

# Adult Bible Class

## The Book of Leviticus - Lesson #16

### Conclusion of the Book of Leviticus - Chapter 27

The Book of Leviticus begins with worship through offerings given to the Lord - and it ends with worship through *voluntary* offerings given to the Lord. Chapter 27 deals with gifts which are given voluntarily and promised or vowed to the Lord as a form of worship. Making vows was a commonplace thing in Old Testament days.

Human beings are not known for keeping their vows or commitments. Political candidates are known for making many promises (many that they really have no sure power to bring to pass) and then to make excuses later for not fulfilling their promises. In every walk of life - as parents, children, friends, business associates, or even as Christians - people make vows and then they don't or can't keep them. Chapter 27 actually gives the person who gave the gift the opportunity to get out of his vow by paying penalties. God's people were going to learn that vows to God should be taken seriously, and it was costly to get out of a vow to Him.

**Deuteronomy 23:21 (NKJV)** "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. <sup>22</sup> But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. <sup>23</sup> That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.

**Proverbs 20:25 (NLT)** Don't trap yourself by making a rash promise to God and only later counting the cost.

**Ecclesiastes 5:4** When you make a promise to God, don't delay in following through, for God takes no pleasure in fools. Keep all the promises you make to him. <sup>5</sup> It is better to say nothing than to make a promise and not keep it. <sup>6</sup> Don't let your mouth make you sin. And don't defend yourself by telling the Temple messenger that the promise you made was a mistake. That would make God angry, and he might wipe out everything you have achieved.

<sup>7</sup> Talk is cheap, like daydreams and other useless activities. Fear God instead.

A vow can be something like "worship on credit." It is a promise to God with a certain offering in the future. A person makes a vow to God in time of trouble or great need, or a person might make a vow in thankfulness or because he has been blessed with abundance or victory. The vow is made to God, often promising to offer something in the future if God would go to work on the person's behalf. Fallen man has ups and downs in life. Vows to God are often made in the heat of the moment. However, zeal and commitment can cool off. Let's look at a few examples of vows made in Scripture:

**Genesis 28:20 (NLT)** Then Jacob made this vow: "If God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and if he will provide me with food and clothing, <sup>21</sup> and if I return safely to my father's home, then the Lord will certainly be my God. <sup>22</sup> ...and I will present to God a tenth of everything he gives me."

**Numbers 21:1** The Canaanite king of Arad...heard that the Israelites were approaching . . . So he attacked the Israelites and took some of them as prisoners. <sup>2</sup> Then the people of Israel made this vow to the Lord: "If you will hand these people over to us, we will completely destroy all their towns." <sup>3</sup> The Lord heard the Israelites' request and gave them victory over the Canaanites.

**Judges 11:29** At that time the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah . . . <sup>30</sup> And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord. He said, "If you give me victory over the Ammonites, <sup>31</sup> I will give to the Lord whatever comes out of my house to meet me when I return in triumph. I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

**1 Samuel 1:10** Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> And she made this vow: "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut."

**Jonah 2:1** Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the fish. <sup>2</sup> He said . . .

<sup>9</sup> But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise,  
and I will fulfill all my vows.  
For my salvation comes from the Lord alone."

<sup>10</sup> Then the Lord ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach.

Not only do the righteous make vows to God, but the heathen do as well - especially in times of trouble. Look at this example from the story of Jonah:

**Jonah 1:15** Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! <sup>16</sup> The sailors were awestruck by the Lord's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him.

In Leviticus 27, the list of gifts or vows made to God in worship were voluntary. The person promised to offer to God a particular gift. When a gift was brought to the Tabernacle and given to the priests, God viewed it as a gift given to Him. The priests were to assist in the giving of the vow - assessing its value if necessary.

As we read the chapter, we see that in many instances God made a way for a person to "back out" of the gift - to replace the original offering with another.

