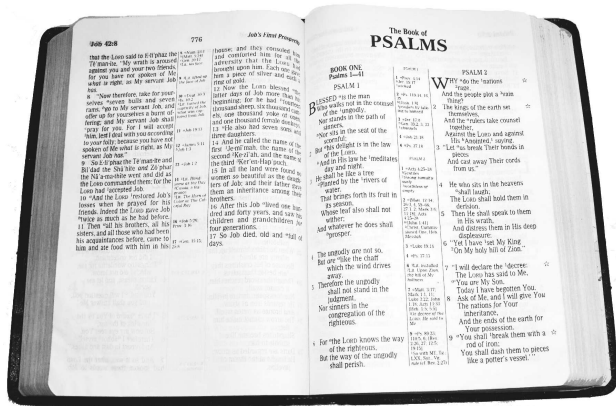


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



May 2020

Bible readings from Malachi chapters 2 and 3
2 Peter and Leviticus chapters 1 to 11

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You have wearied the LORD with your words

God told Israel, '*You have wearied the LORD with your words*' (2:17). These people were lacking in spiritual perception and in any awareness of their own wickedness. They asked, '*In what way have we wearied him?*' complaining that '*everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD.*' They asked, '*Where is the God of justice?*' They failed to recognise their own evil ways and they wearied the Lord. Many in our time, who lead godless or hypocritical lives like Malachi's Jewish contemporaries, often blame God, whom they otherwise disregard, for all that is wrong in the world. The perplexed child of God who cannot understand why he is passing through some dark valley experience may, like Job, ask many questions. He does not reproach God, however.

The Jews longed for the coming of the Messiah, '*the Messenger of the covenant*' (1) when they imagined that Israel would know greatness and prosperity. The Lord, speaking through Malachi, promised that Messiah would come, but not with the results that they expected: '*Who can endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears?*' (2). Iain Duguid comments, God's judgement is coming against all kinds of sin, both those against God and those against man (3:5). Who can endure the day of his coming? Strict justice would certainly condemn us all!' (HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, MALACHI, page 226). **Let us praise God for his grace and for having mercy upon us, and for giving such a great salvation from sin and its consequences.**

The Lord said that he would first send his messenger to prepare the way for his coming (3:1). This messenger was John the Baptist who preached repentance for the remission of sins (Matthew 11:10–11; Mark 1:1–4). When Jesus came, conditions in the religious life of Israel were much the same as in Malachi's day. The priesthood and religious leadership were corrupt. The sons of Levi, the priests, had to be purged and purified (2–3). Many of the priests became obedient to the faith after the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 6:7). Israel, however, rejected Christ, and Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed in AD 70.

I am the LORD, I do not change

Why had God spared sinful Israel from destruction? We are told in verse 6: *For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.* God had set his love upon Abraham and he made a covenant with him. His grandson Jacob was re-named ‘Israel’ (Genesis 32:28). The nation of Israel, descended from Jacob’s sons, was precious to God and the promised Messiah was to come from that nation. The Jews had were constantly changing, falling into sin and repenting, but God remained the same. His purposes and promises never change. and for this reason he spared Israel from destruction. We also change, and when we sin, which is often, we too, like Israel, need to repent of our sins.

The Bible teaches that God is not only eternal but also unchanging. Theologians call this wonderful truth ‘the immutability of God’. The psalmist acknowledged God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and he said to the Lord, *‘And they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end’* (Psalm 102:25–27). There is great comfort in the fact that Lord does not change. He is described as *the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning* (James 1:17). The Bible also declares that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever* (Hebrews 13:8).

It is a great comfort to know that in this world of change and decay, God is always the same. His infinite power will never diminish and his great faithfulness, mercy and love are always the same! We are powerless to stop the relentless onrush of time with all its changes, for better or for worse. John Blanchard rightly observes, ‘God may change our circumstances, but our circumstances can never change God’ (THE COMPLETE GATHERED GOLD, page 236, published by Evangelical Press). **Christian, are you passing through a fiery trial? Are you afraid for the future? Remember, God does not change. He holds you safe and secure, and he will never forsake you (cp. Romans 8:31–39; Hebrews 13:5–6).**

‘Prove me now’ ... says the LORD of hosts

Malachi prophesied to a backslidden people whom God called upon to return to him. They asked, *‘In what way shall we return?’* (7). God told them that they had robbed him and they asked, *‘In what way have we robbed you?’* (8). He said that they had robbed him by neglecting to pay tithes and offerings (8).

A tithe is a tenth of our income (cp. Genesis 28:22). The work of God languishes because many Christians do not face up to their responsibility to support it by giving generously. If we are mean and miserly or neglect to give to the Lord’s work, we are robbing God! No true Christian would ever dream of robbing a bank or stealing from his employer, but we may rob God by failing to support our church. Paul found the most generous Christians to be the most poor! (2 Corinthians 8:1–5). Let us gladly give as God has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2).

You may not have been aware of your responsibilities to give financial support to God’s work because no one has ever taught you this truth. If you now realise that you have fallen short in this respect, will you resolve to put matters right before the Lord? – *‘Prove me now in this,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it’* (10).

Is your spiritual life dry? We saw yesterday that God does not change! He is still the same and his promises are true and reliable. He challenges you to prove him! Give to him generously and cheerfully out of a grateful and loving heart (2 Corinthians 9:6–7; cp. Luke 6:38). Iain Duguid comments, ‘Our giving is a window into how we view God. If we see God as the gracious giver of good gifts, then we will desire to excel in the grace of giving’ (HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, MALACHI, page 233). **The unchanging God is not distant or remote from those who honour him. He is near, just waiting for you to prove him! He is waiting to pour out blessings upon you, if you will only respond to his Word.**

The LORD listened and heard them

The Lord again rebuked Israel for their words. They had wearied him with their words (2:17) and now he charges them with saying harsh things against him (13). As before, they questioned God's accusation against them, '*What have we spoken against you?*' He told them that they had said that '*it is vain to serve God.*' They had kept the religious feasts, but the Lord was not blessing them. On the other hand, the proud, the wicked and those who tempted (tested) God by their defiance of him went free (14–15). The problem with these people was that their heart was not in their religion. We have already seen that they too had behaved wickedly in the sight of God and their sacrifices, feasts and fasts were an empty ritual (eg 1:6–14; 2:10–16).

