



TODAY IN THE **WORD**[®]

A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

A Study of Leviticus

APRIL 2023

All on the Altar

From the President of Moody Bible Institute

"Sometimes pursuing the call of God requires that sort of dramatic break away from our past. We need to take a stand for the change God wants to see in our life, putting everything on the altar."



What does it look like to put everything on the altar for God? As we study the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, I

am reminded of the story of a young man named Gideon. In Judges, we find God's people in a desperate state, worshiping foreign gods and oppressed by their enemy.

Gideon described himself as the most insignificant member of his tribe. Like many in Israel, Gideon's family had their own altar to Baal and an Asherah pole, dedicated to the goddess of fertility. Worship of these foreign gods was demonic and even involved human sacrifice. Imagine young man's surprise when the angel of the Lord appeared, addressing him as a "mighty warrior" (Judges 6:12). The angel told Gideon to "take" a bull from his father's herd, "tear down" the family altar, and use it to "build" an altar to the Lord (vv. 25–26). Knowing this would be shocking to his family and community, Gideon obeyed. He destroyed his family's altar, then constructed an altar to the Lord God, sacrificing the bull on it.

Sometimes pursuing the call of God requires that sort of dramatic break away from our past. We need to take a stand for the change God wants to see in our life, putting everything on the altar. We repent of the sin that has become all too familiar and say, "This will not be repeated."

At our church, I met a man called Big Don. He was 6'4", weighed 220 lbs, and had a crack cocaine addiction. After years of his aunt badgering him, he finally agreed to come to church. The first time Don showed up at the service, his arms were crossed in defiance. But the next week he heard the gospel, and, sobbing, gave his life to Christ. In a massive transformation, he gave up his addiction. Don's obsession with drugs turned into a passion to help others. Don became an addiction counselor and has now helped hundreds of people walk down the path of sobriety and drug-free living. "I have a passion to see people set free."

Friend, I believe that your greatest shame, your greatest weakness, even the darkest area of your past, can be completely transformed when God gets a hold of it, and you throw it all on the altar. What once brought shame is now used for His glory! ■

Once for All

by Dr. John Koessler

“Sacrifices pointed out the problem sin poses but were not meant to solve it. That task was reserved for Christ.”

Leviticus is not an easy book to read, with its collection of rules and rituals. Old Testament scholar R. K. Harrison calls the book of Leviticus “a well-organized reference manual for the Old Testament priesthood.”

Those more familiar with the New Testament than the Old may feel as if they are in an entirely different world when they read Leviticus, and in a way, they are. The sacrifices and repeated cycles of offerings had a temporary function and played a specific role in God’s plan of redemption. According to the author of Hebrews, they were a “shadow” of what Christ would do and served as a “reminder of sins” (Heb. 10:1, 3). In other words, these sacrifices pointed out the problem sin poses but were not meant to solve it. That task was reserved for Christ.

The book of Hebrews points out a fundamental difference between the sacrifices in Leviticus and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The sacrifices required by the law of Moses were merely a “copy” (Heb. 9:24). As a reminder of sin, they were repeated on a regular basis. The offering of

Christ was real and permanent. Jesus “appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26).

As a foreshadowing of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice of Himself, the book of Leviticus has much to teach us. But Christ’s perfect offering has made Leviticus obsolete as a worship manual (see also Heb. 8:3). Unlike these sacrifices, Jesus does not need to be offered again and again (Heb. 10:11–12). By that one sacrifice, “he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Heb. 10:14). We do not draw near to God by offering the blood of bulls and goats but “by the blood of Jesus” who provided “a new and living way” (Heb. 10:19–20).

The mode of worship described in Leviticus paved the way for the worship we read about in the New Testament. We can learn about sin and holiness by studying Leviticus. But we cannot be made perfect by the sacrifices it describes. For that, we need Jesus! ■

For Further Study

To learn more, read *Leviticus* by Samuel Schultz (Moody Publishers).

Go Deeper

We hope these questions will help you consider (or discuss with others) what God is teaching you through this month's study of His Word. We've left a bit of room to write down your thoughts as well!

WEEK 1: What do the sacrifices in ancient Israel teach us about the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross? What connections do you see? (see April 6)

WEEK 2: How does your belief in God influence practical things, such as what you eat, wear, or spend your free time on? (see April 11)

WEEK 3: How do you react to the consequences of sin outlined in Leviticus 20? What does this teach us about God's view of sin? (see April 20)

WEEK 4: When we worship, what should be our focus? How do we know if worship is successful or not? (see April 22)

Want more questions? Check out the Go Deeper section on our website or app!

April 2023

TODAY IN THE WORD®


The Heart of Worship: A Study of Leviticus

Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.—Leviticus 19:1

The detailed procedures for sacrifices, lists of clean and unclean animals, and peculiar laws in the book of Leviticus may seem too complicated and irrelevant for us today. But as we celebrate our risen Savior this month, Leviticus will reveal Christ's sacrifice to us through the pictures in the Old Testament. We'll see His death and resurrection in a new way and learn to worship Him better. We pray this study will help you:

- Be inspired to worship God in every aspect of your life
- Understand the purpose of sacrifice, fulfilled by the atoning work of Jesus
- Grow in holiness, to become more like Christ

Your devotional author,



Ryan J. Cook

Dr. Ryan Cook is professor of Bible at Moody Theological Seminary. He earned his BA in Bible and Theology from Moody, his MA in Old Testament from Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, and his doctorate from Asbury Theological Seminary. Ryan lives with his wife, Ashley, and their three children in Northwest Indiana.

VOLUME 36 • ISSUE 4

Managing Editor: Jamie Janosz Senior Editor: Elena Mafter Contributing Editor: John Koessler Writer: Ryan Cook
Art Director: Lynn Gabalec Graphic Designer: Rachel Hutcheson Marketing & Production: Paul B. Currie

Moody Bible Institute is the sole publisher of *Today in the Word*, copyright © 2023 by Moody Bible Institute. All rights reserved. Please direct all *Today in the Word* inquiries to Donor Resource Management, 820 N. LaSalle Blvd., Chicago, IL 60610. Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Printed in the U.S.A. *Today in the Word* is published monthly. Printed on 30% recycled paper.

TODAYINTHEWORD.ORG

From and For

Read Leviticus 1:1–2

God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.—1 Corinthians 1:9

In church, we like to talk about what we were saved *from*. We were saved from sin and God's judgment. But we don't often stop to ask, "What were we saved *for*?" What has God called us to? The Bible from beginning to end describes how we were created to be in relationship with God and dwell in His presence.

The end of Exodus (40:34–38) describes the cloud which represented the glory of God, filling the tabernacle (v. 34). This cloud would lead Israel through their journey to the Promised Land (v. 36). But there was a problem. God is holy and pure and cannot dwell among sinful people. How then could He dwell with Israel? After Israel's sin with the golden calf, God told Moses, "Go up to [the] land . . . but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people" (Ex. 33:3). But Moses would not accept that answer, and God agreed to continue to dwell with Israel (Ex. 33:12–16).

However, for God to dwell among His people, He needed a way for their sin to be atoned and for His holiness to be protected. Israel would become like the burning bush, having the fire of God's presence in their midst but not being consumed by it. The sacrifices and offerings outlined in great detail in Leviticus taught Israel about sin and God's holiness. They would show them, and us, how precious it is to be in fellowship with God.

The New Testament draws from the language and teaching of Leviticus. When we better understand the Old Testament view of sin and the requirements for sacrifice, we will better appreciate what Jesus achieved on the cross.

► What were you saved from? What are you saved for? As we begin this study of Leviticus, reflect on those two questions. It is our prayer that you will grow in your understanding of and relationship to our holy God.

Pray with Us

Lord, to know You is to comprehend holiness; to comprehend holiness is to fear You; to fear You is to revere You; to revere You is to love You. You saved us from what we deserve so we could love and glorify You.

Total Dedication

Read Leviticus 1:3–17

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.—Romans 12:1

Have you ever noticed how many people are involved in planning a church service? From people in the sound booth, to musicians, to building maintenance and ushers. When leading people in worship, it is important to get the details right. We see this type of attention to detail in Leviticus as well.

