

Leviticus Bible Study #18

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 16:1-34

1 The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, **2** and the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. **3** But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. **4** He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. **5** And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

6 “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. **7** Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **8** And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. **9** And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, **10** but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

11 “Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. **12** And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil **13** and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. **14** And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. **16** Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. **17** No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. **18** Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. **19** And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

20 “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. **21** And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. **22** The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

23 “Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there. **24** And he shall bathe his body in water in

a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people. **25** And the fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. **26** And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. **27** And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire. **28** And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

29 “And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. **30** For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. **31** It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever. **32** And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. **33** He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. **34** And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.” And Aaron did as the LORD commanded Moses.

Introduction

The author of Hebrews states plainly that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”¹ Yet here, as we read through the laws concerning the Day of Atonement, we find that the text affirms forgiveness given to the people for all of their sins (both intentional and unintentional) as they observe the holy day. In fact, as the last verse relates, there is atonement *made* for their sins then. How then did the children of Israel receive forgiveness if it was not by the blood of the sacrifices?

In a word, blood is just blood and death is just death. There is no natural nor spiritual quality to the life of an animal which would remove guilt from a human being. Blood is not *inherently* a form of currency which pays for something like gold or silver. Rather, as Hebrews says,² it is the way in which the sacrifices point to the ultimate sacrifice on Calvary which counts for something before God. The regulations presented in this chapter of Leviticus are in full agreement. The ancient Israelites, with different levels of awareness, were to make their sacrifices with an abiding trust that God would forgive them. This forgiveness was granted on account of the sacrifices representing Christ's atoning sacrifice on the Cross, as well as the scapegoat representing Him taking away our sins.

Vs.1-5

1 The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, **2** and the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. **3** But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. **4** He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. **5** And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

The reforms instituted after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu do not represent a change to the core of the Law, instead forming a series of safety precautions to prevent wrath breaking out on the people.

1 Hebrews 10:4

2 Hebrews 10:1-10

Having spent the past few chapters going over regulations concerning ceremonial cleanliness, now Aaron is warned that this does not mean he is “free” just because he is the high priest. To the contrary, his position requires even more care because he is now instructed to be in God's special presence on the Day of Atonement. God will arrive, with only the smoke of incense as a screen-like barrier preventing Aaron from seeing our Lord with his naked eyes and dying as a result. After all, God had informed Moses earlier that man shall not see His face and live.³ If Aaron has any sins which have not been atoned, if he gazes upon the face of God, if he is not wearing the proper attire and if he does anything amiss in the rite, then he forfeits his life: God will not countenance sin in His presence.

We may wonder at God appearing in this fashion. Previously and elsewhere men behold God face to face without perishing. Abraham speaks with our Lord before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,⁴ the elders of Israel saw our Lord and *ate* with Him,⁵ and the later appearances of the Angel of the Lord are all said to be God Himself. What Moses writes of here is best understood then as the specific presence of God the Father. St. John explains that no one has seen Him, while Christ – who has a mediating presence of a human nature – reveals Divinity to us through Himself.⁶ Though the Israelites could see Jesus (then referred to as the Angel of the Lord) at various times just as Abraham beheld Him, to see our Heavenly Father with an unmediated presence would spell doom for any sinner. Thus the Day of Atonement includes these regulations as a form of precaution.

Vs.6-22

6 “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. **7** Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **8** And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. **9** And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, **10** but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

11 “Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. **12** And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil **13** and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. **14** And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. **16** Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. **17** No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. **18** Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. **19** And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

20 “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. **21** And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head

3 Exodus 33:17-23

4 Genesis 18,

5 Exodus 24:9-11

6 John 1:18

of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. **22** The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

The high priest must first offer up a bull, the standard sin offering required for any priest,⁷ covering any unintentional sins he may have committed. This permits him to then proceed with the casting of lots for two goats. One is a sin offering, the other the “scapegoat” called “Azazel.” This is the first mention of casting lots in Scripture. The function was likely by the use of the urim and thummim, small stones or dice given to the priest and worn on the breastplate.⁸ When seeking an answer from God about a matter, in the absence of a prophet the priest could use them in the same way someone might flip a coin to make a decision.⁹ The key difference is though that the priestly devices did not leave a matter up to chance as a coin flip would; to the contrary, with the urim and thummim what *would* be random chance becomes a revelation of the Lord's will. This decides which goat dies and which one lives.

The term “Azazel” has led to much unmerited speculation. Various Jewish myths¹⁰ and textual critics alike posit that Azazel is some desert-dwelling earth spirit, demon, or pagan deity. The word itself does not countenance such an interpretation. The proper word, **עִזָּאזֵל**,¹¹¹² is quite literally a composite derived from the two words for “goat” (**עִז**)¹³¹⁴ and “departure” (**אָזַל**),¹⁵¹⁶ making it “goat of departure” or “escape goat” - from which we receive our traditional word “scapegoat.” While the lamed (**ל**) prefix denotes an assignment *to* or *for* something - “that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel,” in this instance the composite nature of the word tells us that it is more accurate to say “it may be sent away into the wilderness to be Azazel.”

After the goats are chosen by lot, and the high priest has offered the bull of atonement for himself and his house, then entry is made with incense into the Holiest of Holies multiple times. As stated, the smoke of the incense creates a screening effect to prevent him seeing the Father's visage. Once the incense has filled this space, he enters fully so as to bring the blood of the bull in and sprinkle it on the mercy seat, the title for the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. Because the mercy seat covers the rest of the Ark, it receives the blood of the sacrifice as a means of declaring that the sins of the priest are *covered* by the blood of the bull; once his sins are covered, then he intercedes for the people with the sin offering goat.

The Day of Atonement is drenched in blood. The high priest does not stop at the mercy seat in the Holiest of Holies, but continues the sevenfold sprinkling of blood on the tent of meeting and the altar. Everything receives the seven sprinkles of blood as a term of “reset;” just as creation itself was perfect on the seventh day,¹⁷ the high priest and people and tabernacle and altar are drenched in this fashion so as to *return* them to being in such a state before God. The message is clear; in order to be returned to a state like the seventh day of creation, mankind must be covered in the blood of another – but *not* the blood of the animals just sacrificed.

After all of the sacrifices and bloodshed, a man stands by to lead the scapegoat away who will take their sins. The sacrifices of the Day of Atonement showed the people that they would not be saved without blood upon the mercy seat, but the blood of the animals did nothing to remove their sin. It still

7 Leviticus 4:1-4

8 Exodus 28:30

9 The urim and thummim are shown being used in this fashion during Saul's reign in 1 Samuel 14:41-42

10 Including, perhaps especially, the “book of Enoch.”

11 Transliterated directly as “Azazel,” Strong's #5799

12 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5799.htm>

13 Transliterated “ez,” Strong's #5795

14 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5795.htm>

15 Transliterated “azal,” Strong's #235

16 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/235.htm>

17 Genesis 2:1-3

remains, and must be placed on the scapegoat. The scapegoat showed them that atonement only happens when one being takes all of their sin and is castigated, but even then the children of Israel would know that their iniquity was still *somewhere* in the wilderness, not being truly removed. In both goats, the people see what the author of Hebrews would proclaim later on. Though they have absolution, it is not by the blood of animals or even by the goat which lived: they perform and observe this complex ceremony because they look forward to the One whose blood will truly bring them forgiveness, the Messiah who would truly do away with all their sins. Thus they find themselves forgiven and atoned for, not by sacrifice but by their *faith*.

Vs.23-34

23 “Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there. **24** And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people. **25** And the fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. **26** And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. **27** And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire. **28** And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

29 “And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. **30** For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. **31** It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever. **32** And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. **33** He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. **34** And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.” And Aaron did as the LORD commanded Moses.

All those who worked during the Day of Atonement must bathe. They are not considered unclean (otherwise the high priest would have had to wash his clothes), meaning that a different message is being sent. The same goes for those who take the remains outside the camp to be burned. These are *not* requirements for the normal daily offering. Thus the message is sent to the people; those who are covered by the blood and who observe the castigation of the scapegoat must bathe to be among God's people. This of course is another picture of Baptism before the Sacrament's institution.

The people are instructed to afflict themselves and rest during the day's operations in the presence of the Tabernacle. This means that they are to do nothing *but watch* as the sacrifices are offered, as the scapegoat is sent away, and as the celebrants wash themselves. In other words, they are observing a pantomimed pre-enactment of the Gospel and the institution of the New Covenant. It is not the blood of the goats or bulls which works Atonement for them, but seeing the Gospel prophesied before their very eyes every year. They were to trust that our Lord would forgive their sins as they observed the holy day; while faith comes by hearing for us,¹⁸ for every generation under the Old Covenant the ancient Israelite awaiting the full expression of the Gospel would come to faith by hearing *and* sight.

¹⁸ Romans 10:17

Leviticus Bible Study #19

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 17:1-16

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the people of Israel and say to them, This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. **3** If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, **4** and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people. **5** This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the LORD. **6** And the priest shall throw the blood on the altar of the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting and burn the fat for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **7** So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.

8 “And you shall say to them, Any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice **9** and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it to the LORD, that man shall be cut off from his people.

10 “If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. **11** For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. **12** Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.

13 “Any one also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. **14** For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off. **15** And every person who eats what dies of itself or what is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or a sojourner, shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening; then he shall be clean. **16** But if he does not wash them or bathe his flesh, he shall bear his iniquity.”