We may be tempted to think that *it is vain to serve God* when things go terribly wrong in our lives. Remember that God is lovingly and wisely working out his purposes in our lives for good and for his own glory (Romans 8:28). Job refused to curse God when everything went tragically wrong in his life. He worshipped through his grief and tears (Job 1:20–22; 2:9–10). God is honoured when we trust him and speak well of him even when we pass through the dark valley of suffering!

There were very few who feared God in Malachi's day, but God did hear their words. They took time to meditate on God's name (his character). They spoke to each other of his goodness and mercy. They honoured him in their speech *and the LORD listened and heard them so a book of remembrance was written before him* (16). These people belonged to the Lord. They were his jewels, his special treasure whom he would preserve in the day of judgment. That day would reveal the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not (17–18). **How often do you speak about the Lord and of his wondrous ways? What spiritual conversation do you have with others? Do you honour God with your lips so that he delights to hear you?**

The great and dreadful day of the LORD

The Lord gives his answer in these verses to those who felt it vain to serve him and imagined that proud and wicked people were more blessed than they were (3:14–15). *The great and dreadful day of the LORD* was coming when they would be burned up like stubble (1, 5). The Bible often speaks of *'the day of the LORD'*. It refers to a time of divine visitation when God punishes the wicked (Isaiah 13:6; Zephaniah 1:4,7). The second coming of Christ is also described as *the day of the LORD* (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10–13). His coming will be terrible for the wicked (Revelation 6:12–17) but wonderful for those who fear the name of God. *The Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings* (2). There will be healing and liberation for the Lord's people. They will be like calves, kept in their stalls from birth, who had not known the delight of living in the open. They are set free and though the earth is blackened from the fire, they trample over the ashes and delight in their liberty (3).

The reference to the return of Elijah is applied to John the Baptist in the New Testament (Matthew 11:10,14; 17:10–13). John was not literally Elijah, but went out *in the spirit and power of Elijah* (Luke 1:17). He prepared the way of Christ (3:1) whom Israel rejected. The Jews had not recognised a day of visitation in mercy (Luke 19:41–44). They later suffered a dreadful visitation of judgment when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. It was a *great and dreadful day of the LORD*.

The last word of the Old Testament is *'curse'* (or *'destruction'*; 6). **All who reject Christ are cursed and will hear the dread words of the Saviour rejecting them in the day of judgment (Matthew 25:41).** He was made a curse for us to save us from our sins and to bring blessing (Galatians 3:13–14). If you are not a Christian, come to the Lord Jesus, repenting of your sin. Ask him to save you. He will then accept you, forgive your sins and give you eternal life.

2 PETER

Peter wrote his second letter in AD 66 or 67 shortly before he was martyred (cp. 1:14–15). He wrote the letter to remind his first readers of the teaching of the prophets and the apostles (1:12–15; 3:1–2). He warns against the false teachers who were infiltrating the church. We are not to be surprised that in these last days there will be scoffers who scorn the promise of Christ's second coming. The apostle urges us to be holy and to be prepared for the return of Christ (3:10–14). His letter encourages us to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (3:18).

Outline of 2 Peter

- | | | |
|---|---|--------|
| 1. Opening greetings | – | 1:1–4 |
| 2. Be fruitful in the knowledge of Christ | – | 1:5–21 |
| 3. Beware of false teachers | – | 2:1–22 |
| 4. Be prepared for the return of Christ | – | 3:1–18 |

For further reading, I recommend:

Alexander Nisbet: 1 & 2 Peter, published by Banner of Truth.

Dr. D.M. Lloyd-Jones: Expository sermons on 2 Peter, published by Banner of Truth.

Exceedingly great and precious promises

Peter emphasised that he was first a *servant* of Christ and then an *apostle* (1). We have obtained a *precious faith* through the righteousness of Christ (1) who gave his perfect life as a sacrifice for sinners. *The knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord* (2,3,8) is one of the Christian's great privileges. To know God the Father and his Son is to have *grace and peace* multiplied to us (2); it is to have eternal life and to be godly (3; cp. John 17:3). **Is it not a sad fact that so often we behave as if the Lord is a stranger to us? We rarely talk about him and do not spend enough time with him in prayer nor listen to him through the words of Scripture.** We all need to grow in our knowledge of God. How keen is your spiritual appetite? Do you thirst after God (Psalm 42:1–2)?

It is not only important to know God; we must also be like him: *His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him* (3). God has given us *exceedingly great and precious promises* that through them we may be *partakers of the divine nature* (4). We rightly enjoy the comfort of God's promises but we must also take seriously the commands of God. Christians are adopted into God's family but we are still human. To partake of the divine nature means to be *conformed to the image* of the Lord Jesus (Romans 8:29). We are no longer in bondage to the lusts of the flesh but are now Christ's free men and women (cp. John 8:34,36). We are free to be holy, free to love God and to serve him!

The *exceedingly great and precious promises* from the Word of God are absolutely true and that are very,very valuable. God does not lie, he cannot lie (Titus 1:2)! These promises are not man-made fables (16). It is far better to encourage ourselves in the promises of God's Word rather than to wallow in self-pity when our *precious faith* is tested and attacked!

Neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus

We are reminded in verses 2 to 4 of this chapter that the Lord has done great things for us, but this does not mean that we should just sit back to bask in our blessings. The Christian life is not static. We must for this very reason be very diligent (exert ourselves) to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (3:18). We are told how to do this in these verses (5–7).

- *Add (supply) to your faith virtue* (i.e. moral excellence, cp. Philippians 4:8). Peter used the same word in verse 3 to describe the moral excellence of God. We have been called to *proclaim the praises* (same word as *virtues*) of God (1 Peter 2:9). We must by godly living show that we belong to God and proclaim his virtues by our lives as well as with our lips.
- *Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge* (discernment) so that you will be able to recognise the *destructive heresies* of false teachers (2:1) that would harm us.
- *Add to knowledge self-control*. We battle with sinful desires and temptation and we must exercise discipline in our lives.
- *Add to self-control perseverance*. We have to learn to persevere in the face of discouragement and difficulties.
- *Add to perseverance godliness*. We should always seek to please and honour God.
- *Add to godliness brotherly kindness* (cp. Ephesians 4:32).
- *Add to brotherly kindness love*. ‘In the Christian life you start with faith and you always end with love. Without faith you can do nothing, but given faith, and the practising of faith, you must inevitably end with love, for God himself is Love’ (D.M. Lloyd-Jones, EXPOSITORY SERMONS ON 2 PETER page 31).

