

Youth Spiritual Competition 2023

The Book of Leviticus

Junior High Edition



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Chapter 1: Introduction to Leviticus

Leviticus as a Book of Worship and Holiness¹

In the book of Exodus, God released His people from the slavery of Pharaoh to lead them through the wilderness towards the heavenly Canaan. The people were in need of God's accompaniment with them through this trip, for He is the Holy One who grants the "Holy life" through His unique holy sacrifice.

A Book of Worship. As the sequel to the book of Exodus, Leviticus is a liturgical book that seeks to reveal the nature of common worship. In order to maintain their relationship to God, the children of Israel needed to learn how to properly worship Him. God prepared His people to learn worship prior to entering the promised land since in Canaan, there would be many forms of pagan worship. He did not want the Israelites to be influenced by this paganism.

In many ways, since worship is at the heart of every Orthodox Christian, so was the book of Leviticus—a book of worship and holiness—the center of the Pentateuch. It was also called by the Jews as the “law of the priests” or the “book of offerings” because it contained all the aspects of their worship related to the sacrifices and offerings.

A Book of Holiness. The book of Leviticus presents to us God's holiness, and charges us, as God's people, to be holy as He is holy: “And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine” (Lv. 20:26). God declared that these were His people, and He was their God. The book of Leviticus proclaims the intimacy of God and His people through the holy life, which is enjoyed through the Lord Christ, Who is both the sacrifice and the priest.

Thus, Leviticus is a book of holiness. Through holiness, we behold God and unite with Him. Holiness is a gift from God, granted through the propitiation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is symbolized by the blood sacrifices and offerings of animals. The Lord, Who is the Lawgiver, introduces to mankind the Levitical priesthood, which is earthly, as a symbol for us to understand His priesthood, which is heavenly.² He presents the divine Law pertaining to worship to reveal the sanctification by blood and the enjoyment of redemption as God desires that mankind may be sanctified according to His image.³

Author

In the Holy Tradition of the Church, the author of this book, like the other books of the Pentateuch, is **Moses**. God addresses him 38 times in this book. There is only one instance, Leviticus 10:8, in which the Lord spoke solely to Aaron. As we will see, these expressions that God spoke or called to Moses indicate not only that Moses is the author, but also the place and relative time in which the commandments and statutes comprising this book were given to Moses by God.

¹ Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*.

² Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, 2.

³ Malaty, Fr. Tadros, Y. *The Book of Deuteronomy*. Coptic Orthodox Christian Center, 2005, 16.

Moses received from God the statutes and commandments comprising the book of Leviticus while on Mount Sinai. At the end of Chapter 7, which concludes the law governing sacrifices, Moses summarizes what God commanded him on Mount Sinai during the sojourn of Israel in the wilderness. Chapter 25, which focuses on the sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee, begins with the expression that the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. The section on blessings and curses (Lv. 26:1-46) is also concluded by “these are the statutes and judgments and laws which the Lord made between Himself and the children of Israel on Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses” (Lv. 26:46). Lastly, the book concludes, “These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel on Mount Sinai” (Lv. 27:34).

Structure

The book of Leviticus is broken into five divisions, with a sixth serving as an appendix:

- I. Regulations regarding sacrifices (Lv. 1:1-7:38);
- II. Descriptions of the ordination of Aaron and his sons and the first sacrifices offered at the Tent of Meeting (Lv. 8:1-10:20);
- III. Laws regulating ritual purity (Lv. 11:1-15:32)
- IV. Liturgy and calendar for the Day of Atonement (Lv. 16:1-34)
- V. Laws with exhortations to holy living (Lv. 17:1-26:46)
- VI. Laws on vows and offerings (Lv. 27:1-34) (Appendix)

Purpose

The goal and purpose of this book, then, is to proclaim that holiness is the line that distinguishes the people of God from the rest of the world. Holiness is demonstrated in the worship and behavior of God’s chosen people. The goal of worship, in all its form, and the goal of the divine commandment, is for all to enjoy holiness in the Lord. This goal is plainly seen when the Lord says, “For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy” (Lv. 11:44).

Chapter 2: Offerings (Lv. 1-7)

Introduction to Division I (Lv. 1-7)

Division I (Lv. 1-7), which contains the regulations for offering the various kinds of sacrifices, is further divided into two sections:

- (1) The basic teachings regarding the sacrifices (Lv. 1-5)
- (2) The administration of such sacrifices (Lv. 6-7).

Again, these sacrifices and this pattern was given to Moses by God not only for Aaron and his sons, but for the entire congregation of the children of Israel. As Origen writes:

Therefore, in the beginning of Leviticus it says, "The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting" that he should publicly announce to the sons of Israel the laws of sacrifices and offerings.⁴

We must bear in mind, however, that the law is a shadow of what is to be completed and accomplished in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is our tutor (cf. Gal. 3:24). Our study will require us to look at what God prescribed and required of the people and how these regulations pointed to Christ who not only completed, but exceeded through the reality of salvation that can only be found in Him.

Two Groups of Sacrifices (Lv. 1-7)

The first section of the sacrifices is also divided into two groups:

- (1) sacrifices that offer a sweet-smelling aroma to God, namely:
 - the whole burnt offering (Lv. 1),
 - the grain offering (Lv. 2),
 - the peace offering (Lv. 3);
- (2) sacrifices that provide forgiveness, namely:
 - the sin offering, (Lv. 4-5)
 - the guilt offering (Lv. 4-5).

The first group of offerings in the first section of offerings present an image of a liturgical offering. It is essentially labor between the one bringing the offering and the priest, as *liturgia* is work of the people. The one bringing the offering presents his offering to the priest, and together they offer it on behalf of that individual. This concept is seen clearly in Lv. 1:3-9.

⁴ Barkley, Gary Wayne, translator. *Origen: Homilies on Leviticus: 1-16*. Edited by Thomas P. Halton, Catholic Univ. of America Pr., 1990, 31.

