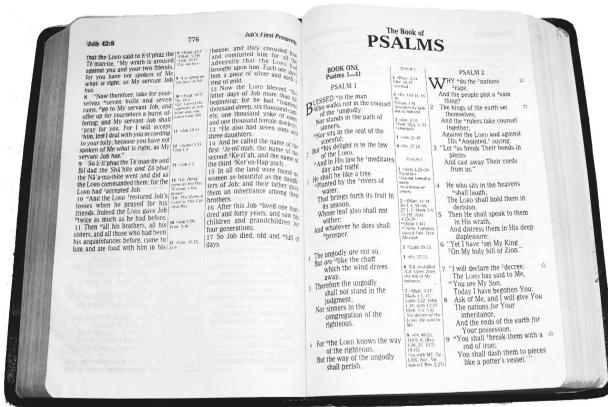


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

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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Recommended commentaries for Malachi:

T.V. Moore: Haggai & Malachi (published by Banner of Truth).

Iain M. Duguid: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi and John Benton: Losing Touch with the Living God (both published by Evangelical Press).

You have wearied the LORD with your words

The Lord told Israel, ‘*You have wearied the LORD with your words*’ (2:17). They lacked spiritual perception and any awareness of their own wickedness. They asked, ‘*In what way have we wearied him?*’ and he rebukes them for saying that ‘*everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD*’ and for complaining, ‘*Where is the God of justice?*’ They wearied the Lord because they failed to recognise their own evil ways. Many in our time, who lead godless lives like Malachi’s Jewish contemporaries, often blame God, whom they otherwise disregard, for all that is wrong in the world.

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 send his messenger ahead of the Messiah, to prepare the way for his coming (3:1). That 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? The reason is given 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 were constantly changing, falling into sin and repenting (7), 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

God called on his backslidden people. ‘Return to me,’ and they asked, *‘In what way shall we return?’* (7). He 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).

Many Christians do not face up to their responsibility to support the church to which they belong. 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. Some poor Christians are the most generous (2 Corinthians 8:1–5). Let us gladly give as God has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2). We must be wise and careful in our giving and avoid giving gifts to tele-evangelists who make emotional and high pressured appeals to support them. Most of them are charlatans who have extravagant and luxurious lifestyles.

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).

We saw yesterday that God does not change! He is still the same and his promises are true. He challenges us to prove him! Give 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 near to those who honour him, just waiting for us to prove him! He will bless us if we obey his Word.**

The LORD listened and heard them

The people had wearied the Lord with their words (2:17) and now he rebukes them for saying harsh things against him (13). As before, they questioned God's accusation against them saying, '*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 festivals and fasts, and had dressed in mourning garments (to show sorrow for sin) but it was all empty ritual (eg 1:6–14; 2:10–16). They were so blind to their own hypocrisy and wickedness when they complained that the Lord was not blessing them, whereas 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 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). God is honoured when we trust him and speak well of him even when we pass through the dark valley of suffering!

There were some who feared God in Malachi's day and he did hear their words. They were not like those priests who despised God's name (1:6) but they meditated (better translated 'valued') God's name (his character). 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*' (elsewhere translated '*special treasure*'; eg. Exodus 19:5), 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 thought 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). The ESV, Iain Duguid and T.V. Moore take this to refer to a day when the rising of the sun will bring deliverance, but I agree with Matthew Henry and John Benton who see it as a reference to Christ who brings healing and liberation for God’s people. They will be like calves, kept in their stalls from birth, who are set free to trample over the ground blackened from the fire, delighting 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 he 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* (5).

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 Lord Jesus rejecting them on the day of judgment (Matthew 25:41).** He was made a curse for us to save us from our sins and to bring us blessing (Galatians 3:13–14). Be sure that you know him as your Saviour and Lord!

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

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|---|---|--------|
| 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). He points out that Christians have obtained the same *precious faith* that he had *by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ* (1); this verse clearly shows that Jesus is God. Verse 2 also shows that Jesus is distinct from God the Father, speaking of *the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*. To know God the Father and his Son is a great privilege (3,8); it is to have *grace and peace* multiplied to us (2); it is to have God's *divine power* at work in our lives *through the knowledge of him who has called us to glory and virtue* (3).