Introduction

The priesthood of ancient Israel was a vocation reserved for the Aaronic line alone. After the golden calf incident, Levi was the loyal tribe and was thus ordained for service.¹² What was and should have been a universal priesthood, with Aaron being first among equals, became a sort of caste system wherein Aaron reigned as the religious authority over men. With the seventeenth chapter though it becomes clear that some of the Israelites were ignorant of this change or actively rejected it. Here then, our Lord more strongly states that the people are not permitted to perform their own sacrifices, nor to treat their usual dietary practices as something sanctified by the man killing the animals. To violate the new system and act as a non-Levitical priest was to merit death or exile.

Though Leviticus is not chiefly a narrative document, it is evident here that this chapter is a

¹ Exodus 32:25-29

² Though we discussed this matter at the beginning of this series, it bears repeating in the context of the chapter.

moment of *case law*, wherein a dispute between parties or a discovery of injurious behavior leads to the establishment of new rules. Before Moses was instructed to write these laws, there must have been an informal movement among the people to engage in unauthorized sacrifices. Though it started innocently enough, the men who were engaging in this activity became heinous in both their intentions and in their activity. Perhaps there would have been a softer declaration if they were just imitating Aaron's sacrificial practices, but they were instead engaging in ritual drinking of blood while sacrificing to demons. However this state of affairs came about, it is sufficient to say that our Lord intends here to put a stop to it, reinforcing His established order while tamping down on the chaos that erupted.

Vs.1-9

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the people of Israel and say to them, This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. 3 If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, 4 and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people. 5 This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the LORD. 6 And the priest shall throw the blood on the altar of the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting and burn the fat for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. 7 So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.

8 “And you shall say to them, Any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice 9 and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it to the LORD, that man shall be cut off from his people.

The verboten activity is not about private slaughter for eating meat in their homes. Later on, even further clarification will be made on the matter, establishing that an Israelite may kill and eat his own animals as much as he likes, though he is still prohibited from drinking blood. Though the first four verses suggest that merely slaughtering animals privately is a great offense, the eighth verse makes the context more explicit. Perhaps there was a brief period in which *all* butchering was to be done at the entrance of the tent of meeting so as to stop the unauthorized sacrifices, but by the time Moses writes Deuteronomy private slaughter is once more permitted.³

God mentioned peace offerings especially in the fifth verse. The social movement for lay sacrifices was most likely started with good intentions. We can imagine one man butchering a goat to feed his extended family, and out of piety he prays over the roasting food with thanksgiving. Then someone notes that his actions are similar to the peace offerings conducted by the priests, and concludes that *every* meal is a form of peace offering, thus rendering all men capable of making such sacrifices. If it had stayed there, then the people would have received clarification regarding prayers being different from sacrificial pronouncements. Unfortunately, it spiraled.

Eventually “goat demons” were being worshiped. The word “demon” is not in the Hebrew, which is simply the word for “he-goat.”⁴⁵ Yet it is obvious from the context that they turned to worshiping some form of goat-spirit, as sacrificing an animal to an animal would make no sense contextually. Though it is not stated directly in this passage, there does appear to have been a deep confusion on the Israelite's part regarding Azazel in the previous chapter. The people heard that a scapegoat was taken to the wilderness, bearing all of their sins; concluding that the goat must have gone *somewhere* and to *someone*, they began to make offerings to an invented goat-deity. With relief over their sins being off of their shoulders, they neglected the First Commandment by making peace

3 Deuteronomy 12:13-16

4 שַׁעִיר, transliterated “sayir,” Strong's #8163

5 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8163.htm>

offerings to whatever was taking the scapegoat. What likely began as confusion over peace offerings became a rebellion against the institutional priesthood established after the golden calf incident.

Later on in Israel's history the goat and the calf became symbols of a schismatic religion established by Jeroboam, the first king of Northern Israel. After having split off from the Davidic dynasty in Judah, he utilized these incidents, placing goat idols and golden calves in the temples he built while permitting anyone to become a priest.⁶ The reader might find such open blasphemy to be absurd, especially in the face of a literate population who had read or heard about this incident in the Law. But Jeroboam was able to institute his “reforms” successfully by casting the Levites out before they could protest it.⁷ Appealing to the more populist sentiment among the people allowed the lowest common denominator to prevail against faithfulness to the Word, as was the case in this chapter of Leviticus.

Vs.10-16

10 “If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. **11** For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. **12** Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.

13 “Any one also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. **14** For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off. **15** And every person who eats what dies of itself or what is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or a sojourner, shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening; then he shall be clean. **16** But if he does not wash them or bathe his flesh, he shall bear his iniquity.”

The prohibition on eating or drinking blood was a universal law that went back to the Noahic Covenant.⁸ That it had to be re-stated here is a sign that the heretical spiral the Israelites engaged in was nothing short of catastrophic. Seeing the priests pour blood out at the altar, the people engaged in unauthorized sacrifices began to *drink* the blood of their butchery thinking that they would reap some spiritual benefit. Indeed there is value to blood, as the Lord states, for it is the life of the creature being poured out. If the scapegoat gave its life going off in the wilderness, then the life of the animal must be precious enough to consume, they would conclude. Our Lord corrects the misunderstanding by firmly asserting the single use of blood: to atone for sins.

With this correction, we see our Lord institute a new practice for slaughter as well. Reinforcing the prohibition on consuming blood, He commands that all slaughter include a period of draining and burying the animal's fluids. If a man eats something that had already died previously, his scavenging is acceptable *in extremis*, but he is rendered unclean by the possibility that there may have still been blood in the food he ate. This way, by forbidding blood entirely, the Lord prevents even the appearance of this breakout of paganism in the future. Later on, this sort of “fencing” around the core precepts of the Law would become a practice of the pharisees, who would form rabbinic traditions and laws to keep the people from violating other precepts. Though they have a precedent from Leviticus 17, naturally they end up going too far, such that by their traditions they placed burdens that no man could truly carry, especially when they contradicted each other or the Law itself.⁹ Thus they showed error in imitating how God protected the observance of His Law.

6 1 Kings 12:25-33

7 2 Chronicles 11:13-17

8 Genesis 9:6

9 Mark 7:1-13

Leviticus Bible Study #20

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 18:1-30

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. **3** You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. **4** You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. **5** You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

6 “None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD. **7** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. **8** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness. **9** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home. **10** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness. **11** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, brought up in your father's family, since she is your sister. **12** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's relative. **13** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's relative. **14** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. **15** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness. **16** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. **17** You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, and you shall not take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are relatives; it is depravity. **18** And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive.

19 “You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. **20** And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her. **21** You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. **22** You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. **23** And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.

24 “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, **25** and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. **26** But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you **27** (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), **28** lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. **29** For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. **30** So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.”

Introduction

The pagan world around the Israelites did not have the Law explicitly laid out for them, so instead they found themselves stumbling about with morality according to the witness of the Law in

their hearts.¹ While various nations had laws against theft, at times murder was permitted if the right victim was selected (typically slaves). The civil code of Hammurabi penalized adultery, but permitted most forms of incest,²³ and sibling marriage was common in ancient Egypt. While the surrounding nations were not in a state of moral anarchy, they were certainly and dreadfully confused, with even the most ancient pagan laws being devoted chiefly to economic matters.⁴ In a word, humanity's corrupt nature became most obvious through its laws and behaviors.

The Israelites were called to be *different*. Having received the Law, they were able to stand as the example of purity and good conduct to everyone around them. In turn they would be blessed from on high, and their prosperity – living in the closest state one could get to Eden – would be an incentive for pagan peoples to learn the Law at their feet. Yet more importantly, the revelation of the Law is not just a matter of evangelism, but includes with it an expectation of obedience for its own sake. God holds the Israelites accountable for abstaining from sexual sin, for instance, because sexual sin is wrong in and of itself. Moses is not just giving the congregation good ideas, but a way of life that reflects reception of eternal life, as it was supposed to be from the beginning. Hence the refrain “I am the Lord” being repeated several times in this chapter; our Lord puts His own Name as the underlining for every command as a means of emphasis.

Vs.1-5

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. 3 You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. 4 You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. 5 You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

God makes a contrast between the lifestyles of pagans and the way He wants the Israelites to operate. Going further, He also condemns their “statutes,” or codes of law. It is not enough to simply hold to the existence of the true God instead of the false ones. The civic code, customs, culture and daily life of the Israelites must be entirely *other* to their neighbors, with everything about them being superior on account of having the Law from God Himself.

Special attention must be paid to the fifth verse. “If a person does them, he shall live by them,” is not an observation of habit, lest it be a circular statement. Moses is not recording a tautology which says that a man who lives in obedience to the Law lives according to the Law. St. Paul notes that this is a *soteriological* declaration. Both in Galatians and Romans, he presents the fifth verse as a kind of thesis statement for the Law itself; if a man would live eternally without being justified by faith, then he must perfectly obey every last command.⁵ Because we are sinful and thus incapable of fulfilling this Law, the verse invites us to see it as a pronouncement of curse upon us, so that we would seek God's mercy by faith in Christ. This is what the theologians refer to as the “Second Use” of the Law, wherein our sin is shown to us and our need for a Savior made clear.

