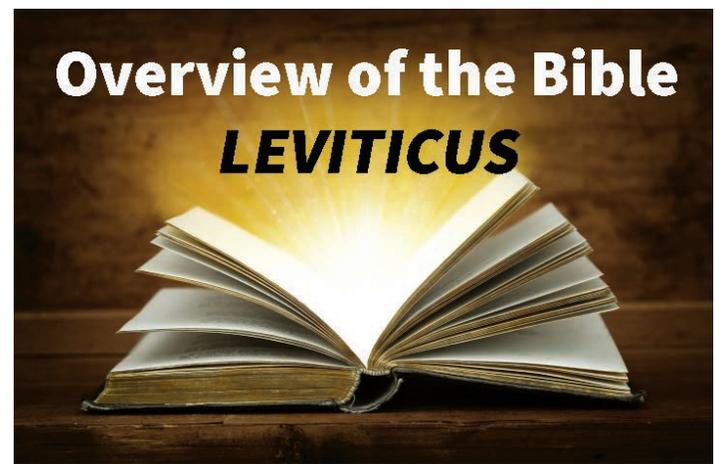


LEVITICUS:  
A Holiness Manifesto  
*Leviticus 21-27 – Lesson 25*  
Wednesday, November 4, 2020



It is the priest as human being, as citizen, who is discussed in these two chapters. The following items are highlighted: restrictions on the number of people for whom the priest may mourn, and the categories of women from which he may not choose a prospective bride (21:1-9); these restrictions are even more stringent for the high priest (21:10-15); physical blemishes, which in most cases are permanent, prohibit a priest from officiating (21:16-24); the priest may not eat any of the sacrificial food when he is temporarily unclean, as spelled out in chs. 13-15 (22:1-9); who in priest's family has a right to eat priestly food (22:10-16); blemished animals are unacceptable for sacrifice (22:17-30).

The common denominator in all these regulations is that God has "*sanctified/made holy*" the priest (21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32). Therefore, he is to be "*holy*." By and large these are unique standards imposed only on Israel's clergy. Certainly, in any age God's summons to holiness must be exemplified unquestionably in the life of those who "*bear the vessels of the Lord*." If they do not set and implement the standard, how will the congregation ever exemplify the holy life?

In these priestly regulations we again see that one does not achieve holiness by withdrawing from society. Holiness has to do with one's relationship to family, spouse, and household employees and with one's own physical appearance.

### **Holy Festivals (23)**

This section adds to the list certain holy days and festivals on the calendar. The list includes the Sabbath (v. 3); Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (vv. 4-8); the offering by farmers of a sheaf of barley, the first grain to ripen in the spring, to God, who receives his portion of the new crop before any of his people may have access to it (vv. 9-14); the Feasts of Weeks or Pentecost (vv. 15-22); the Feasts of Trumpets (vv. 23-24); the Day of Atonement (vv. 26-32); the Feasts of Tabernacles (vv. 33-44). Part of living the holy life is, according to Leviticus 23, giving God control over one's time weekly (v. 3) and seasonally (vv. 4-44), orienting one's work around worship, not vice versa.

These holy days are to be happy days. Too often these two ideas are kept worlds apart. One can be holy but at the same time unhappy, or happy but at the same time unholy. The people of God are "*to rejoice before the Lord*," at least on the Festivals of Weeks/Pentecost (v. 40).

On the majority of these days normal manual labor is suspended (vv. 7, 8, 21, 35, 36) -that is, work related to one's occupation and livelihood, but not lighter work, say, around one's house. But on the Sabbath (v. 3) and the Day of Atonement (vv. 28, 30, 31) any and all kind of work is outlawed. It is a time for families to be together. It is a time to be generous in assisting the poor (v. 22).

### **The Holy Place and the Holy Name (24)**

Two areas are discussed with regard to the Tabernacle. The first is the necessity of using pure oil for the lighting in the Tabernacle (vv. 1-4). The second is that the shewbread, consisting of twelve wheat loaves (for the twelve tribes), set in two rows of six, be replaced every Sabbath (vv. 5-9). Four times (vv. 2,3,4,8) we read that these

procedures in the tent of meeting are to be done “*continually, regularly*”—that is, daily in the case of vv. 1-4 (the lighting of the menorah from the evening to morning), and weekly in the case of vv.5-9 (the priests are eating the provided holy bread).

Then comes a story of a man of mixed parentage who cursed the Name (vv. 10-16), an infraction mandating the death penalty, a penalty enforced by the community, not by a hooded executioner (vv. 14,16).

The chapter concludes with a catena of laws. It is clear why the first of these laws, the one about one person killing another (v. 17), comes here. It follows the account of the blasphemer who is stoned to death for his crime. Not all taking of human life is illegal, or maiming (vv. 19-20).

### **The Sabbatical and Jubilee Years (25)**

Two strategic years are discussed in this chapter: the Sabbatical Year (vv. 1-7), which occurs every seventh year; and the Jubilee Year (vv. 8-55), which occurs every fiftieth year.

The emphasis on the Sabbatical Year is that the land is to lie fallow every seventh year. Exodus 23:10-11 says the Sabbatical Year is for the sake of the poor. Deut. 15:1-11 says; this year is for debtors and the remission of their debts. In leaving the land fallow for one year out of every seven, the people of God are being reminded that the land, God’s gift to his people, needs a Sabbath rest occasionally as much as they do weekly. They are also learning how to trust God to provide for their food needs over that year.

The name “*Jubilee*” is an Anglicized translation of the Hebrew word *yobel* (v. 10), which translates both as “*ram*” and as “*ram’s horn*,” the sounding of which proclaims the start of the Jubilee Year. As in the Sabbatical Year, land must lie fallow (vv. 11-12). Property is to return to its original owner. This was to show them that ultimately the land belongs to God.

In a way beyond that of the Sabbatical Year, in the Jubilee observance, God is putting his people in an even potentially devastating situation in which they need to trust him. There is no sowing of seed in the forty-ninth or fiftieth years. What if the forty-eighth year has been a year of drought? Will God sustain his people through three lean years (vv. 20-21)? There is a parallel in the manna story of Exodus 16, where God instructs his people not to gather manna on the Sabbath, and instead he provides a double supply on the sixth day to carry them through the seventh.

The kin of anyone who, for some reason or other, understandable or not, becomes poor should redeem that person (vv. 25-28, 35-38, 47-55). There is a ban on taking interest for room or board by a creditor (vv. 35-38). Nor is the debtor to be treated as a slave (vv. 39-46) if the debtor was forced by poverty into self-enslavement.

### **The Two Ways (26)**

The two ways are the lifestyle that brings the blessing of God (vv. 3-13) versus the lifestyle that brings the wrath of God (vv. 14-46). Leviticus 26 might be called the altar call of Leviticus. Blessings are threefold: sufficient rains for the harvest (v. 4), peace in the land (v. 6), and, most of all, the presence of God (v. 11). The wrath of God includes circumstances ranging from disease and sickness (v. 16) to war (vv. 23-29), whose by-products are plague, famine, cannibalism.

### **Religious Vows (27)**

It would be more accurate to say that this chapter deals with the retraction of, not the making of, religious vows.