

# Leviticus: A Chapter-by-Chapter Study

## Introduction

Leviticus is the third book in the Pentateuch, all written by Moses. The Exodus from Egypt is believed to have occurred in 1446 BC, so the Pentateuch would be finished before the death of Moses, around 1406 BC. The word “Leviticus” means “concerning the Levites” from the Greek Septuagint. The original Hebrew name is translated as “And He called” which are the first words of chapter 1.

The purpose of this book is to describe in detail the necessary steps to establish an earthly kingdom for God. This book is often referred to as a “manual of holiness” that man must follow in order to come before God. As such, the book of Leviticus is often found to be dry by many readers’ standards and even considered an unnecessary inclusion by modern Christians. But a practical understanding of Leviticus and the Old Covenant help bring clarity to the sacrifice of Christ and the freedom Christians have to come to God openly and just as we are. This book, as well as the rest of the Old Testament also help identify the Messiah to the Jews so they would know Him when they see Him.

## Chapter 1

### V1-4

There is little in the way of an introduction of the book of Leviticus. This is usually attributed to this book picking up immediately where Exodus left off. In verse 1, God called to Moses from the tabernacle, which the last 5 chapters of Exodus spent building and completing. Now that the tabernacle is complete, God is giving Moses further instructions on how the Jews are to approach God with reverence.

The concept of sacrifice was nothing new to the Jews or the rest of the world. Even Genesis records sacrifices going as far back as Adam. What God is establishing here are His parameters for sacrifice, leaving no room for human misinterpretation.

Verse 2 says that an animal sacrifice is to come from a herd or flock. This means an animal that is owned by a person, not a wild animal or one simply discovered along the way to the temple. Animals were a symbol of wealth in this period. A sacrifice was supposed to be just that: giving up something you have.

A burnt offering was to be a male animal without blemish. Male animals were considered more valuable during the time of Moses so this would be a bigger sacrifice. The term “without blemish” is not without some debate on meaning. This could simply mean a healthy male, or it could also mean an unspotted, unmarked, perfect specimen of a male. The latter is usually considered more accurate, especially considering that Jesus Christ was free from sin (blemish) and that He was a perfect (unblemished) sacrifice.

Another aspect of this sacrifice was that it was to be made of free will. The sacrifice was not to be a tax or something that was forced upon people by the priests. The Jews had to choose to sacrifice to God, just as we must choose to accept the salvation of Jesus. This ritual of sacrifice includes the “transference of guilt” making the sacrifice more personal. The person had to lay their hands on the animal before it was killed. The Hebrew term used here implies that one did not simply pat the animal on the head. The person held on to or even leaned against the animal before it was killed.

### **V5-9**

Verse 5 indicates that the person offering the sacrifice is also the one that must kill the animal, in this case a bull. The priests could assist as necessary, but the one who was “transferring the guilt” must also be the one to administer death. Once the animal is killed, the priests would then take over the procedure. The priests would skin the animal, cut it into pieces and those pieces placed in a particular order on the altar for burning.

### **V10-13**

This passage indicates the procedure for offering a sheep or goat as a burnt offering. The procedure is the same for a bull, but the sheep or goat is not skinned like a bull would be.

### **V14-17**

This is the sacrificial procedure for a dove or pigeon. Instead of skinning and cutting the animal to pieces, the priest would use his fingernail to open the birds’ neck and drain the blood. There is some debate over whether the priest actually separated the head of the bird from its body. Most scholars believe the head remained attached and the neck was opened to allow the flow of blood. The bird would then be squeezed against the east side of the altar, the side away from the temple, to pump the remaining blood out of the body.

## **Chapter 2**

### **V1-3**

Where chapter 1 consists of animal sacrifices, chapter 2 discusses a grain offering.

*What is the purpose of a grain offering as opposed to an animal sacrifice?*

The scholar Matthew Poole offered three convincing reasons for the grain offering. First, animals typically belonged to the middle-class and above in social circles. The poor often could not afford animals or even land to keep them on. Yet, grain could be grown, and bread could be baked by even the poorest of people. Second, growing and baking (v4-10) required time. In lieu of money (animals), a person could offer their time to God with a grain offering. And third, a grain offering was made not only to God, but to the priests, as well. This was a form of payment for the livelihood of the priests.

The term “fine flour” used here for the grain offering would involve a lot of time and effort on the part of the provider. Fine flour usually meant that all impurities had been sifted and purged during the grinding process. Adding oil and frankincense turned this flour into a luxury item, the best-of-the-best flour.

The closing of this section is one of the more interesting statements and is speculated upon regularly. The grain sacrifice is said to be a sacrifice of gratitude, not a sin-offering like an animal sacrifice. This is the most pleasing sacrifice to God because it doesn’t come with any strings attached. There is no request for forgiveness of sin, simply an offering of gratitude. But this does make one wonder if the poor that owned no animals were ever forgiven for their sins in this manner.

### **V4-10**

The first three verses discuss presenting flour in its processed form as an offering. These verses discuss a grain offering in the form of baked bread. There are three different types of baked breads presented here. First is the grain offering baked in the oven as wafers. Second is bread baked in a pan. These would

probably be similar to “bread knots” as they would be broken into pieces. The third option is bread baked in a covered pan. Most scholars believe this would indicate a type of fried bread, almost like a doughnut. Notice that no yeast (leaven) is to be used in this bread. It is not made clear here, but Leviticus 2:11 gives an explicit command to not use yeast.

*Why would yeast be considered bad?*

Although there is nothing wrong with yeast in and of itself, yeast is a fungus or mold that changes the bread from its original form. This would be seen as an impurity that cannot be removed. Once yeast is added to flour and kneaded into the dough, it is impossible to take out. The symbolism here is that of sin. Once sin enters us, it cannot be removed. This would indicate that there is no redemption for us. Only the baker (the Creator) can decide to keep the bread (His creation) or dispose of it. Fortunately, our Creator wants to keep us.

### **V11-13**

Verse 11 states that no yeast or honey shall be used in grain offerings.

*Why would honey not be allowed?*

Just as yeast would change the consistency of bread and even cause the bread to taste sour, honey would cause the bread to taste sweet. But both of these were additives and took away the purity of the flour.

Another reason why honey may not have been used would be because many pagan rituals involved honey. God wanted His people to be separated from the rest of the world.

Verse 12 instituted the offering of first fruits. Leviticus 2:14-16 goes into more detail on how to present fruit offerings.

Verse 13 institutes the use of salt. It is stated three times in this single verse, an indication of a serious command.

*Why would salt be acceptable to use when yeast and honey would not?*

Oil, frankincense, and salt would all serve a purpose in the outcome of the offerings. Oil is used to bind the flour together, just as we should bind ourselves to God. Frankincense would be an expensive additive that would smell particularly good when the offering was burned, and salt would be used to preserve and enhance the flavor of the bread and meat, just as God wants to enhance our lives and preserve us.

Yeast and honey were also more readily available as resources. Oil, frankincense, and salt were all more expensive items, adding to the sacrifice.

### **V14-16**

Just as our tithing should be the “first” ten percent of our income, the first-born and first-fruit sacrifices were just that: the first. Only these sacrifices were even riskier because unlike dividing up an income into tenths, the first born or first fruits might be all that the giver has. When a cow gives birth to a calf, that calf is God's. It doesn't matter if the cow gives birth again or not. And the first fruits of the season

may be the only time that crop produces. This sacrifice is a trust that God will provide in some form and some way.

Notice that the first fruit and first-born sacrifices are not to be used by the priests. These are all for God.

## **Chapter 3**

### **V1-5**

The peace offering could be either male or female, unlike the sin offerings. But the animal still had to be without defect or blemish. The blood, fat, and entrails would be burnt upon the altar. Although not stated here, the meat would be cut up and distributed among the priests and some returned to the one offering the sacrifice. Unlike sin offerings, peace offerings, often simply called burnt offerings, were voluntary.

*What is the purpose of the peace offering?*

The purpose of the peace offering is not stated here but is elaborated upon more in chapter 4. The peace offering is more an offering of gratitude that there is peace between God and the giver. The sin offering is to make peace with God, the peace offering is to enjoy peace with God.

### **V6-11**

This passage describes the procedure for sacrificing a peace offering of a lamb as opposed to a bull or cow in verses 1-5. The main difference here is that the “fat and whole fat tail” was offered to God rather than distributed among the priests and giver. The fat tail is considered a delicacy and the choice portion of the animal for eating. The typical fat tail could weigh around 50-60 pounds. It is often thought that this sacrifice would be symbolic of sharing a meal with God.

### **V12-17**

Much like the previous instructions, a peace offering of a goat could also be made with the same requirements of the fat and blood being given to God.

