**Leviticus Commentary**

**Leviticus Chapter 1**

Lev 1:1

**“spoke to him out of the Tent of Meeting.”** This happened a number of times and is better described in Numbers 7:89. The “Tabernacle” (“Dwelling Place”) is also referred to as the “Tent of Meeting” because it was the place where people met with God. The Hebrew phrase is *'ohel mo'ed*, in which *'ohel* (#0168 אֹהֶל) means “tent,” and is followed by *mo'ed* (#04150 מוֹעֵד or מֹעֵד) which means a “meeting” or a “place for a meeting.” Thus the *'ohel mo'ed* is the “Tent of Meeting” (see commentary on Exod. 27:21).

Lev 1:2

**“approaches with.”** The Hebrew word is *qarab* (#07126 קָרַב), often translated “brings,” but in this context, the point is that the person “approaches” God with an offering when without it God would be unapproachable. It can be hard for the modern Christian to really understand the relationship that the average Israelite had with God because it is so different from the relationship believers have with Him today. One huge difference is about being “far” from God or “near” Him. The concepts of “far” and “near” are huge in the Old Testament but often veiled by translation. With no long-range communication in the biblical world such as telephones, getting to be “near” someone so that you could see them, hear them, and get access to them was a privilege and honor, and this was true of people and of God.

For the most part, the average Israelite was kept “far” from God, separated from Him by space and curtains (or walls), and anyone who violated those walls and spaces died (cf. Num. 1:51; cf. Num. 4:20; 8:19). The average Israelite could only regularly “come near” to God with an offering or sacrifice. However, in most English Bibles it can be hard to see the relationship between “coming near” to God and having an offering or sacrifice because Leviticus 1:2 usually reads that people “bring” an offering to God: “When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD…” (NASB). But the word “bring” can be translated “come near” and the verse could be translated “If any man of you comes near with an offering.” So even the average Israelite was kept “far” from God by curtains, walls, and spaces. The curtains surrounding the courtyard of the Tabernacle were seven and a half feet high (2.3 meters), which was too high for the Israelites to see over (Exod. 27:18). They could only enter the courtyard when they brought an approach offering.

This distance between people and God meant that people thought and felt differently about God than we do today. Now, because of the work of Christ, non-Jews who were “far” from God are brought “near” (Eph. 2:13), and every believer—Jew and Gentile—can go right up to God and be “near” Him; indeed, everyone can approach the throne of grace and be “near” to God (Heb. 4:16).

**“approach offering.”** The Hebrew is *qorban* (#07133 קֹרְבָּן). *Qorban* began as the verbal noun derived from the verb *qarab*, and thus *qorban* derives its basic meaning from the word *qarab*, “to bring, to approach with.” This is why E. W. Bullinger called the *qorban* an “admittance offering.” Bullinger writes: “It is the present brought to this day in the East in order to secure an audience, or to see the face of the superior, and find access to his presence. Hence called today, ‘the face-offering.’ …Hence, Korban is essentially an admittance offering; securing the entrée.”[[1]](#footnote-14093)

Although *qorban* is usually simply translated “offering,” and indeed that is the simple meaning of the word that developed over time, the fact that it developed as a verbal noun from *qarab*, “bring, approach,” and the fact that God had to be approached with an offering, is good evidence that God’s original intent was that the *qorban* was an approach offering, allowing the offeror to come near to Him. “In the OT the noun *qorbān*, which belongs to the jargon of the priestly cult, probably derives much of its semantic content from the verb *qārab/hiqrib.*”[[2]](#footnote-27523)

The word *qorban* was clearly associated with approaching God in His Tabernacle/Temple because it occurs 40 times in Leviticus, 38 times in Numbers, and 2 in Ezekiel (Ezek. 20:28 referring to Israel offering at a High Place, and Ezek. 40:43 referring to offerings at the Millennial Temple).[[3]](#footnote-31786) So out of 80 occurrences in the Bible, 78 of those are in Leviticus and Numbers. Hebrew lexicons tell us that *qorban* is the least specific Hebrew word for an offering, which is logical because being able to approach God was part of every offering. Although it is perfectly acceptable, and no doubt in some cases even preferred, to translate *qorban* simply as “offering,” doing so disassociates the offering from the reason that the offering was brought in the first place, which is found in the root word *qarab*: the *qorban* allowed the offeror to approach God, and come near to Him without danger of death. It is because of the clarity of “approach offering” that the REV translation usually has “approach offering” when *qorban* is in the Hebrew text.

[For more information and a more complete list of the feasts and sabbaths in Israel, see commentary on Lev. 23:2.]

Lev 1:6

**“He is to skin the burnt offering.”** The burnt offering was to be completely burnt up except for the skin of the animal, which was given to the priests (Lev. 7:8). This was different from the other animal sacrifices such as the sin offering or fellowship offering because the person who offered that sacrifice got to eat some of the meat.

Lev 1:9

**“burn all of it into smoke​.”** The skin of the burnt offering was not burned, but was given to the priest who offered the offering (Lev. 7:8).

[For more on “burn into smoke,” see commentary on Exod. 29:13.]

**Leviticus Chapter 2**

Lev 2:2

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 2:11

**“yeast…honey.”** Yeast and honey were two things that would cause the grain to ferment, so God forbids them.

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 2:12

**“you may offer them.”** A person may offer grain with yeast or honey to Yahweh, which the priests would then get a share of, but grain with yeast or honey was not to be offered on the altar.

Lev 2:13

**“the salt of the covenant.”** This refers to the ancient salt covenant, which was a binding covenant made by sharing salt in some way, usually eating it. The idea of having the salt covenant as part of the sacrifices and offerings, even the grain offerings, was to ensure the sincerity of the worshiper. God is not a God who wants people to “just go through the motions” of worshiping Him without being sincere. He makes that clear in a number of places in the Bible.

[For more on the salt covenant, see commentary on 2 Chron. 13:5. For more on God wanting a person’s heart to be right with Him before making sacrifices and offerings, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

**“With all your approach offerings you are to offer salt.”** This command here in Leviticus 2:13 made it clear that it was not just the grain offerings that had to be offered with salt, but every offering. The phrase, “all your approach offerings” is literal and means “all,” and there were many different “approach offerings.” The salt emphasized the covenant of the Law that God made with Israel (Exod. 24:3-8) and emphasized the sincerity of the person making the offering, and that was important for every person and every sacrifice and offering. No offering was in and of itself sufficient to cover for sin. The offering had to be done in sincerity of heart, with trust (faith) in God that He would accept the offering and make atonement. David understood that fact well, and expressed it in Psalm 51: “Behold, you desire faithfulness in the inward parts. For you do not delight in sacrifice, or else I would give it. You have no pleasure in a burnt offering. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:6, 16, 17). Sacrifices without trust in God and obedience to Him were not acceptable to God, a point that the Bible makes clear in many places.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Lev 2:16

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

**Leviticus Chapter 3**

Lev 3:2

**“the Tent of Meeting.”** The “Tabernacle” (“Dwelling Place”) is also referred to as the “Tent of Meeting” because it was the place where people met with God. The Hebrew phrase is *'ohel mo'ed*, in which *'ohel* (#0168 אֹהֶל) means “tent,” and is followed by *mo'ed* (#04150 מוֹעֵד or מֹעֵד) which means a “meeting” or a “place for a meeting.” Thus the *'ohel mo'ed* is the “Tent of Meeting” (see commentary on Exod. 27:21).

Lev 3:4

**“the appendage of the liver.”** The Hebrew word apparently refers to an appendage that is on cows, sheep, and goats but not humans (see commentary on Exod. 29:13).

Lev 3:5

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 3:10

**“the appendage of the liver.”** The Hebrew word apparently refers to an appendage that is on cows, sheep, and goats but not humans (see commentary on Exod. 29:13).

**Leviticus Chapter 4**

Lev 4:1

**“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying.”** Here Yahweh speaks about the sin offering. The sin offering is talked about in Leviticus 6:24-30 and Numbers 15:22-31.

Jesus Christ was a sin offering for us (2 Cor. 5:21; see REV commentary on 2 Cor. 5:21).

Lev 4:2

**“unintentionally.”** The sin offering and trespass offering were for unintentional sins. If a person sinned on purpose, willfully, defiantly, he was to be “cut off” from his people (Num. 15:30-31). That is why we sometimes see the wrath of God fall on people in the Old Testament, such as on Aaron’s sons who disobeyed God about the offerings (Lev. 10:1-2), or when the ground opened up and swallowed Korah and the rest of the leaders who rebelled against God and Moses (Num. 16:1-2, 31-35).

If a person sinned intentionally, and had no intention of repenting, then their life was in danger from God, the Devil, or people. However, we all sometimes sin intentionally, and God is gracious and so often there are no immediate consequences for that sin; but there certainly will be on the Day of Judgment unless the person repents and God accepts their asking for His forgiveness (cf. 1 John 1:9 and note the record of the tax collector in Luke 18:13).

Lev 4:3

**“sin offering.”** The Hebrew word translated as the short phrase “sin offering” is *chatta'ah* (#02403 חַטָּאָה or חַטָּאת). The Hebrew word can either mean “sin” or “sin offering,” depending on the context. Here it means “sin offering.” The Greek word in used in the Septuagint is *hamartia* (#266 ἁμαρτία), and it, too, can be understood to be “sin” or a “sin offering” according to the context. Here in Leviticus 4:3, 8, 21, 24, 25, 29, 32, and 4:33, the Hebrew word *chatta'ah* and the Greek translation *hamartia* are properly translated into English as “sin offering” in the various English versions.

Leviticus 4 should have set the pattern for Christ being our sin offering, and 2 Corinthians 5:21 should have read in most English versions that Christ was a “sin offering” on our behalf, and thus paid the penalty for our sin. There is no textual or typological reason for 2 Corinthians 5:21 to be translated as Christ became “sin” for us. He did not become “sin,” he became our sin offering.

[For more on Christ being our “sin offering,” see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:21.]

Lev 4:4

**“to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, before Yahweh.”** The “Tabernacle” (“Dwelling Place”) is also referred to as the “Tent of Meeting” because it was the place where people met with God. The Hebrew phrase is *'ohel mo'ed*, in which *'ohel* (#0168 אֹהֶל) means “tent,” and is followed by *mo'ed* (#04150 מוֹעֵד or מֹעֵד) which means a “meeting” or a “place for a meeting.” Thus the *'ohel mo'ed* is the “Tent of Meeting” (see commentary on Exod. 27:21).

