



## Leviticus - Chapter Twenty Two

### **VII Leviticus 18:1-22:33 - The Call to Holiness (continues/concludes)**

#### Summary of Chapter Twenty Two

This chapter aims at guaranteeing the holiness of offerings, particularly against those who handle them, i.e. the priests and lay offerers. The offerings, just like the priest, ought to be physically without blemish.

#### **VII.e Leviticus 22:1-33 - Holiness of the offerings**

Refer to the chapter summary above.

#### **VII.e.i Leviticus 22:1-16 - The Use of Holy Offerings**

In this sub-section God gives instructions to remind the priests that the donations offered by the people belong to God and are therefore sacred. No one serving as a priest may touch any of the sacred offerings while in an unclean state. The priests, their immediate family members and purchased servants may eat of the sacred offerings as prescribed by law, but only those who are resident within the priest's household.

<sup>1</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Direct Aaron and his sons to deal carefully with the sacred donations of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they may not profane my holy name; I am the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Say to them: If anyone among all your offspring throughout your generations comes near the sacred donations, which the people of Israel dedicate to the Lord, while he is in a state of uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence: I am the Lord.

### Leviticus 22:1-3

The potential cause of profaning the offerings lies in uncleanness. The heavy responsibility demanded of the priests is reflected in the phrase cut off from my presence, which is more severe than the ordinary formula ‘cut off from his people.’ When a layman is cut off in the Levitical law, it is from among the people (19:8 and 20:5), but the priest is exiled from the service in the tabernacle, i.e. in God’s presence.

Because the Old Covenant was a covenant of shadows and types, pointing to the glory of the New Covenant: <<Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ>> (Colossians 2:16-17), <<Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one; for Moses, when he was about to erect the tent, was warned, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain’>> (Hebrews 8:4-5), and: <<Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach>> (Hebrews 10:1), the idea that a priest could not minister in a ceremonially defiled or an unclean state was important. Israel needed to know that drawing close to God was to be pure.

<sup>4</sup> No one of Aaron’s offspring who has a leprous disease or suffers a discharge may eat of the sacred donations until he is clean. Whoever touches anything made unclean by a corpse or a man who has had an emission of semen, <sup>5</sup> and whoever touches any swarming thing by which he may be made unclean or any human being by whom he may be made unclean — whatever his uncleanness may be — <sup>6</sup> the person who touches any such shall be unclean until evening and shall not eat of the sacred donations unless he has washed his body in water. <sup>7</sup> When the sun sets he shall be clean; and afterwards he may eat of the sacred donations, for they are his food. <sup>8</sup> That which died or was torn by wild animals he shall not eat, becoming unclean by it: I am the Lord. <sup>9</sup> They shall keep my charge, so that they may not incur guilt and die in the sanctuary for having profaned it: I am the Lord; I sanctify them.

### Leviticus 22:4-9

For the background of these rules, refer to Leviticus 11:1-47, 13:1-59, 15:1-33 and 17:15. Contracting uncleanness is inevitable, but when purification has

been made, one can eat the holy offering. If purification is not made and the offering is eaten, the offender forfeits his life.

The person who touches any such shall be unclean until evening and shall not eat of the sacred donations unless he has washed his body in water. Violations of these examples would not ruin a man's career as a priest. A violation would make the priest ceremonially unclean until evening. Once ceremonial cleanliness was restored, they could be restored to their priestly service as before.

When the sun sets he shall be clean. The Jews start their days at sundown, not sunrise or midnight. With this description, God indicates that one can start the new day clean and pure to the Lord. No matter how one might have failed the day before, one can begin each new day pure and close to the Lord. His mercies are new every morning: <<*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness*>> (Lamentations 3:22-23). In application, believers can stop beating themselves up for yesterday's sin. They should confess it, repent of it, and then get on with the business of walking with the Lord today.

<sup>10</sup> No lay person shall eat of the sacred donations. No bound or hired servant of the priest shall eat of the sacred donations; <sup>11</sup> but if a priest acquires anyone by purchase, the person may eat of them; and those that are born in his house may eat of his food. <sup>12</sup> If a priest's daughter marries a layman, she shall not eat of the offering of the sacred donations; <sup>13</sup> but if a priest's daughter is widowed or divorced, without offspring, and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food. No lay person shall eat of it. <sup>14</sup> If a man eats of the sacred donation unintentionally, he shall add one-fifth of its value to it, and give the sacred donation to the priest. <sup>15</sup> No one shall profane the sacred donations of the people of Israel, which they offer to the Lord, <sup>16</sup> causing them to bear guilt requiring a guilt-offering, by eating their sacred donations: for I am the Lord; I sanctify them.

### Leviticus 22:10-16

For non-priests, the right of eating the holy offerings is conditioned on whether a person belongs to a priestly house, whether through purchase or by birth. Priests and their families subsisted on food from donations to the tabernacle. Who else may partake of that food? A hired servant or slave purchased by a priest is included, but a hired labourer is not.

Verse 11 shows that a slave was considered part of the priest's household, and entitled to eat of the offerings. This reveals a different attitude towards slavery

in Israel than in western history; slaves were considered, and largely treated as, part of the family.

A priest's daughter may participate only until she is married outside the priestly family. The priests are to guard the holy food so that those unauthorised may not eat of it.

For I am the Lord; I sanctify them. This shows why the offerings had to be regarded with special care. These offerings were specially sanctified by the Lord.