The Law's thesis is not just a condemnation though. There is a logic to it which, though it be impossible for sinners to fulfill, is nonetheless beneficial in its instruction. The Decalogue is perfect morality taught to us all by God; to obey it is to live as man was always supposed to live. For the Israelites then, the expression of the Edenic ideal in the Levitical code is a proclamation of life for them

1 Romans 2:14-15

2 The “marriage regulations” found in Hammurabi's Code are laws #127-194

3 [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Code_of_Hammurabi_\(Harper_translation\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Code_of_Hammurabi_(Harper_translation))

4 The legal code of Lipit-Ishtar being an infamous example:

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Code_of_Lipit-I%C5%A1tar

5 Romans 10:5-9, Galatians 3:10-14

and towards all their neighbors. The Israelites were to live as though they were in a state of immortality, so that the nations would see it and be inspired to follow the Lord.

Note that the comparison between Israel and the other nations' laws is not brought up until this point. This is to say, contrast with other peoples is not the intent of the previous commands concerning sacrifices, diet, cleanliness, and childbirth. While many an exegete has pointed to the dietary habits of pagans (e.g., Canaanites eating pork) in explaining why the ceremonial code was in place, it is striking that the exhortation to be distinct from other peoples is not made until God commands Moses to start writing about interpersonal relations. Thus, while that distinction is certainly present in terms of comparing what Israelites ate or wore with their neighbors, it does not form the central hermeneutic for why those regulations were put there in the first place. It is for this reason that the Edenic ideal is so important for understanding Leviticus as a whole, for it forms a stronger emphasis point than the evangelistic result of the Levitical code.

Vs.6-18

6 “None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD. **7** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. **8** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness. **9** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home. **10** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness. **11** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, brought up in your father's family, since she is your sister. **12** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's relative. **13** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's relative. **14** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. **15** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness. **16** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. **17** You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, and you shall not take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are relatives; it is depravity. **18** And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive.

We arrive at the regulations concerning sexuality, written with explicit condemnation against the sexual practices of the pagans. These practices are wrong in and of themselves, as the Sixth Commandment has already prohibited them, but our Lord highlights the tolerance for such things in Canaan and Egypt as a way of expressing how evil they truly are. Men are forbidden from approaching their mothers, sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and aunts sexually, with “uncovering nakedness” being the euphemism employed for coitus. Going a step further, they are not allowed to approach their stepmothers, step-sisters, and in-laws either, as the uniting of flesh that results from marriage necessitates that these be treated as blood relations.⁶ A man's step-mother is, for all intents and purposes, as closely related to him as his actual biological mother. For that matter, a man cannot sleep with women who are related by blood as sisters or as mother and daughter; to engage in such a union would be grievous and destructive to say the least.

The prohibition against all forms of incest is an astounding matter, as it mars the reputations of many of the prior saints. Abraham, Lot, Jacob, and even Moses himself⁷ either engaged in or were products of such forbidden unions. Though it was permitted in the earliest days of humanity (as Adam and Eve were the only humans to begin with, their offspring would necessarily have sibling marriage), the corruption of man's nature rendered it an abominable practice before God. Here, despite the embarrassment of showing so many ancient fathers – and his *own* father – to have sinned in this

⁶ Genesis 2:24

⁷ Exodus 6:20

manner, Moses nonetheless laudably submits to God's command to record this part of the Law.

Vs.19-23

19 “You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. **20** And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her. **21** You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. **22** You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. **23** And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.

The pagan nations did not just engage in incest, though that would have been bad enough to show their wickedness. They were known to sleep with each other during a woman's menstrual period, commit adultery, engage in homosexuality and perform coitus with animals. All of these things were already abominations to God, but made even more repugnant by the child sacrifice that attended them. The nations sacrificed infants and young children, including but not limited to molech worship.⁸ Indeed, marriage was further twisted into an economic practice whereby poor people would survive by selling their infants to priests who would slaughter them.⁹ Here the message is clear, that the cults of sexual sin are to be shunned by the children of Israel, lest they too commit similar abominations.

Vs.24-30

24 “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, **25** and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. **26** But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you **27** (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), **28** lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. **29** For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. **30** So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.”

Incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, child sacrifice, and other sexual sins are all connected in their inherent evil and uncleanness. Yet God did not destroy the Canaanites just because a few sinners here and there engaged in them – every society has had its perverts and depraved sinners. To the contrary, these nations were *militantly, religiously* devoted to these practices. Later in the Law, sinful movements such as cultic prostitution will be mentioned by name,¹⁰ with the existence of such being informed by its presence in the nations. In other words, Moses would not know that cultic prostitution and child sacrifice even existed if they were not institutional aspects of near eastern religion. Sexual depravity was *codified* into the civics of these countries and regulated, such that their laws and religions were an abomination to God just as much as the sexual sins themselves. On account of this, after having given them a number of centuries to repent, the Israelites are led forward to cleanse the land of its inhabitants.

8 <https://www.archaeology.wiki/blog/2018/06/29/new-evidence-of-ancient-child-sacrifice-found-from-bronze-age-mesopotamia/>

9 <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1976/03/child-sacrifice-in-the-ancient-near-east>

10 Deuteronomy 23:17

Leviticus Bible Study #21

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 19:1-37

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. **3** Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. **4** Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the LORD your God.

5 “When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. **6** It shall be eaten the same day you offer it or on the day after, and anything left over until the third day shall be burned up with fire. **7** If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is tainted; it will not be accepted, **8** and everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned what is holy to the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from his people.

9 “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. **10** And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

11 “You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. **12** You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

13 “You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. **14** You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

15 “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. **16** You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

17 “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. **18** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

19 “You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.

20 “If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave, assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom, a distinction shall be made. They shall not be put to death, because she was not free; **21** but he shall bring his compensation to the LORD, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. **22** And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed.

23 “When you come into the land and plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it must not be eaten. **24** And in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. **25** But in the fifth year you may eat of its fruit, to increase its yield for you: I am the LORD your God.

26 “You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes. **27** You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. **28** You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD.

29 “Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity. **30** You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

31 “Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.

32 “You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

33 “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. **34** You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

35 “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. **36** You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. **37** And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD.”

Introduction

While the Israelites operated under the revealed Law of God, this revelation was done progressively. While the whole moral Law was revealed at Sinai as God pronounced the Decalogue,¹ the application of these broad tenets was yet to be elaborated. Even before Sinai, the habit of the Israelites during this period was to take disputes and legal questions to Moses or one of the appointed judges so as to clarify where God stood on a matter.² The decisions rendered by Moses and the appointed chiefs of the people form what is now known as *case law*; if a decision was prominent among the children of Israel, then God made the decision a legal precedent with the full force of Divine command. Typically, the circumstances which led to any decision were kept out of the text of the law, for men only need to hear the precedent, not the potentially gossip-inspiring details of persons and conflicts. However, on occasion Moses does give more detailed examples which reveal the ways in which various cases may arise, as he does in the matter of Zelophehad's daughters and inheritance law.³

The nineteenth chapter of Leviticus appears to be a collection of case-law decisions, answers to procedural questions, and additional warnings regarding misbehavior on the part of the Israelites. While at first glance it may appear random in the presentation, Moses has collected the decisions into three groupings. The first eight verses are concerned with the first table of the Law, or how one interacts with God rightly. Verses nine through eighteen are concerned with the second table of the Law, or how one interacts with their neighbor. The remainder of the text extends and elaborates on the second table, namely in its impact on the environment, how age impacts one's neighbor etc. With these groupings, Moses provides the priorities of obedience (in descending order of course) from placing God first to caring for one's neighbor to caring for their new home in the Promised Land.

Vs.1-8

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. **3** Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. **4** Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the LORD your God.

¹ Exodus 20

² Exodus 18:13-27

³ Numbers 27:1-11

5 “When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. **6** It shall be eaten the same day you offer it or on the day after, and anything left over until the third day shall be burned up with fire. **7** If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is tainted; it will not be accepted, **8** and everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned what is holy to the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from his people.

Beginning this section is the prime command, “you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” In the New Testament, St. Peter will write to Christians and extend this same command to the Church, supporting the doctrine of supersession which states that the Church is the true Israel.⁴ St. Peter applies this to a general awareness of one's conduct ordered aright, but for the ancient Israelites it approaches a greater level of specificity. While this passage includes a just a few examples, it broadly includes all of the first table of the Law; one must only worship the true God, maintaining the proper use of His Name and honoring the Sabbaths, and honoring their parents. Citing the Fourth Commandment may seem strange to the reader since one's parents are not the Lord, but as Luther explains in the *Large Catechism* one's parents are tasked with representing God and providing for a child in His stead; thus to honor one's parents is to honor God vicariously.⁵ Before Moses is tasked with relating the case-law decision, the Israelites are thus reminded of their first priority.