Today's reading covers the most foundational sacrifice, the whole-burnt offering. Unlike other offerings where a portion of the offering would support the priests or be given back to the worshiper as part of a celebration meal, in the whole-burnt offering the entire animal was consumed on the altar (see also Lev. 6:8–13).

Imagine being present at such an offering. The crowd of worshipers would press forward toward the tabernacle. You would hear the animals being led toward the altar. You would see the priest examine each animal to ensure it met the requirements (v. 3). The animal's hide would be warm to the touch as you

rested your hand on its head (v. 4). Then the smell of the offering being consumed would fill the room. This was an experience that includes all five senses. This was also a worship experience that involved everyone; the rich (v. 5), middle class (v. 10), and poor (v. 14). The size of the offering did not matter as much as the heart of the worshiper (Ps. 69:30–31).

The purpose of this offering was to provide atonement or payment for sin (v. 4). By placing your hand on the animal's head, you identified yourself with the animal. You were noting that this animal was taking your place so that your sin could be symbolically covered, and you could be in fellowship with a holy God.

► This ritual pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice for sin, Jesus Christ (Eph 5:2). Jesus covered our sin once and for all for those who trust in Him. Just as the whole burnt offering was completely given to the Lord, we too are to hold nothing back (Rom. 12:1).

Pray with Us

Much as we want to be wholly surrendered to You, we struggle to submit completely. Please continue to do Your work in our hearts, giving us humility, joy, and delight in Your Word and Your will.

Giving to God

Read Leviticus 2:1–16

*Do not forget to do good and to share with others,
for with such sacrifices God is pleased. —Hebrews 13:16*

On my office desk, I keep some homemade bookmarks, a gift from my daughter. She took some things she had lying around the house and created this lovely present. Each bookmark is decorated with pictures and quotes like, “just one more chapter . . .” or “fell asleep here.”

In Israel, anyone could offer a gift to God. Today’s reading describes the grain offering (v. 1; see also Lev. 6:14–23). The Bible teaches that grain, wheat, and other produce is a gift from God (Ps. 65:9–13). The grain offering was a way for people to take this produce, work it with their hands, and offer it back to God.

The offering itself was quite simple, wheat prepared with olive oil and incense (v. 2). It was to be baked without yeast or honey (v. 11). Later in Scripture we see leaven used to symbolize the pervasive nature of sin (Matt. 16:6; 1 Cor. 5:6–7). This could be a reason why it is prohibited here. The prohibition on date/honey could be instituted because it was used in Canaanite worship.

Not only was this offering a way anyone could give to God, but it also provided for the priests. After a token portion was burned on the altar, the rest of it went to help feed the priests who worked in the tabernacle (vv. 2–3). The priests were not given any land in Israel to grow their own crops, so they were dependent on the offerings of the people (Deut. 18:1–4).

One other element in this offering was salt (v. 13). Salt was primarily used to preserve food in the ancient world. Because of this preservative quality, it became a symbol of the enduring nature of God’s covenant with His people (Num. 18:19). God was committed to a permanent relationship with His people in a “covenant of salt.”

► Today, consider what you can give to God. Maybe you can offer Him praise (Heb. 13:15–16) or support ministry efforts (Phil. 4:18). After all, everything we own is already His!

Pray with Us

As Your children we have made You an offering of ourselves, living sacrifices for Your glory. Today, what can we offer as another token of our love and adoration? We will bless whom You bless and support what You support.

Give Thanks!

Read Leviticus 3:1–17

Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind.—Psalm 107:21

The only time I eat turkey and pumpkin pie is at Thanksgiving. It is my favorite holiday. Thanksgiving is one of the few times a year when our extended family is together without much of an agenda other than enjoying each other's company. It is also a time to stop and give thanks to God for His blessings over the past year.

The fellowship offering was unique for ancient Israel (read also Lev. 7:11–34). It could be an offering from any animal from the herd or flock without defect (vv. 1, 6). It was also the only offering where only a portion of it was consumed on the altar or by the priest. Most of the offering was enjoyed as a meal by the worshiper (7:15). Meat was expensive and would not have been an everyday food in ancient Israel. So, presenting a fellowship offering was a time of joyful celebration as the whole family would enjoy a meal together.

I can imagine how excited children would be when they found

out they were going as a family to offer a fellowship offering. This offering was given as an expression of thanksgiving (7:12, 15), for the fulfillment of a vow, or as a spontaneous freewill offering (7:16). This offering was a way for people in Israel to have table fellowship with each other in the presence of God.

The order of the sacrifices in Leviticus is also significant. The whole burnt offering was presented first. That offering was for atonement for sin. The whole burnt offering made the fellowship offering possible. Only when sin has been atoned for can we have fellowship with God. That is one of the reasons this offering is joyful. In the New Testament, Jesus' death on the cross provided our once-for-all atonement for sin, so we can enjoy fellowship with God.

► Even though it is April, why not have a special meal of thanksgiving? Give thanks to God for what He has done. Celebrate His love and goodness together!

Pray with Us

Father, thank You for admitting us into fellowship with You! Thank You for creating us with the capacity for relating to others. Thank You for endowing us with love and affection for You and for Your creation.

Sin and Forgiveness

Read Leviticus 4:1–5:13

For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.—Hebrews 10:14

While driving down a two-lane road in rural northern Michigan, I looked in my rearview mirror only to see flashing red lights. When the police officer pulled me over, he asked if I knew why. I honestly did not. He informed me that the speed limit had lowered to 35 mph because the road was approaching a small town. Unfortunately, my ignorance did not get me off the hook.

Today's reading describes the sin offering (see also Lev. 6:24–30). This offering was provided for two different situations, for unintentional sins or for ceremonial uncleanness (5:2–4). These laws reflect several important spiritual principles.

First, the more responsibility a person had, the greater the consequences of their sin for the community. This principle is reflected in the size of the required offering of a high priest or leader in the community compared with a common person. Leaders have a greater potential to lead others astray and so are held to a higher standard (James 3:1).

Second, the whole nation could be guilty of unintentional sin (Lev. 4:13). This may be difficult for those of us in a culture influenced by Western individualism to understand. But it is possible for a group of people to sin corporately, for example, Israel's covenant with Gibeon without consulting the Lord (Josh. 9:14).

Third, everyone needed to have their sin atoned through sacrifice, not just the leaders. To make provision for this, God accepted smaller offerings from those who had less means (Lev. 5:11–13). It was never about the size of the offering, but what it represented. The ritual had three steps: laying one's hands on the offering, which included confession of sin (4:29; 16:21); presentation of the sacrifice; and receiving forgiveness (4:31).

► The same pattern holds true today. We can be forgiven if we confess our sins (1 John 1:9). The sacrifices in Leviticus point forward to Jesus, the once-for-all sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:14). Spend time in confession today.

Pray with Us

"The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—come not from [You] but from the world" (1 John 2:16). Father, forgive us for our sins—whether deliberate or unintentional. Sanctify us, make us more like You!

He Gets Us

Read Leviticus 5:14–6:7

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.—Isaiah 53:6

When I was fresh out of college, I worked for a couple of years as a high school teacher. I noticed that students gravitated toward a particular teacher, Mr. S. One day I asked a student, “What do you like about him?” The student responded, “Oh, Mr. S., he gets us.” Mr. S. understood what students cared about, struggled with, and needed: he was a good teacher.

One of the things that the book of Leviticus has taught so far is that God gets us. He entered a covenant relationship with Israel, which included laws regarding how Israel should act toward Him and toward each other. However, He also knew that Israel was not going to be able to live up to their commitments. God provided a way for them to atone for sin so they could remain in fellowship with Him. As the Psalmist put it, God “knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14).