The entrance of the Tent of Meeting was the entrance to the Holy Place, the first room of the Tabernacle, where the menorah, Bread of the Presence, and the golden altar of incense were. God dwelt in the Tabernacle, so to bring the bull to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, before Yahweh, was to bring the bull into the Tabernacle courtyard but not into the Tabernacle itself.

Lev 4:5

**“bring it into the Tent of Meeting.”** The priest was to bring the blood “into” the Tent of Meeting. Although the Hebrew text can be either “to” or “into,” the priest was already before the Tent of Meeting, so in that context, the Hebrew means “into.” The priest slaughtered the bull in the courtyard of the Tabernacle, then went into the Holy Place and sprinkled the blood before Yahweh, before the curtain to the Holy of Holies (Lev. 4:6).

Lev 4:6

**“the veil of the Holy *of Holies*.”** This is the veil of fine linen that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Exod. 26:31-35). Yahweh came to Israel between the cherubim (see commentary on Num. 7:89) that were on the Atonement Cover, which was the cover over the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 25:22).

Lev 4:7

**“the altar of sweet incense before Yahweh that is in the Tent of Meeting.”** After sprinkling the blood toward the Holy of Holies, the priest is to put blood on the horns of the golden altar of incense.

**“Then he is to pour out all of the rest of the blood of the bull at the base of the altar of burnt offering.”** So, the process of the sin offering involves the priest slaughtering the animal in the Tabernacle courtyard, then going into the Holy Place, the first room of the Tabernacle, and sprinkling the blood toward the Holy of Holies, then putting blood on the horns of the golden altar of incense, then going back out into the Tabernacle courtyard and pouring out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar of sacrifice. Then the priest deals with the parts of the animal that are burned on the altar as an offering to God (Lev. 4:8-10), then the priest deals with the parts of the sacrifice that must be burned outside the camp (Lev. 4:11-12).

Lev 4:9

**“and the appendage on the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is *yoteret* (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), and according to the *HALOT* Hebrew-English lexicons it refers to an “appendage of the liver.” *HALOT* explains that this appendage is found in cows, sheep, and goats but is not in humans (see commentary on Exod. 29:13).

Lev 4:10

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 4:12

**“And and burn it on wood with fire.”** Students of Scripture are well aware that the Tabernacle and Temple had two altars: the golden altar of incense inside the Holy Place (Exod. 30:1-10; 37:25-28) and the large altar of sacrifice in the courtyard of the Tabernacle/Temple (Exod. 27:1-8; 38:1-7). However, there was a third altar associated with the Tabernacle and Temple that was “outside of the camp,” that is, it was outside of the area of the Tabernacle/Temple. It was on this third altar that things that were often considered unclean, such as the bodies of sin offerings, were burned (cf. Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27). This altar is associated with the death of Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:10, and see commentary on Heb. 13:10).

Lev 4:21

**“carry the bull outside the camp and burn it.”** There were three altars associated with the Tabernacle and Temple: the golden altar of incense, the bronze altar of sacrifice, and a third altar east of the camp where certain parts of sacrifices were burned, and that altar is closely connected to the death of Christ (see commentary on Heb. 13:10).

Lev 4:27

**“one person.”** The Hebrew text is “soul” (*nephesh*) but here it refers to the person.

**“the common people.”** The Hebrew text is literally “the people of the land,” but this is one of the places where a literal translation could be confusing. The “people of the land” are the common, ordinary people who live in Israel. The phrase does not refer to farmers, and certainly not to “landed people” like we think of land owners in Europe.

**“by doing one of the things​.”** Even breaking one commandment is breaking the Law and is sin. The Hebrew word “one,” *echad*, is in the text and should not be played down in translation. James 2:10 says that breaking one of the commandments makes a person guilty of breaking the whole Law.

Lev 4:31

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 4:33

**“sin offering.”** The word translated as “sin offering” occurs twice in the Hebrew text of Leviticus 4:33, but only once in the Septuagint.

**Leviticus Chapter 5**

Lev 5:1

**“If anyone sins.”** Leviticus 5:1-13 continues the rules given in chapter 4 about the sin offering. It would have been less confusing for the reader if Leviticus 5:1 had not been a new chapter but instead had been numbered as part of Leviticus 4. That would have made Leviticus chapter 4 have 48 verses instead of 35, but then all of chapter 4 would have been about the sin offering and then Leviticus 5 would start a new subject and be about the trespass offering. As it is, the first part of Leviticus 5 continues the information about the sin offering, and a new subject, the trespass offering, starts in the middle of chapter 5 (Lev. 5:14).

Lev 5:6

**“his offering for *his* guilt.”** The Hebrew word *asham* (#0817) in this context refers to the penalty for the guilt the person incurred due to their sin, so it is translated as “offering for guilt.”

Lev 5:12

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 5:15

**“unfaithfully, yes, unfaithfully.”** God uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16). To sin ignorantly is still to be unfaithful and trespass against God.

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

**Leviticus Chapter 6**

Lev 6:9

**“This is the law of the burnt offering.”** The burnt offering was to be completely burnt up except for the skin of the animal, which was given to the priests (Lev. 7:8). This was different from the other animal sacrifices such as the sin offering or fellowship offering because the person who offered that sacrifice got to eat some of the meat.

Lev 6:12

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 6:16

**“the Tent of Meeting.”** The “Tabernacle” (“Dwelling Place”) is also referred to as the “Tent of Meeting” because it was the place where people met with God. The Hebrew phrase is *'ohel mo'ed*, in which *'ohel* (#0168 אֹהֶל) means “tent,” and is followed by *mo'ed* (#04150 מוֹעֵד or מֹעֵד) which means a “meeting” or a “place for a meeting.” Thus the *'ohel mo'ed* is the “Tent of Meeting” (see commentary on Exod. 27:21).

**Leviticus Chapter 7**

Lev 7:4

**“and the appendage on the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is yoteret (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), and according to the *HALOT* Hebrew-English lexicons it refers to an “appendage of the liver.” *HALOT* explains that this appendage is found in cows, sheep, and goats but is not in humans.

Lev 7:5

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 7:31

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 7:34

**“waved breast and the heaved thigh.”** When someone offered a peace offering, the fat and some other parts were burned on the altar, but the meat was eaten by the people. However, the priests got the breast and right thigh, which were waved before Yahweh. Apparently the breast was waved back and forth, and the thigh was waved (or “heaved” because it was so heavy) up and down.

**Leviticus Chapter 8**

Lev 8:3

**“the Tent of Meeting.”** The “Tabernacle” (“Dwelling Place”) is also referred to as the “Tent of Meeting” because it was the place where people met with God. The Hebrew phrase is *'ohel mo'ed*, in which *'ohel* (#0168 אֹהֶל) means “tent,” and is followed by *mo'ed* (#04150 מוֹעֵד or מֹעֵד) which means a “meeting” or a “place for a meeting.” Thus the *'ohel mo'ed* is the “Tent of Meeting” (see commentary on Exod. 27:21).

Lev 8:11

**“And *also* the *bronze* basin.”** This is the large bronze basin that was in the courtyard of the Tabernacle and was used for washing (cf. Exod. 30:18; 38:8).

Lev 8:13

**“caps.”** These “caps” were “a band of linen wrapped around the head, forming something like a brimless convex cap” (see commentary on Exod. 28:40).

Lev 8:16

**“and the appendage on the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is yoteret (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), and according to the *HALOT* Hebrew-English lexicons it refers to an “appendage of the liver.” *HALOT* explains that this appendage is found in cows, sheep, and goats but is not in humans.

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 8:17

**“burned with fire outside the camp.”** There were three altars associated with the Tabernacle and Temple: the large bronze altar of sacrifice, the golden altar of incense, and a third altar east of the camp where certain parts of sacrifices were burned, and that altar is closely connected to the death of Christ (see commentary on Heb. 13:10).

Lev 8:20

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 8:21

**“burned the whole ram into smoke.”** The burnt offering was to be completely burnt up except for the skin of the animal, which was given to the priests (Lev. 7:8). This was different from the other animal sacrifices such as the sin offering or fellowship offering because the person who offered that sacrifice got to eat some of the meat.

Lev 8:23

**“ear...thumb...big toe.”** Symbolizing hearing the words of God, doing the work of God, and walking the walk of God (see commentary on Exod. 29:20).

Lev 8:33

**“entrance of the Tent of Meeting.”** This is the courtyard between the Tent of Meeting and the main entrance to the Tabernacle complex.

**“ordination.”** For the translation “ordain,” or “ordination,” see commentary on Exodus 28:41, and in this sentence, “ordination” is simply the word meaning “filling,” which then fits together with the Hebrew for “ordain.”

**Leviticus Chapter 9**

Lev 9:10

**“and the appendage on the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is yoteret (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), and according to the *HALOT* Hebrew-English lexicons it refers to an “appendage of the liver.” *HALOT* explains that this appendage is found in cows, sheep, and goats but is not in humans (see commentary on Exod. 29:13).

**“burned into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 9:11

**“he burned with fire outside the camp.”** There were three altars associated with the Tabernacle and Temple: the golden altar of incense, the bronze altar of sacrifice, and a third altar east of the camp where certain parts of sacrifices were burned, and that altar is closely connected to the death of Christ (see commentary on Heb. 13:10).

Lev 9:13

**“and he burned them into smoke upon the altar.”** The burnt offering was to be completely burnt up except for the skin of the animal, which was given to the priests (Lev. 7:8). This was different from the other animal sacrifices such as the sin offering or fellowship offering because the person who offered that sacrifice got to eat some of the meat.

Lev 9:19

**“and the appendage on the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is *yoteret* (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), and according to the *HALOT* Hebrew-English lexicons it refers to an “appendage of the liver.” *HALOT* explains that this appendage is found in cows, sheep, and goats but is not in humans (see commentary on Exod. 29:13).

Lev 9:23

**“The glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people.”** In this context, “the glory of Yahweh” was the glorious light that surrounded Yahweh. God is not absent from His glory; often when God is said to be present, He is surrounded by a glorious cloud of brilliant light. The people saw the glory and knew Yahweh Himself was present with them. Then, in the next verse, Leviticus 9:24, fire comes out from God’s presence, out from the cloud, and lights the fire on the altar of the Tabernacle.

[For more on the glory of God, see commentary on Ezek. 1:28.]

Lev 9:24

**“fire came out from the presence of Yahweh.”** The phrase, “the presence of Yahweh” could also be translated “from the faces of Yahweh,” where “faces” would be a plural of emphasis or majesty, pointing to the greatness of God.

