

LEVITICUS

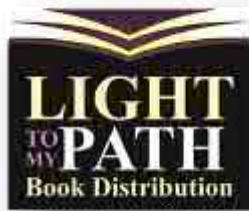
A person wearing a white robe is holding an open scroll of the Bible. The scroll is made of aged, yellowish-brown parchment and is filled with handwritten Hebrew text in a traditional script. The person's hands are visible, holding the edges of the scroll. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

**A Devotional Look at God's Standard
of Behaviour for the Old Testament Believer**

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

Leviticus

*A Devotional Look at the God's Standard
of Behaviour for the Old Testament Believer*



F. Wayne Mac Leod

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Leviticus

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Table of Contents

Preface	1
Introduction.....	3
1 The Burnt Offering	6
2 The Grain Offering	13
3 The Fellowship Offering	19
4 The Sin Offering.....	25
5 The Guilt Offering	32
6 Regulations Concerning Offerings (Part 1).....	37
7 Regulations Concerning Offerings (Part 2).....	43
8 Aaron and His Sons are Ordained	50
9 God Reveals His Glory	57
10 A Lesson From Nadab and Abihu	63
11 Clean and Unclean Animals.....	72
12 Childbirth	79
13 Laws Regarding Skin Disease and Mildew	88
14 Ceremonial Purification from Skin Diseases and Mildew	97
15 Unclean Discharges.....	106
16 The Day of Atonement	112
18 Laws Governing Sexual Behaviour	123
19 Be Holy	131
20 Punishment for Particular Sins.....	144

21 Requirements for the Priests	151
22 Respect for God's Holy Things	159
24 God's Holy Place; God's Holy Name	174
25 The Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee.....	180
26 Blessings and Curses.....	187
27 Rules Concerning Vows	195

PREFACE

The book of Leviticus is an important book for many reasons. First, it gives us a better appreciation of what the Lord Jesus came to do. The sacrifices of the Old Testament looked forward to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. Through the Old Testament sacrifices we learn more about the work of our Lord.

Second, the laws of the book of Leviticus teach us about what God expects of His people. It is true that the cross of Christ radically changed things, but there is still much to learn from the rules and laws of God about the lifestyle He requires of all who belong to Him.

Finally, the regulations of the book of Leviticus teach us about God. As we learn what He requires, we see something of His character. We understand more fully who God is and what hinders us from enjoying fellowship with Him. All this should encourage deeper intimacy with Him.

Leviticus is a vital part of Scripture. The goal of this study, and the challenge for me as the author, is to help the reader see the character of God and His purposes more fully. I trust that this study will be a tool to draw

each reader closer to their Lord and into a deeper appreciation of what He has done for us in the person of the Lord Jesus

F. Wayne MacLeod

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to Leviticus

Author:

Moses is the traditionally considered to be the author of the book of Leviticus. While the book does not clearly state this, it is obvious that the laws recorded in the book were given directly to him by the Lord. The phrase, “the Lord said to Moses,” is repeated often in Leviticus. Both Jesus and the apostles referred to the Old Testament laws and regulations as the “Law of Moses” (see Luke 2:22; Acts 13:39; 1 Corinthians 9:9; Hebrews 10:28). It is possible that Moses had a secretary to write down the words the Lord gave him but the laws and regulations found in this book were revealed directly to Moses for his people.

Background:

Israel had been freed from her bondage in the land of Egypt. As they left Egypt they were a loosely connected people without laws or understanding of their God. They had been influenced by the religion of Egypt. They had no priests or Scriptures to guide them in the way of the God of their fathers. They did not know His requirements nor did they know their God.

As they camped around Mount Sinai the Lord spoke to Moses and revealed to him His requirements for worship and behaviour. He instructed His people in the kind of sacrifices they were to bring and how they were to live as His people. He taught them the difference between clean and unclean, pure and holy and showed them what to do when they found “uncleanness” in their midst.

A central theme of the book is holiness. God called His people to be holy, just as He was holy (see Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:6). The holiness God speaks about in the book of Leviticus touches all of life. Physical cleanliness, sexual behaviour, attitude of the heart, spiritual faithfulness, social relationships or respect for the environment are all covered in the Lord’s definition of holiness in this book.

Importance of the Books for Today:

Leviticus is a significant book because of what it teaches us about the requirements of God for Old Testament believers. While we are no longer under the Mosaic Law after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the book of Leviticus teaches us how true holiness touches every part of life. Leviticus shows us that there is no such thing as a “Sunday Christian.” That is to say, God expects us to live out our relationship with Him in our workplace or in the privacy of our own home every day of the week. He is concerned about the thoughts of our minds, the attitudes of our heart, how we treat our employees, family or the environment. True holiness affects everything we do as followers of God.

Leviticus also teaches us about the justice of God. He holds us accountable for our actions. Every sin needed to be punished or covered by the blood of a sacrifice. Sin,

uncleanness or impurity would not be ignored. God required that His people live according to His standard or pay the consequences for their actions. Leviticus speaks powerfully about justice and the penalty for sin. Sections of this book are devoted to the curse of God on those who walk in disobedience. Sin is an obstacle to our relationship with God. Leviticus speaks to us in our day about the barrier of sin and shows us that it cannot be ignored if we want to know God and walk in His path.

Throughout the book of Leviticus we also see the compassion and forgiveness of God. We cannot read the book without seeing the great effort the Lord God made to cover every offense His people would make. The provision of sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin shows us that the Lord God had not given up on His people. His love for them was such that He wanted to forgive and heal them and their land. All these sacrifices point to the wonderful grace and patience of God toward His people in providing them a way of forgiveness. They also point to the even greater work of the Lord Jesus for all who will accept His sacrifice on their behalf for the forgiveness of sin.

1

THE BURNT OFFERING

Read Leviticus 1:1-17

As we begin our study, God is speaking to Moses in the Tent of Meeting. As they spoke that day, God gave instructions to Moses about the various types of sacrifices the Jews were to make (verse 2). The requirements for these sacrifices and offerings came directly from God. The words and regulations contained in this book are not of human origin but from God. While Moses spoke these words and wrote them down for the people, the true author of this book is God. These were His requirements for His people.

In chapters 1-7 of the book of Leviticus we learn that there were five different types of offerings a Jewish believer could make to the Lord God; the burnt offering (Leviticus 1), the grain or cereal offering (Leviticus 2), the fellowship or peace offering (Leviticus 3), the sin offering (Leviticus 4:1-5:13) and the guilt offering (Leviticus 5:14-6:7). In this chapter we will examine what God told Moses about the burnt offering.

The animal offered as a burnt offering was to be a male without defect from the herd (verse 3). There are three important points we need to make here.

First, the animal was to be from their herd. This means that it was going to cost something for the person who was offering the sacrifice. They could not offer a wild animal they had trapped. The only animal acceptable to God was one they had cared for themselves. David understood this when he was offered free oxen for a burnt offering in 2 Samuel 24:22-24. Listen to his words to Araunah in this passage:

(22) Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. (23) O king, Araunah gives all this to the king." Araunah also said to him, "May the LORD your God accept you." (24) But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.

God expects that our offerings cost something. Remember that He offered His Son to us at great cost. Although salvation is a free gift given to us by God, living in a relationship with Him can be costly. Jesus expected His disciples to take up their cross to follow Him.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Matthew 16:24 (NIV)

Sacrificial living is not an option. It was a requirement for every man and women in Israel. God taught Moses that the burnt offerings brought to the altars of Israel were to come as true sacrifices from His people. He expects that we have the same heart today.

The second requirement for the burnt offering was that it be without defect. The Lord expected that His people bring the best they had. They were bringing their gift to the Lord God. To offer a sick or injured animal they themselves could not use would be an insult. Their God deserved the best they had. He still does.

The third requirement of verse 3 is that the animal be a male without defect. We need to remember that these sacrifices were symbolic of what was to come. Consider the phrase "male without defect." The Lord Jesus came to this earth as a man. He lived a perfect life and died as a sacrificial lamb for our sin. The animal that was brought to the altar looked forward to the time when a perfect man would come to offer His life as a sacrifice for our sins.

Notice also in verses 3-4 that the offering was to be brought to the Tabernacle. The person bringing the offering was to place his hands on the animal's head so that it would be "accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him." By putting his hands on the animal's head, the worshipper was identifying with the sacrifice that was to be made. He symbolically passed his guilt to the animal that was killed in his place. This is in reality a very powerful picture of what the Lord Jesus did for us. He took our sins on Himself and laid down His life as a sacrifice so that we could be forgiven and restored to a right relationship with the Father.

If the animal being offered was a young bull, it was to be slaughtered and Aaron's sons would catch the blood and sprinkle it against the sides of the altar (verse 5). The dead bull would then be skinned and cut into pieces (verse 6). Aaron and his sons would prepare a fire on the altar and arrange the various pieces that had been cut on the altar. In this particular form of offering everything was to be burnt, even the head and the fat (verse 8). The inner parts and the legs were to be washed with water possibly to remove any dung or uncleanness before being burnt. If all these requirements were observed the smell of this offering would rise to God as a pleasing aroma (verse 9). In other words, He would accept their offering.

Notice that the aroma of this sacrifice was a "pleasing aroma" to the Lord. This tells us that the Lord delights in our sacrifices. Though we owe everything to God, He is not blind to the sacrifices we make for Him. In fact, our service and offerings rejoice His heart. This is in reality quite amazing to me. Why should God delight in us paying back to Him what He already deserves and owns? He sees the attitude of my heart and the love with which I bring my offering and is pleased.

A burnt offering did not have to be a young bull. It could also be a sheep or goat (verse 10). If it was a sheep or goat it was to be a male without defect. It was slaughtered at the north side of the altar. As with the young bull, Aaron's sons were to take the blood from the sacrifice and sprinkle it against the sides of the altar (verse 11). The sheep or goat was then cut into pieces, the inner parts and the thighs washed of any defilement and the head, fat and all the pieces burnt as an offering to the Lord.

The third type of animal that could be offered as a burnt offering was a dove or a pigeon. It is quite possible that

there were individuals in Israel who did not have a bull or a sheep to sacrifice to the Lord. These individuals could bring a pigeon or dove. If the offering brought to the Lord was a bird, the priest was to bring it to the altar, wring off its head, tear it open by the wings (verse 17) and burn it on the altar. Its blood was drained out at the side of the altar (verse 15). The crop and any undigested food was removed and thrown to the east of the altar where the ashes from the offerings were kept (verse 16).

Notice that this small offering also rose up to God as a pleasing aroma (verse 17). God would be as pleased with the offering of a small dove as He was with a young bull. The size of the gift was not what was important to God. What was important to the Lord was that the offering He ordained was offered with a heart that delighted in Him.

One day Jesus was in the temple watching those who were putting their offerings in the offering box. Mark records Jesus conversation with His disciples on that occasion.

(41) Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. (42) But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. (43) Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. (44) They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on." (Mark 12:41-44)

Jesus saw the sacrifice of the poor widow that day and rejoiced more in it than in the larger gifts offered by the

rich. The Lord made provision for people of every status in society. The rich and the poor could equally bring joy the heart of God. There was provision for everyone to bring an offering and know the forgiveness and acceptance of God.

God does not see people as we see them. He does not look at how much money they have or how influential they are in the society. He does not value larger gifts any more than the simple gift. He sees the heart and rejoices in all gifts brought to him.

Let me conclude with one more statement about the burnt offering. It was the only offering made that was completely burned. The other offerings we will consider in this section were only partially burned. It represented a total sacrifice of everything. Nothing was to be held back. Everything was laid on the altar. Are you willing to lay everything on the altar today? Will you release everything and give Him full control? Will you surrender yourself completely into His hands and offer yourself for Him to do with as He pleases? This is a sacrifice that rises up to Him as a pleasant aroma. Will you delight His heart today by offering yourself completely and fully to Him?

For Consideration:

- What sacrifices are you making for the Lord today?
- Are you offering the Lord the best you have of your time and resources or are you giving Him what you no longer need yourself?
- Is the size of our gift important? What makes an offering acceptable to God?
- What encouragement do you find in the fact that the Lord God delights in our offerings to Him?

- What do the regulations about the burnt offering teach us about what the Lord Jesus did for us? What do they teach us about what God expects of us?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be more willing to offer yourself and your resources to Him.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for any unwillingness or hesitation to give Him the best you have.
- Thank the Lord that He accepts your offerings, big or small, with great delight.
- Thank Him that He was willing to offer Himself without reservation for the forgiveness of your sin.

2

THE GRAIN OFFERING

Read Leviticus 2:1-14

The second form of offering that God gave instructions about was the grain offering. A grain offering was different from other offerings in that there was no shedding of blood. Grain offerings could be brought to the Lord in several different ways.

Uncooked Grain Offering

Grain could be brought to the Lord as an uncooked offering. The grain for this type of offering was first ground into flour. A mixture of oil and incense was put on the flour and it was taken to the priests. It is interesting to note that priests or kings were anointed with oil as a sign of being set apart for God. Revelation 5:8 speaks of incense rising up to God with the prayers of the saints. There may be some significance to these two ingredients poured on the grain offering.

Verse 2 tells us that the priest was to take a handful of the fine flour, oil and incense and burn it on the altar. This

handful of grain was called a memorial portion which was given to the Lord. The rest of the offering belonged to Aaron and his sons.

While the burnt offering was offered completely to the Lord, only some of the grain offering was burned on the altar and the remainder went to the priests. This was one of the ways the priests were paid for their services. There may have been some people who questioned why the priests should offer only a handful of this offering and keep the rest for themselves. Verse 3, however, makes it quite clear that it was the intention of God that the priests keep this portion. He considered the portion given to Him and the portion given to the priests to be equally holy.

The rest of the grain offering belonged to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.

The portion given to the priests was as holy as the portion burned on the altar. This same principle applies in the New Testament. Speaking in Matthew 25:45 Jesus said:

“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

Earlier in Matthew 10:42, speaking of those who ministered to his disciples, Jesus taught:

And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”

Notice in Leviticus 2:2 that this offering, partially burnt on the altar and partially given to the priests rose up to God as a pleasing aroma. By giving to His servants the priests, God's people were also giving to Him and His work.

Cooked Grain Offering

The second type of grain offering God's people could bring to Him was baked or cooked. In the case of a grain offering that was baked, the grain was ground into flour, mixed with oil and made into cakes or wafers. A baked offering was not to contain yeast (verse 4). In 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 the apostle Paul compares yeast to sin. Writing to the Corinthians he said:

(6) Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? (7) Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (8) Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

Yeast in this sense was a symbol of sin. The offerings of God's people were to be free from yeast. It is also of significance that when the people of God left Egypt they brought with them bread without yeast because they did not have time to wait for the bread to rise. The bread without yeast may also have been a reminder of the deliverance of God from Egypt and Israel's indebtedness to Him for releasing them from bondage.

The grain offering could also be fried on a griddle or cooked in a pan. Provision was made for any form of

cooking that was accessible to the people of that day. This baked or cooked grain offering was brought to the priest who would take it to the altar, remove a memorial portion, burn it and keep the remainder for himself (verses 8-10).

We have already seen that no yeast was to be found in any cooked or baked grain offering. Notice, however, in verse 11 that honey was also forbidden in an offering made to the Lord by fire. There is no reason given for this in the passage nor do we have any clear indication of why this was forbidden. Honey, however, is often associated with wealth and prosperity. God told His people in Exodus 3:8 that He was going to give them a land flowing with "milk and honey." The offering brought to the Lord was to be a simple offering. God's people were not to dress it up. When the Lord Jesus came to this earth He came as a simple man. He could have come as a king with all the luxuries and wealth He deserved but He didn't. He came in all simplicity. This is how the grain offering was to be offered.

Verse 13 tells us that all grain offerings were to contain salt. Salt had a cleansing, purifying and preserving effect. Salt kept the food of the Israelites from going bad. In this case, it was a symbol of holiness and purity. Salt also is a symbol of God's covenantal faithfulness. This is evident from the Old Testament references to a "covenant of salt" (see Numbers 18:19, 2 Chronicles 13:5). Just as salt preserved an offering, so God as a covenant keeping God, would keep His promises to His people. Just as salt kept food from going bad, so God expected His people to remain pure and faithful to Him as their God.

Grain Offering as First Fruits of Harvest

The final type of grain offering was an offering that could be brought as a thanksgiving offering from the first fruits of the harvest. New grain was crushed and roasted in the fire. Oil and incense was poured over this crushed and roasted grain and brought to the priest. The priest would take a handful of grain as a memorial portion and burn it on the altar to the Lord. The remainder would be his portion.

The regulations for these offerings were clear. The offering was to be without yeast, a symbol of its perfection. It was to be crushed and brought to the Lord as an offering. Though He was without sin, the Lord Jesus was crushed and placed on the cross as an offering for our sin.

The offerings were to be anointed with oil and incense. Oil and incense were used to consecrate an object and are symbols of the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, too, was set apart and filled with the Spirit of God to be the sacrifice for our sin.

No burnt offering was to contain honey but was to be offered in all simplicity. Jesus could have taken on the wealth of this world and come as a great king, but He chose to come as a simple man walking unnoticed among us. He lived a simple life, with no home or possessions.

All offerings were to be seasoned with salt. This salt was a symbol of holiness and purity. It had a preserving effect. Jesus lived a holy and godly life. He walked in this sinful world but was free from its impurity. He died on the cross as a perfect sacrifice before the Father for our sins.

While these grain offerings were brought to the Lord in thankfulness for His provision, we can see how they looked forward to the day when a perfect and holy sacrifice would be made for the sins of the world.

For Consideration:

- How did the grain offering differ from the other offerings of the Old Testament?
- Though bloodless in nature, how did these grain offerings point to the Lord Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for our sin?
- What types of grain offerings could be offered to the Lord?
- How were the needs of the priests provided for through these grain offerings?
- The grain offering teaches us that by giving to others we are also giving to the Lord. What are the needs around you today? How could you be reaching out to those needs?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you how He would like you to minister to the needs around you.
- Take a moment to consider how God is worthy of all we have. Thank Him that He is worthy of our worship and praise.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the sacrifice He made on our behalf. Thank Him that He died as a perfect and holy sacrifice to bring us to God.

3

THE FELLOWSHIP OFFERING

Read Leviticus 3:1-17

So far in this study we have examined the burnt offering and the grain offering. The third type of sacrifice the people of God could make was known as the fellowship or peace offering. This was generally brought as an offering of thanksgiving to God. In this chapter we read about three types of animals that could be brought to the Lord as a fellowship offering.

An Animal from the Herd

The first animal that could be sacrificed to the Lord for a fellowship offering was an animal from the herd such as a bull. While the burnt offering of chapter 1 required that the animal be a male, the fellowship offering had no such requirement. Those bringing a fellowship offering could bring either a male or a female animal from their herd. In either case, however, the animal had to be inspected to be sure it had no defect. God required that they offer Him only those animals that were without blemish.

It is important that we understand the significance of this requirement. There are at least two reasons why the animal was to be without defect. The first reason was to show respect for God. Listen to what the Lord God said to his people in Malachi 1:6-8:

(6) "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' (7) "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. (8) When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty.

God condemns His people in Malachi 1:6-8 for showing disrespect and contempt for His name by bringing defiled sacrifices. God deserves the best we have. To give any less, is to dishonour His name.

There is a second reason why the animal offered on the altar was to be without defect. These animals symbolically looked forward to the great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary. Hebrews 4:15 describes the Lord Jesus as being without sin.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.

Christ was a perfect lamb. His sacrifice was a perfect sacrifice. The animal on the altar was symbolic of the greater and perfect sacrifice that was to come in the person of the Lord Jesus. For this reason it was to be without defect.

If the animal offered was from a herd, it was brought to the tabernacle and presented to the priests. The person offering the animal was to place his hands on its head and slaughter it. The act of placing one's hands on the head of the animal was symbolic of passing on his sins to the animal who would suffer the penalty on his behalf. The animal would die in the place of the person sacrificing it. Once again, this is a very clear picture of what the Lord Jesus did for us. He took our sins on Himself and died in our place.

The blood of the slaughtered animal was sprinkled against each side of the altar. It was then cut open and the fat, the kidneys and part of the liver were removed and burned on the altar as an offering to the Lord.

An Animal from the Flock

An Israelite could also bring an animal from their flock of sheep and goats to the Lord. If the animal being offered was from the herd it could be either a male or female without defect. The same principles applied to the sacrifice of an animal from the flock as applied to the animal sacrificed from the herd.

The person offering the animal, either sheep or goat, would bring it to the tabernacle where he would lay his hands on its head, identifying with the animal's death on his behalf. The animal was sacrificed and the blood sprinkled on the sides of the altar. When the animal was cut

open the fat, the kidneys and part of the liver were removed and burned on the altar to the Lord God.

Leviticus 7 gives us further insight into the purpose and regulations for the fellowship offering. While we will deal with this later, it may be of help to mention a few points here. The fellowship offering was brought to the Lord as a means of giving Him thanks (Leviticus 7:11-12) or to fulfill a vow (Leviticus 7:16). God required that the meat from a fellowship offering be eaten on the day it was sacrificed (Leviticus 7:15). If the offering was the result of a vow, however, it could be finished on the second day (Leviticus 7:16). Anything left over after that was to be burned.

What we see from this is that the fellowship or peace offering was a sacrifice and meal combined. Part of the animal was sacrificed, the other part was eaten. It is obvious that if the entire sacrifice was to be eaten that day or the next, no one person could do this alone. The meal therefore was shared with others. This was a happy occasion. An offering of thanks had been made and now God's people shared their joy with others by eating together.

The fellowship offering provided God's people with a way of celebrating His goodness. They did this by offering the Lord a portion of the meat and sharing the rest with friends and loved ones. It reminded them that their faith was not something they kept to themselves. They were to share it with others.

In Matthew 5:14-16 we read:

(14) "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the

house. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

It is the purpose of the Lord that we let our light shine so that others can see the Father in heaven and praise Him for his goodness. Do you celebrate the goodness of God? Do you share His blessings with others so they too can know the goodness of your God? The fellowship offering of the Old Testament provided the means for this to happen. May God give us grace today to find ways of sharing His goodness with those around us as well.

For Consideration:

- Why was it important that an animal sacrificed to the Lord be without defect?
- The person bringing a fellowship offering to the Lord would place his hand on the head of the animal before it was slaughtered. What did this represent and what does it teach us about the work of the Lord Jesus for us?
- The fellowship offering provided God's people with a means of celebrating His goodness with others. How do you share the goodness of God with those around you?
- What does this offering teach us about the importance of sharing our faith?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He was a perfect sacrifice for your sin.

- Take a moment to consider the good things God has given you. Thank Him for those blessings in your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be more willing to share His goodness and mercy with those around you.

4

THE SIN OFFERING

Read Leviticus 4:1-5:13

The next type of offering that could be brought to the Lord was a sin offering. It is quite obvious from its title that this offering was brought when an individual had fallen into sin and needed God's forgiveness. Notice, however, from verse 1 that the sin was unintentional. We have examples of this type of sin recorded for us in Leviticus 5:1-4.

The first example is of a person who refused to be a witness in a public case when he had information about that case that could affect the outcome (Leviticus 5:1). In reality he was hindering the course of justice by refusing to speak. He may have refused to speak because he was afraid. By giving into fear he may have allowed a guilty person to go free or an innocent person to be falsely accused. It was not his intention to pervert justice but his refusal to speak out allowed this to happen.

Another example of unintentional sin is seen in Leviticus 5:2. Here we have the case of a person who touched something ceremonially unclean. He may have had to get

rid of the carcass or maybe somehow he had accidentally touched it in the course of his normal routine. While he did not intend to do anything bad, he had still touched something that he was not supposed to touch and was guilty of sin. The moment he became aware of the fact that he had touched this uncleanness he needed to make a sacrifice for cleansing (Leviticus 5:3).

The final example in Leviticus 5:4 is of a person who took an oath hastily, realizing later that the oath he had taken was foolish and unrealistic. Again, in this case, the individual was guilty of making promises he could not keep.

We learn from Leviticus 5:1-4 that the types of sins addressed by the sin offering were sins of omission (not doing, for whatever reason, something that should have been done), sins of carelessness (such as making a foolish promise), or sins of necessity or ignorance such as touching a dead body.

What is important for us to understand is that we can be guilty before the Lord even when we do not intend to sin. Consider for a moment the case of a dead animal found in the Israelite camp. How was this dead carcass to be disposed of? Someone would have to defile themselves to get rid of the rotting corpse. The intention of the person getting rid of the corpse was to keep the camp pure by removing the defilement, but by touching the dead body he was guilty before God and needed to bring a sin offering.