If these graces are found in good measure (*abound*) in our lives we will be *neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*. To lack these things is to be short-sighted to the point of blindness (8–9). **Are you growing in your knowledge of the Lord and bearing precious spiritual fruit in your life?**

Be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure

God has chosen us and called us and we are kept by his power (1 Peter 1:4–5). We cannot lose our salvation but we can lose our assurance. We cannot fall from grace but we can fall into sin. We must be very diligent to make our *calling and election sure* (10). This exhortation is most important because:

- There are many who profess to follow Christ, but have little interest in the Bible or in obedience to God's precious Word. We can be religious without being Christian. The Lord Jesus gave a very solemn warning about false believers in the Sermon on the Mount. He warned that he would cast out *many* from his presence on the day of judgment who had worked miracles and prophesied in his name. They were not truly called or chosen by God; they failed to obey his will and were lawless (Matthew 7:21–23).
- There are Christians who are very sensitive to their own failings and they struggle with assurance of salvation and question themselves about the reality of their faith in Christ. Even the most godly person may experience times of doubts. A lack of Christian assurance hinders us in our work and witness for Christ and robs us of our Christian joy.

How do we make our *calling and election sure*? The phrase *be even more diligent* implies urgency and zeal. We are to examine ourselves as to whether we *are in the faith* (2 Corinthians 13:5). However, we must beware of excessive introspection which causes us to take our eyes away from Christ. We are to have a practical faith which shows the graces described in verses 5 to 8. Our faith must be seen in our good works (cp. James 2:18). If we do the things commanded in verses 5 to 7 we *will never stumble* and we will be sure of a wonderful welcome into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ when we meet him at death or when he returns (11). **Are you making your calling and election sure?**

Holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit

The Lord Jesus had told Peter by what death he would glorify God (John 21:18) and he knew that he was soon to die. He was soon to put off his *tent*; this means departing from the body through death (cp. 2 Corinthians 5:1–8). The apostle wrote that as long as he was alive he would remind them of the things commanded in verses 5 to 10. We have another *therefore* in verse 12. Peter wanted *these things* to be remembered and obeyed after his death. These things are still important. Notice the words *remind ...reminding ... reminder* (12–15). Godliness comes from knowing the Lord Jesus Christ, from knowing his Word and obeying it.

The coming of Christ into the world is no cleverly devised story (16). Peter was an eye-witness of his majesty and dazzling splendour at the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus (16–18; Matthew 17:1–8). He was privileged to hear the voice of God from heaven, but we have the Word of God in the Scriptures, which Word we must heed. The Bible is no ordinary book. Scripture was given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. *Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (21; cp. 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Many professing Christians neglect God's Word today preferring to listen to the ideas and heresies of self-proclaimed prophets. We have *the prophetic word made more sure* (19). The Scriptures are as a light shining in the darkness of this world exposing false teaching. The Bible is sufficient for all our guidance in matters of faith and practice. We do not need modern revelations or so-called prophecies. **If we know God's Word we will be spared much trouble and confusion. The Bible will never lose its power to guide us, build us up in our holy faith, bless us and inspire us.**

*Father of mercies, in thy word
What endless glory shines!
For ever be thy Name adored
For these celestial lines.*

(Anne Steele)

False teachers among you ... destructive heresies

This is a very solemn and frightening chapter. Peter knows that he is soon to die (1:14) and he now warns us against the *destructive heresies* and *destructive ways* of false teachers. He writes of the severe judgment that God will bring upon these people (1–3). The apostle is vehement in his denunciation of heretics. Is it any wonder that almost every New Testament book has warnings against false teachers and false teaching? The Lord Jesus and the apostles warn us against them (Matthew 7:15; 1 Timothy 4:1–3; Titus 3:9–11). False teaching is a greater threat to the church than persecution.

The Christian world is plagued with false teachers. We may be aware of the heresies of the cults, but we must be on our guard against false teachers within professing evangelical churches. Some teachers, once respected, have turned away from the teaching of the Bible. Others are followed because their doctrines of prosperity and wealth appeal to the selfish desires of men and women. *By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words* (3). Many appear to be 90% sound in the things that they teach, and they speak about the cross of Christ, deceiving the unwary.

Heretics misuse Scripture to propagate their pernicious views. They are presumptuous and self-willed (10). Beware of their *deceptive words*. (3). They will exploit you and lead you astray if you tolerate them. False teachers attract ‘**many**’ to *follow their destructive ways* (2). We must never assume that a man is right because his teaching is popular. Do not be surprised that those who love truth are in the minority; this has always been the case.

We must not tolerate false teachers. Their destructive heresies are being introduced to weak, untaught believers. We must sound the alarm. **Do you love truth enough to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3)?**

The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations

Peter warns us against the *destructive heresies* and *destructive ways* of false teachers (1–3). He also tells us that God will surely bring judgment on them reminding us that he did not spare the angels who rebelled against him before the world was made. He did not spare the ancient world of Noah's day nor the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (4–6,9). The apostle goes on to write of two men who lived among people who were very wicked – Noah and Lot.

Noah lived in desperate times. He and his family were alone in their obedience to the Lord. The whole world was in the grip of the evil one and *the wickedness of man was great in the earth ... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence* (Genesis 6:5,11). How did Noah manage to survive such dreadful spiritual darkness? He walked with God and was blameless (Genesis 6:9). Noah also had the courage to be *a preacher of righteousness* in a world that hated good and loved evil (5). He did not compromise his message to obtain a hearing among the ungodly. Can you imagine the mocking and the taunts that he suffered?

Lot found himself in Sodom because of his own folly and greed but he is described here as being righteous. Sodom was just like the western world today where sexual perversion and wickedness are flaunted. He heard the vile speech of the wicked around him and saw their filthy behaviour and he was oppressed and tormented by it (6–8).

Do you feel distraught at the spiritual ignorance and indifference to the gospel that prevails around you? The Bible warns that we are to expect these *perilous times* (2 Timothy 3:1). God has called you to be a light in the darkness (Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 5:8). We may be sorely tried by the wickedness of the ungodly and the blasphemies of false teachers, but *the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations* (or 'trials'; 9–10). **Remember that God is sovereign. What a privilege it is to know him and to walk with him in a wicked world!**

They promise ... liberty

The ecumenical movement is increasing in its influence over churches. Most of those in this movement do not believe that the Bible is God's holy and inspired Word, and they tolerate many blasphemous errors. They are not very tolerant however of the Lord's people, who will have nothing to do with their confusion. Peter knew that false teaching posed a great threat to the church and we must also understand this.

