



Leviticus - Chapter Twenty Four

VIII Leviticus 23:1-25:55 - Holy Times (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Four

The placement of the text concerning the lamp and the bread of the presence in the Tabernacle directly after a discussion of the Israelite festal calendar appears peculiar. However, its placement here may be to remind the Israelites not to forget the daily Tabernacle activities in light of the annual festivals discussed in Chapter 23.

The command against blaspheming God's name has already been given in Exodus 20:7 and 22:28. It is dealt with again in the present passage for two reasons: firstly, no penalty for it was provided in the previous prohibitions; secondly, the one who blasphemes in this case is not a full-fledged Israelite. The man is placed under temporary guard until judgement is passed.

The chapter concludes with the principle of *lex talionis*, which is Latin for 'the law of retribution', a concept that has formed the basis of law in many free countries and is still carried out literally in some cultures.

VIII.b Leviticus 24:1-4 - The Lamp

These verses deal with the command to the people to provide the fine olive oil that the priests are to use to keep the lamps burning in the Tabernacle.

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ² Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil of beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly. ³ Aaron shall set it up in the tent of meeting, outside the curtain of the covenant, to burn from evening to morning before the Lord regularly; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your

generations. ⁴ He shall set up the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold before the Lord regularly.

Leviticus 24:1-4

Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil of beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly. The lamps in the Tabernacle, standing on the solid gold lampstand, were the only source of light for the Tabernacle. They had to be tended continually, supplied with pure olive oil and trimmed wicks, so they would give light continually.

To burn from evening to morning before the Lord regularly. Jesus never stopped being the light of the world (John 8:12); he never took a break from it. As well, Christians are never to take a break from being the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), but they can only do this as they are continually supplied with oil, i.e. the Holy Spirit, and have their wicks trimmed, that is, undergo training through trials.

It shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. This command was carried out in the Tabernacle until the time of King Solomon and was then conducted in the temple after its consecration.

VIII.c Leviticus 24:5-9 - The Bread for the Tabernacle

The twelve loaves symbolise the twelve tribes of Israel as they stand in the presence of God. In Exodus 25:30 they are called 'the bread of the Presence.' New loaves are to be set out on each Sabbath without exception. This is important because it is a sign of the covenant between the twelve tribes of Israel and God.

⁵ You shall take choice flour, and bake twelve loaves of it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. ⁶ You shall place them in two rows, six in a row, on the table of pure gold. ⁷ You shall put pure frankincense with each row, to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering by fire to the Lord. ⁸ Every sabbath day Aaron shall set them in order before the Lord regularly as a commitment of the people of Israel, as a covenant for ever. ⁹ They shall be for Aaron and his descendants, who shall eat them in a holy place, for they are most holy portions for him from the offerings by fire to the Lord, a perpetual due.

Leviticus 24:5-9

You shall take choice flour, and bake twelve loaves of it. This bread for the Tabernacle speaks of fellowship and communion with God, a symbolic 'breaking of bread' with God, and speaks of the continual fellowship God wanted with Israel. The bread of the Presence literally means 'bread of the face' in the sense of it

being eaten in the presence or before the face of God. This bread was holy: <<*A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place*>> (Hebrews 9:2).

Who shall eat them in a holy place. The bread was dedicated to God and was thus itself holy. Therefore, it had to be eaten by the priests in a place that was also consecrated in the sight of God: <<*Aaron and his sons shall eat what is left of it; it shall be eaten as unleavened cakes in a holy place; in the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it*>> (Leviticus 6:16).

VIII.d Leviticus 24:10-23 - Blasphemy and Its Punishment

This section interrupts the flow of divine instructions with a narrative; it indicates the way in which many of the case laws in Israel arose, as responses to specific situations. It also shows how to apply these case laws in new situations that come up, by analogy with the existing laws.

