57] Like the number seven (see at 4:5–7), the number forty can denote thoroughness or completeness in the Bible, as when the Lord sent the flood for 'forty days and forty nights' (Gen. 7:4), or the Israelites spied out the land for 'forty days' (Num. 13:25). As a result, by the end of this time, the mother would have undergone a thorough wait, and would now be ready to transition fully from being ritually impure to being ritually pure.

ii. Second case: regulations for the birth of a female child (12:5)

Verse 5 addresses issues related to a girl's birth. It differs from verses 2–4 in two

significant ways.

First, there is no mention that the girl is to be circumcised. This is no surprise, since earlier texts specify that circumcision was only for 'male' (*zākār*) Israelites (Gen. 17:10, 12, 14; cf. Exod. 12:48). This was actually a great mercy, since female circumcision, which is practised in many parts of the world today, can have very harmful effects.[58] But restricting circumcision to males does lead to a natural question: If circumcision is the covenant sign (see at v. 3), and only males received it, does this mean that only males were considered covenant members? By no means. In Israelite society, the father was considered the head of the family, and thus the family representative. If he received the sign of the covenant, then all who were members of the family – including all females – were considered to be covenant members as well (cf. Gen. 6:18).

A girl's birth leads to a second difference: the length of the mother's impurity is doubled to *fourteen* and *sixty-six days* (for a total of eighty days; cf. at v. 4). The text does not say why, but three relevant observations may be made.

First, there is a wide variety of guesses at this law's rationale. Some state that the passage is sexist (Noth, 1965: 97), apparently assuming that lengthened impurity is a sign of lesser respect or greater anomaly. This rationale is not impossible as far as impurity goes, but is hard to square with the Israelites' own understanding of creation, where male *and female* are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). It also fails to explain why the following rites are exactly the same for boys and girls (vv. 6–8). Furthermore, it is just one of many guesses, most of which have nothing to do with the relative value of males and females. Some of these proposals are medical. Keil (1988: 376) has noted that some ancients believed a woman's vaginal discharge persisted for a longer time after a girl's birth, and Rabbi Ishmael, like other ancients, thought that males had a shorter formation period in the womb than females (Milgrom, 1991: 751, citing *m. Nid.* 3:7).[59] From a non-medical perspective, others have suggested that the boy's circumcision on day eight in some way contributed to the purification, so the overall time of impurity was shortened when a son was born (Gill, 1810: 596; Hoffmann, 1905: 361).

Second, it must be remembered that some cultural traditions find their root in a specific historical circumstance. For example, the Israelites did not eat part of the meat connected to the thigh bone, because the angel of the Lord touched Jacob there (Gen. 32:32). It is entirely possible that the same has happened here: an earlier circumstance – not recorded for us – stands behind the different lengths of time, a circumstance which is no longer recoverable (and which would be impossible to guess).

Finally, the Israelites themselves may not have had a specific rationale, but

simply viewed this as expected practice (in much the same way that Westerners expect a man to take off his hat when entering someone's home; cf. at Introduction, p. 48).

It is impossible to prove which of the above explanations – if any! – would have resonated most with an Israelite. As a result, we simply do not know why the length of impurity differs between boys and girls. Whatever the case may be, the text now proceeds to the final purification rites, which, as mentioned above, make no distinction at all between boys and girls (vv. 6–8).

iii. First and second case: joint regulations for the birth of a male or female child (12:6–8)

6–7. As expected for a 'major' impurity, the mother now *brings* sacrifices to complete the purification process (see further at Introduction, pp. 45–46). Two sacrifices are mentioned: a *purification offering* (traditionally *sin offering*; see at 4:3) and a *burnt offering*.[60] The *purification offering* consisted of *a young pigeon or a dove* (see at 1:14); the *burnt offering* of *a year-old lamb* (see at 9:15–21).

The *purification offering* served to remove the mother's impurity from the tent of meeting and its contents (see Introduction, p. 52), as well as from the mother herself (*and she will be ritually pure* [NIV *ceremonially clean*], v. 7). The *burnt offering* may have served a dual role, atoning for the mother's general sinfulness as she came before the Lord, and expressing her deep thanks and praise for the gift of her child (cf. *Meaning* at Lev. 1:2–17).

The mother was to bring these offerings to *the entrance to the tent of meeting*, that is, the area in the courtyard in front of the tent's entryway (see at 1:3). This indicates that women were as welcome as men to come and worship before the Lord (cf. 1 Sam. 1:9–25).

The *priest* would then *offer* the mother's sacrifices to the LORD in order *to make atonement for her*. As noted at 1:4, atonement in Leviticus involves both purification and ransom. This chapter clearly focuses on purification: *she will be ceremonially pure from her flow of blood*. But not just any type of purification would do. As noted above, the mother's impurity – like all major impurities – was thought to defile the Lord's tabernacle, a severe offence indeed (see also Introduction, pp. 52–53). The mother, of course, did not intend to defile the tabernacle, so the Lord graciously allows these sacrifices as a means of *atonement* that both cleanses her impurity and ransoms her from the judgment that would otherwise come for such a great offence.

8. If the mother was unable to *afford a lamb*, she was *to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a purification*

offering (cf. 5:7). This was a merciful concession, which not only demonstrates the Lord's love for the poor, but anticipates the extent to which he will one day share in their experience (cf. Luke 2:22–24).

Meaning

While a child's birth was an incredibly joyous occasion (Gen. 33:5; Ps. 127:3), the mother became ritually impure because of the blood lost during and after the event. Because those who were impure could not come into contact with that which was holy, the mother was unable to partake in worship at the tabernacle, nor could she partake in covenant fellowship meals (v. 4). As a result, the first half of this law would have reminded the Israelites of the Lord's blazing holiness: only those who were ritually pure could draw near to his dwelling (cf. Lev. 15:31). Significantly, it would have been easy for the Israelites to see that, if this were true in the ritual realm, it would be even more so in the moral realm (Ps. 24:3–4; Matt. 5:8; cf. *Meaning* at Lev. 11).

At the same time, the Lord mercifully provided careful directions on how to become ritually pure, so that the mother could once more participate fully in Israel's covenant worship. As a result, the Israelites would be reminded of the Lord's intention for humanity since the beginning of creation: namely, to come before him in worship and to celebrate covenant fellowship with him and with one another. Such worship and fellowship are the very things Jesus came to bring his followers (John 14:2–6; 17:20–21), and will characterize his kingdom in all its fullness (Rev. 5:9–10; 21:1–7; 22:1–5).

(For how laws on ritual impurity apply to the believer today, see *Meaning* at Lev. 11.)

C. Laws on the ritual status and treatment of various skin conditions and garment or house infestations (13:1 – 14:57)

Context

Leviticus 12 – 15 focuses on ritual impurity arising from matters related to the human body. As noted at Leviticus 12 (see *Context*), these chapters form a chiasm, with Leviticus 13 – 14 right in the middle:

A – Impurity that results from the loss of bodily fluids (Lev. 12)
B – Impurity that results from ritually defiling skin diseases (Lev. 13 – 14)
A' – Impurity that results from the loss of bodily fluids (Lev. 15)

The impurity addressed in Leviticus 13 – 14 results from something called *ṣāraʿat*. In humans, *ṣāraʿat* manifested itself as various types of skin afflictions (13:1–46; 14:1–32), and has traditionally – though wrongly – been translated as ‘leprosy’ (see *Comment* below). In other contexts, *ṣāraʿat* refers to various fungal infestations of garments (13:47–59) or homes (14:33–57), infestations that had signs similar to human *ṣāraʿat*: discolouration (13:42, 49; 14:37), damage below the surface (13:3; 14:37) and the tendency to spread (13:7, 51; 14:43–44). In every case – human or otherwise – *ṣāraʿat* always resulted in severe ritual impurity, which, if left unchecked, could eventually defile the tabernacle itself (see at Lev 15:31). For this reason, Leviticus 13 – 14 discusses how to identify and properly address *ṣāraʿat* in all its forms.

There are two aspects of *ṣāraʿat* which these chapters do not address. First, they do not explain why it resulted in ritual impurity. Some commentators suggest that this is because its signs were similar to those of the ultimate impurity: death (Milgrom, 1991: 819–820; cf. Num. 12:10–12). Others suggest holiness and wholeness went together in Leviticus, so that a lack of physical wholeness – which *ṣāraʿat* indeed causes – resulted in the opposite of holiness: impurity (Wenham, 1979: 203). Both explanations are possible, although proving either remains difficult (see also Introduction, pp. 47–48). What the text itself focuses on is the very practical question: How does one deal properly with the impurity *ṣāraʿat* causes?

Second, these chapters do not describe how Israelites with *ṣāraʿat* dealt with the emotional and spiritual suffering that accompanied it. For that, we must look

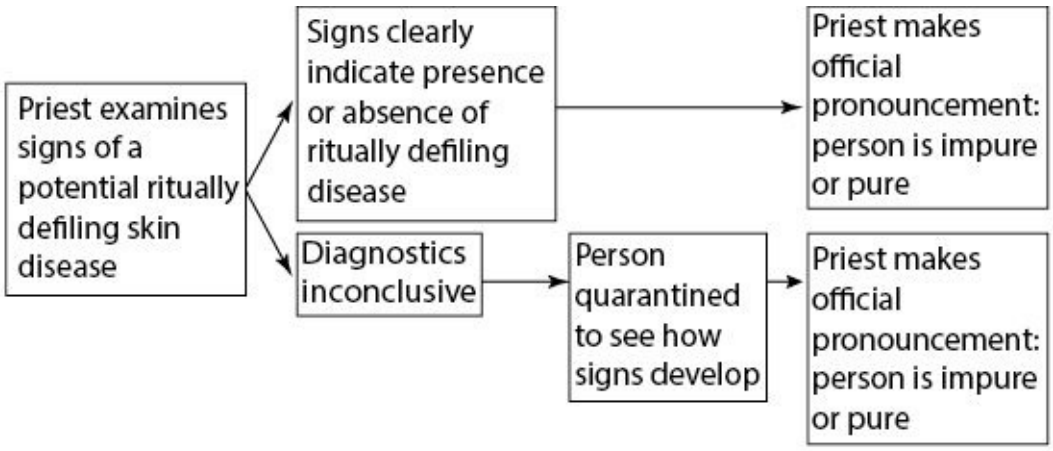
to the Psalms, which provide many examples of how Israelites prayed when sick (cf. Pss 6; 13; 38; 41). In these prayers, the sufferers are achingly honest about their pain and despair, deeply earnest in their appeals for healing, and yet amazingly steadfast in their conviction that their Lord of covenant love can indeed be trusted (Pss 6:8–10; 13:5–6; 38:15; 41:11–12).

In terms of structure, Leviticus 13 – 14 divides nicely into five sections. The first describes how to identify whether a skin condition is *ṣāraʿat* (13:1–44), and if so, the consequences that follow (13:45–46). The second does the same for *ṣāraʿat* in garments (13:47–59). The third addresses how to purify a person who has been healed of *ṣāraʿat* (14:1–32), while the fourth addresses its identification in houses, its consequences and the required purification process (14:33–53). The chapters conclude with a summary statement (14:54–57).

Comment

i. The ritual status of various skin conditions (13:1–46)

The purpose of this section is to help priests identify *ṣāraʿat*. It does this by providing a series of laws that are grouped into seven distinct cases (vv. 1–8, 9–17, 18–23, 24–28, 29–37, 38–39, 40–44). Each follows a similar pattern. First, the law describes initial signs that could indicate the presence of *ṣāraʿat* and must therefore be examined by the priest. Next, it gives diagnostics to help the priest determine whether the signs did indeed indicate *ṣāraʿat*. If the diagnostics were conclusive, the priest officially proclaimed the person impure or pure. If not, the person was quarantined for a period of time to see whether the signs developed, at the end of which the priest made an official pronouncement.



Since the diagnostic signs are only broadly described, significant debate has

arisen concerning the identification of *ṣāraʿat* in modern medical terms. The debate can be summarized under three questions.

First, does *ṣāraʿat* refer simply to 'leprosy' (so AV, RSV)? It is now generally agreed that the answer is 'no'. Today, the term 'leprosy' refers to 'Hansen's disease'.[61] But Leviticus 13 either fails to mention some of the most common signs of leprosy (such as the loss of feeling), or mentions signs that are not its primary indicators (such as the shedding of dead skin; Wright and Jones, 1992: 278; Hulse, 1975: 91). Moreover, Leviticus 13 does not describe a single condition or disease, but gives a series of signs that would qualify a number of different conditions or diseases as *ṣāraʿat* (perhaps including psoriasis, favus, seborrhoeic dermatitis and patchy eczema; see Hulse, 1975: 99). These facts have led to the general consensus that *ṣāraʿat* is not equivalent to leprosy, but is a general term encompassing several different conditions or diseases.[62]

This leads to a slightly different question: Could leprosy be one of the diseases to which *ṣāraʿat* refers? A majority of commentators say no, arguing that there is no evidence that leprosy was known in the Ancient Near East at this time, and that the signs given here are not in keeping with leprosy (Hulse, 1975: 88–91; Wright and Jones, 1992: 278). Gerstenberger (1996: 158), however, argues that there is possible evidence that leprosy existed in the Ancient Near East at this time, and Harrison (1986: 105) has noted that various stages of leprosy exhibit the necessary signs to qualify as *ṣāraʿat*. At this stage of our knowledge, it is perhaps safest to say that Leviticus 13 did not have leprosy *primarily* in view, although it is possible it was one of the diseases to which *ṣāraʿat* could refer.

Finally, how should *ṣāraʿat* be translated? Some more recent translations retain 'leprosy', with a marginal note explaining that the Hebrew term refers to various skin diseases (so NRSV, ESV). But even with such notes, the term 'leprosy' is potentially misleading. Other versions are too specific, offering 'infectious skin disease' (NIV 1984), or 'contagious skin disease' (NJB), even though it is not clear that each instance of *ṣāraʿat* is because of an infection or is contagious.

A different approach is to translate *ṣāraʿat* with both medical and ritual terms, such as *defiling skin disease* (NIV 2011) or, more broadly, 'ritually defiling skin disease' (my trans.). Incorporating ritual terms in the translation is in keeping with the ritual focus of Leviticus 13 – 14 (and Lev. 11 – 15 as a whole), and highlights that *ṣāraʿat* always results in severe ritual defilement. For these reasons, 'ritually defiling skin disease' is adopted below.

1–8. The first case begins by identifying three signs that might indicate the presence of 'a ritually defiling skin disease': a 'raised lesion', *rash* or 'discolouration' (v. 2).[63] The *priest* would know 'a ritually defiling skin disease' was present if two further signs were evident. First, *the hair in the sore had*

turned white (v. 3), not because the hair had lost its colour (which is not typical of skin diseases: Hulse, 1975: 98), but because it was covered with white flakes of dead skin (which is quite typical of skin diseases: Hulse, 1975: 93; Wright and Jones, 1992: 278; cf. Num. 12:10–12; 2 Kgs 5:27). Second, *the sore appeared to be more than skin deep* (v. 3), perhaps on account of the skin thickening, another feature typical of certain skin diseases (Hulse, 1975: 97). On seeing both signs, the priest would proclaim the person 'ritually impure' (v. 3; NIV *ceremonially unclean*), and the restrictions of verses 45–46 would apply.

But if these two signs were not seen, the person was 'quarantined' (NET) – the text does not specify how – for *seven days* (v. 4; see at 12:2 for *seven days* as a complete period). This allowed time to see whether the *sore* developed. If after one week it *was unchanged*, another week of quarantine followed. If the *sore had faded and not spread*, it was deemed a harmless type of *rash* (vv. 5–6), and *the priest would pronounce* the person 'pure'. (Perhaps because the person had been set apart as potentially impure, a minor purification procedure – the *washing* of *clothes* – was necessary to re-enter the community.) But if the sore was found to be a *rash* that had *spread*, it was considered a ritually *defiling skin disease*, and *the priest* would *pronounce* the person impure (vv. 7–8).

9–17. The second case begins by addressing a situation in which there is a 'white raised lesion', with 'white hair' (v. 10a), but apparently no thickening of the skin (cf. v. 3). In this case, an open sore (*raw flesh*) was the sign of a ritually *defiling skin disease* (v. 10b). It indicated that the disease was 'old' (JPS), that is, well-established (v. 11; the NIV's *chronic* is unlikely). No quarantine was necessary, because the person was *already unclean*, and the restrictions of verses 45–46 would apply immediately.

Verses 12–13 introduce a closely related law. At first glance, the Hebrew appears to describe a person's *whole body* being covered *from head to foot* with a *disease* that turns *all the skin white*. But the context suggests another reading: namely, the *skin* that *turns white* is the skin where *raw flesh* has been healed (wherever it occurred on the *whole body*, *from head to foot*). Indeed, verses 16–17 indicate that *raw flesh turning white* was the first sign that healing had begun. In any case, when such healing happened, the person was considered 'pure' (vv. 13, 17), although if *raw flesh appeared* again, the person was considered 'impure' (vv. 14–15).

18–23. The third case addresses skin conditions related to some type of healed lesion (often translated as *boil*, although the exact identification is uncertain). After the lesion had *healed*, it was possible for a *white raised* lesion or *reddish-white* discolouration to *appear* at that *place* (vv. 18–19). If such a mark was *more than skin deep and the hair in it had turned white*, then it was clear

evidence of a ritually *defiling skin disease* and *the priest* would *pronounce* the person impure (v. 20; cf. v. 3).

But if these two signs did not appear, and the new mark was *faded* in comparison with the original lesion, *the priest* would quarantine the person for *seven days* (v. 21; see at vv. 1–8). If the mark had *spread*, the person had a ritually *defiling skin disease* and would be *pronounced* 'impure' (v. 22); if it had *not spread, it was only a scar from the boil*, and the person would be *pronounced* 'pure' (v. 23).

24–28. The fourth case addresses skin conditions related to the *raw flesh* of a *burn* that becomes *reddish-white or white* (v. 24). The remaining verses basically follow the outline of verses 18–23.

29–37. The fifth case addresses skin conditions at places where hair could grow (vv. 30, 31, 37), namely, the *head* (i.e. scalp) or, for men in particular, the *chin*. If the *sore appeared to be more than skin deep, and the hair in it was yellow and thin* (i.e. thinned out), then the *person* had a ritually *defiling skin disease* and was impure (v. 30; cf. v. 3).

Verse 31 introduces a variation to the case: the *sore* was not *more than skin deep*, but the *black hair* typical of a healthy Israelite was missing (cf. v. 37). Since this could be an early sign of a ritually defiling skin disease, the person was quarantined for two periods of *seven days* – with an inspection in between – to see how the sore had developed (vv. 31–34; cf. vv. 4–6). If at the end there was no *spreading, no yellow hair* and it was *not more than skin deep* (vv. 32, 34), the person did not have a ritually defiling skin disease (v. 34; cf. v. 6). If at any point afterwards the disease did *spread*, then *the person was* 'impure' and *the priest did not need to look for* any other sign (such as *yellow hair*) (vv. 35–36; cf. vv. 6–7). When such a person eventually returned for an inspection, the priest would know that the disease had been *healed* when the sore had not spread (*it was unchanged*) and when healthy *black hair had grown* back (v. 37).

38–39. The sixth case addresses the presence of dull *white spots* (vv. 38–39). (The Israelites described this condition with the word *bōhaq* [v. 39], which the NIV translates as *harmless rash*, although 'skin discolouration condition' might be better [cf. ESV], since most English speakers associate a rash with a red and itchy condition.) These *white spots* could be signs of 'one variety of leukoderma known as vitiligo in which patches of the skin and hair lose their pigmentation' (Wright and Jones, 1992: 278; see also Hulse, 1975: 95). Since these spots do not manifest the usual signs associated with a ritually defiling skin disease – such as being deeper than the skin or having raw flesh – the person remains pure.

40–44. The seventh case begins by addressing baldness. Since thinning hair was sometimes associated with a ritually defiling skin disease (v. 30), the text

makes clear that baldness by itself was not ritually defiling (vv. 40–41). *But if* on the bald spot there appeared *a reddish-white sore* (v. 42) – *like* the *reddish-white sores* that appear on other *skin* areas (v. 43; cf. v. 19) – then the person had a ritually *defiling skin disease* and would be *pronounced* impure (v. 44).

45–46. The ritually *defiling skin diseases* of verses 2–44 resulted in a 'major' ritual impurity (see Introduction, pp. 45–46). Since major impurities spread easily by physical contact, verses 45–46 focus on minimizing contact between those who have the impurity and those who do not. (This would have the added benefit of minimizing the spread of any *ṣāraʿat* diseases that were contagious.) Those with *ṣāraʿat* were required to follow three rules.

First, they had to change their physical appearance, perhaps in part to warn others from a distance. They *wore torn clothes, let their hair become unkempt,* and *covered the lower part of their face* (v. 45). These actions were also signs of mourning (10:6; Ezek. 24:17), and therefore especially appropriate for those experiencing the pain of living outside the covenant community (v. 46).

Second, they were to cry out, 'Impure! Impure!' (NIV *Unclean! Unclean!* v. 45b), clearly alerting others of their condition.

Third, they had to live *outside the camp* (v. 46). This did not mean that they had to live *alone* (so NIV). The Hebrew word (*bādād*) simply means to be 'apart from' a larger group (cf. LXX, TNK), although contact with others who lived 'apart' was still possible (cf. Num. 23:9). At the very least, those with a ritually defiling skin disease could live with those suffering from the same affliction (2 Kgs 7:3; cf. Luke 17:11–19; Milgrom, 1991: 805). At the very most, it seems possible that family members or friends could join them, since it was not wrong to become impure in this instance, only to fail to deal with the impurity properly. (To purify themselves, family or friends might have had to do something along the lines of Lev. 14:46–47 before re-entering the camp.)

Nonetheless, living apart from the covenant community was still a hardship, since the community was the covenant family (Deut. 1:8; cf. Eph. 2:19). And while those with the disease could certainly still praise and worship the Lord, their deepest longing would have been to do so with their covenant brothers and sisters at the tent of meeting (cf. Pss 42:1–4; 122:1).

Those with the disease were to follow these three rules as long as the condition persisted (v. 46). This was not meant to increase their hardship, but to prevent the impurity from spreading. (Although not from a ritual perspective, modern societies do the same when they quarantine those suffering from certain contagious diseases.)

Meaning

Those suffering from *ṣāraʿat* were bearers of severe ritual impurity. The text does not say why such impurity resulted (see *Context*); it assumes it as fact and discusses how to identify it (vv. 1–44) and how to quarantine it (vv. 45–46).

The impurity had to be quarantined because it could easily spread – like an unseen virus – throughout the camp, eventually defiling the Lord's holy palace. This would have been a sign of great disrespect, loosely comparable to a modern king's palace being vandalized (cf. at 15:31). Therefore, those with such impurity had to leave the camp until they were healed. Such drastic measures testified to the severity of the impurity and especially to the holiness of the Lord, into whose presence ritual impurity was never to come. Naturally, if this was true of ritual impurity, Israelites could easily conclude the same was true of moral impurity (cf. *Meaning* at Lev. 11:1–47), so these measures could serve as visual reminders of the importance of holy living. Purity of life is always to characterize the Lord's holy people (see Introduction, pp. 40–41; cf. Lev. 19:2; Ps. 51:10; Eph. 5:3).

As for those who were quarantined, it is certainly possible that their *ṣāraʿat* was a sign of the Lord's discipline for a specific sin (Num. 12:1–15; 2 Kgs 5:20–27; 2 Chr. 26:16–21), and Israelite sufferers may very well have examined their lives to see whether this was the case (Pss 38:3; 41:4; 103:3; 139:23–24). This should be a practice of believers today as well (cf. 1 Cor. 11:29–30). But neither this text, nor any other, assumes *ṣāraʿat*, or any sickness, is always because of a specific sin. Indeed, the book of Job – whose main character suffers a severe skin affliction (cf. Job 2:7 and Lev. 13:18–20) – clearly demonstrates that suffering and sin do not always go together (cf. Job 1:8), and so warns us against judging others who are suffering (cf. John 9:1–3).

This section concludes by indicating that the quarantine ended once those with *ṣāraʿat* were healed (v. 46; cf. Lev. 14:1–32). For how they might have prayed at this time, see Psalm 30:2, 11–12 and *Meaning* at 14:1–32. For how they might have prayed in the meantime, see *Context* above. (It is imperative to note that the person could still worship, and pray to, the Lord during this time, even if not at the tabernacle.) And for how laws on ritual impurity apply to the believer today, see *Meaning* at Leviticus 11.

ii. The ritual status and treatment of various garment and leather infestations (13:47–59)

Since the same signs were often present both for human skin conditions and for fungal infestations of garments or homes (see *Context*), Hebrew speakers used the term *ṣāraʿat* in both instances. (Compare how English speakers say that paint

on a wall ‘blisters’ – a term normally applied to human injuries – if it develops air pockets.) For skin conditions, *ṣāraʿat* is best translated with ‘ritually defiling skin disease’ (see *Comment* at 13:1–46); for fungal infestations of garments or homes, it is best translated with *defiling mould* (NIV) or, more generally, ‘ritually defiling infestation’ (my trans.).

Ritually defiling infestations were no doubt some form of fungus, such as mould or mildew, that was *greenish or reddish* in appearance (v. 49). Since these fungi flourish in damp conditions, Canaan’s rainy winter season would have provided a perfect breeding ground. The fungi could infect *clothing*, typically made of *wool* (from sheep) or *linen* (from flax) (v. 47). (The words *any woven or knitted material* [NIV] in v. 48 are better translated ‘in warp and woof ’ [so LXX, RSV, etc.], and refer to cloth currently being prepared on a loom.) The fungi could also infect *leather*, whether the skin by itself or *anything made of leather* (v. 48), such as belts (2 Kgs 1:8), or skins to hold liquids (Josh. 9:4). Items with such a *greenish or reddish* mark would be quarantined by *the priest for seven days* and then re-examined (vv. 49–51a).

If the mark *had spread*, it was deemed a *persistent* (or ‘malignant’, RSV) infestation (v. 51). Trying to remove it was fruitless, and the item had to be *burned* (vv. 51b–52). This may not strike many moderns as very significant, but for Israelites, who had to make their clothes by hand, every garment represented a significant amount of time and effort.

If, however, the mark *had not spread*, the item was to be *washed*, quarantined *another seven days*, and re-examined by *the priest* (vv. 53–55a). If there was no *change* in *appearance* – *even though* the mark *had not spread* – the item was still impure and had to be *burned* (v. 55b). But if the mark had *faded*, the affected area was to be *torn out* (v. 56) and the item was to be *washed again* (and no doubt patched) (v. 58). If the mark ever reappeared, it was considered an ‘outbreak’ (NASV; NIV *spreading mould*), and the item was to be *burned* immediately (v. 57).

The section finishes, as elsewhere, with a brief summary statement (v. 59; cf. 11:46; 14:54, 57; 15:32–33).

Meaning

See at *Meaning* of 14:33–53.

iii. Becoming ritually pure after having a ritually defiling skin condition (14:1–32)

Those with *ṣāraʿat* would undoubtedly have prayed to the Lord for healing

(Num. 12:11–13; cf. Luke 5:12–13). After being healed, they would have needed to remove the ritual impurity caused by the *ṣāra'at*. That purification process is now described.

The process was gradual and involved three different ceremonies corresponding to three different degrees of purity. After the first ceremony, those being cleansed were pure enough to re-enter the camp (vv. 2–8); after the second, they were pure enough to go to the tabernacle (v. 9); and after the third, they were pure enough to fully re-enter society (vv. 10–20). (For a similar three-stage purification process, see *Context* at Lev. 12. As noted there, performing an action three times was a way of underscoring it.) Always conscious of the poor, the Lord also provides a less costly rite for those with limited means (vv. 21–32).

1–8. The person who had been physically healed was now ready to begin the process of 'ritual purification' (NIV *ceremonial cleansing*, v. 2a). First, *the priest* would go *outside the camp* – where the person had been living (13:46) – to *examine* and confirm that *healing* had indeed occurred (v. 3). If so, *the priest* would give an *order* for the ritual materials to be collected: *two pure birds, cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop* (v. 4).

The *birds* were to be 'wild' (ESV margin). (The word may also be translated *live* [so NIV], although this would be redundant, since the following prescriptions make it clear that the birds must be living.) The text does not explain why the birds must be wild, although it may have been to lessen the chance that the second bird – which was laden with impurity (v. 7) – would return to the camp (Milgrom, 1991: 833). In any case, *one of the birds* was to *be killed over a clay pot* containing 'spring' *water* (v. 5; NIV *fresh water*).[64] The pot would catch the bird's blood, so that *water* and blood – two of the main cleansing agents in Israel – could be used together in the rite (vv. 6–7).

The priest would then *dip* the remaining items into this cleansing mixture and *sprinkle the one to be purified seven times* (vv. 6–7a), an act often associated with cleansing (Lev. 4:5–7; 8:11). *Hyssop* was apparently well designed for smearing or sprinkling liquid (Exod. 12:22; Num. 19:18). The reason for using *cedar wood* and *scarlet yarn* is less clear, although they do occur together in other purification contexts (Num. 19:6), perhaps because their red colour was reminiscent of blood, the most powerful purification agent in ancient Israel. (If so, the use of red items would have underscored the purifying action, in much the same way that using a red pen today can underscore a written message.) Whatever the case may be, the end result is clear: the person was pronounced pure by the priest (v. 7a), who would then *release the live bird in the open fields* (v. 7b). This act parallels the release of the live goat in 16:21–22, suggesting that just as the live goat carried away the people's sins, so the live bird carried away

the person's impurity.

The *person being purified* was then to perform three final cleansing rites: *washing* his or her *clothes*, *bathing* and *shaving* (v. 8a). *Washing clothes* and *bathing with water* are natural pictures of cleansing and occur frequently in purification rites (15:5–8; 16:26; 17:15). *Shaving* occurs less frequently (v. 9; Num. 8:7), but it too signifies cleansing, and strongly so, since it goes beyond the removal of dirt (*bathing*) to the removal of anything left on the skin.

Those who had completed these rites reached an initial level of ritual *purity* and were allowed back in *the camp* (v. 8b), although they had to *stay outside* their *tent* – perhaps in a smaller tent or makeshift shelter (cf. 23:42) – for *seven days* (v. 8b). This was a typical waiting period for major impurities (15:13, 28) and implied the person's remaining impurity was strong enough to pollute anything inside the tent (cf. Num. 19:14). The next rites therefore provide further purification.

9. The rites in this verse are the same as described in verse 8a, bringing those who go through them one step closer to being completely pure, and preparing them to go to the tabernacle the next day for the final ceremony.

10–20. The final rites of the *eighth day* return the person to a regular state of ritual purity and allow him or her to reintegrate fully into the covenant community. Significantly, these rites require the three main atoning sacrifices: *reparation* (vv. 12–18), *purification* (v. 19a) and *burnt* (vv. 19b–20). The presence of all three assured the person that his or her impurity had been fully addressed.

The first sacrifice is the *reparation offering* (traditionally *guilt offering*; see at 5:15). Elsewhere, this offering atoned for sins against the Lord's holy property (see *Context* at 5:14 – 6:7), and it could have the same function here (cf. Lev. 5:17–19). But since the text focuses on the person's *purification*, not forgiveness, this reparation offering more likely has a cleansing function. This idea is strengthened by two modifications to the normal reparation offering rite (cf. 7:1–7), both of which are in keeping with a cleansing goal.

First, *the priest* takes *some of the* sacrificial *blood* – the most powerful cleansing agent available in ancient Israel – and *puts* it on the person's extremities: the *right ear lobe*, *right thumb* and *right big toe* (v. 14). These extremities represented the whole body (cf. at 4:5–7), so that, by placing the blood there, the priest brought the entire person into a higher state of purity (just as Moses did by placing sacrificial blood on the priests' extremities; cf. at 8:23–24).

Second, along with the reparation offering, the priest presents a *log of oil* (*log* is a transliteration of a Hebrew term of measurement; it was somewhere in the

range of 1.3 to 2.3 cups [1.2 to 2.2 metric cups]; Cook, 1988: 1051) (v. 15). He *sprinkles some of it before the* LORD *seven times* (v. 16), an act meant to consecrate the sanctuary on account of the defilement caused by the person's impurity (cf. at 8:10–12). He also *puts some of the oil* on the person's extremities, *on top of the blood* (v. 17), where it imitates the blood's purifying function. The priest then underscores this purification by *putting the rest of the oil in his palm on* the individual's *head* (v. 18a), an act that also moved the person to an increased level of purity (cf. 8:12). By means of the above rites, the priest *makes atonement for* the person (v. 18b), who now moves one step closer to full ritual purity.[65]

The second sacrifice is the *purification offering* (traditionally *sin offering*; see at 4:3), and the third is the *burnt offering, together with* its *grain offering* (vv. 19–20a). Purification and burnt offerings occur together elsewhere in contexts of purifying a major impurity (12:6–7; 15:15, 30). In these contexts, the *purification offering* removed the impurity from both the tent of meeting and the offeror, while the *burnt offering* atoned for the offeror's general sinfulness and expressed thanksgiving and praise for the Lord's favour (see further at 12:6–7). Significantly, when these two offerings occur together elsewhere, one of the animals is usually a bird. The requirement here of two flock animals makes this a much more costly offering, implying that the impurity being cleansed is much more severe.

The section concludes by stating that the priest *makes atonement for* the person, who is now pure and may fully reintegrate into the community's life and worship.

21–32. Since many Israelites would be too *poor* to *afford* all the animals required in verses 10–20, verses 21–32 identify less costly offerings that the poor could bring (see also 5:7–13; 12:8). This would ensure that all Israelites could come before the Lord, regardless of their financial situation. Such compassion for the poor is a hallmark of biblical religion (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35–37; Deut. 15:7–8; Ps. 140:12, etc.).

Two concessions are made. First, instead of bringing *three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering* (v. 10), the poor need bring only *one-tenth* (v. 21) (see at 2:1 for modern equivalents). Second, instead of flock animals for the *purification* and *burnt offerings* (v. 10), the poor may bring birds (v. 22). Naturally, some would be too poor to afford birds, in which case we may assume they could substitute grain (cf. Lev. 5:11–13; although not explicitly stated, it would not be a surprise if the same principle applied to the reparation offering as well).

Despite the differences in offerings, the end result is exactly the same: *the*

priest makes atonement before the LORD for the person (v. 31), who is now pure and may fully reintegrate into the community's life and worship.

Meaning

Those who had been healed of *ṣāraʿat* would have felt deep gratitude to the Lord. Psalm 30 would have been especially appropriate to sing:

> O LORD my God, I called to you for help,
> and you healed me...
> You turned my wailing into dancing;
> you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
> that my heart may sing to you and not be silent.
> O LORD my God, I will praise you for ever.
> *(Ps. 30:2, 11–12; cf. Luke 17:11–19)*

But even after physical healing had taken place, those who had experienced *ṣāraʿat* still bore severe ritual impurity, and this had to be removed before they could fully re-enter the covenant community (see *Meaning* at 13:1–46). This removal happened through a wide range of procedures for those being purified: they were sprinkled with purifying liquids (water and blood) (vv. 6–7a); a live bird was released, symbolically bearing away their impurity (v. 7b); they washed their clothes, bathed, shaved and underwent seven-day waiting periods (vv. 8a, 9); and all of the atoning sacrifices were offered on their behalf (vv. 10–20). Such a full range of procedures – especially when grouped into three distinct ceremonies (see at 14:1–32) – emphasized that those who went through them were completely pure and could fully re-enter the covenant community's life and worship.

By providing his people with a means of ritual cleansing, the Lord demonstrates his desire for them to come before him in worship and enjoy his presence, and to do so in the context of the covenant community (see *Meaning* at Lev. 12). Moreover, what the Lord does here by providing *ritual* cleansing serves as a picture of what he does by providing *moral* cleansing (cf. Ps. 51:2), a cleansing ultimately accomplished by the most precious sacrificial blood of all – that of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:13–14; 1 John 1:9; see Introduction, pp. 73–74).

iv. The ritual status and treatment of various house infestations (14:33–53)

So far, Leviticus 13 – 14 has described how to identify and address *ṣāraʿat* of the body or of garments and leather (13:1 – 14:32). These types of *ṣāraʿat* were threats to the Israelites as they camped in the wilderness, but soon they would

head to Canaan, where a new threat would emerge for those who built permanent homes: *ṣāraʿat* of houses. This threat is now addressed.

As with *ṣāraʿat* of garments and leather (13:47–59), *ṣāraʿat* of houses refers to a *ritually defiling infestation*, no doubt some form of *mould* or mildew (see at 13:47–59). The laws addressing such *ṣāraʿat* fall into four main sections: what to do when *ṣāraʿat* is first discovered (14:33–42); what to do if it returns (14:43–45); ways in which a house with *ṣāraʿat* defiles people (14:46–47); and what to do if the *ṣāraʿat* has not spread (14:48–53). It is possible that such a focus on keeping their own homes ritually pure would have been a constant reminder for them to make sure the Lord's home remained ritually pure (cf. at 15:31).

33–42. These laws applied in the *land of Canaan* (cf. Lev. 19:23; 23:10), whose borders roughly followed those of modern-day Israel, although perhaps extending a bit further north and north-east (Num. 34:2–12; cf. R. de Vaux, 1968: 23–30). The Lord was *giving* this land to the Israelites as their *possession* (v. 34), just as he had promised to their forefather Abraham (Gen 17:8).

The Lord states that, within *that land*, he would at times 'put an unwelcome mark of a ritually defiling infestation on a house' (v. 34; cf. NASV). While such language could indicate that the Lord was punishing someone (cf. Num. 12:9–11), that does not appear to be the focus here (this section mentions neither sin nor forgiveness). Rather, verse 34 is the Lord's affirmation that such events happen under his sovereign control (cf. Job 2:10; Ps. 104:27–29).

Such marks would be *examined* by *the priest*, who could *pronounce* the house impure (v. 36; cf. 10:10). But since it was not officially impure until this pronouncement, *the priest* would first *order* it *to be emptied*, so that *nothing* else *in the house* was *pronounced unclean* (v. 36). This was a gracious provision, since it prevented the homeowner from having to destroy certain items, or from putting others through purification procedures (cf. 11:32–35; 15:12). Once the house had been emptied, the examination could begin.

If the priest saw that the mark was *greenish or reddish* and it *appeared deeper than the surface of the wall* (i.e. it went below the plaster), he would quarantine *the house for seven days* (vv. 37–38; cf. at 13:1–8). (This does not mean the house was boarded up, since it was still accessible during this time [v. 47]. Rather, the house was officially set aside as impure.) After seven days, if the mark *had spread on the walls, the priest ordered that the contaminated stones be torn out and thrown into an impure place outside the town* (vv. 39–40). This removed the impurity from the Israelites' midst, as well as transferred the impure building materials to a designated place – a 'garbage dump' of impurity – so that others would know not to use them. The plaster was then *scraped* off the house's *inside walls*, the removed *stones* were *replaced*, and the *house* was replastered

(vv. 41–42). The text seems to assume that a second seven-day waiting period now begins, the results of which are described in verses 43–45 and 48–53.

43–45. *If the defiling mould reappeared and spread*, it was considered a *persistent* infestation (vv. 43–44). Trying to remove the infestation was fruitless, and the house was to be *torn down* (v. 45; cf. 13:51–52). In many societies today, this would ruin people financially. Not so in ancient Israel, where houses were small and made of materials that usually could be gathered for free, and where members of one's clan or tribe would doubtless pitch in to help with rebuilding. Nonetheless, it was still a hardship, since rebuilding a home required a significant amount of time and effort.

46–47. Verses 46–47 briefly interrupt the flow of thought to give instructions on how those who entered a quarantined house were to purify themselves. The verses imply that it was not wrong to enter the house, as long as the proper purification procedures were followed afterwards. Those who simply went *into the house* were impure *till evening* (v. 46), whereas those who spent more time in it – either *sleeping* or *eating* there – needed more thorough purification and therefore had to *wash their clothes* (v. 47).