Today’s reading describes the guilt offering (see also Lev. 7:1–10) to atone for three kinds of sins. First, if someone had profaned sacred property (5:15), for example, eating food dedicated to a priest or withholding a tithe or some other violation against the sanctuary. Second, it was offered if they unintentionally broke one of the Lord’s commands (v. 17). Third, for defrauding or deceiving another Israelite and lying about it under oath (6:1–3). In each instance, the person would offer a ram as a sacrifice to atone for their sin. They also needed to make restitution for the wrong they had committed. For example, defrauding a neighbor required a return of the value plus 20 percent in addition to the sacrifice.

► Isaiah 53 describes Jesus as our guilt offering. His death made possible the full forgiveness and atonement of sin (v. 10). Have you trusted in Jesus so that you can be made right with God?

Pray with Us

Dear God, forgive me for falling short and grant me salvation. I believe in You; I believe that Jesus is Your Son; I believe that He took the punishment I justly deserve so I can have eternal life in You.

Dedicated to God

Read Leviticus 8:1–36

He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.—2 Corinthians 1:21–22

Some professions require people to wear a particular uniform. A police officer wears a badge and uniformed pants and shirt. If you see someone in a white coat with a stethoscope around their neck, most likely they are a doctor. Each uniform communicates that these people have been trained, equipped, and authorized to engage in their profession.

In Leviticus chapters 1 to 7, the Lord outlined all the various sacrifices Israel was to offer in the tabernacle. In today's reading, the focus shifts to the priests who would carry out these sacrifices and offerings.

Aaron and his sons had been set apart by God to minister on behalf of Israel in the tabernacle (vv. 1–3). In front of the whole nation, Moses called Aaron and his sons forward, washed them, dressed them in their priestly garments, and anointed them with oil (vv. 5–13). Much attention is given to their clothing. You may notice that there

is no mention of shoes or sandals. This is because the priests working in the tabernacle would not wear sandals since they were on holy ground (Ex. 3:2–5).

To consecrate them as priests, Moses had to offer a sin offering to atone for their sin (Lev. 8:14–17). He then offered a ram for their ordination (vv. 22–29). One unusual part of this offering is that some of the blood of the sacrifice was put on the right ear, thumb, and big toe of the priests (vv. 23–24). This represents that they would be totally dedicated to God. They would hear His word with their ear and do it with their hands and feet.

► Today is Good Friday, and we remember Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross. As believers, we have been consecrated by the blood of Jesus and anointed by God's Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21–22). Jesus is our great High Priest and has appointed us to serve as a "royal priesthood" of believers (1 Peter 2:9). How will you serve Him today?

Pray with Us

Lord, even mature believers struggle with doubt at times. On this Good Friday, comfort us with the truth that we are consecrated to You by the blood of Jesus; we are Yours, marked and sealed forever.

An Approved Order

Read Leviticus 9:1–24

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.—John 1:14

When my wife and I put our youngest daughter to bed, she likes things done in a certain order. First my wife will pray with her and say goodnight. Only then can I come in and do the same. For some reason, it just does not work if we change places.

In today's reading, the priests have gone through a seven-day ordination ceremony. On the eighth day, they are now ready to begin their ministry (v. 1). You will notice a great deal of precision in this book, this portion focuses on the order of the first sacrifices.

Moses instructs Aaron and the priests to first sacrifice a sin offering and burnt offering for themselves (v. 2). Only then could they offer the sin and burnt offerings for the people (v. 7). The order of the sacrifices teaches an important principle: Leaders need to first take care of their own relationship with God before they can lead others (Acts 20:28).

After the sacrifices for atonement were offered, the fellowship offering

could be given (v. 18). To be in right relationship with God requires that our sin is atoned for. As we have seen throughout the book, these sacrifices pointed forward to the greater and permanent sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The only reason anyone can be in right relationship with God is because He provided a way for us.

God demonstrated His approval of this worship service through the appearance of His glory in the sight of all the people. Fire came out from the Most Holy Place and consumed the offering. When “the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people,” their reaction was immediate: they “shouted for joy and fell facedown” (vv. 23, 24).

► Leviticus reminds us that our sacrifices to God not only have to be offered they also have to be accepted. Praise God today that He accepted Jesus as the permanent and perfect sacrifice for our sin. This gives us reason to shout for joy and worship (v. 24)!

Pray with Us

Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ for substituting His blood for ours! Your blood gives us secure hope, driving purpose, patience in suffering, comfort in loss, and never-ending fellowship with You!

A Consuming Fire

Read Leviticus 10:1–3

What will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?—1 Peter 4:17

Is a fire always bad? According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire, forest fires serve some important roles. They clean the forest floor, provide wildland habitats for animals, and rid trees of dangerous diseases. While a fire may destroy, it also provides life for future generations.

The fire described in Leviticus 10 is shocking. Everything had been going so well for Israel. The priests were consecrated for their ministry and God had accepted their sacrifice. That same day, Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu offered incense in an "unauthorized fire" and everything changed (v. 1). What did Nadab and Abihu do wrong?

Well, just about everything. First, they were not the right people to offer incense in the Holy of Holies, that was the high priest's job (v. 1). Second, they offered this incense at the wrong time. It was only on the Day of Atonement that the high priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies to burn incense (Lev. 16). Third, they offered the wrong kind of incense.

The word translated "unauthorized" is more literally "strange" or "foreign" (v. 1). Nadab and Abihu could have been introducing a foreign or pagan ritual into the worship of the Lord.

Because of their disobedience, "fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them" (v. 2). Instead of a fire that consumed the sacrifice, they were themselves consumed in judgment. Their essential problem was thinking they knew better. They didn't take God or His word seriously (v. 3), they didn't treat God as holy. God wanted to make sure that Israel knew they could approach Him only on His terms, according to His commands.

► On this Resurrection Sunday, we celebrate our risen Savior who has conquered death forever. This truth should impact our worship! The writer of Hebrews reminds us: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (Heb. 12:28–29).

Pray with Us

On this Easter Sunday, Lord, as we celebrate Your resurrection, we also remember what You delivered us from. In compassion You endured our just penalty so that we could be made holy!

The Burden of Leadership

Read Leviticus 10:4–20

*From everyone who has been given much,
much will be demanded.—Luke 12:48*

In the midst of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln's eleven-year-old son William succumbed to typhoid fever. Because of the crisis embroiling the nation, Lincoln did not have much time to stop and mourn. He carried his grief with him as he conducted his responsibilities as President.

In ancient Israel, it was common to enter a period of formal mourning at the death of a loved one. The mourning ritual involved tearing your clothes and not caring for your hair or handling the dead body. Aaron and his sons had been consecrated for ministry to offer sacrifices on behalf of the nation. They had been in the midst of the worship associated with the dedication of the tabernacle when tragedy occurred.

Moses reminded Aaron that despite the loss of two of his sons, he had to fulfill his role as high priest (vv. 6–7). Moses was not saying Aaron could not be sad or grieve. Rather as leaders, the priests had a job that they needed to complete. In

verses 8–11, the Lord spoke to Aaron directly and commanded him and his sons not to drink any alcoholic beverage while on duty. One reason could be that alcohol was involved in Nadab and Abihu's sin—although this is not stated directly. The Lord provided several reasons why priests should abstain while on duty. They needed to be able to think clearly to distinguish between the clean and unclean (v. 10).

Part of their role was also to teach the Law of Moses to the people (v. 11). In Israel, it wasn't just the priests or religious leaders who needed to know God's word. All the people were to be trained in the knowledge of God's commands.

► Today's reading reminds us that Christian leaders are held to a higher standard. Jesus taught, that "from everyone who has been given much; much will be demanded" (Luke 12:48). Take a few moments today to pray for your pastor or other spiritual leaders whom God has placed in your life.

Pray with Us

Our pastors and elders are big targets of the Enemy. Lord, please strengthen them in faith and surround them with trusted friends who will support them and graciously hold them accountable.

You Are What You Eat

Read Leviticus 11:1–47

Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them. —Mark 7:15

Keto. Paleo. Atkins. Vegan. Carnivore. Mediterranean. The sheer number of popular diets can be bewildering. We love food and, at the same time, we worry about what we eat. That makes diets a lucrative business. According to CNBC, in 2021 the diet industry was worth an estimated \$71 billion.

