



Leviticus - Chapter Twenty Seven

Summary of Chapter Twenty Seven

This final chapter of Leviticus sets out the means of redemption as it relates to vows made to the Lord and his sanctuary. The material appears to be an appendix or addendum to the book; it does not fit smoothly with the content of the previous Holiness Code. This does not mean that the chapter was added at a later time, but it was placed here at the end to underscore the importance of funding the sanctuary.

x. Leviticus 27:1-34 - Votive Offerings

Refer to the chapter summary above.

X.a Leviticus 27:1-8 - The Case of Persons

In Israel, a man may make a vow to the Lord dedicating himself or a member of his family. This pledge entails service in the sanctuary. However, because non-Levites cannot serve on the temple grounds, a person may be freed from this service by making a payment to the sanctuary. These verses establish the payment scale, perhaps determined by the customary prices for slaves.

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ² Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When a person makes an explicit vow to the Lord concerning the equivalent for a human being, ³ the equivalent for a male shall be: from twenty to sixty years of age the equivalent shall be fifty shekels of silver by the sanctuary shekel. ⁴ If the person is a female, the equivalent is thirty shekels. ⁵ If the age is from five to twenty years of age, the equivalent is twenty shekels for a male and ten shekels for a female. ⁶ If the age is from one month to five years, the equivalent for a male is five shekels of silver, and for a female the

equivalent is three shekels of silver. ⁷ And if the person is sixty years old or over, then the equivalent for a male is fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. ⁸ If any cannot afford the equivalent, they shall be brought before the priest and the priest shall assess them; the priest shall assess them according to what each one making a vow can afford.

Leviticus 27:1-8

When a person makes an explicit vow to the Lord concerning the equivalent for a human being. What did it mean to consecrate a person to the Lord? It could be done either for one's self, or on behalf of another, such as consecrating a child to the Lord. This was a completely voluntary act, meant to demonstrate that this person was totally given to God. For example, a man from the tribe of Judah, in a time of distress, or out of gratitude, or out of a sense of calling, wants to consecrate his son to the Lord. He could not give his son to the service of the tabernacle, because he was not a priestly family. So to consecrate his son, he would follow the procedures in these verses.

The beauty of these commands is that it gave the one making a vow of consecration something definite to do; the vow of consecration was therefore far more than mere words, it had a definite action associated with it, and prevented people from making empty vows to God.

The equivalent for a male shall be: from twenty to sixty years of age the equivalent shall be fifty shekels of silver by the sanctuary shekel. Importantly, no one was prohibited from fulfilling a vow of consecration because they did not have enough money; if they were poor, the priests would be flexible with the valuation. Everyone can give their life to the Lord; there are none who are too small, or too insignificant, or too useless. God wants to use each and every one.

The sanctuary shekel was approximately 11.4 grams, giving the following values:

<u>Person</u>	<u>Shekels</u>	<u>Weight in Silver</u>
A male from twenty to sixty years	50	570 grams
A female from twenty to sixty years	30	342 grams
A male from five to twenty years	20	228 grams
A female from five to twenty years	10	114 grams
A male from one month to five years	5	57 grams
A female from one month to five years	3	34 grams
A male aged sixty and over	15	171 grams
A female aged sixty and over	10	114 grams

If the age is from one month to five years, the equivalent for a male is five shekels of silver. This command of redemption for a new born is reiterated in the next book: <<*The first issue of the womb of all creatures, human and animal, which is offered to the Lord, shall be yours; but the firstborn of human beings*

you shall redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. Their redemption price, reckoned from one month of age, you shall fix at five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary (that is, twenty gerahs)>> (Numbers 18:15-16).

The priest shall assess them according to what each one making a vow can afford. The value of each person is set according to age and gender, but there is always the provision that no person will be excluded on the basis of poverty, as stated above.

X.b Leviticus 27:9-13 - The Case of Animals

One of the vows a man can make is to donate a clean animal to the sanctuary. No redemption of the animal is permitted once the animal has been donated. A person may also contribute an unclean animal for the service of the tabernacle. It is, however, not to be sacrificed. The priests may sell it in the markets and use the money for the sanctuary. If the original owner tries to buy it back, it will cost him twenty percent more than its valuation by the priests.

