**Leviticus Commentary**

**Leviticus Chapter 1**

Lev 1:1

**“And Yahweh called.”** The Hebrew name of Leviticus is “And he called.”

**“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-31276)

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-16380)

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-25265) 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 1:3

**“a burnt offering.”** The burnt offering indicated a desire to surrender to God and to trust and obey Him. The burnt offering was also often offered to elicit a response from God, much like we expect a response from our prayers. Elijah expected a response when he faced off against the prophet of Baal and offered burnt offerings (1 Kings 18:24). Although we natually think of the sin offering atoning for sin, there was atonement in the burnt offering as well, but in a more general sense than the sin offering (cf. Lev. 14:20; 16:24). When Noah gave burnt offerings after the Flood, God smelled the smell and was soothed and said He would no longer curse the earth (Gen. 8:20-21). When David sinned by improperly taking a census of Israel, God was appeased by David’s burnt offering (2 Sam. 24:25; 1 Chron. 21:26).

Lev 1:5

**“altar that is before the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.”** The altar in front of the Tent of Meeting is in contrast to the golden altar of incense that is inside the Tabernacle.

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 1:8

**“suet.”** Suet is a specific kind of fat. It is the hard, unrendered fat that is found around the kidneys and loins of beef, lambs, and mutton. It is different from the fat found on pigs, which is called “lard.” Suet is often used in British cooking, such as pastries and puddings (e.g., in the second stanza of the song “We Wish You a Merry Christmas”: “Now bring us some figgy pudding”). Suet is also given to birds because it is high in fat, protein, and often minerals that birds need, especially in the colder months up north.

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.]

**“legs.”** The Hebrew word likely refers to just the lower legs, but why they would be singled out is not completely understood.

**“pleasing aroma.”** The Hebrew word can mean “soothing” or “pleasing” and the English versions differ (see commentary on Gen. 8:21).

Lev 1:12

**“suet.”** Suet is a specific kind of fat (see commentary on Lev. 1:8).

Lev 1:14

**“pigeons.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “the sons of the pigeon.” The meaning of this phrase is unclear, and scholars are divided as to what it means, which explains why the English translations differ. The Hebrew phrase can refer to “young pigeons,” and many versions read that way (e.g., ASV, CJB, CSB, KJV, NASB, NIV). However, the phrase can also refer to the different varieties of the pigeon family, of which there are many, so many English versions simply say “pigeon” (e.g., CEB, ESV, JPS, NAB, NRSV, REB). The text gives no reason why the sacrifice of a pigeon must be a “young” pigeon, and none of the other animal sacrifices listed, bulls, sheep and goats, needed to be young, so given those facts, and also given the fact that the pigeon species, which includes doves, has many varieties and all of them would seemingly be accepted as sacrifices, the REV translators believe that “pigeons” is the most probable meaning of the text.

Lev 1:15

**“pinch off.”** The *HALOT* Hebrew-English lexicon says to pinch off with one’s fingernails. Twist the head and break the neck, then pinch off the head.

**“pinch off its head and burn *the head* into smoke.”** The Hebrew text literally reads, “pinch off its head and burn into smoke.” But since the whole phrase reads, “The priest is to approach with it [the bird] to the altar and pinch off its head and burn into smoke on the altar,” the English text is unclear as to what is burnt, the head or the whole bird. We learn from the context that the head is burned first, then the unclean part of the bird is cast away, then the rest of the bird is burned on the altar.

If the bird was a sin offering, it was handled differently (Lev. 5:7-9).

Lev 1:16

**“cast it beside the east side of the altar.”** The ashes from the great altar of burnt offering that was in the Tabernacle courtyard were put beside the altar on the east side of the altar as Lev. 1:16 says (cf. Lev. 6:10). Eventually there would be a big pile of ashes there, and so apparently at some point they were carried out to the “clean place” east of the Tabernacle and dumped there (Lev. 4:12). Interestingly, the “unclean” bodies and body parts of sacrificial animals were carried outside the camp to that same “clean place” on the east side of the camp of Israel and burned to ashes there (Lev. 4:12). In contrast to this simple solution of what happened to the ashes from the great altar, in time the rabbis expanded and mystified what happened to the ashes. Rabbi Rashi writes about the place for ashes close to the altar of burnt offering and says, “I.e., the place where each morning they deposit the ashes removed [from the outer altar], and the ashes removed from the inner altar and the menorah. All these were [miraculously] absorbed there in their place. — [*Yoma* 21a].”[[4]](#footnote-16418)

The ashes from the great altar of sacrifice started their journey by being put east of the altar, then were taken out of the camp to a “clean place” east of the camp of Israel, which in the time of Solomon and after was a clean place east of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives, where the unclean sacrifices were burned (see commentary on Heb. 13:10).

**Leviticus Chapter 2**

Lev 2:1

**“fine flour.”** The Hebrew is one word and in this context it refers to finely ground flour.

**“fine flour...oil...frankincense.”** The oil was olive oil. Also, the grain offering, and every other approach offering, had to be offered with salt (Lev. 2:13).

Lev 2:2

**“flour...oil [olive oil]...frankincense.”** The grain offering consisted of these three ingredients, and also salt was added (Lev. 2:13).

**“the priest will burn this reminder portion.”** When the offerer brought a grain offering to Yahweh, only a small portion of the offering (a handful) was burned on the altar. The rest was eaten by the priests (Lev. 2:3).

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

Lev 2:3

**“a most holy.”** The way a superlative is formed in Hebrew is to double the word, so, for example, a “king of kings” is the best king, the most prominent king. Here, the “holy of holies” is the most holy, the most holy portion.

Lev 2:4

**“spread.”** The Hebrew word is literally “anointed,” but that theologically loaded word gives the wrong idea here. The wafer was not given a special “anointing” in the Pentecostal sense, the oil was simply put on the wafer. The Bible does not describe the way the oil was put on the wafer, but it was likely poured on and then spread. Because the Hebrew text does not tell us exactly how the oil was put on the wafers, the English versions differ somewhat as to how it might have been put on (e.g., “anointed” (ASV, YLT); “spread” (CEB, CJB, JPS, NAB, NASB); “coated” (CSB); “smeared” (ESV, NET); “brushed” (NIV). It is likely that different people put the oil on the wafers differently, which would be explained by the text not directing people to put the oil on the wafer in a specific way.

Lev 2:5

**“griddle.”** In this case, the “griddle” was a flat cooking surface usually made of stone or metal that was heated and then the dough was cooked on it. Today we think of pancakes cooked on a “griddle,” a flat surface which in modern times is usually the flat bottom of a large frying pan.

Lev 2:7

**“covered-pan.”** The Hebrew word is a hapax legomenon, it only occurs here in the entire Old Testament. There is evidence that the word refers to some kind of covered pan, and that would differ from the other ways the bread was cooked in the previous verses which was baked in an oven or cooked on a griddle.

Lev 2:9

**“its reminder portion and will burn that *portion* into smoke.”** The “reminder portion” was the portion that reminded people of God, whose love and mercy made the heavens and earth and food for people, and should be remembered each time we eat (cf. 1 Cor. 11:25).

Lev 2:11

**“No grain offering that you offer to Yahweh is to be made with leaven.”** “Leaven” is yeast, and it makes the dough rise and sweetens it. There were only two times in the Mosaic Law when grain offerings were allowed to be leavened, but in those cases the bread was not offered on the altar. One was a part of the Peace Offering (Lev. 7:13), and the other was bread that was offered at the Feast of Weeks, also known as the Day of Pentecost (Lev. 23:17).

**“leaven…honey.”** Leaven (yeast) and honey were two things that would cause the grain to ferment, so God forbids them (cf. Exod. 23:18; 34:25). C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch posit an explanation of why leaven and honey were not to be offered to God. “They [the grain offerings] were to be kept free, therefore, both from the leaven of hypocrisy (Luke 12:1) and of malice and wickedness (1 Cor. 5:8), and also from the honey of the deliciae carnis [“the delights of the flesh], because both are destructive of spiritual life.”[[5]](#footnote-13384)

There were offerings made with leaven (Lev. 7:13), but they were eaten by the people and also given to the priests to eat (Lev. 7:14); they were not burned on the altar. Another reason honey may not have been accepted by Yahweh is that evidence from the culture is that many pagan cultures used honey in the worship of their gods.

**“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 if it was part of a firstfruits offering, but grain with yeast or honey was not to be offered on the altar, it was not to be burned up. The priests would get the whole offering.

Lev 2:13

**“All of your approach-offerings.”** The Hebrew text of Leviticus 2:13 uses the singular, technically, “approach-offering,” but this is a collective singular, so we can translated it as “approach-offerings,” which makes more sense in English.

**“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 3:1

**“peace offerings.”** The primary point of the peace offering sacrifice was to establish or confirm the relationship between God and the person who was offering the sacrifice. This was made clear by the fact that the fat parts of the animal were burned on the altar of Yahweh but the meat was eaten by the worshipers in a meal before God—in fact, the peace offering was the only sacrifice in which the worshipers got to eat some of the meat of the sacrifice. The priests got to eat parts of the sin offering and grain offerings, but the common people did not.

It is helpful to understand that the “peace offering” was actually a general term for different offerings—there were different types (or perhaps different categories) of peace offerings and the different types could have some different regulations as to how the offering was handled. However, those different offerings were all under the category of “peace offering.” Understanding that helps us understand some of the verses in Leviticus about the peace offering that seem to be contradictory. For example, the meat of the peace offering that was offered in thanksgiving had to be eaten the day the animal was sacrificed (Lev. 7:15), but the meat of the peace offering that was associated with a vow could be eaten that day and the next day too (Lev. 19:5-6).

The NET text note on Leviticus 3:1 reads, “When there was a series of offerings that included a peace offering (see, e.g., Lev 9:8-21, sin offerings, burnt offerings, and afterward the peace offerings in vv. 18-21), the peace offering was always offered last because it expressed the fact that all was well between God and his worshiper(s). There were various kinds of peace offerings, depending on the worship intended on the specific occasion. The “thank offering” expressed thanksgiving (e.g., Lev 7:11-15; 22:29-30), the “votive offering” fulfilled a vow (e.g., Lev 7:16-18; 22:21-25), and the “freewill offering” was offered as an expression of devotion and praise to God (e.g., Lev 7:16-18; 22:21-25). The so-called “ordination offering” was also a kind of peace offering that was used to consecrate the priests at their ordination (e.g., Exod 29:19-34; Lev 7:37; 8:22-32).”

The Hebrew word “peace” also contains the idea of wholeness and completeness. It is from the same root as the word “shalom.” This is further evidence that the “peace” offering established the wholeness of the relationship between the worshiper and God.

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.”** See commentary on Exod. 29:13.

