



Leviticus is in the middle of the five books making up “the law,” the heart of the Old Testament. It gets its name from the fact that it focuses especially in the ministry of the Levite priests, and the core of the book is the law of holiness. This tells us what God demands of the people who are privileged to belong to him, both in terms of their worship and of their daily lives.

This is enough for us to situate the book. We will understand these laws and liturgical regulations better, which are characteristic of ancient times, if we are willing to remember that holiness—in the biblical sense, is just as real for us now. Holiness is one of the keys to knowing God and it helps us to understand our special vocation as a holy people. We can never overstate the fact that God embraces all of creation in his love, that God is present in it and in the lives of people, that God is very close to us “in secret” (Mt 6:6). Neither should we forget that God is “holy,” that is to say, totally distinct from creation and that his mysterious personality is incredibly beyond anything we can imagine. If God has called us to believe in his Only Son, our mission cannot be confused with any of the paths of wisdom that humankind has ever known: God has chosen us for his own “amazing and mysterious” work. Today though we are no longer bound by the countless liturgical or sociological precepts of the law, these pages tell us again that we have been set apart in order to serve as leaven.

The spirit of the law never changed after the revelation made to Moses, and became its foundation. However, many developments and adaptations did take place. The “Mosaic Books,” as they are called, reach us in the state in which they were fixed by the Jewish priests of the fifth century before Jesus, at the time of the return from the Exile.

Previously, the influence of the prophets made itself felt. They were asking for a more dynamic faith, an awareness of the demands of justice inscribed in the Covenant and a struggle against alienating foreign influences. They were also speaking about preparing the future. But after the Babylonian captivity, Israel’s need to affirm its identity in order to face up to the trials of the nation, brought about a conservative trend that would become increasingly stronger in the course of time. Thus, many Jews went back to a religious conservatism made of rituals and traditions that Jesus would severely condemn (Mt 23).

These laws form part of the Scriptures and therefore they are the words of God. But they are words of God addressed to a people who had not yet received Christ. If we receive these words, it does not mean we should put them into practice just as

they are since we have passed the first stage of human and religious formation of the Old Testament. In his letters, Paul attacks those who did not want to go beyond the customs and feasts of the Jews (Col 2:16), as well as those who primarily saw God's word as laws to be observed (Gal 3:1-7). On the other hand, Jesus invites us not to lose anything of the spirit that inspired these laws (Mt 5:17-19).

**Burnt offering**

25:22

**1** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh called Moses, and from the tent of meeting addressed him, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Speak to the people of Israel; say to them: When anyone brings an offering of an animal to Yahweh it can be from either his cattle or sheep and goats.

<sup>3</sup>If the offering is a burnt offering of one of his cattle, he is to offer a bull without any defect. He shall offer it at the entrance to the tent of meeting, so that his offering may be accepted before Yahweh. <sup>4</sup>He is to lay his hand on the bull’s head, and it shall be accepted as a sacrifice to take away his sins. <sup>5</sup>Then he shall kill the bull before Yahweh, and the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall offer the blood. They will pour it out on the sides of the altar which stands at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>6</sup>Then he shall skin the victim and quarter it. <sup>7</sup>The sons of Aaron, the priests, must put fire on the altar and arrange wood on this fire. <sup>8</sup>Then the sons of Aaron, the priests, are to put the pieces, the head and the fat on the wood on the altar fire. <sup>9</sup>The man shall wash the internal organs and legs in water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. This will be a burnt offering and its sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh.

<sup>10</sup>If his offering is an animal out of the flock, a lamb or a goat offered as a burnt offering, he is to offer a male without any defect. <sup>11</sup>He shall kill it on the north side of the altar before Yahweh, and the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall pour out the blood on the sides of the altar. <sup>12</sup>Then he is to quarter it, and the priest is to arrange the quarters, as well as the head and the fat on the wood on the altar fire. <sup>13</sup>The man shall wash the internal organs and legs in water, and the priest shall burn all of it on the altar. This will be a burnt offering and its sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh.

<sup>14</sup>If the man is offering a bird as a burnt offering, he is to offer a turtledove or a young pigeon. <sup>15</sup>The priest shall offer it at the altar and wring off its head, which he is to burn on the altar; then its blood is to be drained out on the side of the altar. <sup>16</sup>Then he shall remove the crop and the feathers: these he is to throw on the eastern side of the altar, where the ashes from the fat are placed. <sup>17</sup>He is to divide it in two halves with a wing on each side, but without separating the two parts. Then the priest shall burn it on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire. This will be a burnt offering and its sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh.

Gen  
15:10

• **1.1** Yahweh spoke to Moses. Each law is introduced by this expression, giving the impression that Moses had dictated these laws which were actually introduced centuries later. Although the law was written long after Moses’ time, the authors of Leviticus used this literary form to convey that the law embodies the spirit of all that God taught Moses on Sinai.

The Hebrews practiced the rituals and customs of their ancestors. Since they were shepherds, they used to offer their animals in sacrifice. Later on, in Canaan, the Israelites found other sacrifices and customs among the pagan Canaanites and they adopted some of them. Yet, the revelation granted to Moses on Sinai provided them with criteria to judge new or old forms of worship:

– God is the only God, the Invisible One who needs nothing but asks that his followers serve him.

– Yahweh is the Holy God, totally different from every creature, and Israel, consecrated to God, must remain “holy” and apart from other nations.

– Yahweh demands justice; therefore, ritual “purity” must reflect interior sanctity.

At the time this book was written, the Jewish people had only one Sanctuary, the Temple of Jerusalem, and people came from everywhere to offer sacrifices there. The Temple, built by king Solomon (see 1 K 6), was not a very large

building (some 25 meters in length by 15 in width) and only the priests went inside. The people used to gather in the paved patios. In the main patio was a large altar made of solid stones, the altar of *holocausts*, or of *totally burned victims*. On some occasions, part of the blood was poured on another, in a much smaller altar inside the Temple.

There were various types of sacrifices and for most of them, the priests used to receive part of the victim in payment; the other part would be eaten by the donors at a communion banquet. But, in the holocaust nothing was eaten because everything was offered to God as a sign of perfect submission.

Like other ancient people, the Israelites believed that the life of every being was in the blood (see Gen 9:5). Thus, the blood belonged to God and no one could eat or drink it. The life and the blood of the sacrificed animal represented the one who offered it: he was delivered from all in him that might be displeasing to God and lead to his death (Lev 17:11). Not without reason did Jesus wish to die by shedding his blood to express that he was giving his life to cleanse his people of their sins. From the Jewish sacrifices, the letter to the Hebrews draws the following lesson which was fulfilled in Jesus’ passion: “there is no forgiveness (of sins) without the shedding of blood” (Heb 9:22).

**The grain offering**Num  
15:1-16

**2** <sup>1</sup>If anyone offers Yahweh a grain offering, his offering is to be fine flour on which he is to pour oil and put incense. <sup>2</sup>He shall bring it to the sons of Aaron, the priests; he is to take a handful of the fine flour and oil and all the incense, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as a memorial, a burnt offering whose sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh. <sup>3</sup>The remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; this is a most holy share for it comes from the burnt offerings of Yahweh.

<sup>4</sup>When you are going to offer a grain offering of bread baked in the oven, the fine flour is to be prepared either in the form of unleavened cakes mixed with oil, or in the form of unleavened wafers spread with oil.

<sup>5</sup>If your offering is a grain offering fried on the griddle, the fine flour mixed with oil is to have no leavening. <sup>6</sup>You must break it in pieces and pour oil over it. It is a grain offering. <sup>7</sup>If your offering is a grain offering cooked in the pan, the fine flour is to be prepared in oil. <sup>8</sup>You must bring to Yahweh the grain offering that has been thus prepared, presenting it to the priest, who is to bring it to the altar. <sup>9</sup>The priest shall take part of this offering and burn it on the altar to recall before Yahweh the person who is offering it. And it will be an offering whose sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh. <sup>10</sup>The remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; this is a most holy share of Yahweh's burnt offering.

Mt 16:6;  
1Cor 5:6

<sup>11</sup>None of the grain offering that you offer to Yahweh is to be prepared with yeast for you must never burn yeast or honey as a burnt offering for Yahweh.

<sup>12</sup>You may offer them up to Yahweh, as an offering of first fruits, but they must not go up as a sweet-smelling odor to please Yahweh. <sup>13</sup>You must salt every grain offering that you offer, and you must never fail to put on your grain offering the salt of the Covenant with your God: to every offering you are to join an offering of salt to Yahweh your God. <sup>14</sup>If you offer Yahweh a grain offering of first fruits, it may

Num  
18:19;  
Ezk  
43:24

2K 4:42

be from either roasted corn or bread made from ground corn. <sup>15</sup>You are to add oil to it and put incense on it; it is a grain offering <sup>16</sup>and the priest is to burn part of the bread and oil (together with all the incense) as a burnt offering for Yahweh.

**The peace offering**

**3** <sup>1</sup>If anyone offers a peace sacrifice, <sup>2</sup>offering from his cattle, male or female, whatever he offers before Yahweh must be without any defect. <sup>3</sup>He is to lay his hand on the victim's head and kill it at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall pour out the blood on the sides of the altar. <sup>3</sup>Then he is to offer the following as a burnt offering for Yahweh: the fat that covers the internal organs, all the fat that is on the internal organs, <sup>4</sup>the two kidneys, the fat on them and on the loins, the best part which he is to remove from the liver and kidneys. <sup>5</sup>The sons of Aaron shall burn all this on the altar along with the burnt offering, on the wood on the fire. It will be a burnt offering and its sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh.

7:11;  
19:5-8;  
22:21

<sup>6</sup>If he offers a sheep or goat as a peace offering for Yahweh, he is to offer a male or female without any defect. <sup>7</sup>If he offers a sheep, he is to offer it before Yahweh; <sup>8</sup>he is to lay his hand on the sheep's head and kill it in front of the tent of meeting; then the sons of Aaron shall pour out its blood on the sides of the altar. <sup>9</sup>Of the peace offering he is to offer the following as a burnt offering for Yahweh: the fat, all the tail taken off near the backbone, the fat that covers the internal organs, all the fat that is on the internal organs, <sup>10</sup>the two kidneys, the fat that is on them and on the loins, the best part which he will remove from the liver and kidneys. <sup>11</sup>The priest shall burn this part on the altar as food, as a burnt offering for Yahweh.

<sup>12</sup>If his offering is a goat, he is to offer it before Yahweh: <sup>13</sup>he is to lay his hand on the goat's head and kill it in front of the tent of meeting, and the sons of Aaron shall pour out its blood on the sides of the altar. <sup>14</sup>Then he is to offer the following as a burnt offering for Yahweh: the fat that

We should note the frequent use of the expression "without blemish." The prophets would scold the people who did not observe

this command (Mal 1:8-13). We oftentimes give God out of our surplus, and not the best of what we have.

covers the internal organs, all the fat that is on the internal organs, <sup>15</sup>the two kidneys, the fat that is on them and on the loins, the best part which he will remove from the liver and kidneys. <sup>16</sup>The priest shall burn these pieces on the altar as food, as a burnt offering for Yahweh.