⁹ If it concerns an animal that may be brought as an offering to the Lord, any such that may be given to the Lord shall be holy. ¹⁰ Another shall not be exchanged or substituted for it, either good for bad or bad for good; and if one animal is substituted for another, both that one and its substitute shall be holy. ¹¹ If it concerns any unclean animal that may not be brought as an offering to the Lord, the animal shall be presented before the priest. ¹² The priest shall assess it: whether good or bad, according to the assessment of the priest, so it shall be. ¹³ But if it is to be redeemed, one-fifth must be added to the assessment.

Leviticus 27:9-13

If it concerns an animal that may be brought as an offering to the Lord, any such that may be given to the Lord shall be holy. If an animal was clean, i.e. fit for sacrifice, and the offerer wanted to redeem it from the vow of consecration to the Lord, perhaps because the animal was especially useful, he could not exchange it for another animal even if that animal was also clean and equally suitable for sacrifice. If he attempts to exchange the animal with another then both of them become holy and belong to the Lord. All offerings are holy irrespective of the reason for the offering.

If it concerns any unclean animal that may not be brought as an offering to the Lord. If an animal was unclean, i.e. unfit for sacrifice, it could still be vowed to the Lord and then redeemed; but the priest would set a value on the animal, and one would add one-fifth to that value, i.e. twenty percent, and give the total to

the tabernacle treasury. Again, if one simply wanted to give their unclean animal, a donkey, for example, to the Lord, he could give it to a priest, who would use it or sell it, giving the money to the tabernacle treasury; but if they desired to keep the animal, while still consecrating it with a vow to the Lord, they had to pay the price of the animal plus twenty percent. A person could give their donkey and use him too, but it would cost the owner the value of the donkey plus twenty percent.

X.c Leviticus 27:14-15 - The Case of a House

This is a more expensive donation than that of an animal. Its value is estimated by the priest; to redeem it one must add, as in the animal case, a fifth to the value.

¹⁴ If a person consecrates a house to the Lord, the priest shall assess it: whether good or bad, as the priest assesses it, so it shall stand. ¹⁵ And if the one who consecrates the house wishes to redeem it, one-fifth shall be added to its assessed value, and it shall revert to the original owner.

Leviticus 27:14-15

If a person consecrates a house to the Lord, the priest shall assess it. With a house, as in the case with an unclean animal, if a man wanted to consecrate by a vow the house to the Lord, while still using it, the priest would set a value on the house, and one would add one-fifth to that value, and give the total to the tabernacle treasury.

X.d Leviticus 27:16-25 - The Case of Land

Dedication of land is divided into two cases, that of inherited land (vv.16-21) and that of purchased land (vv.22-25). Since the land belongs to the Lord, only the crops can be donated to the Lord which, in practice, means donating them to the priests. Hence the rules on the jubilee year apply as necessary (vv.17-18); refer also to 25:15-16. If the donor does not redeem the land when the Jubilee comes, then he forfeits the land to the priesthood. It becomes a binding donation.

¹⁶ If a person consecrates to the Lord any inherited land-holding, its assessment shall be in accordance with its seed requirements: fifty shekels of silver to a homer of barley seed. ¹⁷ If the person consecrates the field as of the year of jubilee, that assessment shall stand; ¹⁸ but if the field is consecrated after the jubilee, the priest shall compute the price for it according to the years that remain until the year of jubilee, and the assessment shall be reduced. ¹⁹ And if the one who consecrates the field wishes to redeem it, then one-fifth shall be added to its assessed value, and it shall revert to the original owner; ²⁰ but if the

field is not redeemed, or if it has been sold to someone else, it shall no longer be redeemable.²¹ But when the field is released in the jubilee, it shall be holy to the Lord as a devoted field; it becomes the priest's holding.²² If someone consecrates to the Lord a field that has been purchased, which is not a part of the inherited land-holding,²³ the priest shall compute for it the proportionate assessment up to the year of jubilee, and the assessment shall be paid as of that day, a sacred donation to the Lord.²⁴ In the year of jubilee the field shall return to the one from whom it was bought, whose holding the land is.²⁵ All assessments shall be by the sanctuary shekel: twenty gerahs shall make a shekel.

Leviticus 27:16-25

If a person consecrates to the Lord any inherited land-holding, its assessment shall be in accordance with its seed requirements. For land, its value was based on its potential production, as well as the number of years remaining until the Year of Jubilee.

X.e Leviticus 27:26-27 - The Case of the Firstborn

The firstborn of man or animal cannot be made the subject of a vow because the firstborn already belongs to the Lord, as stated in: <<*Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine*>> (Exodus 13:2), and: <<*All that first opens the womb is mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. No one shall appear before me empty-handed*>> (Exodus 34:19-20).