This event is God lighting the fire upon the altar of sacrifice that was in front of the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle. God indicated His acceptance of the offering that the children of Israel were making by burning it up with fire that came from Him. After that, the priests were never to let that fire go out. The perpetual fire on the altar is the fire of God (Lev. 6:9, 12, 13). Albert Barnes wrote: “The very ancient Jewish tradition has been widely adopted that the sacred fire of the altar originated in this divine act, and that it was afterward preserved on the altar of the tabernacle until the dedication of the temple, when fire again “came down from heaven.” 2Ch 7:1. But according to the sacred narrative [the Bible] the altar-fire had been lighted in a natural way before this occasion.”[[4]](#footnote-24631) (See Lev. 8:16; 9:10; 9:12-13, Exod. 40:29).

God accepted Gideon’s offering with divine fire (Judg. 6:21). Elijah’s sacrifice was accepted by fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38), as was David’s (1 Chron. 21:26). God also lit the fire on the altar of the Temple with fire from heaven (2 Chron. 7:1-3). On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Jewish people who were in the Temple understood all this and had the opportunity to see that God (and His Messiah) accepted the apostles when tongues like fire came down over them (Acts 2:3).

**Leviticus Chapter 10**

Lev 10:1

**“firepan.”** These were likely long-handled pans that could scoop coals from the altar that incense could then be placed on. They were almost portable altars for the burning of incense because the incense was actually burned in them.[[5]](#footnote-18787) There were firepans associated with the Menorah that were made of gold (Exod. 25:38), and firepans (same Hebrew word) that were made of bronze that were associated with the altar (Exod. 38:3). The firepans that were associated with the Menorah could have held coals that were used for lighting the wicks of the oil lamps and also might have been where burning or smoldering wicks were placed. Here, Nadab and Abihu used the firepan to scoop burning coals from an unauthorized fire to put their incense on.

**“and offered unauthorized fire before Yahweh.”** The fire that was to be used on the altars in the Tabernacle was to be specifically authorized by God—God Himself lit the fire and commanded that that fire be kept burning perpetually. It is not clear what sin Nadab and Abihu had committed. Many scholars likely correctly postulate that it was because they did not take the fire that God had ignited on the great bronze altar, but that is not clearly commanded in Scripture except for the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. So, while that could have been the sin they committed, there is no way to prove that from Scripture. Keil and Delitzsch say, “This might be called ‘strange fire’ if it was not offered in the manner prescribed in the law, just as in Exod. 30:9 incense not prepared according to the direction of God is called ‘strange incense.’”[[6]](#footnote-25190) One thing we can be sure of is that God could have told us exactly what the sin of Nadab and Abihu was, and the fact that He did not tells us that He wants us to focus on the importance of obedience, not get distracted by analyzing the sin the men committed.

There is no explanation in the text for this action of Aaron’s sons. God’s way is to be explicit about how He wanted things to be done in a way that pleased Him, so it seems that, even though we do not know the exact sin, we can see that the motive for the men’s actions could only be pride and arrogance, not a simple mistake. The fact that Aaron was silent about the death of his sons (Lev. 10:3) shows that he understood that his two sons had sinned against Yahweh in an egregious manner. If they simply had made a mistake, surely Aaron would have said something about it, and both he and Moses made mistakes in trying to lead Israel.

There are a number of important lessons that we can learn from this incident. One is that God has told us how to do things in a way that pleases Him, and it is important to love God enough and be humble enough to do things God’s way. To ignore God’s way of doing things and go our own way and make up our own rules is dangerous. For example, today people get saved by taking Christ as Lord and believing God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). There are many people who ignore that and say, “I am a good person; I believe God will save me.” But that belief is deadly because none of us are “good enough” to be saved. We all need a Savior from sin.

Another lesson in this record is that to whom much is given, much will be required. Nadab and Abihu were the very first generation of priests, and Nadab was in line to become the High Priest (Exod. 6:23). They had a lot of responsibility and influence. Their example of ignoring God’s commands and doing things their own way would almost certainly have been very harmful to Israel, especially in the first couple of years after leaving Egypt. Furthermore, how would Nadab act after he became the High Priest? The fact that he was serving as a priest meant he was at least 30 years old, and it seems that at his age his attitude toward the things of God would not have changed much or even changed for the worse if given the position of High Priest, which had even more power and responsibility than he already had. It is a general principle that people in the believer community who have lots of responsibility are held to a higher standard than the average believer, and every leader needs to be aware of that (James 3:1).

**“which he had not commanded them *to do*.”** This is the figure of speech tapeinosis, or understatement.[[7]](#footnote-16564) Tapeinosis occurs when something is graphically understated in a way that actually emphasizes the opposite. It was not that God had not commanded Nadab and Abihu to offer unauthorized fire, instead, God had strictly forbidden unauthorized fire to be used (Exod. 30:9). A “normal” reading of the text without the figure of speech would have been, “which God commanded them not to do.”

Lev 10:2

**“consumed them.”** The Hebrew word is *ʾakhal* (#0398 אָכַל), and it more literally means “ate.” Here the word is used hyperbolically, because the fire did not consume them, it killed them. However, the text uses the word “consumed” deliberately. The word “consumed,” is the same word used in the previous chapter when fire came from Yahweh and “consumed” the sacrifices (Lev. 9:24; cf. Num. 16:35). The fire of Yahweh consumed the sacrifices, indicating He accepted them, but He also consumed people who attacked His holiness and authority as God, showing that He was the Creator and was to be respected and obeyed.

In a very real sense, Nadab and Abihu, and the 250 men who rose up against Moses (Num. 16:35) were types of every person who does not accept God on His terms—they will eventually be destroyed by fire when they are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14-15). Romans 10:9 tells how to accept God on His terms today: confess Jesus Christ as your lord and believe that God raised him from the dead.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Lev 10:4

**“Uzziel the uncle of Aaron.”** Uzziel was one of the brothers of Amram, the father of Moses and Aaron (Exod. 6:18, 22), so he was Aaron’s uncle, and his sons were Aaron’s cousins but not priests. **“your brothers.”** In this context the word “brothers” means relatives.

Lev 10:5

**“in their tunics.”** The Hebrew text can also read "by their tunics," and the English versions are divided. In any case, the fact that the tunics were not burned up shows that the fire that killed the two men did not kill them by burning them up. It is possible that the fire that came from Yahweh was more like a lightning strike.

Lev 10:6

**“go loose.”** The idea was to not let their hair just hang loosely as if it was not taken care of.

Lev 10:14

**“you are to eat in a clean place.”** The “clean place” is different from the “holy place” where the priests were to eat. Leviticus 10:14 included the sons (who would have been priests) and the daughters (who would not have been priests). Although the text allows for the meat to be eaten in any “clean place,” a natural one would have been the houses of the priests, which they would have kept ritually clean so they could serve in the Tabernacle without having to go through a cleansing ritual.

Lev 10:17

**“by making atonement for them before Yahweh.”** The sin offering took away the sin of the congregation “by making atonement for them.”[[8]](#footnote-30692)

**Leviticus Chapter 11**

Lev 11:20

**“that walk on all fours.”** The scholars suggest that this is a generalization for many insects, such as the fly, bees, wasps, etc. They have six legs, not four, but they move forward like animals that have four legs. Thus, the phrase “walk on all fours” refers simply to moving in a forward direction on their legs.

Lev 11:22

**“and any kind of grasshopper.”** For the translation “any kind,” see commentary on Genesis 1:11.

Lev 11:23

**“that have four feet.”** Insects have six legs, but here, “four feet” is used as a generality for those things that walk on their legs, (see commentary on Lev. 11:20).

Lev 11:24

**“until the evening.”** The new day started at sunset, so if a person was unclean until the evening, then he or she was unclean the rest of that day until the new day started in the evening at sunset.

Lev 11:29

**“any kind of large lizard.”** For the translation “any kind,” see commentary on Genesis 1:11.

Lev 11:35

**“stove.”** This seems to refer to some kind of platform that could hold two pots. The oven and stove would have been made of baked clay and could be easily broken in pieces.

Lev 11:43

**“any creeping thing that creeps.”** The Hebrew can also be rendered “any swarming thing that swarms.” The Hebrew word refers to things that “creep” on the ground and can be found in “swarms” or groups (cf. Lev. 11:44). This is not introducing a new kind of forbidden animal, but is further clarifying creatures that make people unclean.

Lev 11:44

**“make yourselves holy.”** The people were to do what it took to make themselves holy in the sight of God. The *Bible In Basic English* (BBE) gets the idea of the verse in translating the phrase, “for this reason, make and keep yourselves holy.” The translation, *The Scriptures*, done by the Institute for Scripture Research, South Africa), has: “you shall set yourselves apart.”

[For more on “make yourselves holy,” see commentary on Josh. 3:5.]

**Leviticus Chapter 12**

Lev 12:2

**“children of Israel.”** The literal Hebrew is, “Speak to the sons of Israel,” but in this case, although “sons” referred mainly to the men to whom Moses would speak directly, the term “sons” is somewhat inclusive and so women were included as well, thus the phrase, “the children” of Israel referred to both men and women. So, Moses would speak to the men and tell them what Yahweh said, but women would be included in the application of what he said.

Lev 12:4

**“the holy place.”** In this context, the “holy place” is the courtyard of the Tabernacle. Even if the woman was born into a family of priests or Levites, she would not be allowed into the tabernacle itself.

Lev 12:6

**“a sin offering.”** The reason for the sin offering is not specifically stated in the text. It seems clear that the act of sexual intercourse was not a sin (cf. Lev. 15:16), nor was the act of conception or birth. Also, it is worth noting that the animal required to expiate the sin was the least expensive of the acceptable blood sacrifices: a pigeon or dove. It has been suggested that the sin was what prevented the mother from entering the courts of the Temple during her uncleanness, but that explanation does not seem to fit the facts, because the act of sexual intercourse also prevented both the man and woman from entering the Temple but was cleansed only by bathing in water, not by a sin offering (Lev. 15:16-18).

It is apparent from the scope of Scripture that mankind has an inherent sinfulness, indeed, a sin nature that has been passed down from Adam, that must be atoned for. Thus, we see times in the Law when there was not a specific sin, but rather some sort of outward manifestation that in some way showed or recalled the innate sin of man, that called for a sin offering. For example, a sin offering had to be made for the priests before they were anointed to serve as priests, not because of any specific sin, but simply to be clean in the eyes of God. Here in Leviticus 12:6, the act of childbirth recalls the sin and curse of Genesis 3:16, that the woman would have travail in childbirth, and thus manifests the human sin nature, so God commanded that a sin offering was appropriate.