17:10;  
Gen 9:4;  
Dt 12:16

<sup>17</sup>All the fat belongs to Yahweh. This is a law forever for all your descendants, wherever they may live: never eat either fat or blood.”

#### Offering for an unintentional sin

Num  
15:22

**4** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: <sup>2</sup>“Speak to the people of Israel and say: Anyone may sin without intending to do so against any of the commandments of Yahweh and do one of the forbidden things; in such a case:

<sup>3</sup>If the one who sins is the anointed priest, his sin defiles the people. Then, for the sin which he has committed, he is to offer to Yahweh a young bull, an animal from the herd without any defect, as a sacrifice for sin. <sup>4</sup>He is to bring the bull before Yahweh at the entrance to the tent of meeting, and lay his hand on its head and kill it before Yahweh. <sup>5</sup>Then the anointed priest shall take a little of the blood of the bull and take it into the tent of meeting. <sup>6</sup>He shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it over the veil of the Sanctuary seven times, before Yahweh. <sup>7</sup>Then the priest shall put a little of the blood of the bull on the corners of the altar of incense that sends up smoke before Yahweh in the tent of meeting and he is to pour all the rest of the bull’s blood at the foot of the altar for burnt offerings that is at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

26:33

30:1

<sup>8</sup>From this bull offered as a sacrifice for sin, the priest will remove all the fat: the fat that covers the internal organs, all the fat that is on the internal organs, <sup>9</sup>the two kidneys, the fat that is on them and on the loins, the best part which he will remove

from the liver and kidneys, <sup>10</sup>exactly as was done with what was set apart in the peace offering, and the priest shall burn these on the altar for burnt offerings.

<sup>11</sup>The bull’s skin, all its flesh, its head, legs, internal organs and intestines, <sup>12</sup>the whole of the bull, must be carried outside the camp to a place that is clean, the place where the ashes from the fat are thrown away, and the bull must be burnt there.

<sup>13</sup>If the whole community of Israel has sinned without intending to do so, and, without being aware of it, has done something that is forbidden by the commandments of Yahweh, <sup>14</sup>the community is to offer a young bull as sacrifice for sin, an animal of the herd without any defect, as soon as the sin of which they have been guilty is discovered. The animal must be brought before the tent of meeting; <sup>15</sup>the elders of the community shall lay their hands on the bull’s head before Yahweh, and it must be killed before Yahweh.

<sup>16</sup>Then the anointed priest is to carry a little of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting. <sup>17</sup>He is to dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it on the veil before Yahweh seven times. <sup>18</sup>Then he shall put a little of the blood on the corners of the altar that stands before Yahweh inside the tent of meeting, and pour out all the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar for burnt offerings at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

<sup>19</sup>Then the priest shall remove all the fat from the animal and burn it on the altar. <sup>20</sup>He shall do the same thing with this bull as he did with the bull for the sacrifice of sin. When the priest has performed the sacrifice for the people’s sin, they will be forgiven. <sup>21</sup>The priest must have the bull taken out of the camp and burn it as he burned the first one. This is the sacrifice for the sin of the community.

<sup>22</sup>When a leader sins and without intending to do so does one of the things

• **4.1** Next come the sin *offerings*. It is not a question of real sin, the inner sin (Mt 5:22) *coming from the person* (Mk 7:20), but of faults against the laws regarding worship. In verses 22 and 27, we read: *when a leader sins and without intending to do so*. This constitutes another kind of fault, a matter of carelessness, 5:1-13.

But in 5:20-26 we deal with other faults which require an offering in reparation because they are real sins.

Paul tells us that the purpose of the law is to

make sin evident (Rom 4:15; 7:7). It is true that ancient texts rarely identify real sin: indifference towards God, or rebellion against his established order, errors or ignorance. It would take time to wait for enlightenment, but this fear of sin reminds us that the force of evil is at work in us, even when we are not conscious of it. The day we discover what the love of God is, and how he keeps waiting for us, we shall realize how deeply sinful we are.

*The tent of meeting* (5, 7, 14, 16) is the temple.

forbidden by the commandments of Yahweh his God, thus becoming guilty,<sup>23</sup> and after that he recalls it, or anyone calls his attention to the sin thus committed, he is to bring a goat as an offering, a male without any defect.<sup>24</sup> He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and kill it in the place where the animals for the burnt offerings are killed. This is a sacrifice for sin:<sup>25</sup> the priest shall take a little of the goat's blood on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar for burnt offerings. Then he shall pour out its blood at the foot of the altar for burnt offering<sup>26</sup> and burn all the fat on the altar, as with the fat in the peace offering. This is how the priest is to offer the sacrifice for the sin of this leader to free him from his sin, and he will be forgiven.

<sup>27</sup>If one of the people sins without intending to do so and makes himself guilty by doing something forbidden by the commandments of Yahweh,<sup>28</sup> and after that he recalls it or anyone calls his attention to the sin he has committed, he is to bring a goat as an offering, a female without any defect.<sup>29</sup> He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and kill it in the place where the animals for the burnt offerings are killed.<sup>30</sup> The priest shall take a little of the goat's blood on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar for burnt offerings. Then he shall pour out all the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar.<sup>31</sup> He shall remove all the fat, as the fat was removed for the peace offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as a sweet-smelling sacrifice pleasing to Yahweh. This is how the priest is to offer the sacrifice for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven.

<sup>32</sup>If anyone wishes to bring a lamb as an offering for this kind of sacrifice, he is to bring a female without any defect.<sup>33</sup> He is to lay his hand on the lamb's head and kill it as a sacrifice for sin in the place where the animals for the burnt offerings are killed.<sup>34</sup> The priest shall take a little of the blood of this sacrifice on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar for burnt offerings. Then he shall pour out all the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar.<sup>35</sup> He shall remove its fat as was done for the sheep in the peace offering, and the priest shall burn it all on the altar, in addition to the burnt offering for Yahweh. This is how the priest is to offer the sacrifice for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven.

### Some cases requiring sacrifice for sin

**5**<sup>1</sup> Sacrifice for sin is required in the following cases: Pro 29:24

A man should have come forward to give evidence in court when officially summoned; but he did not speak and give information about something he had seen or heard; and so he is guilty.

<sup>2</sup>Or else he accidentally touches something unclean, whatever it may be—the dead body of an unclean animal, wild or tame; or the dead body of one of the unclean beings that swarm—and so without realizing it, he becomes unclean, and guilty. 11–16

<sup>3</sup>Or else he accidentally touches some human uncleanness, whatever it may be, and contact with it makes him unclean; so he becomes guilty as soon as he realizes what he has done.

<sup>4</sup>Or else a man makes a careless vow to do either evil or good in any of those matters on which a man may swear unthinkingly; he does not notice it, then, but when he realizes it later, he becomes guilty.

<sup>5</sup>He who is guilty in any of these cases, shall confess the sin committed,<sup>6</sup> and bring to Yahweh as a sacrifice for the sin committed a female of the flock (sheep or goat); and the priest shall offer the sacrifice for the man's sin to free him from his sin. 2Mac 1:16; Dn 9:27

<sup>7</sup>If a man cannot afford a sheep or a goat, he shall offer to Yahweh, as payment for the sin he has committed, two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a sacrifice for sin and the other for a burnt offering.<sup>8</sup> He will bring them to the priest who is to offer first the one intended for the sacrifice for sin. The priest shall wring its neck, without removing the head.<sup>9</sup> He shall sprinkle the side of the altar with the victim's blood, and then drain out the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. This is a sacrifice for sin.<sup>10</sup> Of the other bird he is to make a burnt offering according to the regulations. When the priest offers the sacrifice for the man's sin, he will be forgiven.

<sup>11</sup>If this man cannot afford two turtledoves or two young pigeons, he is to bring two pounds of flour as an offering for the sin committed; but he shall not mix oil with it or put incense on it, for it is a sacrifice for sin.<sup>12</sup> He is to bring it to the priest, who is to take a handful of it to be put on the burnt offering for Yahweh in order to recall this man to Yahweh. This is a sacrifice for

sin. <sup>13</sup>This is how the priest is to offer the sacrifice for the sin the man committed in any of these cases, and he will be forgiven. In this case, as in the case of a grain offering, the rest of the flour belongs to the priest.”

<sup>14</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

<sup>15</sup>“If anyone is guilty of unintentionally cheating by failing to hand over the payments that are sacred to Yahweh, he is to bring to Yahweh as a sacrifice of payment a ram with no defects. This ram is to be valued according to the official standard. This is a sacrifice of repayment. <sup>16</sup>He must make the payments he has failed to hand over, pay an extra fifth as well, and give it to the priest. The priest shall offer the ram as a sacrifice for the man’s sin and he will be forgiven.

<sup>17</sup>If anyone sins and does one of the things forbidden by the commandments of Yahweh without realizing it, he is guilty and must pay the penalty for his fault. <sup>18</sup>As a sacrifice of repayment he is to bring to the priest a ram without any defect. Its value will be according to the official standard. The priest shall offer the sacrifice for the sin he has committed without realizing it and he will be forgiven. <sup>19</sup>This is a sacrifice of repayment for the man was guilty in the eyes of Yahweh.”

### Sacrifices for evildoing

Hg 2:12 <sup>20</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

<sup>21</sup>“This refers to the man who sins against Yahweh by not returning to his neighbor a deposit or a security, or withholding something due to him or cheating him; <sup>22</sup>and also to the one who finds lost property and swears he has not found it; and also to the man who swears falsely in one of the cases in which people usually swear. <sup>23</sup>In all these cases the man who sins and becomes guilty is to give back what he has taken or demanded that does not belong to him: the deposit entrusted to him, the lost property that he found, <sup>24</sup>or any object about which he has sworn untruthfully. He must repay the owner in full and give an extra fifth as well on the

day when he is found guilty. <sup>25</sup>Then he is to bring a ram without any defect to Yahweh as a sacrifice of repayment. <sup>26</sup>The priest shall offer the sacrifice for the man’s sin and he will be forgiven, whatever the act of which he became guilty.”

### Priesthood and sacrifice

**6** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: <sup>2</sup>“Give these regulations to Aaron and his sons. This is the regulation for burnt offerings: the burnt offering shall stay on the altar all night until morning and the fire is to be kept burning.

<sup>3</sup>The priest is to put on his linen shirt and his linen drawers. Then he must remove the greasy ashes of the sacrifice consumed by the altar fire and place them at the side of the altar. <sup>4</sup>Then he is to change his clothes and carry the ashes to some place that is clean, outside the camp.

<sup>5</sup>The fire that consumes the burnt offering on the altar must not be allowed to go out. Every morning the priest must put firewood on it, arrange the burnt offering on it and burn the fat from the peace offerings. <sup>6</sup>An undying fire is always to burn on the altar; it must not go out.