Lev 3:5

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

Lev 3:7

**“sheep.”** The age of the sheep is not specified in the text. Although some versions say “lamb,” there is no specific indication that the animal had to be young. The same word is translated as “sheep” in Genesis 30:32.

**“before Yahweh.”** The text could also be translated as “in the presence of Yahweh.”

Lev 3:9

**“fat tail.”** For information on the fat tail, see commentary on Exodus 29:22.

Lev 3:10

**“and the two kidneys.”** Leviticus 3:10, 15; 4:9, and 7:4 are the same.

**“the appendage of the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is *yoteret* (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), (see commentary on Exod. 29:13).

Lev 3:15

**“and the two kidneys.”** Leviticus 3:10, 15; 4:9, and 7:4 are the same.

Lev 3:17

**“you are not to eat any fat or any blood.”** This fat refers to the fat of the animal that was to be offered to God. It would be impossible to eat the meat of the animal without eating the fat that runs through the meat. The Hebrew word for “fat” *chelev* (#02459 חֶלֶב). Baruch Levine writes, “As was noted...*helev* does not refer to ordinary fat that adheres to meat but to fat that covers the internal organs and entrails.”[[6]](#footnote-30138) As Leviticus has said, that organ fat is to be burned on the altar to God and not eaten by people (cf. Lev. 7:25).

The blood was not to be eaten either. This ordinance was to be strictly enforced, so it is stated many times in the Law (cf. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26, 27; 17:10, 12, 14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23; 15:23; and 1 Sam. 14:33).

**Leviticus Chapter 4**

Lev 4:1

**“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying.”** Here in Leviticus 4, Yahweh speaks about the sin offering. The sin offering is discussed in Leviticus 4:1-35; 6:24-30, and Numbers 15:22-31.

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

Lev 4:2

**“unintentionally.”** The sin offering and guilt 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

**“If the anointed priest.”** The “anointed priest” is the High Priest. The Hebrew is more literally, “If the priest, the anointed, sins.” The word “anointed” is *mashiach* (#04899 מָשִׁיחַ), which is the word that gets transliterated into English as “Messiah.” There were many anointed people in the Old Testament, so the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was not special in that he was “anointed,” but was special because of who he was.

**“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 4:8

**“all the fat.”** In this context, “all the fat” refers to the fat that is specifically referred to in the text, for example, the fat on the innards (see commentary on Lev. 3:17).

Lev 4:9

**“and the two kidneys.”** Leviticus 3:10, 15; 4:9, and 7:4 are the same.

**“and the appendage on the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is *yoteret* (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), (see commentary on Exod. 29:13).

Lev 4:10

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

Lev 4:11

**“But the bull’s skin, all its flesh.”** To understand Leviticus 4 about the sin offering, one must read it along with what Leviticus 6 says about the sin offering. Leviticus 6:30 says, “No sin offering of which any of the blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place may be eaten; it must be burned with fire.” There were three times the blood of the sin offering was brought into the Tabernacle itself—into the Holy Place where the golden altar of incense was. These three times were if the High Priest sinned (Lev. 4:1-12), if the entire congregation sinned (Lev. 4:13-21), and when the sin offering was offered on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:27). For the sin offering of regular people, the priests got to eat part of the sin offering (Lev. 6:26). Here in Leviticus 4:11, the context is the High Priest sinning, so the animal’s flesh could not be eaten.

**“dung.”** A rare word. Most scholars think it refers to the dung (cf. Mal. 2:3). The dung may be specified because it seems like ordinarily the dung would not be burned.

Lev 4:12

**“and all the rest of the bull.”** This would include the skin. Ordinarily, the skin of the burnt offering was given to the priests (Lev. 7:8). However, when a priest sinned, which is the case here in Leviticus 4:12, the skin was burned along with the rest of the animal. The priests were not allowed to profit from their own sin.

**“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. This third “altar” is not called an altar anywhere but Hebrews 13:10. 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).

It its important to notice, when connecting the offerings in the Old Testament with Jesus Christ, that the body of the sin offering of the High Priest was burned outside the camp, and Jesus Christ was a sin offering (2 Cor. 5:21) and he was “burned” (tortured and died) outside the camp near that clean place where the ashes of the sin offering were poured out and where the body of the sin offering was burned.

Lev 4:13

**“the whole congregation of Israel.”** This is the whole collective group of the people of Israel.

**“strays unintentionally.”** This straying is revealed to be a sin in the next verse. It is an unintentional sin.

**“the assembly.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic. More literally the text reads, “not noticed by the eyes of the assembly.” The “eyes of the assembly” are the elders and leaders of the congregation, the ones who were charged with the oversight of the congregation.

Lev 4:14

**“the sin.”** What is referred to as “strays unintentionally” in Leviticus 4:13 is clearly designated as a sin here in Leviticus 4:14.

Lev 4:15

**“The elders of the congregation.”** These elders are referred to as “the eyes of the assembly” in the Hebrew text of Leviticus 4:13.

Lev 4:17

**“before the veil.”** In this context, the veil is the veil that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

[For more on the veil and the various coverings, screens, and the veil of the Tabernacle, see commentary on Exod. 26:1).

Lev 4:18

**“the altar that is before Yahweh that is in the Tent of Meeting.”** This is the golden altar of incense in the Holy Place, the outer room in the Tabernacle that contained the menorah, the table of the Bread of the Presence, and the golden altar of incense. The golden altar is described in some detail in Exodus 36:1-10 and 37:25-29.

Lev 4:19

**“the altar.”** That is, the altar of burnt offering.

**“all its fat.”** This is not all the fat on the animal, but all the fat that is described in other verses that is to be burned to God (cf. Lev. 3:9-10).

Lev 4:21

**“carry the bull outside the camp and burn it.”** 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, as Leviticus 4:21 says, “outside of the camp,” that is, it was outside of the camp of Israel. Later, when the Temple was built, it was outside of Jerusalem proper, and Jewish records show it was on the Mount of Olives. This “altar” is only called an altar in Hebrews 13:10. It was on this third altar that things that were often considered unclean, such as the bodies of sin offerings, were burned.

When we are studying the death of Jesus Christ, it is important to understand that the bodies of the sin offerings were not burned on the altar inside the Temple, but were burned in the designated place, the “clean place” (Lev. 4:12) that was east of the Temple. The bodies of sin offerings were burned outside the camp (Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27). The bodies of the sin offerings were burned outside the camp, and those bodies were considered to be the sin offering (Lev. 4:21), even though the animal itself was killed in the Tabernacle/Temple courtyard (Exod. 29:10-14).

This altar outside of the camp (and later outside Jerusalem) is associated with the death of Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:10, and see commentary on Heb. 13:10). Jesus Christ was the sin offering that humankind needed in order to be saved. Jesus was without blemish and was a sin offering (2 Cor. 5:21 REV). Jesus was a sin offering, so his body had to be “burned,” in his case killed, outside the camp, which it was.

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.

Lev 4:35

**“sheep.”** The age of the sheep is not specified in the text.

**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 guilt offering. As it is, the first part of Leviticus 5 continues the information about the sin offering, and a new subject, the guilt offering, starts in the middle of chapter 5 (Lev. 5:14).

Lev 5:2

**“swarming creature.”** Translated “swarming creature” here (Gen. 1:20; 7:21).

Lev 5:4

**“unnoticed by him.”** What was “unnoticed” was that what he said was a sin.

Lev 5:6

**“penalty 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 “penalty for his guilt.” in this context, the *asham* is not the “guilt offering” as some versions have (cf. LSB, LSV, NASB) but the penalty for the sin.

The NET text note explains the translation. “In this context the word for “guilt” (אָשָׁם, *ʾasham*) refers to the “penalty” for incurring guilt, the so-called consequential אָשָׁם (J. Milgrom, Leviticus [AB], 1:303; cf. the note on Lev 5:1).”

Lev 5:7

**“two pigeons.”** See commentary on Leviticus 1:14.

Lev 5:8

**“pinch off its head from its neck.”** The sin offering is treated differently from the burnt offering. The way to do a bird sacrifice as a burnt offering is covered in Leviticus 1:14-17.

Lev 5:11

**“two pigeons.”** See commentary on Leviticus 1:14.

Lev 5:12

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

Lev 5:13

**“he has sinned in *any* one of these things.”** Breaking one commandment in the Law was the same as breaking the whole law (cf. James 2:10).

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 Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

**“of proper value in silver shekels.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “according to your evaluation in silver shekels.” The idea seems to be that the ram had to be worthy of being sacrificed, not an almost-dead, worthless ram.

Lev 5:16

**“a fifth part.”** That is, 20 percent.

Lev 5:17

**“he is guilty and will bear his iniquity.”** God holds people responsible to know His laws (cf. Luke 12:47-48).

**Leviticus Chapter 6**

Lev 6:2

**“Unfaithfully.”** The Hebrew word is *maʿal* (#04604 מַעַל), and it has a range of meanings that include being untrue, violating one’s legal obligations, being deceitful or a cheat, and being greedy, and some people are most or all of those meanings. The wide range of meanings of the Hebrew word explains the large variation in the English translations.

**“or has oppressed his neighbor.”** The Hebrew word translated as “oppressed” is *ʿashaq* (#06231 עָשַׁק), and it can mean to oppress, exploit, steal, or even blackmail. Evil leaders do all of these things.

Lev 6:5

**“in full.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic, literally, “in its head,” (i.e., up to its head, meaning “in full”).

**“a fifth more.”** The cheat has to add 20 percent more than the original amount he gained by fraud and oppression.

**“on the day that he is found guilty.”** Many cheats realize they will have to give back what they have illegally or immorally taken, but they delay giving back what is not theirs. The Bible says to restore that illicit gain “on the day” the guilt is discovered.

Lev 6:6

**“of the proper value.”** Similar to Leviticus 5:15 and 5:18 (cf. NIV2011).

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.

**“hearth.”** This word only occurs here in the entire Bible, and it refers to the top of the altar on which the sacrifices were burned.

**“the fire of the altar is to be kept burning on it.”** In this way, the pleasing aroma of the sacrifice goes up to God constantly, day and night.

Lev 6:10

**“undergarments.”** These are mentioned in Exodus 28:42 and 39:28.

**“and he is to put them beside the altar.”** The priest is to take the ashes from the sacrifices that are burned on the great altar and put them beside the altar, to the east of it (cf. Lev. 1:16).

Lev 6:11

**“and put on other garments.”** The holy garments of the priesthood were not to be worn outside of the Tabernacle.

Lev 6:12

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

Lev 6:14

**“the altar.”** This is the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard of the Tabernacle.

Lev 6:15

**“He is to take from it.”** The “he” is a priest, a “son” (descendant) of Aaron, according to Leviticus 6:14.

**“his handful.”** This instruction goes with the instruction in Leviticus 2:2 and 5:12.

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).