We live in difficult and uncertain times but this is a great encouragement to us. 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 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 his Word.**

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). To partake of *the divine nature* is to have God the Father and the Lord Jesus making their home within us (John 14:23); it is to *be joined to the Lord* (1 Corinthians 6:17). Christians are still human but we are no longer in bondage to the corrupt sinful ways of the world. We are 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 they are very valuable. God 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 despair 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 we are not to be complacent. The Christian life is not static. We must *for this very reason* make every effort to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (3:18). We are told how to do this in verses 5 to 7:

- *Add* (Greek verb means ‘supply’) *to your faith virtue*. This is ‘moral excellence’, cp. Philippians 4:8). Peter used the same word in verse 3 to describe God’s virtue. We have been called *to proclaim the praises* (same word as ‘virtues’) of God (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* 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* (cp. 1 Timothy 6:6). We must walk worthy of our Christian calling (Ephesians 4:1–3).
- *Add to godliness brotherly kindness* (cp. Ephesians 4:32).
- *Add to brotherly kindness love* (cp. John 13:34–35). ‘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 1:2–5). We cannot lose our salvation but we can lose our assurance. We cannot fall from grace but we can fall into sin. We must therefore, 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 it's teaching. 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 send *many* who had worked miracles and prophesied in his name from his presence on the day of judgment. They were not chosen or called 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 the reality of their faith in Christ. Even the most godly person may experience times of doubt. A lack of Christian assurance hinders us in our work and witness for Christ and robs us of our Christian peace and 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) but we must beware of excessive introspection which causes us to take our eyes away from Christ. We are to have a practical faith which does the things 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

We have another ‘*therefore*’ in verse 12. The Lord Jesus Christ had shown Peter by what death he would glorify God (John 21:17–19) and he knew that he was soon to die, putting off his ‘*tent*’ (13–14); this means departing from the body through death. Our bodies are like tents, being temporary dwelling places for our souls (cp. 2 Corinthians 5:1–8). The apostle wrote that as long as he was alive he would remind his first readers of the things commanded in verses 5 to 10. Peter wanted *these things* to be remembered and obeyed after his death. Notice the words ‘*remind ... reminding ... reminder*’ (12–15). *These things* are still important so that we may be *established in the truth* which comes from knowing God’s Word and obeying it.

The coming of Christ into the world is not a cleverly devised story (16). Peter was an eye-witness of the majesty and dazzling splendour of the Lord Jesus at his transfiguration (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 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* (‘*carried along*’) *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*. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are as a light shining in the darkness of this world, exposing false teaching (19). The Bible is sufficient for all our guidance in matters of faith and practice. We do not need new 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 one of the most solemn and frightening chapters found in the whole of the Bible (see Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones' EXPOSITORY SERMONS ON 2 PETER, page 123). Peter knew that he was soon to die (1:14) and he warns us against the *destructive heresies* and lascivious ways of false teachers. He is vehement in his denunciation of heretics whom God will surely judge (1–3). There are warnings against false teachers and false teaching throughout the New Testament. The Lord Jesus and the apostles warn us against them (eg. Matthew 7:15; 1 Timothy 4:1–3; Titus 3:9–11). False teaching is a greater threat to the church than persecution.

We may be aware of the heresies of the cults, but we must be on our guard against false teachers within professing evangelical churches. Peter warns that they *secretly bring in destructive heresies* (1). The Greek word 'lathra' translated '*secretly*' carries the idea of being unnoticed and this is the danger we face from false teachers who attract '*many*' to *follow their destructive ways* (2; cp. 2 Timothy 3:4–7). '*Destructive*' is not a good translation in this verse. The Greek word indicates a lack of restraint (the ESV '*their sensuality*' is better). False teaching is often accompanied by loose living. Never assume that a person is right because his teaching is popular.

False teachers who have infiltrated churches, but others have entered many Christian homes through commercial television, deceiving many with their sensational stories. Those who promise wealth pander to the selfish desires of men and women. They make high-pressure appeals for money, exploiting gullible people, leading millions astray. Many of them lead opulent lives with their own private aircraft and fleets of luxury cars. *By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words* (3). Some claim to be 'gods' who can speak creative words to perform their phony miracles. We must not tolerate their appalling heresies. Do not be surprised that those who love truth are in the minority; this has always been the case. We must sound an 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 tells us that God will surely bring judgment on false teachers, reminding us that he did not spare the angels who rebelled against him before the world was made. Neither did God spare the ancient world of Noah's day or the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (4–6,9). **'If'** this is so (4), **'then'** he knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations ('trials') and he will surely punish the wicked (9–10).