The conclusion to this chapter restricts the Jews from eating fat or drinking blood. During this time, blood was used in many pagan rituals and may be one of the reasons why this was forbidden. The fatty portion was considered a delicacy of the time, but it was also a hindrance as the dietary benefits were not widely understood in this era. Eating the fat of an animal, while keeping the meat juicy and flavorful, could also be unhealthy with one problem being that tapeworms and parasites often reside in fatty tissue.

## **Chapter 4**

### **V1-12**

*What is the difference between this sin offering and the burnt offerings in chapter 1?*

The primary difference here is that this sin offering is offered by someone who is generally a follower of God but goes astray. The Hebrew word for “unintentionally” contains the idea that someone has “gotten lost.” This offering is for someone who has been in good standing with God but has recently done something that is disobedient to God and wants to rectify that sin. The sacrifices in chapter 1 are more of a regularly scheduled event to cleanse the people of sin whereas this sin offering is to be done on an as-needed basis. The opening of this chapter addresses the purpose of the sin offering, but the

process differs slightly for the positions of the people. The first section is for an offering for when a priest sins. The sins of a priest require that the sacrificial blood be used to sprinkle seven times before the Lord, be poured on the horns of the altar and the remaining blood at the base of the altar. The good portions of the animal are burned on the altar and the remaining portions that are not used in the sacrifice are burned away from the tabernacle and the people.

### **V13-21**

This passage describes the sacrifice for the people as a whole. It differs from the priestly sacrifice only in that the elders of the people lay their hands on the bull rather than the priests.

### **V22-26**

This passage depicts the sacrifice for a ruler among the people. Notice that a ruler only requires the sacrifice of a goat, not a bull. This is a lesser animal as a ruler would be lesser than God (represented by the priests) and lesser than the body of Israel. Also, the remainder of the animal could be used by the priests and didn't need to be burned away from the tabernacle.

### **V27-35**

For any other person in Israel, a common person in some translations, a female goat or a lamb could be used for the sacrifice. As with the sacrifice of the ruler, the remainder of this sacrifice could be used by the priests.

## **Chapter 5**

### **V1-5**

This chapter describes the sacrifices concerning guilt offerings. Verse 1 is still referenced today in many variations, but the meaning is very much the same. Not telling the truth is the same as lying.

Withholding information that may change the outcome of an argument or disagreement is the same as committing perjury.

Verses 2 and 3 discuss the "unclean" sin. This is not a moral issue, but a ceremonial issue. A Jew was not allowed to touch a dead animal or human and there were certain animals that were not to be touched even while alive. As soon as a person realized that they had been made unclean, they needed to resolve that by a ceremonial cleansing and offering.

Verse 4 and verse 1 go together but are broken up by the ceremonial cleanliness offering. Verse 4 differs from verse 1 in that a spoken vow or public promise is broken. This may not be a "lie" per se, but a broken promise is the same as lying. God wants us to mean what we say.

Each of these sins, once it is realized that they are sin and that the sinful act has been committed, must also be confessed before the priests and God.

### **V6-13**

The sacrifice for these sins could be a lamb or goat. If one of those could not be acquired, then two birds, one as a sin offering and one as a burnt offering, would also suffice. Short of that, a grain offering was also acceptable. This indicates that God was not so much concerned with the material wealth of the offering, but the heart of the person making the sacrifice. For some, a grain offering would be all that they could afford. But if they made the offering with the intention of resolving guilt with God, that was all that God cared about.

## **V14-16**

*What are the “holy things of the Lord” in verse 15?*

It is not made abundantly clear here, but this references the sacrifices themselves. If a Jew didn't offer a proper or significant sacrifice in regard to first fruits, firstborn, unblemished animals, etc., then there was a way for them to remedy this infraction, as well. This offering also included twenty percent interest.

## **V17-19**

This final passage of the chapter regards an offering for sins that were made without knowledge. Even if we don't know that we are sinning, it is still sin and still goes against the commands of God. Luke 12:47-48 addresses this same concept straight from the mouth of Jesus. God is still God, and He commands us to get to know Him. If we do not, that is not God's fault, but our own. Our lack of knowledge does not forgive us for the act of sin.

## **Chapter 6**

### **V1-7**

God instructs Moses on what a person is to do when they have wronged their neighbor. A guilt offering is to be made when a person:

- Lies to his neighbor about a delivery. For instance, an Amazon package requiring a signature goes to a neighbor instead of the empty home of the recipient. That person is responsible for turning the package over in a timely fashion.
- Goes back on a pledge or cheating that person out of something that rightfully belongs to them.
- Steals from or robs his neighbor.
- Extorts or threatens his neighbor in order to gain what his neighbor has.
- Keeps something that he found that he knows belongs to his neighbor. There is no “finders-keepers, losers-weepers” with God.

It should be noted that a guilt offering could be made only after restitution to the neighbor had been made. A guilt offering was an admission of guilt and an indication that a wrong had been righted. Only then could forgiveness be fulfilled.

### **V8-13**

Chapter 1 describes many methods of sacrificing to God. The following sections detail what the priest is to do with those sacrifices. In this passage, the detail goes down to what the priest should wear, how often the fire is to be tended (there is an interesting note about the fire in chapter 9:24), and even what to do with the ash from the altar.

### **V14-18**

This passage goes over the grain offering first mentioned in chapter 2. Only the holy, or ceremonially clean, could partake in this offering.

### **V19-23**

This passage describes the grain offering used for the consecration of a priest going back to Exodus 29. This particular grain offering was not to be consumed by anyone except God. It was to be burned completely on the altar.

### **V24-30**

This passage gives more clarity to the sin offering from chapter 4. There is more involved with this sacrifice as it is used to forgive the sins of the people offering it. Sin is to be taken seriously and must be dealt with seriously.

## **Chapter 7**

### **V1-10**

Chapter 7 revisits some of the sacrifices already described in previous chapters, but these instructions are aimed at the priests more so than the person making the offering.

The guilt offering, or trespass offering, is to be burnt at the altar of the tabernacle. The original Hebrew word used for the word “kill” or “slaughter” in verse 2 more literally means “to cut open the throat.” The removal of blood from the animal is one of the criteria used to make the animal kosher or fit for consumption. The priests are further instructed to burn the fatty parts of the animal. The priest that performs the offering is entitled to the meat and the skin. The priests are also entitled to a portion of the grain offerings. The priest who accepted the grain offering is responsible for distribution among the other priests.

### **V11-14**

A small handful of translations refer to the “heave offering,” but most translations simply refer to this offering as a type of thanksgiving offering. The term “heave offering” comes from the upward motion of the offering used by the priests to present the offering to God.

This is the first time that the Bible mentions that leavened bread is to be presented as an offering. Leviticus 2:11 says that no grain offering with yeast is to be made to God, but this is apparently only true for burnt offerings. The bread and cakes offered with the peace offering are not burned and are to be presented in both leavened and unleavened forms.

*What is the significance to modern Christians of having both leavened and unleavened bread in the offering?*

It has often been observed that the unleavened bread would represent God’s chosen people, the Jews, and the leavened bread represents the Gentiles. Jesus Christ, removing the need for any more sacrifices to have a relationship with God, is the peace offering for both Jews and Gentiles.

### **V15-18**

This passage describes the timeframe for partaking of the peace offering and the thanksgiving offering. A peace offering had to be eaten the same day. A thanksgiving offering could be eaten up to the following day. Any meat left over on the third day must be burned.

### **V19-21**

This passage provides definitions for a pure offering. Any meat not eaten immediately had to be kept in a clean manner. Only priests who had gone through the purification process could eat of sacrificed meat. Anyone who was knowingly unclean and ate sacrificial meat is to be excommunicated. This is similar to how modern Christians treat communion (1 Corinthians 11:27-32).

### **V22-27**

This passage defines the use of the fatty portions of an animal. No fat was to be eaten, regardless of how it died. But the fat of a sacrificed animal was to be given to God. The fatty portions of a non-sacrificial animal could be used, just not eaten. Eating the fat meant excommunication. The consuming of blood also meant excommunication.

### **V28-34**

This passage describes the sacrificial uses of the breast and thigh portions.

*What is a "wave offering" mentioned in verse 30?*

Just as the heave offering described how the sacrifice was presented to God, the wave offering was to be presented to God with a waving motion by the person making the offering. Even though the priest would be able to keep the breast portion, the ritualistic waving motion dedicated it to God first.

The thigh portion was to be offered as a heave offering. The right thigh would then go to the priest. It is interesting to note that these two types of offerings would define the shape of the cross. A wave offering is made by waving side to side and a heave offering is made by moving the sacrifice up and down. This is literally hundreds if not thousands of years before crucifixion even became a form of capital punishment.

### **V35-38**

This passage reiterates that God intends for the priests to have portions of the sacrifices for themselves. Although this may seem extravagant since meat was a major commodity of the time, the reason God stated this so clearly is that the Levites did not own land for themselves, one of the other major commodities. This elaborate feast for the priests was their form of payment for their tribe not being able to own land.