Lev 12:7

**“A woman.”** The Hebrew is literally “her,” but that is somewhat awkward in Εnglish.

**Leviticus Chapter 13**

Lev 13:2

**“disease.”** The Hebrew noun is *nega* (#05061 נֶגַע), and it most literally means a stroke or stripes (related to “to strike or hit”), but it was used metaphorically of a plague, disease, or mark, and can be used that way depending on the context. The large semantic range explains the many different translations in the English versions.

**“leprosy.”** The Hebrew word is *tsaraath* (#06883 צָרַעַת), and it refers to any seemingly infectious or spreading skin disease, not just the disease “leprosy.” The term “leprosy” has been used from the earliest English versions. William Tyndale used the word leprosy in his Bible in 1530, and the Geneva Bible (1599) and King James Bible (1611) used it as well. The word “leprosy” continued to be used in some Bibles in modern times (cf. NASB, 1977), but there was a trend to get away from the word “leprosy” and use “skin disease” or something similar.

Skin diseases, including classical leprosy, were used typologically of sin in the Old Testament. Of course, not much was known about disease and there was concern the disease might be contagious, but beyond that, it made a person ritually unclean before God.

Lev 13:13

**“if the leprosy has covered all his flesh...It has all turned white.”** If the person who had the disease no longer has any sores that are oozing or open or has scales falling off, but his body is an even color all over, then the person is not contagious and is to be considered clean before God.

Lev 13:22

**“spread, yes, spread.”** The text uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

Lev 13:30

**“a scall.”** The exact identity of this disease is not known, which explains the different translations in the different English versions (cf. “scall” ASV; “scabies” CEB; “crusted area” CJB; “scaly outbreak” CSB; “leprosy” JPS; “leprous disease” ESV). It appears to be some sort of scale on the skin, and could be something like psoriasis.

Lev 13:44

**“unclean, yes, unclean.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton, where the verb is repeated twice for emphasis, but the verb is in different cases.

[For more on polyptoton and the emphasis it brings, as well as the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Lev 13:46

**“where he lives must be outside of the camp.”** Israel was living in a tent camp at that time since they had just come out of Egypt. Once Israel was settled in the Promised Land the people with skin diseases had to live outside of town.

**Leviticus Chapter 14**

Lev 14:5

**“living water.”** “Living water” was water that was used for ritual cleansing from sin and impurity. Living water came from God, and thus included rainwater, well water, and water from a flowing river or stream. Water that sat in a cistern was not living water.

[For more on living water, see commentary on Num. 19:17.]

Lev 14:14

**“ear...thumb...great toe.”** Symbolizing hearing the words of God, doing the work of God, and walking the walk of God (see commentary on Exod. 29:20).

Lev 14:21

**“cannot afford so much.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “his hand cannot reach.” The same idiom is in Leviticus 14:22, 31 and 14:32.

Lev 14:48

**“enters, yes, enters.”** The text uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

Lev 14:50

**“living water.”** “Living water” was water that was used for ritual cleansing from sin and impurity. Living water came from God, and thus included rainwater, well water, and water from a flowing river or stream. Water that sat in a cistern was not living water.

[For more on living water, see commentary on Num. 19:17.]

**Leviticus Chapter 15**

Lev 15:2

**“has a discharge from his body.”** This is often assumed to be a discharge from the penis, but the text is not sufficiently clear to make that assertion (cf. Lev. 15:7). The context changes in Leviticus 15:16, and that is about emission of semen from the penis.

Lev 15:13

**“living water.”** “Living water” was water that was used for ritual cleansing from sin and impurity. Living water came from God, and thus included rainwater, well water, and water from a flowing river or stream. Water that sat in a cistern was not living water.

[For more on living water, see commentary on Num. 19:17.]

Lev 15:16

**“and be unclean.”** According to Levitical law, when a man and woman had normal sexual intercourse it made them “unclean.” This is not saying that sexual intercourse is somehow frowned upon by God. Saying that would be like saying that if a loved one died, God frowned upon any of His people touching the dead body or giving it a decent burial because that made the people involved unclean. God wants us to understand that there is a difference between His holiness and our common earthly life, and there are things in this life that made people “unclean” in the sight of God but were simply part of this fallen world. People were to have such respect for God that they recognized that He is somehow set apart from their daily earthly life, and although He is intimately involved with people on a minute-by-minute basis, when they “come into His courts” to worship, there is a holiness there above one’s simple daily routine.

However, when the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Church became the Temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16), and the physical Temple and sacrifices stopped being performed by Christians (although that took some time). Today, because of the work of Christ, Christians have a different relationship with God than the Jews of the Old Covenant had, and there is no rule saying a Christian should not enter a church building if he or she has engaged in sexual intercourse.

An Israelite man or woman who was unclean because of normal sexual intercourse could perform almost all of the normal tasks of the day. The major thing being unclean prevented was going into the court of the Tent of Meeting or the Temple. We can see the pattern of sexual intercourse making someone unclean in verses such as Exodus 19:15 when Israel was about to meet God, and Leviticus 16:29-31, which is about people’s ritual purity on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 12:4 about uncleanness due to childbirth).

One very important result of God’s separating His holy precincts of the Tent of Meeting and the Temple from uncleanness due to sexual intercourse was it effectively forbade the practice of temple prostitution. Cultic prostitution was a pagan practice that existed in many parts of the ancient world at various times in which female and male “prostitutes” were part of, or somehow associated with, the worship of a pagan god (some modern scholars rename “temple prostitution” as “sacred sex” due to the fact that the “prostitute” may not have been paid. The name is not important, but we would point out that there was some sort of payment, even if it was to procure the favor of a god or king). The Mosaic Law specifically forbade temple prostitution or sacred sex (Deut. 23:1-18), but saying that someone who had sexual intercourse was “unclean” was another way to ensure that it never became part of the worship associated with God’s Temple.

Lev 15:19

**“from her flesh.”** Here, “flesh” is used euphemistically for her vaginal area (cf. “flesh” for the penis; Ezek. 16:26).

**Leviticus Chapter 16**

Lev 16:1

**“when they drew near before Yahweh and died.”** Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire before Yahweh and died (Lev. 10:1).

Lev 16:2

**“Holy Place.”** This holy place behind the inner veil of the Temple is often called “the Holy of Holies,” (cf. Exod. 26:33).

**“the veil in front of the atonement cover.”** The “veil” is the veil of fine linen that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Exod. 26:31-35). Yahweh came to Israel between the cherubim that were on the Atonement Cover, which was the cover over the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 25:22).

**“appear in the cloud.”** The bright glory that surrounds God was often described as a cloud. The cloud indicated God’s personal presence. It is not as if the cloud would appear on its own without God in it. Here we have the accurate description: “I will appear in the cloud” (see commentary on Ezekiel 1:28).

**“over the atonement cover.”** The Atonement Cover is traditionally called the “mercy seat” (see commentary on Exod. 25:17). God said He would appear, and speak, from “over” the Atonement Cover and “between” the cherubim (see commentary on Num. 7:89)

[Leviticus 16 is about the Day of Atonement. For more information and a more complete list of the feasts and sabbaths in Israel, see commentary on Leviticus 23:2.]

Lev 16:6

**“and for his house.”** In this context, Aaron’s “house” refers to his household and dynasty, all the other priests.

Lev 16:7

**“set them before Yahweh at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.”** So the goats would be in the courtyard of the Tabernacle, at the entrance to the Holy Place in the Tabernacle, and at that place they would be “before Yahweh,” who was in the Holy of Holies.

Lev 16:8

**“Azazel.”** This is almost certainly a name of the Devil, and many scholars believe it likely means “Mighty Goat.” “Mighty Goat” would fit the Hebrew etymology well, and also fit with both experiences from the spiritual world and with the teachings of the Bible. Practitioners of the black arts, such as Satanists, have long known that Satan is worshiped in the form of a goat or goat man being, and also that demons sometimes manifest themselves as goats or goat men (cf. the “Goat of Mendes,” “Baphomet,” “Sabbatic Goat,” etc.). This is very ancient and also is true across many cultures.

The different theories for what Azazel means are discussed at length in many commentaries on Leviticus, but the most common ones are: that “Azazel” is a basically combination of “goat” and “go away,” and thus the “scapegoat,” or “goat that is sent away.” Or, as many Jewish commentators believe, “Azazel” is the name of a place and the goat for the sin offering is sent away to the place called Azazel. However, most commentators now lean toward the interpretation that Azazel is the proper name of the Devil (some say a ruling demon of the desert), and that it comes from the word for “goat” combined with the Hebrew word *el*, or “mighty,” such that the name means “Mighty Goat” (see text note on Lev. 16:8 in the NET Bible; First Edition).

The term “Mighty Goat” would fit with what we see in the spiritual world and also what the Bible says. The Devil would be the “Mighty Goat.” Some of his demons would appear and be represented in art, and be worshiped as goat demons, even as they were in the ancient world (Lev. 17:7; 2 Chron. 11:15). Evil leaders would be known as “he-goats” (Isa. 14:9; Zech. 10:3), and unbelievers are known as “goats” (Matt. 25:33).

[For more on goats and ungodly leaders being called he-goats,” see commentary on Isa. 14:9.]

Lev 16:10

**“Azazel.”** See commentary on Leviticus 16:8.

Lev 16:12

**“and bring it inside the veil.”** The “veil” is the veil of fine linen that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Exod. 26:31-35). Yahweh came to Israel between the cherubim that were on the Atonement Cover, which was the cover over the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 25:22; Lev. 16:2; see commentary on Num. 7:89). The censer with the incense would produce a large amount of smoke and hide the ark and mercy seat from sight. The spices that made up the incense are described in Exodus 30:34-38.

Lev 16:13

**“atonement cover.”** Traditionally called the “mercy seat” (see commentary on Exod. 25:17).

**“the testimony.”** That is, the ark of the covenant, which was sometimes called “the testimony” by metonymy because the ark held the tablets with the Ten Commandments, to which the people of Israel had testified that they would keep them.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

Lev 16:14

**“in front of the atonement cover.”** So after sprinkling blood on the atonement cover itself, the High Priest would sprinkle blood on the ground in front of the atonement cover.

Lev 16:15

**“and bring his blood inside the veil.”** This is the second time the High Priest is entering the Holy of Holies. The “veil” is the veil of fine linen that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Exod. 26:31-35). Yahweh came to Israel between the cherubim that were on the Atonement Cover, which was the cover over the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 25:22; Lev. 16:2; see commentary on Num. 7:89).