48–53. Verses 48–53 now resume the flow of thought and describe what to do if the priest re-examines the house and finds the mark *has not spread* (v. 48; cf. vv. 43–45). In this case, he would *pronounce the house clean* (v. 48) and perform the same initial ritual he did for the person cleansed of a ritually defiling skin disease (vv. 49–53; cf. at vv. 1–8). In so doing, he would *make atonement for the house, and it would be clean* (v. 53). Like people, inanimate objects in Israel could experience severe ritual pollution, and, like people, deep cleansing was needed if such objects were to continue in the midst of the Lord's holy covenant community.

Meaning

For Israelites, ritual impurity could have an impact on every area of their lives, whether their bodies (13:1–46), their clothing (13:47–59) or their homes (14:33–53). This impurity had to be addressed properly in order to prevent it from spreading through the camp and defiling the Lord's holy palace (see *Meaning* at 13:1–46). This often required Israelites to undertake costly actions, whether dwelling outside the camp (see at 13:45–46), burning garments (see at 13:47–59) or tearing down their homes (see at 14:43–45). The costliness of these actions would have underscored how deeply the Israelites were to respect the holy Lord who had redeemed them and now dwelt in their midst. Indeed, it is costly action that teaches us his worth and speaks most highly of our love and respect for him (cf. 2 Sam. 24:24). Costly actions would also have reminded the Israelites of the

love they were to show their neighbours (19:18). Failing to deal properly with these diseases or infestations could have a tremendously negative impact on the camp as a whole; love of neighbours often requires costly action in order to prevent harm from coming to them.

At the same time, these regulations were reminders to the Israelites that, just as *ritual* impurity could have an impact on every area of their lives, so too could *moral* impurity (see at 20:22–26). The regulations would therefore have functioned as calls to holiness in all of life. Biblical religion is never about committing just part of our life to the Lord, but all of it. ‘So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God’ (1 Cor. 10:31).

(For how laws on ritual impurity apply to the believer today, see *Meaning* at Lev. 11.)

v. Summary: these are the laws for ritually defiling skin diseases or infestations (14:54–57)

These verses summarize the content of this section (vv. 54–56, 57b) and the reason these ‘law[s]’ (RSV; NIV *regulations*) have been given: so that the priests may ‘teach’ (NASV; NIV *determine*) the Israelites about ritual purity and impurity (v. 57a; cf. 10:10–11; Mal. 2:7), in order that the Israelites may know how to live in communion with their holy Lord (cf. 1 Tim. 4:16).

D. Further laws on ritually defiling bodily fluids (15:1–33)

Context

Leviticus 15 returns to the issue of ritually defiling bodily fluids, and the chiasm introduced in chapter 12 is now complete:

A – Impurity that results from the loss of bodily fluids (Lev. 12)
B – Impurity that results from ritually defiling disease (Lev. 13 – 14)
A' – Impurity that results from the loss of bodily fluids (Lev. 15)

Like Leviticus 12, Leviticus 15 nowhere explains why certain bodily fluids were ritually defiling; it assumes it as fact and discusses how to address it (cf. Introduction, pp. 48–49). But unlike Leviticus 12, which addresses only one type of fluid (blood lost at childbirth), Leviticus 15 addresses four, arranging them in yet another chiasm (cf. Wenham, 1979: 216; Levine, 1989: 93):

A – Introduction (15:1–2a)
B – Abnormal male discharges (15:2b–15)
C – Normal male discharges (15:16–18)
C' – Normal female discharges (15:19–24)
B' – Abnormal female discharges (15:25–30)
A' – Conclusion (15:31–33)

Because these discharges caused differing levels of impurity, some required more thorough cleansing rites than others (see table). But in each case, the resulting impurity could be spread through physical contact, meaning it could eventually reach – and directly defile – the Lord's holy palace (see at v. 31). In order to avoid this, Leviticus 15 tells the Israelites how to address each impurity and so maintain covenant fellowship with their holy Lord.

Impurity from bodily fluids and its treatment

Cause of impurity (in	***Ritual procedure for those with the discharge***	***Ritual procedure for those who come into contact with the***

order of its severity)		***discharge's impurity***
Normal male discharge (seminal emission) (vv. 16–18)	Bathe and wait until evening	Bathe and wait until evening
Normal female discharge (menstruation) (vv. 19–24)	Wait seven days (and then probably wash clothes, bathe and wait until evening)	In most instances, wash clothes, bathe with water, wait until evening (vv. 21–23); in one instance, wait seven days (and then probably wash, bathe and wait until evening) (v. 24)
Abnormal male or female discharge (vv. 2–15, 25–30)	Wait seven days; wash clothes, bathe with fresh water, wait until evening; on eighth day offer purification and burnt offerings (birds)	In one instance, simply wait until evening (v. 10a); in most instances, wash clothes, bathe with water, wait until evening (vv. 5–8, 10b, 11, 27)

Comment

i. Introduction (15:1–2a) and the impurity that comes from abnormal male discharges (15:2b–15)

2–3. The first section addresses a male *bodily discharge*, that is, a genital *discharge*, as also in the following sections (vv. 16, 19, 25). The Hebrew word translated *bodily* (*bāśār*) can refer to the genitals in particular (Ezek. 23:20).

The *discharge* in view is not a daily discharge, such as urine (in that case, everyone would have been constantly impure); nor is it semen (since that is addressed in the next section, vv. 16–18). Instead, it is an *unusual discharge* that causes continual dripping (*flowing*) from the male member, or obstructs (*blocks*) it from discharging normally, both of which are signs of various infections that fall under the general category of urethritis.

The *discharge* results in a major ritual impurity (see Introduction, pp. 45–46). Since major ritual impurities were contagious, the next verses describe the ways

it could be passed on and how it could be cleansed in each instance. Six basic scenarios are given.[66]

4–6. First, if *the man with a discharge lay* on *a bed*, or *sat* on any object (such as a chair or rug), these became contagiously 'impure' (v. 4; NIV *unclean*). Those who became impure through contact with these items were to perform standard purification procedures: *washing their clothes, bathing with water, and* waiting *until evening* (see at 11:24–25; 14:1–8).

7–8. The same procedures were required in the second and third scenarios. In the second, people became impure by *touching the man* with *the discharge* (v. 7). In the third, they became 'impure' if he *spat* on them (v. 8), an action meant to bring shame or dishonour (Deut. 25:9; Job 30:10; Isa. 50:6).

9–10. Fourth, *everything the man sat on when riding* – such as a donkey's saddle (Gen. 22:3) – became contagiously impure (v. 9). Those who simply *touched* such items became impure *till evening* (v. 10a), while those who handled them more thoroughly (*picked them up*) were to perform more extensive procedures (v. 10b; cf. v. 6).

11. The fifth scenario infers that *the man with the discharge* could have minimal contact with others, provided he first *rinsed his hands with water*. This did not make the man totally pure, but was considered sufficient to prevent him from defiling others by touch. If he did not do this, those he touched became impure and were to perform standard purification procedures.

12. The final scenario might assume the law of verse 11, so that the following items became impure only if *the man* did not first wash his hands. In any case, if he *touched* a vessel made of *clay*, it became impure and was to *be broken*; *wooden articles*, however, were to be *rinsed with water* (v. 12; cf. 11:32–33). (It was a gracious concession that *wooden articles* did not have to be destroyed, since they were much more costly to produce.)

13–15. As for *the man with the discharge*, he was not simply in need of purification, but of *atonement* (v. 15), because his discharge had indirectly defiled the Lord's holy palace (see Introduction, pp. 52–53). These verses outline the necessary steps he was to take.

When he was 'purified' (NIV *cleansed*) *from his discharge* – that is, when the discharge causing his impurity had ended (v. 13) – he was to *count off* the *seven days* necessary for purification from a major impurity (cf. 13:6; 14:8) and then *wash his clothes and bathe* with spring water (v. 13; for NIV's *fresh water*, see at 14:1–8). This would result in an initial level of *purity* that allowed him to go to *the tent of meeting* on the *eighth day* (vv. 13b–14).

The *eighth day* sacrifices required *two* birds, but no flock animal (v. 14), suggesting that this was a lower-grade major impurity. *The priest* would *sacrifice*

one for a purification offering (to cleanse the man's impurity from the tent of meeting and the man himself) *and the other for a burnt offering* (to make general atonement for the man and express his thanks and praise for healing; cf. at 12:6–7). By these means, *the priest* would *make atonement before the LORD for the man because of his discharge* (v. 15), and he would be pure.

ii. The impurity that comes from normal male discharges (15:16–18)

Three laws describe how to ritually cleanse oneself from an *emission of semen*.

16. Since verse 18 describes what to do for an emission that happened during sex, verse 16 must apply to a different situation, for example, a nocturnal emission (cf. Deut. 23:10). In such cases, the man was to undergo standard cleansing rites for lesser impurities (*bathing* and waiting *till evening*).

17. Similar cleansing rites applied to any *clothing* or *leather* that got *semen* on them: they were to be *washed with water and* would be impure *till evening*.

18. When an *emission of semen* happened during sex, the cleansing rites were the same as those in verse 16.

It should be noted that ritual impurity resulted from sex simply because an *emission of semen* – like various other bodily fluids – was considered a source of impurity. This view has been held by many cultures (see Milgrom, 1991: 931–934), although the rationale is not always the same, nor is it always known, even by members of the culture itself (see Introduction, p. 48). The Bible does not state whether or not the Israelites had a specific rationale, although, as a practical matter, commentators have noted that classifying emissions as impure would have prevented illicit sexual rites from being practised at the sanctuary (Hartley, 1992: 211).

What is clear is that impurity resulted because of the seminal emission, not because sex was viewed as negative or sinful. Israelites thought of sex very positively, and were in fact exhorted to be captivated by their spouse's physical love (see Prov. 5:15–19). If it seems strange that a positive view may be held of a ritually defiling event, one need only consider childbirth, which also resulted in ritual impurity due to the loss of a bodily fluid, but was nonetheless viewed as a supreme blessing (see *Comment* at 12:1–4). In short, Israelites looked very positively on certain activities that made them ritually impure, just as many moderns look positively on certain activities that make them physically impure (such as farming or sports). Such impurity must be addressed (as farmers do when they wash off the dirt before going to church), but this does not cast a negative light on the activity that caused it.

iii. The impurity that comes from normal female discharges (15:19–24)

These laws address the impurity coming from *a woman's regular flow of blood* (v. 19), that is, menstruation. The cleansing rites are more elaborate here than in verses 16–18. This is not because men are being treated more favourably (note the same procedure is required for men and women with abnormal flows; vv. 13–15, 28–30); it is because lost human blood was one of the most ritually defiling substances in ancient Israel (cf. at 12:1–4).

19–23. A woman having her period was ritually impure for *seven days* (v. 19). When did the count begin? If it began at the end of her flow, one might expect language similar to verse 28: when she becomes pure from her discharge, she must count off seven days (cf. v. 13). The absence of such language could imply that the *seven days* began at the start of her flow. At the end of the *seven days* she would then be pure (v. 19), no doubt after bathing and washing her garments (cf. vv. 13, 21–22). Significantly, although the impurity was very severe, sacrifice was not required, mercifully sparing women and their families a heavy financial burden.

Since the impurity was contagious, those who *touched* anything the woman *lay* or *sat on* during her period would be impure and would have to perform standard purification procedures: *bathing*, *washing their clothes*, and remaining impure *till evening* (vv. 20–22; cf. vv. 4–6). This implies that those who *touched her* would have to do the same (v. 19).

Significantly, these laws do not prohibit contact with menstruating women (it is usually not wrong to become impure, as long as one dealt with the impurity properly). As a result, family members and friends were in no way prevented from extending physical and emotional comfort to them. In addition, these laws provided women with a socially acceptable way of withdrawing from others to rest and recuperate, something for which they may have been especially grateful in a world with no medications or hygiene products related to menstruation (cf. Gen. 31:35).

24. Verse 24 describes the ritual impurity of *a man* who *has sexual relations with* a menstruating woman and comes into direct contact with her *flow*. True, sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman was forbidden (18:19; 20:18), but a couple might discover during sex that the wife's menstrual cycle had begun, and a law was therefore necessary to address the resulting impurity. In any case, the man seems to have the same degree of impurity as the woman, being impure *for seven days* (cf. v. 19) and communicating that impurity to *any bed he lay on* (cf. v. 20). This implies that he would also need to go through the same

purification procedures as the woman.

iv. The impurity that comes from abnormal female discharges (15:25–30)

The final set of laws addresses an abnormal *discharge of blood* from a woman (v. 25), that is, one not resulting from menstruation (cf. vv. 19–24; Matt. 9:20). Such discharges are generally termed dysfunctional uterine bleeding and result from such things as ovulation, intercourse, or cervical or uterine cancer.

25–27. Although menstruation was not the cause of the *discharge of blood*, blood was lost just the same, and the resulting impurity had the same effect on others as that of menstruation (cf. vv. 20–22).

28–30. The woman, once healed, would perform the same procedures as did the man with the abnormal discharge (see at vv. 13–15; bathing and laundering can be assumed in v. 28 on the analogy of v. 13).

v. Conclusion and summary (15:31–33)

31. It seems that major impurities in some way automatically *defiled* the sanctuary, although such automatic defilement would count as an unintentional sin (people do not intend to defile the sanctuary by having such impurities) and could therefore be atoned for by means of sacrifice (see Introduction, pp. 52–53). But if people did not address the impurity properly, this defilement remained on the Lord's home. Furthermore, the people risked having their impurity spread through the camp and come again to this holy place. As a result, failing to deal properly with impurity was not simply a failure to acknowledge the Lord's holy kingship, but a direct repudiation of it, a declaration that it was of no consequence. It was nothing less than an act of treason, and therefore was met with the penalty that often awaits the treasonous: death.

The Lord therefore exhorts Moses and Aaron (the *you* is plural) to 'keep the people of Israel separate from their impurity' (ESV): that is, to help them to address the impurity properly and thereby avoid punishment for disrespecting their holy King. (The NIV's *keep the Israelites separate from things that make them impure* could give the mistaken impression that they were to avoid such things as sex.) Naturally, such a command would apply to all the impurities of Leviticus 11 – 15.

32–33. The concluding summary corresponds generally to the chapter's outline: *a man with a discharge* (vv. 2–15), 'a man with a seminal emission' (NASV) (vv. 16–18), *a woman* with *her period* (vv. 19–23), *a man or woman with a discharge* (vv. 2–15, 25–30), and *a man who has sexual relations with a*

ritually impure woman (v. 24). This summary alludes to the law of verse 24 after the laws of verses 25–30, perhaps because it chose to mention the sections receiving the most attention before those receiving the least, or because it chose to mention instances in which men and women were affected individually before mentioning the instance in which they were affected together.

Meaning

Like Leviticus 12 – 14, Leviticus 15 deals with ritual impurity arising from matters related to the human body. Due to this similarity, it emphasizes some of the same themes. For example, the great care it takes in describing how to address these impurities testifies to the holiness of the Lord, into whose presence such impurity was never to come (see *Meaning* at 13:1–46). Moreover, Leviticus 15 makes clear that ritual impurity was something that could have an impact on every area of life (see *Meaning* at 14:33–53). Finally, by providing the Israelites with a way to cleanse their impurity – and where necessary to atone for it – the Lord demonstrates his desire for his covenant children to come into his presence in worship, as well as to enjoy covenant fellowship with one another (see *Meaning* at 14:1–32).

As also noted in the previous chapters, such lessons in the realm of *ritual* purity and impurity would have served as pictures of what was expected in the realm of *moral* purity and impurity (see also Introduction, pp. 48–49). Leviticus 15 would have therefore reminded Israelites to seek moral purity in every aspect of life (especially in terms of sexual purity; cf. 1 Cor. 6:13–20), as well as to look to the Lord to provide moral cleansing (cf. Ps. 51:2). Believers today are to do the same, having a holy hatred of sin (Jude 23), as well as a firm assurance that the blood of Jesus can cleanse us – thoroughly and completely – of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

(For how laws on ritual impurity apply to the believer today, see *Meaning* at Leviticus 11.)

4. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (16:1–34)

Context

The previous chapter ended by identifying the danger of defiling the Lord's tabernacle (15:31). This chapter now addresses how the tabernacle and those who have defiled it may be cleansed and atoned for.

By this point in Leviticus, it is clear that the Israelites' sins and impurities defiled not only themselves, but also the Lord's sanctuary (see Introduction, pp. 52–53). This created a serious problem, because defiling a king's home was viewed as a treasonous act to be met with swift justice (see at 15:31). Ideally, the Israelites would have addressed such defilement by the sacrifices and rites of Leviticus 4 – 5 and 11 – 15. But in reality, some would have been unaware of their sin or impurity (see at 4:1–2; 5:2–3), while others may have been aware but defiantly refused to address it. As a result, the Lord's sanctuary remained defiled, and his justice an imminent threat.

The Lord, however, was Israel's redeeming King, who always desired to continue in covenant fellowship with his people. He therefore provided this day – the 'Day of Atonement' (23:27) – to make full atonement for their sin and impurity, thus removing the threat of his judgment and assuring the Israelites that they could continue in covenant fellowship with him.

The chapter consists of four major sections. Since the high priest performs this day's rites, the first section provides an overview of Aaron's duties (vv. 1–10). The next describes the day's rites in more detail, identifying three ways in which atonement was made: the purification offerings, the 'scapegoat' and the burnt offerings (vv. 11–28). Taken together, these three rites underscored that full atonement was made for all sin and impurity (cf. *Context* at Lev. 12). Such rites were powerless, however, if not accompanied by faith. The third section therefore addresses how the Israelites were to observe this day, focusing on their need for repentant hearts (vv. 29–31). The chapter concludes by commanding future generations to celebrate this day annually, ensuring that fellowship between the Lord and his people remained unbroken (vv. 32–34). (Because of the focus on 'atonement' in this chapter, it might be helpful to review the relevant comments in the Introduction, pp. 50–55, or the summary comments at 1:4.)

Comment

A. General directions for Aaron: how to enter the Most Holy Place (16:1–10)

In order to cleanse the entire sanctuary, Aaron had to enter the Most Holy Place where the Lord sat enthroned over the ark (1 Sam. 4:4). Since entering an earthly king's throne room had to be done with the utmost respect (cf. Esth. 4:11), entering the heavenly King's throne room required even more care (cf. Lev. 10:1–2). The Lord therefore warns Aaron against entering wrongly (vv. 1–2), and then provides an overview of how to do so correctly (vv. 3–10).

i. Introduction and warning (16:1–2)

1. The chapter begins by referring back to Aaron's *two sons*, Nadab and Abihu, *who died when they approached the* LORD in an unauthorized way (see at 10:1–2). If Aaron was to avoid the same fate, he would have to heed carefully the instructions that follow.

This verse seems to imply that the speech of Leviticus 16 came directly after the events of Leviticus 10. If so, then chapters 11 – 15 have probably been placed in between because they describe the various impurities Leviticus 16 will help to address.

2. This ominous beginning is followed by a strong warning. Aaron must *not come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place* (see diagram, p. 86). This was the Lord's throne room (see above), symbolically guarded by the angelic beings woven into the *curtain* that hung in front of it (Exod. 26:31–33; cf. Gen. 3:24). The Lord manifested his presence here directly, *appearing in* his *cloud* of glory over the *ark* (cf. Exod. 25:22). For Aaron to barge into this room – as his sons had tried to do – would have been a sign of great disrespect, resulting in the same fate: he would *die*.

For *atonement cover*, see at verses 11–16a.

ii. Aaron is told of the animals, clothing and rites necessary for entering the Most Holy Place (16:3–10)

With this warning in place, verses 3–10 now identify the conditions *Aaron* must fulfil *to enter the Most Holy Place* (v. 3a).

3–5. To begin, Aaron must have the necessary animals (see below) and clothing. Rather than his ornate high-priestly clothing, he was to wear a simpler set of plain *linen* clothes (v. 4). The reason is not stated. Since his ornate clothes

had kingly overtones (see at 8:7–9), these might have been deemed inappropriate when coming into the heavenly King's presence (Wenham, 1979: 230). Alternatively, humbler clothes might have been considered a more appropriate way to show contrition (Bush, 1842: 144–145). In either case, the clothes' simplicity suggests humility.

Naturally, *before putting on* these clothes, Aaron was to cleanse himself ritually (v. 4). In this instance, however, he was to *bathe* not just his hands and feet (Exod. 30:19–21), but his entire 'body' (NASV; NIV *himself*), an act that underscored the complete purity required when coming before the heavenly King (Keil, 1988: 396).

6–10. With the ritual materials identified, verses 6–10 provide an overview of what Aaron must do with the *bull* and the *goats*. Verses 11–22 will give further detail.

Aaron was to *offer* the *bull* as a 'purification offering' (NIV *sin offering*) for himself and the priests (v. 6), indicating that all priests needed atonement (cf. Heb. 7:27). He would *cast lots for the two goats*, perhaps using the Urim and Thummim (vv. 7–8; see at 8:7–9). The lots would indicate that one goat was for *the LORD* (v. 8); it was to be *sacrificed as a purification offering* (v. 9). The other was for *'ăzā'zēl* (often translated as *the scapegoat*; so NIV); it was to be *sent into the wilderness* (v. 10).

The meaning of the word *'ăzā'zēl* is uncertain; there are three main approaches. First, it could be a name, listed here parallel to the Lord's personal name: 'one lot for the LORD[67] and the other lot for Azazel' (v. 8, ESV; so also Milgrom, 1991: 1020). Those taking this approach often suggest that Azazel would have been an evil spiritual force, such as a demon (cf. Lev. 17:7), but emphasize that the goat was not a sacrifice to this being (note that it was not slaughtered). Rather, it was used as a sign of utmost contempt, sending back to the demon a load of sin and defilement (cf. Noordtzij, 1982: 163).

The difficulty with this view is that the Lord typically tells his people to have absolutely nothing to do with false gods (Exod. 23:24; 34:13; Deut. 12:3), as he in fact does in the very next chapter (17:7). One wonders whether he would involve a demon in this rite, even in such a negative way, and risk the Israelites turning the rite into some form of appeasement to this demon (Wenham, 1979: 234).

Second, *'ăzā'zēl* could refer to a 'rough' or 'rocky place'. Possible support for this approach is found in the Arabic word *'azâzu* ('rough ground') (Driver, 1956: 98), and would be another way of referring to the 'land cut off ' (NIV *remote place*), mentioned in verse 22.

Third, *'ăzā'zēl* could be a compound term, consisting of the noun *'ēz* ('goat')

and the verb *’āzal* (‘go away, disappear’), that is, a ‘goat that departs/goes away’ (cf. LXX). This leads to the traditional rendering of *scapegoat* (AV, NIV), since the goat departs bearing all the Israelites’ sins.

The second and third approaches do not deny the parallelism of verse 8; they simply recognize that it does not require *‘ăzā’zēl* to be a proper name (Hess, 2008: 721; cf. NIV, which maintains the parallelism nicely). Moreover, they avoid the difficulty of involving a demon in this rite. Finally, their proposed etymologies are at least plausible. At this point in our knowledge, however, it is impossible to prove either is correct, so the old advice of Bochart is perhaps best to follow: ‘...the more prudent leave the Hebrew word uninterpreted’ (cited in Bush, 1842: 147). The notes that follow will therefore refer to this goat as ‘the *‘ăzā’zēl* goat’.

Regardless of the approach taken to the translation of *‘ăzā’zēl*, the overall function of the goat remains clear: to make atonement on the Israelites’ behalf by bearing their sins far away (v. 10). (In this regard, the traditional rendering *scapegoat* actually does a good job of capturing the role the goat played on this day; see at vv. 20–22.)

B. Specific outline of the rites Aaron performs on this day (16:11–28)

As happens elsewhere, the ceremony's general overview (vv. 3–10) is followed by detailed directions (vv. 11–28; cf. Deut. 27:2–3 and 27:4–8; Wenham, 1979: 228). The ceremony consisted of three atoning rites: purification offerings (vv. 11–19), the *'ăzā'zēl* goat rite (vv. 20–22) and burnt offerings (vv. 23–24). As noted earlier, performing an action three times was a way of underscoring it (cf. *Context* at Lev. 12); the atonement accomplished on this day would be full and complete.

i. The purification offerings: atoning for Israel by cleansing their impurities and sins from the sanctuary (16:11–19)

Since the Israelites' sins and impurities defiled the sanctuary (see *Context*), the initial rites focused on cleansing it, starting at its heart in the Most Holy Place (vv. 11–16a), then working outwards to the Holy Place (v. 16b) and the burnt offering altar (vv. 18–19).

11–16a. Aaron began by making atonement to purify the Most Holy Place of his and the priests' sins and impurities (vv. 11–14; cf. Heb. 7:26–27). To do so, he performed three separate groups of activities. First, he acquired blood from *the bull to make atonement for himself and his household* (v. 11), that is, for all the priests (cf. v. 33). This blood would have been collected into a vessel.

Second, he entered the Most Holy Place *behind the curtain* and used *incense* to create a cloud of *smoke*. This was to *conceal the atonement cover* that rested above *the tablets of the covenant law* in the *ark* (vv. 12–13), that is, the stone tablets on which the covenant was written (Exod. 31:18). The incense cloud protected him from death (v. 13), either by shielding him from exposure to the Lord's glory, or by serving as a type of atonement gesture as he approached the Lord's throne (cf. Num. 16:46–47), or both.

Third, Aaron retrieved the *bull's blood* to perform two sprinkling rites (v. 14; cf. Heb. 9:7, 11–12). He first *sprinkled blood on the atonement cover* (see Exod. 25:17–22), so called because its Hebrew name (*kapporet*) is built on the root for 'atonement' (*kpr*), and because atonement was made at this very spot. Why here? The priests' sins were rebellion against the Lord's kingly rule, and their impurities were incompatible with his holy rule. It would make sense that these

sins and impurities were thought to defile the very object that represented that rule, namely, the atonement cover over which the Lord sat enthroned as King (Exod. 25:22; 1 Sam. 4:4). The cover was therefore sprinkled with blood – an action often associated with cleansing or consecrating (see v. 19). Aaron also *sprinkled the blood before the atonement cover seven times*, perhaps to underscore what was done on top of the cover, as well as to purify the entire *Most Holy Place* (v. 16a; cf. at 4:5–7).

Aaron repeated this procedure on the people's behalf with the *blood* of the *purification offering goat* (vv. 15–16a). This was to *make atonement* for *the Israelites'* 'impurities' (NIV *uncleanness*) as well as *their sins*. These would include any unintentional sins that the Israelites were unaware of having committed, such as eating sacrificial meat while unknowingly being ritually impure. They also included sins against the Lord for which sacrificial atonement was normally not an option, namely, sins of *rebellion* (*peša'*), a strong word used elsewhere to describe rebelling against a superior (Exod. 23:21) and thus well understood to refer to the 'high-handed' sin of Numbers 15:30–31 (for description, see Introduction, p. 43). At the least, verse 16 encouraged the Israelites that, if one in their midst had committed such a sin, the Lord would not hold it against the whole nation, even if that one person remained defiant. The sinner would suffer for his sin, but the Israelites would not. At the most, verse 16 also encouraged the repentant sinner that the sin had been atoned for. Naturally, any relevant civil penalties would still apply, and the Lord might still exercise fatherly discipline, but the sin itself no longer hung over the sinner's head. Thus, while individuals could not bring a sacrifice for rebellious sins to make atonement (Num. 15:30–31), the Day of Atonement was exceptional, and those who had committed rebellious sin could still look to the Lord with repentant hearts (v. 29) and be assured that their sins were atoned for by means of the communal offerings (see further Sklar, 2012: 476, n. 23).

16b–17. Just as he had cleansed the Most Holy Place, Aaron cleansed *the tent of meeting* (v. 16b), placing blood on one item (the incense altar; Exod. 30:9–10) and sprinkling blood seven times before it (cf. vv. 14–15).

Since only priests were allowed inside the *tent*, verse 17 is a warning to them in particular (cf. Exod. 19:24). Aaron was to go into the tent alone, as the representative of the entire nation, *to make atonement for himself* and all *Israel*.

18–19. Having finished inside the tent, Aaron *came out to the* burnt offering *altar* and performed similar rites *to cleanse and consecrate* it. The word *cleanse* indicates movement into a state of ritual purity (13:6, 13), and the word *consecrate*, into a state of ritual holiness (8:10–12, 30). This made the altar fit for use, so the Israelites could confidently draw near to the Lord with their

sacrifices throughout the year.

ii. The **‘ăzā’zēl** *goat: atoning for Israel by removing their sins from the camp (16:20–22)*

The previous rites addressed impurity and sin as a defiling substance that had to be cleansed from the sanctuary (vv. 11–19). This rite addressed sin as a lethal substance that had to be removed from the camp (vv. 20–22).

Aaron began by *confessing all the Israelites’* sins and placing them on the *goat*. This is in keeping with the biblical principle that confession is the necessary first step when seeking atonement (5:5; cf. Ps. 32:5; 1 John 1:9). The *goat* then ‘bore on itself all their sins to a land cut off ’ (v. 22; my trans.). This removed the lethal substance of sin from the camp very publicly. Unlike the rites within the Most Holy Place, this rite was performed in full view of all the Israelites, who could watch the goat – laden with their sin – disappear into the wilderness, never to return (cf. Ps. 103:12).

The goat bore not only their sins, but also the penalty their sins deserved, as the following observations suggest. First, the sins were *put on the goat’s head* (v. 21), implying that the goat was now responsible for them (just as someone with bloodguilt on his head was responsible for it; 2 Sam. 1:15–16). Second, the goat is said to *bear on itself all their sins* (v. 22), and the phrase ‘to bear sin’ is used elsewhere to refer to bearing sin and its penalty (see at 5:1). Finally, the goat was sent to a ‘land cut off ’ (v. 22; my trans.). The word for ‘cut off ’ (*gĕzērâ*) is built on a root used elsewhere to describe people being cut off from worship at the temple (2 Chr. 26:21, NASV), from life (Lam. 3:54), or from the Lord himself (Ps. 88:5). In short, the lethal burden and penalty of the Israelites’ sin was taken off their shoulders and placed on the goat, which bore it away and endured its consequences on their behalf. (Cf. Isa. 53, which uses the language of this chapter to describe the suffering servant as the one who ‘bore the sin of many’ [v. 12] and was ‘cut off ’ from the land of the living [v. 8]. The New Testament sees Jesus as the ultimate suffering servant who bears the sins of others [Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24].)

iii. The burnt offering: atoning for Israel’s sins (16:23–24)

In order to perform the special rites of verses 11–22, Aaron entered into a higher ritual state by taking off his regular clothes, washing his body with water, and putting on the linen garments (v. 4). He now returned to his regular ritual state by

reversing the actions: he *took off the linen garments* (leaving them in the Holy Place), *bathed himself with water and put on his ordinary* high-priestly *garments* (vv. 23–24a). He then offered burnt offerings *to make atonement for himself and for the people* (v. 24b), in this way underscoring the atonement that had already taken place (see at vv. 11–28 above), and perhaps also expressing worship and thanksgiving for the Lord's gracious provision of such atonement (cf. at 12:6–7).

iv. Additional matters related to the above rites (16:25–28)

These verses address four remaining matters related to the above rites, the first taking place inside the camp, and the next three, outside the camp. First, the *purification offering fat* was to be *burned on the* burnt offering *altar* (v. 25; cf. 4:8–10).[68] Like all fat, it was to be given to the Lord (see at 3:16). Second, the *man who released the 'ăzā'zēl goat* (cf. v. 21) was to *bathe* before re-entering *the camp* (v. 26), thereby purifying himself of any defilement contracted by handling the sin-laden goat. (The text gives no indication as to whether this was a layman or a priest.) Third, as expected for *purification offerings*, *whose blood was brought* inside the tent, *their hides, flesh and intestines* (or offal) were to be *burned* up at a pure place outside the camp (v. 27). When it came to a sacrifice made for their own sin and impurity, neither priests nor people could profit by eating from its meat (see at 4:11–12). Finally, the one who *burned them was to wash his clothes and bathe* before returning to the camp, implying that he had contracted ritual impurity by this event (cf. Num. 19:6–10), and underscoring again the need for purity within the camp.

C. Directions for Israel: how they are to observe this day (16:29–31)

This section now addresses all the Israelites (the *you* is plural throughout). It tells them how to observe this day (vv. 29, 31) and summarizes its purpose (v. 30).

Verse 29 gives the Israelites three different instructions. First, they must observe this day perpetually (it is a *lasting ordinance*) *on the tenth day of the seventh month*. This occurred sometime during the harvest in September or October (cf. Lev. 23:39).

Second, the Israelites were to 'humble' themselves (NASV). At the least, this refers to fasting (cf. Ps. 35:13), although it might refer to other forms of self-denial as well, such as not using ointments (cf. Dan. 10:3 with 10:12). Such self-denial often accompanied repentance as an outward sign of a humble, repentant heart (cf. 1 Sam. 7:6; Dan. 9:3–5). This day's rites mattered little if the Israelites did not acknowledge and turn from their sins (cf. Ps. 51:17; Isa. 1:11–17).

Third, in contrast to other special days in which limited work could be done (cf. 23:7), on this day they were not to do *any work* (v. 29; cf. at 23:3); it was to be a 'Sabbath of complete rest' (NRSV) (v. 31). This underscored the day's holiness and allowed for a focused time of prayer and petition to the Lord.

The *native-born* and the 'resident alien' (NIV *foreigner*) living in Israel were both to observe this day (v. 29). The *native-born* were the ethnic Israelites who were full citizens with land rights (Josh. 13 – 14). The 'resident aliens' were non-Israelites who did not own land (since it all belonged to Israel; Gen. 12:7), but who *resided* in it and were given most of the same rights, protections and responsibilities under the law as full citizens (Exod. 23:9; Lev. 19:33–34; Deut. 1:16). This included observing laws that might today be classified as religious (cf. Exod. 20:10; Lev. 17:10; 24:16; Num. 19:10), although there were some religious laws that applied only to the resident aliens who chose to partake in certain activities, such as eating the Passover (Exod. 12:48–49). In the case of the Day of Atonement, all resident aliens were expected to participate, since all those dwelling in the Lord's land were to repent before him for their wrongs (cf. Num. 15:26–30).

Verses 29–31 form a chiasm, with verse 31 repeating the instructions of verse 29 in reverse order. At the chiasm's heart is verse 30, reiterating that this day's purpose was to *make atonement* for the Israelites and so *purify* (NIV *cleanse*) them *from all* their *sins*. It is no surprise to find purification language in this context, given that sin often leaves us feeling dirty (cf. Ps. 51:2). Significantly,

verse 30 also makes clear that purification had been achieved: the Israelites were *pure before the LORD* and could rest assured that their covenant relationship with him would continue.

D. Directions for future generations and concluding statement (16:32–34)

Since this was to be a *lasting ordinance* (v. 31), future high priests – who were *anointed* on the head (v. 32; see at 4:3) – were to carry on the atoning rites of this day *once a year* (v. 34). These verses stress the centrality of *making atonement* by mentioning it five times (cf. NASV). Clearly, atonement was necessary in order for an impure and sinful people to continue in relationship with the pure and holy Lord.

Meaning

The Israelites had a serious problem: the holy Lord now dwelt in their midst, but their sins and impurities defiled his holy dwelling. True, they would have atoned for many of these properly (Lev. 4 – 5, 11 – 15), but they would have missed many others, which then defiled the tabernacle more and more (see *Context*). How could the holy Lord continue in their midst without bringing his justice to bear against them? By means of a regular atonement ceremony – the Day of Atonement – that would cleanse and remove the Israelites' sins and impurities so that they could continue in covenant fellowship with him.

Three rites formed the heart of the ceremony, each making atonement in its own way. First, the purification offerings focused on cleansing the Lord's home from the defilement caused by the sins and impurities of the Israelites, including Aaron and his family (16:11–19). Next, the *'ăzā'zēl* goat functioned to bear the lethal burden of their sins and carry them far away, never to be seen again (vv. 20–22). Finally, the burnt offerings – as the third rite in the series – underscored the atonement being made (vv. 23–24; cf. at Lev. 12, *Context*). Taken together, these rites fully atoned for the Israelites; their sins and impurities no longer remained, and the slate was completely clean (cf. Ps. 103:12). The holy God who is offended by sin and impurity is also the compassionate and gracious God who delights to cleanse and forgive it (cf. v. 21 with Exod. 34:6b–7a; see also Mic. 7:19; 1 John 1:9).

It was of course necessary for the Israelites to accompany these rites with repentant hearts. The Lord is not interested in his people's ability to perform ritual, but in whether they embrace him from the heart (vv. 29, 31). As with a wedding, a ceremony is an empty event if the participants are not fully committed to one another.

The New Testament describes the day of Jesus' crucifixion as the ultimate Day

of Atonement, by which he entered into the heavenly throne room itself to atone for sin (Heb. 9:24). Unlike Aaron, Jesus had no need to atone for himself, because he is a perfect high priest (cf. Heb. 5:1–3 with Heb. 4:15; 7:26–28). It is in fact because of this perfection that he can bear away others' sins, offering his own blood to cleanse these sins fully and finally away (Heb. 9:12, 14, 28; cf. Isa. 53:11–12; see further at Introduction, pp. 73–74). If Israelite believers felt the burden of their sin lifted because of Aaron's ministry on the Day of Atonement, how much more the believer today because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross!

5. LAWS ON THE PROPER SLAUGHTERING AND EATING OF ANIMALS AND THE PROPER USE OF THEIR BLOOD (17:1–16)

Context

Like chapters 1 – 16, Leviticus 17 addresses issues related to the proper place of sacrifice (cf. 17:4 with 1:3; 3:2; 4:4), the proper use of blood (cf. 17:10, 12, 14 with 3:17; 7:26), the importance of addressing ritual impurity (cf. 17:15–16 with 11:24–25, 39–40; 15:31; 16:16, 19), and the application of these laws to resident aliens (cf. 17:8, 10, 13, 15 with 16:29). But like chapters 18 – 20, Leviticus 17 also has a prohibition against illicit cultic practices (cf. 17:7 with 18:21; 19:4; 20:2). The chapter therefore serves as a smooth transition between Leviticus 1 – 16 and Leviticus 18 – 20.

After a brief introduction (17:1–2), the chapter divides into five sections that address the proper slaughtering and eating of animals and the proper use of their blood (17:3–16). The first prohibits Israelites from engaging in illicit sacrifice by requiring them to slaughter sacrifices at the sanctuary (17:3–7), and the second underscores this command and broadens it to include the resident alien (17:8–9). Since these two sections concern the fellowship offering (vv. 5, 8), whose meat the offeror ate, the third addresses the related issue of how not to eat meat, namely, raw with blood (17:10–12). It also identifies the sole proper use of an animal's blood: making atonement (17:11). The fourth section takes the prohibition against eating meat raw with blood and applies it to hunted game (17:13–14), while the fifth addresses further issues related to eating animals: namely, how to purify oneself after eating an animal that died naturally or was killed by other animals (17:15–16).

Comment

A. Introduction (17:1–2)

In this chapter, the Lord provides general laws on sacrifice, laws which apply to priest (*speak to Aaron and his sons*) and lay person (*all the Israelites*).

B. Sacrificial animals may be slaughtered only at the tent of meeting and must be offered there to the Lord (17:3–7)

This section contains a prohibition (vv. 3–4) and its context (vv. 5–7). In order to understand the prohibition, it is helpful first to consider the context.

Verse 7 indicates that the Israelites were *offering sacrifices to goat idols* (or *goat demons/gods*; cf. NIV margin). For the Israelites, worshipping a being in the form of a goat was no stranger than worshipping a god in the form of a calf (Exod. 32:4; cf. 2 Chr. 11:15). And while many moderns are shocked that the Israelites were still worshipping other gods, polytheism was to ancient Israel what materialism is to many today: it was so much a part of the cultural air they breathed that they were very slow to turn from it, even after deciding to follow the Lord (cf. Gen. 35:4; Josh. 24:14, 23).