Sin is still sin even when the intentions behind it are not evil. You don't have to be aware that you have sinned to be guilty. God does not excuse sin because the intention was noble or because we didn't know what we were doing. Sometimes we find ourselves in sin simply by virtue of living in a sinful world. We see things we never intended to

see. We say things we thought to be right but later found them to be false. We make bad decisions and are not always able to follow through with our promises. All these sins need forgiveness. They are not intentional or rebellious in nature but they defile us. This is what the sin offering was about. It provided a means by which the people of God could be cleansed of the defilements of everyday living.

What is particularly interesting in Leviticus 4 is that the type of sin offering brought to the Lord depended on the individual's role in the society. Let's consider this briefly.

Priest (Leviticus 4:3-12)

If the person who sinned unintentionally was a priest, he was to bring a young bull without defect to the Lord as an offering (4:3). This bull was brought to the entrance of the tabernacle. The priest laid his hand on the bull's head to identify with its death and to symbolically transfer the guilt onto the bull. He then slaughtered the bull (4:4). The blood was taken into the Tabernacle and sprinkled seven times in front of the curtain and also placed on the horns of the altar of incense. The remainder of the blood was poured at the base of the altar of burnt offerings at the entrance to the Tabernacle. From this we see that the objects and locations where the priest ministered were sprinkled with blood covering his offences.

The bull was then cut up and the fat, the kidneys, and part of the liver were removed and offered to the Lord as an offering burned by fire on the altar. The bull's hide, flesh, hind legs, inner parts and dung were taken outside the camp and burned (4:11-12).

The Whole Community (Leviticus 4:13-21)

If the whole Israelite community was guilty of sin, even though they were unaware of sinning at the time, they were responsible for their actions. When they became aware of their guilt, they were to bring a young bull to the tabernacle. The elders were to lay their hands on the bull's head to identify with its death and symbolically transfer their guilt onto it on behalf of the people. The bull was slaughtered and the blood brought into the tabernacle. The priest would dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it before the Lord seven times in front of the curtain. Blood was also put on the horns of the altar of incense in the Tabernacle and the remainder poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offerings in the courtyard. The fat was removed and burned on the altar and the hind legs, skin, inner parts and dung were taken outside the camp to be burned.

A Community Leader (Leviticus 4:22-26)

If a community leader sinned unintentionally, when he became aware of his sin he was to bring a male goat without defect to the Lord. As with the other sin offerings the leader would put his hand on the head of the goat to identify with it and symbolically transfer his guilt. The animal was slaughtered and the blood was put on the horns of the altar and the rest poured out at the base. The fat portions were burned on the altar. Notice that while the community leader still needed to be forgiven his offering was different. The blood was not taken into the tabernacle and his sacrifice was smaller than the sacrifice required for a priest.

Individual

If an individual member of the society sinned unintentionally, when he became aware of his sin he was to bring either a female goat or lamb (see 4:28 and 4:32). In either case the female goat or lamb was to be without defect. As with all the sin offerings, the individual was to lay his hands on the head of the animal to identify with its death and symbolically transfer his guilt. The animal was slaughtered and some blood put on the horns of the altar with the remainder poured out at its base. The fatty portions were removed and burned on the altar as an offering to the Lord God and the individual would be forgiven (4:31).

Leviticus 5:5 tells us that the offering was not the only thing required for forgiveness. When a person realized his guilt he was also to confess that particular sin.

When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned.

God expected that the individual bringing his offering would confess the particular sin he had committed. It is quite possible to make an appearance of holiness by confessing that we are sinners in need of the Lord's forgiveness, it is quite another to name the sins we have committed one by one. God wanted His people to come before Him, sincerity seeking His forgiveness for specific sins and failures.

The Poor

There were people in the Israelite community who could not afford to bring a lamb to offer for the forgiveness of their sins. These individuals also needed a means to have

their sins forgiven. If these individuals could not afford a lamb, they could bring two doves or two young pigeons (5:7). These birds were presented to the priest who would wring their necks and cut them open. He would sprinkle blood of one bird against the altar and pour what remained at the base. The other bird was offered on the altar as an offering to the Lord. By this means the poor person would be forgiven (5:10).

Individuals who were too poor to even afford two doves or two pigeons, they could bring an offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour (2 US quarts or 2 litres). Notice in Leviticus 5:11 that no oil was poured on this flour as in the case of a grain offering. Oil was used to set something apart as holy. This was not the case here. The flour offering was an offering for sin and as such was not set apart in the same way. The offering was brought to the priest. He would take a portion (memorial portion) and burn it on the altar as an offering for sin. The rest of the offering would belong to the priest (5:12-13).

God provided the sin offering to His people as means to deal with unintentional sins. God made a provision for the forgiveness of the sins of every person in the society. All could be forgiven, from the richest to the poorest. Day after day people were being defiled. They failed in their promises; they touched things that did not intend to touch, and failed to meet their obligations. They said things they should not have said. They saw things they should not have seen. The routine of daily life defiled them. Their human weakness caused them to fail God and fall short of His purpose. They needed ongoing forgiveness and cleansing for their sin and failures. God made provision for this in the sin offering.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever tried to excuse your sins? What kind of excuses have you made to justify your actions? What does this chapter have to teach us about these excuses?
- How important it is that we take responsibility for our actions?
- Leviticus 4 and 5 speak about the various sacrifices that were offered depending on one's place in society. The priest had to offer a greater sacrifice than an ordinary person. What does this tell us about the responsibility that God has placed on spiritual leaders?
- When a person brought a sin offering he was expected to name the particular sin. How important is for us to name our sins before God? Have you ever been guilty of confessing sins generally and never naming them particularly?
- What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the importance of God's ongoing and daily cleansing and forgiveness?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have tried to excuse your sin and refused to accept responsibility.
- Thank the Lord that He has made provision in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins.
- Ask the Lord to reveal the particular sins that you have been guilty of. Take some time to confess those sins and receive His forgiveness.

5

THE GUILT OFFERING

Read Leviticus 5:14-6:7

The final type of offering discussed in this section of Leviticus is the guilt offering. Notice in Leviticus 5:15 that the guilt offering was for sins committed against the “Lord’s holy things.” In other words, the guilt offering provided for sins committed against things that had been dedicated to the Lord. This could include the furnishings of the tabernacle or offerings brought to Him. Leviticus 6 tells us that the guilt offering also provided forgiveness for the individual who had been irresponsible in regards to the property of his neighbour. This offering paid for any damages caused by the guilty party to property dedicated to the Lord or owned by another person.

Damaged Caused to the Dedicated Things of the Lord

When a person sinned unintentionally by damaging or defiling something that had been dedicated to the Lord, he was to bring a ram from his flock as an offering. Notice that it was brought as a “penalty” (verse 15). The priest would estimate the value of the damage caused and the sinner

would bring a ram and the estimated value in money to pay for the damages. He was also to add one fifth to the price assigned and bring that to the priest as a penalty for his sin. The ram would be sacrificed and the sin of the individual forgiven.

Unknown Sins

Verse 17 is quite striking. Here the Lord told Moses that if someone did what was forbidden, “even though he did not know it,” he was guilty and would be held responsible.

There is an interesting story in the book of Job. Job was a righteous man whose children did not always walk with the Lord. Job’s children would take turns holding feasts where they would eat and drink. Job feared that his children would be guilty of sinning at these “parties” and so he would bring a sacrifice to God on their behalf. Notice his custom in Job 1:4-5:

(4) His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. (5) When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” This was Job’s regular custom.

Job did not know of any particular sin here. “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts,” he said. Though he had no proof of any particular sin, he still offered a sacrifice to God for them.

The wonderful thing about the ministry of the Lord Jesus is that His sacrifice covers all our sins, past, present, future, known or unknown. We read in Hebrews 7:27 about Jesus as our high priest:

Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

When a person brought a guilt offering for a sin he or she may have committed unintentionally, they were to bring a ram from the flock. This ram was to be without defect and of proper value. The priest would offer the ram as a sacrifice to the Lord to cover the individual's wrongdoing.

Loss or Damage to a Neighbour's Property

In Leviticus 6:1-7 we have the example of an individual who had been unfaithful to the Lord by deceiving his neighbour with regards to something that had been entrusted to his care. He may also have cheated his neighbour in some way (verse 2). We have an example in verse 3 of a person who found something that belonged to his neighbour and lied about it. He may have found this article and kept it himself, lying to cover it up.

In any of these cases the individual concerned was guilty before God. The law required that he return anything he had stolen, found or taken by deceit. He was to pay everything back and add one fifth of the value to it. He was also to bring a ram to the priest as a guilt offering. This ram would be sacrificed as a guilt offering to the Lord on his behalf so that he could be forgiven.

Notice that there were two aspects to the guilt offering. The first had to do with forgiveness before God. A ram had to be brought and offered to God as a sacrifice to cover the guilt. The second aspect had to do with taking responsibility and paying back the rightful owner for damages caused to him or his property. This would restore the relationship with the party who was offended and bring the individual who had sinned back into a proper relationship with God.

In the book of Luke, we have a record of the Lord Jesus meeting a tax collector named Zacchaeus. As a tax collector, Zacchaeus was a clear example of the type of person that needed to come to the Lord with a guilt offering. He had cheated many people out of their money. When he met the Lord Jesus, however, he came under conviction of sin. He realized that he was wrong and that he needed to do something to make it right. Notice his response to this conviction of sin in Luke 19:8:

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Zacchaeus demonstrated responsibility for his sin by willingly paying back those he had cheated. Prayer or confession is not enough. The law of the guilt offering also demanded that the believer pay for what he had taken or damaged. Two relationships need to be restored. First, the believer needs to restore his relationship with God through confession and receiving His forgiveness. Second, the believer also needed to restore his relationship with his brother or sister. In fact, the relationship with God can never be fully restored until restoration has been made with our brother or sister.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about our need to take responsibility for our actions?
- Is it enough just to confess our sin to God? What does this passage teach us about our need to be restored to our brother or sister as well?
- How does paying for damages done help to repair the relationship with our brother or sister?
- Are there people you need to be restored to again? Who are they? What do you need to do to be restored to a right relationship with them?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be responsible for your actions. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have not taken responsibility for damage you have caused to the property of another.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there is a brother or sister with whom you need to be restored. Ask Him to show you what you need to do to be restored.

6

REGULATIONS CONCERNING OFFERINGS (PART 1)

Read Leviticus 6:8-30

So far we have seen the various types of offerings that could be brought to the Lord. In this next section of the book of Leviticus God explains in more detail His requirements regarding these various offerings.

The Burnt Offering (Leviticus 6:8-13)

The first type of offering discussed in this section is the burnt offering. The burnt offering was an offering consumed completely by fire. God instructed Moses in verse 9 that this offering was to remain on the altar throughout the night with the fire on the altar continually burning. This would assure that the offering was completely burned with nothing remaining. In the morning, the priest was to put on his linen clothes and underwear and remove the ashes from the altar. These ashes were placed in a pile beside the altar. When all the ashes had been removed the priest would take off his priestly garments and put on other

clothes to take the ashes outside the camp to a place that was ceremonially clean. These ashes were not to be placed in an unclean place as they were what remained of what had been offered to the Lord.

Notice in verses 12-13 that the fire on the altar was kept burning. It was never to go out. In reality it was a symbol of the constant need for sacrifices to be made for sin. Unlike the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, sacrifices were to be made continually to cover the sins of God's people.

The Grain Offering (Leviticus 6:14-23)

When a grain offering was brought to the Lord, the priest was to take a handful of the mixture of flour oil and incense and burn it on the altar as an offering to the Lord. The remainder of the offering belonged to him. While the remainder of the grain offering belonged to the priests, God placed several restrictions on how it could be used.

First, the grain offering was to be eaten without yeast. The Israelites used yeast in their bread, but this offering of flour oil and incense was an offering given to the Lord and His priests. It was not to contain yeast. Yeast was a symbol of sin (see 1 Corinthians 5:8). This offering was to remain pure, clean and holy (verse 17).

The second requirement of the Lord regarding the priest's portion of the grain offering was that it be eaten in a holy place in the courtyard of the tabernacle (verse 16). The grain offering was not to be taken out of the tabernacle. It was a holy offering to the Lord and nothing was to be done to devalue its significance. It was not to be treated like ordinary bread.

Third, the grain offering could only be eaten by the male descendants of Aaron. This implies that their wives could not eat this bread. This offering was reserved for the priests alone.

Fourth, verse 18 tells us that those who touched this bread would become holy. This is a wonderful picture of what the Lord Jesus did for us. In John 6:33 we read:

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He gives life to all who come to Him. Those who come are made holy and pure. They are forgiven of their sins. The bread the priests ate symbolized the purifying and forgiving work of Jesus Christ.

There was one final requirement of the Lord regarding a grain offering made at the time a priest was anointed. The priest was to bring his grain offering to the altar. He was to bring a tenth of an ephah of fine flour (about two US quarts or two litres). The flour was to be cooked with oil on a griddle, half in the morning and half in the evening. The resulting bread was to be broken in pieces, brought before the Lord and burned on the altar. In the case of a grain offering brought to the Lord at the ordination of a priest, it was not to be eaten. Instead the entire grain offering was to be burned before the Lord (verse 23).

The grain offering was holy. It was to be treated with great respect. God permitted only His priests the privilege of eating this bread. It could only be eaten in a special place and was not to be treated like other bread.

The Sin Offering (Leviticus 6:24-29)

The sin offering was made for those who had unintentionally disobeyed the commands of God. This type of offering was to be slaughtered in the courtyard. It should be remembered that only parts of this sin offering were burned on the altar. The remainder of the offering belonged to the priest. Notice in verse 26 that the priest who offered the animal was to eat the parts that were not sacrificed.

The sin offering was eaten in the courtyard of the tabernacle. It was not to be taken outside. Again, this reminded the people that this was an offering dedicated to the Lord.

As with the grain offering, those who touched the flesh of the sin offering would become ceremonially holy. This is once again a picture of what the death of the Lord Jesus did for us. His death makes all who come to Him holy.

Notice in verse 27 that the blood of this slaughtered animal was holy as well. If blood splattered on a garment while the animal was being sacrificed, then that garment was to be washed in a holy place. The garment was not to be taken home and washed with other clothes. Even a drop of blood from the sacrifice splattered on a garment required special treatment. It was holy to the Lord.

If the meat from the animal offered as a sin offering was cooked in a clay pot, the pot was never to be used again. It was to be broken after it was used. If the animal was cooked in a bronze pot, the pot was to be scoured and rinsed thoroughly with water.

Only the male members of the priest's family could eat this sacrifice (verse 29). This sacrifice was holy to the Lord and

only those who had been set apart for His service could eat the meat.

Notice in verse 30 that an offering brought into the Holy Place to make atonement for the people as a whole was considered too holy to be eaten even by the priests. These sin offerings were to be completely burned.

We see from these laws that the Lord required that the objects used in worship of His name be set apart for Him. What was consecrated to God was not to be profaned or considered ordinary.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this section about how things dedicated to the Lord were to be treated? Does this same principle apply today?
- The altar was to have a fire burning on it at all times. What did this say about the need for continual sacrifices to be made for the sins of God's people? How did the Lord Jesus change this when He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sin?
- Those who touched the grain offerings or the sin offerings became ceremonially holy. What does this teach us about the work of the Lord Jesus as an offering for our sin?
- The sin offering and the grain offerings of the priests were to be eaten only by those who had been set apart by God as priests. What are the requirements for those who participate in the Lord's Supper in our day?

- What things can we do that show disrespect for the holy things of God today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you show more respect for Him and those who belong to Him.
- Take a moment to consider how the sacrifice of Christ makes those who come to Him and accept His work pure before God. Thank Him for the complete forgiveness offered to you through His blood. Thank Him that you are holy because of His work.
- Ask the Lord to help you as His servant to live a life that is pure and right before Him. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have dishonoured Him and His holy things by your lifestyle or actions.

7

REGULATIONS CONCERNING OFFERINGS (PART 2)

Read Leviticus 7:1-38

In chapter 6 we examined the rules concerning the burnt offering, grain offering and the sin offering. Chapter 7 continues along the same lines and addresses the other types of sacrifices an Israelite could make to the Lord God.

Guilt Offering (Leviticus 7:1-10)

The next offering God speaks to Moses about in chapter 7 is the guilt offering. The Lord commanded that this offering be slaughtered in the courtyard of the tabernacle. The blood of the slaughtered animal was sprinkled against the sides of the altar (verse 2).

The fat of the animal along with the kidneys and part of the liver were all removed and placed on the altar as an offering to the Lord God (verse 3-4). The priest alone could burn this offering on the altar as a guilt offering (verse 5). We see from this that the practice of burning sacrifices to

the Lord God was strictly regulated. Only those who had been ordained as priests were permitted this privilege. This was a means of controlling how the sacrifices were performed to be sure that everything was done as the Lord commanded.

The remainder of the guilt offering belonged to the priest who performed the sacrifice. Any male family member of the priest's family could eat the sacrifice. It could only be eaten, however, in a holy place (verse 6). If the guilt offering came in the form of grain instead of an animal, after offering a portion to the Lord the remainder belonged to the priest who offered it.

We see from this that the Lord provided for the priest through these sacrifices. They made their living by offering sacrifices to the Lord and caring for the spiritual needs of His people. Writing in 1 Corinthians 9:13-14 the apostle Paul says:

(13) Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? (14) In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

The Lord's intention was that His priests devote themselves to the work of the tabernacle. For this to happen, the ordinary people needed to provide for their needs. This provision came through the offerings that were brought to the Lord.

Writing 1 Timothy 5:17-18, the apostle Paul said:

(17) The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

(18) For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

In writing this, Paul encouraged his readers to give to their spiritual leaders and provide for their needs so that they would not be without food and the necessities of life. Notice that Paul told his readers that those who ministered the affairs of the church well were worthy of "double honour." God's people were to respect those who worked hard for the cause of His kingdom. Those who served faithfully and diligently were to be especially honoured. God gave to His people the responsibility to see that their religious leaders were cared for and without need so that they could continue to devote themselves to their calling.

The Fellowship Offering (Leviticus 7:11-21)

There were various reasons for offering a fellowship or peace offering. First, it could be offered as an expression of thankfulness to the Lord God. If this was the case, then the individual was to bring cakes of bread or wafers made without yeast and mixed well with oil (verse 12). After a portion was given to the Lord, the remainder belonged to the priest as payment for his services (verse 14). If the fellowship or peace offering was an offering of an animal, the priest was to burn the portion that belonged to the Lord and he could keep the rest for himself. God required, however, that the animal be eaten that day. None was to remain until the morning (verse 15).

A fellowship offering could also be given as a result of a vow. If this was the case and there was too much meat to

eat in one day, it could be eaten the second day. Anything left over until the third day was to be burned. If the meat was eaten on the third day, the offering made would no longer be accepted. God would not credit this offering to the person who offered it and the priest who ate the meat would be guilty before God (verses 17-18).

It is interesting to note that the actions of the priests would literally cancel any benefit to the person offering the sacrifice. The person who brought the offering may have come with a right attitude but this was not enough for the offering to be accepted. God also required that the priest strictly follow His regulations. There are those who say that the attitude of the heart is all that matters. This passage teaches us that God requires more than this. The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans said this about his fellow Israelites:

(10:1) Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.
(2) For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. (Romans 10:1-2)

Notice that Paul talks about the Israelites as a people filled with zeal for God but their zeal was not based on knowledge. In other words, they were excited and passionate about God but their understanding of Him was twisted and based on faulty information. God expects us to be zealous for Him, but this is not enough. We also need to be informed. In other words, just as the priests needed to follow the commands of the Lord in order for their offerings to be accepted, so we also need to do things God's way. Experience, emotion and zeal are not enough; we also need His Word to guide us. God's work must be done in God's way if it is to receive His full blessing.

Notice in verses 19-21 that if the meat brought as a fellowship offering touched anything ceremonially unclean, it was not to be eaten. It was to be burned. All offerings had to be pure. If a priest ate this unclean meat, he was to be banished from Israel. This shows us the seriousness of the commands of the Lord God. There were severe punishments for anyone who would disregard the law of God regarding the offerings and sacrifices.

Fat and Blood (Leviticus 7:22-27)

The fat and blood of every animal belonged to the Lord. The fat was burned on the altar. Notice in verse 24 that while animal fat could be used for other purposes, it was not to be eaten. The same principle applied to blood. The blood of an animal sacrificed to the Lord was sprinkled or poured on the altar. The blood of any animal or bird was also poured on the ground. It was never to be eaten by the people of Israel. Verse 27 imposes a serious punishment on anyone who disobeyed this law. They were cut off from the people of God and banished from their presence.

The Priests' Portion (Leviticus 7:28-36)

Part of every fellowship or peace offering brought to the Lord was sacrificed to the Lord. The person bringing the offering brought it to the tabernacle. The animal was slaughtered and the priest offered the fat on the altar. The remainder of the animal was cut up. Notice in verse 30 that the breast of the animal was presented as a wave offering.

A wave offering was an offering that was taken by the priest and waved before the Lord. This act was symbolic. By waving it before the Lord the priest was symbolically offering it to the Lord and dedicating it to His purposes. This wave offering was not burned on the altar. Instead it

was kept by the priest. In this case, the breast of the animal was waved before the Lord to dedicate it to Him, and then given to Aaron and his sons (verse 31).

The right thigh of the fellowship or peace offering was given to the priest who made the offering (verses 32-33). These portions of the fellowship offering were payment for their service at the tabernacle. From the time they were anointed to serve the Lord, this would be their means of income. God's people were to provide for their needs through the offerings brought to the tabernacle (verses 35-36).

For Consideration:

- How were the priests paid for their service in the tabernacle? What does this tell us about our obligation toward those who serve as spiritual leaders over us?
- The priest could cancel any benefit of a sacrifice by eating it after the third day. What does this tell us about the importance of doing things in God's way? Is it possible to have a sincere heart before God but fail to receive His blessing because we are not doing things His way?
- What does this passage teach us about the importance of understanding the requirements of God as found in the Word of God? Are right attitudes and emotions enough? Why do we need God's Word also?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to the financial and practical needs His servants are facing today. Ask the Lord to show you how you can help by bringing relief to them and support them as God requires.
- Thank the Lord that He has given us His Word to show us what He expects. Ask Him to give you a deeper burden to study and follow that Word so that you can please Him in all that you do.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there is any way you are not doing His work or living as He requires. Ask Him to help you to make the changes necessary.

8

AARON AND HIS SONS ARE ORDAINED

Read Leviticus 8:1-36

In the first seven chapters of the book of Leviticus we examined the various regulations regarding the sacrifices that were brought to the Lord. These sacrifices were performed by priests who had been ordained for that purpose. Leviticus 8 shows us how Aaron and his sons were ordained to this priesthood.

As the ordination service began, Aaron and his sons presented themselves before the Lord at the entrance of the tabernacle. They came that day with their garments, anointing oil, a bull for a sin offering, two rams, and a basket of bread made without yeast. An assembly of people gathered to witness the occasion.

When everything was in place, Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward. He washed them with water to purify them from any uncleanness and then helped Aaron put on his priestly garments which consisted of a tunic, sash, an

apron-like ephod, waistband, breast plate, turban and the Urim and Thummim. The Urim and the Thummim were stone-like objects kept inside the priest's breast plate. While it is uncertain exactly how they were used, the purpose of these objects was to determine the specific will of the Lord in a given situation. We have an example of this in Numbers 27:21:

(21) He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in."

With Aaron dressed in his priestly garments, Moses anointed the tabernacle and all the articles in it with oil. He sprinkled the altar seven times. He also poured some of the oil on Aaron's head to consecrate him and set him apart for the work of the Lord. When Aaron was consecrated, Moses brought his sons forward and dressed them in their garments (verse 13)

As the priests stood dressed in their priestly garments, Moses took the bull they had brought for a sin offering. He had Aaron and his sons lay their hands on it to identify with its death and symbolically transfer their sin onto it. The bull was slaughtered and the blood put on the horns of the altar to purify it. The rest of the blood was poured out on the base of the altar. By this means Moses consecrated the altar and made it ready for the sacrifice that was to take place. The fat, the liver and the kidneys were cut out of the animal and burned on the altar before the Lord. The hide, flesh, and dung were taken outside the camp (verse 17). This was an offering for the sins of the priests.

This offering shows that the priests were not perfect. They were ordinary individuals in need of forgiveness just as the people they served. Despite this, they were called of God to this special role. How easy it is for us to elevate our spiritual leaders and forget that they are just like us with all the struggles and shortcomings we face. How easy it is also for us to think that we have to be perfect to serve the Lord. God uses imperfect men and women to accomplish His purposes on this earth.