**Leviticus 27:1 (NLT)** The Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate someone to the Lord by paying the value of that person, <sup>3</sup> here is the scale of values to be used. A man between the ages of twenty and sixty is valued at fifty shekels of silver, as measured by the sanctuary shekel. <sup>4</sup> A woman of that age is valued at thirty shekels of silver. <sup>5</sup> A boy between the ages of five and twenty is valued at twenty shekels of silver; a girl of that age is valued at ten shekels of silver. <sup>6</sup> A boy between the ages of one month and five years is valued at five shekels of silver; a girl of that age is valued at three shekels of silver. <sup>7</sup> A man older than sixty is valued at fifteen shekels of silver; a woman of that age is valued at ten shekels of silver. <sup>8</sup> If you desire to make such a vow but cannot afford to pay the required amount, take the person to the priest. He will determine the amount for you to pay based on what you can afford.

Persons as well as property could be dedicated to the Lord. The God of heaven does not accept human sacrifice, but people could be dedicated to God through their service to Him or symbolically by paying in money the value of that person's service. Samuel is a good example of this.

A person who was symbolically vowed to the Lord could be "redeemed" or bought back with a payment of money. The vow would then be fulfilled, and the Lord would receive a gift of money instead of service. Remember, only the Levites were allowed to serve in the Tabernacle, so this was another way that persons who were not Levites could be "given to God." When reading the above passage, one might think that God devalues women, children, or the elderly. However, the

passage needs to be read from the perspective of “because of this person’s age, situation, and abilities, he will be worth this much service.” Even though God set the standard for the redemption of the person dedicated to the Lord, the poor could negotiate the amount. They could go to the priest and the priest could lower the amount based upon what the person could afford.

**Leviticus 27:9** “If your vow involves giving an animal that is acceptable as an offering to the Lord, any gift to the Lord will be considered holy. <sup>10</sup> You may not exchange or substitute it for another animal—neither a good animal for a bad one nor a bad animal for a good one. But if you do exchange one animal for another, then both the original animal and its substitute will be considered holy. <sup>11</sup> If your vow involves an unclean animal—one that is not acceptable as an offering to the Lord—then you must bring the animal to the priest. <sup>12</sup> He will assess its value, and his assessment will be final, whether high or low. <sup>13</sup> If you want to buy back the animal, you must pay the value set by the priest, plus 20 percent.

The above passage gives instructions for giving an unclean or clean animal to God as a gift. A clean beast that is given to God as an offering cannot be exchanged (Scripture indicates that if a person tries to exchange the animal, both the original animal and the substitute will belong to the Lord)!

However, unclean beasts can be given as a voluntary gift to God, and they can also be redeemed. If the person who offered it paid the value of the animal (and this is set by the priest) plus an additional 20%, he could have his animal back.

Say, for instance, a man brought the family donkey to the Tabernacle and gave it to the priests as a vow to God in thanksgiving. Then, when he got home, the kids started crying because they missed “Daisy the Donkey” so much. Desiring peace in his family, Dad had second thoughts about his vow, so he went to the priests, hoping they hadn’t sold the animal yet, and asked them to assess the value of the donkey. He then paid that amount plus an additional 20% and brought the donkey home.

Vows should be taken seriously and made thoughtfully. There was a price to pay to change a vow or to back out of it.

**Leviticus 27:14** “If someone dedicates a house to the Lord, the priest will come to assess its value. The priest’s assessment will be final, whether high or low. <sup>15</sup> If the person who dedicated the house wants to buy it back, he must pay the value set by the priest, plus 20 percent. Then the house will again be his.

This is probably a house that is not a part of the family inheritance. Remember our study about the Year of Jubilee. The Promised Land was extremely important to God and to His people. The real estate that God gave to His people, Israel, was to revert back to the original family owners every fifty years (the Year of Jubilee). This kept the land in the families. Perhaps the houses referred to in the above Scripture are the houses in cities that could exchange owners. If someone gave the property to the Lord, he could change his mind. Again, the priest would assess the value of the house, and the person would pay the value plus another 20%.

