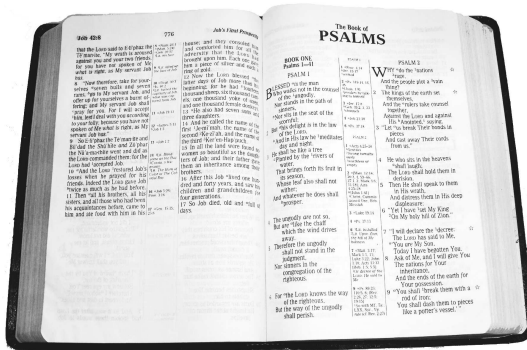


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



June 2020

Bible readings from Leviticus chapters 11 to 27

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You shall be holy; for I am holy

These verses deal with the problem of ritual uncleanness brought about through contact with the carcasses of animals (24–40). There are also more dietary laws (41–43) forbidding the eating of creatures without legs or those with many feet (eg. snakes, millipedes).

God told the people, *‘I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy’* (44). He is sovereign (*‘the LORD your God’*) and must be obeyed. He is holy and we too must be holy (the need for holiness is repeated throughout Leviticus (eg. 19:2; 20:7–8,26; 21:6–8,15,23, etc.)). He had been merciful and good to the Israelites and had brought them out of slavery in Egypt to be a holy people, a people distinct from those of the other nations. They were separated to God and this needed to be seen in their behaviour (45). They owed him so much for his great grace and it was quite reasonable for him to demand that they be holy.

The Lord has saved us from our sin and has heaped blessings upon us. If we love him, we will delight to obey him (John 14:15). He expects us to be different from those who are not Christians. We must not allow our thinking or behaviour to be influenced by the godless ways of the world around us (Romans 12:1–2). He has chosen us in Christ before he created the world, *that we should be holy and without blame before him in love* (Ephesians 1:4). He has called us to be holy in all our conduct, and the words of verse 44 are repeated in 1 Peter 1:15–16. Biblical holiness brings great joy to our lives. **If we have no desire to be holy, we are either backslidden in heart or not truly saved (Hebrews 12:14).**

*Jesus, Master, whose I am,
Purchased thine alone to be
By thy blood, O spotless Lamb,
Shed so willingly for me,
Let my heart be all thine own,
Let me live to thee alone.*

(Frances R. Havergal)

She shall be unclean

God told Moses that a woman giving birth to a male child *shall be unclean seven days*. This also made the child unclean, hence circumcision was on the eighth day (1–3). There were then a further thirty-three days for purification during which she was not allowed to enter the sanctuary or to touch any hallowed thing (eg, to partake of peace offerings). When she gave birth to a girl, both periods were doubled (4–5).

When her purification was completed, she had to bring a lamb to the priest for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtle-dove as a sin offering which was to make atonement for her. Those who were too poor to bring a lamb were to bring another turtle dove or young pigeon as the burnt offering (6–8).

The holy Son of God took human flesh and came into the world without any taint of sin. His mother, however, observed the ritual described in this chapter. The Lord Jesus was born under the law and was circumcised the eighth day from his birth (Luke 2:21 –24; cp. Galatians 4:4). The Lord Jesus perfectly fulfilled the demands of the law, not only in the observance of its ritual, but also through his perfect life (Matthew 5:17). He laid down his sinless life to save sinners condemned by God’s law (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18). He died *to redeem those who were under the law that we might receive the adoption as sons* (Galatians 4:4–5). **He is worthy of our grateful praise and of our joyful obedience to his wise and holy will.**

*Children of the heavenly King,
As ye journey, sweetly sing;
Sing your Saviour’s worthy praise,
Glorious in his works and ways.*

*Lift your eyes, ye sons of light
Zion’s city is in sight;
There our endless home shall be,
There, our Lord we soon shall see.*

(John Cennick)

Outside the camp

Leprosy was a dreaded disease which isolated the sufferer from his family and from the social and religious life of the community (cp. Numbers 12:12–15). There were many skin disorders and some may have been mistaken for leprosy. These verses give instructions for the priests who were to determine whether or not a person with sores, spots or a rash had leprosy or some other skin disease. *

Where the diagnosis was in doubt, the priest was to isolate the sufferer for seven days. He was then to check the condition of his skin and if the sore had not spread, the person was isolated for a further seven days and examined again. If the sore had darkened and not spread, the priest pronounced the sufferer clean, but if the scab had spread on the skin the person was declared unclean (1–8; further instructions are given in verses 9 to 46). The person with leprosy had to dwell *outside the camp* and warn any who would approach him that he was unclean (45–46).

Miriam (Numbers 12:10–15), Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27) and Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:19–21) were all struck down with leprosy by God as a punishment for their sin. It is significant that in the year that King Uzziah died, the prophet Isaiah had his great vision of God in which he felt the pollution of his sin to be like that of leprosy (Isaiah 6:1,5).

When the Lord Jesus healed leprosy sufferers, they were described as being ‘cleansed’ rather than healed (eg. Matthew 8:2–3; Luke 17:12–14). All mankind is polluted by the plague of sin which is to be more dreaded than leprosy. Sin isolates us from God and it leads to death and hell which is far more to be feared than being ‘*outside the camp*’ (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23; Revelation 21:8). **Have you been cleansed from your sin through the precious blood of Christ (1 John 1:7)?**

*. John Currid points out that the Hebrew word translated ‘leprosy’ is generic, describing features common to a variety of skin diseases (COMMENTARY, page 168).

The law of the leprous plague in a garment

These verses contain *the law of the leprous plague in a garment* (59) and they cover problems with garments of wool, linen and leather (47–48). Most Bible commentators are puzzled by these references to leprous plagues in clothing and Matthew Henry writes, ‘It is a thing which to us now is altogether unaccountable’. Others believe it to be nothing more than an infestation of mildew or fungus.