The apostle writes of two men who lived among people who were very wicked – Noah and Lot. Noah lived in desperate times when the whole world was in the grip of Satan 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). Only Noah and his family worshipped and obeyed the Lord. 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 chose to live in Sodom because of his own greed and folly 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 us that we are to expect these *perilous times* (2 Timothy 3:1). God has called us to be lights in the darkness around us (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 ('trials')*. **Remember that God is sovereign. What a privilege it is to know him and to walk with him in a wicked world!**

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves

We have seen that false doctrine is often associated with wrong living. *The wages of unrighteousness* may appear attractive for a time, but they will bring terrible judgment (12–13). 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 are like clouds that promise rain but bring storms. 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 a bribe (16). False teachers are able to infiltrate churches because they often have *a form of godliness* (2 Timothy 3:5). They are very persuasive but their words are empty. *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption.* Those who are beguiled by them are brought into bondage (18–19). They do find true freedom but slavery and ultimate misery!

You may wonder if there really are false teachers today who fit the description of verse 14. They know God's Word but teach error and even worse, they utter blasphemies and indulge in sexual immorality. Sadly, there are such people who deceive many and they are supported by some pastors and church leaders.

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 remind us 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 they expected. Peter reminds us that the prophets and the apostles of the Lord Jesus had warned of scoffers who *walk according to their own evil desires* (3; ESV).

Have you noticed that many who scoff at the Bible hate its teaching of coming judgment and assert that nothing changes. They taunt us with the question, ‘*Where is the promise of his coming? ... all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation*’ (4). They deliberately forget that this is not true (5).

There have always been scoffers and Peter takes us back to the book of Genesis to remind us that things did not continue as they were. God created the world by his word and sent the flood by the same word which destroyed the wicked (5–6). Noah, *a preacher of righteousness* (2:5) was ignored. Those who heard him 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. 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 to us 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 longsuffering (patient) toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance* (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 they are in for a shock. The Lord Jesus will come when least expected, *as a thief in the night*. His second coming will be the time of final judgment which will be a terrible day for those who do not expect or prepare for it. The earth and *'the heavenly bodies'* (ESV) 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 day of the Lord* 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). This 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

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

Peter affection for his first readers is seen in his reference to them as *'beloved'*. He uses the same word of the apostle Paul. He recognises Paul's 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 approach the Bible with a reverent and submissive attitude. The untaught and unstable twist Scripture *to their own destruction*. Cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses do this though they claim to know the Bible.

We must also beware of those who promise all kinds of God's blessings (healing and prosperity) to those who support them. They appear to be evangelical, but many hold to all kinds of heresies. Peter warns us to beware of being carried away by the error of false teachers which will cause us to lose our stability (17). We must remain steadfast in the truth of God's Word. Wrong doctrine will never produce a life that pleases God.

Peter 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

- | | | |
|---|---|---------------|
| 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 the person 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 offering is 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). The people lamented in a time of famine because they 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 brought 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 was permitted for *the peace offering* (1) 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, harmony, and communion. In peace offerings, God and his people feasted together as a token of friendship.
- Prosperity and 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 blessing that was desired. If a man prayed for any mercy, he would back his prayer of with a peace-offering.
 - b. For thanksgiving for some particular mercy received when a vow was made (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* (the high priest; who was the only anointed priest; 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 sin of the high 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).

The ritual associated with the sin offering is similar to that relating to the burnt offering and the peace offering except when a bull was offered for the high priest or for the whole congregation (5–6, 16–17). Here the high 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 burned on the altar of burnt offering; the rest of the animal burned outside the camp (8–12, 19–20, 26,31).

The problem with these sacrifices was that they could not fully atone for sin because they were repeated day after day and year after year. – *But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance of sins every year, for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins* (Hebrews 10: 3–4). **These offerings foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus which is sufficient to atone for all our sins (Hebrews 10:1–18).**

If a person sins unintentionally

There is a difference between unintentional sin and deliberate sin (Numbers 16:29–31). *The sin offering* (8) had to be offered *if a person sins unintentionally* (2,13,22,27). 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 sin because we are sinful by nature. We may not intend to sin, but because of our human frailty we do sin. When we walk with the Lord, we will not deliberately sin against God. We often sin unintentionally, however, perhaps through thoughtless behaviour or speech. **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).