Lev 16:16

**“that dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanness.”** God does not like sin, but He understands human weakness and sin, so here we see the text making the point that God, who dwells in the Tent of Meeting over the ark of the covenant between the cherubim, lives in the midst of His people in spite of their sin. People should never feel that God abandons them because of their sin and weakness. Sin can cause God to limit His interaction with us, and continued purposeful sin can cause Him to withdraw from us, but His arms are always open to welcome us back to Him if we want to come back to Him. It is sometimes taught that God had to forsake Jesus because he “became sin,” but that is not accurate (see REV commentary on Matt. 27:46). One of the comforting messages in Scripture is that God loves people and continues to love and support us in spite of our sin and shortcomings.

Lev 16:21

**“a man appointed *for the job*.”** The Hebrew text could also be understood to mean a man who was waiting, or a man who was ready for the task. But the man did not just happen to be ready, he had been appointed to do that job and take the goat into the desert.

Lev 16:23

**“and is to leave them there.”** That is, leave them there in the Tent of Meeting, not in the Holy of Holies.

Lev 16:25

**“burn into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 16:26

**“Azazel.”** See commentary on Leviticus 16:8.

Lev 16:27

**“must be carried outside the camp, and they must burn their skins, their flesh, and their dung with fire.”** There were three altars associated with the Tabernacle and Temple: the golden altar of incense, the bronze altar of sacrifice, and a third altar east of the camp where certain parts of sacrifices were burned, and that altar is closely connected to the death of Christ (see commentary on Heb. 13:10).

Lev 16:29

**“forever.”** The Hebrew word *olam* (#05769 עוֹלָם), often translated “forever,” could mean “forever” or it could simply mean for a long time. We now know that it means for a long time, but the Israelites did not necessarily know that at the time.

**“afflict your souls.”** This was an idiomatic phrase that, when used in the context of the Day of Atonement, meant to fast, to go without food. On the Nisan Calendar of Israel, the seventh month was Tishri and the tenth day of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement. It was on that day, and that day only, that the High Priest was commanded to go into the Holy of Holies, which he did twice that day. The first time he went in to make atonement for himself, and the second time he went in he made atonement for the people (Lev. 16). God commanded the people “afflict their souls” that is, afflict themselves on that day by not eating. This was so strictly observed in Israel that the Day of Atonement was simply referred to as “the Fast” (cf. Acts 27:9).

Lev 16:31

**“It is a Sabbath of complete rest.”** The Hebrew is *shabbath shabbathon*, more literally, “a Sabbath of Sabbath observance.” As with any regular Sabbath, the affliction of the Day of Atonement was to last from sunset one day to sunset the next (cf. Lev. 23:32).

[For more information on *shabbath shabbathon*, see commentary on Lev. 25:4.]

**“you are to afflict your souls.”** In the context of the Day of Atonement, which was the tenth day of the seventh month (Nisan calendar) the primary meaning of the phrase “afflict your souls” is to go without food, to fast (see commentary on Lev. 16:29).

**Leviticus Chapter 17**

Lev 17:3

**“Any man.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “a man, a man,” meaning “any man” (cf. Lev. 17:3, 10, 13; 18:6).

**“kills.”** That is, kills as a sacrifice, not just to eat. This is made clear in the context. This command elevated God because only He could accept the sacrifice, so it had to be made in His presence, and it prevented people from sacrificing to pagan gods in other places. But the Israelites regularly disobeyed this command and sacrificed animals to pagan gods anyway.

Lev 17:6

**“burn...into smoke.”** See commentary on Exodus 29:13.

Lev 17:7

**“goat demons.”** Demons have associated themselves with goats and appeared as goats or goat men from very ancient times, and biblically, unbelievers are referred to as “goats” (Matt. 25:33). The ancient peoples understood there were many types of demons. Psalm 106:37 mentions demons that were associated with human sacrifice.

[For more on Azazel and goat demons, see commentaries on Lev. 16:8 and Isa. 14:9.]

Lev 17:10

**“I will set my face against that soul who eats blood.”** As far as historians know, the prohibition against eating blood was uniquely practiced by Israel. It seems that since God forbade eating blood right after the Flood (Gen. 9:4; although admittedly that command is somewhat unclear) many cultures would have forbidden eating blood, but that does not seem to be the case.

Lev 17:11

**“the life of the flesh is in the blood.”** This general statement is true and was important in the sacrificial system of Israel. We know that the individual cells in the bodies of humans and animals are all alive, and “cellular death” is well understood in modern medicine. Nevertheless, the meaning of the phrase, “the life of the flesh is in the blood” is well understood, particularly as it applied in biblical times. The blood was necessary for life and without it, the person or animal died, and that is as true today as it was in biblical times.

God had stated that the life was in the blood hundreds of years before Leviticus was penned. God had told it to Noah right after the Flood, when God first allowed humans to eat animals and not just plants (compare Gen. 1:29-30 with Gen. 9:3-4). The fact that the life of the flesh (the body) is in the blood made blood an acceptable substitute for the life of a person who deserved to die because of sin. The blood of the animal clearly depicted “a life for a life.”

**“I have assigned it.”** The Hebrew word translated “assigned” is literally “given,” but as John Hartley points out, when God is the subject as He is here, it “means ‘appoint, assign.’”[[9]](#footnote-30201) See also HCSB, NET, TNK). In making provision for covering people’s sin, God assigned the blood of an animal to be able to make atonement for people because the blood was the life of the flesh. But because of the importance of the blood in the sacrificial system, and particularly because it could cover for the deserved death of a human, God forbade eating animal blood. C. F. Keil writes: “God appointed the blood for the altar, as containing the soul of the animal, to be the medium of expiation for the soul of men, and therefore prohibited its being used as food.”[[10]](#footnote-19457) The point is that the life in the animal was poured out to cover, and thus preserve, the life of the person who sacrificed the animal. This is a case of “a life for a life,” although we know from the scope of Scripture that the death of the animal was only a temporary covering. It took the death of the Lord Jesus Christ to actually fully atone for the sins people commit.

**“the life *it has*.”** The addition, “it has” makes the text clearer to the English reader, but also narrower in scope. In total, the blood does not just “have” life, it supports and sustains life. Thus, the Hebrew, “because of the life,” is more complete than the English in the REV, but the more literal Hebrew is quite unclear and confusing to the reader.

**Leviticus Chapter 18**

Lev 18:5

**“live by them.”** That is, he will live a full life now and an everlasting life later.

Lev 18:6

**“to uncover their nakedness.”** This is an idiom for sexual intercourse. Up until the Mosaic Law, there was no regulation or law about marrying a close relative, and with good reason. After God created Adam and Eve, and they began to have children (Gen. 5:4), the only persons available for someone to marry were a sibling or close relative. Furthermore, that same situation occurred again after Noah’s Flood. Also, people lived in family and clan groups, and so often most of the people in the group were related. Thus, for example, Abraham married his half-sister Sarah (Gen. 20:12). However, by the time this Law was given about marrying close relatives many centuries had passed since the Flood, and there was no need to marry a close relative.

Lev 18:8

**“your father’s wife.”** This would not necessarily be your mother. Also, since many men married much younger women, your father’s wife might be more the age of the father’s son than the father himself.

Lev 18:18

**“You are not to take a wife to be a rival *wife* to her sister.”** In other words, a man was not to marry a woman and her sister.

**“uncovering her nakedness.”** This is idiomatic for having sexual intercourse with her.

Lev 18:19

**“impure by her uncleanness.”** That is, unclean by her monthly period.

Lev 18:21

**“children.”** The Hebrew is literally “seed,” here referring to children.

Lev 18:22

**“You are not to lie with a man as with a woman.”** God created the human race with two sexes, male and female (Gen. 5:2), and designed them to be together and to have families, and the family was designed to be the stable center of God’s human society. The “natural use” sexually of the man is with a woman and vice versa (Rom. 1:26). Homosexual and lesbian relationships are sinful in the eyes of God, as are adultery and other acts that defy, ignore, or destroy the centrality of the God-designed human family.

[For more on homosexuality, see commentary on 1 Cor. 6:9.]

Lev 18:23

**“You are not to lie with any animal.”** Sex with animals was strictly forbidden and was punishable by death. For a person to have sex with an animal “is a perversion,” in that it is against the natural way that God created the earth and the people and animals on it (see commentary on Exod. 22:19).

Lev 18:24

**“in all these things.”** The Canaanite culture that Israel was to conquer and displace was very sexually perverse, as stated here.

Lev 18:25

**“and the land has become defiled.”** One of the great lessons of the Bible is that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. The land that we humans live on is not “neutral territory,” unaffected by what the people do. The land and weather are affected by God and by demons, and demons work to make the land unproductive and life on the land harsh, frustrating, and challenging. Every farmer knows how frustrating and hurtful it is to plant crops and then have them die from lack of rain. But rain in its season and productive soil are promises of God for the people who live on the land if they live godly lives (cf. Deut. 28:1-2, 8, 11-12), and if people abandon God then demons come in and make the weather destructive and the land unproductive, as we see here in Leviticus 18:25.

People want good weather with regular, gentle rains, plenty of sunshine, and no destructive weather such as hurricanes or tornados, and certainly no famines, so they should live godly lives. Furthermore, although a godly person living in a sinful land can be protected to some extent, if there is a hurricane or famine, even the godly person will be affected. That is why Christians must stand up against those who promote ungodly behavior, and why a nation must have godly laws and leaders if it is to do well. This lesson about people’s behavior affecting the land is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 9:10-14; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10).

**“I have visited its iniquity upon it.”** The word “visit” can also in some contexts be translated “punish,” and so the sentence could also be translated as it is translated in the CSB: “The land has become defiled, so I am punishing it for its sin.”

[For more on the meaning of “visit,” see commentary on Exod. 32:34.]

**Leviticus Chapter 19**

Lev 19:4

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Habakkuk 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

Lev 19:7

**“eaten, yes, eaten.”** God uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

Lev 19:9

**“you are not to entirely harvest the corners of your field​.”** God has great concern for the poor and disadvantaged. He commands to leave food for the poor in several places (cf. Lev. 19:9-19; 23:22; Deut. 24:19).

Lev 19:14

**“but you are to fear your God.”** God cares for the hurt and disadvantaged, so to offend them is to offend God. The person who fears God takes care of the needy.