The particular decision in verses five through eight relate to peace offerings. More specifically, it is peace offerings “that you may be accepted.” Though the regulation also relates to the peace offerings of fellowship, it applies more strongly to the *shelamim* as fulfillment of a *vow*. The Israelite who completes a vow does so with a peace offering in view at the end of the task. By making the offering, he or she declares *Shalam* before God. Here, though the circumstances of the case are not given, our Lord adds that one must perform it correctly. The celebratory eating must cease by the third day, wherein whatever is left must be burned to ashes. While the time limit is not explained, a reasonable speculation is that the meat of the offering would begin to rot after three days; this would be an incursion of the curse on creation onto the offering, thus making it a violation of the Edenic ideal to which Israel was called. To eat rotten meat as part of a celebration is to taint the proclamation of perfection, contradicting the dual principles of *Shalom* and *Shalam* alike.⁶

Vs.9-18

9 “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. **10** And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

11 “You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. **12** You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

13 “You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. **14** You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

15 “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. **16** You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. **17** “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. **18** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

⁴ 1 Peter 1:13-16

⁵ <https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/ten-commandments/#:~:text=Therefore%20it%20is%20a,done%20him%20all%20good.>

⁶ While we have discussed these terms before, a summary reminder: *Shalom* is peace and wholeness, *Shalam* is the process of reconciliation or *getting* to that state of *Shalom*.

The chapter begins with “you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy,” but the subsequent sections end with their respective headers. In this section, it is centralized on “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Christ identifies this as the second greatest Commandment in the Law.⁷ As soon as the reader sees that verse, the preceding commandments make sense as part of a whole. A farmer who does not completely harvest his produce is permitting gleaners to harvest a little for themselves, thus caring for the poor. Someone who steals or lies or oppresses or robs fails to love his neighbor as himself. This includes treating the disabled with a measure of dignity and care which accommodates their vulnerabilities instead of taking advantage of them.

One may note that the section includes a great deal of emphasis on honesty. If one swears by the Name of the Lord falsely, he has committed two sins, both in lying to his neighbor *and* taking God's Name in vain. Moses here includes commands directly against lying to one's neighbor, slandering, and bearing false witness, but in addition to this he includes the requirement to “reason frankly.” This is to say, being open when upset with one's neighbor rather than harboring secret grudges or hatred in one's heart. The mirror commandment to loving your neighbor as yourself is thus made plain, that believers are forbidden from *hating* their neighbors. It is this “flip side” of the Second Greatest Commandment that St. John explains in harsh terms, such that one cannot be considered a Christian at all if he harbors such hatred.⁸ This includes, as St. James says, a command against partiality in favor of the rich or high status over poor brothers and sisters.⁹

Vs.19-35

19 “You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.

20 “If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave, assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom, a distinction shall be made. They shall not be put to death, because she was not free; **21** but he shall bring his compensation to the LORD, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. **22** And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed.

23 “When you come into the land and plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it must not be eaten. **24** And in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. **25** But in the fifth year you may eat of its fruit, to increase its yield for you: I am the LORD your God.

26 “You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes. **27** You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. **28** You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD.

29 “Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity. **30** You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

31 “Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.

32 “You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

33 “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. **34** You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

⁷ Mark 12:28-34

⁸ 1 John 1 2:9, 3:15

⁹ James 2:1-7

35 “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. 36 You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. 37 And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD.”

These verses *also* appear disconnected in topic until one reaches the last sentence, just as the previous ten. Here the unifying law is “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity.” This is not merely a command to maintain equal weights and measures in transactions, extending outward into animals, slaves, the land itself, and personal conduct. In a word, the Israelites are commanded to have a strong ethic of life over death and wholeness over confusion. It is likely that St. Paul had these tenets in mind when wrapping up the principle thus and applying it to congregational dynamics: “God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.”¹⁰

God intends for His people to live in a state of being sensible and clear. The cows are the way God made them, so intentionally trying to change their nature through hybridization is a cause of ignorance and destabilization; muddying the waters by introducing different animal types is thus verboten. The same goes for planting seeds of different kinds, which would lead to confusion in matters of harvest. Since the priesthood wore mixed fabrics,¹¹ for a normal Israelite to wear them would be to cause confusion as to whether competing religious orders had arisen. Prostitution creates havoc between men and women, and its lucrative profits only expand its destabilizing influence. Communicating with the dead brings in confusion between life and death itself, and along with divination causes the interference of one world with another.

The nation who is tasked with representing life on earth, living in the closest one can get to the Edenic state, must not plant discord within her borders thereby inviting more of the curse upon themselves. To the contrary, the picture God wants to paint in the land is one of verdancy and life, just as Eden was. Disfigurements and tattoos on behalf of the dead suggest a permanent mourning state, inviting the people to emphasize death over life. To this point the Law not only commands against confusion of properties and persons, but also demands the visual verification of life everywhere the Israelites perform agriculture. The trees are not to be harvested until the fourth year, and even that is reserved for the priests to eat; for four years, all the land is covered in a state of plenty without being consumed.

Yet it is not just vegetable and animal life which must be emphasized. A slave is shown to be a person, not merely property. A slave girl coerced into sexual congress by her master is still a victim; the man who slept with her must make restitution for defrauding his brother,¹² now that he has claimed her as his own wife instead of a slave.¹³ Old people are still *persons* despite their being less physically able, and must be honored for their previous labors instead of mistreated or ignored. The sojourner is still a person, and not only must be treated well but must be *loved* with the same accommodations for the duration of their stay in the land; for that matter, they must also be treated as being under the same Law. They are thus exhorted to *participate* in the life of the people and its Divine mission, encouraging them to convert.

Christians are free from many of these restrictions today, but we are called to see the greater principles God had in mind. Though Christians may hybridize animals today, even here one must take pause to ensure that it is not done to *harm* the animal. Believers must emphasize life over death, personhood over property, and fair dealings over greed. All of these are virtuous matters presented in these commandments as broader principles in the New Testament, making them more valuable in our freedom than for Israel in their bondage.

10 1 Corinthians 14:33

11 Exodus 28

12 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7

13 Sleeping with a slave woman elevated her to a wifely status, Exodus 21:7-11. In this case law, the slave woman could not refuse the order, and was thus made a spouse to the owner instead of the man she was betrothed to.

Leviticus Bible Study #22

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 20:1-5

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Say to the people of Israel, Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. **3** I myself will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name. **4** And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, **5** then I will set my face against that man and against his clan and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech.

Introduction

Leviticus is the first book of the Bible to mention Molech¹ (also known as Moloch or Milcom). In fact, this is the first mention of a false deity by name in all of Scripture. Why is this the case?

The Gospel is predicated on a past event, namely the Crucifixion of Christ for our sins and His Resurrection on the third day. The man who believes in the Gospel and entrusts his soul to Jesus rests confidently that he is no longer destined for death and damnation; because Jesus defeated sin, death and the devil at the Cross, the believer has confidence for the future – namely a Resurrection on the last day. The ancient Israelite was under a similar dynamic. Because God had delivered their nation from bondage to the Egyptians, they were to entrust themselves to Him and keep faith that He would lead them to the Promised Land. By providing for them through their wilderness years and bringing them into the land, they were to trust that one day He would send the Messiah to deliver them (and the whole world) from the Fall and its consequences.

With the faith though comes expectations. Christians must seek to be like our Savior,² obeying His commands and embodying everything He teaches. In fact, the process of conversion and sanctification begins with our death and ends with our Resurrection in like fashion: though our own mortality is not redemptive the way Jesus's is, it still conforms us to His image.³ So too were the Israelites to embody the redemption given to them in the Exodus. Unlike their bondage in Egypt, they were to love the sojourner as themselves.⁴ They were to grant freedom to their brethren after proscribed periods of enslavement, instead of keeping them in miserable lifelong service. Most importantly, they were to remember that God provided them with lambs to redeem their firstborn in the first Passover; this event would be played out and pantomimed over and over again for each firstborn among both cattle and human alike.⁵ The Israelite was intended to be *about* redemption, for he himself was redeemed from bondage by our Lord. For this reason, Molech is mentioned by name before any other false god. The cult of Molech involved human sacrifice – and most notably that of children.⁶ To the true God, who redeems and commands redemption for children, this practice is abominable.

¹ Leviticus 18:21

² 1 Corinthians 11:1

³ Romans 6:5, 8:29, 1 John 3:2

⁴ Leviticus 19:34,

⁵ Exodus 13:11-16

⁶ <https://biblearchaeology.org/research-articles/abortion-and-the-ancient-practice-of-child-sacrifice/>

Molech and the Ammonite Campaigns

Regarding identity and naming, it is obvious that God has the Ammonite false deity in mind when He speaks to Moses. The writer of 1st and 2nd Kings gives us enough helpful detail to make the correct identification. When Solomon turns from the pure worship of the Lord and builds temples for false gods, the “abomination of the Ammonites” is referred to both as Milcom and Molech, with each one having nearly the same triconsonantal root in Hebrew.⁷⁸ That the Ammonites lived on the eastern border of the Promised Land meant that the competing culture and religion were next door to the future home for the Israelites. This means that the chosen people would hear about Molech far more often than Greek pagan figures or even Egyptian false gods.

Human sacrifices, even those of children, are not unique to the Ammonites, as child sacrifice (among other atrocities) was a common feature of Phoenician and Canaanite paganism in general.⁹ But the close proximity of the Ammonites to Israel made them a unique danger. Not only were the children of Israel going to be exposed to their different way of living, but Ammon was a warlike people, known throughout the book of Judges for constantly harassing Israel and laying siege to Israelite cities; it is their aggression and the mutilation of their victims which solidified the rise of Saul to unify Israel as a kingdom.¹⁰ After the general failure of their attempted conquests, the Ammonites switched to something more deadly.

