

The Law, Book 3

Leviticus

The name of the book is Latin, meaning “concerning the Levites,” and is taken from Saint Jerome’s Latin Vulgate Bible, the first complete Bible (the first to include both the Old and New Testaments in one book).

The book of Leviticus is, in a sense, an interruption of the story begun in Exodus. Leviticus presents the basic body of the laws of God for the Israelites, his special people¹. Here are laid down, in great detail, the laws concerning consecration of the priesthood, and the duties of the Priests (Aaron and his descendants) and their assistants, the Levites (the other descendants of Levi). Here also are the detailed laws concerning sacrifices and offerings, tabernacle worship (and, later, Temple worship), the holiness expected of God's people, the feasts of God, health matters, and the proper means of approaching God and relating to Him.

At first glance the Mosaic Law seems harsh and restrictive, with its detailed requirements and precise directions for living; but we must remember that the Jewish people had known nothing but Egyptian paganism for 430 years, and they needed rules to follow in order to be rightly related to their holy God. The people of God would not have the indwelling Spirit of God, to guide them in matters of right and wrong, for another 1,500 years.

God Speaks. One remarkable aspect of Leviticus is that so much of it is in the form of direct quotations from God. The entire Bible is inspired by God; but the means of inspiration differs from book to book. We could fairly say that the writing of Leviticus was not only inspired by God, but that large portions of it were actually dictated by God, as Moses wrote.

The Tenderness of the Heart of God. Another remarkable, and wonderful, feature of Leviticus is that, in the midst of what many see as the harshness of the Levitical Law, we find so many expressions of the love of God, especially the tenderness of his heart for widows, orphans, the poor and the foreigners ("strangers" in the Authorized Version [KJV]).

A. Author. Like the other four books of the Law, the human author was Moses².

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² Some critical scholars date Leviticus, like all five Books of the Law, as being written much later--during, or after, the captivity. This would make these books essentially dishonest fabrications, since they present themselves as being written during the life of Moses.

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B. Place and Date. Like Genesis and Exodus, Leviticus was probably written during the one-year encampment at Sinai, about 1,500 BC.

C. Occasion. Like the other four books of the Law, Moses wrote Leviticus as directed and inspired by God; there was a very great deal that the people needed to learn in order to follow this new way of living.

D. Theme. The theme of Leviticus, with its exhaustive detailing of instructions for relating to God, is three-fold:

1. The Holiness and Perfection of God. As Paul would explain to us about 1,500 years later, the Law was to be our schoolmaster, showing us our imperfect sinful nature, by constant reminders of the perfect holiness of God. The Hebrew word for “holy (or holiness), *qodesh* (“*ko-desh*”), occurs more than 150 times in Leviticus.

2. Separation. God knew, of course, that the Israelites would be inclined to contaminate themselves with the paganism that would surround them wherever they went. He also knew that it would destroy them. In order to fulfill His desire for a separate, holy people--His own people, and for their protection, they must remain separated from the wickedness of the pagans around them.

3. The Cost of Sin. Since the time of Cain and Abel there had been sacrifices offered to God; Noah built an altar on Mt. Ararat and offered a sacrifice in thanksgiving for deliverance from the Great Flood. But such sacrifices were irregular, and were usually offered by heads of families. Prior to the Exodus, there had been no consecrated priesthood and no organized system for sacrifices. Under the Levitical system, the constant succession of sacrifices, and the endless glow and smoke of fires on the altar, reminded the Israelites of the deadliness of sin, its cost, and pointed to the eventual, ultimate sacrifice of the Christ, the spotless, sinless, sacrificed Lamb of God.

NOTE: *there is a **basic principle** concerning animal sacrifices. In them the individual brings an animal (one without blemish) to the Tabernacle (later, to the Temple) and lays his hand on the animal's head, symbolically transferring the owner's sins to the animal. Then the animal is slain by having its throat cut, and certain parts are cooked on the altar and offered as a sacrifice for the man's sins. In this way, the animal takes the place of its owner, purchasing for the owner a **temporary atonement** for his sins. The sacrificed animal must be without blemish, and there must be the shedding of blood. These sacrifices had to be repeated, regularly, for the next 1,500 years. This sacrificial system pointed the way to the final*

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sacrifice of Christ, the sinless Lamb of God, who would become the ultimate sacrifice for all the sins, of all men, for all time; and this sacrifice would never need to be repeated.

