Leviticus Bible Study #33

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

Leviticus 27:1-34

1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, If anyone makes a special vow to the Lord involving the valuation of persons, **3** then the valuation of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old shall be fifty shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. **4** If the person is a female, the valuation shall be thirty shekels. **5** If the person is from five years old up to twenty years old, the valuation shall be for a male twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels. **6** If the person is from a month old up to five years old, the valuation shall be for a male five shekels of silver, and for a female the valuation shall be three shekels of silver. **7** And if the person is sixty years old or over, then the valuation for a male shall be fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. **8** And if someone is too poor to pay the valuation, then he shall be made to stand before the priest, and the priest shall value him; the priest shall value him according to what the vower can afford.
9 “If the vow is an animal that may be offered as an offering to the Lord, all of it that he gives to the Lord is holy. **10** He shall not exchange it or make a substitute for it, good for bad, or bad for good; and if he does in fact substitute one animal for another, then both it and the substitute shall be holy. **11** And if it is any unclean animal that may not be offered as an offering to the Lord, then he shall stand the animal before the priest, **12** and the priest shall value it as either good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall be. **13** But if he wishes to redeem it, he shall add a fifth to the valuation.

14 “When a man dedicates his house as a holy gift to the Lord, the priest shall value it as either good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall stand. **15** And if the donor wishes to redeem his house, he shall add a fifth to the valuation price, and it shall be his.

16 “If a man dedicates to the Lord part of the land that is his possession, then the valuation shall be in proportion to its seed. A homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver. **17** If he dedicates his field from the year of jubilee, the valuation shall stand, **18** but if he dedicates his field after the jubilee, then the priest shall calculate the price according to the years that remain until the year of jubilee, and a deduction shall be made from the valuation. **19** And if he who dedicates the field wishes to redeem it, then he shall add a fifth to its valuation price, and it shall remain his. **20** But if he does not wish to redeem the field, or if he has sold the field to another man, it shall not be redeemed anymore. **21** But the field, when it is released in the jubilee, shall be a holy gift to the Lord, like a field that has been devoted. The priest shall be in possession of it. **22** If he dedicates to the Lord a field that he has bought, which is not a part of his possession, **23** then the priest shall calculate the amount of the valuation for it up to the year of jubilee, and the man shall give the valuation on that day as a holy gift to the Lord. **24** In the year of jubilee the field shall return to him from whom it was bought, to whom the land belongs as a possession. **25** Every valuation shall be according to the shekel of the sanctuary: twenty gerahs shall make a shekel.

26 “But a firstborn of animals, which as a firstborn belongs to the Lord, no man may dedicate; whether ox or sheep, it is the Lord's. **27** And if it is an unclean animal, then he shall buy it back at the valuation, and add a fifth to it; or, if it is not redeemed, it shall be sold at the valuation.

28 “But no devoted thing that a man devotes to the Lord, of anything that he has, whether man or beast, or of his inherited field, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the Lord. **29** No one devoted, who is to be devoted for destruction from mankind, shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death.

30 “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord. **31** If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it. **32** And every

tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the Lord. **33** One shall not differentiate between good or bad, neither shall he make a substitute for it; and if he does substitute for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed."

34 These are the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai.

Introduction

This chapter is the second appendix and final passage in Leviticus. By ending the book with a discussion on the vows people may take and how they can fund the Tabernacle, Moses finalizes the broadly chiastic structure of Leviticus. A *chiasm*, based on the Greek letter Chi (X), is a literary device which establishes a focal point to any given text. Parallel or contrasting sections are organized opposite one another based on their distance from the focal point in the middle of the text. A chiasm can be topical over the course of long passages, or it can be based on a short text itself. For instance, from Leviticus 20:26, a minor chiastic verse:

"You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine."