False doctrine is often associated with wrong living and Peter describes the wickedness of false teachers in his day. They have *eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children* (14). They are like empty wells, their teaching not satisfying the thirsty soul. They will be cast into the gloom and darkness of hell (17).

Balaam uttered sublime prophecies concerning God and his people (Numbers chapters 22–24), but he was a wicked man *who loved the wages of unrighteousness* (15). His madness was such that he was willing to denounce God's people for money (16). *The wages of unrighteousness* may appear attractive for a time, but will bring terrible judgment (12–13). False teachers are able to infiltrate the church because they often have *a form of godliness* (2 Timothy 3:5). They are very persuasive but their words are empty. *They promise ... liberty* though they themselves are *the slaves of corruption*. 'Those who are beguiled by them are brought into bondage (18–19).

Verses 20 to 22 do not teach that we can lose our salvation. Scripture is quite clear that this is not possible. **God does not choose us to lose us.** These verses warn that some who come under the influence of the gospel are in particular danger. They acquire a knowledge of the Lord and escape from the pollution of the world but they return to their sinful ways as a dog returns to his vomit, and a sow, after she is washed, to her wallowing in the mire. They have never been truly converted (see the Parable of the Sower – Matthew 13:19–22).

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise

Peter again states his purpose for writing his letter. It is to stir up our pure (sincere) minds to make us mindful of the words of the prophets and the apostles (1–2). Many Christians in the early church were expecting the immediate return of Christ. They grew discouraged as persecution increased and Christ did not return as expected. Peter reminds us that the Lord Jesus and his apostles had warned of the scoffers who would taunt us with the question, ‘*Where is the promise of his coming?*’ (4).

Have you noticed that many who scoff at the Bible *walk according to their own lusts* (3)? They hate the idea of judgment and assert that nothing changes – *all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation* (4). They wilfully forget that this is not true (5). Peter takes us back to the book of Genesis to remind us of the creation and the flood. Things did not continue as they were because God later destroyed the wicked world by the flood (5–6). Noah was a preacher of righteousness (and such preaching includes warnings of judgment upon sinners; 2:5). Those who heard Noah had 120 years to repent of their sin (cp. Genesis 6:3) but they did not take him seriously. God was indeed true to his Word and his promise to Noah, and the world perished in the flood. God then used water as the instrument of destruction; next time it will be fire (7,10).

We may at times be tempted to feel that God is slow to keep his promises and his threats to punish the wicked. Let us always remember that God is not bound by time; he inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15). A thousand years is as one day with God (8). *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise ... but is long-suffering (patient) toward us* (9). The Lord is gracious and he delights in mercy (Micah 7:18). He is full of compassion and he delays judgment to give sinners ample opportunity to repent. **If your heart is not right with God please do not be careless about the need to repent now. Death or judgment may come suddenly and then it will be too late.**

What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct

The day of the Lord is a term used for the return of Christ (10,12; cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2). Scoffers may doubt that Christ will come again but he will come when they least expect it, as a thief in the night. They are in for a shock awakening. The second coming of Christ will be the time of final judgment; it will be a terrible day for those who do not expect or prepare for it. The earth and everything in it will be burned up in a massive conflagration (10,12).

The hope of Christ's return should not make us lethargic in our Christian lives, nor cause us to indulge in fruitless speculation about dates or minute details. We must:

- Be prepared. The coming judgment should have a sobering effect upon us. *What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness* (11,14). Worldliness is the great enemy of godliness (1 John 2:15–17). The world is not here for ever and we should be preparing ourselves for eternity. *Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure* (1 John 3:3). The Lord Jesus said, *Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect* (Matthew 24:44).
- Be expectant. *Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God* (12). If God the Father has determined the day of Christ's return (Acts 17:31), how can we hasten it? No one knows just when Christ will come and we cannot bring the day nearer (Matthew 24:36). We know that the gospel must be preached to all nations and all the elect saved before Christ returns (Matthew 24:14,31). We hasten the day by preparing ourselves for it (see above) and in preaching the gospel.

Christians can look for the day of God, not with despair, but with a sense of great anticipation and joy. The Lord will create *new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells* as he has promised (13; cp. Isaiah 65:17). **There is no future for this passing world but we have a wonderful future. How prepared are you for Christ's second coming?**

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour

If we are looking for the return of Christ we will see to it that we will be diligent to be *without spot and blameless* in our lives; this is the only way to knowing the peace of God in our lives and to be found by Christ in peace at his coming (14). The coming again of the Lord Jesus is a great incentive to holy living (1 John 3:2–3).

Peter refers to the apostle Paul and recognises his writings as Scripture (15–16). He says that some things in Paul’s epistles are hard to understand. If we want a better understanding of Scripture we must come to the Word of God with a reverent and submissive attitude. The untaught and unstable twist Scripture *to their own destruction*. We must beware of some of those who have popular television programmes. They promise all kinds of blessings (healing and prosperity) to those who support them. They appear to be evangelical, but many hold to all kinds of heresies. We must remain steadfast in the truth of God’s Word so that we will not be led into error (17). Wrong doctrine will never produce a life that pleases God.

Peter has urged us to beware of being carried away by the error of false teachers which will cause us to lose our stability (17). He ends his letter by reminding us of the greatest antidote to ungodliness and false teaching. He urges us, ‘*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*’ (18). Where there is true spiritual life there is also growth. As you look back on your Christian life, are you able to trace and to see the evidence of this growth? Are you showing an increase of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:22–23)? Are you enjoying a closer walk with God? Are you working out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)? Do you know God’s Word better than you did a few months ago? ***Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and for ever. Amen.***

LEVITICUS

God commanded that the priests of Israel and all who served in the tabernacle (and later, the temple), be chosen from the tribe of Levi. The name 'Leviticus' comes from the Greek word 'Levitikon' ('of the Levites') which is used for the title of the book in the Greek version of the Old Testament.

Leviticus, more than any other book of the Bible, contains direct speech from God, being prefaced by a brief statement, eg. *Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying ...* (1:1; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1; etc.). It describes the sacrifices and worship of ancient Israel, and contains God's laws for a 'holy' people, set apart to him. The Lord gave these laws to Moses on Mount Sinai (7:38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34).

Leviticus is one of the least read, least known and least understood of all the books of the Bible, but its teaching is most important. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16). Leviticus is Scripture! You will find much profit in this book as you read it and think upon its teaching. The sacrifices it describes are no longer necessary for they point to the perfect sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is demonstrated in the book of Hebrews which shows how our Saviour is a better High Priest and a better Sacrifice for sin.