<sup>7</sup>This is the regulation for the grain offering: One of the priests, a son of Aaron, is to bring it into the presence of Yahweh in front of the altar; <sup>8</sup>he is to take a handful of the fine flour (with the oil and incense which have been added to it) and burn it on the altar as a memorial, to recall to Yahweh the person making the offering so that it becomes a sweet-smelling odor pleasing to Yahweh. <sup>9</sup>After that, the remainder is to be given to Aaron and his sons; they shall eat it in the form of unleavened loaves. They are to eat it in a sacred place within the courtyard of the tent of meeting. <sup>10</sup>The share I give them of my burnt offering must not be baked with yeast. It is most holy, like the sacrifice for sin and the sacrifice of repayment. <sup>11</sup>All the males of Aaron’s family may eat this part of Yahweh’s burnt offering—this is a law forever for all your descendants. Everything that touches the offering becomes consecrated as well.”

• **6.1** Among so many laws dealing with cooking, note the following details:

Verses 5. The fire is never to be put out. A lamb is offered as a holocaust daily in the morning and in the afternoon.

Verses 20. What is offered to God belongs to

him and becomes as if totally permeated by the Holiness of God.

Verses 22-23. In order for the sacrifice to be effective, the meat—which through the sacrifice is made holy—must be eaten. Part of it belongs to the priest: in this way he is assured of a livelihood.

<sup>12</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

<sup>13</sup>“This is the offering that Aaron and his sons are to make to Yahweh on the day of their anointing as priests: two pounds of flour as a daily offering, half in the morning and half in the evening. <sup>14</sup>It must be fried on the griddle and mixed with oil; you must bring the paste as a grain offering in several pieces, offering them as a sweet-smelling odor pleasing to Yahweh. <sup>15</sup>Every descendant of Aaron who succeeds him as high priest shall do the same. This is a law forever. This grain offering shall be completely burned as a sacrifice for Yahweh. <sup>16</sup>Every grain offering made by a priest must be a total sacrifice; none of it is to be eaten.”

<sup>17</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said,

<sup>18</sup>“Say to Aaron and his sons: This is the regulation for the sacrifice for sin:

The victim for the sacrifice is to be killed before Yahweh in the place where the animals for the burnt offerings are killed. It is a most holy offering. <sup>19</sup>The priest who offers this sacrifice is to eat it. It must be eaten in a holy place within the courtyard of the tent of meeting. <sup>20</sup>Everything that touches the flesh of this animal will become consecrated; if any of the blood splashes on clothing, the stain must be cleaned in some holy place. <sup>21</sup>The clay pot in which the meat is cooked must be broken; if a bronze pot has been used for the cooking, it must be scrubbed and thoroughly rinsed with water. <sup>22</sup>Any male who is a priest may eat the meat. It is a most holy thing. <sup>23</sup>But no one may eat any part of the animals offered for sin, whenever any of the blood is brought into the Tent and used in the sacrifice to take away sin. The meat must be thrown on the fire.

### The sacrifice of repayment

**7**<sup>1</sup>This is the regulation for the sacrifice of repayment:

<sup>2</sup>It is a most holy offering. The animal for this offering is to be killed in the place where the animals for the burnt offerings are killed, and the priest must pour out the blood on the sides of the altar. <sup>3</sup>Then he is to offer all the fat: the tail, the fat that covers the internal organs, <sup>4</sup>the two kidneys, the fat that is on them and on the loins, and the best part which he will remove from the liver and kidneys. <sup>5</sup>The priest must burn these pieces on the altar as a burnt

offering for Yahweh. This is a sacrifice of repayment. <sup>6</sup>Any male who is a priest may eat it, but it must be eaten in a holy place because it is a most holy thing.

<sup>7</sup>As with the sacrifice for sin, so with the sacrifice of repayment; the regulation is the same for both. The offering which he has used in the sacrifice for sin belongs to the priest. <sup>8</sup>The skin of the animal presented by a man to the priest to be offered as a burnt offering belongs to the priest. <sup>9</sup>Every grain offering baked in the oven, every grain offering fried in the pan or on the griddle shall belong to the priest who offered it. <sup>10</sup>Every grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, is to belong to all the sons of Aaron equally.

### The peace offering

<sup>11</sup>This is the regulation for the peace offering presented to Yahweh:

<sup>12</sup>If it is offered as a thanksgiving offering, there must be added to it an offering of unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and fine flour in the form of cakes mixed with oil. <sup>13</sup>This offering, then, must be added to the loaves of leavened bread and to the thanksgiving offering. <sup>14</sup>One of the cakes of this offering is to be presented as an offering to Yahweh; it shall belong to the priest who pours out the blood of the peace offering. <sup>15</sup>The flesh of the animal must be eaten on the day when the offering is made; nothing must remain until the next morning.

<sup>16</sup>If the animal is presented before Yahweh as a sacrifice freely offered, it is to be eaten on the day it is offered and also on the following day; <sup>17</sup>but on the third day whatever remains of the animal's flesh must be thrown on the fire. <sup>18</sup>If the meat offered as a peace offering is eaten on the third day, the man who has offered it shall not be accepted nor receive credit for it, for it is defiled meat, and the man who eats it should suffer the penalty of his fault.

<sup>19</sup>If this meat has touched anything unclean, it cannot be eaten; and must be thrown on the fire.

<sup>20</sup>Anyone who is clean may eat meat of the peace offering, but whoever eats the meat of a peace offering presented to Yahweh even though he is unclean shall be cut off from his people. <sup>21</sup>If anyone touches anything unclean, whether human or animal, or any crawling creature, and

Jer  
17:26;  
Ps  
116:17

Num  
15:3;  
Ps  
22:26;  
50:14;  
Ezra 1:4



then eats the meat of a peace offering presented to Yahweh, this man shall be cut off from his people.

<sup>22</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said,

<sup>23</sup>“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them:

You must not eat the fat of ox, sheep or goat. <sup>24</sup>The fat of an animal that has died a natural death or been killed by a wild animal may be used for any other purpose, but you must not eat it. <sup>25</sup>Anyone who eats the fat of an animal offered as a burnt offering to Yahweh shall be cut off from his people.

Dt 14:21;  
Ezk 4:14

17:10

<sup>26</sup>Wherever you live, you must not eat blood, whether it be of bird or animal. <sup>27</sup>Anyone who eats blood, whoever he may be, shall be cut off from his people.”

### The priests' share

<sup>28</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said,

<sup>29</sup>“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them:

Anyone who offers a peace offering to Yahweh is to bring himself the part of his sacrifice that is offered to Yahweh. <sup>30</sup>He is to bring Yahweh's burnt offering, that is, the fat that is near the breast and also the breast, with his own hands. Then he will make the gesture of offering before Yahweh. <sup>31</sup>The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, and the breast shall belong to Aaron and his sons. <sup>32</sup>You must set aside and give to the priest the right hind leg from your peace offering. <sup>33</sup>The right hind leg shall be the share of the son of Aaron who offers the blood and fat of the peace offering. <sup>34</sup>Thus, I keep back this breast and hind leg out of every peace offering presented by the sons of Israel, and give these

Dt 18:3

to Aaron the priest and to his sons: this is a law for the sons of Israel forever.”

<sup>35</sup>This is the share of Aaron and his sons in Yahweh's burnt offerings since the day he called them to be his priests.

<sup>36</sup>This is what Yahweh commands the sons of Israel to give them from the day they are ordained as priests: this is a law for all their descendants for all time to come.

<sup>37</sup>Such is the regulation for burnt offerings, grain offerings, sacrifices for sin, sacrifices of repayment, ordination and peace offerings. <sup>38</sup>This is what Yahweh commanded Moses on Mount Sinai when he told the people of Israel to make their offerings to Yahweh in the wilderness of Sinai.

### Ordination ceremonies

**8** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: <sup>2</sup>“Take Aaron, his sons with him, and the vestments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sacrifice for sin, the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. <sup>3</sup>Then call the whole community together at the entrance to the tent of meeting.”

<sup>4</sup>Moses did as Yahweh commanded; the community gathered at the entrance to the tent of meeting, <sup>5</sup>and Moses said to them, “This is what Yahweh has commanded.”

<sup>6</sup>He made Aaron and his sons come forward, and washed them with water. <sup>7</sup>He put the shirt on Aaron, passed the sash around his waist, dressed him in the robe and put the Ephod on him. Then he tied around his waist the woven band of the Ephod with which he clothed him. <sup>8</sup>He put the embroidered linen breastpiece on him, and placed the Urim and Thummim in it. <sup>9</sup>He put the turban on his head, with the

• **8.1** With the detailed description of Aaron's consecration by his brother Moses, Leviticus wants to teach the ceremony for consecration of the high priest.

Vestments, ornaments and purifications express the sacred character of the man “taken from among mortals to be their representative before God and to offer sacrifices for them” (Heb 5:1).

These rituals did not come down from heaven; rather, they reflect the religious mentality of the times. For those people, there were two kinds of people and things in the world: those belonging to God, that is, sacred and others not belonging to God, that is, profane. Some were considered clean, others unclean; some were said to be “holy,” and others to “carry a sin,”

which simply meant they could not be used in worship.

God took into account the primitive mentality of the people of those times and educated them little by little. With time, they would discover that sin is not some external blemish, or defect, but human faults. The prophets first, and then the Gospels, would state that sin is *what comes from the person*.

Priests were consecrated through an *anointing with oil*. Kings would also be consecrated by an anointing. Priests and kings would thus be the *anointed* of God, expressed by the word *Messiah* in Hebrew, and *Christ* in Greek. The high priest was called the *Christ* of God: this prefigured Jesus, priest of the New Covenant, as the Letter to the Hebrews will explain (5–8).

golden ornament on the front; this is the sacred sign of dedication as Yahweh commanded Moses to do.

<sup>10</sup>Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the Holy Tent and everything in it, to consecrate them. <sup>11</sup>He sprinkled the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and its furnishings, the basin and its stand, to dedicate them all to Yahweh. <sup>12</sup>Then he ordained Aaron by pouring the anointing oil on his head.

<sup>13</sup>Then Moses made Aaron's sons come forward; he put the shirts on them, tied the sashes around their waists and put on their headdresses, as Yahweh had commanded him to do.

<sup>14</sup>Then he had the bull for the sacrifice for sin brought forward. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the bull's head <sup>15</sup>and Moses slaughtered it. Then he took the blood and with his finger put some of it on the corners around the altar, to take away its sin. Then he poured out the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar, which he dedicated to Yahweh by performing the atonement over it. <sup>16</sup>Then he took all the fat that covers the internal organs, the best part of the liver, the two kidneys and their fat; and he burned them all on the altar. <sup>17</sup>After that he burned outside the camp the bull's skin, its flesh and its intestines as Yahweh had commanded him to do.