After offering the bull for the sins of the priests, a ram was brought forward. This ram was offered as a burnt offering to the Lord. As with the sin offering, the priests placed their hands on the ram's head and it was slaughtered. The ram's blood was sprinkled against the altar on all sides and the ram cut into pieces. Because this was a burnt offering, the entire ram was burned on the altar. The inner parts and the legs, however, were washed with water to remove any uncleanness before placing it on the altar. The burning of the entire ram as an offering to the Lord reminded the priests of their commitment to the Lord God. They were, like this ram, to be totally dedicated to the work. Everything they were and all they had needed to be offered to the Lord for His service. The offering reminded them of their need total consecration.

The apostle Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that they no longer belonged to themselves. Writing in 1 Corinthians 6:19 he said:

(19) 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.

Writing in Romans 12:1 he said:

(12:1) 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.

This is the obligation of every servant of God. We present ourselves wholly to God. We die to all we are so that we can live completely for Him. Like the burnt offering on the altar, everything we have is offered to Him for His service and His purpose.

After the sacrifice of the first ram, a second ram was brought forward. This ram was to be slaughtered for the ordination of Aaron and his sons (verse 22). For the third time, the priests placed their hands on the sacrifice to identify with it and its death. The ram was slaughtered and some of the blood placed on Aaron's right ear lobe, his right thumb and his right big toe (verse 23). This same procedure was repeated for all of Aaron's sons (verse 24). The rest of the blood was sprinkled against the sides of the altar.

The act of putting the blood of the ordination ram on the ear, thumb and toe of the priest appears to be quite symbolic. First, from head to toe the priest now belonged to the Lord. He was to keep himself pure and undefiled because he had been set apart for a holy life. Second, the ear is used for hearing while the hands and feet were used for doing. The priest was to listen to the Lord and move his hands and feet in obedience to the commands of the Lord. His ear was dedicated to listening and his hands and feet were dedicated to obedience.

After anointing the ear, thumb and toe of the priests, the ram was cut up. Moses took the fat from the kidneys and the right thigh along with some bread from the basket the

priests had brought, and give it to Aaron and his sons. They waved this offering before the Lord and gave it back to Moses. Moses received the offering and burned it on the altar to the Lord. The breast of the ram was waved before the Lord as a token of thankfulness and in a gesture of dedicating it to the Lord. This portion belonged to Moses who had offered the ram on behalf of the priests (verse 29). The ceremony was concluded when Moses took anointing oil, mixed it with blood and ashes from the altar and sprinkled Aaron and his sons with it (verse 30).

The ordination was celebrated in verses 31-36 by a meal shared together. The meat remaining from the sacrifices was cooked at the entrance of the tabernacle. It was eaten with the basket of bread the priests had brought. Any meat or bread remaining was burned; nothing was to remain.

For seven days the priests remained in the entrance of the tabernacle. A serious warning is given to the priests that day. Moses told them that if they left the tabernacle during that time they would die (verse 35). This was likely a time for reflection, offerings and worship as God further prepared His priests for the task He had given them.

The priest was set apart in a special way for the Lord and His purpose. He was to dedicate himself, mind and body to the purpose for which God had called him. As priest before God today, are we totally committed to Him and His call on our lives?

For Consideration:

- The ordination service of Aaron and his sons teaches us a lot about the kind of people God uses. What does the fact that the priests had to offer a sin offering tell us about them? Do we have to be perfect for God to use us?
- The burnt offering was burned entirely on the altar. What did this show the priests about their obligation to God? Are you devoted entirely to the work God has given you?
- Moses put the blood of the ordination ram on the right ear lobe, right thumb and the right toe of the priests. What does this tell us about what God expected of them as His servants?
- The priests had to wait for seven days in the tabernacle. Has the Lord ever made you wait on Him? What lessons have you learned in this time of waiting?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to use us as His servants even though we have often failed Him. Thank Him for His forgiveness.
- Ask the Lord to give you greater devotion to the work He has called you to do. Ask Him to show you if there is anything that stands in the way of total dedication to Him and His work in and through you.
- Ask God to give you ears that hear him and hands and feet that are quick to obey.
- Ask the Lord to give you patience as you wait on Him. Pray that He would be pleased to teach you great lessons in this time of waiting. Ask Him for

forgive you for the times you have been impatient
and tried to run ahead of Him.

9

GOD REVEALS HIS GLORY

Read Leviticus 9:1-24

The seven days for the ordination of the priests had been accomplished, and it was now the eighth day. This was the day the priests would begin their ministry. On that day, Moses called Aaron and his sons, as well as the elders of the land together in the tabernacle.

In the presence of the elders, Moses told Aaron to take a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering and sacrifice them for himself before the Lord. While this had already been part of the ordination service, it was again required as Aaron began his ministry. This shows us that the blood of the bull could never fully take away sin. Sacrifices were constantly offered as a reminder of sin but not one of those sacrifices could ever take sin away completely. Listen to how the writer to the Hebrews expressed this in Hebrews 10:1-4:

(10:1) The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming — not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices

repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. (2) If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. (3) But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, (4) because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

After having dealt with his own sins, the priest was then to accept the offerings of his fellow Israelites. A male goat was offered as a sin offering and a one year old calf and lamb as a burnt offering to the Lord (verse 3). An ox and a ram were also offered as fellowship offerings. On top of this, Aaron also received a grain offering.

What is important to note is that the priest had to offer sacrifices for himself before he could offer anything on behalf of the people. The priest needed to be clean before God if his actions on behalf of his people were to be accepted. Provision was made for the priest's forgiveness and cleansing. God did not expect His priests to be perfect. He did, however, expect that they walk in the forgiveness and cleansing He provided.

Notice in verse 4 the special promise of the Lord God. He told His people that He would appear to them that day. While God is everywhere present, from time to time He chooses to make His presence known in a deeper way. This is what He was saying to His people that day. He wanted to come to visit them in a special way.

The people responded by bringing sacrifices. Verse 5 tells us that the entire assembly came near and stood before the Lord. Moses reminded them that they would see the glory of God that day as the priests performed their duties

(verse 6). We can only imagine the expectation that welled up in the hearts and minds of the people who had gathered. God had promised to meet with them.

Aaron slaughtered a calf for a sin offering for himself. Dipping his fingers in the blood brought to him by his sons, Aaron put it on the horns of the altar. He then placed the fat of the calf along with its kidneys and part of the liver on the altar to burn as an offering to the Lord. The flesh and the hide of the calf were burned outside the camp (verse 11).

Having made a sin offering for himself, Aaron then proceeded to offer his burnt offering. His sons again handed him the blood and he sprinkled it against the altar on all sides. As his sons handed him the burnt offerings piece by piece, he burned them on the altar (verse 13). The inner parts and the legs were washed before they were burned to remove any impurities (verse 14).

After completing the offerings for himself, Aaron offered sacrifices for the people. He offered a goat for their sin, (verse 15) a burnt offering, (verse 16) and a grain offering to the Lord on behalf of the Israelites. He also slaughtered an ox and a ram as a fellowship offering, sprinkling its blood against the sides of the altar and burning the fat portions. Aaron then waved the breasts and the right thigh before the Lord to dedicate them to the Lord's service and kept them for himself as required by God (Leviticus 7:31-32).

When everything was completed, Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them. When he finished he stepped down and went with Moses, likely into the Holy Place of the Tabernacle (verses 22-23).

We are not told what Moses and Aaron did in the Tabernacle that day, but when they came out to bless the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all those present. The glory appeared in a fire that came from the Lord and consumed the burnt offering on the altar. That fire was a clear evidence of the Lord's presence. It showed that God was pleased with the work of Aaron that day, and with the offerings he had made on behalf of his people.

Notice the response of the people to what they saw. First they shouted for joy (verse 24). We are not told what form that shouting took. It was not organized or rehearsed. It was the response of each person at the moment. They saw the power of God and their hearts leapt for joy within them. Maybe there were a few shouts of "praise the Lord." Perhaps a few people cried out in thanksgiving to the Lord. What we see here was the unplanned response of God's people to the glory they saw before them. This is in direct contrast to the very structured rules about the way the sacrifices were made. God was in both the structured worship and the unstructured response of His people.

The second response of God's people was to fall face down. Likely, if you were standing at a distance watching what was happening you would see the people falling one by one with their faces to the ground as an act of reverence and worship to the God who had revealed His presence that day. Again, this was not planned. It was the normal reaction of the people of God to being in His presence. Each one of them, touched by the majesty and glory of God, bowed down in humble submission and worship to the Lord God of Israel. They were overwhelmed with His glory and majesty.

Let me say something about this moment in the life of God's people. There are many people who see the

worship of the Old Testament as being dry, full of rituals and predictable. Let me say, however, that it was also filled with the presence of God. Who can deny that the power of God was present in the worship of the tabernacle that day? God moved through the rituals and blessed His people in a wonderful way.

In our day there is much talk about the style of worship. This is not a bad thing in itself. We are commanded to sing “a new song” (see Psalm 33:3; 96:1; Isaiah 42:10). Each generation needs to express their heart of thanks to the Lord their God. What we need to be aware of, however, is that the style of worship is not what is important. In this chapter we see the people of God standing silent before the Lord as one sacrifice after another was offered. There was no singing, no preaching, no sharing of testimonies. There was no worship band or choir. God descended, however, in a wonderful way bringing His people to their faces on the ground in reverent and glorious worship of His name. This happened as God’s people came in humble obedience to His Word. God blessed their obedience and made His presence known.

For Consideration:

- As we begin this chapter we see how the priests had to offer sacrifices to the Lord God for their own sins before serving their people. What does this tell us about God’s servants?
- Why is it important for us to be sure we are in a right relationship with God before ministering to others? What happens if we are not in a right relationship with God when we serve Him?

- God revealed His presence to His people in the form of fire. What is the significance of fire? What does this teach us about God?
- What was the response of the people of God in this chapter to the revelation of His glory? What does this teach us about what our response needs to be?
- Take a moment to consider the worship service that took place here in Leviticus 9. What did the priests do? What did the people do? What did God do? What does this teach us about worship?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to ask the Lord to forgive you for your sins and shortcomings. Thank Him that you don't have to be perfect to serve Him. Thank Him for the provision He has made for your forgiveness.
- Ask God to help you to walk in the cleansing He offers. Ask Him to help you to live in obedience to His Word.
- Thank the Lord that He is holy and awesome. Ask Him to give you a fresh vision of His majesty, glory and holiness today.
- Ask God to enable you to worship Him with joy and reverence as His people did in Leviticus 9.

10

A LESSON FROM NADAB AND ABIHU

Read Leviticus 10:1-20

The priests of the Old Testament had to bring sin offerings to cover their failures and shortcomings before God. God made provision for their forgiveness through the sacrifice of these animals. They could not take this forgiveness for granted, however. Willful disobedience to God's laws brought the strictest punishment, especially in the case of the priest. In chapter 10 we see what happens when Aaron's sons openly disregard the law of God.

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu had been ordained to the priestly ministry. On one occasion, however, they put fire and incense in their censers and offered it before the Lord, "contrary to His command." The passage does not give us any further details. What is clear is that they did not do things in the way God had instructed. This was not done in ignorance. They had heard the instructions of Moses regarding God's requirements but they did not take those instructions seriously. For whatever reason, they chose to

offer their incense in a way that God had not prescribed. Verse 2 tells us that their judgment was swift. Fire came from the Lord and consumed them so that they died.

That day God declared to Moses in verse 3:

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

This is an important verse that deserves consideration. Notice that the verse speaks of those who approach God. At that time it was not just anyone who could approach God. This was the privilege of the priests alone. They stood between God and the people. They brought the people's sacrifices to God. They acted as God's ambassadors.

God told Moses that He would show Himself holy to the priests who approached Him. Holiness refers to a separation from all that is sinful. What happens when holiness confronts sin? Like wood in a raging fire, sin is consumed in the presence of holiness. This was how God would reveal Himself to His priests. Those who approached Him without regard for their sin would pay the consequences. Just like Nadab and Abihu, they would be consumed and perish.

Notice also in verse 3 how God told Moses that He would be honoured in the sight of the people. The people would see how quickly He dealt with those who approached Him in an unholy manner. They would fear Him as a Holy God who would not tolerate sin and rebellion.

This swift judgment of Aaron's sons was a very powerful warning to the people of God. It showed them that God had a plan for their lives. It showed them that He had a

way He wanted them to live and minister. How often have we done things our own way, like Nadab and Abihu? How often have we stooped to worldly tactics or human wisdom in an attempt to build the kingdom of God? Have we been guilty of the sin of Nadab and Abihu? Are we doing things our own way and ignoring the purpose of God? In my ministry I have seen too many people offering false incense to God. These individuals minister in their own strength and wisdom. They use worldly business techniques and human philosophies rather than the Word of God in an attempt to serve the Lord. How much better we would be if we would only seek our answers in the Word of God and trust His ways.

Notice in verse 3 the response of Aaron to the death of his sons. He remained silent. There was nothing he could say. His sons had disregarded the ways of the Lord. They had failed in their responsibility toward God. They were guilty. He did not seek to defend them.

In verse 4 Moses called the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel to take the bodies of Nadab and Abihu outside the camp. This is where unclean objects were cast. They were considered unclean before God because of their actions. Because Uzziel's sons were not priests, they could touch these dead bodies. Still dressed in their priestly garments, Nadab and Abihu's bodies were taken out of the camp in disgrace (verse 5).

In verse 6 Moses told Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar that they were not to let their hair get messy or tear their clothes as was the usual custom for those who mourned the loss of a loved one. Notice also that they were not to leave the tabernacle. This meant that they could not be with their relatives at this time of grief. The activities of the tabernacle were to go on as normal. Moses

told Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar that if they disobeyed these commands of God they would die and God would be angry with the whole community.

While the rest of the nation could mourn, Aaron and his sons were forbidden to do so. This may seem harsh, but as we have already seen, God wanted to show Himself as a holy God. His honour was to take priority over family matters. Speaking to His disciples in Matthew 10:37-38 the Lord Jesus said:

(37) "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; (38) and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

The name of the Lord God had been dishonoured by Nadab and Abihu. They had disregarded the command of God and blasphemed His name. Aaron and his remaining sons had a choice to make. They could grieve for Nadab and Abihu or they could grieve over the blasphemy against the name of the God they served. God called them to stand firm for the honour of His name. For Aaron this meant turning his back on his own sons. There may be times in our own lives when we too are called to choose between our loved ones and the honour of God.

In verses 8-11 God made it clear to Aaron that he and his sons were to honour His name in the work He had called them to do. One of the ways they could do this was by refusing to drink wine or other fermented drinks when they went into the tabernacle to perform their duties. This is not a statement against the drinking of wine in general but about being under the influence of alcohol while serving the Lord. By serving the Lord under the influence of

alcohol, the priest blasphemed the name of the Lord. By doing so they would suffer the same penalty as Nadab and Abihu. We are left to wonder if Nadab and Abihu were drunk when they offered their incense to the Lord. God calls us to be respectful and clear in our mind about His ways and requirements as we serve.

Another way the priests were to honour the name of the Lord was to make a clear distinction between the unclean and the clean (verse 10). They were to be holy in their life-style and practices. They were to live their lives in purity and integrity, following the clear commands of the Lord their God in their daily life. This implied that they were to walk in this holiness not only when they came to serve at the tabernacle but also when they were off duty. They were to live holy lives at all times.

Notice also in verse 11 that they could honour the name of the Lord by teaching the people about God and His decrees. It was not only their responsibility as priests to be holy themselves but to make sure that the people were walking in obedience to the will of God. They had a God-given obligation to lift up the name of the Lord God and teach others to do the same. If the people were not honouring God, it was their responsibility to correct them and bring them in line with His truth. What priest, truly seeking the glory of God, could stand by while the people blasphemed His name?

For their efforts, the priests were to receive the offerings brought to the tabernacle. The grain offering was holy and could not be shared with others (verse 12-13). Their families could eat the thigh or the breast waved before the Lord (verse 14). These offerings, however, were to be eaten in a ceremonially clean place.

In verses 16-18 we read that Aaron's sons Eleazar and Ithamar brought a sin offering to the Lord. Instead of eating the meat in the tabernacle, as required by the Law of God, they burned it completely. This was contrary to the law of God and another offense against God that day. Moses questioned Aaron and his sons about this in verses 16-18 asking them why they had not followed the command of the Lord regarding the sin offering and ate the meat in the tabernacle. Aaron told Moses that because of the things that had happened that day, he did not feel the Lord would have been pleased had they eaten the sin offering (verse 20).

What is Aaron's reasoning here? God had made it clear to the priests that it was to be business as usual at the tabernacle. They were not to stop the work of the tabernacle because God had judged their brothers for sin. Aaron reminded Moses that he was still overseeing the offerings and continuing the work of the Lord even though he had lost his sons that day. He told Moses, however, that he did not eat the sin offering because he felt that the Lord would not be pleased with him. This tells us that Aaron's concern was not about his own loss but pleasing the Lord. There are some interesting verses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that may help us to understand Aaron's reasoning at this time.

Listen to the words of Deuteronomy 26:14:

I have not eaten any of the sacred portion while I was in mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor have I offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God; I have done everything you commanded me.

Notice the phrase “I have not eaten any of the sacred portion while I was in mourning.” Aaron understood that the Lord had told him that he was not to show outward signs of his grieving, but he had just lost two sons. It was hard for him not to grieve in his heart for the tragic loss of these two sons due to their disobedience. The Law of God required that he was not to eat the sacred portion assigned to him when he was mourning. It is quite possible that he felt he would dishonour God by eating this meat in his present state of mind.

Another passage that may shed some light on Aaron’s response is found in Leviticus 21:11. Speaking about the priest, the Law of God stated:

He must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother.

While it is unclear where the sons of Aaron were when they were struck down by the Lord, the context would indicate that they were in the tabernacle when it happened. Did the dead bodies of his two sons defile the tabernacle? The law of God stated that the sin offering was only to be eaten in the court yard of the tabernacle (Leviticus 6:26). If the courtyard had been defiled by the death of Aaron’s two sons, Aaron may have felt that it would not be right for him and his sons to eat the sin offering there.

Consider also the instructions of God in Numbers 19:14:

This is the law that applies when a person dies in a tent: Anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in it will be unclean for seven days.

The fact that Aaron and his sons had entered the place where his two sons had died made them unclean. The law clearly stated that no one who was ceremonially unclean could eat the offerings. This is quite clear from Leviticus 7:19:

Meat that touches anything ceremonially unclean must not be eaten; it must be burned up. As for other meat, anyone ceremonially clean may eat it.

These passages show us that there may have been some clear reasons why Aaron and his sons did not eat the sin offering. What is clear is that when Moses heard the explanation he was satisfied and did not pursue the matter further.

The lesson we need to learn from this is that not everything is as it appears on the outside. We can be very quick to judge other believers for their actions. When we take the time to listen with a goal to understanding, we will be less likely to judge.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the importance of doing things God's way? Have you ever been guilty of doing things your own way? Have you, by this means offered unclean incense before the Lord?
- God told Moses that He would reveal Himself to those who approached Him as a holy God? How does knowing that God is a holy God affect how we serve Him?

- God commanded Aaron and his sons not to mourn for Nadab and Abihu because they had dishonoured His name. What does this teach us about the priorities we should have as believers? Is God's honour first in your life?
- One way the priests were to honour God was through the teaching of His Word to others. How important is this in our day? How does teaching others what God expects ultimately bring Him honour?
- Moses was initially angry with Eleazar and Ithamar because they did not eat their portion of the sin offering, but after speaking with Aaron he was satisfied. How important is it to speak to others to verify facts before making a judgement?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to show you if there is any way you are not honouring Him in how you live your life or serve Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is a holy God. Ask Him to help you to live with a healthy fear of dishonouring His name in what you do or say.
- Ask God to forgive you for times when you jump to a conclusion and judge someone before knowing all the facts.
- Ask God to help you to live your life with His honour first in your heart.

11

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN ANIMALS

Read Leviticus 11:1-47

The law of God, as recorded for us in Leviticus 11, regulated the type of food God's people could eat. The rules God gives in this chapter were for the health and well-being of his people. There were certain animals that could be eaten without a health risk, while other animals carried diseases that could make them sick. God's concern for His people's health shows us that He is interested in the whole person -- spiritual, emotional and physical. Remember also that sickness and disease was a result of sin on the earth.

Land Animals

As we begin chapter 11 God gave Moses and Aaron a simple rule that made it easy to determine whether a land animal could be eaten or not. The rule of verse 3 stated that an animal could be eaten if it met two requirements. First, it had to have a split hoof and second, it needed to chew

its cud. Both of these requirements needed to be met in order for an animal to be clean.

There were animals that met only one of these requirements. The camel is given as an example in verse 4. Though it chewed the cud it did not have a split hoof and could, therefore, not be eaten. Other examples of animals that chewed the cud but did not have a split hoof are the coney (badger) and the rabbit (verses 5-6). An example of an animal that had a completely split hoof but did not chew the cud was the pig. Because these animals did not meet both of the requirements, they were unclean for the people of Israel (verse 7). They were not to eat them, nor were they permitted to touch their carcasses.

Water Creatures

Verses 9-12 explain the regulations regarding creatures that lived in the water. Again there was a simple rule to determine if a water creature could be eaten. It also had to meet two qualifications. First, it had to have fins and second it had to have scales (verse 9). Anything that did not meet these qualifications was unclean and could not be eaten.

Birds

Verses 13-19 give a list of birds that were unclean. Generally these birds were birds of prey that fed on other unclean animals or fish. The list of birds that were considered unclean included the eagle, vulture, osprey, buzzard, kite, raven, ostrich, hawk, seagull, owl, pelican, stork, heron, hoopoe, and the bat. None of these birds could be eaten.

Insects

For an insect to be clean it had to have wings and jointed legs for hopping on the ground. Examples of this were the locust, katydid, cricket and the grasshopper. All other winged insects that walked on four legs were unclean for God's people.

Touching a Carcass of an Unclean Animal

Notice in verse 24 that the law stated that whoever touched the dead body of an unclean animal would be unclean until the evening. There were times when touching the body of an unclean dead animal could not be avoided. If a man had a camel that died, for example, he had to dispose of the body. The law of God permitted the man to touch the dead animal but required that he wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening, separating himself from other people and objects. This would prevent the spread of germs or disease.

Rodents and Reptiles

Verses 29-38 speak of rodents and reptiles. Examples of these are the weasel, rat, lizard, gecko, skink and the chameleon. All of these animals were unclean for the people of God. They were not to be eaten and whoever touched their dead bodies would have to wash and remain unclean until evening. Particular attention is given to these rodents and reptiles in this section.

Notice in verse 32 that if one of these animals died and the corpse fell on wood, hide or cloth, whatever it fell on was unclean. The wood, hide or cloth was to be put in water

and cleaned. It would be unclean until the evening and could not be touched until the next day. If the body of one of these rodents or reptiles fell into a clay pot, that pot was to be broken. If the pot contained food, it was considered unclean and could not be eaten. Any liquid these rodents or reptiles fell into was unclean (verse 34). If the body of a rodent or reptile fell on an oven or cooking pot, it was to be broken (verse 35). A new oven would need to be built in its place.

If the body of a rodent or reptile fell into a spring or a cistern, the water would remain clean. Notice, however the reference to the person touching the carcass (verse 36). This implies that this dead body was not allowed to remain in the water. It would have been removed and those who removed it would become unclean until the evening.

If the carcass of a rodent or reptile fell on seeds that were about to be planted, these seeds would remain clean unless water had been put on the seeds. If the seeds were wet when such an animal fell on them they would then be unclean (verse 38). This is likely because the water could spread any germs or disease these creatures may have been carrying.

Touching the Carcass of a Clean Animal

Verses 39-40 speak about an animal that had died of natural causes. It may have been killed by another animal or died of old age or disease. Anyone who touched this carcass (possibly to discard the remains) was unclean. He was to wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening. If anyone ate the carcass of an animal found dead, they would also have to wash their clothes and remain unclean until the evening (verse 40).

Other Unclean Creatures

Verses 41-45 speak about other creatures that moved on the ground. This appears to refer to any kind of crawling creature. This might include such things as crawling insects, snakes, or other such creatures. In verse 43 God particularly tells His people not to defile themselves by touching or eating any of these creatures. They were instead to consecrate themselves to God and be a holy people (verses 44-45).