The garment was examined by the priest, isolated for seven days, and if the plague had spread, it was burned and destroyed (50–52). If it had not spread, the garment was washed and isolated for a further seven days. The following course of action then followed:

- If the plague had faded, that area of the garment was torn out and the garment was returned to its owner, who would repair it.
- If the infection had broken out again on the garment, it was to be destroyed.
- If the infection has disappeared, the garment is washed and then pronounced clean (56–58).

Our clothing represents whatever is closest to us, and we are to hate *even the garments defiled by the flesh* (Jude 23). If our friends, our possessions or our hobbies lead us into sin, they are like impure garments and we must remove them from us. Christ has given us a robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). We have seen that God requires us to be holy (11:44). **It is unthinkable that we should want to hold on to unclean garments!**

*Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.*

*This spotless robe the same appears,
When ruined nature sinks in years!
No age can change its glorious hue;
The robe of Christ is ever new.*

(Nicholas von Zinzendorf; translated by John Wesley)

... and he shall be clean

Leprosy was not assumed to be incurable and God in his mercy did heal some who suffered with the disease (Numbers 12:13–15; 2 Kings 5:14). Others who were pronounced to be leprosy may have found the symptoms disappearing long after the seven or fourteen day period when they first went to the priest (cp. 13:4–5). This chapter describes the elaborate ritual required for the cleansing of the leper before he was allowed to mingle with family and society.

The priest had to go out of the camp to examine the person whose leprosy had cleared. He then took *two living and clean birds*. One of the birds was killed in an earthen vessel over running water. The priest then took cedar wood, scarlet wool, hyssop and the living bird, and dipped them into the blood of the dead bird. The blood was then sprinkled seven times on the one to be cleansed from his leprosy who then had to wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water *... and he shall be clean* (9). He was then restored to the camp after this ritual but not allowed into his tent. Sacrifices had to be offered on the eighth day before he was fully restored to family and community (10). The living bird was released into the open field (7; cp. the sending away of the scapegoat, 16:21–22).

We can imagine the great joy of the leper when he was pronounced ‘clean’. The release of the living bird may have signified his new found freedom. **Christian, do you rejoice when you consider all that the Lord Jesus has done for you. When Jesus sets us free, we are free indeed (John 8:36).**

*Has Jesus made you free?
Then you are free indeed;
Ye sons of liberty,
Ye chosen royal seed,
Walk worthy of your Lord and view
Your glorious head in all you do.*

(William Gadsby)

Such as he is able to afford

The person who recovered from his leprosy was allowed into the camp following the purification ritual on the first day but was not allowed into his tent (1–9). On the eighth day, the cleansed leper had to bring three lambs (two males, one for a trespass offering, the other for a burnt offering, and a female lamb for a sin offering). A grain offering and some oil was also brought (10–11).

The priest took some of the blood of the trespass offering and put it on the extremities of the person's body – the tip of his right ear, the thumb of his right hand and the big toe of his right foot (14); a similar ritual was involved in the consecration of a priest (8:23–24). The priest then took some of the oil and sprinkled it before the Lord. He also applied oil to the same parts of the body to which the blood had been applied (15–16). Some commentators point out that the blood was a token of forgiveness and the oil a token of healing, 'for God first forgiveth our iniquities, and then healeth our diseases; Psalm 103:3' (Matthew Henry).

A poor man was only required to bring a male lamb as a trespass offering. He was allowed to offer turtledoves or pigeons for the other offerings *such as he is able to afford* (22,31–32). The Lord Jesus told a leper whom he had healed, '*Show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them*' (eg. Matthew 8:4; cp. Luke 17:14). His death and resurrection have now made such rituals obsolete. **The one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is sufficient to cover all kinds of sin and conditions. There is no distinction between rich and poor; we all have the same sacrifice.** We are *redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot* (1 Peter 1:18–19).

It seems to me that there is some plague in the house

When God gave Moses the words of Leviticus, the Israelites were living in tents. The legislation concerning leprous plagues in houses was for the future, ‘*when you have come into the land of Canaan*’ (34). We cannot be certain as to the nature of the leprous plague in a building. The margin of the NKJV reference Bible suggests ‘decomposition by mildew, mould, dry rot, etc.’ John Currid uses the word ‘fungus’ instead of ‘*leprous plague*’ (COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS, page 197). There is a suggestion of divine judgment in verse 34: ‘*and I put a leprous plague in a house ...*’ (cp. Zechariah 5:4).

When trouble was detected in the structure of a house, the owner was to go to the priest and say, ‘*It seems to me that there is some plague in the house*’ (35). The priest was to examine the house and put it into quarantine for seven days. If the infestation had spread during that time, the stones affected and all the mortar and plaster in the house were removed and taken to the rubbish dump outside the city and were replaced with fresh materials (36–42). If the plague returned to the building, it was to be demolished and all the debris was to be removed to the tip (43–47). The ritual for cleansing the house is described in verses 48–53.

We are not under this legislation, but a vital spiritual lesson can be drawn from it. Could it be said that ‘*there is some plague in the house*’ in which you live, things that should be removed from the building because they keep you away from any meaningful communion with God? Does it contain unseemly books or magazines which pollute your mind? Do you allow unedifying television programmes or DVDs or the internet to portray filth and violence in your house? Oh, be sure that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord over your home? **The physical structure of a house must be protected but it is far more important to attend to the spiritual structure of a home because this has eternal consequences (cp. Genesis 35:2).**

Lest they die in their uncleanness

This chapter deals with uncleanness on account of discharges from the sexual organs through disease, menstruation or sexual intercourse. Conditions covered are persistent discharges in a male (2–15); short-term discharges in a male (16–18); menstruation (19–24) and persistent female discharges (25–30). When a persistent discharge had healed, the ritual for cleansing lasted for seven days. On the eighth day two turtledoves or young pigeons were sacrificed, one as a sin offering, the other as a burnt offering (13–15, 28–30). Attention was paid to personal hygiene, but the ritual uncleanness is also an illustration of our uncleanness through sin.