<sup>18</sup>Then he had the ram for the burnt offering brought forward. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head <sup>19</sup>and Moses slaughtered it. He poured its blood out on the sides of the altar. <sup>20</sup>Then he quartered the ram and burned the head, the pieces and the fat. <sup>21</sup>He washed the internal organs and legs, and burned the whole ram on the altar. This was a burnt offering, a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh, a burnt offering by fire for Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

<sup>22</sup>Then he had the other ram brought forward, for the sacrifice of ordination of priests. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the ram's head <sup>23</sup>and Moses slaughtered it. He took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, the thumb of his right hand, and the big toe of his right foot. <sup>24</sup>Then he made the sons of Aaron come forward and he put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears, the thumbs of their right hands and the big toes of their right feet. Next Moses poured

the rest of the blood on the sides of the altar. <sup>25</sup>Then he took the fat: the tail, all the fat that is on the internal organs, the best part of the liver, the two kidneys and their fat, and the right hind leg. <sup>26</sup>From the basket of unleavened bread placed before Yahweh, he took an unleavened cake, a loaf of bread made with oil, and a wafer; he placed these on the fat and the right hind leg, <sup>27</sup>put it all into Aaron's hands and those of his sons, who waved them before Yahweh. <sup>28</sup>Then Moses took them back and burned them on the altar in addition to the burnt offering. This was the sacrifice for ordination of priests, a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh, an offering by fire to Yahweh. <sup>29</sup>Then Moses took the breast and made the gesture of offering before Yahweh. This was the share of the ram of ordination for Moses, as Yahweh had commanded.

<sup>30</sup>Then Moses took the anointing oil and the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled Aaron and his vestments with it, and his sons and their vestments. In this way he consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and his sons and their vestments to Yahweh.

<sup>31</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Cook the meat at the entrance to the tent of meeting, and eat it there, and also the bread for the sacrifice of priestly ordination that is in the basket, as I commanded, when I said: Aaron and his sons are to eat it. <sup>32</sup>What remains of the meat and bread you will burn. <sup>33</sup>For seven days you must not leave the entrance to the tent of meeting, until the time of your ordination is over, for your hands will be consecrated for seven days. <sup>34</sup>All that we have done today is the rite of atonement for you as Yahweh has commanded us to do <sup>35</sup>and for seven days, day and night, you must remain at the entrance to the tent of meeting, doing what Yahweh has commanded, lest you die. For this is the commandment I received." <sup>36</sup>And Aaron and his sons did everything that Yahweh had commanded through Moses.

### The priests offer sacrifices

**9** <sup>1</sup>On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. <sup>2</sup>He said to Aaron, "Take a calf to offer a sacrifice for sin, and a ram for a burnt offering, both without any defect, and bring them before Yahweh. <sup>3</sup>Then say to the

people of Israel, ‘Take a goat to be offered as a sacrifice for sin, and as burnt offering a calf and a lamb both one year old and without any defect, <sup>4</sup>and for peace offering an ox and a ram to be slaughtered before Yahweh; and finally a grain offering mixed with oil. For Yahweh will appear to you today.’”

<sup>5</sup>They brought what Moses had commanded in front of the tent of meeting; then the whole community gathered and stood before Yahweh. <sup>6</sup>Moses said, “This is what Yahweh has commanded to be done, so that his glory may appear to you.” <sup>7</sup>Moses then said to Aaron, “Go to the altar and offer your sacrifice for sin and your burnt offering to take away your sins. Then present the people’s offering to take away their sins as Yahweh has commanded.”

<sup>8</sup>Aaron went to the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sacrifice for his own sin. <sup>9</sup>Then the sons of Aaron presented the blood to him; he dipped his finger in it and put some on the corners of the altar, and then poured out the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. <sup>10</sup>The fat of the sacrifice for sin and the kidneys and the best part of the liver, he burned on the altar, as Yahweh had commanded Moses; <sup>11</sup>the flesh and the skin he burned outside the camp.

<sup>12</sup>Next Aaron slaughtered the animal which was for his own burnt offering; his sons handed him the blood and he poured it on the sides of the altar. <sup>13</sup>Then they handed him the quartered animal and its head too, and he burned these on the altar. <sup>14</sup>He washed the internal organs and legs and burned them on the altar in addition to the burnt offering.

<sup>15</sup>He then presented the people’s offering. He took the goat for the people’s sacrifice for sin, killed it and offered it as a sacrifice for sin in the same way as the first. <sup>16</sup>Then he had the animal for the burnt offering brought forward and offered it according to the regulations. <sup>17</sup>Next he had the grain offering brought forward, took a handful of it and burned it on the altar in addition to the morning burnt offering.

<sup>18</sup>Finally, he slaughtered the ox and the ram as a peace offering for the people. Aaron’s sons handed him the blood and he

poured it out on the sides of the altar. <sup>19</sup>The fat of the ox and of the ram—the tail, the fatty covering, the kidneys, the best part of the liver—<sup>20</sup>all of this he laid on the breasts and burned it all on the altar. <sup>21</sup>With the breasts and the right hind leg Aaron made the gesture of offering by waving them as Yahweh had commanded.

<sup>22</sup>Then Aaron raised his hands toward the people and blessed them. Having thus performed the sacrifice for sin, the burnt offering and the peace offering, <sup>23</sup>he came down and entered the tent of meeting with Moses. Then they came out together to bless the people and the glory of Yahweh appeared to the whole people—<sup>24</sup>a flame leaped forth from before Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and the fat that was on the altar. At this sight the people shouted for joy and fell on their faces.

#### The story of Nadab and Abihu

**10** • <sup>1</sup>Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, each took his censer, put fire in it and incense on the fire, and presented unlawful fire before Yahweh, fire which he had not commanded them to present. <sup>2</sup>Then from Yahweh’s presence a flame leaped out and burned them to death in the presence of Yahweh. <sup>3</sup>And Moses said to Aaron, “That is what Yahweh meant when he said:

‘I will show my holiness through those who approach me, and before all the people I will show my glory.’”

And Aaron had to remain silent.

<sup>4</sup>Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron’s uncle Uzziel, and said to them, “Come and take the corpses of your brothers far away from the Sanctuary, out of the camp.” <sup>5</sup>They came and carried them away, still in their shirts, out of the camp as Moses had commanded.

<sup>6</sup>Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Do not leave your hair uncombed nor tear your clothes to show that you are mourning; lest you die and the punishment extend to the whole community. All the people of Israel shall mourn the death of your brothers, who died because of Yahweh’s fire. <sup>7</sup>But you shall not leave the entrance to the tent of

Heb  
5:1-4;  
7:27

2S  
6:18

1K 8:10

Num  
17:5

Num  
16:35;  
2K 1:10

Ezk  
44:20

• **10.1** The story in this chapter (the death of Aaron’s sons) is a figurative way of presenting some of the duties of Israel’s priests.

meeting, lest you die; for the anointing oil of Yahweh is on you.” And they obeyed Moses.

<sup>8</sup>Yahweh spoke to Aaron; he said:

Is 28:7

<sup>9</sup>“Before coming to the tent of meeting, you and your sons with you, do not drink wine or strong drink; lest you die. This is a law for all your descendants for all time to come, <sup>10</sup>so that you may be able to recognize the difference between what belongs to God and what is for general use, between what is clean and what is unclean. <sup>11</sup>For you must teach the people of Israel all the laws that Yahweh has given for them through Moses.”

<sup>12</sup>Moses said to Aaron and his two remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, “Take the grain offering that is left over from Yahweh’s burnt offering, and eat it without leaven beside the altar, because it is a most holy thing. <sup>13</sup>Eat it in a holy place for it is the share of Yahweh’s burnt offering which belongs to you and your sons. This is what Yahweh commanded me.

<sup>14</sup>The breast that was offered up and the hind leg that was set aside you will eat in some place that is clean, you and your sons and your daughters with you; this is the share of the peace offerings of the people of Israel that belongs to you and your sons. <sup>15</sup>The hind leg that was set aside and the breast that was offered up, when the fat was burned, belong to you, to you and your sons with you, after they have been presented before Yahweh by the gesture of offering, because Yahweh has commanded this forever.”

<sup>16</sup>Then Moses inquired about the goat offered as a sacrifice for sin, and found that they had burned it. He was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s two remain-

ing sons. <sup>17</sup>“Why,” he asked, “did you not eat this goat in the holy place? For it is a most holy thing given to you to bear and take away the fault of the community. <sup>18</sup>Since its blood was not taken inside the Sanctuary, you should have eaten its flesh there, as I commanded you.” <sup>19</sup>Aaron said to Moses, “They have offered their sacrifice for sin and their burnt offering before Yahweh on this day of mourning. If I had eaten the goat offered in sacrifice for sin today, would that have seemed good to Yahweh?” <sup>20</sup>And when Moses heard this, he was satisfied.

**Clean and unclean animals**

**11** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron and said to them, <sup>2</sup>“Speak to the people of Israel and say:

Di 14:3;  
Mt 15:  
10-20;  
Acts 10:  
9-16;  
11:1-18

‘Of all the animals on the earth these are the animals you may eat. <sup>3</sup>You may eat any animal that has divided hoofs, divided into two parts, and that also chews the cud. <sup>4</sup>You may not eat: the camel, because though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; <sup>5</sup>the rabbit, because though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; <sup>6</sup>the hare, as well; <sup>7</sup>the pig, because though it has divided hoofs, it does not chew the cud. <sup>8</sup>You must not eat the meat of such animals nor their dead bodies; they are unclean for you.

<sup>9</sup>Of all that lives in water you may eat anything that has fins and scales, and lives in sea or river. <sup>10</sup>But anything living in sea or river that does not have both fins and scales must not be eaten. <sup>11</sup>They are unclean for you; you shall not eat their flesh nor even touch their dead bodies. <sup>12</sup>Anything that lives in water, but does not have fins and scales, is unclean for you.

• **11.1** The mission of an Israelite was to participate in public worship of the only God. Yet, in order to enter into the Temple to take part in a religious assembly, he had to perform various rituals which made him “pure,” as we remarked in commenting on Chapter 8. Being pure or impure did not mean being guilty or not: it only signified readiness to approach the altar, or a lack of readiness.

These regulations helped Israel discover the road to genuine sanctity:

– Some animals honored by the pagans were declared unclean. They were to be avoided.

– Several laws or “taboos” (prohibitions of sacred origin) concerning sexuality helped engender respect for the sacred character of life. Spon-

taneously, among any primitive people, there are various rules about sex and birth, and so it was among the Jews (see 12:1-8 and Chap. 15).

– Some regulations concerned standards of hygiene, though other reasons are given. For example, the prohibition against eating pork (v. 7) was wise considering that pigs are carriers of disease where cleanliness is lacking. It is the same with leprosy (Chap. 13).

All religious or Christian life is impossible without human formation and without the stability of the family. Love does not suffice for the making of a home if strength of character is absent or if a person marries without having learned to fulfill obligations: hence the importance of education or formation in the family. The law

<sup>13</sup>Among the birds, here are those you must consider unclean and not eat:

<sup>14</sup>the vulture, the eagle, the osprey, the hawk, the several kinds of buzzards, <sup>15</sup>all kinds of ravens, <sup>16</sup>the ostrich, the screech owl, the seagull, <sup>17</sup>the horned owl, the night owl, the seabird, the barn owl, <sup>18</sup>the ibis, the pelican, the white vulture, <sup>19</sup>the stork, the several kinds of heron, and the bat.

