

Leviticus Sermon Illustrations

Sermons Illustrations Book of Leviticus

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Randy Kilgore (Our Daily Bread) has this devotional...

Do I really have to read Leviticus?” A young executive asked me this in earnest as we talked about the value of spending time in reading the Bible. “The Old Testament seems so boring and difficult,” he said.

Many Christians feel this way. The answer, of course, is that the Old Testament, including Leviticus, offers background and even contrasts essential to grasping the New Testament. While Isaiah challenges us to seek God (Isa 55:6), he also promises us that God’s Word accomplishes what the Lord wants it to accomplish (Isa 55:11). Scripture is alive and powerful (Heb. 4:12), and it is useful to teach, correct, and instruct us (2 Tim. 3:16). God’s Word never returns void (Isa. 55:8-11), but sometimes it is not until later that God’s words come to mind as we need them.

The Holy Spirit uses the truths we’ve stored from reading or memorization, and He helps us to apply them at just the right time. For example, Leviticus 19:10-11 speaks of business competition and even caring for the poor. The Spirit can remind us of these concepts, and we can use them, if we’ve spent time reading and contemplating that passage.

Reading the Bible turns our minds into storehouses through which the Spirit can work. That’s a great reason to read Leviticus and the other 65 books as well.

Lord, I want to learn to love Your Word more and more.

Teach me and help me to hide it in my heart

so that I can live it, be encouraged by it, and

help others to know it too. Amen.

To understand the Word of God, rely on the Spirit of God.

Leviticus 1:1-17

It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. - Leviticus 1:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

The book of Leviticus is essentially a handbook of regulations for Israel’s religious life under the Law. The title means “pertaining to the Levites,” which points out that the priests and Levites were responsible for seeing to it that these regulations were followed.

Historically, Leviticus picks up where Exodus left off. The Israelites had just built the tabernacle and begun receiving the Law. As God revealed to Moses the further rules found in Leviticus, the people remained encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai for about a year.

We’ll study several key themes in Leviticus this month, including worship, purity, obedience, and our identity as God’s people. The

first section (ch. 1-10), the sacrifices and priestly duties, focuses on worship and holiness. Part two (ch. 11-16) deals with issues of purity in daily life. The third section (ch. 17-22) explores what it means to be God's chosen people. And the final section (ch. 23-27) lays out special days and festivals in the Jewish calendar.

The primary purpose of the sacrificial system was worship. As Charles Ryrie has noted, the root of the word offering means to "draw near" to God. This is reflected in David's words: "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice" (Ps. 141:2).

Burnt offerings were made voluntarily, and seem to have been the most common type of sacrifice (cf. Ex. 29:38-43). They purified a worshiper from general sin and thus prepared him to draw near to God. This offering was completely burned up to show that it was completely dedicated to the Lord.

To "make atonement" (v. 4) meant that the animal died a substitutionary death in place of a worshiper. By laying hands on it, worshipers showed an understanding of sin and a repentant heart. We know that the blood of these animals did not actually remove sin—only the blood of Christ can do that—but the sacrifices did purify people outwardly and make it possible for them to be in the presence of God (Heb. 9:11-14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As you begin this study of the book of Leviticus, pray over God's purposes for you personally this month. What would He have you learn? What attitudes would He have you change? What actions would He have you take?

Leviticus 1:1-17

It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. - Leviticus 1:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

What pleasant memories do you associate with certain smells? Does the odor of freshly-mown grass evoke images of a perfect summer day? You may think of your husband or wife every time you smell his or her favorite cologne or perfume. For others, smells from the oven bring back memories--fresh bread after school, pumpkin pie at holidays, or chicken soup when you were sick. Prompted by these or other meaningful smells, our minds return to significant moments or people in our lives.

Scripture describes God's response to certain "smells" in a similar way, as illustrated in today's verse. When the scent of true worship rose from the altar, He was pleased. When people's hearts were not right, though, He could "smell" that, too. These are key points to remember as we examine the burnt offering of the Old Testament.

The burnt offering is the first of five offerings we will explore. We will spend three days examining each offering, looking at: (1) a basic description of the offering; (2) a key spiritual principle involved in the offering; and (3) one way in which Christ fulfills the offering.

The main purpose of the burnt offering was propitiation for general sin. Propitiation means to satisfy, and the burnt offering was given to satisfy God's holy wrath over sin. A burnt offering was offered every morning and evening for the whole nation of Israel (Ex. 29:38-43). If an individual wanted to present it, he was required to bring a perfect male animal (Lev. 1:3, 10). He would lay his hand on it, signifying identification, then kill it, signifying that the animal was a substitutionary sacrifice (vv. 4-5). The penalty for sin was--and still is--death, but the animal died instead of the worshiper.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One principle from the burnt offering still instructs us today: each person gave according to his ability. A leader sacrificed a larger animal than an ordinary Israelite; a poor family usually had the option of sacrificing a less expensive bird (Lev. 1:3, 10, 14 with Lev. 12:8).

Leviticus 1:4 (Faith's Checkbook)

A Completed Sacrifice

"And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering: and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" —Leviticus 1:4

IF by that laying on of his hand, the bullock became the offerer's sacrifice, how much more shall Jesus become ours by the laying on of the hand of faith?

"My faith doth lay her hand

On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin."

If a bullock could be accepted for him to make atonement for him, how much more shall the Lord Jesus be our full and all-sufficient propitiation? Some quarrel with the great truth of substitution; but as for us, it is our hope, our joy, our boast, our all. Jesus is accepted for us to make atonement for us, and we are "accepted in the Beloved."

Let the reader take care at once to lay his hand on the Lord's completed sacrifice, that by accepting it he may obtain the benefit of it. If he has done so once, let him do it again. If he has never done so, let him put out his hand without a moment's delay. Jesus is yours now if you will have Him. Lean on Him; lean hard on Him; and He is yours beyond all question; you are reconciled to God, your sins are blotted out, and you are the Lord's.

Leviticus 1:4a (Morning and Evening)

"And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt- offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him." -

Leviticus 1:4

Our Lord's being made "sin for us" is set forth here by the very significant transfer of sin to the bullock, which was made by the elders of the people. The laying of the hand was not a mere touch of contact, for in some other places of Scripture the original word has the meaning of leaning heavily, as in the expression, "thy wrath lieth hard upon me" (Psalm 88:7). Surely this is the very essence and nature of faith, which doth not only bring us into contact with the great Substitute, but teaches us to lean upon him with all the burden of our guilt. Jehovah made to meet upon the head of the Substitute all the offences of his covenant people, but each one of the chosen is brought personally to ratify this solemn covenant act, when by grace he is enabled by faith to lay his hand upon the head of the "Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world." Believer, do you remember that rapturous day when you first realized pardon through Jesus the sin-bearer? Can you not make glad confession, and join with the writer in saying, "My soul recalls her day of deliverance with delight. Laden with guilt and full of fears, I saw my Saviour as my Substitute, and I laid my hand upon him; oh! how timidly at first, but courage grew and confidence was confirmed until I leaned my soul entirely upon him; and now it is my unceasing joy to know that my sins are no longer imputed to me, but laid on him, and like the debts of the wounded traveller, Jesus, like the good Samaritan, has said of all my future sinfulness, 'Set that to my account.' " Blessed discovery! Eternal solace of a grateful heart!

"My numerous sins transferr'd to him,
Shall never more be found,
Lost in his blood's atoning stream,
Where every crime is drown'd!"

Leviticus 1; 22:17–33

Worship and the Requirement of Atonement

Some of America's biggest mega-churches have rejected traditional formalities. Contemporary worship bands replaced robed choirs. Pastors deliver sermons in jeans and wrinkled shirts. Pews, and sometimes even crosses, have disappeared from church buildings. That may be why the detailed prescriptions for worship in Leviticus seem odd to many of us. We have a tough time making sense of all the ceremony. What's more, the blood sacrifice system offends our sensibilities. There's a definite gruesomeness.

First, we need to re-orient ourselves to the historical context of Leviticus. The Israelites left Egypt less than 14 months earlier. They had the stories of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; and while the practice of sacrifices and burnt offerings is not itself new, there's still so much they don't yet understand about their corporate identity and about God Himself.

They needed to absorb the realities of God's holiness and how they, as His people, would be required to revere and reflect that holiness. The prescriptions and prohibitions regarding the sacrifices were signs and symbols of God's perfection and of their sin. There were right and wrong ways to approach this God. Worship required obedience and acceptable practices.

The first seven chapters of Leviticus deal with the various sacrifices the people could bring to God. The burnt offering, as described here in chapter 1, is one of the sacrifices for securing atonement. Atonement is a critical term for understanding Leviticus. A reconciled relationship with God is possible only when sin is dealt with. Because sin incurs the penalty of death, either we will die for our own sin or a substitute will be required to which we transfer our guilt.

Apply the Word - Leviticus looks forward to the final atonement sacrifice, Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the sacrificial system was always an imperfect one. It had been intended as a way of pointing forward to Jesus. Do you doubt

sometimes that God forgives your sin? Believe not in the power of your confession but in the effectiveness of His blood!

Leviticus 2:1-16

Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings. - Leviticus 2:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Salt seems a simple substance, but you may be surprised by some of the facts found in *Salt: A World History*, by Mark Kurlansky.

For instance, salt is present throughout the human body and is needed for virtually every physical function. As another example, it takes weeks of immersion in a salt bath to create Parmesan cheese. And did you know that Gandhi's nonviolent drive for Indian independence began as a protest against a salt tax? Or that the creation of liquid bleach became possible only after scientists figured out the chemistry of sodium?

The salt industry boasts 14,000 different uses for salt! In America, most salt, a prized commodity in world trade in ages past, now goes to de-ice roads in winter.

So what exactly did God mean when He spoke of "the salt of the covenant" in today's verse? In the culture of that day, salt probably symbolized permanence, purity, and value. By putting salt in their grain offerings, the Israelites acknowledged the eternal, perfect, and precious nature of God's covenant with them.

The grain offering, the second of the five main types of sacrifice, was a voluntary recognition of God's goodness. Also called the meal offering or the cereal offering, it was the only one that did not include blood, and so it was normally offered alongside other types of sacrifices. As with every sacrifice except the burnt offering, the priests ate designated portions of this offering (cf. 1 Cor. 9:13–14).

Salt was required in the grain offering, but yeast and honey were excluded. Yeast may have stood for sin and rebellion, but more likely God ordered yeast omitted in order to remind the Israelites of the Passover and how He had saved them from slavery in Egypt. The reason for prohibiting honey is unknown. Neither exclusion was across-the-board, since both yeast and honey could be included in firstfruits offerings.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Since salt is highlighted in today's devotional, try going without it as a personal object lesson about its importance. Don't add salt to anything you eat today, and try to avoid packaged food that lists salt as an ingredient. You may find this rather difficult!

Leviticus 2:1-16

Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings. - Leviticus 2:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last fall, after a three-year study, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that nearly ten percent of U.S. households suffer from hunger or do not have consistent access to adequate food. The rate was even higher in 18 states, led by New Mexico at 15.1 percent.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman commented, "During this, the most prosperous economy in decades, it should shock most Americans to learn that hunger persists and it is in every state." The study found that even families living above the poverty line might go through food shortages, depending on such factors as season of the year, local cost of living, and community food programs.

Food. It seems so simple. Yet many struggle daily to obtain enough food. "Daily bread" is not so simple after all.

The Old Testament meal offering often began with this simple act--baking bread. The ingredients were important. This bread could not have any yeast, which reminded the Israelites of the unleavened bread they baked when God delivered them from Egypt in the Exodus (cf. Ex. 12:15; 1 Cor. 5:7-8). But this bread should have salt, symbolizing the covenant relationship between God and His people (Lev. 2:13; cf. Mt. 5:13; Mk. 9:50).

In ancient times, salt was costly. It was often used as a preservative. These two qualities--value and permanence--make it an apt reminder of God's covenant. Scripture even refers to "an everlasting covenant of salt" (Num. 18:19; cf. 2Chron. 13:5). (**See Trumbull's book = [Covenant of Salt](#)**)

The meal offering, since it was bloodless, had to accompany an animal sacrifice. Representative portions were placed on the altar

with the main sacrifice, but most of the meal offering was eaten by the priests. Also called the grain offering or tribute offering, the meal offering's main purpose was to show thankfulness for God's provision. It also showed faith for tomorrow's food, especially since the Israelites were receiving daily manna at the time this sacrifice was instituted

TODAY ALONG THE WAY One purpose of the meal offering was to help provide food for the priests. God cares for our physical needs.

Leviticus 2–3

Worship and the Expression of Thanksgiving

Ann Voskamp, a farmer's wife and mother of six, wrote the bestselling book, *One Thousand Gifts*, where she chronicles how keeping a gratitude journal and counting God's blessings transformed her. "Thanksgiving is inherent to a true salvation experience; thanksgiving is necessary to live the well, whole, fullest life."

The offerings described in today's reading are voluntary offerings of thanksgiving. Unlike the burnt offering, the grain and fellowship offerings are not made to secure atonement. But the worshiper still bears a solemn consciousness of his sin; the demands for perfect, unblemished offerings remain. For the fellowship offering, the worshiper lays a symbolic hand on the head of the animal before its slaughter, and the animal's blood is thrown against the sides of the altar.

The grain offering is composed of flour, either unprepared or baked in an oven, griddle, or pan. Because flour is a food staple, even the poor can offer this. In fact, we'll later see that flour can substitute for an animal sacrifice if that's all a poor man can afford. Provision is made for every person—rich and poor alike—to make offerings to God. Prohibitions against mixing yeast and honey with the grain offerings signify purity. That the offerings should be seasoned with salt symbolizes the long-lasting nature of the covenant.

For the fellowship, or peace offering, an animal is slaughtered. Unlike the burnt offering, it is not entirely burned up at the altar. The best portions—the fat and the important organs—are reserved for the Lord. Prohibitions against eating the fat and blood remind the worshiper that the best portions must be devoted to God, who grants atonement only through blood. The rest is consumed in a meal shared by the worshiper, his family, and the priests.

Apply the Word - The burnt offering provided a way for acknowledging God's holiness and the need for atonement. The grain and fellowship offerings provided a way for acknowledging the goodness of God. Thanksgiving is the way we continue coming to God. Consider reading Ann Voskamp's book and starting your own gratitude journal.

Leviticus 3:1-17

When anyone brings a fellowship offering to the Lord . . . it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. - Leviticus 22:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

One winter's day, a woodsman saw a snake lying nearly dead in the snow. He picked it up, put it inside his shirt to keep it warm, and hurried home. He lay the snake in front of the fire, where it gradually warmed up and revived. One of the woodsman's children reached down to pet it, but the snake reared back to strike. The woodsman seized his axe and chopped off the snake's head.

"Ah," said he. "There's no gratitude from the wicked."

Unlike the ungrateful snake, thankfulness is an essential part of worship for the righteous. That's the basic meaning of the fellowship offering, the next type of sacrifice covered in Leviticus. The Israelites offered it voluntarily to show gratitude, to fulfill a vow, or as a freewill expression of love for God.

After the animals for the fellowship offering had been sacrificed, the worshipers and priests shared a meal together. In effect, this was a meal with the Lord Himself, and it showed the intimacy and close fellowship He intended between Himself and His covenant people.

That's why the fellowship offering was also called the peace offering—the word for peace suggests the wholeness found in unhindered fellowship with God. These Old Testament concepts create a rich background for the New Testament's statement: "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

As with the other types of offerings, we see a truly worshipful heart reflected at several points in the sacrificial ritual. The worshiper brought a perfect animal to honor the Lord. He laid hands on it, acknowledging his sin (Lev. 3:13). Blood was sprinkled to signify atonement or purification. And neither blood nor fat could be eaten by the participants. The breed of sheep offered had a large, fat tail, and this part was specially offered to God on the altar—it would have been disrespectful to "chow down" on it (v. 9).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When is the last time you made a “freewill offering” to the Lord? This is something beyond your usual giving, and your normal service in the church. It flows freely and joyfully from your worship, gratitude, and faith in Him.

Leviticus 4

Does God Hold Christians Responsible for Unpremeditated and Unconscious Sins? Dan Vander Lugt

For a believer, unconscious sins are a serious concern, but they shouldn't be a cause for fear of abandonment or judgment by God. Because we are all sinners by nature, born into a fallen world, we are all guilty of unintentional sin. We would be in a hopeless situation, however, if God required us to be aware of every specific sin in our life and then confess it in order to maintain our fellowship with Him. This would be impossible for us in our limited, fallen state.

Old Testament law indicates that God looks upon unconscious sin differently from conscious sin. The law prescribed sacrifices for sins done in ignorance or weakness and without willful intent (Leviticus 4:2-3, 13-14). However, Old Testament law provided no sacrifice for conscious sin:

Anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people. Because he has despised the LORD's word and broken His commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him (Numbers 15:30-31 NIV).

The New Testament also distinguishes clearly between willful and unconscious sin:

That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:47-48 NIV).

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin (John 15:22 NIV).

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13 NIV).

Although the Bible distinguishes between conscious and unconscious sin, when we first put our faith in Jesus Christ, He declared us “justified.” He forgave us in a legal and judicial sense. He did this once and for all, forgiving us of any and all sins: past, present, and future; conscious and unconscious.

On the basis of this legal standing, God has accepted us once and for all into His eternal family (Romans 5:1). Now, even when we sin (either consciously or unconsciously) we are in a new relationship to Him. No longer must we fear God's condemnation and judgment. Christ has enabled us to be God's sons and daughters, no longer facing damnation because of sin. However, although we need no longer fear judgment because of sin, sin still interferes with our relationship with God and other people, and sometimes makes it necessary for Him to discipline us as a firm but loving Father.

We shouldn't worry about our unconscious sin. Although it has destructive effects in our lives, there is so much sin dwelling within us that we can't expect to be instantly delivered from its influence. We need to be humbled, however, by the fact that we sin in many ways that we don't detect, and be willing to confess and renounce any sin that the Holy Spirit brings into the light of our awareness. Our Father in heaven is ready to remedy the loss of communication and personal separation that occurs when we resist Him and go our own way (1 John 1:7,8). But to enjoy the full benefit of relationship with Him, we need to agree with Him about our sin. And it would be wise to follow King David's example by praying, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).

[Reference](#)

Leviticus 4:1-5:13

He is to lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it. - Leviticus 4:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the fifteenth century, the Aztec people practiced human sacrifice on an unprecedented scale. They believed that human sacrifices were necessary to fuel the sun, and that without such sacrifices the forces of darkness would overpower their sun god, Huitzilopochtli.

The Aztecs mostly sacrificed prisoners of war, which led to continuous conflicts with neighboring peoples. Thousands of enemy prisoners might be killed in a single day!

Outside of God's truth, the idea of sacrifice inevitably goes terribly wrong. But inside the Mosaic Law, animal sacrifices showed an awareness of sin and a truly repentant heart before the one true God.

Today's reading describes the sin offering, a mandatory offering for unintentional sin, which is sometimes understood as sins of weakness, carelessness, or omission. Four examples are given at the start of chapter 5, including thoughtless oaths. Once a person became aware of such a sin, he demonstrated his penitent heart by bringing a sin offering. To offer it was to confess sin and seek forgiveness or purification, thus restoring fellowship with God.

The priests sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice seven times because seven was the number of perfection or completeness. Putting the blood on the horns of the altar also pointed to atonement or cleansing from sin—God's perfect forgiveness. The different animals in the passage go along with social roles or wealth. For example, a male goat was expected from a leader, but only flour from a very poor person. Sin offerings for priests and the community were handled more seriously, and had to be burned outside the camp, while sin offerings for leaders and other private persons could be eaten by the priests as usual.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Given our devotional's topic, today might be a good day for an extended time of personal confession. Begin with the words of David: "O Lord, be gracious to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee" (Ps. 41:4, NASB).

Leviticus 4:1-7; 5:14-19

The sin offering is to be slaughtered before the Lord in the place the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy. - Leviticus 6:25b

TODAY IN THE WORD

When Max Perutz died of cancer earlier this year at the age of 87, he was mourned as "one of the twentieth century's scientific giants." A fellow scientist remarked: "The impact of Max's work remains a foundation on which science is being undertaken today." For his groundbreaking work in molecular biology, he shared the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1962. Dr. Perutz pioneered the use of X-ray crystallography in studying the body's proteins, and notably, he determined the structure of hemoglobin, the vital molecule which carries oxygen through the blood. Oxygen in the blood brings life to the body. Similarly, blood from animal sacrifices brought spiritual life to Israel.

So far this month, we've focused on the forgiving nature of our God. For the next several days, we'll move on to consider some biblical roots for the idea and practice of forgiveness. The Old Testament sacrificial system is a good place to start. The major sacrifices were the burnt offering, grain offering, fellowship offering, sin offering, and guilt offering--we'll focus on the last two of these.

The sin offering was mandatory and was made for specific, unintentional sins. The guilt offering was also required, it accompanied restitution for various sins, even if the sins were unintentional. Leviticus 4–7 emphasizes the holiness of these sacrifices, the holiness of seeking forgiveness. When a man laid hands on the animal to be sacrificed, he identified with it, accepting responsibility for the sins about to be punished. The animal died in his place as his substitute. When the priest sprinkled blood, it represented atonement for sin. The animal offered needed to be unblemished or perfect. That plus restitution (in the case of the guilt offering) served as evidence of true repentance or contrition.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In light of today's reading, we suggest that you do additional study on the Old Testament sacrificial system. What sacrifices did the Mosaic Law require? For what reasons or on what occasions were sacrifices offered? What symbolism was involved? In what ways did these sacrifices anticipate Christ? What can the church learn from these parts of the Old Testament?

Leviticus 4:7 (Faith's Checkbook)

What Sanctifies Our Offerings?

"And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord."—Leviticus 4:7

THE altar of incense is the place where saints present their prayers and praises, and it is delightful to think of it as sprinkled with the blood of the great sacrifice. This it is which makes all our worship acceptable with Jehovah: He sees the blood of his own Son, and therefore accepts our homage.

It is well for us to fix our eyes upon the blood of the one offering for sin. Sin mingles even with our holy things; and our best repentance, faith, prayer, and thanksgiving could not be received of God were it not for the merit of the atoning sacrifice. Many sneer at "the blood," but to us it is the foundation of comfort and hope. That which is on the horns of the altar is meant to be prominently before our eyes when we draw near to God. The blood gives strength to prayer, and hence it is on the altar's horns. It is "before the Lord," and therefore it ought to be before us. It is on the altar before we bring the incense; it is there to sanctify our offerings and gifts.

Come, let us pray with confidence, since the Victim is offered, the merit has been pleaded, the blood is within the veil, and the prayers of believers must be sweet unto the Lord.

Leviticus 4:13-21, 27-35

The elders of the community are to lay their hands on the bull's head before the Lord. - Leviticus 4:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

The hand is an important tool of human communication. Some research-ers have estimated that as much as sixty percent of all communication is nonverbal!

Consider a few examples related to hands. When a student raises her hand in class, the teacher knows she has a question or comment. When a friend places a hand on your shoulder, you know it is an expression of support or encouragement. When a legal witness puts his hand on the Bible, it indicates his commitment to tell "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God." Joining hands, as for a family prayer, demonstrates unity.

When the elders of Israel (or any worshiper) laid their hands on the head of a sacrificial animal, their act signified an identification with the animal, an acceptance of responsibility for sin. This gesture was an essential part of the sin offering, the third Old Testament offering in this month's study.

The sin offering, a compulsory sacrifice, was made for unintentional sin. Also referred to as a purification offering, its purpose was to restore the worshiper to unhindered fellowship with God. On the annual Day of Atonement, a special sin offering was made for all unintentional sins of which people were not already aware, an occasion to wipe the spiritual slate clean (see Ex. 30:10).

Acknowledgment and confession of sin was a key aspect of the sin offering (Lev. 5:5-6). It is thus fitting that in this sacrifice the animal was slain by the worshiper himself, rather than by a priest (Lev. 4:29). The overall procedure for the sin offering varied somewhat by person or occasion--today's reading covers sacrifices for the entire community and for an ordinary Israelite as examples.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Although Christians today don't have to make sin offerings, we need to take sin just as seriously! Why? Because our holy God does.

Leviticus 4:1–5:13

Worship and the Expression of Guilt

Although federal prosecutors had taped conversations that clearly implicated Rod Blagojevich, former governor of Illinois, in federal crimes, he continued to publicly deny his guilt: "I don't believe there's any cloud that hangs over me. I think there's nothing but sunshine hanging over me."

Sin has a track record of self-deception. We can be made to feel guilty when we've done nothing wrong or believe ourselves innocent when we're guilty. Feelings are no fail-safe guide for exposing sin; the Bible is our only reliable authority when it comes to probing our inner motivations and arbitrating our actions.

Leviticus offers a thorough look at what is and isn't sin. In our passage today, we see that sin isn't only a descriptor for the evil things we've done intentionally. Sin can also include unintentional acts. Guilt or innocence is not weighed on the scales of motivation. To mean to do right while inadvertently doing wrong is still sin. Sin is the transgression, or betrayal, of God's holy standards, whether we're conscious of those standards or not.

We betray God's law not only by doing bad things (sins of commission) but also by neglecting to do good things (sins of omission). In Leviticus 5, we see someone who refused to publicly testify about a situation which he witnessed. He was guilty because of what he failed to do.

Because sin wields such power of self-deception, it is our inclination to justify ourselves before God. We make excuses for why our sin isn't really that bad. But all of our well-reasoned arguments don't exonerate us. The good news is that God is always providing a

means for atonement. It's His gracious desire to forgive and reconcile people to Himself.

Apply the Word

We need the light of Scripture to shine in our hearts even as we ask, "Search me, God, and know my heart; . . . See if there is any offensive way in me" (Psalm 139:23–24). Make this your prayer every evening when you lie down or every morning when you wake up. Accept any conviction from the Holy Spirit, and then accept His forgiveness when you confess.

Leviticus 4:1-3 Unintentional

By Dennis Fisher

Read: ; Romans 3:21-26

If a person sins unintentionally . . . let him offer to the Lord . . . a young bull without blemish. —Leviticus 4:2-3

When I was returning our grandson Alex to his family after a visit, the traffic seemed especially challenging. Fast-maneuvering cars blocked me from the correct toll lane, forcing me to go through a lane where only cars with a prepaid pass are permitted, which I didn't have. Alex told me that my license plate would be photographed and a ticket might be mailed to me. I was frustrated because a penalty would have to be paid even though my infraction was unintentional.

For the ancient Jews, a violation of God's laws committed even in ignorance was taken very seriously. The Old Testament recognized and provided for unintentional sins through appropriate sacrifices: "If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments . . . let him offer to the Lord . . . a young bull without blemish as a sin offering" (Lev. 4:2-3).

Old Testament sacrifices were more than a reminder that accidental wrongs have consequences. They were given in anticipation that God in His grace would provide atonement even for wrongs we didn't realize we were doing. He did this through the death of Jesus in our place. God's grace is far greater than we could ever imagine!

Grace is getting what we do not deserve. Mercy is not receiving what we do deserve.

Insight

Today's passage from Romans is one of the most beautiful statements in Scripture of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus bore our sins on the cross, He has made us righteous in God's eyes. This righteousness comes through faith in Jesus (v.22); is given to us by God's grace; and, best of all, is free to all who believe (v.24).

Leviticus 5:14-6:7

It is a guilt offering; he has been guilty of wrongdoing against the LORD. - Leviticus 5:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Steve and Mike Lane had a gospel songwriter for a mother and a minister for a stepfather. "We were two kids who grew up in church," Steve says.