1. The Whole Burnt Offering (Lv. 1:1-17)

A whole burnt offering was to be given for general sins (Lv. 1:3-17) and served as a confession of general sinfulness. Poor worshippers brought two birds (1:14-17), while those who could afford would offer a male sheep or goat from their herd/flock (Lv. 1:14-17).

The one bringing the offering would either present his bull (Lv. 1:3), which was to be of superior quality, a male without blame or blemish, and the best of the firstfruits. The one bringing the offering would lay his hand on the head of the animal, identifying the animal as his own (Lv. 1:4), which was then followed by the slaughtering of the animal by that person offering (Lv. 1:5). The priest would dash the blood against the altar (Lv. 1:5), and the one who brought the offering would skin and cut the offering (Lv. 1:6). The animal would be arranged by the priest, who would prepare a fire (Lv. 1:7-8). The one who brought the offering would wash the innards and legs (Lv. 1:9), and the priest would burn the fat of the offering (Lv. 1:9).

The Bull points to Christ

The bull offered in Lv. 1 points to Christ. The bull is a male without blemish, a typical description of Jesus, “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Pt. 2:22). While the bull is offered for various people, such as “a soul,” “a high priest,” “a synagogue,” or “a prince,” Christ is offered for the entire human race.

Christ became man, “being the firstborn among many brethren” (cf. Rm. 8:29), that He may offer Himself upon the Cross. He is offering and offeror, and yet He is without sin. He does so not because He has need of an offering, but that He may offer the acceptable sacrifice on our behalf that our sins may be forgiven and that we may be reconciled unto the Father.

Moreover, the manner by which the bull is killed provides further images of the death of Christ upon the Cross. As the bull is offered at the door of the tabernacle and his blood is sprinkled on the altar by the doors of the tabernacle of testimony, so our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified outside of Jerusalem. This is a one-to-one image of what St. Paul describes in Hebrews, saying, “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (He. 13:12).

Acceptable Sacrifice

How was Christ’s death acceptable to His Father, as St. Paul describes, “an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma” (Ep. 2:2), whose body was presented as a “living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” (Rm. 12:1)?

The sacrifice of Christ is acceptable because it is done in purity and righteousness. He is perfect and blameless, free from all stain and dishonor. The Lord has sanctified His Body and has prepared it to be offered upon the holy wood of the Cross. He washed it in the waters of the Jordan and overcame temptation in the wilderness. He refrained from filthy speech and evil conduct and instead gave life through His word and provided healing through His pure body. Being man in everything except sin, He took a human mind, body, and soul, which He sanctified

in Himself. While man toiled and could not overcome the heavy yoke of the law, Christ accepted unto Himself the circumcision and was obedient where we failed. Having accomplished the works of the economy in His flesh, He offered that which He received from the Holy Theotokos Virgin Mary as a propitiation for our sins, and not just our sins, but for the sins of the whole world (cf. 1 Jn. 2:2). Ultimately, His offering is acceptable because, being God, He offered Himself in humility to die on our behalf:

[W]ho, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:6-11).

Offering ourselves as Whole Burnt Offerings

St. Augustine recognizes that, as the offering is wholly burnt and wholly consumed, so too must we be wholly consumed by divine fire. St. John Chrysostom provides another example of the whole burnt offering, pointing to the martyrs as those who have entirely given themselves to God.

St. Gregory the Theologian calls all Christians to offer to God the members of our body here on earth (cf. Cl. 3:5), to dedicate them to God to be counted as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is our reasonable service (cf. Rm. 12:1). This directs us to refrain from using our bodies for sin, like St. Paul's example of the one who stole now working with his hands to give to one in need (cf. Ep. 4:28-29), or the Ninevites who ceased sinning with their hands (cf. Jo. 3:8, 10).

2. Grain Offering (Lv. 2:1-16)

The second offering is the grain offering, also called the cereal offering. God provides instruction to Moses that the offering shall be of fine flour, oil shall be poured on it, and frankincense added on it. The entire offering is then burned, creating a sweet smelling aroma to the Lord (cf. Lv. 2:1-2). When offering the grain offering, one may offer (1) fine flour (Lv. 2:1-3), (2) grain baked in the oven (Lv. 2:4-6), or (3) grain baked in a covered pan (Lv. 2:7-10). Just as the whole burnt offering is a type of Christ, so also is the grain offering. As grain can be ground and bread be made, so too does the Lord announce that He is the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:15, 48).

This is an illustration of the Eucharist, in which our Lord Jesus Christ offers His Body and Blood upon the Cross, of which we partake for eternal life and reconciliation. As St. Paul instructed the church in Corinth, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of

the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Co. 10:16-17).

Just as God commanded that *oil* be poured on the grain offering (Lv. 2:1, 4, 7), so was Christ anointed by the *Holy Spirit*. We too, being called Christians, are anointed in the Chrismation with the *Holy Myrrour*, receiving the Holy Spirit who St. Paul describes as the seal of our salvation and guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession (cf. Ep. 1:13-14). However, our anointing is not the same as Christ since we are not anointed divinely with our own spirit.

The oil clearly points to the gift of the Holy Spirit. This cannot be separated from the sacrifice. Since we cannot separate the offering of oil from the offering of the grain, then we cannot separate the crucifixion of Christ from the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Christ offered Himself as a burnt offering, the Lord granted us to receive the Holy Spirit.

The Lord granted us the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter, to aid us in our sojourn on earth, to continue to work the works of salvation within us, sanctifying and transforming us, that we may continue to be renewed in the likeness of God through Christ. In comforting us and providing truth, the Holy Spirit is the healer, who works in the mysteries of the Church to renew Christians.

Christ as the Firstfruit.

Christ is the firstborn over all creation (cf. Col. 1:15). As St. Paul declared, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Co. 15:20). As St. Cyril of Alexandria said, “For Christ is the firstfruits, as I said, of a nature which is restored to newness of life, and in Him all things have become new.” So it is that anyone in Christ is a new creation (cf. 2 Co. 5:17), as St. Cyril also said, “He Himself is the offering made for us, the spiritual firstfruits, that is, the firstfruits of humanity, the firstborn from the dead, the first to enter incorruption, the firstfruits, as it were, of those that slept.”