The poor woman who was healed by the Lord Jesus after touching the hem of his garment had not only suffered twelve years of weakness through loss of blood, but also the indignity of being ritually unclean for all those years. Her touch would have rendered the Lord Jesus unclean for the rest of the day according to the law (Luke 8:43–48). In order to make us righteous, the sinless Son of God was made to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The Lord concluded these instructions by saying to Moses and Aaron, *‘Thus you shall separate the children of Israel from all their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness when they defile my tabernacle which is among them’* (31). This was a severe warning against polluting the place where God was specially present on account of ritual uncleanness. **To die in the uncleanness of sin is far worse! There is no hope for cleansing from sin after we die and to die in our sins is to be shut out of heaven (Revelation 21:27; 22:11).** If you are not a Christian, I urge you to come to Christ now, praying for forgiveness and cleansing from your sin. He will then hear your prayer and will freely accept you.

Atonement

The word ‘*atonement*’ is mentioned a number of times in this chapter; it means ‘a covering’. The Old Testament sacrifices atoned for sin, covering it from God’s sight so that it no longer provoked his wrath. There can be no atonement or forgiveness of sin without blood sacrifice (17:11; cp, Hebrews 9:22). The Day of Atonement is the most solemn of all Jewish holy days. It was the only day of the year when:

- The high priest entered the Holy of Holies, which contained the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God’s presence.
- Atonement was made for all the sins of all the congregation of Israel (16–17, 21–22, 30–34), who were to humble themselves (‘*afflict*’, 29); this was an expression of sorrow for sin and repentance from it, accompanied by fasting (cp. Psalm 35:13; Isaiah 58:3).

The high priest first sacrificed a bullock as a sin offering for himself (3, 6,11). He then entered the Holy of Holies (‘*the Holy Place*’), burned incense, and sprinkled some of the blood on the mercy seat (the lid of the ark of the covenant) and in front of the mercy seat (12–14).

The Day of Atonement foreshadowed the great sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Hebrews chapters 9–10 and comparisons below). The Old Testament sacrifices brought outward cleansing (purifying of the flesh) but they could not bring inward cleansing to a guilty conscience (Hebrews 9:9,13–14; 10:4,11). All believers from the Old and New Testament eras are forgiven on the basis of Christ’s death.

Levitical High Priest	Jesus, our great High Priest
Offered sacrifices for his own sin (3,6,11).	He is sinless and did not need to offer sacrifices for himself (Heb. 7:26–27).
Sacrifice repeated every year (29–31) and other sacrifices were offered daily.	Sacrificed himself once, never to be repeated (Hebrews 7:27; 9:25,28; 10:10–12).
Appeared in the Holy of Holies (‘ <i>the Holy Place</i> ’) to represent the people (15–16).	Appears in ‘ <i>the Most Holy Place</i> ’ of heaven to represent us (Heb. 9:12,24).

The scapegoat

Two goats were taken and lots were cast to determine which should be killed as a sin offering for the people and which should be the ‘scapegoat’ (7–10). The blood of the sacrificial goat was sprinkled in the Holy of Holies (*inside the veil*) in the same manner as the blood of the bullock (15). The high priest then laid his hands on the ‘scapegoat’ (i.e. ‘the escape-goat’); this symbolised the transfer of the sins of the people to the animal. With both hands on the scapegoat, he confessed over it the sins of Israel. He then sent it *away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man* who had been set apart to do this (20–21). This ritual symbolised the removal of Israel’s sins. After this, he sacrificed burnt offerings for himself and for the people (3, 24).

The Hebrew word ‘azazel’ which is translated ‘scapegoat’ (8) is thought by many to refer to a demonic ruler in the wilderness. John Currid writes, ‘On this view, the word is used in contradistinction to “Yahweh”; one goat is presented to the good and one is given to the evil. However, no biblical textual support exists for this interpretation. A more likely proposal says that the word literally means in translation the “goat that goes away”, and also the name simply describes the function of the animal’ (COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS, pages 216–217).

The Day of Atonement shows the necessity of blood sacrifice to atone for sins and that the sinner needs to confess his sins. Unless we acknowledge our sins and accept responsibility for them, there can be no forgiveness. Sacrifice and confession are brought together in 1 John 1:7–9: ***The blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul

God gave instructions that all animals intended for eating were to be killed at the door of the tabernacle and offered as peace offerings. The blood of the animal had to be poured out on the altar. The penalty for disobedience was severe (1–6). God had provided the tabernacle and the priesthood for the administration of worship and sacrifices. Now that the tabernacle had been set up, the Israelites were forbidden to kill their sacrifices in the open field. This was perhaps to prevent the ritual from degenerating into idol worship with its sacrifice to demons (5,7). The rule which insisted that the killing of animals for food was to take place at the tabernacle was relaxed once the Israelites had settled in Canaan (cp. Deut. 12:10–15). The blood of animals killed in hunting had to be poured out in the field (13).

The eating of meat with its blood was strictly forbidden (10–12). Verses 15 and 16 would appear to cover those who had eaten flesh without realising that the blood had not been drained because of the way in which the animal had died. They were to bathe themselves and were unclean until evening.