This connection between not touching unclean animals and true holiness seems strange to our ears. The connection is quite clear in Leviticus 11:44-45 however:

(44) I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. (45) I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

If we are to understand this passage we need to grasp what God is telling Moses here. The holiness of God's people touched every aspect of their lives. It even had an impact on what they ate. God had brought His people out of the bondage of Egypt for a purpose. He wanted to make of them a great nation. He wanted them to be a light for all the nations. Through them He would accomplish His purposes for the entire world. If they were to become all that God wanted them to be, part of this included taking care of their bodies. The connection between our physical bodies and holiness is clear in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 where the apostle Paul said:

(19) 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; (20) you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

God's people were to honour Him with their bodies. The person who realizes that his body belongs to the Lord Jesus and is the temple of the Holy Spirit will do all he or she can to care for that body. He will not want to put things into that body to defile or harm it. We have all too often been guilty of assuming that while we are to honour God with our hearts and souls our bodies belong to us to do with as we please. God expects us to care for the bodies He has given us. They are the temple in which He dwells. They are the instruments through which He desires to work.

God's concern is for the whole person, body, soul and spirit. I find it quite challenging that a whole chapter is devoted to God teaching His people how to prevent germs and disease by watching what they ate and touched. This shows us that as we move out in His name we too are to be concerned about the whole person. While the salvation of souls is of utmost importance, God is also concerned about the physical well-being of His creatures as well. In His ministry, Jesus not only preached the gospel but He also ministered to the sick and hurting. As His servants, we need to see people as more than just converts to win. We need to see them as God sees them. We need to minister to them body, soul and spirit.

For Consideration:

- Why do you suppose God spent time explaining to Moses what foods could and could not be eaten?
- How did these food laws protect God's people from diseases and sickness?
- What do these laws show us about the concern of God for the whole person, body, soul and spirit?
- How does this passage impact how we live our lives or how we minister to people around us?
- What physical needs do you see around you today? What do you suppose could be done to meet those needs?
- How can you honour God with your body today?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is concerned for you as a whole person.
- Thank the Lord that He has placed His Holy Spirit in you and that your body is His temple.
- Ask the Lord to show you any way in which you have not been caring for your body as His temple. Ask Him to show you what to do to change that.
- Ask God to open your eyes to the physical needs of those around you. Ask Him to show you what you can do to reach out to those needs in His name.

12

CHILD BIRTH

Read Leviticus 12:1-8

Chapter 12 deals with the laws of God regarding the birth of a child. Notice that the requirements were different, depending on the sex of the child.

The Birth of a Son

When a woman gave birth to a son she was unclean for seven days just as she would be during her monthly period. Notice that the woman was “ceremonially unclean.” She was not guilty of any particular sin nor was the act of giving birth to a child sinful or impure. In fact the birth of a child was considered to be one of life’s greatest blessings. Listen to the Psalmist in Psalm 127: 3-5:

- (3) Sons are a heritage from the LORD,
children a reward from him.
- (4) Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are sons born in one's youth.
- (5) Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.

They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

While the act of giving birth to a child was a blessing, the woman was still “ceremonially unclean” for seven days. This impurity was the result of the flow of blood and the other secretions that were a natural part of childbirth.

On the eighth day the young boy was circumcised as God required. This act of circumcision was given by God to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-14 and was a sign that this child was an Israelite under God, His commands and His blessings.

After the circumcision of her son, the woman was to wait another thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. During that time she was not to touch anything sacred or go to the tabernacle (verse 4).

The Birth of a Daughter

The command of God differed slightly if the woman gave birth to a daughter. Instead of being ceremonially unclean for seven days, as in the case of a male child, the woman was unclean for two weeks. Notice also that the period of purification was also doubled if the child was a girl. The mother was to wait sixty-six days during which she could not go to the tabernacle or touch anything sacred.

This brings up an important question. What was it about being a female that required twice the amount of time for cleansing? The answer to this is not given in this passage but is worth considering in this context. Let me make a few observations here.

First, it is clear medically that it would not take twice as long for a mother's body to recover from the birth of a female child so the reason is not medical. There has to be another reason for this difference in time.

Second, it is important that we understand that God does not value women any less than men. Both are made in His image and of equal value in His eyes. The apostle Paul made this quite clear when he wrote in Galatians 3:28-29:

(28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The apostle Peter taught the same principle in 1 Peter 3:7 when he said to husbands:

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Notice again that the wife was a partner and heir of the gift of life. Any husband who mistreated his wife would have his prayers hindered.

In his earthly ministry the Lord Jesus treated women with respect and dignity. He allowed them to sit at His feet like men and learn from His teaching (see Luke 10:39). Women accompanied Jesus and His disciples on their ministry trips. Listen to Luke 8:1-3:

(8:1) After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, (2) and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; (3) Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

These women played an important and sacrificial role in the ministry of the Lord Jesus as He moved from one town to another.

Having said this, it is quite clear throughout the Bible that there was a difference in the roles of men and women. Paul makes it clear that the Lord gave the husband the role of headship in the family. Writing in Ephesians 5:23 he says:

(23) For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

This role of headship has nothing to do with intelligence or ability. Women are equally as intelligent and capable as men. The role of headship has to do with God's choice and purpose.

One of the important laws of the Old Testament was the law related to the firstborn. This law dated back to when God destroyed the firstborn males of all the children in Egypt and set His people free from their long bondage. In order to protect the firstborn of Israel from death, God required that His people paint the blood of a lamb on their

doorposts. When the Lord passed over the land and saw the blood He would spare the firstborn male of that Israelite family.

From that moment onward, the firstborn male belonged to the Lord. This was true of the firstborn of their animals or the firstborn of their children. These children had to be redeemed or bought back from the Lord.

Exodus 13:11-13

(11) "After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers, (12) you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. (13) Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

All firstborn males belonged to God:

For all the firstborn are mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for myself every firstborn in Israel, whether man or animal. They are to be mine. I am the LORD." (Numbers 3:13)

The firstborn had special obligations and privileges. They would be the head of the family with all its responsibilities. They would also be given a double portion of the father's inheritance:

He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all

he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him. (Deuteronomy 21:17)

What does all this have to do with the difference in the law between male children and female children? The apostle Paul makes the following comment in 1 Timothy 2:12-13:

(12) I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. (13) For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

Notice what Paul says here. He told Timothy that a woman was not to take authority over a man because the man was formed first. In other words, he was the firstborn. As the firstborn, he had an obligation before God. He was to be the head of his family (Ephesians 5:23). This was his obligation and privilege as the firstborn.

Because man was "formed first" (Ephesians 2:13) he had a special obligation before God. As all firstborn he was set aside for a special role. He would represent the family and the nation. He would bear the sign of circumcision on his body as a representative of the family. No such sign was given to women. While there was no difference in the value of men and women in the Scripture, there was clearly a difference in role. Male children carried an obligation before God. They were set aside by God from birth as firstborn of creation to be the head of their families and to lead them in His ways and purposes.

This distinction is quite clear here in the law regarding the purification of the mother after childbirth. Both male and female children were loved and valued equally. They were common and equal heirs of God's blessings but the male child, as firstborn of creation, belonged to God as His

representative. The fact that it took twice as long for a mother to be purified after the birth of a female child was a reminder to God's people of these differences in roles.

Offerings for Purification

When the days of her purification were over, the mother would bring a one year old lamb to the tabernacle as a burnt offering to the Lord. She would also bring a pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. When these offerings were made, she would again be ceremonially pure and cleansed from her flow of blood.

Notice two things about these offerings. First, the mother had not actually disobeyed God, but she was still required to bring a sin offering. She was defiled because of the natural process of healing after the birth of a child. As human beings we live in a world filled with sin. We become defiled often just by living in this world. We live and work with many individuals who do not love the Lord God. We hear them blaspheme the name of the Lord God. We see things around us that offend a holy God. These things enter our minds and defile them even though we have not intentionally opened ourselves to them. Just as the woman was defiled by the body's natural process, something she could do nothing about, so we too, are often defiled by things around us we cannot change.

This teaches us something about the holiness of God. His holiness is such that He required purification from every defilement. The natural act of giving birth to a child required the death of a lamb and a dove for a mother to be restored to a right relationship with God. How many things defile us in the course of a day? How many impure thoughts, actions or attitudes have defiled us today alone?

How wonderful it is to know that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God covers every one of them.

There is a second point we need to make. Notice that the sacrifices made at the end of the period of purification were the same for a male and a female child (see verses 6-7). There was no difference in the number of animals sacrificed. In fact, this same principle applied for all sacrifices made. There was no difference in what a male would bring for his sin or what a female would bring. Both required the same sacrifice. This shows us that before God there was no difference between men and women with regards to sin. Both needed to be forgiven and the same sacrifice would be required of both.

Notice finally in verse 8 that special provision was made for even the poorest women. If she could not afford a lamb she could bring two doves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and one for a sin offering. It was God's desire that every woman have the privilege of being cleansed of her defilement and restored to a right relationship with him.

For Consideration:

- Why was it necessary for a woman to be purified after the birth of a child? What does this teach us about the holiness of God?
- How can we be defiled by living in this world? What things defile us each day? How does the blood of the Lord Jesus cover these defilements?
- What do we learn in this passage about the different roles God gave to males and females? Do

these different roles mean that one is more important than the other?

- The sacrifice a mother would bring to God at the end of her purification was the same for either a male child or a female child. What does this tell us about the equality of males and females before God?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to worship the Lord for His holiness. Thank Him that even though He is holy, He still provides a way for us to enter His presence and be His children.
- Thank the Lord for the way His sacrifice covers all your sins and defilement.
- Thank the Lord for the blessing of children. If you have children, ask the Lord to reach out to them and bring them to Himself.

13

LAWS REGARDING SKIN DISEASE AND MILDEW

Read Leviticus 13:1-59

God's concern for the health of His people is quite obvious in the book of Leviticus. There were many diseases that could spread among the people, so God taught His people how to recognize such diseases to keep them from spreading. Notice that the responsibility for diagnosing these conditions fell on the priests. They were not just to care for the spiritual well-being of their people, but also for their physical well-being. God was concerned for the whole person and took the time to teach the priests what they needed to do to prevent the spread of contagious diseases.

If, as believers, we want to share the heart of God, we will be concerned not only for the spiritual well-being of our brothers and sisters but also their physical and emotional well-being. We do not abandon the purpose of God by caring for the physical and emotional ills of our society. If we

are to fulfill the call of God, we will be concerned about the whole person.

As we begin this chapter, the Lord God instructs the priests in how to recognize and deal with various kinds of spots and blemishes found on the skin.

Swelling, Rash or Bright Spot (verses 1-8)

The first condition was a swelling, rash or bright spot on the skin. If a person found such a spot, they were to go to the priest (verse 2). The priest would examine the sore for two things. First, he was to see if the hair on the sore had turned white. Second, he would see if the sore appeared to be more than skin deep (verse 3). If the rash or bright spot was more than skin deep and the hair in it had turned white, the priest would proclaim the person unclean.

If the rash or spot was not deeper than the skin and the hair had not turned white, then the person would be put in isolation for seven days (verse 4). On the seventh day the priest would again examine the spot. If it had faded, the individual would wash his or her clothes and be clean (verse 6). That person would be free to continue with life as usual.

If after being declared clean, however, the rash spread, the person was to return to the priest. If the priest noted that it had spread, he would declare the individual unclean (verses 7-8). Verses 45-47 tell us clearly what that meant for this individual:

(45) "The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out,

'Unclean! Unclean!' (46) As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.

This individual was not to have any contact with the people in his community and would be compelled to warn them of his uncleanness by crying out "Unclean! Unclean!" wherever he went. While this may seem harsh, it was for the protection of the whole community.

Infectious Disease (verses 9-11)

God instructed His people in verses 9-11 that if a person discovered he had some form of infectious skin disease he was to go to the priest. In this case the priest would examine his skin for three conditions. First, he was to see if there was a white swelling in the skin. Second, he was to see if the hair had turned white on the skin. Finally, he was to see if the flesh was raw. If these three conditions were present on the skin, the person was pronounced unclean and removed from the camp.

Disease Covering Entire Body (verses 12-17)

If a skin condition broke out all over a person's body and the priest saw that the skin was all the same colour, the person was clean. If, however, he found raw flesh, the disease was infectious and the person unclean. If, in time, the raw flesh began to heal and return to its normal colour, the person could return to the priest for examination in the hope of being declared clean again (verses 14-17).

Boils (verses 18-23)

Sometimes an individual would come to the priest with a boil on his skin that had healed. In the place where the boil had been there would be a white swelling or reddish-white spot. The priest was to examine this spot to see if it was deeper than the skin and if the hair in the scar had turned white. If these conditions were discovered, the person was unclean.

If there was no white hair in the spot nor did it appear to be deeper than the skin, the person would be put in isolation for seven days (verse 21). If his condition spread during that time, he would be unclean. If the spot remained unchanged he was clean (verses 22-23).

Burns (verses 24-28)

If a person came to the priest with a burn on his skin, the priest would examine it to see if it had a white or reddish-white colour, was deeper than the skin and the hair in the wound was turning white. If these conditions were present, an infection had broken out and the person was unclean.

If, on the other hand, these conditions were not present, the individual was to be isolated for seven days after which time his burn would be examined again by the priest. If the marks on his skin had spread he was unclean. If it remained unchanged or had faded he was clean and could go about his daily routine.

Sores on the Head or Chin (verses 29-37)

A man with a sore on his head or chin was to go to the priest for examination. If the spot was more than skin deep and the hair in the spot was yellow and thin the priest was to declare the man unclean (verses 29-30).

If these conditions did not appear in the sore, the priest would put the man in isolation for seven days. On the seventh day the priest would examine him again. If the itch had not spread, did not appear to be more than skin deep and there was no yellow hair in it, the man was to shave the infected area and be put in isolation for another seven days (verse 32-33). If after this second period of isolation, the spot had not spread, the priest would declare him clean. He would wash his clothes and go about his daily routine. Verses 35-37, however, tell us that the individual was to keep watch on the spot to be sure it did not spread.

White Spots (38-39)

Any white spots on the skin were to be examined by the priest. If they were dull in colour they were considered harmless (verses 38-39).

Loss of Hair (40-44)

If a man lost his hair it was considered to be a natural occurrence. He was simply going bald. If, however, there was a reddish-white sore in the place where the hair was lost it was considered to be infectious and the man declared unclean (verses 40-44).

Mildew (47-58)

The priests were not only to examine skin diseases but they were also to be concerned about any type of mildew that broke out on any clothing, woolen, or linen articles. Any article that contained mildew was to be shown to the priest. The priest would isolate the article for seven days and re-examine it. If the mildew had spread the article was unclean and would be burned.

If after the seven days of isolation the mildew had not spread, the priest would order that it be washed and isolated for another seven days. If after that second period of isolation the mildew had not changed in appearance, even if it had not spread, the article was still to be burned.

If the mildew had faded, the section that was contaminated was to be removed and the remainder of the cloth washed and kept. If the mildew reappeared, however, it would be burned by fire.

The real temptation here is to “spiritualize” the application of this chapter and to speak of how as believers we need to separate ourselves from the spiritual uncleanness in our midst. Paul does speak about the importance of having nothing to do with divisive people (Titus 3:10) or the “fruitless deeds of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11-12). I am afraid, however, that doing this would be missing the main point this chapter is making.

God’s concern here is not just for His people’s soul it is also for their physical well-being. This is something that ought to amaze us. These earthly bodies of ours are temporary and will not come with us to heaven. God will give us a new body (1 Corinthians 15:35-49). Throughout history there have been those who have downplayed the

importance of the physical body. Some would physically beat their bodies or cause themselves to suffer in order to focus on their souls. Some felt that by ignoring their physical bodies they would gain favour with God.

Throughout history, this concept pushed its way into the church so that some felt that the only legitimate form of Christian service was that of winning souls. These individuals felt that those who ministered by caring for the physical and social needs of a community were losing focus and being distracted from the purpose of God.

One of the ministries of the priest, according to Leviticus 13 was to watch over the physical health of his people. This whole chapter is dedicated to teaching the priest how to examine skin diseases that might spread through the community. Those who care for the physical well-being of those who are sick are also doing the work of the Kingdom of God.

The concern of God for the whole person is seen in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Not only did He preach the good news of salvation but He also healed those who were sick and hurting. If we are to follow the example of the Lord Jesus, we must be concerned for the physical needs of those He puts on our path. Let me conclude with the word of Jesus from Matthew 25:34-39:

(34) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you*

looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (Emphasis mine).

For Consideration:

- Why was it important for the health of the community that the priest examine the wounds and diseases of the skin? What could have happened if individuals with these conditions were left in the community?
- God taught the priests of the Old Testament how to examine skin diseases and what to do when they were infectious. What does this tell us about the concern of God for the physical well-being of His people?
- What encouragement do you find in the fact that God is concerned about your physical well-being?
- What does this passage teach us about the responsibility of God's people to minister not only to the spiritual needs of those around them but also to their physical needs? What is being done for the physical needs of those around you in Christ's name?
- How did Jesus minister when He was on this earth? What does his example teach us about how we need to minister today?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is concerned for your physical as well as your spiritual well-being. Thank Him that He cares what you are facing physically.

- Ask the Lord to give you more concern for the physical needs of those around you. Ask Him to show you what you can do to minister to those needs.
- Ask God to help you to take care of the body he has given you, recognizing that in doing so you are honouring Him.

14

CEREMONIAL PURIFICATION FROM SKIN DISEASES AND MILDEW

Read Leviticus 14:1-57

In the last chapter we saw that the priest was instructed in how to look for infectious skin diseases. Those who were declared unclean with such conditions were separated from the community of Israel and forced to live in isolation until there was an improvement. When the skin condition was healed, the individual concerned had to go through a ceremonial purification before he or she was again accepted into the community of Israel.

Ceremonial Cleansing from Skin Diseases

If a person was healed of his skin condition, the priest was to go outside the camp to examine him (verse 3). If he discovered that this was the case, he would order that two live birds, some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the individual who was to be cleansed (verse

4). One of the two birds was killed over some fresh water in a clay pot. The blood would fall into the pot. The other bird, the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and hyssop were dipped in this blood. The person was then sprinkled seven times with the blood of the dead bird and pronounced clean. The live bird, that had been dipped in the blood, was released in the open fields (verse 7).

The symbolism of these two birds is significant. The bird that was killed seems to represent the individual who was in need of cleansing. God could not accept anything that was impure and unclean. This first bird died in the place of the unclean person, to cleanse him or her of their impurities. The fact that the blood of the bird was sprinkled on the unclean person shows us that he was being covered by the blood of the bird sacrificed on his behalf.

The second bird represented the individual after his cleansing. Because of the death of the first bird, the individual was clean and free to return to his or her family. This is a wonderful picture of what the Lord has done for us. We are free because He took the penalty for us. He died so that we could be cleansed, forgiven and set free from the penalty of our impurities.

There is some question about the significance of the other articles brought in the cleansing. Verse four tells us that that a piece of cedar wood, some scarlet yarn and some hyssop were brought along with the two birds. They hyssop was very likely used to sprinkle the blood of the bird on the individual to be cleansed. We have an example of this in Numbers 19:18:

Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who

were there. He must also sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death.

It is more difficult to understand what the purpose of the scarlet yarn and the cedar wood. Some believe that the scarlet yarn was used to tie the branches of hyssop together. We are not told in the passage or elsewhere in the Scripture. The same is true for the cedar wood. It did have a fragrant smell and oil that preserved the wood and may have been chosen for these qualities.

After the sacrifice of the bird, the person was to wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe in water. He was then free to enter the camp, but was to remain outside his tent for seven days. After these seven days, he would again shave all his hair, including his beard, eyebrows and any other body hair. After he had again washed all his clothes he was to bring two male lambs and one ewe lamb a year old to the tabernacle. He was also to bring three-tenths of an ephah (6 quarts or 6.5 litres) of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering and log ($\frac{2}{3}$ of a pint or 0.3 litres) of oil.

The priest would take one of the two male lambs, along with the oil and offer it as a guilt offering before the Lord (verse 12). Notice that the offering was a guilt offering. This man had not intentionally sinned against the Lord. He had developed a skin condition over which he had no control. While there was no intentional sin, the man was still unclean before the Lord and a sacrifice was required to cover this impurity. The remainder of the meat not used for the guilt offering would belong to the priest for his services (verse 13).

Some of the blood from the sacrificed lamb was placed on the lobe of the individual's right ear, his right thumb and the big toe of his right foot. The priest would then take more oil and pour it in his hand and, dipping his right hand into the oil, he would sprinkle it before the Lord. The remaining oil was then place on the right ear lobe, the right thumb and the right big toe of the person to be cleansed (verse 17). This represented his cleansing from head to toe, that is to say, he was completely clean.

When the individual to be cleansed had been anointed, the priest would sacrifice a second lamb as a sin offering to the Lord. A third animal was sacrificed and burnt completely on the altar as a burnt offering. Finally a grain offering was burned before the Lord. Only after these offerings, could the individual concerned be completely clean (verse 20).

The procedure for cleansing from a skin infection was quite involved and required three animals from the flock, two birds and an offering of grain. Altogether four animals were killed and one set free so that this one individual could be declared pure before the Lord. All this was for a disease the person contracted by no fault of his own. There are two very important lessons we need to see here.

First, we must understand the absolute purity and holiness of the Lord. Nothing impure can enter his presence. We understand this in terms of spiritual impurity but before us in this chapter we have a case of physical illness and infection. This also created a barrier between the person and God. When sin entered the world through Adam and Eve it changed the earth. The ground would bear its fruit with difficulty. Women would give birth through pain (see Genesis 3:16-19). Sickness, disease, famine, wars and a whole host of other evils would invade the world as a result

Ceremonial Purification from Skin Diseases and 101 Mildew

of sin. The individual who had the diseased skin was experiencing the effects of living in a world filled with sin and disease caused by sin. He needed to be cleansed if he was to be right with a holy God.

The second lesson we need to understand from this is that God has made provision for us to be cleansed. In the Old Testament, the Lord provided for a temporary cleansing through the sacrifice of animals and the shedding of their blood. By means of these sacrifices a person could again be brought into a right relationship with God. The problem with these sacrifices was that they had to be continually offered. These sacrifices, while effective for the moment, had no lasting effect. Every day more sacrifices had to be offered. With every sin or impurity, another animal had to be sacrificed. While this required tremendous work for the priests and a certain expense for the individual who needed cleansing, God did provide a way of forgiveness and cleansing. It has always been in the heart of God that His people know His cleansing and enter a right relationship with Him. This ought to give us a deeper appreciation for the work of the Lord Jesus for us on the cross. His sacrifice did away with all the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament. We can now be cleansed completely and for all time through His one-time offering.

As we have already said, the purification of an individual from an infectious skin condition was costly. Not everyone in Israel had the resources necessary for such a ceremony. God also provided a means for the poor Israelite to be cleansed and restored.

If an individual was poor and could not afford the animals required, he could bring only one male lamb as a guilt offering and a tenth of an ephah (2 US quarts or 2 litres) of

fine flour mixed with oil and two doves or pigeons. One bird would be used as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering before the Lord (verses 21-22).

On the eighth day, after his purification, the poor person would bring his lamb and 2 pigeons or doves to the priest at the entrance of the tabernacle. The priest would take his lamb and offer it to the Lord as a guilt offering. The blood of this guilt offering was placed on the right ear lobe, the right thumb and the right big toe of the person desiring to be cleansed. This symbolized the fact that they were clean from head to toe through that blood that had been shed for them. The priest would then pour oil into his left hand and with his right hand he would sprinkle it before the Lord (verse 28). Whatever remained of the oil was then put on the individual's forehead.

The two doves or pigeons would then be slaughtered. One of them was offered as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the Lord. When these animal sacrifices were completed the priest would offer a grain offering to the Lord and the poor man would be cleansed.

Dealing with Mildew in Home

The final section of Leviticus 14 gives instructions to the priests about how to deal with mildew discovered in an Israelite home. Leviticus 13 dealt with mildew found on cloth or leather. The process of dealing with mildew in a home was not so easy.

Notice in verse 33 that this law applied to the time when Israel entered the land of Canaan. The people of God were moving through the desert when God gave this law to Moses. They did not have houses, but lived in tents. This law looked forward to the time when the people of God would

Ceremonial Purification from Skin Diseases and 103 Mildew

have their own houses in the land that God had promised them.

If a person discovered mildew in his house, the owner was to go to the priest and tell him about it (verses 34-35). The priest was to order that the house be emptied of all its contents. When this was done, the priest examined the house. If the mildew on the walls was greenish or reddish in colour and appeared to be deeper than the surface of the wall, the priest was to close the house for seven days. After those seven days he was to return and examine the wall again. If the mildew had spread, he was to order that the contaminated stones be torn out and brought to an unclean place outside the town (verse 40). The rest of the walls were scraped and the material also dumped in an unclean place outside the town. The stones were replaced by new stones and clay and then re-plastered.