Lev 19:16

**“endangers the life of your neighbor.”** The Hebrew text reads that a person is not to “stand on the blood of your neighbor.” The exact meaning of the phrase is unclear, although the point is not. The verse before, Leviticus 19:15, is about a court of law, while the verse after, Leviticus 19:17, is about not hating your “brother,” i.e., a fellow Israelite. The idea is that people should not endanger others or stand idly by while another person is being taken advantage of or endangered (the context indicates that, for example, that would include being a witness on their behalf). These meanings are reflected in the different English translations. For example, the NIV reads, “Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life,” while the NET reads, “You must not stand idly by when your neighbor’s life is at stake,” and the NRSV reads, “you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor.” The Hebrew text can encompass all these meanings.

Life is messy and evil, and many people are hurt or taken advantage of in many different ways in life, and there is a tendency for others around them to take the position, “I don’t want to get involved.” While there are some situations where that may be the correct position to take, too many times people who could and should get involved and help the disadvantaged person do not get involved. Proverbs 19:17 says that the person who helps the poor (or disadvantaged) “lends to Yahweh,” and Yahweh will repay them. The point of the life of a Christian is not to see how many messes they can avoid or how clean and simple they can keep their life, but rather, when, where, and how is God calling them to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a help and blessing to others. Helping others can get messy, but what we give we “lend to the Lord,” and he will repay that effort many times over in the future.

Lev 19:17

**“rebuke, yes, rebuke.”** There is a polyptoton in the Hebrew text and God uses the figure of speech polyptoton to emphasize that people are to “strongly rebuke” others who are sinning. Not helping a neighbor avoid or get out of a sinful situation is a sin to the one who could and should have helped. Some sins are sins of commission, what we do, and some sins are sins of omission, what we do not do that we should have done. Ignoring the sin and distress of others is a sin of omission.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Lev 19:18

**“bear a grudge.”** Although almost all English translations have “bear a grudge,” the Hebrew text is very inclusive and could be read as Fox[[11]](#footnote-23045) has translated it: “retain anger.” Normally we think of bearing a grudge as holding on to anger for a very long time, but the text does not force that meaning. The Word of God is just to not maintain your anger, and thus agrees with Ephesians 4:26: do not let the sun go down on your anger.

**“but you must love your neighbor as yourself.”** Although this is not one of the Ten Commandments, it was well-known to be the second greatest commandment in the Torah, the Law, and it is quoted a number of times in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8).

**“neighbor.”** The Hebrew word is *rea’*, sometimes spelled *reya* (#07453 רֵעַ or רֵיַע pronounced 'ray-ah). *HALOT* says of its meaning that it, “includes a wide range of related meanings which are more closely defined by their respective contexts. …the general sense may be summarized thus: רֵעַ, without expressing a particular legal relationship, means those persons with whom one is brought into contact and with whom one must live on account of the circumstances of life….”[[12]](#footnote-14351) Thus, depending on the context, it can mean “neighbor” (and it is used that way in the non-technical sense of someone you should be friendly with), friend, companion, fellow, another person.

The Law has a lot to say about how we should treat our “neighbors.” In fact, it is the basis of Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). For more on how to treat neighbors, see Exodus 20:16-17, 21:14, 18, 35; 22:7-11, 14, 26. The Jews had differing opinions on who was a “neighbor.” Jesus answered this question. See commentary on Luke 10:27.

Lev 19:31

**“those who have familiar spirits.”** See commentary on Deuteronomy 18:11.

Lev 19:35

**“dishonest standards.”** Here the REV follows the translation in the NIV and NLT. The Hebrew is more literally, “unrighteousness in judgment.” But we would say that someone who cheats in business is “dishonest,” while the biblical concept is more naturally, “unrighteousness.” The “judgment” was based on “standards.” God is saying not to cheat in business by using dishonest measures.

Early in history, weights and measures varied from town to town and region to region. It was the desire for trade that put pressure on the development of standardized systems of measurement across wider areas, but that was only partially successful. The weights and measures from the Middle East that have been discovered by archaeologists vary quite a bit. Early measurements were related to common things such as the width of a hand, the length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, a bowshot, or how far a person could walk in a day. Eventually, it was the job of the Levites to keep accurate weights and measures that could be used to standardize the ones being used by merchants in Israel (1 Chron. 23:27-29).

[For more on using different weights and measures, and using the balance in trading, see commentary on Prov. 11:1.]

**Leviticus Chapter 20**

Lev 20:2

**“stone him with stones.”** The standard method of killing a criminal was to stone them with stones (cf. Lev. 20:2; 24:23; Num. 15:35; Deut. 13:10; 21:21). Some people have asserted that the Jews just dropped one huge stone on the person, but there is no evidence for that in the Bible. Also, stoning with stones was how Achan and his family were killed (Josh. 7:25), and how the Jews killed Stephen (Acts 7:58-60). It was important for the ceremonial cleanliness of Israel that the criminal be stoned to death outside the camp, and when Israel was settled in the Promised Land, outside the city or village. Touching a dead body made a person unclean, so executions were carried out outside the camp or city, and graves were dug outside the city (cf. Lev. 22:4, 6; Num. 19:11-16, 22). In fact, it was because graves were normally dug outside a city that the burials of King David and some other kings of Judah were so special because they were dug inside the city of David, inside Jerusalem (1 Kings 2:10).

Lev 20:6

**“person.”** The Hebrew is more literally “soul,” standing for the person themself, and it occurs twice in this verse.

**“those who have familiar spirits.”** See commentary on Deuteronomy 18:11.

Lev 20:7

**“make yourselves holy.”** The people were to do what it took to make themselves holy in the sight of God (cf. Lev. 11:44).

[For more on “make yourselves holy,” see commentary on Josh. 3:5.]

Lev 20:9

**“everyone who treats his father or his mother with contempt.”** The Hebrew verb that occurs twice here in Leviticus 20:9 and is translated as “treats...with contempt” is *qalal* (#07043 קָלַל ), which has a range of meanings that include “to treat someone lightly,” or “treat someone with contempt,” although it can certainly refer to cursing someone. However, the more common word that means “curse” is *ʾarar* (#0779 אָרַר), which is not used here (see commentary on Exod. 21:17).

Lev 20:13

**“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.”** Homosexual behavior is also covered in Leviticus 18:22.

[See commentaries on Leviticus 18:22 and 1 Corinthians 6:9.]

Lev 20:16

**“they must be put to death, yes, death.”** Sex with animals was strictly forbidden and was punishable by death (see commentary on Exod. 22:19).

The phrase “put to death” is one verb in the Hebrew text and it is repeated twice, the first time being an infinitive verb and the second time an imperfect verb. Repeating the verb twice in succession is the figure of speech polyptoton and it is used for emphasis, highlighting both the seriousness of the sin and the penalty for it.

Lev 20:27

**“who has a familiar spirit.”** See commentary on Deuteronomy 18:11.

**“death, yes, death.”** The Hebrew text repeats the verb for “put to death” twice, thus using the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**Leviticus Chapter 21**

Lev 21:7

**“for the priest is holy.”** The text reads, “for he is holy,” abruptly changing from the plural “they” to the singular “he,” but the reading is confusing in English because it reads as if the divorced husband is holy which is not what the text is saying. The point of the singular is to emphasize that every priest is holy.

Lev 21:10

**“ordained.”** For the translation “ordained,” see commentary on Exodus 28:41.

Lev 21:17

**“the food.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “bread,” but “bread” stood for food in general, and since there were meal offerings of grain, in this context “food” is the preferable translation. No priest who had a blemish was to make the sacrifices and offerings.

Lev 21:21

**“No man of the seed of Aaron.”** That is, no man who is a priest. The “seed,” or offspring, of Aaron were the priests.

Lev 21:22

**“He may eat the food of his God.”** This shows how much God cares for His people. The priest with a defect is not to approach God and offer sacrifices and offerings, respecting the holiness of God, but he may still eat of the holy things that were offered.

**Leviticus Chapter 22**

Lev 22:4

**“Whoever touches anything that is unclean by the dead.”** When it comes to understanding being Levitically unclean because of the dead, it is important to understand the difference between what Numbers 19 and Leviticus 22 are saying. When Leviticus 22 says, “Whoever touches anything that is unclean by the dead...the person that touches any such will be unclean until the evening” (Lev. 22:4, 6; Num. 19:22), it is speaking of touching anything that is now unclean because it touched the dead body. However, if a person directly touches a dead body, then they are unclean for seven days (Num. 19:11-16).

Lev 22:11

**“born in his house.”** This phrase refers to slaves, a point that is made especially clear when it is combined with “bought with his money.” Slaves could be bought, but also, the child of a slave was a slave who was “born in the house.”

[For more on “born in his house,” see commentary on Gen. 17:12.]

**Leviticus Chapter 23**

Lev 23:2

**“the appointed festivals of Yahweh.”** Yahweh divided up the year by many feasts and Sabbaths (days of rest), and these were designed to help people remember Yahweh and His provision and blessing upon His people. The Hebrew calendar was full of special days, and there were three feasts in which all the males (meaning the males of fighting age; Exod. 23:14, 17; 34:23-24; Deut. 16:16) were to appear before Yahweh (these three feasts are underlined). Although these sabbaths and feasts are mentioned many times in the Bible, below are some important scriptures that describe some requirements of each feast.

**Daily Offerings:** These were to be offered every day of the year (Num. 28:1-8). When there were other feasts or offerings, the daily offerings were in addition to them.

**Weekly Sabbath:** This was to be done every Sabbath in addition to the daily offering (Exod. 16:23-29; 20:8-11; 31:13-17; 35:2-3; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:12-15.). The specific Sabbath offerings are described in Numbers 28:9-10.

**New Moon:** This was done at the first sighting of the new moon, indicating a new month (Num. 10:10; 29:6; Ps. 81:3). The specific new moon offerings are stated in Numbers 28:11-15.

**Passover:** This feast occurs on the fixed date Nisan 14 (Exod. 12:3-11, 43-45; 34:25; Lev. 23:4-5; Num. 9:14; Deut. 16:1-7). The special offering of Passover was the Passover lamb (or goat) itself.

**Feast of Unleavened Bread:** This feast occurred on Nisan 15-22, directly following Passover (Exod. 12:15-20; 23:15; Lev. 23:6-8; Deut. 16:1-8). The special offerings during the Feast of Unleavened Bread are listed in Numbers 28:17-25.

**Pentecost:** Pentecost was a one-day feast and it was 50 days after the first regular Sabbath after Passover (Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8). It was also called the “Feast of Harvest” (Exod. 23:16) and the “Feast of Weeks” (Exod. 34:22; Num. 28:26; Deut. 16:10, 16; 2 Chron. 8:13). The special offerings for Pentecost are given in Leviticus 23:15-21 and Numbers 28:26-31.