In Leviticus, God gave His people specific laws about food. Israel did not have to turn to diet books to discern what was acceptable to eat or not. It is important to note that Israel did not separate religion from the rest of their life. They understood that obedience to God involved not just worshiping at the sanctuary, but also everyday decisions of what to eat, what to wear, and how to treat people. Following dietary laws would have reminded Israelites a couple of times each day that they were God's people. Observing these laws would help instill an attitude of obedience to God.

It is important to remember that in places Leviticus was primarily a procedural manual. It does not always

explain the rationale for various laws. Several explanations have been offered to explain the logic of the food laws: (1) Hygiene—unclean animals were often unhealthy and more prone to disease; (2) Morality—some animals acted in ways that served as examples of behavior to avoid or emulate; and (3) Holiness—Israel was to be separate from the nations around them.

This last option finds the most biblical support. After presenting the food laws, God says, “Be holy, because I am holy” (v. 45). These laws would prevent God's people from having close table fellowship with their Canaanite neighbors and maintain their distinctive Israelite identity. These laws became especially important during exile.

► Does your belief in God influence what you eat, what you wear, or how you spend your free time? While the New Testament makes clear that all foods have been declared clean (Mark 7:19), we are also called to stand out from the world because of our commitment to Christ (John 13:35).

Pray with Us

God, may our devotion to You be reflected in every choice that we make, from what we eat to how we spend our time. If others notice and ask questions, may our words and example lead them to You!

Clean and Unclean

Read Leviticus 12:1–8

*Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin. — Psalm 51:2*

Have you seen those dishwasher magnets with two words on them: “Dirty” and “Clean”? They help us know when it’s okay to add dirty dishes to the racks and when it’s time to put clean dishes away.

In Leviticus, we read many laws about what is considered clean or unclean. These categories may seem strange to us today. But it is important to realize that uncleanness did not necessarily equate with sinfulness. Many non-sinful aspects of life could make you unclean.

Welcoming a child into the world was one such event. A woman was considered ceremonially unclean after giving birth (v. 1). She could not enter the sanctuary or participate in the normal duties of life until she was purified. There was nothing sinful about having children. In Scripture it is clearly considered a blessing (Ps. 127:3). But the loss of blood in childbirth rendered the woman unclean. Things associated with death, such as losing bodily fluids or touching a corpse, were

nonmoral reasons why a person might be rendered unclean. A practical benefit was that it gave a new mother time to recover from labor before returning to normal life.

Some may wonder why having a girl rendered the mother unclean for twice as long as a boy (vv. 1, 5). The length did not have anything to do with perceived value. Both male and female were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). The sacrifice for both was also the same (vv. 6–8). Some think the shorter length for the male baby could be so the woman could participate in the ceremony related to circumcision (v. 3). When Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph obeyed these regulations, including offering a sacrifice (Luke 2:22–24). As a poor family, they offered pigeons or doves instead of a lamb.

► Reading through these laws may make you wonder how anyone could ever achieve holiness. But we know that because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are clean before God (John 15:3).

Pray with Us

“Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee, though the eyes of sinful man Thy glory may not see. Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee. Perfect in power, in love and purity.”

Made Clean

Read Leviticus 13:1–46

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes.
There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,
for the old order of things has passed away.—Revelation 21:4*

My father enjoyed quoting Leviticus 13:40: “A man who has lost his hair and is bald is clean.” Certainly, that verse is a comfort to many who have experienced male-pattern baldness.

Today we continue to discuss what makes something clean or unclean. We have learned that it is not simply a moral category. Sin could make one unclean, but so could many other things. Cleanness represented wholeness or normalcy. Things that made one unclean were often associated with death or mortality. Things that were unclean were not to come in contact with what was holy. The unclean could not touch what was clean without contaminating it.

The camp of Israel was considered holy. In it was the tabernacle where God met with His people. Part of a priests’ job was to protect the holiness of the camp and the tabernacle. In Leviticus 13, we read about various types of skin diseases that might render someone unclean. There is a clear pattern to this chapter.

If a person had an anomaly on the skin, they were to come to a priest (v. 1). The priest would assess whether that person was clean or unclean (v. 3). If the situation was unclear, the priest would ask the person to come back after a week to reassess it (v. 4). Twenty-one different types of skin issues are covered.

There are many instances in Scripture when God afflicted people with a skin disease as an act of His judgment (Num. 12:10–12). Some in Israel were tempted to believe that all skin diseases were a result of sin, which was clearly not necessarily the case (see Job 2:7).

► When Jesus touched someone with a skin disease, He did not become unclean. Instead, the unclean person became whole and healthy again (Matt. 8:1–4). Jesus came to redeem us from all aspects of the Fall, including disease. We look forward to the day when those kinds of afflictions will be no more (Rev. 21:4).

Pray with Us

Lord, we are washed in Your blood, made clean forever, robed in Your righteousness. May we never cease to praise You for freeing us from our sin! May we never stop striving to honor You with our lives, day to day.

Uncanceled Culture

Read Leviticus 14:1–22

Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.—Hebrews 13:12

The term “cancel culture” is often used today. Someone who says or does something another group does not like is “canceled,” ignored or disregarded. While our society has become pretty good at canceling people, we are not so skilled at welcoming into the community.

In the book of Leviticus, we learn how a person was determined to be clean or unclean. The purpose again was to protect the holiness of the camp and the tabernacle. Some types of uncleanness were severe enough that people were required to live outside the camp (13:46). However, the laws did not leave those people without hope. There were also instructions on reintegrating people into the community (vv. 1–7).

This ceremony had four elements: two birds, cedar wood, scarlet yarn, and hyssop (v. 4). The significance of this ceremony is not given and a bit obscure to us today. However, the result is clear enough. After going through the ceremony, the whole community would know that this

person was now considered clean. They would now be integrated back into the camp and could join in corporate worship.

If you read further in chapter 15, you will see laws regarding bodily discharges for men and women. These occur in the regular course of life and could be handled without going to a priest. For these situations, people had to trust each other that they would not defile the sanctuary by entering it when they were not ceremonially clean. As believers, we have permanent access to worshipping God at any time because of the finished work of Christ (Heb. 13:12). God provided a temporary way for this to be accomplished in ancient Israel that pointed forward to Jesus who “suffered outside the gate” on our behalf!

► How and when can we welcome back those who have been “outside the camp” of our Christian community? This is a topic worthy of prayer and discussion as individuals and as a church body.

Pray with Us

Give us the grace to discern where wisdom and wariness diverge and help us choose the path of wisdom in welcoming back a believer who once turned away from the faith. Help us rejoice in their restoration, building them up.

Questions & Answers

by Dr. Valencia Wiggins, Ph.D., L.P.C.,
Associate Professor and Director of Clinical Training

Q My husband serves in the military and was deployed overseas for two years. We are thanking God for his safe return. But since then, I've noticed changes in his moods. How can I help him?

A First, I want to thank your husband for his service to our country. Second, I want *you* to know that these types of transitions can bring significant challenges to our emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual health.

When people return from military deployment, they often experience post-traumatic stress. This can occur after a traumatic event is over (i.e., war, combat, or natural disaster). It triggers a range of intense emotions, anger, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and even distressing nightmares.

In this life, we encounter many stressful situations. In John 16:33 Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." We cannot avoid difficulties, but we can have peace, knowing that God is with us and is our source of strength. Psalm 55:22 urges us to "cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you."

In the Bible, we see examples of individuals who faced extreme stress. Noah navigated a worldwide flood

in Genesis 9:19–27. Joshua endured endless battles. In Joshua 1:9, God said to him: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." While we cannot avoid stressful experiences, we are promised that God will be with us.

It is not unusual to notice changes in your loved one after they return home. They may experience disruptions in their mood, sleep, relationships, and regular family life and responsibilities. This can be confusing to both family members and the military member returning home. Here are a few recommendations to help ease the transition:

- 1. Keep communication open.** Talk to your loved one about how they are feeling and let them know they are loved. "Encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thess. 5:11).
- 2. Stay connected.** Share your family's needs with believers who can pray with you and support you. Accept help to walk through this stressful time (Acts 11:27–30). Spend time in God's Word and prayer, knowing that God sees your need: "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23).
- 3. Find support.** The military and even some local churches provide

“While we cannot avoid difficult situations, we can have peace, knowing that God is with us and is our source of strength.”

resources to help support families with transitions for returning military members (for example, Military OneSource: militaryonesource.mil).