Lev 6:18

**“All who touch the offerings must be holy.”** This sentence has been disputed by scholars, and a number of proposals have been set forth for its meaning. Given the context, which is the priests, the “sons of Aaron” offering the offerings and eating them, it seems like the “all” refers to the priests who regularly touch the offerings, and they “must be holy” to participate in the offering and eating of the offerings. If they were Levitically unclean, they would not be allowed to participate (cf. Lev. 7:21). Nevertheless, the Hebrew can be translated in different ways. For example, one proposal is that the verse should read “whatever” instead of “who,” as if something else touched the offerings, it would be made holy, but the objects that were regularly used to handle the offerings, such as the firepans, tongs, etc., were already holy.

It has also been suggested that the verse should be translated as “All who touch them will become holy” (cf. CEB, CJB, CSB, ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV). But that does not seem to be correct, because anyone who worked with the sacrifices, either bringing them or working with them, was already to be Levitically clean and holy. The NET reads, “Anyone who touches these gifts must be holy.” The Amplified Bible reads, “whoever touches them shall [first] be holy (consecrated and ceremonially clean).” William Tyndale translated the phrase, “nether shal any man twytche it, but he that is halowed” [“neither shall any man touch it, but he that is holy”].

Rabbi Baruch Levine translates Leviticus 6:18 [Lev. 6:11 in the Hebrew text] as: “‘anyone who is to touch these must be in a holy state.’ Similar statements pertaining to the sanctity of the altar occur in Exodus 29:37 and 30:29 and in verse 20 [English: Lev. 6:27] below. The problem of interpretation concerns the verb *yikdash*. Does it mean ‘will become holy’—as a result of contact with sanctified substances and objects—or ‘must be in a holy state’—before being allowed to come into contact with sacred substances and objects? Several scholars, most notably M. Haran, have argued for the former interpretation. Haran has formulated a theory of ‘contagious’ holiness, according to which the sanctity of holy objects and substances is communicated, or conducted, to all that comes into contact with them. Although the verb *k-d-sh* itself often connotes resultant holiness, it is more likely that here it refers to what must occur prior to contact with the sacred. Our verse [Lev. 6:18] simply means that only consecrated persons may have contact with sacrificial materials, a notion that reinforces the opening of the verse: Only Aaronide priests may partake of the sacrifices. Similarly, in Exodus 29:37 and 30:29, the sense is that only consecrated persons may have contact with the altar. In fact, there are indications that holiness was *not* regarded as contagious at all, unlike impurity, which was thought to be highly communicable. ... The point is that whereas impurity is transferred through physical contact alone, substances do not become holy merely through contact with sacred materials. An active consecration is required.”[[7]](#footnote-14882)

Leviticus 10:10 and 20:25 are similar in saying that the Israelites were to keep the people and things that were Levitically clean separate from the people and things that were unclean (see commentary on Lev. 20:25). A reason for that was that if something unclean touched something clean, what was clean became unclean. Uncleanness was communicable, cleanness was not. There are a large number of verses that speak of being made unclean by touching something unclean (cf. Lev. 5:2; 11:24, 25, 39, 40; 15:6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27; Num. 6:7; 9:6; 19:11, 14, 16, 22. See also Haggai 2:10-12). In contrast, it seems that if someone or something could be made clean simply by touching something holy, then going through the waiting periods and washings to become clean would simply be wasted time and effort. Anyone or anything unclean could simply go into the Tabernacle courts and touch the altar and be clean.

Lev 6:21

**“as baked pieces.”** The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain and so the English Bibles vary. The general idea is that the grain offering was not offered as one big loaf, but as pieces, and the flour was to be mixed with oil then cooked on a griddle.

Lev 6:22

**“it is to be a whole offering burned.”** The whole grain offering of the priests was to be burned; none of it was to be eaten.

Lev 6:23

**“Every grain offering of a priest is to be a whole offering. It is not to be eaten.”** When the people brought a grain offering to the priests, a handful was burned and the priests ate the rest (Lev. 2:1-3). When the priests brought a grain offering all of it was burned and none of it was eaten by the priests.

Lev 6:26

**“The priest who offers it for sin is to eat it.”** According to the Law of Moses, the meat from the sin offering was eaten by the priests, the people did not get to eat any. The fat was burned on the altar as were some other parts of the animal (Lev. 4:6-9, 16-20).

**“offers it for sin.”** This phrase is one word in the Hebrew text. The same root word that is used for the offering for sin is used for the cleansing from sin. The same is true for “sin.” The same Hebrew word is used for “sin” and the “offering for sin” (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:21).

Lev 6:27

**“Whoever touches its flesh must be holy.”** For this translation, see commentary on Leviticus 6:18. Also see Leviticus 6:27 in the NET, “Anyone who touches its meat must be holy” (cf. NKJV).

Lev 6:28

**“the offering is boiled.”** The Hebrew text is literally “it is boiled,” but it is referring to the meat of the offering; “the offering” was added for clarity, and some other English versions do that as well (cf. BBE, CEB, CSB, GWORD, NJB, NIV, REB).

Lev 6:29

**“Every male among the priests may eat of it.”** The people did not get to eat meat from the sin offerings, only the priests did. However, there were qualifications involved with eating the sin offering (see commentary on Leviticus 6:30).

Lev 6:30

**“No sin offering of which any of the blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place may be eaten.”** At first this seems to be a contradiction with what the text had just said, “The priest who offers it for sin is to eat it” (Lev. 6:26). However, if we read Leviticus 6:30 carefully, it is specifically referring to any sin offering that the blood is brought into the Tabernacle tent itself.

The three times the blood of the sin offering was brought into the Tabernacle itself, i.e., into the Holy Place where the golden altar of incense was. These three were: 1) if the High Priest sinned (Lev. 4:1-12). 2) If the entire congregation sinned (Lev. 4:13-21). 3) If the sin offering was the specific sin offering offered on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:27).

As for the sin offerings given by regular people, the priests got to eat part of those sin offerings. See also Leviticus 10:16-20. Ordinarily, Aaron could have eaten the sin offering, but he did not feel it was right to eat a feast on the day that two of his sons died, and Moses agreed.

**Leviticus Chapter 7**

Lev 7:3

**“fat tail.”** For information on the fat tail, see commentary on Exodus 29:22.

Lev 7:4

**“and the two kidneys.”** Levitcus 7:4 is the same as Leviticus 3:10, 15; 4:9.

**“and the appendage on the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is *yoteret* (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), (see commentary on Exod. 29:13).

Lev 7:5

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

Lev 7:9

**“will be the priest’s who offers it.”** But a handful of the grain offering was burned (Lev. 2:2; 5:12; 6:15).

**“covered pan.”** (Compare Lev. 2:7. These are the only two uses of the Hebrew word).

Lev 7:11

**“This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings.”** The peace offerings are also written about in Leviticus 3:1ff (see commentary on Lev. 3:1).

Lev 7:12

**“he is to offer unleavened cakes...and unleavened wafers.”** At first glance, this contradicts Leviticus 2:11,

Lev 7:13

**“with cakes of leavened bread.”** Leavened bread (bread made with yeast) was not allowed to be offered on the altar and burned (Lev. 2:11). So this unleavened bread that was part of the Peace Offering must have been eaten as it was, with no part of it being offered to God on the altar. There were only two times in the Mosaic Law when grain offerings were allowed to be leavened. One was a part of the Peace Offering (Lev. 7:13), and the other was bread that was offered at the Feast of Weeks, also known as the Day of Pentecost (Lev. 23:17).

Lev 7:14

**“a contribution to Yahweh.”** For the translation “contribution,” see commentary on Leviticus 7:32.

Lev 7:15

**“must be eaten on the day of his offering.”** The peace offering was a complicated offering in that there were different regulations that went with the different types of peace offerings. For example, a peace offering that was given due to thanksgiving was to be eaten the same day it was offered (Lev. 7:15). The Bible never says why that particular peace offering had to be eaten the same day. But if the peace offering was due to a vow or if it was a freewill offering, then the meat could be eaten the day the sacrifice was offered and the next day as well (Lev. 7:16). This is repeated in a different way in Leviticus 22:29-30.

Lev 7:16

**“if the sacrifice that is his approach-offering is a vow or a freewill offering.”** Leviticus 7 concerns peace offerings. There were different specific types of peace offerings, such as for thanksgiving, or a vow, or a freewill offering, and the different peace offerings had different regulations as to how to correctly perform them.

**“it is to be eaten.”** The peace offering was the only Levitical offering from which the ordinary people got to eat some of the meat. One can imagine that made the peace offering a very popular offering.

**“and on the next day what remains of it may be eaten.”** See commentary on Leviticus 7:15.

Lev 7:21

**“unclean detestable *thing.*”** Some Hebrew manuscripts read “swarming” instead of “detestable,” and translations that follow that idea read “detestable creature,” or something such as that, but they add the word “creature” as a clarification (cf. CEB, CSB, ESV, JPS, LSV, NAB, NET, NIV, NJB, NRSV). Many other versions read “things,” as does the REV (cf. CJB, KJV, LSB, NASB, NJB, NLT).

**“When anyone touches anything unclean...and eats some of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings.”** If a person touches anything unclean, that person becomes unclean. If an unclean person eats any of the meat that has been offered to God—and God’s offerings are clean—then that person is cut off from his people.

Lev 7:23

**“fat.”** This refers to the fat of the animal that was to be offered to God. It would be impossible to eat the meat of the animal without eating the fat that runs through the meat. The Hebrew word for “fat” is *chelev* (#02459 חֶלֶב). Baruch Levine writes, “As was noted...*helev* does not refer to ordinary fat that adheres to meat but to fat that covers the internal organs and entrails.”[[8]](#footnote-11276) As Leviticus has said, that organ fat is to be burned on the altar to God and not eaten by people (cf. Lev. 7:25).

Lev 7:24

**“used for any other purpose.”** Animal fat was used for greasing things, coating iron to keep it from rusting, and other uses as well. Mesopotamians used it in making soap, and perhaps the Jews did as well.

**“but you must never eat it.”** The Hebrew text is somewhat awkward. Literally it reads, “but eating you are not to eat of it.”

Lev 7:26

**“You must not eat any blood.”** The blood was not to be eaten. This ordinance was to be strictly enforced, so it is stated many times in the Law (cf. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26, 27; 17:10, 12, 14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23; 15:23; and 1 Sam. 14:33).

Lev 7:27

**“peson...person.”** Here the word “person” is more literally “soul” in the Hebrew text, and it refers to the person. The person is the “soul.”