If the mildew reappeared on the wall, after re-examining the house, the priest would have it torn down completely and its stones, timber and plaster taken to an unclean place outside the town. Anyone going into the house would be unclean until evening. Anyone who slept or ate in the house would have to wash his clothes (verses 46-47).

If the mildew had not reappeared after it had been re-plastered, the house would be declared clean but the In order for the house to be purified of this mildew, the owner would have to bring two birds, cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop to the priest. One bird was killed over a clay pot. The wood, the yarn and the hyssop were all dipped in the blood and the house was sprinkled seven times with the blood. The second bird was to be released as a reminder of the freedom from any guilt and impurity.

Consider for a moment the absolute holiness and purity of God that even a disease of the skin or mildew on the walls of one's house could affect our relationship with Him. Sacrifices would have to be made in order that the individual could once again enter a right relationship with God. Consider also the tremendous love and heart of God that He would desire to relate to us who walk in this sin cursed earth with hearts that are "deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jeremiah 17:9). Let your heart rejoice that as unclean as we are, our God desires fellowship with us and has made every provision for us to be cleansed.

For Consideration:

- How did a disease of the skin affect one's relationship with God? What provision did God make for a restoring of that relationship?
- What do we learn in this chapter about the absolute purity and holiness of God?
- Can we live on this earth without being affected by sin and impurity?
- What provision has God made for us to be cleansed? How does this chapter give us a deeper appreciation of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank and praise the Lord for His purity and holiness.
- Thank the Lord for the fact that, despite our sinfulness, He loves us and desires to enter a relationship with us.

Ceremonial Purification from Skin Diseases and 105 Mildew

- Thank the Lord Jesus for His sacrifice on our behalf. Thank Him that it covers all our impurities and sins.
- Ask God to help you to walk daily in the knowledge of your forgiveness in Christ. Thank the Lord for the extent of His forgiveness and cleansing that covers our sins and daily defilement.

15

UNCLEAN DISCHARGES

Leviticus 15:1-33

One of the most striking things about the book of Leviticus is that it shows us how even the body's natural processes could make a person unclean before God. These discharges come in various forms. They could be the result of sickness or disease that caused fluid to flow from the body, sexual activity, or a woman's monthly period. Any of these bodily fluids would make a person unclean before God.

As we begin Leviticus 15 the Lord told Moses and Aaron that whenever a man had a bodily discharge, that discharge was unclean. Notice from verse 2 that the discharge could either flow freely from the body or be blocked. A person might, for example, put a bandage on a wound. That bandage would keep the bodily discharge contained but the person would still be unclean.

The law of God was quite strict about anyone with a bodily discharge. Verses 4-12 tell us that any bed that person slept on or anything he sat on would become unclean. If

someone touched this person, his bed or anything he sat on, they would be unclean as well. They would have to wash their clothes, bathe, and be unclean until the evening. If the man who had a discharge spat on or touched another person, that person would become unclean and would have to wash their clothes, bathe, and be unclean until the evening. If he used a clay pot, the pot was to be destroyed. If he used a wooden article it was to be thoroughly rinsed before it could be used again.

When the discharge stopped flowing, the individual would count off seven days for ceremonial cleansing. He would wash his clothes, bathe in fresh water and be clean again. On the eighth day he was to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the tabernacle and give them to the priest. The priest would offer one of them as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to cleanse him ceremonially before God (verse 13-15).

Notice that this man had to offer a sin offering to God to be purified from his discharge. This is not to say that the man had sinned. He was, however, touched by the general curse of sin on this earth that brought this sickness on him and for this he brought his offering.

Another form of discharge was the emission of semen when a man had a sexual relation with his wife. When this happened, the law required that he and his wife wash their whole body in water and remain ceremonially unclean until the evening. Any clothes or leather articles that had semen on them were to be washed with water (verses 16-18).

It is important to note that no sacrifice was required for the emission of semen during a sexual relationship. This shows us that sexual relations in marriage are legitimate

and pure. The uncleanness was a result of the bodily fluids and not the act itself.

The third form of bodily discharge treated here was the discharge resulting from a woman's monthly period. When a woman was having her monthly period, anything she slept on or sat on during this time became unclean. Anyone who touched her would be required to bathe in water, wash their clothes and be unclean until the evening. Any man who had sexual relations with a woman who was having her monthly period would become unclean for seven days. If that man laid in another bed during those seven days that bed would also become unclean. If the woman's monthly period lasted longer than usual she would be unclean for as long as her flow of blood continued (verses 19- 27).

When her flow of blood stopped, the woman was to count seven days for ceremonial cleansing. On the eighth day the woman was to bring two doves or two pigeons to the tabernacle and give them to the priest. The priest would then sacrifice one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the Lord. After that time she would be clean again.

Leviticus 15 concludes with a warning to show the seriousness of these laws. In verse 31 God warned Moses and Aaron to keep the Israelites "separate from things that make them unclean so they will not die." This is a strong warning. Failure to keep these laws relating to bodily discharges could result in death. Those who disregarded the laws defiled the dwelling place of God who lived among them (verse 31).

God saw not only the sins and rebellion of his people but their physical uncleanness as well. An individual with a

bodily discharge was not to come into his tabernacle. A man who had sexual relations with his wife was to wait until evening before he could come to worship God. We have a clear example of this in Exodus 19:14-15. When Moses was preparing the people for God's descent on the mountain he told them:

(14) After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. (15) Then he said to the people, "Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations."

A woman who was on her monthly period could not come into the tabernacle to worship God. To do so would have been to defile the dwelling place of God and risk being judged by God. Let me conclude with some important lessons for us to see in this chapter.

The first lesson we need to take from this chapter relates to the absolute purity and holiness of God. This holiness is such that it touches not only the spiritual but also the physical aspects of life. Any contamination, physical or spiritual separates us from a holy God.

Second, we do not have to willfully sin to be guilty before God. There are those who believe that as long as they keep themselves from certain sinful practices they will be right with God, but this is simply not true. We read in this passage that a woman's monthly period rendered her unclean before God. Even the body's natural functions could separate a person from God. An individual who suffered from a bodily discharge caused by a sexual relationship or a sickness was unclean before God. If a person touched anyone or anything that was unclean they were unclean. We cannot walk on this earth without feeling the effects of

sin or touching things that are unclean. We take uncleanness into our bodies by the food we eat, the things we see or the things we hear. We live on a sinful earth and the dust and dirt of this sinful earth touch us and makes us unclean every day. This is not to mention the spiritual sins we are guilty of committing in thought, action and word every day.

Not one of us could ever be clean before God by any human effort of our own. A sacrifice was required for every physical or spiritual uncleanness. Guilt offerings were brought before God for sins the individual was unaware he had even committed. Even sickness and disease separated us from our Saviour. We need a Saviour not just because we sinned a few times in our lives but because our nature is sinful and we live on a sin cursed and unclean earth. Jesus came to be the sacrifice for every uncleanness. He came to cleanse us of both the spiritual and physical impurities that separate us from a holy God. His one-time offering on the cross covers every impurity, physical and spiritual. We can approach God in worship and service, confident that every impurity has been covered by the work of His Son on the cross of Calvary.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the extent of God's holiness? What separates us from God?
- What are the physical effects of sin on our lives today?
- How does the sinfulness of this world affect us today? What do we take in through our eyes, our ears? How does this defile us?

- What does this chapter teach us about our need for a Saviour?
- How does the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus cover our “uncleanness” and make us right before a holy God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is absolutely pure and separated from anything unclean or unholy.
- Ask the Lord to protect you from the effects of sin and this world.
- Thank the Lord that while we live in a sinful world, His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary covers all our sin and shame. Thank Him that because of His sacrifice we can have a relationship with a holy God.

16

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Read Leviticus 16:1-34

Every year on the tenth day of the seventh month Israel was to celebrate what was known as the Day of Atonement. This was a special day when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle to seek the forgiveness of his people for their sins. While there were regular sacrifices made each day for the sins of God's people, this day was a special day. On this day the priest would seek the forgiveness of God for the entire nation. It was a national day of repentance.

As we begin, the Lord brings a warning through Moses to Aaron the High Priest. Notice from verse 1 that this warning comes after the tragic death of his two sons who had been struck by God for offering unauthorized incense (see Leviticus 10). The death of Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, was a powerful reminder of what could happen if Aaron or his sons approached the Lord in an unworthy or unauthorized manner.

The warning God brought to Aaron through Moses related to entering the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle. The Most Holy Place was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. God revealed His presence from the cover of the Ark between the two carved cherubim. The Lord warned Aaron that he was not to enter the Most Holy Place whenever he wanted (verse 2). The punishment for entering this place in an unauthorized manner was death.

Consider this for a moment. The separation between God and His people was such that no one but the high priest could enter the presence of God beyond that veil in the tabernacle. Even the high priest, however, could only enter briefly once a year to minister on behalf of his people. Should he dare to enter at any other time, he would be killed. When Aaron did enter the presence of the Lord, there was a special way for him to do so. God instructs him in this chapter on the procedure for entering the Most Holy Place.

Before he could enter the Most Holy Place, Aaron needed to come to the courtyard of the tabernacle with a young bull and a ram for himself and two male goats and a ram as an offering for his people. He was to bathe in water and dress in his priestly underwear, linen tunic, sash and turban.

Aaron was then to offer the bull as a sin offering for his own sin and that of his household (verses 6, 11). After slaughtering the bull for his own sins, Aaron was to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar where the bull had been sacrificed and add two handfuls of ground incense. Verse 13 tells us that he was to take this smoking censer and put it on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The smoke from the censer would rise and hide the cover

where the Lord revealed His presence. Notice also in verse 13 that he was to do this so that he would not die.

The presence of the Lord had to be hidden from the High Priest. Again this shows us something of the awesome holiness and glory of the Lord God. No person could see His face and live (see Exodus 33:20). How easy it is for us to lose sight of this awesome holiness. The God of the Old Testament has not changed (Malachi 3:6). He is the same God today. His presence still is as glorious and holy as it has always been.

After placing the censer on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, the high priest was then to take some of the bull's blood and sprinkle it on the front of the cover on the Ark of the Covenant. He was to then sprinkle the blood seven times in front of that cover (verse 14). This blood represented the sacrifice that had been made for his sins. It was only by means of this sacrifice that the priest could have access to the presence of God over the Ark of the Covenant. This is a powerful picture of what the Lord Jesus has done for us. His sacrifice and blood sprinkled before God gives us access into His presence.

When he had sacrificed the bull for himself and his family, the priest was then to take the two goats and present them to the Lord at the entrance of the tabernacle. Notice in verse 8 that God required that lots be cast for the goats. We are not told exactly how this happened. The idea here is that one goat would be chosen for sacrifice and the other would be set free. The goat that was set free was called the scapegoat (verse 8). The fate of each goat was not Aaron's to choose. This decision belonged to the Lord and was determined by the lots that were cast.

In verse 15 the goat to be sacrificed was brought to the altar and slaughtered. Its blood was taken behind the curtain into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled on the cover of the altar and in front. We understand from verse 16 that this blood made atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites. Aaron was also to make atonement for the Holy Place (verse 16) and the altar (verse 18). Atonement for the altar was done by taking blood from the bull and the goat and putting it on the altar horns and sprinkling it seven times with his finger (verses 18-19). Notice from verse 17 that Aaron was to be alone when he made atonement in the Most Holy Place.

Let's take a moment to consider what is happening here. The High Priest made an offering for his own sins and those of his people. These offerings, however, were not only for the people but also for the tabernacle. Verse 16 tells us that the tabernacle and its articles needed to be cleansed because of the sins of God's people. The tabernacle was defiled because those coming in and out were sinful people. In the last chapter we saw how a person with a bodily discharge could make another person unclean by simply touching them or their garments. This same principle applies here. An unclean person, whether he knew it or not, could defile the tabernacle simply by walking on the soil of the outer court. This uncleanness, unseen and unknown to the priests of the day, needed to be purified on a yearly basis. Blood needed to be shed and sprinkled on the various articles so that they could be used in the worship of God.

There is something very powerful in this picture. Consider how easy it is to minimize sin. Consider how much we let things slide without dealing with them. How many sins, known and unknown defile our bodies and our churches?

How patient God is with us that He would continue to love us despite the uncleanness of our homes and churches.

After Aaron had purified the temple and its articles he brought forth the live goat (verse 20). Laying both hands on the goat he would confess the wickedness and rebellion of his people over it. Their sins would be named and the goat would symbolically carry those sins on his head. He would then be taken into the desert and released (verse 22). Remember that two goats had been brought into the tabernacle. One goat was killed on the altar as a sin offering. The other was released into the desert to go free after the sins of God's people had been placed on its head. There are several important pictures in this ceremony.

The first picture is that one goat had to die so that the other could go free. This is a picture of what the Lord Jesus did for us. He died so that we could be forgiven. He took our punishment so that we did not have to die.

The second picture is one of transferring sins onto another. Sins were confessed over the goat. That goat symbolically took on the sins of God's people and carried them away with him to a place where they would never be seen again. This again is a picture of what the Lord Jesus did for us. He took our sins on Himself and carried them off to a place where they would never again be remembered. The Psalmist reflected on this when he said in Psalm 103:11-12:

(11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;
(12) as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

When Aaron had completed his sacrifices he was to take off his priestly garments, leave them in the tabernacle, bathe himself, put on his ordinary clothes and offer a burnt offering for himself and for the people (verses 23-25).

The person who had been given the responsibility to release the scapegoat was to wash his clothes, bathe himself with water and return to the camp. The hide, flesh and dung of the bull and goat offered for a sin offering were taken outside the camp and burned. The person removing these carcasses was to bathe himself with water and wash his clothes before returning to the camp (verse 26-28). Notice the importance of purity and cleanness before the Lord. All defilement was to be removed before anyone was permitted to enter the presence of the Lord in the camp of His people.

On the tenth day of the seventh month of every year, the people of God were to celebrate this Day of Atonement. On that day the tabernacle, its articles, the priest and the people were all to be cleansed of their uncleanness and sin. That day was considered to be like a Sabbath for the people of God. No work was to be done. This was a holy day set apart for the cleansing of the nation and the tabernacle.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about the separation between God and His people? Has God changed?
- How was the blood sprinkled on and before the cover of the Ark of the Covenant a symbol of the

work of the Lord Jesus? How does His blood give us access to the Father?

- We understand from this chapter that the tabernacle and its articles needed regular ceremonial cleansing because of the sins of the people. Even the presence of sinful people in the tabernacle defiled it. What does this teach us about the absolute holiness of God?
- How have we minimized the importance of dealing with sin in our day? Does the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross mean that we can simply ignore sin and its consequences? What sins need to be addressed in your life or in your church?
- What do the two goats of this chapter teach us about the work of the Lord Jesus for us?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His absolute holiness and separation from sin. Thank Him that all He does is right and pure.
- Thank the Lord Jesus for becoming a sacrifice for your sin so that you could have access to the Father through the work of His Spirit.
- Ask the Lord to help you to become more serious about walking in purity and obedience. Ask Him to cleanse you from your sins, known and unknown.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have not taken sin seriously.
- Thank the Lord for His tremendous patience with you.

17

The Proper Place for Sacrifices and Rules about Eating Blood

Read Leviticus 17:1-16

We all need to be accountable to each other for our actions. This is especially true with regard to our spiritual lives. Maybe you have met individuals who do not seem to be accountable to anyone. These individuals can sometimes fall into serious doctrinal error or sinful lifestyles. Accountability is important in the church. As we examine Leviticus 17:1-9 we see that God sets up a system of accountability to protect His people from error.

In verses 3-4 God made it clear to Moses that if an individual sacrificed an ox, a lamb or a goat and did not bring it to the Tabernacle, he would be guilty before God and cut off from His people. All sacrifices were to be brought to the priest at the entrance of the Tabernacle (verses 5; 8-9). The priest would sprinkle the blood of the animal on the altar to the Lord as a pleasing aroma to Him (verse 6).

Verse 7 gives a reason for this law. God did not want His people to offer sacrifices to pagan idols. Verse 7 leads us to believe that this was an ongoing temptation. For this reason, all sacrifices were to be brought to the priest who would offer them to the Lord as required by law. This law

provided accountability and structure for God's people to protect them from temptation.

By requiring that all sacrifices be made by the priest at the tabernacle, God was insuring that His regulations regarding these sacrifices were kept. The individual offering the sacrifice brought it to the priest and watched as the priest performed his duty. There in the tabernacle, the priest performed his duty in the presence of other priests who could see what was happening. This guaranteed that everything was done as God required.

In the ministry of writing that God has given me I have a team of believers who know me well to whom I send every book I write. I do this so that they know exactly what I am writing. I give them permission to challenge me on anything I write. I choose to listen to them and take what they say into account. It is healthy for us to have others stand with us and keep us accountable to doing what is right. This seems to be the intention of this requirement of God that every sacrifice be brought to the tabernacle.

Verses 10-12 speak to the issue of eating blood. Blood was sacred to the Israelites. Verse 11 gives us the reason why blood was not to be eaten. First, it contained the life of the animal and all life was sacred. Second, God gave them the blood of animals to make atonement for themselves on the altar. Blood was never to become common to them. It was to be respected and set aside.

Eating blood and treating it as common, was to show disrespect for God. Anyone who showed this kind of disrespect would be cut off from the people of Israel. The blood of an animal or bird killed for food was to be offered back to God by draining it on the ground.

The Proper Place for Sacrifices and Rules About Eating Blood

Leviticus 17 concludes with a reminder to God's people that if they ate anything that had been found dead or torn by wild animals they would become unclean. They would have to wash in water and remain unclean until the evening. They would be held responsible before God if they did not follow this procedure (verse 16).

Leviticus 17 reminds us that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were not to be treated as common. God set up an accountability structure so that these practices and articles could be kept holy before Him. All sacrifices were to be brought to a priest. All blood was to be drained on the ground or brought to the altar of God in the tabernacle.

Leviticus 17 also reminds us that there are things too holy to be treated as common. Have we lost this sense in our day? Have we lost our sense of God's holiness and the sacredness of His presence? In a day of easy abortions, have we depreciated the value of life to such an extent that we feel we can throw it away if it becomes inconvenient for us? Has the Word of God become so common we no longer fear to walk in disobedience to its principles? Have we lost a sense of the sacred? May God teach us afresh to respect what is holy. May He give us all the humility to be accountable before each other for the glory of His name.

For Consideration:

- What do we need to regard as holy today?
- Have we lost respect for the holy things of God? Give some examples.

- How can we keep each other accountable to honour the holy things of God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to respect and honour His ways and purposes in your life.
- Ask God to help you to be willing to submit to being accountable to others for your actions and beliefs.
- Thank God that He has placed us in a fellowship where we can support and encourage each other in our walk with God.
- Ask God to show you those things you need to respect and honour in your life and service for Him.

18

LAWS GOVERNING SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Leviticus 18:1-30

The Lord God has a plan for our sexual lives. Our society has not always agreed with the plan of God. This is nothing new. In verse 3 the Lord told His people that they were not to do as they did in Egypt where they used to live. Neither were they to follow the practices of Canaan where the Lord was bringing them. God's people were surrounded by people who had no regard for the purposes of God for their sexual lives. God knew that it would be easy for His people to fall prey to these terrible practices as well.

Notice that God's people had to live among those who ignored the purposes of God for their sexual lives. In verse 2, however, the Lord reminded the Israelites that He was the Lord their God. Because the Lord was their God, they had an obligation to Him. They were under His authority and were required to follow His purposes. God held His people accountable for their sexual behaviour. The world around them had its own ideas and practices but Israel

was not governed by the standards of the world. They were to seek God and His purposes.

God reminded His people in verse 4 that they were to be careful to follow His decrees. The word careful is an important word here. To be careful requires attention and special effort. This is what God is asking His people to do. He is asking them to pay special attention to His laws and make a special effort to do what He required. Notice that God promised a blessing in verse 5 to those followed His purposes for their sexual lives. Those who kept His laws would live by them (verse 5). In other words, there was life in the words of God. By submitting to the purposes of God for their sexuality, God's people would bring blessing to themselves and their society. Let's take a moment to examine briefly the laws of God regarding the sexual behaviour of His children.

Forbidden Sexual Partners

The law of God stated that the Israelites were not to have a sexual relationship with a person who was closely related to them (verse 6). This law prohibited, for example, sexual relations between a mother and her son (verse 7), a brother and a sister (verse 9) a grandparent and a grandchild (verse 10) or an aunt (verses 12-14). It also forbade sexual relationships with a daughter-in-law or a sister-in-law (verses 15-16).

In the culture of Israel, family relationships were quite complicated. A man might have more than one wife. This meant that your father's wife was not always your mother; neither did you and your sister always have the same mother. Even these relationships were protected. Sexual relationships were forbidden with a father's wife (verse 8) and the daughter of one's father or mother (verse 9, 11).

A man was also not to have a sexual relationship with both a mother and her daughter or grandchild even if these individuals were not related to him (verse 17). Nor was he to have a sexual relationship with his wife's sister while his wife was still living (verse 18).

There appears to be several reasons why these sexual relationships were forbidden. The first had to do with the dishonour it brought another individual. The phrase "that would dishonour" or equivalent is repeated many times in this passage (see verses 7, 8, 10, 14, 16). Family relations were to be honored. To engage in a sexual relationship with a close relative dishonored that relative and put a strain on the family.

There appears to be another reason for forbidding these sexual relationships in these verses. This is related to the tension and jealousy that such relationships would cause. This is quite clear in the wording of verse 18 when it reads:

Do not take your wife's sister as a *rival* wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living (emphasis mine).

Notice that the NIV uses the word "rival." There is a clear example of this in the case of the sisters Rachel and Leah in Genesis 29:31-30:24. Throughout the early years of their marriage they were in constant competition between each other for the attention of their husband. This caused tremendous friction and division in their household. This was not the purpose of God for the family. By restricting sexual relationships to those who were not closely related, the Lord was protecting relationships and preserving harmony in the society.

Sexual Relationships during a Woman's Monthly Period

While verses 6-18 deal with sexual relations that dishonour individuals or created rivalry and jealousy, verse 19 deals with the matter of ceremonial purity before God. The law of verse 19 forbade having a sexual relationship with a woman during her monthly period. The reason for this is clear from the rest of the book. A woman who was having her monthly period was unclean (Leviticus 15:19-23). Anyone who touched her or anything she sat on was also unclean.

Adultery

Verse 20 speaks to the matter of adultery, that is, sexual relations with another person's husband or wife. Notice here that God made it clear that a person who had a sexual relationship with another person's husband or wife defiled himself. The word is a strong word and suggests that he had been polluted or made utterly unclean. In fact Leviticus 20:10 states that a couple guilty of adultery were deserving of the death penalty:

If a man commits adultery with another man's wife
— with the wife of his neighbour —both the adul-
terer and the adulteress must be put to death.

There did not appear to be any forgiveness for such a crime. Both parties were to be put to death. This shows us just how seriously God took this matter of adultery.

Protecting the Fruit of a Sexual Relationship

Verse 21 seems to be somewhat out of context but we need to understand that children are the fruit of a sexual union. The children of these relationships were to be protected. Verse 21 tells us that they were not to be given as a sacrifice to the pagan god Molech. Molech was an Ammonite god who required the sacrifice of human life. The Lord God made it quite plain that if they offered their children to Molech they would profane the name of the Lord God of Israel.

This law comes in the context of teaching about forbidden sexual relationships. This is not by mistake. The point we need to see here is that the children born to such relationships, either legitimate or not, were protected and loved by God. The person who sacrificed them to Molech was guilty of profaning the name of the Lord God and would suffer the consequences of His wrath. Even the child of an illegitimate relationship was to be respected, loved and protected.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality is addressed in verse 22. God clearly forbade sexual relationship between men. This same principle would also apply for women. Notice the word that is used here to describe God's feelings toward homosexuality. The NIV uses the word "detestable". The King James Version uses the word "abomination." These are strong words that reflect the thinking of God about the practice of homosexual relationships.

Animals

The final matter to be addressed in this chapter concerns a sexual relationship with an animal. Verse 23 tells us that if a man had a sexual relationship with an animal he would defile himself. If a woman did so it was a perversion. In either case these individuals had violated the purpose of God for their sexuality. Leviticus 20:15-16 makes it clear that they were to be put to death:

(15) If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death, and you must kill the animal. (16) If a woman approaches an animal to have sexual relations with it, kill both the woman and the animal. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

Verse 24 reminds us that these things were practiced among the nations that God was going to drive out before his people. Whole nations had become defiled by their evil sexual practices. We learn from verse 25 that the land was defiled because its inhabitants had practiced sexual sin. The land was going to vomit out the inhabitants. The picture here is of a land that is sick and ready to vomit. God would judge those nations who practiced such deeds. He would cast them out and destroy them. He would purge the land of its evil.