This chapter closes with a summary of the first 7 chapters of the book.

## **Chapter 8**

### **V1-5**

This chapter begins the priestly line of the Levites as God tells Moses to consecrate Aaron and his sons. This would be done publicly and with much ceremony. The reason behind the ceremony would be to set aside the line of the Levites from the rest of the Jews for the priesthood.

### **V6-9**

The ceremony begins with a cleansing ritual. The Levites were to be clean before any other part of the ceremony took place. It is believed that this ceremony involved full immersion to make them as clean as possible. After this, only the cleansing of the hands and feet needed to be completed for priestly duties.



Once the priests were clean, they were to be dressed in their ceremonial garb. The ceremonial garments were provided by God per the money gathered for the construction of the temple (Exodus 28).

*What are the Urim and the Thummin?*

These are believed to be a pair of stones, one white or light-colored, the other black or dark-colored. These stones represent a “yes” (light) or “no” (dark) answer from God. The priests would ask God a question and then reach into the breastplate and retrieve a stone without looking at it. Whichever stone they pulled out would represent the answer from God.

### **V10-13**

In this passage, Moses consecrates the altar and the priests. The altar was sprinkled seven times to signify the holiness of its purpose. The altar was a way of communicating and resolving our sin with God.

### **V14-17**

Moses then sacrificed a bull for a sin offering for the priests. The blood was used to sanctify the altar.

### **V18-21**

Moses follows the sin offering with a burnt offering of a ram. This blood would also sanctify the altar.

### **V22-30**

Moses would make a third sacrifice, but this offering had a different purpose. Once the sin offering and burnt offering were completed, this third offering would be used for consecration. The priests were to be set aside from the rest of the Jews for the purpose of serving God. Their lives would be dedicated to this purpose.

*Why place blood on the right ear, thumb, and toe?*

Blood is what gives a body life. Taking the blood of this sacrifice and placing it on the priests meant that their lives now belonged to God. The right side was consecrated because this era held that the right side was superior due to most people being right-handed. The consecration of the ear, thumb, and toe meant that the priests should hear in Godly terms, work in Godly terms, and walk in Godly terms, respectively.

The best parts of the second ram would be used with selected breads and grains as part of a wave offering. This would be unique among most wave offerings as consecrating priests was a unique ceremony.

Finally, the garments of the priest were sprinkled in blood to separate the clothing that the priests would wear from what typical Jews would wear.

### **V31-36**

The ceremonially consecrated priests would then have a meal with God. This feast would last seven days, and the priests were not allowed to leave the temple during this time. This was to be a communion with God where the priests were set aside from the Jewish people for the sole purpose of interacting with God.

*Why would the priests be threatened with death?*

The penalty for breaking the consecration of the priesthood was death. This may seem harsh, but this showed the importance of rituals that God asked the priests to perform. God wants a relationship with us, but He abhors sin. The priesthood and the temple rituals were the only way for the Jews to maintain a relationship with God. Anything short of this would be deadly.

## **Chapter 9**

### **V1-4**

This segment of the ceremony of the consecration of the priests would involve Moses, Aaron and his sons as the newly ordained priests, and the elders of Israel representing the people as a whole. Note that this chapter begins on the eighth day of the ceremony. The installation of the priesthood took more than a week!

There is speculation that Aaron was requested to offer a young bull as a sacrifice in order to atone for the creation of the golden calf in Exodus 32.

### **V5-6**

After a week of sacrifice and ceremony, this day was to be different. Upon completion of the sacrifice of a young goat, a calf, a lamb, a bull, a ram, and a grain offering, the Lord would appear to the newly appointed priests.

### **V7-14**

This section describes a sin offering and burnt offering on behalf of Aaron.

### **V15-21**

Aaron making an offering for the people would be his first act as priest. Aaron's sons would also participate as their first act as priests-in-training. Notice that all the sacrifices described in detail in chapter 1-7 are performed here.

### **V22-24**

Once these sacrifices were complete, the priests went into the tabernacle. When they returned, they blessed the people. Then God shows His glory to the people.

*What does the glory of God look like in verse 23?*

The Bible does not say specifically how God appeared to those assembled at the temple. There is much speculation, of course. Most suppose it was some sort of fire since that is what consumed the sacrifice on the altar. Whatever form God appeared in it was enough to satisfy the crowd that this was truly God. They fell down before Him and worshipped in awe and wonder.

## **Chapter 10**

### **V1-7**

In this chapter, the Bible steps away from defining the law and portrays events concerned with the law. This passage introduces some of Aarons family, including his sons, uncle, and cousins. Two of Aarons sons are killed because of their disobedience to the rules of the temple. There is speculation due to the wording used in the original Hebrew that Nadab and Abihu not only used the wrong fire for this

ceremony, but that they may have even entered into the Holy of Holies with it. The same fire that consumes the sacrifice on the altar of God consumed these two would-be priests.

The cousins of Aaron, Mishael and Elzaphan, are tasked with removing the bodies of Aaron's two sons. Aaron and his remaining sons cannot leave the temple as they are in the midst of their confirmation ceremony. This may seem like a harsh God that doesn't allow time for the family to grieve, but God's holiness comes before all other considerations.

*What is the motivation for Nadab and Abihu adding incense to their fire?*

This passage does not give any details about why these sons of Aaron would add incense to their fires which is a strong indication of the answer: the reason is irrelevant. Whether their intentions were good or not does not matter. They did not follow the law of God. There is a reason that the Old Testament goes into dramatic detail of building the tabernacle, the tools, the altar, the garments, and everything used for communing with God. These rules are to be adhered to because God is holy. Doing anything more or less than what is commanded is a sin.

*What are some other examples of people trying to do good things but disobedient to God?*

1 Chronicles 13:9-10 tell of Uzzah who tried to stop the ark of the covenant from falling off the cart while it was being transported. His intention was to keep the ark from touching the ground, but he disobeyed God by touching the ark and was struck dead. This is just one of many examples of "good disobedience" in the Bible. Even our own good intentions, if not in line with what God wants, can do more harm than good.

#### **V8-11**

God gives the priests another command about drinking before performing their priestly duties. It is often noted that this does not forbid the priests from drinking, only being drunk before doing their jobs. There is speculation that since this command came immediately after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu that those two may have been drunk when offering the strange fire to the Lord, but this is not a certainty.

#### **V12-15**

Aaron and his two remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, are to partake of the grain offering and wave offering during this consecration ceremony. Note that this passage also mentions that the daughters can partake, as well, indicating that these portions are for the entire household of the priests, not just the priests themselves.

#### **V16-20**

This passage describes some confusion as to what happened to the goat of the sin offering. It is commonly believed that Aaron did not eat of the offering as a form of fasting for the loss of his sons. Most scholars believe that the two remaining sons of Aaron were simply following their father's example. Since God didn't burn them as he did the other brothers, Moses accepted this as a legitimate answer that was pleasing to God.

## **Chapter 11**

### **V1-8**

Chapter 11 discusses what can and can't be eaten, as well as a few other regulations concerning purity and cleanliness. This will be the theme for the next 5 chapters.

*Why would some animals be “clean” and some “unclean” since all animals are created by God?*

This is an often-asked question by Jews, Christians, and even non-believers. The answer is unknown. There is no reason given in the Bible for why certain animals are clean and others are not. Speculation on the reasoning covers symbolic, hygienic, cultural, and more or even any combination of these.

The first 8 verses concern the consumption of land-based mammals. Cattle, sheep, and goats are all acceptable for eating, but camels, pigs, badgers, and rabbits are considered unclean, and their dead bodies shouldn't even be touched!

### **V9-12**

This section describes what sea-creatures are clean or unclean. Most fish would be acceptable, but catfish, shrimp, clams, crabs, and lobsters would be unclean.

### **V13-19**

This passage defines the cleanliness of birds. The common theme in this law is that birds that are scavengers or predators are unclean, but otherwise most birds would be acceptable.

### **V20-23**

Most insects are considered unclean with the exception of grasshoppers, crickets, and locusts.

*Why does Moses use the phrase “walk on all fours” to describe the movements of insects?*

This phrase is often lost in translation from the original Hebrew. Moses isn't saying insects have only 4 legs. He's describing the crawling movement that most animals or even humans would make if they were “creeping” on the ground.

### **V24-28**

If someone did come in contact with the carcass of an unclean animal, such as for moving it for disposal, there was a way to become clean again, but this involved waiting for a period of time and cleaning oneself. As a result of the Jews having little to do with pigs and rats, they were often spared from parasites and diseases that plagued other cultures.

It should also be noted that being “unclean” in this manner is not the same as being sinful. It was often necessary to come in contact with a carcass, and this could be done so long as one followed the cleaning process afterwards.

### **V29-30**

Mice, moles, geckos, chameleons, and most other large reptiles would also be considered unclean.