Why were the people forbidden to eat blood (cp. Genesis 9:4)? Blood sustains life (11,14) and when poured out in sacrifice, it symbolised a life given on behalf of the guilty sinner. *It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul* (11). Blood is sacred because God required it to be poured out on the altar to atone for sin. **God graciously gave the sacrificial system to Israel in anticipation of the perfect sacrifice of Christ who shed his own precious blood to save us from our sins (Hebrews 9:14,22; 1 John 1:7; 1 Peter 1:19).**

*There is a fountain filled with blood
 Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
 And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
 Lose all their guilty stains.*

(William Cowper)

Nor shall you walk in their ordinances

This chapter contains laws given by God which forbid incest (6–19), adultery (20), child sacrifice (21), homosexuality (22) and bestiality (23). God repeatedly reminded the Israelites of his lordship over them and the words, *'I am the LORD'* are found six times in this chapter and fifteen times in the next. They were not to take their moral standards from the Egyptians among whom they had lived, or from the Canaanites whose land they were to possess. God said, *'The doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances.'* They were to keep God's commandments and walk in them (3–4).

The sexual behaviour in our society is not far removed from that of ancient Egypt or Canaan. To approach any relative to engage in sexual activity is wicked (6). Incest and adultery are sins (6–20) which are now so commonplace that they do not shock our generation. Many of those who are admired for their success in business, sport or the arts, regularly break the seventh commandment which forbids adultery. God's holy standards set down here are confirmed in the New Testament and we need to be reminded of them.

John Currid observes, 'We often forget to measure the results of such unrestricted freedom of sexual appetites: the spread of sexual diseases is at its greatest height in the history of mankind; divorce is at all-time highs; abortion is common; births out of wedlock have skyrocketed ... As Leviticus demonstrates, laws governing sexual activity are absolutely necessary for the good of society' (COMMENTARY, page 247).

We must not allow the wicked standards of the world to influence our behaviour. Let us remember that we are not our own but have been bought with the precious blood of Christ. He expects us to *present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God (Romans 12:1–2; cp. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20)*. **Pure and undefiled religion demands that we keep ourselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27).**

Do not defile yourselves with any of these things

The people of Canaan and the surrounding nations sacrificed children to appease their gods and to gain favour in times of trouble (21; cp. 20:2–5; 2 Kings 3:27). Western society would rightly condemn such a practice as barbaric and yet it sanctions the slaughter of millions of unborn infants in its abortion clinics!

Bestiality is a dreadful sin (23). The Bible is also quite clear in its teaching that homosexual behaviour is wicked. It is an abomination in the sight of God (22; cp. 20:13). The so-called ‘Gay rights movement’ has become increasingly bold and strident in its defiance of God’s holy law. We must not become intimidated by their verbal abuse which is directed against those they consider to be ‘homophobic’.

Some who profess to be Christians have twisted the plain teaching of Scripture to accommodate homosexual behaviour. The whole thrust of this chapter is that God’s people must not behave like those in the world. Wicked practices are not sanitised when professing Christians engage in them. The New Testament is also quite clear in stating that homosexuality is vile, shameful and against nature (Romans 1:26–27); this is not an unpardonable sin, however! Homosexuals can be saved and transformed by the grace of God so that they will loathe their perversion and turn from it (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). **We must keep ourselves from the filth of the world if we are to please and honour our precious Saviour!** We will want to be different if we truly love the Lord! God’s Word is quite clear: ‘*Do not defile yourselves with any of these things*’ (24). Those who defied God’s Word in these matters were warned that they would come under divine judgment (25–30). We live *in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation* among whom we must *shine as lights in the world* (Philippians 2:15)

You shall love your neighbour as yourself

The Lord again reminded the Israelites that they must be a holy people because he who is their Lord is holy (2; cp. 11:45). He repeats, *‘I am the LORD your God’* (2,3,4,10). Holiness is a beautiful thing which should be seen in our lives. These verses describe the effects of holy living. We will observe the ten commandments (the third, fourth and fifth commandments are found in verses 3 and 4 – shunning idolatry, keeping the Sabbath and honouring parents).

Those who are holy do not opt out of life in the world around them. They not only love God but take seriously the command, *‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’* (18). We are also to love strangers as we love ourselves (34; cp. the parable of the good Samaritan, Luke 10:29–37). Love for others is seen in various ways:

- The farmer was to leave the harvest in the corners of his field for the poor to glean. (9–10).
- Honesty, integrity and a refusal to engage in tale-bearing (11–13,16; cp. Exodus 20:15–16; eighth and ninth commandments).
- Compassion for the disabled (14).
- Prompt payment of wages to employees (13; cp. Deut. 24:15).
- Fair and impartial treatment of others, whether poor or rich (15).
- Being prepared to rebuke those who wrong us but shunning hatred, grudging or seeking vengeance. *You shall love your neighbour as yourself’* (17–18). **If everyone loved his neighbour as himself, the church and the world would be far better. How are you showing that you love your neighbour?**

*Give me a faithful heart,
Likeness to thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wanderer sought and won,
Something for thee.* (Sylvanus O. Phelps)

Honour the presence of an old man

Verse 19 contains a law prohibiting the mixing of things which were separated by creation. This law would for example, forbid the cross-breeding of a horse and an ass which would produce a mule. Matthew Henry suggests that these things were forbidden ‘either as superstitious customs of the heathen, or to intimate how careful they should be not to mingle themselves with the heathen.’ Adultery with a slave-woman was to be punished and a trespass offering sacrificed (20–22). When fruit trees were planted, fruit from them should not be eaten until the fifth year (23–25); this law and that described in verse 27 are not binding on Christians

The practices described in verses 26, 28–29 and verse 31 were very common among the heathen nations and were strictly forbidden. We are not to have tattoos, a practice which has proliferated in society today (28). There has been an alarming increase in prostitution (29) and occult practices in Britain and the western world (26,31). These sins are condemned throughout the Bible. Some astrologers and new-age gurus who dabble with evil spirits have celebrity status and are consulted by many of the rich and famous. At the same time the Lord’s Day is despised and places of worship deserted (30). May God have mercy on us! Oh, let us rise up to pray fervently for our land and proclaim the glorious gospel of Christ!