Key words:– *Holy – holiness – blood – atonement.*

'There is in the book a deep, underlying unity of plan and thought which expresses itself in a two-fold way. First, Leviticus deals with the removal of that defilement which separates man from God (chapters 1 to 16), and secondly with the restoration of the lost fellowship between man and God (chapters 17 to 26)' (E.J. Young – INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT).

Outline of Leviticus

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|-----|--|---|---------------|
| 1. | The laws of the sacrifices | – | chs. 1 to 7 |
| 2. | Laws concerning the priests | – | chs. 8 to 10 |
| 3. | Cleanness, uncleanness and purification | – | chs. 11 to 15 |
| 4. | The Day of Atonement | – | chapter 16 |
| 5. | The altar and the blood of sacrifice | – | chapter 17 |
| 6. | Laws and punishments | – | chs. 18 to 20 |
| 7. | The holiness of the priests | – | chs. 21 to 22 |
| 8. | The consecration of seasons | – | chapter 23 |
| 9. | The holy oil, showbread and the sin of blasphemy | | chapter 24 |
| 10. | The Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee | – | chapter 25 |
| 11. | Promises and warnings | – | chapter 26 |
| 12. | The making of vows | – | chapter 27 |

A recommended Commentary on the Book of Leviticus

For further study, I warmly recommend John Currid's commentary on Leviticus, published by Evangelical Press. Currid is a Bible scholar whose love for the Lord is seen throughout his commentary.

Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary is always very helpful

A sweet aroma to the LORD

There are two sets of instructions for the offerings described in chapters 1 to 7:

- The Lord's portion of the sacrifice (1:2 to 6:7).
- The portion of the priest and the offerer (6:8 to 7:36).

The burnt offering was so called because all of the flesh was consumed upon the altar; it is also called '*a whole burnt sacrifice*' (Deuteronomy 33:10). The hide of the animal was kept by the priest (7:8). Wealthy people offered a bull (5), others brought a sheep or a goat (10) and the poor offered a turtle-dove or a young pigeon (14; cp. 5:7).

We are all sinners and Leviticus teaches us that God is holy and cannot accept us because of our sin (Habakkuk 1:13; Psalm 51:1,9). A sacrifice was brought to the door of the tabernacle to be offered to God. The offerer put his hand on the head of the sacrifice, indicating the transfer of his sin to the animal which was to die in his place. The sacrifice was accepted by God, to make atonement on his behalf (4; 3:8; 4:4). '*To make atonement*' means 'to cover over'. The blood of the sacrifice covers the sin of those bringing it to God (17:11).

The sacrificial animal had to be *without blemish* (3,10; 3:1, etc). The Lord Jesus gave himself as a perfect sacrifice, *as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*, to satisfy God's justice, so that we could be freely forgiven (1 Peter 1:18–19). The burnt offerings are described as '*a sweet aroma to the LORD*' (9,13,17). The sweet aroma indicates that God is satisfied with the offering. In the New Testament, the term is used in the context of self-sacrifice and a total giving up of self. The Lord Jesus loved us and gave himself for us, *an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma* (Ephesians 5:2). **God no longer requires animal sacrifices from us, but if we love him, we will give sacrificially to further the work of the gospel.** God is well pleased with such sacrifices which are a *sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice* (Philippians 4:18).

With all your offerings you shall offer salt

The grain offering was often brought to God from the first-fruits of the harvest (14). It was the second of the ‘*sweet aroma*’ offerings (2,9; cp. 1:13–17). The grain offering was a recognition of God’s blessing in the provision of daily food (cp. Joel 2:14). There was lamentation in time of famine because the people were unable to bring their grain offerings to God (Joel 1:9,13). **We must never take God for granted but always remember that we depend on him for our food each day (Matthew 6:11).** This offering was also a means of provision for the priests and their families, only part of it being burned. It was *most holy* because none of it was permitted to be eaten by the offerer (3,10)

The grain offering often accompanied other sacrifices (cp. Numbers 15:1–11). It consisted of fine flour, on which oil was poured and it was burned with frankincense. Unleavened cakes or wafers could also be offered as well as roasted grain from the first-fruits (1–7,14). Leaven and honey were not to be burned with the grain offering, though they could be offered separately as first-fruits (11–12).

Salt was used in making covenants and became a symbol of fidelity and permanence, hence the term, ‘*the salt of the covenant*’ (13; cp. Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5). The people of Israel were in covenant with God who said, ‘*With all your offering you shall offer salt*’ (13). We no longer offer sacrifices with salt but as people of the new covenant, we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God, to be holy and to serve him (Romans 12:1–2).

*In full and glad surrender
I give myself to thee,
Thine utterly and only
And evermore to be.*

*O Son of God who lov’st me,
I will be thine alone;
And all I have and am, Lord,
Shall henceforth be thine own.* (Frances Ridley Havergal)

The peace offering

The burnt offering had to be a male animal (1:1–10) but a male or female (1) was permitted for *the peace offering* which was the third of the sweet aroma offerings (5,16). An animal from the herd (cattle), a lamb or a goat could be sacrificed (1,7,12; cp. 7:11–26). The *peace offering* was an expression of thanksgiving to God or could accompany a vow (7:15–16). The animal had to be without defect and its blood was sprinkled on the altar as with the burnt offering (2,8,13; cp. 1:5,11). Only its internal organs and the fat surrounding them (and the tail of the lamb) were burned as a sacrifice. Part of the offering went to the priest and the rest was eaten by the offerer and his family as a sacred meal *before the LORD* at the sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12:6–7, 17–18).

Matthew Henry comments, ‘The burnt offerings had regard to God, as in himself the best of beings, most perfect and excellent; were purely expressive of adoration; and therefore were wholly burnt. But the peace offerings had regard to God as a Benefactor to his creatures, and the giver of all good things to us; and therefore these were divided between the altar, the priest, and the owner. Peace signifies:

- Reconciliation, concord, and communion. And so these were called peace offerings, because in them God and his people did as it were, feast together in token of friendship.
- Prosperity and all happiness. The Hebrew greeting ‘Shalom’ (‘Peace be to you’), was a wish for well-being. The peace offerings were offered, either:
 - a. By way of supplication or request for some good that was wanted and desired. If a man were in the pursuit or expectation of any mercy, he would back his prayer of it with a peace-offering.
 - b. For thanksgiving for some particular mercy received (7:15–16).

The Lord Jesus Christ died to reconcile us to God. – *He himself is our peace* (Ephesians 2:14). May we always rejoice in him! ***Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name*** (Hebrews 13:15–16).