<sup>20</sup>All winged insects that move on four feet shall be unclean for you. <sup>21</sup>Of all the winged insects you may eat only the following: those that have legs above their feet so that they can leap over the ground.

<sup>22</sup>These are the ones you may eat: the several kinds of locusts, crickets and grasshoppers. <sup>23</sup>But all other winged insects that have four legs you are to consider unclean.

<sup>24</sup>Anyone who touches <sup>25</sup>or picks up the dead bodies of one of these animals will be unclean until evening. <sup>26</sup>The same with animals that have hoofs, unless their hoofs are divided and they chew the cud; <sup>27</sup>and also four-footed animals which walk on the flat of their feet. <sup>28</sup>Anyone who picks up their dead bodies must wash his clothing and will be unclean until evening.

<sup>29</sup>These are the small animals crawling on the ground that shall be unclean for you: rats, mice and several kinds of lizards: <sup>30</sup>the gecko, the chameleon, the agama, the skink and the mole. <sup>31</sup>Anyone who touches them when they are dead will be unclean until evening.

<sup>32</sup>Anything on which the dead body of any of these creatures falls becomes unclean: wooden utensil, clothing, skin, sackcloth—any utensil at all. It must be dipped in water and will remain unclean

until evening; then it will be clean. <sup>33</sup>If the creature falls into a clay pot, the pot must be broken; whatever the pot contains is unclean. <sup>34</sup>Any food on which water from such a pot has poured will be unclean. <sup>35</sup>Anything on which the dead body of such a creature may fall will be unclean: if it is a clay stove or oven, this must be broken; for they are unclean and you must treat them as unclean. <sup>36</sup>A spring or cistern for collecting water remains clean; but whoever touches the dead body becomes unclean. <sup>37</sup>If one of their dead bodies falls on any seed whatever, the seed will remain clean; <sup>38</sup>but if the seed has been wet, and such a dead body falls on it, then you must consider it unclean.

<sup>39</sup>If one of the animals that you use as food dies, then anyone who touches the dead body will be unclean until evening; <sup>40</sup>anyone who eats the meat of the dead animal must wash his clothing and will be unclean until the evening. And anyone who picks up the dead body will also be unclean until the evening and has to wash his clothing.

<sup>41</sup>All the creatures that swarm on the ground are unclean and may not be eaten. <sup>42</sup>Everything that crawls on its belly or goes on four legs, or has many legs, may not be eaten. <sup>43</sup>Do not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that might defile you, <sup>44</sup>for I am Yahweh your God. Take the way of holiness and be holy, for I am holy.

Do not make yourselves unclean with any of the creatures that swarm on the ground, <sup>45</sup>for I am Yahweh who brought you from the land of Egypt, that I might be your God. Be holy because I am holy.

19:2;  
22:30;  
1P 1:16

19:2;  
Jer 11:4;  
Mt 5:48;  
1P 1:  
15-16;  
1Jn 3:3

with its manifold precepts, many of which do no more than call for a basic dignity and humanity, prepares people to serve God in truth even if its instructions and its “exterior” rites (Rom 2:28) remain on the level of “the flesh” (Phil 3:3).

Many of the laws, whose purpose escapes us, served mainly to make God’s people different from others in terms of their meals, feasts and customs.

Israelites, who often settled in the midst of other people, were not to mix with their pagan neighbors: the law, by regulating their lives in every detail, prevented them from adopting the customs of others and prevented them from adopting their thinking as well. Although it is the interior attitude which must differentiate the believer from others, external discipline helps one become aware of one’s own spirit. Old Tes-

tament laws addressed a people who had not yet come to religious maturity and for that reason, imposed on them a different way of life.

These laws began to be strictly observed from the time of Ezra and were followed by the Jewish community of the last centuries before Christ. Nehemiah 13 illustrates the danger they were exposed to in being separated from other people.

In Jesus’ time, the Jews clung excessively to these prescriptions which were originally only certain external requirements for those wishing to take part in religious acts. Jesus criticized this confusion of legal purity with purity of conscience (Mk 7:15).

Verses 5-6. The Scriptures is not a book that teaches science.

<sup>46</sup>This is the law for animals and birds and for every living creature that moves in the water or that crawls on the ground. <sup>47</sup>Let everyone distinguish between the clean and the unclean, between creatures that may be eaten and creatures that may not.”

#### Purification of a woman after childbirth

**12** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses: <sup>2</sup>“Say to the Israelites: when a woman gives birth to a male child, she shall be unclean for seven days as in the days of her monthly period. <sup>3</sup>On the eighth day the child is to be circumcised; <sup>4</sup>then she shall wait for thirty-three days to be purified of her bleeding. She shall not touch anything that is consecrated nor enter the Sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed.

<sup>5</sup>If she gives birth to a daughter she shall be unclean for two weeks as in her menstruation; then she shall wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding.

<sup>6</sup>And when the days of her purification are completed whether for a son or daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the door of the tent of meeting, a lamb born that year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. <sup>7</sup>The priest shall then offer it to Yahweh to make atonement for her and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood.

This is the law for the woman who gives birth to a child, male or female. <sup>8</sup>But if she cannot offer a lamb, she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering, the other for a sin offering. The priest shall make atonement for her and she will be purified.”

#### A regulation for lepers

**13** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, <sup>2</sup>“If someone has a boil, an inflam-

mation or a sore on his skin which could develop into leprosy, he must be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of the priests, his descendants. <sup>3</sup>The priest shall examine him and if the hair on the sore has turned white and the sore appears to be deeper than the surrounding skin, then it is indeed the sore of leprosy. When the priest sees this, he shall declare that person unclean.

<sup>4</sup>But if the sore is white and does not appear to be deeper than the skin around it and the hairs have not turned white, the priest is to isolate the sick person for seven days. <sup>5</sup>On the seventh day the priest shall again examine him. If he sees that the sore looks the same and has not spread on the skin, he shall isolate the sick person for another seven days and once more examine him on the seventh day. <sup>6</sup>If the sore has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest shall declare that person clean: it was only eczema. Let him wash his clothes and he will be clean.

<sup>7</sup>But if the sore spreads over the skin after the sick person has been examined by the priest and declared clean, then he must present himself again to the priest. <sup>8</sup>After examining him and finding that the sore has spread over the skin, the priest must declare him unclean: it is leprosy.

<sup>9</sup>When a leprous disease strikes a man, he must be taken to the priest, <sup>10</sup>who must examine him, and if he finds on the skin a whitish swelling which turns the hairs white and an ulcer is forming, <sup>11</sup>then it is leprosy in the skin and the priest must declare him unclean. It is useless to isolate him for a time; he is unclean.

<sup>12</sup>But if the leprosy spreads all through the skin, if it covers him entirely from head to foot so far as the priest can see, <sup>13</sup>then the priest must examine the sick person and, if he finds that the leprosy covers his

Jesus and his mother submitted themselves to these rituals (Lk 2:21).

• **13.1** In cases of leprosy, which was considered a contagious disease, the sick person was required to live apart from the community. A leper was considered “unclean,” meaning that he could not participate in public or religious life (see what is said in 8:1 and 11:1).

At a time when misfortunes were thought to be divine punishment, leprosy was seen as a sign of a divine curse. The people easily believed that the leper excluded from the community was actually unclean in God’s eyes.

Gen  
17:10;  
Lk 2:21

Lk 2:  
22-38

Num  
12:10;  
Dt 24:8

• **12.1** Primitive people often contrast the “pure” and noble blood of a male, shed in wars, to the “impure” flow of blood during a woman’s period. Therefore, childbirth and a woman’s periods preoccupy men (they are the ones who impose the rules and make the laws) and they require purification rituals.

In this we see how, although they are part of the word of God, the rules of the Old Testament were adapted to ancient times and to the criteria of the people of Israel. God’s people were aware of this, which they expressed in their own way by saying that the law was planned by angels: Acts 7:38; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2.

whole body, declare the sick person clean. Since it has all turned white, he is clean. <sup>14</sup>But as soon as an open sore appears on him, he will be unclean. <sup>15</sup>After examining the sore, the priest is to declare him unclean: the open sore is leprous. <sup>16</sup>But if the sore becomes white again, the man must go to the priest. <sup>17</sup>The priest shall examine him and if he finds that the disease has turned white, he shall declare the sick person clean: he is clean.

<sup>18</sup>When an ulcer appears on a person's skin, which, after healing, <sup>19</sup>leaves a whitish swelling or a shiny spot of reddish white, that person must show himself to the priest. <sup>20</sup>The priest shall examine him, and if he finds a spot deeper than the surrounding skin and the hairs in it have turned white he shall declare him unclean: it is a case of leprosy that has broken out in a boil. <sup>21</sup>But if on examination the priest finds neither white hair in it nor a deep spot on the skin, but it is lighter in color, he shall isolate the sick person for seven days. <sup>22</sup>If the disease has indeed spread over the skin, he shall declare him unclean: it is a case of leprosy. <sup>23</sup>But if the shiny spot remains unchanged and has not spread, then it is only the scar of a boil and the priest is to declare the man clean.

<sup>24</sup>If someone has had a burn, and on the burn an ulcer forms, a shiny spot reddish white or whitish in color, <sup>25</sup>then the priest must examine it. If he finds that the hairs in that spot have turned white and it seems to be deeper than the surrounding skin, this means that leprosy has broken out in the burn. The priest shall declare the man unclean: it is a case of leprosy. <sup>26</sup>If on the other hand the priest on examination does not find white hair on the mark and it is not deeper than the surrounding skin, but is light in color, then the priest shall isolate him for seven days. <sup>27</sup>On the seventh day he shall examine him, and if the disease has spread on the skin, he shall declare him unclean: it is a case of leprosy. <sup>28</sup>If the mark is still unchanged and has not spread over the skin, but instead is light in color,

this means that it is only a swelling due to the burn. The priest shall declare the man clean: it is merely a burn scar.

<sup>29</sup>If a man or woman has a sore on the head or chin, <sup>30</sup>the priest must examine this sore; and if it seems to be deeper than the surrounding skin, with the hair on it yellow and thin, he must declare the sick person unclean. It is a dreaded skin disease, that is to say, leprosy of the head or chin. <sup>31</sup>If on examining this case the priest finds no spot which seems deeper than the surrounding skin, and no yellow hair, he shall isolate the person for seven days. <sup>32</sup>He shall examine the infected part on the seventh day, and if he finds that the disease has not spread, that the hair on it is not yellow, and that there is no spot which seems deeper than the surrounding skin, <sup>33</sup>the sick person will shave his hair, all except the part affected with the disease, and the priest is to isolate him again for seven days. <sup>34</sup>He must examine the infected part on the seventh day, and if he finds that it has not spread over the skin, and that there is no spot which seems deeper than the surrounding skin, the priest shall declare the sick person clean. After washing his clothes he will be clean. <sup>35</sup>But if after this purification the disease does spread over the skin, <sup>36</sup>the priest must examine him; if he finds that it has indeed spread over the skin, this means that the sick person is unclean, and there is no need to look and see whether the hair is yellow. <sup>37</sup>Whereas if, so far as he can see, the disease has not spread and dark hair is beginning to grow on it, this means that the sick person is cured. He is clean, and the priest is to declare him clean.