3. The Peace Offering (Lv. 3:1-17)

Along with the whole burnt offering and the grain offering is the peace offering. The peace offering was offered as an act of thanksgiving (Lv. 7:12; 22:29-30), to fulfill a special vow (Lv. 7:16; 22:21), or as a freewill offering (Lv. 7:16; 22:18, 21, 23). No birds or grains may be offered. The only animals that may be offered are bulls, lambs, and goats. Since it expresses the inner joy and life of thanksgiving, it is also called “perfect sacrifice.” which was optionally offered by the whole congregation or by any of its members on certain joyful occasions as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for His care and love.

Jesus Christ is the True Peace Offering.

The source of peace is the Lord Jesus Christ, who reconciled and brought to us peace with the Father through His blood.⁵ He is true peace, who puts to death the enmity and provides us access by one Spirit to the Father (cf. Ep. 2:14-18). The peace offering involves the innards of the offering since it reflects the depth of affection of the Lord who offers Himself according to His tender mercy and the thanksgiving in the heart of the offeror. This love of God and the Church results in sanctification, as St. Paul describes, that Christ loved and gave Himself for the Church, that He might “sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ep. 5:25-27).

Second Group: Sin and Trespass Offerings (Lv. 4:1-5:19)

The second group of sacrifices, those providing propitiation and forgiveness, concern:

- (1) the “sin offering,” also called the “purification offering.”
- (2) the guilt offering, also called the “trespass offering.”

These offerings were required for those who sinned in order to remain in fellowship with God as members of His holy community. Either one was required for the purpose of remaining in fellowship with God. The sins here were *unintentional* and *ignorant* failures to keep the commandments.

4. The Sin Offering (Lv. 4:1 to 5:13)

The sin offering could be offered for the high priest (Lv. 4:1-12), the entire community (Lv. 4:13-21), the prince (Lv. 4:22-26), and private persons (Lv. 4:27-5:13), but only in those instances where the failure was inadvertent.

5. The Guilt Offering (Lv. 5:14-6:7; 7:1-6)

These are different from the sin offerings because they have to do with offenses where the damage that has been done may be assessed. They are compensation payments and in most cases one-fifth is added to the assessment.⁶ The guilt or trespass offerings are divided into two kinds: (1) sacrifices offered for sins which cause harm to the divine sanctuaries; and (2) sacrifices offered for sins that cause harm to the brethren.⁷

An unintentional sin in regard to holy things of the Lord refers to slothfulness in offering the temple commitments. This includes the first fruit of the clean animals, man, fruits, and tithes as mentioned in Lv. 27. As such, the man who commits such sin will offer a ram along with restitution for the amount withheld due to his sloth, with an additional one-fifth added to it.

⁵ Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, 43.

⁶ Peake, Arthur S., et al. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 1964, 243.

⁷ Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, 65.

The second kind of guilt offering, those offered for sins that cause harm to the brethren, are described in Lv. 6:1-7. This section describes the sins of betraying one's neighbor through lying or extortion. These are sins of deceiving and taking advantage of another person. For such a sin, the sinner is to return what was stolen or to restore its value plus one-fifth as a type of penalty or further punishment to deter the person from sinning in this way again. As with the other kind of guilt offerings against the sanctuary, the person offers a ram.

Does God Desire Sacrifice?

Does God desire sacrifice from His people? While the sacrifices we've just studied are shadows of the Lord's sacrifice on the Cross, does He still require sacrifice from us? Even considering the time of the Old Testament, we find many instances in Scripture where God rejects the sacrifices of the children of Israel (see include 1 Sa. 15:14–22, Je. 7:21–23, Ho. 6:6, Mi. 6:6–8 and Ze. 7:4–7). Even consider Psalm 50 in which the Psalmist says, "If you desired sacrifice, I would have given it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings" (Ps. 50:18, LXX).

This does not mean that God contradicts His instruction in Leviticus, nor does He abolish the sacrifice. Rather, He rejects those empty sacrifices that are done for appears or piety's sake without a contrite and broken heart, as David says later in that Psalm, "The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart God shall not despise" (Ps. 50:19, LXX) followed by "Then You shall be pleased with sacrifices of righteousness, offering, and burnt sacrifices: then they shall offer calves upon Your altar" (Ps. 50:21, LXX).

So while Isaiah demanded that the people cease their sacrifices, convocations, and appointed feast days (Is. 1:11-15) which are established in the book of Leviticus, he says they must come to God with clean hands and a clean heart. If they approach God with a contrite heart desiring forgiveness, God will accept their sacrifices, just as he accepted David's sacrifices for his sin with Bathsheba after David repented.

Chapter 3: Ordination (Lv. 8-10)

Introduction to Division II

Division II of the book of Leviticus (Lv. 8-10) concerns the ordination of Aaron and his sons (Lv. 8) and the offering of the first sacrifices at the newly erected sanctuary (Lv. 9). Division II concludes with the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, who were devoured by fire that went out from the Lord since they offered “profane fire.”

Ordination of the Priest (Lv. 8)

The solemn rite of ordination prescribed for Aaron and his sons is carried out according to the directives in Ex. 28:1 to 29:35, 39:1-31, and 40:12-15. This Division follows the sacrifices since there is no priesthood without sacrifices, and there are no sacrifices without priesthood. While Aaron and his sons are ordained into the Levitical priesthood, they are a type of the priesthood of Christ, who is the Great Archpriest according to the order of Melchizedek. The ordination rites reveal aspects regarding Christ’s own priesthood and His ministry towards mankind.

The rite of consecration requires preparation (Lv. 8:1-5), washing with water (Lv. 8:6), putting on the tunic of priesthood (Lv. 8:7-9), anointing with oil (Lv. 8:10-13), the sanctification by the sacrifice (Lv. 8:14-32), and the consecration (Lv. 8:33-36). We can draw from the ordination of the priests an image of salvation as well as the sacramental life.

