



*Good News*  
**Bible Reading Program**

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

**— May 2002 —**

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1 May	New tablets; Covenant relationship renewed; Moses' face shines	Exodus 34
2 May	Sabbath regulations; Offerings for the tabernacle; Artisans called	Exodus 35:1–36:1
3 May	The people bring more than enough; Constructing the tabernacle	Exodus 36:2–38
4-5 May	Making accoutrements for the inner tabernacle and outer tabernacle; Total materials	Exodus 37–38
6 May	Making the priestly garments	Exodus 39
7 May	Tabernacle set up; Covered by cloud and filled with God's glory	Exodus 40
8 May	Burnt offering instructions	Leviticus 1
9 May	Grain offering instructions	Leviticus 2
10 May	Peace offering instructions	Leviticus 3
11 May	Sin offering instructions	Leviticus 4
12 May	Trespass offering instructions; To accompany restitution	Leviticus 5:1–6:7
13 May	Law of each offering; Fat & blood not to be eaten; Priest's portion	Leviticus 6:8–7:37
14 May	Consecration of the priests	Leviticus 8
15-19 May	FIVE-DAY BREAK (one of four planned breaks in the year)	
20 May	Priesthood starts; Sin of Nadab and Abihu; No alcohol before officiating	Leviticus 9–10
21 May	Laws of clean and unclean meat; Laws concerning childbirth	Leviticus 11–12
22 May	Laws concerning leprosy	Leviticus 13
23 May	Laws concerning leprosy continued	Leviticus 14
24 May	Laws concerning bodily discharges	Leviticus 15
25 May	Day of Atonement	Leviticus 16
26 May	Holiness and centralization of sacrifice; Regulations on blood	Leviticus 17
27 May	Laws concerning sexual morality	Leviticus 18
28 May	Various holiness precepts	Leviticus 19
29 May	Child sacrifice forbidden; Review of sexual laws; Dietary laws	Leviticus 20
30 May	Regulations for priests; Fitness for priestly service and sacrifice	Leviticus 21–22
31 May	The Feasts of the Eternal	Leviticus 23

### Highlights to Think About from This Month's Reading

#### **Covenant Relationship Renewed and a “Shining Example” (Exodus 34)**

**May 1**

Since Moses had broken the tablets of the Ten Commandments that God had given him previously, God instructs him to carve out of stone two more tablets so that God could again write His commandments, the basis of the covenant relationship between Him and His people. This was an act of tremendous mercy on the part of God, who, despite the Israelites' terrible disobedience, was willing to renew His covenant relationship with them.

God then passes before Moses, showing him part of His glory. As He does, He proclaims the glory of His character—focusing on His tremendous mercy and graciousness—the very thing that enables the covenant relationship to be renewed (verses 5-7). Yet He still warns that sin has consequences (verse 7). Upon hearing this, Moses is quick to again seek God's merciful pardon of the people's sins, also asking again that God would “go among” them (verse 9).

God's response? He renews the covenant relationship. And He begins this renewal with the wonderful announcement that He will do an “awesome thing” in driving out the inhabitants of Canaan from before the people (verses 10-12). The Israelites were to make no treaties with the Canaanites, to prevent their being corrupted by pagan customs and ideas. They were certainly not to adopt pagan worship practices.

God considered His relationship to Israel to be one of marriage (Jeremiah 3:1-14). For the Israelites to “play the harlot” with pagan gods (Exodus 34:15-16)—to worship them or adopt their religious rites—was thus a kind of marital infidelity and spiritual adultery. But the phrase also had a direct literal application, as sexual rites with temple prostitutes, both male and female, was a major part of the disgusting and debasing pagan religions of the land the Israelites were to enter. Here, as with God's reaction to the golden calf incident in chapter 32, we see that pagan religious practices are abominable and utterly unacceptable to Him—something we should consider whenever we examine the origins of today's popular religious traditions and customs (be sure to read our eye-opening booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*). Notice that God also warns in this context that intermarriage with those outside the true faith is a dangerous path that can lead to compromising His truth.

God then goes on to repeat some of the terms of the covenant that He gave in chapters 21–23. Exodus 34:26 repeats the prohibition from 23:19 about boiling a young goat in its mother's milk. Regarding the earlier verse, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* states: “The legislation in 19b (and in Dt 14:21) puzzled commentators for centuries; however, the discovery and publication of the Ras Shamra literature (*UM* [Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Manual*, 1955] 52:14, “Birth of the Gods”) have eliminated this conundrum. It is now clear that this practice was a cultic one among the Canaanite neighbors of the Hebrews. Hence, the Israelites were to refrain from it, lest they also adopt some of the Canaanite cultic inferences.” Referring to the same verse, *Matthew Henry's Commentary* states: “At the feast of *ingathering*, as it is called (v. 16), they [the Israelites] must give God thanks for the harvest-mercies they had received, and must depend upon him for the next harvest, and must not think to receive benefit by that superstitious usage of some of the Gentiles, who, it is said, at the end of their harvest, *seethed a kid in its dam's milk*, and sprinkled that milk-pottage, in a magical way, upon their gardens and fields, to make them more fruitful next year. But Israel must abhor such foolish customs.”

As we are to avoid customs that originated in pagan worship, it would still seem prudent to refrain from intentionally boiling a young goat in its own mother's milk. Yet, on the basis of the restriction in question, Orthodox Jews will not eat meat and dairy products together at all. In fact, these foods must be prepared in different places with different utensils in order to be considered “kosher” by them. The Jews see a general principle in these verses—that what was given to nourish life (milk) not be used to destroy it. However, this was clearly not God's intent. Abraham, who kept God's statutes and laws (Genesis 26:5), had Sarah prepare meat and milk products together to serve to God (the preincarnate Christ) and two angels: “So [Abraham] took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate” (Genesis 18:8). Thus, even God Himself, while manifested in physical form, ate milk and meat together. Yet some Jews, while admitting the restriction is a narrow one, will argue against eating meat and dairy

products together on the basis that there might be a chance, however remote, that a particular milk product was derived from the mother of the animal being eaten. But if we applied remote possibilities to our diet in general, we could never eat *anything*, for fear that a molecule of something unclean had somehow gotten onto it. This is certainly not what God had in mind.

After being in the presence of God this time, Moses came down from the mountain with his face shining—a muted reflection of the glory that had shone upon him while in God’s presence. It appears that this happened each time Moses met with God hereafter. Moses would then appear before the people—and they would know he had come from God because his face was shining. Then, as Paul later explained, he would put on a veil to conceal the fading of this temporary glory (2 Corinthians 3:7, 13). We may view Moses’ shining face as typical of the glory of God’s character as it is reflected in us. In seeing it, others will know that we represent God and have been close to Him. As time passes between our contacts with Him, our spiritual power and focus wanes, as does our example—something we don’t want reflected. Then we go to God for renewal and are ready to let our light shine before others once again.

### **No Fire on the Sabbath? (Exodus 35)**

**May 2**

Chapter 35 begins with instruction about the weekly Sabbath. God said, “You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day” (verse 3). A long-held Jewish interpretation is that it is wrong to start *any* fire on the Sabbath, such as a fire in a fireplace or just lighting a match. On the basis of this verse, some even argue that it is not permissible on the Sabbath to light a stove, turn on an oven or use any electrical device with a heating element, such as a hairdryer. Others go so far as to say that we can’t start a car or even turn on a light switch on God’s weekly Holy Day.

Yet the context here is important. There certainly may be a need to limit personal fire usage—as major fire maintenance can certainly become a violation of the Sabbath if a great deal of obvious work is involved (for example, moving logs and chopping them up or a major gathering of sticks, such as that in Numbers 15:32). However, this passage, occurring at the beginning of Moses’ relaying of the instructions for building the tabernacle, is most likely referring to tabernacle construction. God, it appears, was telling them to not kindle *industrial* fires on the Sabbath—to melt silver or gold or forge other metals for the construction of the tabernacle. No doubt some minor smelting was done in individual homes, which was also forbidden by this proscription. Instead, all industry was to cease, even the special work of building the tabernacle, so people could give full attention to resting and worshipping God on the Sabbath as He commanded.

God has always wanted His weekly Sabbath day to be a blessing and a delight to us (Isaiah 58:13-14), not an intolerable burden as some would later make it out to be through their focus on overly restrictive rules. However, there are certainly general rules we should follow. For instance, as a general rule we must not be conducting our regular business on the Sabbath or using the Sabbath as a time to plan our regular work. Moreover, the Sabbath is not a time for sports and personal hobbies. Instead, the Sabbath is a time to focus on our relationship with God.

To learn more about God’s Sabbath, download or send for our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*.