4. Seek counseling. A counselor can be a great help in navigating these issues and strengthening your family during this season.

Q I am the primary caregiver for my family member who has struggled with mental illness for many years. How can I show Christ’s love when I am tired and need a break?

A I want to encourage you for doing this important work. I also want you to know that you are not alone. It is easy to feel isolated in caregiving, but more than one in five Americans are in a similar situation. As many as 8.4 million Americans provide care to an adult with an emotional or mental health issue (Family Caregiver Alliance, 2022).

Here are a few suggestions. First, be sure to take time for yourself. As a caregiver, you may find it difficult to balance your time between their care and your own responsibilities. God designed us for work and for rest (see Heb. 4:9–11, Mark 6:31). When you don’t get a break, it will lead to stress, anxiety, and depression. You may experience anger, irritability, boredom,

lack of appreciation, loneliness, and tiredness or fatigue.

Create a plan to engage in mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually nourishing activities. Scripture calls your body the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19). You need to make sure you are caring for yourself so you can care for others. It may be tempting to stop going to church or take walks, but that may be exactly what you need to stay healthy and whole.

Second, acknowledge your grief. Caregivers experience grief as they navigate changes in the relationship with their loved one due to the mental or physical health challenge. You may be grieving a loss of community or even grief with the shifting nature of your relationship with your loved one.

Next, find support through your local church and professional social services; people who can share your burden (Gal. 6:2). Many offer resources for caregivers. Professional counseling can also help with your own emotional well-being during this stressful season.

I am reminded of Psalm 42. Here we see David who was feeling forgotten yet continued to place his hope in God (v. 11). Know that God sees you and your situation. Keep looking to Him. ■

The Day of Atonement

Read Leviticus 16:1–34

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

Starting with Adam and Eve, the central problem the Bible addresses is this: “How can a holy God dwell with a sinful people?” This almost led to the destruction of Israel after they sinned by creating and worshiping a Golden Calf (see Ex. 32–34).

Today’s reading describes the Day of Atonement, the most theologically significant passage in Leviticus and perhaps in the entire Old Testament. It is important for every believer to understand the significance of this ceremony. After Aaron’s sons approached the Lord in the wrong way and were killed, God provided instructions for how Aaron could rightly enter the Holy of Holies to offer an atoning sacrifice for the nation (Lev. 16:1–2).

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, Aaron was to offer a sin offering for himself and for the nation (vv. 3–5). This was a holy and solemn affair. It was the only day of the year that the High Priest could enter the

Holy of Holies. After offering the appropriate sacrifices, Aaron would enter the Holy of Holies, burn incense before the Ark of the Covenant, and sprinkle blood on the cover of the Ark, often called the Mercy Seat (vv. 11–14).

After performing this ritual, he was to take the scapegoat, lay his hands on its head, and confess the sins of Israel (v. 21). The goat was then to be led out of the camp into the wilderness, thus symbolically removing Israel’s sin from the camp (vv. 21–22). On that day, all Israel was to cease from work and mourn (v. 29).

► It was for our sin that Jesus died on the cross. His shed blood made the Day of Atonement ceremony no longer necessary. The curtain to the Holy of Holies was torn in two (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38) and all believers were given direct access to the Father. Jesus served as the ultimate scapegoat, taking upon Himself the sin of the world (1 Peter 2:24; Heb. 9:28).

Pray with Us

You alone know the true weight of sin, the real sting of death, and the desolation of being separated from Your Father. Yet You willingly endured all to free us from these things—and now we worship in Your presence!

Washed by the Blood

Read Leviticus 17:1–16

*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,
and I will raise them up at the last day. —John 6:54*

Some people fear the sight of blood. They have to look away during their annual blood test and have a hard time helping bandage a wound. While blood can be frightening, it is also necessary. Every moment, blood pumps through our bodies, keeping us alive by supplying our body with oxygen and nutrients.

In today's reading, we have arrived at a major turning point in the book. Up to this point, the commands and teaching have been given to the priests. It instructed them on how to atone for sin and maintain purity in the tabernacle and the camp. Beginning in this chapter, Moses addresses all Israel (v. 1). This part of Leviticus teaches Israel how to maintain holiness in their everyday life.

This chapter addresses two issues. The first issue was how to properly slaughter animals for food (vv. 3–7). If Israel desired to slaughter an animal to eat, they were required to bring it to the Tent of Meeting

and offer it as a fellowship offering (v. 5). This ensured that the animal was slaughtered properly. It also reminded Israel that food was a gift from God and a part of regular worship. It would prevent Israel from being tempted to sacrifice to false gods away from the tabernacle (v. 7).

The second issue was a prohibition against consuming blood of any kind (vv. 10–14). Blood represented the life of the animal. By refraining from consuming the blood, Israel showed respect for the sanctity of life (Gen. 9:4–6). Blood was also used in worship as a source of sanctification (Lev. 17:11).

► The word “blood” takes on even more meaning in the New Testament. We speak of Christ’s blood when we observe the Lord’s Supper. It is His blood that cleanses us from sin and makes us holy in God’s sight (1 Cor. 11:23–26). When we are “Washed by the Blood”, as the hymn proclaims, we are forever changed!

Pray with Us

May we, “being rooted and established in love, have power” and “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge!” (Eph. 3:17–19).

Faithfulness in Marriage

Read Leviticus 18:1–30

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. —Hebrews 13:4

Larry Nassar held an important role as team doctor for USA Gymnastics. But in 2017, Nassar fell from grace when he was convicted of abusing hundreds of children and young women under his care. He is currently serving a 175-year prison sentence. One of the elements that make his actions so reprehensible is that he was in a trusted position of authority.

In ancient Israel, male heads of households were in a position of authority and power. Back then, households were structured differently than they are today. It was not uncommon for four or more generations to live together in close proximity with members of one's extended family. In a world before police officers or social workers, the head of house was responsible for the well-being of everyone in his family.

With such big responsibility comes the potential for abuse. And today's reading provides a series of prohibitions directed at a male head of household. Most of the commands clarify for the head of house who in his

family is sexually off-limits—everyone but his wife. Family members needed to feel safe from abuse while living and working together.

These commands are given twice in the chapter for emphasis; Israel was to be different from other nations (vv. 1–2, 30). God judged Canaan because of the abusive sexual practices and custom of child sacrifice (v. 21). God held the nations accountable for these practices, which included adultery and homosexuality (vv. 20–22).

God created sexuality to be enjoyed in the right context: a committed marriage relationship. Outside of this context, it can be abusive and destructive. Part of what it means to be holy is to follow God's direction in this area (Col. 3:5).

► God's directions about sexuality were countercultural for Israel, as well as for us today. The book of Leviticus reminds us that God wants the best for us in every aspect of our lives. He has provided specific guidelines for sexuality and cares deeply about the abused and vulnerable.

Pray with Us

There are so many ways to abuse or misuse our sexuality. However, You created it for good! Single or married, regardless of our past, help us move forward by honoring You with our bodies.

Intentionally Inefficient

Read Leviticus 19:1–17

All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along. — Galatians 2:10

Efficiency and productivity are buzzwords you often hear in the business world. Sharp business owners ask, “How can we do what we do better? How can I leverage my resources to maximize profits and efficiency?” This attitude has led many to unbelievable success and is understandably valued in our society.

In Leviticus 19, we read through a series of laws designed to provide Israel with practical examples of holiness in everyday life. One law commanded Israel to be inefficient in their work. At harvest time, Israelite farmers were instructed not to harvest the edges of their fields (v. 9). In a similar way, vineyard owners were not to go back over their vineyard a second time but instead to leave the remaining grapes (v. 10). In other words, Israel was called to *not* make the most out of their productive land. Why? This would allow the poor and the foreigner to harvest food (v. 10).