God concludes in verses 26-30 by reminding His people that they were to keep His decrees and laws by abstaining from the detestable practices of the people of the land where He was taking them. These people did not follow the ways of God for their sexuality and defiled not only themselves, but their land. God warned His people that if they defiled their land by falling away from His purposes in their sexual relationships, the land would vomit them out

just as it had vomited out the people before them (verse 28). To keep this from happening, any person who fell into these sinful sexual practices was to be cut off from his people. They were not to permit anyone who turned from God's sexual purposes for their lives to live in the land the Lord was going to give them.

For Consideration:

- God reminds His people in this chapter that He was their God and that they had a special obligation to follow His purposes for their sexuality. Is God concerned about our sexuality? How does His purpose for our sexuality differ from the ways of the world around you?
- What sinful practices do you see in your society today? Have these sinful practices influenced the church? In what way?
- How are we to treat the children born to illegitimate relationships? What does God teach us in this chapter?
- What is the impact of sexual sin on our land?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to submit to Him and His purposes for your sexual life. Ask Him to give you grace to resist the ways of the world.
- Ask God to purify His church of all improper sexual practices. Ask Him to forgive and cleanse you as an individual so that you are pure before Him.
- Take a moment to examine the sickness of your society because of sexual sin. Ask God to heal

your society and restore it to His purposes for sexual relationships.

- Ask God to give you and your society strong and healthy marriages where sexuality is expressed in a wholesome and godly way.

19

BE HOLY

Leviticus 19:1-37

The Lord God introduces chapter 19 with a challenge for His people to be holy even as He was holy (verse 2). What is particularly interesting about this chapter is how holiness included every aspect of their lives. Leviticus 19 shows us the fruit of holiness in the life of the godly person.

Respect for Parents (verse 3)

Notice in verse three that the Lord begins by calling His people to live with respect for their mother and father. Let's consider this briefly. There are a variety of reasons why the holy person needs to respect his or her parents.

Consider first, that they were the ones to bring us into this world. They stood by us and prepared us for life. They protected us, taught us and provided for our every need. We owe them respect for what they have done.

A second reason why we need to respect our parents has to do with our society. The parent is the child's first contact

with authority. What happens if the child never learns to respect the authority of his parents? The result is that he never respects the authority of other leaders in his community. Learning respect for the authority of a parent will help the child to learn how to live with respect for others in his society as well. The holy person is one who respects those in authority over him and is grateful for what they have done.

Respect for the Sabbath (verse 3)

Another aspect of respect had to do with the observation of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a day set apart to remember the Lord and what he had done. One of the characteristics of a holy person, according to verse 3, is that he or she would take the time to remember the Lord God. This was to be a priority. How often have the pressures of this world taken us away from this time? God calls us as holy people to take the time on a regular basis to remember Him and His goodness.

Turning Away from Idols (verse 4)

Those who respect God and what he has done for them will also turn their backs on any other god. The holy person is one whose heart is dedicated entirely to the Lord God. They will resist the temptation to worship other gods. We need to remember that idols are not only made of metal and stone. An idol can take on many forms. Sometimes an idol can be our work, our family or our ministry. Anything that takes the place of God in our lives is an idol. God must be first in the life of the holy person.

Doing things God's Way (verses 5-8)

In verses 5-8 the Lord spoke to His people about the importance of following His ways when they brought their fellowship offerings. They were to offer them in such a way that it would be accepted on their behalf (verse 5). They were to eat their fellowship offering on the day it was brought to the priest. Nothing was to be left over until the morning. To do so, would be to desecrate what was holy (verse 7). God's people were to respect the ways of God. They were not to take matters into their own hands and do as they pleased. They were to follow the purpose of God in everything. The holy person is one who carefully follows the ways of the Lord. He considers what God wants as being more important than his own ways.

Concern for the Poor (verses 9-10)

Holiness also has to do with seeing the need of others and doing something about it. Notice in verses 9-10 that the Lord God told His people not to harvest the edges of their fields but to leave them for the poor. They were not to go over their vineyards a second time but to leave what remained so the poor and the foreigners could have something to eat. They were to do this because the Lord was their God. In other words, they were to do this in His name and because they loved the Lord their God. Those who share the heart of God will want to minister to those who are hurting around them.

Honesty (verses 11-13)

Verses 11-13 speak to the matter of honesty and integrity of heart. Here in these verses the Lord reminds His people that they were not to take what was not theirs, lie or deceive one another (verse 11). As a holy people they were

never to swear falsely in the name of the Lord, cheat their neighbour or hold back the wages of a hired man (verses 12-13). Believers were to be known for their honesty of character and words. A holy person must be trustworthy.

Compassion (verse 14)

Another aspect to true holiness has to do with compassion for those who have physical disabilities. Notice in verse 14 that the holy person will not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of them. They would not do this because they feared the Lord. In other words, they know the heart of God for those who have physical handicaps and will not sin against Him by mistreating His creation. Instead, they will do what they can to minister to those who have these particular handicaps. This shows us that the holy person is one who respects all human life. He will not mock those who face handicaps or struggles in life. His heart will be compassionate and merciful toward those who suffer.

Justice (verse 15)

The next aspect of holiness described in chapter 19 has to do with justice. Justice and integrity are closely connected. The holy person will not prefer one person over another in matters to be judged. Holiness treats all people equally. The rich will not find more justice than the poor. Holiness shows no prejudice but will treat all people alike and fairly. God does not judge us by the colour of our skin. He doesn't consider our cultural background or the type of house we live in. He is concerned that all people be treated fairly. Just as the Lord God offers His forgiveness and pardon freely to us all, so we too, as holy people, share that same heart.

Avoiding Slander (verse 16)

A special reference is made to the practice of spreading slander. Slander is spread by word of mouth. Its intention is to give a negative impression of an individual or organization. Ultimately the purpose of slander is to wound or hurt someone's character or reputation by words. The person who slanders does not have to speak lies about another. Slander can also be spread by leading a person to assume certain things. The intention of slander is to make someone else look bad. Slander is not the practice of the holy person. The holy person will protect the character and honour of a friend or neighbour, and not bring harm to them.

Relationship with Neighbours (verse 16-18)

Out of respect for God, the holy person will do nothing to endanger his or her neighbour's life. There are numerous laws in the Old Testament that speak about putting proper fences up around one's property or keeping one's animals so that they did not harm a neighbour or his property. The holy person is responsible for his actions and will take every precaution not to endanger his neighbour's life, health or reputation.

Notice that the love and respect for one's neighbour comes from the heart (verse 17). A holy person is not one who does things to be seen by others. He does them because it is in his heart to do them. Holiness not only affects the outward actions, but is motivated by a heart filled with compassion and love.

Notice also in verse 17 that the holy person is concerned when his or her neighbour wanders from the path of righteousness. The Lord challenged His people to rebuke their

neighbour so that they would not share in his guilt. In other words, the Israelites were to watch out for each other. When they saw their neighbour going down a path that would be harmful for him spiritually or physically, they would warn him. The holy person would do all he could to help others walk in holiness. Notice that if the holy person did not rebuke his neighbour when it was necessary to do so, he would share in the guilt. In other words, he would be responsible for the neighbour's harm because he had the power to do something to prevent it but he did not.

When it came to one's neighbour, the holy person would never seek revenge or bear a grudge in his heart. He would be quick to forgive. In fact, holy people love their neighbour just like they love themselves. They will do all they can to provide for their comfort and security. They will protect their neighbour and warn them of any danger. They will do this even if the neighbour did not prove himself to be worthy of such love. The holy person loves and treats his neighbour just as the Lord God treats him.

Mixing species (verse 19)

Verse 19 is quite interesting. Notice in this verse that the Lord forbids mating of different kinds of animals, planting a field with two kinds of seed or wearing clothes woven with two kinds of material. There may be several reasons for this command of God.

First, it may be in reaction against the pagan religious practices of the day. Remember that the law of God forbade the sexual relationship between a human and an animal (see Leviticus 18:23). The Lord told his people clearly that these practices were observed in the land of Canaan where they were going (Leviticus 18:24). Remember that stories abounded about how the pagan gods mated with

animals and humans to produce offspring of different kinds. It may be that the reason why God forbids the practice of mixing species here was to keep His people from falling into the pagan practices of the religions around them.

The Lord may also be reminding His people of the importance of making sure that they keep themselves pure. These laws were a constant reminder that as the people of God they were to be a separate people. They were not to mix with the pagan nations around them or give their sons and daughters to them in marriage. They were not to mix the faith of the Lord God with the practices of the nations around them. They were to keep their faith pure and undefiled.

The holy person is one who remains true to the Lord God and His Word. He will be careful not to compromise his faith or allow false religions or worldly ways to influence his relationship with God. He is careful to keep his faith pure and undefiled.

Treatment of Slaves (verse 20-22)

Verses 20-22 need to be understood in the cultural context of the day. Slavery was an accepted practice of that time. Slaves did not have the same rights and privileges as others in the society. It is not our purpose to discuss the reason for this in this context. What is important is that we see the intention of verses 20-22. In these verses we have an example of a man who sleeps with a slave girl promised to another man in marriage. This slave girl, though promised to another man, was still a slave who had never been given her freedom. Normally, this crime was punishable by death because the woman was engaged to be married but, in this case, because she was still a slave, neither she nor

the man who slept with her would die. The man, however, would be required to bring a ram to the tabernacle as a guilt offering to the Lord so that he could be forgiven for his sin.

We see from this that the slave was considered to be the property of another. To kill a slave was to take away the property of another and reduce his ability to make an income. The slave, in this case, was protected by the law and would not die for her sin. The man, however, would have to pay for his crime and bring an offering to the Lord.

God noticed the slave. Though slaves did not have freedom, they were still protected. This shows us that God, as a holy God, is concerned for those who are in bondage for whatever reason. It is interesting to note the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 25:36-40:

(36) 'I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (37) "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' (40) "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Notice the heart of God for those who are suffering from injustice or even crimes of their own making. Jesus told his listeners that whatever they did for the least of His brothers they did it to Him. The Lord God felt what happened to this slave girl. Society had reduced her in significance but the

Lord God noticed her. He demanded that the man who had defiled her pay for his crime.

The holy person is aware of those in his society who are being treated unjustly. He sees the heart of God for them and treats them with respect and dignity. He protects and provides for them and will call all who harm them to account for their actions.

Remembering God in the Planting of a Tree (verses 23-25)

In verses 23-25 God told his people that when they planted a tree, they were to consider its fruit as forbidden for three years. It was not to be eaten. On the fourth year they were to bring all its fruit to the Lord as an offering of praise to God. Only on the fifth year could they eat the fruit of this tree.

What does this law tell us about the requirement of God for the holy person? It tells us that the holy person is one who is generous and thankful in heart. In recognition of the goodness of God the fruit of that tree, on the fourth year, was dedicated entirely to Him. How many fruit trees were planted in the land of Israel? Consider that God expected His people to be thankful to Him for each one that bore fruit. How easy it is for us to forget that our blessings come from God. The holy person is always mindful of the blessings of God on his or her life and willingly returns to Him what He had given so generously.

Separation from False Religions (verses 26-31)

God expected that holy people separate themselves from the false religions and practices of their day. He gives

examples of such practices in verses 26-31. He speaks here about the practice of eating meat with blood in it or practicing divination and sorcery (verse 26). Verses 27-28 addressed the pagan custom of cutting hair at the sides of their head, clipping off the edges of their beard, cutting their bodies for the dead or putting tattoo marks on themselves. God's people were to separate themselves from the horrible practice of making their daughters prostitutes for the pagan gods and consulting mediums or spiritists (verses 29-30). The nations practiced these things in their false religions. God's people were to make a clear distinction between themselves and the pagan nations around them. They were not to copy their practices or allow people to even think that they were associated in any way with the evil practiced by these false religions.

The holy person is careful to make a clear distinction between what is from God and what is not. They will live their lives in such a way that there is no confusion between holiness and worldliness. When people see them and watch their ways, they will know that they belong to God.

Respect for the Elderly (verse 32)

Verse 32 speaks to the matter of showing respect to the elderly. Notice that God challenged his people to "rise in the presence of the aged." Rising in the presence of an elderly person was a way of showing them respect and recognizing their worth.

Many elderly people have come to a place in their life where they are not able to do what they used to do. Their bodies are not as strong. Their minds are not as sharp as they once were. Many begin to wonder if they are of any use to society or to the church. By rising in the presence of the elderly, God's people were showing them that they

appreciated and valued them. Not only would this bless the elderly but it would also show respect for their years of service.

God does not forget us in our old age. He does not turn from us when we become frail. He loves us as we are. He will always love us. The holy person sees as God sees. He will be aware of the elderly and infirm in his midst. He will respect them even when they are weak and feeble. He will honour them for their age and the blessing of God on their lives.

Love for the Foreigner (verses 33-34)

The holy person, according to verse 33 will show respect for people of another nationality and culture. God made it quite clear in verse 33 that the Israelites were not to mistreat foreigners who were living among them. They were to be treated like their own people. God's people were to love them as themselves, remembering that they, too, were at one time foreigners in the land of Egypt (verse 34).

God calls us to be world Christians. The struggle of brothers and sisters in other countries is our problem as well. Those who do not know the Lord in other countries are our concern. The holy person has a missionary heart. He loves those of other cultures and nationalities. His desire is for their well-being, physically and spiritually.

Honest in business (verses 35-36)

God expects that those who love him and live holy lives be honest in all their business dealings. Of particular concern in these verses is the practice of cheating customers by using dishonest weights. True holiness impacts how we do

business. The holy person will use honest weights. He will not cheat his customers. He will not deceive them, but give them what he promises. Those who deal with a holy businessman know that they will be treated fairly. They know they can trust his word.

It is important that we understand from this chapter that holiness impacts every aspect of our life. It will change our relationships with those around us, and give us compassion for the poor, needy and outcasts. It will affect how we speak and do business. It opens our hearts to those who live in our midst but also gives us a missionary heart for the whole world. It fills us with gratitude, compassion and generosity. The holy person is not one who separates himself from the world but rather one who lives and demonstrates the heart of God in the activities of everyday life.

For Consideration:

- How does holiness impact the kind of relationships we have with those around us. Are there unholy relationships in your life?
- How does holiness impact how we do business or work for our employer?
- The holy person was one who observed the Sabbath. In other words, the holy person takes time for God on a regular basis. Do you take time for God in your life?
- Leviticus 19 tells us that the holy person is generous and compassionate. Have you been generous and compassionate with the blessings God has given you?

- The holy person will be concerned about how he uses his words. How careful have you been with your words?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there are relationships in your life that you need to deal with. Ask Him to remove any prejudice, lack of compassion or respect.
- Ask God to help you to be absolutely honest in your words and deeds.
- Thank the Lord that He delights to meet with us. Ask Him to help you to take more time with Him on a regular basis. Ask that He would meet you in that time to encourage and strengthen you.
- Ask God to open your mind and heart to the needs of those around you. Ask Him to help you to see these individuals as He sees them.
- Ask the Lord to guard your lips so that they do not speak evil of another person.

PUNISHMENT FOR PARTICULAR SINS

Read Leviticus 20:1-27

There are consequences for our actions. A holy God cannot allow sin to go unpunished. Sin has implications on our land and impacts the blessing of God on His people. In Leviticus 20 we see that God demanded sin be punished. In some cases, the person who sinned was to be killed for his crimes. The land was to be purified and all evil removed if the blessing of God was to remain on His people.

Punishment for Offering Children to Molech (verse 2-5)

The first sin to be addressed in Leviticus 20 was the sin of offering a child to Molech. Commenting on this practice Jamieson, Fausset and Brown state:

Molech, or Moloch, which signifies "king," was the idol of the Ammonites. His statue was of brass, and rested on a pedestal or throne of the same metal. His head, resembling that of a calf, was adorned

with a crown, and his arms were extended in the attitude of embracing those who approached him. His devotees dedicated their children to him; and when this was to be done, they heated the statue to a high pitch of intensity by a fire within, and then the infants were either shaken over the flames, or passed through the ignited arms, by way of lustration to ensure the favor of the pretended deity. The fire-worshippers asserted that all children who did not undergo this purifying process would die in infancy; and the influence of this Zabian superstition was still so extensively prevalent in the days of Moses, that the divine lawgiver judged it necessary to prohibit it by an express statute.¹

The practice of dedicating a child to this pagan idol would obviously be a temptation for the people of God. It is hard to imagine how the Israelites could fall into such a horrible sin but pagan superstitions are temptations for believers as well. Anyone found guilty of presenting their child to Molech was to be stoned to death by the community.

Notice in verse 3 that by giving his children to Molech, a man was guilty of defiling the sanctuary and profaning the name of the Lord. It is important that we take note of this. This man's crime was not just against his child but also against God. God held him responsible for how he treated the children He had given him. Any sin against his children was a sin against God. By dedicating his children to Molech and not raising them to know and follow the Lord God

1 Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A.R.; Brown, David, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*: Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Laridian Electronic Publishing, comments on Leviticus 18:21.

of Israel, this man was profaning the name of God. It is the obligation of every believing parent to protect his or her children from evil and raise them to know and love the Lord God.

Notice from verses 4-5 that the whole community was to take this matter of giving children to Molech seriously. If they closed their eyes to what this man did and failed to put him to death for his crime, the Lord would set His face against them. God calls us to live in community. As a community of faith we are to look out for each other. When we see a brother or sister wandering from the truth, we are to warn them.

Punishment for Consulting Mediums and Spiritists (verse 6-7)

Another crime against God was that of consulting a medium or spiritist (one who consults the spirits for the purpose of seeking their advice or counsel). Notice two things from verse 6.

First, God would set His face against the person who consulted mediums and spiritists. This is a strong statement. The idea is that God would take particular action to turn away from this individual. By turning to mediums and spiritists, this individual was making himself an enemy of God.

Second, notice how God describes the act of consulting mediums and spiritists. He says in verse 6 that those who do such a thing “prostitute” themselves. In other words, they are being unfaithful to God. They are breaking their covenant vows with God by seeking the counsel and advice of those who consulted evil spirits.

Instead of seeking counsel from spiritists and mediums, God's people were to consecrate themselves to Him and follow His words. They were to set their hearts on Him and His ways and make it their life ambition to walk in obedience to the Lord their God.

Let me make a brief comment here on this matter. There are still many mediums and spiritualists in our day. Horoscopes, witchdoctors or other traditional practices offering to guarantee a good future are still temptations for believers. God calls us to put our complete trust in Him. Is our God big enough to take care of us? Can we trust Him fully? Those who belong to Him must devote themselves to Him alone and trust His purpose. Those who consult or listen to the advice of spiritists and mediums are seeking Satan's counsel and opposing God. In Old Testament times anyone who consulted a spiritist or medium was to be stoned to death.

Punishment for Cursing One's Parents (verse 9)

Respect for parents was a serious matter before God. Verse 9 tells us that those who cursed their father or their mother were to be put to death. It is true that not every father or mother was a good parent, but that was not the issue here. A child was to show respect for his parents even when they were unworthy of that respect.

Parenthood was a role to be taken very seriously. Parents were to be respected because of the role God had given them. They had been given a charge to keep, protect, and nurture the children God had given them. They were spiritual leaders and shepherds to the small flock God had entrusted them. The role of parenthood was a sacred one carrying sacred obligations and responsibilities. Just as it would be unthinkable to speak evil of a priest, so it was

unthinkable to speak evil of parents. God so valued the role of parenthood, that anyone who cursed a parent was to be put to death.

Punishment for Sexual Sins (verses 10-21)

Verses 10-21 speak specifically to sexual sins and the penalty required. Let's touch briefly on these sins here.

There were a number of sexual sins punishable by death. A sexual relationship with another man's wife (verse 10) a father's wife (verse 11), a daughter-in-law (verse 12), a homosexual relationship (verse 13) or a sexual relationship with an animal (verses 15-16) were all punishable by death. In these cases all parties involved in the sin were to be killed. The death penalty was also imposed on a man who married both a mother and her daughter (verse 14). In this last case, all three individuals were to be burned in a fire.

Verses 17-18 speak of sexual sins for which individuals would be cut off from their people. At the very least these individuals would no longer be considered part of the people of God and separated from His blessings. A man who married his sister (even if she didn't have the same mother) and had sexual relations with her was to be cut off from his people (verse 17) as would a man who had a sexual relationship with a woman during her monthly period (verse 18).

There were other sexual sins for which the guilty person would be "held responsible." These sins included having a sexual relationship with an aunt (either the sister of a father or a mother) or a brother's wife (verse 21). The punishment for this is given in verses 20 and 21. The person guilty of such a sin would die childless. The blessing of God would

be removed and the individuals would die with no one to carry on their name.

Warnings and Challenge (verses 22-27)

God reminded His people in verses 22-27 that He was going to give them their own land. He was bringing them to a land where the customs and practices of the inhabitants were evil. The practices of these nations were so terrible that the land was going to vomit them out. God warned His people that if they fell to the same temptation and practices, the land would vomit them out as well. God wanted to set His people apart from the other nations and make them a holy people. He would make the land He was giving them to be a land of “milk and honey.” In other words He wanted to bless His people and shower them with the richness of the land. If this was going to happen, however, God’s people would have to make a clear distinction between what was clean and unclean. They would have to distinguish between unclean and clean animals and separate themselves from any ungodliness.

Disobedience to God's Word and His purposes could remove any blessing from their lives. God makes it clear in this passage that His people were to be serious about sin. If they wanted to live in the fullness of God’s blessing, they needed to walk in holiness and purity.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about the obligation we have as parents to raise our children to

know and honour the Lord God? How seriously does God take the role of parenthood?

- What superstitions, practices or traditions draw people away from trusting God, His provision and guidance?
- God challenges His people in this chapter not to be like the people of the land He was going to give them or else the land would vomit them out. What impact does our sin have on our society and land?
- How important is obedience and purity if we want to experience the blessing of God?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to pray for the parents in your community. Ask God to help them to be faithful in raising their children in the ways of the Lord.
- Ask God to reveal any superstitions or pagan practices in your life and society. Ask Him to help you to place all your confidence in Him and His plan for your life. Thank him that He is completely worthy of that confidence.
- Ask the Lord to heal your land of the sin-sickness it is feeling today.
- Commit yourself to God and His ways. Ask Him to keep you pure and holy. Ask Him to open up His blessings and pour them down on you today.

21

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PRIESTS

Read Leviticus 21:1-24

While the nation of Israel was to be a holy nation, it was particularly important that the priests walk in a manner worthy of their calling. In chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Leviticus, God gives them specific instructions about how they were to live and minister on His behalf.

Purity before God (verses 1-4, 11)

One of the first requirements of God for the priest was that he keep himself ceremonially pure. One of the ways a priest could make himself ceremonially unclean was by being in the presence of a dead body. Consider the law of God in Numbers 19:14:

This is the law that applies when a person dies in a tent: Anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in it will be unclean for seven days.

Notice in verses 1 and 11 that the priest was not to make himself unclean even for one of his people who died. This meant that the priest would not be able to come near the body of the man or woman who died lest he defile himself.

There was an exception to this rule. It did not apply in the event of the death of a close relative such as a mother, father, brother, son, daughter or unmarried sister. He was permitted to make himself unclean for these individuals alone. Because these people depended on him, he had an obligation to care for them in their death.

This meant that the priest would not be able to comfort a grieving family in their time of need. Because the family would likely be unclean at this time, the priest was not to go near them. His obligation was first toward God. As His chosen servant, he was to be clean before God at all times.

Follow God's Purposes (verses 5-6)

Notice from verse 5 that the priests were not to shave their heads, trim the edges of their beards or cut their bodies. This was the custom of the pagan nations around them. They did these things as a sign of mourning and as a means of attracting the attention of their gods. We have an example of this in 1 Kings 18:27-29 when Elijah addressed the prophets of Baal:

(27) At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or travelling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." (28) So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. (29) Midday passed, and they

continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

The priest was to be careful to follow the ways of the Lord. He was not to be influenced by the traditions and customs of the pagan nations around him. He was to commit himself to God and His ways alone. As servants of God we are not free to do as we please. God has a purpose for our lives and ministry. Sometimes doing things God's way will mean that we walk alone. God calls His servants, however, to be true to His commandments and walk in obedience. He alone must be our guide.

Holy Partners (verses 7-8, 13-15)

In verse 7 and 8 the Lord commanded the priest not marry a divorced woman or one who had been a prostitute. The priests were a holy people and God demanded that the women they married be women of holy and noble character. The wives of the priests were to remember that their husbands were chosen men of God. These women were to do nothing that would hinder the ministry of their husbands.