Lev 7:31

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

**“the breast will be Aaron’s and his sons’.”** So the priests got to divide the breast meat of the peace offering, but exactly how that meat was divided among so many priests is not discussed. The priest who actually performed the sacrifice got the right thigh of the animal (Lev. 7:33). The rest of the meat went to the one who brought the animal as an offering. The priests also got to eat part of the grain offering (Lev. 6:18), and part of the sin offering (Lev. 6:26).

Lev 7:32

**“as a contribution.”** The NET text note explains the translation “contribution.” “Older English versions (e.g., KJV, ASV) translate this Hebrew term (תְּרוּמָה, *tᵉrumah*) “heave offering,” derived from the idea of “to raise, to lift” found in the verbal root (cf. NAB “a raised offering”). “Contribution offering” is a better English rendering because it refers to something “taken out from” (i.e., “lifted up from”...) the offering as a special contribution to the specific priest who presided over the offering procedures in any particular instance….”

The translation “contribution,” or “gift” is found in many versions (cf. CEB, CJB, CSB, ESV, JPS, LSB, NAB, NASB, NET, NJB, REB).

Lev 7:33

**“will have the right thigh as a portion.”** The priest who offered the peace offering got to have the right thigh (see commentary on Lev. 7:31).

Lev 7:34

**“breast that is waved and the thigh that is a contribution.”** 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. Apparently, the breast was waved back and forth, thus the wave offering.

**“lasting ordinance.”** The scholars are divided as to what the Hebrew text means here, and whether it refers to an “ordinance” or a “portion.”

Lev 7:35

**“he brought them near to serve as priests.”** The “he” could be Moses, or God.

Lev 7:37

**“the ordination offering.”** The special offering at the ordination of Aaron and his sons (cf. Exod. 29:22, 26, 27, 31, 34; 8:22, 28, 29, 31, 33).

**Leviticus Chapter 8**

Lev 8:1

**“Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying.”** Leviticus 8-9 is closely related to Exodus 29. In Exodus, God told Moses how to ordain Aaron and his sons; here they get ordained.

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 8:4

**“Moses did as Yahweh commanded him.”** This statement is recurring in this section of Scripture (cf. Lev. 8:9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 31, 36).

Lev 8:7

**“He put the tunic on him.”** God commanded this in Exodus 29:5-6.

Lev 8:8

**“breastplate.”** This is described mainly in Exodus 28:15-30 (see the commentary on Exod. 28:15).

Lev 8:10

**“Moses took the anointing oil.”** This is according to God’s instruction in Exodus 29:7.

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 8:15

**“in order to make atonement upon it.”** The NET text note is helpful in understanding the verse. “The goal here was to consecrate the altar in order that it might become a place on which it would be appropriate ‘to make atonement’ before the LORD.” Rabbi Baruch Levine writes: “The sense here is that the altar was consecrated for the purpose of making expiation, since expiation sacrifices required an altar.”[[9]](#footnote-12283) Some English versions that more clearly give the sense of the verse include the CEB, CSB, Geneva Bible, JPS, KJV, LSV, and NAB.

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 lexicon, it refers to an “appendage of the liver.”

**“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 Lev. 1:16; Heb. 13:10).

**“burned with fire outside the camp.”** There were two altars in the Tabernacle and Temple that students of Scripture are well aware of: 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 camp of Israel and later outside of Jerusalem proper. This third “altar” is not called an altar in the Old Testament, but it is in Hebrews 13:10. It was on this third altar east of the camp where certain parts of sacrifices were burned, such as the bodies of sin offerings, (cf. Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27). This altar is closely connected to associated with the death of Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:10, and see commentary on Heb. 13:10; and Lev. 1:16).

Lev 8:20

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

**“suet.”** Suet is a specific kind of fat (see commentary on Lev. 1:8).

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).

**“big toe.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “thumb toe.” What we refer to as the “big” toe, Hebrew uses “thumb” toe.

Lev 8:25

**“fat tail.”** For information on the fat tail, see commentary on Exodus 29:22.

Lev 8:27

**“before Yahweh.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “before the face of Yahweh.” God is thought of as being in the Tabernacle and anything done right outside it is in God’s face.

Lev 8:31

**“at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.”** This is the entrance to the Tabernacle itself, not the entrance of the Tabernacle courtyard (cf. Exod. 29:32).

Lev 8:32

**“you are to burn with fire.”** See Exodus 29:34.

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. They were not inside the Tabernacle every day because they were making offerings every day on the altar of sacrifice (Exodus 29:35-37).

**“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 9:1

**“And on the eighth day.”** Aaron and his sons were to stay in the Tabernacle courtyard for seven days without leaving to fulfill their ordination as priests (Lev. 8:33). This is now the eighth day so their ordination was complete.

Lev 9:2

**“young bull.”** Also in Exodus 29:1, Leviticus 4:3, 14.

Lev 9:3

**“calf.”** The sex of the calf is not specified in the text.

Lev 9:4

**“peace offerings.”** The peace offering could be eaten by the people (Lev. 7:15-16).

Lev 9:5

**“stood before Yahweh.”** It is not clear exactly where the people stood. Yahweh was in the Tabernacle, so the people were somewhere in front of the Tabernacle, but they may or may not have been in the courtyard.

Lev 9:6

**“This is what that Yahweh has commanded you to do.”** This is referring back to all the proper sacrifices and procedures that show respect for God’s guidance.

Lev 9:8

**“and slaughtered the calf for the sin offering.”** This is the calf that was mentioned in Leviticus 9:2.

Lev 9:9

**“The sons of Aaron brought the blood to him.”** When someone slaughtered an animal as a sacrifice, there had to be a priest or someone else present to catch the blood. In this case, Aaron killed the animal and his sons caught the blood. Note that in Leviticus 1:5, the offerer slaughtered the animal and the priest caught the blood.

Lev 9:10

**“and the appendage on the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is *yoteret* (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), see commentary on Exodus 29:13.

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

Lev 9:11

**“the flesh and the skin he burned.”** Ordinarily, the priests got to eat some of the sin offering, but when the sin offering was for a priest, as it is here, the priest do not get any of the offering. They cannot profit from their own sin.

**“he burned with fire outside the camp.”** 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. This third “altar” is not called an altar anywhere but Hebrews 13:10. 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 (see commentary on Heb. 13:10; Lev. 1:16; 4:21).

Lev 9:12

**“And he slaughtered the burnt offering.”** In this context, the burnt offering was the ram that was mentioned in Leviticus 9:2.

**“Aaron’s sons handed the blood to him.”** See commentary on Leviticus 9:9.

Lev 9:13

**“piece by piece.”** This phrase seems to be emphasizing that Aaron and his sons were following the commands of God concerning the pieces (or sections) of the animal that had to be dealt with differently (cf. Exod. 29:17; Lev. 1:6-12).

**“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 9:14

**“He washed the innards and the legs.”** This was commanded in Leviticus 1:9 and 1:13. It seems the other parts of the burnt offering were offered and then the innards and legs were washed with water and then offered (Lev. 1:6-13). The whole animal was to be burned (Lev. 1:13).

**“burned them into smoke along with *the rest of* the burnt offering.”** The versions and the scholars are divided about whether to translate the Hebrew text “with” or “along with” the rest of the burnt offering (cf. CEB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NJB, NLT, NRSV), or “on top of” the burnt offering (cf. ASV, CJB, KJV, NET, NIV). The Hebrew text is not clear and the ceremony is not described elsewhere. The bottom line seems to be that the animal was slaughtered and the pieces were put on the altar and burned at the same time, and how the pieces were placed on the altar is not known.

Lev 9:15

**“the goat that was the sin offering for the people.”** This is the goat that is mentioned in Leviticus 9:3.

**“previous one.”** The earlier sin offering was the young bull mentioned in Leviticus 9:2. That bull was for Aaron and his sons and the elders. This sin offering is the he-goat for the people.

Lev 9:17

**“filled his hand from it and burned *that part* into smoke.”** This is according to the procedure described in Leviticus 2:2.

**“in addition to the morning burnt offering.”** According to the Jewish rabbis, the morning burnt offering—which had not been set in place yet—is likely the burnt offering mentioned in Leviticus 9:12.

Lev 9:18

**“the sacrifice of peace offerings that was for the people.”** The peace offerings likely were “for the people” because the people got to eat part of the peace offerings (Lev. 7:15-16). The bull and the ram that were the peace offerings are mentioned in Leviticus 9:4. The instructions about how to offer the different peace offerings are given in Leviticus 3 and 7:11-21.

Lev 9:19

**“fat tail.”** For information on the fat tail, which was on the ram, not the bull, see commentary on Exodus 29:22.

**“and the appendage on the liver.”** The Hebrew word translated as “appendage” is *yoteret* (#03508 ֑יתֶרֶת), (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.”[[10]](#footnote-21827) (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 and 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.[[11]](#footnote-24407) 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 offer unauthorized fire before Yahweh.

**“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.’”[[12]](#footnote-29146) 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 instead of getting distracted by analyzing the sin the men committed.

There is no explanation in the text for this action of Aaron’s sons. God was often very explicit about how He wanted things to be done, so it seems that even though we do not know the exact sin of Nadab and Abihu, 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 had simply made a mistake, surely Aaron would have said something about it, because 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 “do our own thing” 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 is “good enough” to be saved and have everlasting life. 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 since this occurred 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.[[13]](#footnote-13743) 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

**“they came near and carried them.”** It seems possible that a person’s relatives were called upon to take care of the person who died (cp. Lev. 10:4; Amos 6:10). If true, it makes logical sense because an uncle or other relative would be close enough to the family to want to help even if it meant being unclean by touching a dead body, but not as close as an immediate family member who might well become overwhelmed with emotion.

**“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

**“Eleazar and to Ithamar.”** The sons of the High Priest are included here along with Aaron the High Priest because all three of them are in the seven-day period of ordination, so this period of time is not “business as usual.”

**“Do not let *the hair of* your heads hang loose.”** In contrast to this, the leper must tear his clothes and let his hair hang loose (Lev. 13:45). The Hebrew text is more literally something like, “do not let your head go wild,” and it has been interpreted in different ways. The most common is represented in the REV, about letting the hair of the head “go wild” by letting it get loose and be uncared for (ASV, CJB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NJB, NIV).

On the other hand, since shaving the head bald was associated with mourning (Micah 1:16), some scholars think the text refers to shaving the head or “uncovering” the head, especially when the text does not mention “hair” at all, but says “head.” Rabbi Baruch Levine writes, “The sense of the Hebrew verb...is to ‘dishevel’ the hair. Such an act of mourning obviously involved baring the head.” Thus, some English Bibles refer to that (e.g., Darby, Geneva, JPS, KJV, LSB, LSV).