The priest, then, being consecrated, is set aside to administer the sacraments in holiness, himself living a life of sanctification and repentance as we mentioned during our discussion on the sin offering in Division I. The ordination of a priest calls for their whole lives, both inward and outward, to be consecrated unto God, as each will give an account to the Lord regarding their inner being and their outward behavior.

Distinguishing Priesthood of Christ from Levitical Priesthood

St. Paul points to Melchizedek, seen in Ge. 14:18-29, as a type of Christ, indicating that He was both a king and a priest. He distinguishes the Levitical priesthood from that of Melchizedek, demonstrating that since “Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant” (cf. He. 7:22), then “such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens” (He. 7:26).

The differences between the priesthood of Levi and that of Melchizedek may be summarized by the following table.⁸

⁸ This table is found in *The Orthodox Study Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 2008, 1661.

Priesthood of Levi	Priesthood of Melchizedek
Genealogical Requirement. The Levitical priesthood is limited to one tribe. It cannot transform mortal and corrupt humanity because it consists of mere men.	As Melchizedek was without earthly genealogy, so is Christ by virtue of His virgin birth. He is God incarnate, immortal and sinless, and therefore His priesthood is able to transform humanity.
Ordination. The power given at ordination is incomplete. The Levitical priesthood is weak, its sacrifices have to be repeated, and it cannot perfect the worshipers. It cannot reconcile people to God nor give them the inner power to obey. The ordination is without direct confirmation from God.	The power given at ordination is strong and effective. The power of Christ's priesthood is perfect and draws us near to God. His sacrifice is offered once for all. The Father Himself ordains the Son.
Term of Office. The Levitical priesthood is temporary. Since it is composed of mortal men, it requires many members.	Melchizedek's priesthood is a type of the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ, since he was both priest and king who offered bread and wine, and, in comparison with the Levitical priesthood, had no earthly genealogy.
Moral and Spiritual Requirements. These must be less than perfection, for the Levitical priests are all created beings subject to sin.	The requirement of perfect holiness is met in Christ, the only sinless One. He is more than mere man since He is the Son of God.

Chapter 4: Uncleanness (Lv. 11-15)

Introduction to Division III

Division III of the book of Leviticus (Lv. 11-15) presents a series of laws regulating *ritual purity*: (1) clean and unclean foods and animals (Lv. 11); (2) giving birth (Lv. 12); (3) leprosy as it concerns people, garments, and homes (Lv. 13-14); and (4) bodily discharge.

As we've studied, the reason God gave such complex and harsh rules was to emphasize how critical it was that His people prepare themselves to enter into His presence. The concern with purity, then, is not whether uncleanness by itself, but rather encountering God's holiness while unclean.

The law, as tutor (cf. Ga. 3:24), teaches wholeness and completeness of holiness. It provided numerous symbols or illustrations for the people about the wholeness, purity, perfection, and unity of God. As we will study, our Lord Jesus Christ put an end to the laws of *ritual purity*, calling for purity of the heart (cf. Mk. 7:14-23; Mt. 15:17-20; Rm. 14:14; Ep. 2:22-21; Ti. 1:15). However, the concept of *ritual purity* is still preserved in the church today.

What is meant by Cleanliness? (Lv. 11)

Cleanliness is all about drawing a distinction. It is distinguishing what is good from what is bad, what is appropriate from what is inappropriate, what is edifying and what is destructive. Christ used clear illustrations to demonstrate that we must draw a line of demarcation to make distinctions between the natures of things: light and darkness, night and day, right and wrong. It is a lesson for God's people to know as they enter God's presence: what is holy and right? While sin has blinded and made it difficult for man to distinguish his left hand from his right, God provides means for the people to learn morality in a natural way by incorporating discernment in their daily routine and life. This is made abundantly clear at the end of Lv. 11:

This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten (Lv. 11:46-47).

Ultimately, the purpose of the laws of cleanliness is to distinguish between what is holy and what is not. Holy is that which has to do with God, and everything that belongs to God is holy.⁹ The Hebrews were taught that God is concerned with every aspect of life and with the whole of it.¹⁰ Thus Lv. 11 ends:

For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

⁹ Peake, Arthur S., et al. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 1964, 246.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy (Lv. 11:44-45).

While these dietary restrictions and regulations regarding food may seem quite foreign today, these were very common to ancient people.¹¹ According to scholars, God commanded the Israelites to exclude those foods that were harmful to hygiene. Scholars moreover point out that the foods considered unclean were those also used in pagan worship for sacrifices, magic, and superstitious practices. Nevertheless it is sufficient to know that God has called some animals clean and others unclean, so that the Jews may sanctify themselves in something so little as food. Therefore, they do not lose anything by refraining from certain foods since they gain holiness and enjoy the blessings of God.

Leprosy (Lv. 13-14)

Leprosy is a serious skin disease that may result in destruction and distortion of the body. It is a swift and contagious disease. Much of the priest's duty and role in serving the leprous person is determining whether this person is actually inflicted with leprosy, which would result in removal from the camp.

What happens if a person is afflicted with leprosy? First, the priest must conduct an examination to determine whether the person has leprosy. If the leprous symptom is merely outward, then there will be a seven-day period of isolation to see if the symptom has gone away. Those periods of isolation shall continue in seven day intervals until the symptom is gone. If the priest examines the man and confirms the man is a leper, the man is declared unclean and will be separated from the camp until the leprosy ceases.

The image of the leper being removed from the camp is the spiritual reality of the man who separates himself from the Body of Christ through sin. Transgressing against God causes us to isolate ourselves from Him and the Church. It is moreover understood by some as a period of reflection and repentance.

Those who have the merely outward symptoms yet are not declared lepers are those wounded by sin, and are recovering from its blows. Christ was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5). We wound and injure ourselves through sin spiritually, psychologically, and even at times physically by giving ourselves over to death. On the Cross, Christ accepted all these wounds on our behalf even though He is blameless and without sin.

While Lv. 13 describes the law regarding leprosy, including its evaluation and prescription, Lv. 14 provides the rite for cleansing a healed leper.