Yet the stepfather kept a collection of pornographic magazines, which Steve and Mike found. As adults, they produced publications defending pornography and were set to enter the lucrative business themselves. Thirty thousand pornographic magazines had been printed and were stacked in a warehouse awaiting distribution.

Then they watched an evangelistic television program and trusted Christ as Savior. Their lives changed, and their magazine investment was lost. Says Steve: "What we have now is worth a lot more than money."

Steve and Mike could not sell their pornography magazine once Christ had entered their hearts. True repentance changes the heart and thus the actions. This same idea underlies the Old Testament guilt offering, the fourth sacrifice to be considered in this month's study.

As in the sacrifices we've already studied, the guilt offering included true confession, blood atonement, and God's promise of forgiveness. One new feature is that this offering required restitution, when appropriate (Lev. 5:16; 6:5). To show true repentance, a worshiper was required to pay back and add 20 percent (a double tithe).

One type of sin requiring a guilt offering (also called a trespass offering) was the unintentional breaking of special commands regarding religious duties (vv. 15, 17). Examples included neglecting to tithe or eating the priest's portion of a sacrifice. The point, as summed up in today's verse, is that such sins were "wrongdoing against the Lord" in a distinct way.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We need to see our sins in the same way that God does. What does this mean?

Leviticus 5:14–6:7

Worship and the Definition of Sin

At the end of the second century, Jewish oral traditions were codified and written down in the Mishnah. Before this time, it was the task of the rabbis to interpret the traditions. As a result, there was a constant dueling over interpretations between rabbis and the schools of thought they represented.

Jesus was often put in the middle of these theological squabbles. One teacher of the law came to Him to ask which of the commandments was most important. Jesus answered that there were two: love God and love your neighbor. These are the totality of what God requires of us.

Notice that according to Jesus, and to our passage today from Leviticus, all sin is offense against God. To be sure, some sins are aimed more explicitly at God, such as the misuse of "the Lord's holy things" (5:15). This presumably means the sacrifices themselves. Both bringing blemished animals and neglecting to bring clean animals when they were required were obvious acts of sin for which payment must be made in the form of a guilt offering.

But sin is not merely the overt things we do to defraud God or dishonor Him. It is also sin against God to mistreat one's neighbor and to neglect practices of honesty and justice in our relationships. In this way, sin eludes the kind of neat compartmentalization that we might like to use. Our behavior toward our neighbor is a just measure of our spiritual faithfulness, and deception and dishonesty are ways we fail to love God Himself. Righteousness is horizontal with our neighbor as much as it is vertical with God.

Confession and restitution: these are practices still relevant and important today, grounding us in the reality that we are sinners and need to humbly seek to repair the damage our sin has caused.

Apply the Word - Jesus taught that public worship was an invitation to make right our human relationships (cf. Matthew 6). Before you next attend church, consider where your relationships have suffered. Where have you held grudges or cast judgments or clung to jealousies? Confess these to God and the person you've offended, seeking reconciliation.

Leviticus 5:14-6:7

It is a guilt offering; he has been guilty of wrongdoing against the Lord. - Leviticus 5:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Alexander Pope was one of the leading essayists, poets, and satirical writers of eighteenth-century England. Though he suffered from a disease that affected his spine, hunched him over, and caused him much suffering, he wrote voluminously and did landmark translations into English of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey.

In his famous work, *An Essay on Criticism*, he penned a line that has become an everyday proverb: "Good nature and good sense must ever join; To err is human, to forgive, divine."

Indeed, the fact that humans sin and God forgives seems to sum up the entire Old Testament sacrificial system!

The guilt offering, the last of the five major types of sacrifices, was a mandatory sacrifice for specific sins, ones that might involve personal injury or loss. Sometimes called the trespass offering, it was also made when religious duties were disrespectfully neglected, or when "holy things" were mishandled (Lev 5:15). As with other offerings, the guilt offering indicated a repentant heart and brought the worshiper forgiveness and renewed fellowship with God (Lev 6:7).

The main distinctive of the guilt offering was the requirement to make restitution. When a person had, for example, stolen, cheated, or extorted goods or money, he had to return the money plus 20 percent. The sinner was to sacrifice a ram whose value reflected the seriousness of his crime. That same day, he was to make this restitution, thereby getting right with God and his fellow Israelite at the same time (cf. Matt. 5:23–24). If the sin was committed in the area of worship (for example, withholding tithes), restitution was also required, since this was regarded as robbing the Lord.

There's a difference between the sin and guilt offerings: the guilt offering seemed to cover more grave or malicious offenses and more defiant or disobedient attitudes. Since the sin was more serious, repentance was also more serious and needed to be demonstrated through making reparations.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Learning about the Old Testament's sin and guilt offerings has hopefully impressed on us the need to confess and repent whenever we do wrong. We cannot afford to take sin lightly.

Leviticus 6:8-7:21

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. - Psalm 96:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last November, Moody alumna Bonnie Penner Witherall made the ultimate sacrifice.

Bonnie was serving as a prenatal nurse at a Christian medical clinic in Sidon, Lebanon, working with local people and Palestinian refugees. One morning, she opened the clinic at eight a.m. as usual. Gunmen attacked, and she was shot three times through the head, dying instantly.

Her husband Gary, also a Moody graduate, amazingly said that he forgave the killers. He also said that God had led them to Lebanon and that they had always known that martyrdom—sacrificing their very lives—was a possibility.

Offering a sacrifice has many meanings, as we've seen throughout this week. These days we no longer offer animal sacrifices, rather, we offer ourselves as "living sacrifices" in service to God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Today's passage briefly reviews the key features of each of the five major types of offerings, adding some details along the way (for example, specific categories of fellowship offerings). What are some of the vital principles? First, blood is required for forgiveness or atonement. Second, out of respect for God, the animal sacrificed had to be perfect. Third, offering a sacrifice demonstrated a worshipful or repentant heart. By placing their hands on the sacrifice, the people both took responsibility for their sin and acknowledged the substitutionary nature of the animal's death.

Each of these principles foreshadowed Christ. His blood was shed to atone for our sins. He was the only person in history able to be the perfect and effectual sacrifice for sin. He took our place, for we owed the penalty of death. And when He offered Himself, He made it possible for us to be forgiven and draw near to God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Paul applied the principle of sacrifice to believers: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:1-2).

Leviticus 6:1-7 Whose Property?

If a person sins . . . against the Lord by lying . . . about a robbery, . . . he shall restore what he has stolen. —Leviticus 6:2,4

A thief in New Jersey stole \$7,000 in jewelry, old coins, and cash from a widow. The items taken were all she had left from her husband's estate.

In sorting through his loot, the thief came across several church offering envelopes containing money the woman intended to give to the Lord. Leaving their contents inside, he put them in another envelope, addressed it to the woman's church, and then dropped it in the mail.

When the pastor found out what had happened, he commented, "It is a characteristic of the moral confusion of our times that someone would consider stealing from a widow and her children, yet think it reprehensible to steal from the church."

That thief overlooked an important truth: A sin against our neighbor is a sin against God (Leviticus 6:2). All of us, I'm afraid, are prone to think that God's property line ends somewhere near the back of the church. But it doesn't. Everything and everyone belongs to God. To reverence Him is to respect the property that He has entrusted to His children.

Wise is the person who fears God and recognizes that to sin against others is to sin against Him. —Mart De Haan

If we're to fear and love the Lord

And strive to keep His holy Word,

Our neighbor's good will always be

Of great concern to you and me. —D. De Haan

An offense against your neighbor builds a fence between you and God.

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Leviticus 6:8–7:38

Old Testament Worship: Pointing the Way Forward

Many of us think of the Old Testament as the antithesis of the New Testament and the Mosaic Law as the enemy of the gospel. After all, when was the last time you heard an evangelistic sermon based on the book of Leviticus?

Yet Jesus is threaded all throughout the language of sacrifice. Leviticus is not irrelevant the way we might have once thought. True, Leviticus describes a sacrificial system that's no longer required, but the system is still imbued with layers of meaning. It perfectly and symbolically illustrates what Jesus came to do and why.

Jesus is the holy High Priest, who has entered heaven's throne room to present a sacrifice of atonement. But He did not enter with a slaughtered animal: He entered to surrender His own body and spill His own blood. His blood, unlike the

blood of the Levitical sacrifices, was not carefully drained and collected. Instead, it seeped into the earth, absorbing into all of creation to free it from the power and penalty of sin. He is the perfect Lamb of God on whom we, by a faith confession, transfer our sin.

He is also the Bread from heaven, restoring the fellowship with God that had been broken in the Garden. By His sacrifice of Himself, we, the unholy, are made holy. We, the unclean, are cleansed. Guilt is erased; sin is paid for; and because of Christ, men and women, once distanced, are brought near to God.

All of this is symbolized in the Communion meal: the holy blood spilled out, the broken bread of His body. The invitation is made for all: take, eat, drink. Remember the Lord's death until He comes.

Apply the Word - Our life as Christ followers is portrayed in the New Testament in sacrificial language. We follow in the footsteps of Christ, hearing the call to present our bodies as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1). We are described as "the pleasing aroma of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:15). Following Jesus is a life of sacrifice and unreserved devotion to God. Hold nothing back.

Leviticus 6:9, 12-13 Keep The Fire Burning

Read: Romans 12:9-21 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 84-86; Romans 12

[Be] fervent in spirit. —Romans 12:11

Modern furnaces have taken the work out of keeping warm in cold climates. We simply set the timer on the thermostat, and the house is warm when we get up in the morning. But in former days, fire was carefully tended and fuel supplies were closely monitored. Running out could be deadly.

The same is true spiritually. If we think our “spiritual fire” can be ignited as easily as a modern furnace, we risk losing our fervor for the Lord.

In ancient Israel, the priests were instructed not to let the fire on the altar go out (Lev. 6:9,12-13). This required a lot of work, not the least of which was collecting firewood in a land not known for its dense forests.

Some scholars see the fire on the altar as a symbol for the flame of our devotion for the Lord. Spiritual passion is not something to be treated lightly or taken for granted. It will grow cold if we fail to keep it supplied with fuel.

The apostle Paul addressed the subject of spiritual fervor in his letter to the Romans (12:1-2,11). To keep the fire of our devotion burning strong, we must continue the hard work of stocking our fuel supply with hope, patience, steadfast prayer, generosity, hospitality, and humility (vv.11-16).

O God, my heart is the altar

And my love for you is the flame;

I'll keep the fire burning for You, Lord,

And I will rejoice in Your name. —Hess

Our love for Jesus is the key to spiritual passion.

Leviticus 6:13 (Morning and Evening)

How is Your Prayer Altar?

"The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out." - Leviticus 6:13

Keep the altar of private prayer burning. This is the very life of all piety. The sanctuary and family altars borrow their fires here, therefore let this burn well. Secret devotion is the very essence, evidence, and barometer, of vital and experimental religion.

Burn here the fat of your sacrifices. Let your closet seasons be, if possible, regular, frequent, and undisturbed. Effectual prayer availeth much. Have you nothing to pray for? Let us suggest the Church, the ministry, your own soul, your children, your relations, your neighbours, your country, and the cause of God and truth throughout the world. Let us examine ourselves on this important matter. Do we engage with lukewarmness in private devotion? Is the fire of devotion burning dimly in our hearts? Do the chariot wheels drag heavily? If so, let us be alarmed at this sign of decay. Let us go with weeping, and ask for the Spirit of grace and of supplications. Let us set apart special seasons for extraordinary prayer. For if this fire should be smothered beneath the ashes of a worldly conformity, it will dim the fire on the family altar, and lessen our influence both in the Church and in the world.

The text will also apply to the altar of the heart. This is a golden altar indeed. God loves to see the hearts of his people glowing towards himself. Let us give to God our hearts, all blazing with love, and seek his grace, that the fire may never be quenched; for it will not burn if the Lord does not keep it burning. Many foes will attempt to extinguish it; but if the unseen hand behind the wall pour thereon the sacred oil, it will blaze higher and higher. Let us use texts of Scripture as fuel for our heart's fire, they are live coals; let us attend sermons, but above all, let us be much alone with Jesus.

Leviticus 6:14-17; Malachi 1:6-14

[The offering] must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. - Leviticus 22:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Handel's Messiah “sets out the central truths of Christian faith with a concision and balance never equaled before or since,” says one music scholar. Another writer claims that the work “has probably done more to convince thousands of mankind that there is a God about us than all the theological works ever written.”

Using fifty-three Scripture verses, mostly from the Old Testament, Messiah tells the story of Christ's birth, redemptive life and death, and future return. Many have noted how perfectly the music and words fit together, for instance, awe and dread are in both the words and music of “Who shall abide the day of His coming?” A sense of joy and expectancy is similarly conveyed in the section “O

thou that tellest good tidings to Zion.” And of course the “Hallelujah Chorus” traditionally brings audiences to their feet in exultant respect and worship.

In both form and content, Handel’s Messiah is a perfect sacrifice of praise!

Offering only perfect sacrifices was a requirement of the Mosaic Law, a key principle in the sacrificial system. As Deuteronomy 15:21 summarizes: “If an animal has a defect, is lame or blind, or has any serious flaw, you must not sacrifice it to the Lord your God” (cf. Lev. 22:18-22). Why? Because offerings to the Lord were “most holy” (Lev. 6:17)—only the best was acceptable.

The Malachi passage illustrates what happens when offerings are not perfect. God was angry at the Israelites for offering blind and crippled animals—ones they would never think of offering to a human governor! They showed contempt for Him and dishonored His name in doing so (1:6, 12-13). As a result, He refused to accept their sacrifices (v. 10). As has been the case ever since Cain, unacceptable sacrifices truly reveal the sinful hearts.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps one of your meals could be dedicated to a time of worship, remembrance, and re-consecration just as Passover meals were.

Leviticus 7:22-38

All the holy offerings the Israelites give me I give to you and your sons as your portion and regular share. - Numbers 18:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

What did God value most in the Old Testament sacrificial system?

Samuel knew: “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). David knew: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). Solomon knew: “To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (Prov. 21:3). Isaiah knew: “Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. . . . Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed” (Isa. 1:13, 14, 15, 16, 17). Hosea knew: “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6).

Offering sacrifices was not just some ritualistic observance. The Israelites understood that God was looking for worshipful hearts and righteous actions, including justice and mercy. That’s important to keep in mind as we wrap up Leviticus’ rules for sacrifice today.

Among these miscellaneous rules was a prohibition against eating fat or blood. We’ve already mentioned why not fat (see July 3), but why not blood? We’ll discuss this in more detail on July 17, but for now notice that blood symbolized atonement and life. To eat blood would have dishonored life in general and spiritual life in particular.

These rules also highlighted that one purpose of the sacrifices was to feed the ministering priests. Their share—including what they could eat and when—was mentioned earlier, and is detailed here with regard to the fellowship offering. As in the New Testament, God’s people show respect for Him by supporting those who serve Him in vocational ministry (1 Cor. 9:13,14; 1 Tim. 5:17,18).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God’s worthiness to be worshiped was the center of the Old Testament sacrificial system, and we need this truth to hit home with us as well!

Leviticus 8:1-36

What has been done today was commanded by the Lord to make atonement for you. - Leviticus 8:34

TODAY IN THE WORD

The classic hymn, “Take My Life,” by Frances Havergal, begins: “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.” The following verses invite God to take every part of a person: “Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love; Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee. . . . Take my voice and let me sing always, only, for my King; Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee.”

This idea of dedicating every part of our person to the Lord’s service finds a vivid parallel in today’s reading. During the ordination ceremony consecrating Aaron and his sons to ministry, Moses anointed their right ears, thumbs, and toes with blood (Lev 8:12, 24). This likely signified that their whole persons were now specially dedicated to the Lord for service, and that in all they did from now on they should be mindful of their holy station.

God had previously given instructions for this ordination ceremony (Ex 28-29, 39-40). The priests wore special garments, including a plate on the high priest's turban inscribed, "Holy to the Lord." He carried the Urim and the Thummim, sacred lots for inquiring about God's will. As Moses enacted special ceremonies, including washing the priests with water, anointing them and the tabernacle items with oil, and offering the sacrifices.

In fact, this was the first official run-through of all God's instructions for the sacrifices, so Moses was modeling how to do it, both for the priests and for the benefit of the nation. A great deal of work had gone into constructing the tabernacle following God's design, and everyone present was committed to getting everything off to a good start. No wonder the consecration process took an entire week!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY As an interesting follow-up to today's reading, why not investigate the rules for ordination at your church or in your denomination? What qualifications are required? How can candidates fulfill them? Once a person is approved for ordination, what does the service look like? When people become ordained, does that change their status or duties? Can they ever be "unordained"—how and why?

Leviticus 8

Universal Guilt: Consecrating the Priests

Men and women of humility rarely write on the subject. A pastor of a large American church wrote a book on humility a number of years ago. He's since been under the discipline of his church for sins of pride, having mounted a track record of resisting correction and refusing accountability.

It's one more example that even the "strongest" among us are vulnerable to sin. We are all wrecked; every day we fall to our own pride and selfish desires. None of us is immune to the contagion of sin.

The ordination ceremony in Leviticus 8 pictures these truths of human frailty and depravity. The construction of the tabernacle has been completed, with its holy furniture and ornamentation. We've come to the moment when Aaron and his sons are consecrated for their priestly work. They will have charge of maintaining the tabernacle and offering the sacrifices brought by the people for expressions of atonement, thanksgiving, obedience, and worship. This is a holy work commended to an unholy people.

Moses presented offerings on behalf of the priests; they also needed atonement. Blood must be spilled on their behalf, for the sins they'd committed and will yet commit, for the good they'd already failed to do and will yet neglect. The sacred vestments in which Aaron and his sons were clothed were cleansed and consecrated. Water was the means of purification, and oil the means of consecration. Every detail illustrates the need for mercy and forgiveness. We cannot approach or serve God by our own merits.

The ordination was a public assembly for all to observe. Every detail was prescribed by God. Worship is serious business. He is holy and requires reverence.

Apply the Word - It can be devastating when our spiritual leaders fail. We often unreasonably expect perfection from them. Let today's reading be a reminder that none of us is perfect, even those called into the ministry. Commit to praying for your pastor and the ministry leaders at your church, that they grow in humility and in the practices of confession and accountability.

Leviticus 9:1-24

The glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. . . . And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown. - Leviticus 9:23, 24

TODAY IN THE WORD

Some people believe that biblical references to God's glory, such as the one found in today's verses, are actually evidence for UFOs. This theory, initially popularized by the book *Chariots of the Gods* in the 1960s, is held by some even today. According to them, "God" is a name designating advanced extraterrestrial beings who flew around in flashing, glowing spaceships. From these ships, the super-beings spoke to Job, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Paul and others. The Bible's teaching of a "Second Coming" may in fact be preparation for a future alien invasion or takeover.

How sad that some people find these crackpot ideas easier to believe than the challenging, holy reality of God Himself!

Immediately following their consecration described in yesterday's reading, the priests began to minister before the Lord. Within the sacrificial system, they represented God to the people and represented the people to God. As they received the sacrifices and ate the fellowship offerings with the people, their actions showed the covenant relationship and God's acceptance of their worship (Lev 9:6).

Taking up their commission of spiritual leadership on this momentous day, Aaron and his sons offered their first round of sacrifices, including sin and burnt offerings for themselves, and sin, burnt, and fellowship (plus grain) offerings for the people. God had promised to appear, and everyone needed to prepare to meet Him (Lev 9:4). So the sacrifices were offered, a blessing was spoken, and the glory of God came down. His glory probably manifested itself in a form similar to the pillar of cloud and fire that had guided and protected the Israelites thus far, especially given the miraculous fire that consumed the burnt offering. The people responded with reverence and joy, which they expressed by shouting and falling facedown to worship the Lord (Lev 9:23, 24).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY In the Old Testament, the priests ministered before the Lord. The New Testament affirms that all believers are a “royal priesthood.” As such, we also have a responsibility to serve the Lord.

Specifically, evangelism, proclaiming the good news of the gospel of God, is our “priestly duty” (Ro 15:16). We are to “declare the praises of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1Peter 2:9). Have you witnessed this message of life to someone recently? Pray for an opportunity in the near future.

Leviticus 9

Fire and Blessing: Consuming the Sacrifice

After the death of Steve Jobs, the world waits to see what will become of Apple. Steve Jobs brought the force of his creative leadership to Apple, and no one doubts that the success of Apple—and the innovations of the iPhone, iPod, and iPad—can largely be credited to him.

The world needs great leaders, but leadership is often hard. In today’s reading, we see an important transfer of some of that responsibility to Aaron and his sons.

During the seven-day ordination ceremony, Moses presented the sacrifices on behalf of the priests. On the eighth day, he commended to Aaron this work. Aaron must present offerings on his behalf, on behalf of his sons, as well as the entire community. And he was careful to do the work just as God Himself had prescribed.

We draw two important conclusions from the work done by Aaron and his sons at the altar. First (and as we’ve already seen), atonement must be made for the people to draw near to God and for Him to draw near to them. Sin will prevent a holy God from communing with an unholy people. The sacrifices symbolize this divide and the need for divine mercy.

Second, we see God’s grand plan to bless His people. When Aaron finished offering the sacrifices, he raised his hands to bless the people. Atonement is a sure path to joy: God’s overriding impulse is that of blessing: in the Garden, He blessed Adam and Eve. When He called Abraham, He promised him blessings of land and legacy. When He rescued Israel, it was for the purpose of blessing them.

Here, at the entrance to the tabernacle, the fire of God’s holy blessing falls, and the people breathe joy and holy fear.

Apply the Word

One of the devil’s oldest strategies is to try to convince us that God’s plans for us are not good. Have you fallen for that lie? Maybe there’s been suffering and great pain in your life, and you questioned the character of God. May you trust and believe today that He is good, and may that faith lead you into deeper joy.

Leviticus 10:1-20

Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.

TODAY IN THE WORD

A Far Side cartoon pictures God as a white-bearded old man seated at his computer. On the screen we see a hapless young man walking down the street. A piano is suspended by a rope over his head. God’s finger is poised over a button labeled “Smite.”

All too often, this caricature is how many people, even including some Christians, picture the judgment of God. But as we see in today’s reading, the judgment of God is never arbitrary or cruel, but always just and holy. Aaron’s two eldest sons dishonored God and their priestly calling, and were punished by Him with instant death.

Why did Nadab and Abihu’s action merit such an extreme penalty? It was not because they made a small mistake about some ritualistic detail, but because they did what they pleased how and when they pleased, publicly defiling the act of worship. Their blatant disobedience in the holiest of places and with the holiest of tasks called for swift and public justice: God had sworn to show Himself to be an utterly pure and holy God. Aaron’s silence indicated sad agreement with His justice (Leviticus 10:3).

It may have been that the two men were drunk, which would have made God's follow-up instructions a corrective measure (Leviticus 10:9). Excessive alcohol works against the faculty of reason, underscoring the irrationality of disobeying God.

No doubt Israel was shocked by this event, and the people were allowed to mourn for the two men. Aaron and his two remaining sons, however, were not permitted to participate, because their service before the Lord took precedence over family concerns (Leviticus 10:6, 7).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we see from the fate of Nadab and Abihu, disobedience and disrespectful worship are serious business. Ask God to examine your heart on these same questions today. Have you ever entered a worship service with your focus on self, your thoughts distracted, or something else at the top of your priority list? Do you think God was pleased with your worship on that day?

Leviticus 10:1-11 Holiness

By Haddon W. Robinson

By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified. —Leviticus 10:3

Sometimes God seems to overreact. In Leviticus 10 we read about people who dropped dead simply because they didn't worship correctly. Priests were threatened with death if they didn't stay well-groomed or if they wandered away from the tabernacle. To modern readers who like to dress casual and live free, all of this sounds a bit stifling.

But the aim of this instruction is not to tell us how to dress for church. It tells us about God. It reminds us that God is holy, and He is not to be trifled with. God is not a buddy who just wants us to feel comfortable around Him.

The Scriptures do not merely educate us in morality. God didn't give us the Bible to teach us how to be good little boys and girls. Instead, Scripture demands that we live respectfully and worshipfully in the awesome presence of the holy God. Without God's holiness, our faith loses its meaning. British theologian P. T. Forsyth (1848-1921) wrote, "Sin is but the defiance of God's holiness, grace is but its action upon sin, the cross is but its victory, and faith is but its worship."

Angels in the presence of God call to one another, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!" (Rev. 4:8). If we are believers in Christ, we can join them in that chant.

The holiness of God reveals

Our insufficiency;

But when His Spirit fills our hearts,

His work in us we'll see. —Sper

To refrain from sin doesn't make us holy, but holiness makes us refrain from sin.

Leviticus 10:1-11 Holiness

By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified. —Leviticus 10:3

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Leviticus 10:8-11 Dirty Laundry

Read: Leviticus 10:8-11, 1 Corinthians 2:13-16

Distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean. —Leviticus 10:10

Whenever my husband and I leave the house, our dog Maggie goes sniffing for old shoes and dirty laundry. She surrounds herself with what she finds and then sleeps with it near her nose. The familiar smells comfort her until we return.

Of course Maggie doesn't realize she's following a levitical command to "distinguish between . . . unclean and clean" (Leviticus 10:10). Nor does she know she's violating it.

In a world still swirling in sin long after its catastrophic collision with evil, God commanded His followers to live holy lives (Leviticus 11:45). Distinguishing between clean and unclean is essential to that task.

Such discernment requires more than finely tuned physical senses. The apostle Paul wrote that the "natural man"—that is, a human being in his sinful state—"does not receive the things of the Spirit of God . . . ; they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is the Holy Spirit who provides this wisdom (1Cor 2:13).

Just as Maggie finds comfort in old shoes and socks, many people seek comfort in old dirty sins. We must be mindful that our comfort and consolation come from God, who loves us and who establishes us in "every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;

Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.

See if there be some wicked way in me;

Cleanse me from every sin and set me free. —Orr

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There is no true happiness apart from holiness, and no holiness apart from Christ.

Leviticus 10

Fire and Judgment: Consuming the Guilty

In his essay, "The Art of Listening," Henning Maskell laments "the constant chatter of the Western world, where no one seems to have the time or even the desire to listen to anyone else. . . . It's as if we have completely lost the ability to listen. We talk and talk, and we end up frightened by silence, the refuge of those who are at loss for an answer."

There are sacred moments of silence in the Bible: Job became speechless before the power of God; Zechariah was made mute by His unbelief; and Aaron, in today's reading, was silenced by fire.

In yesterday's reading, the fire consumed the animal sacrifices offered to God on the altar. It symbolized God's pleasure and acceptance of those sacrifices, and the people responded with great joy. In today's reading, the fire consumed two of Aaron's sons who were guilty of dishonoring God and disobeying the prescriptions for worship. The fire symbolized God's displeasure and holy judgment, and the people, especially Aaron and his other sons, responded with a paralyzing fear and an inability to speak.

The sin of Nadab and Abihu was that they had offered "unauthorized fire" (v. 1). As priests, they had been commanded to take burning coals from the altar of burnt offering and use only these coals to burn incense in a hand-held censer. Apparently, Nadab and Abihu did not burn their incense in the prescribed way and from the prescribed source.

God will be proved holy. He will be honored. The fire He had ignited on the altar of burnt offering symbolized that acceptable atonement had been made for sin. It was this fire alone that provided access to God.

Apply the Word - Although we have complete forgiveness through Christ, we should not be casual with the holiness of God. God's

intention in the Bible is to gain glory for Himself. He will not compromise His holiness. We can be tempted to rationalize our sin, but a book like Leviticus brings us back to the sobering and reverent acknowledgement of God's holiness.