### **The People Bring Too Much (Exodus 36)**

**May 3**

Even though many of the Israelites had stiff necks and hard hearts, those whose hearts were willing gave more than enough for the house of God, which was at that time the tabernacle. *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: “The offerings for the tabernacle are perhaps the most impressive offering ever taken from God’s people for any endeavor! The key was the stirring of the *heart* and the willingness of the *spirit* of those who gave. *Both men and women* gave. Even in this patriarchal time, women participated actively in God’s work. All people came with gifts that were sumptuous, varied, and abundant. At last they had to be told to stop giving (see 36:2-7)!” Perhaps they were inspired to be extra generous after receiving God’s abundant forgiveness for their idolatry in the golden calf incident. This should give us the example we need to follow when God wants something done—we should have this same willingness of heart and generosity of spirit (see Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7). Like the Israelites, we should be stirred to give generously when we realize the abundance of mercy God has given to us.

Among the gifts the people brought was the wood for the tabernacle. The wood was from the acacia tree (*shittim* tree in the older King James). *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* makes some interesting comments about it. “Ideally suited for cabinet making, the hard orange-brown

wood...is still common in the desert regions of the Negeb and Sinai. These acacias produce a very durable wood.”

Although the account of the Israelites’ generosity is inspiring, it didn’t necessarily mean that they would be just as zealous about opportunities that were more spiritual in nature, and it didn’t mean that such zeal would necessarily last for long. Indeed, as we will see, the people would sink into rebellion again and again. For this is the nature of human beings unaided by spiritual conversion from God.

### **The Tabernacle Accoutrements (Exodus 37–38)**

**May 4-5**

The building of the tabernacle and the items God commanded to be in it was a monumental task. In chapters 37 and 38, Bezalel makes the implements of the temple according to the commands God had earlier given Moses. No doubt the details are repeated to show that all was done exactly as God had instructed. And it should be pointed out that Bezalel did not work alone. He was the overseer and had many artisans working under him (see 36:8). Aholiab and those under *him* did all of the weaving and engraving (38:23).

Chapter 37, concerning the furnishings of the sanctuary, begins with the manner in which Bezalel constructed the Ark of the Covenant, including the mercy seat and the cherubim. The text exactly follows the instructions God had given Moses on how the construction was to be done (see 25:10-22). The only thing left out here is God’s instruction that the tablets of the Testimony be put into the ark and that the mercy seat be put on top of it—which we will later find Moses doing once the tabernacle is complete (40:20). In the same way, all of the instructions God gave regarding the table of showbread (25:23-30) are followed by Bezalel in chapter 37. The only detail not repeated is God’s instruction that the showbread be placed on the table—which, again, is something that happens once the tabernacle is finished (40:4, 22-23). Then we see here the construction of the lampstand or menorah—also according to God’s instructions in chapter 25 (verses 31-40). The only thing left out is the lighting of its lamps, which, still again, is done when the tabernacle is completed (40:4, 25). Then we are presented with the making of the altar of incense, following the instructions God gave in chapter 30.

Chapter 38 concerns the court of the tabernacle. It begins with the construction of the altar of burnt offering, according to God’s instructions in 27:1-8. Then follows the bronze laver or washbasin, according to God’s instructions from 30:17-21. Finally, we see the construction of the court itself, following what God told Moses in 27:9-19. Notice that the various furnishings, including those inside the sanctuary, were made with rings to slide poles through for carrying. This was to keep people from touching the holy implements. God’s perfection and glory were symbolized by these items, and thus they were not to be profaned.

The chapter ends with a summary of the precious metals that went into the building of the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings. As a talent weighed about 70 pounds, equaling 3,000 shekels, the weight of all the gold used may have been around a ton. The weight of the bronze was around 2 1/2 tons. And the silver added up to the enormous weight of 3 1/2 tons! Indeed, silver was used in even the most basic elements of the tabernacle and its accoutrements. As *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: “Although the tabernacle was a tent, it was not a makeshift dwelling. It was a glorious shrine that symbolized the presence of the living God in the midst of His people.” Lest we think these are unimportant or insignificant details, Hebrews 8:5 and 9:23 remind us that the tabernacle and its furnishings were “the copy and shadow of the heavenly things” and “copies of the things in the heavens.”

### **Priestly Garments; The Work Completed (Exodus 39)**

**May 6**

The priestly garments were made according to the fashion God had instructed Moses in chapter 28. The only thing left out here is the placement of the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate (see 28:30)—a step that takes place in Leviticus 8:8. Notice here the short trousers that were part of the priestly uniform. This linen undergarment, God had earlier explained, was for modesty’s sake—“to cover their nakedness” (Exodus 28:42). “Given the sexually preoccupied worship of Israel’s neighbor’s, this provision was decidedly countercultural” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 42). “This modesty communicated to the Israelites that human sexuality could not influence God. That idea was a central feature of Baal worship, which continually tempted the Israelites. The priests of Baal would use obscene gestures and actions in the pagan worship of their depraved god” (note on

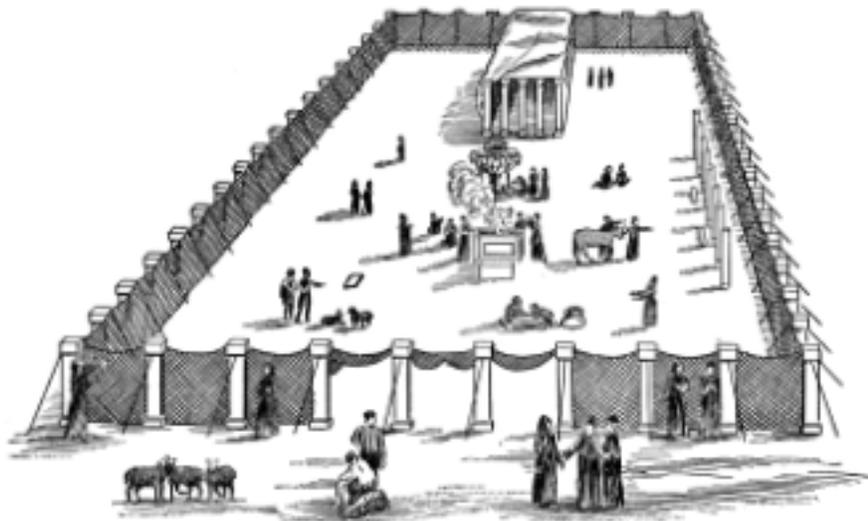
Leviticus 6:10). In stark contrast, “Nothing obscene or unseemly was permitted in the pure worship of the living God” (note on Exodus 20:26).

With the completion of the priestly garments, the work of construction was finally finished. Verses 32-43 of chapter 39 list “all the work” that God had commanded through Moses. It was now finished. “Then Moses looked over all the work” (verse 43)—a final inspection. And the result? “And indeed they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, just so they had done it” (verse 43). May the same be said of *us* as we strive to please God in our lives. In the end, Moses blessed them, just as Christ will bless us if we follow God’s instructions.

### **The Finished Tabernacle Filled With God’s Glory (Exodus 40)**

**May 7**

God gave Moses explicit instruction regarding every detail of the building of the tabernacle. And the Bible makes two interesting statements regarding the care with which Moses *followed* these instructions. Verse 16 says, “Moses did according to all that the LORD had commanded him,” while verse 33 simply says, “So Moses finished the work.” Moses was a faithful man of God. He strove for excellence in everything God gave him to do. The book of Hebrews comments on his faithfulness, “Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant” (Hebrews 3:5).



The tabernacle was finally set up and its furnishings arranged on the first day of the first month, Abib or Nisan on the Hebrew Calendar, of the second year of Israel’s journey out of Egypt (verses 2, 17). This was around 10 months after the people had arrived at Sinai and nearly two weeks before their second keeping of the Passover. When everything God had commanded had been completed, He came near in a dramatic descent that manifested His glory among the Israelites, filling the tabernacle with His glory so that even Moses could not enter. The appearance of God’s glory is sometimes called the Shekinah or the Shekinah glory, coming from the Hebrew for “to dwell.” *The Nelson Study Bible* states: “The glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle demonstrated His Presence with the Israelites, His significance to them, and His awe-inspiring wonder. The words of John 1:1-18 are appropriate to recall here. In the Incarnation, the glory of God was manifest not in a tent, but in His Son.... How wonderful that the Book of Exodus concludes with this image of the gracious God, hovering protectively over His people.... A faithful Israelite follower of God could see the tabernacle and realize that God was there in His splendor and power. And with Him the people advanced to Canaan, the land He had promised to them.”

### **Introduction to Leviticus (Leviticus 1)**

**May 8**

Moses evidently wrote much of Leviticus sometime in the first month [Abib or Nisan on the Hebrew calendar, corresponding to March–April] of the second year of the wandering of Israel (compare Exodus 40:17; Numbers 1:1; 10:11)—perhaps putting it in its final form shortly before his death nearly 40 years later. The book’s Hebrew name, *Wayyiqva*, meaning “And He Called,” is taken from the first words of the book. The Greek title, from the Septuagint, is *Leuitikon*—Latinized in the Vulgate as *Leviticus*—which means “pertaining to Levites.” However, this title is somewhat misleading as the book does not deal with the Levites as a whole but more with the priests, the family of Aaron, a segment of the Levites. (The Levites as a whole are not sanctified until the book of

Numbers.) Perhaps more appropriate titles for the book would be those found for it in the Jewish Talmud—"The Law of the Priests" and "The Law of the Offerings."