These two examples present the image of repentance: Christ begins the action and completes it, as St. Paul said, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Pp. 1:6). This is an image of repentance: God puts it in our heart to repent,

¹¹ Plaut, W. Gunther. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981, 818.

yet it is He who comes after us. There is no contradiction in the cleansing of the leper, but rather an incredible image of the sincerity of God's love for us.

Once the priest goes out of the camp, he examines the leper to determine if he is healed. If he is healed, the priest shall call for two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. One bird he commands to be killed in an earthen vessel over running water (Lv. 14:5). He takes the living bird, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip all these along with the living bird in the blood of the dead bird (Lv. 14:6). The priest takes that blood, drips it seven times on the leper, declares him clean, then lets the living bird fly free (Lv. 14:7).

The man who is now clean washes his clothes, shaves off all his hair, washes himself, and remains outside his tent for seven days (Lv. 14:8). On the seventh day he shaves off all his hair including his beard and eyebrows and wash his body and clothes (Lv. 14:9). On the eighth day, the man shall take two male lambs without blemish and fine flour mixed with oil and one log of oil (Lv. 14:10). He shall offer a trespass offering, a sin offering and burnt offering, and anoint the man seven times with oil (Lv. 14:11-17). The remainder of the oil shall be poured on the head of man. This is an atonement for him before the Lord (Lv. 14:18).

The two birds represent Christ. As one bird was killed, and its blood sanctified the leper, so Christ offered Himself on the Cross that through His blood we may be saved. As the living bird was washed in the slain bird's blood, our Lord took flesh through the incarnation and was baptized to purify mankind in the waters of the baptism and recreate our race according to the image and likeness of God. As we partake in this baptism, we also partake in the death of Christ, being washed in His blood, and yet we also partake in His resurrection, and thus have the same freedom as the bird that flies. However, although there are two birds, Christ our God is one, since the humanity and the divinity are united perfectly in Him.

The cedar wood is a type of the Cross and of Christ's Body, which saves us. Those under the law were cursed, but our Lord became a curse for us, hanging on a tree, "that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Ga. 3:14).

Hyssop provides images of the crucifixion and baptism. The hyssop is a bunch of dried shrubs and was used by the Jews to sprinkle the blood on their doorposts to protect their homes during the passover in Egypt (Ex. 12:7). Sprinkling the blood by the hyssop points to the Blood of Christ, the true passover lamb. The washing and purification points to baptism, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us in the Chrismation that sanctified us.

Chapter 5: Atonement (Lv. 16)

Introduction to Division IV

The fourth division of Leviticus (Lv. 16) regards the great day of atonement. As mentioned in the introduction to this text, this is the climax of the book of Leviticus, if not the entire Pentateuch. This day foreshadows both Great Friday and Theophany in which our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to be the true High Priest of mankind who unites mankind and God in Him.

This single chapter makes up the entire Division IV of the book. It includes an elaborate description of the ritual for securing atonement for the whole nation. *The Day of Atonement*, the most solemn day in Israel's calendar, even today, takes place on the tenth day of the seventh month in keeping with the great significance of the number seven to ancient Israel.¹² It is called "The Day" (He. 7:27) and "The Fast" (Ac. 27:9). It has also been called the "scapegoat ritual."¹³ It is called the "Sabbath of Sabbaths," the "Sabbath of Rest," and the "Feasts of Feasts." It is a day of reconciliation, in which the entire nation of Israel, from the priesthood to the holy place to its furniture, were to be reconciled to the Lord.¹⁴

Preparation for the Day

Preparation for the high priest is extremely important. The Lord spoke to Moses immediately after the death of Aaron's son as a result of offering profane fire before the Lord in chapter 10. These rites are necessary to instruct Aaron in heavenly doctrine, namely how one must ascend the altar and how to properly supplicate for atonement. Aaron must not fall into the same error as his sons. There must be great care in approaching God.

Preparation of the high priest required the assistance of 500 priests. He would remain in seclusion seven days prior to the day of atonement in an inner chamber inside the temple. During the time of Solomon, seventy elders of the Sanhedrin would not allow him to sleep the entire night, lest he risk defiling his body. As the high priest ministered alone in the Most High Place, the elders made him swear not to alter or change any part of the prayer.¹⁵

This preparation to approach the altar of God is not exclusive to Aaron. God has called all of us to this degree of preparation to approach Him. As we saw in the previous section on cleanliness, God calls us to prepare both our bodies and spirits to approach Him. The Lord commands, "Watch and pray, let you enter into temptation" (Mt. 26:41). The Church provides for us evening offering or sacrifice of incense, namely the Vespers (i.e., the Evening Offering of Incense), as well as the midnight watches of the Agpeya and the service of the Midnight Psalmody (i.e. *Tasbeha*) for us to make vigil and pray, lest we fall into temptation.

¹² Sanford, La Sor William, et al. *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form and Background of The Old Testament*. 2nd ed., W.B. Eerdmans, 1996, 88.

¹³ Barton, John, and John Muddiman. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Oxford University Press, 2001, 101.

¹⁴ Kurtz, J.H. *Offerings, Sacrifices and Worship in the Old Testament*. Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998, 387.

¹⁵ Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, 175.

Aaron even prepares his clothing. He is to put on a holy linen tunic and linen trousers, girded with a linen sash, and with a linen turban (Lv. 16:3-4). These are declared to be “holy garments.”

The Rite of the Day of Atonement

The rites of the Day of Atonement require the high priest to present an offering on behalf of himself and his family. The high priest comes before the Lord with a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt for himself (Lv. 16:3, 6).

From the congregation of the children of Israel he takes two goats, along with a ram for a burnt offering, and presents them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting (Lv. 16:6-7). Lots are cast for the two goats: one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat (Lv. 16:8-9). “But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness” (Lv. 16:10). The high priest offers the bull as a sin offering for himself to make atonement for him and his house (Lv. 16:11), then offers incense before the Lord (Lv. 16:12) so that the cloud of smoke covers the mercy seat (Lv. 16:13). After sprinkling the blood with his finger seven times to “cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel” (Lv. 16:14).