E. Highlights. Highlights of Leviticus include the following:

1. In Which Direction Is God's Throne Room? (Chapter 1)

In Leviticus Chapter 1 there are some interesting references to north and east; they are worth a thought in passing. Have you ever wondered about where is Heaven? Most of us have a general idea that it is "up"--that is, above us, in the sky, or out in space. But where? In what direction? It is probably unimportant, except as it concerns cults and paganism, in which directions are sometimes extremely important. In Freemasonry, for example, the direction of deity is always east. The Worshipful Master of the local lodge has his throne in the east end of the ceremonial room; he will often say, "I sit in the east" (which is an insider's expression for "I am the Worshipful Master"). Locations in the throne room for the seats of the Senior and Junior Wardens, the 2 most important officers in the lodge after the Worshipful Master, are in the south and west, respectively. There is no seat in the north, and nothing important happens there. This reverence for the east derives from paganism (nature worship) in general, for the Sun, the source and sustainer of life, rises in the east; and Freemasonry is a modern day expression of Egyptian paganism and the worship of the Sun (Osiris) and the Moon (Isis). In this regard, see Ezekiel Chapter 8, especially verse 16.

The Bible, however, suggests that God is in the north (verse 11), and that the east is the location for ashes and garbage (verse 16).

In the removal of pagan idols from the Temple and surrounding area during spiritual revivals in ancient times, they were broken up and burned in the Kidron valley; and blood for Temple sacrifices was drained into the Kidron Valley for disposal. This Valley, across which Jesus led his disciples to the Mount of Olives on the night in which He was betrayed, and which became place for refuse, is East of the Temple. See in this regard Psalm 48:2 and Isaiah 14:13.

And so, for whatever it may be worth, the scriptural direction of God, at least symbolically, seems to be north.

2. Types of Sacrificial Offerings. (Chapters 1-7)

In Chapters 1-7, there are instructions for presenting the basic kinds of offerings. The details can be mind-boggling, so the following is a brief overview of the basic kinds of offerings.

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a. Burnt Offerings. Bulls, Rams, Goats, Doves and Pigeons (depending on what the individual could afford) were burned completely on the altar; this represented complete surrender to God.

b. "Meat" (Meal) and Drink Offerings. Flour, grain or cakes **without leaven (yeast)** were brought to the priests; it **must be seasoned with salt**, and if it was bread already baked, it was to contain neither leaven nor honey. The priests burned a handful, with incense, on the altar and kept the rest for their food; this represented the concept of the tithe--giving the first-fruits, or first portion, to God. Drink offerings were always wine (see Lev 23:13)³.

c. Peace Offerings. These offerings were cattle, sheep or goats; they were for special occasions (such as Pentecost), and were expressions of thanks for the peace that comes from being rightly related to God. The fat was burned on the altar, and the rest was for the priests and Levites.

d. Sin Offerings and Trespass Offerings. These were animal sacrifices, with different offerings for different offenses. The fat was burned on the altar; the rest, in some cases, was burned outside the camp, and in other cases was eaten by the priests and Levites. When another person had been wronged, restitution plus 1/5 had to be made before the offering could be presented. These offerings symbolized the principle of justice.

e. Wave Offerings and Heave Offerings. These were offerings made for special occasions, or simply gifts for the maintenance of the Tabernacle (later the Temple) and the priests and Levites. There is some disagreement about the unusual names; but they probably refer to the way that these offerings were presented, with the wave offerings held in the hands and moved side-to-side horizontally, and the heave offerings lifted vertically from the shoulder. The nature of the presentation probably depended on the type of offering, with those of lighter weight (grain, bread, wine, etc) "waved," and the heavier (animal) offerings "heaved."

f. "Free Will Offerings". Concerning the above, and all sorts of sacrificial offerings, we shall see in Chapter 22 the necessity of bringing sacrificial gifts to the Lord as "freewill" offerings. The concept of offerings, **required** under the law, yet given as expressions of **our free will**, seems to be a contradiction. It expresses, however, a fundamental, and extremely vital, principle in our relating to our Creator. We are separated from Him by sin,

³ Remember that Jesus said, "I am the bread of life"; here in the bread or meal offerings are symbols: sinlessness (no leaven); salt for preservation and desirable taste ("salt of the earth"); and wine, representing the blood of Christ (I John 1:7, "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us of all sin").