God cares deeply about the poor and the vulnerable. Through

this practice, God instituted a way in Israel for the poor to work for their own food. It was not a handout but a requirement to work, not a dependency on one individual’s charitable impulse but divine command. Israelite farmers were not giving charity, they were simply obeying the law.

This law reminded Israel that the land was ultimately not theirs, but God’s. It encouraged them to show compassion for the poor and foreign resident and provide a way for them to integrate into society. This provision in the law enabled Ruth to provide food for herself and Naomi when they returned to the land of Israel without husbands or sons to sustain them (Ruth 2).

► Take time to think creatively about how you can help the poor and vulnerable, a subject close to God’s heart (Prov. 19:17). God warns us against greed, a perpetual temptation for believers (Luke 12:15; Eph. 4:19).

Pray with Us

Lord, are we guilty of greed? Hard-heartedness? Fear of the future? If there is something holding us back from giving and helping others, convict and change us. Bring to our attention the needy around us.

Love Your Neighbor

Read Leviticus 19:18–37

*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command:
“Love your neighbor as yourself.”—Galatians 5:14*

One day a teacher of the Law asked Jesus, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” (Mark 12:28). Jesus answered that the greatest commandment was: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (v. 30). But then He added a second, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 31). The reason Jesus gave two commands, not just one, is that they go together. You cannot really love God without loving your neighbor and vice versa.

Today’s reading includes the second greatest commandment (Lev. 19:18). Not surprisingly, it is included in a section with a variety of commands, some of which address our relationship with God, while others address our relationship with other people.

The laws relating to God deal with correct worship (vv. 26, 30). These include upholding the food laws and observing the Sabbaths (vv. 26, 30).

These are easy enough to understand. Some of the laws were designed to remind Israel that they were a separate and holy people (v. 19). Some of the more bizarre laws relate to Israel remaining distinct from the cultures around them and not participating in pagan worship (vv. 27–31).

Throughout these verses there is a concern to treat others well. Israel was to respect the elderly (v. 32), show hospitality to foreigners (v. 34), and be honest in their work (vv. 35–36). They should live this way because that is how God had treated them. He had also redeemed them from slavery in Egypt (v. 36).

► As followers of Jesus, we are not under the Mosaic Law. Yet, as Jesus affirmed, the principles behind the Law still reveal the character of God and are authoritative. In this passage, we get a glimpse of God’s love for His people and the world He created (vv. 23–24). We are called to be like Him (Lev. 19:2).

Pray with Us

Your wrath is majestic. Your justice is holy. Your power is incredible. We who are small, weak, and prone to sin rejoice that You are also “gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29) and abounding in love!

Consequences, Consequences

Read Leviticus 20:1–27

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law
by becoming a curse for us. — Galatians 3:13*

In one country I visited, driving was a terrifying experience. People did not pay attention to stoplights or lanes. Cars would veer into oncoming traffic to make a turn. For me, coming from the suburbs in the United States, it seemed chaotic. I asked a local, “Are there traffic laws?” He responded, “Oh, yes. We have laws, but no one ever enforces them.”

Leviticus 18 and 19 presented us with laws covering many different aspects of life. A natural follow-up question is, “What happens if a law was broken?” Today’s reading outlines the consequences of disobedience. The modern reader might be surprised at how many infractions resulted in the death penalty.

The death penalty was reserved for behaviors that fundamentally broke God’s covenant with Israel. Every case of the death penalty can be tied directly to one of the Ten Commandments. For example, sacrificing children to Molek broke the command against murder and against worshipping other gods (vv. 1–5). This

was a serious infraction that put the whole community at risk of God’s judgment. Dishonoring one’s parents and adultery also required the death penalty (vv. 9–10).

Israel did not require the death penalty as often as other ancient cultures. For example, it was not required for matters of property like theft. People were considered more important than objects. Even so, the reason for severe consequences was that Israel would be holy, set apart for God (v. 26). Israel was to act differently than the nations around them (v. 23). If they wanted to live in the land under God’s blessing, they needed to follow His covenant regulations (vv. 22–24).

► Since the church is not under the Mosaic covenant and is also not a political entity in the way Israel was, these consequences are no longer in force. However, they remind us that God takes sin seriously. It should also make us deeply grateful that Jesus bore the penalty for sin on our behalf (Gal. 3:13).

Pray with Us

As Your church, Jesus, we are called to be holy. You have freed us from the obligations of the Law. Help us be faithful in the mandates that apply to us. By Your grace, let us live above reproach, loving You.

To Whom Much Is Given

Read Leviticus 21:1–24

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses. — Hebrews 4:15

After Peter Parker was bitten by a radioactive spider and endowed with superpowers to become Spider-Man, his Uncle Ben gave him this memorable advice, “With great power comes great responsibility.” These words are similar to Jesus’ statement: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded” (Luke 12:48).

Priests in Israel were given much. They represented the people before God in the tabernacle and could enter the Holy Place. But with special privileges came a higher standard for holiness. Today’s reading outlines three specific areas where priests had greater restrictions than the rest of Israel: mourning rituals, potential marriage partners, and physical defects.

Priests could not make themselves ceremonially unclean in mourning for just anyone. They were allowed this practice only for close blood-relatives (vv. 1–4). The high priest had an even higher standard. He could not publicly mourn for anyone (vv. 10–12). This practice was in sharp contrast to other

ancient cultures, such as Egypt, where the care of the dead was a primary concern of priests. These prohibitions may have helped Israel avoid falling into ancestor worship.

Priests also were restricted in their potential spouses. Their spouse needed to represent the holiness of their role and so could not have been previously married or have been engaged in prostitution (v. 7).

Just like sacrificial animals had to be physically whole, priests needed to be as well (vv. 16–21). They could not have physical deformities to serve in the tabernacle. Priests who did not measure up to this standard were still provided for financially along with their families (vv. 22–23).

► Praise the Lord that Jesus, our High Priest, perfectly lived up to the highest moral standards during His earthly ministry (Heb. 4:14–15). He continues to serve as our High Priest in the presence of the Father (Heb. 10:12–13). Even now He is sanctifying His people, His bride at the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7–8).

Pray with Us

We could never hope to live up to your standard of holiness. But Lord Jesus, holy and perfect, by sacrificing Yourself, You covered us in Your holy blood. Praise be to You forever!

The Heart of Worship

Read Leviticus 22:17–33

Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!—John 1:29

It is often tempting to cut corners. A high school student might read the CliffsNotes version of *A Tale of Two Cities* instead of slogging through the entire novel. A carpenter might not use all the safety features on his table saw because it is quicker to use it without them.

In today's reading, the Lord warns Israel against cutting corners in worship. For burnt offerings or offerings to fulfill a vow, the worshiper must present a male without defect from the cattle, sheep, or goats (vv. 19–20). For a fellowship offering, a male or female animal was acceptable, but it must be without blemish (v. 21). This was a problem in ancient Israel. The prophet Malachi admonished, "When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you?" (Mal. 1:8). In optional sacrifices like freewill offerings, some deformities were allowed (v. 23).

Another way Israel might have tried to save money would be to offer a newborn animal that had not yet cost anything to feed or care for. Moses instructs that the animal must be at least a week old (v. 27). God is to be treated with reverence and respect. Offering only the best sacrifices reminded Israel of the holiness of God (v. 32).

Today's passage reminds us that Jesus was also the perfect sacrifice, "you were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18–19). In response, we offer ourselves to God as a "living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (Rom. 12:1).

► What should be the focus of worship? It is not that we walk away feeling satisfied, or even worse, entertained. The most important part of worship is that it is acceptable and pleasing to God. Worship like that will be the most satisfying to us as well.

Pray with Us

Father, draw us closer. May we know You so well that we delight in the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs that please You. Draw us closer in our worship; draw us closer.

Rest for the Weary

Read Leviticus 23:1–5

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest. —Matthew 11:28*

We often like to tell people just how busy we are. “I’m so busy; I can hardly keep up!” As one author described the struggle, “I wanted to figure out why I was so busy, but I couldn’t find the time to do it.” One of the reasons we keep ourselves so busy is that we find a sense of value and worth in constantly being productive.