Christians do sin and we must be determined to deal with sin in our lives. **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 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 confess our sin and seek God's forgiveness. 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

Four examples are given in these verses of sins which made a person guilty before God and which required a sin offering,

- Concealing the truth when sworn in as a witness (1).
- Touching any unclean creature or its carcass (2; cp. 11:24–31).
- Touching any unclean person (3; see chapters 12 to 15).
- The rash use of oaths (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. If we fail to keep our promises, 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. There is general confession in public prayer, admitting our guilt as sinners, but naming our own specific sins are for private confession. *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 will not admit their guilt. They refuse to confess their sin and put matters right with those they have wronged and seek their forgiveness. We cannot expect God to forgive us if we behave in such a manner. *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:

- Unintentional sin against the Lord *in regard to the holy things of the LORD* (5:14–16). Details of the offences are not given.
- Disobedience to commandments of the Lord though the person had been unaware of it (5:17–19). This covered a situation where a person was not sure that he had sinned *in regard to the holy things*. This did not excuse his offence and *a ram without blemish* had to be offered.
- Deliberate sin against others (6:1–7). This sin included dishonest acts such as fraud, extortion or theft.

If we have offended someone, we must put matters right with them and seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23–24). We may have defrauded someone before we came to faith in Christ, but we must pay restitution to them, compensating the full value of the offence (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 repay anyone from whom we may have stolen money or goods. They will be surprised when we contact them but it also provides an opportunity to tell them how the Lord has saved us and changed us. * **Do you owe anything to God or men for which you have not paid restitution?**

* Some years a business man in Coventry was wonderfully saved. He had been guilty of insurance fraud on a massive scale. He went to the police and confessed his crime and was sent to prison for eighteen months. He paid back all that had been defrauded. It brought him financial ruin but his story was reported in the national press and God was glorified.

It is most holy

John Currid comments, ‘Up unto this point, the description of the sacrificial system of Israel has been directed to the entire nation. But in this new section the material is addressed specifically to the priesthood ... Leviticus 6:8 – 7:38 appears to be a priestly manual for the operation of the sacrificial system in Israel’ (COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS, page 78).

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 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). The priests had to be ceremonially clean when eating the grain offering (18). When they 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 sin offering is described as ‘*most holy*’ (25) but the sacrifice of Christ is far more precious and sacred than Jewish sacrifices (Hebrews 9:13–14; 10:29). The priests sacrificed daily for their own sins and for the sins of the people (20) but the Lord Jesus *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 when he offered up himself* (Hebrews 7:27). **We do not need temples, altars, priests or sacrifices to be offered each day. We have a wonderful salvation; let us be determined to love and serve the Lord Jesus with all our heart (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).**

Any unclean thing

This chapter continues with laws for trespass (guilt) offerings and peace offerings. The trespass offering was described in chapter 5:14 to 6:7 but there is additional detail in these verses. Only part of this offering was burned on the altar, the remainder being for the priests but not their families to eat (1–7). The parts of the burnt-offerings and grain offerings which belonged to the priest are described; the hide of the animal also belonged to the priests (8–9). 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 next 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 are not bound by 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 Christians are greatly defiled and damaged because they become addicted to pornography. We must avoid *any unclean thing* on television, internet or in newspapers, magazines or books. We must not allow the ways of the world to defile us (cp. 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; 2 Peter 2:10; Psalm 1:1). We remember the great sacrifice of Christ at the Lord’s Table and we must not take the bread or the cup 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

The word '*fat*' when used of an animal in Leviticus describes the best part of its flesh rather than fatty tissue. The fat of the sacrificial animals was burned as an offering to the Lord and the blood was sprinkled on the altar (1–4; cp. 3:3–17). The eating of any portion of the animal which was set apart to be burned to the Lord was strictly forbidden. The blood was sacred, representing the life of the animal which was sacrificed to atone for the sin of the offerer (22–27; cp. 17:10–12). The eating of any blood was forbidden, not only that of sacrifices. This prohibition was universal, going back to Genesis 9:4.