The shared heritage presented a unique temptation that arose both before and after the years of war. With the Israelites descended from Abraham and the Ammonites descended from the patriarch's nephew Lot,¹¹ it was simple for Israel's pagan neighbor to take the Promised Land by intermarriage, slowly seeding their idolatry into the populace. They looked similar, spoke similar languages, and could always appeal to common descent. Naturally, the Ammonites would do this in response to any failure of harder methods. Sadly, this shift can only be described as a sort of *Anschluss* campaign by the use of their women. The Davidic line was forever marked by Ammonite blood with Solomon's wife Naamah, who bore Rehoboam.¹² The practice continued even until the days of Ezra, who complained to God about further intermarriage between the two nations.¹³ In other words, the Ammonite's marital paganizing campaign not only occurred in Israelite history, but was far more successful than anything they tried militarily.

The Lord's Warning

As any command that the Lord gives which Israel later egregiously breaks, the first verses of Leviticus 20 are stark in their prescriptions. Anyone who engages in child sacrifice must be put to death regardless of the age of the child sacrificed. Anyone who does not wince in horror at the deed is cursed. If the people do not perform the commanded executions, then God will curse them personally. Our Lord knew the stakes. The Israelites were not only close to Molech worship in the land of Canaan but also by familial ties; since the Ammonites and their chief deity represent the *opposite* of the Exodus paradigm they were to live, then any toleration they had of a cult of Molech in the land would surely lead them to spiritual ruin.

7 1 Kings 11:1-8, esp. vs. 5 and 7.

8 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4445.htm>

<https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4432.htm>

Milcom is written as מִלְכָּם, while Molech is written מֹלֵךְ. Both share the same root *Melek*, meaning “king.”

9 The Carthaginians are just one such example:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2014-01-23-ancient-carthaginians-really-did-sacrifice-their-children>

10 1 Samuel 11

11 Genesis 19:30-38

12 1 Kings 14:21-22

13 Ezra 9

The stark warnings and punishments are also on account of the positive ideals given to the people. God did not just give them a set of rules to the end that they would engage in blind loyalty. To the contrary, as we have shown over and over again, the Edenic ideal was to be the operating principle of the nation. Israel was to represent the closest one could get to Eden in this fallen earth, and in Eden children don't die. For that matter, the reasons for which one *would* offer their child in the ancient days (better crops, successful voyages, avoiding inconvenient disabled children) would be illegitimate in a place for which perfection was the prime attribute. Molech worship, just as every other cult and religion in the world at the time, represented the opposite; religion conducted by crass transactionalism and death, feeding and thriving off of the cursed earth instead of seeking the God who could fix it. Thus our Lord warns solemnly against it, that the people may stand apart from the obviously satanic nature of their neighbors' way of life.

Leviticus Bible Study #23

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 20:6-9

6 “If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. 7 Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. 8 Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you. 9 For anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his blood is upon him.

Introduction

Leviticus, as with the rest of the Scriptural witness, presumes upon the reality of magic. Of course, the Biblical authors are quick to tell us that this is a *bad* thing; though mankind has the capacity to engage in conjuration, whoever would belong to the true God must not engage in the practice. This is a real capacity, as nowhere does Moses claim that the occultists of his age were faking it. God does not ban “smoke and mirrors” or sleight of hand, instead making real practices with real spirits verboten.

Not only does God ban any sort of witchcraft, He distinguishes between the various practices of the day. It is not just that magic is real, but it has different categories of distinction and method. Having already condemned fortune telling and omen reading,¹ Moses relates the commands against mediumship, necromancy, and cursing one's parents, demonstrating that all such actions are not only consequential but a deep departure from the faith. To go after a medium or necromancer is spiritual harlotry, while cursing one's parents makes the offender as guilty as if he had murdered them. These topics must be a subject of special inquiry if they are so repugnant to God as to merit swift and immediate punishment.

Mediums

The term for a medium is אֵוִיב,²³ which despite the few letters has a broad range of connotations. If the letter *vav* (ו) was absent, it would be the same as אָב,⁴ which means “father.”⁵ Strictly speaking, אֵוִיב means something along the lines of *ghost*, with the implications that one is speaking to a ghost or other spiritual entity. The text is not translated as “if a person turns to ghosts” though, as in that era such communications were done through a human intermediary, or medium. This is why, when King Saul inquires about the witch of Endor, he is written of as seeking an אֵוִיב who also has an אֵוִיב – the same word is used both for the woman and the spirits she calls up.⁶ Here we see the connection in words: אֵוִיב meaning “ghost” is written so similarly to אָב as “father” because the dead are the *fathers* of the living, but heretofore deceased. Then, as now, there was a real curiosity as to the state of the dead, and especially for loved ones that have passed on.

So the Israelite is commanded not to contact ghosts or those who call them up. This raises the question as to whether ghosts are real. Of course, the Scriptures *do* teach us that every human being has

1 Leviticus 19:26

2 Transliterated “Ob,” Strong's #178

3 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/178.htm>

4 Transliterated “Ab,” Strong's #1

5 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1.htm>

6 1 Samuel 28:7-8

a soul, that spiritual part of them which resides after death in either Heaven or hades. But does the Word teach that there are wandering spirits of the dead here on earth, who may “haunt” various places? No answer is given definitively, and even Christ's reference to the phenomenon could be interpreted broadly; when He eats fish to prove that he is not a “spirit,” this does not establish whether ghosts are “real” in the sense we think of.⁷ That is beside the point though, as the *warning* is the main message. Seeking contact with the dead is strictly considered “whoring” in our reading, meaning that it comprises the same spiritual adultery as worship of false gods. Though mediumship is a reliable means for speaking with spirits, there is no guarantee that one is speaking to a dead relative rather than a demon. Even if one could contact the spirit of a departed human being, this is still a grave sin, for God has sole prerogative in the veil between worlds.

Necromancers

The term translated as “necromancer” is יִדְּעֵנִי.⁸⁹ Its origin is from the word יָדַע,¹⁰¹¹ which means “to know.” Whereas a medium is one who calls up spirits for the sake of communication, the necromancer's specialty is in knowing and communicating with the spirits for other ends. They are called “knowers” after this fashion not because they know *facts* concerning the spirits, but because they engage in familiar relationship with them. While Moses complains of certain Israelites worshiping goat demons, the necromancers of old were the figures people would go to for communicating with them.

A Canaanite pagan would go to a medium to discuss things with a dead person, but he would go to a necromancer to get a *favor* or *knowledge*. The necromancer functions in a fashion similar to that of a prophet, claiming to have an intimate familiarity with a deity, ghost, or power source. A prototypical example of this would be Balaam, son of Beor, despite his communications with the true God. Though a prophet by talent, Balaam was a necromancer by trade, as he sold his abilities to the highest bidder for cursing different targets peoples.¹²

It is already wicked to approach a spirit other than the true God for any sort of favor. Yet it is an even greater affront to God that one would approach one of these necromancers for *knowledge*. Isaiah pours contempt on their “revelations” and “teaching” as being a mere chirping or muttering; those who go to them instead of the Word of God, the prophet says, have nothing but darkness in their future.¹³ To get “knowledge” from a necromancer is to look for divine revelation in sources other than that which God has allotted to the people, thus demonstrating a betrayal of the faith one is bound to have.

Curses

The term translated “curse” is קָלַל,¹⁴¹⁵ which has a primary meaning of making something lighter in weight. This is to say, the one who treats their parents with contempt is guilty of refusing to treat one's father and mother with the honor (or *weight*) due to them. But then to curse them with a *true* curse, one which has the supernatural effect of harming them, is a far graver offense. There, the קָלַל concept of making light means abatement of the victim, winnowing away at their well-being. God comments that it was this sort of curse which Balak wanted Balaam to inflict upon Israel as a whole.¹⁶

7 Luke 24:36-43

8 Transliterated “yiddeoni,” Strong's #3049

9 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3049.htm>

10 Transliterated “yada,” Strong's #3045

11 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3045.htm>

12 Numbers 22

13 Isaiah 8:16-22

14 Transliterated “Qalal,” Strong's #7043

15 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7043.htm>

16 Joshua 24:9

Though the word can be used in a wide range, here it is a specific imprecation with long-term effects on the persons targeted, experiencing constant calamity until they are undone.

The means by which people would curse others is not detailed in Scripture. This is likely for the sake of those who would get too curious, but there is also a matter of propriety. Being born in Egypt and having been exposed to the dealings of the royal court, Moses knew all too well what supernatural curses looked like. He was well acquainted with execration texts like that written against the Asiatic Princes in the Middle Kingdom era:¹⁷

*Every evil word, every evil speech, every evil slander, every evil thought,
every evil plot, every evil fight, every evil quarrel, every evil plan, every
evil thing, all evil dreams, and all evil slumber.*¹⁸

As words like these were rhythmically chanted, eventually the one performing the execration would break a statuette, urn or familiar objects, and then they would expect such a wave of calamity to afflict their target until they were dead. Though the Near East had many other means of cursing, Moses does not provide the example he was familiar with, likely because of its singular concentration on hatred of the victim.