The Aaronic priesthood was divinely ordained by God as a mediator between Him and the nation of Israel. As this book directed, the priests were to officiate over an elaborate system of sacrifices and rituals. The book of Hebrews tells us that "all this is symbolic, pointing to the present time [of Christ's redemption]. The offerings and sacrifices there prescribed cannot give the worshipper inward perfection. It is only a matter of food and drink and various rites of cleansing—outward ordinances in force until the time of reformation" (9:9-10, New English Bible)—that is, the time of Christ's death and resurrection followed by the giving of the Holy Spirit to the New Testament Church. Nevertheless, the sacrificial system *was* from God—and served a valuable purpose in that it was part of what was ultimately intended to lead people to Christ (see Galatians 3:24-25). Indeed, there will again be sacrifices after Christ returns (see Ezekiel 46:1-15).

Jesus has, of course, become the true sacrifice for all mankind. Thus, there is no need for the sacrifice of animals at this time: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He [Jesus] came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, "Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God."' Previously saying, 'Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the law), then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.' He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:4-12).

It should also be noted that the Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ has now taken over from the Aaronic priesthood. Jesus is now the Mediator between God and man (see Hebrews 7–10). And, in fact, *Christians* are now *priests* serving under Him (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Indeed, the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ was not the only thing typified in the various sacrifices of the Old Testament. They also represented our following Christ's example today, presenting *ourselves* as offerings: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). Realizing this amazing fact, as *The Nelson Study Bible's* introductory notes on this book explains, "modern Christians can learn much from Leviticus. The holiness of God, the necessity of holy living, the great cost of atonement and forgiveness, the privilege and responsibility of presenting only our best to God, the generosity of God that enables His people to be generous—these are only some of the lessons. Leviticus reveals the holiness of God and His love for His people in ways found nowhere else in the Bible. Ultimately, Leviticus calls God's people of all ages to the great adventure of patterning life after God's holy purposes."

Before looking at each of the five main offerings detailed in the first seven chapters of Leviticus, it is recommended that those wishing to study them in much greater depth read a 19th-century book by author Andrew Jukes titled *The Law of the Offerings*. It is available to order through the Internet or you can probably find it at your local library or Christian bookstore, as it is considered the standard work on this topic. While we would not agree with Jukes' book in a number of particulars, it is biblically sound in many important respects and offers some incredible insights into the subject. Be warned, however, that because of its older and somewhat elevated style, it does not always make for easy reading.

### **Burnt Offerings (Leviticus 1)**

**May 8 Cont'd**

We often think of Old Testament sacrifices as simply typical of Christ's death. But there is far more to it than that. As Andrew Jukes explains, offerings were "divided into two great and distinctive classes—first, the sweet savour offerings, which were all... oblations for acceptance; and secondly, those offerings which were *not* of a sweet savour, and which were required as an expiation for sin. The first class, comprising the Burnt-offering, the [Grain]-offering, and the Peace-offering—were offered on the [bronze] altar which stood in the Court of the Tabernacle. The second class—the Sin and Trespass-offerings—were not consumed on the altar: some of them were burnt on the earth without the camp; others the priest ate, having first sprinkled the blood for atonement. In the first class, sin is not seen or thought of: it is the faithful Israelite giving a sweet offering to [the Eternal].

In the Sin-offerings it is just the reverse: it is an offering charged with the sin of the offerer. Thus, in the first class—that is, the Burnt-offering, the [Grain]-offering, and the Peace-offering—the offerer came for acceptance as a worshipper. In the second class, in the Sin and Trespass-offerings, he came as a sinner to pay the penalty of sin and trespass. In either case the offering was without blemish.... But in the [sweet aroma offering], the offerer appears as man in perfectness, and in his offering stands the trial of fire—that is, God’s searching holiness; and accepted as a fragrant savour, all ascends a sweet offering to [the Eternal]. In the other, the offerer appears as a sinner, and in his offering bears the penalty due to his offences” (pp. 55-56).

In the case of the burnt offering, we are not “to consider Christ as the Sin-bearer, but as man in perfectness meeting God in holiness. The thought here is not, ‘God hath made Him to be sin for us’ [2 Corinthians 5:21], but rather, ‘He loved us, and gave Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour’ [Ephesians 5:2]. Jesus... both in the Burnt-offering and Sin-offering, stood as our representative.... We have here what we may in vain search for elsewhere—man giving to God what truly satisfies Him” (pp. 56-57). But it is not only the way that Christ lived His life on earth 2,000 years ago that is pictured here. Rather, Christ lives in us today as the same burnt offering. Thus, we are enabled to present *ourselves* as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1)—offering a “sweet smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18) by giving ourselves wholly to Him (compare 2 Corinthians 8:5). Indeed, the burnt offering was wholly consumed, symbolizing “that the worshiper must hold nothing in reserve when coming to God; everything is consumed in the relationship between God and the sincere worshiper” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Leviticus 1:3).

Jesus, of course, set the perfect example in this. Jukes explains: “Man’s duty to God is not the giving up of one faculty, but the entire surrender of all.... I cannot doubt that the type refers to this in speaking so particularly of the parts of the Burnt-offering; for ‘the head,’ ‘the fat,’ ‘the legs,’ ‘the inwards,’ are all distinctly enumerated. ‘The head’ is the well-known emblem of the thoughts; ‘the legs’ the emblem of the walk; and ‘the inwards’ the constant and familiar symbol of the feelings and affections of the heart. The meaning of ‘the fat’ may not be quite so obvious, though here also Scripture helps us to the solution [Psalm 17:10; 92:14; 119:70; Deuteronomy 32:15]. It represents the energy not of one limb or faculty, but the general health and vigour of the whole. [Indeed, consider that our bodies typically contain enough carbohydrates to last us for a run of several miles, but we have fat storage enabling us to walk 1,000 miles at three miles per hour. Fat is good if it’s healthy fat.] In Jesus these [various aspects] were all surrendered, and all without spot or blemish. Had there been but one affection in the heart of Jesus which was not yielded to His Father’s will... then He could not have offered Himself or been accepted as ‘a whole burnt-offering to [the Eternal].’ But Jesus gave up all: He reserved nothing. All was burnt, all consumed upon the altar” (pp. 63-64). This is the same end to which we strive—through Christ living His life in us today.

### Grain Offerings (Leviticus 2)

May 9

The King James Version of the Bible labels these as “meat” offerings. However, this Elizabethan English word simply means “food.” Sometimes also called “meal” offerings, they consisted of grain. This all makes sense when we consider that man’s most consistent source of sustenance, the “staff of life,” has been bread. In this symbolism, we may perhaps observe that the grain offering symbolized worship of God through providing for fellow man. Christ has done this perfectly as the “bread of life” that came down from heaven, which we are to eat of as our food (see John 6; Matthew 4:4). Indeed, this offering provided a major portion of the food for God’s priests. It was not wholly burned upon the altar as the burnt offering was. For rather than symbolizing total devotion to God, it, again, included the service of fellow man as part of that devotion. And yet, though it was not wholly burnt, it *was* totally consumed—by the fire of God as well as by the priests—with nothing left for the offerer. The offerer, as in the burnt offering, was to give of himself completely.

Let us examine, then, some of the ingredients of the grain offering. First is flour. “Bread flour must be ground” (Isaiah 28:28)—or “bruised,” as the King James has it. “Christ our staff of life is here represented as the bruised One. The emblem, [grain] ground to powder, is one of the deepest suffering.... The thought is one of bruising and grinding; of pressing, wearing trial. Jesus was not only tried by ‘fire’; God’s holiness was not the only thing that consumed Him. In meeting the wants of man, His blessed soul was grieved, and pressed and bruised continually. And the bruising here was from those to whom He was ministering, for whom He daily gave Himself” (Jukes, p. 80). And, of course, there was His actual physical bruising as a service to mankind. “And what a lesson is there here for

the believer who wishes to give himself in service to his brethren! [—to be a food offering!] This scripture, as in fact all Scripture, testifies that service is self-surrender, self-sacrifice. Christ, to satisfy others, was broken: and bread [grain] must still be bruised: and the nearer our ministry approaches the measure of His ministry—immeasurably far as we shall ever be behind Him—the more we shall resemble Him, the bruised, the oppressed, the broken One” (p. 83). Jukes also brings out the fact that fine flour, as it was supposed to be, has no unevenness—just as with Christ, who was consistent in being fully godly in all areas.