Lev 10:7

**“You must not go out from the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.”** This was the same as Leviticus 8:33, 35. During this ordination period, the priests were to stay close to the Tabernacle itself.

Lev 10:10

**“to make a separation.”** God’s people were to keep the Levitically clean and the unclean separate. A reason for that was that if something unclean touched something clean, what was clean became unclean. Uncleanness was communicable, cleanness was not (see commentary on Lev. 6:18 and Lev. 20:25).

Lev 10:13

**“your portion and your sons’ portion.”** The Hebrew word can mean “portion,” “share,” or “allotment,” or in some contexts it can refer to a statute (cf. Exod. 29:28; 30:21).

Lev 10:14

**“the thigh that is contributed.”** Exod. 29:27; Lev. 7:34; 10:14, 15; Num. 6:20.

**“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 10:16

**“goat.”** This would have been a male goat (cf. Lev. 4:23; 9:3). In some contexts, “goat” is used without the sex being given, but often the sex is in the context.

**“the sons of Aaron who remained.”** Eleazar and Ithamar remained alive after Nadab and Abihu died (Lev. 10:1-2).

Lev 10:17

**“to make atonement for them before Yahweh.”** The sin offering took away the sin of the congregation; it made atonement for them. Some versions have “by making atonement,” and that may catch the sense of the verse, but it is not necessary.[[14]](#footnote-32103)

Lev 10:18

**“the holy place.”** In this context, the holy place is the Tabernacle itself.

**“You should have eaten, yes, eaten it.”** Moses is referring to the law given in Leviticus 6:26, 30, that a sin offering was to be eaten by the priests in the Tabernacle courtyard. But if the blood of the sin offering was brought into the Tabernacle, then the sin offering was not to be eaten. Since in this case, the blood of the sin offering was not brought into the Tabernacle, the meat was to be eaten. But, as Aaron argued, since the family had lost two sons that day, it did not seem that eating the sin offering was appropriate, and Moses was satisfied with that answer.

**“eaten, yes, eaten.”** The Hebrew repeats the verb “eaten” twice, more literally, “eaten eaten,” with the first verb being an infinitive and the second being an imperfect. This is the figure of speech polyptoton, and the repetition is done for emphasis.

[See Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

Lev 10:19

**“such things as these have happened to me.”** Aaron is referring to the death of his two sons and the associated events.

Lev 10:20

**“it was pleasing in his eyes.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic. The meaning is that Moses was satisfied with Aaron’s answer; he approved of it.

**Leviticus Chapter 11**

Lev 11:2

**“These are the living things that you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth.”** The major lists of what may and may not be eaten are in Leviticus 11:1-23 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21. Interestingly, in neither Leviticus 11 nor Deuteronomy 14 is a consequence given for eating something that is forbidden. This is in contrast to touching or carrying the carcass of an unclean animal. If one touches or carries the carcass of an unclean animal, that person is to take steps to become “clean” again which usually means being unclean until the evening (i.e., the next day), and sometimes means washing one’s clothes (cf. Lev. 11:24, 25, 27, 28, 39, 40).

As one studies the Mosaic Law, it becomes clear that there are three major categories of transgressions that make God’s people unclean or unholy in the sight of God, and these three broad categories are regulations about food (e.g., Lev. 11 and Deut. 14), regulations about proper and improper sexual behavior (e.g., Lev. 18, 20), and regulations about participation in pagan worship, the worship of any god except Yahweh. Rabbi Baruch Levine observes: “Underlying all the dietary regulations is a broad social objective: maintaining a distance between the Israelites and their neighbors, so that the former do not go astray after pagan religions. ...They condemn what they perceived to be the abominable ways of others, especially the Canaanite peoples of the land. This attitude is basic to the interpretation of the dietary laws.[[15]](#footnote-13111)

Scholars have sought in vain for centuries to find reasons for the choices in the lists of clean and unclean animals. It is important to understand that “clean” and “unclean” are Levitical and ritual differences. They do not equate to “healthy to eat” and “unhealthy to eat.” Many animals, birds, and sea creatures that Leviticus designates as “unclean” are eaten all over the world with no apparent adverse health results. Furthermore, the Jews who eat completely kosher (i.e., according to Leviticus) are not, as a group, healthier or longer-lived than people who do not eat a strictly kosher diet but generally do eat healthy and live healthy lives. Also, when God told Noah he could now eat animal meat, He told Noah, “Every moving thing that lives will be food for you” (Gen. 9:3). God telling Noah he could eat any meat is very different from the kosher food laws in Leviticus, which came some 900 years afer Noah and forbade eating “unclean” animals. It states, “You are not to eat *any* of their flesh and you are not to touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you” (Lev. 11:8).

People have tried to say that no carnivore is “clean,” but that is not strictly true. Most fish are carnivores. In contrast, many animals that are strictly vegetarians are not clean, but only because they don’t have a parted hoof. Thus, for example, horse meat is eaten in many parts of the world, but it is “unclean” in the Torah.

In the end, it seems Levine is correct: the very real effect of the Kosher laws about food, sex, and worship is that they are very effective in keeping God’s people separate from the pagan people of the world.

Lev 11:5

**“hyrax.”** The text note in the LSV reads, “A small, shy, furry animal (Hyrax syriacus) found in the peninsula of the Sinai, northern Israel, and the region round the Dead Sea.” The KJV reads “coney,” which was a name for the European rabbit, but the Hyrax and rabbit are not the same animal. Another name for the hyrax is the “rock badger.” Proverbs 30:26 also mentions the hyrax.

Lev 11:6

**“hare.”** Occurs only here and in Deuteronomy 14:7.

Lev 11:7

**“The pig.”** Although the pig was considered unclean by the Jews, the people in pagan nations ate pigs and also used their fat for things like keeping metal weapons and instruments from rusting.

Lev 11:10

**“detestable things.”** The Hebrew text uses the collective singular, i.e., “a detestable thing.”

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

**“be unclean until the evening.”** A study of the Old Testament Law shows that “uncleanness” is communicable, but “cleanness” is not. If something “clean” touches something “unclean,” the “clean” thing becomes “unclean,” the “unclean” thing does not become “clean” (see commentary on Lev. 6:18).

Whoever touched the dead body of an animal was unclean until the evening, but if a person touched the dead body of a human being, they were unclean for seven days (Num. 19:11).

**“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 11:25

**“Whoever carries any part of their carcass must wash his clothes.”** A person can touch a carcass and only be unclean until evening (i.e., the next day, which began at sunset), but if the person carries any part of the carcass it is assumed that the carcass will have touched the person’s clothing, so his clothes have to be washed too, as Leviticus 11:25 says. This command in Leviticus 11:25 is similar to Leviticus 15:10 about a person carrying anything that an unclean person sat on.

Lev 11:26

**“Everyone who touches them.”** The context dictates that this is referring to touching a carcass.

Lev 11:29

**“mole.”** The Hebrew word is only used here in the entire Bible, and the scholars debate what animal it actually refers to, but “weasel” seems unlikely. Also, Israel has a lot of moles.

**“mouse.”** The translation “mouse” is likely correct (cf. 1 Sam. 6:4; Isa. 66:17).

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

**“large lizard.”** The translation “large lizard” is likely close to the meaning of the Hebrew text, which does seem to mean lizard, but if there is a specific kind, that is unknown. Although some versions read “tortoise,” that seems less likely.

Lev 11:30

**“gecko.”** The Hebrew word only occurs here in the Old Testament. In any such case, there is always some doubt about the identification.

**“sand reptile.”** The Hebrew word only occurs here in the Old Testament. In any such case, there is always some doubt about the identification, and that it the case here.

**“the chameleon.”** The Hebrew is traditionally taken to be the chameleon, but that identification, like with most of the other animals in the list, is not 100% certain.

Lev 11:34

**“Any food that may be eaten on which *such* water comes will be unclean.”** If water that has been contaminated by something unclean being in it comes in contact with food, that food becomes unclean and may not be eaten. Also, any drinkable fluid that is in a vessel into which some unclean things comes will be unclean and must not be drunk.

Lev 11:35

**“two-pot stove.”** This seems to refer to a kind of stove that had holes at the top to set pots on and that then could be heated by the fire in the stove. The oven and stove would have been made of baked clay and could be easily broken in pieces, although at quite a loss to the homeowner.

Lev 11:36

**“but whoever touches their carcass will be unclean.”** This would likely be anyone who got the dead animal out of the spring or cistern.

Lev 11:39

**“If any animal that you may eat dies.”** Leviticus 11:39-40 teaches that if any animal that you are normally allowed to eat, such as a sheep, dies on its own from old age, disease, injury, being killed by another animal, or whatever cause, even though it was a “clean” animal, you are not to eat it. If you touch it, you are unclean until evening, and if you carry it or eat it, then you have to wash your clothes and be unclean until evening (i.e., until the next day, because the next day started at sundown).

**“he who touches its carcass will be unclean.”** This is referring to an animal that dies from a cause other than being slaughtered for food, not to a clean animal that is slaughtered to eat. If that were the case, the priests would be almost permanently unclean because they slaughtered animals every day. Kiel and Delitszsh write: “Lastly, contact with edible animals, if they had not been slaughtered, but had died a natural death, and had become carrion in consequence, is also said to defile.”[[16]](#footnote-20721)

**“will be unclean until the evening.”** A study of the Old Testament Law shows that “uncleanness” is communicable, but “cleanness” is not. If something “clean” touches something “unclean,” the “clean” thing becomes “unclean,” the “unclean” thing does not become “clean” (see commentary on Lev. 6:18).

Lev 11:40

**“He who eats of its carcass must wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening.”** People were not to eat from animals, even clean animals, that died of themselves (Lev. 11:8). But if they did, they were unclean until the evening (the next day).

Lev 11:41

**“Every creeping thing.”** This generally refers to animals and rodents that walk close to the earth, such as rats, mice, moles, lizards, weasels, etc. (cf. Lev. 11:29-31).

Lev 11:42

**“belly.”** The Rabbis teach that in the Hebrew word גָּחוֹן, “belly,” the וֹ word is the middle letter in the Torah. When copying manuscripts, the rabbis would count each letter to make sure that no word or letter got omitted from (or added to) the copy. The middle letter in the Torah occurs in Leviticus 11:42.[[17]](#footnote-24016)

Lev 11:43

**“You are not to make yourselves detestable.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “You are not to make your souls detestable,” but in this context, “your souls” means “yourself.”

**“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.”** In this context, making yourself holy is not speaking of moral behavior but rather that the eating habits of the people would set them apart from other peoples and nations who did not have the same dietary laws. The laws in the Torah kept the Israelites apart from the other nations. 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.]

**“creeping things.”** These are partially described in Leviticus 11:29-31 and include the small animals and rodents that crawl along the ground, such as mice, rats, weasels, lizards, etc.