<sup>38</sup>If shiny spots break out on the skin of a man or woman, and if these spots are white, <sup>39</sup>the priest must examine them. If he finds them to be a dull white, it is a rash that has broken out on the skin: the sick person is clean.

<sup>40</sup>If a man loses the hair on top of his head, this is baldness of the scalp but the man is clean. <sup>41</sup>If he loses his hair from the

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Among their obligations, priests had to diagnose leprosy and prescribe the isolation of lepers. They were also responsible for verifying cures and for allowing lepers to return to their families. This is what Jesus recalled when he healed lepers (Mk 1:43).

Sacrifices for the purification of lepers were

part of ancient folk ways. The mysterious "sin" which, according to them, had caused leprosy, was transferred to two birds (14:5). One of them was killed so that the sin would disappear with the bird. For more assurance, the other bird was released to take far away that same sin now dissolved in the dead bird's blood (14: 6-7).

front of the head, this is baldness of the forehead but the man is clean. <sup>42</sup>If, however, a reddish white sore appears on the top of his head or forehead, this means that leprosy has broken out. <sup>43</sup>The priest must examine it, and if he finds a reddish white swelling on the head or forehead, which looks like leprosy of the skin, <sup>44</sup>this means that the man is leprous: he is unclean. The priest shall declare him unclean; he is suffering from leprosy of the head.

<sup>45</sup>A person infected with leprosy must wear torn clothing and leave his hair uncombed; he must cover his upper lip and cry, "Unclean, unclean." <sup>46</sup>As long as the disease lasts he must be unclean; and therefore he must live away from others: he must live outside the camp.

Num 5:2;  
2K 15:5;  
Lk 17:12

**"Leprosy" (mildew) on clothing**

<sup>47</sup>When a mark of mildew appears on a piece of clothing—woolen or linen clothing, <sup>48</sup>linen or woolen textile material or covering, leather or leatherwork—<sup>49</sup>and if this clothing, textile material, covering, leather or leather-work appears greenish or reddish, it is a spreading mildew to be shown to the priest. <sup>50</sup>The priest must examine it and put the object away for seven days. <sup>51</sup>If on the seventh day he observes that the mildew has spread on the garment, textile material, covering, leather or leatherwork, whatever it may be, it is a case of spreading mildew and the object is unclean. <sup>52</sup>The priest will burn this clothing, textile material, linen or woolen covering, leather article of any kind, on which the mildew has spread and which must be destroyed by fire.

<sup>53</sup>But if on examination the priest finds that the mildew has not spread on the clothing, textile material, covering or leather object whatever it may be, <sup>54</sup>he is to order the object to be washed and is to isolate it again for a period of seven days. <sup>55</sup>After the cleansing he must examine it again and if he finds that the mildew has not changed color, even though it has not spread, the article is unclean. It must be destroyed by fire.

<sup>56</sup>But if on examination the priest finds that the mildew has faded after washing, he is to cut it out of the clothing, leather, textile material or covering. <sup>57</sup>But if the mildew reappears on the same clothing, textile material, covering or leather article

whatever it may be, this means that the mildew is spreading again and the owner must destroy the article by fire. <sup>58</sup>The clothing, textile material, covering or leather article whatever it may be, from which the mildew disappears after washing, is to be clean after it has been washed a second time.

<sup>59</sup>Such is the law for a case of leprosy in a linen or woolen garment, in textile material, in clothing or in anything of skin—for judging whether it is clean or unclean."

**Purification from leprosy**

**14** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses: <sup>2</sup>"This shall be the law for the leper on the day of his purification.

He shall be brought to the priest <sup>3</sup>and the priest shall take him outside the camp and examine him. And if the person has been healed from leprosy, <sup>4</sup>the priest shall order two live, clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. <sup>5</sup>The priest shall also give orders that one of the birds be slain on an earthenware pot over fresh water. <sup>6</sup>He shall take the live bird and also the cedar wood, the crimson yarn and the hyssop, and he will plunge them together, including the live bird, in the blood of the bird that was slain over fresh water. <sup>7</sup>Then he will sprinkle the one to be purified seven times. After that he shall declare him clean and he shall let the live bird go free over the open fields.

Mt 8:4;  
Lk 17:14

<sup>8</sup>The person to be purified must wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe himself in water; then he will be clean. After this he may enter the camp but he must stay outside his tent for seven days. <sup>9</sup>On the seventh day he shall shave off all the hair on his head, chin and eyebrows. He shall wash his clothes, bathe himself in water and then he will be clean.

12:22;  
Ps 51:9;  
Heb 9:19

<sup>10</sup>On the eighth day he is to take two lambs and a yearling ewe lamb, all without defect, and three-tenths of a measure of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering and a log of oil. <sup>11</sup>The priest who declares him clean shall present the man to be purified and his offerings before Yahweh at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>12</sup>The priest will then take the first lamb and present it as a guilt offering together with the log of oil. He shall wave them before Yahweh. <sup>13</sup>He shall slaughter the male lamb in the



place where they slaughter the sin offering and the burnt offering—the holy place. For the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest; it is most holy.

<sup>14</sup>The priest shall then take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be purified, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. <sup>15</sup>The priest shall take the log of oil and pour it on the palm of his own left hand.

<sup>16</sup>Then, dipping his right forefinger in it, he shall sprinkle it seven times before Yahweh.

<sup>17</sup>Then he is to take a little of the oil that remains in the palm of his hand and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the man who is being purified, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, over the blood of the sacrifice of reparation. <sup>18</sup>The rest of the oil which is in his palm, he shall put on the head of the man who is being purified. In this way he shall perform over him the rite of atonement before Yahweh.

<sup>19</sup>Then the priest shall offer the sacrifice for sin, and perform the rite of atonement for the man who is being purified. After this he must slaughter the animal for the burnt offering <sup>20</sup>and offer it with the grain offering on the altar. When the priest has performed the rite of atonement over him in this way, the man will be clean.

<sup>21</sup>If the leper is poor and cannot afford all this, he shall take only one lamb for the guilt offering to be offered with the gesture of offering in the rite of atonement. And for the grain offering he will bring only one tenth of wheaten flour mixed with oil, and the log of oil, <sup>22</sup>and finally two turtledoves or two young pigeons—if he can afford them—one to be used as a sacrifice for sin and the other for the burnt offering. <sup>23</sup>On the eighth day he must bring them to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting before Yahweh, for his purification. <sup>24</sup>The priest is to take the lamb for the guilt offering and the log of oil, and present them before Yahweh with the gesture of offering. <sup>25</sup>Then he must slaughter the lamb for the guilt offering, take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the man who is being purified, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. <sup>26</sup>He is to pour the oil into the palm of his left hand, <sup>27</sup>and with this oil he must make seven sprinklings with his

finger before Yahweh. <sup>28</sup>He is to put some of it on the lobe of the right ear of the man who is being purified, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot as he did with the blood of the guilt offering. <sup>29</sup>The remainder of the oil in the palm of his hand he must put on the head of the man who is being purified, performing the rite of atonement over him before Yahweh. <sup>30</sup>Of the two turtledoves or two young pigeons—if he can afford them—he is to offer <sup>31</sup>a sacrifice for sin with one, and with the other a burnt offering together with a grain offering—if he can afford them. In this way the priest will have performed before Yahweh the rite of atonement over the person who is being purified.

<sup>32</sup>Such is the law concerning a person afflicted by leprosy who cannot afford the means for his purification.”

#### “Leprosy” in houses

<sup>33</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron; he said:

<sup>34</sup>“When you reach the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as your inheritance, if I strike a house with mildew in the land you are to possess, <sup>35</sup>the owner must come and warn the priest; he must say, ‘I have seen something like mildew in the house.’ <sup>36</sup>The priest is to give orders for the house to be emptied before he goes to examine the infection; thus nothing in the house will be declared unclean. Then the priest must go and look at the house; <sup>37</sup>and if on examination he finds reddish or greenish spots that appear to be eating into the wall, <sup>38</sup>the priest is to go out of the house, to the door, and shut it up for seven days. <sup>39</sup>On the seventh day he shall go back again and if on examination he finds that the infection has spread over the walls of the house, <sup>40</sup>he shall give orders for the affected stones to be removed and thrown into some unclean place outside the town. <sup>41</sup>Then he shall have all the inside of the house scraped, and the plaster that comes off must be emptied out into an unclean place outside the town. <sup>42</sup>The stones must be replaced by new ones and the house given a new coat of plaster.

<sup>43</sup>If the infection spreads again after the stones have been removed and the house scraped and re-plastered, <sup>44</sup>the priest is to come and examine it. If he finds that the infection has spread, this means that mildew

is affecting the house: it is unclean. <sup>45</sup>It must be pulled down and the stones, woodwork and all the plaster be taken to an unclean place outside the town.

<sup>46</sup>Anyone who enters the house while it is closed will be unclean until evening.

<sup>47</sup>Anyone who sleeps there must wash his clothing. <sup>48</sup>But if the priest finds, when he comes to examine the infection, that it has not spread in the house since it was plastered, he is to declare the house clean, for the infection is cured.

<sup>49</sup>As a sacrifice for the sin of the house, he is to take two birds, cedar wood, red cord and a sprig of hyssop. <sup>50</sup>He shall slaughter one of the birds in an earthenware pot over running water. <sup>51</sup>Then he shall take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the red cord and the live bird, and dip them into the blood of the bird that was slaughtered and into the running water. <sup>52</sup>He shall sprinkle the house seven times; and after having offered a sacrifice for the sin of the house with the blood of the bird, the running water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop and the red cord <sup>53</sup>he shall set the live bird free to fly out of the town into the open country. When the rite of atonement has been performed over the house in this way it will be clean.

<sup>54</sup>Such is the law for all cases <sup>55</sup>of dreaded skin diseases, mildew of clothing and houses, <sup>56</sup>swellings, scabs and shiny spots. It defines the cases when things are unclean and when they are clean. <sup>57</sup>Such is the law on leprosy.”

### Sexual impurities

**15** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron; he said,

<sup>2</sup>“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them:

<sup>3</sup>When a man has a discharge from his body, that discharge makes him unclean. The rules about his uncleanness are:

Whether his body allows the discharge to flow or whether it retains it, he is unclean.

<sup>4</sup>Any bed the man lies on and any seat he sits on shall be unclean. <sup>5</sup>Anyone who touches his bed must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.

<sup>6</sup>Anyone who sits on a seat where the man has sat must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening. <sup>7</sup>Anyone who touches the body of a man so affected must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening. <sup>8</sup>If the sick man spits on someone who is clean, that person must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.

<sup>9</sup>Any saddle the sick man travels on will be unclean. <sup>10</sup>All those who touch any object that may be under him will be unclean until evening. Anyone who picks up such an object must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.

<sup>11</sup>All those whom the sick man touches without washing his hands must wash their clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening. <sup>12</sup>Any clay pot the sick man touches must be broken and any wooden utensil must be rinsed.