### **V31-38**

This section would seem obviously hygienic to modern readers, yet the cultures of this era did not yet know how diseases were transmitted. Disposing of dead animals, washing furniture that a rodent had

crawled on, disposing of food or water that a rat had been in, all these actions would save lives without the Jews realizing it.

### **V39-43**

Not only were the bodies of unclean animals considered unclean, but a clean animal that died had to be disposed of and cleaned up after. This would also promote the health of the Jewish people.

The last few verses of this passage are considered the closing of the laws concerning clean and unclean animals.

### **V44-47**

In the closing of this chapter, God explains why He commands this even if He doesn't explain why some animals are considered clean and some animals aren't. God is holy and clean. He wants us to be holy and clean. These rituals would help support that in a small way until the Messiah comes to replace the Old Covenant once and for all.

## **Chapter 12**

### **V1-5**

There are two laws in this passage, one old and one new. The old law is that of circumcision. This goes back to the days of Abraham in Genesis chapter 17. The new law concerns the mother. She is to be treated as "unclean" for 7 days or 14 days, and then an additional 33 days or 66 days depending on the gender of the child. There is a misnomer here concerning the term "unclean." There is nothing wrong with the mother. In fact, God wants us to reproduce. The mother being unclean in this situation is a good thing. She would be forced to rest. While a woman is unclean, she is relieved of most household duties and social obligations. She would spend most of her time with her newborn child.

*Why is there a time difference between a son and daughter?*

There is no clear reason stated here as to why the length of uncleanness for a daughter is double that of a son. There are a couple of theories presented as to why this would be the case. The first reason revolved around the Jewish faith. As a mother, you are responsible for bringing other people, i.e., sinners, into the world. This shouldn't be seen as a penalty, but it is to be a serious consideration. As a mother bringing a daughter into the world, you would also be responsible for their children, as well. So, the timeframe for weighing the responsibility of that increased.

The second possible reason has to do with human physiology. Females are typically smaller at birth than males and this would allow the mother to care for the child longer.

Another possibility is that this longer time period would allow the mother to bond with the daughter. Males were the more "prized" children of this culture, so this longer bonding period would allow the daughter to feel more appreciated by the family as she grew older.

### **V6-8**

This passage describes the sacrifices made for the child at birth. A lamb was to be offered as a burnt offering and a dove as a sin offering. In the event the family could not afford a lamb, a dove could be offered instead. Read Luke 2:22-24. The family of the Messiah was not wealthy and did not have a lamb

to offer. This also implies that the magi from the east had not visited yet, as their gifts could have been used to purchase a lamb for this purpose.

## **Chapter 13**

### **V1-8**

This entire chapter is dedicated to infectious diseases, in particular, leprosy. The original Hebrew wording does not actually specify leprosy, but the examination and treatment of the patient would include leprosy. The examination and isolation process specified here would not only determine if someone had leprosy, but it would keep the ill away from the general population for 7 days. This would keep other infectious diseases, such as measles and smallpox, from spreading.

There are a multitude of reasons for including this section in Leviticus. The priests of God would be the physicians for the Jews. The process of diagnosing leprosy kept the Jews from being wiped out by a contagious disease. And diagnosing leprosy and the disease itself served as an example of how sin can spread and corrupt.

### **V9-11**

Some of the verbiage used in this chapter will seem repetitive, but this shows the importance of getting the diagnosis right. Leprosy is a serious matter and no part of it should be taken lightly. Even just a sore had to be thoroughly examined and carefully considered.

### **V12-17**

A rash (or worse) that covered the whole body meant an even more rigorous examination of the patient. White skin indicates that new skin is growing to replace whatever ailment the person might have had. No white skin indicates that the skin could not rejuvenate itself and is one of the major symptoms of leprosy.

### **V18-23**

The examination process for leprosy is similar to the previous sections for that of a boil on the skin.

### **V24-28**

Burns and even just dry skin could leave a person vulnerable to leprosy and must be examined carefully.

### **V29-37**

The English translation of this section can seem a little misleading to readers. The use of the word “beard” here would seem to indicate that this is only for males, but nowhere in the text does it differentiate between male and female. Most translations clarify this by specifying both man and woman. Beards are obviously more common for males, but the original Hebrew indicates that this should be “hairy parts of the body.”

### **V38-39**

Because the examination of a potential patient includes “white skin,” this passage offers further clarification on what the priests are to look for.

### **V40-44**

It is unclear as to why clarification was needed specifically for the examination of baldness, but this passage offers an in-depth analysis not only of bald people, but of two different types of baldness. “Bald

on the head” indicates the crown of the head losing hair. “Baldness of the forehead” indicates a receding hairline.

#### **V45-46**

If the diagnosis is indeed leprosy, then the patient shall tear his clothes and remove any head covering as a sign of mourning. The remainder of a leper’s life would be spent in exile.

#### **V47-59**

This last passage is one of the indicators that the original Hebrew was including more than just leprosy. Leprosy has no effect on clothing. These final verses are most likely describing some sort of mold or mildew, which would be unhealthy for anyone to wear. These garments could be washed, but most undergo an examination to determine if they are still usable. If washing the garments cleaned the “leprosy” then there was no problem with using them. If the uncleanness had taken such a hold that washing them had no effect, the garments would have been burned. The chapter on diagnosing leprosy ends with this passage, but the subject of leprosy continues in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 14**

#### **V1-9**

Leprosy and infectious diseases were so serious that there are even rituals concerning the cleansing of an ill person. The first half of this chapter instructs a healed person on what to do upon becoming “clean.”

Note that verse 3 says the priest is to go to the healed person. The ill were not to enter the temple until after the cleansing ritual had taken place.

This ritual is an unusual occurrence compared to the previous sacrifices discussed to this point in Leviticus. This is a strong indicator of just how serious this illness is to be taken. This cleansing ritual consists of 2 birds, cedar wood, scarlet rope or yarn, and a hyssop branch.

Once the priest completed this part of the ritual, the cleansed person is to shave, bathe, and wash their clothes. This person could then return to the camp but must live in public view for 7 days. Shaving consists of all hair on the person's body including eyebrows! At the end of the 7 days, this person repeats the shaving, bathing, and washing.

#### **V10-20**

After the 7 days of clean living are complete, the person can go to the tabernacle to complete the cleansing ritual. The healed person presents 2 male lambs, 1 female lamb, flour, and oil for sacrifice. It is unclear how much an ephah really is but estimates for the 3/10 of an ephah range from 5 pounds to 20 pounds. Some translations specify that a log of oil is to be used in the sacrifice, which is roughly 10 ounces.

One of the unusual aspects of this sacrifice is that the priest would apply blood to the clean person in the same manner that blood was applied to the consecration of priests in chapter 8. The priest would also take some of the provided oil, sprinkle it before the altar, and then apply it to the clean person the same way as the blood was applied. The rest of the oil would be used to anoint the cleansed individual.

The first lamb is the trespass offering, whose blood is used to sprinkle the individual. Then the oil is applied to the newly clean person. A second lamb is offered as a sin offering. The third lamb is used for the burnt offering. And, finally, the flour is presented as a grain offering. Upon completion of this ritual, the once “unclean” person is considered whole again.

### **V21-32**

Because leprosy meant exile, it was difficult for an “unclean” person to maintain any sort of living. Lepers would often not be able to afford the luxury of 3 sheep, flour, and oil. This passage describes the provision for those that could not afford the first form of offering. Still, even with the diminished requirements, those who had been lepers would have to rely on charity to provide the poor-man’s sacrifice.

### **V33-47**

This section concerns mold or mildew more so than leprosy. Here, God describes what to do if a dwelling has been found to be contaminated. It is interesting to note that this practice is still the recommended solution for mold and mildew in houses. It should also be noted that the Jews were still wandering the desert and did not have permanent dwellings. This passage was given in anticipation of the chosen people settling in the promised land.

### **V48-53**

If the house was determined to be clean, then a cleansing ritual similar to that of a person being freed from leprosy was performed.

### **V54-57**

The chapter closes with a summary of chapters 13 and 14, combining them into “The Law of Leprosy.”

## **Chapter 15**

### **V1-12**

This chapter pertains to health and cleanliness not only before God, but around fellow human beings. The chapter opens with what is believed to be a form of sexually transmitted disease, although the symptoms and treatment are not limited to just STD’s. The vague symptoms offered here are often mostly associated with gonorrhea. Whatever the disease may be, these symptoms indicate that it can be transmitted by contact and even by bodily fluids. Isolation and bathing were the most common treatment available at this time.

### **V13-15**

Once a man had been deemed cleansed, he could perform a cleansing ritual consisting of 7 days of isolation, bathing, and a bird sacrifice for a sin offering and a burnt offering. He could then return to normal life.