**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 12:5

**“But if she bears a female child.”** There is no explanation in the Bible for why giving birth to a baby girl makes a woman unclean for twice as long as when she gives birth to a baby boy. Scholars have postulated a few different reasons, but none of them are completely satisfying. Perhaps the most satisfying answer so far has been that God wants to make a clear separation between the sexes. In the Old Testament law women were treated differently than men. So, for example, in Leviticus 27:2-7, when a person made a vow, the law demanded less payment for women than for men, but there is no explanation for that either. It is just a statement in the law that we pay attention to.

**“like *she is* in her menstrual impurity.”** The word “menstrual impurity” is related to the meaning “separation,” so that a few versions use “separation.” So, for example, the KJV reads, “as in her separation.”

Lev 12:6

**“a sin offering.”** The reason for the sin offering is not specifically stated, but the text indicates that it is due to the blood that is shed during childbirth (Lev. 12:7). 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 seems that the sin because of the shedding of blood and contact with blood was what made the mother unclean and prevented her from entering the courts of the Temple during her uncleanness. That is likely. But we must recognize that any kind of ritual uncleanness prevented people from entering into the holy place, the courtyard of the Tabernacle or Temple, And that included the common act of sexual intercourse, which also prevented both the man and woman from entering the Temple but was cleansed by bathing in water, not by a sin offering (Lev. 15:16-18). However, in this case, it seems that because blood is mentioned in the immediate context several times (Lev. 12:4, 5, 7), it is the blood that makes the woman unclean and causes the need for the sin offering.

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 humankind 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 (Lev. 8:14). Here in Leviticus 12:6, the act of childbirth recalls the sin and curse of Genesis 3:16, that a consequence of Eve’s sin was that women would have travail in childbirth, and thus the travail and blood of childbirth manifests the human sin nature, so that is also a possible reason, or a contributing reason, that God commanded that a sin offering be given.

Lev 12:7

**“and make atonement.”** It seems in this context that the word translated as “atonement” refers more to a cleansing than an “atonement,” i.e., a covering. The preposition before the noun indicates it is different from “atonement” in other places.[[18]](#footnote-12031)

**“a woman.”** The Hebrew is literally “her” (or “she”) but that is somewhat awkward in Εnglish.

Lev 12:8

**“she is to bring two turtledoves or two pigeons.”** Mary did this after the birth of Jesus (see commentary on Luke 2:24). That Mary offered two turtledoves after Jesus was born shows that the Magi had not yet come to see Jesus. A person could only bring two birds if they were too poor for a lamb, but after the Magi visited Mary and Joseph they would have had enough money to buy a lamb. The Magi came many months after Jesus was born.

**“two pigeons.”** See commentary on Leviticus 1:14.

**Leviticus Chapter 13**

Lev 13:2

**“a swelling, or a scab, or a bright-spot.”** These words are rare, and exactly what they referred to is unknown.

**“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.

**“he is to be brought to Aaron.”** It seems to be a common human tendency that people who are sick do not go to the doctor on their own, but have to be encouraged by others. In this case of a communicable disease, people need to make sure that the sick person goes to get help so he does not cause sickness among the community.

Lev 13:5

**“a second time for seven days.”** Communicable diseases were very dangerous in the ancient world, and God wanted to make sure the community was safe from disease before allowing anyone who showed signs of a disease into the congregation.

Lev 13:7

**“But if the scab has spread, yes, spread.”** Leviticus 13:6 covers what occurs if the scab has not spread, whereas verse 7 covers what occurs if the scab has spread.

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

[See Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

Lev 13:9

**“he is to be brought to the priest.”** The people who know the leprous man are to care enough about the health of the whole community that they take the leprous man to the priest. Many times, sick people delay going to the doctor, but the people of the community must keep their community safe.

Lev 13:10

**“raw.”** The Hebrew is literally, “living,” but we would call it “raw.”

Lev 13:11

**“it is a chronic leprosy.”** The idea in the Hebrew text is that the disease is old or recurring.

**“He is not *merely* to isolate him.”** The leper was not to be merely isolated in the camp as he was when his disease was being determined; the leper was to be driven out of the camp.

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 Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

Lev 13:25

**“if the hair in the bright spot has turned white and its appearance is deeper than the skin.”** If the hair is white and it is deeper than the skin, it is leprous (Lev. 13:3).

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 13:31

**“scall.”** The word “scall” occurs in Leviticus 13:30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, and 14:54.

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 13:45

**“he must wear torn clothes and the hair of his head must hang loose.”** The leper must make it plain to others that he is a leper and could be contagious. The priests were not to look like lepers when mourning (Lev. 10:6).

Lev 13:46

**“his dwelling place must be outside 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.

Lev 13:48

**“whether it is in warp or woof of linen or of wool.”** It has been argued that there is no way that the warp and woof of the yarn in cloth could be kept so separate that one could get leprosy but not the other. However, in this case, the material for the warp was made separately from the material for the woof, and so it is not the woven cloth that is being separated here, but the yarn from which the cloth is made. If the warp yarn gets leprosy, or the woof yarn gets leprosy, that yarn must be dealt with.

**Leviticus Chapter 14**

Lev 14:4

**“cedar wood...hyssop.”** The Bible never explains why these two things are part of the cleansing ceremony. It is possible that cedar wood represented the most regal and highly positioned of the trees, while hyssop represented the lowliest of the plants, the significance being that both the mighty and the poor and disadvantaged need to be cleansed with blood—but that is just one possible explanation.

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 14:7

**“He is to sprinkle *it*.”** The “it” refers to the bloody water—the living water that had the blood of the slaughtered bird in it. After the leprous man was sprinkled with the bloody water, he was pronounced clean.

This bloody water ritual is unique. There is no other Levitical ritual in which blood is mixed in water, and then when a person is sprinkled with it, they are pronounced to be “clean.” This makes one wonder whether this is a deep shadow of the death of Christ, who when stabbed with a spear just after he died, blood and water poured out (John 19:34), and it is by the death and blood of Christ that we are cleansed from sin (1 John 1:7). This bloody water ritual is also performed on houses that have leprosy (Lev. 14:50-51).

**“he is to let the living bird go into the open field.”** The exact meaning of this ritual is not stated, but it is possible that letting the living bird go represented the uncleanness, representing sin, being carried away.

Lev 14:8

**“all his hair.”** This is defined in Leviticus 14:9 as the hair of his head, his beard, and his eyebrows.

**“but must live outside his tent seven days.”** The reason for this is not stated, but Rabbi Rashi says that one of the effects of this command was to prevent the man from having sex for those first seven days.[[19]](#footnote-27185)

Lev 14:9

**“On the seventh day, he is to shave all his hair off.”** After living in the camp for seven days, the man is to shave and wash again.

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).

**“on the lobe of the right ear.”** The lobe of the ear (cf. Exod. 29:20, Lev. 8:23; and commentary on Exod. 29:20).

Lev 14:18

**“this is how.”** This is a similar idea to the NJB. Leviticus 14:18-20 is a kind of summary of the procedure of the cleansing of a leper.

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 14:22

**“two pigeons.”** See commentary on Leviticus 1:14.

**“such as he is able to afford.”** The Hebrew continues the idiom in verse 21: “as his hand can reach.”

Lev 14:28

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Lev 14:30

**“pigeons.”** See commentary on Leviticus 1:14.

**“such as he is able to afford.”** See commentary on Leviticus 14:21 and 22.

Lev 14:31

**“such as he is able to afford.”** See commentary on Leviticus 14:21 and 14:22.

Lev 14:34

**“give.”** The word “allow” (here translated “give”) is a gloss in *HALOT* (the eighth listing), and it is in keeping with the idiom of permission that is often used in the Hebrew text (see commentary on Exod. 4:21).

Why would God send leprosy into the houses in Canaan? Rabbi Rashi says that the Amorites hid treasure in the walls of their houses, so when the Israelites demolished the house, they found the treasure.[[20]](#footnote-25163) However, that is likely Jewish wishful thinking; no scriptural or archaeological evidence backs that up.

Lev 14:42

**“mortar.”** “Dust,” like in Leviticus 14:41.

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.]

Lev 14:54

**“a scall.”** The word “scall” occurs in Leviticus 13:30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, and here in Leviticus 14:54 (see commentary on Lev. 13:30.

**Leviticus Chapter 15**

Lev 15:2

**“has a discharge from his flesh.”** This is often assumed to be a discharge from the penis (cf. Ezek. 16:26; 23:20), but the text is not sufficiently clear to be positive about that (cf. Lev. 15:7, 13; where “flesh” refers to any part of the body). The context changes in Leviticus 15:16, and that is about emission of semen from the penis.

**“his discharge is unclean.”** The discharge is unclean, but it makes the person unclean. Some English versions add to the text and say “because of the discharge he is unclean” (cf. KJV), but that is adding to the text even though the conclusion is correct; the man becomes unclean.

Lev 15:4

**“any article.”** The CSB has “furniture,” and that may be too limiting, but it gets the general idea. In contrast, “anything” seems too broad. It does not seem that if the man sat on the ground that the ground would somehow become unclean.

Lev 15:7

**“the flesh.”** Although in other contexts, “the flesh” may refer to the penis, that is not the case here.

**“and be unclean until the evening.”** A study of the Old Testament Law shows that “uncleanness” is communicable, but “cleanness” is not. If something “clean” touches something “unclean,” the “clean” thing becomes “unclean,” the “unclean” thing does not become “clean” (see commentary on Lev. 6:18).

Lev 15:9

**“saddle.”** The true “saddle” that we use today was not invented until after the biblical period (see commentary on 1 Kings 13:13). Thus, this “saddle” was more like a blanket that was tied onto the horse or donkey and then sat upon.

Lev 15:10

**“Whoever touches anything.”** If a person just touched something unclean, the person does not need to wash his clothes, but if a person carries the unclean thing, it is assumed that the clothing came in contact with the unclean thing. This command in Leviticus 15:10 is similar to Leviticus 11:25 and a person carrying a part of a carcass.

Lev 15:11

**“has rinsed his hands in water.”** The unclean person would have rinsed his hands during his whole purification process. This is not just speaking about him casually rinsing his hands.

Lev 15:12

**“And an earthenware vessel.”** An “earthenware” vessel is made of clay.

Lev 15:13

**“is cleansed of his discharge.”** In this context, this phrase means that his discharge has stopped.

**“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 15:14

**“two pigeons.”** See commentary on Leviticus 1:14.

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 that 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).

**“menstrual impurity.”** In this case, the verb is feminine and the reference is to the woman’s period. Sometimes the Hebrew word is used differently (cf. Num. 31:23). The word “menstrual impurity” is related to the meaning “separation,” so that a few versions use “separation.” So, for example, the Young’s Literal Translation reads, “seven days she is in her separation.”