<sup>13</sup>When the man suffering from a discharge is cured, he must allow seven days for his purification. He must wash his clothing and take a bath in running water and he will be clean. <sup>14</sup>On the eighth day he must take two turtledoves or two young pigeons and come before Yahweh at the entrance to the tent of meeting, and give them to the priest. <sup>15</sup>The priest is to offer a sacrifice for sin with one of them, and with the other a burnt offering. So the priest will perform the rite of atonement before Yahweh for the man's discharge.

<sup>16</sup>When a man has a seminal discharge, he must bathe his whole body with water and he shall be unclean until evening.

<sup>17</sup>Any clothing or leather touched by a seminal discharge must be washed and it will be unclean until evening. <sup>18</sup>When a

Num5:2,  
25 3:29

• **15.1** Among all primitive people we find a sacredness surrounding everything related to sex and birth. That is the origin, somehow, of these prescriptions about sexual purity and impurity. It would be wrong to interpret them as if sexual relations were impure in themselves; they are only so when the demands of genuine love are not respected.

The Canaanites, among whom the Israelites

settled, yielded to the forces of nature which they thought to be divine, and sexual orgies accompanied all their religious feasts. For the Israelites, however, the many purifications concerning sexual life reminded them that sex was part of human nature as God created it and that its drives had to be subject to the law of God. The baptized person is guided by other considerations: 1 Corinthians 6 and 7.

woman has slept with a man, both of them must take a bath and they will be unclean until evening.

<sup>19</sup>When a woman has a discharge of blood, and blood flows from her body, this uncleanness of her monthly periods shall last for seven days. Anyone who touches her will be unclean until evening. <sup>20</sup>Any bed she lies on will be unclean; any seat she sits on will be unclean.

<sup>21</sup>Anyone who touches her bed must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening. <sup>22</sup>Anyone who touches any seat she has sat on must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening. <sup>23</sup>If there is anything on the bed or the chair on which she sat, anyone who touches it will be unclean until evening.

<sup>24</sup>If a man sleeps with a woman who is unclean because of her monthly period, he shall be unclean for seven days. Any bed he lies on will be unclean.

<sup>25</sup>If a woman has a flow of blood for several days outside her period, or if her period is prolonged, during the time this flow lasts she shall be unclean as during her monthly periods. <sup>26</sup>Any bed she lies on during the time this flow lasts will be unclean as during her monthly period. Any seat she sits on will be unclean; as it would be during her monthly periods. <sup>27</sup>Anyone who touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.

<sup>28</sup>When she is cured of her flow, she will let seven days pass; then she will be clean. <sup>29</sup>On the eighth day she is to take two turtledoves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>30</sup>With one of them the priest is to offer a sacrifice for sin and with the other a burnt offering. This is the way in which the priest will perform the rite of atonement over her before Yahweh for the flow that made her unclean.

<sup>31</sup>Make the sons of Israel aware of everything unclean, lest they die because of defiling the Tent of my presence among them.

<sup>32</sup>Such is the law concerning a man with a discharge, anyone made unclean by a seminal discharge, <sup>33</sup>a woman unclean because of her monthly periods, a man or a woman with discharge, a man who sleeps with an unclean woman."

### The great day of atonement

**16** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the presence of Yahweh.

<sup>2</sup>Yahweh said to Moses, "Tell your brother, Aaron, not to enter at any time he pleases the Most Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the Ark, lest he die, for I appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.

<sup>3</sup>This is how Aaron will enter the Holy Place with a bullock for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. <sup>4</sup>He is to put on the sacred linen tunic and linen undergarments next to his body; he is to have the linen sash around him and wear the linen turban. These are sacred garments, so he must bathe in water before he puts them on.

<sup>5</sup>The assembly of the Israelites has to give him two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. <sup>6</sup>Then Aaron shall offer the bullock for a sin offering for himself to make atonement for himself and for his household. <sup>7</sup>He shall take the two male goats and present them to Yahweh at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>8</sup>He is to cast lots for the two goats, one lot for Yahweh and one lot for Azazel. <sup>9</sup>Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot fell for Yahweh as a sin offering. <sup>10</sup>But the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel will be placed alive before Yahweh to make atonement by being sent into the wilderness as a scapegoat.

<sup>11</sup>Aaron will then bring the bullock as a sin offering for himself to make atonement for himself and his household and he shall slaughter the bullock for the sin offering which is for himself. <sup>12</sup>Then he shall take a censer full of coals from the fire above the altar before Yahweh and two handfuls of

• **16.1** The ceremony for the feast of Atonement was very expressive: one of two rams was set aside to carry the punishment for sin and therefore had to die; the other was sent off toward Azazel. Symbolically the he-goat bore the sins of the people.

The Letter to the Hebrews, Chapters 9 and

10, recalls these Jewish rituals when it mentions the forgiveness of sins that Christ won through his death and resurrection.

In verses 29-34 it is again said that these commands will be the everlasting law: how do we explain that the Church canceled them when Christ came? Paul explains this in Galatians 3-5.

Gen  
31:34

Ezk  
18:6

Mt  
9:20

Num  
29:7;  
Heb  
9:7

Heb 6:19

powdered, fragrant incense and take them inside the veil. <sup>13</sup>He shall put the incense on the fire before Yahweh and the cloud of incense will cover the mercy seat that is on the Ark of the Covenant, so that he will not die. <sup>14</sup>He will take the blood of the bullock and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat to the east and also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle blood seven times. <sup>15</sup>Then he shall slay the goat for the sin offering of the people and take its blood inside the veil and do with its blood what he did with the blood of the bullock. He shall sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of it. <sup>16</sup>In this way he shall make atonement for the Holy Place because of the uncleanness of the Israelites and because of all their sins. And he shall do the same for the tent of meeting which stands among them in the midst of all their uncleanness.

<sup>17</sup>No one shall be in the tent of meeting from the time Aaron goes to make atonement until he comes out. After he has made atonement for himself, for his household and for the whole assembly of Israel, <sup>18</sup>he shall go out to the altar before Yahweh and make atonement for it. Then he shall take some of the bullock's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on the horns of the altar on all sides. <sup>19</sup>He shall sprinkle it with blood seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

<sup>20</sup>When he has finished making atonement for the Holy Place, for the tent of meeting and for the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. <sup>21</sup>He shall lay his hands on the head of the goat and confess over it all the wickedness of the sons of Israel and all the sins they have committed against me. So he will charge them on the head of the goat and send it away to the wilderness by the hand of an assistant. <sup>22</sup>So the goat will carry away all their wickedness to an arid land, when the man releases it in the wilderness.

<sup>23</sup>Then Aaron is to go into the tent of meeting and take off the linen garments he had put on before he entered the sacred place. He shall leave them there, <sup>24</sup>bathe himself with water in a sacred place and put on his clothes. After that he will come out and sacrifice the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people to make atonement for himself and the people. <sup>25</sup>The fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar.

<sup>26</sup>The man who releases the scapegoat to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, after which he may re-enter the camp. <sup>27</sup>The bullock of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be brought outside the camp and they shall burn their hides, their flesh and their dung in the fire. <sup>28</sup>The one who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, after which he may re-enter the camp.

<sup>29</sup>This shall be a lasting ordinance for you: on the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and do no work—neither the native nor the stranger living among you—<sup>30</sup>for on this day atonement will be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be cleansed of your sins before Yahweh. <sup>31</sup>It is a Sabbath of solemn rest when you must deny yourselves. It is a lasting ordinance. <sup>32</sup>The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father will make atonement. He shall put on the linen garments, the holy garments, <sup>33</sup>and will make atonement for the Holy Place, for the tent of meeting and for the altar. He shall also make atonement for the priests and all the people of the assembly. <sup>34</sup>This shall be for you a lasting ordinance to make atonement for the people of Israel once a year, because of all their sins."

And Moses did as Yahweh commanded him.

## THE LAW OF HOLINESS

**17** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>"Speak to Aaron, his sons and all the Isra-

elites and say to them: This is what Yahweh has commanded: <sup>3</sup>Any man from the

• **17.1** In this chapter, we have the beginning of the *Law of Holiness*, or, the law of a people consecrated to God.

The law about blood was a way of instructing about and instilling a sense of the sacred meaning of life. This is summarized in Chapter 17.

house of Israel who kills an ox, or a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside the camp<sup>4</sup> and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to make an offering of it to Yahweh before the tabernacle of Yahweh—that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed. He has shed blood and he shall be cut off from among his people.

<sup>5</sup>The reason for this ordinance is so that the sons of Israel may bring the sacrifices that they used to slay in the fields to Yahweh at the entrance to the tent of meeting, to the priests, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace to Yahweh.

<sup>6</sup>The priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of Yahweh at the entrance to the tent of meeting and burn the fat as a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh. <sup>7</sup>This way they shall no longer slay their sacrifices for the goat idols to whom they prostituted themselves.

This is to be a lasting ordinance for them in the generations to come.

### You shall not eat blood

<sup>8</sup>Then you shall give them this ordinance: Any man from the house of Israel or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice<sup>9</sup> and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to sacrifice it to Yahweh, that man shall be cut off from his people.

<sup>10</sup>If any man from the house of Israel or any alien living among them eats blood, I will set my face against that person and I will cut him off from among his people. <sup>11</sup>For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you to rescue your life on

the altar. Offered blood makes atonement because of the life within it. That is why I said to the sons of Israel: No one among you shall eat blood, nor may any alien who lives among you eat blood.

<sup>12</sup>If any Israelite or any alien living among you snares in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten, <sup>13</sup>he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust. <sup>14</sup>For the blood of every creature contains its life and I have therefore said to the people of Israel: You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is within its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.

<sup>15</sup>And every person who eats an animal that dies or that is torn by wild beasts, whether he be a native or an alien, shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and remain unclean until evening; then he will be purified. <sup>16</sup>But if he does not wash his clothes or bathe his body, he shall carry his guilt.”

### The law of holiness

**18** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, <sup>2</sup>“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them: I am Yahweh, your God.

<sup>3</sup>You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you used to live, nor shall you do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not follow their practices. <sup>4</sup>My practices instead you will follow, and you will carry out my ordinances; I am Yahweh your God.

Just as with most primitive people, the Hebrews believed that life was in the blood. Therefore, blood was sacred, even the blood of animals, and could only be offered to God (see Gen 9:5). If it was not offered on the altar, it must be poured on the ground, but must not be consumed.

Even at the time of Christ, the Jews felt such a repulsion for blood that, for some years, Christians from other nations observed that law in order not to scandalize their Jewish brothers (Acts 15).

Verse 11 explains why Christ chose a death in which he shed his blood. Whenever we read “Christ saved us through his blood,” we must understand “through the offering of his life.”

• **18.1** The Law of Holiness continues with more sexual prohibitions. These bans, now seen

by many people as outdated prejudices, are, in fact, basic to human dignity in the sense that they submit whims to a law. They are also at the root of married fidelity and of mutual respect between members of the same family.