This is the law of the burnt offering, because of the burning upon the altar all night unto the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be burning in it.

Leviticus 6:9

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and we cannot be reconciled to Him without meeting certain requirements; and yet, we must choose to meet these requirements as acts of our free will. There will be no draftees in Heaven--only volunteers.

NOTE: Chapters 8 and 9 describe in detail the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests, briefly described in Exodus 29. From them the following Highlights, 3 through 5, are selected.

3. Seven Days of Consecration. (8:31-36)

Preparing Aaron and his sons for the priesthood, Moses commands them to make certain sacrifices and to stay at the door of the Tabernacle seven days; if they leave before the time is completed, they will die.

4. "Heaven Fire" Part I--YHWH Appears to Aaron, His Sons, and the People. (9:8-24)

With detailed guidance from Moses, Aaron and his sons prepare animal sacrifices for the first time and the glory of YHWH appears to them and to all of the people in the form of fire from Heaven, which descends and consumes the selected animal parts and meal on the altar. In this way, the Israelites are given a visual lesson in the awesome glory and power of God, and His approval of the offering is demonstrated.

5. "Heaven Fire" Part II--Nadab and Abihu Become an Object Lesson. (10:1-11)

This is, in a sense, Part II of God's lesson concerning His glory and power. In the first instance, Aaron and his sons obeyed their instructions exactly, God was pleased, and the result was glorious. But then, for reasons unknown, Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron's sons, take it upon themselves to improvise; they make an offering of "strange fire" and incense. As a result, God sends fire from Heaven a second time and it consumes **them**⁴. With careful obedience to Moses' instructions, the bodies are carried outside the camp as unclean things, and Moses speaks to Aaron and his two surviving sons, who are understandably shocked and grieved. He tells them that they are not to grieve over the death of Nadab and Abihu, "lest you die." Rather, he said, let the children of Israel do the grieving.

Is this extreme? Definitely, by our standards; but the Israelites have much to learn about God's standards. All of this is a powerful object lesson in the

⁴ The punishing "heaven fire" did not actually consume Nadab and Abihu; it just hit them like a lightning bolt, killing them instantly. It appears that the fire did not even burn up their clothes, for Moses commanded that their bodies be picked up "in their coats" and carried out beyond the camp (where unclean things were disposed of).

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majestic purity and power of God, and the deadly danger of disobedience or flippancy in approaching Him.

NOTE: The exact meaning of the "strange fire" mentioned here is unknown; but it almost certainly refers to any fire (actually, hot coals) from any source other than the sacred fire on the altar of God. Since YHWH, in speaking directly to Aaron, declares that the priests must not drink wine or strong drink before ministering at the altar, it is possible that the two sons were drunk when they committed the offense. It certainly appears that the two, who had been consecrated as priests only the day before, were presumptuous, lifted up with their exalted view of their own position as priests.

Everything that the two newly minted priests did in this incident was wrong: Aaron was the attending priest that first day, and they had no business doing anything which they had not been told to do; there was to be only one functioning priest on duty at a time--not three--and they were not supposed to be inside the Tabernacle; fire for the altar of incense was to be taken from the consecrated fire in the altar of burnt offerings--not any other fire; and, in all of this, they were presumptuous, to say the least. In neither passage is "strange fire" explained; but it probably means that they had put coals from another, unconsecrated, fire outside of the Tabernacle, in their censers. Then they put their own incense on the unconsecrated coals, entered the Tabernacle and offered it; thus, they offered "strange fire."

This was a powerful lesson in the purity and majesty of God; but the Israelites, like us, were slow to learn, and quick to forget.