Leviticus 11:1-47

I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. - Leviticus 11:44

TODAY IN THE WORD

Tea is the ubiquitous Chinese drink. In welcoming guests, chatting with friends, and celebrating special occasions, serving tea is a necessary social ritual.

According to legend, tea was discovered when some leaves accidentally fell into an emperor's cup. Since then, tea-drinking has become embedded as part of China's cultural heritage. While Shanghai may have 25 Starbucks coffee stores, the city has 3,000 cafés specializing in tea! Recently, a museum and amusement park dedicated to tea were opened in Fujian Province, a region that grows China's famous oolong tea.

Just as drinking tea is quintessentially Chinese, so the food regulations in today's reading outline dietary distinctives for God's people, the Israelites. So far in our month's study of Leviticus we have focused on the system of worship, including the sacrifices and the priests. We now move on to issues related to daily life and purity. In an outline which conveys a similar idea, Charles Ryrie has divided the book into two parts: the "Way to God" (ch. 1-10) and the "Walk with God" (Lev. 11-27).

The theme of holiness remains constant here, as illustrated by today's verse and the fact that the word holy appears more times in Leviticus than in any other book of the Bible. We might think of the rules that we'll be reading about as a means for protecting the holiness of God in the daily lives of the Israelites. The Law intertwined ceremonial purity with spiritual purity, so by keeping these rules a person could cultivate the heart of a true worshiper. Some of the rules may have related to hygiene or avoidance of pagan religious practices, but it's the purity or set-apartness of God's people that is the deeper, underlying principle.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY When the Pharisees challenged Jesus on the issue of ritual uncleanness, He responded by teaching them about the true spirit and purpose of the Law in this regard (see Matt. 15). Since we will encounter these concepts a number of times in Leviticus, it might be helpful if you review Matthew 15:18, 19, 20 in particular

Leviticus 11

Dietary Laws: Holiness for God's People

A host of books are being published today about the purported health benefits of the Jewish dietary laws. In many cases, these laws did promote good health. Pigs, for instance, were forbidden for consumption, and pigs are among the dirtiest of the farm animals. On the other hand, rabbits could not be eaten, and there is no apparent health benefit for this avoidance.

It's reasonable to assume that God's intentions behind some of the particulars of the dietary laws might have been, in part, to promote good health, although there's nothing explicit in the text to indicate this. The Bible teaches that our bodies are worthy of care. But because not all dietary laws can be traced to healthy practices, we need to look for a broader explanation.

We find the primary reason for the strict classification of clean and unclean animals at the end of chapter 11: the Israelites are called to obey God's laws because they owe Him their allegiance. He has rescued them and now stands in authority over them. And because He is holy, they, too, must be holy.

Holiness isn't moral purity alone. Holiness is the state of being "set apart." These dietary laws did just this for the nation of Israel: they set apart God's people as different from the nations around them. Their food choices reflected this consecrated, holy identity.

Moreover, in Leviticus 11, we find an echo of Genesis 1. The categories for animals in this chapter are the precise ones found in Genesis 1: land animals, birds, sea creatures, and creeping things. But where Genesis 1 had made provision for humanity to eat any creature, the prohibitions found in Leviticus symbolize how creation has become contaminated because of sin.

Apply the Word - Imagine how revolutionary the words of Jesus were: "The things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them . . . murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matt. 15:18, 19). The contaminant wasn't outside a person's body; it was lodged deep within the heart. We would each need a heart transplant!

Leviticus 11, Ephesians 5:1-20

Levitical Themes in New Testament Clothes

Some Christians find it difficult to reconcile the Old and New Testaments. They might characterize the God of the Old Testament as

vengeful and angry, the God of the New as merciful and loving.

Hopefully through our study of Leviticus, and especially as we conclude today with a look at Ephesians 5, we have seen that there's no distinction between the God of the Old and New Testaments. The themes of Scripture are consistent. In fact, the book of Leviticus has the power to illuminate our understanding of the gospel.

All throughout Leviticus, we've been looking at the sacrificial system, understanding that without blood sacrifice there can be no atonement for sin. Ephesians uses this language of Leviticus but applies it to Christ. Jesus was the fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. He fulfilled the requirement of blood payment for sin. He is the faithful high priest as well as the sufficient sacrifice, an incarnated salvation.

Leviticus has also inspired in us reverence for God's holiness. In the story of Nadab and Abihu and the later story of the blasphemer, we saw fierce expressions of God's wrath. Note that Ephesians makes reference to this aspect of God's holy character: God has always reserved wrath and judgment for disobedience, both then and now.

Because God is holy, He requires holiness of His people. In Leviticus, laws regulated ritual purity as a demonstration that men and women needed to be clean before a holy God. Ephesians explores not ritual purity but holy character and conduct. Although we have been saved by grace, we're not entitled to live life as we please or to pay no attention to moral boundaries.

Apply the Word - We are the dwelling place of God. The candles that burned in the tabernacle from evening to morning—that is our flame (Eph. 5:8). The burning incense that perfumed the air—that is our fragrance (2 Cor. 2:14). We are a witness to the world of the holy God who delights to forgive sin and to show mercy. To whom will you tell this good news today?

Leviticus 11:44 Start With One Step

By Dave Branon

Read: 1 Peter 1:10-16

I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. —

"Be holy, for I am holy." Is there any command more difficult to obey? Probably not, yet there it is in God's Word (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16).

But how can we be as holy as God? After all, the reason we must trust Jesus as Savior in the first place is because we are not holy. "All have sinned," Romans 3:23 tells us. And even after we put our faith in Christ for salvation, how can we think about being as holy as God is?

The challenge of trying to match God in the holiness category can seem far too complicated to attempt. But if we yield to the Holy Spirit who lives in us and convicts us, we will grow.

Taking one step at a time should help. For instance, what is one thing you do or say or think that does not reflect God's holiness? Maybe you treat others harshly. Or you have a secret sin. Tackle that area today. Talk to God about it. Ask His forgiveness. Then, by His power, seek to overcome it.

Or think of this: What one thing can you do to enhance your relationship with God? The more time you spend with Him, the more you will become like Him.

Little by little, step by step, work to rid your life of unholy behavior. And strive each day to grow closer to God. As a believer in Jesus Christ, there is no greater challenge.

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;

Abide in Him always and feed on His Word.

Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,

Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek. —Longstaff

For a Christlike walk, keep in step with Christ.

Leviticus 11:44

THE LEVITICUS REMINDER

"I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. —Leviticus 11:44

If you are following the Bible reading schedule in Our Daily Bread, you've been in the book of Leviticus lately. Leviticus may be one of the least-read books in the Bible, and you might be wondering what its purpose really is. Why all those laws and rules about clean and unclean animals? (ch.11). What message was God giving to the Israelites—and to us?

Bible commentator Gordon Wenham says, "As the laws distinguished clean from unclean animals, so the people were reminded that God had distinguished them from all the other nations on earth to be His own possession. . . . Man's highest duty is to imitate his creator."

Five times in Leviticus God says, "Be holy, for I am holy" (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26). And forty-five times He says, "I am the Lord" or "I am the Lord your God." One of the most important themes in the book is God's call for His people to be holy. Jesus echoed that theme when He said, "You shall be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

As you read Leviticus 11, remember that you are special to God and are to "proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

We need the Leviticus reminder every day. —Anne Cetas ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Some portions of the Word of God
Are difficult to read,
But God will help us understand
Rich truths He'd have us heed. —D. De Haan

Study the Bible to be wise; believe it to be safe; practice it to be holy.

Leviticus 11:44 THE LEVITICUS REMINDER

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Leviticus 12:1-8

[The priests] are to teach the difference between the holy and the common and distinguish between the unclean and the clean. - Ezekiel 44:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

A recent British national survey found that most women are "terrified" of giving birth and find it "more painful than they ever

imagined.” Sixty percent said their prenatal classes had failed to prepare them for the reality of childbirth, and 75 percent mentioned the pain was far worse than they had imagined it would be.

Nearly half of the women surveyed said postnatal care was inadequate. Eighty-six percent added that they continued to experience pain for up to several weeks after the birth, and feelings from general sadness to depression were also common.

Nonetheless, 99 percent of these women said that motherhood gave them more happiness than their careers!

Although since the Fall women have suffered pain in childbirth (Gen. 3:16), a new baby remains one of life’s greatest joys and God’s greatest blessings: Children are “a reward from him. . . . Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them” (Ps. 127:3, 4, 5).

Why, then, did the Law regard a woman as unclean after giving birth? Theological speculation generally centers around two possible reasons. First, she might be unclean because of the postnatal discharge of blood. Since blood is a symbol of life and forgiveness, all matters involving blood were treated with great care and seriousness in the Law. Also, women who had unusual discharges of blood were required to offer the same sacrifices as listed here for a woman who had given birth (see Lev. 15:25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30).

A second possible reason for the uncleanness might be to remind the Israelites of the Curse—that is, of Adam and Eve’s original disobedience and the fact that pain in childbirth was one of the resulting punishments. In this way, the “unclean” designation reminded the people of history (after all, Moses wrote Genesis), of the universality of sin and of the urgent necessity of obedience.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY One theme we have been tracing so far in the book of Leviticus is holiness or purity—both God’s perfect righteousness and our calling to live righteous lives before Him.

Leviticus 12

Unclean: Purification after Childbirth

It’s estimated today that a two-parent family with two children will spend \$226,920 to raise each child. Statistics like this feed the cultural trend today to label children as a liability. Children are often seen as a drain on financial resources, an obstacle to professional advancement, and a strain on already depleted environmental resources.

This isn’t the biblical view. Children were always considered of enormous value, in both the Old and New Testaments. The passage in Leviticus 12, however, gives rise to some serious questions. If sacrificial offerings must be made following the birth of a child, and if a new mother is ritually unclean because of childbirth, is there something inherently sinful or bad about having children?

No. The issue is not that the woman is morally unclean after childbirth, but ritually unclean. The new mother has not sinned, but rather, her postnatal flow of blood disqualifies her from the ceremonies of public worship. This parallels the prohibition against eating the blood of animals. Only the priests were permitted to handle blood, and this only for presenting the sacrifices of atonement.

Today’s reading has echoes of themes in Genesis. Just as Adam and Eve were excluded from the Garden of Eden because of their sin, so the unclean woman is excluded from public worship because of her ritual contamination. But the hope that had been announced in the garden long ago in the promise of a holy “seed” or offspring for redemption, is called to mind in verse 1 of today’s reading. The phrase, “a woman who becomes pregnant,” when literally translated from the Hebrew means, “a woman who produces a seed.” Mary, young virgin mother of Jesus, would become ritually impure to bear the holy Seed of the Messiah.

Apply the Word - Postnatal blood and menstrual blood were both sources of ritual contamination for a woman. Imagine then the bold faith of the woman who had suffered a bleeding disorder for twelve years and dared to touch the hem of Jesus’ robe (Luke 8:42–47). Jesus turned to her and said, “Go in peace.” He comes to bring the impure and the unclean back to God.

Leviticus 13:1-59

If an [unclean] person does not purify himself, he must be cut off from the community, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. - Numbers 19:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

If you think issues of uncleanness are limited to the ancient world, consider this cover story headline last year from an issue of U.S. News & World Report: “The Future of Water: Costly • Dirty • Scarce.”

The article began with an account of dirty water in Atlanta, where in some neighborhoods it had been flowing brown from the tap. From time to time, “boil water” advisories had been issued to let residents know the water was not safe to drink. The situation may grow worse as 700,000 miles of aging pipes and mains throughout America decay and reach the end of their life spans. One federal official called clean water “the biggest environmental issue that we face in the 21st century.”

Such health concerns help bring the world of Leviticus closer to home. For example, our readings for today and tomorrow deal with the problems of infectious skin diseases and mildew.

Some Bibles translate infectious skin disease as leprosy, or Hansen's disease, as it is called today. But the Hebrew word used here is a general term, and the symptoms don't seem to fit leprosy. The word for mildew is similarly a general term, and can also refer to mold or fungus. These two health or hygiene issues may be paired here because they were seen as parallel problems—one affecting living things, one affecting inanimate objects.

The Law prescribed several practical responses to these problems, including careful diagnosis, various forms of quarantine, and thorough washing. Why were the priests responsible for this? Perhaps because diseases and such, while not sin, were still consequences of the Fall and thus results of sin. Additionally, the priests were the community's guardians of purity, no matter what kind of purity was involved.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Today, we are going to leave this application portion of the devotional open for the Holy Spirit to direct you. We recommend that you pray for a specific application for yourself based on the principle of purity, modernized for today, and personalized for you. To begin, you might review "Today Along the Way" for the past two days, both of which dealt with the question of purity.

Leviticus 13

Unclean: Skin Diseases

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition—or the DSM-IV—is the manual used by mental health professionals for diagnosing and treating mental illness. Since its publication in 1952, it's been revised four times, removing disorders previously considered pathological and adding new ones.

Leviticus 13 reads like an infectious disease manual. But just as we've seen in our previous days' readings regarding the dietary laws and the ritual purification required after childbirth, skin disease is not necessarily a medical or moral issue. What's in focus here is determining when a person is ceremonially clean or unclean, fit or unfit for participation in the community.

The priests arbitrated these matters of skin diseases, determining which ones prevented a person from entering the tabernacle. The criterion seems to be whether a condition was acute or chronic. Persons with chronic skin conditions that did not heal over a period of time of isolation were to be excluded from community worship as well as from habitation in the camp.

Imagine the horror the unclean men and women inspired when they patrolled the outskirts of the camp, yelling, "Unclean!" Imagine their tragic loneliness. They were not being punished for sin, although no doubt it must have felt like it to some.

The exclusion did, however, act as a kind of protective measure over the community, whose close living quarters could breed infection. Vigilance was exercised over unclean materials because any contagion of mold or disease had the possibility of spreading quickly throughout the camp, putting everyone at risk. Symbolically, this illustrates the horrors of sin in its ability to contaminate and destroy.

Apply the Word - Each of us has been infected by sin. We are unclean, and without a new birth by which we're given new spiritual skin, we cannot draw near to God. Jesus has made a way for forgiveness and spiritual rebirth by dying for unclean sinners. "And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood" (Heb. 13:12).

Leviticus 13:13 (Morning and Evening)

"Behold, if the leprosy have covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague." - Leviticus 13:13

Strange enough this regulation appears, yet there was wisdom in it, for the throwing out of the disease proved that the constitution was sound. This evening it may be well for us to see the typical teaching of so singular a rule. We, too, are lepers, and may read the law of the leper as applicable to ourselves. When a man sees himself to be altogether lost and ruined, covered all over with the defilement of sin, and in no part free from pollution; when he disclaims all righteousness of his own, and pleads guilty before the Lord, then he is clean through the blood of Jesus, and the grace of God. Hidden, unfelt, unconfessed iniquity is the true leprosy; but when sin is seen and felt, it has received its deathblow, and the Lord looks with eyes of mercy upon the soul afflicted with it. Nothing is more deadly than self-righteousness, or more hopeful than contrition. We must confess that we are "nothing else but sin," for no confession short of this will be the whole truth; and if the Holy Spirit be at work with us, convincing us of sin, there will be no difficulty about making such an acknowledgment—it will spring spontaneously from our lips. What comfort does the text afford to truly awakened sinners: the very circumstance which so grievously discouraged them is here turned into a sign and symptom of a hopeful state! Stripping comes before clothing; digging out the foundation is the first thing in building—and a thorough sense of sin is one of the earliest works of grace in the heart. O thou poor leprous sinner, utterly destitute of a sound spot, take heart from the text,

and come as thou art to Jesus—

“For let our debts be what they may, however great or small,
As soon as we have nought to pay, our Lord forgives us all.
'Tis perfect poverty alone that sets the soul at large:
While we can call one mite our own, we have no full discharge.”

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Come needy, come guilty, come loathsome and bare;
You can't come too filthy—come just as you are.

Leviticus 13:45; 22:4 The Untouchables

By David H. Roper

Read: Mark 1:40-45

Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him. —Mark 1:41

Of all diseases, leprosy is the only one singled out by the law of Moses and linked with sin. It's not that having leprosy was sinful, nor was it the result of sin. Rather, the disease was seen as a graphic symbol of sin. If we could see sin, it would look something like leprosy.

In Mark 1 we read about a leper who fell on his knees before Jesus and made his request: "If You are willing, You can make me clean" (v.40). It's the first instance in the Gospels of a plain request for healing—touching and profound in its simplicity.

Jesus was "moved with compassion" (v.41). People normally felt sympathy for the sick and troubled, but not for lepers. Because they were considered in those days as "unclean" both ceremonially and physically (Leviticus 13:45; 22:4), they were repulsive in every way to most people, who stayed as far away from them as possible. Nevertheless, Jesus was "willing" to reach out to this desperate, disease-ridden man and actually touch him! At that very moment the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

Why did Jesus touch this man? He could have healed him just by saying, "Be cleansed." But His touch illustrated His great compassion.

Jesus loves sinners. Do we?

Jesus taught when He lived on this earth

How to show love to the lost;

So don't be afraid to give a kind touch,

No matter how much it may cost. —Carbaugh

To love sinners is to be like Jesus.

Leviticus 14:1-57

Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. - 2 Corinthians 7:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

What exactly is the hyssop plant mentioned in today's reading? It is difficult to answer this question precisely, because hyssop is not a specific term. One type of hyssop is a small, hardy shrub. Another is an herb from the basil family, somewhat bitter and mint-flavored. Tourists to Israel are purportedly sold this "hyssop" in small jars, though since it is a protected plant in Israel the jars frequently contain a blend of other Mediterranean herbs. It has also been suggested that hyssop is actually the caper plant, a green, rock-climbing vine that is said to have cleansing properties.

In any case, the hyssop plant in the Bible symbolized spiritual purification (cf. Ps. 51:7; Heb. 9:19). The cleansing sequence in today's reading involved two components. In the first part, conducted outside the camp, a priest examined the infected person and pronounced him clean. The follow-up ceremony involved sprinkled blood, hyssop, cedar, and scarlet yarn, all symbols of cleansing and forgiveness. One bird was sacrificed and one set free (like the scapegoat). In the second part, done inside the camp, the healed person shaved, washed, and offered sacrifices, signifying renewed fellowship with God. As we also saw during the priests' ordination, certain body parts were anointed to symbolize renewed commitment to worshiping and serving the Lord.

As we have mentioned previously, it might be better to translate "atonement" simply as "purification" in this passage. After all, to have a disease was not a sin, and in the similar ceremony for cleansing a house from mildew it is difficult to see theologically how "atonement" could be necessary or even possible.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Reading through passages on skin disease and mildew may not seem like a very helpful devotional activity! Yet these chapters are part of an important thread that runs through the Bible on purity, consecration, and being clean.

Leviticus 14

Pronouncing Clean: The Ceremony and Its Symbolism

Many ancient religious rituals included superstitious practices whose goal was to appease the wrath of the gods. Some might view the text we read today the same way. We feel suspect about all the bizarre ceremony of it all. Upon closer examination, we'll see that these symbols are full of meaning.

What is being described here is the ceremonial cleansing that takes place when a ritually unclean person has been healed of his disease. He wasn't reintegrated into the community immediately. Instead, the priest visited the person outside the camp, made the pronouncement that he was clean, and invited him back into the camp where he had to wait seven days before entering his tent. On the eighth day, the person to be cleansed offered appropriate guilt, sin, and fellowship offerings to the Lord.

Many scholars have drawn parallels between this ritual ceremony of cleansing and the Flood account in Genesis. First, in both, the agent of cleansing is water. In Leviticus, the unclean person bathes and washes his clothes, having been sprinkled with the blood of the bird killed over fresh water. In Genesis, an unclean world undergoes a cleansing by a disastrous flood, the means by which God wipes away sin and begins anew. Second, the appearance of birds in both stories provides a link. Two birds are used in the ceremonial cleansing: one killed over fresh water, one dipped in its blood. In the Flood story, birds are released when the rain stops and Noah waits to leave the ark. And finally, both the ceremonial cleansing and the Flood narrative conclude with sacrifices.

Leviticus is drawing on larger themes from the Pentateuch, highlighting God's great desire for relationship with His people and man's great need for redemption and rescue.

Apply the Word - The overwhelming balance of the New Testament, when it comes to the language of sacrifice, is the focus on Jesus Christ. No other sacrifice is required. Only two mentions are made of sacrifices we actually offer to God: the sacrifice of our money for the advancement of mission (Phil. 4:18) and the sacrifice of praise we offer God from our lips (Heb. 13:15).

Leviticus 15:1-33

[K]eep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place. - Leviticus 15:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

Until recently, the Colombian army encouraged Marxist rebels to surrender by distributing photos of glamorous women. Since the rebels are not allowed to date without permission from the commanders, the implication was that as soon as they gave up fighting they could have their pick of the beautiful women in the photos. The new defense minister, a woman, put an end to that policy!

We live in confused times. The world has no idea what to do with issues of sexual morality and behavior. By contrast, the Law provided clear guidelines for God's people. Today's reading focuses on standards for cleanness and uncleanness related to sexual hygiene.

What was at issue here? Leviticus 15:1–15 discuss abnormal male conditions, possibly the result of an illness or sexually transmitted disease. Leviticus 15:16, 17, 18 describe the appropriate procedures for male hygiene under normal circumstances. And Leviticus 15:19-24 deal with a woman's menstrual period. Finally, Leviticus 15:25-30 cover abnormal female symptoms in which a woman experiences a chronic hemorrhage (called "menostaxis"). The woman Jesus healed in Mark 5 suffered from this condition (see "Today Along the Way").

The text here is pretty straightforward about the guidelines under normal circumstances, and only minimal times of purification were required. Disease-related complications, by contrast, were more serious. They contaminated all who came in contact with them, and required burnt and sin offerings to be made for purification. (Again, it may be better to think in terms of purification rather than atonement.) The bottom line is that these rules reflect a respect for blood (as symbolic of life) and reproductive organs (as generative of life).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY As a supplementary Scripture passage today, we encourage you to read and reflect on Mark 5:25-34, the story of Jesus' miraculous healing of a woman with a chronic bleeding condition. According to the Law, how would she have suffered from her condition physically, socially, and spiritually? In light of this, consider not only the power but also the great love and compassion Jesus showed in healing her. How might the Jewish people in the crowd, who would have known the Law, have perceived and responded to this miracle?

Leviticus 15

Principle of Separation

In December 1952, five days of suffocating smog hovered over the city of London. In the following weeks, medical reports estimated that over 4,000 people died, and 100,000 people fell ill. This environmental catastrophe made way for new legislative policies, such as the Clean Air Act of 1956.

The book of Leviticus addresses its own kind of contaminant: the bodily diseases, dysfunctions, and discharges, all of which make a person ceremonially unclean. Today's reading brings us into the secrecy of one's bedroom and bathroom, launching us into the awkward discussion of bodily fluids.

Semen and menstrual blood are both contaminants. No one entered the tabernacle for seven days following menstruation or contact with a menstruating woman; an emission of semen or contact with it made people unclean until sundown. This meant that women were ritually unclean nearly half of every month. Men were also frequently unclean. Not only was the person with the discharge unclean, but anything he or she touched was unclean: cooking pots, riding saddles, beds, chairs.

Laid out are strict rules of separation in order to prevent contamination. The reason for the severity of these restrictions is explained in verse 31. Contamination is probable; therefore, every person must keep himself from what would make him ritually unclean in order that he might worship a holy God.

Remember the general purpose of the Pentateuch? Moses wrote to explain to the nation of Israel their newfound identity as God's people. God had chosen to make His dwelling right in their midst, and in response, they were to endeavor to be holy.

Apply the Word - The principle of separation is one that stands even in the New Testament. (Note today's key verse.) We've been called, not to conformity with the world, but to transformed lives of holiness. And yet we hold this in tension with the compassionate example of Jesus, which we have in the Gospels. He kept company with sinners and touched those who were unclean.

Leviticus 16:1-34

Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites. - Leviticus 16:34

TODAY IN THE WORD

Modern Jews call the Day of Atonement "Yom Kippur" and regard it as the holiest day on their calendar. On Rosh Hashanah, it is believed that God writes a "book" of each person's actions during the past year. Eight days later, on Yom Kippur, these "books" are irrevocably sealed. The eight days, known as "Days of Awe," are a time to repent and be cleansed from sin, and thus to alter the

judgments inscribed in the "books." During this time, many Jews wear white as a symbol of purification.

How does today's reading describe this important day? As a climactic day of holiness and purity, which is why it is placed here in the flow of Leviticus. It took place around September or October, in between the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month of the Jewish year.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest washed carefully, put on special garments, and made sin offerings for himself and the community. He sprinkled atoning blood throughout the tabernacle area and publicly confessed the sins of the nation (Leviticus 15:21). The people were required to rest and fast. They were to "deny" themselves in the sense of humbling themselves before the Lord about their sin (Leviticus 15:29, 30, 31)

This was the one and only day of the year when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled sacrificial blood directly on the cover of the ark. The smoke from the burning incense hid the ark and protected the priest from the overwhelming glory and presence of God. And just in case he inadvertently did something wrong, two rams were sacrificed as an extra burnt offering at the end of the whole procedure.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY If you skipped "Today Along the Way" for July 4, why not return to it now? We suggested spending time in personal and national confession of sin—an application that also fits well with our topic today of the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16:1-20, 20-22

"THE SCAPEGOAT"

"It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people." - John 11:50

The company was losing money. The price of its stock was sliding, and the corporate board was grumbling. So the president, desperate to do something, fired the vice-president in charge of sales.

In a similar situation, a college basketball team was mired in a losing season after 6 consecutive successful years and three visits to the NCAA Tournament. Attendance was down and the alumni were howling. So the university fired the coach. In both cases, good people were released because the organization needed a scapegoat. They focused the blame on one person, even though many were at fault.

That's what happened to Jesus. The high priest Caiaphas, without knowing the full import of his words, said it would be best to sacrifice one man, Jesus. He thought it would save the nation from the oppressive Romans (Jn. 11:47-50). What he didn't realize was that Jesus was bearing the guilt and penalty for the sins of the world in fulfillment of the Old Testament picture of the two goats - one a sacrifice for sin, the other a scapegoat which symbolically carried their sins away (Leviticus 16).

We deserve eternal death. How grateful we can be that God made Jesus our scapegoat.- D C Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, thank You for eternal life,
For dying in my place,
For taking all my punishment,
For showing me Your grace.-- Sper

Christ became our scapegoat that we might escape sin's penalty.

Related:

- [Leviticus 16 - What is the meaning of Azazel / the scapegoat?](#)
- See also - [Scapegoat - Wikipedia](#) - [Picture of Scapegoat](#)

Leviticus 16:34

DAY OF ATONEMENT

"This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year" (Leviticus 16:34).

On Easter Sunday in 1908, William Grenfell, a missionary doctor in Labrador, started a sixty-mile journey with his sled dog team to help a desperately ill person. To shorten the trip, he decided to cross a frozen bay, though he knew the ice had begun melting.

The ice broke and Grenfell and his dogs fell into the frigid water. The doctor and three dogs crawled onto a floating piece of ice. To keep himself from freezing to death, he eventually killed his three dogs and covered himself with their bloody skins.

Grenfell struggled for physical survival and found it in a bloody covering. So in a way did ancient Israel. God's people fought both nature and themselves, and their internal battle with sin produced never-ending guilt. In the various tabernacle offerings, God provided a way for people to relieve their guilt through bloody sacrifices. The word atone may mean "to cover." Thus in atonement the blood of a slain animal hid a person's sin, bringing forgiveness and access to God.