The basic chiastic structure here is the standard "A-B-B-A" chiasm:

A *You shall be holy to me*
B *For I the Lord am holy*
B2 *and have separated you from the peoples*
A2 *that you should be mine.*

The emphasis in the verse is that *God* is the Holy One, and He is the one who brought the children of Israel to their new and separate status. Because of that focal point, the children of Israel must seek to be holy in line with what God has already accomplished. While there are smaller chiasms like this all over Leviticus, the entire book is organized according to a topical chiastic structure. The basic form of it is thus:

Leviticus

A. Requirements for sacrificial devotion (chapters 1-7)
| B. Priestly consecration (8-9)
| | C. Ritual purity (10-15)
| | | D. **The Day of Atonement (16)**
| | C2. Moral purity (17-20)
| B2. Priestly qualifications (21-22)
A2. Requirements for non-sacrificial devotions (23-27)[1]

While the latter three sections are more concerned with moral matters (which remain connected to the ceremonial), the final chapter is tied to the *voluntary* use of vows by the people the same way the first chapter regulated the burnt offerings – which are included in *voluntary* sacrifices. Thus Moses adds the same weight to the vows people choose to engage in as the sacrifices they make with their animals; the faith is not merely a set of requirements for the blood of animals but includes a robust life of good deeds prompted by the individual faithful.

One may note that the Day of Atonement is the center of Leviticus. The center of the book

1 This includes the case-law interruption of the man who blasphemed God's Name in the twenty fourth chapter.

which is the center of the Law of Moses[2] – the "top of Mount Pentateuch" so to speak – is the moment when the people are forgiven of their sins en masse by the sacrifice of a scapegoat. It is a foreshadowing of the Gospel, which itself is the center of all history. Scripture sums up cosmological history with a chiastic structure, wherein creation and *re*-creation are the bookends and the Atonement is the very center.

Vs.1-8

1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, **2** "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, If anyone makes a special vow to the Lord involving the valuation of persons, **3** then the valuation of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old shall be fifty shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. **4** If the person is a female, the valuation shall be thirty shekels. **5** If the person is from five years old up to twenty years old, the valuation shall be for a male twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels. **6** If the person is from a month old up to five years old, the valuation shall be for a male five shekels of silver, and for a female the valuation shall be three shekels of silver. **7** And if the person is sixty years old or over, then the valuation for a male shall be fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. **8** And if someone is too poor to pay the valuation, then he shall be made to stand before the priest, and the priest shall value him; the priest shall value him according to what the vower can afford.

These verse put a positive value marker for whoever would consecrate themselves to serving the priests, so that payment of money stands in as an alternative. These are also "standard donation" lists for those who simply wish to generously give for the sake of Tabernacle upkeep. But the value of labor that could be offered to the priests will vary based on the circumstances of that person's birth: a young man could offer much more labor than than an old woman could, so the cost of his vow is greater. So in this fashion, people are given the ability to make good on those vows they take, but they have the ability to fulfill them monetarily as an alternative.

With this command, God allows for flexibility in devotion. Example: a young woman lives with her father and makes a vow after God heals her sister of an illness. She vows to serve the Lord doing menial labor for the priests for one year, and her father does not exercise his veto rights.[3] But then after three months, her family has found a suitable candidate to marry her who will not wait another ten months for a bride. After consulting with her and the priests, they make the decision to pay the rest of the vow monetarily – thirty shekels – to get her back home and secure her future with the man. She is not considered an oath breaker, but does not have to abide by the times for which she had previously vowed.

Vs.9-15

9 "If the vow is an animal that may be offered as an offering to the Lord, all of it that he gives to the Lord is holy. **10** He shall not exchange it or make a substitute for it, good for bad, or bad for good; and if he does in fact substitute one animal for another, then both it and the substitute shall be holy. **11** And if it is any unclean animal that may not be offered as an offering to the Lord, then he shall stand the animal before the priest, **12** and the priest shall value it as either good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall be. **13** But if he wishes to redeem it, he shall add a fifth to the valuation.

14 "When a man dedicates his house as a holy gift to the Lord, the priest shall value it as either good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall stand. **15** And if the donor wishes to redeem his house, he shall add a fifth to the valuation price, and it shall be his.