He goes on to explain the oil in the grain offering as symbolic of God’s Holy Spirit, which, in the burnt offering, was represented as water (Leviticus 1:9). “The third ingredient of the [Grain]-offering is frankincense—‘he shall put frankincense thereon’; in connexion with which, and yet in contrast, it is commanded—‘ye shall burn no honey unto the Lord.’ These emblems, like all the others, are at once simple yet most significant. Frankincense is the most precious of perfumes, of enduring and delightful fragrance: fit emblem of the sweetness and fragrance of the offering of our blessed Lord. Honey, on the other hand, though sweet, is corruptible; soon fermented, and easily turned sour. In frankincense the full fragrance is not brought out until the perfume is submitted to the action of fire. In honey it is just the reverse; the heat ferments and spoils it. The bearing of this on the offering of Jesus is too obvious to comment. The fire of God’s holiness tried Him, but all was precious fragrance. The holiness of God only brought out graces which would have escaped our notice had He never suffered. Yea, much of the precious odour of His offering was the very result of His fiery trial” (p. 88).

The fourth and last ingredient of the grain offering was salt—in contrast to leaven, which was forbidden to be offered on the altar. “The import of these emblems is obvious: the one positively, the other negatively.... ‘Salt,’ the well-known preservative against corruption, is the emblem of perpetuity and incorruptness; while ‘leaven,’ on the other hand, composed of sour and corrupting dough, is the as well-known emblem of corruption” (pp. 89-90). A case in which leaven *could* be offered was that of the “offering of the firstfruits” (2:12)—that is, in the leavened loaves offered at Pentecost (23:15-21). But it could not be burned on the altar for a sweet aroma (2:12). These leavened loaves represented the Church, still beset with sin (compare 1 John 1:8-10) yet finding acceptance through Christ’s sacrifice and His living within its members. Just as Christ did, we are to offer ourselves as food for the world around us—serving our fellow man as an offering to God (compare Matthew 25:31-46).

Also, the sacrifice mentioned in Leviticus 7:13, which is called, “the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offering” was made with leaven. Here again, this sacrifice was not burned on the altar.

### Peace Offerings (Leviticus 3)

May 10

As *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: “The Hebrew word for peace means ‘wholeness, completeness, soundness, health.’ When a person has this, in all its dimensions, that person is at peace. The peace offerings were times of feasting, drinking, talking, singing, and enjoying salvation as a great gift from God (see 7:11-21). Paul describes Jesus Christ as our perfect peace offering (see Col. 1:20)” (note on Leviticus 3:1). In the peace offering, unlike other offerings, the *offerer* was allowed to eat and thus find satisfaction in the offering: “God, man, and the priest, all fed together, all finding satisfaction in the offering. God first has His part and is satisfied, for He declares it to be very good. ‘It is an offering made by fire of a sweet savour unto the Lord.’ Man (in Christ) as offerer has his part, and is permitted to share this offering with his friends. And the priest, that is, Christ in His official character, is satisfied also, and His children are satisfied with Him. What a picture is here presented to us! The offerer feasts with God, with His priest, and with the priest’s children” (Jukes, p. 108).

In this picture, not only is God satisfied but so is the whole priestly family—symbolic of Christ’s family, the Church of God. So, too, is the offerer himself. Christ set the example here. Isaiah prophesied of Him, “He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11, King James Version). Indeed, His life offering in God’s service sustained Him as food. He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). Indeed, there normally had to be a “burnt offering” in order that a peace offering could follow. For the peace offering was to be offered “upon the burnt sacrifice” (Leviticus 3:5). Being in alignment with God’s will, as represented by the burnt offering, the worshiper would then be in a position to fellowship with God and with his or her family in the sharing of the peace offering.

As with the other offerings, there is much more to the peace offering that could be said—particularly when it comes to their being used in chapter 7 as thanksgiving or praise offerings

or for taking a vow. Again, you are encouraged to study this subject on your own, as it is much broader than can possibly be covered here.

### **Sin Offerings (Leviticus 4)**

**May 11**

As we've already seen, "in the Burnt-offering and other sweet-savour offerings, the offerer came as a worshipper, to give in his offering, which represented himself, something sweet and pleasant to [the Eternal]. In the Sin and Trespass-offerings, which were *not* of a sweet savour, the offerer came as a convicted sinner, to receive in his offering, which represented himself, the judgment due to his sin or trespass.... In the one case the offering was accepted to shew that the offerer was accepted of the Lord; and the total consumption of the offering on the altar shewed God's acceptance of, and satisfaction in, the offerer. In the other case the offering was cast out, and burnt, not on God's table, the altar, but in the wilderness without the camp; to shew that the offerer in his offering endures the judgment of God, and is cast out of His presence as accursed.... And yet the Sin-offering needed to be 'without blemish,' as much as the Burnt-offering.... A part indeed, 'the fat,' was burnt on the altar, to shew that the offering, though made a sin-bearer, was in itself perfect.... 'The fat,' as we have already seen in the other offerings, represents the general health and energy of the whole body. Its being burnt to God was the appointed proof that the victim offered for sin was yet in itself acceptable" (Jukes, pp. 142-143, 146, 165).

There were different regulations for the sin offering depending on who the offerer was. If the sin being atoned for was that of the entire congregation or the priesthood, the blood of a sacrificial bull was to be brought inside the Holy Place and sprinkled on the altar of incense. This was not necessary in the case of a civil ruler or common person. One guilty individual would not necessarily upset the entire spiritual life of the nation. But sin among all the people or the priests would. And, thus, the incense altar, which represented the prayers of God's people ascending up to His throne and therefore their contact with Him, had to itself be purified of the taint of sin. It should also be recognized that when the sacrifice was not for themselves, the priests were to eat part of it. They were, thus, satisfied when the demands of divine judgment were met and the spiritual life of the nation preserved. But when a priest was atoning for his own sin, the whole animal was to be burnt outside the camp—for no one was allowed to profit from his own sin.

Special sin offerings for priest and congregation were sacrificed on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:11-19, 27). The only differences were that on Atonement the animal for the whole congregation was specified as a goat (goats being used as a sin offering for the congregation in other special circumstances as well) and, on that one day only, the blood was taken beyond the altar of incense into the Most Holy Place.

Clearly Jesus Christ fulfilled the sin offering by dying in our place. But there is a sense in which this offering is also fulfilled in us—in a secondary way. Jukes explains: "God forbid I should be mistaken upon this point, as though I thought that the saint could atone for himself or others.... Still, there is a sense and measure in which the Sin-offering has its counterpart in us, as bearing on our self-sacrifice: there is a sense in which the Christian may bear sin, and suffer its judgment in his mortal flesh.... Christ's death in the flesh for sin is made our example: we too must also, yea therefore, die with Him.... The saint, as having been judged in the person of Christ, and knowing that for him Christ has borne the cross, follows on by that cross to judge and mortify all that he finds in himself still contrary to his Lord. The flesh in him is contrary to that Holy One [compare Romans 7:18, 23]: the flesh in him therefore must die.... God's truth is, that so far from 'the flesh' or 'old man' being saved from death by the cross, it is by it devoted to death and to be crucified [Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20]; and that Christ's death, instead of being a kind of indulgence for sin, or a reprieve of the life of the flesh, the life of the old man, is to His members the seal that their flesh must die, and that sin with its lusts and affections must be mortified [Colossians 3:5]" (pp. 204-206).

### **Trespass Offerings and Accompanying Regulations (Leviticus 5:1-6:7)**

**May 12**

Though the trespass offering is sometimes called a sin offering (compare 5:6-9), there is a general distinction to be made between sin and trespass. Some have argued that sin is against God while trespass is against fellow man. But the Bible makes it clear that it is possible to commit trespass against God (compare verses 15-19). What then, is the difference between sin and trespass? Jukes explains, "With our shortsightedness, our inability to see beyond the surface, we naturally look at *what man does* rather than at *what he is*; and while we are willing to allow that *he does* evil, we perhaps scarcely think that *he is* evil. But God judges *what we are* as well as *what we do*; *our sin*, the

sin in us, as much as *our trespasses*. In His sight sin in us, *our evil nature* [compare Romans 7], is as clearly seen as our trespasses, which are but *the fruit* of that nature. He needs not wait to see the fruit put forth. He knows the root is evil, and so will be the buddings.... Thus in the Sin-offering *no particular act* of sin is mentioned, but *a certain person* is seen standing confessedly as a sinner: in the Trespass-offering *certain acts* are enumerated, and *the person* never appears. In the Sin-offering I see a person who needs atonement, offering an oblation *for himself* as a sinner: in the Trespass-offering I see certain acts which need atonement, and the offering offered *for these particular offences*....

“Of course, in the Sin-offering, though the *man* is seen rather than his acts, proof must needs be brought that he is a sinner. But let it be noticed that this is done, not by the enumeration of certain trespasses, but simply by a reference to the law; which, though no particular transgression is mentioned, is said to have been neglected or broken” (pp. 148-149). Of course, there will be particular acts to show that the person is guilty of sin. Yet the sin offering does not atone for these specifically—it atones for sinful nature in general, which stands in rebellion against God (compare Romans 8:7). “In the Trespass-offering, on the other hand, it is exactly the reverse. We have nothing but one detail after another of particular wrongs and offences; the first class being of wrongs done against God, the other of wrongs against our neighbor” (pp. 149-150). The trespass offerings, then, are to atone for specific sinful acts. It is these specific acts of trespass that require restitution, as detailed in this section.