**Rosh Hashanah:** The Hebrew “Rosh Hashanah” literally means “head of the year” (from the Hebrew *rosh*, “head”). This one-day feast occurred on Tishri 1, the beginning of the civil new year (Lev. 23:24-25; Num. 29:1-6). The religious new year began on Nisan 1. The first day of the month Tishri was considered the first day of the year for over 2,500 years, from Adam until the Exodus. At the Exodus, God changed the Jewish calendar and switched it by six months. The seventh month, which had been Nisan (also called Abib), became the first month (Exod. 12:2). That change made the first month (Tishri) become the seventh month (see commentary on Exod. 12:2). Rosh Hashanah was to be a special day of rest and memorialized by blowing shofars, the ram’s horn trumpet, so it became known as the “Feast of Trumpets,” although that name is not in the Bible.

**Day of Atonement:** Also known as Yom Kippur, this day was on Tishri 10 (Lev. 23:26-27; 16:1-34; esp. v. 29). The specific offerings for this day are given in Numbers 29:7-11. In time, the Jews made this a day of fasting, calling it “The Fast” (Acts 27:9).

**Feast of Booths:** Also known as the “Feast of Tabernacles” or the “Feast of Ingathering” (Exod. 23:16; 34:22), this feast occurred on Tishri 15-22—it was an eight-day feast. Special sacrifices for the Feast of Booths are given in Numbers 29:12-28.

**The Feast of Dedication:** Also known as “Hanukkah” and “The Festival of Lights” (John 10:22). This was an 8-day festival starting on the Kislev 25 and going into the month Tevet (the fourth month from Tishri). It normally falls in our December. It was instituted by Judas Maccabaeus in 167 BC.

**Feast of Purim:** This feast was celebrated on Adar 14, the last month of the Jewish year (Esther 9:26-32). It was established in Persia during the Babylonian Captivity (c. 500 BC) and normally falls in March.

Lev 23:3

**“a Sabbath of complete rest.”** The Hebrew is *shabbath shabbathon*, more literally, “a Sabbath of Sabbath observance.” For more information, see commentary on Leviticus 25:4.

God rested on the seventh day in Genesis 2:1-3, but He did not command that anyone follow His example and rest on the seventh day until Exodus 16, when He gave the manna from heaven, and even then He did not fully explain the Sabbath. The Sabbath became part of the Law and the Old Covenant when it was given as part of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:8-11).

[For more information on the Sabbath, see commentary on Exod. 20:10.]

Lev 23:5

**“In the first month.”** Here in Leviticus 23:4-8 the Bible mentions both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is similar to Deuteronomy 16:1-8, where God treats Passover as if it were part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Although technically, the Passover was killed on Nisan 14 and the Feast of Unleavened Bread started on Nisan 15, the Passover meal was eaten the evening of Nisan 14 and would typically be a long ceremony and meal that would last past sundown, and sundown started Nisan 15 and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Thus, in actual practice, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread melded together.

**“between the *two* evenings.”** The Passover lamb was killed about 3 p.m. in the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan. In Jewish reckoning of days, there were two evenings. There was an early evening when the sun was noticeable as falling in the western sky. In modern terms we today would call that “afternoon,” not “evening.” The later evening was what we today would generally call evening, that is, in the late afternoon but still before sunset. The Passover lamb had to be killed before sunset to be killed on the fourteenth of Nisan because the new day, the fifteenth of Nisan and the Feast of Unleavened Bread started at sunset. So the Passover lamb was killed after the early evening and before the later evening, which traditionally became about 3 p.m.

Lev 23:6

**“On the fifteenth day of the same month.”** The first month of the Hebrew calendar is Nisan (also sometimes called “Abib”). The 14th day of Nisan is Passover, but the Passover lamb was not killed until mid-afternoon (the Hebrew text is “between the evenings;” see commentary on Exod. 16:12). The Passover meal took a while to eat and so it was usually eaten from late that afternoon into the evening and even on into the night. However, when the sun set, the new day started, which was the 15th of Nisan (the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread). The Feast of Unleavened Bread then lasted seven days.

Lev 23:10

**“then you are to bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.”** The rabbis disagree on the meaning of this phrase. However, the most likely meaning seems to be that this firstfruits sheaf was brought to the priests at the Tabernacle/Temple the day after the first regular Sabbath that occurred during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That also seems to be the day that Jesus appeared in the Temple after his resurrection (see commentary on John 20:17).

Lev 23:22

**“You are to leave them for the poor.”** God has great concern for the poor and disadvantaged. He commands to leave food for the poor in several places (cf. Lev. 19:9-19; 23:22; Deut. 24:19).

Lev 23:24

**“In the seventh month.”** The first day of the month Tishri was considered the first day of the year for over 2,500 years, from Adam until the Exodus. At the Exodus, God changed the Jewish calendar and switched it by six months. The seventh month, which had been Nisan (also called Abib), became the first month (Exod. 12:2). That change made the first month (Tishri) become the seventh month (see commentary on Exod. 12:2). The Hebrew “Rosh Hashanah” literally means “head of the year (from the Hebrew *rosh*, “head”).” This feast occurred on Tishri 1, the beginning of the civil new year (Lev. 23:24-25; Num. 29:1-6). The religious new year began on Nisan 1. Rosh Hashanah was to be a special day of rest and memorialized by blowing shofars, the ram’s horn trumpet, so it became known as the “Feast of Trumpets,” although that name is not in the Bible.

**“a memorial.”** Some scholars say the shofar blasts and sabbath is so God will remember the people and look favorably upon them, while others say it is for the people to remember God. It is likely for both: the people remember God, and He looks favorably upon their obedience to Him.

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Lev 23:27

**“on the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement.”** The seventh month is Tishri, and it was originally the first month of the year (see commentary on Exod. 12:2, also see Lev. 23:24).

**“you are to afflict your souls.”** In the context of the Day of Atonement, which was the tenth day of the seventh month (Nisan calendar) the primary meaning of the phrase “afflict your souls” is to go without food, to fast (see commentary on Lev. 16:29).

Lev 23:32

**“a Sabbath of complete rest.”** The Hebrew is *shabbath shabbathon*, more literally, “a Sabbath of Sabbath observance.”

[For more information, see commentary on Lev. 25:4.]

**“In the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening.”** Sunset on the ninth day of the month Tishri started the tenth day of Tishri and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), which went to sunset the next day. Thus the Day of Atonement went from sunset on the ninth of Tishri to sunset on the tenth of Tishri, one full 24-hour day.

Lev 23:36

**“Seven days you are to offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. On the eighth day is to be a holy assembly.”** The Feast of Booths (also commonly known as “the Feast of Tabernacles” or among the Jews as “Succoth”) was a seven-day feast. However, because the eighth day was a special Sabbath when people could not work or travel, in effect the feast became an eight-day feast.

Lev 23:37

**“Offerings...burnt offerings...grain offerings, sacrifices.”** In the Hebrew text, these are singular, for example, “an offering, a sacrifice.” But they are collective singulars, and in this context, they refer to categories of offerings, not just a single offering. This is best represented in English by plurals, which the REV and many other English translations do.

Lev 23:40

**“the fruit of majestic trees.”** In this case, the “fruit” (produce) of majestic trees are its branches and boughs.

**Leviticus Chapter 24**

Lev 24:2

**“regularly.”** In many English versions, the Hebrew text is translated as “continuously,” but in this context that gives the wrong impression. The oil lamps burned continuously in the sense that they continued to be burned night after night, every night of the year, year after year, but they were not burned 24 hours per day, they were only burned at night (Lev. 24:3). Given that fact, “regularly” catches the sense of the text better than “continuously.”

Lev 24:3

**“the veil of the Testimony.”** The “veil of the Testimony” was the veil that hung between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant was. The ark of the covenant was sometimes called “the Testimony” because it contained the tablets with the Ten Commandments, which Israel vowed to obey and thus they were a “testimony” to what Israel had committed themselves to.

**“keep it in order from evening to morning.”** The Bible says that the menorah was to be lit for the night and the lamps put out in the morning. However, Jewish tradition usually teaches that the center lamp was burned continually, day and night. Josephus even says that three lights were allowed to be kept burning. When these later traditions developed, and if they were strictly adhered to, is not known.

Lev 24:4

**“He must tend the lamps on the pure gold menorah.”** The menorah was a lampstand, and on it were set seven oil lamps that were burned from evening until morning every day. In this context, “continually” does not mean that the oil lamps burn continually, but rather that there is a continual tending of the lamps, day after day. The lamps were to burn every night of the year.

Lev 24:5

**“12 cakes.”** The Bread of the Presence was to be baked in a round form, like a huge pancake.

**“two-tenths of an ephah.”** An ephah is a dry measure that is about 23 quarts (5.6 gallons; 22 liters). So two-tenths of an ephah is roughly four and a half quarts, or a little over a gallon of fine flour. So these would have been very large wheat cakes, and they would have been stacked up on the table in two separate stacks. An ephah was one-tenth of a homer (Ezek. 45:11).

Lev 24:9

**“It will belong to Aaron and his sons, and they are to eat it.”** So when the old bread was replaced by new bread on the Sabbath, the priests who were serving got to eat the bread that had been on the table since the last Sabbath.

Lev 24:15

**“Anyone, anyone.”** “Anyone” is repeated in the Hebrew text for emphasis, but that emphasis does not occur in most English translations. The text is clear that no one is excluded from the consequences of their actions.

**“who curses his God.”** This could also be understood in a more general manner: “Whoever curses his god will bear his sin.” In that case, “god” could refer to other things besides the God of Israel (cf. Fox[[13]](#footnote-12974)).

Lev 24:16

**“death, yes, death...stone, yes, stone.”** The Hebrew text uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis. God makes the point very clearly and powerfully: anyone who blasphemes the name of Yahweh was to be executed.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

Lev 24:17

**“And if a man takes the life of any human being.”** The Hebrew text is more idiomatic than the English translation reflects, and reads more like, “And if anyone strikes down the soul of a human being….” In this case, “strikes down” means “kill” and “soul” refers to the human life. The essence of the verse is “Anyone who takes another person’s life must be put to death” (NLT). Modern societies have abandoned this law of God, even though He created people and ostensibly should know how to run a society. Generally, modern societies let murderers go after some prison time, or keep them alive and house, feed, clothe, and medically care for them until they die, which is often decades, and during that time they often cause much harm and danger to society. But have our “modern sensibilities” made society any better or safer? No. Instead, we are a very unsafe society and have a horrible prison problem. The Bible commands that murderers be put to death.