### **V16-18**

In this passage, a man who has had a seminal discharge is deemed unclean for a brief period. There is much speculation about the meaning of this “uncleanness,” but it is commonly believed that this has nothing to do with the act of sex itself. On the contrary, this brief cleansing period would separate the Jews from the rest of the surrounding cultures who often included sexuality in temple rituals. This would also instill a sense of respect for the act of sex. It was not to be treated casually.



### **V19-24**

This passage concerning the female menstruation period is often looked at as controversial by unstudied eyes. However, this is another example of God providing a means for cleanliness and health among the Jews. This “uncleanness” was not a rebuke of the woman, but a sign of respect for blood, which God claimed as His own through the sacrifices described in the previous chapters. This also provided a side benefit to the woman: she was not to be around her husband or children, or to even do any housework for a week.

### **V25-27**

An unusual discharge outside of a woman’s normal menstruation could indicate that she had an illness or disease that needed to be considered. As with an STD, isolation would keep a communicable disease from spreading.

### **V28-30**

The cleansing ceremony for a female is the same as a male in verses 13-15.

### **V31-33**

This is the closing summary of the chapter. Note that these references made a person ceremonial unclean, not evil, or sinful. These are natural occurrences and are not the same as committing sin.

## **Chapter 16**

### **V1-10**

This section describes the ritual for the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The phrase is not used here, but this ritual is revisited in chapter 23 where the title is given. The opening of this chapter reminds Aaron and all future priests that this ritual is to be taken seriously. Coming before God in the wrong way will result in death, which is what happened to Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron.

Verses 3-5 give the description of what is to be sacrificed and what the priest is to be wearing. These garments would not be the normal priestly garments, but simply white clothing.

Aaron was also to do most of this work alone. Only the high priest could enter the temple during this ceremony.

There is some debate on how the lots were cast to decide which goat was sacrificed and which was set free, but the common theory is that the one lot or stone had the name of God on it and the other had the name Azazel on it (Azazel roughly translates to scapegoat). One lot was drawn while near the first goat and this would determine the fates of the two goats.

The ancient Hebrew word Azazel is also not without some debate. Typically, modern translations use the word scapegoat or something similar. But the rarity of the word and the use of ancient Hebrew has caused the real meaning to be lost over time.

### **V11-14**

The bull sacrifice was strictly for the high priest to make himself holy before entering the temple. Some of this blood would be sprinkled over the ark of the covenant.

### **V15-19**

The blood of the goat would also be sprinkled over the ark of the covenant. This ritual would cleanse the temple so that the high priest could enter and see God. The incense that was burned would not only provide a pleasing aroma but would cause the Holy of Holies to be filled with smoke so that the high priest wouldn't be killed by the shining Glory of God. It is Jewish tradition that the Day of Atonement is the only day that the high priest could utter the name of God (Yahweh). The high priest is the ONLY person that knew the exact pronunciation of the name and he was to pass it on to his successor before he died.

### **V20-22**

The sin of the Jews was to be cast onto this remaining goat and then sent away outside the city. Before the coming of the Messiah, sin could be forgiven and even forgotten but could never really be permanently gone. The goat bearing the sin of the Jews was still alive in the wilderness, just not truly gone. Jesus would remove the need for this recurring ritual as He has removed sin completely.

### **V23-28**

To complete the ritual, the high priest would then bathe and change into his priestly garments.

### **V29-34**

Some translations for verse 29 use the term, "afflict your souls." Others simply say, "humble yourself." Although the literal translation is debatable, it is believed that this is what defines the Day of Atonement as a day of fasting. This is the only day of fasting observed in all of Mosaic law. Yom Kippur is still observed by practicing Jews to this day.

## **Chapter 17**

### **V1-7**

The Hebrew word "sht" is used in verse 3, which defines "slaughter in the way of sacrifice." This meaning is lost in many English translations which simply use the word "kill" or "slaughter." God isn't telling people not to kill their animals. He's telling them not to sacrifice their animals to any other gods. God even specifically refers to the common "goat-gods" of other cultures of the time.

### **V8-9**

This passage is meant to include "outsiders" of the descendants of Abraham. Specifically, those that choose to follow the One True God. These would be converts to Judaism even if they weren't Jews by birth. If an outsider wanted to be a part of the Jewish community, they needed to be all-in. They couldn't just live amongst the Jews and not worship God.

### **V10-14**

Here, God gives the specific reason for the inclusion of blood in His sacrifices and why all of the blood should be given to Him. Blood is what gives life to a body. It carries oxygen to different parts of the body. It protects the body from infection. It provides warmth to the extremities. The ancient cultures of this time recognized the importance of blood, and it was often included in pagan rituals. Drinking the blood of an animal or even another human was thought to transfer the strength or "life force" of the one being sacrificed to the consumer.

As such, blood is sacred to God. God created life and gave humans life. Any sacrifice made should be done to honor Him and Him alone.

### **V15-16**

The eating of an animal that had died by natural causes including being killed by another animal could be eaten. However, it made one unclean and one had to undergo a ceremonial cleansing to become clean again.

## **Chapter 18**

### **V1-5**

These first 5 verses don't really indicate what the rest of the chapter has in store. Instead, God is reminding the Israelites that what He says goes. They belong to Him and are not to follow in the footsteps of other cultures. The reason for this reminder becomes evident in the rest of the chapter. This is a serious topic that the Jews are to take to heart.

### **V6-18**

Here, God lays out each family member that a person should not have sexual relations with. Verse 6 opens this passage with a broad statement of "no incest" and emphasizes that this is an affront to God. But God doesn't stop there. The next 11 verses list the relatives that one should not have sex with.

- V7 – mother
- V8 – stepmother
- V9 – sister and half-sister
- V10 – grandchildren
- V11 – stepsister
- V12 – paternal aunt
- V13 – maternal aunt
- V14 – uncle's wife
- V15 – daughter-in-law (son's wife)
- V16 – sister-in-law (brother's wife)
- V17 – no sexual relations with more than one generation of a family (spouse's children)
- V17 – grandchildren (spouse's grandchildren)
- V18 – no sexual relations with spouse's siblings

*Why did God find it necessary to spell out this long list of relatives after verse 6 covered the entire category?*

There are many reasons for defining the list of "off limits" relatives. The first reason is that many of the people groups of this era did not have restrictions like this. God wanted to ensure that there was no misunderstanding in what He was saying. Another reason, and perhaps the most important reason, was to reclaim some of what the curse of Genesis 3 took away. Genesis 2:25 describes the beautiful relationship between Adam and Eve. Once sin entered the world, that relationship was tainted. This passage reiterates the importance of a monogamous relationship.

It should also be noted that this is not a comprehensive list. These are examples of what not to do, not a complete list of what not to do. The point of this passage is to direct a man and a woman to a single, monogamous relationship, not to list who a person can and can't have sex with!

### **V19-23**

This passage gives another list of sexual impurities to be avoided.

- Do not have a sex with a woman on her period.
- Do not commit adultery. This is a reiteration of the seventh commandment. This is also the culmination of everything being discussed in this chapter, but sexual immorality was (and is) so rampant that God felt the need to go into detail.
- God specifically mentions the pagan idol Molech in verse 21, but this should be taken as a command against idol worship in general, a reiteration of the first and second commandments. Molech worshippers would heat a metal statue of Molech until it was red hot. Once heated, an infant sacrifice would be placed on the outstretched arms of the idol. Numerous large drums would be played to drown out the crying of the infant until the baby finally burned to death on the statue.
- Do not have same-sex sexual relations. It is interesting to note, especially in this day and age, that the Bible does not condemn love between people of the same sex, only sexual relations between people of the same sex.
- Do not have sex with animals.

*Why include a command about idolatry among commands concerning sex?*

God is clear that He wants a relationship with us. A monogamous relationship between spouses is an example of how a Christian relationship works. Worshipping another god is equivalent to cheating on a spouse.

### **V24-30**

This is the closing summary of the chapter. God reminds the Jews that their sexual behavior separates them from the rest of the world. The people who violate the commands in this chapter are to be excommunicated.

## **Chapter 19**

### **V1-4**

Chapter 19 does not discuss any new concepts but reiterates things that have already been discussed. These actions are important to God and He wants His followers to be different than the rest of the world. In this section, God restates the fifth, fourth, and second commandments. Honoring your parents, observing the Sabbath, and not having any idols would not only honor God, but separate the Jewish culture from the other cultures of this time.

### **V5-8**

This passage covers the laws regarding the peace offering found in chapter 7:11-14.

## **V9-18**

This passage pertains to dealing with your neighbors. It starts off with repeating the concepts of the eighth, ninth, and third commandments. Swearing in the name of God and then breaking that vow would be the same as profaning the name of God.

Showing compassion to the blind and deaf would also be new ideas to the cultures of this world. Deformities and physical handicaps were often viewed as punishment from the gods. The Lord God is reminding the Jews that this is not the case.

Basing judgments of the financial or social status of an individual is no justice at all. God wants justice to truly be blind to power and wealth.