The sin offering

The sin offering (8) was not a freewill offering as were the burnt, meal and peace offerings. It had to be offered *if a person sins unintentionally* (2,13,22,27). Laws are given concerning the sin offering of the anointed priest of God (3–12), the whole congregation (13–21), a ruler (22–26) and *anyone of the common people* (27–35). The *trespass offering* is also a *sin offering* (5:1–13).

The ritual associated with the sin offering is similar to that used for the burnt offering and the peace offering but there is a definite difference concerning the sprinkling of blood when a bull was offered for the priest or for the whole congregation (5–6, 16–17). Here the priest had to sprinkle some of the blood *seven times before the LORD, in front of the veil* (17) which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. He also had to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense (burnt offering). The remaining blood was poured at the base of the altar of burnt offering (6–7, 17–18, 25–26, 29–30). The internal organs and fat on them were taken from the animal and burned on the altar of burnt offering; the rest of the animal burned outside the camp (8–12, 19–20, 26, 31). **These offerings foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus whose one sacrifice is sufficient to atone for all our sins (Hebrews 10:1–18).**

These verses teach us that sin, even when committed in ignorance, is enough to separate us from God. *If a person sins unintentionally* he still bears guilt for his sin (27). God does not overlook our sin though we may be unaware of what we have done. Sin requires atonement even when it is committed in ignorance. We are sinful by nature and because of this, we sin. We may not intend to sin, but in our ignorance of God's law and in our human frailty we do sin. **This does not mean that God excuses us. Ignorance is not the same thing as innocence. We are still guilty before God whatever our sin (Romans 3:19). We praise God that he did not leave us without hope. He is merciful and he sent the Lord Jesus into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).**

If a sin which he has sinned comes to his knowledge

The sin of the anointed priest was most serious. He represented all the people and his sin brought guilt upon all of them (3). Our sin does affect others. Notice that the priest was required to sacrifice a bull for his own sin or for national sin (3,13–14). Other individuals brought a goat or a lamb for their sin offering (23,28,32).

There are slight variations in procedure with the sin offerings made for the different groups of people. The sin offering is described as *a sweet aroma to the LORD* only when it was offered for the common people.

We often sin without realising it but as soon as our sin is revealed to us we must do something about it. This was so in Israel of old: *If his sin which he has sinned comes to his knowledge, he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats without blemish* (23,28). The guilty person in Israel was able to bring his sin offering, and when it was sacrificed, an atonement was made and he received forgiveness (31,35). When the law of God reveals our sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7–8) and the Holy Spirit convicts us of it, we should be most thankful to God for clearing away our ignorance in the matter. We can then seek forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. Christians do sin and we must be careful to deal with remaining sin in our lives.

We are often unaware of our own sin and we should frequently use the words of Psalm 139:23–24 when we pray:– ‘*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*’

He shall confess that he has sinned

Some examples of specific sins which required a sin offering are given here. If a man was sworn as a witness but concealed the truth, he was guilty before God (1). Anyone who inadvertently touched any unclean thing or person who was unclean according to the law, was guilty in the sight of God, though he may not immediately realise it. The rash use of oaths also incurred guilt (2–4). What lessons do these laws have for us? Principles do not change! If we conceal truth, we are a party to lies and that is sin. We must also think before we speak. We may make promises without giving much thought to what we are saying. If we fail to do what we have promised, it is sin.

God requires that we confess our sins. – *And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing* (5). John Currid observes. ‘The act of confession is portrayed here as an integral part of sacrificial worship in the tabernacle. The worshipper needs to have a broken and contrite heart which leads him to mourn for his iniquity and then to confess it aloud ... Confession of sins is necessary for the people of God today. It must be a core part of our worship as it was in the days of the old covenant (COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS, pages 70–71).

We must confess our sins:

- To God. Confession involves naming our sins before God and admitting our guilt. We then seek his forgiveness for those sins. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).
- To those we have wronged. The lives of many Christians are blighted because they refuse to confess their sin to those they have wronged and they will not admit their guilt. We cannot expect God to forgive us if we refuse to put matters right with those we have wronged and do not seek their forgiveness. *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed* (James 5:16). **We are not yet perfect. When did you last confess your sin or sins to God or to those you have hurt?**

He shall make restitution for the harm that he has done

There is a close connection between the sin offering and the trespass (guilt) offering but there is a major difference. Restitution was required before the trespass offering was sacrificed. – *And he shall make restitution for the harm that he has done* (16). A ram without blemish had to be offered and the debt had to be repaid plus one-fifth. The trespass offering was required when the rights of others (God or men) were violated with regard to property or service:

- Trespasses against the Lord (*in regard to the holy things of the LORD*, 5:14–19). This covers sins of robbing God by withholding tithes, offerings, etc. (cp. Malachi 3:8–10).
- Trespasses involving the property rights of others (6:1–7). This sin includes dishonest acts such as fraud or robbery (2–4).

Sin puts us in debt to God (cp. *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors* in the Lord's Prayer; Matthew 6:12). God has claims on us (eg. our time and our money to serve him and to support his work) which we must meet. Are these verses challenging you because you know that you are half-hearted in your devotion to God? Have you been robbing the Lord because you do not honour him by giving cheerfully to his work. If God's people in Old Testament times were required to give a tithe (a tenth) of their income, dare we offer less when the Lord Jesus Christ has done so much for us?

Though Christ freely forgives us when we repent of our sin, we must still pay restitution to any whom we may have defrauded or robbed (cp. Luke 19:8). Though the Lord will not remember our sins (Hebrews 10:16–17), those we may have wronged will not forget what we have done to them. We must put matters right with them; this involves repaying any from whom we may have stolen money or goods. **Do you owe anything to God or men for which you have not paid restitution?**

And when its blood is sprinkled on any garment, you shall wash that on which it was sprinkled, in a holy place

The remainder of this chapter and the next chapter contain laws for the priests concerning the offerings (6:8 to 7:38). Animals sacrificed as a burnt offering were totally consumed by the fire. There was no portion for priest or offerer to eat. The fire on the altar of burnt offering was to burn continually and instructions are given for the disposal of the ashes of the sacrifices (8–13).

The grain offering was often brought to God from the first-fruits of the harvest (14; cp. 2:14). The whole of the grain offering was eaten by the priests except for the memorial portion (15; cp 2:16). They were to eat their portion of the offering in a holy place, that is, within the court of the tabernacle (16). Notice that they had to be ceremonially clean when eating the grain offering: *Everyone who touches them must be holy* (18). When priests were anointed, they had to bring a grain offering which was to be wholly burned (20–23). They were allowed to eat the flesh of certain sin offerings, the exception being those offered for a priest himself or for the whole congregation. Those sin offerings were to be burned outside of the camp (24–30; cp. 4:12,21).