### **A Perpetual Fire (Leviticus 6:8–7:38)**

**May 13**

This section is basically a review of the various offerings, albeit with many interesting additional bits of information. One fascinating fact we find in this passage is that the fire upon the altar was to be kept burning (6:9, 12-13). *The Nelson Study Bible comments*: “The fire on the altar was never to go out. This was accomplished at night with a burnt offering that was not extinguished. It could have been stoked with wood through the night to keep it burning. After being renewed in the morning [with wood] (see v. 12), the fire was kept going throughout the day for the succession of [various offerings].... Five times in this paragraph the priests are instructed to keep the fire burning. There are at least three reasons for this: (1) The original fire on the altar came from God (9:24). (2) Perpetual fire symbolized the perpetual worship of God. (3) Perpetual fire symbolized the continual need for atonement and reconciliation with God, which was the purpose of the offerings” (notes on 6:9 and verses 12-13).

When the altar was transported, the ashes were removed and a cloth was put on top (Numbers 4:13-14). The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* states in its note on verse 13: “No mention is made of the sacred fire; but as, by divine command, it was to be kept constantly burning, it must have been transferred to some pan or brazier under the covering, and borne by the appropriate carriers.” Though we can’t be certain about this, it is plausible since sacrifices were offered every morning and evening, which may well imply that they were done even at times of transport. When tabernacle worship was later transferred to the temple at the time of Solomon, God ignited that fire too. However, it is not known whether the same fire was kept burning through periods of apostasy when temple worship was abandoned, although it certainly could have been. And there is no indication that God ignited the fire of the altar built after Judah’s Babylonian captivity.

### **Aaronic Priesthood Consecrated (Leviticus 8)**

**May 14**

The incredible mercy of God is demonstrated in the appointment of Aaron as Israel’s ecclesiastical leader. Aaron, after all, had presided over Israel’s idolatry with the golden calf. Yet, now forgiven, God gives him another chance—this time to serve as God’s own high priest, with Aaron’s sons serving as priests under him. Indeed, the priesthood was to be perpetuated through his family from then on.

This also serves as a reminder that when God forgives, He forgives us *completely*. In Psalm 103:12, King David proclaims that God removes our transgressions “as far as the east is from the west.” Isaiah 43:25 and Jeremiah 31:34 tell us that He remembers our sins no more. In Isaiah 1:18 God says that our sins, formerly as scarlet, “shall be white as snow.” God’s mercy and forgiveness toward Aaron are proof that God is equally merciful toward *us*, both forgiving and forgetting *our* sins. This is possible because, although God has perfect memory of the past, while we continue in the process of repentance and overcoming He looks on the new person within that He is forming and shaping as distinct from the sinful nature we battle (see Romans 7:17). Our old sinful self will one day be eliminated at our transformation to immortal incorruption (see 1 Corinthians 15) and only the

sinless new self will remain. But thankfully, we don't have to wait until then to be considered forgiven and reckoned as sinless. When we repent, God forgives us totally right then and there.

Leviticus 8 records the consecration, or setting apart, of Aaron and His sons for their important responsibility. The entire nation came out to witness the important event. As God's prophet and chief servant on earth, Moses was the only one qualified to ordain Aaron and his sons to their offices. Aaron, as the high priest, was anointed through the pouring out of oil upon his head (Leviticus 8:12)—symbolic of a special dispensation of God's Holy Spirit (compare Acts 10:38). In ancient Israel, the high priests and kings were anointed. Interestingly, both offices looked forward to the coming of an "Anointed One"—which is the meaning of *Mashiach* (or Messiah) in Hebrew and *Christos* (or Christ) in Greek. And indeed, Jesus Christ now fills both of these positions, king and high priest.

Though Aaron's sons were not anointed in the same manner he was, they were, along *with* him, sprinkled with anointing oil and blood (Leviticus 8:30; compare 10:7). Furthermore, Aaron and his sons were all specially consecrated by the blood of a ram being applied to the right ear, right thumb and right big toe of each of them. Some have speculated that this anointing of their extremities, top to bottom, represented a total covering by the sacrificial blood. Or perhaps it meant something else. The ear often represents hearing—so perhaps their willingness to listen to and heed God's instructions was being sanctified. After all, the phrase "this is what the Lord commanded," or similar words, is stated 10 times in this chapter (verses 4, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 34, 35, 36). The right thumb is the part of the right hand that allows it to function—and the right hand is often symbolic in the Bible of a person's actions. The priest's actions had to be holy. And as for the big toe, it enables balance in walking and standing—which are often representative in Scripture of walking with God, i.e., leading a godly life, and remaining steadfast in the faith respectively. These are important qualities for God's priests—qualities we must exemplify too, as we are now God's chosen holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

We should also take note of the washing of Aaron and his sons. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* states regarding Leviticus 8:6 that Moses "directed them to wash themselves, no doubt all over, and not merely their hands and feet. This cleansing from bodily uncleanness was a symbol of the putting away of the filth of sin; the washing of the body, therefore, was a symbol of spiritual cleansing, without which no one could draw near to God, and least of all those who were to perform the duties of reconciliation" (Vol. 1, p. 544). Many of the washing rituals of the Old Testament foreshadowed the baptism of the New Testament, and that would seem to be true in this case. Again, the New Testament Church is a holy priesthood, each individual being cleansed symbolically through washing in water when baptized—although it is actually the grace of God through "the blood of Jesus Christ" that "cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

## **FIVE-DAY BREAK**

**May 15-19**

*Starting May 15, there is break in the program for five days. Regular reading resumes May 20. (There are four planned breaks in each calendar year. This allows more time for personal study at these occasions and perhaps an opportunity for you to catch up in the reading if you have fallen behind.)*

## **Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 9–10)**

**May 20**

In chapter 9 Moses instructs Aaron to proceed and offer the first offerings as God's high priest. In verse 15, the offering for the people is a goat. While the animal specified as a sin offering for the congregation in Leviticus 4:14 was a bull, a goat was used for this purpose on some occasions (16:9, 5; Numbers 28–29; 15:22–26; 2 Chronicles 29:20–24; Ezra 6:17; 8:35).

At this inauguration of sacrifices, Aaron pronounces a blessing on Israel (verse 22). The specific wording of the priestly blessing that God commanded to be bestowed upon Israel is given in Numbers 6:23–26. This may be the blessing to which Leviticus 9:22 refers.

In verses 23–24 we see a spectacular event. "The sacrifices were consumed, not by fire ignited by Aaron, but by fire from before the LORD. This is the first of only five times that the Old Testament records fire from God as a sign that a sacrifice was accepted (Judg. 6:21; 1 Kin. 18:38; 1 Chr. 21:26; 2 Chr. 7:1). Since the fire on this altar was never to go out [see Leviticus 6:9, 12–13], all Israel's sacrifices from this time forward would be consumed by fire that originated from God" (*Nelson Study*

*Bible*, note on 9:24). However, while certainly plausible, it is not absolutely clear that this was the case.

After Aaron's sons are later killed for bringing profane fire before the Lord, Moses explains to Aaron why God has done this and then instructs Aaron's cousins to remove the dead men from the sanctuary. God then commands Aaron and his sons to not drink alcohol before going into the tabernacle of meeting. But the account had only spoken of Nadab and Abihu bringing profane fire and incense before God—so why is this particular instruction regarding intoxicating drink given to Aaron in the midst of what had just happened? Although it is possible that God was simply relating another way that one could show disregard for him during these rituals, the text here may be indicating that the inappropriate use of alcohol had played a role in the two brothers' poor judgment and behavior.

The punishment God inflicted on the two was very severe. We know there are certainly many times where people have "worshiped" God in a way that He does not recognize or appreciate, yet for which He does not strike them down immediately. However, at the time of this account, God was playing a very visible role in the nation of Israel and was actually teaching the people the magnitude of reverence they needed to have for Him: "By those who come near Me I *must* be regarded as holy; and before all the people I *must* be glorified" (Leviticus 10:3)—it was critical for them to understand.

What Aaron's sons did was not in ignorance, for God had already given clear instructions through Moses on how He was to be regarded. In this situation, Nadab and Abihu's disregard and carelessness could not go uncorrected—it was not only offensive to God, but would have fostered a careless attitude about God's instructions among the people. When God says to regard Him as holy, He means it. The instructive nature of this event was so important that Aaron and his remaining sons were not allowed to show any outward sign of grievance—they were required to maintain their composure and to continue their priestly duties to illustrate the justice and righteousness of God's wrath.

*The NIV Study Bible* notes regarding the death of Nadab and Abihu: "They are regularly remembered as having died before the Lord and as having had no sons. Their death was tragic and at first seems harsh, but no more so than that of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). In both cases a new era was being inaugurated.... The new community had to be made aware that it existed for God, not vice versa."