Conclusion

Like consulting mediums and necromancers, one who engages in execration reveals a total lack of faith in God. Harming another through supernatural means is proof positive that the one cursing does not trust in God to establish justice in the land, restore something stolen, or mend bitterness. Furthermore, *all three* of these practices violate the principle of *Shalom*, for their means and ends are directed at the curse which never should have been; deteriorating a human being until they are undone, consulting a dead person, or asking favors or knowledge from spirits are things that were not present in Eden, which had no entropy nor ignorance nor death! And so, they are counted as grave offenses, equal in weight to those who were making offerings to Molech as referred to in the previous passage.

¹⁷ Approximately 2200-1700 B.C.

¹⁸ As detailed in James B. Pritchard's *The Ancient Near East* anthology, Princeton University Press, 2001. Page 323

Leviticus Bible Study #24

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 20:10-27

10 “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. **11** If a man lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. **12** If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them. **13** If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. **14** If a man takes a woman and her mother also, it is depravity; he and they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no depravity among you. **15** If a man lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. **16** If a woman approaches any animal and lies with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.

17 “If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness, and he shall bear his iniquity. **18** If a man lies with a woman during her menstrual period and uncovers her nakedness, he has made naked her fountain, and she has uncovered the fountain of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from among their people. **19** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for that is to make naked one's relative; they shall bear their iniquity. **20** If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness; they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. **21** If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.

22 “You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. **23** And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. **24** But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. **25** You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. **26** You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

27 “A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them.”

Introduction

Leviticus as a whole has been more concerned with purity in devotion more than civic conduct. This is to say, while it is a book of Law, it is chiefly about ceremonial observance which every Israelite was tasked with obeying. Later, in Deuteronomy, Moses will be given oracles that supplement the ceremonial laws with civil statutes which drive trade, punishment, property, etc.¹ But we ought not drive too deep a wedge between the ceremonial and civil codes in the Law, for the text of Scripture

¹ Example: the law concerning the minimum number of witnesses needed to discern fault for a crime committed, Deuteronomy 19:15-21

blurs these lines regularly. Civil code is couched in Divine terms, and ceremonial observances have the full weight of life and death behind them. The latter is observed in the conclusion to the Holiness Code for lay Israelites, wherein disobedience results in the same punishments one would expect for murderers.

Vs.10-21

10 “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. **11** If a man lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. **12** If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them. **13** If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. **14** If a man takes a woman and her mother also, it is depravity; he and they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no depravity among you. **15** If a man lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. **16** If a woman approaches any animal and lies with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.

17 “If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness, and he shall bear his iniquity. **18** If a man lies with a woman during her menstrual period and uncovers her nakedness, he has made naked her fountain, and she has uncovered the fountain of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from among their people. **19** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for that is to make naked one's relative; they shall bear their iniquity. **20** If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness; they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. **21** If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.

The list of sexual sins here matches the previous list which identifies them as iniquity.² Here their severity is put on full display by the consistent requirement of severe punishment. The first seven include explicit calls for the death penalty, namely for adultery proper,³ bestiality, parental incest, and homosexuality are all punished with execution. The other five use more ambiguous language for punishment, but retain the same level of severity. They may be “cut off” from the people in terms of *exile* rather than cut off from life itself, but in the context in which Leviticus was written this may as well be a death sentence. As Moses writes, the congregation of Israel is in the desert wilderness, surrounded by hostile nations; anyone expelled from the safety in numbers they had would either die in short order by the desert environment or be captured by slavers. It is also unclear whether the term “die childless” is a command for the Israelites to destroy the offenders before they can have any children or whether it denotes that God Himself will curse the couple. Either way, the implication is the same.

The modern reader may be shocked to find such harsh punishments for what is often considered a “mistake” or indiscretion by the people who commit sexual sins. Yet all of these offenses are not just evil for what they are by themselves; by engaging in improper or unnatural sexual liaisons, more is happening than *just* the physical. To take a man's wife for one's own is to make a claim on all that is his, as the one-flesh union would put the adulterer on par with the offended party. This is the likeliest reason for bizarre sexual offenses recounted in Scripture, like Absalom's decision (informed by counselors) to sleep with his father David's concubines;⁴ by claiming David's *women*, Absalom claims David's *kingdom*. The prohibitions on bestiality and homosexuality maintain the strict categories placed by God in creation; sex is not just kept within the bounds of marriage, but also the *category* of human men and women. To sleep with an animal or someone of the same sex is to rebel against the way that God created the world and His creatures, thus violating the Edenic ideal which Israel is supposed to

² Leviticus 18

³ That is, sleeping with someone else's spouse

⁴ 2 Samuel 16:20-23

represent. To engage in that depravity thus invites the curse, which results in depravity – or more properly *pollution* – in the land. This is to say, since woman was created for man to be his spouse, man should not look to other men or to animals to fulfill his need for sexual companionship. As St. Paul comments, this is also true for women, who must avoid lesbian attractions and behavior lest they too merit punishment.⁵

Vs.22-27

22 “You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. **23** And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. **24** But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. **25** You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. **26** You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

27 “A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them.”

This passage concludes the arc of legislation which governs the behaviors, diet, and cleanliness of the people. It began in the tenth chapter with the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, from which event God tasked Aaron and his remaining sons to instruct the people on the standards of behavior He has for His people. They are to distinguish between clean and unclean, maintain proper relationships, conduct right sacrifices through the priesthood at the designated area, and avoid sorcery of any stripe. This is the holiness code as given to the average Israelite; the holiness code given to the priesthood comes after.⁶

The Children of Israel are once more called to be holy, for God has separated them from all other nations to be His emissaries on earth. Thus they are to embody the ideals and morals given to them in the commands, not least of which being that of Shalom, Shalom, and the Edenic ideal. Let us not suppose though that these principles are only applicable to the ancient Israelites; to the contrary, God states that He detested the Canaanites and had the land “vomit” them out, precisely because the Canaanites lived contrary to these principles. Their relationships were full of incest, they sacrificed their children to false gods, they ate whatever flesh they could obtain without distinction and they engaged in constant witchcraft. Thus they are judged by the universally applicable Law, and cast out by the conquering Israelites. Over the course of Israel's history, it will become evident why stringent punishments are enforced on those who violate these commandments. The more the people broke the Law, the more paganized they became, making them more like the Canaanites they had expelled. This culminates eventually in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, which reciprocated onto the Israelites that which they had done to Canaan.

The final verse in the chapter appears at first blush to be an oversight, as though Moses had to adjudicate an issue that resulted in the imposition of another case law. But the previous verses establish that killing mediums and necromancers is a necessity for their continued existence, lest they experience the decline and death which were to mark the end of the Canaanites. To slaughter the violators without mercy is *what it took* during this era to be in good standing with God, for they did not have the fullness of the Gospel which would later call these people to repentance rather than the gallows.

⁵ Romans 1:26-27

⁶ Typically, Leviticus 17-26 is summarized as “the holiness code” by commentaries, but we distinguish here between the rules given for the people and the *extra* rules given for the priests.

Leviticus Bible Study #25

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 21:1-24

1 And the LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, No one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people, **2** except for his closest relatives, his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother, **3** or his virgin sister (who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may make himself unclean). **4** He shall not make himself unclean as a husband among his people and so profane himself. **5** They shall not make bald patches on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts on their body. **6** They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God. For they offer the LORD's food offerings, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy. **7** They shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled, neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband, for the priest is holy to his God. **8** You shall sanctify him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy. **9** And the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by whoring, profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.

10 “The priest who is chief among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil is poured and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose nor tear his clothes. **11** He shall not go in to any dead bodies nor make himself unclean, even for his father or for his mother. **12** He shall not go out of the sanctuary, lest he profane the sanctuary of his God, for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him: I am the LORD. **13** And he shall take a wife in her virginity. **14** A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, or a prostitute, these he shall not marry. But he shall take as his wife a virgin of his own people, **15** that he may not profane his offspring among his people, for I am the LORD who sanctifies him.”

16 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **17** “Speak to Aaron, saying, None of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God. **18** For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, **19** or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand, **20** or a hunchback or a dwarf or a man with a defect in his sight or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. **21** No man of the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the LORD's food offerings; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. **22** He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things, **23** but he shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the LORD who sanctifies them.” **24** So Moses spoke to Aaron and to his sons and to all the people of Israel.

Introduction

The past ten chapters dealt mostly with the holiness code to be taught to the average Israelite. The people were to distinguish between clean and unclean among foods, materials, and even people. In addition to this, regulations were introduced to maintain the religious and sexual purity of Israel; any instance of necromancy or incest was to be met with swift execution. The sum and purpose of these laws is in the way that it binds the people to a standard of perfection. That which ought to be is established in law; that which ought not to be is prohibited; that which cannot be helped must be hidden until conditions improve. The promised land (and wherever the Israelites happened to be) must not only *look* like Paradise, it must also reach close to *being* Paradise – or the closest thing one could get to it in

the world. Leviticus is where the concept of *Shalom* shifts from state of being to legal impulse.

Yet the strict standards for the Israelite laity seem lax in comparison to the *extra* limitations and regulations placed on the priesthood. The priest has all the same commands applying to him as the average Israelite, but with stricter enforcement and more layers of purity. In addition to this, the tribe of Levi and all their women get caught up in the elevation of tribal standards. As the tribe of Levi was set apart after the golden calf incident,¹ they and the Aaronic dynasty of priests were to be treated as *holy*, that the people may look to them as the proper representatives of God on earth. If Israel's land was to be like Eden, the priesthood was to represent our Lord who walked among its trees. On the other hand, since the priests represented the people as they interacted with God, they were also called to a standard of holiness on the peoples' behalf.