6. Animals for Food: Clean and Unclean. (Chapter 11)

Chapter 11 sets forth those animals (clean) which may be eaten, and those (unclean) which may not be eaten. Even those that are clean may not be eaten (they become unclean) if they die, or are "torn" (killed by a predator) rather than being properly slain and bled out. Those who touch an unclean animal are unclean, but become clean by the end of the day if they wash. Water that has touched an unclean animal is unclean, as is whatever it touches; seeds which are touched by unclean water may be planted, but not eaten. If water in a clay container becomes unclean, the water must be discarded and the container smashed.

Why would God impose such complex rules about food and water? Probably only He knows; but the answer appears to be two-fold:

a. Like all the law, to make the point of God's unimaginable purity, and man's essential sinfulness.

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b. For reasons of health. Undoubtedly many Israelites would have died of infections and other sicknesses had they not been required to obey the laws of clean and unclean things and ceremonial washings. It is also likely that this healthier lifestyle extended their life expectancy. For example see verses 3-8, 9-12 and 29-39.

7. Child-Bearing: Clean and Unclean Women. (12:1-8)

Chapter 12 Establishes the law for cleansing after a woman bears a child. The period of cleansing after bearing a baby girl is twice as long as for a baby boy, but why? I have no idea; but we may be certain that there is a reason, which some day will be revealed to us.

Verse 3 requires the circumcision of a boy baby on the 8th day. The children of Israel probably wondered why it must be done on the 8th day--not a day sooner or a day later--but they could not know why; they could only trust God and obey. Today we know the reason: the clotting factors in the baby's blood are at their peak on the 8th day, and there would be the least danger of excessive bleeding. God, of course, knew this all along⁵. This passage also requires the presentation of an animal sacrifice in celebration of the gift of the new child.

***NOTE:** The offering to be brought to the priest for a new baby is a lamb; if too poor to bring the lamb, the parents are to bring two pigeons or two doves. We know that Mary and Joseph were poor, for this is what they brought after the birth of Jesus⁶.*

8. Laws Concerning Sickness. (13:1-17, 38-46; 14:33-42; 15:1-13)

Chapters 13 through 15 contain laws concerning sickness, especially leprosy, and ritual cleansing. They include even instructions for cleansing a house where sickness has been.

9. The Day of Atonement. (16:1-2, 7-10, 15-17, 20-22, 29-34)

Chapter 16 contains the very detailed instructions for Aaron, as High Priest (and his successors), for the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). On this day temporary atonement is made: first, for the sins of the High Priest himself; and, after that, for all the children of Israel. This ritual of atonement is to be repeated annually in the Fall.

To emphasize the seriousness of approaching the Holy of Holies with its Ark of the Covenant, the instructions begin with a reminder that two of Aaron's sons died because of their presumption. Not only is the High Priest

⁵ See the Study Guide to Genesis 17:12, *NOTE*.

⁶ See in this regard Luke 2:24.

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the only person who may enter the Holy of Holies, and that only once a year, but during the atonement rituals, no one else may be anywhere inside the Tabernacle.

***NOTE:** As we saw in the detailed description of the High Priest's robe in Exodus 28:34, at the bottom of the skirt there are pomegranates of specified colors, alternating with golden bells. As the High Priest moved within the Holy of Holies, he made an audible tinkling sound.*

Although it is not mentioned in the detailed descriptions in Scripture, there is a Jewish tradition that is believed by some and denounced as mythical by many, to the effect that the High Priest had around his ankle a scarlet or golden rope, which extended out into the Holy Place. In this way, if the priests outside no longer heard the tinkling of the bells, they could assume that the High Priest had died, and his body could be dragged out of the Holy of Holies, and recovered, without the death of the priests recovering the body. The earliest record of this practice is in a 13th Century document called the Zohar, and there are problems with it. There is no record to support this idea in the highly detailed descriptions in Scripture, and there is no record of any High Priest's dying in the Holy of Holies.