This did not minimize the wrong in the eyes of the Lord, who describes such worship with the metaphor of *prostitution*. In Israel, to 'prostitute' oneself was to engage in sexual activity outside the covenant of marriage. It is a fitting metaphor, since the Lord himself had entered into covenant relationship with the Israelites, and they betrayed that covenant, like an adulterous spouse, whenever they worshipped other gods (Jer. 3:6–9; cf. Exod. 34:15; Num. 25:2).

It is in this context that verse 3 prohibits the Israelites from 'slaughtering' (NASV) a sacrificial animal at any place of their choosing, whether *in the camp or outside it*. Instead, they had to bring it *to the entrance to the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the* LORD (v. 4). Some understand that Israelites had to bring these animals to the tent only if they intended to make a fellowship offering (Hartley, 1992: 269–271), although others understand that Israelites had to slaughter all sacrificial animals at the tent, even if they intended simply to have a meal of meat (Wenham, 1979: 241).[69] In either case, following this command would help to stop idolatry and syncretism (v. 7), and would unify the Israelites in their worship of the Lord.

Those refusing to obey would be *considered guilty of bloodshed* (v. 4). This was because the blood represented the animal's life (v. 11), which belonged to the Lord and could only be used as he allowed, for example, in sacrifice to him (vv. 6, 11). Those who used it in prohibited ways (vv. 3–4, 7) would be held responsible for the animal's life and would be *cut off from their people*, that is, be exiled or suffer premature death (see at 7:19–21).

C. Israelites and resident aliens must offer any whole burnt offerings or sacrifices to the Lord at the tent (17:8–9)

These verses not only underscore the previous section, they also broaden it beyond the *Israelites* to include ‘any resident alien’ (NIV *foreigner*; see at 16:29–31 for description). Other texts make clear that resident aliens could become a part of the covenant community (cf. Gen. 17:10–13 with Exod. 12:48–49; see also Deut. 29:10–13; 31:12; Josh. 8:33–35); for this reason, many laws address their participation in Israel’s covenant worship (see also Lev. 22:18; Num. 15:14–16, 26, 29). Such laws not only prohibited syncretism of religion; they also welcomed the nations into the blessing of relationship with the Lord, the very blessing he had always intended to extend to the nations through the Israelite people (Gen. 12:3).

D. Israelites and resident aliens must not eat any blood; the rationale for this prohibition (17:10–12)

These verses are structured as a chiasm:

A – Prohibition against eating blood (v. 10)
B – Rationale (v. 11)
A' – Prohibition repeated (v. 12)

This structure emphasizes the prohibition by repeating it (vv. 10, 12) and highlights the rationale by placing it in the centre (v. 11).

10, 12. Prohibition against eating blood. This is the third time Leviticus prohibits *eating blood* (3:17; 7:26), that is, eating raw meat that still has the blood in it (cf. Gen. 9:4; Deut. 12:23; Milgrom, 1983: 99). This chapter does not explain why meat would be eaten this way; perhaps it was associated with pagan worship or occult practices (cf. 17:10 with 17:3–7, and 19:26a with 19:26b). In any case, the Lord emphasizes the prohibition's seriousness: he not only states that those breaking it will be *cut off,* but also adds, *I will set my face against* them (v. 10). This refers to the Lord's personal opposition to those who commit wrong, an opposition that results in some form of punishment (cf. 20:3, 6; 26:17; Ezek. 14:8; 15:7). The Lord is making clear that the *cutting off* will indeed take place.

11. Rationale. The rationale for this prohibition consists of three related statements. The first is simply: *the life of a creature is in the blood* (or perhaps better, 'the life of the body is in the blood', NLT). When a body loses its blood, it is lifeless, so it is very natural to equate the body's life with its blood (cf. Gen. 9:4, 5; Lev. 17:14; Deut. 12:23). It is perhaps for this reason that the Israelites may have considered lifeblood to possess special powers and so used it for occult practices (cf. at 19:26–28).

But this is not the use the Lord intended, as the second statement explains: 'I have given it to you to make atonement for your lives on the altar' (NRSV). This statement provides two reasons why blood must not be consumed. First, all life is the Lord's, as implied when he states, *I have given it to you*. The Lord can determine how lifeblood is used because he sovereignly owns all life. Second, he has provided lifeblood to be used for a very specific purpose: 'to make atonement for your lives'. This phrase most likely has the meaning of 'to ransom your lives' (Levine, 1989: 115; Schwartz, 1991: 55, n. 1), its meaning in the two

other passages where it occurs (Exod. 30:15–16 [cf. esp. 30:12]; Num. 31:50). To use blood for any other purpose is to deny the Lord's sovereign ownership of it.

The third statement explains how an animal's lifeblood accomplished such ransom: 'it is the blood that makes atonement by means of the life' (cf. RSV, NASV, NIV margin).[70] In short, the animal's lifeblood was accepted as the ransom payment in place of the offeror's: it served as a mitigated penalty on the offeror's behalf, graciously accepted by the Lord (the offended party), in this way rescuing the offeror (the offending party) from due punishment and restoring peace to the relationship between the sinner and the Lord (see Introduction, pp. 50, 53). Baruch Levine (1989: 115), echoing the teaching of earlier rabbis (Rashi; Ibn Ezra), observes:

> Rashi states: 'Blood represents life, and it can therefore expiate for life.' Basic to the theory of sacrifice in ancient Israel, as in many other ancient societies, was the notion of substitution. The sacrifice substituted for an individual human life or for the lives of the members of the community in situations where God could have exacted the life of the offender...[S]ubstitution could avert the danger, with sacrificial blood being especially instrumental because it was the symbol of life. [...] God accepts the blood of the sacrifices in lieu of human blood.

It must not be missed that such ransom could take place only because of the Lord's grace. Those who commit a wrong have no right to demand they be forgiven; such a decision belongs solely with the one who has been wronged. In this case, the Lord, in his great love and mercy, has graciously made such a means of forgiveness possible: an animal's lifeblood. The second phrase highlights this by including an extra 'I' in the Hebrew: 'and *I myself* have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your lives' (my trans.). Sacrifice was indeed something the Israelites gave to the Lord, but first and foremost it was something he gave to them, in his grace, as a means of atoning for sin and achieving the forgiveness they so desperately desired.

E. Israelites and resident aliens must not eat the blood of hunted animals; the rationale for this prohibition (17:13–14)

There were various pure animals that could *be eaten,* although not sacrificed. These included wild land *animals*, such as gazelle and deer (Deut. 12:15), and wild *birds*, such as quail and partridge (Num. 11:31; 1 Sam. 26:20). Since these were not sacrificial, their blood could not be placed on the altar; instead, it was to be poured out on the ground and *covered with earth* (v. 13). This would prevent it from being *eaten* (v. 14) or used for any other purpose (cf. at 19:26–28).

F. Israelites and resident aliens must purify themselves after eating from an animal that has died of natural causes or been torn by wild animals (17:15–16)

So far, this chapter has addressed eating animals that have been either slaughtered for sacrifice or hunted. It now focuses on the issue of eating animals that have either died naturally (*found dead*; cf. 11:39) or been killed by other beasts (*torn by wild animals*; cf. Exod. 22:13) (v. 15).

Although not stated, the law would naturally assume these animals are pure and therefore edible. It would also assume previously stated laws, in particular, that Israelites may eat animals that die naturally (Lev. 11:39–40), but not those torn by wild animals (Exod. 22:31). As a result, the law addresses only three scenarios: a native-born Israelite eating an animal that had died naturally; a resident alien eating the same; a resident alien – but not an Israelite (Exod. 22:31) – eating an animal torn by wild beasts.

In all three scenarios, those *eating* such animals become ritually 'impure' (NIV *unclean*) (11:39–40) and must go through standard purification procedures (*washing clothes and bathing with water and* waiting *till evening* ; see at 11:24–25; 14:1–8). It is important to note that these verses do not prohibit Israelites or resident aliens from eating such animals (see also 11:39–40). Furthermore, it is not usually wrong to become impure (see at 5:2–3); what is wrong is failing to deal properly with ritual impurity, since the impurity might spread through the camp and eventually defile the Lord's tabernacle (see at 15:31). This was nothing less than treason against the holy King, and offenders are assured that they would 'bear their punishment for iniquity' (v. 16; see at 5:1 for translation).[71]

Meaning

This chapter reminded the Israelites of three principles. First, their relationship with the Lord was exclusive (vv. 3–9). The Lord had delivered them from great bondage (Exod. 12 – 15), and they owed him – and only him – their very lives (cf. Rom. 9 – 11 with Rom. 12:1). He was their covenant King (Exod. 19 – 24), and it is this King alone whom they were to serve. As Jesus taught, 'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other' (Matt. 6:24; see also Josh. 24:15; 1 Kgs

18:21).

This chapter also reminded the Israelites to respect their covenant King by respecting that which belonged to him, namely, life itself (vv. 10–12, 14). In this context, that meant using an animal's blood – which was equated with its life – only as the Lord had commanded (see at v. 11).[72] But this also served as a general reminder to respect all life, for all life belongs to the Lord, its Creator and King (Pss 95:5–7; 100:3). For this reason, the Lord's followers should be on the forefront of caring for life in all its forms: human life (Lev. 19:15–18), animal life (Deut. 5:14; Prov. 12:10) and even plant life (Lev. 25:2–5). To do so is to proclaim, 'This has value because it belongs to my King!'

Third, this chapter reminded the Israelites of the Lord's great mercy and love. They knew that to break the Lord's law was to commit treason against him. This was serious indeed, for if those who commit treason against an earthly king forfeit their lives, how much more do those who commit treason against the King of heaven (cf. Rom. 6:23). But the Israelites were also aware that this King, in his great mercy and love, had provided a way for them to ransom their lives: they could offer an animal's lifeblood in place of their own (see at v. 11). Such mercy and love is seen with even greater clarity when Jesus offers his own life as a ransom for us (Mark 10:45). This ransom far exceeds that of Leviticus, for no longer do guilty sinners present an atoning sacrifice to ransom themselves; it is now the offended King who has provided the atoning sacrifice to ransom them: 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8)!

6. LAWS ON LIVING AS THE LORD'S HOLY PEOPLE (18:1 – 20:27)

Up to this point in Leviticus, most of the laws have focused on matters directly related to the tabernacle: the sacrifices to be presented there (Lev. 1 – 7), the procedures necessary for public worship to begin there (Lev. 8 – 10), the procedures for addressing impurity so that it does not pollute the tabernacle (Lev. 11 – 15; cf. 15:31), the yearly ritual that cleansed it (and the people!) (Lev. 16), and the necessity of performing sacrifice properly there (Lev. 17).

Chapters 18 – 20 now turn to matters related more broadly to living as a kingdom of priests in the Promised Land. Leviticus 18 and 20 focus on the unholy practices of the land's inhabitants that must be avoided, while Leviticus 19 addresses unholy practices to be avoided as well as holy practices to perform. If the Israelites obey the Lord in these things, they will prove themselves to be his holy people (20:26) and will enjoy life under his favour and blessing (18:5).

A. Laws forbidding various sexual and worship practices (18:1–30)

Context

Taken together, Leviticus 18 – 20 form a chiasm (cf. *Context* at Lev. 12).

A – The Israelites must distinguish themselves as holy by following the Lord's commands, not the nations' practices (Lev. 18)

B – The Lord's holy practices for his holy people (Lev. 19)

A' – The Israelites must distinguish themselves as holy by following the Lord's commands, not the nations' practices (Lev. 20)

Each chapter emphasizes that the Lord's people must reflect his holiness by closely following his commands. This would not only protect Israel from suffering the judgment coming on the land's current inhabitants (see 18:24–30); it would also enable them to enjoy life under the Lord's favour and blessing (see at 18:1–5) and to reflect his holy character to the watching world (see at 20:7–8; cf. Matt. 5:13–16).

As for Leviticus 18 and 20 in particular, both contain laws addressing illicit sexual relationships and illicit worship. Leviticus 18 frames its laws in an apodictic form ('You shall not do x'), thus focusing on the prohibition. Leviticus 20 frames its laws as case laws ('If a person does x, then y is the result'), thus focusing on the penalty:

Apodictic law	Case law
Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife; do not have relations with her (Lev. 18:15).	*If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both of them are to be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads* (Lev. 20:12).

Leviticus 18 also forms a chiasm:

A – Introduction: I am the Lord your God, therefore enjoy life under my

favour and blessing by practising my statutes, not those of the land's inhabitants (vv. 1–5)

B – Laws forbidding various practices of the land's inhabitants: sexual immorality and illicit worship (vv. 6–23)

A' – Conclusion: I am the Lord your God, therefore avoid my wrath by practising my statutes, not those of the land's inhabitants (vv. 24–30)

The chapter thus begins and ends with the Lord's affirmation: *I am the* LORD *your God* (vv. 2, 30). This phrase grounds Israel's obedience in the context of their covenant relationship with the Lord, the one who not only redeemed them from a life of slavery, but also called them to reflect his holy character to the world (see at vv. 1–5).

Comment

i. Introduction: I am the Lord your God, therefore enjoy life under my favour and blessing by practising my statutes, not those of the land's inhabitants (18:1–5)

These opening verses accomplish three things. First, they establish that Israel is to obey the Lord because he rescued them to be his very own. The phrase *I am the* LORD *your God* (or a variation thereof) is repeated three times (vv. 2, 4, 5), evoking a whole series of related ideas: 'For I am the LORD your God, who has redeemed you (Exod. 20:2; Lev. 11:45) and set you apart to be mine (Exod. 19:4–6; Lev. 11:45; 20:24; 22:32b–33), and come to dwell in your midst as your God (Exod. 29:46).' The Israelites were no longer slaves of men, but children of the redeeming King, to whom they were to respond with loving and reverent obedience (Exod. 4:22–23a).

Second, these verses explain that such obedience meant *being careful to follow* the Lord's *decrees*, instead of *following the practices* of *Egypt* (where they *used to live*) or *Canaan* (where the Lord was *bringing* them) (vv. 3–4).

Finally, these verses make clear that those who follow the Lord's paths *will live*, that is, will enjoy life under his favour and blessing (see at v. 5).

3. There were certain *practices* in *Egypt* and *Canaan* that were forbidden to the Israelites (for extra-biblical parallels, see at vv. 6–17, 21, 23). These practices fall into two main camps: illicit sexual activities and illicit worship practices (see vv. 6–23).

5. Verse 5 explains the benefit of keeping the Lord's laws: *the person who*

obeys them will live by them. The sense is not, ‘The person who obeys them will live in accordance with them’, which is redundant, but, ‘The person who obeys them will enjoy life under the Lord’s favour and blessing by means of keeping them.’ The Bible regularly connects obeying the Lord’s commands with living in the sphere of his favour (Lev. 26:3–13; Deut. 4:1; 5:33; 30:16, 19–20; cf. Ezek. 20:11 with 20:13). This is because his commands are like the borders of his kingdom, and those who stay within those borders proclaim their allegiance to him as King and remain within the sphere of his blessing (see further at Introduction, pp. 41–42).

It is crucial to understand that this verse does not mean the Israelites were to earn relationship with the Lord through their obedience. The larger context makes clear that the Lord gives the Israelites the law *after* he redeemed them (cf. Exod. 1 – 19 with Exod. 20 – 23). The law regulates this relationship; it does not create it. As in the New Testament, relationship with the Lord is always grounded in his gracious redemption (cf. Rom. 5:8). Naturally, as in any relationship, faithfulness to the other parties is necessary in order to continue in fellowship with them, a point Jesus himself emphasizes (John 14:21; 15:1–6, 10). But such faithfulness is never seen as a way to gain relationship with the Lord; it is always seen as a right response to the gracious Lord who has rescued his people and given them his law, that they might walk in fellowship with him and reflect his good and holy character in all the earth.[73]

ii. Laws forbidding various practices of the land’s inhabitants: sexual immorality and illicit worship (18:6–23)

The Bible identifies three types of sins that are especially defiling, not only to those who commit them, but also to the land on which they are committed: sexual immorality (Lev. 18:24–25 [cf. 18:6–20, 22–23]; Jer. 3:1), murder (Num. 35:33–34; Deut. 21:1–9) and illicit worship practices, especially idolatry (Lev. 19:31; Jer. 16:18). Each of these sins is identified in this chapter. (As noted at v. 21, Molek worship involved idolatry as well as murder.) They are arranged into four sections, the last three of which form a chiasm:

A – Laws forbidding improper sexual relations with a near relative (18:6–17)
B – Laws forbidding other improper sexual relations (18:18–20)
C – A law forbidding an illicit worship practice: child sacrifice to Molek (18:21)

B' – Further laws forbidding other improper sexual relations (18:22–23)

6–17. Laws forbidding improper sexual relations with a near relative. While many modern societies have an aversion to marrying relatives, especially blood relatives, such was not the case in many ancient societies, which were often clan-based and encouraged marriage within the clan, perhaps to strengthen clan ties and to safeguard clan property (cf. Num. 36). Even within the clan, however, certain relatives were considered too close for sexual relations. Those who crossed these boundaries brought defilement on themselves as well as on the land (see vv. 24–30). Such defilement was inappropriate for the Lord's holy people, so this chapter's laws make clear to the Israelites which relatives were off-limits for sexual relations.[74]

6. The phrase *to have sexual relations* is literally 'to uncover nakedness', one of many Hebrew idioms for 'having sex'. This phrase, however, always refers to illicit sexual relations (18:7–19; 20:11, 17–21; Ezek. 22:10) or, more broadly, to a public exposing of nakedness resulting in shame on those exposed (Isa. 47:3; Ezek. 16:36–37; 23:18, 29). In either case, the connotation is strongly negative, and it could well be translated throughout this chapter as 'to have shameful sexual relations' (my trans.).

In these instances, the sexual relationship is shameful because the person is considered to be a *close relative*. The reason why this is shameful is not explained, although it is clear that obedience to these laws had at least two practical benefits. First, they helped to protect the family's weakest members: children would be protected from their parents, and women from their closest male relatives (who no doubt lived in the same household or very nearby). Second, these laws helped to protect the unity of the larger family unit. A divorce between husband and wife is painful enough; a divorce between a closely related husband and wife is all the more so, since other close relatives would doubtless take opposite sides and thus split the larger family unit in two.

The following verses now identify who counts as a *close relative* (see also 21:2–3).

7–17. In terms of forbidden sexual unions with close relatives, many moderns think primarily in terms of blood relatives (consanguineous), for example, a natural brother and sister. The Israelites thought in terms of blood relatives as well as marital relatives (affine), for example, a brother and stepsister. These forbidden relationships are summarized in the following chart ('C' stands for consanguineous, 'A' for affine).

A man may not have sexual relations with his:

Mother	***Aunt***[75]
Mother (C) (v. 7)	Paternal aunt (C) (v. 12)
Stepmother (A) (v. 8)	Maternal aunt (C) (v. 13)
	Paternal uncle's wife (A) (v. 14) [76]

Sister
Sister (C) (v. 9)[77]
Stepsister (A) (v. 11)
Fraternal sister-in-law (A) (v. 16)

Daughter
Daughter (C)[78]
Daughter-in-law (A) (v. 15)
Wife's daughter (A) (v. 17a)

Granddaughter
Granddaughter (C) (v. 10)
Wife's granddaughter (A) (v. 17b)

7–8. Verse 7 forbids a man from having *sexual relations* with his own mother (*she is your mother*), while verse 8 forbids relations with his stepmother (his *father's wife*).

The Hebrew of verse 7 is complex, but the idea is as follows: 'You will not commit a shameful act by having sexual relations with the woman who is a close relation of your father through sexual relationship, namely, your mother; she is your mother; you will not commit a shameful act by having sexual relations with her' (my trans.). The focus remains on the fact that this relationship is off-limits because the woman is a *close relative* (v. 6; NIV loses this focus by introducing into the translation the idea of *>dishonour* to the husband [vv. 7–8, 14, 16] or to the perpetrator [v. 10]).

Verse 8 ends literally: 'she is your father's nakedness', best translated, 'she is your father's flesh and blood' (my trans.). The idea is as follows: 'She is the one to whom your father exposes his nakedness in sexual relationship, so that she has now become one flesh with him (Gen. 2:24), his own flesh and blood, and therefore your own flesh and blood.' Once again, the focus remains the same as

in verse 6: she is off-limits because she is a *close relative*.

See 20:11 for the penalty (and cf. Introduction, pp. 63–69, esp. pp. 63–66; also in vv. 9, 12–17, 19–23).

9. This law forbids a man from having sexual relations with his blood *sister*, whether his *father's daughter* or his *mother's daughter*, *whether she was born in the same home* (and therefore obviously closely related) or lived *elsewhere* (such as a half-sister, whom the mother bore in a previous marriage but who stayed with her father's household when her parents divorced; Wenham, 1979: 256). At the least, this law forbids sexual relations with half-sisters, although this clearly implies that sexual relations with a full sister – a far closer relative – are forbidden as well.

See 20:17 for the penalty.

10. A man is forbidden from having sexual relations with his granddaughters, for 'they are his own flesh and blood' (replacing NIV's *that would dishonour you*; see at vv. 7–8). Naturally, this implies that sexual relations with his own daughter – a far closer relative – are forbidden as well.

11. This law forbids a man from having *sexual relations with* his steps*ister* (*the daughter of his father's wife*). The phrase *born to your father* (NIV) is better translated 'brought up in your father's family' (ESV), which helps to distinguish this law from that of verse 9.

12–13. A man is forbidden from having *sexual relations with* either his *father's sister* or his *mother's sister*, since these were his parents' *close relatives* and therefore his as well.

See 20:19 for the penalty.

14. This law forbids a man from having *sexual relations with* his paternal uncle's wife. A father's brother was considered to be an especially close relative, coming directly after the father's children in terms of inheritance (Num. 27:9–10). A man is therefore forbidden from committing a shameful act by having sexual relations with a woman who is his 'father's brother's flesh and blood' (my trans.; see at vv. 7–8), namely, his uncle's wife, since she would be the man's close relative as well. (It is not clear whether this law would also apply to a maternal uncle's wife or whether maternal uncles were for some reason not considered to be close relatives.)

See 20:20 for the penalty.

15. A man is forbidden from having *sexual relations with his daughter-in-law*, who had become a close relation through marriage to his son. The prohibition is a great mercy for the daughter-in-law, who is therefore protected from becoming a sexual slave to multiple men in a household.

See 20:12 for the penalty.

16. This law forbids a man from having *sexual relations with his brother's wife*, who was 'his brother's flesh and blood' (see at vv. 7–8) and therefore the man's close relative as well.

It may be assumed that this law applied only while the man's brother was living (laws are often framed as though addressing the most common situation). If the brother had died without children, however, the man was to marry his sister-in-law, and the first son born would carry on the deceased brother's name (Deut. 25:5–6). This was also of great benefit to the woman, who might otherwise remain in the financially precarious position of widow. (Since she had not yet had a son, most men might assume she could not, and therefore be hesitant to marry her.)

See 20:21 for the penalty.

17. A man is forbidden from having *sexual relations with a woman and her daughter* or granddaughters. The *daughter* and granddaughters were *close relatives* and had come under the man's roof for protection. To exploit them sexually would be *wickedness*, a term used frequently to refer to wicked acts, whether generally (Ps. 119:150) or with reference to wicked sexual acts in particular (Lev. 19:29; Judg. 20:6; Ezek. 23:44).

See 20:14 for the penalty.

18–20. Laws forbidding other improper sexual relations.

18. Verse 18 begins literally: 'Do not take [i.e. marry] a woman in addition to her sister...' Because the preceding verses have been about family relations (vv. 7–17), this verse is usually understood in the same way: it is prohibiting a man from marrying *his wife's sister* while his *wife is living* (Hartley, 1992: 297; NIV and most versions).

Others, however, have taken this to be a general prohibition against polygamy. (This understanding occurred as early as the Qumran community: 11QTemple 57:17–19; 66:15–17; CD 4:21. See also Tosato, 1984: 199–214; Hugenberger, 1998: 115–118; NASV margin.) There are at least three lines of support (see esp. Hugenberger, 1998: 115–118).

First, in the phrase 'a woman in addition to her sister', and in its related phrase 'a man in addition to his brother', the words 'woman' or 'man' serve to indicate one person or object, and the words 'her sister' or 'his brother' serve to indicate another person or object, usually not related, and when related, only by coincidence:

> 'Five curtains shall be joined *one in addition to another* ' (lit. 'a woman in addition to her sister') (Exod. 26:3);
>
> 'When the Israelites saw it, they said *one to another* ' (lit. 'a man to his brother') (Exod. 16:15; see

also Gen. 42:21; Num. 14:4; 2 Kgs 7:6).

If taken this way, verse 18 would be prohibiting polygamy in general: 'Do not marry one woman in addition to another.'

Second, while it is true that verses 7–17 focus on 'not approaching one's closest relatives' (v. 6), verse 18 starts a new section. This is especially clear in the Hebrew: verses 7–17 all start with the same word; verse 18 begins differently. This in turn means that prohibiting relations between closest relatives is not necessarily in view (just as it is not in view in vv. 19–20).

Finally, had this law meant to prohibit a man from marrying 'a woman and her sister', it could have done so much more clearly simply by stating 'a woman *and* her sister', as in the preceding law ('a woman *and* her daughter'). Instead, it uses the phrase 'a woman *in addition to* her sister', which was a common expression that did not refer to relatives, except by coincidence.

These points are not necessarily decisive, but do weigh in favour of understanding verse 18 as a general prohibition against polygamy.[79] Whichever view is correct, the law forbids such a marriage, lest the second wife become *a rival*, a word used elsewhere to describe hostile relationships (Num. 10:9; 33:55; Amos 5:12). Such rivalry was typical between wives of the same man (Gen. 16:4; 29:21 – 30:24; 1 Sam. 1:6), a point highlighted in these stories in order to stress again that such marriages should be avoided (Wenham, 2000: 85–86).

19. A man must not *have sexual relations* with a woman during *her monthly period*, perhaps because doing so would make him equally ritually impure (cf. 15:24 with 15:19–23), thereby increasing the chances of spreading ritual 'impurity' (NIV *uncleanness*) in the camp. This was a risk that no-one was to take (see at 15:31).

See 20:18 for the penalty. For how laws on ritual impurity apply to the believer today, see *Meaning* at Leviticus 11.

20. This law forbids a man from having *sexual relations with his neighbour's wife*. The word *neighbour* (*'āmît*) refers in a general way to those with whom one interacted in the course of a day (19:15, 17). This does not mean the man could have sexual relations with the wives of non-neighbours. Neither does it mean that it was morally permissible for a married man to sleep with an unmarried woman. Several texts show clear disapproval of such activity (1 Sam. 2:22; Hos. 4:14; cf. Job 31:1), while others exhort husbands to sexual fidelity to their wives (Prov. 5:15–23; see full discussion in Hugenberger, 1998: 313–337, esp. 329–337). This law simply addresses – as most laws do – the most common situation in terms of this wrong: committing adultery with the wife of someone who lived close by. See 20:10 for the penalty.

This type of sexual relationship resulted in being *defiled* (*ṭāmē'*), as did all those preceding (see v. 24). Until this point in Leviticus, the word has referred to impurity that comes from events or circumstances that are not immoral, such as childbirth (12:2) or leprosy (13:14). This type of impurity is allowed, may be removed by ritual means (bathing, laundering, sacrifice) and does not lead to further penalty. It is commonly called 'ritual impurity'. In this verse, however, the word *defiled* refers to impurity that comes from moral wrongdoing. This type of impurity is forbidden, cannot be removed by ritual means and does lead to further penalty. It is commonly called 'moral impurity' (see further Sklar, 2005: 141–153). Actions that cause such impurity – and therefore rupture one's relationship with the Lord – are to be avoided at all costs.

21. A law forbidding an illicit worship practice: child sacrifice to Molek. For Israelites, it was very natural to find illicit worship addressed at this point: like sexual immorality, it was very defiling, both to the sinner and to the land (see at vv. 6–23).

Variations on the name *Molek* appear in numerous texts from Canaan and its surroundings (see Heider, 1985: 96–97, 103, 115). Verse 21 makes clear that worshipping Molek involved *giving* him one's children, that is, dedicating them to him as his possession (cf. 1 Sam. 1:11). This was done by means of *sacrifice*, more literally translated, 'causing to go into [sacrificial fire]' (cf. RSV). Other texts confirm that Canaan's inhabitants burned their children as sacrifices, whether to Molek or to other gods (Deut. 12:31; cf. 2 Kgs 16:3; Ps. 106:35–38). This was to add murder to idolatry, and the Lord strongly forbids the Israelites from practising such horrors.

To do so was to *profane the name of their God*. The *name* represented the very person (cf. Exod. 33:19a with 34:6–7); to *profane* the Lord's name was to deny his holiness by means of wicked behaviour (22:31–32a; cf. Matt. 6:9). Tragically, this was the very thing coming generations of Israelites would do in their worship practices (2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17; Ps. 106:37–38; Jer. 32:35).

See 20:2 for the penalty.

22–23. Further laws forbidding other improper sexual relations. Having addressed illicit worship, the text now returns to matters regarding improper sexual relationships (see outline at vv. 6–23).

22. This verse forbids a man from having sexual relations with another man. The Hebrew uses both a verb (*šākab*) and a noun (*miškābîm*) built on the same root (*škb*), a root associated elsewhere with having sexual relations (Gen. 26:10; 35:22; Lev. 15:18; Num. 5:19; Judg. 21:12). The verse's meaning is well captured by the NIV: *Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman*. As 20:13 makes clear, it is consensual sex that is in view (cf. comments

at 20:11). In short, sexual relations are meant to occur between a man and a woman, not between two men (and not, by implication, between two women). This was in keeping with the theological backdrop against which Israelites would have read this law: namely, the Lord's design that sexuality be expressed in marital, heterosexual relationship (Gen. 1:27–28; 2:22–24; cf. Matt. 19:4–5; see also Grenz, 1998: 45–46).

If someone breaks this law, it is a *detestable* act (*tôʻēbâ*), a word referring to a thing or practice considered reprehensible in the eyes of another. In some instances, this refers to acts that are *detestable* for various cultural reasons, not necessarily intrinsic moral reasons. The Egyptians, for example, considered it to be *detestable* to eat with the Israelites (Gen. 43:32), while the Israelites viewed certain animals to be *detestable* as a food source (Deut 14:3). In other instances, however, the word refers to acts that are *detestable* because they go against the moral fibre of God's created world. This includes things such as idolatry (Deut. 7:25–26; 27:15), which is a denial of humanity's Creator, or cheating others financially (Deut. 25:13–16), which is a denial of the value of those created in God's image. Homosexual practice belongs with these second instances, since it is a denial of the Lord's very intent for sexuality (cf. Gen. 1:27–28; 2:22–24), a point the New Testament underscores (Rom. 1:26–27; cf. Matt. 19:4–5).[80]

See 20:13 for the penalty.

23. Bestiality was certainly known in Canaan. For example, the Hittite laws forbid sex with cattle (HL §187), sheep (HL §188), and pigs and dogs (HL §199), although they permit it with horses or mules (HL §200). Israelite law forbids all forms, calling it a *perversion* (*tebel*), a word whose root refers elsewhere to 'mixing up/confusing' something (Gen. 11:7, 9). In this context, it refers to an illicit 'mixing up/confusing' of sexual relationship (see also 20:12). The Lord has designed sexuality not simply to be expressed in heterosexual relationship, but in human relationship. To deny this is to deny his intent for creation and therefore his position as Creator.

See 20:15–16 for the penalty.

iii. Conclusion: I am the Lord your God, therefore avoid my wrath by practising my statutes, not those of the land's inhabitants (18:24–30)

In this final section, the Lord emphasizes the importance of obediently following him instead of disobediently following the nations' practices.

24–25. For the *defilement* mentioned here and in the following verses, see at

verses 6–23 and verse 20. The *nations* of Canaan are identified elsewhere as the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites and Girgashites (see Exod. 3:8; Deut. 7:1). Because they had *defiled* themselves with their sin, the Lord was going to *drive* them *out before* the Israelites (v. 24), either by filling them with terror so they fled (Exod. 23:27–28) or by delivering them to the Israelites to be destroyed in war (Deut. 7:1–2; 20:16–18).

But their sin also *defiled the land*, leading again to the Lord's judgment: 'so I am going to visit its punishment on it' (so NLT, NJB), that is, on its inhabitants who have defiled it (v. 25). How so? *The land* is going to *vomit out its inhabitants*, as the stomach does food, so that nothing remains inside. The *land* is personified (cf. Lev. 26:34), as though it were physically repulsed by its inhabitants' wickedness. Paul speaks of the earth in a similar way when he describes it as 'groaning' because of humanity's sinfulness, and 'longing' for the day when it is filled with God's kingdom (Rom. 8:19–22). The earth was created to be the holy King's righteous realm; anything less than this saddens and sickens it.

26–29. Verse 26 begins with a strong contrast in Hebrew: 'But you yourselves must keep my decrees; you must not do any of these detestable things' (cf. NASV). Since all of these detestable things pollute the land, the laws forbidding them applied to all who dwelt in it, whether *native-born* or 'resident aliens' (NIV *foreigners*; see at 16:29–31). If the Israelites or resident aliens chose instead to copy the *nations*, the land would again be *defiled* and *vomit out* its inhabitants (v. 28). To prevent this from happening, those who followed the nations' practices were to be *cut off*: that is, like the nations, they were either to be driven from the land (Exod. 23:27–28) or to suffer premature death (Deut. 7:1–2; 20:16–18; see further at 7:19–21). Such a punishment stands in stark contrast to the life of favour and blessing experienced by those who follow the Lord's decrees (v. 5).

30. Verse 30 ties together the themes of this section (*do not defile yourselves* ; cf. v. 24) and this chapter (*I am the LORD your God*; cf. v. 2). A life of loving and reverent obedience is the only appropriate response for those who have been redeemed by the holy King.

Meaning

In both their past (*Egypt*) and their future (*Canaan*), the Israelites confronted nations whose manner of living differed radically from the life the Lord intended for his creation (v. 3). Those living in this way not only removed themselves from the sphere of his favour; they placed themselves into the sphere of rebellion against him, where they could expect his full and just opposition (vv. 24–29; cf.

Gen. 3:16–19).

But this was not the Lord's intent for humanity, whom he had created to experience his blessing and favour (Gen. 1:26–28). He therefore begins and ends this chapter by stressing the importance of obeying his commands (vv. 1–5, 24–30). These commands marked the borders of his holy kingdom, a kingdom whose members experienced life under his favour and blessing (see at v. 5).

Some of these commands are then specified in verses 6–23, focusing on areas where the Israelites often went astray: sexuality and worship. Human sexuality is a good part of the Lord's creation, but in a sinful world, it can be misused. This can happen by having sexual relationship with those considered to be close relatives, which is accompanied by very negative consequences or possible consequences (see at v. 6), and puts one in a place of opposition to the Lord's commands. This can also happen by having a type of sexual relationship that the Lord never intended or allowed, once again putting those who did in a place of opposition to his commands (see at vv. 20, 22–23). The Lord therefore provides careful instruction to protect his people from misusing their sexuality and experiencing his just opposition (vv. 24–29). Following this instruction is crucial, since ongoing unrepentant disobedience in these matters can indeed disqualify us from membership in the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–10).

As for worship, the Lord forbids the Israelites from serving Molek, and especially from sacrificing their children to him (see at v. 21). The Israelites owed their allegiance to the Lord alone, their Creator and Redeemer, and it was to him they were to give their children. They did not do this by sacrificing them on an altar, but by marking them with the covenant sign (Gen. 17:9–13) and raising them in the Lord's instruction (Deut. 6:4–9; cf. Eph. 6:4).

Whether in sexuality or in worship, the Israelites were not to defile themselves and the land by imitating the nations, but to honour the King who had redeemed them, enjoying life under his favour and blessing as they lived holy lives that spread his holy kingdom in all the earth. This happens today as we follow King Jesus, whom 'God has made both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36), and through whom we experience abundant life indeed (John 6:35; 10:10; cf. John 3:36).

B. The Lord’s holy practices for his holy people (19:1–37)

Context

As noted at *Context* of Leviticus 18, chapters 18 – 20 are arranged as a chiasm:

A – The Israelites must distinguish themselves as holy by following the Lord’s commands, not the nations’ practices (Lev. 18)

B – The Lord’s holy practices for his holy people (Lev. 19)

A' – The Israelites must distinguish themselves as holy by following the Lord’s commands, not the nations’ practices (Lev. 20)

These chapters are about holy living. While each one focuses on unholy practices the Israelites must be sure to avoid, Leviticus 19 also focuses on holy practices they must be sure to do. Holiness is not simply the avoidance of evil, but the practice of righteousness.

Leviticus 19 itself may be divided as follows:

A – Overarching command: be holy for the Lord is holy (vv. 1–2)

B – Specific commands for holy living (vv. 3–36)

A' – Summary command: keep and do all the Lord’s commandments (v. 37)

The summary command (v. 37) makes clear that the overarching command to holiness (vv. 1–2) is fulfilled by means of obedience to the Lord’s individual commands, and in particular, those listed in verses 3–36. What is more, the phrase ‘I am the LORD (your God)’ occurs no less than sixteen times in this chapter (vv. 2, 3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37). As noted at 18:1–5, this phrase evokes a whole series of related ideas: ‘For I am the LORD your God, who has redeemed you (Exod. 20:2; Lev. 11:45) and set you apart to be mine (Exod. 19:4–6; Lev. 11:45; 20:24; 22:32b–33), and come to dwell in your midst as your God (Exod. 29:46).’ The phrase therefore makes clear that the Israelites’ obedience was to be a loving and reverential response of worship to their holy King who had called them to be a community that embodied his holy kingdom.

Comment

i. Overarching command: Be holy for the Lord is holy (19:1–2)

The Lord's command in verse 2 identifies the theme of this chapter: being holy as he is holy. The Hebrew actually emphasizes holiness, and may be literally translated: '*Holy* you shall be, for *holy* am I, the Lord your God.'

Up to this point in Leviticus, terms related to the word *holy* have referred primarily to a ritual state describing people (8:12), places (16:2) or objects (5:15) that have been set apart for special purposes in the Lord's tabernacle. From this point on, holiness terms will refer increasingly to a moral quality, that is, the Lord's unmatched moral purity and love that sets him apart as distinct. It is this moral purity and love that the Israelites have been set apart to embody in the Lord's world, demonstrating his character to all who watch (see also at Introduction, pp. 40–41; cf. 1 Pet. 1:16).

As this chapter will make clear, such holiness is not accomplished by withdrawing from the world, but by engaging actively in it, living out the Lord's righteous character in every sphere of life:

Sphere of life	***Verses***
Family	3a, 29
Worship	3b–8, 26–28, 30–31
Business practices	9–10, 13b, 19a, 23–25, 34b–36
Proper treatment of the poor and disadvantaged	9–10, 13–14, 33–34
Court of law	15–16, 35a
Ritual practices	19b
Social interactions in general	11–12, 17–18, 20–22, 32

In short, holiness is not restricted to 'religious' matters: all of life is a stage on

which holiness is to be lived out.

ii. Specific commands for holy living (19:3–36)

These verses function together to explain what practical holiness looks like among the Lord's people.

3. The chapter begins its exhortation to holiness by referencing the fifth and fourth commandments (Exod. 20:12; 20:8–11), both of which are fundamental to a holy society's proper functioning. The fifth commandment stresses the importance of obedience to parents, the ones who provided covenant instruction (Deut. 6:6–7). This verse emphasizes that obedience by using the word 'revere' (so ESV), sometimes translated as 'fear' and often used to describe the obedient reverence and service one is to have before the Lord (Deut. 6:2; 8:6; 10:12; 13:4). As applied to parents, this would include not only obedience to their covenant instruction, but also caring for them in their old age (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8.)

The fourth commandment was also foundational to a holy society, since weekly *Sabbaths* were the sign of the Sinai covenant, Israel's constitution of holy living. The *Sabbaths* were therefore to be *observed* diligently as a constant reminder of this covenant and all it entailed (Exod. 31:12–17; cf. Heb. 10:25; see further at 23:3).