*What does the phrase, “you are not to jeopardize the life of your neighbor” mean in verse 16?*

The exact Hebrew phrase is more closely translated as, “you are not to stand upon the blood of your neighbor.” Its exact meaning is not made clear, but most scholars believe this to mean that you are not to stand silent if your neighbor is being accused of something he did not do. If you have information that can prove your neighbor innocent and you do not provide it, then you are found guilty in the eyes of God.

Being a good neighbor also means not letting them fall into sin. If you can point out to someone that the path they are choosing is harmful, then you should say something.

The closing of this passage is not often found cited in the Old Testament but is repeatedly found in the New Testament. Jesus and Paul used this phrase often to remind the Jews what their true purpose was (to be separated from the world and belong to God) and to show the Gentiles that God truly is different than anything they’d ever encountered before.

## **V19**

This verse is often a source of confusion to uninformed readers. This verse is not so much about purity (although purity is not to be dismissed) as much as it is about paganism. Many pagan cultures saw the intermixing of species, seeds, and fabrics as a source of magical power. The Jews were to be different. The purity of these things would also be in keeping with the Jews not marrying outside of their own religion. God doesn’t care about mixed fabrics. He cares about spiritual purity.

## **V20-22**

*What does this passage describe? Does this treatment seem fair?*

The scenario presented here is foreign to most civilized cultures of the modern world, as well it should be. If a slave woman is engaged to be married to a free man, but she is raped by a different man before she is married, then there are penalties for the man. If the man had raped a free woman, he would be put to death. Since the woman in this case was a slave, the man is not to be executed, but is to pay a price to the woman’s fiancé, after which he would need to present a guilt offering at the temple. Although not stated here, Jewish law states that the man would then be obligated to marry the woman he defiled since the fiancé would not be able to marry a non-virgin woman.

Although this seems barbaric by today’s standards, this law presented much better treatment of women than any other culture of its day. Women were property, treated just slightly better than cattle. The

Jewish laws established here presented safe environments for not only women, but orphans, the elderly, the blind, deaf, and the handicapped. No other culture or religion showed this much compassion to people. This was truly a revolutionary concept of its day.

### **V23-25**

The reason for this law is not stated here, but not harvesting from new fruit trees for a few years is good for the trees and surrounding environment. The harvest of the fourth year would belong strictly to God. After that, the orchard was to be used as intended.

### **V26-31**

This passage describes laws concerning pagan rituals. As in verse 19, this is not so much to do with the act itself, but the purpose of the act. The consuming of blood was a common pagan ritual. Shaving hair in certain fashions was another common pagan practice. Tattoos were used in pagan burial rituals of various kinds or to show which deity one worshipped. Even self-harm scars were used by pagans to commune with the dead. God wanted His followers to remain free from these rituals.

### **V32-37**

John 13:35 states, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." This closing passage of chapter 19 is an early iteration of the statement Jesus made at the last supper. Honoring the elderly, being kind to strangers, keeping your word, and not lying or cheating are the examples used here, but this by no means is a complete list of how the Jews and, in turn, Christians are to act. Everything we do should be done in love.

## **Chapter 20**

### **V1-5**

As with the previous chapter, many of these concepts have already been presented and would not be new. What would be different is that God is instructing the Israelites on how to deal with the people that commit these acts. This chapter gives guidance on the punishment for those convicted of these particular atrocities.

The chapter begins with declaring that those that worship the idol Molech (see chapter 18:21) by sacrificing children should be put to death by stoning. God even goes so far as to say those that do not carry out this punishment shall be separated from Him.

*What does the phrase, "...set My face against that man..." mean in verses 3 and 5?*

This is not a punishment that the Israelites would carry out, but one that God would carry out. Whatever blessings and dealings God had with the Jews would not extend to anyone that God had declared guilty. It is not known how long or to what extent this was carried out. This was entirely up to God.

### **V6-8**

Anyone who practices witchcraft or has dealings with the occult shall be separated from God. Again, this was not a punishment carried out by the Jews, but only by God.

### **V9**

It is often pointed out that the act referred to here is not an angry outburst from a child but is a pre-meditated decision to cut oneself off from one's parents out of anger or hatred. The punishment for this

was death. This may seem like a harsh sentence for the hating of parents, but this showed the importance of the family unit to God. Although not stated here, Deuteronomy 21:18-21 addresses this concept even further and says the sentence could not be carried out by the parents. Rather, this had to be brought before a neutral party and only they could decide if the sentence of death should be carried out.

*What does the phrase, “His blood shall be upon him” mean?*

This removes guilt from anyone carrying out the death sentence. They are executing God’s judgement and cannot be held responsible for this death. The responsible party is the one being executed. This phrase will be used repeatedly throughout the chapter.

### **V10-12**

In this passage, adultery and incest are covered, both bearing the death penalty for all parties involved. What is not stated here is that there must be at least 2 witnesses for this punishment to be carried out (Deuteronomy 17:6-7). As such, this punishment was rarely implemented since this act was usually committed in secret.

### **V13-16**

These verses are aimed at people committing acts of perversion. Homosexuality, sex with multiple generations of the same family, and bestiality are all seen as abominations to God. Homosexuality and bestiality earned the death penalty. There is some debate about the penalty for those involved in the multiple-generational sin. Most scholars believe that those involved would be burned alive. Some believe they were to be branded with a hot iron and marked for life.

### **V17-21**

This section concerns sexual sins that do not merit the death penalty. These sins meant exile for the convicted. There is a great deal of debate concerning the phrasing used in the description of the sentence. “They shall be childless” could mean many things. Possible interpretations of this are that those involved would have their children removed from them and they would be given to the nearest relatives. Some scholars think that God may have kept them from having any more children for the remainder of their life. Another possibility is that the male would be castrated so as not to produce anymore offspring.

### **V22-26**

This section acts as the closing summation to the chapter (with one last exception). God reminds the Israelites of *why* these laws and punishments are important. The world was full of unholiness and impurities. Those that follow God walk a much different path. One that revolved around love of God and love of neighbors. For those that know the laws of God and choose to ignore them, the punishment was greater than for those of the nations that didn’t know God’s law. God wants us to show the world something different. God wants us to show love. If we can’t show God love, each other love, or the rest of the world love, or even worse, choose not to show love, then we might as well be dead.

### **V27**

It is unclear why this verse is placed as it is. Some speculate that this verse needs special attention because a medium not only defiles themselves before God, but leads others astray, as well. Whatever the reason may be, a medium or fortune teller was to be stoned to death.

## **Chapter 21**

### **V1-5**

*Why would a priest be required to refrain from touching a dead body?*

Death is a result of sin being introduced into the world. As a priest of God, a priest was to abstain from anything that was sinful and many things that were associated with sin. Notice that priests aren't supposed to be around dead bodies or even care for dead bodies. They were also forbidden from shaving or cutting themselves as the pagan cultures did for the mourning of their dead.

### **V6-9**

Priests were not to marry any woman that wasn't a virgin. Although it is not specifically mentioned in this passage, it is assumed that widows were also off limits to priests, although there is some debate concerning this rule.

### **V10-12**

The high priest was not only prohibited from being around dead bodies, the same as the priests, but he was not even to mourn publicly for the death of his own parents.

### **V13-15**

The high priest was under the same constraints as his fellow priests in taking a wife, but it is made very clear here that the high priest could not even marry a widow.

### **V16-24**

This is seen by some as a controversial passage since it forbids anyone with defects from becoming a priest. It does not prohibit them from being in a priestly family or even having a position of some authority. They simply could not approach the temple. This may seem callous on the part of God, but God and the Jews consider birth defects a side-effect of the sin of the world. Even though these people may not have done anything wrong themselves, the sin of the world has affected them in an adverse way and would disqualify them from service in the temple.

## **Chapter 22**

### **V1-9**

This passage further describes to the priests their need to be pure. This passage is a continuation of the previous chapter concerning the sanctity of the priesthood and the higher standard that the priests are to live by.

There is a wide variation of translations in verse 2. The New King James version says, "...that they separate themselves from..." while the New American Standard says, "...to be careful with..." The original Hebrew verb is difficult to translate due to its age, but most scholars agree that the meaning behind this phrase is "treat with respect" or "be scrupulous about."

Verses 4-8 give examples of, but not a complete list of things that could cause a priest to be impure. These were just temporary examples of impurities, and the priest could resume his duties once he had become ritually clean.



## **V10-16**

This passage gives guidance on the sacrificial gifts and the food that goes to the priests. Since the priests were held to a higher standard than the rest of the Jews, they and their families were the only ones allowed to eat the food that was presented as offerings.