The Scapegoat. An interesting feature of the Day of Atonement is the selection of the "scapegoat" and his representing the hopelessness of the sinner with no means of redemption⁷. The High Priest takes two kids (young male goats) and presents them to the Lord. He also presents a young bull with horns (bullock) to the LORD. The bull is killed and offered for the atonement of the High Priest and his family. The High Priest then casts lots on the goats, choosing one for a burnt sacrifice to the Lord, and the other as the scapegoat. The sacrifice goat is killed and offered as a sin offering to the Lord for the sins of the people. The High Priest then places his hands on the head of the scapegoat, confesses the sins of the people upon it, and it is driven by a chosen man into the wilderness, carrying the sins of the people into "a land not inhabited," and released. The symbolism is obvious and interesting. And so the sins of the High Priest, the priests, Levites and the common people are dealt with ("covered") for another year.

10. "The Life of the Flesh Is in the Blood". (17:8-16)

Chapter 17 contains prohibitions against making animal sacrifices by anyone except the priests in the Tabernacle, and against eating blood.

⁷ This is the origin of our English word, meaning one who takes the punishment for the wrongdoing of others.

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Animals which die, or those which are killed by wild beasts, may not be eaten; a wild animal killed for food must be bled, and the blood buried or covered with dust. These prohibitions are partly for symbolic reasons, and partly for reasons of health. Verse 11 is the basis for the prohibition of blood transfusions in some cults, such as Jehovah's Witnesses. The beliefs of such cults are extreme and without scientific basis; yet sincere people in those groups willingly die, and allow their children to die, refusing transfusions, believing that they are pleasing God

11. Nakedness, Sexual Sin and Other Matters. (Chapter 18; Chapter 19:9-18, 28, 31-37)

In Chapters 18 and 19 there are detailed prohibitions concerning modesty, sexual sin and paganism that are dealt with in Exodus 20 and 22. The matter of modesty and sexual restrictions was unknown to the Egyptians among whom they had been living for 430 years, and among the Canaanite pagans they were about to encounter. These restrictions concerning nakedness seem to have to do with the sanctity and privacy of sex in the marriage relationship, another concept not only unknown to the pagan world but, to them, bizarre. What God knew, that the God-less pagans did not know, is that the sanctity of the marriage relationship would be necessary for the health and happiness of God's people. In addition, it is made clear that **even the very land can be defiled** by such sinful behavior⁸.

Also, as in Exodus 22, there are strict provisions requiring care for the poor, foreigners, widows and orphans, respect for the elderly, and for honest business dealings. In Chapter 19, verse 28 seems to prohibit tattoos (repeated in 21:5 and Deuteronomy 14:1), and the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves⁹.

***NOTE:** at the end of His earthly ministry, when Jesus was challenged to say what was the most important commandment of all, He said that it was to love God with all that we are, quoting Deut. 6:4-5; then He added a second one, "like unto it," quoting 19:18b here, and said "on these commandments hang all of the Law and the Prophets"¹⁰.*

To "love thy neighbor as thyself" seems like such a radical New Testament concept; and yet, here we find it in the very heart of the Levitical Law.

12. "They Shall Be Burnt with Fire." (20:1-6; 9-23, 27)

⁸ Prohibitions against paganism and sexual sin are frequently combined in the law, as they are here, because the two cannot be separated. Paganism is ultimately sexual in its out-workings.

⁹ Matthew 22:37-40; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8.

¹⁰ Matthew 22:36-40; Mk 12:28-31; Lk 10:25-28; Jas 2:8.

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Chapter 20 repeats the prohibitions against disrespect to parents. It also repeats the forbidding of sexual sins and the occult, pagan practices of the Canaanites, such as consulting with evil ("familiar") spirits, and restrictions concerning nakedness and modesty. In this chapter, the death penalty is not only prescribed for certain of these sins, but in one case the offenders are to be burned (presumably after being stoned to death). In other cases, perhaps dealing with unlawful marriages (verse 20), the offenders will be punished by being childless.

This chapter summarizes sins, some of which should be unthinkable, yet in the all-knowing mind of God they are not. They were common among the pagans of Egypt, and were common among the pagans of Canaan among whom the Israelites were about to go. This brief chapter summarizes the sexual sins of pagans, and adds the occult sins of witchcraft and consulting with "familiar" spirits, which God saw fit to repeat (verses 6 and 27).