There has also been a dramatic increase in violent crimes against the elderly but those who fear God will respect the aged and *honour the presence of an old man* (32). Let us be sure that we always have a caring attitude towards those who are advanced in years.

A wholesome society is marked by compassion and consideration for others, honesty and integrity in business (34–36). **Those who despise God’s laws are foolish indeed!** Their folly is also shown when they bemoan the instability and wickedness in the world but refuse to acknowledge our rebellion against God’s holy laws.

I will set my face against that man

Molech worship is again denounced (1–5; cp. 18:21). Molech was the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:7) and the worship of this foul idol involved the sacrifice of children. God hates spiritism and those who indulge in its practices will not go unpunished (6, 27; cp. 19:31). There are also warnings against sexual impurity and perversion (10–21). Those guilty of some of these heinous sins were to be put to death (2, 9, 13, 15–16). *Their blood shall be upon them* (9, 11–13, 16, 27) means that offenders were to bear the consequences of their guilt (17). God said, *‘I will set my face against that man’* (3, 5, 6); he does not allow wickedness to go unpunished. Death was to be by stoning (2, 27) and in some circumstances, the corpses of those executed were to be burned (verse 14 does not mean that the offender was to be burned alive; cp. Joshua 7:15, 25).

Many people say that the death penalty is a barbaric form of punishment. We must remember that God ordained the death penalty for certain crimes; dare we accuse the Lord of barbarism? Though the death penalty is not presently administered for the sins described in these verses, it does not alter the fact that these sins are very grave in the sight of God.

The sins described in this chapter were common in the land of Canaan which the Israelites were to possess. The Lord warned the Jews that if they fell into these sins when they settled in the land, he would vomit them out. As a nation chosen by him, they had to be holy (separate) to him and to keep his commandments (7–8; 22–26). Christians are chosen by God to lead holy lives (cp. Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20). **When we see that God gave his beloved Son to be crucified to save us from our sin, we will never take any sin lightly.**

They shall be holy to their God

If the people of God were to be holy, how much more their priests who offered their sacrifices to God! *They shall be holy to their God ... therefore you shall sanctify him ... he shall be holy to you* (6, 8). The priest was not to defile himself by contact with the dead, except when their next of kin died (1–4). The rules for the high priest were far more stringent than for other Israelites because they had been set aside to serve God in the sanctuary. He was not to go near to any body or to be engaged in mourning ritual for relatives (except presumably for his wife, with whom he was *one flesh*; 10–12; cp. Genesis 2:24). Priest and people alike were to abstain from pagan mourning ritual (5; cp. 19:27–28). The priests were also restricted in their choice of marriage partner (7, 13–14) and the punishment for a priest's daughter who disgraced him by prostitution was very severe (9).

Animals offered as sacrifices had to be without blemish and so were the priests who offered them (17–21). Those who were not allowed to serve at the altar through some physical defect were, however, allowed to eat of the holy things, the priest's portion of the sacrifices (22).

What spiritual lessons are to be found in these verses?

- The Lord Jesus is our perfect, holy, undefiled High Priest. He is far superior to any high priest in Israel (Hebrews 7:25–27).
- The Lord demanded higher standards from the priests than from the people. **He expects exemplary standards of behaviour and character from those who serve him as pastors (elders) or deacons.** *They shall be holy to their God* (6). Those holding office in the church must be *an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity* (1 Timothy 4:12; cp. 1 Timothy 3:1–13).
- Much is expected of the children of elders just as it was of the priests (9; Titus 1:6). They face pressures unknown to other children and they need your understanding and prayers.

No outsider shall eat it

These verses give the circumstances in which the priests were not allowed to exercise their ministry or to eat their portion of the sacrifices. Ceremonial uncleanness whether through skin disease, discharges, contact with the dead or with unclean animals disqualified the priest from eating his portion (2–7).

John Currid writes, ‘The priests of Israel had to prepare themselves carefully and diligently in order to serve in the house of God. I often mourn when I see the lack of preparation of pastors who proclaim the Word of God from the pulpit and lead worship in the church. I understand the many duties of the pastor and how these easily crowd out preparation time for preaching and worship. But this is no excuse! The time of worship and preaching is the centre of a church’s activity, and it must be done well and properly’ (COMMENTARY, page 289).

Members of the priest’s family, including slaves, were allowed to share the priest’s food (his portion of the sacrifices) as long as they lived under his roof. Hired labourers or those visiting the priest were not allowed to eat this holy food – *no outsider shall eat it* (10–13). If anyone ate of it unwittingly, they were to repay the equivalent of what they had eaten plus one fifth (13–14).

If great care was to be taken regarding the eating of the holy offerings, how much greater care must be exercised regarding the Lord’s Table! Those who are not Christians must not be allowed to partake of this holy ordinance – *no outsider shall eat it*. Matthew Henry comments, ‘Holy things are for holy persons, for those who are holy, at least, in profession (Matt. 7:6).’ If we know that we are defiled by sin and have not repented of that sin, our hearts are not right with God. We must then abstain from eating the bread and drinking the cup when our urgent need is to repent. If we come to the Lord’s Table in an unworthy manner we will be chastened by God (1 Corinthians 11:27–32). **Christian, do you examine your own heart before coming to the Lord’s Table?**

It must be perfect to be accepted

The Israelites were not allowed to sacrifice animals with physical defects (they were later condemned for doing this very thing; Malachi 1:7–8). An exception was a bull or a lamb with a limb too long or too short which could be sacrificed as a freewill offering (23). Some of the defects are described in verses 22 to 24 (*'bruised or crushed'* refers to animals which had been castrated). A mutilated animal was not acceptable, nor was a newborn animal which was to be left with its mother for at least seven days. It was also forbidden to sacrifice a cow or ewe with her young on the same day (27–28).