4. This verse has the second commandment in view (Exod. 20:4), while also implying the first (Exod. 20:3). The word for *idols* (*'ĕlîlîm*) is a general term, in this context perhaps describing idols that were made from wood – or even clay – but not cast metal (see immediately below). It was a perfect word to use for idols, since it can also refer to that which is worthless (Job 13:4; Zech. 11:17), and thus underscored the uselessness of worshipping them (see Ps. 96:5 in ESV; cf. 1 Cor. 8:4). The Israelites were not to *turn* to idols, that is, look to them for help (cf. Isa. 45:22), since to do so meant they were turning their backs to the Lord (Jer. 2:27; 32:33).

Metal gods were sometimes wooden images that were metal plated (Hab. 2:18–19), although in other cases they might have been solid metal. They represented other gods or even (inappropriately) the Lord (Exod. 32:4–5). In either case, this verse was a strong warning, since it would clearly have brought to mind the golden-calf episode with all its disastrous consequences (Exod. 32).

5–8. Whereas verse 4 prohibited illicit worship, these verses address offering sacrifice properly so that the offeror would be favourably accepted (v. 5, ESV; see at 1:3). The focus is on the *fellowship offering*, since this chapter is addressed to all Israelites (v. 2) and this is the only offering of which they all ate (see at 3:3–4). Proper worship involved eating the meat *on the day of the sacrifice* and *the*

next, with any remaining meat *burned* up (v. 6; see at 7:16–18 for possible rationale). Any *eaten on the third day* would be considered ritually *impure* (v. 7), and those eating it, guilty of *desecrating* it (v. 8), that is, treating it as a common object and therefore showing utter disregard for the Lord's *holy* property. (For *cut off*, see at 7:19–21.)

9–10. These verses anticipate life in the Promised Land (*when you reap the harvest of your land*); they focus on properly sharing food from the harvest with the needy.

There are five commands in total. The first four concern not harvesting a *field* or *vineyard* bare, and the fifth provides the reason: in order to *leave* food for *the poor* and the resident alien (NIV *foreigner* ; see at 16:29–31). Resident aliens are often listed with the disadvantaged (Deut. 10:18; 14:29), no doubt because they often experienced financial difficulty because of their lack of land ownership (see at 16:29–31) and their arrival in a foreign land, where they might be starting from scratch or easily taken advantage of.

These verses underscore a central theme of covenant law: namely, holy living means generously caring for those in need (Exod. 22:25–27; Lev. 25:35–37; Deut. 15:7–11; 24:12–15; Matt. 5:42; Gal. 2:10; 6:10; Jas 1:27; for a fuller discussion, see Wright, 2004: 146–181). Such generous care means putting people before maximum profits. For a narrative example, see Ruth 2.

11–12. These commands teach that Israelites must deal with one another in a completely trustworthy manner (v. 11) and must not involve the Lord in wrongdoing (v. 12).

The commands are logically related. *Stealing* is forbidden in the eighth commandment (Exod. 20:15; cf. Exod. 22:1–4, 7). Those who stole would often *lie* and *deceive* to cover up their wrongdoing. If accused, the guilty would be tempted to *swear falsely* an oath of innocence in the Lord's *name* (cf. the third and ninth commandments, Exod. 20:7, 16; see also at Lev. 6:2–3). By doing so, they were using the Lord's name in order to get away with the very evils he had forbidden, thereby treating his name as a common and ordinary thing (*profaning* it). And because a person's *name* represents their person (cf. Exod. 33:19a with 34:6–7), to *profane* the Lord's *name* in this way was to treat the Lord himself as a common and ordinary thing, instead of as the holy God who was to be loved and revered.

13–14. While verses 11–12 deal with unjust acts between those who are more or less equals, these verses deal with unjust acts committed by the powerful against those unable to defend themselves (Wenham, 1979: 267).

Defrauding refers to withholding that which belongs to another (Hos. 12:7), while *robbing* refers to taking someone's property by force (Job 20:19).

Defrauding was sometimes done by not giving *hired workers* their *wages* in a timely manner, an act that was especially cruel because these workers may have been living hand to mouth (Deut. 24:14–15; cf. Prov. 3:28; Jas 5:4). In addition, since these workers could be not only fellow Israelites but also resident aliens (Deut. 24:14), this law affirms that justice and mercy must be expressed to all nations, the very thing one would expect of those called to demonstrate the Lord's holy character to the watching world.

Verse 14 forbids any oppression of the weak, describing two particular ways in which this was done. *The deaf* must trust that others are not *cursing* them in their presence, while *the blind* must trust that others will not purposely trip them. Both groups of people are at the mercy of others and represent all those at some physical or social disadvantage, whether physically or mentally challenged, poor, widowed or displaced. While these people may not be able to hold offenders accountable, *the LORD* most certainly can and will. The Israelites must therefore *fear God*, that is, have a deep reverential awe of him that results in worshipful love and obedience (Deut. 8:6; 10:12). In this context, that means demonstrating his special care and love to the disadvantaged (Deut. 10:18; Ps. 68:5; see also Lev. 19:9–10; Job 29:15; cf. Deut. 27:18; Prov. 4:14–16).

15–16. These verses prohibit unjust legal acts.

Verse 15 addresses those charged with the responsibility of deciding cases. These were local leaders (Exod. 18:25–26) who would probably have known the parties in the trial and therefore might have been tempted to *pervert justice* by showing *partiality*, whether from compassion *to the poor* or *favouritism to the great* (see also Exod. 23:6–9; Deut. 1:17; 16:19).

Verse 16 continues the legal theme and addresses witnesses, who were especially important in the days before modern forensic evidence. It was therefore crucial that they did not *pervert justice* by lying about those involved in the trial (*spreading slander*), especially when the lie could result in the death penalty (thereby *endangering* a *neighbour's life*) (see also Exod. 23:1, 6; Deut. 19:16–21; for further discussion on the court in ancient Israel, see Wright, 2004: 302–304).

Together, these verses address the temptations present when justice is exercised among neighbours: 'In the intimate atmosphere of a local trial it would be particularly easy for neighbors to let their feuds and personal animosities distort the proceedings. *I am the LORD* reminds all the participants that God is the ultimate judge: let their decisions reflect what he would do' (Wenham, 1979: 268).

17–18. These verses teach Israelites how to respond when wronged by a *fellow Israelite*.

There are four things the Israelite must not do. 1. To *hate* 'with your heart' (NIV *in your heart*) is not simply a feeling, but a feeling put into action: 'But if *out of hate* someone lies in wait, assaults and kills a neighbour...' (Deut. 19:11a). 2. This would be to *seek revenge*, that is, to respond to a wrong with a wrong ('If they slandered me, I'll slander them'). This not only fuels the hostility; it also puts the person seeking revenge in the place of God, the ultimate Judge (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:17–21). 3. To *bear a grudge* is closely related: it means to maintain a hostile attitude – and show it in action – instead of forgiving. 4. Any of these actions will cause a person to 'incur sin because of ' his or her neighbour (ESV; NIV *share in their guilt*), that is, to commit sin against the sinner and now also be guilty (see again Deut. 19:11a).

In contrast, there are two things the Israelites must do. 1. Show the other party his or her sin (*rebuke your neighbour frankly*; for the proper response to such rebuke, see Ps. 141:5; Prov. 9:7–8; 15:12). This is not done in order 'to humiliate or exact vengeance through ridicule but to resolve the conflict without any lingering resentment' (Mathews, 2009: 174; cf. Gen. 21:25–27; see also Prov. 27:5; Matt. 18:15–17). Peace is the goal. In some cases, this might involve a court of law (Gen. 31:37; Job 9:33), although at no point are believers to take vengeance themselves (see also Rom. 12:17–21; 2 Pet. 2:3; Rev. 6:9–11). 2. Believers are instructed to *love your neighbour as yourself*. A neighbour is anyone with whom one interacts in the course of the day (cf. Luke 10:29–37). As with *hate*, *love* is not first and foremost a feeling, but an action. In this context, such love means a person is to forgive a neighbour's wrongs as quickly as his or her own. More broadly applied, it means a person is to show others the same practical care he or she shows himself or herself. Doing so fulfils every law the Lord gives his people about how to treat one another (Matt. 7:12; Gal. 5:14).

In short, the Lord's people must address the wrong, but always with the goal of restoring fellowship. This too is holy living, for it is how the holy Lord shows his generous love to those who sin against him (Ps. 86:5; Jer. 3:12; Ezek. 33:11; 1 John 1:9).

19. This verse teaches that the Lord's holy people acknowledge his kingship by respecting the categories he has established. It gives three commands. The first two are alike in prohibiting cross-breeding or cross-fertilization of living things (*different kinds of animals, two kinds of seeds*). This is similar to prohibitions in the realm of sexuality, where the Lord forbids mixing together what he has created to be distinct. To do so is to rebel against his creational design and therefore his position as Creator (see at 18:23). As applied here, the Lord has created the animals and plants distinctly ('according to their kinds', Gen. 1:11–12, 21, 24), and to ignore these distinctions – to try, in fact, to

obliterate them – is to rebel against the Creator himself. (It may be noted that this verse prohibits attempts to breed or fertilize across categories within the Israelite taxonomy, such as sheep with goats, or wheat with barley. It does not prohibit cross-breeding two different types of sheep, or cross-fertilizing two different types of wheat.)

The third command differs: it does not forbid making a garment of *two kinds of material*, but *wearing* it. The rationale may be that some priestly garments were made from mixed fabrics (woollen yarn and linen, Exod. 28:5). Since non-priestly Israelites were forbidden from doing priestly duties (Num. 3:10, 38), this prohibition would have prevented them from heading in that direction (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.208 [4.8.11]), something the early Israelites were tempted to do (Num. 16:1–40). The New Testament no longer distinguishes the church's leaders by special clothing, meaning Christians may wear mixed fabrics today. It does, however, recognize the special role the Lord has given to the church's leaders, exhorting Christians to support and submit to them (1 Thess. 5:12–13; Heb. 13:17).

20–22. Much debate surrounds verse 20 on account of its use of rare words and its lack of detail about the situation it addresses (see Hugenberger, 1998: 284–288). A possible explanation goes as follows. *A man* has sex with a *female slave* (although 'female servant' might be a better translation; see Additional note at 25:40). The master, however, had *promised* her in marriage *to another man*. (Such promises were natural in ancient Israel because all marriages were arranged, and the master, as head of the household, bore this responsibility.) To make this promise, the master probably would have taken an oath in the Lord's name (cf. Gen. 24:3, 9). The man to whom she had been promised, however, had not yet betrothed her, which was the first step towards marriage in ancient Israel and involved giving a betrothal gift (Gen. 34:12; Exod. 22:16–17). This gift would have *freed* the woman (*ransomed* her) and made the betrothal official (cf. 2 Sam. 3:14). Had this occurred, the man who slept with her and the woman herself would have been put to death (Deut. 22:23–24), since betrothal was taken much more seriously in those days and their act would have been considered adultery. But in this case, the woman *had not been ransomed*, indicating that the betrothal had not taken place, meaning the man and woman had not committed adultery and therefore were *not to be put to death*. Instead, the law of fornication would apply, meaning that the man who slept with her must now marry and care for her (Deut. 22:28–29; the fact that this law applies certain penalties makes clear that fornication was not the Lord's design for sex). But by marrying her, he caused the master's oath to be broken, which was a serious *sin* because it meant the Lord's name was profaned (see at 6:2–3). The man therefore had to bring the

standard penalty for violated oaths, namely, the 'reparation offering' (NIV *guilt offering*) (see 6:2–3, 6). As with Leviticus 5:14 – 6:7, this law therefore underscores that the Lord's holy people must address sacrilege whenever it occurs.

23–25. Like verses 9–10, these verses anticipate life in *the land* of Canaan (see at 14:33–42). They command the Israelites to *regard* any *fruit* from the *trees* they *planted* – such as olive, fig, date, pomegranate or almond trees – as *forbidden* for the first *three years*. The word *forbidden* is literally 'uncircumcised', a strong way of describing that which was to be rejected by the Lord's covenant people (cf. Gen. 17:14). Verse 24 hints at the reason for the prohibition: *in the fourth year all its fruit will be holy*, suggesting it was given to the priests like the holy firstfruits (cf. Num. 18:12). Since the Israelites could not eat from the harvest until the firstfruits had been given (Lev. 23:9–14), they were likewise forbidden from eating any fruit from the trees until after the fourth year. (The fourth year is perhaps chosen simply because many of these trees need at least this long to mature; see Milgrom, 2000: 1684.) The fourth-year fruit was brought as *an offering of praise to the* LORD, a way for the Israelites to acknowledge him as their faithful covenant King who kept his promises to bring them to Canaan and to protect and provide for them (see Deut. 26:1–10). The *fifth-year* fruit was then included with the rest of the harvest (*in this way your harvest will be increased*).

26–28. These verses prohibit a series of pagan practices.

Verse 26a is the fourth time Leviticus commands not to *eat meat with the blood still in it* (3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10–14). See at 17:10, 12 for the rationale. As noted there, eating meat this way may have been associated with pagan worship or occult practices. This could explain why it is followed here by a prohibition against *practising divination or seeking omens* (26b), practices that tried to discover secret information, especially about the future (Ezek. 21:21). It is an understandable temptation, since humans have a natural aversion to uncertainty. The Israelites, however, were not to turn to occult practices, but to the Lord, who would guide future decisions by means of lots (Lev. 16:8; Josh. 18:6; cf. Acts 1:26) or prophets (1 Sam. 9:6, 9; cf. Deut. 18:14 with 18:15). When he did not, 'the people were expected to walk by faith and live in accordance with God's general will declared in the law' (Wenham, 1979: 272), trusting that the Lord was in charge of their future and would shepherd them with tender love and care (cf. Ps. 23:1–4).

Verses 27–28 prohibit pagan mourning rites, such as various *hair* or *beard* styles, or *cutting* one's *body for the dead* (cf. Lev. 21:5; Deut. 14:1; for Ancient Near Eastern examples of the latter, see Hartley, 1992: 321). The rationale is not

provided, although cutting one's body is associated elsewhere with pagan worship (1 Kgs 18:28), perhaps implying all these practices were somehow involved with illicit spiritual rites (cf. Isa. 15:2, where lamenting for the dead involves some of these rites and is done at high places). Alternatively, it could simply be that they were so associated with Canaanite practices that adopting them would blur the distinction between the Israelites and the Canaanites.

The words translated as *tattoo marks* (*kĕtōbet qa'ăqa'*) occur only here. Although their precise meaning is unclear, the first word is related to 'writing' or 'marking', and the context supports some sort of marking on the flesh (either tattooing or perhaps painting). It is not clear whether this is connected with mourning rites or is simply another pagan custom that involves putting marks on the body; in either case, it is probably prohibited for the same reasons as the preceding practices. Tattoos today – at least in Western cultures – do not have the same pagan associations as they did in ancient Israel, so believers are no longer prohibited from getting them (just as they are no longer prohibited from various hair or beard styles, v. 27). Other quite separate questions might include: 'Is it wise to get a tattoo?' and 'What does it mean to do so wisely?'

29–30. These verses contain contrasting commands. Verse 29 prohibits Israelites from a temptation they faced because of poverty or greed: *making* their *daughter a prostitute*. To do so was to *degrade* her, the same word used in verse 8 to describe *desecrating* that which is holy. Like every Israelite, daughters were part of the Lord's *holy* people (v. 2) and to be treasured as such; they were not to be treated like a common thing that anyone could use. To do so was not only to disregard their holy status but also to set a pattern many others would follow; the entire *land* would quickly be infected with this degrading and *wicked* behaviour. The obvious result would be the Lord's judgment (cf. 18:24–28).

The land was instead to be filled with those who embraced the covenant from the heart (v. 30). To *observe* the *Sabbath* was to affirm the covenant and all it entailed (see at v. 3). Similarly, because the Lord lived in the Israelites' midst in his *sanctuary*, they were to follow his covenant commands obediently, in this way showing due *reverence* to his holy presence. Having the Lord as a neighbour should have a radical impact on how a person lives (cf. 1 Cor. 6:18–20).

31. While verse 26 prohibited individuals from performing divination, this verse prohibits them from going to others who do so and, in particular, those who claim to contact the dead.

A *medium* conjures the spirits of the dead to seek information about future events (see 1 Sam. 28:3–19). The term translated *spiritist* (*yiddĕ'ōnî*) is less clear, although it always occurs with the word for *medium* (*'ōb*) and is therefore

understood as referring to someone who either communicates with the dead (*spiritist*, NIV, NASV) or has access to power gained from the world of spirits ('wizard/magician', NRSV, NJB). To *turn* to either for guidance and direction was to turn away from the Lord (see at vv. 26–28).

For *defiled*, see at 18:20. For penalties connected to this law, see 20:6, 27.

32. This verse has three commands. The first two express – and therefore emphasize – the same idea, since *standing up in* someone's *presence* was a sign of *respect* in ancient Israel (cf. Gen. 31:35). Such *respect for the elderly* was a way to acknowledge the wisdom and experience that comes with years (Job 32:4, 6; Prov. 20:29). Moreover, it was a way of showing respect for authority, since the elderly would often be one's parents or parental figures in the community (Prov. 23:22; cf. 1 Tim. 5:1). Such respect was also a natural impulse of those showing the Lord's love to the disadvantaged, for we slow and weaken as we age and are in greater need of patient care and compassion. By fulfilling the first two commands, the third was automatically accomplished: having a *reverential* awe of the Lord that led one to imitate his ways (see at vv. 13–14).

33–34. Verse 33 makes clear that resident aliens must not be *mistreated*, a word that 'usually connotes economic exploitation, the deprivation of property, or denial of legal rights' (Levine, 1989: 134; cf. Lev. 25:15; Ezek. 22:29; 45:8). But verse 34 goes further, commanding the Israelites to treat resident aliens with full justice, just as they would the *native-born* (cf. v. 18). The Israelites knew how dehumanizing it was to be mistreated in a foreign land (*Egypt*) and were therefore to show resident aliens the same practical *love* they themselves had longed to be shown, the love the *LORD their God* had indeed shown to them. Those who experience the Lord's love and mercy are to be the quickest to extend it to others (Deut. 10:18–19; cf. Matt. 18:23–35).

35–36. Verse 35 is better translated as ESV: 'You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity.' As such, the verse prohibits injustice in dealing with others, whether in the public court (cf. v. 15) or in business transactions.

Verse 36 focuses on the latter. A *scale* consisted of a bar with a fulcrum in the middle and a pan hanging from either side. The object being weighed was placed in one pan and the *weights* to measure it on the other. It was very easy for the scale's owner to use *dishonest* weights for dishonest gain, a practice completely contrary to the justice the Israelites were to embody (Deut. 25:13–16; Prov. 11:1; Amos 8:5; Mic. 6:11). Honesty was also required with regard to two other standards. The *ephah* was a dry measurement, anywhere from 19 to 35 US dry quarts (21 to 39 litres), and the *hin* a liquid measurement, anywhere from 1 to 1.7 gallons (3.6 to 6.5 litres; Cook, 1988: 1051). Most authorities lean towards

the lower end of this scale.

The reason for such honesty is rooted in the Israelites' covenant relationship with the Lord (*I am the LORD your God*), the one who redeemed them from oppression (*who brought you out of Egypt*), not that they might oppress others, but that they might demonstrate to others their Lord's holy and redeeming love (see at vv. 1–2).

iii. Summary command: Keep and do all the Lord's commands (19:37)

This is a fitting conclusion and similar to other verses that either head up a list of commands (18:4–5) or conclude them (20:22). As these other passages make clear, obedience to the Lord's commands enabled the Israelites to carry out their mission, namely, to embody the Lord's holy character in the world and therefore to spread his kingdom and reign. Such obedience would also ensure the Israelites were protected from the Lord's righteous judgment and experience instead life under his favour and blessing, the very thing humanity was created for.

Meaning

While the Lord provides a diverse number of commands in this chapter, they are all related by one theme: holiness (see at vv. 1–2). Three particular aspects of this holiness may be noted.

First, the Lord makes clear that his people will live holy lives by imitating him (v. 2). On the one hand, this is the Lord's call for all humanity, who are created in his image and are to reflect that image throughout the earth (Gen. 1:26–28). On the other, this is his call to the Israelites in particular, whom he chose as his holy people to model authentic humanity to the world (Exod. 19:4–6; Lev. 11:44–45). Peter applies this quite naturally to the church, which has exactly the same mission and call: 'But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" ' (1 Pet. 1:15–16).

Second, the Lord makes clear that his people are to imitate his holiness by obeying his laws (v. 37). Importantly, these laws not only prohibit wicked behaviour, but also command righteous behaviour. Both are necessary: '...holiness must be manifest in lives that say both yes to what God requires and no to what God forbids. One without the other will never be sufficient to obey God's commandments' (Balentine, 2002: 160). Equally important, the Lord's people do not obey in order to achieve salvation, but as a loving and reverential response to the King who has saved them and set them apart for holy living (see at *Context*).

Finally, the Lord makes clear that his commands for holy living cover all aspects of life (vv. 3–36). It is especially noteworthy how many of these commands relate to interactions with other people (see chart at 19:1–2). Far from being an abstract concept, holiness is to be a reality fleshed out in relationships. ‘Holiness takes on a relational and experiential meaning; it is not just a quality or power associated with the divine being...Holiness is manifest in relationships characterized by integrity, honesty, faithfulness, and love’ (Gorman, 1997: 111–112). Stated simply, holiness becomes real as we live out the Lord’s love to others.

C. Laws forbidding divination and various sexual and worship practices (20:1–27)

Context

The way Leviticus 20 relates to the previous two chapters has been commented on above (see at *Context* of Lev. 18). The chapter itself is structured as a simple chiasm:

A – Laws against Molek worship (20:1–5) and seeking out divination (20:6)
B – Exhortation for the Lord's people to be holy (20:7–8)
C – Laws against dishonouring parents and sexual immorality (20:9–21)
B' – Exhortations for the Lord's people to be holy (20:22–26)
A' – Law against those practising divination (20:27)

The B and B' sections provide the rationale for the others: it is because the Lord has called the Israelites to reflect his holy character in the world (B, B') that they must walk in his ways (A, C, A'). By doing so, they will live out their privilege as a kingdom of priests, a kingdom meant to minister to – and on behalf of – all the nations (cf. Exod. 19:4–6).

Comment

The following laws are arranged not only by theme (see *Context* above), but also by penalty. Three main penalties are described, listed from most to least severe: death (vv. 2–6, 9–16, 27), being 'cut off ' (vv. 17–19), and having one's genealogy come to an end within Israel (vv. 20–21). (For details, see Introduction, pp. 63–65.)

i. Laws against Molek worship (20:1–5) and seeking out divination (20:6)

1–5. People *sacrificed* their *children to Molek* as a way of dedicating them to him (see at 18:21). Such a horrific wrong was a capital offence, and *the members of the community* were to carry out the penalty: death by *stoning* (v. 2). It would be very tempting not to do so (v. 4). After all, families lived close to one another, so that executing someone in the community often meant executing a close relative. Nevertheless, loyalty to the redeeming King was to come ahead of any earthly loyalty (Deut. 13:6–10; cf. Luke 14:26).

Molek worship was so horrific that the Lord states his personal opposition to such sinners: *I myself will set my face against [them]* (see at 17:10, 12) and *cut [them] off from [their] people* (v. 3; the form of the verb *cut off* here clearly refers to destruction, as also in vv. 5–6). Some understand this to be a way of explaining verse 2: death by stoning represents the Lord's opposition (Keil, 1988: 426–427). Others understand it to be a threat in addition to verse 2: the person is killed by the community (v. 2) and then faces the Lord's opposition in the afterlife (v. 3; Hartley, 1992: 337–338). It is difficult to decide between these options, although even if the first is correct, a person cut off by the Lord in this life should not have good hopes for what will happen in the one to come. In either case, the point remains: the Molek worshipper has shown utter contempt for the King who dwells among the Israelites (*he has defiled my sanctuary*; see Introduction, p. 52) and for his holy nature (*he has profaned my holy name*; see at 18:21; cf. Ezek. 23:39).

In case the *community* did not carry out the death penalty (v. 4), the Lord assures that he himself will see that justice is done, not only against the individual, but also against his *family* (v. 5a), that is, his 'clan' (ESV), who undoubtedly knew what the sinner had done and yet had failed to act against him. Indeed, such justice would extend to any of those who betrayed their love for their redeeming Lord by *prostituting themselves* to Molek (v. 5b; see at 17:3–7). As emphasized elsewhere, the unrepentant cannot ultimately escape the Lord's justice and are therefore warned: 'Be sure that your sin will find you out' (Num. 32:23; cf. Jer. 16:17–18).

6. See at 19:31 for details on *mediums and spiritists*. It is quite possible that these sins were done secretly (cf. 1 Sam. 28:8), and for this reason, the Lord again affirms his personal opposition to those who committed them (cf. at vv. 1–5). If the sin were discovered, however, the regulation of verse 2 would undoubtedly apply.

ii. Exhortation for the Lord's people to be holy (20:7–8)

These verses parallel one another and emphasize the importance of obeying the preceding laws. Verses 7a and 8a make clear that the Israelites are to live in a *holy* manner by *following* the Lord's holy *decrees*. Verses 7b and 8b provide the reason for doing so: they belong to *the* LORD 'who has set them apart to live in a holy manner', in this way privileging them to restore his holy kingdom in the earth (Exod. 19:4–6).

Command	*Rationale*
[7] But you will live in a holy manner and so be holy,	because I am the L ORD your God.
[8] You will keep my decrees and follow them.	I am the L ORD who sets you apart to live in a holy manner (my trans.).

iii. Laws against dishonouring parents (20:9) and sexual immorality (20:10–21)

As noted above, these laws are arranged by theme as well as penalty. The penalties are listed in order of decreasing severity: death (vv. 9–16), being 'cut off ' (vv. 17–19), and being without descendants (vv. 20–21). (For details, see Introduction, pp. 63–65.)

9. This verse states the penalty for those who disregard the law of 19:3 (*each of you must respect your father and mother*). It is perhaps placed here because many of the following laws also involve the family.

The word translated *curses* (*qillēl*) can refer either to cursing someone (that is, wishing the deity to harm them) or to 'dishonouring' someone (so NLT). In this context, 'dishonour' seems the better choice (cf. Deut. 27:16, which appears to refer to the same command and uses a word that clearly means 'dishonour' [*hiqlâ*]).

Deuteronomy 21:18–20 expands on what it means to *dishonour one's father or mother*. Briefly stated, it does not refer to the regular disobedience that marks most children (although that is dishonouring), but to a total rejection of the parents' covenant instruction and therefore the covenant Lord (Deut. 21:18, 20). In addition, it is not young children who are in view; note that the child is called a 'glutton and a drunkard' (Deut. 21:20), titles reserved for adults. In short, it is an adult child, still choosing to live at home, but openly rebelling against his or her parents and the Lord.

As with this chapter's other wrongs, a court would decide the case, thereby giving the son or daughter full access to the law (cf. Deut. 21:19). If convicted, they alone would bear the guilt for their death (*their blood will be on their own head*), not those who carried out the due penalty. This made clear that the relatives of the guilty could not carry out blood vengeance on the executioners (cf. Num. 35:19).

10. See at 18:20.

Adultery was forbidden in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). As its punishment makes clear, it was a very serious wrong, being an act of treachery against one's spouse (Jer. 3:20; Mal. 2:14), as well as a sin against God (Gen. 20:6; 39:9), who created marriage between man and woman as the cornerstone of a stable human society (Gen. 2:18–24). As its punishment also makes clear, this law addresses cases of consensual sex (note that the woman is identified as an *adulteress*). In cases of rape, the woman is not held liable (Deut. 22:25–27).

11. See at 18:7–8 (especially for comment on NIV's use of the word *dishonour*).

This verse refers to a man having *sexual relations with his* stepmother (cf. 18:8), although it would also apply to relations with his natural mother (cf. 18:7). As in verse 10, this is not a case of rape (in which case, the innocent party was not punished; Deut. 22:25–27); it is a case of consensual sex, as evidenced by the fact that both parties are to be punished. The same is true for verses 12–21 as a whole.

12. See at 18:15.

The term *perversion* is rare in Leviticus, with only one other occurrence where it describes bestiality (18:23). Its use here underscores how inappropriate a relationship between a man and his daughter-in-law would be, perhaps because she was considered to be his own daughter.

13. See at 18:22.

14. See at 18:17.

The law assumes that the man is married to both a woman and her mother at the same time (*both he and they must be burned*).

As opposed to execution by burning, it seems likely that the guilty parties were executed and then their corpses *burned*, as happens elsewhere (Josh. 7:25; cf. Deut. 13:15 with 13:16, and Josh. 6:21 with 6:24). Burning the corpse might represent complete removal from the Lord's people: not even the bones are left (cf. 2 Kgs 9:36–37). In today's language, they have no tombstone and are not even in an unmarked grave. The penalty's severity suggests that this type of incestuous relationship was particularly vile.

15–16. See at 18:23.

These verses do not explain why the animal involved in the sexual act must be killed; it was perhaps viewed as a willing partner. Other passages also treat animals as responsible agents (Gen. 9:5; Exod. 21:28).

17. See at 18:9.

The word *disgrace* refers elsewhere to the shame associated with evil behaviour (Prov. 14:34). It is perhaps used here because the incestuous couple

publicly shamed their families.

The Hebrew states that the couple are to be *cut off from their people*. This could refer either to premature death or exile (see at 7:19–21), although if death were the penalty, one might expect the same phrase as the previous laws (*put to death*, vv. 9, 10, 11, etc.). It is therefore likely that exile is in view (so NIV *removed from their people*).

The phrase *he has dishonoured his sister* is literally: 'he has uncovered his sister's nakedness', better translated, 'he has had shameful sexual relations with his sister' (see at 18:6). The sex is consensual (see at v. 11) and the shame is mutual.

The phrase *he will be held responsible* is literally: 'he will bear his punishment for sin' (*nāśā' 'āwōn*; see at 5:1). It is stated in the singular, as is often the case for laws, although it probably applied to the woman as well (cf. v. 19, where the plural is used).

18. See at 18:19.

The regulations of Leviticus 15:24 make provision for cases in which a couple discover during sex that the woman's period has begun. But those who knowingly engaged in sex during this time were to be *cut off*, that is, exiled (see at v. 17), perhaps because they willingly increased the risk of spreading ritual impurity in the camp (see again at 18:19).

19. See at 18:12–13.

The phrase *for that would dishonour a close relative* is better translated: 'for that would be to commit a shameful act by exposing a close relative' (cf. at 18:7–8). Both parties would 'bear their punishment for sin' (see at v. 17), the punishment perhaps being the same as that of the previous law: exile.

20. See at 18:14.

Dishonours his uncle is better translated: 'has shameful sexual relations with his uncle's flesh and blood' (see at 18:6, 7–8).

The couple will *die childless*: that is, the penalty is not that they will be *put to death* (as in vv. 9–16), or even exiled (as in vv. 17–19), but that, at death, they will not have descendants within Israel to carry on their name (see Introduction, p. 65). This penalty is perhaps slightly less harsh than previous ones, because a paternal uncle's wife was considered a more distant relative than a paternal or maternal aunt (v. 19; so also with the sister-in-law in v. 21, who was not onsidered as close as a sister, v. 17).

21. See at 18:16.

For *childless*, see above comment.

Dishonours his brother is better translated: 'has shameful sexual relations with his brother's flesh and blood' (see at 18:6, 7–8).

The result of such an act is *impurity* (*niddâ*), a word associated with the most ritually defiling events: menstruation (Lev. 15:19) and death (Num. 19:9, ESV). It therefore emphasizes how much this relationship must be avoided.

iv. Exhortations for the Lord's people to be holy (20:22–26)

These verses again emphasize the importance of obeying the preceding laws (cf. at vv. 7–8). Verses 22–24a do so by focusing on the Lord's just response against the nations who had committed these great evils and would therefore be *driven out before* the Israelites (v. 23; see at 18:24–25). The Israelites were to avoid such a fate by *keeping* and *following* the laws of the Lord (v. 22), who was *giving* them this land *flowing with milk and honey* (v. 24a). This was a common description of Canaan (Exod. 3:8; 13:5; 33:3, etc.). *Milk* came from herds and flocks and was an important food source (Prov. 27:27), providing essential nutrients. *Honey* refers either to bees' honey (Judg. 14:8) or to the 'honey' (i.e. 'nectar') of certain fruits, such as dates (cf. 2 Chr. 31:5; Milgrom, 1991: 189); it was one of the sweetest foods available (Judg. 14:18) and therefore highly desirable (Prov. 24:13; Olivier, 1997: 1. 917). A land *flowing* with these things was blessed indeed, having everything necessary and desirable for abundant living (Deut. 8:7–10). This was especially important in the ancient world, where life did not depend on the local grocery store, but on the fruitfulness of the land outside one's door.

Verses 24b–26 emphasize the importance of obedience, by stressing that *the LORD* is the Israelites' *God* and has *set them apart from the nations to be his own* (vv. 24b, 26; see further at 18:1–5). Verse 25, coming in the middle, states that Israelites lived out this calling by 'setting apart clean animals from unclean animals' (v. 25, ESV). This seems almost out of place, since diet has not been an issue anywhere else in the chapter. It is probably mentioned here by way of analogy, as though the Lord is saying, 'Just as you show you are mine by making distinctions between ritually clean and unclean animals in terms of your food, so you must show you are mine by making distinctions between morally clean and unclean actions in terms of your life.' (See also Introduction, p. 49.) As Paul would later say, 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God' (1 Cor. 10:31).

v. Law against those practising divination (20:27)

See at 19:31 for details on *mediums and spiritists*.

Verse 6 has identified what happens to those who seek the services of

mediums or spiritists ; verse 27 now identifies what happens to the *mediums or spiritists* themselves: they *must be put to death*. By returning to the same theme as verse 6, this verse ties together the entire chapter (see at *Context* above) and leaves the Israelites with a final reminder: the Lord's people must make maintaining their holiness their highest priority.

Meaning

As in Leviticus 18, this chapter emphasizes that the Israelites belong to the Lord and are to show the world his holy character by following his just and holy commands (vv. 7–8, 24b–26; see at *Context* above). This was especially true in matters most basic to life: worship, sexuality and family relations (see at *Meaning* of Lev. 18).

But whereas chapter 18 focused on the laws to be obeyed, chapter 20 focuses on the penalties that come when those laws are broken. The penalties were meant to teach the Israelites at least three principles.

First, sin is a serious matter. These laws came from the King of heaven, who had created this world and those in it to display and experience his kingdom of love, justice and goodness. This is why breaking his law is so serious: it is treason against the King, as well as violence against the love, justice and goodness he intends for his creation. (See also at Introduction, pp. 65–66.)

Second, sin among the Lord's people must be addressed. They are the King's ambassadors to the world (cf. Exod. 19:4–6). If the ambassadors fail in their duties, the King's message is never heard, leaving the nations with no testimony to their gracious Creator (cf. Deut. 4:5–8).

Third, those continuing in sin will experience the Lord's justice. Even if the people of God fail to discipline unfaithful covenant members, the Lord himself will ensure that the discipline happens (vv. 4–5). As Paul would later say, 'Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows' (Gal. 6:7; cf. Acts 5:1–11).

Of course, these penalties were never God's intent for humanity, whom he created to experience his favour and blessing as they walk in close fellowship with him in his ways (Gen. 1 – 2; see at Lev. 18:5). Such blessing and relationship now come to those who heed Jesus' call to enter into the yoke with him, learning from him how to walk in God's ways and thus finding rest for their souls (Matt. 11:28–30).

7. LAWS ON SHOWING DUE REVERENCE FOR THE LORD'S HOLY THINGS AND HOLY TIMES (21:1 – 24:23)

Chapters 21 – 24 are unified by a focus on showing due reverence to the Lord's holy things and holy times: priests (or the priestly office, 21:1–24), food portions from the holy offerings (22:1–16), the offerings themselves (22:17–30), the regular holy times (23:1–44), the Lord's holy dwelling (24:1–9) and the Lord's holy name (24:10–23). The reason for such reverence is straightforward: that which is holy is the Lord's, and to disrespect that which is his is to disrespect the Lord himself (see further at *Context* to 5:14 – 6:7 and *Meaning* of 5:14–16). The way to show such reverence is also straightforward: the Israelites are to make sure these things remain holy. By doing so, they not only respect the Lord deeply; they also fulfil their privilege as the people of God, maintaining a society in which the Lord's concern for holiness is clearly displayed (Exod. 19:4–6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9).

A. Commands for priests to revere the Lord's holy things (21:1 – 22:16)

Context

The previous chapters turned from matters directly related to the tabernacle (Lev. 1 – 17) to matters related more broadly to living as the Lord's holy people in the Promised Land (Lev. 18 – 20). Leviticus 21:1 – 22:16 now returns to matters more closely related to the tabernacle.

Comment

These chapters teach that priests are held to higher standards than other Israelites. There are at least two reasons.

First, the Lord calls the priests to a special role as those who serve constantly in the courts of his palace. And since the Lord is a holy King, it is especially important that his palace servants maintain their holy status, not only so they can come near him, but also to communicate to his people how much he values holiness. If the palace servants desecrate their holy status, it would show that they thought little of their privileged position and could suggest to others that the King cared little about holiness. (This is loosely comparable to a surgeon's assistant who leaves the operating room, comes into contact with germs and bacteria, and then goes back into the operating room. Not only would this show how little the assistant thought of his position; it could communicate to others that the surgeon himself cared little about cleanliness.) In short, those in special roles of service are held to higher standards, not only so they can continue in their role, but also so they communicate properly to others the values of the one they serve.

The second reason is related: priests are to be models not only of ritual purity but also of moral purity. While we expect this of most leaders, we especially expect it of those who lead us in the things of God. (It is therefore no surprise that the New Testament lists specific moral qualifications for elders: 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9.) Leaders of the Lord's people are to be uniquely holy.

i. Commands for priests about mourning and marriage (21:1–8)

1–6. Commands about mourning. These verses begin by forbidding priests from defiling themselves for the dead (vv. 1–4) and from engaging in pagan

mourning rites (v. 5); they end by emphasizing that priests must remain holy (v. 6).

1–4. Mourning for the dead usually involved coming in close contact with the corpse, one of the most ritually defiling objects in ancient Israel. Such contact resulted in a major seven-day ritual impurity (Num. 19:11–19; see also Introduction, pp. 45–46). Because of his holy status, *a priest* could not *make himself* 'ritually impure' (NIV *ceremonially unclean*) in this way, even for *his* own *people* (his tribal relatives, v. 1). (Naturally, he is not prohibited from being sad, simply from participating in mourning rites that cause impurity.)

But the Lord graciously allowed an exception in the case of a priest's *close relatives*, for whom he could engage in mourning rites (vv. 2–3). This included his 'unmarried sister (who is near to him because she has no husband)' (v. 3, ESV). When unmarried, the sister was still a member of her father's household (Deut. 22:16), as was her brother (cf. Gen. 42:1–4). Once married, the sister became part of another household, one that would carry out the mourning rites for her (Gen. 23:1–2; 35:19–20).

Exceptions could not be made for *people related to him by marriage* (v. 4). Did this include his wife? She certainly was a relative by marriage and is not listed in verses 2–3. But she was also 'bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh' (Gen. 2:23), one whom he had left 'father and mother' to join (Gen. 2:24; cf. v. 2). This suggests she was considered the priest's very closest relative, a point the law assumes to be understood (so also Wenham, 1979: 290; Noordtzij, 1982: 215; Milgrom, 2000: 1798).

5–6. In certain circumstances, the priests could engage in mourning rites (vv. 2–3), but not those of verse 5, which are prohibited because of their associations with pagan practices. See at 19:26–28.

Such rites were especially wrong for those who were to be ritually *holy* (v. 6; the Hebrew emphasizes this by beginning and ending the verse with the word *holy*). The reason is clear: like royal servants presenting food to a king, the priests *presented the* Israelites' *food offerings to the* LORD. And since the Lord was a most holy King, those drawing so near to him could not be impure, for this would be to *profane his name*, to say, in effect, that his holiness was of no importance and worthy of no respect (see at *Comment* above; for *profane*, see at 18:21; for *food offering*, see at 1:9; for *food*, see at 3:11).