One of the most distinctive elements of Israel’s faith was their practice of Sabbath. The command is rooted in Creation. Over six days God created the universe and on the seventh He rested (Gen. 2:2–3). It was important enough that God illustrated this command by example.

Today’s reading reminded Israel of one of the purposes of Sabbath: it was to be a “day of sacred assembly” (Lev. 23:3). The community would come together in rest and fellowship with each other and with the Lord. Sabbath reminds us that life is not about being productive all the time. After all, God is the Lord of time.

The practice of keeping the Sabbath puts a check on our ambition. It reminds us that we can take the time to rest in God’s presence because we trust Him to provide for us. It reminds us that it is not our work or frantic activity that makes us holy, but our relationship with God. Without this principle, work can become an idol or an oppressor. The Sabbath was to be for everyone; men and women, children, servants, foreigners residing in Israel, and even animals (Ex. 20:10).

As members of the New Covenant, we are not required to observe Sabbath in the same way Israel did (Col. 2:16). However, having a pattern of work and rest is still authoritative for us. Jesus invites His followers to find their rest in Him (Matt. 11:28).

► Take a few moments to evaluate your own life and pattern of rest and work. Do you devote regular time to rest in the Lord? How can you set aside that time this week?

Pray with Us

Bless our rest, we pray. Help us relinquish, if only for a time, the endless tasks we must accomplish. Instead, we want to reflect on You, rejoicing in the peace of a quiet morning. As we rest our bodies, please rest our souls.

Remember!

Read Leviticus 23:5–43

*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.— 1 Corinthians 11:26*

One of the most frequent commands in Scripture is “Remember!” God knows we are prone to forget. In Scripture, forgetting is considered a moral failure (Deut. 4:23). God is not concerned with everyday forgetfulness like trying to remember where you put your car keys. Rather, He is concerned with deep relational forgetfulness, forgetting who He is and what He has done (Deut. 6:12).

To help Israel remember, God instituted a calendar. Israel's life would be punctuated by breaks in the year where people would stop their normal work. They would remember God's deliverance from Egypt through the 10 plagues at Passover (Lev. 23:5). They would remember the haste in which they left Egypt in the Festival of Unleavened Bread (v. 6). They would remember God's provision at harvest time in the Festivals of Firstfruits and Weeks (vv. 9–20). The first day of the seventh month was a holy day of rest and remembrance marked by the blowing of a ram's horn (vv. 23–25). The Day of Atonement was a

solemn day of fasting and mourning over sin while the priest atoned for the sin of the people (vv. 26–32). Finally, the Festival of Tabernacles commemorated the Lord's provision after the Exodus (vv. 33–44). These events reminded Israel of who God is and helped pass on that knowledge to their children (v. 43).

These festivals provide important background for many New Testament practices. The Last Supper was held on Passover (Matt. 26:17). The Holy Spirit descended upon the church at Pentecost (Acts 2). Paul describes Jesus as the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep,” pointing to the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20). When we celebrate communion, we remember what Christ has done and anticipate His second coming (1 Cor. 11:25–26).

► Why not make a remembering calendar of your own? In what ways has God shown His goodness to you and your loved ones? Maybe in addition to celebrating birthdays or anniversaries, we can also celebrate remembering!

Pray with Us

Lord, we remember all the ways You have provided for us, comforted us, and opened our eyes to the truth. We are indebted to You for every good thing, and it is a joy to be indebted to a loving God like You!

An Eye for an Eye

Read Leviticus 24:10–23

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. — Matthew 5:44

During his tumultuous presidency, Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said, “I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day.”

In today’s reading, Moses encountered a situation where he was not sure what to do. Instead of making a quick decision, he waited, “until the will of the LORD should be made clear to them” (v. 12). This is a good reminder that the law in Israel was not given by Moses, but God. Moses knew he needed to wait for God’s guidance and leading.

The specific situation had to do with a man who had an Egyptian father and Israelite mother (v. 10). This man got into a fight with an Israelite, during which he blasphemed and cursed the name of the Lord (v. 11). This was a serious offense. The Lord commanded that the man be put to death (v. 14).

This specific situation led to a series of laws that have become famous, “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (v. 19). While this may seem harsh, it put a limit on how much retribution was allowed. Often this command was not applied literally. For example, if a slave lost an eye, he was given his freedom (Ex. 21:26). The point was that the punishment should be in proportion to the crime.

The New Testament required that punishment be carried out by civil authorities (Acts 25:11; Rom. 13:4). In addition, Jesus called His followers to a higher standard. Instead of an “eye for an eye,” He declared, “do not resist an evil person . . . love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:39, 44).

► If you are feeling overwhelmed, it is always good to spend time in prayer. Ask God for His guidance in your life. Ask Him to use the truth of His Word to speak into your situation.

Pray with Us

Like Moses, we are often stumped about the right course of action. Father, speak to us and make apparent Your will. Grow us in knowledge and wisdom so we can make decisions that are pleasing to You.

My Father's World

Read Leviticus 25:1–7

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. — Psalm 24:1

My son has access to the hand tools at our house. He is free to use them for his own projects. However, he also needs to be responsible with their use. He must use them safely and not leave them outside after he is finished. I set these rules for him because they are my tools, and he is my son.

Israel needed to be reminded regularly that their land was ultimately God's. God had the authority to set the rules for its use. In today's reading, God instructed Israel regarding their farming. They were to work the land for six years (v. 3). But in the seventh year, they were to let the land lie in rest (v. 4). They were not to sow crops or prune their vineyards.

Just like people get a sabbath every seventh day, the land was to get a sabbath every seventh year. Whatever produce the land yielded during the sabbath year, it was to serve as food for everyone (vv. 6–7).

Observing the sabbath year meant that people would not maximize the potential profit of their land. This practice taught Israel that God desired both hard work and trust in Him, since they would have to plan for this sabbath year and had no guarantee that the eighth year would yield a bountiful harvest.

One of the reasons for Israel's exile from the land was that they did not obey this law. During the exile, "the land enjoyed its sabbath rests" (2 Chron. 36:21).

► What a great reminder that everything we have ultimately is a gift from the Lord and belongs to Him. The goal of our life should not be to accumulate the maximum amount of wealth we possibly can, but to live in right relationship with God, others, and the world He created. Today is a good day to celebrate the truth that "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1).

Pray with Us

"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters" (Ps. 24:1–2). Everything we have is a gift from You. Thank You!

The Year of Jubilee

Read Leviticus 25:8–55

*Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God.
I am the LORD your God.—Leviticus 25:17*

According to a recent report, there are only 2,668 billionaires in the world. Together, these individuals have accumulated \$12.7 trillion in wealth. And, 86 of the people in this exclusive club are under the age of 40! Consider the tremendous wealth held by those 2,668 individuals in comparison to the rest of the world's 7.837 billion people.

This sharp division between the rich and the poor was not the ideal in ancient Israel. The Jubilee laws were designed to prevent the utter ruin of those who fell into debt. It also prevented individuals within Israel from accumulating large amounts of land perpetually. After every seventh sabbatical year, the year of Jubilee was proclaimed (vv. 8–9). During this year, all land that had been sold was to be returned to its original owner (v. 10). In addition, if any Israelite had to sell themselves into debt-slavery, they were released (vv. 40–41).

Two reasons are given for this legislation. God proclaimed, "The land must not be sold permanently,

because the land is mine" (v. 23).

Returning land to the family that had originally been assigned the property when Israel entered the land would be a way to remind Israel of this truth. Similarly, God proclaimed that slaves could not be kept permanently because "the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt" (v. 55). Every Israeli had an equal status as a redeemed servant of God.

Today's reading reminds us of God's heart for the poor. He wanted to ensure that at least once in a person's life there was a chance for a new start. This legislation also served as a check against unbridled greed.

► One day all things will be made right. The year of Jubilee gave Israel a foretaste of that day. The Lord Jesus fulfilled aspects of the Jubilee legislation (Luke 4:18–19). He not only cared for the poor but also released them from the debt of sin before God (Luke 7:36–50).