The Lord reminded Israel that he had brought them out of Egypt to be their God and to be hallowed among them (31–33). Is it any wonder that their sacrifices *must be perfect to be accepted* (21)? The wonderful message of the gospel is that God gave us the perfect sacrifice to save us from our sins. The Lord Jesus is the Lamb of God who has no blemish or sin (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 1 John 3:5).

God has given us the best possible sacrifice to save us from our sins; dare we offer him our second-best in serving him with our time and money? Whatever we do for him, we must be determined to do well. **We should always remember that only our best is good enough for the Lord in all that we do for him.**

*Oh not for thee my weak desires,
My poorer, baser part!
O not for thee my fading fires,
The ashes of my heart!*

*O choose me in my golden time,
In my dear joys have part;
For thee the glory of my prime,
The fullness of my heart!*

(Thomas H. Gill)

These are my feasts

Various Jewish feasts are listed in this chapter, beginning with the weekly Sabbath. The spring feasts are then listed (4–22) followed by the autumn feasts (23–44). They are described as holy convocations (assemblies for worship). The Lord told Moses, ‘*These are my feasts*’ (2) because they were times set aside for worshipping him and for offering sacrifices.

The only holy day sanctioned for us in the New Testament is the Christian Sabbath – the Lord’s Day (Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10). Many professing Christians disregard the Lord’s Day and place more emphasis on observing holy days which Scripture does not warrant, eg. Christmas Day and Good Friday. The Sabbath principle that we abstain from our usual work enables us to worship God with minds free from the demands of everyday business. **The more that we prepare ourselves and give ourselves to the worship of God on his day, the more precious each Lord’s Day will become to us.**

The Passover feast began on the fourteenth day of the first month and continued for a further seven days as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During this week, no leavened bread was to be eaten (cp. Exodus 12:14–20). It began and ended with a Sabbath on which the Israelites were to *do no customary* (‘ordinary’) *work* (4–8). The Feast of Weeks was celebrated on the fiftieth day from the Sabbath which began the Passover. This feast later became known as ‘Pentecost’ and it was also a Sabbath (15–22).

We do not keep Jewish feasts, but we must observe the ordinance (or sacrament) of the Lord’s Supper. Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7) and at the communion service we break bread and drink from the cup to remember his death for us (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). If we love the Lord, we cannot be indifferent to his command that we should meet ‘*often*’ around his table.

When you reap the harvest of your land

The Feast of Weeks was later called the Feast of Pentecost because it was celebrated on the fiftieth day from the Sabbath which began the Passover (15–16).

Harvest time had a special significance:

- It was a special time of thanksgiving to God. When the very first of the sheaves were gathered in, the people were to bring a sheaf to the priest who waved it before God as a token of thanksgiving (hence the title, ‘Feast of Firstfruits’). A lamb was sacrificed as a burnt offering and a grain offering was also burned. The Feast of Firstfruits of the barley harvest in Israel began in March/April at the time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the day after the Sabbath (9–14). The firstfruits of the wheat harvest were offered during the Feast of Weeks (20; cp. Exodus 34:22; Numbers 28:26).

- It provided an opportunity to show compassion to those in need. *When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleanings from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God (22; cp. 19:9–10).* Jehovah (*the LORD*) requires those who belong to him to be people of compassion. The corners of the fields were not to be reaped, and the wheat or barley that was dropped in harvesting was to be left for the poor to gather. Ruth was able to take advantage of this when she and Naomi were destitute (Ruth chapter 2).

Christians are not commanded to observe harvest festivals, but they are a good witness to a godless world to remind them that we worship God, who is Lord over our harvests and on whom we depend. We also show our gratitude to the Lord with our gifts which can be passed on to those in need. **God is good and merciful to us and we too should show compassion to those in need.**

You shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days

The seventh day was important in the life of Israel (3) and so was the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. Three autumn feasts were held in the seventh month – the Feast of Trumpets on the first day (23–25), the Day of Atonement on the tenth day (26–32) and the Feast of Tabernacles began on the fifteenth day and continued for seven days (33–44).

The Day of Atonement was the most solemn of all feasts (27, 29, 32), but the Feast of Tabernacles involved great rejoicing. The Lord said, ‘*You shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days*’ (40). The people were to rejoice in recognition of God’s goodness to them in bringing them out of Egypt (41–43). Do you ever think about God’s goodness to you and rejoice? The feast ran from the fifteenth to the twenty-second day of the seventh month. By this time the harvest had been gathered and the Israelites were required to live in booths made from tree boughs and branches of palm trees during the feast (40–42). The booths emphasised the temporary nature of the dwellings of the Israelites during their wilderness wandering. Various offerings were made throughout the feast (see Numbers 29:12–40).

It was on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles (*‘the last day, that great day of the feast’*) that the Lord Jesus cried out, *‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink’* (John 7:2,37). By that time religion for many had become very formal, lacking in reality and joy. **Is your religion like that – empty and meaningless?** Come to Jesus believing, and drink and take of the life-giving water (Revelation 21:6; 22:17). You will not be disappointed.

*Come, we that love the Lord,
And let our joys be known;
Join in a song with sweet accord,
And thus surround the throne.*

(Isaac Watts)

Continually

The golden lampstand and the table of showbread were located in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle with the altar of incense (Exodus 25:23–40; 30:1–10). The lampstand had seven lamps, one on its main stem and the others on each of the six branches coming from that stem which provided light for the Holy Place (Exodus 25:37). Pure olive oil was given by the people for the lamps which were to be tended by Aaron and his sons (2–4; cp. Exodus 27:21). Oil in Scripture is a symbol of the Holy Spirit whose presence is vital in our worship and in our work for God. Just as the lamp needed to be supplied with oil continually in order to give its light, we must depend on the Holy Spirit at all times. We must not grieve him by sinful behaviour, but walk as children of light (Ephesians 4:30 to 5:14).