²⁶ A firstling of animals, however, which as a firstling belongs to the Lord, cannot be consecrated by anyone; whether ox or sheep, it is the Lord's.²⁷ If it is an unclean animal, it shall be ransomed at its assessment, with one-fifth added; if it is not redeemed, it shall be sold at its assessment.

Leviticus 27:26-27

A firstling of animals, however, which as a firstling belongs to the Lord, cannot be consecrated by anyone. Since the first born already belonged to God, the offerer could not 'buy it back' from the Lord; if it was a clean animal, it had to be sacrificed by the priests.

It shall be sold at its assessment. An unclean animal could either be sold or 'bought back' from the Lord, with the money being placed in the sanctuary treasury and used by the priests to meet the costs of their service to the Lord.

X.f Leviticus 27:28-29 - The Case of Devoted Things

The devoted thing, Hebrew *Kherem*, belonged irreversibly to the Lord and could not be ransomed. This kind of devoting was part of Israel's war against the Canaanites; a blasphemer or idolater could also be devoted: *<<Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the Lord alone, shall be devoted to destruction>>* (Exodus 22:20), and: *<<you shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword, utterly destroying it and everything in it – even putting its livestock to the sword>>* (Deuteronomy 13:15). Probably only recognised leaders had the authority to pronounce such a sentence.

²⁸ Nothing that a person owns that has been devoted to destruction for the Lord, be it human or animal, or inherited land-holding, may be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the Lord. ²⁹ No human beings who have been devoted to destruction can be ransomed; they shall be put to death.

Leviticus 27:28-29

Nothing that a person owns that has been devoted to destruction for the Lord, may be sold or redeemed. For these reasons, an item devoted to God could not be 'bought back' by giving its value plus twenty percent to the tabernacle treasury; it had to be given, and presumably destroyed, to the Lord.

Every devoted thing is most holy to the Lord. To devote something to the Lord was a further step than consecration by a vow; it often had the meaning of destroying the item or executing the person so that it could not be used by anyone else, and all of its value was given to God. Joshua 6:17, which concerned the destruction of Jericho: *<<The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers we sent>>*, among other passages, translates this word devoted with the word accursed, because that thing devoted to God would be destroyed, being used for no other purpose.

No human beings who have been devoted to destruction can be ransomed; they shall be put to death. In this sense also, one could not escape execution by being 'bought back' from the Lord; they had to face the penalty for their crime.

X.g Leviticus 27:30-33 - The Case of Tithes

The tithe is already the Lord's; this law allows the rules for ordinary vows to govern the tithes as well, as confirmed by vv.9-13.

³⁰ All tithes from the land, whether the seed from the ground or the fruit from the tree, are the Lord's; they are holy to the Lord. ³¹ If persons wish to redeem any of their tithes, they must add one-fifth to them. ³² All tithes of herd and flock, every tenth one that passes under the shepherd's staff, shall be holy to the Lord. ³³ Let no one inquire whether it is good or bad, or make substitution for it; if one makes substitution for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy and cannot be redeemed.

Leviticus 27:30-33

All tithes from the land are the Lord's. Once an offering is made then it belongs to God and cannot be taken back without due penalty.

If persons wish to redeem any of their tithes, they must add one-fifth to them. Tithes could also be 'bought back' from the Lord; instead of tithing good seed from a field, a farmer could pay the value of the seed plus twenty percent.

X.h Leviticus 27:34 - Postscript

The phrase 'on Mount Sinai' appeared in Leviticus 25:1 and 26:46, perhaps giving the impression that just Chapters 25-27 were spoken on Mount Sinai. However, the semantic range of commandments, Hebrew *mitsvot*, which probably includes 'rules and statutes', as confirmed by Leviticus 26:14-15, suggests that this verse refers to the entire content of Leviticus. As indicated previously, Leviticus is a seamless transition from Exodus and on to Numbers Chapter 10, when the Israelites finally move on from Sinai.

³⁴ These are the commandments that the Lord gave to Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai.

Leviticus 27:34

These are the commandments. These were not mere traditions and customs, although the people began to attach traditions and customs to these commandments; these were and are the commandments, and not merely suggestions, of the Lord.

That the Lord gave to Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. As seen before in Leviticus, the phrase 'to the Lord' occurs more than 60 times, more than any other book in the Bible. What happens in Leviticus happens in the presence of the Lord, and every point of obedience it calls believers to illustrates, either in specific command or in precious picture, how to walk before the Lord.