Lev 15:29

**“two pigeons.”** See commentary on Leviticus 1:14.

Lev 15:31

**“make...unclean.”** The two words translated “uncleanness” and “unclean” are from the same root, and it helps clarify what is happening in the verse if they are both translated by related English words. For example, the LSB (Legacy Standard Bible) translates the last part of the verse as “so that they will not die in their uncleanness by making My tabernacle that is among them unclean.” We learn from many places in Leviticus that “uncleanness” was communicable, that is, if something “unclean” touched something “clean,” the clean thing became unclean (see commentary on Lev. 20:25). If the priests are “unclean” when they serve in the Tabernacle, then anything they touched would beome “unclean” and that is unacceptable to God (cf. Exod. 29:37; 30:29; Lev. 6:18), and if a priest who was serving in the Tabernacle was unclean, he was liable to die.

**Leviticus Chapter 16**

Lev 16:1

**“Yahweh spoke to Moses.”** The Day of Atonement has received a lot of attention through the centuries, and we can understand why: both the Tabernacle itself, and the people of Israel, have their sins covered and taken away. The Hebrew word translated as “atonement” in many English versions is kafar (#03722 כָּפַר) and it has two meanings. The most well-known one is “cover,” the ceremony of sacrifice “covered” sins. The second, and less well-known meaning is to cleanse, purge, take away.

Everett Fox writes: “As modern commentators have pointed out, two things are happening here: first, the sanctuary is being purged of ritual pollution that has accumulated from both priests and laypeople; and second, the accumulated sins of the community are receiving atonement. It is not surprising, therefore, that the chapter is built on different uses of the verb *kipper*, which can denote covering, purging, atonement, (expiation), or ransom; here the two meanings ‘purging’ and ‘atoning’ seem to fit the double context best. ... Appropriately, the ritual includes two processes... riddance... and purification.”[[21]](#footnote-20840)

The “riddance” part of the ritual involved the High Priest putting his hands on the head of a goat and sending it out into the wilderness, while the purification part involved the blood sacrifice.

**“when they drew near the presence of Yahweh and died.”** Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire before Yahweh and died (Lev. 10:1). “The presence of” is perhaps more literally, “the face of,” but that is used idiomatically for presence.

Lev 16:2

**“Holy *place*.”** This holy place behind the inner veil of the Temple is called “the Holy of Holies” (cf. Exod. 26:33). In other contexts, the “Holy” referred to different things that were holy (cf. Lev. 16:3, 16).

**“the veil *that is* 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 16:3

**“the Holy *place*.”** In this case, the “Holy place” is the Tabernacle courtyard, where the animals were brought and slaughtered.

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

**“place lots.”** The Hebrew is literally, “give lots.”

**“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 basically a 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 16:9

**“bring.”** The literal is “bring near.”

**“the lot came up.”** The lot “came up” out of the urn, or whatever the High Priest had put the lots in, which traditionally was some kind of urn. This is one of the places in the Bible where the text is impossible to understand without knowing the custom that was involved. In this case, the custom is preserved in the Talmud. Rabbi Rashi explains that the High Priest “would place one [he-goat] on his right and one on his left. Then, he would insert both his hands into an urn [which contained two lots, one bearing the inscription “to the Lord” and the other “to Azazel.” These lots were mixed up, and Aaron, with both hands inside the urn] took one lot in his right hand and the other in his left hand, and he would place them upon them [the he-goats]: [The one] upon which [he placed the lot] with the inscription “to the Lord,” would be for God, while the one upon which [he placed the lot] with the inscription “to Azazel,” would be sent off to Azazel. [Yoma 39a]”[[22]](#footnote-11553)

So in the ceremony on the Day of Atonement involving the two male goats, the High Priest is to bring the two male goats near to the entrance of the Tabernacle. He is to have there an urn in which are two “lots,” which are likely stones that feel the same. On one stone are the words “For Yahweh,” and on the other stone are the words “For Azazel.” The High Priest reaches down into the urn, shuffles the stones around, and then pulls up the two stones, one in each hand. He places one stone on the goat on his right, and one stone on the goat on his left, then what is on the stones, on the “lots,” is read. The goat with the stone “For Yahweh” is slaughtered as a sin offering, while the goat that had the stone “For Azazel” is sent alive into the desert.

**“offer him as a sin offering.”** The translation is “offer him” because the goat was specified as a male goat. “Offer” is more literally “make.”

Lev 16:10

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

**“is to be left standing alive.”** There is a rabbinic tradition that after the goats were chosen by lot, the goat for Azazel had a red ribbon tied around its horns so it could not be inadvertently mixed up with the other goat. Although that tradition is not in the Bible, it is very likely that it is a very early tradition and was practiced during the biblical period. Red ribbons were used for identification (cf. Gen. 38:28; Josh. 2:18).

Lev 16:11

**“for his house.”** “For his house” means for his household.

Lev 16:12

**“firepan.”** See commentary on Exodus 25:38.

**“the altar before Yahweh.”** This is the great altar of sacrifice that is in the courtyard of the Tabernacle. The High Priest would get burning coals from the altar of sacrifice and put them into his censer with the special incense that was made for Yahweh and bring them into the Holy of Holies.

**“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

**“cover the atonement-cover.”** A primary definition of the Hebrew word translated in the REV as “cover,” is “cover,” but a second definition is “conceal,” which seems to be the purpose of the smoke in this instance, and some English translations read that way (CEB, NIV, cf. JPS “screens”; NJB “hides”). The smoke of the incense did “cover” the ark and atonement-cover, but it also concealed it from the priest. The Holy of Holies was dark anyway, and the smoke of the incense would have made it quite impossible to see the ark clearly.

**“atonement- cover.”** The Hebrew word translated as “atonement-cover” in the REV is *kapporet* (#03727 כַּפֹּרֶת). Because the Hebrew is one word, the REV translation has used the hyphenated word “atonement-cover,” which traditionally is 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 Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

**“so that he does not die.”** It was dark in the Holy of Holies, so the High Priest could not clearly see any visible presence of God, but God commanded that the incense be burned to cover the ark and thus provide protection for the priest from the presence of God. Rabbi Baruch Lavine writes, “The incense cloud served to protect the High Priest while he stood in the immediate area of God’s *kavod*, ‘presence.’ Incense was widely used as an apotropaic substance, or means of protection. In Numbers 17:11-13, we read that Moses instructed Aaron to burn incense in a fire pan to protect the Israelites from a plague sent against them by God, who had become enraged at the rebellion of Korah and his group. Aaron stood with the incense ‘between the dead and the living,’ and the plague subsided.”[[23]](#footnote-18782)

Lev 16:14

**“on top of the atonement-cover.”** So, after sprinkling blood on the atonement-cover, 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

**“the Holy *place*.”** The same Hebrew word translated as “Holy *place*” is used in Leviticus 16:2 and 16:3, and the meaning is determined by context. In this case, the priest is inside the Holy of Holies when he is sprinkling the blood and making atonement for all of the “Holy.” In this context, the “Holy place” is likely a metonymy for the Holy place and the things in the Holy place, such as the altar, the menorah, and other holy furniture and articles.

**“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 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 16:17

**“Holy *place*.”** In this case, the “Holy” is the Holy of Holies, the innermost room in the Tabernacle. The word “Holy” is used many times in Leviticus 16, and it has different meanings depending on the context. Here in Leviticus 16:17, the “Holy *place*” refers to the room in the Tabernacle generally referred to as “the Holy of Holies.”

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.

**“for all their sins.”** The subject of the phrase goes back to the word “confess,” earlier in the sentence, that the High Priest confessed “for all their sins.”

**“a man appointed *for the job*.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “a timely man,” that is, a man appointed for that time, i.e., that job.

Lev 16:23

**“to come into the Tent of Meeting.”** Leviticus 16:23-24 has been confusing to scholars for centuries. The High Priest had been in the inner room of the Tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, and now he moves from there to the outer room in the Tabernacle, the Holy Place, where he is to disrobe. But then he is supposed to bathe in water and put on his other clothing “in a clean place.” But how is the High Priest supposed to get from the Tabernacle to “a clean place” when he is totally nude? And where would this “clean place” be? The Tabernacle was just a tent inside a courtyard, and there were often lots of people in the courtyard, both men and women, who were doing various acts of worship or cleansing. Furthermore, the Law forbade a person’s nakedness being exposed around the altar (Exod. 20:26). Various explanations have been offered, including rearranging the verses in the text so that the order of what happens is changed, but no solution offered to date has provided satisfactory answers. It seems possible that some kind of laver could have been brought into the Holy Place for the High Priest to wash in, since no other priest or Levite was allowed in the Holy Place that day (Lev. 16:17). However, the wording of Leviticus 16:24 seems to imply that the High Priest did not wash where he was, but in a different clean place.

**“and is to leave them there.”** That is, leave them there in the Tent of Meeting, not in the Holy of Holies (called the “Holy place” here in Leviticus 16:23). This shows that there had to be places to put things that are not described in the general descriptions of the Tabernacle. For example, not only did there have to be a place where the High Priest’s robes were stored, there had to be a place for the incense and olive oil and articles that were used to minister in the Holy Place and 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

**“to make atonement in the Holy *place*.”** In this context, the “Holy *place*” is the Holy of Holies.

**“must be carried outside the camp, and they must burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their dung.”** 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, not forever, but the Israelites did not necessarily know that at the time.

**“afflict your souls.”** This was an idiomatic phrase that applied to a wide range of things that a person might do to “afflict their soul” and focus on God for the day. When it was used in the context of the Day of Atonement, one important thing that it meant was 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 by New Testament times, the Day of Atonement was simply referred to as “the Fast” (cf. Acts 27:9).

Rabbi Baruch Levine writes, “In biblical literature the idiom *‘innah nefesh* [“afflict soul”] always connotes fasting, as Ibn Ezra observed and as we may deduce from the context of Isaiah 58:3, 10 and Psalms 35:13. Mishna Yoma 8:1 interprets self-denial to involve five abstentions: from food and drink, bathing, use of oil or unguent on the body, wearing leather shoes, and sexual intercourse.”[[24]](#footnote-21056) Those five things are not specified in the Bible, but developed over time. It is more likely that as the phrase was used in the Bible and biblical times, it referred more generally to many different things a person would do besides just fasting. Gordon Wenham writes, “The phrase *afflict yourselves* is rare (Lev. 23:27, 32; Num. 29:7, of the day of atonement; Isa. 58:3, 5; Ps. 35:13). In Isaiah it is associated with fasting. Ps. 35 suggests a wide range of penitential practices were involved, including self-examination and prayer.”[[25]](#footnote-11091)

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).