Moses pointing out that the goat of the sin offering (Leviticus 10:16) was not to be burned but eaten by the priests shows that this particular sin offering was not for the whole congregation or priesthood (see Leviticus 4). It is thus a later offering than the one referred to in 9:15. Following the death of his nephews, Moses was rather concerned about making sure everything was being done correctly. In verse 18, he isn't rebuking Aaron's sons for failing to bring the blood into the holy place, but rather pointing out that, because the blood was not brought in, the offering was to be eaten, not burned (see 6:29-30).

Aaron explains that he himself did not eat of the offering because he was afraid God would not accept it. Eating of the sin offering was an act of worship symbolizing satisfaction with God's justice, and Aaron understood the need to be in a proper and reverential frame of mind. Yet he and his sons were sorely grieved and distracted by what had happened—perhaps even unnerved and unhappy with God's judgment for the moment.

"Aaron did not eat of the sacrificial meat because he was afraid of what more God might do. He was not being rebellious, as his dead sons had been in burning the incense. Aaron was arguing that in circumstances such as the one he faced that day, God would prefer the priest to err on the side of caution rather than presumption.... Rebellion arises from a heart that is not right toward God. Moses recognized that Aaron's failure was not rebellion, that his argument had merit, and that Aaron could be forgiven" (*Nelson Study Bible*, notes on verses 19-20).

## **Laws of Clean and Unclean Meat (Leviticus 11–12)**

**May 21**

These dietary laws, repeated in Deuteronomy 14, were around long before the institution of the Levitical priesthood—indeed, long before Israel even existed. For even before the Flood of Noah's day, almost 1,000 years earlier, we see the distinction between clean and unclean animals. At that time, God commanded Noah to take two of every unclean animal onto the ark and seven (or seven pairs) of every clean animal (Genesis 7:2-9). Regrettably, many today argue that the dietary laws were done away in the New Testament. However, there are no scriptures that support this view, even though some have misused certain verses to try to make the point. To counter one popular argument, the dietary laws were not done away by the ending of the Old Covenant initiated at Sinai,

because, again, they were in force long before that covenant came into being. Nowhere does the New Testament abrogate God's laws regarding clean and unclean animals. Indeed, frogs are still viewed as "unclean" at the very end of the Bible, along with certain birds (compare Revelation 16:13; 18:2).

While the Jewish people have preserved the dietary laws—along with some dietary traditions not enjoined by Scripture—the people of the "lost 10 tribes" of Israel, influenced by their gentile neighbors, gradually stopped observing them. And God remains very displeased about this fact. In Isaiah 65, speaking of the end time, He says: "I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts; a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face... *who eat swine's flesh, and the broth of abominable things is in their vessels*" (verses 2-4).

In fact, the next chapter of Isaiah prophesies that Christ, at His return, is going to punish such people for eating unclean meat as part of their willful ignorance of and disobedience to God's instruction, even though they may not view it as such. Notice what God says: "For behold, the LORD will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword the LORD will judge all flesh; and the slain of the LORD shall be many. 'Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves, to go to the gardens after an idol in the midst, *eating swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse*, shall be consumed together,' says the LORD. For I know their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory" (66:15-18). Ultimately all nations will come to know God's truth—including His laws regarding clean and unclean meats.

We will see more about clean and unclean meats as pertaining to holiness (see Leviticus 11:44-47) in the highlights for Leviticus 20:25-26. To learn more about our responsibility in this matter, and to read what several medical professionals have to say on the subject and its impact on human health, request or download our free booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?*

### **Laws Regulating Disease and Bodily Discharges (Leviticus 13–15)**

**May 22-24**

Modern leprosy, also called Hansen's disease, is, according to *Mosby's Medical, Nursing, & Allied Health Dictionary*, a "chronic, communicable disease... that may take either of two forms, depending on the immunity of the host. Tuberculoid leprosy, seen in those with high resistance, presents as thickening of [skin] nerves and [insensitive], saucer-shaped lesions. Lepromatous leprosy, seen in those with little resistance, involves many systems of the body, with widespread [deposits forming hardening] and [small lumps] in the skin, [eye inflammation], [corneal inflammation], destruction of nasal cartilage and bone, testicular atrophy, [swelling of extremities], and involvement of the [immune] system. Blindness may result. Death is rare unless... tuberculosis [or a related illness] occurs concurrently. Contrary to traditional belief, leprosy is not very contagious, and prolonged, intimate contact is required for it to be spread between individuals" (4th ed., "Leprosy").

Still, it is contagious nonetheless. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states in its article on the disease: "The prevention of leprosy rests upon the recognition of bacteriologically positive cases so that they may be isolated and treated" (1985, Vol. 7, p. 287). And this is quite biblical. While treatment is not emphasized in Leviticus, the priests, as medical control officers, were to diagnose individuals and then take action to protect the community from further infection—by isolating those displaying the disease's symptoms.

It may even be that the "leprosy" identified in Leviticus 13–14 was far more communicable than the modern disease of that name. "There is some debate among medical scholars about whether the Hebrew word translated 'leprosy' in the Bible is exactly the same disease as the modern variant. It may have been another deadly infectious disease that differs from modern forms of leprosy" (Grant Jeffrey, *The Signature of God: Astonishing Biblical Discoveries*, 1996, p. 147). Indeed, *The Nelson Study Bible* notes on the word "leprosy" in Leviticus 13:2, "Hebrew *saraath*, disfiguring skin diseases, *including* leprosy." So there may have been an immediate concern about a very infectious disease at the time God inspired Moses to write Leviticus.

Of course, it is also possible that the leprosy of the time was the same as today. In that case, God may have simply been instituting a general way of dealing with communicable illness—that is, quarantine. In any case, He was also illustrating the need for removing *spiritual* uncleanness by the lesson of such physical separation—and made this even clearer by certain ritual or ceremonial ordinances. "Leprosy" on house walls and garments, it should be pointed out, was almost certainly

“decomposition by mildew, mold, dry rot, etc.” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 14:34)—spreading fungus. “All of these were harmful growths, whether on human skin, clothing, or the wall of a house.”

It is especially interesting to read the requirements of shaving and washing in water. Incredibly, the idea of microscopic germs passing on illness, which Leviticus seems to take for granted, was not even generally believed in until very modern times. Indeed, Ignaz Semmelweis, a Hungarian doctor, was ridiculed by the entire medical establishment in the mid-1800s for instituting handwashing before examining patients—as if there were some invisible infectious agents to be worried about. Thankfully, his notion eventually caught on—but not until many died unnecessarily and until he died as well, following decades of rejection that, sadly, drove him into a mental institution (Jeffrey, pp. 145-146, from S.I. McMillen, *None of These Diseases*).

Yet consider the time during which Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Ancient Egyptian medical knowledge was primitive compared to that of the 1800s. It is obvious from the Papyrus Ebers manuscript and other ancient sources that there was no sense of sanitation in Egypt whatsoever. For instance, dung, from many different animals, was a primary ointment ingredient for all manner of ailments. The ancient laws of the Israelites, on the other hand, show nothing but concern for sanitation. They would have protected against microscopic pathogens. Yet how could Moses have known of the existence of such germs? The Egyptians certainly did not—nor did any other ancient culture.

In fact, “until this century, all previous societies, except for the Israelites who followed God’s medical laws regarding quarantine, kept infected patients in their homes—even after death, exposing family members and others to deadly disease. During the devastating Black Death [or bubonic plague] of the fourteenth century, patients who were sick or dead were kept in the same rooms as the rest of the family. People often wondered why the disease [which killed half of Europe and seemed unstoppable] was affecting so many people at one time. They attributed these epidemics to ‘bad air’ or ‘evil spirits.’ However, careful attention to the medical commands of God as revealed in Leviticus would have saved untold millions of lives. Arturo Castiglione wrote about the overwhelming importance of this biblical medical law, ‘The laws against leprosy in Leviticus 13 may be regarded as the first model of a sanitary legislation’ (Arturo Castiglione, *A History of Medicine...* 1941, p. 71). Fortunately, the church fathers of Vienna finally took the biblical injunctions to heart and commanded that those infected with the plague... be placed outside the city in special medical quarantine compounds. Care givers fed them until they either died or survived the passage of the disease. Those who died in homes or streets were instantly removed and buried outside the city limits. These biblical sanitary measures quickly brought the dreaded epidemic under control for the first time. Other cities and countries rapidly followed the medical practices of Vienna until the Black Death was finally halted” (Jeffrey, pp. 149-150).

No, Moses simply could *not* have understood the need to institute such laws through the natural means available to him at the time. But the Creator God *did* understand. And in commanding that His instructions for handling such situations be preserved in the Bible, the Eternal has given us one more amazing proof that this wonderful book is truly His inspired Word.