**Leviticus 27:16** “If someone dedicates to the Lord a piece of his family property, its value will be assessed according to the amount of seed required to plant it—fifty shekels of silver for a field planted with five bushels of barley seed. <sup>17</sup> If the field is dedicated to the Lord in the Year of Jubilee, then the entire assessment will apply. <sup>18</sup> But if the field is dedicated after the Year of Jubilee, the priest will assess the land’s value in proportion to the number of years left until the next Year of Jubilee. Its assessed value is reduced each year. <sup>19</sup> If the person who dedicated the field wants to buy it back, he must pay the value set by the priest, plus 20 percent. Then the field will again be legally his. <sup>20</sup> But if he does not want to buy it back, and it is sold to someone else, the field can no longer be bought back. <sup>21</sup> When the field is released in the Year of Jubilee, it will be holy, a field specially set apart for the Lord. It will become the property of the priests.

A person could actually dedicate a part of his family inheritance to the Lord. Let’s say a person dedicated a field to the Lord and gave it to the priests for their use. Again, if he changes his mind, he can pay the assessed price for the land plus another 20% and it will be his again.

If the field is sold to another person (by the priests, perhaps), then on the Year of Jubilee, the field will revert back to the priests because it was given to the Lord.

**Leviticus 27:22** “If someone dedicates to the Lord a field he has purchased but which is not part of his family property, <sup>23</sup> the priest will assess its value based on the number of years left until the next Year of Jubilee. On that day he must give the assessed value of the land as a sacred donation to the Lord. <sup>24</sup> In the Year of Jubilee the field must be returned to the person from whom he purchased it, the one who inherited it as family property. <sup>25</sup> (All the payments must be measured by the weight of the sanctuary shekel, which equals twenty gerahs.)

The Promised Land was important to God. If someone purchased family land from a “down on his luck” Israelite and then gave it as a vow or gift to the Lord, the person was to pay the value of the land “on that day.” On the Year of Jubilee, the land would go back to the original family owners.

**Leviticus 27:26** “You may not dedicate a firstborn animal to the Lord, for the firstborn of your cattle, sheep, and goats already belong to him. <sup>27</sup> However, you may buy back the firstborn of a ceremonially unclean animal by paying the priest’s assessment of its worth, plus 20 percent. If you do not buy it back, the priest will sell it at its assessed value.

<sup>28</sup> “However, anything specially set apart for the Lord—whether a person, an animal, or family property—must never be sold or bought back. Anything devoted in this way has been set apart as holy, and it belongs to the Lord. <sup>29</sup> No person specially set apart for destruction may be bought back. Such a person must be put to death.

God would not permit His people to make a vow or gift out of something that was already His by rights (devoted things), nor could a person redeem it. A vow was a promise to the Lord that was voluntary. But something that was *devoted* to the Lord had a stronger meaning than something that was vowed. The meaning from the Hebrew word is that the thing that was *devoted* was God’s by rights and was given completely (like a whole burnt offering). There is a sense of being destroyed as it was given - *it was wholly given to God*. Something that was *devoted to God* was wholly given to God, whether in life (a person) or death (an animal sacrifice). In the above Scripture, God’s people were not to confuse the *devoted* things with the vowed things.

A person who had committed a capital crime could not get out of his death sentence - no redemption allowed - he must pay for his crime with his life.

**Leviticus 27:30** "One-tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy. <sup>31</sup> If you want to buy back the Lord's tenth of the grain or fruit, you must pay its value, plus 20 percent. <sup>32</sup> Count off every tenth animal from your herds and flocks and set them apart for the Lord as holy. <sup>33</sup> You may not pick and choose between good and bad animals, and you may not substitute one for another. But if you do exchange one animal for another, then both the original animal and its substitute will be considered holy and cannot be bought back." <sup>34</sup> These are the commands that the Lord gave through Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelites.

The tithe already belonged to the Lord (it was a devoted thing). It could not be given as a gift or vow. We think of tithe as money, but for the Israelite, the tithe was often a tenth of the crops or a tenth of the animals, for this is how the Israelite was "increased." A person could, in fact, buy back the tithed produce by paying its value plus 20%.