Pray with Us

Our year of Jubilee will be when You return! Lord Jesus, reveal Yourself to us so that we recognize Your face in your Second Coming. You will come in wrath and power, but to us You will be a Savior and a friend!

Clear Expectations

Read Leviticus 26:1–42

*If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands,
I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield
its crops and the trees their fruit. —Leviticus 26:3–4*

In 2006, a team of landscape architects conducted a simple study on the impact of a fenced-in playground. They had a preschool teacher take her students to a playground without a fence. The children all huddled around the teacher and did not utilize the full playground space. They then took the same class to a fenced in playground and observed that the children felt freer to explore the entire space. Having a clear boundary led to a greater sense of freedom and security.

Through the law, God provided Israel with clear expectations. They did not have to wonder what God required of them. This gave them a sense of security and freedom in their relationship with God. However, God's instructions also came with consequences. Today's reading outlines the blessings for Israel if they obeyed the covenant and curses if they did not.

If Israel obeyed the covenant, they would be richly blessed. They would have abundant harvests and

safety from their enemies (vv. 3–10). Their greatest blessing would be the presence of God in the midst of His people (vv. 11–12).

If Israel disobeyed, the consequences were just as clear. They would be struck with disease, famine, and defeat by their enemies (vv. 14–17). Most grievously, they would be exiled from the land and from access to God's presence at the tabernacle (vv. 33–35). However, even if they broke the covenant and experienced the full brunt of God's judgment, He would not give up on them. The chapter ends on a note of hope. God would remember His covenant with Abraham (vv. 42–45). If the people repent, they would be restored (vv. 40–41).

► We worship a God who is both gracious and forgiving. God has given us clear rules to follow, but He has also provided a way for forgiveness and restoration. If you do not know Jesus as your personal Savior, we invite you to turn to Him today. In Him, you will find hope and a future.

Pray with Us

When Israel disobeyed, You fulfilled Your promises to punish them. When they repented, You restored them. In the same way, You promise to forgive us when we repent. When we throw ourselves on Your mercy, we are saved!

Promises Kept

Read Leviticus 27:1–34

*I will fulfill my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.—Psalm 116:14*

The book of 1 Samuel opens with the story of Hannah. Unable to have children, Hannah was suffering. In her “deep anguish,” she vowed to the Lord that if He gave her a son she would give him back to the Lord “for all the days of his life” (1 Sam. 1:9–11).

Vows were common in ancient Israel. They often involved dedicating something to the Lord, whether a person, an animal, or real estate. Vows were also entirely voluntary. Nowhere in Scripture does God command the making of vows. However, if a person did vow, it was vital to fulfill it (Eccl. 5:5–6; Mal. 1:13–14). Leviticus 27 outlines ways in which vows could be fulfilled.

A person dedicated to the Lord could serve at the tabernacle or be redeemed through paying a price (vv. 1–7). The price was set by the age and gender. This was not an assessment of someone’s intrinsic worth. The Bible is clear that all, male and female, are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). Rather, it was an assessment

of a person’s value as a worker. Provision was made for the poor so they could make this kind of vow and could afford to fulfill it (v. 8).

Rules also outlined different situations that could arise in the dedication of property or animals (vv. 9–28). The basic principle at work was that a person needed to be faithful to give what they vowed. Scripture recognizes the human tendency, after the excitement of the moment when a vow was made, to go back on it once the request is answered or the moment of crisis passes. Fulfilling a vow was a joyous occasion (Ps. 61:8; 65:1). It was a time when people could recount God’s faithfulness and celebrate in His presence (Ps. 66:13–15).

► Have you ever promised God something in a moment of desperate need? Did you fulfill your vow? Today’s reading is a reminder to take our vows seriously. When God does answer prayer, it is appropriate to celebrate through testifying about it to others.

Pray with Us

You have compassion on all You have made. “All your works praise you, LORD; your faithful people extol you. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations” (Ps. 145:10, 13).

God Made a Way

Read Hebrews 10:1–18

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.—Hebrews 10:12

It is easy to take aspects of our modern world for granted. For example, we have refrigeration to store and preserve food and ready access to clean running water. Unless you've lived without these conveniences, you might not appreciate how wonderful they are.

Many aspects of the book of Leviticus probably seem foreign and strange to Christians today. One of the reasons is that we have never participated in animal sacrifice or abided by Jewish dietary laws. Since Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Old Testament sacrificial system, we are no longer under it. But studying the law provides a richer understanding of God's gift to us in Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews rejoices in the comparison between the sacrifice of Jesus and the sacrificial system outlined in Leviticus. He notes that the sacrifices in Leviticus always pointed beyond themselves. As Hebrews teaches, "it is impossible for the blood

of bulls and goats to take away sins" (v. 4). But Jesus, through His once-for-all sacrifice, cleansed us from sin and made us holy (v. 10). Instead of having a priest present offerings day after day, Jesus fully achieved our atonement for sin (v. 11). After His resurrection, He sat down at the right hand of God. His work was complete (v. 12).

When we trust in Jesus' death to atone for our sin, we receive forgiveness and are made holy (v. 14). Even more astounding, the Holy Spirit dwells inside of us. God's presence is now not screened behind the veil in the Holy of Holies. We have access to the Father!

► We hope this study of Leviticus helped you more fully understand and appreciate the salvation we have been given through Jesus. Studying the sacrificial system and the role of the priests reveals to us the wonder of what Jesus has done. A perfect God can only be in fellowship with holy people. Through Jesus, God made a way for us to become holy.

Pray with Us

We worship Jesus, Emmanuel, the perfect sacrifice! You have given us fruitful life in this world and eternal life in the world to come. Your will is perfect. Your compassion is unending. Your love is mighty!



*“With each new pain and sorrow, I have come
to love and believe Jesus more.”*

—COLLEEN CHAO

*How do we suffer long and well? What do we do when we feel
cheated? How do we face pressing darkness?*

Come along with fellow sufferer Colleen Chao, and learn to
embrace one day at a time, to trust and love Jesus more, and
rest *In the Hands of a Fiercely Tender God*.



MOODY
Publishers®

moodypublishers.com | (800) 678-8812



EXPERIENCE JESUS CONFERENCE

If you're a high school student
or youth pastor, you don't want
to miss this **LIFE-CHANGING EVENT!**

THE **XJ CONFERENCE** EMPOWERS TEENS TO:

- Know Jesus deeply
- Love Him passionately
- Proclaim Him boldly

Register at **moody.ticketspice.com/xj23**
The cost is \$350 per person (housing and meals included).



JULY 10-15, 2023
MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE, CHICAGO

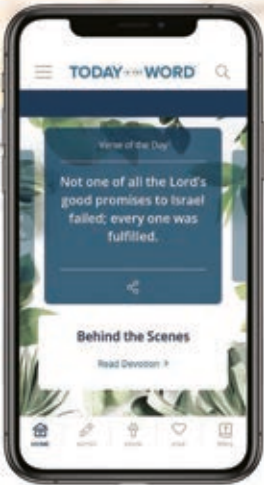
Sponsored by Sonlife and Moody Bible Institute



God meets you where you are.
Shouldn't your devotional be there, too?

The *Today in the Word* app brings your Bible, notebook, and study resources right to your fingertips in one easy-to-use app.

Download today!



TODAY in the WORD

Visit us online to request resources and view past issues.

todayintheword.org

Today in the Word | @TodayintheWord | TodayintheWord
 TodayInTheWordDevotional



MOODY
BIBLE INSTITUTE™

Moody helps equip you with the truth of God's Word as you impact your community and the world for Christ. We believe that understanding and sharing God's Word is a lifelong journey. Let us help you take the next step in your relationship with Christ.

Learn more at MOODYBIBLE.ORG or call (800) DL MOODY today.

MOODY
Bible Institute™
moody.edu

MOODY
Theological
Seminary™

MOODY
Publishers®
moodypublishers.com

MOODY
Radio®
moodyradio.org