The blood of the sin offering was sacred: *And when its blood is sprinkled on any garment, you shall wash that on which it was sprinkled, in a holy place* (27). The blood of Christ is more precious and sacred than the blood of Jewish sacrifices (Hebrews 9:13–14; 10:29). Some theologians who do not believe that the Bible is the Word of God, hate what they call ‘blood theology’. They will not sing hymns which refer to the blood of Christ shed to save sinners. Their religion is not Christian and they know nothing of the saving grace of God. **Have you been washed from your sins in the blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5)? Do you love the Lord and keep yourself from sinning against him?**

Any unclean thing

This chapter continues with laws for the trespass offering and the peace offering. The priest retained all of the trespass offering except for the parts of the animal that were burned as an offering to the Lord (1–7). Grain offerings were also offered with animal sacrifices (9–10). The peace offering was the only sacrifice of which the offerer was allowed to retain a portion for himself. When it was offered for a thanksgiving, unleavened cakes and leavened bread were also offered and the flesh of the animal was to be eaten the same day (12–15). When it was a voluntary offering or to do with a vow, any portion not eaten, could be kept for the following day (16).

All ritual pollution was to be avoided: *Moreover the person who touches any unclean thing ... shall be cut off from his people* (21). Matthew Henry comments, ‘When a person was upon any account ceremonially unclean, it was at his peril, if he presumed to eat of the flesh of the peace-offerings. Holy things are only for holy persons.’

Since Christ has been sacrificed for us we do not have to be concerned with Jewish sacrificial ritual (Hebrews 7:27). However, sin still cuts us off from enjoying fellowship with God and with his people. Our bodies are the temples of the living God but there are many unclean things which can pollute us. Many Christian men and women are greatly defiled and damaged because they use the internet to watch pornography. We must avoid salacious newspapers, magazines or books and not allow the ways of the world to defile us (cp. 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; 2 Peter 2:10; Psalm 1:1). We are not partake of the bread or the cup at the Lord’s Table if we are clinging to any sin in our lives (1 Corinthians 11:27–30). **We must be concerned about being holy! If we are not, we have no reason to believe that we are truly saved (Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:14–16).**

His own hands shall bring the offerings

We have seen that the fat of the sacrificial animals was burned as an offering to the Lord and the blood was sprinkled on the altar (eg. 1–4; cp. 3:3–17). The eating of any of those parts of the animal set apart to be burned to the Lord, or the drinking of blood was strictly forbidden. The blood was sacred, representing the life of the animal which was given on behalf of the offerer, to atone for sin. (22–27; cp. 17:10–12). The right thigh and the breast of the animal were given as heave and wave offerings respectively, and were retained by the priest as his portion of the sacrifice (31–35).

The Lord instructed that the offerer himself with *his own hands shall bring the offerings made by fire to the LORD* (28–30). Matthew Henry comments that this signified ‘his cheerful giving it up to God.’ We have read through these early chapters of Leviticus and have been reminded of the various offerings required of the Jews under the old covenant. These sacrifices were a constant reminder that sin keeps us from God and that there is no cheap forgiveness. How thankful we should be that the perfect sacrifice of our blessed Saviour has put an end to this elaborate ritual. His one offering is all that is necessary for the salvation of a sinner (cp. Hebrews 10:1–4,10). Christians rejoice that they have been redeemed *with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot* (1 Peter 1:18–19).

As sinners we come to God through Christ, empty-handed and begging for mercy. Augustus M. Toplady reminds us of this in the line from his great hymn – ‘Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling’. The Lord expects us to come to him with our grateful offerings of worship, praise, service and money (Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 9:6–7). **How often do we fail to do these things?**

He ... anointed him to sanctify him

Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons to the priesthood according to the instructions given to him by the Lord (see Exodus chapters 28 and 29). The statement *'as the Lord commanded Moses'* or similar is repeated throughout the chapter (4–5,9,13,17,21,29,35–36). This consecration was witnessed by *all the congregation at the door of the tabernacle of meeting* (4).

Moses first washed Aaron and his sons with water (6). The priests drew near to the Lord on behalf of the people and had to be cleansed with the washing of water (cp. Hebrews 10:22). Christians are priests to God through Christ and this ritual washing points to the cleansing from sin through the blood of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5–6).

Aaron was then dressed in the garments of the high priest and his sons in those of the priests (7–9,13). This clothing was described as *holy garments ... for glory and for beauty* (Exodus 28:2). Every Christian is clothed with *'the garments of salvation'* and is covered with *'the robe of righteousness'* (Isaiah 61:10; cp. Revelation 7:14). Are you living a godly life so that these beautiful garments are seen on you?

After anointing the tabernacle and its furniture, Moses turned to Aaron *and anointed him, to sanctify him* (12). This symbolises the unction of the Holy Spirit whose ministry is vital in our lives (Romans 8:12–17; 1 John 2:27). **If we want to serve God we must know the forgiveness and cleansing of sin through the blood of Christ. We need the anointing (unction) of the Holy Spirit in our lives (cp. Acts 1:8).** You will not know his anointing if you are grieving him through sinful behaviour (Ephesians 4:28–31).

He took some of its blood and put it on the tip of Aaron's right ear

A sin offering (14–17), a burnt offering (18–21) and a consecration offering (22–32) were sacrificed at the consecration of Aaron and his sons. They were allowed to eat the flesh of the consecration offering (31). There was a difference in that the portion reserved for the priests (the breast given as a wave-offering) was reserved for Moses (29). With each offering, Aaron and his sons had to place their hands on the head of the sacrifice to show their identification with it (14,18,22).

The sin offering was to make atonement for Aaron and his sons. Matthew Henry comments, 'Ministers, that are to declare the remission of sins to others, should give diligence to get it made sure to themselves in the first place, that their own sins are pardoned. Those to whom is committed the ministry of reconciliation, must first be reconciled to God themselves, that they may deal for the souls of others as for their own.'

The consecration ceremony lasted for seven days during which Aaron and his sons were commanded to remain in the court of the tabernacle. Moses repeated the sacrifices on each of these days (33–34). After Moses had killed the ram of consecration, *he took some of its blood and put it on the tip of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot*; this was repeated with Aaron's sons (22–24). **The priest had to have a listening ear for God's voice, hands to work for God and feet to walk in his ways.** Thumbs and toes were a token of a man's strength and to lose them rendered him weak and unable to serve as a soldier (Judges 1:6). To dedicate them to God was to dedicate all of one's strength to him.