Because the people could never stop sinning, the need for animals was never ending. The priest was as much butcher as confessor. At best, he had a grisly task. No less nauseating was Golgotha. No less unfathomable is the mystery of blood—shed to cover the sins of the whole world.

Leviticus 16

Day of Atonement: A Day of Grace

Yom Kippur, or the Jewish Day of Atonement, is still a day of solemn reflection and fasting. One Jewish woman explains, "When the fast is over, the hope is that your prayers were answered, and you were written in the Book of Life and it will be a good year."

Believers in Christ can count on more than simply hoping that God has heard our prayers and forgiven our sins. Jesus' death on the cross, perfectly figured in the ceremony described here, was the finally sufficient atoning sacrifice for our sins. Tomorrow, we'll explore that symbolism.

Today, we take a broader view of the Day of Atonement. First, we note the previous breach of priestly protocol. Nadab and Abihu died when they approached the Lord inappropriately (see May 12). Aaron was stunned into silence by this swift expression of God's judgment and probably felt reluctant to resume his priestly duties.

On the one hand, the Day of Atonement was certainly a day for appropriate fear. It highlighted God's unconditional holiness. The high priest could enter the Holy of Holies only once a year, and when he did, he had to bring blood sacrifices both for himself and his family as well as for the entire nation. The incense burning on his censer was meant to obscure a view of the cover of the atonement seat; he was forbidden to look upon God. Every part of the ceremony signified a careful approach of the living God. The penalty of any misstep was death.

But while the ceremony inspired fear, it was also an expression of grace. Despite their sin and unworthiness, this great God of Israel had made His dwelling in their midst and made provisions for approaching Him.

Apply the Word - An important reason to read a book like Leviticus is to shape our view of God. Culture today encourages people to believe what they want to believe. Inevitably, people draw conclusions about God according to their own preferences. The truth is, however, that God is not who we want Him to be but who He has revealed Himself to be in the Scriptures.

Leviticus 16:1-20, 20-22 "THE SCAPEGOAT"

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Leviticus 16:1-22 Tale Of Two Goats

In all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest. --Hebrews 2:17

Two goats without blemish stood before the high priest in the bright Middle Eastern sun. Lots were cast, and the priest slowly led one to the altar to be killed as a sin offering for the people. Its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. That goat was a sacrifice.

The other goat, known as the scapegoat, portrays another truth. The priest placed both his hands on its forehead and confessed the sins of Israel. Then the goat was led out into the desert and turned loose. As it wandered away, never to be seen again, it symbolically took Israel's sins along with it. They were gone. The people were reconciled to God. That goat was a substitute.

Both of these goats were pictures of what Christ would do for us. The cross became an upright altar, where the Lamb of God gave His life as a sacrifice for sin. And what the scapegoat symbolically portrayed for Israel—the removal of their sins—Jesus fulfilled in reality. He became our substitute. Because of our identification with Him as believers, our sins have been taken away completely.

Two goats representing two truths: sacrifice and substitution. Both were fulfilled in Christ when He died on the cross and made full atonement for our sins. Praise God! —David C. Egner

Guilty, vile, and helpless we,

Spotless Lamb of God was He;

Full atonement! Can it be?

Hallelujah, what a Savior! —Bliss

Jesus took our place to give us His peace.

Leviticus 16:34 DAY OF ATONEMENT

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Leviticus 16:5-22 The Other Goat

By Cindy Hess Kasper

He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. —1 John 2:2

The Scapegoat, a novel by Daphne du Maurier, is about two men who are amazed at the striking similarity in their appearance. They spend an evening together, but one runs off, stealing the other's identity and leaving him to step into a life filled with problems. The second man becomes a scapegoat.

The origin of that word comes from a ceremony performed with two goats on the Hebrew Day of Atonement (known today as Yom Kippur). The high priest would sacrifice one goat and symbolically place the sins of the people on the head of the other—the

scapegoat—before it was sent into the wilderness carrying away the blame of the sin (Lev. 16:7-10).

But when Jesus came, He became our scapegoat. He offered Himself up “once for all” as a sacrifice to pay for the sins of “the whole world” (1 John 2:2; Heb. 7:27). That first goat had been sacrificed as a sin offering for God’s people and symbolized Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. The other goat was a representation of the completely innocent Jesus accepting and removing our sin and guilt.

None of us is without sin—but the Father laid on Jesus “the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). God sees followers of His Son as blameless—because Jesus took all the blame we deserve.

Jesus our Savior left heaven above, Coming to earth as a Servant with love; Laying aside all His glory, He came, Giving His life, taking all of our blame. —Hess

Jesus takes our sin and gives us His salvation.

Leviticus 16 What Was the Purpose of Animal Sacrifices?

Dan Vander Lugt

According to Scripture, sacrifice was instituted and approved by God. But when worship of the true God was abandoned, blood sacrifice was transformed into a way to magically appease, manipulate, and avert the anger of imaginary gods. The apostle Paul wrote:

Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Romans 1:21-25).

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting (Romans 1:28).

(See the ATQ article, [Why Did Ancient Pagans Practice Blood Sacrifices?](#))

Faithful sacrifice in worship of the true God was reinstated at the time of the Flood (Genesis 8:20-21) and confirmed when God established a special covenant with a man of faith named Abraham.

Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3).

Faith in God’s goodness and grace became the bridge between sinful creatures and a holy God (Hebrews 11:6-19). Abraham demonstrated his genuine faith by his radical obedience. He was willing to offer his long-awaited, precious son, Isaac, as a sacrifice to God (Genesis 22:1-3). God didn’t dispute or deny human unworthiness, or imply that death wasn’t the necessary price for atonement. It was necessary, after all, for Abraham to be willing to bring Isaac as a sacrifice. But God didn’t require Isaac to die. God Himself provided a sacrifice—a ram (Genesis 22:12-13)—to die in his place.

On the mountain top in Moriah (traditionally identified as the temple mount in Jerusalem), God revealed His grace and mercy in a way that—for Abraham and his descendants—clearly ended the practice of human sacrifice. In the Old Testament law, God clearly forbade that man shed human blood in sacrifice (Deuteronomy 18:9-12).

Since God was now known as both holy and merciful, sacrifice was no longer to be motivated by superstitious fear. It was to be the expression of conscious acknowledgment of guilt, 1 of belonging to God, and of desiring to be restored to fellowship with Him. 2

The Old Testament law (Leviticus 16) introduced the ritual of atonement, in which the life of a goat was accepted by God as a symbolic substitution for the lives of a corrupt people who were individually and corporately worthy of death. But Old Testament sacrifices were not in themselves sufficient to atone for sin. They were sufficient only to point forward to the coming of the Messiah who would die in atonement for the sins of the world. Hebrews 10:4 declares,

It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Further, Hebrews 10:10-14 tells us that “by one offering He (Christ) has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

One of the main purposes of Old Testament law was to make the people of Israel conscious of the great gap between their own weakness and corruption and the expectations of a Holy God (Romans 5:12-20). Old Testament sacrifices accustomed the Jews to

acknowledge their guilt and their need for divine grace and forgiveness. But it was only through Christ's perfect life and death that actual and permanent atonement was made for the sins of an evil world. By entering His own created universe and assuming the penalty for its sin, His infinite suffering has atoned for the natural and moral evils that resulted from His creatures' freedom to sin (Luke 22:20 ; John 6:53 ; Romans 3:25 ; 1 Corinthians 10:16 ; Ephesians 2:13 ; Hebrews 9:14 ; 1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus Christ was a human sacrifice, but not a sacrifice offered up by fallen mankind to God. He offered Himself up freely as a sacrifice by God to God for mankind (John 3:16 ; John 11:27-33 ; Romans 8:32 ; 1 John 4:9).

Unlike the sacrifices of the pagans, Old Testament sacrifices had to be offered in a spirit of humility and repentance (Numbers 15:22-31 ; Isaiah 66:1-4 ; Amos 5:21-24). It wasn't enough that they simply be performed as magical means of appeasement. [Back To Article](#)

"The object of the sacrifice is to establish a moral relation between the man as a personal being and God the absolute Spirit, to heal the separation between God and man that had been caused by sin. Now, as free personality is the soil out of which sin has sprung, so must the atonement be a work rooted in free personality as well. Being outside the sphere of moral freedom, the animal may be regarded as innocent and sinless; but for the same reason it cannot possess innocence in the true sense of the word and thus have a righteousness that could form an adequate satisfaction for the sin and guilt of man" (New Unger's Bible Dictionary, p.1100). [Back To Article](#)

"Who makes the propitiation? In a pagan context, it is always human beings who seek to avert the divine anger either by the meticulous performance of rituals, or by the recitation of magic formula, or by the offering of sacrifices (vegetable, animal, or even human). Such practices are thought to placate the offended deity. But the gospel begins with the outspoken assertion that nothing we can do, say, offer, or even contribute can compensate for our sins or turn away God's anger. There is no possibility of persuading, cajoling, or bribing God to forgive us, for we deserve nothing at His hands but judgment. Nor, as we have seen, has Christ by His sacrifice prevailed upon God to pardon us. No, the initiative has been taken by God Himself, in His sheer mercy and grace" (John Stott, The Atonement). [Back To Article](#)

<http://questions.org/attq/what-was-the-purpose-of-animal-sacrifices/>

Leviticus 16 - Hebrews 9

Day of Atonement: Forgiveness Made Complete in Jesus

In the book, Devil at My Heels, Louis Zamperini tells his incredible life story. As a World War II bombardier, he was captured by the Japanese and tortured as a POW for two years. Later, Zamperini met Jesus and was granted the power to forgive those who had beaten and tortured him.

God's heart pulses with forgiveness. He wants to show mercy and to forgive sin. The rituals of the Day of Atonement, performed only once a year, were a picture of the people of God securing His forgiveness and mercy. The symbolism of these rituals is rich with meaning, pointing to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus.

The author of Hebrews works to draw out the connections to the Old Testament priestly code and ceremony with the New Testament gospel. First, he explains what was insufficient in the old covenant. All of the prescriptions for the sacrifices, all the regulations for worship—these never did complete the full work of forgiveness. Those who came to the tabernacle with their offerings left with the nagging sense that they were still failures, undeserving of God's mercy. The blood of bulls and goats had a superficial kind of effect. They could declare a person ceremonially clean, but they could not fully absolve the conscience (v. 9).

Jesus, whose sacrifice was made in heaven, not the tabernacle, brought before God His own perfect blood. There was no need to bring sacrifice for His own sin, only the sin of the people. There was no need to repeat the sacrifice year after year. It was complete and final from the very beginning. And His blood had a power that the blood of bulls and goats did not: it had the power to free people from guilt and their terrifying sense of failure, and to commission them for the purpose of priestly service.

Apply the Word - Have you experienced the free and freeing forgiveness of God? Or does your conscience remain tortured, replaying scenes of your failures and past sins? God's desire is that you walk in the freedom of His forgiveness. Share with a friend how you're struggling to receive God's forgiveness, and have that friend pray for you.

Leviticus 16 Take The Time

Read: Matthew 9:18-26

Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me. —Mark 9:37

A legend is told about a rabbi from a small Jewish town. The people had gathered in the synagogue on the eve of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), but when the time came for the most important service of the Jewish year to begin, the rabbi was nowhere to be

found.

During the delay, a young mother went home to check on her little daughter, whom she had left sleeping. To her surprise, she saw the rabbi sitting quietly in a chair, holding the child in his arms. He had been walking by her home on the way to the synagogue when he heard the infant crying and stopped to help. He held the little one until she fell asleep.

There's a lesson for us in this rabbi's example and in Jesus' love for people (Mt. 9:18-26). In our hectic and busy lives, we tend to get so caught up with our own concerns that we lose our sense of compassion for others. We must take time to observe and respond to individuals—whether they are little children, parents, or older believers.

Somewhere amid all the demands on you as a servant of Jesus Christ, take the time to hold the hand of an aging believer, to comfort a tired mother, or to cradle a child until she sleeps.

How good to be an instrument
Of grace that He can use
At any time, in any place,
However He may choose! —Guirey

Great occasions for service come seldom—little ones surround us daily.

By David C. Egner

Leviticus 16:1-34

Fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. - Hebrews 3:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Let your imagination take you back several thousand years to the time of Israel's wilderness wandering. The golden calf incident showed you that God is holy and takes sin seriously. On occasion, you and your family have brought a goat to the tabernacle to be sacrificed as a sin offering. But throughout the year, there have been ways that you have sinned, not to mention thoughts that have been less than holy. So, you have been eagerly anticipating this day, the Day of Atonement.

Before you stands the great high priest Aaron. He is human like you, but he leads you into worship and sacrifices on your behalf. On his breastplate, you see the stone bearing the name of your tribe, together with eleven other stones (Ex. 28:21). As he offers sacrifices concerning his own sin (v. 6), he also sacrifices for your sins (Leviticus 16:15). As he sprinkles the blood of the sacrificed goat in the Most Holy Place, he makes atonement for your sin (Leviticus 16:16). Finally, he confesses your sins and all the people's sins over the live goat. As the goat is led away into the wilderness, you see the guilt of your sin removed (Leviticus 16:22).

The Day of Atonement made possible this restoration of the people that was essential for continued worship of the Lord God. Atonement, or the covering of sin, showed that shedding of blood was necessary. In other words, death was the price required of sinful humans. In the Old Testament, the blood shed was that of bulls and goats. But in the New Testament, we learn that only the blood shed by Jesus Christ could fully restore fellowship between God and man.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Reread today's passage, taking note of the function of the high priest, the sacrificed goat, and the scapegoat. Then read Isaiah 53:4, 5, 6, 7, 8. In what ways is Jesus, the Suffering Servant, like the goat sacrificed as a sin offering? In what ways is Jesus like the scapegoat who removes the guilt of our sins? Later in our study, we'll look at Jesus as the true High Priest, but for now, take some time to praise the Father for sending the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Leviticus 16:1-28

Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. - Hebrews 9:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

If you were an "average" Israelite standing by your tent on the Day of Atonement, you would be witnessing and participating in a very solemn and important event.

First of all, you would have been fasting since the evening before. This was to prepare your heart before the Lord, and because even minor household activities such as lighting a fire and cooking were prohibited.

You would also see the high priest in his special garments as two goats were brought before him at the door of the tabernacle, the "Tent of Meeting" (Leviticus 16:7). He would cast lots for the goats, choosing one for sacrifice and the other to be the "scapegoat" that would be released into the wilderness.

But the real focus and concern of this holy day was the moment when the high priest, carrying the blood of the sacrifice, stepped behind the curtain into the Most Holy Place by himself to make an atonement for the sins of Israel for another year (Leviticus 16:15, 16, 17).

It doesn't take much imagination to sense the hushed tension the Israelites must have felt as they waited to see if the Lord would accept the sacrifice and cover their sins for the coming year.

No one was allowed to go with the high priest into this small room where the presence of God resided. Since the priest faced death if he failed to follow the Lord's requirements, his garment was fringed with bells so the people could hear that he was still moving around. There was also a rope tied around his ankle, so he could be pulled from the inner sanctuary if anything went wrong.

What a relief it must have been when the high priest pushed aside the curtain and stepped out, and the word spread, ""The atonement has been made!"" The people also had a visible testimony to this when their sins were confessed over the head of the scapegoat and it was released in the wilderness, symbolically carrying away Israel's sins.

It's hard for us to imagine this ritual happening every year, with our forgiveness before God hanging in the balance each time. Praise God for Jesus' ""once-for-all"" sacrifice!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Although we do not have to bring animals or food to God as sacrifices to atone for sin, we are not empty-handed worshippers.

One of the sacrifices we, as New Testament Christians, can make is ""to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased"" (Heb. 13:16). Is there someone in your neighborhood or church who has a need you can help meet? Do what you can in the name of Christ, as a witness to the other person and a sacrifice of gratitude to Him.

Leviticus 16:6-10, 20-31

He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites. - Leviticus 16:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

In modern usage, the idiom "scapegoat" is negative. If the boss is "looking for a scapegoat," it means he wants someone to take the blame, no matter who deserves it. Perhaps the truth is too complex to understand or admit, or perhaps he himself is guilty of failure or wrongdoing and doesn't want to acknowledge it.

A "scapegoat" is someone who takes undeserved blame, usually unwillingly. This person may be powerless in the situation and is innocent of what he or she is being "punished" for. Most people would sympathize with a "scapegoat," but no one would want to be one.

The literal "scapegoat" of the Old Testament did indeed receive punishment for others, but it did so as part of God's directions for the sin offering. The animal was a hapless victim--as is the focus in the modern phrase--but the community identified with the animal in a redemptive ritual. Identifying with the sacrificial animal by laying hands on it symbolically, and even legally, transferred guilt to it.

The sin offering described in today's reading took place on the Day of Atonement, when Aaron as high priest represented the entire nation before the Lord. On this special day, two "scapegoats" were offered, one to be sacrificed and one to be sent from the camp into the desert. The animals became a substitutionary atonement, that is, they died or were exiled in place of the worshiper. By rights, this should have been the fate of the guilty people!

The first goat paid the price of sin, which is death. But what about the second goat? Why was it sent out of the camp? This goat symbolized the cleansing or removal of sin. "On this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins" (Lev. 16:30).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY On the Day of Atonement, the Israelites had to show their sincerity by fasting ("deny yourselves," Lev. 16:29). Many of us might not be familiar with the Bible's teaching on this discipline or how it applies to us today. In the Bible, who fasted, when, how, and why? What can be learned from these examples? Is there any teaching relevant to this topic? What is the

Leviticus 17

Should Christians Keep the Old Testament Law?

Dan Vander Lugt

The Mosaic law was not given to the Gentiles (Romans 2:1-16) but to the people of Israel (Exodus 20:1-17). It was intended to

reveal the goodness and wisdom of God, bring awareness of sin and guilt, and show the need for divine redemption (Leviticus 17:11; Romans 3:19-20; 7:7-13; 1 Timothy 1:7-11). The law, however, was not given as a performance-based means of salvation. Abraham was saved by faith long before the law was given through Moses (Hebrews 11).

Because Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law (Romans 5:5-8; 8:1-4), we are no longer under the external law of Moses. When we are obedient to the Holy Spirit, we manifest God's love and exhibit righteousness, which fulfills the law (Romans 13:8-10). The New Testament contains numerous passages that clarify the Christian believer's distinctly altered relationship to the Mosaic law (Galatians 3-5; Philippians 3; Colossians 2).

The Lord's declaration in Matthew 5:17 that He had come not "to abolish the law but to fulfill it" should be understood in its context. He said this just before explaining the spiritual meaning of the system of laws given to Israel by Moses. By contrast, the Pharisees of His day missed the spirit and intent of the law while overemphasizing conformity to external legal and ritual elements. Jesus emphasized the thoughts, motives, and attitudes behind the deeds. The contrast He set forth in verses Matthew 21-47 is not between the law and His own teaching but between the ideas of the Pharisees and the real meaning of the law. Christ had so much respect for the law that He would not cancel even one small demand until after He had fulfilled it.

However, Jesus Christ did fulfill the law both in His life and in His death. He obeyed it perfectly. He never broke even one of its commands. Of the entire human race, only He never sinned (see 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22). He also laid down His life to pay the penalty for sin demanded by the law (see John 3:16; 10:11-18; 11:50-52; Romans 5:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21). In all of this He became the reality of whom all the Old Testament sacrifices and rituals were only symbols.

When the life of God's perfect Lamb was given as the ultimate sacrifice for sinners, the Mosaic law, as a national, legally binding system came to an end. Second Corinthians 3:2-18 makes it clear that even the Ten Commandments were part of a "dispensation/ministry" that has passed away. If we read the law with the mindset of the old covenant between God and Israel, a veil covers our hearts (v. 18).

"But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:16-18).

The part of the Bible that contains all these rules and regulations still instructs us. But it is no longer binding on us because Jesus Christ fulfilled it.

While Christians are not bound to follow the ceremonial laws and regulations of the old covenant with Israel, they are obligated to live by the great moral principles it contains. The Old Testament law was itself based on unwritten moral principles that God had revealed to the human race throughout the ages (Romans 2:14-15). The works of the flesh and the works of the Spirit listed by the apostle Paul (Galatians 5:13-26) illustrate the impossibility of living a Spirit-filled life while violating the moral principles contained in the law given at Sinai. Rather than being governed by a law whose letter brought rebellion, awareness of sin, and death, those in Christ are governed by the living Spirit of God who instructs them in how to live in freedom and gratitude.

<http://questions.org/attq/should-christians-keep-the-old-testament-law/>

Leviticus 17:1-16

Be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life. - Dt 12:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

Oliver Cook has written the lyrics and music for a modern chorus entitled, "I Know a Fount." Its simple, direct words express a powerful truth: "I know a fount where sins are washed away; I know a place where night is turned to day. Burdens are lifted; blind eyes made to see. There's a wonder-working power in the blood of Calvary."

As we have seen already this month, blood symbolizes life. That's why the eating of blood is so strongly forbidden in today's reading. God is sovereign over all of life, so to eat blood was presumptuous, as if asserting an independent control or power over life. To eat blood would have also disrespected atonement or forgiveness, as well as the sanctity of life itself (Leviticus 17:11). Interestingly, the idea of blood as cleansing or purifying was not part of the thinking in any other ancient Near Eastern religion, so this symbolism was unique to the Jewish faith.

This month, we have been looking at Leviticus through the lenses of worship, holiness, and purity. One purpose of the Law's teachings on these topics was to establish the identity of God's people. That is, what made God's chosen people different from other peoples? What was different about them in terms of lifestyle, moral standards, and worship practices? We will consider these questions over the next week or so.

One of the distinctives of God's people was that they sacrificed only at the central place of worship, the tabernacle (or later, the temple). Individuals were not allowed to establish their own altars or offer private sacrifices. The priest was the proper representative, and he would offer the proper sacrifices in the proper ways. This rule protected the Israelites from temptations to idolatry, and the penalty for disobeying it was excommunication (vv. 3-4).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The Law commanded the Israelites not to eat blood out of respect for the sacredness of physical life. Spiritual life is also found in the blood--the blood of Christ. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Eph. 1:7; cf. 1Pe 1:18, 19).

Leviticus 17:1–9

Narrative Shift: Holiness for Everyone

In December 2011, troops were called to the Church of the Nativity to break up a fight between the monks. The Church, considered the traditional site of Jesus' birth, is maintained by three denominations—Roman Catholics, Armenians, and Greek Orthodox. Apparently, this particular day the denominational disagreements had gotten out of hand.

Christians visit this site and others, but we have never had one authorized holy place for worship. The Israelites had been instructed by God to worship at the tabernacle and later in the temple. They had been making animal sacrifices in the wilderness; this was not a new practice. Now that the tabernacle has been completed, however, God commanded that all sacrifices be brought to the tabernacle and offered to Him there. The penalty for not doing so was severe: exclusion from the community of Israel.

Centralizing the worship of God at the tabernacle was a protection against idolatry. God had declared the ways by which He could be approached. He had prescribed the kind of animals He would accept and the specific ways they were to be slaughtered and offered. Those who chose to disregard these prescriptions and offer animal sacrifices anywhere outside the tabernacle were actually participating in idol worship and guilty of bloodshed.

These nine verses that we read today form a kind of narrative shift between the first and second halves of Leviticus. The first sixteen chapters of Leviticus, or the Priestly Code, prescribe the rituals of worship and the requirements of the priests. The second half of the book, or the Holiness Code, turns its focus from the requirements of the priests to the holy commands given to the entire community.

Apply the Word - Old covenant practices have been abolished, but some principles remain true. In Leviticus, we see that God is addressing not individuals, but an entire community of people. This is also true in the New Testament where following Christ is not exclusively an individual pursuit but a call to identify oneself with a holy community of believers.

Leviticus 17:10–16

Blood: Life, Death, and Atonement

In 1945, a new doctrine was introduced into the dogma of beliefs held by Jehovah's Witnesses. It prohibits their adherents from accepting blood transfusions or donating their own blood for transfusion. Perhaps they had been reading from the pages of Leviticus.

The smell and sight of blood greeted any worshiper who came to the tabernacle. All throughout Leviticus, we've seen the critical importance of blood. For the ritual sacrifices, the priests took special care of the blood they drained from the slaughtered animals: most often, it was sprinkled on the altar of burnt offering, but at other times, it was sprinkled on the outside of the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Once a year, the high priest carried the blood of the sacrifices with him into the Holy of Holies, sprinkling it on the atonement cover of the ark.

At other times, blood was used in the ordination ceremonies of the priests. It was applied to the right ear, right thumb, and right big toe of the priests who were being anointed. Blood also figured in the cleansing rituals for both people and houses. Blood, having these special significances, was forbidden for consumption. Any person who hunted and slaughtered an animal must drain the blood and bury it.

All this reverence was paid to blood in all the ritual ceremonies of Leviticus because blood was a symbol of life. Because God and God alone is the giver and sustainer of life, people could not treat casually either human or animal life. Moreover, blood was used to make atonement. Sin incurred the penalty of death, and the only rescue from death came as a result of the principle of exchange, when life was given for death.

Apply the Word - Our key verse tells us that it's Jesus' blood that gives us confidence to enter the Most Holy Place. The exclusive and solemn privilege of the high priest granted only once a year is now ours to enjoy at any moment of every day. Take time to absorb the grace of God that has made this possible through Jesus, giving Him praise.

Leviticus 17:11-14; Hebrews 9:22

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. - Hebrews 9:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

Two days ago, we mentioned how blood transfusions save lives. But why? Scientifically speaking, why is blood so important?

You have about five liters of blood inside you, pumped around your body by your heart. Blood carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of your body, and returns with carbon dioxide for your lungs to exhale. Blood also transports vitamins and minerals, necessary hormones, and waste materials to their proper destinations in your body. New blood is continually being made inside your bones. Blood clots when you cut yourself, and white blood cells help fight various diseases.

Our Creator designed blood to do all these amazing tasks! The early Israelites knew that "the life of a creature is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11; cf. Deut. 12:23). That also helps explain the spiritual symbolism of blood and why the Old Testament required "blood sacrifice" for sin. Only blood could make atonement (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22; cf. Jn. 6:53, 54).

That's one of the key principles behind the burnt offering. The blood of the sacrificial animal had to be caught in a bowl and sprinkled against the sides of the altar. Today's readings are explicit--blood is the effective element, that which actually operates to make atonement. Blood is therefore sacred, and the Israelites were forbidden to eat or drink it. By contrast, many pagans did so, believing that they gained strength by absorbing animals' (or enemies') lives through their blood.

Why is blood necessary for forgiveness or atonement? This principle can be traced at least as far back as Noah (Gen. 9:4, 5, 6) and likely before (see Gen. 4:10). The reason is that sin deserves death--a price must be paid. Life for life must be given to satisfy perfect justice.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We have an unusual suggestion for today's application: blood donation. If your age and physical health allow you to do so, consider donating blood at a local hospital, blood bank, or Red Cross office. You'll be giving someone a gift of life, particularly if you have a rare blood type or are a universal donor.

Leviticus 18:1-30

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. - Leviticus 18:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last summer, a new book was released with the provocative title, *The 50-Mile Rule: Your Guide to Infidelity and Extramarital Etiquette*.

The author told one interviewer that the book contains "serious information presented in a fun way. There are no books out there on this subject in a format that is not judgmental. I want to help people make smart decisions. . . . Affairs are wrong. But the reality is that people are having them anyway. So you have to meet people where they are. For a lot of people morality doesn't end up in [the equation]. If you are going about your business in a discreet way and you are continuing to take care of your wife and, most importantly, your children, there is no reason to feel guilt."