7–8. Commands about marriage. The fact that verse 7 is necessary suggests the women it describes did remarry in ancient Israel (the latter is clearly attested in Deut. 24:1–2). But priests were *holy*, and their role required model purity, not only ritually, but morally. They were therefore to marry those who set a similar model of purity and who could not be reproached for past or present behaviour.

(Naturally, *divorce* was not necessarily the wife's fault; v. 7 may simply assume what is most common in divorce: both partners usually contribute wrongdoing that leads to the break-up of the marriage.)

The Israelites themselves were to 'treat' (NIV *regard*) the priests 'as holy' (NLT), which in context suggests they were to help him maintain his holy status, particularly in the above matters (cf. Hartley, 1992: 342: 'You are to make sure he is holy'). As in verse 6, this is because of the priests' holy role (they offer up *the food of your God*) and the holiness of the King they serve (*I the LORD am holy*).[81]

ii. A law regarding priests' daughters (21:9)

Any daughter engaged in *prostitution* dishonoured her parents greatly by committing such evil; the result was to be death by stoning (cf. Deut. 22:21). This was the common fate for those who dishonoured parents, whether son or daughter (Deut. 21:18–20; cf. at Lev. 20:9). But in this case, the daughter's sin was doubly severe: she not only dishonoured her parents in general; she 'profaned' (ESV) her father in particular, treating his holy calling – and thus the one who had called him (the Lord) – as a common thing, unworthy of respect. The punishment was therefore doubly severe: her corpse was to be *burned* after she had been stoned (see at 20:14). (For narrative examples of a priest's sons dying for failure to respect the priestly office and thus the Lord, see Lev. 10:1–2; 1 Sam. 2:12–17, 34; 4:11.)

iii. Commands for the high priest about mourning and marriage (21:10–15)

As in verses 1–8, these rules also address issues of mourning (vv. 10–12) and marriage (vv. 13–15). They are also stricter, since the high priest had the highest level of ritual holiness and had to guard it more carefully.

10–12. Commands about mourning. The *high priest* was set apart into his higher level of ritual holiness by having the *anointing oil poured on his head* (see at 8:10–12) and by wearing special *garments* (see at 8:7–9). On account of this special state of holiness, he was forbidden from engaging in the ritually defiling mourning process, whether in rites involving his appearance (v. 10b; see at 10:6–7) or rites that brought him near the corpse (v. 11a; cf. Num. 19:14). This rule, unlike those for regular priests, applied *even for his father and mother* (and undoubtedly all the closest relatives listed in vv. 2–3). (As Hartley [1992: 349] notes, 'Nothing is said about the death of the high priest's wife. What concessions may have been made in this regard are not mentioned.')

Verse 12 cannot mean the high priest could never *leave the sanctuary*; otherwise, it would be impossible for him to live with his family or to have physical relations with his wife (the latter would be forbidden in the sanctuary). Note also that Aaron, the high priest, did not remain at the sanctuary all the time (Num. 12:1–4; 16:47). The context therefore suggests the high priest could not leave the sanctuary to mourn and become impure (so also Keil, 1988: 432; Noordtzij, 1982: 219; Milgrom, 2000: 1816). After all, he had been *dedicated* for a special role there, and to defile himself willingly with such a major impurity would be to 'profane' (ESV) – to show great disrespect for – the holiness of the place in which he must be ready to serve. (For *I am the LORD*, see at 11:41–45.)

13–15. Commands about marriage. Not only must the high priest's wife be free from accusation of misconduct (*divorced, defiled by prostitution*; see at vv. 7–8), she may not even be a *widow*, only a *virgin*, perhaps to ensure that any child born to his wife is his. His wife must also come *from his own people* (v. 14), that is, his own tribal relatives (see at vv. 1–4). This is perhaps because the next high priest would come from the *offspring* of the current high priest (Exod. 29:29–30). And since priests were to come from the tribe of Levi (Num. 3:1–10), it was especially important that the high priest's offspring be a Levite through and through. If the high priest did not ensure these things, he 'profaned' (ESV) *his offspring among his people*: that is, he disqualified them from the holy high-priestly role in the midst of his holy Levite relatives. Such profaning was forbidden to the high priest, whom the Lord had 'set apart to live in a holy manner' (NIV *made holy*, v. 15; see at 22:9).

iv. Descendants of Aaron who may not officiate (21:16–23), and v. Conclusion (21:24)

Verses 1–15 focus on priests maintaining their holy status so they can serve at the altar. This leads naturally to a discussion of which descendants of Aaron may not serve there (vv. 16–24). As the outline makes clear, this section focuses on prohibiting Aaron's descendants with physical 'blemishes' (ESV) from altar-service:

1. Introduction (vv. 16–17a)
2. Initial statements of prohibition (vv. 17b–21)
3. A clarification provided (v. 22)
4. Prohibition repeated (v. 23a)
5. Rationale for the prohibition (v. 23b)

6. Conclusion (v. 24)

While the focus is clear, it also raises a serious question: Why would descendants of Aaron with a physical blemish 'profane' (ESV) the Lord's holy precincts if they worked there (v. 23b)? While the text does not provide an explanation, it should not surprise us if the answer is rooted in the tabernacle's rich symbolism. One possible explanation is that the tabernacle was like the garden of Eden, where the Lord 'walked' among his people (cf. Gen. 3:8 and Lev. 26:12; see also Beale, 2011: 617–622). As such, it was to be a place of perfection, and those working in it were not to have any physical blemishes as a way to symbolize the perfection that used to belong to all of humanity (Gen. 2:25) and will one day belong again to all those who enter into God's presence in the heavenly tabernacle (Rev. 7:9–17; 21:2–4). Another possible explanation is that the priests, as the Lord's representatives to the people, were not to have any physical blemishes as a way to symbolize that the Lord they represented and who dwelt in this tabernacle had no blemishes whatsoever: he was perfect and complete. In either case, to disregard this requirement would be to 'profane' – to treat as unworthy of respect – the Lord's holy tabernacle and what it represented, since it would be to undercut and deny the very message the tabernacle was meant to communicate.

The above explanations, like any other for this text, are ultimately impossible to prove. What is very clear, however, is that these descendants of Aaron were not to be looked down on, but honoured and loved. The Lord himself underscores this by stating that they still have a seat at his table (v. 22)! Just as King David welcomed disabled Mephibosheth to his table (2 Sam. 9) – thereby demonstrating to all that he was to be given full honour as one loved by the king – so the Lord makes clear that these descendants of Aaron are welcome guests at his table and are to be given full honour as those whom the King loves and, indeed, has made in his image (cf. Luke 14:21).[82]

18–20. These verses give various examples of physical 'blemishes' (ESV; NIV *defects*). The meanings of five of these seem clear: *blind* and *lame* (v. 18), *crippled foot* or *hand* (v. 19), and *damaged testicles* (v. 20). (The phrase *crippled foot or hand* is literally 'broken foot or broken hand'. In ancient Israel, broken bones could not always be set properly and therefore resulted in various deformities.)

The remaining terms are very rare and therefore difficult to define with certainty. *Disfigured or deformed* (v. 18) is also understood as 'disfigured face or a deformed limb' (NASV). Most versions agree with *hunchback* and *dwarf* (v. 20), support for which can be found in some ancient versions (although not in

others). Most are also agreed that verse 20 refers to some sort of *eye defect* (although its nature is not clear) and to some sort of skin problem (although many translations are either more specific or more general than NIV's *festering or running sores*).

22. As noted at 2:2–3, the offerings were divided into the *most holy* and the *holy*, and the Lord had assigned various portions of these offerings to the priests and their families. As also noted there, while a priest's family could partake of *holy* offerings, the *most holy offerings* could be eaten only by the priests and had to be eaten in the tabernacle courtyard. This verse therefore shows that priests with physical blemishes were still counted among the Lord's royal servants, and were not only allowed into the courtyard, but also welcomed as guests at his royal table.

23. Perhaps better: 'but behind the curtain he shall not go and to the altar he shall not draw near, for he has a physical blemish; so he shall not profane my holy precincts, for I am the LORD who sets them apart as holy' (my trans.).

To go *near the curtain* was to enter the Most Holy Place (cf. 16:2). Only the high priest went there and only on the Day of Atonement (16:2–19, 34). This verse makes clear that he could not do so if he had one of the above blemishes.

The phrase 'holy precincts' refers to the precincts of the tabernacle complex (cf. Jer. 51:51). Priests with blemishes could certainly go to the tabernacle (see at v. 22), but not minister there (behind the curtain or at the altar). Because the Lord had *set* these precincts *apart as holy*, they were to be treated with the full respect belonging to the King's holy things (and not 'profaned' [NIV *desecrated*]; see above comments at vv. 16–23, 24).

Meaning

The higher standards of holiness to which the Lord called the priests were a reminder to them of their privileged role as those who served in the very courts of the holy King. This role required holiness not only so they could draw near to the King, but also so they could communicate to the rest of the King's people how much he valued holiness. The holiness of the priests' lives – both ritually and morally – was to be a picture to the Israelites of the Lord's own holiness. This was a high privilege indeed and called the priests to undertake their duties with special reverence (cf. 1 Tim. 4:7–8, 12–16) and the Israelites to help them do so (see at vv. 7–8; cf. Heb. 13:17).

But it also called the Israelites to far more than this, for just as the priests were privileged to reflect the Lord's holiness to the Israelites, so too were the Israelites privileged as a kingdom of priests to reflect the Lord's holiness to the world (Exod. 19:6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). And just as the priests who served faithfully

helped the Israelites to understand who the Lord was and what he valued, so too the Israelites who served faithfully helped the world to understand the same (Deut. 4:5–8; cf. Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12). All of the Lord's people are his servants and are privileged to reflect his holy character – and spread his holy kingdom – in the world.

vi. Commands and laws for priests about treating sacred offerings properly (22:1–9)

Having just mentioned the priests' right to eat from the Israelites' *sacred offerings* (21:22), this section now commands priests not to mishandle them. Priestly rights came with added responsibilities.

2. Summary command. The priests (*Aaron and his sons*) must *treat the sacred offerings with respect*. The *sacred offerings* were various food items that had been given to the Lord and were therefore *sacred*. These items included various portions of the grain (2:10), fellowship (10:14), purification (6:25–26, 29) and reparation offerings (Num. 18:9), as well as the firstfruits of oil, wine and grain (Num. 18:8–13). The Lord, in turn, gave these exclusively to the priests and their households (Lev. 22:10–16; Num. 18:19). As a result, this section's commands are given to the priests (*Aaron and his sons*), who were responsible for handling these offerings properly. To fail to do so was to disrespect the Lord's holy property and therefore his holiness (*profane his holy name*; see at 18:21; see further at *Context* at 5:14 – 6:7 and at *Meaning* of 5:14–16; for *I am the* LORD, see at 11:41–45).

3. No impure priest may present a sacred offering. Because priests were to be ritually holy in order to work at the holy altar, it would be great disrespect for them to *come near* to present *the sacred offerings* while 'ritually impure' (NIV *ceremonially unclean*). Those who did so would be *cut off from* the Lord's *presence*. At the least, this means the priest would no longer continue in his role in the sanctuary before the Lord (cf. Deut. 10:8; 1 Sam. 2:30; Jer. 33:18). At the most, the mention of being *cut off* implies that the priest would be exiled from Israel, or even die (cf. v. 9; see at 7:19–21).

4–7. No impure priest may eat a sacred offering. It would also be greatly disrespectful for priests who were ritually impure to *eat* of *the sacred offerings*. This was true whether the impurity was major (v. 4a) or minor (vv. 4b–7; for the differences between these, see Introduction, pp. 45–46). In either case, the priest could eat of the offerings only when he became 'ritually pure' (vv. 4a, 7).

8. Animals priests must never eat. Eating an animal that dies naturally (*found dead*) or is killed *by wild animals* causes ritual impurity (17:15). While

this was allowed for lay Israelites (17:15), it is prohibited for priests. No rationale is provided, although priests are held to higher accounts elsewhere in terms of ritual purity (21:1–4, 7).

9. Summary: priests must obey the above. The verse is better translated: 'So they shall keep my requirements so that they do not bear punishment for mishandling a sacred offering and die on account of their sin when they profane the holy gift; I am the LORD who sets them apart to live in a holy manner' (my trans.). There are several instances where the Lord is said to *make* a person *holy* (NIV), in the sense of 'setting the person apart to live in a holy manner' (20:8; 21:8b, 15; 22:32). In this context, the priests were to do so by obeying the above commands and showing due reverence for the sacred offerings.

Meaning

Priests had the privilege of handling the Lord's holy items. But with such privilege came great responsibility, for they now risked disrespecting these items – and the Lord who owned them – if they mishandled them (see at v. 2). Those with special privileges in the things of God must treat their responsibilities with absolute seriousness (cf. Jas 3:1).

vii. Commands and laws for priests about guarding sacred offerings properly (22:10–16)

Not only did priests have to handle *sacred offerings* properly themselves (vv. 1–9); they also had to guard them from being mishandled by lay Israelites (vv. 10–16).

10–13. Who else may (and may not) eat sacred offerings. The *sacred offerings* had been given by the Lord to the priests and their households (see at v. 2). *No one outside a priest's* household could eat them, including a 'priest's hired resident alien workers' (NIV *guest of a priest or his hired worker*), or his *daughter* if she married a non-priest (since she then became part of a non-priestly household) (vv. 10, 12, 13b). But members of a priest's household could *eat his food* (i.e. the holy *sacred offerings*, not the most holy ones; see at 2:2–3).

11. Verse 11 begins literally: 'But if a priest buys a person with his money...' This would appear to refer to a permanent servant (see discussion at 25:39–46 and Additional note at 25:40). They and any children *born* to them were dependent on the priest for food and shelter and were considered a part of his *household*. If they were not Israelites, they were to be circumcised, thus becoming covenant members (Gen. 17:12–13).

13. If a woman in Israel was a *widow or divorced* and *had no children*, she

might *return to her father's household* (cf. Gen. 38:11). If a *priest's daughter* did this, she could again *eat* from the offerings (*her father's food*). (Hess [2008: 776] suggests that, if she had children, she would stay with her husband's family, since those 'children continue[d] the line of her husband, and his family retain[ed] an interest and responsibility in her well-being and that of her family'.)

14. Eating a sacred offering by mistake. If a priest's household had *sacred offerings* as well as regular food, it might be easy for a guest or hired worker to eat some of the priest's *sacred offerings by mistake* (Gerstenberger, 1996: 326). The standard penalty for inadvertently taking a holy thing applied: repayment *to the priest* in full plus an additional *fifth* (see at 5:16, which seems to be alluded to here, meaning the person would be aware of the need for a reparation offering as well).

15–16. Summary: the priests' responsibility. They *must not* treat the *sacred offerings* as everyday items (*desecrate* them) *by allowing* lay Israelites *to eat* them. Priests had a special responsibility to guard the Lord's holy things. If they failed to do so, the lay Israelites could *bring upon themselves guilt requiring payment* (perhaps better, 'the punishment of guilt's consequences'; see at 4:3). To disrespect the Lord's holy property was serious indeed, for it was to disrespect him (see at v. 2).

Verse 16b is better translated: 'I am the LORD who sets them apart to live in a holy manner' (see at v. 9). It is not clear if the word 'them' refers to Israelites or to priests. In either case, the Lord has not called them to disrespect his holy things, but to live holy lives.

Meaning

As noted above (vv. 15–16), the priests had a special responsibility to guard the Lord's holy things from being mishandled by the Israelites. Doing so meant the priests were also protecting the Israelites themselves from sin (v. 16; cf. 1 Cor. 11:17–34). The Lord's shepherds are responsible for the spiritual well-being of his sheep (cf. Mal. 2:7–8; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:16; Heb. 13:17).

B. Commands for priests and lay people to revere the Lord's holy things (22:17–33)

Context
This section continues the focus on showing due reverence to the Lord's holy things (cf. at 21:1 – 24:23).

i. Proper animals for sacrifice (22:17–25)

This section and the next focus on *acceptance* (vv. 19–21, 23, 25, 27, 29): that is, the Lord responding with favour and pleasure to an offering and therefore to the offeror (see at 1:3). Such acceptance required a proper sacrificial animal (vv. 17–25) and proper sacrificial procedure (vv. 26–30). Since these requirements were the responsibility of priests and lay persons, these verses are addressed to both (v. 18).

17–20. Vow or freewill burnt offerings. For details on *vow* and *freewill offerings*, see at 7:16–18. Those verses made clear that fellowship offerings could be brought *to fulfil a vow or as a freewill offering*; these verses make clear that the same was true of *burnt offerings*.

Such offerings could be brought by native *Israelites* or 'resident aliens' (NIV *foreigners* ; see at 17:8–9). Burnt offerings were the costliest type. They therefore had to be 'without blemish' (NIV *without defect*), since animals with a defect would be less valuable and therefore unworthy to present to the covenant King (cf. Mal. 1:8). The value of the sacrifice must match the value of the one to whom it is given.

21–25. Vow or freewill fellowship offerings. For description, see again at 7:16–18. Verse 21 mentions a *special vow*, that is, a vow about a matter of special significance for which one made an especially significant promise: the sacrifice of a costly herd or flock animal (as opposed to an offering of grain or birds).

Verses 22–24 list twelve physical *blemishes* that disqualify animals from being acceptable offerings, and verse 25 clarifies that these are unacceptable, even when bought 'from a resident alien'. Except for the word *blind*, the translation of the blemishes listed in verses 22–23 is debated: *injured* appears to refer to an animal that had (or previously had) a broken bone;[83] *maimed*, to one that had been cut (or disfigured) in some way; *warts* could also refer to a running sore; *festering or running sores*, to some sort of skin problem (see at 21:18–20); *deformed* could refer to a limb in particular (see at 21:18–20); and *stunted*, to a

body part (although whether a specific body part is meant is unclear). The four terms in verse 24 are usually understood as describing different ways in which a male animal was made sterile.[84]

This list parallels that concerning priests in 21:18–20. Not only do five of the terms overlap in the Hebrew (*blind*, *deformed*, *crippled/injured*, *festering sore*, *running sore*), but each list contains twelve blemishes, beginning with blindness (21:18; 22:22) and ending with damaged testicles (21:20; 22:24). At the least, such parallels underscore that whatever approaches the altar must be without blemish, whether priest to serve at it or sacrifice to go on it. (For rationale, see at 21:16–23, 24.)

There is one exception: a *freewill offering* animal may have a *deformed* limb or *stunted* body part (v. 23). This did not apply for offerings that fulfilled a *vow*, probably because these were public expressions of thanksgiving to the Lord for answered prayer (see at 7:16–18), and it was wrong to cheapen these expressions in any way. It also did not apply to freewill *burnt offerings* (22:17–20), perhaps because a burnt offering also focused on giving something costly *to the* LORD (v. 18). This could in turn suggest that *freewill* fellowship offerings focused more on the provision of meat for a shared meal (see at 3:11), therefore allowing slightly lower standards for the animal's appearance. (Indeed, the part that was given to the Lord – the fat – would be unaffected by these blemishes.) In any case, the standards were only slightly lower even here, as only certain types of blemishes – undoubtedly those considered the least serious – were acceptable.

ii. Proper sacrificial procedure (22:26–30)

Proper sacrificial procedure, which was also necessary for *acceptance* (see at vv. 17–25), required animals to be sacrificed at the proper time (vv. 26–28) and their meat eaten in the proper way (vv. 29–30).

26–28. When an animal may be sacrificed. There are two guidelines. First, the animal must be at least *eight days* old (v. 27). The text does not give the reason, although both ancient and modern writers have understood this to be an act of compassion (Philo, *Virt.* 143; Ross, 2002: 393), and this explanation fits with several other laws in the Pentateuch that show concern for an animal's well-being (Exod. 23:5, 10–12; Deut. 22:6–7; cf. Prov. 12:10). In particular, this could be an act of compassion for the mother, who can suckle her offspring for seven days, a period of time considered to be 'full' and 'complete' in Israel (see at 4:5–7).

Second, an animal *and its young* could not be *slaughtered on the same day* (v. 28), which many again understand to be an act of compassion, since it would

be cruel to wipe out an entire ‘family’ on the same day, even an animal family (cf. Deut. 22:6–7; see *Tg. Ps.-J.*, Hoffmann, 1906: 115).

29–30. When sacrificial meat must be eaten. These verses concentrate on the ‘praise offering’ (NIV *thank-offering*), perhaps because the focus of these chapters is on treating the Lord’s holy things with respect, and this was the holiest of the fellowship offerings (see further at 7:12–15).

Meaning

As a gracious King, the Lord delights to show his people favour. But he is still their King, and they must come to him on his terms, not their own. With regard to sacrifice, this means they must bring only the sacrifices that he approves (vv. 17–25) and offer them only in the way he allows (vv. 26–30). Those who did so could be assured that he accepted them with favour. The New Testament picks up on these same themes when it presents Jesus as the ultimate unblemished sacrifice of which the Lord approves (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:18–19) and states that through his sacrifice – and only through his sacrifice – we ourselves may be accepted by God as those who have been made holy and are without blemish (John 14:6; Eph. 5:25–27; Heb. 10:19–22).

iii. Concluding commands to obedience (22:31–33)

Like many of the preceding chapters, this one concludes with strong commands to obey its laws (cf. 18:24–30; 19:36–37; 20:22–26). These verses probably refer also to the laws of chapter 21, which does not have this type of concluding formula but does have the same theme: treating the Lord’s holy things with due reverence (see at 21:1 – 24:23).

Two biblical themes combine to provide the Israelites with a reason for obedience. First, the Lord is their Redeemer, *who brought* them *out of Egypt to be* their *God*. They did nothing to deserve such redemption; it was an act of his gracious love, and such love alone calls for them to obey him as an act of grateful worship. Second, he is also their redeeming *God*, who is above all *holy*. This means they must not *profane* him – treat him as non-holy – by disobeying his commands (see at 18:21); they are instead to *acknowledge* his holiness with reverential obedience. The Lord does not simply rescue his people from slavery; he ‘sets them apart to live in a holy manner’ (see at v. 9), in this way privileging them with reflecting his holy character to the world (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13–16). Redemption and holy obedience to the Redeemer always go hand in hand (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:17–19; see also Introduction, pp. 40–41).

C. Observing the Lord’s holy times (23:1–44)

Context

Leviticus 21 – 22 focused on showing due reverence to the Lord’s holy things: priests (21:1–24), food portions from the holy offerings (22:1–16), and the offerings themselves (22:17–30). This chapter has a related focus on the Lord’s holy times and, in particular, when and how to observe them. While each of these times has a unique focus, they all concentrate on some aspect of who the Lord is or what he has done for his people.

As the chart on below shows, the chapter begins with the weekly holy time (the Sabbath, v. 3) and then turns to annual holy times (vv. 4–43). The annual times are listed chronologically and are divided between the first half of the year (vv. 4–22) and the second (vv. 23–43). During these annual holy times, seven days in particular are identified as days of rest (vv. 7–8, 21, 24, 28, 34–36; Balentine, 2002: 172). This brings a Sabbath feel to the entire year and thus a constant reminder of the covenant the Sabbath signifies (see at v. 3).

Reference	Event	Month	Day	Season/ Modern calendar	Work prohibition	Ma requ to g sanctu
Lev. 23:3	Weekly Sabbath	Every	Every seventh	–	Total	N
			First half of year			
Lev. 23:5	Passover	1	14	Spring/ March–April	None stated	Ye
Lev. 23:6–8	Festival of Unleavened Bread	1	15–21	Spring/ March–April	Partial on days 1, 7	Ye
Lev. 23:9–14	Offering of the firstfruits	–	Day after first	Spring/ April–May	None stated	N

			Sabbath of harvest			
Lev. 23:15–22	Festival of Weeks/Festival of Harvest/ Pentecost	–	Fiftieth day after the offering of the firstfruits	Spring/ May–June	Partial	Ye

Second half of year

Lev. 23:23–25	Day of trumpet blasts	7	1	Fall/September–October	Partial	No
Lev. 23:26–32	Day of Atonement	7	10	Fall/September–October	Total	No
Lev. 23:33–36, 39–43	Festival of Booths/Festival of Ingathering	7	15–21	Fall/September–October	Partial on day 1	Ye
Lev. 23:36	Festival of Booths closing assembly	7	22	Fall/September–October	Partial	Ye

Comment

i. Introduction (23:1–2)

Verse 2 introduces two of the chapter's themes. The 'appointed times' (NIV *appointed festivals*) are those times at which religious holidays take place (cf. Exod. 23:15). The Lord describes these as *my appointed times* because they are focused on him (cf. the phrase 'my birthday'). This leads naturally to the second theme: these appointed times are to be proclaimed as 'holy gatherings' (my trans.; NIV *sacred assemblies*), indicating that people were not only to assemble together at these times, but also to set them apart as holy to the Lord, especially

by stopping work and observing any rites connected to the holiday (see vv. 3, 7, 8, etc.).

ii. The weekly holy time: the Sabbath (23:3)

The Sabbath was the sign of Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord (Exod. 31:12–17). By observing it, the Israelites reaffirmed the covenant weekly and proclaimed the Lord as the one who created all things in six days and ceased from work on the seventh (Gen. 2:2; Exod. 31:17).[85]

The seventh day is here called 'a Sabbath of complete rest' (NASV); the Israelites could not do *any work* at all, whether ploughing or harvesting (Exod. 34:21), baking or boiling food (Exod. 16:23), preparing a fire (Exod. 35:3) or gathering wood (Num. 15:32–36; Hartley, 1992: 375–376). This stands in contrast to other special days on which limited work could be done (see at vv. 6–8). In either case, stopping work helped to set a day apart as holy.

Such rest was a great blessing: 'What a boon a weekly rest must have been to the ancient laborer and farmer in his weary round of toil!' (Harris, 1990: 623; cf. Exod. 23:12). And how much more so for the Israelites, who were accustomed to the back-breaking labour piled on them as slaves in Egypt (Exod. 5). With his typical grace, the Lord commands the Israelites to proclaim their loyalty to him (observing the Sabbath) in a way that brings them blessing (needed rest and refreshment; cf. Mark 2:27).[86]

iii. The seasonal holy times (23:4–43)

Other pentateuchal passages that list seasonal festivals include Exodus 23:14–17; 34:18–24; Numbers 28 – 29; and Deuteronomy 16:1–17. The lists in Leviticus and Numbers are the most thorough.

4. Reintroduction of chapter theme. After the brief mention of the Sabbath – which was called a 'holy gathering' (v. 3), although not an 'appointed time' (cf. v. 2) – this verse now repeats the chapter themes of verse 2 as a way of introducing the holy gatherings that are also 'appointed times'.

5–22. Holy times of the first half of the year. See chart on p. 278 for overview.

5. The Passover. For details on the *Passover*, see Exodus 12:1–11, 43–50. The Israelites celebrated this to remember the Lord had delivered them from judgment and led them up from the land of slavery (Exod. 12:25–27, 42). By doing this in *the first month* (see Exod. 12:2), they began their year by declaring that the Lord is a God who saves.

The Passover was so significant that special arrangements were made for

those unable to celebrate it at the proper time (Num. 9:10–12). Those who refused to partake were 'cut off ' from their people (Num. 9:13), since refusing was equal to denying the Lord's salvation and deliverance (comparable to a Christian refusing to take communion). The New Testament writers use the Passover to explain the death of Jesus, who was crucified at the same general time as the Passover (Matt. 26:17; 27:15–26) and is described as 'our Passover lamb' (1 Cor. 5:7). It is a fitting metaphor, since Jesus' sacrifice also delivers us from the Lord's judgment (1 Thess. 1:10) and leads us out of sin's slavery into adoption as the Lord's children (John 1:12; Eph. 1:5; cf. Exod. 4:22). It is during the communion meal, instituted by Jesus at the Passover feast (Luke 22:1–23), that Christians remember and proclaim, 'Jesus, you are the mighty Saviour, the sacrificial lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (cf. Isa. 53:5–12; John 1:29).

6–8. The Festival of Unleavened Bread. In ancient Israel, a *festival* was a community celebration that involved sacrifices and shared meals in honour of a deity (cf. Exod. 32:5–6). The *Festival of Unleavened Bread* began on the day after the Passover and shared its purpose: to remember the Lord's deliverance of the Israelites from bondage (Exod. 12:17; Deut. 16:3). It was *seven days* long, during which the Israelites ate only *unleavened bread* in order to remember the food they had eaten after being delivered (Exod. 12:39). Each day, they presented *food offerings* to the Lord (Lev. 23:8; cf. Num. 28:19–23), and on the first and seventh days, they held a 'holy gathering', suggesting that they began and ended the festival with a special community celebration. On those two days, they could do none of their *ordinary work* (Lev. 23:7–8), such as farming, although they could prepare the food they would eat in celebration (Exod. 12:16; cf. at v. 3 above).

This festival was very significant: it counted as one of three that all Israelite males, as representatives of their families, were to celebrate at the sanctuary (Exod. 23:14–17; it should not surprise us if the entire family often attended; cf. at vv. 15–22). Any who refused to celebrate it would be 'cut off ' from the nation (Exod. 12:15; cf. at v. 5 above). Together with the Passover, it began each year as a tremendous declaration and celebration of the Lord's deliverance, in this way reminding Israelites to follow him with strong confidence in his salvation, great reverence for his power, and great thankfulness for his redeeming grace. This makes it entirely fitting that Jesus' death and resurrection – the ultimate displays of the Lord's redemption – happened during this festival (cf. Matt. 26:17; 27:15–26, 62–66; 28:1–10).

9–14. Offering of the firstfruits. As in previous chapters, these verses anticipate life in the Promised Land (v. 10; cf. 14:33–53; 19:23–25). Once there,

the Israelites were to *bring a sheaf of the first grain* of their *harvest* – which would be barley (see Appendix 2) – as an offering of 'firstfruits' (NASV) to the Lord (v. 10). By doing so, they acknowledged that he was their provider, the one who graciously blessed them with the crops they needed to survive (Deut. 26:10). What is more, by giving him the firstfruits – considered to be the harvest's best (Num. 18:12) – they declared he was worthy of the best they could give.

The *priest* would *wave* the sheaf back and forth before the Lord as a means of dedicating it to him on the offeror's behalf (v. 11; see at 7:28–36). This was to take place *on the day after the Sabbath*, a phrase that has led to much debate. While some have identified this as a day during or immediately after the Feast of Unleavened Bread described in verses 4–8 (see survey in Hartley, 1992: 385–386), others have noted that verse 10 focuses on the harvest itself, implying that this day was *the day after the Sabbath* of the first harvest week (Gane, 2004: 389; Kiuchi, 2007: 424). In any case, the goal was the Lord's favourable *acceptance* (see at 1:3), something he delighted to show his covenant children as they came in humble reliance before him.

The offeror was also to present a *burnt offering* (v. 12), perhaps to underscore thankfulness for the Lord's provision and to request for such provision to continue (cf. *Meaning* at Lev. 1). The accompanying grain offering was *two tenths of an ephah of the finest flour* (v. 13), somewhere between 17.6 to 32.6 cups (16.6 to 30.8 metric cups), or 5.6 to 10.2 lbs (2.6 to 4.6 kg; Cook, 1988: 1051; cf. at 2:1). This was twice the normal amount (cf. Exod. 29:40; Num. 15:4), perhaps as an added expression of thankfulness to the Lord for the crops. The *drink offering*, which would have been poured on the altar (Exod. 30:9), was the normal amount: *a quarter of a hin* (cf. Num. 15:5), somewhere between 0.24 to 0.4 gallons (0.9 to 1.6 litres; Cook, 1988: 1051). This made a complete 'meal' to the Lord, with drink, meat (the *lamb*) and bread (the *grain offering* ; cf. *Context* at Lev. 2).

The Israelites could partake of the new crops only after they had brought the above *offering* (v. 14). Thankfulness is one of the first emotions to evaporate; this requirement made sure the Israelites gave proper thanksgiving and honour to their bountiful King before enjoying his generous provision (cf. Deut. 26:10–11; Prov. 3:9–10).

15–22. Festival of Weeks. This festival went by different names (just as the Lord's Supper does today: communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper). In two passages it is called the Festival of Weeks (Exod. 34:22; Deut. 16:10), since it occurred seven weeks after the offering of the firstfruits of the barley harvest (cf. vv. 10–11, 15). In another passage it is called the Festival of the Harvest (Exod.

23:16), since it celebrated the firstfruits of the wheat harvest (cf. Exod. 34:22). In post-exilic times it was called Pentecost (Tob. 2:1; 2 Macc. 12:31–32; Acts 2:1) after the Greek word for 'fiftieth' (*pentēkostos*), since it occurred on the fiftieth day after the offering of the firstfruits (v. 16).[87] But no matter which name was used, this festival was a celebration of the Lord's provision in the harvest.

Like the Festival of Unleavened bread, this festival was very significant and counted as one of three festivals that all Israelite males were to celebrate at the sanctuary (Deut. 16:16; in practice, it seems that entire families often went; Deut. 16:11). They were to bring *an offering of* the *new grain* of the harvest (v. 16) that had been prepared at home as *two loaves baked with yeast* (leaven, v. 17). Leavened bread accompanied praise fellowship offerings (7:13), and this could explain why it is offered on this occasion of thanksgiving and praise, although Noordtzij (1982: 236) also suggests that such bread was 'like the Israelites' normal fare, and...thus formed an expression of thanksgiving for daily bread'. Leavened bread could not be presented on the altar (2:11), but the priest could *wave* the loaves before the Lord to dedicate them to him (see at 7:28–36) and then receive them back from the Lord (23:20; see also Num. 18:12–13; Deut. 18:4). See at verses 9–14 for the significance of giving firstfruits to the Lord.

The significance of this day is also shown by the extensive series of additional offerings (vv. 18–19). Very few households would have been able to provide so many offerings, and this makes it likely that the offerings were brought by the entire community, as also during the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Booths (although it should not surprise us if many families also presented their own fellowship offerings in order to enjoy a covenant meal before the Lord). By making these offerings, the Israelites were able to achieve atonement (*purification offering*, *burnt offering*), express worship and praise (*burnt offering*) and celebrate covenant fellowship (*fellowship offering*).

Verse 22 concludes this section by repeating 19:9–10, except that it does not mention the vineyard. (Grapes ripen later in the year than wheat; see Appendix 2.) The repetition of the verses here reminded the Israelites that all they have is a gift from the Lord and therefore to be generously shared (cf. 2 Cor. 9:11).

While the Passover and Festival of Unleavened Bread celebrated the Lord's deliverance from the old land (vv. 4–8), the offering of firstfruits and the Festival of Weeks celebrated his provision in the new land (vv. 9–22). Instead of looking to Canaanite gods, such as Baal, to provide for their agricultural needs (cf. Hos. 2:8–9!), the Israelites were to remember that the Lord who delivered them from the land of slavery would provide for their needs in the land of promise (Deut. 26:9–10; cf. Ps. 145:15–16; Matt. 6:19–34).

23–43. Holy times of the second half of the year. See chart on p. 279 for overview. All of these took place during the *seventh* month, making it particularly significant and perhaps serving as one more reminder of the Sabbath principle and the covenant the Sabbath signified.

23–25. Day of trumpet blasts. This ‘holy gathering, on the first day of the seventh month’, was to be ‘a reminder proclaimed with trumpet blasts’ (my trans.; cf. NASV), that is, a reminder before the Lord (cf. Exod. 28:12, 29, and esp. Num. 10:9–10). In contexts in which the Lord ‘remembers’ someone, he shines his favour on them (Gen. 30:22; Num. 10:9) and affirms his covenant faithfulness to them (Gen. 9:15–16; Lev. 26:42, 45). In contexts in which trumpets are blown, it is to acknowledge and request the Lord’s help (Num. 10:9–10). The blowing of the trumpets was therefore a musical prayer acknowledging and requesting the Lord’s favour. And since the Lord is the one commanding them to do this, it is his assurance that he will hear their prayer (cf. Gen. 9:13–16). (For the *food offering*, v. 25, see Num. 29:1–6.)

While there is debate as to whether early Israelites thought of this day as New Year’s Day (Milgrom, 2004: 280), it was celebrated as such from at least the fourth century BC (Hartley, 1992: 387). This practice continues today (Rosh Hashanah), and a ram’s horn (shofar) is blown to announce it (but cf. Num. 10:2, 10 for the possibility that silver trumpets were originally used).

26–32. Day of Atonement. Known today as Yom Kippur. These verses emphasize the importance of observing this day, repeating twice the punishment for those who do not observe it (vv. 29, 30; see at 7:19–21), three times that the people must *deny* (or ‘humble’, NASV) themselves on it (vv. 27, 29, 32; see at 16:29–31), and three times that people must *do no work* on it (vv. 28, 30, 31a; see at 16:29–31).

This emphasis is no surprise: this is the day on which the people’s sins and impurities were cleansed and removed so that they could continue in covenant fellowship with their holy Lord. Those who did not observe this day were denying either the Lord’s holy hatred of sin or their desperate need of his cleansing and forgiveness (or both). Either way, they were fundamentally rejecting their covenant Lord and their need of him (cf. Heb. 10:28–31). But those who did observe this day could rest assured that the Lord had cleansed them fully. The holy God who is offended by sin is also the compassionate and gracious God who delights to cleanse and forgive it (cf. v. 21 with Exod. 34:6b–7a; see also Mic. 7:19; 1 John 1:9). For fuller comments, see at Leviticus 16.

33–43. Festival of Booths. (NIV *tabernacles*) Today it is known as Sukkoth, the Hebrew term for ‘booths’. In biblical times it was also called the Festival of Ingathering (Exod. 23:16), since it came near the end of the harvest season (Lev.

23:39). It is a very significant festival: it lasts *seven days* (v. 34), includes an additional *eighth-day* closing *holy assembly* (v. 36), requires extensive *food offerings* (as might be expected during a harvest festival, v. 36; cf. Num. 29:13–33), and all males were required to celebrate it at the sanctuary (Deut. 16:16; as with the Festival of Weeks, it seems that entire families often attended, Deut. 16:14).

The verses divide into three sections. Verses 33–36 focus on when to celebrate it (on *the fifteenth day of the seventh month*), when not to work (limited work prohibition on the first and eighth days), and what to offer (*food offerings* each day; cf. Num. 29:13–33).

Verses 37–38 provide an initial conclusion, summarizing that this chapter has been about the Lord's 'appointed times' (v. 37); they also make clear that these are to supplement, not replace, other sacred occasions (*the LORD's Sabbaths*) and other *gifts* and *offerings* (v. 38).

Verses 39–43 then return to the Festival of Booths (for a narrative example of which see Neh. 8:13–18). They provide additional commands that explain its purpose. The commands are for *native-born Israelites* (v. 42), although it is possible that foreigners who had joined themselves to Israel would also be able to participate (cf. Exod. 12:43, 45 with 12:48a). Those participating were to gather *branches* from *trees* (v. 40) and to build and live in *sukkōt* (v. 42), a word translated as *temporary shelters* (NIV) or 'booths' (NASV). It is the same word used in verse 34 for the festival's name and refers to temporary structures built for protection from the elements (Isa. 4:6; Jon. 4:5). At least some Israelites lived in such structures when the Lord delivered them *out of Egypt* (v. 43; while some Israelites had tents [Exod. 16:16], this verse makes clear that others did not at first, perhaps because many in Egypt had been living in houses, Exod. 3:22). By living in these structures as they feasted on the harvest, the Israelites were to teach their *descendants* – and to remind themselves – that the blessings of redemption and bountiful provision they enjoyed were gracious gifts from their loving King, gifts that called for an appropriate response of wholehearted dependence, obedience and worship (see *Meaning*).

iv. Conclusion (23:44)

As he had been commanded (v. 2), *Moses announced to the Israelites the* 'appointed times' *of the* LORD, showing not only his obedience but also his role as the Lord's spokesman.