[For more on the death penalty, see commentary on Exod. 21:12.]

Lev 24:18

**“life for life.”** This is one of the verses in the Bible that shows that animals have the same life force (*nephesh* or “soul”) that humans do. It is often taught that humans have a soul but animals do not. That is not correct. The Bible shows us that the invisible life force in animals is the same as the invisible life force in humans. The Bible usually refers to it as *nephesh* (Hebrew), and *psuchē* (Greek), and those words often get translated as “soul,” although sometimes when they are used of animals they are not translated as “soul” because of human theology. In a context like this, the nephesh, the “soul,” is the life of the animal.

[For more on “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Lev 24:21

**“He who kills an animal is to make restitution.”** This verse settles an issue that has come up in these modern times. There are environmentalists who state that animals are just as important as humankind. That is not what the Bible says. Animals are not made in the image of God, and many of them are specifically stated to be a source of food (cf. Gen. 9:3) and of domestic blessings. Biblically, the life of an animal is not valued as highly as the life of a human being.

[For more on the death penalty, see commentary on Exod. 21:12.]

Lev 24:23

**“stoned him with stones.”** The standard method of killing a criminal was to stone them with stones (cf. Lev. 20:2; 24:23; Num. 15:35; Deut. 13:10; 21:21). Some people have asserted that the Jews just dropped one huge stone on the person, but there is no evidence for that in the Bible. Also, stoning with stones was how Achan and his family were killed (Josh. 7:25), and how the Jews killed Stephen (Acts 7:58-60).

[For more on stoning people to death, see commentary on Lev. 20:2.]

**Leviticus Chapter 25**

Lev 25:4

**“Sabbath of complete rest.”** The Hebrew is *shabbath shabbathon*, more literally, “a Sabbath of Sabbath observance.” This is to be understood as a Sabbath in which there is Sabbath observance, or a Sabbath of complete rest (cf. “complete rest” CJB, HCSB, NAB, NET, NLT). This Hebrew phrase occurs six times in the Bible: Exodus 31:15, 35:2; Leviticus 16:31; 23:3, 32, and here in Leviticus 25:4.

God rested on the seventh day in Genesis 2:1-3, but He did not command that anyone follow His example and rest on the seventh day until Exodus 16, when He gave the manna from heaven, and even then He did not fully explain the Sabbath. The Sabbath became part of the Law and the Old Covenant when it was given as part of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:8-11).

[For more on the Sabbath, see commentary on Exod. 20:10.]

Lev 25:5

**“from your harvest.”** This is a very accurate statement because the grain was not harvested until it was ripe, and during the act of cutting the grain and carrying it to the threshing floor some of the grain would be knocked off the stalk and fall to the ground, where it would grow. That “volunteer grain” was not to be harvested in the Sabbath year.

Although this seems somewhat harsh, it taught the people to rely on God and not be sneaky about it. If people could eat the volunteer grain on the Sabbath year, then they would almost certainly give in to the temptation to “allow” more than just accidental grain to fall to the ground the year before the Sabbath year. In fact, quite a bit of grain would likely be “accidentally knocked off the stalk,” by people as they harvested, in full knowledge that it would grow and be food during the Sabbath year. God wanted to avoid such dishonesty and teach the people to rely on Him.

Lev 25:6

**“for…for…for…for…for.”** This is the figure of speech anaphora, where successive sentences or phrases begin with the same word or words. Anaphora emphasizes each individual item in the list.[[14]](#footnote-25437) God is making it clear that everyone, yes, everyone, living in Israel obeys His law about the Sabbath.

[See figure of speech “anaphora.”]

Being a resident alien did not exempt a person from God’s law. If a person did not want to live under the laws of God, Israel was only a small country, not even 200 miles long and 100 miles wide, and a person was free to leave.

Lev 25:9

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Lev 25:36

**“Take no interest from him, or profit.”** The command to not charge interest on a loan to a fellow Israelite occurs in several places in the Torah (cf. Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-38; Deut. 23:19-20; see commentary on Deut. 23:19 and 23:20).

Lev 25:40

**“he may serve with you until the Year of Jubilee.”** Israelites who were slaves served for six years and go free in the seventh year (Exod. 21:2; Deut. 15:12). But if an Israelite slave does not want to be set free, then he or she goes through a ceremony where his or her ear is pierced, and then the slave serves “forever” (Exod. 21:5-6; Deut. 15:16-17). But here in Leviticus we learn that “forever” just refers to what could be a long time, the time until the Jubilee year when all Israelite slaves were allowed to return to their tribe and family area. However, it is questionable how many slaves actually did that and went free if they wanted to be with the household they were serving in when they could have been set free years earlier.

Lev 25:50

**“according to the time period of a hired servant is it to be with him.”** This law reflects the wonderful justice in the Mosaic Law. If a man sold himself to another man and the buyer knew that the one who sold himself was going to go free on the year of Jubilee, then the price the person sold himself for would depend on how long it would be until the Jubilee. So similarly, if the man is going to be bought back from the buyer, the price would depend on how long until the Jubilee. The man who is selling back the man who sold himself will have to hire a worker to replace him, so the cost of the worker from date of sale until the Jubilee would be the price the man (or a kinsman-redeemer) would have to pay to buy him back.

Note that the cost of buying the man back is not calculated based on how much the man originally sold himself for. People who are poor and desperate may agree to sell themselves for a lot less than they are worth just to have food and shelter. But if a man sold himself for less than he was worth, that does not change the fact that the one who bought him will now have to hire a man to replace him, so the cost of buying the man out of slavery may end up being more than the man originally sold himself for, but that is not the original buyer’s problem. The slave originally sold himself of his own free will for an agreed-upon price, and now it will cost him the amount of hiring a man to replace him to buy him back.

**Leviticus Chapter 26**

Lev 26:1

**“idols.”** The Hebrew text has the word *'eliyl* (#0457 אֱלִיל), more literally “Worthless Ones” or “worthless things,” a sarcastic name for “idols” (see commentary on Hab. 2:18, “Worthless Ones”).

**“a standing-stone.”** Although some standing-stones were set up as memorials, most standing-stones were set up as part of the worship of pagan gods, and that is the context here. God has no tolerance for idols. They are harmful in many different ways. They are to be destroyed.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18. For more on idols being harmful, see commentary on Deut. 7:5.]

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Lev 26:8

**“your enemies will fall before you.”** We see this played out many times in the Bible. When the people of God obeyed God, there were miraculous victories (see commentary on Josh. 11:8).

Lev 26:16

**“and make your soul to pine away.”** The Hebrew word *nephesh*, often translated as “soul,” has many meanings, including a person’s attitudes, thoughts and emotions, which is what it means in this context. Because of their disobedience, the lives of the people would be so difficult that they would lose their energy for life; they would just waste away.

[For more on *nephesh* and “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Lev 26:26

**“staff of bread.”** “Bread” was a common idiom for food. “Bread” came to be used by metonymy for food in general because bread was the main food in the culture and a staple of life. Bread was indeed the staff upon which the people leaned for food, and in literature it is sometimes referred to as the “staff of life.” Here it is the “staff of bread” (cf. Ps. 105:16; Ezek. 4:16; 5:16).

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

Lev 26:30

**“your *pagan* shrines.”** In this context, the shrines of the disobedient Israelites were clearly pagan and had altars and idols on them.

[For more on shrines, see the REV commentary on Num. 33:52.]

Lev 26:34

**“make up for.”** In certain contexts, the Hebrew verb *ratsah* (#07521 רָצָה) means to “make up for,” “pay for,” “expiate,” and this is one of those cases. The land was supposed to rest every seven years, but Israel never did fully keep that command and allow the land to rest, which built up a debt that had to be made up for, satisfied, or paid off. A number of modern versions have “make up for” (cf. HCSB, NAB, NET, JPS). The CJB has “repaid,” and Rotherham has “pay off.” This same word occurs in Isaiah 40:2, that the iniquity of Israel has been “paid off,” and thus pardoned, because she received from Yahweh “double” for all her sins. This verse in Leviticus is an early example showing that sin was sometimes thought of in terms of a debt, something that was much more fully developed during and after the Babylonian Captivity and during New Testament times.

[For a more complete understanding of sin, see commentary on 1 John 1:7, “sin.”]

Lev 26:39

**“because of.”** The Hebrew is literally “in,” but it is the iniquity that is causing the people to rot away. Sin is harmful on many levels.

Lev 26:41

**“pay the penalty.”** This is the same word as “make up for” in Leviticus 26:34.

Lev 26:43

**“pay the penalty.”** This is the same word as “make up for” in Leviticus 26:34.

**Leviticus Chapter 27**

Lev 27:3

**“50 shekels.”** That is roughly 1.25 pounds (567 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

Lev 27:4

**“30 shekels.”** Thirty shekels is roughly 12 ounces (340 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

Lev 27:5

**“shekels.”** Twenty shekels is roughly eight ounces (227 grams) and ten shekels is roughly four ounces (113 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

Lev 27:6

**“shekels.”** Five shekels is roughly 2 ounces (56.5 grams) and three shekels is roughly 1.2 ounces (34 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

Lev 27:7

**“shekels.”** Fifteen shekels is roughly six ounces (170 grams) and ten shekels is roughly four ounces (113 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

Lev 27:16

**“shekels.”** Fifty shekels is roughly 1.25 pounds (567 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

Lev 27:32

**“passes under the *owner’s* rod.”** This was the custom of how the tithe of animals was collected. The animals that had been born that year were rounded up and then driven through a narrow place and counted. Each tenth animal was marked, and it was given to Yahweh as the tithe. If a man had just begun building his herd or flock, and less than ten of that kind of animal had been born that year, the man did not have a tenth animal to give and so did not have to tithe that year. Next year his herd or flock would likely be bigger, and he would tithe then. God never meant the tithe to impoverish the people or keep them from having an abundance.

[For more on the tithe, see commentary on Deut. 14:22.]

1. Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, Appendix 43, “Offer” and “Offerings.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14093)
2. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 13:155. [↑](#footnote-ref-27523)
3. *Theological Dict. of the Old Testament*, 13:153. [↑](#footnote-ref-31786)
4. Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes*. [↑](#footnote-ref-24631)
5. John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-18787)
6. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-25190)
7. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 159, “tapeinosis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16564)
8. For the translation “by making atonement,” see John Kleinig, *Leviticus* [ConcC], 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-30692)
9. Hartley, *Leviticus* [WBC], 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-30201)
10. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-19457)
11. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23045)
12. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14351)
13. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12974)
14. Cf. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 199, “anaphora.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25437)