Vs.1-6

1 And the LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, No one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people, 2 except for his closest relatives, his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother, 3 or his virgin sister (who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may make himself unclean). 4 He shall not make himself unclean as a husband among his people and so profane himself. 5 They shall not make bald patches on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts on their body. 6 They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God. For they offer the LORD's food offerings, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy.

While touching a dead body made someone unclean and becoming unclean was generally something to be avoided, the people were permitted to carry off and bury their dead. This is not so for the priests, who are only permitted to do this for close family members. If the priesthood speaks on behalf of the God who does not die, then they are only permitted to interact with death in specific ways. First there are the sacrifices, wherein they must handle animal bodies for butchering and offering on the altar; in that case, the priest interacts with death on behalf of the people to make expiation and special acts of devotion. In the other case, because the priests are still *human*, they must also take responsibility for the bodies of their family members.

The fourth verse elaborates on the self-conception of the priesthood. God instructs Moses that the priest is a “husband” or chief among the people. Because they were the teachers of the Law to the people, ran intercessory sacrifices and inspected the afflicted, the priests had a supervisory and guiding role for the Israelites to look up to. Thus, the layman must never see the priest becoming unclean, so that in seeing his maintenance of purity he follows a more positive example. This includes the way in which priests approach death, which includes a prohibition on the pagan style of performative mourning – cutting oneself, ripping hair out, or changing one's beard. In a world marked by death and chaos, the priest is to be a living example of *life* to the Israelite.

If there is a role model, then there is a goal for the people to strive for. By their strict living, the priests set an example for the people to *reach* to, that they may be clean, well behaved, and honorable. For this reason, we can surmise that the Parable of the Good Samaritan is assuredly *not* a condemnation of the priesthood or the Levites, but a presentation of how the Gospel offers something even greater.² That a priest or a Levite would pass by a man nearly dead was them fulfilling their duties according to the Law; even if they *wanted* to help, they cannot break these commands. But Christ speaks of the Samaritan as one who, in Gospel fashion, demonstrates Agape love in ways that the Law cannot help with. So while Christians must certainly set a positive example to our pagan neighbors as St. Paul says,³ and St. Peter says elders in the church must do so even more,⁴ these obligations rest on a foundation of

1 Exodus 32:25-29

2 Luke 10:25-37

3 1 Corinthians 8,

4 1 Peter 5:1-3

mercy as provided by the Atonement. Meanwhile, the strict purity standards of the Law could *hamper* acts of mercy if the afflicted found themselves on the wrong end of misfortune, and a priest was forbidden from helping.

Vs.7-9

7 They shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled, neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband, for the priest is holy to his God. **8** You shall sanctify him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy. **9** And the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by whoring, profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.

The priest could not marry unless he was marrying a virgin. While the world is “messy” in terms of relationships, the priesthood is to represent the gold standard in marriage. Adam and Eve were together as husband and wife with no previous partners and no romantic competition, and so the priests representing that ideal must conform to it. They do this both as a role model to the people *and* in their intercessory role. As Israel was supposed to present the Edenic ideal to the world, God interacts with men under the Old Covenant with the demand of seeing His priests conform to its vision for the sexes. In Eden, there was no fornication nor adultery nor divorce nor prostitution, and so these ought not be present in Israel *at all*, but especially not among the priests.

Because the priestly dynasty is a *family*, the daughters of the priests have a role in this as well. The inherent connections and bonds within the family means that one member's sin is the responsibility of the whole. Thus a woman in Aaron's family may not engage in fornication, adultery, prostitution, etc. While these sins are prohibited from *everyone*, they are not enforceable en masse; lovers may engage in secret trysts, prostitution may be discreet, and there is no way for the chiefs of the people to be fully aware of such activities. But for the priesthood, which is called to a stricter lifestyle, both sons and daughters were monitored much more closely – lest the son be found to marry a forbidden woman and the daughter engage in sexual sin, either of which dishonoring the family. As much as death is to be shunned by the priests in most cases, so too is sexual impurity.

Vs.10-15

10 “The priest who is chief among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil is poured and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose nor tear his clothes. **11** He shall not go in to any dead bodies nor make himself unclean, even for his father or for his mother. **12** He shall not go out of the sanctuary, lest he profane the sanctuary of his God, for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him: I am the LORD. **13** And he shall take a wife in her virginity. **14** A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, or a prostitute, these he shall not marry. But he shall take as his wife a virgin of his own people, **15** that he may not profane his offspring among his people, for I am the LORD who sanctifies him.”

The high priest is under all the same extra regulations as the normal priests, but even more so. As he is the one who goes into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement, he represents the highest standard *of* the highest standard. While the concession is made for a priest to handle the dead body of his close relatives, this is forbidden from the high priest, who may not be unclean for any reason whatsoever or even appear to be in mourning. The twelfth verse appears to clarify that in the event of a family member dying, the high priest is to remain in the sanctuary of God until the bodies have been buried. For all intents and purposes, death is something that almost doesn't exist in the high priest's life: it is outside of his field of vision.

The marital requirements are the same for the high priest, but with higher stakes. Just as death is to be off of the high priest's proverbial radar, so too is sexual impurity. If he were to take a non-virgin woman as his bride, the offspring would be considered profane on account of the previous history of indiscretions. Later on in Deuteronomy the people are permitted to marry divorced women (albeit as a

concession to the hardness of men's hearts, as divorce is something which ought not happen in the first place);⁵ since it was not a sin per se for an Israelite man to marry a divorced woman or a prostitute, the point is not the union itself. The offense created by a priest – and especially for the high priest – marrying a woman who had past partners or a history of sexual sin was the imposition of the *curse* on sacred ground. Sexual sins and changes to relationships were never intended for humanity in Eden; since the sanctuary, especially the Most Holy Place, was the most sacred ground on earth, to bring in such violations of the principle of *Shalom* is an affront to God. As a theoretical punishment, the high priest who does such a thing forfeits his place as priest, with him and all of his offspring being laity (“profaned”).

Vs.16-24

16 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **17** “Speak to Aaron, saying, None of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God. **18** For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, **19** or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand, **20** or a hunchback or a dwarf or a man with a defect in his sight or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. **21** No man of the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the LORD's food offerings; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. **22** He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things, **23** but he shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the LORD who sanctifies them.” **24** So Moses spoke to Aaron and to his sons and to all the people of Israel.

These verses, wherein the deformed or injured or diseased may not serve priestly functions, is actually a merciful *concession* rather than a rote prohibition. The Law specifies that no one among Israelite laity may enter into the assembly of the Lord if they have these defects: if a man is unclean by virtue of a skin disease, or if he is physically mutilated,⁶ he is excluded. Yet as the priestly dynasty is set apart for service unto the Lord, for a priest to be cast out would depart from God's promises regarding Aaron's family. Thus, the deformed member of the priestly family may still contribute by laboring for his family as though he were a standard Levite: he may not offer sacrifices or enter into the inner Tabernacle area, but nonetheless still receives the priestly portion of the sacrifices as a man sanctified unto service. This “safety net” law may appear to be a double standard, since the deformed among the laity may not even approach the Tabernacle, but it is one of the few privileges granted to Aaron's family, as they have no land to inherit and far fewer freedoms than the common man.

⁵ Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Matthew 19:3-9

⁶ Deuteronomy 23:1, Leviticus chapters 13 through 15, etc.

Leviticus Bible Study #26

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 22:1-33

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to Aaron and his sons so that they abstain from the holy things of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they do not profane my holy name: I am the LORD. **3** Say to them, ‘If any one of all your offspring throughout your generations approaches the holy things that the people of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD. **4** None of the offspring of Aaron who has a leprous disease or a discharge may eat of the holy things until he is clean. Whoever touches anything that is unclean through contact with the dead or a man who has had an emission of semen, **5** and whoever touches a swarming thing by which he may be made unclean or a person from whom he may take uncleanness, whatever his uncleanness may be— **6** the person who touches such a thing shall be unclean until the evening and shall not eat of the holy things unless he has bathed his body in water. **7** When the sun goes down he shall be clean, and afterward he may eat of the holy things, because they are his food. **8** He shall not eat what dies of itself or is torn by beasts, and so make himself unclean by it: I am the LORD.’ **9** They shall therefore keep my charge, lest they bear sin for it and die thereby when they profane it: I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

10 “A lay person shall not eat of a holy thing; no foreign guest of the priest or hired worker shall eat of a holy thing, **11** but if a priest buys a slave as his property for money, the slave may eat of it, and anyone born in his house may eat of his food. **12** If a priest's daughter marries a layman, she shall not eat of the contribution of the holy things. **13** But if a priest's daughter is widowed or divorced and has no child and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food; yet no lay person shall eat of it. **14** And if anyone eats of a holy thing unintentionally, he shall add the fifth of its value to it and give the holy thing to the priest. **15** They shall not profane the holy things of the people of Israel, which they contribute to the LORD, **16** and so cause them to bear iniquity and guilt, by eating their holy things: for I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”

17 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **18** “Speak to Aaron and his sons and all the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of the house of Israel or of the sojourners in Israel presents a burnt offering as his offering, for any of their vows or freewill offerings that they offer to the LORD, **19** if it is to be accepted for you it shall be a male without blemish, of the bulls or the sheep or the goats. **20** You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you. **21** And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it. **22** Animals blind or disabled or mutilated or having a discharge or an itch or scabs you shall not offer to the LORD or give them to the LORD as a food offering on the altar. **23** You may present a bull or a lamb that has a part too long or too short for a freewill offering, but for a vow offering it cannot be accepted. **24** Any animal that has its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut you shall not offer to the LORD; you shall not do it within your land, **25** neither shall you offer as the bread of your God any such animals gotten from a foreigner. Since there is a blemish in them, because of their mutilation, they will not be accepted for you.”