13. Ceremonial Holiness Required of the Priests. (Chapter 21; 22:1-7; 10-11)

Chapters 21 and 22 set forth requirements for the priesthood concerning separation from anything unclean. Contact with a dead body is forbidden unless a close relative; interestingly, this exception for a daughter applies only if she is a virgin. The prohibitions are strict; for example, a man with a physical deformity, although descended from Aaron, cannot function as a priest; he has all the privileges of food, etc, but no priestly duties. They are strictly forbidden to "make any cuttings in their flesh" or to "make baldness upon their head." These were pagan practices (see 19:27-28). The prohibitions are still more strict for the High Priest; for example, he must marry only a virgin (cannot marry a widow as other priests can), and if one of his daughters should become sexually promiscuous she is to be burned (presumably after being stoned, as required by the law of adultery/fornication). A priest or a member of his family who is ceremonially unclean, or with certain illnesses, could not eat the consecrated food in the priest's home until cleansed.

NOTES:

a. This prohibition concerning death and burial of family members, which seems to us to be arbitrary if not cruel (for it excludes a married daughter, whom the priest would love as much as an unmarried daughter), seems to be just another way of expressing the purity of God and the sinful contamination of men, and the privileged position of the priests in approaching the presence of God. Under the New Covenant, all believers

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have the privilege of close fellowship with God through our Great High Priest, Jesus, a precious gift that we often take too lightly.

b. Verses 10-11 are interesting, and their significance is easily overlooked. The consecrated food that feeds the priests cannot be shared with a foreigner who is lodged in the priest's home, or with a hired servant; yet it could be shared with a slave! Under the Old Covenant slavery was a common practice among the Israelites, including the priests; but such a slave became part of the owner's family, and God made careful provisions for the slave's well-being.

c. If we think about these repeated prohibitions of certain forms of sin, we find that the ones most strongly on the mind of God--and thus worthy of repetition--are in two groups: sexual sin and occult sin (witchcraft, familiar spirits, etc.). And, often, sins within the two groups apply to both.

Other sins, proscribed in the Ten Commandments and in following passages of the Old Testament, seem to be plain and straightforward. The many forms of sexual and occult sin, however, need to be carefully specified and repeated; and the punishments are severe.

This singling out of these two forms of sin, and the severity of the punishments, are (as often stated in the text) because they are commonly practiced among the Egyptians, among whom the Israelites have lived for 430 years, and will be commonly practiced by the Canaanites, among whom they are about to live.

14. Free Will Offerings. (22:17-29).

Chapter 22, among other things, emphasizes the necessity for the presentation of ceremonial sacrifices as "freewill" offerings, i.e., that they are to be brought as an expression of gratitude to the Lord for their prosperity. For a discussion of the theological significance of this, see the previous Highlight 2, sub-highlight f. For a New Testament expression of this concept, see II Corinthians 9:5-7.

15. Sabbaths and Feasts.

In Chapter 23, the Lord sets forth instructions for the weekly Sabbaths, and for the seven yearly festivals (feasts)¹¹:

a. The Weekly Sabbath. (23:1-3)

A reiteration of the weekly Sabbath day observance required in Ex 20:8-11.

b. The Feast of the Passover. (23:4-5)

¹¹ Detailed instructions for some of these feasts are also set forth in Numbers 28 and 29.

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A reiteration of the Passover observance, beginning on the 14th day of the first month, which is fully described in Exodus 12.

c. The Feast of Unleavened Bread. (23:6-8)

The seven days following Passover (beginning on the 15th day of the first month), during which no leaven (yeast) may be eaten. The first and seventh days are Sabbath days, and offerings are made by fire to the Lord daily.

d. The Feast of First Fruits. (23:9-14)

The day after the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the harvest of barley begins; and the first sheaf (armload) of barley is brought to the priest, who waves it before the Lord. Then a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, is offered as a burnt offering, along with fine meal, mixed with olive oil, and wine as a drink offering. The principle of offering the first-fruits to God is to put Him first in all things.