Meaning

When the Israelites forgot that the Lord was their powerful and gracious King, they doubted his care for them and became quick to grumble (Exod. 15:24; 16:2–3; 17:1–3) and disobey (Exod. 32:1–6; cf. Deut. 8:11–14). The Lord therefore provides constant reminders of his character and actions in these holy times. Whether it was the weekly reminder that he was their covenant King (v. 3), or the annual reminders of his redemption and provision (vv. 4–43), the Lord instituted these times to help the Israelites remember his power and grace, enabling them to respond to him with appropriate dependence, obedience and worship. What is more, he did not want the Israelites to come before him simply as individuals; he made these times holy 'gatherings' (v. 2). The Lord always calls individuals into a body of covenant keepers, knowing that all believers need brothers and sisters to strengthen and encourage them to live as his holy people.

Given these realities, it is no surprise that Jesus institutes a regular feast – the Lord's Supper – to do in remembrance of him as a regular proclamation of his powerful and gracious act of salvation for his people (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26), a reminder that enables them to respond to him with appropriate dependence, obedience and worship. And as with the holy times in ancient Israel, Christians celebrated this holy time with their brothers and sisters in the faith (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17–22, 33–34). The Lord does not call us simply to follow him, but to join his family and, as such, to be active family members: 'Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching' (Heb. 10:24–25).

D. Two continual rites at the Lord's Holy Place (24:1–9)

Context

The previous chapter described the festivals of Weeks (23:15–22) and Booths (23:33–36, 39–43), during which Israelite males would bring offerings of harvest produce to the tabernacle. Chapter 24 follows naturally, with verses 1–9 describing the use of some of that produce in two tabernacle rites: lighting the lamps (which requires olive oil, vv. 1–4) and placing the bread of the presence (which requires flour, vv. 5–9). As noted below (*Meaning*), these rites served to acknowledge the holy King's presence and to request his divine favour.

Comment

i. Lighting the lamp (24:1–4)

A *pure gold lampstand* stood on the south side of the Holy Place (Exod. 40:24), that is, to the left as you faced the tent (see diagram, p. 86). Other passages tell us that it was made of pure gold and shaped like a miniature tree, with a main trunk, six branches coming off of it, and covered with flowering blossoms (Exod. 25:31–40; 37:17–24). The trunk and six branches each had a *lamp* that held oil and a wick. When lit, these would provide *light* for the Holy Place.

The *olive oil* was to be *clear* (not mixed with any spices; cf. Exod. 30:34–35) and *pressed*, a word describing 'the top quality olive oil that was produced by gently pounding the olives in a stone mortar (rather than the more economical crushing in oil presses...) and then carefully pouring it off to remove all impurities' (Van Dam, 1997: 747). This was oil fit for a king.

The *lamps* were to be *kept burning continually* through the night (v. 3). The importance of this is emphasized by using the word *continually* three times (vv. 2, 3, 4). This light represented the Lord's presence within the tent (see *Meaning*), and the priests were to keep it burning continually to acknowledge his constant presence and to show their willingness to serve him always.

3. *Aaron's* sons could also *tend the lamps* (Exod. 27:21). It is possible that Aaron alone is mentioned here because he was ultimately responsible (Mathews, 2009: 211, n. 3).

ii. Placing the bread of the presence (24:5–9)

A *table* covered in *pure gold* stood on the north side of the Holy Place, opposite

the gold lampstand (Exod. 40:22; see diagram, p. 86). It was 27 in. high by 36 in. long by 18 in. wide (67.5 cm by 90 cm by 45 cm, assuming 18 in. [45 cm] per cubit; Sarna, *Exodus*, 159; see Exod. 25:23–29 for more detail). Because the furniture in the Holy Place was directly *before the* LORD*'s* presence (v. 6), the *bread* on the table was known as the *bread of the Presence* (Exod. 25:30). By *setting out this bread regularly before the* LORD, the Israelites were acknowledging his continual presence and their continual willingness to serve him.

The word for *loaves* (*ḥallâ*) is used in 2:4 to describe flat unleavened loaves baked in an oven. Since they were flat, they could be put into *piles* (v. 6). This was necessary because they were large, each weighing at least 5.6 lbs (2.6 kg; see at 23:9–14), while the tabletop was small, and already held other items (Exod. 25:29).

Pure 'frankincense' (NIV *incense*; see at 2:1) was to be placed *by* (or possibly on) *each pile*, perhaps in a separate dish so that it could be easily removed and burned on the altar (cf. Lev. 2:1–2). It was a *memorial portion* (v. 7), meaning it not only served as a token of the offering itself, but also as a request of the Lord to remember the offeror with favour (see at 2:2–3). And since there were twelve loaves (v. 6) – naturally suggesting Israel's twelve tribes (cf. Exod. 24:4) – it was a request that the Lord show his favour to each tribe.

Verse 8 makes this even more specific by describing the bread as *a lasting covenant*. The word *covenant* can describe an action or event that served as a sign of a particular covenant (Exod. 31:16–17a; cf. Gen. 9:12–13; 17:7, 10–11). This fits verse 8 well, especially when it is noted that such signs could serve to assure the Israelites that the Lord would 'remember' his covenant with favour (Gen. 9:16; cf. *memorial portion* above). Bread was an especially appropriate *covenant* sign, because covenants in the Ancient Near East were often sealed by eating a meal (see at 3:11). In this case, the priests ate the bread on the people's behalf (cf. Exod. 24:9–11), confirming the covenant with the Lord every time they did so.

Finally, while a laden table was appropriate for a king dwelling in his palace, this does not mean the Lord actually needed food (see Introduction, pp. 71–72). 'That its purpose was display, not consumption, is...indicated by the fact that it is replaced weekly, not daily as elsewhere in the ancient Near East' (Tigay, 2004: 167).

9. Only priests could eat *most holy offerings* (see at 2:2–3). They perhaps did so when the new loaves were brought out so that the table was never empty. (If the loaves were anything like modern-day matzos, they would still have been perfectly edible after a week.)

Meaning

This passage has rich symbolism. By performing these actions continually, the Israelites acknowledged the Lord's continual presence among them. 'If there is a lamp burning, incense burning and bread on the table, then someone is "home"...' (Averbeck, 2003: 815). Their continual actions were also a clear demonstration of their continual commitment to serve him. Further, by using only the best ingredients – *clear oil of pressed olives*, *the finest flour*, *pure frankincense* – they honoured the Lord as their King. And finally, by placing bread before him every Sabbath as a covenant sign, they continually reaffirmed their covenant commitment to him and continually requested his covenant favour.

Today we are called to continually serve King Jesus, surrendering our very lives to the one who is worthy of all we have (Matt. 16:24–26). Both the Old and New Testaments teach that serving the Lord can be done only with a whole heart or it cannot be done at all (1 Kgs 18:21; Matt 6:24; 10:37–39). And both also teach that we can do so with good hope, knowing that the Lord whom we serve delights to shine his favour on us (Pss 5:12; 29:11; 32:10; Eph. 1:3, 18–20; 2:4–7).

E. Revering the Lord's holy name: a case of blasphemy and principles of justice (24:10–23)

Context

The narrative concerning Nadab and Abihu is a special warning to priests to honour the Lord by revering him in his holy palace (10:1–11). The current narrative is a special warning to all within Israel – whether native citizen or resident alien – to honour the Lord by revering his holy name. It may have been placed at this point in Leviticus simply because the event occurred at this point in the giving of the laws (cf. Num. 9:1–14) or because it fits well with the theme of the preceding chapters: showing due reverence to that which is holy (see at 21:1 – 24:23).

This narrative is similar to three others in which Moses seeks direction from the Lord because it is not clear from legal precedent what is to be done (Num. 9:1–14; 15:32–36; 27:1–11; cf. Fishbane, 1985: 98–102). In this case, the question appears to be: How does the law against blasphemy apply to a resident alien living among the Israelites (see at vv. 10–12)?

i. A case of blasphemy (24:10–16)

10–12. During a *fight in the camp* between two men (v. 10), one *used the Name blasphemously* (v. 11), that is, *the name of the* LORD (v. 16). Since the name represented the very person (cf. Exod. 33:19a with 34:6–7), to blaspheme the Lord's name was to blaspheme him. (We use the word 'name' in a similar way when we say, 'He dragged my name through the mud': i.e. 'He brought my character into disrepute.') In this case, the offender actually *cursed* the Lord's name. The narrative of 2 Samuel 16 provides an example of an inferior (a servant) cursing a superior (a king): it involves name-calling (vv. 7–8), accusation of evil (v. 8), and is spoken with great contempt (vv. 6, 13). As applied here, the offender was not using the Lord's name as a swear word (which would be bad enough), but speaking great evil of the Lord, showing him utter contempt and rejecting him as King.

On hearing this, the Israelites *put him in custody until the will of the* LORD *should be made clear to them* (v. 12). They would have known blasphemy was wrong (Exod. 22:28) and would have been able to reason that, if an Israelite who cursed his parents was to be put to death (Exod. 21:17), the same would apply to an Israelite who cursed the Lord. But in this case, the offender was of mixed ethnic heritage. Since descent was usually traced through the father (cf. Deut.

25:5–6), and since this man's *mother* was *an Israelite* but his *father* was *an Egyptian* (v. 10), it seems he was not considered a *native-born* Israelite (cf. v. 16, which makes clear this law applied to the resident alien). The Israelites therefore asked the Lord how to proceed.

13–14. The Lord begins his response to Moses with the verdict. First, the blasphemer was to be taken *outside the camp*. This is where executions were carried out (Num. 15:35), undoubtedly because dead bodies were ritually defiling (Num. 19:11) and the Israelite camp was to be pure (cf. Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2–4).

Second, *those who heard him were to lay their hands on his head*. Given the legal context and the importance of witnesses to a crime (Deut. 17:6), this rite may have been a way for the witnesses to identify the guilty party and take the first step in condemning him (cf. Deut. 17:7). Alternatively, if hearing the curse somehow polluted the witnesses, the rite might also transfer this pollution back to the guilty party (cf. Lev. 16:21). Of course, it is also possible for rites to accomplish more than one thing, so both these options may be correct.

Third, the blasphemer was to be *stoned* to death by *the entire assembly* (*entire assembly* can refer to certain men of Israel acting on the people's behalf; Josh. 22:12). In ancient Israel, as in many cultures, treason against the king was a capital crime (1 Sam. 11:12), since it was a personal offence against the king as well as a danger to the kingdom's well-being. It is therefore no surprise that cursing a king was also a capital crime (1 Kgs 21:13), since those who did so were acting as traitors by speaking evil of the king and holding him in utter contempt. This is exactly what the blasphemer has done with the King of heaven, and so he faced a punishment that fitted his crime. As Wright (1994: 152) notes, 'The death penalty in a sense sealed the offender's own decision.' (For further details on criminal penalties, see Introduction, pp. 62–66.)

15–16. It seems best to understand these as parallel laws. The first half of each describes the crime (blaspheming the Lord's name with a curse; cf. v. 11), and the second half describes the punishment, first generally (v. 15b), then specifically (v. 16b):

[15]Anyone who curses their God	shall bear their punishment; [88]
[16] anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD	shall surely to be put to death.

By stating the law two different ways, and then repeating the punishment twice in verse 16 (*to be put to death...to be put to death*), the severity of the crime is underscored. To reject our Maker is to forfeit the life he has granted us.

The Lord then states that these laws applied not only to the *native citizen*, but also to the 'resident alien' (NIV *foreigner*; see at 16:29–31), at least to those within Israel's legal borders (note the mention of *the camp* in v. 10). Justice was to be applied equally to all.

15. The phrase *their God* is literally 'his God' and is a common way to refer to the God of Israel (21:12, 17, 21, 22).

ii. Principles of justice (24:17–22)

Verses 17–21 are arranged as a chiasm:

A – Killing a person (24:17)
B – Killing an animal (24:18)
C – Injuring a person; the law of equal justice (*lex talionis*) (24:19–20)
B' – Killing an animal (24:21a)
A' – Killing a person (24:21b)

These verses come in between two others that make clear that justice applies equally to all (vv. 16, 22). This suggests that verses 17–21 are also stating principles of justice. Three principles in particular may be identified.

First, crimes against humans are far more serious than crimes against property (v. 21; cf. also vv. 17 and 18). This fits well with the biblical teaching that humans are created in God's image and therefore of special worth (Gen. 1:26–27; 9:5–6). It also explains why murder is a capital offence in ancient Israel, although crimes against property are not. (See also Introduction, p. 66, especially for comparison with other Ancient Near Eastern laws.)

Second, penalties must be appropriate to the crimes (vv. 19–20). These verses articulate what has come to be known as the *lex talionis*, a phrase borrowed from Roman law that refers to equal justice being done. While this law was taken literally in ancient Israel in cases of murder (the murderer was put to death), in other cases it was probably viewed as a guiding principle, 'a handy way of saying that the punishment must fit the crime' (Wright, 2004: 310). For example, a master who injures his servant is not injured in return; rather, the servant is freed, which amounts to a fine for the master and liberty for the servant (Exod. 21:26–27). As a result, this approach to justice was far from barbaric and bloodthirsty. Instead, it both limited 'the scope for revenge, which always tended

to escalate indiscriminately and endlessly in any tribal society' (Kleinig, 2003: 529; cf. Gen. 4:23–24), and ensured that the punishment fitted the crime. (See also Introduction, pp. 62–63.)

The third principle is closely related: the penalty must not only fit the crime, it must also be applied equally to all, whether resident alien or native citizen, and, by implication, whether rich or poor, slave or free. This is again in keeping with the biblical teaching that all humans are created in God's image and again contrasts with some Ancient Near Eastern laws in which the 'eye-for-an-eye' principle was applied if you injured someone of your own social status or above, although not if you injured someone of a lower status (LH §196–198; see also Introduction, p. 67).

17. *Anyone who takes the life of a human being*, that is, murders someone; in cases of manslaughter, the offender was able to flee to a city of refuge and live there safely (Exod. 21:12–14; Num. 35:11, 15; Deut. 19:4–6).

When it was murder, the offender was *to be put to death*. All life is sacred because it belongs to the Lord (see at 17:11), and human life is especially so because humans are created in his image (Gen. 1:26–27). Those who destroy human life commit the ultimate wrong and therefore face the ultimate penalty. In fact, as Tidball (2005: 289) notes, capital punishment in the case of murder actually emphasizes 'the sacredness of life. No-one could take a life without surrendering his own...' [89]

18. The word for *animal* (*bĕhēmâ*) often refers to domesticated animals (1:2). The phrase *life for life* introduces the principle of equal justice (see above). In this context, it presumably means the guilty party replaces the animal or gives money equal to the animal's value (cf. Exod. 21:33–34).

19. The word *neighbour* refers to any person dealt with in the course of a day (see at 18:20).

22. *I am the* LORD *your God*, who loves resident aliens (Deut. 10:18–19) and has made them in my image. You must give them the same justice you give yourselves (Lev. 19:33–34).

iii. The Israelites obey the Lord (24:23)

This verse ties the whole story together: the Israelites sought the Lord's direction (v. 12), Moses passed it on to them (vv. 13–23a) and they obeyed the Lord's commands (v. 23).

Meaning

The story of the blasphemer (vv. 10–16) made very clear to the Israelites that

those who reject the Lord will be rejected by him (a point the New Testament underscores when it states that those who reject the Holy Spirit's testimony about Jesus will likewise be rejected, Mark 3:28–30). Furthermore, because disobeying the Lord is a sign of rejecting him (see *Meaning* at Lev. 18), this story was also a warning to the Israelites.

The blasphemer's negative example was also an exhortation to the Israelites to treat the Lord's name, that is, his person, as holy. When Jesus teaches us to pray, 'hallowed be your name' (Matt. 6:9), he is teaching us to pray for this very thing: that all the earth would set God apart as holy by bowing the knee before him in humble worship and obedience.

As for the laws illustrating principles of justice (vv. 17–22), they underscore the high value of human life (vv. 17–18, 21), the importance of punishments fitting the crime (vv. 19–20), and the equality of all people under the law (v. 22). At first glance, Jesus seems to take a negative view of the law of verses 19–20 (*eye for eye, tooth for tooth*), as well as other Old Testament laws, in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:38–42). But on closer inspection, 'Jesus is not criticizing the OT but the understanding of the OT many of his hearers adopted' (Carson, 1984: 148). In this light, many have suggested that people were applying the law of Leviticus 24:19–20 in the context of personal relationships, using it as an excuse for revenge, instead of recognizing that it was given to ensure equity in the context of public justice (vv. 11–12, 16, 23; Harris, 1990: 632; Tidball, 2005: 289, n. 32). Jesus corrects this misapplication by emphasizing that, in personal relationships, it is not the law of 'equal justice' that applies, but the law of love and forgiveness (see Lev. 19:18), a law that causes us to imitate him by being generous with others, even when we have been wronged (Matt. 5:39–41) or when there is no chance of ever being repaid (Matt. 5:42; cf. Matt. 18:21–35). Love, not retaliation, is the mark of the righteous person.

8. LAWS ANTICIPATING LIFE IN THE PROMISED LAND (25:1 – 27:34)

Chapters 25 – 27 were given to Moses ‘on’ (ESV; NIV *at*) *Mount Sinai* (25:1; 26:46; 27:34), not later at the tent of meeting, where most of Leviticus was given (1:1; cf. at 7:37–38). Nonetheless, they are placed here as a fitting conclusion to the covenant laws of Leviticus and a good transition to the book of Numbers.

They are a fitting conclusion to the covenant laws of Leviticus for two reasons. First, the Lord finishes his discussion of covenant laws in Exodus 20 – 31 by focusing on the covenant sign: the Sabbath (31:12–17). It is his way of saying, ‘And here’s how you show covenant faithfulness to my law: you keep the Sabbath!’ Similarly, Leviticus 25 – 26 come near the end of this extended discussion of covenant laws in Leviticus (Lev. 1 – 24) and focus on the Sabbath year (25:1–7), the ‘super-sabbath’ year (Jubilee, 25:8–55), and the Sabbath in general (26:2, 25, 34–35, 43). It as though the Lord is again saying, ‘Keep the laws in these two chapters as a sign of your covenant faithfulness to all the laws in Leviticus!’ Second, Leviticus 26 in particular belongs near the end of the book because it contains blessings and curses, the very elements with which covenants in the Ancient Near East concluded (see at Lev. 26, *Context*). Significantly, its placement here also implies that Leviticus itself should be read as covenant law. Even though most of it is given after Moses has come down from the mountain, it still belongs to the Sinai covenant.

Chapters 25 – 27 are also a natural transition to the book of Numbers, where Israel departs from Sinai and marches towards the Promised Land (Num. 10:11–12). Each of these three chapters deals with issues that concern how Israel must live there, whether observing Sabbath or Jubilee years (ch. 25), acting obediently in general (ch. 26), or keeping various laws related to life there (27:14–24, 30–31). Clearly, the Israelites are to be in that land very soon.

Finally, it may be noted that these chapters are arranged in a chiasm. ‘Redemption’ is a major theme of chapters 25 and 27: in the Hebrew, the verb ‘redeem’ occurs ten times in chapter 25 and twelve times in chapter 27. ‘Jubilee’ is also a major theme, and in Leviticus occurs only in these two chapters: fourteen times in chapter 25 and six times in chapter 27. In between these chapters is the grand exhortation to covenant obedience, highlighting the blessings that come from embracing the covenant from the heart and the curses

that come from rejecting it:

A – Laws about redemption (Lev. 25)
B – Blessings for covenant obedience and curses for covenant disobedience (Lev. 26)
A' – Laws about redemption (Lev. 27)

In sum, placing these chapters at the end of Leviticus whets our appetite for the fulfilment of the long-awaited covenant promise: the land (Lev. 25, 27). The covenant law has now been given, and the Israelites may march boldly into Canaan – provided, of course, that they maintain faith in their Redeemer and carry out his covenant mission of filling the earth with his righteous and holy kingdom (Lev. 26; cf. Exod. 19:4–6).

A. Laws for the Sabbath and Jubilee years, and for redeeming people and property (25:1–55)

Context

It was of fundamental importance to the Lord that Israelites were in close relationships with their families, had ownership of land, and observed the Sabbath principle. Close family relationships were important because the Lord had appointed the family as the foundation of society. The personal and social benefits of strong families have been established repeatedly by modern studies (see Waite and Gallagher, 2000). The Lord wanted these benefits to be woven into the fabric of Israelite society, both to bless the Israelites and to model for the nations what society was to look like. Ownership of land was important because it was tied to economic well-being. Land enabled people to provide for their needs by growing crops and keeping herds and flocks. Observing the Sabbath principle was important not only because it protected the people and the land from overwork, but also because obedience to it was the fundamental sign of covenant loyalty.

The purpose of Leviticus 25 is to ensure that all three realities continued in Israel. Close family relationships and land ownership were both threatened by debt, which could force Israelites to sell their land and move away from their immediate relatives (see at 25:23–55). The laws of redemption and Jubilee provided clearance or cancellation of debt, enabling people to *go back to their own clans and to the property of their ancestors* (v. 41). These laws had the added benefit of maintaining a level of social equity, since the Jubilee meant that about once a generation all Israelites had the opportunity of a fresh start on their own land. This was intended to prevent the creation of a feudal system in which increasing numbers of poor serfs served a small minority of rich land owners (cf. Isa. 5:8).

As for the Sabbath principle, it was extended to include entire years, whether every seventh year (the Sabbath year) or every fiftieth (the Jubilee). This offered people, animals and the land itself an extended period of rest and refreshment, allowing them briefly to escape the ‘curse of the ground’ and to enjoy a period of rest in the Lord that foreshadowed a far greater experience of rest in him that was yet to come (Heb. 4:1–11).

It may be asked whether these laws were ever followed. No clear mention of their observance is made, but, as Wright (2004: 205, n. 12) notes, ‘there is no historical record of the Day of Atonement, either. Silence in the narratives

proves almost nothing.' Later texts imply that these laws were not followed leading up to the exile (2 Chr. 36:21), although whether this was also true earlier in Israel's history is impossible to say. Any failure on the Israelites' part to follow these laws, however, does not mean they were impractical (cf. Neh. 10:31). Rather, it indicates that the Israelites had little faith in the Lord's provision, and their priorities were out of keeping with the Lord's vision for the world (cf. Wright, 2004: 205, n. 12). This should not surprise us; we disobey to this day for the same reasons.

Comment

i. Laws for the Sabbath and Jubilee years (25:1–22)

The order of the laws is logical: those that apply to every seventh year (vv. 1–7) precede those that apply to every fiftieth (vv. 8–17; vv. 18–22 are a conclusion).

1–7. Laws for the Sabbath year. When the Israelites took possession of the Promised *Land*, they were to let it *observe a sabbath year* (vv. 2, 6) every *seven years* (v. 4), so that it could *rest* (vv. 4–5). They could perform non-agricultural work during this year and pick and eat whatever *the land* grew naturally (vv. 6–7), but any *sowing, pruning* or full-scale *harvesting* were forbidden (vv. 4b–5a). They had to let the land rest. It was the object of the Lord's special care (cf. 26:34–35).

The Sabbath year paralleled the Sabbath day in two significant ways. First, it benefited workers and animals by providing rest from back-breaking field work (vv. 4–5; cf. Exod. 23:12). It even went a step further by providing free food (vv. 6–7; cf. Exod. 23:11). Second, it too was a sign of keeping the covenant and would therefore be met with strict justice if violated (cf. 26:34–35, 43 with 26:25; cf. Exod. 31:13–17).

6. *Hired worker and temporary resident*. Perhaps better translated 'hired resident alien workers': that is, resident aliens who hired out their labour for a certain amount of time and who were often poor (Deut. 24:14–15). They are included here because the Lord's love extends to all people, Israelite or not.

7. *Livestock* and *wild animals* are also included in this law, since they are part of the Lord's creation (Gen. 1) and therefore the objects of his love (cf. Pss 104:24–27; 145:15–16; 147:9).

Meaning

The Lord, as Creator of all things, is King over them (Ps. 95:3–5; Rev. 4:11), and shows his loving care to all, whether the land (vv. 2, 4, 5), the animals who dwell in it (v. 7), the foreigners who work in it (v. 6), or the Israelites he calls to tend it

(v. 6). The Lord's care is not limited just to humans, and certainly not just to Israelites; it is as broad as the creation itself, and the Israelites, as his covenant people, are to show this same care for everything in their Father's world (cf. Lev. 19:18; Prov. 12:10).

One way to do so was to let the land rest every seven years. This would be like someone today giving up pay every seven years, only more so, since there was no natural guarantee that the harvest of the eighth year would be good. The Israelites could do this, however, knowing that the Lord had promised to provide. Letting the land rest would therefore be a bold proclamation of faith that the Lord would care for the needs of those who followed him (vv. 20–22; cf. Matt. 6:19–34).

8–17. Laws for the Jubilee year. The English word 'jubilee' is related to the Hebrew word *yôbēl*, which refers to an animal's horn that has been made into a trumpet (Exod. 19:13). Such a horn was probably used as the trumpet that announced the start of this year (v. 9).

These laws identify when the Jubilee occurs (vv. 8–9), how to treat it as holy (vv. 10–13), and how to buy and sell land leases in light of it (vv. 14–17).

8–13. The number *seven* has special significance in Leviticus. It is associated with the Sabbath (23:3) and also signifies a complete amount (see at 4:5–7). Not surprisingly, the *fiftieth year* (v. 10) – the one coming after *seven* periods of *seven years* (v. 8) – was especially significant, a crowning Sabbath year with special benefits for the people.[90]

This year began *on the Day of Atonement* (v. 9), which was a fitting day for many reasons: it took place in the *seventh month* (v. 9), it was itself a day of *sabbath rest* (16:31), and it was the day in which both the people and the tabernacle were cleansed, making it an appropriate start to a holy year.

The start of Jubilee had two practical results. *Liberty* (v. 10) refers here to releasing people from debts that have caused them to sell either their property (vv. 23–38) or themselves (vv. 39–55). In either case, release meant that all Israelites would have a fresh start, *returning to* their own *property*, surrounded by their closest relatives (*clan*; vv. 10–13). Other Ancient Near Eastern sources have similar proclamations of release (*andurāru/mīšarum* proclamations; see survey in Milgrom, 2001: 2167–2168). The evidence, however, suggests that these were sporadic, happening either when a king came to the throne or simply decided to proclaim a release (perhaps in times of crises; Kleinig, 2003: 538). 'The divine King of Israel, by contrast, set up a system of release at fixed intervals, which was not dependent on arbitrary human leadership' (Gane, 2004: 432). Release for his people was guaranteed.

The second practical result was that people were forbidden from full-scale

agricultural work (v. 11), although they could eat whatever *the fields* grew naturally (v. 12; cf. at vv. 1–7 above). This would give a super-sabbatical of rest to the land as well as to those working it.

14–17. Severe financial hardship could force Israelites to *sell* their *land* (v. 14; see at vv. 25–34). More specifically, they sold leases for the use of the land. (The land itself could not be sold, since it belonged to the Lord, v. 23.) Since all leases ended in the Year of Jubilee (vv. 10, 13), their prices were calculated according to *the number of years left for harvesting crops* until the next Jubilee (vv. 15–16). This would have to take into account Sabbath years in which no crops were harvested.

Do not take advantage of each other (vv. 14, 17), either by paying less than the land's value or by charging more. It would be easy for sellers or purchasers to commit wrong here, and especially for purchasers to take advantage of desperate sellers. The command to *fear God* is appropriate: it is issued elsewhere to remind those with power that there is a far greater authority to whom they must give account (see at 19:13–14).

18–22. Conclusion. This section concludes with an exhortation to obedience (vv. 18–19) and an assurance that the Lord will provide (vv. 20–22).

18–19. *Live safely...eat your fill.* The Lord promises to provide for the needs basic to abundant human life (cf. 26:4–12). He makes these promises to those who embrace the covenant from the heart (*follow my decrees, and be careful to obey my laws*, v. 18; cf. 26:3). The picture that emerges takes us back to Eden: people living securely in God's garden, having all their needs met, and walking in obedient fellowship with the Lord. This has always been the Lord's intent for humanity, and now Israel is privileged with showing the nations this vision of Eden and inviting them to experience it (Exod. 19:4–6; Deut. 4:6–8; see esp. Ps. 67).

20–22. The question of verse 20 is asked from the perspective of a Sabbath year: *'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?'* The Lord's answer assures them that they are to have no worries, even if it happens to be the Sabbath year immediately before the Jubilee year: *I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years*. This means you will have enough to eat in the seventh (year 49), in the *eighth* (when you *plant* in year 50), even *until the harvest of the ninth* (year 51) (vv. 21–22; cf. table below).

While there is debate about how to understand the timing implied in these verses (see overview in Milgrom, 2001: 2181–2183), Milgrom's approach (2001: 2183) accounts best for the data (the numbers represent the years):

FALL		SPRING
5 Sow		6 Reap
6 ---	sabbatical	7 ---
7 ---	Jubilee	8 ---
8 Sow		9 Reap

(Milgrom puts the fall on the left because the Sabbath and Jubilee years begin in the fall with sowing, vv. 3, 11. For the sowing season, cf. Appendix 1.)

Whatever the timing, the overall point is clear: the Israelites can obey the Lord's commands boldly because they know he will provide for their needs (cf. Matt. 6:25–34).

22. *Old crop*. Harvested grain could last quite well for at least seven years (cf. Gen. 41:1–49; 47:13–26).

Meaning

See *Meaning* at end of chapter.

ii. Laws applying redemption and the Jubilee to those who become poor (25:23–55)

This section explains how redemption and Jubilee worked for those who were forced to sell their property or themselves on account of poverty. An introduction (vv. 23–24) is followed by four main laws describing what to do when *a fellow Israelite becomes poor* (vv. 25, 35, 39, 47).

The laws address three levels of poverty. While there were many ways to become poor, it will be helpful to explain these different levels using the example of crop failure. If a crop failed and an Israelite had no savings, he would have to borrow money in order to buy seed to plant the following year. If that crop failed, he might have to sell some of his land to cover his debts as well as borrow more money for seed (vv. 25–28). If that crop failed, he might have to sell his remaining land to cover the debt (vv. 35–38). If significant debt remained, his only option was to sell himself (vv. 39–43, 47–55).

23–24. Introduction. Typically, 'resident aliens' (NIV *foreigners and*

strangers) did not own land (Gen. 23:4). This picture is applied to the Israelites: they are servants on the estate of the divine King, who owned *the land* and was entrusting it to their care. It was not ultimately theirs to own, but to care for and use in a way that honoured him (cf. Matt. 25:14–46).

The Lord was going to give land to each of the tribes (Josh. 13 – 21). The danger, however, was that prospering tribes would buy more and more land and cause economic disparity among the Lord's people. He therefore prohibits the *permanent sale of land* (v. 23); the Israelites were always to have the right to *redeem the land* at any time (v. 24). If they could not afford to do so, the land would still return to its owner in the Jubilee (v. 28), giving a fresh start to those who had suffered financially.

25–34. Applying redemption and Jubilee to Israelites who become poor and sell some of their property. For a possible scenario where these laws would apply, see at verses 23–55 above.

25–28. *Becomes poor*. From oppression (Amos 5:11–12), laziness (Prov. 24:30–34) or natural causes (such as crop failure or inability to work because of sickness or old age; Gen. 47:13–26; Ruth 2:2). Wright (2004: 171) states that the first of these – oppression – 'is by far the major recognized cause of poverty' in the Bible. Whatever the cause, poverty could force Israelites to sell *some of their property*. When this happened, they had three options.

Ideally, their 'nearest redeemer' (ESV) – such as a brother, an uncle or a cousin (vv. 48–49) – *redeemed* it immediately, releasing it from the ownership of the non-family member by buying out the lease (v. 25). Since land was the basis of wealth, this had the social benefit of keeping wealth within family groupings.

If this was not an option, those who had become poor might *redeem it themselves* if they *acquired sufficient means*, for example, by gaining income from their remaining land, selling goods they owned, hiring themselves out to work or receiving an inheritance.

If neither option was possible, the Lord himself would act as their Redeemer by means of this law (Hartley, 1992: 439), and the land would *return in the Jubilee*. It is a characteristic of the Lord to redeem people: he had redeemed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to be his people (Exod. 6:6–7), and now, by this law, he redeems them from their debts (Hartley, 1992: 439, citing Hubbard, 1991: 11).

29–31. Israelites sometimes formed tiny *villages* directly on the fields they inherited from the Lord. The *houses* of these villages were so closely tied to the land that the laws of verses 25–28 applied: there was a permanent right of *redemption* and return of the house *in the Jubilee* (v. 31). *A house in a walled city*, however, was not tied to land inheritance, so the *Jubilee* laws did not apply.

Instead, the seller's *right of redemption* lasted only one year, after which time the house belonged *permanently to the buyer* (vv. 29–30). The law thus graciously provided the seller a chance to get the house back without putting an unfair burden on the buyer.

32–34. *Levites.* Non-priestly members of the tribe of Levi. The Lord had set them apart to help the priests at the tabernacle (Num. 3 – 4). Their inheritance from the Lord was not large tracts of land, but forty-eight cities and the houses in them (Josh. 21:1–42). Levites therefore *always had the right to redeem their houses*, and the laws of *Jubilee* always applied.

The pasture-land belonging to their towns must not be sold, perhaps because it did not belong to individuals, but to all the people of the city, who needed it for grazing their animals.

35–38. Applying redemption and Jubilee to Israelites who become poor and sell all their property. This law apparently assumes the person has no more property to sell and is still in debt.

Verse 35a is better translated: 'If your fellow Israelite becomes poor and he falters financially under your authority, and you *retain him* [Heb. *heḥĕzîq*] like a resident alien...' (my trans.; see also Kleinig, 2003: 542). The term *heḥĕzîq* is used elsewhere to describe people being retained under the authority of another (Exod. 9:2, 'hold back'; Jer. 50:33, 'hold fast'). This reading best fits the context, since those who could not repay a debt could be 'held' as a servant by their creditors (cf. 2 Kgs 4:1).

But creditors could not oppress their *fellow Israelites*. Instead, creditors were to provide them with loans, including *food* staples (v. 37b), so they could eat, and money (v. 37a), so they could buy seed, grow crops and 'make a living' (vv. 35, 36, my trans.; NIV *live*). It is assumed that the creditor would let them work the land as tenant farmers, paying back their debt with the crops and making a little extra to support themselves. Creditors were also forbidden from taking advantage of debtors by charging *interest* on the loans (cf. Wright, 2004: 165). They were instead to show the same merciful love the Lord had shown them (v. 38; cf. 1 John 4:11).[91]

39–55. Applying redemption and Jubilee to Israelites who become poor and sell themselves. When Israelites with significant debt had sold all their property, their last resort was to *sell themselves* (v. 39), either to a fellow Israelite (vv. 39–46) or to a resident alien (vv. 47–55).

39–46. Selling themselves to a fellow Israelite. Israelites were not to treat one another as 'permanent servants' (NIV *slaves* ; see Additional note at 25:40), but as 'hired resident alien workers' who would work for an agreed amount of time (see at v. 6). In this case, the period of work ended at *the Year of Jubilee*,

unless those who had sold themselves were redeemed or had earned enough money to buy their own freedom (cf. vv. 48–49). This law effectively abolished permanent servitude of one Israelite to another (unless they so chose, Exod. 21:5–6).

Two other commands follow. First, Israelites *must not be sold as* ‘permanent servants’ to others. They are ‘permanent servants’ of the Lord (v. 42), who *brought* them *out of Egypt* to be their King and they his people.

Second, the Israelites must not *rule over* these servants *ruthlessly* (vv. 43, 46b). This language describes the ways in which Egyptians had made the Israelites’ lives bitter with hard labour (see Exod. 1:13–14). Naturally, Israelites must never repeat such wickedness, especially because these servants belong to the heavenly King (cf. Eph. 6:9). But in this context, the term *ruthlessly* might refer specifically to extending servitude beyond the agreed time limit, the Jubilee (cf. v. 46a [of non-Israelites] with v. 46b [of Israelites]; cf. Chirichigno, 1993: 336–338).

The text addresses two natural questions that arise at this point for the Israelites (vv. 44–46a). First, may they have ‘permanent servants’? Yes, but permanent servants must come from *the nations* surrounding Israel (v. 44) or ‘from’ foreign nationals living as *temporary residents* in their midst (v. 45; ‘from’ is better than NIV’s *some of*). Second, do these also go free automatically in the Jubilee? No, these servants may serve *for life* (v. 46), although this law does not require that. Indeed, several Ancient Near Eastern texts make clear that permanent servants could gain their freedom. For example, in some texts the servant was adopted by the master, usually in exchange for taking care of the master until his death, at which point the servant would be free (Mendelsohn, 1949: 78–81). Hints of this appear in the Bible as well (cf. Gen. 15:2–4 and possibly 1 Chr. 2:34–35). In other Ancient Near Eastern texts, servants were simply freed by means of payment made by another or by themselves (Mendelsohn, 1949: 66–67, 82). It should not surprise us if this also took place in Israel. In any event, Leviticus 25:44–46 does not prohibit the Israelites’ foreign servants from gaining freedom at some point.

While the placement of verse 46b – *you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly* – could imply that Israelites may treat foreign servants ruthlessly, this is ruled out by other passages (see Additional note at 25:40). Verse 46b is focused on preventing Israelites from treating covenant brothers and sisters ruthlessly, not on giving them permission to treat others that way. For further questions about these verses, see Additional note.

40. *Until the Year of Jubilee.* For how this relates to Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12, see Chirichigno (1993: 334–336), who argues that

Leviticus 25 is addressing a case in which the head of a household is so impoverished that he must sell himself and his entire household into servitude, while Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12 address a situation in which an Israelite landowner with far less debt sells a dependant into servitude (cf. Wright, 1990: 253–257, who argues similarly).

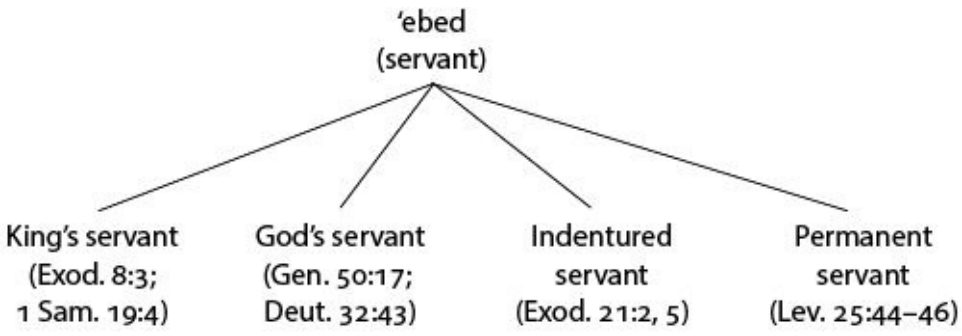
Additional note: ‘Slavery’ in Leviticus 25

This chapter often troubles readers in at least three different ways, each of which will be considered in turn.[92]

The term ‘slave’

First, most English versions use the word ‘slave’ several times in Leviticus 25. For many readers, this calls to mind the brutal slavery known in Greco-Roman times and more recently in the United States and elsewhere. Significantly, this chapter appears to have no problem with it.

The English term ‘slave’, however, is potentially misleading here. The Hebrew term, *‘ebed*, could describe morally illegitimate forms of servitude, such as the Israelites’ slavery in Egypt, as well as morally legitimate forms of servitude. At least four legitimate forms may be identified:



It is in the last two categories that the word *‘ebed* is sometimes translated ‘slave’ (cf. v. 44), which is potentially misleading, since many moderns think of a ‘slave’ as ‘a person who is the legal property of another or others and is bound to absolute obedience, human chattel’ (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*). According to this definition, a ‘slave has no rights and slave owners may assume they are free to do with the slave as they wish’ (Goldingay, 2009: 458).

But this type of slavery is forbidden to Israelites. To begin with, servants had legal rights in Israel. Israelite law stipulated that they went free if their masters abused them (Exod. 21:26–27) and that they had the right to rest on the Sabbath (Exod. 20:10; see Wright, 2004: 334–335). In addition, Israelite masters were commanded to treat their servants with compassion (Deut. 15:12–15; 16:11–12). In short, servants in Israel could not be treated as slaves were treated in the Greco-Roman world or, in more recent times, in the United States and

elsewhere. The term *'ebed* is therefore better translated – depending on the context – as 'servant', 'indentured servant' or 'permanent servant' (see also Williams, 2011: 452).