The right thigh and the breast of the animal were given as heave and wave offerings, and were retained by the priest as his portion of the sacrifice (31–35). These early chapters of Leviticus have reminded us 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 the Lord Jesus Christ has put an end to this elaborate ritual. His one offering is all that is necessary for the salvation of a sinner (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).

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.' As sinners we come to God through Christ, empty-handed and begging for mercy. Augustus M. Toplady reminds us of this in the line of his great hymn, Rock of Ages: '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

The Lord told Moses to take Aaron and his sons, their garments, the anointing oil, the animals to be sacrificed and unleavened bread to the tabernacle where he should gather the Israelites (1–4). Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons to the priesthood according to the instructions given to him by the Lord (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). John Currid observes, ‘This event is so momentous that all Israel is to witness it. The ceremony denotes the elevation in the status of Aaron and his sons within the congregation; thus the whole nation is summoned’ (COMMENTARY ON LEVITICUS, page 104).

Moses first washed Aaron and his sons with water (6). They had to be ritually cleansed because they drew near to the Lord on behalf of the people. Aaron was then dressed in the garments of the high priest and his sons clothed as priests (7–9,13). After anointing the tabernacle and its furniture, Moses turned to Aaron *and anointed him, to sanctify him* (12).

Aaron had greatly sinned in making the golden-calf for Israel to worship (Exodus 32) but was now elevated to lead the worship of Israel. Hebrews 7:26–29 reminds us that ‘*the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected for ever.*’ There is no weakness in the Lord Jesus, our perfect high priest! By his one sacrifice, he offered up himself to save us from our sins. Christ is the offering, Christ is the priest, Christ is the offerer. **He has given us a salvation loaded with blessings we do not deserve (Ephesians 1:3–11; 2:1–13). We should love him with all our heart!**

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude
In my place condemned he stood;
Sealed my pardon with his blood;
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!*

(Philip P. Bliss)

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). The breast given as a wave-offering was reserved for Moses (29). Aaron and his sons had to place their hands on the head of each offering to show their identification with them (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.'

Aaron and his sons were commanded to remain in the court of the tabernacle for the consecration ceremony which lasted for seven days. 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.

*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)

Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people

As soon as Aaron and his sons were consecrated, Moses called on them, in the presence of the elders of Israel, 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* (23–24). 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 should pray that God will make his holy presence known among us when we meet together to worship him and to hear his Word.

The people shouted for joy when they saw God fulfil his promise. The Hebrew verb translated ‘shouted’ is associated with joy (24; 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 keeps his word. **Worship should produce great joy, but if a sense of holy reverence is absent, it is not biblical worship.**

Lo! God is here! let us adore, and own how awesome is this place!
(Gerhard Tersteegen, translated by John Wesley)

Profane ('strange') fire

Nadab and Abihu were the two elder sons of Aaron (Exodus 6:23) and Nadab was in line to succeed his father as high priest. God had also singled them out to be with Moses and Aaron on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:1–2,9). The incident recorded in these verses took place after *the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar* (9:23–24). One would have thought that such a solemn occasion would have placed some constraint on them, but they took it upon themselves to offer *profane ('strange') fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them* when they burned incense in their censers (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 had 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). Their bodies were carried in their priestly garments out of the camp (4–5). The fire had killed them but had not burned up their garments. 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). Aaron and his two remaining sons were not allowed to leave the tabernacle to join the people in mourning for Nadab and Abihu (6–7).

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 their offering would please God 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 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 have impaired their judgment; in such a state they might have disregarded the precise laws relating to the offerings, and been unable to accurately teach the people all the statutes of the Lord given through Moses (10–11; cp. Isaiah 28:7). The New Testament also warns against the dangers of intoxicating drink (1 Timothy 3:3,8).

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

- To *‘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.
- To *‘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 was angry with Aaron and his two remaining sons 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 or 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. Chapter 11 gives dietary laws relating to clean and unclean creatures (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 and Noah offered burnt offerings of every clean animal and bird after the flood (Genesis 7:2; 8:20). 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 cloven hooved animals which chewed the cud were ‘clean’. Typical ‘clean’ animals were cattle, sheep and goats.
- 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 forbidden.
- 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? They set Israel apart as a *‘holy people’* (44). 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.**