In place of service for the upkeep of the Tabernacle or the needs of the priests, the people may also donate animals or land or buildings. Because the usefulness of these properties is more varied than

2 Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Yes, these all form a chiastic structure as well, but that is for another study series.

3 Heads of household could cancel the rash vows of their children, outlined in Numbers 30.

that of a human person's services, the valuation of the vow it at the priest's discretion. A clean animal that may be sacrificed is not to be redeemed or exchanged; it is now holy and will likely be sacrificed. An unclean animal that could still be used as a beast of burden though, such as a horse or mule, may be redeemed with an extra twenty percent (which makes up for the opportunity cost). On account of shifting human needs, houses may always be redeemed. In both cases, the person who redeems it is counted as having fulfilled their vow.

Vs.16-25

16 "If a man dedicates to the Lord part of the land that is his possession, then the valuation shall be in proportion to its seed. A homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver. **17** If he dedicates his field from the year of jubilee, the valuation shall stand, **18** but if he dedicates his field after the jubilee, then the priest shall calculate the price according to the years that remain until the year of jubilee, and a deduction shall be made from the valuation. **19** And if he who dedicates the field wishes to redeem it, then he shall add a fifth to its valuation price, and it shall remain his. **20** But if he does not wish to redeem the field, or if he has sold the field to another man, it shall not be redeemed anymore. **21** But the field, when it is released in the jubilee, shall be a holy gift to the Lord, like a field that has been devoted. The priest shall be in possession of it. **22** If he dedicates to the Lord a field that he has bought, which is not a part of his possession, **23** then the priest shall calculate the amount of the valuation for it up to the year of jubilee, and the man shall give the valuation on that day as a holy gift to the Lord. **24** In the year of jubilee the field shall return to him from whom it was bought, to whom the land belongs as a possession. **25** Every valuation shall be according to the shekel of the sanctuary: twenty gerahs shall make a shekel.

On account of the ancestral allotment God made to the Patriarchs of Israel, land may be redeemed in almost all circumstances. However, if someone dedicates a field and does not redeem it from the hand of the priests, it becomes ancestral land for the priests. Since the tribe of Levi had no inheritance in the land of Israel save a few cities, this is a potential means of restoring the inheritance that the patriarch Levi had taken from him. Jacob rescinded their inheritance after the Dinah incident along with that of Simeon,[4] making their future in the Promised Land one of wandering or stationary service; over time, they are permitted to earn it back by caring for the needs and vows of the faithful. Later on, Ezekiel's vision of an idealized land of Israel will include an equal inheritance for the priests and Levites alike, in respect to their historic faithfulness.[5]

Vs.26-34

26 "But a firstborn of animals, which as a firstborn belongs to the Lord, no man may dedicate; whether ox or sheep, it is the Lord's. **27** And if it is an unclean animal, then he shall buy it back at the valuation, and add a fifth to it; or, if it is not redeemed, it shall be sold at the valuation.

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God ensures here that these laws concerning vows are not to be misused. They do not undercut

4 Genesis 49:5-7 cf. Genesis 34

5 Ezekiel 48:8-14

the law of consecration for the firstborn,[6] nor do they give men the opportunity to "weasel out" of mandatory sacrifices. If a man has a chattel slave that he purchased or took as the spoils of war, then him devoting the slave for service to the priests is irreversible. Those who are "devoted" to the Lord for the cause of justice are slain without recourse. Yet here there is some flexibility on account of the laws interacting with one another; since the unclean animal may not be offered on the altar, it may be purchased or sold while still having gone through the standard dedication rite. The laws demanding tithes now include the right for Israelites to re-obtain *some* of that produce back, provided they make an even larger offering to make up for it. As Leviticus ends, it ends on a note of permission for people to work *with* the Law to help in their circumstances, lest an incorrigibility destroy the people. Thus Leviticus maintains both its chiastic structure, beginning and ending with reforms for the sake of the people, and remains having a heart of mercy per the book's center – the Day of Atonement.

6 Exodus 13