Certainly our culture is confused about standards of right and wrong! The people of Israel faced a Canaanite culture that was even worse, however. Against the subjectivism, permissiveness, and outright perverseness of sexual behavior in the world, the Law set clear standards and boundaries for the people of God.

Forbidden behavior included incest, child sacrifice, homosexuality, bestiality, and adultery. Incest included sex with close relatives and family members (verse 18 may have the Jacob-Leah-Rachel episode in mind). Child sacrifice was done by the Ammonites as part of the worship of Molech, and from its placement here we might infer that the ritual involved sexuality in some way. As for the practice of homosexuality, God's Word is clear and unequivocal that it is sin (cf. Ro 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

What was the punishment for disobedience in this area? If the Israelites wanted to see a demonstration of the answer, they simply needed to see how God was about to judge the Canaanites! Their immoral behavior was so despicable that the land itself needed

purifying—colorfully, God said it would vomit out the wickedness of those people (Leviticus 18:24, 25).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In our society, in which promiscuity, pornography, and sexually transmitted diseases are relatively common, the call to sexual purity and marital faithfulness is more urgent than ever. We need God's help to guard our bodies, minds, and souls from pervasive immorality.

Leviticus 18:1-5 A Book For Pilgrims

By David C. McCasland

You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God. —Leviticus 18:4

Many people who determine to read the Bible through in a year get bogged down and quit about halfway through Leviticus. After the fascinating narrative in Genesis and the dramatic deliverance in Exodus, Leviticus seems to unfold with all the excitement of a technical manual for ancient clergymen. But don't let the priestly details fool you. This is a textbook for pilgrims, a life-guide for people who have been delivered from their past and are on their way toward a glorious, God-planned future.

Near the center of the book we find God's charge to His people. He told them they must not imitate the people of Egypt where they had been, nor the practices of those in Canaan where they were going. In Leviticus 18:4, He said to them, "You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God."

Leviticus is also filled with word pictures of God's salvation, painted almost 1,500 years before Jesus was born. Every offering and sacrifice points to the cross of Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

On your journey from Genesis to Revelation, don't let Leviticus stop you. Instead, let it be a wonderful bridge that takes you from the sacrifices to the Savior.

The offerings of animals,

Were made in days of old,

To point us to the Lamb of God,

His sacrifice foretold. —Fitzhugh

The Old Testament altar points to the New Testament cross.

Leviticus 18:1-30

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways. - Leviticus 18:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

Boethius, a philosopher from the sixth century, wrote, "Who would give a law to lovers? Love is unto itself a higher law." Gay rights activists use it as a slogan endorsing homosexuality and transgender lifestyles. They take offense at any effort to place restrictions on whom they love or how they express it.

Scripture supports the notion that law cannot prohibit love (Gal. 5:22-23). But it's a mistake to equate sexual activity with love. While love is a universal command to be obeyed, the Bible clearly condemns certain sexual behaviors. The people of Canaan had been guilty of sexual immorality, and God warned Israel to abstain from that perversion. Their sin violated the land to the point that it vomited out the people to rid itself of their evil. At that time, God demanded the death penalty or at the very least a form of social excommunication for anyone who violated these commands against incest, homosexuality, or bestiality (Lev. 20:10ff).

These commands weren't just special "Old Testament only" restrictions reserved for Israel alone to set them apart. God repeatedly called the acts detestable or an abomination. God's views on homosexuality haven't changed. But the method of punishment from the Old Testament was specifically assigned to Israel as an extension of God's judgment.

Today, we are not called to be executors of God's wrath. We are followers of Christ, who was sent to save the world, not to judge it (John 3:17). And if Jesus, who is blameless in every way, was not on a mission of judgment, how can we who still wrestle with our own sin accuse anyone? Paul chastised his readers who passed judgment on immoral people, because no one is faultless (Rom. 2:1).

We need to recognize today's reading for what it is and is not. It does declare that sexual perversion is an abomination in God's

eyes. Not all sex between consenting adults is permissible (even most gay rights activists condemn incest or adultery). But this passage is not a waiver of the command to love. If we loved only the righteous, we would love no one (Rom. 3:10).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Debate is rampant in political and religious circles about what rights should be granted to homosexuals, but one right that no one should have to fight for is the right to receive love from the body of Christ. If you have a hard time feeling compassion for people trapped in sin, ask God to soften your heart. Remember that the blood of Christ has paid the penalty for your sin, and you, too, have been the recipient of unspeakable grace.

Leviticus 18; 19:9–18

Sexual Ethics and Economic Justice

Entire denominations are fracturing over the issue of homosexuality in the church, some defending traditional biblical interpretations that forbid homosexual practice, others going so far as to ordain practicing homosexuals.

Today's reading confronts us with sexual ethics. What is and is not forbidden? Clearly, this passage protects marriage and prohibits the practices of incest, homosexuality, adultery, and any sexual contact between humans and animals. These are associated with the cultural mores of the heathen nations, most specifically Egypt and Canaan (vv. 23–30).

God insists that He is their God, and they must obey His authority. He intends they be a holy people, distinctive not only because of the way they worship but also for how they conduct their relationships. His prohibitions aren't exclusive to regulating private, intimate relationships; He also insists on fair business practice and just economic policy. It's important to notice that both are equally important to God. Obedience, both in the private and public sector, is an expression of fearing the Lord and acknowledging that He is witness to everything we do—in the bedroom as well as in the field.

Provision is made to care for the poor and the immigrant. God's people were to be lax when harvesting and gleaning; what they left behind after a first gleaning was to be left for the poor. All relationships were to depend on the principles of fairness and honesty. Employers were required to pay fair wages. Everyone was commanded to care for the less fortunate and the handicapped. The essence of the Law is summarized in verse 18: "Love your neighbor as yourself." To keep sexual expression within the confines of marriage, to take care of the marginalized—these were ways to honor the Lord and honor one another.

Apply the Word - As Christians, we are right to defend the sacredness of marriage. But just as vehemently, we must also speak up against injustice such as global poverty, racial discrimination, and economic injustice. As reflected in our passage today, we see God's great concern for both sets of issues, neither of which should be ignored.

Leviticus 19:1-18

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. - Leviticus 19:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1988, Robert Fulghum made the literary claim, "All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten." The main idea behind his essay was that since the governing principles of life—sharing, being nice, cleaning up after yourself, and maintaining a sense of wonder—are taught at the earliest stages of social development, the lessons should be obvious to us throughout our lives. Fulghum's observations made his book of essays an instant success and put it atop the best seller list for almost two years.

So how could a book of such elementary rules come as new information to adults? Because selfish pursuits tend to distract us from the truth that we expect our young children to grasp. And selfish pursuits are the favorite pastime of humankind.

When God delivered the law to Israel through Moses, it was one of the first acts of spelling out such a comprehensive list of laws for men. But even without the law, the human conscience has always informed men about what is right and wrong in God's eyes (Rom. 2:14-15). So commandments such as "Do not deceive one another" (v. 11) and "Do not defraud your neighbor" (v. 13) hardly came as a surprise to Israel. Still, having the commandments in writing gave a permanence and finality that any man, woman, or child could understand.

Among the precepts found in this chapter is an interesting command against overly thorough harvesting. Not only were the people to give a tenth of their harvest as a tithe to the Lord (Lev. 27:30), but they were also to leave whatever part of their crop remained after the first pass. It was a gesture of generosity shown to the poor and vagrants passing through the land. You might remember that Ruth would later become the beneficiary of that particular bit of legislation (Ruth 2). In this way, a provision intended for the poor gave food to a woman from whom the kings of Israel, and the King of Kings, would descend.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Another command found in this passage is also one of the hardest to obey: the warning against carrying anger and the exhortation to rebuke a neighbor's sin. It sounds so simple, but it requires a mature control over our emotions. If a neighbor is in sin, even if he or she sins against you, you must avoid both the temptation to dwell on your anger and the desire to look the other way completely. Ask the Lord for the courage and the control to confront the person lovingly.

Leviticus 19:1-37

Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. - Leviticus 18:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

One morning at breakfast, four-year-old Hannah complained about the food in front of her. Her dad admonished her not to gripe, especially when so many people in the world are starving or struggling to get enough to eat.

Her mom later said, "She quietly soaked in the comments. Later that day she came to me with the entire contents of her piggy bank: \$3.47. She said, 'I'd like to give this to the Salvation Army to help the poor people.' We were humbled and thankful."

Several of the miscellaneous rules in today's reading show God's heart for justice and the poor (cf. Ps. 146:7, 8, 9). For example, harvesters were commanded not to reap their fields completely, but to leave enough for poor people to glean food. Employers were instructed to pay out daily wages to their hired men, since they relied on the money to provide immediate needs for their families. Before God, every person stands equal, and the same should hold true in human law: "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly" (Leviticus 19:15).

Other rules listed here include provisions to protect those who may be weaker or less able to protect themselves. For example, people were not to discriminate against impaired individuals, including the deaf and blind. They were to show proper respect and care for the elderly. They were also to give fair treatment to non-Israelites who lived with them, which would have been quite unusual in that day and age (Leviticus 19:33, 34).

Some of these commands are repetitions of rules stated previously, including the Ten Commandments and instructions for the sacrifices. Others reinforced moral or spiritual points, such as the dictate against witchcraft and the instructions that prevented the Israelites from following pagan cultic practices (Leviticus 19:27, 28).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In this reading we have seen provisions in the Law for the well-being of the poor. Can you come up with a modern application?

Leviticus 19:1–8, 19–37

The Language of Sin and Holiness in Leviticus

Author and journalist A. J. Jacobs, who describes himself as a nominal Jew, devoted an entire year to obeying every one of the 613 Old Testament laws. His book, *The Year of Living Biblically*, describes his quest to "follow the Bible as literally as possible . . . without picking and choosing."

Leviticus 19 gives us a glimpse at the challenge that A. J. Jacobs faced and the questions he must have asked along the way. Some of the Levitical commands seem logical, such as the ones governing sexual practice and condemning idol worship. Other commands, like those that forbid a field be sown with two kinds of seed or those that insist on certain hairstyles, seem utterly strange. What could God have meant in all this seemingly haphazard, "Thou shall," and "Thou shall not"?

We turn to Leviticus 19 to introduce us, not only to the complexities of studying this book but also to its evident themes. Some things are clear. First, the book of Leviticus is a book where God, as the holy authority over His people, is at the center. The phrase, "And the Lord said to Moses," becomes its familiar refrain. These words spoken are God's words. These commands are God's. The authority is His and His alone, and His authority is grounded in His work of redemptive love and rescue.

Clear categories that emerge in the book of Leviticus: the clean and the unclean, the holy and the profane. In essence, as much as the holiness of God takes center stage in Leviticus, alongside it is the chronic reminder of humanity's sin. What Leviticus does is to provide prescriptions, given by God, for bridging the divide and bringing sinful men and women near to Him. Leviticus is not only law but grace—an expression of the gracious inclination of God to provide a means for atonement.

Apply the Word - Jacobs makes no claims to be a "believer" after his year's experiment. But he must have discovered the sheer impossibility of keeping even one of God's commands. In the book of James, we're reminded, "Whoever keeps the whole law and

yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (2:10). What desperate need we have for a Savior!

Leviticus 19:9-15

"KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF"

"You shall not steal." Exodus 20:15

Tom and Pauline Nichter were a homeless, jobless couple who had been living in their car or with relatives for months. So the wallet they found containing \$100 bills looked like a windfall. But they gave it all back to the tourist who lost it. "We could have used that money," said Pauline. "But we weren't brought up that way, and we didn't want our son brought up that way."

If everyone practiced honesty like that, it would revolutionize society. Employee theft of goods and time would stop. Shoplifting would go out of style. Overcharging for goods and services would end. Prices could be lowered. And we would all have more of what is rightfully ours.

The eighth commandment reveals God's desire for that kind of society. It's based on the principle that everything belongs to God and that when we cheat an institution or a person we are stealing from the Lord. It also protects everyone's right to be a property owner in the only sense that God allows -- not to amass more and more for personal gain but to manage wisely what is His for the good of others.

A living relationship with Christ can keep us from being thieves. As that relationship grows, He will teach us how to be givers and not takers. - D J De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

To take from others what is theirs
Is robbing from the Lord;
For all they have is from His hand --
It's theirs by His own word.-DJD

Christians don't own their wealth -- they OWE it.

Leviticus 19:16, 17 (Morning and Evening)

"Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people .. Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. " - Leviticus 19:16, 17

Tale-bearing emits a threefold poison; for it injures the teller, the hearer, and the person concerning whom the tale is told. Whether the report be true or false, we are by this precept of God's Word forbidden to spread it. The reputations of the Lord's people should be very precious in our sight, and we should count it shame to help the devil to dishonour the Church and the name of the Lord. Some tongues need a bridle rather than a spur. Many glory in pulling down their brethren, as if thereby they raised themselves. Noah's wise sons cast a mantle over their father, and he who exposed him earned a fearful curse. We may ourselves one of these dark days need forbearance and silence from our brethren, let us render it cheerfully to those who require it now. Be this our family rule, and our personal bond-SPEAK EVIL OF NO MAN.

The Holy Spirit, however, permits us to censure sin, and prescribes the way in which we are to do it. It must be done by rebuking our brother to his face, not by railing behind his back. This course is manly, brotherly, Christlike, and under God's blessing will be useful. Does the flesh shrink from it? Then we must lay the greater stress upon our conscience, and keep ourselves to the work, lest by suffering sin upon our friend we become ourselves partakers of it. Hundreds have been saved from gross sins by the timely, wise, affectionate warnings of faithful ministers and brethren. Our Lord Jesus has set us a gracious example of how to deal with erring friends in his warning given to Peter, the prayer with which he preceded it, and the gentle way in which he bore with Peter's boastful denial that he needed such a caution.

Leviticus 19:36 (Morning and Evening)

"Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have." — Leviticus 19:36

Weights, and scales, and measures were to be all according to the standard of justice. Surely no Christian man will need to be reminded of this in his business, for if righteousness were banished from all the world beside, it should find a shelter in believing hearts. There are, however, other balances which weigh moral and spiritual things, and these often need examining. We will call in the officer to-night.

The balances in which we weigh our own and other men's characters, are they quite accurate? Do we not turn our own ounces of goodness into pounds, and other persons' bushels of excellence into pecks? See to weights and measures here, Christian. The

scales in which we measure our trials and troubles, are they according to standard? Paul, who had more to suffer than we have, called his afflictions light, and yet we often consider ours to be heavy—surely something must be amiss with the weights! We must see to this matter, lest we get reported to the court above for unjust dealing. Those weights with which we measure our doctrinal belief, are they quite fair? The doctrines of grace should have the same weight with us as the precepts of the word, no more and no less; but it is to be feared that with many one scale or the other is unfairly weighted. It is a grand matter to give just measure in truth. Christian, be careful here. Those measures in which we estimate our obligations and responsibilities look rather small. When a rich man gives no more to the cause of God than the poor contribute, is that a just ephah and a just hin? When ministers are half starved, is that honest dealing? When the poor are despised, while ungodly rich men are held in admiration, is that a just balance? Reader, we might lengthen the list, but we prefer to leave it as your evening's work to find out and destroy all unrighteous balances, weights, and measures.

Leviticus 19:18

GRUDGES

A little grudge can create a huge gap in human relationships. The Philippines Daily Express reported on a couple in England who had lived together as "silent partners" for 12 years. The wife was finally seeking a divorce. "For 12 extraordinary years they had lived their lives so that they wouldn't have to meet each other," said lawyer Simon King, who was handling the case. "When one would come into the house, the other would leave. And when they did communicate with each other, it was with notes." They had lived happily together for the first 18 years of their marriage and had raised a son. For the last 12 years, however, they didn't speak to each other. Ironically, neither one could remember what the hassle had been all about.

LEVITICUS 19:18

"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." (Leviticus 19:18)

One morning my wife and I awoke to find a note from our neighbors on our front door. It read in part: "We've gone away until tomorrow night. Please look after Cleo (their family dog) for us. If she howls and want to go inside, a spare key is hanging on a nail by the garage door. Thanks." I was glad to read that note because it meant we had built a strong bridge of trust in the two years since they moved in.

The Israelites The Israelites were instructed not to rob their neighbors (Leviticus 19:13), to judge righteously (v. 15), to not do anything that would threaten the lives of their neighbors (v. 16), and to love and forgive them (v. 18). In this way they would give witness to the nations that Jehovah was the true God and that those who worshiped Him were loving, honest, and just in their personal relationships and in their business dealings. What was true for Israel is also true for Christians. We too should love our neighbors, and that includes more than just the people who live next door. Jesus defined our neighbor as anyone in need (Luke 10:29-37). We might have to go out of our way. It might mean making an emergency run to the hospital or giving up a half gallon of milk when we're running low. But a good neighbor policy fulfills God's command. It may even help bring someone to Christ. —D C Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, fill me today with desire to do good, not harm, to everyone I encounter.

Leviticus 19:10, 33-35; 26:27-45

Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt. - Exodus 23:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Anyone who has ever traveled knows how vulnerable the experience of being an "alien," or foreigner, can be. This is particularly true if you don't speak the native language. It's easy to feel misunderstood, or even wonder if you're being taken advantage of somehow. For most of us, such experiences are temporary. There were, however, a number of alien residents within Israel, and we see the Lord's concern for these foreigners throughout the Mosaic Law.

Leviticus 19 is sometimes called the Community Code, because of its focus on farming and commercial practices, but it's also part of a larger section called the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26). The placement of Leviticus 19 within the Holiness Code shows that every part of life in Israel somehow concerned holiness, even treatment of foreigners.

In Leviticus 19:10, we find instructions to leave some grapes for the poor and the alien, revealing God's heart for those most vulnerable to deprivation and exploitation. It was often difficult for foreigners to make a living, because they didn't have inheritance rights or access to land. We will see a similar provision for foreigners in the story of Ruth (see Dt. 24:19, 20, 21, 22). The basis for Israel's treatment of foreigners was the remembrance of what it was like to be a foreigner in Egypt (Leviticus 19:33, 34).

The passage from Leviticus 26 outlines the disaster that would befall the nation if it failed to keep God's ordinances. First, notice the horror of exile; instead of blessing the nations, Israel would be scattered among them to die (vv. 33, 38). This was the complete reversal of the covenant blessings and the consequence of failing to be the kind of witness the nation was intended to be.

Second, notice the link between Israel's actions and God's reputation among the nations. We have already seen how the nations "watched" as God delivered Israel from Egypt. In a similar way, God's faithfulness to His covenant promises could be observed by all the nations. Thus even when Israel sinned, God would remember His covenant "in the sight of the nations" (v. 45).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's surprising how much of the Pentateuch addresses the concerns of foreigners. Using a concordance, look up "alien," "foreigner," and "stranger." What are some of the specific concerns that are addressed? Ask yourself who the foreigners are in your midst. At one level, this could include anyone outside the body of Christ, but it could also include those from another country. Perhaps there are international students at a nearby college that you could befriend. Or maybe your church could help foreigners learn English.

Leviticus 19:9-15 Buried Treasure

By Randy Kilgore

Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law. —Psalm 119:18

Growing up in rural Missouri where American outlaw Jesse James (1847–1882) had lived, my friends and I were convinced he had buried treasure nearby. We wandered the woods in dreamy hopes of digging up a saddlebag or other treasure. Often we'd run into an elderly man chopping firewood with a giant axe. For years, we watched this mysterious "axe man" trudge the highways in search of soda cans, his own kind of treasure. Redeeming the cans for cash, he'd retire to his run-down, roofless, unpainted shack with a bottle in a brown paper bag. After his death, his family found bundles of money stored in his ramshackle home.

Like the axe man who ignored his treasure, we Christians sometimes ignore parts of Scripture. We forget that all of Scripture is ours to use; that each passage has a reason for its inclusion in the canon. Who knew Leviticus held so much buried treasure? In an efficient seven verses in chapter 19, God teaches us how to provide for the poor and disabled without stripping them of their dignity (vv.9-10,14), how to run our businesses ethically (vv.11,13,15), and how to embed respect for Him into our daily life (v.12).

If a few verses can contain so much treasure, think of all that can be ours if we dig into our Bibles every day.

For Further Study Mine the treasure in Leviticus 19, and then search for more treasure in other parts of Leviticus to put into practice in your Christian walk.

Every word in the Bible was placed with a purpose; any part you've not read is your buried treasure.

Leviticus 19:9-15 On Helping Others

November 14, 2013

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. —Leviticus 19:9

When snowstorms bury the grazing lands, ranchers must feed their herds by hand. As hay is tossed from wagons and trucks, the strongest animals bull their way to the front. Timid or sickly animals get little or no feed unless the rancher intervenes.

Workers in refugee camps and food pantries report a similar pattern. When they open their stores to those in need, the weak and timid may not make it to the front of the line. Like the ranchers, these human lifelines must take steps to ensure that their services reach the feeble, weary, and sick at the edge of society's attention.

They are carrying out a principle set forth by God long ago. In Leviticus 19, Moses instructed Israel's farmers and vintners to leave portions of their crops so the poor and the stranger could have something to eat (vv.9-10).

We too can serve as caretakers to the weak and weary. Whether we're teachers coaxing quiet students to open up, workers coming alongside a struggling co-worker, prisoners looking out for new arrivals, or parents showing attention to their children, we have ways to honor God by helping others.

As we seek to serve those in need, may the grace of God that reached us in our need move us to reach out to others in theirs.

Father, open my eyes to those struggling to have

enough food, enough love, enough hope; then open my

heart to find ways to help them receive love, using my hands in service to them—and through them, to You.

By serving others, we serve God.

Leviticus 19:9-15 "KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF"

"You shall not steal." Exodus 20:15

Tom and Pauline Nichter were a homeless, jobless couple who had been living in their car or with relatives for months. So the wallet they found containing \$100 bills looked like a windfall. But they gave it all back to the tourist who lost it. "We could have used that money," said Pauline. "But we weren't brought up that way, and we didn't want our son brought up that way."

If everyone practiced honesty like that, it would revolutionize society. Employee theft of goods and time would stop. Shoplifting would go out of style. Overcharging for goods and services would end. Prices could be lowered. And we would all have more of what is rightfully ours.

The eighth commandment reveals God's desire for that kind of society. It's based on the principle that everything belongs to God and that when we cheat an institution or a person we are stealing from the Lord. It also protects everyone's right to be a property owner in the only sense that God allows -- not to amass more and more for personal gain but to manage wisely what is His for the good of others.

A living relationship with Christ can keep us from being thieves. As that relationship grows, He will teach us how to be givers and not takers. - D J De Haan (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

To take from others what is theirs

Is robbing from the Lord;

For all they have is from His hand --

It's theirs by His own word.-DJD

Christians don't own their wealth -- they OWE it.

Leviticus 19:11-16 Whisperers

By M.R. De Haan

You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people. —Leviticus 19:16

According to persistent reports, I have divorced my wife and have married a 20-year-old. I am also reputed to visit taverns and was pulled from my wrecked car so intoxicated that I couldn't stand up. I have been accused of being involved in every conceivable kind of racket and scandal. And worse yet, these stories have been believed by some people.

Do these things bother me? Not at all. I just feel sorry for the scandal mongers who spread these choice bits of gossip. I can say with David, "All who hate me whisper together against me" (Ps. 41:7). I take some comfort in knowing that this has been the experience of many of God's servants.

Some time ago a friend told me of a particularly sordid rumor about me. When I heard it, I jumped up and shouted, "Praise the Lord!" My friend was surprised until I quoted to him the words of Jesus: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake" (Mt. 5:11). He added, "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!" (Lk. 6:23).

If you are serving the Lord, and people are spreading rumors about you (Lev. 19:16), remember that what counts most is not what people say about you but what the Lord in heaven knows about you. And then rejoice! —M. R. De Haan, M.D. (founder of RBC Ministries)

When lies and rumors spread and seek

To hurt and injure you,

Don't fret and worry—trust the Lord

Because He knows what's true. —Sper

He who gossips to you about others will gossip to others about you!

Leviticus 19:18 GRUDGES

A little grudge can create a huge gap in human relationships. The Philippines Daily Express reported on a couple in England who had lived together as “silent partners” for 12 years. The wife was finally seeking a divorce. “For 12 extraordinary years they had lived their lives so that they wouldn’t have to meet each other,” said lawyer Simon King, who was handling the case. “When one would come into the house, the other would leave. And when they did communicate with each other, it was with notes.” They had lived happily together for the first 18 years of their marriage and had raised a son. For the last 12 years, however, they didn’t speak to each other. Ironically, neither one could remember what the hassle had been all about.

Leviticus 19:18 Bearing A Grudge

By Dennis J. De Haan

Read: Genesis 27:35-41

You shall not . . . bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. —Leviticus 19:18

English essayist and critic Charles Lamb (1775-1834) had this to say about a person he did not want to meet: “Don’t introduce me to that man! I want to go on hating him, and I can’t hate someone I know.”

Harboring malice robs us of close relationships with others. Jacob cheated his brother and stole his birthright. Understandably, Esau was angry. But what he did with his anger became a serious problem, not only for Jacob but for Esau himself. For years he harbored a deep resentment that robbed him of a warm relationship with his brother.

Grudges can also create a cold, icy environment in churches, and this often keeps people away. Pastor George Gardiner asked the members of a congregation he visited why their church wasn’t growing. He received this reply: “There’s an elder in this church who holds a grudge.”

Instead of bearing a grudge, we must bare it before God in confession and ask for deliverance. We must begin praying for the person toward whom we have negative feelings and, if possible, take practical steps to resolve our differences. We must find ways to show love.

Resentment will fade when the object of our ill will becomes the special object of our goodwill.

When anger lingers in our heart,

It poisons all we think and do;

But faith seeks ways to show God's love

And keeps our spirit strong and true. —D. De Haan

A grudge is one thing that does not get better when it is nursed.

Leviticus 19:11-18 It Is My Business

By Marvin Williams

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge . . . , but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. —Leviticus 19:18

In 1955, when the South was still highly segregated, Emmett Till, a black teenager from Chicago, visited relatives in Mississippi. After Emmett “dared” to talk to a white woman, two white men brutally murdered him. An all-white, male jury found the two “not guilty”—after deliberating for barely an hour. The two men later confessed to the crime in a Life magazine article.

Following the verdict, Emmett’s mother said, “Two months ago I had a nice apartment in Chicago. I had a good job. I had a son. When something happened to Negroes in the South, I said, ‘That’s their business, not mine.’ Now I know how wrong I was. The murder of my son has shown me that what happens to any of us, anywhere in the world, had better be the business of us all.”

Making another’s concerns our own is what Leviticus 19:18 calls us to do: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus quotes this verse and interprets it as not placing any limitations on loving those around us (Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:25-37). Our neighbor doesn’t just mean someone close by; it’s anyone who has a need. We are to care for others as we care for ourselves.

To love our neighbor means to make the persecution, suffering, and injustice of our fellow human beings our own. It is the business of all who follow Christ.

For Further Thought How can we be a good neighbor? Be respectful to all. Lend a hand. Volunteer. Join a neighborhood association. Speak up when others are treated unjustly.

Compassion puts love into action.

Leviticus 19:11-18 Zero Tolerance

By Marvin Williams

You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people. —Leviticus 19:16

When Shayla McKnight applied for a job for an online printing company, she was surprised to learn that they had a zero-tolerance policy for gossip. The employees are encouraged to confront one another, instead of gossip about their fellow employees. If employees are caught gossiping, they are reprimanded, and if they continue, they are fired.

Long before this kind of policy was ever implemented by a company, God spoke of His own zero-tolerance policy for gossip and slander among His people (Lev. 19:16). Idle talk that foolishly or maliciously spreads rumors or facts about another person was forbidden.