The lampstand is a symbol of the light of God shining in the hearts of his people (2 Corinthians 4:6). We are to reflect that light and shine in this dark world (Matthew 5:16; cp. Ephesians 5:8). The seven churches of Asia were depicted as seven golden lampstands (Revelation 1:20).

The shewbread consisted of twelve cakes laid in two rows of six which were changed each Sabbath (24:5–9). Each cake represented a tribe of Israel. The Hebrew words translated ‘showbread’ mean ‘bread of the Presence’ (as in most modern translations, eg. Exodus 25:30 – ESV). The table with its bread symbolises the fellowship of God with his people, providing for their daily needs. We can say even in the darkest times, ‘*You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies*’ (Psalm 23:5). The lamps were to be kept burning *continually* and the shewbread was to be set in order *continually* (3,8). **God is always with us and he always provides for us. We owe it to him to shine continually as lights among those who are around us.**

Eye for eye, tooth for tooth

The man who blasphemed God and cursed while engaged in a brawl with an Israelite may have belonged to the ‘*mixed multitude*’ who left Egypt with the Israelites (10–11; Exodus 12:38). The name of God is holy (‘set apart’) and must not be used carelessly. The death sentence imposed upon the man emphasises the gravity of this sin (14–16, 23). Job’s wife recognised the same thing when in her distress at his condition, she urged him, ‘*Curse God and die!*’ (Job 2:9). The fact that the death penalty is no longer applied for blasphemy does not lessen the gravity of breaking the third commandment.

Those who had heard the man blaspheming God were told to lay their hands on his head (14). Alfred Edersheim comments that they did this ‘as it were to put away the blasphemy from themselves and lay it on the head of the guilty (compare Deuteronomy 21:6).’ Many people blaspheme God because they are careless in their speech. We must take a stand when we hear them blaspheme and point out just how offensive it is to us because we love the One whom they blaspheme. We should avoid keeping company with blasphemers (cp. 1 Corinthians 15:33).

Murderers should still be executed (17, 21); this law pre-dates the law given to Moses for Israel (cp. Genesis 9:5–6). It is also just that any harm done to another’s animals should be made good (18). *Eye for eye, tooth for tooth* (20) is a law that has been greatly misunderstood. It was given to ensure that punishment was not excessive, but that it fitted the crime. The Lord Jesus pointed out that this law was given to restrain us from seeking personal revenge. **If you have been wronged, do not seek to get even but commit your cause to God, the great Judge of all the earth (Matthew 5:38–39; cp. Romans 12:19–21).**

The Year of Jubilee

The sabbath principle was to be extended from weekly observance to other areas of life in Israel. Every seventh year was to be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land when it was left untilled. Whatever grew of its own accord during that year was not to be harvested by the farmer, but left for all alike to use, himself, his servant, strangers staying with him, and his animals (1–7).

There was also to be a sabbath following the cycle of seven sabbaths of years. This fiftieth year was known as the '*Year of Jubilee*' (13) and it was heralded by the blowing of a trumpet on the Day of Atonement (9). A ram's horn was used as a trumpet in ancient Israel. The word '*jubilee*' comes from the Latin word, '*jubilaeus*' which is derived from the Hebrew word for a ram's horn, '*yobel*.' The Year of Jubilee was:

- A Year of Release (10). All Hebrew slaves were to be released after serving their master for six years, or in the Year of Jubilee which was for them a year of liberty (10, 54).
- A Year of Return (10,13). – Any land sold in previous years was returned to its original owner. The price of the land was determined by the number of years between the time of purchase and the Jubilee – the shorter the lease, the lower the price. The Year of Jubilee was given to promote justice for those obliged to sell their property owing to poverty and to prevent oppression (8–17).

Some may have objected that these sabbath laws would bring hardship but God promised to provide for them for the forty-ninth and fiftieth years. He is sovereign over the harvests and he said, '*Then I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will bring forth produce enough for three years*' (21–22). Obedience to God is costly and it involves self-denial (Luke 9:23–25; 18:29–30). **Is there some area of your life where obedience is lacking? Yield to the Lord and prove him!** He will certainly honour you and pour out his blessing on you (cp. 1 Samuel 2:30; Malachi 3:10).

... *but fear your God*

The Israelites were not allowed to sell their land permanently because it belonged to the Lord (23). When a man was obliged to sell (lease) his land because of poverty, it could be redeemed in three ways:

- A relative could buy back the land on his behalf (25).
- He could buy back the land himself if he were able to raise the money (26–27).
- If he had no means of redeeming the land, he had it restored to him in the Year of Jubilee (28).

When a house located within a walled city was sold, the vendor was allowed to redeem it within a full year of the sale. After this time, the house became the permanent property of the purchaser and it was not returned to its owner in the Year of Jubilee. Houses in villages, perhaps because of their close connection with the land, could be sold and redeemed under the same rules pertaining to fields. Levites were allowed to sell and to redeem their homes but were not permitted to sell their fields (29–34).

God expected the Israelites to help any fellow-Hebrew who fell on hard times by giving him an interest-free loan. They were not allowed to profit from his poverty. The Lord commanded, *‘Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you’* (36). They were to fear the Lord, remembering that he had showed compassion to them, bringing them out of Egypt to give them the land of Canaan, to be their God (35–38). He also expects us to have compassion on the poor (Galatians 6:10). **If we have the means to help a needy fellow-believer but shut our eyes to his need, we can hardly claim to have the love of God in our lives.** *Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth* (1 John 3:16–18).