Verses 13-14 makes it quite clear that the woman a priest married was to be a virgin. She was not to be a widow, a divorced person or a prostitute. She was to be pure and undefiled, a worthy partner for her husband. In this way, their offspring would not be defiled (verse 15). Their children would be the offspring of a holy man and woman and would be trained to walk in the ways of God.

The priest's wife was to be one who complimented and supported him in his ministry. We cannot underestimate the importance of the role of our partners in the ministry.

Those who are called of God must be careful to find a partner who stands with them in their calling.

The Priest's Children (verse 9)

The priest's children were to learn to respect the call of God on their father's life. We have an example of a priest's daughter who became a prostitute. Her actions showed that she had no regard for the position of her father in Israel. She disgraced him and the call of God on his life by acting in such a way. God demanded that such a woman be burned to death for her actions. Notice that it was not only her prostitution that is the issue but the fact that she had disgraced her father's name and calling.

Notice that there is no mention of punishment for the priest. There are those who insist that a pastor resign from his position because of the actions of his children. The priest was not punished here. The entire fault lay on the daughter who rebelled. The priest would not be required to step down because of his daughter's actions.

The priest was to do his best to train his children in the ways of God. While it was the obligation of the priest to train his children in the ways of the Lord, each child would have to make up his or her mind concerning their walk with God and would be held accountable to God for their own actions.

Dignity (verse 10)

Verse 10 speaks particularly about the high priest. In this verse God commanded him to wear his priestly garments, never uncover his head (let his hair become unkempt,

NIV), or tear his clothes. In Job 1:20 we see the response of Job when he learned that his children had died:

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship.

Notice what Job does. He uncovered his head by shaving it and he ripped his garment. Job did this to express his grief. Sometimes those who mourned would literally cover themselves with dust or ashes (2 Samuel 13:19). Those who mourned in this way refused to take care of their appearance. They walked about dirty, with ripped clothes and messy or shaved hair.

God did not want the high priest to mourn in this way. As high priest he was to remain dignified. He was to be careful about his appearance. He was not to walk about in torn clothes, with unkempt or dirty hair. He had a high calling from God. He was to respect that position by being clean and respectable at all times. He was to dress like a priest and act like a priest.

Commitment to Ministry (verses 11, 12)

Verse 11 seems to repeat the command of God in verse 1-4 but adds another dimension for the High Priest. In verse 11 the Lord commanded the high priest not to defile himself by approaching a dead body. The verse makes it clear that he was not even to do this for his father or mother. In fact, the high priest was not to leave the sanctuary. His commitment was to the Lord and the ministry that he had been called to. Not even the death of his parents was to keep him from his obligations toward God.

Those who know the call of God on their life must devote themselves to that call. There will be sacrifices to make. Speaking to a disciple who wanted to bury his father before following him, Jesus said in Matthew 8:22:

“Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

The call of God was to take priority in the priest's life. Nothing was to stand in the way of that call. While this was to be especially true for the Old Testament priest, the principle applies to all who have been called of God in any way. We must not take that calling lightly. God expects us to use the gifts He has given us for His glory. A servant of God must be willing to make great sacrifices for the cause of his Lord. He must be willing to devote his life and efforts to fulfilling that calling no matter the cost.

Without Physical Defect (verse 16-23)

In verses 16-23 the Lord told Moses that only those of his descendants who had no physical defect could serve as priest. No descendant of Aaron who was blind, lame, disfigured or deformed in any way could serve as priest. This included anyone with a crippled foot or hand, a hunchback, a dwarf, one who had an eye defect, running sores, or damaged testicles (verse 19-20). These individuals could eat the food devoted to the priests but they were not to serve as priests (verse 22). If anyone with a physical deformity approached the altar of God, they would desecrate it. God would hold them accountable.

When a priest offered a lamb to the Lord God as a sacrifice, that lamb had to be without defect. In the same way those who approached God were to be without physical defect as well.

Consider for a moment how God rejected all who had any kind of physical deformity as priests. The holiness of God was such that even those who suffered the effect of sickness and deformities could not enter His presence. When the Lord Jesus died on our behalf, He covered sin and all its effects. Our sin and the deformities of our body no longer need to separate us from God. Our deformities never need to keep us from a wonderful and full relationship with God.

The Lord God is a holy God. Those who have been called by God have been given a high and holy calling. They are to walk and serve in a way that brings Him honour and glory.

For Consideration:

- The priest was to keep himself pure before the Lord God. What are the temptations for the servants of God today?
- Is it possible to serve the Lord but do it in a worldly way? How have the ways of the world influenced us in our ministry today?
- How important is it to have a marriage partner that loves the Lord and respects the ministry God has called you to? How has your husband or wife been a support and encouragement to you in ministry?
- What is your commitment to the ministry God has called you to today? What sacrifices have you had to make for your calling?
- What do we learn about physical deformities in the days of the Old Testament? How did the death of the Lord Jesus cover these deformities?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to reveal anything in your life that needs to be forgiven or purified. Thank the Lord that there is forgiveness.
- Do you have a marriage partner who loves the Lord and is a support to you in your ministry? Take a moment to thank the Lord for him or her. Ask God to help you to be a support to your husband or wife in the calling of God on their lives.
- Ask God to help you to take His call on your life seriously. Ask Him to make you willing to make the sacrifices necessary for that calling.
- Thank the Lord that the death of the Lord Jesus covers not only our sin but all the effects of sin. Thank Him that even those who suffer the effects of sin on their bodies can know wonderful fellowship with Christ.

22

RESPECT FOR GOD'S HOLY THINGS

Read Leviticus 22:1-33

In the last chapter we saw how God expected His priests to live according to a certain standard. They were to be a holy people, living lives that pleased the Lord in all that they did. Part of living a holy life was to respect the offerings of God's people. Verse 2 tells us that the sons of Aaron were to "treat with respect the sacred offerings" the Israelites consecrated to God. Notice that by mistreating these offerings they would be profaning the name of the Lord God to whom they were offered. To profane the name of the Lord God was a serious matter. This chapter is devoted to helping the priests understand how they could show respect to the offerings brought to them by the people.

Ceremonially Clean (verse 3-8)

The first way the priests could respect the offerings the people brought was by keeping themselves ceremonially

clean. Any priest who was not ceremonially clean was not to approach the offerings to sacrifice them to the Lord nor was he to eat of the portion that was given to the priests. If a priest offered a sacrifice to the Lord or ate an offering brought to him by the people while he was unclean, he would be cut off from the presence of the Lord. In some cases the Lord would literally strike these priests dead for their blasphemy.

What is important for us to see is that those who minister on the Lord's behalf must be a people of integrity. There must not be any hypocrisy in the service of the Lord. God requires that those who touch His holy things or minister on His behalf be a people of purity and holiness. To serve with known sin is to blaspheme the name of the Lord. The priests of the Old Testament were to be concerned with purity. It was their obligation toward God to examine themselves often to be sure they were in a right relationship with Him before they received the offerings of His people.

In our day it is all too easy for us to ignore sin. All too many servants of God have failed to maintain this purity of heart, body and spirit. God will hold us accountable for any impure attitudes, actions or behaviours. The true servant of God will be sure that when he serves in God's name he is in a right relationship with Him.

In verses 4-8 God specifically describes the conditions that would make a priest impure and hinder him from receiving the offerings of God's people. Any infectious skin disease or bodily discharge would make the priest unclean. No priest was to receive an offering from God's people or eat what was dedicated to the priest if he was suffering from these conditions. Other conditions that could make a priest unclean were touching something defiled by a dead corpse, touching an unclean crawling thing, eating

something found dead or even having a legitimate sexual relationship with his wife (verses 5, 8). In these cases, he was first to bathe himself in water and wait until the sun went down before he could be considered clean again.

The physical defilements of this earth could hinder service of God. The impurities of this world, touching the priest's body, would make him unclean before a holy God and keep him from serving. A priest who served the Lord, knowing he had been touched by something impure, would be cut off from his people and risked being struck dead by God.

Do we treat the things of God with respect today? As servants of God do we examine our hearts, lives and thoughts to be sure that as we come to the Lord we are coming in purity and integrity?

Keep God's Requirements (verses 9)

A second requirement of God for those who handled the sacred offerings was that they were to be careful to follow the word of God and live according to His commandments. If they were going to do this they needed to be good students of God's Word. They needed not only to know the requirements of God but do everything in their power to follow those commandments.

Notice in verse 9 the penalty for those who did not follow the requirements of the Lord. They would die for treating God's requirements with contempt. The Lord's word was holy.

God reminded His priests that they were to be a people who carefully keep His requirements. They were not to be

sidetracked by human wisdom or worldly influences. They were to put their full confidence in God's ways and be careful to follow Him in all they did. There was to be no compromise.

The Importance of Calling (verses 10-13)

The role of priest was a sacred role given to a select people. The priesthood was not for anyone. You had to be called of God to be a priest. God had chosen the tribe of Levi to be His representatives and priests. Verses 10-13 tell us that no one outside the priest's family could eat the sacred offerings. If a priest's daughter married someone who was not a priest she forfeited the right to eat the food dedicated to the priests. If she became a widow or was divorced with no children and returned to her father's house then she could again eat the food dedicated to priests as she was again under his care.

What do these verses tell us? They tell us that only those who had been specifically called of God were to perform the duties of priests and were given the privilege of ministering on His behalf. No one who was not called of God could perform the duties of a priest. If someone took on this role without being called of God, they would be guilty of showing contempt for the sacred things of God.

While we are all called to serve the Lord and to use the gifts he has given us, there is also a special call of God on the lives of those He wants to be leaders in His church today. This is not a task we are to take lightly. There are many pastors and church leaders serving in the church today who have never been called of God. Some of these individuals seem to have great ministries but they are not in the will and purpose of God. In the context of the Old Testament, to serve in such a way was to disrespect the

holy things of God and was punishable by death. We would do well in our day to be sure that we are called of God and walking in a purpose lest we too be guilty of blaspheming the name we represent.

Forgiveness (verses 14-16)

It would be easy to live in fear as a priest. God's demand of holiness and purity was such that to defile His holy offerings was a crime punishable by death. Verses 14-16, however, show us that there was forgiveness for the priest who ate the food dedicated to the priests by mistake. If this was the case, the priest who mistakenly ate a holy offering, was to bring his own offering equal in value to the offering that had been defiled and add a fifth of the value to it. God would see this and forgive the priest for the sin committed in ignorance.

While God is certainly a holy God, he is also a loving and forgiving God. He makes a distinction between those who fall out of weakness and ignorance and those who deliberately ignore His commands. There is forgiveness for those who seek to honour Him when they fall. These individuals can be restored and forgiven.

Offering Proper Sacrifices (verses 17-30)

God reminds His priests in verses 17-30 that they were to be careful to offer sacrifices that were acceptable to Him. Any offering that was brought to the Lord as a burnt offering was to be a male without defect from their cattle, goats or sheep. Any animal with a defect would not be accepted by the Lord. Nothing that was injured, blemished, bruised, had warts, running sores, or damaged testicles could be offered (verse 22, 24). The priest was not to accept these offerings from the people (verse 25). The only deformed

animal that could be accepted was an ox or sheep that was brought as a freewill offering in a fulfillment of a vow (verse 23).

Another law of God required that a lamb, calf or a goat was to remain with its mother for seven days. Only after the eighth day was a lamb acceptable as an offering (verses 26-27). In verse 28 the Lord forbade the slaughtering of a cow or sheep and its young on the same day. While there was a significant amount of animal sacrifice being offered in those days, notice the tenderness of God here. He is concerned for the animals that are born. He is unwilling to separate a mother from its young until the young were able to live on its own.

Remember that the priest would receive a portion of some of these offerings for himself and his family. The temptation would be for the priest to accept even the deformed because he would still have the meat for his family. The priest was to be diligent in this matter. He was to reject any animal that did not meet the standards God had set out, even if this meant personal loss for him and his family. There was to be no compromise in this matter.

As servants of God we need to realize that the temptation will come our way to compromise in our faith. Sometimes we will be tempted to settle for something that is less than what God demands. The priests of the Old Testament were not to disrespect the Lord and their sacred duty. They were to examine every sheep, goat or ox that came to the temple. They were to reject anything that did not honour their Lord. The priest was to take this matter seriously. He was to offer each sacrifice with the understanding that God would hold him accountable for what he did with the offering brought to him.

Notice that not only was the priest to sacrifice the offering in a way that pleased the Lord but he was also to eat it in the same way as well. Nothing was to be left over until the morning (verses 29-30). Even the portion he ate was to be treated as holy. God would watch what he did with the portion that was devoted to Him.

This shows us that God expect us to be wise with what He has given us. If you receive offerings from God's people for your living, you must treat those offerings with the respect they deserve. They have been dedicated to the Lord and His service. We must use what God has given us through His people with respect, realizing that God will hold us accountable to Him for how we use what His people have sacrificially given.

The priest was to acknowledge God as holy. This meant that he lived with respect for God and all that belonged to God. He was to be a worthy representative of the Lord God. He was to do nothing that would blaspheme or misrepresent the name of the God He served.

For Consideration:

- How important is it that we examine our heart and be clean before the Lord? Can we truly honour God if our hearts and lives are not right before Him?
- The priests of the Old Testament were required to follow the requirements of the Lord and keep His commandments. How tempting is it today to follow after the ways of this world and not do things God's way?

- Is it important that we be called of God for service? How does ignoring God's call show disrespect for His ways and purposes?
- What encouragement do you find in the fact that God is a forgiving God who understands our weaknesses?
- The priests of the Old Testament were to be sure that the offerings brought to the tabernacle were pure and undefiled. Sometimes this meant being willing to make a personal sacrifice to reject an offering that did not honour the Lord God. What personal sacrifices have you made or are you willing to make to be assured that God is honoured in your life and in the lives of His people?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to examine your heart and show you if there is any defilement in your life. Ask Him to cleanse you so that you can be a pure instrument in His hands for the advancing of His kingdom.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have not been careful to follow His ways. Thank Him that He has a purpose and plan for His work.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to forgive our weakness and sins of ignorance. Thank Him that He is a God of wonderful compassion and mercy.
- Ask the Lord to make you willing to sacrifice personal gain so that He would be glorified in your life and heart.

23

Sacred Assemblies

Read Leviticus 23:1-44

One of the important aspects of Israel's faith was the assemblies they held at regular times in the year. These were times when the people of God were expected to celebrate the name of the Lord their God. It is important for us to recognize that the Christian life is not meant to be lived alone. God expects us to meet with other believers for support, encouragement and the worship of His name.

The Sabbath Day (verse 3)

The first reference is to the Sabbath day. This was one day in seven where the Jewish people were to refrain from working. Notice in verse 3 that this was a day of sacred assembly. In other words, the Jewish people were to gather together on that day for the purpose of worship. This was a day when God's people would remember Him and His work. It was a day to celebrate His goodness toward them. No work was to be done on that day. It was to be a day of rest and worship. For the Jews, the Sabbath was from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown.

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (verses 4-8)

The second occasion for assembling was during the celebration of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Passover was celebrated in remembrance of the time when the Lord “passed over” the homes in Egypt and spared the first born in those homes whose doors had been painted with the blood of a lamb (see Exodus 12:1-14). The Passover celebrations were to begin on the fourteenth day of the first month (verse 5). This was followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread where, for seven days, the Israelites would only eat bread that had been baked without yeast. On the final day of this celebration the Israelites would gather together in celebration. Again no work was done on the seventh day of this Feast (verse 8).

Yeast in the Scriptures has come to represent sin and evil. It is interesting to note that after the celebration of God’s deliverance from the bondage of Egypt (remembered by the Passover) that God’s people would then cleanse their homes of yeast which represented sin and evil. The Feast of Unleavened Bread reminded the people of God of their obligation toward God in light of His great deliverance. Those who have been delivered by God from bondage must now live and walk in obedience to Him by cleansing their lives of sin and evil.

Firstfruits (verses 9-14)

The people of God were also to remember Him when they began to reap the harvest of the land. When the first grain was being harvested, the people were to take the first sheaf and bring it to the tabernacle where it would be presented to the priest (verse 10). The priest would wave the

sheaf before the Lord in a gesture of dedicating it to Him (verse 11). On the day the person brought his sheaf of grain he would also bring a one year old lamb, a mixture of flour and oil and a drink offering of wine. These would all be offered to the priest in thanksgiving for the harvest. No one could eat any of the harvest until this offering of thanksgiving had first been given to the Lord (verse 14).

Feast of Weeks (verse 15-22)

After the offering of the firstfruits, the Jewish people were to count seven full weeks or fifty days (the seventh Sabbath after the celebration of the firstfruits). This would mark the end of the harvest. On that day they were to bring two loaves of bread made with fine flour and yeast, seven one-year old male lambs, a bull and two rams. A male goat would be sacrificed for a sin offering (verse 19). The two one-year old lambs and the bread would be offered to the Lord as a fellowship offering (verses 19-20). The people would proclaim that day to be a day of sacred assembly (verse 21). People would gather to celebrate the goodness of God in the harvest.

Notice that part of the celebration had to do with showing compassion to the poor among them. In verse 22 the Lord commanded that when they reaped the harvest of their land they were not to reap the edges of their fields. They were to leave some grain along the edges of their fields so the poor and needy could harvest it for their families.

It is important that we notice that if the people wanted to honour God in their harvest they would do two things. First, they would recognize God as the source of this harvest by bringing an offering to Him and His priests. Second, they would share that harvest with those in need. Jesus reminds us of this principle in Matthew 25:40 when He says:

I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

As they ministered to the needy among them with the fruit of their fields they honoured God.

THE CELEBRATIONS OF THE SEVENTH MONTH

We have seen that the seventh day of the week or Sabbath was a holy day set apart for the worship of the Lord. In a similar way the seventh month was a holy month for the people of God. In this month three significant celebrations were to be kept.

The Feast of Trumpets (verses 23-25)

The first celebration of the seventh month was the Feast of Trumpets. This took place on the first day of the month. This day was to be a day of rest for the people of God and no work was to be done. On that day, trumpets would sound calling the people of God to set the day apart and gather to present an offering to the Lord God (verses 24-25).

The Day of Atonement (verses 26-32)

The second celebration of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement took place on the tenth day (verse 27). On that day the people of God gathered together. Notice in verse 27 that they were expected to deny themselves. It may be that they were to fast or to refrain from any sexual relations which would render them impure for the occasion. On this day, the priest would offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people and purify the tabernacle and its articles. Anyone who did not deny himself

and remain ceremonially clean on that day would be cut off from the nation of Israel (verse 28). This was a holy day and required that all who participated in the celebrations be in a right relationship with God. No work was to be done on the Day of Atonement.

The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (verse 33-35)

The third celebration of the seventh month was the Feast of Tabernacles. This was also known as the Feast of Booths. The Feast of Tabernacles took place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and lasted for seven days. The people of God were to assemble on the first day. Throughout the week they were to celebrate and bring offerings to the Lord God (verses 40-41). On the eighth day, another assembly took place as a closing assembly. On that day, special offerings were brought to the Lord and the day was set apart for Him. No work was to be done on the first and eighth day of this celebration.

The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths received its name from the fact that the children of Israel lived for a week in small booths made from palm branches. On this occasion, they would leave their homes to live in these small booths or tabernacles. They did this in remembrance of how their ancestors had lived in such dwellings while they were wandering through the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. It was a reminder of their sufferings and the goodness of God in taking them through the wilderness to the land He had promised their fathers (verses 42-43).

These were the regular feasts and festivals that the Lord commanded His people to observe. On these days the people of God would assemble and bring their offerings to the Lord. The offerings on these days were special

offerings brought in addition to the regular offerings they were already bringing Him (verse 38).

For Consideration:

- The Lord commanded His children in the Old Testament to gather together on regular occasions to celebrate His goodness and to remember Him. How important is it to gather with other believers? What benefit does gathering with other believers bring?
- During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which occurred after the Passover celebration, the people of God would cleanse their homes of any yeast or impurities. What does this tell us about the importance of regularly examining our lives for sin?
- The celebration of the firstfruits was a reminder to the people that God was the source of their harvest. How easy is it to forget that the Lord is our source? How can you remind yourself of the provision and blessing of God today?
- The people of God were not to harvest the edges of their fields. These edges were to belong to the poor and needy. How important is it that we open our eyes to the poor and needy in our community. What can you do to minister to the needy around you?
- During the Feast of Tabernacles the children of God lived in booths to remember the hardships their ancestors faced as they wandered through the wilderness. What did your ancestors have to face so that you could walk in the truth of God's Word?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you opportunities to gather with His people in true celebration of His goodness. Thank Him for the opportunities He has given you to do this. Thank Him for your brothers and sisters who have ministered to you and encouraged you in your faith.
- Take a moment to consider the provision of God for your life. Thank Him for what He has given you and your family.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to the needs around you. Ask Him to show you if there is anything you can do to minister to those who have needs in your community.

24

GOD'S HOLY PLACE; GOD'S HOLY NAME

Read Leviticus 24:1-23

In the Holy Place of the tabernacle there were three articles of furniture (the lampstand, the altar of incense, and a table). As we begin Leviticus 24 the Lord speaks to Moses about two of those pieces of furniture.

The Lampstand (verses 2-4)

In verse 2 the Lord commanded the Israelites to bring clear olive oil to burn in the lampstand. God made it particularly clear to Moses that the light in this lampstand was to be kept burning continually outside the curtain of the Most Holy Place. It was the sacred obligation of the priests to make sure this light never went out and that there was always sufficient oil in the lamp to keep it burning.

What is important for us to note in this context is that God chose to reveal His presence on the top of the Ark of the

Covenant between the wings of the cherubim (carved golden angels).

- (21) Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you.
(22) There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites. (Exodus 25:21-22, NIV)

The Ark of the Covenant was inside the Most Holy Place. The lampstand was to shed light on the curtain that led into the presence of God. It was the duty of the priest to keep this light lit. This is the duty of every Christian today. It is our God-given role to shed light on the path that leads to God. We are lights in this world shining brightly for the Lord Jesus and leading people into His presence. We must never let those lights go out.

The Table (verses 5-9)

The second command of God in Leviticus 5 was concerning the table in the Holy Place. Twelve loaves of bread were baked and set in two rows of six on that table. Along each row the priest was to place pure incense. Each Sabbath the bread was replaced with fresh bread. This bread could only be eaten by the priests in the tabernacle.

Incense is often a symbol of prayer in Scripture. We see this clearly in Revelation 5:8:

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding

golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

The fact that there were twelve loaves of bread is also significant. Could it be that the twelve loaves of bread represented the twelve tribes of Israel and the incense that rose from that table represented the prayers that were being offered for them and by them to God?

By putting the bread on the table each Sabbath, the priest was reminding himself that he had a responsibility toward the twelve tribes of Israel as their representative before God. He was also reminding himself of his obligation to be in prayer to God for the people.

Shelomith's Son (verses 10-23)

Verses 10-23 share the story of the son of an Israelite mother and Egyptian father. His mother's name was Shelomith. The fact that there was union between an Israelite and an Egyptian was a violation of the commandment of God who did not want His people to intermarry with the pagan nations around them (see Deuteronomy 7:1-4).

From verse 10 we see that a fight broke out in the camp between Shelomith's son and an Israelite. During the course of this fight, Shelomith's son blasphemed the name of the Lord God with a curse. The result was that they took him into custody until the Lord's will was determined (verse 12).

In verses 13-16 the Lord spoke to Moses and told him what he was to do. He was to take the blasphemer outside the camp and all who heard him blaspheme God's name were to lay hands on his head and the entire assembly was to

stone him to death. R.K Harrison says the following about the punishment of Shelomith's son:

The sentence ultimately made known was death by stoning outside the camp, so that the ritual purity of the tabernacle and congregation would not be violated. Those who had actually heard that blasphemy had to make a token gesture signifying their involvement in the crime, after which the man was executed. The precise method is not mentioned, but perhaps the offender was made to lie down, after which his head was crushed with large stones and the remainder of his body covered with smaller ones to form a cairn. This procedure would prevent anyone incurring accidental defilement, and as long as the congregation remained in the area the heap of stone would serve as a reminder of the crime that had been committed.²

Moses was to remind the Israelites that anyone who cursed the name of the Lord God would be held responsible for his or her actions and put to death. It did not matter if the person who cursed the name of the Lord God was an Israelite or a foreigner living in their midst, the entire community was to put that person to death by stoning.