¹⁰ A man whose mother was an Israelite and whose father was an Egyptian came out among the people of Israel; and the Israelite woman's son and a certain Israelite began fighting in the camp. ¹¹ The Israelite woman's son blasphemed the Name in a curse. And they brought him to Moses — now his mother's name was Shelomith, daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan — ¹² and they put him in custody, until the decision of the Lord should be made clear to them.

Leviticus 24:10-12

A man whose mother was an Israelite and whose father was an Egyptian came out among the people of Israel. This man, half Egyptian and half Hebrew, was part of the mixed multitude that went with Israel out of Egypt: <<*A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds*>> (Exodus 12:38).

The Israelite woman's son blasphemed the Name in a curse. This man committed the crime of blasphemy, which is to attack someone, especially God, with one's own words. It is somewhat like the modern idea of 'verbal abuse,' but usually directed at God. It seems that it was common for Egyptians to curse their many gods. The root of this man's sin is he considers the Lord God of Israel on the same level as the petty Egyptian gods. Job's wife recognised the punishment for such blasphemy: <<*Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die'*>> (Job 2:9).

¹³ The Lord said to Moses, saying: ¹⁴ Take the blasphemer outside the camp; and let all who were within hearing lay their hands on his head, and let the whole congregation stone him. ¹⁵ And speak to the people

of Israel, saying: Anyone who curses God shall bear the sin. ¹⁶ One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death.

Leviticus 24:13-16

When they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death. The culprit is to be stoned outside the camp. The laying on of hands prior to the stoning has been commonly explained in such a way that the whole congregation, having overheard the curse and become defiled, devolves the guilt onto the culprit, and his death makes atonement for their guilt. Alternatively, it may be taken as a gesture simply to indicate who it is that had cursed the name of the Lord.

Death by stoning was the normal method of implementing capital punishment. It continued into the time of the church, such as in the case of Stephen: <<*Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul*>> (Acts 7:58). This continued despite the Romans denying the Jewish authorities the right to condemn anyone to death: <<*Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death'*>> (John 18:31).

¹⁷ Anyone who kills a human being shall be put to death. ¹⁸ Anyone who kills an animal shall make restitution for it, life for life. ¹⁹ Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: ²⁰ fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered. ²¹ One who kills an animal shall make restitution for it; but one who kills a human being shall be put to death. ²² You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 24:17-22

Anyone who kills a human being shall be put to death. In the context of giving the penalty for the Egyptian blasphemer, God stated a fundamental principle of his justice, crimes must be punished, but in proportion appropriate to the crime. These verses deal with the principle of *lex talionis*, Latin meaning 'the law of retribution'. It is a form of ironic justice in which the punishment for the crime is found in the crime itself. The principle applies to everyone in Israel without exception: <<*If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound,*

stripe for stripe>> (Exodus 21:23-25), and: <<*Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot*>> (Deuteronomy 19:21).

It is unlikely that fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth actually implies mutilation as the punishment for the offender; rather, the value of the injured member will be the imposed fine, as confirmed by: <<*When individuals quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or fist so that the injured party, though not dead, is confined to bed, but recovers and walks around outside with the help of a staff, then the assailant shall be free of liability, except to pay for the loss of time, and to arrange for full recovery*>> (Exodus 21:18-19). This law, when properly applied, guides the judges in assessing damages and sets a limit on the thirst for revenge. Since this is a rule for judges to follow, it should not be invoked in ordinary daily relationships.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus rightly condemned taking this command literally regarding law and order in the community and applying it to personal relationships, where love, forgiveness, and going the extra mile rather than equal retribution is to be the rule: <<*You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you*>> (Matthew 5:38-42).

²³ Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel; and they took the blasphemer outside the camp, and stoned him to death. The people of Israel did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Leviticus 24:23

They took the blasphemer outside the camp, and stoned him to death. This verse is important. It demonstrates that the law of God was not given to Israel for interesting facts or mere guidelines; God expected them to obey it. Here, they obey even when it is perhaps difficult to do so.