### **The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)**

**May 25**

While the term “Day of Atonement” is nowhere mentioned in this chapter, we know that this Holy Day is the one referred to here based on the fact that the events described were to transpire on the 10th day of the seventh month (verse 29). And according to Leviticus 23:27, this is the date of the Day of Atonement. There is, of course, a clear “atonement” theme running throughout Leviticus 16, that very word being used 16 times in the chapter. Further explanation of the rich meaning behind the actions that were carried out on this day is given in the supplementary reading.

**Supplementary Reading:** “The Day of Atonement: Removal of Sin’s Cause and Reconciliation to God,” *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, pp. 38-43.

### **Holiness, the Centralization of Sacrifice and the Sanctity of Blood (Leviticus 17) May 26**

When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He constituted them as a nation and as His special people. From the beginning of His dealing with the people of Israel, God made it very clear that He was not like the gods of the nations. His terrifying judgments on Egypt showed His indisputable reality and supreme sovereignty over the natural world, the animal creation, men, nations, kings and the so-called gods feared and worshipped by the gentiles. Indeed, the very first lesson He impressed upon Moses when He called to him from the burning bush was that God was holy (Exodus 3:5).

The fundamental idea behind holiness is separation or setting apart. Throughout the Pentateuch, holiness is usually seen when God declares certain things holy—that is, to be separated from other things by special means for special purposes. The Holy Days, for example (see Leviticus 23), are declared to be holy because they are days separated from other days, imbued with special meaning and reserved for special activity defined by God. Similarly, the furnishings of the tabernacle were holy because they were set apart for special God-ordained uses and treatment. The high priest's garments were holy garments (Exodus 28:2) because they were designed especially for him and reserved only for his use during the performance of the duties of his office. The anointing oil was also holy (Exodus 30:22ff) because it was set apart for special purposes and no other oil could be made like it (verses 31-33). Likewise the incense made to burn on the altar of incense was holy and the mixture was not to be duplicated for common use. "Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people" (verses 37-38).

Because God is holy—utterly unique, separate from all else—His people must be holy and He must be approached in a holy way. Moreover, because He was in the midst of the camp of Israel (Numbers 5:3), the camp must also be holy. God gives special instructions here concerning sacrifice to ensure that the sacrificing is done in a certain place; Israel is not to sacrifice throughout the camp, but only at the tabernacle. Any man who makes a sacrifice must do so at the door of the tabernacle; anyone who does otherwise will be executed.

Why so strict? Why so severe a penalty? God gives one reason in verse 7—namely, to prevent Israel from ignorantly falling into idolatry. Carnal man's natural inclination is to *syncretize*—to innovate in religion, combining pagan elements with true religion—and to fall headlong into perverse, unholy idolatry. Israel, following bondage in pagan Egypt for more than 200 years, was prone to idolatry. Remember the golden calf? To deter idolatry, a sufficiently severe penalty was required. And, to greatly reduce the natural tendency to syncretism, God enacted a centralization of sacrifice. Here, too, is seen a principle that runs through much of Scripture: There is safety, security, stability and unity in having a degree of centralization. In the Church of God today, the lesson does not imply rigid control of outlying areas—nor that all aspects of God's work must be carried out from a single location. That is neither required nor practical. Rather, we should understand the need to be one of general administration, guidance and direction from a centralized authority, such as a governing ministerial council.

Furthermore, this chapter clearly continues the developing theme of holiness. That *ritual* holiness is in view is seen by the fact that 1) the instructions in this chapter are specifically directed to Aaron and his sons as priests, and then to all Israel; 2) that the instructions are given with regard to sacrifice; and 3) that the last two verses of the chapter are clearly regulations for ritual purity.

God gave Israel strict instruction regarding blood—He categorically forbids its consumption. Today, some try to justify the prohibition against consumption of blood by referring to the many health dangers involved in eating blood. For example, blood corrupts very quickly, and thus disease can be avoided by not ingesting it. Similarly, modern science has proven conclusively that many viral diseases are carried in the blood and consumption of blood can transfer those diseases to the one who eats. But this is not the reason God gives for the prohibition. God declares that the life of an animal is in its blood (verses 11, 14). And this is scientifically accurate since oxygen in the inhaled "breath of life" is carried to each cell of the body by the bloodstream. When blood is shed, life is "poured out," so to speak. This being the case, God reserves blood for a special purpose—namely, making atonement for sin upon the altar, the giving of life for another. These, then, are the specific reasons God mentions for prohibiting the consumption of blood.

This is not to say there are no health benefits from avoiding the ingestion of blood—there are. And God may have had this in mind as well. (Although it is also possible that eating blood is harmful because God has made it so as a penalty for those who would disobey Him in this way.) From this we may learn an important lesson: God's laws often have multiple effects, even beyond what is stated in the giving of the law. As mentioned in the highlights on leprosy, the ancient Israelites were in no position to scientifically determine that blood carries bacterial and viral diseases—the technology necessary to do that was thousands of years away. Nevertheless, those who respected God and His commands unknowingly accrued the blessing of good health by avoiding blood consumption, while also learning the spiritual lessons of the use of blood in sacrifice. Truly, God is a most marvelous and merciful lawgiver.

**Laws Concerning Sexual Immorality (Leviticus 18)****May 27**

Chapter 18 continues the theme of holiness and separation. The instructions here are directed to all Israel, and no mention is made of the priesthood. Hence, the instructions are not for ritual sanctification, *per se*. Since the instructions regard prohibited sexual relationships, they appear to be for social holiness, that is, for producing right relationships between the basic units of society—men and women.

Sexual immorality has been a persistent problem in all human cultures. The societies of Israel's time committed a variety of sexual perversions, as do ours today. To create a holy nation, a nation whose individual and societal conduct was pure and stable, God had to make clear which sexual relationships were forbidden.

The list of prohibited relationships includes marriage between (1) parent and child, (2) stepparent and stepchild, (3) full siblings, (4) half-siblings, (5) grandparent and grandchild, (6) uncle and niece, or aunt and nephew, (7) father-in-law and daughter-in-law, and (8) brother-in-law and sister-in-law. Also, a man was forbidden to marry a woman as well as her daughter or granddaughter. God also now prohibited a man from taking his wife's sister as a second wife while his wife was alive; such a marriage would likely ruin the relationship between the sisters and produce endless rivalry and strife within the family.

These prohibitions, which still apply, prevent destructive sexual relationships with the near of kin, prohibiting sexual relations with persons within two generations of an individual. As can be seen, these prohibitions, had they been enacted earlier, would have prohibited the marriages of any of Adam and Eve's children (per prohibition 3 above), Abraham and Sarah (per prohibition 4 above), as well as Jacob and Leah and Rachel (per the prohibition against marrying a wife's sister). No particular reason is given for the prohibitions, but medical science has demonstrated that the children of unions between near of kin, as defined by God, have a greater risk of genetic abnormality—and it is possible that this was a factor in the enactment of these prohibitions.

God also prohibits sexual relations with a woman during menstruation. While no reason for the prohibition is given, it is possible that a sensitive God gave it to provide a measure of protection for women during this often-uncomfortable period. Menstruation frequently produces mild or even severe physical discomfort, and a woman's emotional condition at this time can be fragile. Moreover, medical science has shown that sex during menstruation poses a greater risk of tissue injury or infection to the woman, as well as of transmitting blood-borne disease from one partner to another. God's giving of this law may also be tied to the special role of blood for the atoning of sin, as blood seems to be the major concern in Leviticus 20:18. Whatever the reason, God takes this matter very seriously—in the verse just cited, where God imposed a severe penalty for violation, as well as in Ezekiel 18, where it is declared a matter of righteousness (verses 5-9).

God concludes his instruction regarding illicit sexual relations and practices by pointedly reminding the Israelites that such conduct defiles not only them but also the land. It is easy to assume that bad conduct only affects the perpetrator and those immediately around him. Not so. The moral quality of a people extends far beyond them to the very land upon which they dwell. God reminds Israel that because such abominable acts were committed by the people of Canaan, that land was going to "vomit them out." Far from being a figure of speech or a poetic device, God's warning reveals a very real moral law of the universe. Sin has a material impact on the natural world. Lucifer sinned and Scripture seems to indicate that the creation was devastated as a result. Adam sinned and the plant and animal natures were corrupted. Just so, when a nation becomes sinful, even its land is defiled. Sin affects everything—man, beast, vegetation and land.

**Various Holiness Precepts (Leviticus 19)****May 28**

Parts of this chapter sound like they came from the New Testament. Indeed, in it we find the Old Testament statement of the second great commandment, as defined by Jesus Christ (verse 18; compare Matthew 22:37-40). The chapter opens with an explicit statement of the purpose for what has gone before and of what is to follow: Because God is holy, so must His people be also. This chapter will continue with sundry laws designed to maintain holy relationships with God and men.

The first two laws hew straight to a fundamental necessity for right relationships: reverence. Reverence is the high respect paid by one individual to another, with special attention to submissive behavior. God commands reverence for parents, the teachers of their children, and the observation of all of His Sabbaths, which are teaching occasions between Him, our spiritual Parent, and us, His

children. He further enjoins reverence for Himself by again prohibiting idolatry. When children revere their parents and God—heeding their instruction—right relationships based on mutual respect and honor are produced, and a whole multitude of blessings follow.