26 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **27** “When an ox or sheep or goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as a food offering to the LORD. **28** But you shall not kill an ox or a sheep and her young in one day. **29** And when you sacrifice a

sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD, you shall sacrifice it so that you may be accepted. **30** It shall be eaten on the same day; you shall leave none of it until morning: I am the LORD.

31 “So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the LORD. **32** And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you, **33** who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD.”

Introduction

When addressing the priests directly, God ensures two parallel dynamics in their living. First, they are afforded certain privileges that the average Israelite does not enjoy. Second, despite these privileges no priest is above the Law. The priests are allowed to eat a portion of the offerings made, but they are not allowed to do so while unclean. A priest who is mutilated or disabled may not serve at the altar, but he is still allowed to help (as though he were a Levite) and to eat from the sacrifices. That latter privilege is a concession to those who cannot help their circumstance though, as this privilege is *not* afforded to those who are temporarily unclean.

The previous chapter featured the stricter lifestyle levied on priests such that they could not just choose who to marry or whether to mourn a loved one. They must only marry virgin women of the tribe of Levi, and Tabernacle services cannot stop for the dead – not even for family. A priest or a Levite may only touch a dead body if they are close family, but the high priest cannot touch *any* dead bodies outside of the sacrifices. That the Lord would then add that unclean priests may not eat of the offerings makes the condition even more clear, that the addition of higher standards did not include with it any “escape clauses” for ease of operation. On the other side of their stricter rules however is their capacity to make judgments for the people in what is acceptable.

Vs.1-9

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to Aaron and his sons so that they abstain from the holy things of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they do not profane my holy name: I am the LORD. **3** Say to them, ‘If any one of all your offspring throughout your generations approaches the holy things that the people of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD. **4** None of the offspring of Aaron who has a leprous disease or a discharge may eat of the holy things until he is clean. Whoever touches anything that is unclean through contact with the dead or a man who has had an emission of semen, **5** and whoever touches a swarming thing by which he may be made unclean or a person from whom he may take uncleanness, whatever his uncleanness may be— **6** the person who touches such a thing shall be unclean until the evening and shall not eat of the holy things unless he has bathed his body in water. **7** When the sun goes down he shall be clean, and afterward he may eat of the holy things, because they are his food. **8** He shall not eat what dies of itself or is torn by beasts, and so make himself unclean by it: I am the LORD.’ **9** They shall therefore keep my charge, lest they bear sin for it and die thereby when they profane it: I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

By “holy things,” the Lord is referring to those offerings brought into the sanctuary by the laity of Israel. This is not just in reference to the animal sacrifices, but to grain, money, and other gifts they might give. Thus they are not just holy in and of themselves, but holy things *of the people of Israel*. The priests are to recognize these offerings as set apart and treat them with respect by not interacting with them while unclean. Their solemn sacerdotal mission is to be performed not only with reverence, but also with duty towards their fellow Israelites, not treating them with contempt. Thus God threatens Aaron and his sons with death if they should violate the command.

The cleanliness laws remain the same for both priest and laity alike. Listing them out, God does not permit any exceptions to the rule. If a priest touches a dead body, has a skin condition, emits semen, or contracts a disease then he must not even touch the offerings, let alone partake of the holy things.

Because the people were to model a sort of perfection through the principle of Shalom, the priests were not to interfere with it; they could not profane that which God had accepted as good.

Vs.10-16

10 “A lay person shall not eat of a holy thing; no foreign guest of the priest or hired worker shall eat of a holy thing, **11** but if a priest buys a slave as his property for money, the slave may eat of it, and anyone born in his house may eat of his food. **12** If a priest's daughter marries a layman, she shall not eat of the contribution of the holy things. **13** But if a priest's daughter is widowed or divorced and has no child and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food; yet no lay person shall eat of it. **14** And if anyone eats of a holy thing unintentionally, he shall add the fifth of its value to it and give the holy thing to the priest. **15** They shall not profane the holy things of the people of Israel, which they contribute to the LORD, **16** and so cause them to bear iniquity and guilt, by eating their holy things: for I am the LORD who sanctifies them.”

While the priesthood is under the same rules as anyone else *and then some*, they still have privileges born out of the necessity of their duty. As a priest has neither the time, land, or resources to engage in farming or cattle ranching, they feed their families with the offerings made to the Lord. This raises the question of just who may eat of these offerings, for if it were *only* the priests then their families would starve. So restrictions and allowances are made here. As the lay Israelite has his own means of obtaining food, he may not eat of it; a slave that the priest buys, however, has no other means of providing for himself and thus is permitted to eat from the proceeds. The stipulation concerning slaves is mostly a hypothetical, since the priests do not have much in terms of earning ability for money, and whatever bartering capital they might have from offerings is tied to the Israelite economy. Good times means more sacrifices, hard times means the priests go hungry. More often than not, they were impoverished, and the priests resorted to crooked means to eat.¹ In other words, they were not going to be buying slaves any time soon.

The rules for familial participation in the offerings are more in the firmly practical realm. A priest's daughter is part of the family so long as she remains in her father's household, and thus she too received the privileged diet. However, the moment she is married off the expectation is for her new husband to provide for her. In this way, the Lord prevents entryism and mitigates dynastic tendencies simultaneously. A man does not get to enter the priesthood by virtue of marrying a priest's daughter, and a priest's daughter cannot claim any special privileges for her new family if she departs. Though the Aaronic line is a genetic lineage of priests, it is decidedly not to be treated as aristocracy.

Vs.17-25

17 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **18** “Speak to Aaron and his sons and all the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of the house of Israel or of the sojourners in Israel presents a burnt offering as his offering, for any of their vows or freewill offerings that they offer to the LORD, **19** if it is to be accepted for you it shall be a male without blemish, of the bulls or the sheep or the goats. **20** You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you. **21** And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it. **22** Animals blind or disabled or mutilated or having a discharge or an itch or scabs you shall not offer to the LORD or give them to the LORD as a food offering on the altar. **23** You may present a bull or a lamb that has a part too long or too short for a freewill offering, but for a vow offering it cannot be accepted. **24** Any animal that has its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut you shall not offer to the LORD; you shall not do it within your land, **25** neither shall you offer as the bread of your God any such animals gotten from a foreigner. Since there is a blemish in them, because of their mutilation, they will not be accepted for you.”

The priesthood is given the solemn duty to examine every animal offered up for sacrifice. Much in the same way a priest must examine *himself* and his fellows in ministry lest they be unclean and thus

¹ 1 Samuel 2:12-17

profane the sanctuary, so too must every sacrifice be examined. God demands that every offering be perfect in its execution, perfect in the status of the participants, and perfect in the distribution of the meat therefrom. A small exception is made for the relatively common malady of mismatched limb length, but this is a concession for a relatively minor amount of sacrifices – freewill offerings, which were spontaneous unprompted gifts given by the people. Other than that, wholeness is emphasized.

There is also a typological aspect to this requirement, “To be accepted it must be perfect.” Every sacrifice proclaimed the Gospel, with the animal offered up representing Christ Himself. Since Jesus is spotless, being entirely free of sin, no animal which would represent Him on the altar may have any defect whatsoever. Every animal that went on the altar was to show to the Israelite that one day a true Sacrifice would be made which renders all other offerings superfluous, with the Law itself fulfilled.

Vs.26-33

26 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **27** “When an ox or sheep or goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as a food offering to the LORD. **28** But you shall not kill an ox or a sheep and her young in one day. **29** And when you sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD, you shall sacrifice it so that you may be accepted. **30** It shall be eaten on the same day; you shall leave none of it until morning: I am the LORD.

31 “So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the LORD. **32** And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you, **33** who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD.”

This last section makes a similar concession to the animals themselves as the previous concession granted to priests and laity. The relationship between the Israelites and their cattle is a simple exchange of food for food, with the oxen and goats benefiting from animal husbandry while their owners receive milk, meat and hides in return. Passages such as this demonstrate that it is a true relationship and God is aware of it. Sheep, goats, and cows are capable of affection for their offspring just as people are (albeit likely to a lesser degree), and thus a mother animal is permitted to spend time with her offspring that are slated to die. Similarly, the Israelites are not allowed to wipe out entire animal lines in the same day, lest they disappear from the earth entirely. These requirements also bring into mind the Passover and the subsequent Exodus, wherein the people were called to eat their meat without leaving any of it until the morning. That the firstborn lamb or sheep is sacrificed on the eighth day shows that it is given one week – or creation cycle – to be verified as spotless, thus becoming a fitting representative of the true sinless Lamb who gave His Life on Calvary.

Thus ends the priestly holiness code additions.