e. The Feast of Pentecost. (23:15-21)

Seven weeks after the waving of the sheaf of barley First Fruits, is the feast of Pentecost (also called the Feast of the Harvest, for it is the time of the wheat harvest, about seven weeks after the barley harvest). "Pentecost" is Greek for 50th, referring to the 50th day after First Fruits; the Greek name for this Jewish feast is taken from the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament). Offered to the Lord are two large loaves of leavened bread, seven male lambs of the first year without blemish, one young bullock and two rams for burnt offerings, along with drink offerings. Then shall be sacrificed one kid as a sin offering and two lambs of the first year for a peace offering. These, with the bread, shall be wave offerings before the lord.

NOTES:

1. These offerings almost certainly were made only once, to represent all the families; for if thousands of each item were brought to be sacrificed, they would vastly overwhelm the ability of the priests to handle them.

2. According to Jewish tradition, when an animal like a calf or bullock was sacrificed as a wave offering, it was led, back and forth, before the altar before being slain. Such an animal would have been too heavy for a priest literally to hold it up in the air and wave it before the Lord.

f. The Feast of Trumpets. (23:23-25)

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In the seventh month (our Autumn), the first day of the month is a holy convocation, with blowing of trumpets. Burnt offerings are to be made to the Lord¹².

g. The Feast of Atonement. (23:26-32)

In the seventh month, the 10th day of the month is a Sabbath day and a holy convocation, the annual Day of Atonement. On this day the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies, sprinkles blood on the mercy seat covering the Ark of the Covenant, and makes atonement for his own sins and the sins of the people.

h. The Feast of Tabernacles. (23:33-36)

In the seventh month, on the 15th day of the month, begins the Feast of Tabernacles. For eight days each day is a holy convocation, with burnt offerings. The eighth day is a solemn assembly. No work may be done during these eight days.

16. The Death Penalty for Blasphemy. (24:10-16)

Here, in verses 10-16, the death penalty for blasphemy is established.

An un-named member of the tribe of Dan, son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man, is involved in a conflict with another Israelite man and, in the course of the conflict, cursed (presumably cursing the other man). In so cursing, this man blasphemed the name of the LORD (YHWH). People who heard the conflict must have been horrified, for the man was brought to Moses; since there had as yet been no law given concerning blasphemy, Moses had him kept under arrest while he sought guidance from the LORD.

The LORD spoke, and the penalty established was death¹³. The offender was to be brought forth, outside the camp; **those who heard and accused him** must lay their hands on him and then stone him to death, along with the rest of the people.

***NOTE:** The name of God used in this passage is YHWH, the unique name of God, the one which separates Him from all pagan gods or human masters. Note also that the apparent wisdom in this seems to be that it would discourage false accusations, since no one could make a false charge, and then be at a comfortable distance from the execution; rather, he was required to be one of the executioners.*

¹² In the text, the items offered are not specified; however, in Nu 29:1-6 they are said to be one young bullock, one ram, seven lambs, and one kid, along with fine flour and oil.

¹³ There is here an interesting differentiation in the severity of the offense, whether the name of God thus blasphemed was YHWH (LORD or GOD) (v15), or Elohim (God) (v16). One can only wonder, for the Trinity is a mystery; however, it may have to do with the fact that YHWH is the **unique** name of God.

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17. A Sabbath Rest Year for the Land. (25:1-7)

The land shall be given a Sabbath rest of one year, every seventh year. In this sabbatical year no plowing shall be done, no crops shall be grown or harvested, nor shall grape vines be pruned nor the grapes harvested. The concept is easy to understand; what is difficult to know is what the people were to eat during that year. Verses 6 and 7 are unclear and difficult; many commentators simply pass them by without comment. Perhaps the best interpretation is that the owners were to eat from what crops grew voluntarily, and to take only what was needed to live; there was to be no proprietary harvest for sale or profit, and the poor and the stranger were to be allowed also to pick and eat what they needed¹⁴.