They are my servants

Matthew Henry writes concerning these verses, ‘We have here the laws concerning servitude, designed to preserve the honour of the Jewish nation as a free people, and rescued, by a divine power, out of the house of bondage, into the glorious liberty of God’s sons, his first-born.’

Israelites were permitted to buy foreigners as permanent slaves but not one of their own people (44–46). The man who sold himself to a fellow-Israelite was not to be considered as a slave, but as a bond-servant. He was to be treated with dignity and in the fear of God (39–43). An Israelite slave could be redeemed by a kinsman or redeem himself if able to do so (48–52). All Hebrew slaves were to be released after serving their master for six years, or in the Year of Jubilee which was for them a year of liberty (10,54; cp. Deuteronomy 15:12–18).

God said of the Israelites, ‘*They are my servants*’ (42,55). God had freed his people from the bondage of Egypt. He reminded the people that he had brought them out of Egypt and that they must never treat each other as the Egyptians had treated them (42,43). We must always treat others with respect and remember that fellow-Christians are also servants and children of God. Some professing Christians are very unchristian and harsh in their attitude to others. We must not be like that but remember that we are answerable to our heavenly Master who hears our words and sees our actions (Ephesians 6:1–10).

We should often remind ourselves that we have been redeemed through the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19). We were once enslaved by our own sin (John 8:34) and under the domain of Satan, ‘*the prince of the power of the air*’ (Ephesians 2:2), but the Lord Jesus has given us glorious liberty (John 8:36). We are free not to sin (Romans 6:14). **We have been bought at a price and we are God’s servants. Let us therefore glorify him by leading holy lives.**

I will walk among you and be your God

This chapter is similar to Deuteronomy chapter 28 with its promises of blessing for obedience to God and its dire warnings concerning the consequences of disobedience. The Lord repeated his warning against idolatry and again urged the Israelites to keep his Sabbaths and to reverence his sanctuary (1–2; cp. 19:4,30).

God made some wonderful promises to the Israelites on condition that they kept his commandments (3). Notice the *'I wills'* in verses 4–13 where God promised Israel rain and good harvests (4–5), peace, security and victory over their enemies (6–8), his favour and his presence (9, 11–12). A holy life which delights to obey God, is a life full of blessing! Righteousness exalts a nation and brings God's smile, but sin brings his judgment (see Proverbs 14:34).

Why do many nations have economic problems? Why is violent crime increasing at an alarming rate? Why is there so much trouble and unrest in the world? It is because men and women have rebelled against God's holy law, scorned it and rejected the gospel. In all the turmoil around us, we can know the blessing of God if only we will obey him. *For I will look on you favourably ... I will walk among you and be your God* (9,12). **To know God's smile upon us and his presence with us is blessing indeed!**

*But we never can prove
The delights of his love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour he shows
And the joy he bestows
Are for them who will trust and obey.*

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.*

(James H. Samnis)

If they confess their iniquity

God solemnly warned his people of the consequences of disobedience and rebellion against his law. He would set his face against them, bringing terror, sickness, sorrow, famine and defeat by their enemies (14–17). If they continued to disobey God, he would send a sevenfold increase in trouble (18, 21, 24, 28). To persist in walking contrary to God’s holy law would cause him to walk contrary to them in fury (27–28). A reading of 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles shows how the troubles described in these verses came upon rebellious Israel. God decreed that the fields should have every seventh year as a sabbath from being sown with seed for food. The land which did not enjoy its sabbaths would be left desolate to enjoy many enforced sabbaths during the captivity of the Jews (34–35; cp. 25:2–7).

God never forgets his covenant however. He promised, *‘If they confess their iniquity ... with their unfaithfulness ... and they accept their guilt — then I will remember my covenant’* (40–45). The grace, patience and mercy of God shine through his dealings with rebellious Israel, and surely, we know the same in our experience! Are you being disobedient to God in some area of your life? Why give Satan cause for satisfaction? He hates you! If you love the Lord, let it be seen by joyful obedience and be sure to repent of any rebellion that is lurking in your heart. **If you have grown cold in heart, confess your sin and guilt to God. He will freely heal your backsliding and restore to you the joy of your salvation (cp. Hosea 14:4).**

*Thou knowest the way to bring me back,
My fallen Spirit to restore;
O for thy truth and mercy’s sake
Forgive and bid me sin no more;
The ruins of my soul repair
And make my heart a house of prayer.*

(Charles Wesley)

If a man sanctifies to the LORD ...

The final chapter of Leviticus deals with vows made to the Lord. These vows concerned the dedication of persons (1–8), animals (9–13), houses (14–15) and land (16–25). Such vows were made at a time of distress or as a token of gratitude for deliverance or blessing. The Lord warns us against making hasty or rash vows (Deuteronomy 23:21–23; Ecclesiastes 5:2–5). Vows which could lead to the death of a person such as that made by Jephthah (Judges 11) must not be paid, but recompense must be made to God. Firstlings, devoted things and tithes already belonged to the Lord and could not be dedicated to him when making vows (26–34).

It was possible to sanctify (dedicate) oneself or a family member to the Lord. God allowed those who sanctified (set apart) persons, animals, property or land to the Lord to redeem (buy back) them. Rules are given for the valuation; in the case of animals, houses and land, it was the value plus one-fifth (13–15,19).

If a man sanctifies to the LORD ... (14–18,22). Do you set apart money or time to be the Lord's? Have you made promises to God which you have not kept? The obligation to give tithes (one tenth) of the produce of the land or of herds and flocks is also commanded (30–33). **Let God's Word in these verses prod you to do something about it.** Remember also, that every Christian belongs to God, having been redeemed at tremendous cost. It should be a delight to serve the Lord, to be holy to him!

*Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all, for thee.*

(Frances R. Havergal)