### **Lessons Learned from Leviticus 27**

God cautions His people through His Word that we should not make vows hastily. We see from this last chapter of Leviticus that some vows cannot be reversed, and some offer "redemption" from the vow by paying a costly price.

Sometimes we do not appreciate the power of money. We might say, "It's only money," but we really should admit that money motivates us like few other things. In Leviticus 27, the price for reversing or "redeeming" a vow is to pay the price of the vowed thing plus a heavy penalty. God taught the Israelites a lesson in vow-keeping by hitting them in their pocketbooks. That usually gets people's attention!

Doing what you are supposed to do is ordinary and expected. However, the offerings described in Leviticus 27 go beyond the required offerings of the day. These are offerings that are given out of love, faith, and thankfulness. These are not "duty" offerings, but "desire" or "delight" offerings, and they are very pleasing to God. However, they must be done correctly, or they can work against the vower.

One reason that a person should take His vows to God seriously is because the world is watching. When a person takes his vows seriously, he takes God seriously. He not only inspires others by keeping his word, but He graces the whole Word of God and inspires others that God's Word is true and reliable. God keeps his promises, and we should too.

Fortunately for us, God knows that we are sinful creatures - rash, fickle, subject to changes. He made a way for the Israelites to "back up" from many of their vows by paying the price in cash. There would still be an "ouch" to the whole matter, but they would be right in God's sight at the end of the day.

There are Bible examples of people who made a vow and kept it willingly. One of the most beautiful accounts is the story of Hannah who vowed that if God would give her a son, she would dedicate him for service in the Tabernacle all his life. Hannah kept her vow, though as a mother, she probably hated to see her young son leave her home (1 Samuel 1:8-28).

The prophet Malachi had to rebuke the people of Israel for offering devoted or vowed animals that were lame or diseased (Malachi 1:6-8). Worship is giving to God our best, and God's people gave him their worst in that situation. This is not an acceptable vow.

## New Testament Christians and Vows

Jesus said:

**Matthew 5:33 (NLT)** "You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.' <sup>34</sup> But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. <sup>35</sup> And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.

In Jesus' day, the Jews taught that vows were to be kept, but a person's word the rest of the time could be broken. Jesus said, "Don't make vows, and keep your word all of the time."

In Mark, we read of religious leaders who got around their responsibilities from the Law of Moses by making a vow.

**Mark 7:5** So the Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked him, "Why don't your disciples follow our age-old tradition? They eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony."

<sup>6</sup> Jesus replied, "You hypocrites . . . <sup>8</sup> For you ignore God's law and substitute your own tradition."

<sup>9</sup> Then he said, "You skillfully sidestep God's law in order to hold on to your own tradition. <sup>10</sup> For instance, Moses gave you this law from God: 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.' <sup>11</sup> But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.' <sup>12</sup> In this way, you let them disregard their needy parents. <sup>13</sup> And so you cancel the word of God in order to hand down your own tradition. And this is only one example among many others."

In this example, the Pharisees and teachers misuse the vow to God. Instead of doing their duty to take care of their parents in their old age (costing money), they take their money or possessions and "give it to God as a vow offering." Well, fortunately for them as priests, they are the recipients of that same vow offering! Now they tell their parents they can't help them financially because the money that was supposed to be for that purpose has been vowed to the Lord. No wonder Jesus was upset with them!

**James 5:12** But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.

## Book of Leviticus - Conclusion

The events of Leviticus took place when the children of Israel were camped at the base of Mount Sinai. God had given them His Law as well as the directions to build the Tabernacle. God also called Aaron and his descendants to serve as priests. Israel was ready to begin their special worship to God through the Tabernacle.

Now the people of Israel needed to offer sacrifices. They not only needed their initial deliverance from Egypt, but they needed God in their daily lives. That is why God gave them the five offerings which picture a life lived for the Lord. These are explained in Leviticus chapters 1-7.