**“slaughters.”** 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.

**“sheep.”** The age of the sheep is not specified in the text.

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. In any case, God said that the blood was not to be eaten. This ordinance was to be strictly enforced, so it is stated many times in the Law (cf. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26, 27; 17:10, 12, 14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23; 15:23; and 1 Sam. 14:33).

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.’”[[26]](#footnote-19463) 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.”[[27]](#footnote-16962) 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.

Lev 17:12

**“No person among you may eat blood.”** God strictly forbids people to eat blood. Not even a foreigner who was living among the Israelites was to eat blood. This ordinance was to be strictly enforced, so it is stated many times in the Law (cf. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26, 27; 17:10, 12, 14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23; 15:23; and 1 Sam. 14:33).

Lev 17:14

**“You must not eat the blood.”** The blood was not to be eaten. This ordinance was to be strictly enforced, so it is stated many times in the Law (cf. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26, 27; 17:10, 12, 14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23; 15:23; and 1 Sam. 14:33).

**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 Mosaic 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 (e.g., Boaz and Ruth), the 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 19:6

**“It is to be eaten the same day you offer it and on the next day.”** There were different types of sacrifices that were called “peace offerings,” and they had different regulations. For example a peace offering that was given due to thanksgiving was to be eaten the same day it was offered (Lev. 7:15), but a peace offering that was offered due to a vow or if it was a freewill offering, then the meat could be eaten the day the sacrifice was offered and the next day as well (Lev. 7:16) (see commentary on Lev. 7:15 and 3:1).

Lev 19:7

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

[See Word Study: “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[[28]](#footnote-12126) 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….”[[29]](#footnote-12696) 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 19:26

**“You are not to eat any meat with the blood still in it.”** The blood was not to be eaten. This ordinance was to be strictly enforced, so it is stated many times in the Law (cf. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26, 27; 17:10, 12, 14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16, 23; 15:23; and 1 Sam. 14:33).

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 20:25

**“make a separation.”** Leviticus 20:25 is similar to Leviticus 10:10. God’s people were to keep the people and things that were Levitically clean apart from the people and things that were unclean. A reason for that was that if something unclean touched something clean, what was clean became unclean. Uncleanness was communicable, cleanness was not. If an “unclean” thing touched something that was “clean,” the clean thing became unclean; the unclean thing did not become clean. Many English versions use the word “separate,” as does the REV (cf. CEB, ESV, GWORD, LSB, LSV, REB, RV, YLT). There are English versions that use the word “distinguish” or “distinction,” i.e., “you must make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean” (NRSV), but that translation does not seem strong enough. It would be possible to distinguish between the clean and unclean but not keep them separate. The clean things and unclean things had to be kept apart so what was clean would not be made unclean by contact with something unclean. There are a large number of verses that speak of being made unclean by touching something unclean (cf. Lev. 5:2; 11:24, 25, 39, 40; 15:6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27; Num. 6:7; 9:6; 19:11, 14, 16, 22).

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.

**“must not let the hair of his head hang loose, nor tear his clothes.”** People in mourning generally did this, and so did lepers (Lev. 10:6; 13:45).

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.]

Lev 22:12

**“*any* of the contribution.”** For the translation “contribution,” see commentary on Leviticus 7:32.

**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 23:17

**“They are to be baked with leaven.”** The phrase, “They are to be baked with leaven” is important to notice (“leaven” is yeast). No offerings that were burned on the altar to Yahweh were to be leavened except the offering on Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks). The Peace Offering offered for thanksgiving included cakes of leavened bread but they were not to be burned on the altar, they were eaten by the priest and by the people who brought the offering (Lev. 7:13).

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[[30]](#footnote-26528)).

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 Word Study: “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 Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

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.[[31]](#footnote-14702) God is making it clear that everyone, yes, everyone, living in Israel obeys His law about the Sabbath.

[See Word Study: “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 25:39

**“sells himself to you.”** This verse, Leviticus 25:39, is one of the key verses for understanding slavery in the Old Testament, and how it differs significantly from the abusive slavery that was seen in most of the ancient world, such as in Egypt, Greece, and Rome, and in the modern world in Europe and the Americas.

This verse teaches that Israelites may sell themselves to a slave-owner in order to pay off debts. Not only does this provide reasoning behind why an Israelite might sell themselves into slavery (because they were poor), but it also demonstrates how proper, biblical, Israelite slavery was not abusive and evil. If it were, no Israelite would willingly enter into slavery. Rather, slavery provided a way to pay off debts (Lev. 25:39) and to walk away seven years later with some wealth (Deut. 15:13) so that one would not have to enter back into slavery unless they chose to make poor decisions again. God commanded that Israelite slaves were to be released every seven years in the year of Jubilee (Exod. 21:2; Deut. 15:12), so, biblical slavery commanded by God was not an abusive, never-ending torturous relationship between a slave and their master, but rather a time of non-abusive (Lev. 25:53; Exod. 21:26-27) service with a promise of later freedom. Slavery in the Old Testament offered true freedom and a future to someone who had made mistakes or was in a bad situation.

It is also worth noting that this passage differentiates between a “slave” (#05650 עֶ֫בֶד, *ebed*) and a “hired servant” (#07916 שָׂכִיר, *sakir*). A fellow Israelite who wanted or needed to go into “slavery” should be treated as a “hired-servant” (Lev. 25:39), whereas a foreigner “of the nations around you” (Lev. 25:44) was to be treated as a “slave.” The primary difference seems to be that a foreign slave could be kept as a slave forever (Lev. 25:46), whereas an Israelite slave was released at the year of Jubilee every seven years. Although this may seem harsh, in Leviticus 25:47, it suggests that some foreigners did become wealthy (either through being enslaved or other means), so it is not as if any foreigner who dwelled in Israel was destined to be poor and a slave for their entire lives; rather, some became wealthy enough to buy slaves/servants themselves. As mentioned above, the text later specifies that some even grow rich through being a slave (Lev. 25:49), which means that again, there is a vast difference between modern abusive slavery and the type of slavery/servitude commanded in the Bible.

People’s livelihood in the ancient Hebrew culture often depended on having enough workers to take care of the land, which is why children were such a blessing to families. Yet, some land owners simply needed more help and buying “slaves” who were foreigners was desirable, if not necessary. It is true that God seems to show extra mercy and grace toward Israelite slaves more than foreign slaves from this passage (Lev. 25:39-46), which could seem unjust. However, it is not as if God is commanding the poor treatment of foreign slaves; rather, God is simply commanding extra grace and mercy (Deut. 15:13) be shown to fellow Israelites who are slaves—more than they deserve—because some Israelite slaves got themselves into a bad situation of debt.

It is very important to remember that Israel, at least during the times of the Judges, did not have a prison system. So, depending on the crime, there were different outcomes and modes of justice. For certain crimes the death penalty was suitable (Exod. 21:12-16; Lev. 24:17-20; Deut. 22:25-27), for other egregious crimes (or sins) banishment from the land was appropriate (Exod. 12:19; 30:38; Lev. 7:20-21), and for others, such as stealing and not being able to pay back with interest what the person stole, slavery was the suitable punishment and way to pay back debt (Exod. 22:3). Thus, not only was biblical slavery a form of enacting justice towards someone who committed wrongdoing, it also could be a way for someone to pay back a debt they cannot afford.

In today’s world, there is no system that directly corresponds to Old Testament slavery, and so these nuances are vital to understanding God’s character and commands. When properly understood, they serve to demonstrate that the Old Testament God, just as much as the New Testament God, is a God of love, justice, and mercy.

[For more on Old Testament slavery, see commentary on Exod. 21:2.]

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 25:44

**“of the nations that are around you.”** For more information on foreign slaves, see commentary on Lev. 25:39.

Lev 25:46

**“you may take your slaves forever.”** For more on foreigners being slaves “forever,” see commentary on Lev. 25:39.

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 Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

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 Word Study: “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 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 27:25

**“All your valuations.”** That is, all the valuations for the Israelites were done as stated in the Law (e.g., Lev. 27:3-7) or they were done by the priests (Lev. 27:8, 12, 14, 18, 23), and the valuations were to be paid in shekels, the “shekel of the holy place” (i.e., the Tabernacle), 20 gerahs to the 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-31276)
2. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. Fabry, Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, 13:155. [↑](#footnote-ref-16380)
3. Theological Dict. of the Old Testament, 13:153. [↑](#footnote-ref-25265)
4. Chabad.org, The Complete Jewish Bible with Rashi Commentary. Lev. 1:16 (emphasis and brackets in the original). [↑](#footnote-ref-16418)
5. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament[/em], vol. 1, The Pentateuch: The Third Book of Moses (Leviticus)[/em], 520. [↑](#footnote-ref-13384)
6. Baruch Levine, JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-30138)
7. Baruch Lavine, The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, 37, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-14882)
8. Baruch Levine, JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-11276)
9. Baruch Levine, The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-12283)
10. Albert Barnes, Barnes Notes. [↑](#footnote-ref-21827)
11. John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-24407)
12. Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-29146)
13. E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, 159, “tapeinosis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13743)
14. For the translation “by making atonement,” see John Kleinig, Leviticus [ConcC], 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-32103)
15. Baruch Lavine, The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-13111)
16. C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the ​Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-20721)
17. John Kleinig, Leviticus [Concordia Commentary], 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-24016)
18. Cf. Baruch Levine, The JPS Torah Commentary​​​​​​, and also see the NET text note: https://bible.org/sites/bible.org/resources/netbible/index.htm?pre.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-12031)
19. https://www.chabad.org/library/bible\_cdo/aid/9915/utm\_source/chatgpt.com/showrashi/true/jewish/Chapter-14.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-27185)
20. Rabbi Rashi, The Complete Jewish Bible with Rashi Commentary, https://www.chabad.org/library/bible\_cdo/aid/9915/showrashi/true, accessed 6/17/2025. [↑](#footnote-ref-25163)
21. Everett Fox, The Schocken Bible, 584. [↑](#footnote-ref-20840)
22. The Complete Jewish Bible with Rashi Commentary, s.v. Leviticus 16:8. https://www.chabad.org/library/bible\_cdo/aid/9917/showrashi/true Accessed June 23, 2025. Brackets in quotation are the author’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-11553)
23. Baruch Lavine, JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-18782)
24. Baruch Levine, The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-21056)
25. Gordon J. Wenham, The Book of Leviticus [NICOT], 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-11091)
26. Hartley, Leviticus [WBC], 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-19463)
27. Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch, 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-16962)
28. Everett Fox, The Schocken Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-12126)
29. Koehler and Baumgartner, Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-12696)
30. Everett Fox, The Schocken Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-26528)
31. Cf. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 199, “anaphora.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14702)