The use of 'property' language to describe servants

A second problem involving Leviticus 25 is that servants are described with terms normally reserved for property (see esp. vv. 44–46), suggesting to some that they were viewed as less than fully human. This conclusion not only runs counter to the previous point, it is also unnecessary. In English, we regularly use commercial language to describe people when the context is commercial, for example, 'trading' a player to another team (as one might 'trade' a stock), or 'transferring' an employee to another location (as one might 'transfer' money). We do not use this language because we view the people involved as less than human; we use it because it accurately describes their circumstances in a given commercial context. To say that servants are *property* (Lev. 25:45) or *inherited* (25:46) is not to put them on the level of furniture, any more than to say a sports star is 'traded' puts him on the level of a stock.

Servants being under the control of others

A third potentially troubling aspect of the chapter is its affirmation that people may be used as indentured or permanent servants, remaining under the control of another. This strikes many as dehumanizing and abusive. Of course, there is no denying that masters could use such control to dehumanize and abuse, but this is true of any relationship of power, whether of governments to citizens, employers to employees, or even parents to children. It is not the relationship of power itself that is dehumanizing or abusive; it is how that relationship is exercised. As applied to indentured and permanent servitude in Israel, two comments are in order.

First, as noted above, Israelite masters did not have absolute control over their servants. Servants had legal protections that recognized and safeguarded their humanity. Second, these types of servitude, if performed under the humane conditions required by law, 'could be said to be little different *experientially* from many kinds of paid employment in a cash economy' (Wright, 2004: 333). In both cases, one person submits to the control of another and provides labour in exchange for certain benefits, whether money (in many of today's economies) or food and shelter (in ancient Israel). Indeed, the potential benefits were great enough that some people sought to become permanent servants (Deut. 15:16–17; cf. Exod. 21:5–6). These benefits included protection from poverty, provision of

regular food and shelter, and a place in a stable family. For those in poverty or facing it, this type of servitude was literally a lifesaver.

The text does make clear that permanent servitude was not to be applied to Israelites (25:39–42, unless they so chose [Exod. 21:5–6; Deut. 15:16–17]). The reason is theological: they are servants of the Lord who had delivered them from Egyptian slavery into his permanent service (25:42). This rationale does not apply to non-Israelites (25:44–46), who have not experienced such redemption and are not naturally covenant members. But even here, the same legal safeguards applied, and several laws presume that servants, even those from foreign lands, would be treated as household members, and thus able to partake in Israelite celebrations like the Passover (Exod. 12:44) and the feasting of Israelite festivals (Deut. 16:11–14). This was the very opposite of dehumanization.

The above does not mean that indentured or permanent servitude was ideal. The ideal is set out in prophetic texts that describe a day in which the world will be set right and 'everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig-tree' (Mic. 4:4). But although not ideal, this servitude was certainly realistic: given the realities of poverty in a fallen world, servitude was far better than starvation, and could, in fact, be ideal enough that people chose to enter lifelong servitude willingly (Deut. 15:16–17). It should also be noted, however, that, even when the ideal world comes, servitude will not stop. Indeed, in that world, all the Lord's people will be permanent servants of the heavenly King – and will consider it the greatest blessing. It was the duty of the Israelite master to imitate his heavenly Master so closely that he gave his own servants a foretaste of that day.

47–55. Selling themselves to a resident alien. If a 'resident alien' (NIV *foreigner*) prospered, and *Israelites* became indebted to him and were eventually forced to *sell themselves* to the resident alien (v. 47), the Israelites' *right of redemption* always remained and could be exercised by a *relative*, or even by the Israelites themselves (vv. 48–49) *if they prospered* (perhaps by means of inheritance). The Hebrew of verses 50–52 is challenging, but the overall point seems clear: the price for redemption is calculated by subtracting the value of the years worked from the original price (cf. v. 27).

If *redemption* by their relatives or themselves was not possible, they *and their children* were *to be released in the Year of Jubilee* (v. 54). The reason is given in verse 55, part of which may be translated as follows: 'The Israelites...are my permanent servants, whom I caused to be released from Egypt.' Just as a redemption payment released an Israelite from debt servitude, so the Lord's redemption of Israel released his people from ruthless servitude in Egypt (Exod.

6:6; 15:13). No-one else could own them permanently, for they were now permanent servants of their gracious Redeemer and King.

Meaning

The prophets speak of a day when all will be made right, a day when 'everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig-tree' (Mic. 4:4a; cf. Zech. 3:10). The Year of Jubilee was to be a foretaste of that great day. All the Israelites would return to their own land, surrounded by their own families, having no debts, enjoying a year of Sabbath rest, looking forward to years of safety and prosperity in a land flowing with milk and honey, and living in soul-satisfying fellowship with their covenant Lord, the one they acknowledged as sovereign over the land and themselves. In short, the Year of Jubilee looks backwards to Eden and forwards to heaven.

It also makes the Lord's priorities for humanity clear. As Wright (2004: 206–209) notes, these priorities fall into three main categories. (His discussion is difficult to improve on and will form the basis of the following comments.) *Economically*, the Jubilee stresses the importance of both equity and opportunity. The equity envisioned is neither socialism (note that the Israelites owned their land) nor unchecked capitalism (the Jubilee prevented a wealthy few from accumulating most of the land). Instead, the Jubilee 'echoes the creation principle that the whole earth is given by God to all humanity, who act as co-stewards of its resources' (Wright, 2004: 207; cf. Gen. 1:26–29). As for opportunity, the Jubilee brought about 'a restoration to family units of *the opportunity and the resources to provide for themselves* again' (Wright, 2004: 207). We have been created to work (Gen. 2:15) and therefore should promote a society that makes it possible to meet that need.

Socially, the Jubilee emphasizes the importance of family. The benefits of strong families have been noted above (see *Context*). The Jubilee aimed to protect the family unit by eliminating debt, which could break up extended or even immediate families, and which to this day is 'a huge cause of social disruption and decay, and tends to breed many other social ills, including crime, poverty, squalor and violence' (Wright, 2004: 208). By cancelling debts, the Jubilee aimed to reverse this decay, reunite families and provide them with a fresh start for prospering together on their own land.

Theologically, the basis for all these commands was that the land and the Israelites belonged to the Lord (vv. 23–24, 42). By following the Jubilee laws, the Israelites acknowledged the Lord's sovereignty over his land and people, knowing that they would have to give account to him for how they treated each. Significantly, the Lord's sovereignty is not limited to the land of Israel or those

within it. ‘The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it’ (Ps. 24:1; cf. Exod. 9:29; Ps. 89:11). This implies that all are accountable to acknowledge his sovereignty by putting into practice the above principles.[93]

Finally, it may be noted that Jesus takes the principles of Jubilee and applies them to his mission. This is especially clear in Luke 4:18–19, where he reads from Isaiah 61, a passage that uses the language of Jubilee to describe a future restoration of the people of God. Jesus says this passage finds its fulfilment in him, a fulfilment that shows itself in two ways. The first was current ethical practice. In keeping with the principles of Jubilee, Jesus did indeed show great concern for the poor (Luke 7:20–23; 14:13) and chastised those who did not (Luke 16:19–31). He expected his disciples to follow his example of care, and this is, in fact, what the early Christians did (Acts 2:44–47; 4:34).

But Jesus did not stop there; he also fulfilled the Jubilee principles on an entirely new level, by releasing people from physical sickness (Luke 7:22), demonic oppression (Luke 4:31–37; 8:1–2) and, above all, the debt of their sins, giving them present peace (Luke 7:36–50; 19:1–10; 24:47) and a future hope that they were members of the family of God (Luke 15:11–32). Jesus started this deeper level of fulfilment with his earthly ministry and will complete it when he returns in glory (cf. Rev. 7:16–17; 22:1–5). And for this reason his people cry, ‘Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!’ (Rev. 22:20).

B. Covenant blessings and curses (26:1–46)

Context

As noted in the last chapter (*Context*), Leviticus 25 – 27 are arranged as a chiasm:

A – Laws about redemption (Lev. 25)

B – Blessings for covenant obedience and curses for covenant disobedience (Lev. 26)

A' – Laws about redemption (Lev. 27)

Set at the centre, chapter 26 highlights the blessings that come from embracing the covenant and the curses that come from rejecting it.

Blessings and curses were commonly placed near the end of Ancient Near Eastern law codes and covenants (cf. the Lipit-Ishtar lawcode [*ANET* 161], the Code of Hammurabi [reverse, *ANET* 178– 180], the vassal-treaties of Esarhaddon [curses only, *ANET* 538–541]). And since the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26, near the end of Leviticus, are associated with the Sinai covenant (v. 46), this implies that all the laws of Leviticus belong to that same covenant.

It should be noted that the blessings in this chapter are not magical formulas spoken for good; neither are the curses magical formulas spoken for evil. Instead, the blessings and curses describe the actions of a personal God towards those who either embrace his covenant from the heart or reject it.

The blessings are arranged into four groupings, beginning with abundant crops (vv. 4–5), then moving from one blessing to the next, until they climax with the promise of the Lord himself dwelling in the Israelites' midst (vv. 11–12). This is nothing less than a return to Eden.

The curses are arranged into five groupings, beginning with fear, disease and defeat by enemies (vv. 16–17), then moving from one curse to the next, until they climax with starving Israelites eating their own children and being slaughtered by their enemies, dispossessed from their land and loathed by the Lord (vv. 27–39). This is nothing less than a living hell.

The contrast between the sections could not be clearer and serves to emphasize a theme found throughout Scripture: the posture we take before the Lord determines whether we experience blessing or cursing. And although this chapter is focused on that experience in the here and now, it is equally true for

our experience in the world to come (cf. Matt. 7:21–27).

Comment

i. Obedience to the covenant commanded (26:1–2)

These verses allude to the beginning of the Sinai covenant to introduce the chapter's theme: the Israelites must be faithful to the covenant commands of their sovereign God (cf. Exod. 20:1–11). The end of the chapter returns to this same theme (vv. 44–45; note especially the repetition of *I am the* LORD). As a result, the interpretive frame for the entire chapter is the Lord's sovereignty and his covenant relationship with Israel.

1. For *idols*, see at 19:4. *Images* is a general term for idols. Often resembling humans or animals (Deut. 4:16–18; 5:8), they are prohibited by the second commandment (Exod. 20:4). A *sacred stone* was a stone pillar used in the worship of false gods (cf. Deut. 7:5; the manner of use is not entirely clear). A *carved stone* was perhaps engraved with different images (cf. Ezek. 8:10 and 8:12 in NASV). The Israelites were not to show loyalty to such powerless and worthless things, but to *the* LORD their *God* who had redeemed them with great power from Egypt to be his people (see at 11:41–45).

2. See at 19:29–30. 'Both the observance of the Sabbath and the reverence of the sanctuary acknowledge the supreme Lordship of Yahweh' (Hartley, 1992: 450).

ii. Blessings for the obedient (26:3–13)

Earlier passages emphasized that obedience to the covenant commands was necessary if Israel was to enjoy the covenant blessings (18:4–5; 25:18–19). What those passages stated in brief, these verses spell out in detail. Coming after the general call to covenant faithfulness (vv. 1–2), these verses make clear that such faithfulness is a necessary condition (v. 3) if the covenant blessings are to come (vv. 4–12). The chapter also explains that disobediently rejecting the covenant (vv. 14–15) will result in Israel experiencing covenant curses (vv. 16–39).

This chapter, like 18:5, is sometimes read as though it were describing a merit-based relationship with the Lord (relationship earned through obedience to law). But this is to misunderstand the role of obedience here. Obedience in the Old Testament is seen as a proper response to grace and, in particular, to the gracious Lord who has already redeemed his people and entered into covenant relationship with them (see comments at 18:5). Naturally, as in any relationship, faithfulness is necessary if the relationship is to continue, a point Jesus also

emphasizes (John 15:1–10). But such faithfulness does not create the relationship. Only the Lord can do that, and it is the privilege of his people to respond with grateful obedience and to enjoy the blessings of their redeeming King.

3. Condition: obedience to the Lord's commands. See above two paragraphs.

4–12. Result: covenant blessings. These blessings fall under the two categories most necessary to us as human beings. The first is material provision and protection (vv. 4–10). The Lord has created us as physical creatures, and therefore his blessings manifest themselves in physical ways. While the 'prosperity gospel' errs by making material blessings life's ultimate goal and claiming they will come automatically and abundantly as long as we have enough faith,[94] it would be equally wrong to go to the opposite extreme and say that the Lord cares only about the soul. Jesus teaches us to pray for our physical needs ('Give us today our daily bread') and promises that our heavenly Father will provide for them (Matt. 6:11, 25–34; cf. Phil. 4:19). 'He that is so gracious in blessing the soul is not sparing in his kindness to the body' (Bonar, 1959: 471).

But we are also spiritual creatures, and so the second category of blessing addresses the very thing the human soul needs most: relationship with the Lord himself (vv. 11–12). Indeed, this blessing comes last in the list because it is the climax of them all. To know the Lord is the greatest good we can ever experience.

4–5. Abundant crops. Unlike Egypt, which had the Nile, the land of Israel was almost totally dependent on rainfall to produce crops. These rains had to come *in season* (v. 4; cf. Deut. 11:14). Heavier rains fell during the initial growing season (December to February), and lighter rains, during the final ripening (March to April; see Rasmussen, 2010: 29). The Lord promises to provide these perfectly, producing such bumper crops that the Israelites would still be *harvesting* them when it was time to *plant* next year's crop (v. 5a; cf. Amos 9:13). He also promises safety (v. 5b), so they would not need to fear enemies coming to steal their food (cf. v. 16; Judg. 6:1–6, 11).

6–8. Peace in the land. The Israelites would be able to *lie down* and sleep peacefully, knowing all threats had been removed from the land, whether *wild beasts* (like lions and bears, 1 Sam. 17:37) or enemies bearing the *sword* (v. 6; cf. Ps. 4:8). When war did occur, only a few Israelites would be necessary to *pursue* and defeat their *enemies*, since the Lord would be with Israel (vv. 7–8; cf. Josh. 23:10).

9–10. Fruitfulness of womb and of crops. The language of verse 9

(*fruitful...increase...keep my covenant*) echoes the covenant promises made to Abraham (Gen. 17:6–7; 22:17), which are, of course, now the *covenant* promises to his descendants, the Israelites. By fulfilling these promises, the Lord is indicating his faithfulness to the covenant. And if the Israelites should ask, 'Where will food for all these people come from?', the answer is clear: the Lord would make each harvest so bountiful that they would not be able to eat it all in one year (v. 10).

11–12. The LORD's presence in the Israelites' midst. The previous blessings would make the land of Israel like the garden of Eden. These verses now return to the Lord's goal in Eden: *walking among* his people as their God (cf. Gen. 3:8). This goal is evident from one end of the Bible to the other: from the exodus (Exod. 25:8; 29:45–46), to the vision of the prophets (Ezek. 37:26), to the coming of Jesus (John 1:14), to his presence with the church (2 Cor. 6:16), to the future climax of history when God will walk among his people and 'wipe away every tear from their eyes' (Rev. 21:3–4).

13. Conclusion: Yahweh is their redeeming God. Egyptian slavery was oppressive, reducing people to the status of animals dragging heavy burdens attached to *yokes* around their necks (cf. Exod. 1:13–14). The Lord's redemption was gracious, freeing the Israelites from these burdens and transferring them into his service. They could now walk *with heads held high*, as is fitting for servants of the King of kings.

iii. Curses for the disobedient (26:14–39)

As was common in other Ancient Near Eastern documents of this time, the curses far outnumber the blessings. Deuteronomy 28, for example, has thirteen verses of blessings but fifty-three verses of curses, and Hammurabi's law code has '16 lines of blessings but some 280 lines of curses' (Milgrom, 2001: 2286–2287)! The long list of curses in Leviticus 26 does not imply the Lord was eager to bring these on his people. The curses would come only *if* they rebelled against his law (vv. 14–15), which he repeatedly warns them not to do. And even when the curses do come, they are not petty acts of anger, but acts of *discipline* meant to restore his people to the life for which they had been created (see at vv. 18–20). But such a long list does imply the importance of covenant faithfulness and the Lord's commitment to bring justice to bear against those who reject his covenant and therefore his purposes for the world.

Many of these curses are the exact opposite of the blessings (see chart below). This makes the contrast between obedience and disobedience all the clearer. We were created to obey the Lord and enjoy the rich blessings that come from

covenant fellowship with him, not to turn from him and experience his justice against our rebellion.

Blessings for the obedient (vv. 3–12)	***Curses for the disobedient (vv. 14–39)***
Abundant rain, harvests and food (vv. 4–5, 10)	Drought, famine and starvation (vv. 16, 19–20, 26, 29)
Peace in the land, feelings of security, freedom from wild beasts, defeat of enemies (vv. 6–8)	War in the land, feelings of fear, decimation by wild beasts, defeat before enemies, exile (vv. 16–17, 22, 25, 31–33, 36–38)
Health and fruitfulness among the people (v. 9)	Disease, decimation and death among the people (vv. 16, 22, 25–26, 29–30, 38–39)
The Lord dwelling in the midst of his people as their God (vv. 11–12)	The Lord turning away from them as his people (vv. 24, 28, 30–31)

14–15. Condition: disobedience to the Lord's commands. For these verses, cf. verse 3.

In a marital relationship, it is one thing for a spouse to be imperfect; it is another thing entirely for that spouse to abandon the marriage. The Lord knows the Israelites will not be perfect and therefore mercifully provides atoning sacrifices (Lev. 4 – 5) and the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). But they must not abandon their covenant relationship with him. Indeed, the phrase *violate the covenant* (v. 15) is used elsewhere to describe rejecting it completely by means of gross disobedience (Deut. 31:16, 20; Isa. 24:5; Jer. 11:10).

If the Israelites did this, they would be choosing to call down the covenant curses on themselves. This is very important to note. Moderns tend to take a negative view of the Lord bringing these curses to bear, but this is like thinking badly of a parent who disciplines his or her child after fair warning.

16–39. Result: curses. There are five groupings of curses (see below) and they increase in intensity as they progress (cf. Amos 4:6–12 for the same). All throughout, the Lord repeats, '*I* will do these things to you.' He will indeed bring

justice to bear against covenant unfaithfulness.

16–17. Fear, disease, being pillaged, defeated and conquered by enemies. Instead of experiencing the peace of Eden (v. 6), the Israelites would live in a state of *terror*, which seems related to the *diseases and fever* that would harm them physically and exhaust them emotionally (v. 16). Enemies would not only pillage their harvest (*eat it*, v. 16), but the Lord himself would oppose them (*set my face against you*, v. 17), the very opposite of his desire for his people (v. 9; cf. Num. 6:24–26). The result would be tragic: the Israelites' enemies would *defeat* them and *rule over* them, and their feelings of terror would continue (*flee when no one is pursuing* ; cf. v. 8!).

18–20. Humbled: drought and famine. Because these judgments from the Lord are meant to teach the Israelites the importance of obedience (Ps. 94:12; cf. Hos. 5:14–15), the word *punish* (v. 18) is better translated 'discipline' (as elsewhere in NIV: Deut. 8:5; 21:18). God does not discipline his people 'merely because they deserve it, but because he loves them and wants to correct their foolish ways' (Wenham, 1979: 330–331; see Prov. 3:11–12; Heb. 12:5–11). As Currid (2004: 351) notes, 'The purpose of these judgments is restoration, not annihilation.'

When discipline is rejected, it often has to be repeated and strengthened (*seven times over*). The number *seven* is being used metaphorically; in Leviticus, it often refers to completeness and thoroughness (see at 4:5–7), and that is the type of discipline now to be expected (v. 18). It begins with *breaking* their *stubborn pride*, a deadly sin that leads people to think they have no need of God or his ways (Jer. 13:9–10). Even blessings can lead to pride when people forget these come from the Lord's hand and not their own strength (Deut. 8:11–19). By removing these blessings through drought (v. 19) and famine (v. 20), the Lord would remind the Israelites that they are completely dependent on him for abundant life (cf. vv. 4–5).

21–22. Decimation from wild beasts. Literally translated, verse 21 begins: 'If you walk with hostility against me...' This is the very opposite of what the Lord requires of humanity: namely, 'to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [their] God' (Mic. 6:8).

The discipline that results is decimation from *wild animals* (cf. v. 6). If being fruitful was a blessing in the ancient world – and of the Abrahamic covenant in particular (v. 9) – becoming *few in number* was a clear sign of being cursed (cf. Jer. 30:19). Sadly, families were so interconnected that even the *children* would suffer as a result of their parents' unfaithfulness (cf. Num. 14:33).

23–26. Attack by enemies, pestilence in besieged cities, defeat before enemies, famine in besieged cities. This is a classic 'punishment fits the crime':

if the Israelites *continue to be hostile towards* the Lord, he *will be hostile towards* them (vv. 23–24). To *avenge* (v. 25) is to bring justice to bear against those who have committed wrong. Elsewhere, this aspect of the Lord's justice is directed at others on behalf of his people (Deut. 32:43); here, it is directed at his people because they have *broken the covenant*. War (*the sword*) would cause the Israelites to *withdraw* into walled *cities*, but even there they would not be safe, for the Lord would send *a plague* among them. This would be so devastating that they would not be able to defend the city and would *be given into enemy hands* (cf. Jer. 32:24). To make matters worse, the siege of the city would also result in famine (v. 26), with food supplies running so low that *ten women* would have to divide up the *bread* from *one* round of baking to feed their entire family (cf. v. 5; see also Ezek. 4:16–17).

27–39. A crescendo of curses. In this last series of curses, the Israelites' towering sin and rebellion are utterly crushed beneath the weight of righteous justice that God releases on them. The goal is still discipline (v. 28), but the curses used to achieve it go far beyond the previous curses in number and severity. The harder the heart, the stronger the hammer used to break it. The curses fall into two sections. In the first, the land is completely emptied of its inhabitants, who either die or flee into exile (vv. 29–33). The curses pause only for a moment – and then only by way of further rebuke – to state that the land could now make up for the Sabbath years it had been denied by the sinful Israelites (vv. 34–35). The curses then pick up where they left off, making clear that those who have escaped the first set of curses would actually be better off dead, since their lives would consist of constant terror, death and wasting away to nothing (vv. 36–39).

28. *Punish.* 'Discipline' is preferable (see at vv. 18–20).

29. Earlier curses involved losing children (v. 22) and suffering famine during siege (vv. 25–26), but here they are combined in the most gruesome way: famine during siege would be so bad that they would lose their children by eating them. See Deuteronomy 28:53–57; 2 Kgs 6:24–29 (cf. Lam. 2:20; 4:10).

30. The Israelites were commanded to remove all false worship from the land (Num. 33:52; Deut. 7:5), and not to engage in it actively. They receive a punishment to fit the crime: the Lord would destroy these false worship centres and would defile them with the *dead bodies* of their worshippers, who would become as lifeless as the *idols* they served (cf. Ps. 135:15–18). The verse speaks of these *idols* in the most negative terms: 'What could be more insulting than to speak of "idols" using a word similar to "dung" and to describe them as "corpses"? The sentence literally reads: "I will...cast your corpses on the corpses of your dung-like objects" (26:30)' (Eveson, 2007: 384). As for the Israelites

themselves, the Lord would *abhor* them, meaning they would experience judgment and might eventually be destroyed (v. 44; cf. Jer. 14:19; Rev. 3:16). This is exactly the opposite of the Lord's intent for his people (v. 11). If only they would embrace his covenant from the heart!

31. *Sanctuaries.* There is debate as to whether these are orthodox or idolatrous places of worship. In either case, they would be destroyed, a clear sign that the Israelites would not have the favour or protection of whomever they worship there. This is emphasized by the fact that any offerings they do make to the Lord would be rejected (*take no delight in...your offerings*). A husband cannot proclaim his love to his wife if he is in the midst of an affair; nor could the Israelites proclaim their love to Yahweh while prostituting themselves to other gods.

32. *Lay waste the land.* To the Ancient Near Eastern mind, this would be a sign that the people's god was very angry with them. (See esp. 1 Kgs 9:8–9; see also Deut. 29:22–24; Jer. 18:16; 19:8; Lam. 2:15.) The presence of *enemies living* in the land would underscore this: the land has been made desolate only to be filled up again with the Israelites' enemies!

33. *Scatter you among the nations*. Exile was a horrible curse indeed. Land was central to the covenant promises (Gen. 12:1, 7; 15:18, etc.). As long as the Israelites remained in the land, they had at least one tangible sign that the covenant continued. But this too would be taken away, leaving them with no physical evidence that the Lord would be willing to maintain the covenant with such a sinful people. He will assure them as the chapter ends that return to the land would be possible (vv. 40–45), but removal from the land would be like separation from one's spouse: even if the promise of reconciliation were present, the loss of the tangible sign of the covenant relationship would be excruciatingly painful. It is no wonder that the people in exile could not sing, but only weep (Ps. 137:1–3). For the fulfilment of this curse in the northern kingdom, see 2 Kings 17:6–18; for the southern kingdom, see 2 Kings 25:8–21.

34–35. 'Then the land will make up for *[rāṣâ]* its sabbath years' (cf. TNK). The word *rāṣâ* can mean *enjoy* (NIV) or 'make up for' (TNK). It is used twice in verse 43 and in the second instance clearly means 'make up for' (or *pay for*, NIV). This could suggest the same meaning may be used here as well, although perhaps there is deliberate ambiguity: when the Israelites were in exile, the land would both enjoy and make up for its *sabbath* years. (For *sabbath* years, see at 25:1–7.)

36–37. The picture here is one of sheer terror: they would not be safely settled in the land of their enemies, but would live there in constant fear for their lives, fleeing at the smallest sound (a *wind-blown leaf*), as though a sword were about to pierce through their heart. They would escape death only to live in constant

fear of it (cf. Deut. 28:65–67).

39. *Waste away*. This refers to a physical wasting away (cf. Ps. 38:5 [‘fester’]; Ezek. 4:17; Zech. 14:12 [‘rot’]). They would survive all of the above only to dwindle and wither away, like a flower without water that wilts and dies in the sun, its petals slowing rotting.

Because of their ancestors’ sins. The initial suffering would come because of their ancestors’ sins; otherwise, why mention them? But it would continue because of the current generation’s own sins (see Boda, 2009: 117–118). This is evident from the fact that they would not simply confess their ancestors’ sins but their own as well (v. 40), and that verses 41–45 focus on the people’s own sins (esp. vv. 41, 43). This places Leviticus 26:39–40 in line with other texts in which punishment begins with a previous generation because of its sins, but continues with the next, who commit the same sins and therefore continue to suffer punishment for them (Ezra 9:7; Jer. 14:20; Dan. 9:16).

iv. The Lord’s abundant mercy to a repentant people (26:40–45)

At some point, the Israelites would admit their treachery against the Lord, be sickened by it and repent of it. (For fuller descriptions of this, see Deut. 30:1–10; Ezek. 6:8–10.) At that time, the Lord would show them his amazing forgiveness and mercy.

40–42. For *unfaithfulness*, see at 5:15. Since circumcision was the sign of covenant relationship with the Lord (Gen. 17:11), an *uncircumcised heart* (v. 41) was a heart that did not submit to the covenant’s requirements. It is always possible to engage in the external rites of covenant relationship with God and yet never submit your heart to God himself. When that is the case, there is no reason to assume you are a member of the covenant. In fact, it is just the opposite.

This is why the Israelites would need *humbled hearts* (v. 41; cf. Deut. 10:16). This would mean admitting their sin was wrong and turning from it (see 2 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr. 7:13–14; 32:26), all the while acknowledging that the Lord was perfectly just to punish them for their sin (2 Chr. 12:6). (For examples of prayers of *confession* for a community, see Neh. 9; Dan. 9:1–19. In both instances, there is acknowledgment of ancestral sin as well as present sin; Neh. 9:2, 32–37; Dan. 9:5–12, 16; cf. at v. 39 above.)

Pay for their sin. By confession and repentance and especially by suffering the punishment of exile (cf. Isa. 40:2; see Boda, 2009: 84–85). When sacrifice can atone for sin, there is no ongoing discipline. But in cases of ‘high-handed’ sin, such as here, sacrificial atonement is not an option (see Introduction, p. 43). In

these contexts, discipline for sin not only occurs; it can continue and, in this case, would continue until the Lord deemed the people had learned their lesson and justice had run its course (2 Chr. 12:7–8; see also Sklar, 2012: 485–490). Naturally, it would be far better to stick so close to the Lord that such discipline was never needed!

In response to his people's humbled hearts and suffering, the Lord would *remember* his *covenant* with *Jacob, Isaac and Abraham* (v. 42). These were the Israelites' three founding fathers who first received the covenant promises (Abraham in Gen. 15:1–21; 17:1–8; 22:15–18; Isaac in Gen. 26:2–6; Jacob in Gen. 28:10–15; 35:9–12). For the Lord to say he would *remember* this covenant does not mean he would ever forget it, but that he would fulfil its promises (Gen. 9:15, 16; Exod. 2:24–25; 6:5–6). In this case, the implication is clear: Israel would return to the land and enjoy covenant fellowship with the Lord.

I will remember the land. 'This statement is unique in Scripture. The personification of the land is, in itself, a frequent theme, but nowhere else is it said that God remembers the land' (Levine, 1989: 191). In this verse, the land is actually parallel to the covenant people! It emphasizes in the strongest way that the land – which the Lord created and commissioned humanity to rule over justly (Gen. 1:26–28) – was the object of his special care (cf. at 25:1–7).

43–45. These verses cover the same ground as verses 40–42, this time assuming the repentance of verses 40–41 and expanding on the promise of verse 42.

I will not reject...or abhor them. What a humbling contrast! The very things the Israelites had done to the Lord's laws (v. 43) he would refuse to do to them. Indeed, the Lord literally says, 'I did not reject them and I did not abhor them.' Sometimes a Hebrew speaker will use a past tense ('I did not') to speak of a future event ('I will not') in order to emphasize that it will surely come to pass: it's as good as done (cf. JM §112g). That's exactly what the Lord does here, in this way underscoring: 'My repentant people will indeed experience my covenant faithfulness and grace!'

Breaking my covenant with them. The Israelites are depicted as having broken the covenant by means of severe disobedience to the Lord's commands (see at vv. 14–15), but the Lord will refuse to follow their example. Despite the fact that Israel has already 'walked out' on the covenant relationship – much as a spouse 'walks out' on a marriage – the Lord affirms that he would remain constant and sure. The book of Hosea, in fact, uses the marriage analogy to emphasize the flagrant and despicable nature of Israel's unfaithfulness, as well as the unbelievably steadfast love of the Lord to his unfaithful bride. See also Jeremiah 30:11; 31:37; 33:25–26.

Covenant with their ancestors. The covenant made with the ancestors, whom the Lord had *brought out of Egypt*, was itself an application of the Abrahamic covenant to the nation of Israel (cf. v. 42). The Lord's act of redemption was a very significant piece of history for the Israelites to remember in exile. If he had delivered them before as a sign of his covenant loyalty, he could be trusted to do so again (cf. Ezek. 28:25; 39:27).

v. Conclusion (26:46)

The phrase 'on Mount Sinai' (ESV) takes us back to 25:1 and ties Leviticus 25 – 26 together. At the same time, the use of so many terms for the Lord's law takes us beyond these two chapters to refer to the book as a whole. This means that, while the laws given 'on Mount Sinai' do not technically include those of 1:1 – 6:7 and 8:1 – 24:23 (see at 7:37–38; 25:1 – 27:34), all are understood as being part of the Sinai covenant. See also at *Context* above.

Meaning

When the Israelites obeyed the Lord's covenant commands, they would experience the covenant blessings that humanity was created to enjoy: walking in rich fellowship with their divine King who cared for them and provided for all their needs (vv. 3–13). This was like a return to the garden of Eden in Genesis 2, where God's people lived securely in a fruitful land, with all of their needs met, walking in obedient fellowship with their gracious Lord. Israel was privileged with showing the nations this vision of Eden and inviting them to experience it (Exod. 19:4–6; Deut. 4:6–8; see esp. Ps. 67). But when the Israelites disobeyed the Lord's covenant commands, they would experience the covenant curses humanity was not created to endure: living outside the protective sphere of the Lord's care and facing his direct opposition (vv. 14–39). This was like a return to the expulsion from Eden at the end of Genesis 3, where God's people were removed from the land of blessing and exposed to all manner of curses, disease and death.

It is clearly blessing, not cursing, that the Lord longs for his people to experience. This was the goal of creation and remains the ultimate goal of redemption (Rev. 21:3–4, 22–27; 22:1–5). And while the blessings of Leviticus 26 begin with a focus on material things, they culminate with the greatest blessing of all: relationship with God himself (see at vv. 4–12). Jesus also emphasized that our relationship with God is central to our lives when he commanded his disciples to focus first on God and his kingdom, trusting that the Lord would provide for their physical needs as well (Matt. 6:19–34, esp. v. 33).

As for the curses, they are not the petty responses of an angry deity, but corrective discipline from a loving Father towards his wayward children (see at vv. 18–20). The stakes are high: if the Israelites break the covenant, they not only break their relationship with the Lord but also fail in their calling to bring his blessing to the nations. It is no wonder the discipline is so severe. The Lord would not love Israel or the nations well by treating this lightly. Indeed, it is no surprise that the Lord continues to discipline his covenant children today, just as a loving father does with his children (1 Cor. 11:27–32). The path of wisdom is to heed the discipline when it happens and to be grateful that the Lord is treating us as his child (Heb. 12:5–11).

In the new covenant, the blessings are for those who have faith in Jesus, the one who has taken on himself the curse that comes as a result of our own rebellion against the covenant (Gal. 3:8–14). These blessings are not stated in terms of the physical promises of Leviticus 26 (although the Lord does promise to meet physical needs, Matt. 6:33). They are stated in terms of being rescued by Jesus from the justice our sins deserve and being given the Spirit of God himself as a sign that we have been adopted as God's own children and will receive an eternal inheritance from him (Rom. 8:15–17; Gal. 3:13–14). In the land of that inheritance, God himself will dwell among his people, wiping every tear from our eyes and banishing all manner of death and mourning and crying and pain (Rev. 21:3–4). The curses will be no more!

C. Further laws related to the Jubilee year and to redeeming people and property (27:1–34)

Context

This chapter concludes the chiasm begun at chapter 25:

A – Laws about redemption (Lev. 25)
B – Blessings for covenant obedience and curses for covenant disobedience (Lev. 26)
A' – Laws about redemption (Lev. 27)

It also ensures that the book of Leviticus does not close with a long section of curses (26:14–39), something that may not have been desirable (Hartley, 1992: 479).

This chapter's laws identify whether a person or object given to the Lord could be redeemed, and if so, how it was done.

People or objects that could be redeemed	vv. 1–8, 11–13, 14–15, 16–19, 22–24, 27, 30–31
People or objects that could not be redeemed	vv. 9–10, 20–21, 26, 28–29, 32–33

The initial laws all deal with voluntary gifts (vv. 1–24), starting with living things the Israelites were currently vowing to the Lord (people and animals, vv. 1–13), then turning to inanimate things that they would be able to dedicate to him once they had entered the Promised Land (houses and land, vv. 14–24; see at *Meaning* for why such gifts might be made). The concluding laws deal primarily with involuntary gifts of people or objects to the Lord (vv. 26–33). In each case, items given to the Lord, or the price paid to redeem them, typically went to the tabernacle for use by the priests.

Comment

i. Laws on voluntary offerings (27:1–24)

This section begins by addressing vows (vv. 1–13; for vows, see at 7:16–18). The assumption throughout is that vows to the Lord must be honoured (see at 5:4; cf. Num. 30). Human beings are in no position to go back on their word to God (Deut. 23:21–23; Eccl. 5:4–5; Mal. 1:14).

1–8. Laws on vowing people as holy to the Lord. Israelites could use a vow to *dedicate* themselves or others *to the* LORD (v. 2), that is, to his service at the tabernacle (cf. 1 Sam. 1:11). This was obviously a *special vow* (perhaps better, 'difficult vow'), and Israelites making it could redeem those they had vowed. This was a gracious recognition that people desperate for the Lord's help might make very difficult promises ('I shall give my children to the service of the Lord's tabernacle!'). These laws provide a compassionate way for the person to fulfil the vow and yet not be bound by the full implications of the rash promise.

The prices of redemption are as follows:

Assessment price in shekels

Age	*Male*	*Female*
1 month–5 years	5	3
5–20 years	20	10
20–60 years	50	30
60+ years	15	10

Moderns may be tempted to assume that these prices are related to a person's intrinsic value, which, if true, would mean that males were of greater intrinsic value than females of the same age. But assuming that price is related to intrinsic value does not make sense of all the data. For example, it would mean that people aged between twenty and sixty were of more intrinsic value than those over sixty, which flies in the face of the biblical ethic that the elderly are to be treasured and honoured (Lev. 19:32; Job 32:4; Prov. 23:22). A better explanation is that prices are related to a person's ability to perform physical labour in an agrarian society (see also Noordtzij, 1982; 275; Balentine, 2002: 102, 208;

Tidball, 2005: 319–320). To put it in blunt modern terms: a tractor that can harvest fifty acres a day simply costs more than a tractor that can harvest thirty acres a day. Since people aged twenty to sixty are in the prime of life, their price is highest, and since males are typically physically stronger, pound for pound, than females, their price is higher (especially since females also had extra time demands in terms of bearing and raising children). In short, this chart reflects 'labour value', not intrinsic value (Kaiser, 1994: 1188).

2. The Hebrew here is difficult, but the meaning it carries is: 'If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate a person to the Lord, the one vowing will give the standard assessment for people.' The 'standard assessment' is then explained in verses 3–7. The word 'assessment' is perhaps better than *value* (NIV), since *value* is often associated with intrinsic worth, which is not the case here (see above comments).

3. For *sanctuary shekel*, see at 5:15.

8. The beginning of verse 8 is better translated: 'But if he is too poor for the standard assessment, then he (the person vowing) will be stationed before the priest, and the priest will assess him...' (cf. NASV), that is, assess what the person *can afford*. It may still have been costly, but on a relative scale. The Lord in his grace makes a way for all people, whether rich or poor, to participate fully in worshipping him (cf. Lev. 5:7–13), in this case by fulfilling their vows.

9–13. Laws on vowing animals as holy to the Lord. If the vowed animal was ceremonially clean (vv. 9–10), the Israelites could not *exchange it* (give an animal of a different type) or *substitute it* (give an animal of the same type). It would be especially tempting to substitute an animal of lesser value (*a bad one for a good one*), as did the people in Malachi's day (Mal. 1:14). It is a human tendency to promise God much when we need him, but to thank him little when he meets our needs. This law forbids such faithless ingratitude by stating that both animals *become holy* (v. 10), thus preventing the Israelites from keeping either. (As the Israelites would have known, to keep a holy animal would be to steal from the Lord, something that was to be absolutely avoided.)

If the vowed animal was *ceremonially unclean* (vv. 11–13), such as a donkey, it could not be presented as a sacrifice (it was *not acceptable as an offering to the LORD*, v. 11), but could still be given to the tabernacle for the priests' use. If the person wanted to *redeem* it (v. 13), the priest would 'assess its value' (v. 12, my trans.; NIV *judge its quality as good or bad*). The person would then add *a fifth* to the price and redeem the animal (as one might want to do, for example, if the animal was well-trained). The addition of *a fifth* was perhaps to discourage Israelites from making such vows lightly.

14–15. Laws on dedicating houses as holy to the Lord. There is a switch

here from *vowing* living things as holy to the Lord (people and animals, vv. 2–13) to *dedicating* inanimate objects as holy to the Lord (houses and land, vv. 14–24). Dedication could be done by means of a vow (Prov. 20:25) or a simple statement (perhaps an oath) (see Judg. 17:3). In either case, a solemn promise was made to the Lord, and the object had to be given to his sanctuary for the use of the priests.