## **V17-25**

These verses give further instructions on how to select an animal for a sacrifice. This is the fifth time that God has given instructions on selecting an animal without blemish (Exodus 12:5, 29:1, Leviticus 1:3, 3:1) indicating that God takes this matter very seriously. Some animals with “minor” defects could be offered as gifts of gratitude but could not be used in the atonement of sin. No animal that had been castrated could be offered as a sacrifice.

## **V26-33**

*Why could a mother and her young not be sacrificed on the same day (verse 28)?*

The reasoning behind this instruction is not made immediately clear but there was a Canaanite fertility ritual that involved sacrificing a mother and its young together. Most scholars believe this command was to keep the two cultures from overlapping in any way.

A sacrifice of thanksgiving was only to be made voluntarily. It could not be asked for by priests or anyone else in authority. God only wants sincere gratitude, not forced gratitude.

This chapter uses the phrase “I am the Lord” or some variation of it a multitude of times. This is an indication that God is not asking us to do these things lightly. Rather, He is commanding us to observe Him as holy.

# **Chapter 23**

## **V1-2**

This chapter describes the seven annual feasts that the Jews are to observe. These would not only be celebrations, but a time for the Jewish people as a whole to show gratitude to God. Note that the feasts of Purim and Hanukkah are not addressed here as they were established much later in Jewish history.

## **V3**

God begins by reminding the people of the Fourth Commandment. The Sabbath is a holy day and should be treated like one of the following seven feasts. It is a day of rest and gratitude.

## **V4-8**

The first two feasts run consecutively on the Jewish calendar. Passover is observed on the fourteenth day of the first month. This is the reminder of the Israelites rescue from Egypt.

The Feast of Unleavened bread begins on the fifteenth day of the first month and runs for seven days. This feast was established at the first Passover and is often considered the second part of Passover. Both the first and last days of this feast were days of rest, like the Sabbath. Work could continue between these two days. This feast served as a reminder of the purity of God and of the purity that the followers of God should try to attain.

### **V9-14**

The third celebration is the Feast of First Fruits or the Harvest Feast. It should be noted that this command was not to be observed at the time the command was given. This feast was a promise from God that the Jews would inherit the land of Canaan. After the Jews entered the promised land, this feast would serve as a reminder that God gave them this land.

### **V15-21**

The fourth celebration is the Feast of Weeks or Feast of Ingathering, also known as Pentecost. Although it isn't given a title here, this same feast is named in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This feast began fifty days after the completion of the Harvest Feast. This feast is unusual in that the bread used in the offering included yeast. The entire nation was to gather before the temple and before God.

### **V22**

This verse stands out because it isn't necessarily related to any particular feast but is a reminder that these feasts are a celebration for *everyone*. The Jews are not to exclude the poor during these feasts just as they are not to exclude the poor at any other time.

### **V23-25**

The fifth celebration is the Feast of Trumpets. This feast is observed on the first day of the seventh month and is a day of rest and sacrifice to God.

### **V26-32**

The sixth celebration is the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. This feast follows the Feast of Trumpets by ten days. This was not so much a celebration as it was a day of inward reflection and humility before God. This is the annual Jewish 'day of reckoning' to atone for the sins committed throughout the year.

### **V33-44**

The final celebration listed in this chapter is the Feast of Tabernacles. This takes place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, placing three celebrations in just a three-week period. It is appropriate that this feast follows the Day of Atonement because this feast is all about celebration and gratitude. This feast required the Jews to live in tents or temporary shelters for seven days to remind them that God led them out of the wilderness and into the promised land where they would be at home. The first and last days would be observed as days of rest. The dwelling in shelters would be conducive to interacting with neighbors making this a very social feast.

## **Chapter 24**

### **V1-4**

The lampstand was described and forged in the book of Exodus. Here is more information concerning the care of the lampstand. This lamp was the only source of light inside the tabernacle. It must be continuously cared for, using only the finest olive oil. The lamp was to remain lit at all times, the lamp filled regularly with oil, the wicks trimmed, and the gold of the lampstand cleaned.

*Why is the lampstand relevant to modern Christianity?*

The lamp remained continuously lit as a symbol of God always making Himself available to us. God's forgiveness never takes time off. He will accept us in whatever shape we're in at whatever time of day we choose.

## **V5-9**

This passage describes the bread of the tabernacle. Each Sabbath, more bread was to be presented to God inside the tabernacle. This bread was to be eaten by the priests inside the tabernacle as a sort of communion with God. There were twelve loaves of bread, one for each tribe of Israel. Some translations use the term “rows” for how the bread was to be arranged, but the original Hebrew is vaguer on this description. It could even be said that the bread was to be arranged in piles.

## **V10-16**

This is an unusual passage as it breaks from the establishment of the laws and refers to an incident among the Jews. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to this story. However, most scholars point out that this passage set a precedent for the law concerning blaspheming the name of God. Although told as a recount of what transpired, this helped set the grounds for laws concerning the name of God.

There is an ancient Jewish legend concerning this man. It is said that his Egyptian father was the soldier that Moses had killed before fleeing Egypt. The soldier was supposedly married to a Jewish slave and this son set out with his mother when the Jews fled Egypt. As he was trying to establish his camp with the tribe of Dan, one of the tribesmen challenged this person’s right to assemble with them. This started the argument which led to him blaspheming the name of God. Since no law had yet been established concerning punishment for this crime, he was brought before Moses. This belief is not biblical and is just legend.

A trial took place where multiple witnesses confirmed the accusation. Those witnesses were the first to cast the stones which would claim this person’s life.

This punishment may seem harsh by both modern standards and Christian standards. But this showed the seriousness of God combatting the sin of the world. His commands to the Jews were not to be taken lightly. The ten commandments were for everyone, not just the Jews. Although God may consider a lesser punishment for someone of another nation or culture who did not know the law concerning sin, the condemnation for the offense of blaspheming God was for anyone and everyone, regardless of race, culture, or religion.

This law was one of the many reasons why no one spoke or even wrote down the name of God except the high priest on the Day of Atonement. This is also why the Hebrew Bible only shows the name of God as a vowel-less four-letter name: YHWH.

## **V17-22**

*Why does God include this passage here amongst the retelling of the Egyptian being sentenced?*

This is an oft-quoted passage, even used in modern American culture. What is curious about this passage is its’ location in the context of the story of the blasphemer. This is God’s way of reminding the Jews that crimes should be punished, but only appropriately punished to fit the crime. The point of this passage is to emphasize the importance of not taking God’s name in vain. The perspective of the phrase “an eye for an eye” is what’s important. God is not saying to overlook forgiveness or even accidents. God is saying let the punishment be appropriate to the crime *and the punishment should not exceed that proportion*. The appropriate punishment for the crime of blaspheming God is death, the same punishment that applied to murder.

*If all sin is the same in God’s eyes, why are the punishments different?*

This is a valid and common question amongst Christians and non-believers alike. All sin is detestable to God, but some sins have more consequences to more people, even if only one person is committing the sin. The punishments of these sins usually reflect the amount of damage to others. What all sin has in common is that God can forgive you regardless of the sin. However, forgiveness does not always mean that there won't be any consequences.

## **V23**

The conclusion of this chapter ends with the execution of the Egyptian blasphemer.

*Why couldn't the blasphemer be forgiven?*

There is what theologians call the "unforgiveable sin" which is referenced here, Mark 3:20-30, and Luke 12:10. Most scholars believe that it is not the unwillingness of God to forgive, but the unwillingness of the person to be forgiven. When someone has so hardened their heart as to not only turn away from God, but to slander God and try and turn others away from God, it would be better for this one person to fall from the forgiving grace of God than to have others suffer a similar fate because of him.

## **Chapter 25**

### **V1-7**

The beginning of this chapter is a reminder that the Israelites are still camped at the base of Mount Sinai. The time from Exodus 19, all of Leviticus, and up to Numbers 10 all take place in the same location and indicate that these writings all take place within a short time span.

This passage describes a Sabbath in terms of years, not days. The weekly Sabbath was to be observed by the Jews. The seventh-year Sabbath was to be observed by the land. This was beneficial for the environment that the Jews inhabited but required them to trust God that He would provide for them during this Sabbath year. Whatever food the land produced on its own could be eaten, but no growing or harvesting was to take place at the hands of the Jews. This would remind the Jews that not only did the land belong to God, but *they* belonged to God.

The Jews found ways around this law in some regards. One way was for a Jew to sell his land to a Gentile with a strict contract attached to it. The Gentile would own the land for a year, make some money while he owned it, and the Jew would be able to work the land and keep some of the harvest for himself. Then, at the end of the year, the Gentile would be required by contract to sell the land back to the Jew for a previously agreed upon price. Since the Jew didn't own the land during this seventh year, he was not violating this command. Another way around this law was to only work sixth sevenths of the land at a time. That way, one seventh of the land would be at rest each year. The problem with these "work arounds" was that, although legal by Jewish standard, it took away from the purpose that God wanted them to adhere to: Trust in God for an entire year.