After killing the bull as a sin offering on his own behalf and raising incense (Lv. 16:11-14), the high priest kills the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, and brings its blood inside the veil and sprinkle it seven times upon the altar (Lv. 16:15). At this time, he makes an atonement for the Holy Place itself, since it has been defiled by sin, doing such for the tabernacle of meeting (Lv. 16:16). It is at this point that the high priest, Aaron, goes into the tabernacle of meeting alone to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, that he may make an atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel (Lv. 16:17). The high priest goes out and makes an atonement for the altar (Lv. 16:18) and sprinkle blood seven times upon it to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel (Lv. 16:19).

Following the atonement of the place, the high priest brings a live goat (Lv. 16:20), places both hands on its head, confesses over it all the sins of the people of Israel and puts all the iniquities on its head. The goat is then sent away and lost in the wilderness (Lv. 16:21). There was a man waiting in order to follow the goat and see that it was successfully lost. This is referred to as the scapegoat.¹⁶ Afterwards the priest and the man who released the goat both wash (Lv. 16:24, 26), and the bull and goat offered for the sin offerings are carried outside the camp are burnt (Lv. 16:27).

Christ’s Offering as High Priest on our Behalf

The high priest is an image foreshadowing the service of our Lord Jesus Christ, who took a human body and soul, becoming man in everything except sin alone, in order to make an atonement for our sins, “Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to

¹⁶ Peake, Arthur S., et al. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 1964, 248.

demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Rm. 3:25).

The Only-Begotten, although He was God by nature and was from God the Father, brought Himself down into our estate, and appeared on earth, as it is written, and lived among us humans. He did this for no other reason than, as the divine Paul says, “that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people” (He. 2:17).¹⁷

Now, whereas the high priest of the Levitical priesthood was required to offer for himself, St. Paul declares that Christ has broken this pattern. As St. Cyril of Alexandria comments on this verse, Christ offered His sacrifice exclusively for our sake, but not for Himself. Because He was neither “co-sinner” with us nor under the yoke of sin.¹⁸ Yet Christ entered once (not annually) into the holy place and with His own blood (not that of an animal) to save us from our sins.

¹⁷ St. Cyril of Alexandria and Nicholas P. Lunn, translator. *St. Cyril of Alexandria: Glaphyra on the Pentateuch, Volume 2, Exodus through Deuteronomy*. Edited by David G. Hunter, Catholic Univ. of America Pr., 2019, 159.

¹⁸ See Anathema 10, Against Nestorius, 3.6.

Chapter 6: Holiness (Lv. 17-26)

Introduction to Division V

Division V (Lv. 17-26) is known as the Holiness Code. Although this title is not mentioned in the chapter, it was given this name because the concept of holiness is so prominent here. The book of Leviticus shows the seriousness of sin and its bitterness in man's life, namely the separation of his soul from God, who is the Source of its life. It presents to us the diverse sacrifices that reveal different aspects of the Cross, as a way by which man would return to God, the Source of his life and sanctification. And as the believers are committed to respond to the work of the sacrifice in their daily life, in all its aspects, God presented the practical statutes that touch upon their food, drink, clothes, houses, and health (Lv. 11-15). Now, He presents the practical statutes that concern their relationships, whether with God, with the brethren, with the irrational nature, or the behavior toward the divine sanctities. Those statutes deal with the sanctification of the people of God, of the priests, and that of the divine offerings.¹⁹

Division V is broken into:

- statutes concerning the sanctification of the people (Lv. 18-20),
- statutes concerning the sanctification of the priests (Lv. 21),
- statutes concerning the sanctification of the offerings (Lv. 22),
- the holy assemblies (Lv. 23),
- the inner joy (Lv. 24),
- the statutes concerning the inner freedom (Lv. 25),
- the blessings and curses (Lv. 26).

To understand the following commands, we must first contemplate the reason God provided these statutes and commands, as found in the text of Scripture:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'I am the Lord your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord'" (Lv. 18:1-5).

Lv. 18 begins with a proclamation that those receiving these commandments to follow in Lv. 18-26 have the Lord as their God, meaning that these commandments are not for justification, but rather for sanctification. God commands that His people be separated from the world, which is the definition of holy.

¹⁹ Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, 186-87.

The statutes found here are not a deprivation, but rather a path to holiness. We will not find satisfaction in sin, but rather may only experience true rest in the Resurrection, whereby we put to death sin in our members and put on love, which is the bond of perfection (cf. Cl. 3:5-14). As we will see in Lv. 26, it is only through obedience to God that we receive blessings, whereas if we are disobedient, we accept to ourselves the wages of sin and its natural consequence, which is death (cf. Ro 6:23).

Feasts and Festivals (Lv. 23)

The feasts in the book of Leviticus are the *Passover* (Lv 23:4-5), the *Unleavened Bread* (Lv. Lv. 23:6-8), *the Firstfruits* (Lv. 23:9-14), *the Feast of Weeks/Pentecost* (Lv. 23:15-22), *the Feast of Trumpets* (Lv. 23:23-25), *the Day of Atonement* (Lv. 23:26-32), and *the feasts of booths* (Lv. 23:33-43).

Moses is commanded by God to tell the children of Israel “The feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, these *are* My feasts” (Lv. 23:2). While within each of these feasts is a memorial of God’s saving actions towards the Israelites, on a much deeper level there is a revelation of God’s plan of salvation for mankind in Christ, “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Col. 2:16-17).

The Sabbath (Lv. 23:1-3)

The Sabbath was a joyful feast and divine gift to God’s people. It was not meant to be a heavy yoke or burden for them to endure. The Sabbath was first seen when God rested, “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Ge. 2:3).

God consecrated the Sabbath as a day of rest for His people, to take an opportunity to reflect and enjoy God’s work in them. It is “not a chance for slothfulness and laziness, but a chance to worship the Holy God and for all to enjoy the fellowship of the divine life” (cf. Lv. 23:3, Nu. 28:9-10).²⁰

The Fathers recognize that God only ceased from His works of creation, which are works regarding the earth. Our Lord revealed that His Father continues working (cf. Jn. 5:17). Christ performed good works on the Sabbath, since He is Lord of Sabbath (cf. Mt. 12:8, Mk. 2:28, Lk. 6:5) and because His works are those that establish the Kingdom of God and glorify His Father.