Solomon said that speaking badly of others could have disastrous effects. It betrays confidence (Prov. 11:13), separates close friends (16:28; 17:9), shames and saddles you with a bad reputation (25:9-10), and perpetually fuels the embers of a quarrel (26:20-22). People rarely can undo the damage their untrue words have done to a neighbor.

Let's ask the Lord to help us not to engage in harmful talk about others. He wants us to set a guard over our mouths so that we'll instead speak all the good we know about everybody.

Many things that others say Are not for us to tell; Help us, Lord, to watch our tongue— We need to guard it well. —Branon

Destroy gossip by ignoring it.

Leviticus 19:15-18 The Tests Of Criticism

By Richard De Haan

Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. —Proverbs 27:6

After a church service in which the minister had preached about spiritual gifts, he was greeted at the door by a woman who said, "Pastor, I believe I have the gift of criticism."

He responded, "Do you remember the person in Jesus' parable who had the one talent? Do you recall what he did with it?"

"Yes," replied the woman, "he went out and buried it" (see Matthew 25:18).

With a smile, the pastor suggested, "Go, and do likewise!"

If criticism is not given lovingly and with an honest desire to help, it can be cruel and destructive. The words of Leviticus 19:17, "You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him," are preceded by warnings against spreading slander and nursing hatred.

You can determine when you should criticize and when you shouldn't by asking yourself three questions:

Am I motivated by a desire to help the other person?

Am I planning to face him honestly, but gently?

Am I doing this for the Lord, or because I enjoy being critical?

If your goal is to help, if your motives are loving, and if your desire is to please God, then go ahead and criticize. If you can't pass these tests, keep quiet.

We're building up or tearing down

In everything we do;

Are we in the construction gang

Or on the wrecking crew? —Anon.

He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help. —Abraham Lincoln

Leviticus 19:18 Alternatives To Revenge

By Marvin Williams

Read: Deuteronomy 19:16-21 Matthew 5:38-45

You shall not take vengeance . . . , but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. —Leviticus 19:18

One Sunday while preaching, a pastor was accosted and punched by a man. He continued preaching, and the man was arrested. The pastor prayed for him and even visited him in jail a few days later. What an example of the way to respond to insult and injury!

While there is a place for self-defense, personal revenge was forbidden in the Old Testament: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18; see also Deut. 32:35). It was also forbidden by Jesus and the apostles (Matt. 5:38-45; Rom. 12:17; 1 Peter 3:9).

The Old Testament law exacted like for like (Ex. 21:23-25; Deut. 19:21), which ensured that judicial punishment was not unjust or malicious. But there was a larger principle looming when it came to personal revenge: Justice must be done, but it must be left in the hands of God or the authorities ordained by God.

Instead of returning injury and insult, may we live by Christ-honoring and Spirit-empowered alternatives: Live at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18), submit to a spiritual mediator (1 Cor. 6:1-6), and leave it in the hands of authorities and, most of all, in God's hands.

Lord, when I'm troubled by the insult of another, help me to let go of my desire for revenge. May I seek justice but also realize that it will happen in Your time. I want to learn to overcome evil with good. Amen.

Leave final justice in the hands of a just God.

Leviticus 19:18 Love Needs Expression

By Haddon W. Robinson

Read: Matthew 22:34-40

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. —Leviticus 19:18

Somehow the command to love doesn't get through to us. We may confess that we lack a strong faith, but seldom do we admit that we are deficient in love. Perhaps we feel we're as loving as the next person, and maybe a little bit more.

After all, we're sensitive to the hurts of other people. Our hearts go out to battered wives and abused children when we read about them in the newspaper. We shift uneasily in front of our TVs when we see little children sobbing with hunger or sitting in silent despair beyond crying.

But deep inside we know that genuine caring reaches beyond feelings to action. Caring, like steam or electricity, isn't worth much unless something happens as a result of it. Love without deeds is useless, just as talent not demonstrated in creative ways is wasted. Both must be expressed or they are no better than a myth.

Because we can't do everything, we often don't do anything. If you want to be a loving person, don't start by taking on the needs of the whole world. Start with caring about one person and build from there.

You can't do everything, but you can do something. What you can do, you should do. Today, determine that in the power and grace of God you will do it.

Let us be Christ's true disciples,

Looking to another's need,

Making stony pathways smoother

By a gentle word or deed. -Thorson

In a world that couldn't care less, we are to be people who couldn't care more.

LEVITICUS 19:18

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One morning my wife and I awoke to find a note from our neighbors on our front door. It read in part: "We've gone away until tomorrow night. Please look after Cleo (their family dog) for us. If she howls and want to go inside, a spare key is hanging on a nail by the garage door. Thanks." I was glad to read that note because it meant we had built a strong bridge of trust in the two years since they moved in.

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Lord, fill me today with desire to do good, not harm, to everyone I encounter.

Leviticus 19:28

Should a Christian Get a Tattoo?

Dan Vander Lugt

Contemporary Issues, Ethicsbarbaric, fashions, paganism, tatto, tattoos

Tattoos are remarkably popular right now. In the past in the West, they were viewed as desirable only within limited social groups like soldiers, sailors, gang members, and bikers. Acceptance was generally confined to males of lower economic classes. For professionals or women they would be unthinkable.

There are a number of cultural and religious reasons that tattoos were viewed negatively by past generations in the West, reasons that I'll summarize a bit further on. But regardless of our earlier Western distaste towards tattoos, they are no longer sought out only by enlisted military men, gang members, and bikers, but are popular among younger people regardless of social class, gender, or religious background.

Most young people who get tattoos do so innocently, with no intention of expressing rebellion against core values of their parents or religious community. They usually know little or nothing about traditional society's reluctance to approve tattoos. Current fashion makes tattoos appear attractive and desirable, so young people get them. With this in mind, I want to make clear that by explaining why tattoos were disapproved by traditional western culture I am not condemning people who have chosen to be tattooed. I am not labeling them rebels, or suggesting that Christians with tattoos are spiritually deficient. In fact, I have close family members who have tattoos.

While Christians should scrupulously avoid hostility or self-righteousness towards people with tattoos (imagine how absurd it would be for Christians to reject a new convert because he or she has tattoos!), we should honestly consider whether the tattooing fad is something that Christians—even Christians who already have tattoos—should encourage.

If you haven't been tattooed and are considering whether you want to be, here are some things you should consider. Tattooing has a long association with the worst kinds of paganism. Even pagan Graeco-Roman civilization associated tattooing with barbaric, violent peoples like the Picts, Scythians, and Huns. Missionaries encountering new peoples also associated tattooing with repulsive practices like cannibalism. Even today, young people with tattoos are statistically more likely to engage in violence or other socially deviant behavior. 1

Because of their pagan origins, both body piercing and tattooing are forbidden by Old Testament Law:

"You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:28)."

Because of these commandments, religious Jews to this day shun tattooing as an abominable practice. 2

Historically, the tattooing of slaves and prisoners has added further stigma to the practice. It was outlawed after Christianity became the majority religion in Europe.

This cultural and historical context raises the question of whether the living skin of a human being miraculously made in the God's image is really an appropriate "canvas" for the relatively crude art of needles and ink. Ink colors fade, muscle tone deteriorates. After 40 years, what was once a colorful tattoo on the back of a youthful leg may look like varicose veins—or worse. Even more importantly, As we age and mature, our perspective changes. Maturity brings changes in priorities, world-views, behavior, grooming habits, life-style and many other things. If you are tattooed in a prominent place—even with a Christian symbol—you "brand" myself for life with a decision made at one particular stage. Regardless of who you become, the impression that others will have of you will continue to be shaped by your tattoo—and tattoos are difficult and expensive to remove.

All of these factors should make a Christian consider whether getting tattooed is showing proper respect for the body as the dwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)?

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1Corinthians 6:19-20).

Although there are strong biblical, psychological, and historical grounds against tattoos, Scripture doesn't absolutely forbid Christians to get tattooed. Getting tattooed is a matter of Christian liberty. But getting a tattoo is also very likely an impulsive decision, that may have some bad long term consequences.

The findings of this study may impact the general perception of adolescents. The results show that the presence of tattoos and body piercings in adolescents is associated with greater risk-taking behaviors of these adolescents in the areas of gateway drug use, hard drug use, sexual activity, suicide, and disordered eating behaviors. In particular, young adolescents with tattoos and body piercings are at greater risk for suicide and cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use. Violence is found to a greater degree in males with tattoos and females with body piercings. Finally, abuse of hard drugs such as cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, and Ecstasy increases as the number of body piercings increases. The presence of tattoos and body piercings in adolescents does not necessarily indicate risk-taking behavior in particular individuals, however, the presence of such should alert parents, teachers, and health care providers of the possibility of greater health risk in adolescents with tattoos and/or body piercings, and appropriate care should be implemented.

Clear differences were found between adolescents with and without tattoos and/or body piercings. Additional investigation is warranted. Examining a larger population of adolescents with tattoos and body piercings may show significant differences in the areas that were found to be suggestive of differences in this study. (Tattoos and Body Piercings as Indicators of Adolescent Risk-Taking Behaviors Sean T. Carroll, MD, Robert H. Riffenburgh, PHD, Timothy A. Roberts, MD and Elizabeth B. Myhre, CPNP, MSN, PEDIATRICS Vol. 109 No. 6 June 2002, pp. 1021-1027) Back To Article

In our day, the prohibition against all forms of tattooing regardless of their intent, should be maintained. In addition to the fact that Judaism has a long history of distaste for tattoos, tattooing becomes even more distasteful in a contemporary secular society that is constantly challenging the Jewish concept that we are created b'tzelem Elokim (in the image of God) and that our bodies are to be viewed as a precious gift on loan from God, to be entrusted into our care and [are] not our personal property to do with as we choose. Voluntary tattooing even if not done for idolatrous purposes expresses a negation of this fundamental Jewish perspective.

As tattoos become more popular in contemporary society, there is a need to reinforce the prohibition against tattooing in our communities and counterbalance it with education regarding the traditional concept that we are created b'tzelem Elokim. But, however distasteful we may find the practice there is no basis for restricting burial to Jews who violate this prohibition or even limiting their participation in synagogue ritual. The fact that someone may have violated the laws of kashrut at some point in his or her life or violated the laws of Shabbat would not merit such sanctions; the prohibition against tattooing is certainly no worse. It is only because of the permanent nature of the tattoo that the transgression is still visible. (quotation from Rabbi Alan Lucas in MyJewishLearning.com) Back To Article

Leviticus 19:32-37 The Best Policy

By David C. McCasland

You shall have honest scales, honest weights, . . . I am the Lord your God. —Leviticus 19:36

A former chairman of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants says that ethical behavior is the foundation of business success. Speaking to an audience of business and community leaders, Marvin Strait said, "People want to do business with people they can trust. Trust is what makes business work. It is the bedrock of the free-enterprise system."

In the wake of corporate scandals and eroding public confidence, his words remind us of the value of honesty. Without it, our lives and our work fall short of God's design.

The Old Testament law says, “You shall have honest scales, honest weights, . . . I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:36). And the New Testament teaches that truth and honesty in all that we say and do should characterize those who have been redeemed by Christ (Ephesians 4:25-28).

A good way to evaluate our daily choices is to ask ourselves: “Would I be embarrassed if I read about this in the newspaper or if my family and friends knew about it? Am I excusing or profiting by the unethical acts of other people?”

Honesty is not only the best policy, it’s God’s policy for every aspect of our lives. Living with integrity honors and glorifies Him.

Lord, help me to be honest

In all I do and say,

And grant me grace and power

To live for You each day. —Fitzhugh

Honesty is the best policy. —Benjamin Franklin

Leviticus 19:35-36; Proverbs 16:11-13

The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. - Proverbs 11:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the 1860 presidential campaign, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune sent Abraham Lincoln a biographical sketch to review before it was published. Among other information, the article said that Lincoln had read the Greek writer Plutarch. Lincoln returned the sketch to the reporter, telling him that although he had not read any of Plutarch’s writings before, he had read some since, so that the statement could be printed as accurate. “A scrupulous teller of the truth,” the reporter said of the future president.

There’s only one way to be honest, and that’s to be scrupulously honest. It’s hard to imagine what our culture would be like if this principle were applied across the board in the workplace. In the law, God gave Israel the best reason of all for practicing honesty in business: “I am the LORD your God.”

The Proverbs even say that the scales and weights used in business in that day were of God’s making, elevating honesty to a spiritual issue. The reference to kings and their love of honesty (Leviticus 19:12, 13) applies to leaders who really care about the way their kingdoms are run. A leadership based on righteousness and honesty will honor God and will likely be rewarded with honor in return.

John the Baptist was another “scrupulous teller of the truth” to the people who came out to hear him, and they were convicted by his message (Luke 3:7-14). Tax collectors were infamous for padding their accounts, and Roman soldiers were known to strong arm people for money. John called both groups to be honest in their work as a sign of true spiritual repentance (Luke 3:13, 14).

Some people’s honesty, or lack thereof, may make the world’s headlines. But God cares deeply how we respond in everyday situations, whether it’s telling the truth or refusing to “borrow” supplies from the office. He takes note of our actions and rewards accordingly.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Another word for honesty is integrity, a quality in short supply today.

Leviticus 20:1-27

You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own. - Leviticus 20:26

TODAY IN THE WORD

“Leviticus reminds me of visiting a factory without a guide,” said pastor Ray C. Stedman in a sermon. He described his own experience of going to a steel products factory. At first, he observed what looked like confusion, clamor, and chaos on the factory floor. When a friend gave him a guided tour, however, it all made sense. He understood the machinery’s purposes and how the workers were organized to produce the final product.

“This is what you may experience with the book of Leviticus,” Stedman continued. Dietary laws, miscellaneous regulations, long passages about disease and mildew--what does it all mean? He pointed his audience to our verse for today: God is holy, and His people must reflect that.

This perspective can keep us from getting bogged down. Portions of Leviticus might seem irrelevant to our contemporary walk with God, but it's still all about the principle of holiness. It's about being so committed to obedience that our light shines out for all to see!

The flip side, however, is the consequences of disobedience, as seen graphically in today's reading. Capital punishment or excommunication were the severest penalties, sentences given for sins including idolatry, witchcraft, and sexual immorality. The death penalty was usually carried out by stoning--the whole community participated as a symbolic demonstration that they were resolved to expunge sin. In addition, at least two crimes would be punished by God with childlessness (Leviticus 20:20,21). But the most fearful punishment of all was God's statement that He Himself would set His face against certain sinners (v. 5). Can any worse fate be imagined?

If the Israelites followed the evil example of the Canaanites, they would suffer the same judgment (Leviticus 20:22, 23). Tragically, the worship of the god Molech, for example, endured many years and was one reason God later sent the nation into exile (Acts 7:43).

Leviticus 20

Expulsion and Death: Severe Penalties for Sin

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* tells the story of Hester Prynne and her daughter, Pearl, whom she's borne as a result of an adulterous affair. Because of her sin, Hester suffers a painful expulsion from her seventeenth-century New England community.

Hawthorne draws on biblical themes of sin and its penalty: from the very beginning, the penalty of sin has been alienation and exclusion. Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden and alienated from God and each other. Cain, when he murdered his brother, Abel, was excluded from community and condemned to spending his life as a restless wanderer. Sin wrecks the fellowship we were created by God to enjoy.

Many of the sins catalogued in Leviticus carry this same penalty of exclusion. When people are found guilty of certain sins, such as consulting a medium, they are to be cut off from the protection and provisions that the community affords. But there remains an even more severe penalty. Capital punishment, carried out by the members of the community, was legal. A person could be put to death for sins we might find rather innocuous like cursing his parents, or sins we know are serious but not lethal like committing adultery, as well as sins we find horrific such as practicing child sacrifice.

The severity of punishment reveals just how serious God was about the holiness of His people. He had rescued them and set them apart from the surrounding nations. And what was at stake was not only their well-being (for obedience is in fact a means to joy and blessing) but also the proper revering of God's name. Again, we look forward to Christ, knowing that He took the penalty for our sin, suffering alienation, even death, for the sake of making us holy.

Apply the Word - How serious a matter is sin to you? Are you tempted to treat it casually? In what ways are you committed to the practice of regular confession? Who is it that you tell when you're struggling and failing? And what are the evidences of repentance in your life? How have you put off habits of sin and put on new practices of righteousness?

Leviticus 20:7-8; 1 Peter 1:13-16

It is written: ""Be holy, because I am holy."" - 1Peter 1:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

John Wesley and his brother Charles were at Oxford University in England when they became part of a group dedicated to prayer, Bible study, self-examination, and works of charity. The group was called the ""Holy Club,"" and it included the great preacher George Whitefield. But even though John Wesley practiced rigid spiritual discipline, he grew increasingly frustrated. After three years in America, he wrote in his journal: ""I went to America to convert the Indians; but oh, who shall convert me?"" It wasn't until after Wesley returned to England in 1737 that he realized he had been trying to practice holiness without a saving relationship with Christ. He was converted in 1738.

John Wesley's attempts to please God by religious activity and self-discipline put him in a long line of sincere, well-meaning people who have tried to manufacture holiness. But the Bible is clear that holiness, the state of being dedicated to or set apart for God, is not a matter of human effort. God emphasized that to Israel by one of His names, ""The LORD, who makes you holy"" (Lev. 20:7).

The Israelites were holy not because they were better than everybody else, but because God chose them and set them apart for Himself. God gave Israel His holy law and commanded the people to obey Him, separating themselves from the sins of the pagan nations around them.

Leviticus 20 is a good example of this. The verses in today's reading occur in a chapter detailing gross sins that were so offensive to God they carried the death penalty. The Israelites were called to an entirely different way of life.

But while God's law demanded internal righteousness as well as external obedience, the law itself was incapable of providing that righteousness. It took Christ's death on the cross to pay the debt of sin and allow God to declare sinners holy when they put their faith in Christ for salvation.

As Christians, we have an advantage over the people living under the law. We have been born again, given new spiritual life from God--and we have the power of the Holy Spirit to live holy lives. From beginning to end, holiness is the work of the God ""who makes you holy.""

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Holiness is a term that isn't used much anymore. Some people are afraid of it because it sounds too . . . well, too holy!

But Peter reminds us that holiness is what God wants and expects from us. Holiness is a reflection of God's character, and He wants His children to look like Him. Romans 12:1, 2 is one of the most practical formulas for holy living in the Bible. Why not turn to these familiar verses and make them your prayer today? Also, memorize them if you haven't done so before.

Leviticus 21:1-22:16

Tell Aaron and his sons to treat with respect the sacred offerings the Israelites consecrate to me. - Leviticus 22:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Chicagoan Silas Purnell is credited with helping more than 50,000 inner-city teens get into college. In the mid-1960s, he quit a marketing job and opened a college placement office in the basement of a public housing project. He worked relentlessly to help those who came to his door: persuading administrators to give young people a chance, pleading for scholarship money, asking local businesses for donations, and encouraging students to work hard once they started classes.

A good word to describe Silas Purnell is "advocate." He believed in young people's future and spoke on their behalf to those in power. A priest was also to be an advocate, speaking to the people on God's behalf and to God on behalf of the people.

The rules and regulations in our recent readings in Leviticus have dealt with how God's people should behave; now the focus shifts slightly to some special standards for those in full-time ministry. How should they act? The bottom line: God was always and exclusively their top priority. That's why the priests weren't allowed to participate in the mourning process for a deceased loved one, unless it was the death of a very close family member (and for the high priest, not even then). This wasn't because God wanted to keep priests from feeling sad; rather it was to preserve the purity of the priests in their service in the presence of God.

Other rules also preserved the honor and purity of the priestly calling. Priests could not practice pagan mourning customs. They could not marry a woman who was not a virgin. Just as the sacrificial animals had to be perfect, physically handicapped men couldn't serve as priests, though they could eat the holy food (Lev 21:21, 22, 23). Ceremonially unclean or diseased individuals were similarly barred from offering the sacrifices. Generally, standards were higher for priests and their families than for ordinary Israelites.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's reading gives commands regarding proper behavior for the Jewish priests. Since, as we noted in "Today Along the Way" for July 9, all believers are now considered priests, what might be proper behavior for us? That is, what attitudes and actions will best identify us as disciples of Christ and give glory to God?

Leviticus 21–22

Responsibilities of Leadership: Holiness of Priests

Every time a well-known evangelical leader with public testimony or ministry falls into ethical and moral failure, we all regret the shadows that are cast over the church and the gospel. Christian leaders are accountable to God. That is why the qualifications for pastors and elders in the New Testament are so stringent and also why it's insisted upon in Leviticus that priests stay morally and ceremonially clean. If they were unclean in any way, they could not be permitted to continue serving in their priestly role and offering daily sacrifices.

The old covenant, unlike the new, was dependent upon the priests to represent the nation to God. The priests were not perfect, sinless men. They had to offer sacrifices on their own behalf, needing atonement just as much as any other member of the community. They were as likely to face the possibility of ritual contamination. As was true for others, certain foods were forbidden for

consumption by the priests, and they had to maintain separation from anything and anyone unclean.

Unlike for other Israelites, stricter regulations were instituted for the priests and especially for the high priest. They were permitted no contact with the dead, except in the case of the death of an immediate family member. The high priest was not even allowed to bury a mother or father. Even in the case of choosing whom they would marry, priests could not marry divorced women or women who had been scandalized by engaging in prostitution. The high priest could not marry a widow: his future wife must be a virgin.

Unfortunately, it's not long after the Jews enter the Promised Land that even the priests would be guilty of betraying God's commands.

Apply the Word - If you have the responsibilities for Bible teaching or any other type of spiritual leadership, you know how much your example means. Do you live the words that you proclaim? Is there integrity to be found in what you say and what you do? While you're not expected to be perfect, it's still a sobering truth that you'll be judged more strictly.

Leviticus 22:11 (Faith's Checkbook)

The Right to Holy Things

“But if the priest buy any soul with his money, he shall eat of it and he that is born in his house they shall eat of his meat.”—Leviticus 22:11

STRANGERS, sojourners, and servants upon hire were not to eat of holy things. It is so in spiritual matters still. But two classes were free at the sacred table, those who were bought with the priest's money, and those who were born into the priest's house. Bought and born, these were the two indisputable proofs of a right to holy things.

Bought. Our great High Priest has bought with a price all those who put their trust in Him. They are His absolute property, altogether the Lord's. Not for what they are in themselves, but for their owner's sake, they are admitted into the same privileges which He Himself enjoys, and “they shall eat of his meat.” He has meat to eat which worldlings know not of. “Because ye belong to Christ,” therefore shall ye share with your Lord.

Born. This is an equally sure way to privilege; if born in the Priest's house, we take our place with the rest of the family. Regeneration makes us fellow-heirs, and of the same body; and, therefore, the peace, the joy, the glory which the Father has given to Christ, Christ has given to us. Redemption and regeneration have given us a double claim to the divine permit of this promise.

Leviticus 22:17-33

I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am the Lord, who makes you holy. - Leviticus 22:32

TODAY IN THE WORD

When people serve in the U.S. military, they are held to high standards of conduct and obedience. They are not living or acting as private persons, but as representatives of their country. Should they break the rules or disobey a superior, they can be charged with “conduct unbecoming” to a soldier. “Unbecoming” means something like “unsuitable” or “inappropriate.” So “conduct unbecoming” means their behavior was inappropriate for someone wearing the uniform—their actions somehow brought shame to their unit, the armed forces, or even the nation.

We can apply the idea of “conduct unbecoming” to worship and our identity as God's children. In today's reading, for example, the Israelites had proper or appropriate ways to offer the sacrifices. Just as those who served before the Lord had to do so in the right ways, so also those who worshiped had to present their sacrifices in the right ways. To worship carelessly or disobediently would dishonor God's name!

As we read earlier in Leviticus, sacrificial animals needed to be perfect, with no defects of any kind. Though exceptions could be made in the case of a freewill offering, bringing a perfect animal showed a worshiper's heart. If a person truly understood who God was, would he bring any less than the best to the altar? If he was stingy and kept the good animals for himself, his sacrifice would not be accepted, there would be no forgiveness, and God would not be pleased. This requirement of the Law's system foreshadowed the perfection of Christ's sacrifice (Heb. 10:10).

The basis for the sacrifices was the Israelites' covenant relationship with God. Leviticus 22:33 makes the amazing statement that He had brought them out of Egypt for this very relationship! Offering sacrifices was not something they did for Him, to repay Him somehow. It was simply His due—the rightful honor they owed Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we've been reading this month about the Old Testament system of priests and animal sacrifices, you may have been wondering

how the New Testament views all this. These things foreshadow or symbolize Christ, but how does it all come together?

Leviticus 23:1-8

These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies. - Leviticus 23:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Passover meal is rich with symbolism relating to God's salvation, both for the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and for us from bondage to sin.

The unleavened bread shows the haste of the people's leaving. The bitter herbs reflect the bitterness of slavery. Savory chutney has a mortar-like texture, reminiscent of the brickmaking and hard labor in Egypt. Red wine embodies joy. Most importantly, the roasted lamb, sacrificed before the meal, illustrates redemption. Paul explicitly called Christ "our Passover lamb" (1Cor. 5:7). When Jesus shared the "Last Supper" with His disciples, it was the Passover meal that He ate and transformed into the "Lord's Supper" celebrated in our churches today (Luke 22:7-20).

Today's reading begins a section of Leviticus dealing with festivals and seasons, beginning with the Sabbath, the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits. These were times of rest, play, fellowship, and worship. A holiday spirit—a true "holy day" spirit—pervaded all the feasts.

The purpose of the weekly Sabbath was both physical rest and spiritual blessing, as the people paused to express their thankfulness and trust through worship (v. 3).

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted one week altogether, would have been celebrated in March or April. This was one of three annual pilgrimage festivals for which all adult males were expected to journey to the national worship center. The Feast of Firstfruits was actually the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and signaled the start of the barley harvest, the earliest harvest of the year. By offering God the first part, they acknowledged that all they had came from His hand.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you have time today, turn back a bit in your Bible and read Exodus 12, then flip over to the New Testament and read John 13. The first chapter tells of the original Passover, the day on which God acted powerfully to deliver His people from slavery. The second chapter narrates how Jesus spent His final Passover before His Crucifixion.

Leviticus 23:4-44

These are the Lord's appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies. - Leviticus 23:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Imagine a holiday dinner. The smell of roasted turkey or baked ham and your mom's special pie drifts through the house. The living room is full of cheerful conversation. People bustle about chopping vegetables, setting the table, or helping children wash their hands. Perhaps seasonal music is playing. There are no appointments or obligations. No one is due at work soon. It's time to relax and celebrate!

This is the kind of festive atmosphere we can imagine accompanied the Jewish feasts of the Old Testament. Occasions of joy and celebration were important not only to Jesus in the New Testament, but also to God the Father in the Old Testament. We may not associate the Mosaic Law with fun times, but such was indeed the case!

There are at least three characteristics in common among the feasts described in today's reading. The first is rest--the people were to do no regular work. Second was worship--the nation was to hold "sacred assemblies" and make sacrifices and offerings to the Lord. The sacred assemblies had many purposes. During them, people might sing, pray, confess sin, offer verbal praises and testimonies, hear God's Word read aloud, and receive instruction from the Levites about the meaning of the Scripture they heard. Jesus similarly connected worship, truth, and joy or pleasure.