### **The Five Offerings of Leviticus**

The five offerings (sacrifices) that are presented in Leviticus are:

*The burnt offering*, or whole burnt offering (Lev. 1, 6:8-13)

*The grain offering*, or meal offering (Lev. 2, 6:14-23)

*The peace offering*, or fellowship offering (Lev. 3, 7:11-36)

*The sin offering* (Lev. 4, 5:1-13, 6:24-30)

*The trespass offering*, or guilt offering (Lev. 5:14-19, 6:1-7, 7:1-10)

As we look at the five offerings of Leviticus, we will see how 1) each one points to Jesus Christ, and 2) each one speaks to us as New Testament believers.

### **The Sweet Savor Offerings**

Jesus is the burnt offering. This offering was an animal that was wholly given to God on the brazen altar. It was without blemish, and it was given with a free will. Jesus was the burnt offering in that He gave Himself freely and totally to God's purpose, and He was sinless and perfect in every way.

For us as Christians, the whole burnt offering speaks of giving oneself completely to the will and purpose of God, following Jesus' example.

Jesus is the grain offering. This offering was fine flour (humanity) mixed with oil (Spirit of God) and salt. Jesus was God in human flesh who lived a sinless life to serve both God and man.

To Christians, this offering speaks of duty and service to God and man. Devotion to God (burnt offering) and love and service to God and man (grain offering) sums up the entire Law.

**Romans 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Jesus is the peace offering. This offering was an animal that again was without blemish and given freely. This offering indicates peace and fellowship between God and man - and between man and man. Jesus desires to have fellowship with us.

**Revelation 3:20** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

### **The Restoring Offerings**

The Passover Lamb brings initial salvation (and Jesus is our Passover - 1 Cor. 5:7). However, the Christian needs forgiveness of sin as he goes along life's way. The next two offerings speak to this need.

Jesus is the sin offering. Again, this offering was an animal without blemish. The fat from this offering was burned on the altar as the Lord's part, the blood was sprinkled in the holy place, and what remained of the animal was taken outside the camp to be burned, typifying Jesus' sacrifice for mankind on Calvary, outside the city gates of Jerusalem.

In some instances the meat from a sin offering was instead given to the priests for their food. Leviticus 10:17 gives us the meaning of this: the priests were to *"bear the guilt of the congregation."*

**1 John 2:1** My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** And He Himself is the propitiation [the atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Jesus is the trespass offering. This offering was much like the sin offering. In addition to the animal sacrifices, restitution money was required to make things right. The amount of restitution plus another 20% was paid to the person wronged. Jesus taught that we are to make things right with our brothers and sisters. Then, we can have fellowship with God.

**Matthew 5:23 (NKJV)** Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

### **Important Points to Remember from Leviticus**

God demands that His people be holy before him (Lev. 11:44-45)

God provided five offerings for His people (chps. 1-7).

The fat of the offerings belonged to God - it was the choice part of the offering (3:16-17). The blood was sprinkled on the altar or where directed.

God's people were never to eat fat or blood (3:17, 7:22-27, 17:11-12).

The priests were given their due portion of the sacrifices (7:32-36).

All offerings were now to be made at the Tabernacle (17:1-9).

When the priestly ministry began in the Tabernacle, the fire came from before the Lord to consume the sacrifices - God was pleased (9:23-24).

When two of Aaron's sons disobeyed God's order and used some other fire, fire came from the Lord to destroy them - God was displeased (10:1-7).

God's people could become unclean by sinning or just by living in this world (touching something unclean) (chps. 11-12).

God had seven feasts that were related to the agricultural year (chp. 23).

God demanded that all offerings should be "unblemished" animals (1:3, 3:1, 22:20-25).

God wanted His people to recognize the Sabbath day, the Sabbath year, and the Year of Jubilee (23:3, 25:1-22).

God had blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (chp. 26).

Making a vow to God is serious business (chp. 27).