It is important to note in verses 17-22 that taking the life of anyone or anything was not something the Israelites were to take lightly. While God demanded that the blasphemer be put to death, if an Israelite killed another human being for any other reason, he was to be put to death. If they took

2 Harrison, R.K. "Leviticus." Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: ed. D.J. Wiseman, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, 1980, pgs.221-222.

the life of an animal they were to pay the owner of that animal with one of their own. If they injured their neighbour, they were to pay their neighbour for the injuries they caused. The general rule was a “fracture for fracture, eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. As he has injured so he is to be injured” (verses 17-20).

God made it clear by this commandment that while there were certainly times to take the life of another, this was not something that was to be done in general. The strictest punishment was enforced for anyone who took the life of another human being. In the case of the blasphemer in this chapter, however, God required that he be killed outside the camp. He had dishonoured the name of the Lord God and was to be put to death for his crime.

We see from this another responsibility of the priests. They were to guard the name of the Lord God and keep it holy in their community. There are certainly many things in our society today that dishonour the name of the Lord God. Open disobedience to the Lord and His commands and the misuse of the Lord's name are all too common. God required in the Old Testament that such evil be rooted out.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about our obligation to be a light to those around us, leading them to God? How has your testimony and lifestyle been a light?
- The obligation of the servant of God was to pray for those God had put under Him. How important is

that we be faithful to pray for those God has put on our path? Have you been faithful in prayer?

- How is the name of the Lord being blasphemed in your community today? What has the church done to lift up the name of the Lord in your community?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be a consistent light to those around you, leading them to see Christ and His work on their behalf. Ask God to show you how to be a better light for Him.
- Thank the Lord that He hears our prayers. Ask God to increase your burden to pray for those He has put in your path.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have brought dishonour to His name by the things you have done. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to what needs to be done so that His name is no longer blasphemed in your society.

25

THE SABBATICAL YEAR AND THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

Read Leviticus 25:1-55

The law of the Sabbath required that the seventh day be set apart as a day of rest and spiritual reflection. No work was done on the Sabbath. From Leviticus 23 we discover that the seventh month of the year was also a holy month with three significant religious celebrations. What was true for the seventh day and the seventh month was also true for the seventh year. This year was known as the Sabbatical year.

The Sabbatical Year (verses 2-7; 18-22)

In verse 2 the Lord told Moses that when they entered the land He had given them they were to observe a Sabbath year. They could sow their fields, work their vineyards and harvest their crops for six years but on the seventh year the land was to rest. In that year, the land belonged to God and they were to renounce all claims to it. Whatever the

land produced on its own was to be food for anyone who lived among them (verses 6-7).

This would have naturally caused concern for the people of Israel. What would they eat if they were not to plant their crops on the Sabbatical Year? God addressed this concern in verse 18-22. He told them that if they followed His laws regarding the Sabbatical year they would live in safety in the land. God would protect and keep them. He would bring a rich blessing to them on the sixth year so that they would have enough for three years (the sixth year, the seventh year and even to the harvest of the eighth year). If they followed His commands, they would have no lack. There are several principles we need to see in the law of the Sabbatical year.

First, God wanted His people to remember Him as their provider. We can only imagine what it would have been like for the people of God to live in that seventh year not being able to work their land. They were forced in that year to trust the Lord God for all their needs. The Sabbatical year was a powerful reminder of how God was taking care of them.

The second principle God's people had to learn in this year was the principle of ownership. Every seventh year the land was given over to God and all rights to it were surrendered. This meant that anyone could come on the land and eat whatever it produced. How easy it would have been for the people of God to claim the land as their own. Being forced to surrender it to the Lord every seventh year meant that they had to remember that nothing was truly theirs. They were merely caretakers of what God had provided.

A third principle learned on this seventh year was one of generosity. Whoever had need was to be free to eat from

the produce of their land on the Sabbatical year. They could not remove them from the land or hinder them from taking whatever they wanted, as the land was no longer theirs. This reminded God's people of their obligation toward those who were poor and needy.

Finally, the law of the Sabbatical year taught God's people respect for the land. By giving the land a year to rest, they were allowing it to be built up again. This showed the Israelites that they needed to care for the land God had given them. They were not to exploit it until it was no longer fruitful. God required that they allow it to rest so it could be restored and continue producing good crops. The Sabbatical year assured a healthy land and taught God's people to respect their environment.

The Year of Jubilee (verses 8-55)

In verse 8 God commanded His people to count off seven Sabbatical years. This year was called the Year of Jubilee. As with the Sabbatical Year, the land was to have a rest, but the Year of Jubilee was special in that freedom would be proclaimed to all inhabitants of Israel and property was returned to its original owners (verses 10-11).

In Israel, as in any other culture, land was bought and sold for various reasons. One difference in Israel, however, was that on the Year of Jubilee, the land was to be returned to its original owner. This meant that a person could only buy a piece of land for a maximum of 49 years. When a piece of land was sold the price was based on the number of years left until the Year of Jubilee when it would have to be returned. The more years the purchaser had to harvest crops on the land, the more expensive the land would be (verse 15).

Land in Israel was never to be sold permanently. The reason for this in verse 23 was that it all belonged to God. God told His people in verse 23 that they were merely tenants on His property.

While everything was to be released back to the original human owners of the land on the Year of Jubilee there was also a provision made to have the land restored prior to this. Provision was made for the land to be redeemed (verse 24). We have an example of this in verses 25-28. Here in these verses we have the case of a man who became poor and was forced to sell part of his property to provide for his family. The value was determined by the number of crops left until the Year of Jubilee. If the poor man was able to make some money and gather sufficient funds together, he could purchase the land back before the Year of Jubilee and use it to plant his crops. If he could not find a relative to buy back his land or if he was unable to pay for it himself, the man would have to wait until the Year of Jubilee for his property to be returned to him (verse 28).

Property in a walled city was treated differently from property in the country. If a man had to sell a house in a walled city, he had one year to purchase it back (verse 29). If after one year he had not purchased his house back, the ownership would go permanently to the buyer and his descendants. In the case of a house in a walled city, it would not have to be returned on the Year of Jubilee. This law, however, was only for walled cities. In villages in the countryside houses or land could not be purchased permanently (verse 31).

Another exception to this rule was the land owned by the Levites. They could sell their houses in the Levitical towns where they lived and their property could be bought back.

It would always be returned at the Year of Jubilee. Their pasture land, however, could never be sold as it was their permanent possession (verse 34).

Another aspect to the Year of Jubilee was that on this year all slaves were set free. While slavery did exist in Israel, there were strict laws governing how they were treated.

In verse 35 God commanded His people to take care of those who were poor among them. They were to loan them money without taking interest. They were also not to sell their food to a poor person for a profit. Instead, they were to remember that they had been abused as slaves in the land of Egypt. By caring for each other in this way, the number of people who were reduced to slavery was limited.

If a fellow Israelite, who had become poor, sold himself because he could not pay his debts, his masters were not to take advantage of him. They were not to treat him "ruthlessly." He was to be treated as a hired worker until the Year of Jubilee. At that point, he and his family were released to go back to their own property (verses 39-42). No Israelite could be kept as a slave. Slaves were to be taken from the nations around Israel. These foreign slaves could become their property and willed to their descendants after them. Foreigners could become slaves for life but no Israelite was to be a slave (verses 45-46).

If a foreigner became rich and an Israelite was forced to sell himself to that foreigner, he could be bought back by one of his relatives. He could also purchase his own freedom from his foreign master. At the Year of Jubilee, however, he was released (verse 54). The rulers of Israel were to see to it that the Israelite servant was never mistreated by his foreign master (verse 53). No Israelite could belong

forever to another as they were servants of God. The Year of Jubilee freed slaves from their masters and restored to them what was theirs.

The Year of Jubilee protected the Israelite from being a servant to someone else forever. It also protected the land that belonged to their family and gave each Israelite the opportunity to be lifted up from their bondage by setting them free and restoring their land. It was God's intention that His people be set free from their oppression. We live in a sinful world. This world can be oppressive and difficult. Israelites were forced to sell themselves or their land at times to provide for their needs. God saw this and took compassion on them. The Year of Jubilee was a year of release from bondage. While sin often had its consequences, God provided a way of release. This is his desire for us today. It is not His purpose that we remain under the burden and bondage of sin and its effects. He proclaims a Year of Jubilee and freedom for all His children.

For Consideration:

- How easy is it to think that everything depends on us? Who is the true provider of all things? Have you ever lost this perspective?
- Consider for a moment what God has given you. Are these things really yours? What right does God have over them? Have you surrendered to Him and submitted to His right?
- Israel was called to stop working their fields and trust God every seven years. What lessons would Israel have to learn in that year? Could you trust God to provide for your needs like this?

- What does the Year of Jubilee teach us about God's desire for us today? Does He want us to be free from the oppression of sin and the world?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the way He has provided. Ask Him to help you to always be grateful for His provision in your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be more willing to surrender all He has given to you. Ask God to forgive you for thinking that what He has given you really belongs to you.
- Thank God that His desire is to release us from the bondage of sin and its effects in our lives. Ask Him to restore what the enemy has taken from you personally or from your church.
- Ask the Lord to increase your faith and trust in Him.

26

BLESSINGS AND CURSES

Read Leviticus 26:1-46

The book of Leviticus is a book of laws. It is much more than this, however. Obedience to the laws recorded in this book released God's blessing on the land while disobedience brought His curse. If the people of God wanted their land to be healthy, they needed to take the words of God seriously.

Blessings for Obedience (verse 1-13)

Leviticus 26 begins with three commands from the Lord God. In verse 1 He reminded His people that they were not to make idols or images of stone and bow down to them. They were to recognize the Lord God alone as their God. This meant turning from other gods and idols.

Notice, however, that turning from other gods was not enough. God expected that His people walk in obedience to His Sabbath and respect His sanctuary. The Sabbath was a time set apart to remember God with thanksgiving for His blessings. God wanted His people to be a grateful

people. He wanted them to recognize and worship Him for what He had done for them. How often do we go through life without recognizing the role God has played in providing and protecting? The Sabbath, whether that be the weekly, monthly or yearly Sabbath, gave God's people a time to remember the goodness and blessing of their Creator.

The third command of God to His people in verse 2 was to reverence His sanctuary. To reverence something is to hold it in high regard and to respect it. By asking His people to reverence His sanctuary, God is asking them to live their lives in such a way that He was honoured in their midst. They were to bring their best offerings to the tabernacle. They were to carefully observe all His commandments regarding worship in the sanctuary. In doing so, they honoured Him.

God was not just looking for strict obedience to His commandments. He was looking for a people whose hearts were filled with thanksgiving and respect for Him. This was the motive for obedience to God. This was the type of obedience that would open up the blessings of God on their land. Notice the result of loving and heartfelt obedience to the commands of God.

In verses 3-4 God promises that if they were careful to obey His commands, He would send rain in its season, the ground would yield its crops and the trees would produce their fruit. They would harvest the produce of their land continually. They would live in safety, without fear or need (verse 5). God would touch the land and bring rich blessings from it because His people obeyed His commands from the heart.

Notice beyond this, however, that obedience to the commands of God would also enable His people to live in peace, with nothing to make them afraid. They would not need to fear the wild animals in their land because God would remove them. Nor would they fear their enemies because they would be victorious over them all. God would strengthen them so that five would chase one hundred enemies and defeat them. Ten thousand enemies would fall to only one hundred Israelite soldiers. God would strengthen His people and give them victory over their enemies if they walked in obedience to Him.

God promised that if His people obeyed His commands He would look with favour on them. They would have many children and become a large nation. They would still be eating their last year's harvest while the new crops were being harvested. In fact, they would have to move out one year's harvest just to make room for the new harvest. God promised to walk among them and be their God. They would walk with their heads held high. They would be blessed by God, strong in His strength, and rich in His provision.

What is important for us to note is the connection between obedience to God's commandments and blessing. Israel's obedience brought blessing on her crops. It drove their enemies from them and brought the power of God into their midst. God was pleased to walk among them as they lived in obedience to His commands.

We are left wondering what would happen if we chose to walk in absolute obedience to God as His people. What this shows us is that our strength does not lie in our own ability but in God's favour poured out on obedient servants. Israel's victory over her enemies did not depend on the size of her army but on her obedience to God's

commands. Her prosperity as a nation and the size of her harvest had more to do with obedience than good farming techniques. How often have we missed this in our day? We try to build our churches by better programmes or more human effort. God is asking for obedience to His commands and devotion to Him. There is nothing that will destroy a church or a nation more than ignoring the purposes of God as revealed in His Word. If we want to know His blessing we must also know and walk in His Word.

Curses for Disobedience (verses 14-39)

Verses 14-39 warn the people of God about disobedience to His law. If they rejected His decrees and refused His laws, God's curse would be on them. He would bring terror and disease on their land (verse 16). They would plant their seed but their enemies would eat the fruit. Their enemies would rule over them. Israel would be so afraid of their enemies that they would flee from them even when they were not being pursued (verse 17). They would live in constant fear. These things would happen as a warning to His people and were only the beginning of His curse if they did not repent.

If God's people did not see the warning signs and return to Him, God would punish them "seven times over" (verse 18). He would punish them with the intention of breaking down their "stubborn pride" (verse 19). To do this He would make the sky like iron and the ground beneath them like bronze. That is to say, the sky would be so hard the rain would not penetrate the ground, resulting in no harvest.

If, even after this, God's people still refused to listen, God would again intensify His judgement (verse 21). This time He would send wild animals against them and they would

kill their children and cattle so that there would be so few in Israel that the roads would be deserted (verse 22).

If these things did not work and the people still refused the correction of the Lord, then God would become hostile toward them (verse 23-24). God would bring the sword against them for breaking their covenant with Him. He would send plagues on them and they would be given over to their enemies. Famine would be so severe that ten women would be able to share just one oven to cook their bread. Bread would be rationed out by weight as it would be so scarce. They would eat, but they would not be satisfied. There would not be enough food to satisfy their hunger.

If these measures did not bring His people to repentance, God would attack their high places, cut down their pagan altars. Dead bodies would begin to pile up in their land. Their situation would become so desperate that they would have to eat the flesh of their sons and daughters to survive. Their cities would be turned to ruins. God would no longer take any delight in their offerings and would turn His face from them. They would be scattered throughout the nations. God would see them as His enemies and draw His sword against them (verse 33). The land will enjoy the Sabbath rest that they had neglected to give it, because they would not be there to cultivate and harvest its produce. God's people would be led off in captivity to enemy lands (verses 34-35).

Any who did remain in the land would be so fearful that they would flee even though no one was pursuing them. They would waste away in the land God had given them, with the blessings of God removed from their lives (verse 39). Their brothers and sisters, who had been captured by the enemy, would be devoured in the land of their captivity.

Again, notice that these people would perish because they had turned away from God and His ways. God did not delight in bringing His curse on the land. Notice how He warns them over and over again, gradually increasing His punishment. He wants them to repent and turn to Him. He did not enjoy punishing them. The purpose of His discipline was restoration.

Confession (verse 40-46)

God concludes His warning to the people in verses 40-46 on an encouraging note. Here in these verses He tells His people that if they confess their sins and the sins of their fathers then He would remember the covenant He had made with them and open His arms to them again. While they would have to suffer the consequences of their sin, He would not destroy them completely. There was hope of restoration for all who would repent and turn to the Lord and His ways.

What is important for us to see in this chapter is that the law God gave to His people was not merely a set of rules to be obeyed. It was a source of life for His people. If God's people wanted to live under His blessing and know the fullness of His purpose for them, the secret was found in doing things God's way. By obedience to God and His purposes, they unlocked the key to fruitfulness and a peaceful existence in the land. The people would know God's rich blessings as they walked in heartfelt obedience to Him and His purpose.

I have met many people in my day who have been seeking the answer to experiencing the blessing of God in their lives. They have tried, with all their human strength and wisdom to obtain that blessing with no success. One idea after another fails and their churches and land still lie under

the curse of God. God is not looking for better methods or better ideas. He is looking for a people who will take Him and His ways seriously. His greatest blessings fall on those who walk in obedience and devotion to Him, no matter how difficult that might be.

For Consideration:

- Why can it not be said that the book of Leviticus is only a book of laws? What does this chapter teach us about the importance of this book for the health of Israelite society in general?
- What did obedience to the law of God do for the society in which Israel lived? What would change in our society if people were to walk in obedience to the Word of God?
- What methods and programs have we adopted in an attempt to obtain the blessing of the Lord for our church? What does Leviticus 26 teach us about how to know and walk in the blessing of God?
- Leviticus 26 offers some serious warnings for the people of God who wandered from Him in disobedience. Take a moment to look at your society. Do you see signs of God's discipline on your church and society today?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has given us His Word. Ask Him to forgive you for seeing it as only a book of laws. Thank Him that it is His key to a right relationship with Him. Thank Him that this Word unlocks the secret for blessings in our lives and the life of our society.
- Ask the Lord to show you any area of your life where you are not walking in absolute obedience to Him and His Word.
- Thank the Lord that He delights in having us repent. Thank Him that He is more than willing to receive us back what we return to Him.
- Ask God to move in your society drawing His people back to Himself and obedience to His Word.

27

RULES CONCERNING VOWS

Read Leviticus 27:1-34

In Old Testament times an individual could make a vow to the Lord. He might say, "Lord, if you help me then I will give my son to your service," or "If you provide for me in this situation I will give my best bull to you." We have a clear example of such a vow in 1 Samuel 1:10-11 where the mother of the prophet Samuel made the following promise to God:

(10) In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. (11) And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

In this case God did answer Hannah's request and she faithfully devoted her son to the service of the Lord. Samuel was powerfully used of God in his day.

Some vows were made for a specific period of time. A man might dedicate himself to serve the Lord in the tabernacle for a period of one year. When that time was up, he would make a payment to the Lord and be released from his vow to return to ordinary life.

In a moment of crisis a person might make a foolish vow, which he regretted when the crisis was over. God still held this person to his word. He did, however, provide a means for them to be released so that the burden on them would not be too great.

Vows Dedicating People (verses 1-8)

If a person made a vow dedicating a person to the Lord and for some reason was having difficulty fulfilling that vow, he could pay a sum of money to the priest and be free from his obligation. A value was set for each person according to sex and age. We need to understand here that the amount of money required to set a person free from a vow has nothing to do with their value as human beings. It had more to do with the type of work they would be involved in and the loss to the tabernacle and its service. A young man for example would be able to perform hard and heavy work while a young child or older man would not have the same strength. The amount required to set a person free from a vow of service was as follows:

Male age 20-60.....	50 shekels of silver
Female age 20-60.....	30 shekels of silver
Male age of 5-20.....	20 shekels of silver
Male over 60.....	15 shekels of silver
Female age 5-20.....	10 shekels of silver
Female over 60.....	10 shekels of silver
Male age 1 month-5 years.....	5 shekels of silver
Female age 1 month-5 years...	3 shekels of silver

While this was the general rule for releasing a person from a vow of service to the Lord, there was an exception for those who were too poor to pay the specified amount. The amount to be paid by a poor person was to be determined on an individual basis by the priest. This meant that it was not just the rich who could be freed from their vow but the poor person also.

Vows Dedicating an Animal (verses 9-13)

Animals were also dedicated to the Lord and His service. When an animal was dedicated to the Lord, that animal became holy (verse 9). That is to say, it was the Lord's animal and the owner no longer had any say about it. The owner could, however, purchase the animal back from the Lord. He could not exchange the animal devoted to the Lord for another. The animal devoted to the Lord would be brought to the priest who would judge its value (verse 12). If the owner wished to have his animal back, he was to pay the price the priest had quoted and add a fifth of its value again. This is the amount he would pay to the priest to have his animal back.

Vows Dedicating a House (verse 14-15)

Sometimes a person would devote his house to the Lord. It might be that the house was to be used for a specific purpose and time. If at the end of the vow the individual wanted to use his house for common purposes again, he would have to purchase it back from the Lord. The priest would judge the value of the house. The man would pay this amount of money and add a fifth of its value. When this money was paid, the house would again belong to him and he could use it as he saw fit.

It is important that we note that when we dedicate something to the Lord, we surrender all rights to that object. How often have we dedicated our lives or our possessions to the Lord and then proceeded to use them as if they were ours. These verses show us that whatever is dedicated to the Lord belongs entirely to Him to use as He sees fit. We have no more right to what we give to God.

Vows Dedicating Land (verses 16-25)

Land was another thing that could be dedicated to the Lord and His service. The value of the land was determined by the number of crops it could produce until the Year of Jubilee when it would have to be returned, by law, to the original owner (verses 16-18). If a person wanted to have this land back before the Year of Jubilee, he would have to pay the value of the property according to the number of crops and add one fifth more to its value. When he had paid this amount to the priest, the land could be returned to him for his own use. The same principle applied to a person who had purchased the field from another and then dedicated it to the Lord. He would pay for the number of crops until the Year of Jubilee and add one fifth to that to have the field back until it had to be restore to the original owners.

Vows Dedicating Firstborn Animals (verses 26-27)

We need to remember that there was a law in the Old Testament regarding the firstborn from every womb. Exodus 13:1-2 tells us:

(13:1) The LORD said to Moses, (2) “Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal.”

In verse 26 the Lord reminds His people that no one could dedicate the firstborn of their clean animals to the Lord in a vow because those animals already belonged to the Lord. If, however, they had dedicated a firstborn unclean animal to the Lord, it could be purchased back by paying the price quoted by the priest and adding one fifth to the payment. If an unclean animal was not bought back by the owner, it could be sold at the value set by the priest and the money used for the service of the tabernacle.

Vows That Could Not Be Changed (verse 28)

Verse 28 can be somewhat confusing. We read here that nothing a man owns and devotes to the Lord may be sold or redeemed. This almost seems to contradict what the rest of the chapter is telling us about buying and redeeming people, animals and land vowed to the Lord. The answer to this lies in the word “devote.” The word in the Hebrew language implies a total consecration of an object or person. This shows us that there were some vows that were intended never to be broken or changed. The type of vow we are speaking about here is a vow of lifelong total and absolute consecration. When a person made this type of vow to the Lord he was held accountable to fulfill that vow and there was no opportunity to be freed from it.

Criminals (verse 29)

Another exception to the law related to criminals. A criminal who had committed a crime worthy of death could not be ransomed. This would be a perversion of justice. All criminals worthy of death were to be put to death with no chance of money being paid for their freedom.

Tithes of Crops and Animals (verses 30-33)

The law of God stated that the Israelites were to give a tenth of everything they had to the Lord. A man, however, could purchase back the grain or fruit he owed the Lord as a tithe. If he wanted the grain or fruit for himself or his family, he could do so by paying the priest the value of the fruit and grain and adding a fifth to the value (verse 31).

In regards to the animals in a flock, every tenth animal that passed under the shepherd's rod belonged to the Lord. Commenting on this verse Jamieson, Fausset and Brown state:

This alludes to the mode of taking the tithe of cattle, which were made to pass singly through a narrow gateway, where a person with a rod, dipped in ochre, stood, and counting them, marked the back of every tenth beast, whether male or female, sound or unsound.³

The choice of which animals belonged to the Lord was made in this way. While only a select few could be brought to the Lord as an offering, the rest also belonged to him. No substitutions were to be made. If a man felt compelled to substitute an animal for another, then both that animal and the substitute would belong to the Lord. This might happen, for example, if that animal was wounded or found to have some blemish. In that case the owner may want to give the Lord another animal in exchange for the blemished one. If he did this, however, he could not take the

³ Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A.R.; Brown, David, "Leviticus 27:32" Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, Cedar Rapids: Laridian Electronic Publishing, 1871.

injured or blemished one for himself. This animal would remain the Lord's.

The Lord does not discourage the process of making vows. He does, however, take those vows seriously. Listen to what the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes says about making a vow to the Lord in Ecclesiastes 5:5-6:

(5) It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. (6) Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?

While we should not be quick to make a vow, any vow we do make to the Lord must be kept. I have been in churches where membership vows were taken and broken without thought. I have met believers who surrendered their lives to the Lord and then went on to live however they wanted, with no thought to the promise that had been made. What we surrender to God no longer belongs to us and we have no more right to it.

This is a powerful ending to the book of Leviticus. God calls for a people who will commit themselves to him and his purposes. Will you commit yourself to the Lord God today? Will you surrender your life, your family and your possessions to Him? Will you be faithful to the commitments you have made to him? God will hold us accountable for what we have devoted to Him.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever made a vow or promise to the Lord? What was the vow or promise? Have you been faithful?
- Do we have any right over the things we give to the Lord? What does it mean to surrender our rights to the Lord?
- Are there things in your life you need to surrender to the Lord? What are they?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have failed to fulfill your promises to him.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to be able to surrender all rights to the things you have given to Him.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there are things in your life that you need to dedicate to Him.

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