The third characteristic is celebration--on these occasions, the people rejoiced and gave thanks for the goodness and blessing of God in their lives. This was true both in an immediate sense, as in the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Harvest (Weeks), and in a historical sense, as in the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Perhaps our mental picture is serious-faced worshipers making burnt offerings to atone for sin. A more complete biblical picture must include the idea of joyful celebration, not unlike our holiday picture mentioned above. These celebrations were focused and purposeful. God actually commanded His people to have a good time! They were not practicing self-indulgence or grabbing worldly pleasures by taking these opportunities to celebrate. Instead, their feasting provides an example of godly pleasure pursued in godly

ways.

Leviticus 23:9-32

Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God. - Exodus 23:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Winston Marsalis is considered one of the finest trumpeters of modern times. Born in New Orleans, in the past twenty years he has recorded more than forty albums of both jazz and classical music, winning multiple Grammy awards in both genres. In 1994, he completed the oratorio *Blood on the Fields*, the story of an African-American couple's struggle for love in the face of slavery. This landmark composition won him a Pulitzer Prize.

The sounding of a trumpet is a key image in the Bible, including the trumpet call on resurrection day (1Th 4:16). In Jewish festival life, sounding the trumpet during the Feast of Trumpets reminded the people of their covenant relationships and responsibilities. This feast, the second "pilgrimage festival" of the Jewish year, took place in the fall and was followed by the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles (discussed tomorrow).

This day is now called Rosh Hashanah, and it marks the beginning of the Jewish civil new year. In the Old Testament trumpets were blown and sacrifices offered at the beginning of every new month. But the Feast of Trumpets was a special time for self-examination, both individually and communally, before God. When the trumpets blew on this day, the people recalled their covenant obligations and renewed their commitment to the Lord.

The Feast of Weeks, also mentioned in today's reading, took place in May or June. Also called Pentecost or the Feast of Harvest, it traditionally commemorates the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. It was also the time when the firstfruits of the wheat harvest were offered to God. In this context, the reminder to leave some grain for the poor to glean was very appropriate (Leviticus 23:22).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If the feasts and celebrations in our current readings sound like a good idea to you, go ahead and plan a "worship festival" of your own for your family or small group.

Leviticus 23:9-14a; 1 Corinthians 15:20

You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. - Leviticus 23:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Every feast that God gave Israel to observe in the Old Testament had a definite purpose behind it. Each celebration was an object lesson and a reminder of God's love, care, and provision for His people. These feasts were also designed to teach the Israelites important lessons about God's character and holiness, and about the place of priority He deserved in the lives of His people.

The Feast of Firstfruits is a good example of the way a feast fulfilled these teaching purposes. This ceremony of dedication to God was held on the second day of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:11), leading some Bible teachers to believe that Firstfruits was simply a part of the larger festival rather than a distinct occasion.

Regardless, this ceremony retains its importance. That's obvious from the first words of today's reading: "'The Lord said to Moses'" (Leviticus 23:9). This was a command from the throne room of heaven.

The ceremony involved bringing the priest a "'sheaf of the first grain'" from the harvest to be waved as an offering before the Lord. This act dedicated the entire harvest to the Lord and served as a promise or pledge of the full harvest to come. After the offering, this portion then belonged to the priests as part of the provision for their needs (Nu 18:13).

Today's verse reveals the verity of the firstfruits offering. God was to receive His portion first, before anyone tasted a bite of the harvest. By obeying this command, the people were acknowledging that all of the harvest came from the Lord and belonged to Him. God blessed the "'firstfruits'" given by His people in the Old Testament, and He still does so for us today. By honoring God first, we are declaring our trust in Him.

In the Old Testament, the principle of firstfruits reached beyond this one-day observance. Several of Israel's feasts included firstfruit offerings, because this principle applied to "'all that you produce from the soil'" (Dt 26:2).

Paul applied the principle of firstfruits to Christ's resurrection--a wonderful reminder that His victory over death is the promise of our resurrection when He returns!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Imagine what would happen if more Christians made it their utmost priority to give God His portion of their time, money, abilities, and other resources.

It's a revolutionary concept, at least as far as our society is concerned. But firstfruits giving is the kind God has always required of His people. Many believers practice this principle, and can testify to God's blessing. Where do God and His work rank in your priorities?

Leviticus 23:15-22; Acts 2:1

Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. - Exodus 23:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

You may have noticed that the passage you read for today and the verse quoted on this page call the same Jewish feast by different names. Actually, Moses did not really assign the feast a specific name in Leviticus 23, but described its duration and various offerings instead. It was known by several names, including the ""Feast of Weeks,"" because of God's instruction to count off seven weeks from the firstfruits offering before holding the festival.

The fact that this feast was observed fifty days after the firstfruits offering is a clue to its more familiar New Testament name. In later generations this special day came to be known as Pentecost, derived from the Greek term for ""fifty.""

Pentecost was an early summer feast to celebrate the arrival of the wheat harvest. The specified number of days between Firstfruits and Pentecost tied the two harvests together, since Firstfruits was an early spring feast to celebrate the barley harvest.

The place this festival holds as part of our heritage of faith is obvious from Luke's statement that it was the ""Day of Pentecost"" on which the Holy Spirit was given. Pentecost became the birthday of the church, as the symbolism of this harvest festival received new meaning in the fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the Spirit (Acts 1:4).

It's interesting to note that Jewish tradition identified Pentecost as the day when Moses received the law from God on Mount Sinai.

The offerings of Pentecost were more elaborate than those commanded for the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. These included bread made with yeast or leaven. Pentecost was the only time that leavened bread was allowed to be brought in offering to the Lord. After the birth of the church, Pentecost must have taken on new meaning for believers. Paul had a strong desire to reach Jerusalem for Pentecost after being delayed on his trip (Acts 20:16). This feast was another witness to God's provision, which we enjoy today in the ministry of the Spirit through the church.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Sometimes it's easy for us to criticize the church and focus on its shortcomings.

But we need to remind ourselves that Jesus Christ loved the church and gave His life for it (Eph. 5:25). At Moody Bible Institute we are committed to serving, strengthening, and helping the body of Jesus Christ fulfill its holy calling. Today, let's pray together that Christ will protect and empower His church in a special way during this historic year.

Leviticus 23:15-22 Give Thanks!

By David C. Egner

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

At harvest time it's natural to thank God for the bounty of His blessings. The Feast of Weeks in ancient Israel, established in Leviticus 23, was a week of joyous celebration and feasting in gratitude for the harvest (Dt. 16:9-12). Even today as farmers gather their crops, many give thanks to the Lord for the abundance of their harvest.

But what if untimely and persistent rain keeps the farmer from getting his machines into the fields and harvesting the ripe grain? What if a sudden hailstorm flattens the corn? Or a summer drought dries up the fields?

The apostle Paul wrote, "In everything give thanks" (1 Th. 5:18). That may sound unrealistic. But think about it. The Jews were instructed to celebrate the Feast of Weeks whether the crops came in or not. Likewise, we are to give thanks to the Lord "in everything." After all, our praise is to God, not to a barn full of hay or a crib full of corn.

Yes, we can give thanks. We can do so whether the day goes smoothly or we meet aggravating problems. We can be grateful if

we're rich or poor, when we're feeling well or if our health fails. In every circumstance, we can affirm God's goodness and discover reasons to give thanks to Him. After all, our gratitude is to Him and for Him.

Consider what the Lord has done

For you and those you love;

Then give Him thanks with hearts of praise

For blessings from above. —Sper

We don't need more to be thankful for, we need to be more thankful.

Leviticus 23:16-22 Empty-Handed

By Kevin M. Williams

They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. —Deuteronomy 16:16

As the first green heads of grain formed on the spring barley in Israel, workers would tie a ribbon around each budding stem to set them apart from the still immature barley. When this marked grain ripened, it was harvested for the temple in Jerusalem because God had commanded that when they came to the feast, they should “not appear before the Lord empty-handed” (Deut. 16:16).

In the Jewish calendar, today is the Day of Firstfruits. And though most Christians don't observe this Jewish holiday, it's a good reminder to ask ourselves: “What do I have to give to the Lord?” It can be easy to fret over what we think we must do to please Him so that we are not empty-handed. Some of us are so busy doing things to please the Lord that we forget to rest in what Christ has already accomplished.

Paul refers to the risen Messiah as “the firstfruits” (1 Cor. 15:20). This means that Jesus has gone ahead of us and stands before God to satisfy our required offering.

Believers also are called firstfruits. “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:18).

Because Jesus is our firstfruits, we have infinite value and will never come before Him empty-handed.

For Further Study

Interested in learning more about biblical holidays?

Check out The Holidays Of God

by RBC staff writer Kevin Williams

When you give yourself to God, all other giving becomes natural.

Leviticus 23:23-32

[Christ] entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. - Hebrews 9:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Steven Ger of Sojourner Ministries (see the April 1 study) says one benefit of studying the Old Testament feasts is that they help us overcome what he calls the “Leviticus Syndrome.” Ger says the problem comes “when we decide to read through the Bible but get wiped out trying to plow through Leviticus.” It's safe to say that few believers spend much time studying the third book of Moses.

This is our loss, however, since the feasts of Leviticus are key to understanding much of the Old Testament. And as we are finding out this month, the feasts of Israel help us better understand our Christian faith. They help explain why Jesus said and did some of the things we read about in the Gospels. The apostle Paul also drew on the symbolism of the feasts in his writings.

Take the two feasts we read about today, for example. The Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement were crucial to Israel's worship. And the Day of Atonement appears in the book of Hebrews, as the writer explains the importance of Jesus' sacrifice.

The command to blow the shofar, or ram's horn, signaled the beginning of the Jewish New Year, called Rosh Hashanah (literally, the “head of the year”) in Hebrew. This “sacred assembly” (Leviticus 23:24) also begins what is known in Judaism as the “ten days of awe” between Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, which is Yom Kippur in Hebrew.

These were holy days of soul-searching and repentance before God, and our Jewish friends still observe them as such today. These holidays occur this year on September 11 and 20, and many calendars list them by their Hebrew names.

We'll study the Day of Atonement in more detail tomorrow and Thursday, given its importance for Israel and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Steven Ger points out that amid all the prayers of repentance and seeking of God's grace that occur during these solemn days, Jewish worshippers can only find forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah and the Savior of all who believe.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We hope these studies in the Jewish roots of our faith are helping you overcome any ""Leviticus Syndrome"" you may have about reading or studying the Old Testament.

We need to remind ourselves regularly that ""All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness"" (2Ti 3:16). The goal of our study is that we might be ""equipped for every good work"" (2Ti 3:17). Ask God to apply His Word to your heart in a powerful way this week, and be alert for opportunities to do His ""good work.""

Leviticus 23:17 The New Harvest

By Mart De Haan

They are the firstfruits to the Lord. —Leviticus 23:17

Acts 2:1-8

I was visiting a friend in a Midwest farming community during harvest season. Huge combines churned through his fields, depositing soybeans into waiting wagons. My friend leaped onto one of the wagons to check out his "firstfruits." What he saw was encouraging. Despite the worst corn crop in 40 years, the soybeans gave him reason to thank God for a good harvest.

Pentecost, which we remember today, has its roots in an agricultural setting. Fifty days after Passover, Jewish farmers celebrated the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15-22), in which they recognized the hand of God who gave the crops.

Centuries later, the Lord chose the Day of Pentecost to celebrate a new harvest. Fifty days from Passover, the Holy Spirit came on a small group of believers and moved through Jerusalem, bringing in a different kind of crop. These firstfruits were men, women, and children added to the church (Acts 2:38-46).

Pentecost's historical farming connection reminds us that a world of lost souls is ready for harvest (John 4:35). As believers in Christ, we are God's fruit, but we are commanded to be His farmers as well.

Are we helping to bring in the new harvest?

There's surely somewhere a lowly place

In earth's harvest fields so wide,

Where I may labor through life's short day

For Jesus, the crucified. —Gabriel

Without the Holy Spirit there would be no harvest.

Leviticus 23:23-32 Happy New Year!

By Julie Ackerman Link

Read: Joel 2:12-17

Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful. —Joel 2:13

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is regarded as the anniversary of the day that God created the world. The celebration begins with a blast of the shofar (ram's horn) to announce that the God who created the world is still the One ruling it. The blowing of the horn also begins a 10-day period of self-examination and repentance leading to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:23-32; Numbers 29:1-6).

The prophet Joel urged people not to just go through the motions of repentance, but to turn from their sins and obey God (Joel 2:13). In his day, tearing garments was a sign of sorrow for sin. It made a good show, but it didn't impress God. He was more concerned with their hearts.

Especially interesting is the basis for Joel's appeal. It wasn't only to avoid God's wrath, but also to enjoy God's grace, compassion, and love. Sometimes we think of God as being heavy-handed with punishment and tight-fisted with mercy. The words of Joel remind us that the opposite is true. The Lord is slow to punish and eager to forgive.

There's no better way to celebrate God's creation than to let Him re-create your heart through faith in Jesus the Messiah and turn your desires toward Him.

When I tried to cover my sin,

My guilt I could not shake;

But when I sought Your mercy, Lord,

My sin I did forsake. —Hess

Confession is the key that opens the door to forgiveness.

Leviticus 23:33-44 Not A Killjoy

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, . . . and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God. —Leviticus 23:40

Contrary to what many believe, God is not a killjoy who frowns on His people having fun. The Old Testament Feast of Tabernacles is one evidence of this. The week-long festival came 5 days after the annual Day of Atonement, a day of fasting when Israelites expressed sorrow for their sins (Leviticus 23:26-32).

The tabernacles were booth-like structures reminding Israel of the temporary dwellings they had in the wilderness. Also known as "The Feast of Ingathering" (Exodus 23:16), it pictured God's blessing on their harvest, as well as the final rest and harvest planned for them in the future.

Everyone who was able joined in a week of worship, rejoicing, and celebration (Deuteronomy 16:13-14). Imagine children greeting playmates they hadn't seen for a year, feasts with plenty of food for all, bonfires under the starry sky, families feasting, and the nation celebrating forgiveness and freedom together.

God used the feasts to teach His people the close connection between the spiritual and physical aspects of life. Times of prosperity and blessing were to be marked by rejoicing before the Lord. Though God takes sin seriously, He is also the One who abundantly pardons and provides for every need. He is not a killjoy!

God takes delight when we rejoice

In all that He has done;

And when we see the love of Christ

Our joy has just begun. —D. De Haan

God wants to paint your life with joy.

Leviticus 23

Celebration and Confession: Holy Days and Feasts

Puritans opposed special holiday observances like Christmas and Easter; settlers were actually forced to pay fines for feasting on those days. "They for whom all days are holy can have no holiday," was a common Puritan saying.

Maybe the Puritans would have benefitted from our reading in Leviticus 23. God Himself outfitted the calendar of the Jewish nation around the observance of holy feasts and assemblies. They are called "appointed festivals of the Lord," occasions for rejoicing and celebration (v. 2).

For three pilgrim feasts (the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Tabernacles), men were expected to travel to Jerusalem. After the conquest of the land and as the tribes spread out to possess it, Jerusalem would be the place of holy assembly.

The Passover and the Day of Atonement were the holiest days of the Jewish calendar. The Passover was observed in the first

month of every year, kicking off the weeklong observance of the Festival of Weeks. Embedded in this holiday was the retelling of how God had miraculously delivered the Jews from Egypt. During this feast, the Jews brought their offerings of firstfruits, which served as a tangible way of acknowledging how God had brought them into this land. The Day of Atonement was a more somber day of reflection. The Jews observed it while fasting, and the week that followed called for living in temporary shelters. Those were reminders of their wilderness journeying.

Each celebration rooted the nation in the stories of God's goodness and power. He had shown Himself faithful to them in Egypt as well as in the wilderness.

Apply the Word - Although the prominent festivals were an important part of each calendar year, the Sabbath was a regular way of reminding the Jews of their dependence on God. Sabbath continues to be an important way to enjoy the rest, to worship, and to declare dependence on God. How have you made these things a priority in your life?

Leviticus 23:33-24:9

[L]ive in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. - Leviticus 23:42, 43

TODAY IN THE WORD

After the Pilgrim settlers in Plymouth survived their first year in the New World and completed their first harvest in 1621, the governor proclaimed a day of thanksgiving and prayer. Colonists and Native Americans joined for three days of feasting, games, and celebration. During the Revolutionary War, Congress proposed a yearly day of national thanksgiving.

Many Americans may not know that the Pilgrims were probably imitating the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. Also called the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Ingathering, the Feast of Tabernacles was held in the fall, following the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. The third and final pilgrimage festival of the year, this feast marked the end of the overall harvest season. Grapes, dates, olives, and other late crops were brought in. During the week, the Israelites lived in tents or booths for both the practical reason of being in the fields to harvest and for the spiritual reason of remembering the wilderness wanderings (Lev 23:42, 43). They decorated the booths with fruit, leaves, and branches to show God's provision and blessing.

Interestingly, the Feast of Tabernacles plays a role in end-times prophecy. Symbolically, the end of the harvest season can be compared to the end of history. Zechariah foretold that one day all nations would come to Jerusalem to worship the Lord during this feast (Zech. 14:16–21).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you are interested in learning more about these celebrations, there are several good books on the traditions and meanings of the Jewish festivals. The Fall Feasts of Israel, by Mitch Glaser and Zhava Glaser, might be a good place to start. Christ in the Passover, by Ceil Rosen and Moishe Rosen, is another helpful title.

Leviticus 23:33-44

[God] has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. - Acts 14:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

Since the end of summer is just a few weeks away, it seems like a good idea to begin with the season of autumn, a time of harvest that almost every culture celebrates in some way.

For many suburbanites, fall celebrations can be largely symbolic, since these people are often far removed from farm life. But for an agricultural society like ancient Israel, the fall harvest was life itself. It was so important, in fact, that God commanded His people to observe the fall harvest with a festival known as the Feast of Tabernacles.

This week-long celebration began and ended with a 'sacred assembly' (vv. 35-36). The people's focus was clearly on the Lord, who had provided for their needs in the harvest.

This festive occasion is also known as the Feast of Booths. The Israelites left their regular homes and lived in homemade 'thatched huts' for the week, to remind themselves that God had brought their ancestors out of Egypt and preserved them through their wilderness wanderings.

Tabernacles was also one of the three feasts requiring every Jewish man to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. As the Jewish pilgrims made their way up to Jerusalem, they sang the songs of ascent (Ps. 120-134).

For the Israelites, fall was clearly a season of fullness, a time when the anticipation of a good harvest was realized. For us today, fall can represent that season of faith when we are seeing a real spiritual harvest in our service for Christ and in our daily relationship with Him.

These are seasons of prosperity. Like a hard-working farmer whose barns are full of food for the winter, all of us have experienced those seasons of spiritual harvest and fullness.

The good news is that a season like this isn't governed by the calendar. God is always ready to share His abundance with those who seek Him with all their hearts. In the Bible, the harvest is used as a metaphor for the times of spiritual fruitfulness they enjoyed.

Most people have a favorite season of the year. Spiritually speaking, fall would be a great choice and the harvest can begin in your heart today.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It was during Tabernacles that Jesus stood and cried out, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink' (John 7:37).

Jesus promised 'streams of living water' for anyone who would come to Him, which, as John says, was a reference to the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39). For a Christian, the Spirit is the key to the enjoyment of God's fullness. You already have the Spirit within you if you know Christ. But ask yourself today, how much does He have of you?

Leviticus 23:33-44a; John 7:37-44

If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. - John 7:37

TODAY IN THE WORD

At the beginning of the month we suggested several reasons for learning about the Jewish feasts and their importance for our faith. (See [notes from Today in the Word April 1, 1999](#))

One reason is that the feasts on Israel's calendar were very important to Jesus Christ. That is apparent in today's study on the Feast of Tabernacles, the last great feast of the Jewish year and the last of the three feasts requiring every Jewish man to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

The description of this feast shows that it was a time of celebration, a harvest festival with some elements similar to our holiday of Thanksgiving. Some interpreters believe that our Pilgrim forefathers may have modeled their celebration, at least in part, after the Feast of Tabernacles.

This feast is also known as the Feast of Booths, because the Israelites left their regular dwellings and lived in homemade "'thatched huts'" for seven days to remind themselves that God had brought their ancestors through the wilderness.

The mood of the event was festive. As the throngs of Jewish pilgrims made their way up to Jerusalem, they sang the songs of ascent (Ps. 120-134). Steven Ger of Sojourner Ministries calls the Feast of Tabernacles "'one amazing city-wide block party.'"

One highlight of this feast was the daily procession by priests and musicians and crowds of people to the Pool of Siloam, where a golden pitcher was filled with water. The high priest would then pour the water into a silver basin at the altar in the temple. This act symbolized the prayer for winter rains, and also the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was to come on the people of Israel.

Jesus found the Feast Tabernacles to be so important that He went to Jerusalem, despite much danger. It was in the midst of the water-pouring ceremony, which captured everyone's attention, that Jesus made His offer of living water. John explains that Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit, who had not yet been poured out in fullness as He would be at Pentecost.

Jesus' statement was startling, and it fueled the controversy about Him once more. But for those of us who have accepted His offer of living water, there is no argument. Jesus is the Savior and promised Messiah of Israel.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Like the fresh water that flows from a spring, the Holy Spirit living within us should be our ever-flowing source of life, refreshment, and renewal.

If a flowing spring describes your spiritual life these days, we encourage you to continue drinking from the "'streams of living water'" the Lord provides. But if your relationship with the Lord has been dry, maybe you could benefit from a weekend walk alone to spend time in prayer and communion with Him.

Leviticus 23:37-43 Our Refuge

By Julie Ackerman Link

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. —Psalm 46:1

Most homes are built to keep its inhabitants safe from ill effects of the weather, but not the dwellings built for Succoth. During this Jewish holiday, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, worshipers live in dwellings made of leaves and branches. One requirement is that the stars must be visible through the “roof.”

Obviously, this dwelling provides little protection from inclement weather. And that’s the point. Living in this vulnerable shelter reminds the Jews of their dependency on God.

During the days of the prophet Isaiah, the people bragged about a very different kind of dwelling place; they had made lies their refuge and falsehood their hiding place (Isa. 28:15). Because of the Israelites’ dependence on ungodly things, the Lord said to them through the prophet, “Hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters will overflow the hiding place” (v.17).

Succoth calls us to examine our lives to make sure that our security rests not on lies but on God’s truth. The Feast of Tabernacles reminds us that all of life is sustained by God’s goodness.

When we make truth our refuge, no storm can threaten us, for we can depend on God to sustain us.

No storm can shake my inmost calm

While to that refuge clinging;

Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,

How can I keep from singing? —Lowry

God is a safe dwelling place in life's storms.

Leviticus 24:1-9 Daily Bread

By Mart De Haan

. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. —John 6:51

Bread has come to be regarded as something less than what it was in Bible times. We don’t usually think of it as a symbol of life’s necessities. In Jesus’ day, however, bread represented nourishment in all its many forms.

This helps us understand why the Lord told Israel to put bread in the holy place of the Tabernacle—His “house of symbols.” There in that first room, 12 loaves were to be displayed on a golden table “before the Lord” (Lev. 24:6). These loaves reminded Israel that God always provides for His own when they come to Him on His terms. The bread reflected God’s promise to provide for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Mt. 5:6; 6:31-34).

For the Christian today, bread may represent food, the Bible, Jesus Christ, fellowship, and the many provisions God has made for our spiritual and physical needs. He cares for us and He’s ready to feed us. But His offer is not unconditional. He promised to provide daily “bread” for those who in obedience have separated themselves to live and to eat from the hand of God. Yes, the Lord cares for those who willingly receive their physical and spiritual food from Him—on His terms.

In You, O Lord, I take delight,

My every need You will supply;

I long to do what’s true and right,

So, Lord, on You I will rely. —DJD

Only Christ the Living Bread can satisfy our spiritual hunger.

Leviticus 24:20

Eye for an Eye

Two tugboat captains, pals for years, passed each other every morning in the channel. If all was well, each man would wave, yell

"Aye!" and blow his whistle in a friendly salute. One day a neophyte crewman asked the mate, "Why do they do that?" "You mean," replied the startled mate, "you've never heard of an aye for an aye and a toot for a toot?" Source unknown

Leviticus 24:10-23

Anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord must be put to death. - Leviticus 24:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

When evangelist Franklin Graham prays "in the name of Jesus" at public events, he's not surprised to receive criticism. When he and Houston pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell both prayed in Jesus' name at the Presidential inauguration in 2001, it attracted a fair amount of media attention. Some commentators felt it violated "separation of church and state" and made people of other religious persuasions feel uncomfortable.

Graham isn't worried about any of that. When he is invited to a public event, he feels it's his duty and privilege, and the duty and privilege of every Christian, to honor the name of Christ. He emphasizes this point in his recent book, *The Name*.

God's name should be spoken with honor—He is worthy of all worship. That's why we find that speaking His name blasphemously is such a serious crime in today's reading.

Why is this story placed in the section of Leviticus dealing with seasons and festivals? It may be to show the flip side of the importance of worship. That is, during the feasts the Israelites gathered to honor the name of the Lord. If they thought this practice was optional rather than essential, this narrative would have cured them of that delusion! Honoring His name is a duty and a privilege, and a person who actively did the opposite must be punished. It's literally a matter of life and death!

If the offender had been an Israelite, the nation would have stoned him immediately, since he had violated a key commandment (Ex. 20:7). But since he was of mixed race, they weren't sure how to apply the Law, and waited on the Lord for judgment. God answered that justice was the same for everyone (v. 22). It's important to note here that the "eye for an eye" principle did not validate revenge or a tit-for-tat mentality, as is sometimes thought. Rather, this describes precise, public justice. The punishment should fit the crime (Leviticus 24:19, 20, 21; cf. Matt. 5:38, 39, 40, 41, 42).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

On July 20 we encouraged you to research Christian perspectives and biblical teaching on capital punishment. Today we want to make justice and mercy a little more personal.

We've touched on these issues several times in the past year in *Today in the Word*. (For instance, see the May issue on the Sermon on the Mount.) How do these principles of justice and mercy affect your interactions with family, friends, coworkers, and others in your church? Pray for the wisdom to practice both justice and mercy.

Leviticus 24

"Lex Talionis:" The Principle of Retribution

The principle of *lex talionis*, or the law of retaliation, was an important part of Old Testament Law. Rather than legislating violent action, it was actually intended to mitigate vengeance. The penalty for a crime could be no more severe than the crime itself.

Our passage today is not all law: it first opens with further instructions concerning the duties of the priests. They tended to the nightly lighting of the golden lampstand, and weekly, they prepared the twelve sacred loaves of bread. Both are symbolic of God's good work of creation and covenant, themes we've already traced in Leviticus. The light of the lampstand calls to mind God's first words of creation: "Let there be light." And by the pillar of cloud and fire, God illuminated the path of the Israelites as they left Egypt. Bread is the symbol of God's provision, reminding us of the table God set for Adam and Eve. They were permitted to nourish themselves from the goodness of God's creation. And in the wilderness, it was of course the bread that fell from heaven, which kept alive the wandering Israelites. These items also point forward to Christ, who declared "I am the light of the world," and "I am the bread of life" (John 8:12; John 6:35).

The passage abruptly turns from instructions for the priests to a narrative retelling. It's only the second story told in Leviticus. (The first was about Nadab and Abihu.) This narrative is another portrait of sin: a man of mixed heritage is heard blaspheming God's holy name. He is put to death by the command of God at the hands of the community. This is not an act of murder, for a distinction is clearly drawn in this passage between capital punishment and murder.

According to the principle of *lex talionis*, or an eye for an eye, all crimes should be punished swiftly but justly.

Apply the Word - In debates over appropriate criminal penalties, Christians should support principles outlined in Scripture. God

favors justice, with penalties in proportion to the crime. They are not to be applied out of vengeance or pleasure. Vulnerable members of society must not be exploited. God's justice is mingled with His mercy, and ours should be as well.