### **V8-12**

This passage describes the Jubilee. Every fiftieth year was considered a Sabbath year. Jubilee begins on the Day of Atonement in the fiftieth year. This was a special declaration of liberation. All slaves were to be set free during this year. Slaves would be bought and sold based on how many years there were until the Jubilee year. This held true even for slaves that chose to remain with their masters (see Exodus 21:26 and Deuteronomy 15:12-18).

In the Jubilee year, slaves were freed, debts were forgiven, and land was returned to the original tribes. This kept the Israelites in a continuous state of “middle-class.” This system worked for many generations of Israel and was a fine balance between socialism and capitalism.

The Jubilee year fell immediately after the seventh seven-year Sabbath. This meant that the Jews would have to trust God for two sequential years without a planting or harvest.

### **V13-17**

Land that had been sold was to be returned to the original owners. The land of Israel would be divided among the tribes of Judah once they entered the promised land. Every Jubilee year, the land was to be properly divided into that original distribution. Most scholars believe that the selling of land was more like a lease than a sale. This was an extremely charitable time for the Jews. This gave the opportunity for the poor families to start over again. They would still be responsible for their own actions and how they used the land they had, but this system kept the Israelites from having a permanent poverty class.

### **V18-22**

God promised the Jews that if they obeyed Him and kept His commandments, the sixth year harvest would be so plentiful that they would not need to worry about food for the Sabbath years ahead of them. This was not a blanket promise. The Jews had to keep their end of the bargain.

### **V23-28**

In verse 23, God reminds the Jews that the land is not theirs, but His. They are borrowing it from Him and should treat it as such. Hence, the leasing of land to others rather than outright selling.

The redeeming relative (‘goel’ in the original Hebrew) had not only the right, but also the responsibility to save a family member sold into slavery, reacquire the family’s land or inheritance if it was sold outside of the family, and avenge the murder of a family member. An example of a redeeming relative would be Boaz in Ruth 3.

The sale of land would be prorated based on how many years since the last or to the next Jubilee year. If a redeeming relative could not afford the land, it would be returned at the following Jubilee.

### **29-34**

This passage presents a caveat to the selling and redeeming of land. A dwelling in a walled city was simply that: a dwelling. It was not required for making a living. Land, buildings, and dwellings, outside of the city walls were used for sustaining a living. The farming, herding, and even mining that took place is what allowed a family to support themselves. Houses, apartments, or rooms in city walls were simply shelter and the law of Jubilee did not apply to these. The only exception to this caveat would be if the house had been sold by a Levite. Since Levites could not own land, their dwellings acted as their livelihood outside the temple.

### **35-38**

This passage is another commandment that is counter-cultural to its day: show compassion to the poor. The term usury is often used in commentaries of this section. Usury is unlawful interest of money. Biblical examples can be found in Ezekiel 18, 22, and Nehemiah 5. Modern examples would be title-loan companies that offer immediate cash for high interest rates with the threat of repossessing property if payments aren’t made.

### **39-46**

This passage is somewhat controversial by modern standards. This commandment allows for slavery so long as the slave is not a Jew. Indentured servitude was allowed to pay off a debt, but a Jew could not buy another Jew as a slave. However, foreigners could be owned as slaves since they did not have the same rights as a Jew under the Hebrew law. God did tell the Jews that everyone, including slaves, must be treated humanely. Even slaves were given the Sabbath off. The modern interpretation of the word slave has many negative connotations to it, as it should. The Jews were slaves in Egypt much like the African Americans were slaves in the early American south. The Jews were allowed to have slaves, but they were not allowed to mistreat them like either of those examples. In many cases, slaves in Israel were treated like family.

### **47-55**

In the case of a Jew becoming a slave to a foreigner, a relative redeemer would do their best to buy their family out of slavery, especially during the year of Jubilee. It was because of this command that Jews rarely sold themselves into slavery. They would often sell themselves into indentured servitude when necessary. What this passage leaves open ended, unfortunately, is what happens when the foreigner is unwilling to sell the Jewish slave back to the kinsmen redeemer.

## **Chapter 26**

### **V1-2**

This chapter has to do with obedience and disobedience to God. There are rewards for the former and harsh penalties for the latter. God opens with a reiteration of the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-6) and a reminder to observe the Sabbaths which God took great care to explain in the previous chapters.

### **V3-8**

God's original plan was for the nation of Israel to have no king but Himself. All they needed to do was follow His commandments and He would provide for them. If Israel obeyed, God would bless them with food, shelter, protection, and peace. There are examples of a small Jewish army defeating larger armies throughout the Old Testament. Gideon, Jonathan, and David are just a few examples.

### **V9-13**

Obedience to God brings dignity for those willing to bow down. Usually, submission would be a loss of dignity, but obedience to God is a show of strength. There is no shame in worshipping the Creator who chooses to know His creation. In fact, taking a stand for God against the world would take great courage. God wants us to follow Him because He wants to be among us.

### **V14-20**

Just as there are blessings for those that follow God, there are consequences for those that don't. God promises a sense of terror and confusion to a disobedient Israel. There will be no peace, there will be no victories in battle, there will be no plentiful harvests.

*What does God mean when He says He will punish them seven times more for their sins (verse 18)?*

This is much like the idea of forgiving your enemy seven times seventy (Matthew 18:22). It's not a calculated limit so much as it is an exponential number that is beyond counting.

## **V21-22**

Even nature would turn against Israel if they became disobedient to God. There would be no refuge on Earth for those that broke their vows. Their livestock, their livelihood, and the lives of their families would all be forfeited.

## **V23-26**

Not only was there punishment for breaking the covenant, but God would continue punishment if Israel did not repent from their wickedness.

*What does the phrase "...ten women will bake your bread in one oven..." mean in verse 26?*

There would be so little grain and so little food from harvest that there would be no need for each family to have their own oven. It would barely be worth lighting the stove for ten women. Famine and pestilence were promised to Israel if they did not seek forgiveness for breaking their vows.

## **V27-39**

Disobedience could be forgiven, but continued and repeated disobedience would result in dire consequences. Many of the punishments listed here came true on more than one occasion. The Israelites ate their own infants while under siege from Babylon (see 2 Kings, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel). And while the Israelites were in turmoil, the land would be able to observe the neglected Sabbath that it was due.

God would be so far from Israel that the Israelites would be continuously paranoid about what punishment would befall them next.

## **V40-46**

Despite the disobedience and turning away, God would still remain faithful to His people. Just because we turn away from God does not mean He turns away from us. The Jews (and all Christians) would still be able to find reconciliation with a forgiving God. He does not want to destroy us. He wants a relationship with us.

It should be noted that verse 46 acts as a conclusion to the book of Leviticus even though there is still one chapter remaining. Chapter 27 is believed to be something like an added appendix.

# **Chapter 27**

## **V1-8**

*What does it mean to consecrate by vow?*

This chapter allows the Jews to offer land, animals, or even themselves as a gift to God. These were strictly voluntary vows and could not be made a requirement by the priests. This passage details the offering of oneself or a family member as a gift. There are many reasons for this type of offering. One could make a vow out of gratitude, out of distress, out of a sense of duty to God, or any other number of reasons. This passage even allows for a payment to be made to fulfill a vow depending on age, gender, and wealth. 1 Samuel 1:11 describes a vow of a mother to dedicate a son to God should she be granted the gift of pregnancy. It should be noted that these vows were not a bargaining chip to use with God, but a promise of fulfillment for one's faith in God.

### **V9-13**

This section is a little more confusing as it deals with the vow of an animal offering, but with provisions for reacquiring the animal. A person might make a vow to God in haste and commit more than he intended. In this case, an animal that had been given in a vow could be equally replaced or purchased back from the temple with a 20% fee added on. This transaction would consider the vow fulfilled before the Lord.

### **V14-15**

As with the case of animals, a homestead could be offered as a vow. Provisions were also made for purchasing the homestead back with the same 20% fee as with an animal.

### **V16-25**

This section describes redeeming land from a vow. The first section, 16-21, describes land that belonged to the clan of the person making the vow. The remainder of the passage, 22-25, pertains to land that did not belong to the person making the vow. All land was valued and pro-rated based on the next Jubilee year, as all land would return to the rightful clan at that point.

### **V26-27**

These verses make a clarification of an animal offering. The firstborn of a clean animal already belonged to God. The firstborn of an unclean animal, however, could be used in a vow.

### **V28-29**

These verses make a distinction between something or someone being devoted to the Lord and something or someone consecrated by a vow to the Lord. Anything that had been devoted to the Lord could not be redeemed.

### **V30-34**

The last section of this chapter deals with tithes. If a person had given animals or a portion of their harvest as a tithe, the animals or harvest could be bought back with a 20% fee. Although many see the fee as a markup and even consider it unfair, it is meant to show the seriousness of the “possessions of God.” There are penalties for playing around with things that have been given to the Lord.

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