NOTE: *The Hebrew word sheb-boo-aw (week or weeks) is often used in the Old Testament to mean seven years. Since seven is the biblical number of completion or fulfillment, as in fulfilling an obligation. In Gen 29:27, Laban told Jacob that he would give him Rachel as his wife if Jacob would "fulfill her week"; and in v 28 we are told that Jacob "fulfilled her week." In these verses "week" means a period of seven years. The most frequent use of "week" meaning seven years is in the Book of Daniel, where it is used 10 times in the prophecies of Chapters 9 and 10. Keep this in mind as we make our way through Chapters 25 and 26.*

18. The Year of Jubilee. (25:8-24)

After every period of seven "Sabbaths of years" (seven times seven years, or 49 years), there would be a year of jubilee in the 50th year. It was to be opened with the trumpet of jubilee, to "proclaim liberty throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof," the beginning of a year of freedom, rejoicing, forgiveness and rest¹⁵. During this 50th year all debts and mortgages were to be forgiven, Hebrew slaves and bond servants were to be liberated, and land that had been lost due to debt was to be restored to its original owner.

As in the Sabbath year (Highlight 17), there was to be no planting, pruning or commercial harvesting; all were to live on what crops grew voluntarily, and the food was to be shared by all. Among the things symbolized by this Year of Jubilee, when no work was done and all the people were provided for by God Himself, was the reminder of the way man had once lived in the

¹⁴ In this matter the Israelites were never obedient. Because of this, their ultimate captivity was to last 70 years, 1/7th of the 490 years that elapsed after entering the Promised Land. In this way, the prophets explained, God would give the land its Sabbath years that the people had refused to give it.

¹⁵ The inscription on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is a direct quotation from Lev. 25:10.

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Garden of Eden, before sin came, and the fact that what we call ownership of land is temporary custody at best, for it all belongs to God. Ultimately, Jubilee pointed to the coming of Christ, when all sin debts could be forgiven, and slaves to sin could be set free, with perfect equality among those who would trust in Him.

NOTE: Verses 35 through 55 contain rules for the buying, selling, and treatment of slaves and bondservants (servants sold into bond service for a limited number of years). Special emphasis is put upon the underlying requirement that slaves and bondservants must not be treated with harshness or cruelty; for the LORD says that, ultimately, the slaves and bondservants belong to Him.

19. A Promise and a Dire, Prophetic Warning. (26:1-12, 14-17, 21-29, 32-39, 44-46)

Chapter 26 presents a vivid expression of the combined mercy and justice of God. It contains a promise of peace and prosperity if the Israelites obey the Lord, followed by a fearsome warning of what evil will ultimately befall them if they do not obey. Actually, the warning is prophetic, for of course God knew how badly they would ultimately rebel against Him. The dire warning spells out what actually occurred, more than 500 years later, as a result of the people's disobedience. He even tells them that their descendants will "pine away" in captivity, in order that the Sabbath years' rest for the land (which they would fail to give it) could be fulfilled¹⁶. The chapter ends with a beautiful promise of the unfailing love and mercy of God ("And yet for all that...I will not cast them away").

NOTE: During the crucifixion, 1,500 years later, the supernatural tearing open of the Veil of the Temple, which had separated all but the High Priest from the Ark of the Covenant and the very presence of God, will symbolize a wonderful change. From that moment until the present, all believers, with Jesus, the Christ of God, as our High Priest, will have have direct access, through Him, to the Father. The Levitical system will have served its purpose and come to an end, although its practices would continue for about 38 more years, until the Roman general, Titus, would destroy the Temple completely and plow the site, as if it had never been there.

20. Temple Tax, Vows and Sanctified People and Things. (Chapter 27)

¹⁶ See, in this regard, Jeremiah 25:11 and Daniel 9:2.

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Chapter 27 establishes the annual tax for maintaining the Tabernacle, (and later the Temple). It is precise, based upon the age of the male, and is measured in shekels of silver.

The chapter also deals with vows, sanctified things, and faithfulness in observing the laws of God. An interesting detail is revealed in verses 31 and 32; it is the principle of tithing to the LORD, that is, giving 1/10th of our gain to Him and his Kingdom. This principle applies to his people today, and will until Christ returns in glory and brings to an end all things as we have known them

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