Leviticus 25:1-7 A Time For Readjustment

In the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land. —Leviticus 25:4

The earth's solar orbit takes 365 and a quarter days. Because of this, every 4 years an extra day is added to the calendar so we don't fall behind in the natural cycle of things. Each leap year we add that day onto the end of February. In this way, the calendar is readjusted to the astronomical timetable.

In the calendar of ancient Israel, God set up a remarkable means of readjusting things. Just as mankind was commanded to rest every seventh day (Ex. 20:8-10), so the land was to be allowed to rest during the seventh year (Lev. 25:4). This sabbatical year allowed the farmland to replenish for greater fertility. In addition, debts were canceled (Deut. 15:1-11) and Hebrew slaves were set free (Dt 15:12-18).

With our busy schedules and our hectic pace of life, we too need readjustment. Demands of work, family, and church can require reevaluation. One way we do that is by observing the sabbath principle—making sure to set aside time to rest and prayerfully refocus our priorities. Jesus, for example, went "to a solitary place; and there He prayed" (Mark 1:35).

When can you pull aside from your activities and prayerfully ask God to reset your spiritual calendar to His Word and His will? Is it time for a readjustment?

To face life's many challenges

And overcome each test,

The Lord tells us to take the time

To stop, to pray, to rest. —Sper

To make the most of your time, take time to pray.

Leviticus 25:1-7

The land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. - Leviticus 25:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

"Sleep scientists" are warning that people are not getting enough rest, and our health and safety are suffering as a result. William Dement, founder and director of the Stanford University Sleep Research Center, estimates that people sleep about one-and-a-half hours less per night than the average from a century ago.

The consequences? One report found that driver fatigue was involved in over half of all American vehicle accidents. Larger accidents, such as the Exxon Valdez disaster, have also been linked to sleep deprivation. In laboratory experiments, prolonged stress without rest apparently caused the immune systems of the rats to fail. Also, recent theories propose that the REM stage of sleep is necessary to learning and memory, meaning that less sleep affects our cognitive functions as well as our physical well-being.

The need for rest should come as no surprise to Christians, for we know that our Creator made us that way! That's why in the Law God made every seventh day a Sabbath, and every seventh year a Sabbath year.

During a Sabbath year, fields were not to be worked, though whatever grew there could be taken for food, especially by poor people (Leviticus 25:5, 6, 7; Ex. 23:10, 11, 12). Physically, leaving the fields fallow for a year was, as we now know, sound agricultural practice, as well as a unique custom compared to the surrounding nations. Spiritually, to rest from farming—on which the people depended for their daily food and livelihood—required faith in God's promise that He would provide bumper crops the year before (Leviticus 25:20, 21). Other features of the Sabbath year included the cancellation of debts and a special reading from the Law during the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 31:10, 11, 12, 13).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you honor the spiritual principle of rest in your life? Though we no longer keep a Saturday Sabbath, God has built rest into the rhythms of life, even setting us an example Himself by resting on the seventh day of His work of creation. Given these facts, it is vital that work not occupy an inordinate amount of our time and energy.

Leviticus 25:1-28

Blessed is he who has regard for the weak . . . the LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land. - Psalm 41:1, 2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Every major U.S. earthquake results in modifications to building codes for commercial buildings and private homes. Strict regulations dictate how houses must be attached to their foundations and where--even if--brick may be used. New building projects require countless permits and inspections. Even existing buildings must sometimes be retrofitted to become compliant.

At times, the number of codes to be met must seem unbearable to architects and contractors. But in the end, everyone knows why such attention to structural detail is so important--newer building codes have dramatically decreased earthquake-related deaths in the United States.

As you read through today's passage, you may have felt that you too were reading a series of "codes." Why so many laws and regulations about the land even before any of the twelve tribes had stepped foot in it? Since the land was God's divine gift to His people, it had to be possessed and protected accordingly. The gift of the land was not to be abused through over- farming (Lev. 25:1--7). Moreover, by leaving the land fallow every seven years, the poor would receive needed care (Lev 25:5, 6, 7).

Today's passage shows that God had also ensured the protection of each Israelite family's land allotment. The land, which ultimately belonged to God, could not be sold permanently (v. 23). Therefore, poor individuals (or their descendants) who had been forced to sell their land to survive would have the opportunity to make a fresh start in the Jubilee year (v. 10). The Jubilee was a gracious provision to preserve human life and dignity and to protect the gift of God's inheritance.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Strict earthquake building codes exist because legislators believe human life is precious and worth protecting.

Leviticus 25:8-55

The year of Jubilee

- (1) began with repentance,
- (2) centered in release,
- (3) involved restoration,
- (4) brought about reunion,
- (5) provided rest,
- (6) meant relying on God,
- (7) required the remitting of debts,
- (8) was a time of rejoicing

Source unknown

(Play [Michael Card's great song - Year of Jubilee](#))

Leviticus 25

Jubilee: Provisions for the Poor/Stewardship of the Land

Katharine Hayhoe might be considered a paradox. She is a Christian climate scientist. The daughter of missionaries, the wife of a pastor, Hayhoe explains, "My faith is the Christian faith . . . and we are told to love our neighbors as ourselves. And our neighbors, especially the poorer ones, are already harmed by climate change."

It's clear that Scripture insists on a proper care and stewardship of the earth. Today's reading explains that not only did God insist upon a weekly Sabbath observance for His people, or a day consecrated to rest, He also commanded a Sabbath rest for the land. Every seven years, the Israelites were to refrain from planting and sowing, reaping and harvesting. The land was to lay fallow, resting and replenishing.

The question Moses anticipates is this: "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" That strikes at the heart of what Sabbath is really meant to do. Sabbath, whether it's a day we set aside for rest and worship, or a year we set aside for the earth to replenish, is an expression of courageous trust. It reminds us that it is not our work that secures for us our livelihood. It is God who provides us with all that we need.

Beyond a Sabbath for the land every seventh year, God ordained the practice of Jubilee to be observed every fifty years. This required more dramatic dependence on the part of the Israelites. Jubilee was a provision of protection for the poor: it called for debt cancellation. Land and homes were returned to the rightful owner as prescribed by family heritage.

Jubilee is not veiled socialism, or simple redistribution according to principles of fairness. It was a way to acknowledge that no one but God owned the land.

Apply the Word - What would the practice of Jubilee look like today? What kinds of debts can you cancel for others? Maybe you can forgive some financial obligations. Or maybe you can forgive someone's offense against you and work to restore the relationship. On a larger scale, how can our churches practice the kind of reconciliation in the principle of Jubilee?

Leviticus 25:8-55

Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you. - Leviticus 25:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

An old Wesleyan hymn celebrates the Year of Jubilee from a New Testament perspective:

"Blow ye the trumpet, blow, The gladly solemn sound, Let all the nations know, To earth's remotest bound; The Year of Jubilee is come! Return, ye ransomed sinners, home. Jesus, our great High Priest, Hath full atonement made: Ye weary spirits, rest, Ye mournful souls, be glad; The Year of Jubilee is come! Return, ye ransomed sinners, home . . . Ye slaves of sin and hell, Your liberty receive, And safe in Jesus dwell, And blest in Jesus live; The Year of Jubilee is come! Return, ye ransomed sinners, home."

The Year of Jubilee is the close and climax of this section of Leviticus. Jubilee literally means "trumpet" or "ram's horn," which was blown to proclaim the start of this special season, observed every fiftieth year (that is, after seven sevens of years).

This time had several economic implications. Land could not be worked and was returned to its original owner. Valuations of real estate and labor were actually based on how many years remained until the Jubilee. This reminded the people that they were merely tenants—God was the true owner (Leviticus 25:23). It also kept land and wealth from becoming over-concentrated in the hands of a few people, and it provided debt relief for the poor.

Spiritually, the Year of Jubilee involved the same faith and obedience that we've seen mandated elsewhere in Leviticus. To obey in this area and give up material gains required faith and humility, but God promised to bless those who followed His command (Leviticus 25:18, 19). In addition, consecration and freedom are interestingly linked in our verse for today, which is also quoted on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

For a musical complement to this month's study, consider listening to the first album of Michael Card's trilogy on the Old Testament, The Ancient Faith, and especially the song, "Jubilee." On that album, Card explores the Pentateuch, and in the song, "Jubilee," he draws parallels between the Year of Jubilee and our freedom in Christ.

Leviticus 25:8-24

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to The Wall Street Journal, tax amnesty programs in New Jersey and Rhode Island earlier this year allowed thousands of delinquent taxpayers to settle their accounts with Uncle Sam. New Jersey's program was especially successful. The state not only allowed businesses and individuals to pay late taxes without prosecution, but also waived all penalties and interest on the delinquent taxes.

It's evident that many people couldn't pass up the chance to set things straight with "the powers that be." Amnesty programs are successful because it makes us feel good to get things back to their rightful owners, whether it's overdue taxes or that tool we borrowed from our neighbor and never returned.

God established an amnesty program of His own for ancient Israel. It was called the "Year of Jubilee," and it went into effect every

fifty years. The purpose of Jubilee is spelled out very clearly in our text. Its purpose was to “proclaim liberty” (Leviticus 25:10) throughout Israel by the return of all land and slaves to the family from which they had been purchased.

By voiding all such transactions after a reasonable period, the Lord was making several powerful points to His people. First, He was teaching them that no Hebrew should be in permanent servitude to another, and no family in Israel should be left destitute by being forced to sell land to pay debts.

But the primary lesson of Jubilee is theological. This festival was a pointed reminder that God retained first rights of ownership on His people and the land (Leviticus 25:23). Each family’s plot of ground in Canaan was “on loan” from the Lord, and they were not free to do absolutely anything they wanted with it.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

To the world’s way of thinking, a provision such as Jubilee seems radical and unreal. But it’s the world that needs a reality check, not God.

Why Does the Bible Tolerate Slavery?

Dan Vander Lugt

The slavery tolerated by the Scriptures must be understood in its historical context. Old Testament laws regulating slavery are troublesome by modern standards, but in their historical context they provided a degree of social recognition and legal protection to slaves that was advanced for its time (Exodus 21:20-27 ; Leviticus 25:44-46).

In ancient times, slavery existed in every part of the world. Slaves had no legal status or rights, and they were treated as the property of their owners. Even Plato and Aristotle looked upon slaves as inferior beings. As inhumane as such slavery was, we must keep in mind that on occasion it was an alternative to the massacre of enemy populations in wartime and the starvation of the poor during famine. It was to the people of this harsh age that the Bible was first written.

In New Testament times, slave labor was foundational to the economy of the Roman empire. About a third of the population was comprised of slaves. If the writers of the New Testament had attacked the institution of slavery directly, the gospel would have been identified with a radical political cause at a time when the abolition of slavery was unthinkable. To directly appeal for the freeing of slaves would have been inflammatory and a direct threat to the social order. 1 Consequently, the New Testament acknowledged slavery’s existence, instructing both Christian masters and slaves in the way they should behave (Ephesians 6:5-9 ; Colossians 3:2 ; Colossians 4:1 ; 1 Timothy 6:2 ; Philemon 1:10-21). At the same time, it openly declared the spiritual equality of all people (Galatians 3:28 ; 1 Corinthians 7:20-24 ; Colossians 3:11). 2

The gospel first had the practical effect of doing away with slavery within the community of the early church.³ It also carried within it the seeds of the eventual complete abolition of slavery in the Western world.

The fact that the Bible never expressly condemned the institution of slavery has been wrongfully used as a rationale for its continuance. In the American South prior to the Civil War, many nominal Christians wrongly interpreted the Bible’s approach to slavery and used their misunderstanding to justify economic interests. The terrible use of African slave labor continued in spite of those who argued from the Scriptures for the spiritual equality of all races.⁴ Today the Christian message of the spiritual equality of all people under God has spread throughout the world, and it is rapidly becoming the standard by which the human values of all nations are measured.

By the time of Christ, there had been several large slave rebellions. The rebellion led by Spartacus in 73 BC terrorized all of southern Italy. His army defeated the Romans in two pitched battles before it was defeated and its survivors crucified. Back To Article

Also in direct contradiction to pagan values, both the Old and New Testaments clearly denied that there is anything demeaning about physical work. Jesus and His disciples were “blue collar” working men, and Paul was a tentmaker by trade (Mark 6:3 ; Acts 18:3 ; Acts 20:33-34 ; 1 Corinthians 4:12 ; 2 Thessalonians 3:8,11). Back To Article

Already by the second century, a former slave named Pius was the Bishop of Rome. Back To Article

William Wilberforce is a prime example of the influence of the gospel. An unlikely candidate for conversion, he was a high-living member of the upper classes and a rising star in English politics. His conversion to Christianity led to his lifelong dedication to the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. His dream was fulfilled just before his death in 1833 when the House of Commons passed a law that abolished slavery.

Another example is John Newton, the author of the beloved hymn “Amazing Grace.” Newton was a slave trader prior to his

conversion. Afterwards, he became a crusader for the abolition of slavery and an important influence in the life of William Wilberforce.

Sweet Slumber

Leviticus 26:1-12

Photographer Anne Geddes has made an art form out of taking pictures of sleeping babies. Her photos evoke smiles. Nothing is a better image of peace than a sleeping child.

But between naps and nighttime, caring for children is an exhausting and relentless responsibility. In their innocence and enthusiasm, children can get themselves into life-threatening situations in no time. After a hectic day of chasing, entertaining, protecting, feeding, dressing, guarding, guiding, and making peace between squabbling siblings, parents are eager for bedtime. After the toys are put away and the pajamas are put on, the sleepy toddler slows down, cuddles with mom or dad for a bedtime story, and finally falls asleep. Later, before putting themselves to bed, parents check on their children one more time to make sure all is peaceful in dreamland. The serene beauty of a sleeping child makes all the day's frustrations worthwhile.

Scripture indicates that God's ideal condition for His children is peace (Lev. 26:6), but too often in our immaturity we get into trouble and cause conflict. Like parents of young children, God desires for us to become weary of wrongdoing and to rest in the safety and contentment of His loving ways. — by Julie Ackerman Link

Lord, help me not to squabble and cause friction

with others about unimportant matters.

May I instead find rest in Your love and wisdom,

and seek peace. Amen.

In His will is our peace. —Dante

Leviticus 26:1-13

I will look on you with favor, and I will keep my covenant with you. - Leviticus 26:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Elijah McCoy was born in 1844 to former slaves who had escaped from Kentucky to Ontario via the Underground Railroad. His parents sent him to study in Scotland, where he earned a degree in engineering.

Working for the railroad, McCoy invented a lubricating cup that automatically dripped oil. He patented it, and it was installed on locomotives. His invention greatly increased engine efficiency, and soon everyone wanted one of the "McCoy Cups." So many inferior copies were made that train engineers began to demand "the real McCoy," the genuine article.

When it comes to worship, who is the "genuine article"? If worshipers obey, they're "the real McCoy." If they don't, they aren't. Obedience is the litmus test of faith (cf. Jas 1:22, 23, 24, 25). That's the straightforward point of today's reading.

Sections of blessings and curses often concluded ancient Near Eastern covenants, so it's no surprise to find them here near the end of Leviticus (cf. Deut. 28–30). Obedience of all the commands was expected, but several key points were highlighted: (1) Do not worship idols or graven images. (2) Keep the Sabbath. (3) Respect the tabernacle (Leviticus 26:1, 2).

The blessings of obeying the Lord were myriad (Leviticus 26:3-12). The people would enjoy material prosperity. Rain would fall, crops would grow, and food would be plentiful. They would enjoy peace and safety. Natural calamities (such as attacks by wild animals) and war wouldn't disrupt their lives, and God would give them easy victories over their enemies. Best of all, they would enjoy a close relationship with God. He would look on them with favor, call them "my people," dwell with them, and walk with them daily.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Obedience is also a spiritual imperative for us today! To reaffirm this principle, we encourage you to memorize Jas 1:22, 23, 24, 25: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. . . . [T]he man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does." You might jot these verses down on an index card and carry them with you until you have them completely memorized.

Leviticus 26:1–13

Blessings for Obedience

If we've become wary of the promises of our politicians, imagine hearing one insist that by the end of his or her elected term, prosperity would be completely restored and our national security completely guaranteed.

God makes promises— and keeps them. He's no long-winded politician just trying to garner a few more votes. As the book of Leviticus draws to a close, God reiterates all the good intentions and purposes He has for His people. These are deliberate echoes of the promises of creation and of covenant, purposes to multiply His people, to dwell among them and make them fully His. Like a sovereign king, He will bring under His protection those who swear to Him their allegiance. He will ensure their national security, making their enemies flee before them. Despite all the ways they've yet been unfaithful, He had not relented from His desire to do them great good.

The locus of the blessing is not only the people themselves but by extension the land. The land, as well as the people, will be fruitful. The fields and orchards will produce abundant yields. God will continue to do what He's done in the desert: He will feed His people, nourishing them and attending to their daily needs. Ultimately, what God seems to be saying is this: Do not be afraid. I love you, I will care for you, and I only ask that you obey Me fully.

That contingency is of course the real sticking point. God demanded their complete loyalty, forbidding any kind of idol worship. Everyone must bow to His authority, acknowledging the rescue He had already performed on their behalf. He is the Lord, and it is His to command what they will do and whom they will worship.

We know that the nation will not be able to fulfill the demands of the covenant.

Apply the Word - Remember the promises of the new covenant, which God would establish through Jesus (cf. Jeremiah 31). He would, by His Spirit, perform heart surgery on His people to transform us from the inside out, thereby securing our loyalty. Praise God for His grace. He doesn't give up, even when we disregard His goodness and disobey His commands.

Leviticus 26:3,12-16 Walking Tall

By David C. McCasland

I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright. —Leviticus 26:13

During my basic training in the Army, our drill sergeant worked hard week after week to transform us from a group of slouching civilians into a company of men who stood straight and walked tall. It was not an easy job. When he finally said, "You're looking good!" we felt proud of who we were and how we had changed.

That experience came to mind when I read Leviticus 26:13, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright." After 400 years of slavery and hard labor, the people of Israel were burdened and discouraged. But under Moses, God led them out of bondage and put them on the road to a new life of freedom through obedience to Him.

It's a vivid reminder of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: "Stand fast . . . in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1).

We don't need to be bowed down with our sin. As we embrace the freedom of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, we can hold our heads high and keep walking tall.

May I stand firm, O God of truth,

For all that pleases Thee;

Undaunted by the critic's frown,

Let nothing hinder me. —Bosch

There are no deadends on the road of obedience to God.

Leviticus 26:14-46

I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. - Leviticus 26:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

On February 7, 1904, the story goes, a man in the basement of a downtown Baltimore building discarded a lit cigarette. It was a small act of carelessness, but one with enormous consequences.

The cigarette started a fire that the wind whipped into a larger fire. By evening, it raged out of control, burning for 31 hours and destroying eighty city blocks. About 2,500 buildings were destroyed or damaged, and property loss was estimated at \$100 million. Thankfully, no lives were lost.

Causes lead to effects—that's the order of life. We reap what we sow. And disobedience brings punishment.

Today's reading complements what we read yesterday. But why is this section of curses so much longer than the section of blessings? God knew the people would disobey, so perhaps He was making an extra attempt to deter them, or at least making sure they would have no excuses. The people understood that disobeying His commands and breaking the covenant—the equivalent of hating or abhorring His laws (Leviticus 26:15)—would have dire consequences: terror, disease, defeat, and the enmity of God Himself.

Vividly described in these verses is an escalation of punishments, all mercifully designed to correct the Israelites' sinful ways, break down their stubborn pride, and bring them back to a right relationship with God. The images of judgment grow progressively darker and more severe. The land would become barren and unyielding, and wild animals would attack. War, plague, and famine would descend. Cities would be broken down, the land ruined, the people scattered. Whereas before five men had chased a hundred, disobedience would cause them to flee in fear at the sound of a falling leaf (v. 36)!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

To support the principle that Scripture is an interlinked whole, and to help keep you from getting bogged down in the minutiae of Leviticus, we have suggested a number of supplementary readings and Bible study topics this month.

Leviticus 26:14–46

Curses for Disobedience

Parenting has its trends, and new books are being marketed every year with tricks and tips for parents. "Positive parenting" is a recently acclaimed method. It teaches parents never to use any punishment or negative consequence but to manage their children with the use of rewards and praise.

Positive parenting was not the sole method God Himself employed with His children. At the beginning of the chapter, His people were promised a host of rewards and blessings contingent upon their obedience; as we read further, great suffering and pain are threatened for their disobedience. God isn't setting up a simple accounting system of checks and minuses or a behavior management plan such as we might see in elementary school classroom. What's in place is the principle of sowing and reaping. Blessing will always have its rewards; sin will always have its consequences.

All throughout the Bible, God makes clear that He wants what's best for His people. His plans and purposes are good and can be trusted. His commands actually serve as a kind of protective measure for His people, put in place to guide them into what is good and to protect them from what is harmful. Disobedience doesn't just elicit God's angry response. By its very nature, it actually leads to forms of death and destruction. That is why God insists that His people obey Him—not simply so that He can be in charge but so that we can be cared for.

Notice the words used for obedience and disobedience in this passage. To obey is synonymous with the verbs to follow, to listen, to carry out. To disobey means to reject, to abhor, to fail, to violate, and even to show hostility. All of these words are active, implying deliberateness and intention. Sin and obedience aren't accidental.

Apply the Word - As severe as these warnings are, and as serious as God is about His intolerance of sin, He will still continue to show mercy. Even when His people fail Him, their confession will be met with immediate grace. He will withhold the full weight of His justice, remembering the covenant. What hope for the days when we've really made a mess of things!

Leviticus 27:1-34

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. - Psalm 24:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Through the prophet Malachi, God condemned the Israelites for their careless, shameful worship practices. Instead of offering Him the best, they selected throwaway animals. Instead of offering Him what was perfect, they chose crippled or diseased sacrifices. Their self-centered "worship" showed their sinful hearts and dishonored God's name among the nations (Mal 1:6-14).

From the book of Leviticus, the Israelites should have known better. In this final reading of the month, we see that offering God our best demonstrates that all we have belongs to Him.

To dedicate items to the Lord, probably as part of a vow or freewill offering, showed commitment and a heart for worship. A cash-plus-twenty-percent redemption was possible in some cases, depending on what had been dedicated. Animals, houses, land, and even people could be offered to the Lord in this way. For example, Hannah vowed that if the Lord answered her prayer for a child, she would give that child to Him. That's how Samuel first entered God's service (1Sa 1, 2, 3).

To devote items to the Lord was even more momentous (Leviticus 27:28). These items could not be redeemed, but belonged only and wholly to God. For example, when Achan stole some gold, silver, and a robe during the conquest of Jericho, he stole devoted items. That's why his crime was punished so harshly (Josh. 7). Another example is when God judged the Amalekites and they were "devoted to destruction"—that is, Saul was supposed to wipe them out. When the king failed to obey, he greatly dishonored the Lord (1 Sam. 15).

When the people offered firstfruits or tithes, they were not to keep the best for themselves. Sheep, for example, passed through a gate, where a shepherd stood holding a rod dipped in colored dye. He marked every tenth sheep that went by, and those sheep would belong to the Lord (Leviticus 27:32, 33).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps beginning with the truths you wrote out on July 12, list several principles and practices you have learned during our study of Leviticus. Your list should include principles and practices you really want to stick with you, ones you want to grow in and apply more consistently.

Leviticus 26:36-45 How To Get Rid Of Fear

The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion. —Proverbs 28:1

The flashing sign along a stretch of North Carolina interstate warned: Slow Down

Drug Checkpoint Ahead

About 200 vehicles took the next exit—and were the only ones searched. The only drivers with reason to exit were residents or those avoiding the checkpoint! Authorities made several arrests and seized two cars that were transporting drugs.

A loss of courage is just one of the side effects of law-breaking. The boldness required to break the law is soon replaced by the fear of getting caught. We find ourselves running even when no one is chasing us (Prov. 28:1). Our fear eventually reveals and confirms our guilt.

In Leviticus 26, God explicitly told His people what would happen if they chose to break His law. He warned that they would flee at "the sound of a shaken leaf" (Lev. 26:36), and they would run "when no one pursues" (v.37). But He also left the door open for genuine repentance (vv.40-42).

Fear shows our lack of a close relationship with God. Confession is the first step in restoration. If we admit our sins to God, He promises forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:9).

By coming clean with God, you'll discover that your fear will be fleeing instead of you.

My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought—

My sin, not in part, but the whole,

Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more:

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! —Spafford

Few things instill more courage than a good conscience toward God.

Leviticus 27:30-34

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last year was a banner year for giving in America. A good stock market, big gains in personal income, and fears that tax deductions for charitable gifts might be trimmed back made Americans more charitable in 1995 than in any other year since 1896. Charitable donations were up by eleven percent.

But the big numbers have triggered concerns that giving might drop off this year—if the high 1995 totals were, as suspected, the result of these realities.

The Bible gives much higher reasons for the giving that God's people are called to do. Giving was commanded for Israel in the Old Testament. It was written into the Mosaic legal code. The various tithes and freewill offerings were carefully spelled out.

God established the ministry of giving for His people for several reasons. One is to help us not to forget the source of our material blessings. Since God created it all and owns it all, He has a right to place a special claim on a portion of our money or possessions.

Giving is an act of obedience on our part, a tangible demonstration of our desire to please God. Giving should also be an act of grateful love. Since God has spared nothing of heaven's best for us, how can we begrudge Him a return portion of His gifts?

The word tithe means "the tenth," but that does not mean the Israelites gave only ten percent of their produce or animals to the Lord. Taking all the tithes and offerings together, some Bible teachers believe that twenty to thirty percent would be a more accurate total.

During the last ten days of the month, we will study giving in detail, so there's a lot more to come. For today, we need to note that there is much debate on whether modern-day believers are obligated to give the tithe.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's study is especially timely given that this is the Lord's day, the day on which Christians are urged to lay aside their gifts for God's work (1Cor. 16:2).

Leviticus 27

Costly Giving: Freewill Offerings and Vows

We might be cynical about promises. Politicians promise not to raise taxes, professional athletes promise they haven't used steroids, and celebrities say, "I do," many of their marriages ending disastrously, sometimes within a matter of weeks.

Leviticus ends with a chapter concerning vows, and they are to be taken seriously. The vows are made publicly to the priests in the presence of the Lord, rescinded only when one paid the value of the item along with an additional 20 percent. Moreover, these vows aren't to be superficial gestures of devotion. They are freewill offerings in addition to the obligatory gifts required of the Israelites, such as the offerings of the firstborn or the required tithe.

Each gift was appraised by the priest. At first glance, we might wonder how one can assign monetary value to a person. And because men and women are valued differently, are we to believe that God esteems men more than women? Upon closer look, it's important to notice that the values assigned to the people are accorded with the potential productivity of their labor. Most valued is a man between the ages of 20 and 60. Because men are generally physically stronger than women, they have the potential for doing more of the manual work that would have been required in this ancient society. A woman of this same age group was valued more highly than an elderly man for apparently the same reason.

Because the Levites alone were responsible for the priestly duties and care of the tabernacle, devoting someone to the Lord would not likely mean enrolling them in the ministry. It could instead look like paying the equivalent value to the Lord as a substitution.

Apply the Word - David once insisted that he would never offer to the Lord something that cost him nothing (2 Sam. 24:24). The relative value assigned to each of these freewill offerings was high, especially in light of the fact that a day's wage was ordinarily about one shekel. It prods us to consider our own giving. Do we give sacrificially? What does our giving really cost us?