The Lord Jesus is our perfect and eternal High Priest, *who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's, for this he did once for all when he offered up himself* (Hebrews 7:26–27). Christ is the offering, Christ is the priest, Christ is the offerer.

Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people

As soon as Aaron and his sons were consecrated, Moses called on them to begin their ministry (1). He commanded Aaron to sacrifice sin offerings and burnt offerings to make atonement for himself and for the people. Peace offerings and grain offerings were also to be offered to the Lord. The congregation drew near to the tabernacle of meeting and Moses reminded Aaron and his sons that the Lord had given them their priestly ministry. He promised, *'The glory of the Lord will appear to you'* (2–7). John Currid comments. 'The glory cloud, the Shekinah glory, will descend on the tabernacle. The manifestation of God's presence will be revealed as the sacrificial system of Israel is instituted. His appearance is confirmation of what is being done' (COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS, page 115).

After the sacrifices were completed (8–22), Aaron entered the tabernacle of meeting with Moses. *They came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering* (23). The people shouted for joy when they saw God fulfil his promise (24). The Hebrew verb translated 'shouted' is associated with joy (cp. Psalm 5:11; Psalm 132:9,16). This joyful shout was in no way irreverent; the people were also filled with awe and fell on their faces. They had been given a powerful demonstration that God kept his word. Matthew Henry points out that 'we are not now to expect such appearances; we Christians walk more by faith, and less by sight, than they did. But we may be sure that God does draw near to those who draw near to him.'

We must not look for visible manifestations such as fire in our services, but we should pray that God will make his holy presence known among us when we meet together to worship him and to hear his Word. **Worship should produce great joy, but if a sense of holy reverence is absent, it is not biblical worship.**

Profane fire

The incident recorded in these verses took place immediately after *the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people* (the remains of the goat sacrificed as a sin offering were found by Moses after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu – cp. 9:3, 23; see comments on verses 16–19 in tomorrow’s notes). One would have thought that such a solemn occasion would have placed some constraint on them, but they took it upon themselves to burn incense and they *offered profane fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them* (1; cp. Exodus 30:9). Though a priest was allowed to burn incense (cp. Luke 1:9), they acted presumptuously in adding something to the day’s ritual which the Lord had not commanded.

God sent fire as a token of his favour when he consumed the burnt offering, but he now sent fire as a token of his wrath and he killed the two sinning brothers (2; cp. 9:24). Aaron and the two remaining brothers were not allowed to leave the tabernacle to mourn for Nadab and Abihu (4–7). A shocked Aaron held his peace when Moses reminded him that the priests, who came near to the Lord to represent the people, must be holy (3).

What are we to learn from this solemn incident? God is still the same and we must seek to glorify him in our worship which is a serious and holy exercise. Nadab and Abihu may have imagined that they were pleasing God with their offering. They may have been sincere, but this did not excuse them for what they did. We are not permitted to experiment with worship, to fool around, to entertain, or to bring any other worldly method into our services. To do so is to offer profane fire! *Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:28–29).

That you may distinguish between holy and unholy

The Lord now spoke directly to Aaron forbidding the priests to take wine or any intoxicating drink before they went into the tabernacle (8–9; cp. Ezekiel 44:21). Any excess of drink would impair their judgment; in such a state they might disregard the precise laws relating to the offerings and they would not be able to teach the people the statutes of the Lord given through Moses (10–11). The New Testament also warns that church leaders must not be those who love intoxicating drink (1 Timothy 3:3,8).

The Lord also reminded Aaron that he and his fellow-priests bore two solemn responsibilities:

- *‘That you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean’* (10; cp. Ezekiel 44:23). The word *‘holy’* refers to something that is set apart and distinct; *‘unholy’* speaks of something that is common and ordinary. The priests had to guard the tabernacle so that no uncleanness was allowed into it.
- *‘That you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by the hand of Moses’* (11). An example of this is seen in the action of Jehoshaphat who sent priests and Levites throughout the cities of Judah to teach the people the Word of God (2 Chronicles 17:7–9; cp. Nehemiah 8:7–8). **Sound Bible teaching is most important for the spiritual well-being of a church. A lack of understanding of God’s holy Word leads to spiritual confusion.**

Moses reminded Aaron and his two remaining sons of the portion of the offerings that they should eat. He was angry when he discovered that they had not eaten their portion of the goat offered as a sin offering. This was important for it signified the carrying of the people’s guilt *to make atonement for them before the Lord* (13–18; cp. 9:3). Aaron, already in a state of shock at the death of Nadab and Abihu, replied that because of this tragedy he did not think that God would have accepted him to eat the sin offering. Aaron had not deliberately sinned nor been careless, and Moses accepted his explanation (19–20).

These are the animals which you may eat

Chapters 11 to 15 contain laws dealing with cleanness, uncleanness and purification. In chapter 11 there are dietary laws relating to clean and unclean animals (1–23, 41–43) and laws concerning uncleanness through contact with dead animals (24–40).

Animals were divided into clean and unclean before the flood (Genesis 7:2). The Israelites were permitted to eat ‘clean’ animals but forbidden to eat those which were ‘unclean’. Four categories of creature are given:

- Land animals (4–8). – The Lord told Moses and Aaron to instruct the Israelites, *‘These are the animals which you may eat ...’* (2–3). In the case of four-footed animals, only those which had cloven hooves and which chewed the cud were ‘clean’. Typical ‘clean’ animals were cattle, sheep and goats. Examples are also given of ‘unclean’ animals.
- Water creatures (9–12). – Only fish which had both fins and scales were ‘clean’. The eating of sea and river creatures such as eels, shell-fish and crab was ruled out.
- Birds (13–19). – The list of ‘unclean’ birds includes birds of prey. Examples of ‘clean’ birds are not given, but doves, pigeons and quail were among their number.
- Insects (20–23). – All insects were ‘unclean’ except for locusts, grasshoppers and crickets.

Why were these laws given? Most unclean animals were unwholesome, or unsafe to eat in a hot climate. Matthew Henry also points out, ‘God would thus teach his people to distinguish themselves from other people, not only in their religious worship, but in the common actions of life.’ **We are not bound by these dietary laws, but we must be wise in our choice of food. We must take care of our bodies which are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We should always show thankfulness to God who provides us with good food.**