This raises an important question: how can a day of rest be recognized as a joyful feast? The Church Fathers, looking at the Sabbath, point to eternal life and heavenly rest in the Lord. According to St. Augustine, “We rest and see. We see and love. We love and praise. That will be at the end without end.”²¹ St. Basil said that this is the day on which we banish evil and give fear to God. We remove all evil from our minds.²² From the writings of the Fathers, it’s clear that

²⁰ *Id.* at 240.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² St. Basil, *On the Human Condition*, On the Origin of Humanity, Discourse 2: On the Human Being, §11

leisure time was not meant as an opportunity to sin or to forget God. On the contrary, when we rest, we are to take the time to remember God and review our thoughts.

The Jews missed the point regarding the spirituality of the Sabbath and instead focused on debating and arguing, for example, what kind of works were allowed. They completely forgot that the Sabbath was called to be a holy feast of healing and freedom from sin. They were shocked to see our Lord Jesus Christ revealing the honor of the Sabbath once more, performing works of healing. He declared Himself to be the Lord of Sabbath (Mt. 12:1-6). The Jews lost touch with the true purpose of the Sabbath and couldn't understand what the Lord presented. For this reason, our Lord Jesus Christ chose to be buried on the Sabbath to bury the old legalistic approach to the Sabbath, and to resurrect on Sunday, the true day of rest for the Christians.²³ The Christians, who worship in spirit and truth (cf. Jn. 4:24) now worship on Sunday, the day of the resurrection, in which mankind finds true and eternal rest in our Lord Jesus Christ who conquered death by death and proclaimed victory on behalf of mankind (cf. 1 Co. 15:55-57).

St. Basil the Great says that there are many things descending from the tradition of the apostles beside the written teachings. Among these things is the sanctification of the first day of the week. The Lord was accustomed to meet His disciples after His resurrection on the first day of the week. These include many appearances:

- Christ appeared to them on the Sunday of the Resurrection itself (Jn. 20:19); and also to the Disciples of Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35).
- On the following Sunday He appeared to His disciples (Jn. 20:26).
- After the ascension, the Apostles assembled for worship on Sunday when the Holy Spirit descended on them, on the Feast of Pentecost.
- St. Paul told the Corinthians to gather funds for the poor, when they meet “on the first day of the week” (1 Co. 16:2).
- The disciples in Troas gathered to break bread “on the First day of the week” (Ac. 20:7).

From these indications, we have to conclude that already in the fifties of the first century, at least in the Pauline communities, Sundays were observed, if not as the only day, then at least as the principal day, on which the Breaking of Bread that is the Christian worship took place. This day is then called “the first day of the week.”²⁴

The Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread (Lv. 23:4-8)

The Passover lamb is not merely a memorial of a historic event that took place in the past. It represents a present and continuous work of God in the life of His people.²⁵ According to the rites of this feast, a male lamb without blemish (12:5) is to be taken on the tenth day of the month (Ex. 12:3) to be offered on the fourteenth day (Ex. 12:6). The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight (Ex. 12:6). A bunch of hyssop (Ex. 12:22) is used to sprinkle the blood on the doorposts (Ex. 12:7). The lamb is to be roasted in fire and eaten entirely

²³ Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, 241.

²⁴ Jungman. *The Early Liturgy*. 19-20.

²⁵ Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *The Book of Exodus*, 66.

along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Ex. 12:8). None shall be leftover till morning (Ex. 12:9).

The secret of Passover is realized in the body of the Lord. He was led like a lamb and was slain like a she-goat saving us from the bondage of the world, i.e. Egypt, and setting us free of the servitude of the devil, i.e. Pharaoh, putting his seal on our souls by His Spirit, and on our body members by His blood. He is the One who brought us from servitude to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life and from oppression to eternal Kingdom. He is our Passover to salvation. He is the silent Lamb that was taken out of the flock, slain in the evening and buried by night. Therefore, that feast was bitter. As said in the Holy Book, “You shall eat unleavened bread with bitter weeds.” (Ex. 12:8). Bitter for you were the nails that were used. Bitter was the tongue that blasphemed. Bitter was the false testimony that you uttered against Him.²⁶

The Feast of the Firstfruit (Lv. 23:9-14)

The Feast of the First Fruit, also called the waiving of the omer, is considered the first agricultural feast. It was practiced by the people after their entry into the promised land. It was celebrated with an extremely joyful rite with the goal of giving thanks to God, the Grantor of goods. Moreover, it was a feast where the people would offer a sheaf of the firstfruits, by which the whole harvest is blessed.

In that feast, offering a sheaf of the firstfruits to sanctify the whole harvest, is a proclamation of the sanctification of the believing humanity through the Only- Begotten, Firstborn Jesus Christ, in Whom we are justified by the Father, and counted as saints.²⁷

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

Just as the feast of the firstfruits could not be celebrated in the wilderness where there is no harvest, but in the Promised Land, so too can mankind only celebrate the firstfruits when our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead, ascended into the heavens (cf. Jn. 3:13) by which mankind entered, for our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20-21), and we receive the firstfruits of the Spirit (cf. Rm. 8:23).

The Feast of Weeks/Pentecost (Lv. 23:15-22)

The goal of the feast of Pentecost or Weeks is to give thanks to God on occasion of the feast of the harvest of wheat, through a collective joyful rite in which all proclaim their joy in God the beneficent.²⁸ Moreover it was recognized by the Jews as a memorial of receiving the law

²⁶ *Id.* at 68.

²⁷ Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, 245.

²⁸ *Id.* at 248.

in Sinai since they believed Moses received the law on that day. The Jews prepared for this day by confessing their sins, cleansing themselves for purification, and spending the night of the feast in praise and worship.²⁹

The Feast of Trumpets (Lv. 23:23-25)

The most prominent feature of this feast is that the Jews used to celebrate it by shouting and blowing the trumpets, hence its name, feast of Trumpets.³⁰ The blasts of the silver trumpets (Nu. 10:1-10) served as a formal reminder that the day was marked by complete rest and a solemn convocation (Ne. 8:1-12).