In this case, the object is a *house*. The text does not specify whether it is in the countryside or city (cf. 25:29–31), so either may be in view. If the owner did not redeem the house (v. 15), it is unclear what happened to it, although it may have been handled in the same way as fields (see at vv. 16–21, 20–21).

14. *Judge its quality as good or bad.* Rather, 'assess its value', as also at verses 9–13.

15. *Dedicate.* Rather, 'dedicate as holy'; also at verses 16–19, 22, 26.

16–24. Laws on dedicating land as holy to the Lord.

16–21. Dedicating to the LORD land you owned. While many questions surround this text, a possible understanding is as follows. Since priests did not have time to care for land 'dedicated as holy' (v. 16), the owners retained control of it until the Jubilee and made a living from it. Ideally, they would redeem the land before the Jubilee, paying the price that held as of the day they had dedicated it and adding *a fifth* (v. 19). (Indeed, if they retained control of the land, they would normally have several years in which to have at least one bumper crop and pay off the entire redemption price.) If they failed to redeem it, or if they leased it during this time, they forfeited it, and it became *priestly property* (cf. at vv. 20–21).

16. It is usually thought that *fifty shekels* represents the cost for the entire fifty-year period from one Jubilee year to the next, possible support for which is found in the fact that 'the standard price of barley [in Mesopotamia] was 1 shekel per homer' (Milgrom, 2001: 2383, citing Maloney, 1974: 4–20). A *homer* was anywhere from 199 to 354 dry quarts (220 to 390 litres) (Cook, 1988: 1051). Most authorities favour the lower half of this range.

17. *Value that has been set*, that is, the fifty shekels, since the dedication starts in the Jubilee (see at v. 16).

20–21. If they *did not redeem the field* before the Jubilee, they forfeited their right to do so and it *became priestly property*. In fact, it was irrevocably *devoted to the LORD* (*ḥērem*), a term that refers to something passing permanently to the Lord (or the tabernacle; see at vv. 28–29). As such, it could not be resold to a non-priest; it was perhaps rented out and the proceeds given to the tabernacle.

They also forfeited their right to redemption if they *sold* the land – that is, leased it (see at 25:14–17) – *to someone else*. Why? Perhaps because it would be

an insult to dedicate land to the Lord, profit by ‘selling’ it to another person, and then redeem that land from the Lord with money that you did not raise a finger to earn. It is one thing to redeem land from the Lord with money that costs you sweat and blood; it is an insult to redeem it with money that costs you nothing.

22–24. *Dedicating to the* LORD land you leased. In this case, the one who *dedicates* the leased *field must pay its value on* the *day the priest determined its value* (vv. 22–23). The text does not give the reason, although many have suggested this may have been intended to keep the land free of liens and thus ‘to protect the rights of the land’s original owner to redeem the land whenever he is able to do so’ (Balentine, 2002: 210). In any case, if the person dedicating the field did not have the money to pay, he presumably gave all the proceeds of the field to the tabernacle. At the Year of Jubilee, the field would *revert* to the original owner (v. 24).

ii. A law on setting assessment values (27:25)

The language here is similar to that of verse 3 and perhaps ties the entire section together. For details on *the sanctuary shekel*, see at 5:15. A *gerah* is the smallest unit of money mentioned in the Old Testament (Cook, 1988: 1053).

iii. Laws on non-voluntary offerings and non-redeemable people or objects (27:26–33)

Verses 2–24 deal with voluntary offerings that can be dedicated to the Lord and could normally be redeemed. Verses 26–33 deal with involuntary offerings that cannot be dedicated to the Lord because they are already his (firstborn, tithes), and with people or objects that are dedicated to him but cannot be redeemed (all devoted objects).

26–27. Laws on firstborn animals. At the first Passover, the Lord commanded that all firstborn males be set aside as holy to him in order to commemorate his redemption of Israel, his firstborn son, from Egypt (Exod. 13:2, 12, 14–15). *Since the firstborn belonged to the* LORD, they were already holy, and could not be *dedicated*. In other words, Israelites could not vow to give to the Lord an animal they owned (vv. 9–13) and then pay that vow with an animal the Lord already owned himself (the firstborn). This would be like returning someone’s property to them and claiming you had given them a costly gift.

If the firstborn was a ceremonially clean animal (v. 26), it was to be sacrificed (cf. Num 18:17), and if a ceremonially *unclean animal* (v. 27), it was to be *redeemed* or *sold*, with the proceeds presumably going to the sanctuary. (It is not

entirely clear whether the law of v. 27 is meant to replace the laws of Exod. 13:13 and 34:20 or is meant simply to supplement them.)

26. *Sheep*. Rather, 'flock animal', whether sheep or goats.

28–29. Laws on devoted things. Having just addressed that which may be redeemed or sold (v. 27), these verses now describe that which may not be.

Devotes, *devoted*, *devoted to destruction*. These are translations of Hebrew words built on the same root (*ḥrm*). As the following will show, these words refer to giving someone or something irrevocably to the Lord (or to someone or something that is irrevocably given to the Lord). This happened in two different contexts (cf. Noordtzij, 1982: 278–279).

First, the community was to give something irrevocably to the Lord in the context of certain wars (Num. 21:2; Josh. 6:17; 1 Sam. 15:3; cf. Deut. 20:10–18) or when judging idolatrous Israelites (Exod. 22:20; Deut. 13:13–16). In these cases, those who were devoted to the Lord were always destroyed (Deut. 2:32–34; 3:6; 7:1–2; 13:15–16). It was as though the Lord's final judgment broke into human history, and Israel was the instrument of delivering his justice.[95] It seems clear that this communal context is the best backdrop for verse 29, a law that was 'particularly relevant to the anticipated conquest of Canaan' (Vasholz, 2007: 352). The verse cannot mean an individual Israelite could irrevocably devote children or servants to the Lord and then kill them, since this would count as murder – the spilling of innocent blood – and was strictly forbidden (Exod. 20:13).

But individual Israelites could indeed devote something irrevocably to the Lord, and this leads us to the second context (v. 28). In these instances, the individual is not simply *dedicating* a person, animal or land – in which case that which was dedicated could be *redeemed* (see at vv. 1–8) – but *devoting* them to the Lord: that is, giving the person or object permanently to the tabernacle for the priests (Num. 18:14). (In the case of *human beings* in particular, this would appear to refer to permanent service in the tabernacle; cf. at verses 1–8; for this possibility with Jephthah's daughter in Judg. 11, see Keil, 1970: 392–395.) As in the case of dedicating a person or object, the act of devoting was probably done by means of a special vow (cf. v. 2).

30–33. Laws on tithes. Although this is the first time Israelites are commanded to tithe, it comes as no surprise. To begin with, their forefather Abraham had done the same (Gen. 14:18–20), and the Israelites would have understood themselves to be following in his footsteps (cf. also Gen. 28:22). What is more, giving a tithe to the king, the gods or the priests was a well-known practice in the Ancient Near East (see overview in Averbeck, 1997: 1035–1036). Since the Lord was not only Israel's God but also their divine King (cf. 1 Sam.

8:7), it was especially appropriate for them to acknowledge and honour him in this way.[96]

Numbers 18 explains that the tithe's purpose was to meet the needs of those who served at the tabernacle. Unlike the other tribes, the tribe of Levi did not receive large tracts of land on which to grow crops (Num. 18:20). What is more, they had extra responsibilities at the tabernacle and thus not as much time to provide for their own material needs. The tithes would address these issues. The initial tithe went to the Levites (18:21–24), who in turn gave a tithe of the tithe to the priests (18:26–29). (Since the priests were far fewer in number, this arrangement would adequately supply them.) Deuteronomy 14 adds that the tithe was also intended to provide every third year for those who were needy, in this way demonstrating to them the Lord's care (14:28–29).

Israelites might *redeem their tithe from the land* if the crop was small and some of the tithe was necessary for food or planting (vv. 30–31). (Since each of the twelve tribes was bringing 10 per cent of their crop to the tabernacle, it received 120 per cent of a normal year's harvest – a 20 per cent surplus. The priests or Levites would presumably store this surplus to draw on in leaner years.) As for *herd and flock* animals (vv. 32–33), these would be routinely counted by *shepherds* (Jer. 33:12–13). The text assumes that, at a given point in the year during one of these counts, *every tenth animal* would be taken as the tithe (meaning that, if there were only nine animals on which to tithe, none would be taken, giving herds and flocks a chance to grow). It is usually assumed that this refers to animals born that year, just as the tithe of the land refers to new crops from that year. (In further support of which it may be noted that taking 10 per cent of a flock or herd every year might reduce it too drastically; cf. Hartley, 1992: 485.) Naturally, no *substitutions* were allowed (cf. at vv. 9–13).

iv. Conclusion (27:34)

The phrase 'on Mount Sinai' (ESV) takes us back to 25:1 and 26:46, and ties Leviticus 25 – 27 together. The *commands* certainly include those of Leviticus 27, although since this is the concluding verse in the book, the *commands* of the book as a whole may well be in view.

Meaning

The underlying assumption of this chapter is straightforward: commitments to the Lord must be honoured. This was certainly true of commitments the Israelites chose to make, such as vows (vv. 1–13) or dedications (vv. 14–24). These were often fulfilled in response to the Lord answering a prayer request

(see at 7:16–18) or providing a blessing in some way (cf. 2 Sam. 8:11–12). Failure to honour them was to show deep ingratitude to the Lord. Indeed, it was even more than that: to break a promise to the King of the universe as though it did not matter was to show him the greatest disrespect. It is no wonder the Scriptures warn, 'It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfil it' (Eccl. 5:5). Jesus applies this principle to discipleship in general, warning those who commit their lives to him to recognize that it should not be done lightly and, in fact, must be done wholeheartedly; there is no turning back (Luke 9:61–62; 14:25–33). As for vows more generally, early Christians did take them (Acts 18:18; 21:22–24), although they are nowhere encouraged to do so (cf. Deut. 23:22; Eccl. 5:1–7) and were never to make them in order to get out of other biblical responsibilities (cf. Matt. 15:3–9).

In addition to voluntary commitments, the Israelites were also to keep commitments the Lord commanded them to make, such as the tithe (vv. 30–33). Presenting tithes was a way for the Israelites to acknowledge that the Lord was their King and had provided for their material needs. It was also a way for them to provide for those who led the people in worship and for those who were needy (see at vv. 30–33; cf. Deut. 26:10). Since Christians are no longer under the Sinai covenant, the command to tithe does not automatically apply as stated here.[97] Like other Old Testament laws, however, the underlying principles continue: Christians are to return material blessings to those who lead them in the Lord's ways (1 Cor. 9:6–18), and to the needy (Rom. 15:25–28; 2 Cor. 8:1–15; Eph. 4:28). We are to do this in response to God's marvellous grace to us in Jesus, a gift so rich and free it causes us to give liberally of our material possessions as an act of grateful worship to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:9). Poor Christians may do this by giving less than 10 per cent (since any gift will be costly); wealthy Christians may give 10 per cent and still not be doing this (since 10 per cent is not costly at all). David once said, 'I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing' (2 Sam. 24:24). This describes well the heart of those who are so overwhelmed by God's goodness and greatness that they joyfully give him gifts that are costly to them.

It may finally be noted that Leviticus 27 is tied to Leviticus 25 – 26 (see *Context*). These chapters form a natural transition to the book of Numbers, in which Israel departs Sinai and marches towards the Promised Land (Num. 10:11–12). Each chapter deals with issues that concern how Israel must live there, whether observing Sabbath or Jubilee years (ch. 25), acting obediently in general (ch. 26), or keeping various laws related to life there (27:14–24, 30–31). Clearly, the Israelites are to be in that land very soon, and these chapters whet our appetite for the fulfilment of that long-awaited covenant promise. Indeed, the

covenant law has now been given, and the Israelites may march boldly into Canaan – provided, of course, that they maintain faith in their Redeemer and carry out his covenant mission of filling the earth with his righteous and holy kingdom (Exod. 19:4–6). The first generation of Israel failed in these things (Num. 10 – 25), while the second generation largely succeeded (Num. 26 – Josh.; cf. Judg. 2:7). The question now remains: Which generation will we follow?

If we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we have every assurance that we will extend his kingdom in this earth, and will one day enter into the long-awaited promised land of his rest. We have this assurance because he will help us all along the way. He is our faithful High Priest, and because of his work on our behalf, we can ‘approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need’ (Heb. 4:16).

This is true. Glory! Amen.

APPENDIX 1: SOWING SEASON, BASED ON MODERN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES IN ISRAEL[98]

	Oct	*Nov*	*Dec*	*Jan*	*Feb*	*Mar*
Wheat		x	x			
Barley		x	x			
Oats		x	x			
Flax			x			

APPENDIX 2: HARVESTING AND INGATHERING, BASED ON MODERN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES IN ISRAEL[99]

	Mar	*Apr*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*Aug*	*Sept*	*Oct*	*Nov*
Wheat			x						
Barley		x							
Oats			x						
Flax					x				
Grapes				x	x	x	x		
Figs						x	x		
Pomegranates						x	x		
Olives							x	x	x

1. While affirming the presence of editorial work sometimes makes conservative scholars nervous, it need not. The Lord can inspire those who edit material as he does those who first write it, as the Gospel of Luke so well attests (Luke 1:1–4). See further Grisanti (2001: 577–598).

2. Questions include: If editorial work is present, is it limited to phrases that introduce the Lord's speeches to Moses ('And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying...')? Does it also include the order in which the speeches are grouped and reported in Leviticus (cf. the way in which the Gospel writers were responsible for the order in which they reported and grouped the speeches of Jesus)?

3. Did they come from a much later time or was the editor someone like Joshua, writing down Moses' words, as did Baruch for Jeremiah (Jer. 36; the possibility is raised by Averbeck, 2012: 158)?

4. For the following, see Alexander, 2012: 7–31, esp. 16–18.

5. Increasingly, critical scholars now argue that H is later than P and should be dated to pre-exilic times (Lyons, 2010: 29, n. 57). Many also argue that it is better to view H as an original composition by the author of Leviticus, or as a redactional (edited) layer, but not as a pre-existing source that was added to P (see overview in Lyons, 2010: 19–29).

6. The above examples are described as plausible indicators of the Late Bronze Age, and are not definite proof, for two reasons. First, an alternate explanation of some of the data is possible. For example, it could be argued that H has both blessings and curses, because it is modelled on the D source (cf. Deut. 27 – 28; this of course leads to another question: How is it that the D source, traditionally held to come from the seventh century BC, has these second-millennium BC characteristics?). Second, it is entirely possible that further archaeological discoveries will demonstrate that certain realities – such as the shape of the tabernacle and Israel's camp – are not unique to the Late Bronze Age. At present, however, the above indicators seem best explained as evidence that these texts come from the Late Bronze Age.

7. Those advocating the DH often date the sources by finding a historical time period that would fit with the social or cultural ideas or realities of the source. This is not wrong in and of itself, but, in practice, it frequently fails to take into account the simple fact that there are often many different points in history that

would fit well with the data. Unless controls are used (see above indicators for P and H), the choice of one date over another becomes very subjective (see Sommer, 2011: 85–108, esp. 94–101).

8. Debate surrounds what qualifies a sin for this middle category. One plausible approach suggests that certain sins were considered automatic signs of apostasy and rebellion (e.g. idolatry), while others might have been granted as being due more to human weakness rather than to apostate intent. See further Sklar (2012: 480 and n. 33).

9. See further Jenson (1992: 89–209). It is important, however, not to go beyond what the text allows. For example, it is not uncommon for commentators to describe as 'unclean' either the camp or the land outside the camp or the land outside Israel (e.g. Tidball, 2005: 27), although Leviticus itself nowhere teaches this.

10. Wright (1994: 139).

11. Sklar (2005: 60).

12. For how this approach applies to the law forbidding wearing a garment of mixed materials, see at 19:19.

13. For a more detailed discussion of how Old Testament laws apply today, see Wright (2004: 314–324), esp. 321–324 (his discussion complements the above; see also pp. 403–408 for questions related to Israel as a theocratic nation). For a helpful summary of various approaches to this question, see Tidball (2005: 28–31). A fifth category could be added to the above: laws that are not repeated in the NT because they are assumed, e.g. the command not to use the Lord's name in vain (Exod. 20:7). We must be careful to avoid making this a 'catch-all' category, however, and reserve it for instances in which the value(s) behind the law is so strongly reiterated elsewhere in the NT that it makes sense to conclude that the law itself would have been assumed (in the case of Exod. 20:7, the values behind the law include not lying and not defaming the Lord, for which see Col. 3:9; Rom. 2:24).

14. Note also that the above demonstrates that there are in fact valid and discernible guidelines for determining whether or not a particular law is still in force. While Christians have not always been consistent in their application of such guidelines, it would be incorrect to argue, for example, that, because

Christians do not think laws concerning unclean foods are still in force, they are being hypocritical in thinking that laws prohibiting certain sexual practices are still in force (e.g. Lev. 18:22). Actually, the reason why Christians do not think food laws are still in force is because Jesus has set aside laws dealing with ritual purity and impurity (category 3 above, p. 59), whereas the reason why they think that laws such as Lev. 18:22 are in force is because these laws are best read against the backdrop of creation and the sexual ethic laid down there (Gen. 1:27–28; 2:22–24), an ethic repeated in the New Testament by Jesus (Matt. 19:4–5), along with a repetition of the prohibition itself (1 Cor. 6:9), thus placing such laws into category 1 above.

15. 'Despite the frequent association of retribution with vengeance and harsh penalties, retribution, in its simplest sense, refers to the idea that "[w]rongdoers should be...punished...because they deserve it" ' (Pritikin, 2006: 740; the citation is from Garvey, 1999: 1835–1836). In this regard, the same law can emphasize both 'retribution' and 'restoration' (cf. Deut. 25:1–3 with Wright's descriptions of retribution and restoration); it is not simply an 'either-or' proposition.

16. For varied perspectives on the question of the legitimacy of capital punishment today, see Owens (2004).

17. Wright (1994: 149).

18. Tidball (2005: 289) notes that capital punishment in the case of murder actually emphasizes 'the sacredness of life. No-one could take a life without surrendering his own...'

19. See p. 32.

20. Some critical scholars would see 11:43–45 as an addition by the H source (Milgrom, 1991: 695–697). Even if this is assumed to be correct, it would only show that the final editor wanted the book to be read as a cohesive whole.

21. Scholars routinely divide Lev. 1 – 16 into three or four major sections, without giving an overarching title to the chapters as a whole (Budd, 1996: 'Contents'; Milgrom, 2001: vii; Balentine, 2002: xi–xiii; Bailey, 2005: 'Contents'). As for 17 – 27, it is often described as the 'Holiness Code' or 'Holiness Source' (Milgrom, 2001: vii; Balentine, 2002: xiii; Bailey, 2005: 'Contents'), but this is so general as to be of very little value (and it gives the misleading impression that holiness is not a concern in 1 – 16).

22. For further description of the tent of meeting, see Averbeck, 2003: 807–827. For the historical plausibility of such a tent at this point in history, see Sarna (1987: 196–200) and Kitchen (2003: 275–283).

23. For the second possibility, see GKC §144d-g; JM §155b [esp. n. 2], d-e.

24. A crop is a sac at the lower end of the neck before the oesophagus joins the stomach. Its purpose is to store food for later digestion, or for regurgitation for the bird's young. Alternatively, one could translate with 'crissum', that is, 'the area around the cloacal (anal) opening, lying beneath the bird's tail', from which the 'filth' and 'excrement' of a bird come. It was to be removed 'along with' – or perhaps 'by' – its feathers, that is, by the feathers around this area (Milgrom, 1991: 170).

25. There are two different Hebrew words for *firstfruits* in vv. 12 and 14. There could be a slight difference between them: the word in v. 12 (*rē'šît*) could refer to the things that are first *processed* (such as the leavened bread and fruit honey of v. 11), while the word in v. 14 (*bikkûrîm*) could refer to the things that are first *ripe* (Milgrom, 1991: 190–191).

26. Hepatoscopy – the use of the liver in divination – was practised in the Ancient Near East, leading some to suggest that the lobe of the liver was burned up in order to prevent such divination in Israel (Milgrom, 1991: 208). While this is not implausible, the text simply links the burning of the lobe to the fact that it was considered as part of the fat.

27. This understanding of the offering helps in determining what to call it. The Hebrew term is *šĕlāmîm*, which has been translated by ancient and modern versions in many different ways: 'salvation offering', 'well-being offering', 'peace offering', etc. This variety is due to the fact that the word's Hebrew root (*šlm*) is used to communicate a wide range of ideas, such as peace, completeness, safety, health, etc. By itself, the root does not tell us which of these ideas is correct in this context. The offering's function, however, makes clear that a name should be used that communicates that this offering was a time for the people of Israel to celebrate and reaffirm their covenant relationship with the Lord and with one another. Translations such as 'communion offering' (cf. NJB) or *fellowship offering* (NIV) do a good job of conveying this relational aspect (although perhaps 'covenant communion offering' or 'covenant fellowship offering' would be even better).

28. The animals required in Lev. 4 perhaps correspond symbolically to the offeror's position in Israelite society: the bull would have been the Israelites' most powerful domesticated animal (and thus offered by their chief leader, the high priest), a male goat the most powerful flock animal (and thus offered by the Israelites' leaders), and a female goat or sheep the most plentiful flock animal (and thus offered by the everyday citizen, the 'flock' of Israel; cf. Num. 27:16–17).

29. The sins of Lev. 4 are sometimes described as sins of 'commission' (i.e. committing a forbidden action, such as eating an offering while impure), while the sins of Lev. 5:1–4 are sometimes described as sins of 'omission' (i.e. failing to do required actions, such as purifying oneself from ritual impurity) (cf. Levine, 1989: 25). But it is probably unwise to make too great a distinction between the two, since the difference is often due to the commandment's form, not to the sin itself. For example, working on the Sabbath could be described as a sin of commission, since one committed a forbidden act (cf. Deut. 5:14: 'Do no work on the Sabbath'), or it could be described as a sin of omission, since one failed to do a required action (cf. Exod. 23:12: 'Rest on the Sabbath'). The sin is the same in either case.

30. The word in question here (*'ašmâ*) is built on the root *'šm*. Words built on this root are frequently used to describe guilt and its consequences: 'Therefore a curse *consumes the earth*; its people must *suffer for their guilt* [*'šm*]' (Isa. 24:6a, my trans.; see also Hos. 10:2; 13:16; see full discussion in Sklar, 2005: 24–41, esp. 39–41).

31. Some translations suggest that the sin itself is hidden (i.e. *the matter*, NIV, NRSV), but it is better to understand that a material fact is hidden (i.e. 'a matter'; so LXX; see BDB 183.6; Kiuchi, 2003: 6).

32. It is better to translate the relevant portions of v. 3 as follows: '...or when he touches human uncleanness...and, though he had known about it, it was hidden from him [i.e. he forgot it], and he suffers guilt's consequences...' (cf. TNK; see also Levine, 1989: 27–28).

33. The Hebrew versification differs here, with 6:1–7 (English) corresponding to 5:20–26 (Hebrew). The English versification is followed below, although the Hebrew versification more naturally keeps all the reparation offering laws in one chapter (5:14–26).

34. Verse 16a is more literally translated: ‘And he must make restitution for that in which he sinned from the holy thing’ (i.e. ‘in which he sinned by taking from the holy thing’; see discussion of v. 15).

35. This law assumes that sin can cause suffering (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30), not that all suffering is due to sin (cf. Job 1). In this case, if the suffering ended after the sacrifice was made, the sinner would know that it had been because of sin and the sin had now been atoned for. If the suffering did not end, the sinner was at least assured that the suffering was not due to sin. Either way, the sinner’s conscience would now be clear.

36. In contrast to 5:4, where the Lord’s name was inadvertently profaned, sinners in this instance were fully aware of their wrong. Perhaps for this reason the more costly reparation offering was required (not the less costly purification offering; cf. 5:4–6). For sacrificial atonement for intentional sin, see Introduction, pp. 43–44.

37. The NIV of v. 6a is awkward. The Hebrew of this verse is difficult, but a better sense is as follows: ‘And he shall bring to the priest his reparation offering to the Lord: a ram...’ (cf. RSV, NASV).

38. The Hebrew versification differs here, with 6:8–30 (English) corresponding to 6:1–23 (Hebrew).

39. The word translated as ‘law’ (*tôrâ*) is related to a verb that means ‘to teach’ or ‘instruct’ (cf. 10:11). It is often translated as ‘law’ (RSV, NASV, ESV, etc.), since such instruction is typically obligatory in these contexts. NIV’s *regulations* may not be strong enough.

40. The Hebrew could read *will become holy* (NIV), but since the context focuses on the holiness necessary for those handling and eating the sacred gifts, the translation *must be holy* is more appropriate.

41. It must be remembered that washing was done when someone or something was moving from a pure state to a holy state (Lev. 16:4), *as well as* when moving from a holy state to a pure state (Lev. 16:24). Anthropologists call this a ‘rite of passage’, i.e. a rite in which someone or something moves from one state to another. In this case, washing the garment moved it from its holy state into its original pure state. For ritual states, see Introduction, pp. 44–49.

42. Naturally, leavened bread (v. 13) could not be burned on the altar (2:11); instead, it was divided between priest (v. 14) and offeror(s).

43. The text ensures that offerors are credited with giving the offering by making clear that they must bring it to the priest *with their own hands* (v. 30). Cf. the function of the hand-leaning rite at 1:4.

44. For an in-depth discussion, see Milgrom, 1991: 462–469.

45. It is possible that Aaron's sons were not washed until the events of v. 13; otherwise, they would be standing unclothed for quite some time (Milgrom, 1991: 513). If this is the case, v. 6 mentions them here because at this time they drew near with Aaron in order to be washed.

46. V. 27b is better translated: 'and he [Moses] presented them as a wave offering before the Lord' (NASV; cf. ESV, NRSV, etc.). The word 'them' refers to the objects the priests are holding (cf. v. 28).

47. It is not clear why the *wave offering* of v. 21 consists of the *breasts* of both animals but only one *right thigh*. The reason might be related to the amount of meat involved. Since the right thigh was given to the officiating priest (in this case Aaron) (7:32), and since one of the animals was very large (an ox), the meat of two right thighs may simply have been too much for him and his family, especially if they had to eat it within a short amount of time (cf. 7:15–16). This was not an issue when it came to the breasts, since these were eaten by the much larger group of all the priests and their families (7:31).

48. The word *fire* here is used by way of metonymy to refer to the fire and the incense together.

49. My translation.

50. The word translated *sanctuary* (NIV) is lit. 'the holy place' (*haqqōdeš*), and can be used, as here, to refer to the *Most Holy Place* where the ark was kept (so also in 16:2, which refers back to this event).

51. The *hyrax* and the 'hare' do not literally chew the cud. Like herd and flock animals, however, they chew their food thoroughly, and their eating habits were therefore described in the same way. This is known as 'phenomenological' language: i.e. language that describes something in terms of the way it appears.

Modern examples include ‘sunrise’ and ‘sunset’. Technically, the sun does not ‘rise’ or ‘set’; it simply appears to do so, and we describe it as such.

52. The Hebrew term (‘*ôp*) can refer specifically to *birds* (NIV) or more generally to ‘flying creatures’ (BDB). Since these verses include insects (v. 20) and bats (v. 19), the latter is more appropriate.

53. Since insects have six feet (not four), and since the Israelites ate certain insects (and thus would have known how many legs they had), it is likely that the phrase *to walk on all fours* is simply a general expression for ‘walking’.

54. If a *carcass* fell on *seed* that was wet, however, that *seed* became impure (v. 38), no doubt because water could convey impurity from the carcass to the seed (v. 34). Perhaps this verse refers only to planted seed that has been watered and is directly underneath the carcass.

55. Once the Israelites had arrived in Canaan, however, they were not allowed to eat such animals (Deut. 14:21), perhaps to make a clear distinction between Israelites and non-Israelites (cf. Deut. 14:21b; see further at 17:15–16).

56. See Milgrom (1991: 763–765) for examples related to birth and menstruation in particular.

57. It may be noted that women lose blood not only during the birth, but for several weeks afterwards, which might explain the extended amount of time required for purification.

58. While female circumcision is performed in different ways, Kunhiyop (2008: 296) notes that all forms can ‘inhibit or terminate sexual feelings during intercourse and can result in infection to the wound, chronic pelvic infections, chronic urinary infections, haemorrhage and shock...Female circumcision also causes difficulties during childbirth, increasing the risks to both the mother and the baby.’

59. While moderns may be tempted to think that pre-moderns, such as the ancient Israelites, would have looked at the differing amounts of time for purification as a negative commentary on the female sex, the example of Rabbi Ishmael – also a pre-modern – shows that this is not a safe assumption to make.

60. When the rite is carried out, the purification offering occurs first (cf. 8:14

and 8:18; 9:8 and 9:12, etc.); when the text simply lists the offerings, however, it sometimes lists the burnt offering first (as in v. 6; cf. Num. 6:14 with 6:16).

61. A chronic disease that damages the skin and peripheral nervous system, resulting in loss of feeling and ultimately ulceration, particularly in the cooler areas of the body (eyes, nose, hands, feet).

62. Earlier versions translated *ṣāra'at* with 'leprosy' after consulting the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament), which uses the term *lepra*. At the time of the Septuagint, however, *lepra* did not refer to modern-day leprosy, but to various other skin diseases. See Hulse, 1975: 88–89.

63. NIV has *swelling* for 'raised lesion', but since the term can refer to the scar of a burn (v. 28), a more generic term is appropriate (so also in 13:10, 19, 28, 43; 14:56). NIV also has *shiny spot* for 'discolouration', but since it can be dull or faded (vv. 6, 39), a term such as 'discolouration' (TNK) or simply 'spot' (RSV) is more accurate (so also in 13:4, 19, 23–26, 28, 38, 39; 14:56).

64. The Hebrew for 'spring water' is literally 'living water' (not because it is alive, but because water from a spring is moving). Due to its association with the word 'living', this type of water may have been considered especially purifying. Indeed, it is only called for in the context of major impurities (Lev. 14:5–6, 50–52; 15:13; Num. 19:17).

65. Since the phrase *and make atonement...before the LORD* comes at the end of a series of rites to indicate the effect of those rites taken together (4:20, 26; 5:6, etc.), it is best to understand v. 18b as a summary of the effect of all the atoning rites in vv. 12–18.

66. The scenarios assume that the man remained in the camp. Once Israel had gathered in military array to go into Canaan (Num. 1 – 4), the man would be quarantined outside the camp (Num. 5:2), perhaps because the camp had an extra level of purity when in military mode (cf. Deut. 23:9–14).

67. Like many English versions, the NIV uses the word 'LORD' in small caps to represent the divine name YHWH.

68. The word translated *purification offering* is singular, but clearly refers to the bull and the goat, as v. 27 makes clear. Gane (2004: 275) notes that the singular can be used to refer to more than one sacrifice (cf. Num. 28:11, 19).

69. If the latter, then once the Israelites were settled in the land, this stipulation was relaxed (Deut. 12:15), perhaps because the main sanctuary would often be too far away for Israelites to visit every time they wanted to eat meat. Even then, however, animals slaughtered at the gate could not be sacrifices, because sacrifices could be presented only at the main sanctuary (Deut. 12:5–8, 11–14).

70. The NIV has: *it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life* (although cf. margin). The debate concerns the translation of the Hebrew phrase *kipper bĕ*, where *kipper* means *to make atonement* and *bĕ* can mean either 'by means of ' (cf. RSV, NASV) or *for* (NIV). A majority of scholars favour 'makes atonement by means of ' (Hartley, 1992: 261; Milgrom, 1991: 706; Elliger, 1966: 218). This is because the phrase *kipper bĕ* frequently has this meaning (Gen. 32:20; Exod. 29:33; Lev. 5:16; 7:7; 19:22; Num. 5:8; 35:33; 1 Sam. 3:14; Prov. 16:6; Isa. 27:9), but nowhere else does it have the meaning *to make atonement for*. In either case, all translations agree that atonement takes place because of the animal's lifeblood.

71. Deut. 14:21 expands the prohibition (Israelites may no longer eat animals that die naturally). It does not offer a reason, although it does link the prohibition to the need for the Israelites to distinguish themselves from other nations in terms of holiness. (Perhaps Deut., coming after the rebellion of Num. 14, seeks to stress the importance of holiness and therefore has stricter requirements.) In any case, it agrees with the underlying principle that eating such meat is associated with ritual impurity and that ritual impurity must always be dealt with properly by those who belong to the Lord of holiness.

72. This led to the prohibition against eating meat red with blood (see at vv. 10, 12). Like laws on ritual purity, this prohibition seems to be an instance of accommodation: the Lord expressing his values in a way that made sense to the ancient Israelites (see Introduction, pp. 55–57). The same prohibition would not necessarily apply in cultures that do not equate blood with life as the Israelites did. Indeed, even in the early church the reason to avoid eating blood was not that it was wrong per se, but that Gentile Christians needed to avoid offending Jewish Christians (Acts 15:19–21; see Bruce, 1988: 311). As noted above, however, the principle of valuing life still applies. For example, Christians should care very much that their food comes from animals that have been cared for humanely.

73. For a plausible explanation of Paul's use of this text, see Schreiner (1998:

555–556) on Rom. 10:5 and Silva (1990: 163–166) on Gal. 3:12. Their basic argument is: a) by NT times, some Jews had begun to cite Lev. 18:5 as proof that obedience to the law could earn eternal life; b) also by this time, one way to critique others was to cite their proof verse and then to put beside it other verses which made clear why their interpretation of the proof verse was incorrect; c) Paul takes this approach with Lev. 18:5, placing beside it other OT verses to show why it was incorrect to hold that Lev. 18:5 taught that obedience to the law could earn eternal life (cf. Rom. 10:5 with 10:6–8, and Gal. 3:12 with 3:10–11).

74. For the possibility of incestuous practices in Egypt, see Murray (1927: 45–46) and Černy (1954). As for Canaan, the Hittites, who were among Canaan's inhabitants (Exod. 3:8), had laws forbidding sexual relations between mother and son, father and daughter (HL §189; cf. Lev. 18:7 and at vv. 10, 15, 17), and, under certain conditions, stepmother and son (HL §190; cf. Lev. 18:8), brother and sister-in-law (HL §195; cf. Lev. 18:16), and a man with a woman and her mother (HL §191; cf. Lev. 18:17). But these laws are by no means as comprehensive as those of Lev. 18, which could imply that the practices in Canaan were much looser than was appropriate for the Lord's holy people. The laws of Lev. 18 therefore serve to draw clear boundary lines to guide the Lord's people in appropriate sexual relations.

75. Since sexual relations between nephew and aunt were prohibited, sexual relations between niece and uncle may also have been prohibited.

76. See at v. 14 for the absence of the maternal uncle's wife.

77. V. 9 might have a half-sister in view, although this would automatically imply a full sister as well.

78. Implied from vv. 6, 10, 15, 17 (see comments there, esp. at v. 10; cf. Lev. 21:2).

79. For further discussion on the ethical stance of the Old Testament towards polygamy, see Hugenberger, 1998: 106–122. For how one African church has dealt with this issue pastorally, see Gitari, 1984: 3–10.

80. For a brief further discussion of biblical texts addressing homosexual practice and its ethics, see Hays, 1996: 379–406. The fullest treatment remains that of Gagnon, 2001.

81. Instead of ‘I who make *you* holy’ (v. 8), many ancient versions have ‘I who make *them* [the priests] holy’ (LXX, Sam, 11QpaleoLev), which is only one letter different in the Hebrew and fits the context better: ‘O Israelites, help the priests to maintain holiness because I have set them apart to live in a holy manner’ (cf. at 22:9).

82. It may be further noted that most of the Israelites, including most of the Levites, were not able to serve as priests, but this was not a sign that they were somehow less loved or less worthy of honour and esteem as those made in the Lord’s image.

83. The same Hebrew root is used in Ps. 51:17 to refer to a ‘broken’ heart, leading Ross (2002: 395, n. 2) to note: ‘...the only damaged or broken sacrifice that people can offer to God is themselves (Ps. 51:17...)’. To come to God with a heart that is broken with grief over our sin is not an offence to him; it is the very type of heart he requires, and now, through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, will cleanse and heal (1 John 1:7, 9–10).

84. Known as ‘gelding’, often done for ‘better quality meat, for manageable beasts of burden, and for the production of wool (Wapnish and Hesse, 1991: 34–35)’ (Milgrom, 2000: 1880).

85. Milgrom (2001: 1960) surveys and rejects various attempts to derive the Sabbath from other Ancient Near Eastern practices, concluding, ‘In sum, no other known culture has anything quite like the sabbath.’

86. For various views on how Christians are to relate to the Sabbath today, see Donato, 2011.

87. How does seven weeks equal fifty days? Perhaps simply by counting the very first day as day one, something known as ‘inclusive reckoning’. For example, from Sunday to Sunday can count as one week (‘I’ll meet you a week from Sunday’) and also as eight days if the first Sunday is counted as well as the last. So too here: if the first ‘day after the Sabbath’ is counted as well as the last, seven weeks would be fifty days.

88. NIV has *be held responsible*, which is too weak; see at 5:1.

89. For varied perspectives on the question of the legitimacy of capital punishment today, see Owens (2004).

90. Some have argued that the fiftieth year overlapped with the forty-ninth (Hartley, 1992: 434–436; Kleinig, 2003: 538), although the majority believes these were two separate years (Kawashima, 2003: 117–120; Gane, 2004: 432–435). The parallel with 23:15–16 supports the majority view; there, the fiftieth day – which also comes after seven Sabbaths (23:16; cf. 25:8) – is clearly distinct from the forty-ninth day (Bergsma, 2005: 122).

91. Naturally, these verses are not meant to describe the only way in which Israelites are to be generous to one another. Other passages speak about the importance of helping the poor with gifts (not just loans, Lev. 19:9–10; Deut. 14:29; 16:10–11), a practice the early Christians were particularly good at (Acts 2:42–47; 4:34–37; Rom. 15:25–27).

92. For fuller discussions, see esp. Wright, 2004: 333–337; Goldingay, 2009: 458–475; Copan, 2011: 124–157.

93. For suggestions on how to do so, Wright (2004: 207–209) recommends several resources. For the economic angle, see Mason (1987) and Mott (1987). For the social angle, see Schluter and Clements (1986) and Ucko (1997). More generally, see Tidball, 2005: 300–304.

94. For a good critique of the prosperity gospel, see Adeleye, 2011. More briefly, see section II.E.5 of the 'The Cape Town Commitment' (2011) by The Lausanne Movement.

95. For further reading on this issue, see Cowles (2003: 63–204, esp. 161–204). Gane (2004: 772) helpfully summarizes much of the discussion there by noting that 'during a certain phase of history [God] *uniquely* delegated *a carefully restricted part* of his destructive work to his chosen nation of ancient Israel, *which he tightly controlled and held accountable under theocratic rule*.' As he also states (2004: 773), 'the fact that the Lord threatened to treat unfaithful Israelites like Canaanites (Lev. 18:28; Num. 33:55–56...) shows that his vendetta was against wickedness, not ethnicity.' Lastly, it is important to note the new dimension added by the cross, where God takes his own final judgment on himself in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:8), demonstrating that his real desire is not to judge the world for its sin, but to rescue the world from it (John 3:16–17).

96. Laws on the tithe are found in several pentateuchal passages (Num. 18:21–32; Deut. 12:6, 10–19; 14:22–29; 26:12–15). As Averbeck (1997: 1038–1050)

states, these laws are sometimes understood to be in tension (some modern scholars), or as describing three different tithes (some early Jewish interpreters), but are best understood as complementary descriptions of a single tithe.

97. In Matt. 23:23 and Luke 11:42, Jesus is speaking to people under the old covenant (not the new), and his point is that they must keep all of it, not pick and choose which parts to keep. See further Averbeck (1997: 1053–1054).

98. See Borowski, 1987: 34.

99. See Borowski, 1987: 37.