The regulation concerning peace (or fellowship) offerings again addresses the relationship between God and Israel. God has produced peace and fellowship between Himself and Israel, and that fellowship, symbolized by the peace offerings, must be respected. Thus, peace offerings are not to be treated in a common manner just because they were widely shared among family members. It was very important to remember that, as the family feasted on the offering, God also had His part in it and dined *with* the family. With such an honored guest in fellowship, care needed to be taken to ensure decorum and respect.

The laws concerning gleanings may not seem like a holiness issue, but they do constitute one, for, as already mentioned, the fundamental idea behind holiness is separation. Here God sets apart a certain portion of a harvest for the poor. In effect, a certain portion was holy to the poor and reserved for their use. Notice, however, that those who received this set-aside portion were still required to work for it. Unlike too many modern welfare systems, the recipients of God's generosity toward them still had to gather their food from the fields and vineyards themselves. This was consistent with the biblical principle Paul later expressed so succinctly: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The law was just to all concerned. It was generous toward the poor, but also fair to the property owners—since God was the one who promised to bless their crops if they would obey Him. By enacting this law, God ensured that He provided for the destitute among His people—and made all Israel participants in that provision.

Attention to truth and justice is prominently addressed. When a people separate themselves to truth and justice, they are unified and blessed with peace. God's priestly nation Israel needed to be just such a people if they were to serve as examples to the rest of the world. A major part of doing justice is to never allow your brother to continue in sin. Such "tolerance" will destroy your brother and, eventually, your community and nation. It is not "broadminded" or "big-hearted" to allow sin to continue (compare 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 6)—it is foolishness and dangerous to all around! Remember, *sin affects everything*. When a brother is sinning, we must make an effort to restore him spiritually (Galatians 6:1-2)—in humility, but with open rebuke if necessary (Proverbs 27:5).

Toward the close of the chapter, God addresses blood, divination and soothsaying, hair, beards, body piercing, tattoos, prostitution and Sabbaths. Why? What do all these have in common? Much. All these prohibitions concern pagan practices. Blood consumption was a part of Canaanite worship, as were divination and soothsaying (that is, prognostication based on pagan practices). Shaving around the sides of the head refers to certain tonsures or hairstyles laden with pagan sun symbolism (this practice of tonsure was widely practiced by the Roman Catholic clergy during the Dark and Middle Ages, and still is to some degree today). Trimming of the beard in a certain style was also part of pagan worship. Body piercing and tattoos served to mark a person as the worshiper of a particular god, but God desires that we honor and glorify Him through the clean presentation of our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20). And, as noted earlier, ritual prostitution was a ubiquitous feature of Canaanite religion.

### **Come Out From Among Them and Be Separate! (Leviticus 20)**

**May 29**

God's purpose was to bring Israel into the Land of Promise—and He would do just that. But the land was filled with people who practiced abominable wickedness. Because Israel was a carnal people, not having the Holy Spirit, and because they had been raised in an oppressive pagan culture, they would be tempted to syncretize and "borrow" pagan elements in their worship of God. This, of course, was completely unacceptable to God.

One of the practices of the people of Canaan was child sacrifice. Children, most often the firstborn, were burned alive to the false god Molech in the belief that their innocence and sinlessness would appease him and make the prayers the children supposedly brought before him more acceptable (hence the mention of mediums and familiar spirits, which were other forms of communication with a god). While it may seem incredible to us that anyone could be seduced into such horrific practice, Israel would not have found it unthinkable—it was simply one of many religious practices of the day. God, however, found it utterly loathsome! So, He unambiguously condemns child sacrifice in the first seven verses of the chapter. The penalty for such conduct was death, and the executioners were to be the people, not the state. This crime was so appalling that God wanted the entire community

involved in its eradication. And notice, God directly connects holiness and sanctification not with such abhorrent practices, but with conscientious obedience to His laws.

This chapter also contains a repetition of the laws of sexual morality, albeit in a condensed form. The laws regarding sexual relations are repeated, but the emphasis is on the punishment and the enormity of the crime. Once again, notice the connection between sin and the defilement of the land.

Notice also that the dietary laws of clean and unclean meats are mentioned and specifically connected to holiness—that is, separation from the people of the surrounding lands. The dietary laws, too, were given primarily for holiness purposes rather than physical health. Indeed, the dietary laws do have many health benefits, and no doubt God so intended them; but their primary purpose is stated as being for holiness. By creating such dietary laws, God added a dimension to daily living that constantly reminded the Israelites that they were to continue to be separate from the people of the world, and the laws created a significant frustration to fellowship with non-Israelites. Does God want such a distinct separation between Christians and the world? Yes! Notice what the apostle Paul wrote: “And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore, ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

### **Laws for the Priests and Fitness for Service (Leviticus 21–22)**

**May 30**

Because God is holy, His priests, who serve Him and represent Him to His people, must also be holy. This chapter details several regulations concerning only the priesthood.

God is eternal and wholly separate from sin. Human death is the product of sin. So, God’s priests must be separate from defilement through death. To accomplish this, the priests were forbidden to become defiled with the death of any person who was not a direct and close family member. Proper mourning was appropriate, and hence mourning for a father or mother, brother or sister, son or daughter was permitted. But otherwise, the priest had to be kept far from the defilement of the dead. For the high priest, even defilement for parents was not permitted, nor outward signs of mourning allowed.

Again, tonsures, certain beard trimming and body piercing for the priests are prohibited. Such practices were pagan in origin and God wanted His priesthood to be distinctively non-pagan.

Priestly marriages were also subject to stipulations not bound upon the average Israelite. In the case of the high priest, it very clearly states that he could marry only an Israelite virgin. Moreover, the priests of God had to be physically unblemished to perform certain rites. A blemished or deformed priest could not enter within the Holy Place, nor could he officiate at the altar. He could, however, engage in the other duties of the priesthood and partake of the offerings. The spiritual parallels with Jesus Christ, our High Priest, should be obvious.

Not only did the priests’ conduct and station in life have to be holy before a holy God, but even their momentary circumstances had to be holy. To officiate at the altar, a priest had to have no ritual defilement upon him. If defiled by disease, bodily discharge, a dead body, a discharge of semen (which may have symbolized the unfruitful going forth of life), an unclean animal, an unclean person, or by any other means, the priest could not officiate until he was ritually cleansed. Ritual *uncleanness* was representative of *sin*. And the holy God cannot be defiled by sin—so everything connected with approach to Him must be without its stain.

Furthermore, if defiled, the priest could not partake of the holy offerings. The priests received portions of certain offerings, which they and their immediate families could eat. But those who partook of the offerings had to also be ritually pure. Thus, as we can see, those who serve God and benefit from His service, must all be clean. As Christians, we have cleansing through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7), without which we cannot come to the Father, and through Christ we have access to holy things (Hebrews 13:10; compare 1 Corinthians 10:16-18; 1 Peter 2:5). Since the Church is the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), intended to show forth the praises of God to the world (1 Peter 2:9), it too must be cleansed, without spot, and holy.

The concluding portions of this section deal with sacrificial fitness. The animals sacrificed to God were symbolic of Christ in different ways. Christ was morally and spiritually perfect and unblemished. Thus, the animals that typified Him had to be physically perfect and unblemished. A sacrifice or offering made with a defective animal was rejected, and an insult to the perfect God.

Carnal man would prefer to give God the defects and keep the good for himself. But this God will not allow. Moreover, it was required that sacrifices be from the worshiper's own goods—not from a foreigner's goods. Every sacrifice must “cost” the one sacrificing. Finally notice, once again, that the chapter closes with an emphasis on holiness.

### **The Feasts of the Eternal (Leviticus 23)**

**May 31**

This chapter provides the first full listing in Scripture of the feasts of God, which lay out His incredible plan of salvation for mankind. Stressed here is the fact that these are not just the Israelites' feasts but *God's* feasts, including the weekly Sabbath, as well as the fact that the Holy Days within them are “holy convocations”—*commanded assemblies*. We must always obey God in observing these feasts—to be in His presence and receive instruction from Him. They are His appointed times to show Him proper appreciation, respect and honor.

The *general* instructions apply fully to mankind today. The instructions about what *offerings* to make are included here because the book of Leviticus focuses on the responsibilities of the priests and Levites. Some instructions given here are especially valuable because they are more complete than elsewhere in the Bible, including those about the wave-sheaf, the counting for determining the timing of Pentecost, and staying in booths (tabernacles or tents)—emphasizing temporarily staying in dwellings other than one's home—during the Feast of Tabernacles.

To learn more about God's feasts, request or download our free booklet, *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. The supplementary readings are found in this publication.

**Supplementary Reading:** “Introduction” and “Are God's Holy Days Relevant Today?,” *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, pp. 2-9; “How to Observe God's Holy Days,” *God's Holy Day Plan*, pp. 58-62).

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