The goals of this feast were: (1) to mark the beginning of the new year; (2) to announce the sanctification of the world world, as the seventh month was recognized as the firstborn of the months; (3) to prepare the people to celebrate the feast of atonement in the middle of the month, with a full moon; and (4) to remember the giving of the law, accompanied with thunder and lightning.³¹

The Church embraces this feast within a new context presented by Christ. The shouting and blowing of trumpets represents to us (1) the destruction of the kingdom of evil; and (2) the establishment of the Kingdom of God. This feast, then, is not just the announcement of the new year, but was a proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the confirmation of God's dominion over time. The trumpets are blown, declaring that the walls of Jericho, the city of evil, are destroyed, and now we proclaim the Kingdom of God, in which we begin a new year that will never end.

The Day of Atonement (Lv. 23:26-32)

This feast was covered earlier and was declared as a feast of the Lord.

The Feast of the Tabernacles or Booths (Lv. 23:33-43)

This feast, called Tabernacles, Tents, or Booths, was the last of the three major feasts of Israel. It was called "Feast of Tabernacles" since, at the time of celebrating the feast, the Israelites dwelt in booths made of the branches of trees, as God Himself reminded Moses, saying, "You shall dwell in *booths* for seven days. All who are naive Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in *booths* when I bought them out of the land of Egypt" (Lv. 23:42-43).

This feast was fulfilled in the Transfiguration. St. Peter, seeing the Lord transfigured, appearing with Moses and Elijah, proposed that they build three tabernacles. Immediately thereafter, the Lord brought forth a heavenly tabernacle, namely a bright cloud that covered them. The Lord did this to "draw the hearts of the disciples to the eschatological feast, when He

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Id.* at 250.

³¹ Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, 250.

will appear in the clouds, not to set for them earthly tabernacles, but to bring them forth into the bosom of the Father. Eternal life is the eternal tabernacle.”³²

The Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee (Lv. 25:1-55)

The seventh year is a “Sabbath of the Lord,” also called the Sabbatical Year. As men are to rest on the seventh day, the land is to rest in the seventh year. If the year's rest is not observed, the land will eventually have to “make up” the lost sabbaths by being laid waste (Lv. 26:34, 42). During the Sabbatical year, the Israelites were not allowed to sow or harvest the land, not even the fruitful trees, except within the limits of paying the tax, and of what concerned the offerings such as the sheaf of waiving, the two bread offerings, and the showbread.

Blessings and Curses (Lv. 26)

Lv. 26 concludes with a fervent appeal for obedience to the laws, promising bliss for the nation if they are observed and threatening terrible punishment if they are violated. This chapter can be divided into 4 parts:

- (1) worshiping the Holy God (Lv. 26:1-2),
- (2) the blessings of obedience to the Holy God (Lv. 26:3-17),
- (3) the curses of disobedience to the Holy God, and
- (4) receiving the repentant sinners (Lv. 26:40-46).

Looking to the conclusion of this chapter, after proclaiming the extent of bitterness of man because of his disobedience, God again confirms that the only way for man to enjoy the blessing instead of the curse will be his return to God by repentance. For this reason, God will remember His promise, proclaiming that, even while they were in their darkest moments, God did not intend for their utter perdition, but for their chastisement.

³² *Id.* at 253.

Chapter 7: Vows (Lv. 27)

The Appendix (Lv. 27) describes the statutes of the vows (Lv. 27:1-25), the firstlings (Lv. 27:26-27), a person or property doomed to destruction (Lv. 27:28-29), and tithes (Lv. 27:30-34). This division concerns vows and voluntary services, the free-will offerings of one's mouth.

The First Born (Lv. 27:26-27)

While the previous section concerned optional vows, the firstlings, or rather the first born, belonged to the Lord by right (Ex. 13:2,12; 34:19; Nu. 18:15). Since these belonged to God by right, they could not become the object of a vow (Lv. 27:26-27). The clean animals were separated unto the Lord, never to be exchanged, and were thereby sacrificed (Nu. 18:17). The unclean animal could be redeemed by its owner, paying its worth plus one-fifth, or sold by the priests.

The Firstborn is our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mt. 1:25), who is recognized as the firstborn not only because in Him we received all the blessings in heavenly places in Christ (cf. Ep. 1:3), but also that He is the acceptable sacrifice to be offered on our behalf.

Tithes (Lv. 27:30-33)

Tithing is more ancient than the written law. Abraham offered tithes to Melchizedek (cf. Ge. 14:20) and Jacob, upon seeing the ladder, promised to give God a tenth (cf. Ge. 28:20-22). God commanded the tithe in Lv. 27:30, calling the tenth "holy unto the Lord." He said "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year" (Dt. 14:22).

The Practice of Tithing (Lv. 27:30-33) provided for the needs of the Levites (Nu. 18:21, 24) as well as of the poor (Dt. 26:12). This ten percent (10%) of all farm produce was not considered a voluntary offering. Only clean animals were taken as tithes. They were chosen by a process of impartial selection.

The tithe was God's possession. As Malachi pronounced, those who withhold the tithe from God rob Him (cf. Ma. 3:8-9). The only thing God asks us to test Him in is tithing. As He promises, for those who tithe, He will open the windows of heaven and pour out such blessing that there will not be enough room to receive it (cf. Ma. 3:10).

The tithe is not the maximum of what we give, but is only a minimum. When we pay the tithe, we do not say that we have given God His due. Rather, we open our hearts to the poor and needy. "Let love be firm in your heart, and do not deal with God, the Church, or the poor mathematically without a heart. Whenever you get a chance to do a merciful deed, do not close your heart by saying you have already paid the tithes."³³ Rather, let us tithe and give gifts, as the Levitical law prescribes, that we may have treasure in heaven (cf. Mt. 6:20).

³³ Pope Shenouda. *The Spiritual Means*. Chapter 37 on tithes.