#### VII.e.ii Leviticus 22:17-33 - Acceptable Offerings

These verses provide instruction to the priests and all the people that any animal offered for any of the mandatory sacrifices must be entirely without blemish. Anything that is not a perfect physical specimen is unacceptable as a sacrificial offering to God.

Animals used for sacrifice must be at least eight days old and must remain in the care of their mother for the first week of life. No animal can be slaughtered on the same day as its mother. The part which can be eaten must be consumed on the day it was slaughtered.

<sup>17</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>18</sup> Speak to Aaron and his sons and all the people of Israel and say to them: When anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens residing in Israel presents an offering, whether in payment of a vow or as a freewill-offering that is offered to the Lord as a burnt-offering, <sup>19</sup> to be acceptable in your behalf it shall be a male without blemish, of the cattle or the sheep or the goats. <sup>20</sup> You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable in your behalf. <sup>21</sup> When anyone offers a sacrifice of well-being to the Lord, in fulfilment of a vow or as a freewill-offering, from the herd or from the flock, to be acceptable it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it. <sup>22</sup> Anything blind, or injured, or maimed, or having a discharge or an itch or scabs – these you shall not offer to the Lord or put any of them on the altar as offerings by fire to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> An ox or a lamb that has a limb too long or too short you may present for a freewill-offering; but it will not be accepted for a vow. <sup>24</sup> Any animal that has its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut, you shall not offer to the Lord; such you shall not do within your land, <sup>25</sup> nor shall you accept any such animals from a foreigner to offer as food to your God; since they are mutilated, with a blemish in them, they shall not be accepted in your behalf.

## Leviticus 22:17-25

It shall be a male without blemish. No animal is to be sacrificed if it is blemished. This parallels the requirements of priestly purity (21:17-23). Animals with defects are considered unholy and incomplete, and are therefore not to be offered to the Holy One.

You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable in your behalf. Blemished or deformed animals were obviously unacceptable to the Lord, and the priests had a responsibility to make sure that the animals brought before them by the people were good enough to bring to the Lord. God did not want the cast-offs from the people; he had right to their best.

Unfortunately, this practice was abused in the days of Jesus, where priests would disqualify an animal for an insignificant reason, and then require them to purchase an approved sacrificial animal at an exorbitant price: <<*Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers'>> (Matthew 21:12-13). This also was a foreshadowing of Jesus, the perfect sacrifice. He was perfect in his nature as both God and man, perfect in his motive, perfect in his personality, perfect in his obedience, perfect in his sacrifice for sin on behalf of the world. The sacrifice of Jesus makes it clear that disabled people should not be treated as inferior when offering themselves to God and can come into his presence. Actually, imperfect people have always been covered by the grace of God, made clear in a passage about those whose testicles had been removed: <<*Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; and do not let the eunuch say, 'I am just a dry tree.' For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off>> (Isaiah 56:3-5).**

The prophet Malachi spoke out against those who brought God inferior animals: <<*A son honours his father, and servants their master. If then I am a father, where is the honour due to me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due to me? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, 'How have we despised your name?' By offering polluted food on my altar. And you say, 'How have we polluted it?' By thinking that the Lord's table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not wrong? Try presenting that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favour? says the Lord of hosts>> (Malachi 1:6-8).*

<sup>26</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>27</sup> When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain for seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day onwards it shall be acceptable as the Lord's offering by fire. <sup>28</sup> But you shall not slaughter, from the herd or the flock, an animal with its young on the same day.

#### Leviticus 22:26-28

When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain for seven days with its mother. The rationale for these laws is uncertain. Some argue that they perhaps have a polemical function against pagan ritual, in particular the fertility rites of the Canaanites. Others believe that they reflect the sanctity of the seven-day cycle in Israel. Yet others maintain that the laws simply show the high regard for all life that the Hebrews are to have, as confirmed by: <<*The choicest of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk*>> (Exodus 23:19), <<*If you besiege a town for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you must not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. Although you may take food from them, you must not cut them down. Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you? You may destroy only the trees that you know do not produce food; you may cut them down for use in building siege-works against the town that makes war with you, until it falls*>> (Deuteronomy 20:19-20), and: <<*If you come on a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs, with the mother sitting on the fledglings or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. Let the mother go, taking only the young for yourself, in order that it may go well with you and you may live long*>> (Deuteronomy 22:6-7).

From the eighth day onwards it shall be acceptable as the Lord's offering by fire. Also prohibited was an offering of an animal less than eight days old, and to sacrifice an animal and its offspring at the same time.

<sup>29</sup> When you sacrifice a thanksgiving-offering to the Lord, you shall sacrifice it so that it may be acceptable in your behalf. <sup>30</sup> It shall be eaten on the same day; you shall not leave any of it until morning: I am the Lord.

#### Leviticus 22:29-30

A thanksgiving sacrifice was a type of peace-offering (7:15). While other types of peace-offerings could be eaten on the next day (7:16), this one was to be consumed on the same day. This stricter rule could suggest that this offering was especially sacred or important.

<sup>31</sup> Thus you shall keep my commandments and observe them: I am the Lord. <sup>32</sup> You shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel: I am the Lord; I sanctify you, <sup>33</sup> I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord.

### Leviticus 22:31-33

Thus you shall keep my commandments and observe them. God commanded Israel, and especially the priests, to keep his commandments and to honour his name because of who he is (I am the Lord), because of what he is (my holy name), because of what he is doing (I am the Lord; I sanctify you), and what he has done and why (I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God).

I am the Lord. Surely, these four things are true of the believer in relation to God today and are each valid and important reasons for obedience: <<*I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you*>> (Genesis 17:7).