As was mentioned in Chapter 15, the Canaanites did not know these bases of human culture (*you shall not do what is done in the land of Canaan* [v.3]) and the Israelites saw in such rules a moral responsibility closely related to their Covenant with Yahweh which made them into a holy people different from all the other people.

The Israelites, comparing their history to that of Canaanites, already understood what Paul later would clearly say: “The person who sows for the benefit of his own flesh shall reap corruption and death from the flesh” (Gal 6:8). Sexual liberty is attractive as long as one does not notice

Acts  
15:20;  
Heb  
9:22

7:24;  
Ezk 4:14

2K 23:8

Dt 12:14

7:26;  
Gen 9:4;  
Dt 12:16

23:24

<sup>5</sup>Keep my practices and ordinances, for whoever keeps them finds life; I am Yahweh.

Dt 4:1; Ezk 20:11; Ne 9:29; Pro 4:4; Lk 10:28; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12

<sup>6</sup>None of you shall have sexual intercourse with a blood relative; I am Yahweh.

<sup>7</sup>Do not have intercourse with your father or your mother; she is your mother, don't have intercourse with her.

Gen 35:22

<sup>8</sup>Do not have intercourse with your father's wife: Respect your father.

<sup>9</sup>Do not have intercourse with your sister or your stepsister, whether born in the same house or elsewhere. <sup>10</sup>Do not have intercourse with your granddaughter; that would dishonor you.

<sup>11</sup>Do not have intercourse with a half sister; she, too, is your sister. <sup>12</sup>Do not have intercourse with an aunt, whether she is your father's sister <sup>13</sup>or your mother's sister.

<sup>14</sup>Do not have intercourse with your uncle's wife; she, too, is your aunt.

<sup>15</sup>Do not have intercourse with your daughter-in-law <sup>16</sup>or with your brother's wife.

<sup>17</sup>Do not have intercourse with both a woman and her daughter or her granddaughter; they are blood relatives; that is wickedness.

<sup>18</sup>While your wife is living, do not take her sister as a wife so that you make her jealous.

<sup>19</sup>Do not have intercourse with a woman during her monthly period.

<sup>20</sup>Do not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her.

<sup>21</sup>Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech and do not profane the name of your God; I am Yahweh.

2K 17:17; Jer 7:31

<sup>22</sup>Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination.

Gen 19:5

<sup>23</sup>Also do not have sexual relations with an animal; that is infamous.

<sup>24</sup>Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways for this is how the nations I am driving out before you, became defiled. <sup>25</sup>As the land was defiled I came to punish it, and it has vomited out its inhabitants.

<sup>26</sup>You shall keep my practices and ordinances, and you shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native nor the alien living among you. <sup>27</sup>Recall the people who did all these things before you in these lands and became defiled. <sup>28</sup>If you defile the land it will vomit you out as it did the nations before you. <sup>29</sup>The one who does any of these abominations shall be cut off from his people.

<sup>30</sup>Keep my laws and do not follow any of these abominable customs which were practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves by them; I am Yahweh, your God."

**19** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, <sup>2</sup>"Speak to the entire assembly of the people of Israel and say to them: Be holy for I, Yahweh, your God, am holy.

22:30; 1P 1:16

<sup>3</sup>Each of you must revere his mother and father; and you shall keep my Sabbaths; I am Yahweh, your God.

<sup>4</sup>Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am Yahweh, your God.

<sup>5</sup>When you offer a sacrifice of peace offering to Yahweh, sacrifice it so that you may be accepted. <sup>6</sup>It shall be eaten on the day you offer it or on the next day. And whatever remains shall be burned on the third day. <sup>7</sup>If it is eaten on the third day it is unclean and will not be accepted. <sup>8</sup>Whoever eats it will pay for his sin, for he has

the aging of his heart and the untruthfulness of his language. At the level of society, sexual liberty means the sterile couple, individuals unfit for strong commitment, and before long, the death of a people.

*Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed (v. 21).* This, too, was done in Canaan. Where instincts rule, there is no respect for life. It was among God's people that the dignity of the human person was discovered. Cannibalism was practiced among the most refined groups of

China. Among most ancient peoples, a father had the right to destroy a newborn child, not to mention the right to offer human sacrifice.

*If you defile the land it will vomit you out (v. 28).* In the Promised Land the Israelites have to live according to the laws of Yahweh; if they do not observe them, they will be exiled. This stay in the promised land is a sign in the Scriptures. See in particular Deuteronomy 8. Paul recalls this in Galatians 5:21.

profaned a holy thing of Yahweh and this person shall be cut off from his people.

### Love your neighbor as yourself

Di24:19;  
Ru 2:15

• <sup>9</sup>When you reap the harvest of your land do not reap to the extreme limits of your field or gather the gleanings after your harvest. <sup>10</sup>Do not strip your vineyard bare and do not gather the grapes that have fallen; leave them for the needy and the stranger. I am Yahweh, your God.

20:7;  
Mt 5:33

<sup>11</sup>Do not steal or lie or deceive one another. <sup>12</sup>Do not swear falsely by my name so as to profane the name of your God; I am Yahweh.

Di24:14;  
Jas 5:4

<sup>13</sup>Do not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. <sup>14</sup>You shall not curse a deaf man nor put a stumbling block in the way of the blind; but you shall fear your God; I am Yahweh.

Di27:18

<sup>15</sup>Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor nor bow to the great; you are to judge your neighbor fairly so as not to share in his guilt. <sup>16</sup>Do not go about as a slanderer of your people and do not seek the death of your neighbor; I am Yahweh.

Mt 18:15

<sup>17</sup>Do not hate your brother in your heart; rebuke your neighbor frankly so as not to share in his guilt. <sup>18</sup>Do not seek

Rom  
12:19;  
Mt 5:43;  
19:19;  
22:39;

• **19.9** Among so many laws which show the still primitive level of God's people, we marvel to find some prescriptions that teach deeply human attitudes often lacking in us.

These prescriptions, addressed to a race of small farmers, must be interpreted in order to adapt them to the circumstances of our present lives.

They teach us that the "right of ownership" is not absolute and that it never justifies oppression of the poor, nor does it excuse us from helping them. We are ordered to care for our brothers and sisters to assure everyone what is necessary to live.

*Do not seek revenge... but love your neighbor as yourself (v. 18).* Here, *neighbor* means *the brother of the same race*. They must be loved and there must be solidarity with them

revenge or nurture a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh.

Rom  
13:9;  
Gal5:14;  
Jas 2:8

• <sup>19</sup>Keep my practices. You shall not let your cattle breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed and you shall not wear clothing made of two different materials.

<sup>20</sup>If a man lies with a woman who is a slave promised to another man, and she has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there shall be punishment. They shall not be put to death because she was not free, <sup>21</sup>but he shall bring a ram as a guilt offering to Yahweh for himself, to the door of the tent of meeting. <sup>22</sup>The priest is to make atonement for him before Yahweh with the ram of the guilt offering, and the sin he has committed will be forgiven.

<sup>23</sup>When you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, you shall count the fruit as unclean. For three years it shall be unclean for you and it must not be eaten. <sup>24</sup>In the fourth year all the fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord. <sup>25</sup>But in the fifth year you may eat of the fruit, that its yield may increase for you. I am Yahweh, your God.

<sup>26</sup>Do not eat anything over the blood nor practice divination or astrology. <sup>27</sup>Do not round off the side-growth of your heads or clip off the edges of your beard. <sup>28</sup>Do not make cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead or make tattoo marks on yourselves. I am Yahweh.

Di 18:  
10-12

<sup>29</sup>You shall not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness.

Di 23:18

because God embraces with the same love all those who belong to his people.

Such a solidarity with those of one's own nation exists in all religions but there is as well the aggression or hostility towards the foreigner. When Jesus speaks to us of love which does not cease at the frontiers of a people (Lk 10:25; Mt 5:43), it will not be a simple extension of the term "neighbor": it will be the discovery of another relation beyond the solidarity practiced naturally by humans as in the case with certain animals.

• 19. Various customs of pagan religions were also forbidden. Mediums and fortune-tellers were also forbidden just as in Deuteronomy 18:10.

<sup>30</sup>Keep my Sabbaths and revere my Sanctuary. I am Yahweh.

<sup>31</sup>Do not turn to mediums or spiritists for you will be defiled by them. I am Yahweh, your God. Dt 18:11; 1S 28:3; Is 8:19

<sup>32</sup>Rise in the presence of the aged and honor the elderly; in doing this you honor your God. I am Yahweh.

<sup>33</sup>When a stranger stays with you in your land, do him no wrong. <sup>34</sup>He shall be to you as the native among you. Love him as yourself for you have been strangers in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh, your God. 22:20; Dt 24:17; Ezk 47:22

<sup>35</sup>Do no wrong in judgment or in measure or weight or quantity. <sup>36</sup>Use honest scales and honest weights and exact containers. I am Yahweh, your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Dt 25:13; Hos 12:8; Am 8:5; Pro 11:1

<sup>37</sup>You shall keep all my laws and all my practices and follow them. I am Yahweh.” 18

**Some punishments**

**20** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses <sup>2</sup>saying, “To the Israelites you shall say this:

Any man from the people of Israel or from among the aliens living in Israel who gives any of his children for the Molech sacrifice, shall be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him. <sup>3</sup>I shall set my face against that man and cut him off from among his people, for by giving his children to Molech he has defiled my Sanctuary and profaned my holy name. <sup>4</sup>And if the people of the land hide their eyes from what that man does and do not put him to death, <sup>5</sup>then I will set my face against them and against their family and cut them off from their people. I will do the same to all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech. 18; 21

<sup>6</sup>I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists and prostitutes himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people.

<sup>7</sup>Take the way of holiness so that you be holy for I am Yahweh, your God. <sup>8</sup>You

shall keep my laws and practice them. I, Yahweh, your God am the one who makes you holy. <sup>9</sup>The man who curses his father or mother shall be put to death. He has cursed his father or mother. He himself shall account for his blood. 21:17

<sup>10</sup>If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife, the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death. <sup>11</sup>If a man lies with his father’s wife, he has dishonored his father, both of them shall be put to death. They themselves shall account for their blood. Dt 23:1; 1Cor 5:1

<sup>12</sup>If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall be put to death for they have committed incest. They themselves shall account for their blood.

<sup>13</sup>When a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both have committed a detestable act and they shall be put to death. They themselves shall account for their blood.

<sup>14</sup>It is wicked for a man to marry both a woman and her mother. He and they must be burned in the fire so that there may be no wickedness among you.

<sup>15</sup>A man who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death and the animal killed. <sup>16</sup>If a woman approaches an animal to mate with it, kill the woman and the animal. They shall be put to death. They themselves shall account for their blood.

<sup>17</sup>If a man takes his sister, the daughter of his father or his mother and they have sexual relations, it is a shameful thing and they shall be cut off before the eyes of their people. He has dishonored his sister and carries his guilt.

<sup>18</sup>A man who lies with a woman during her monthly period and has intercourse with her has exposed the source of her flow and she has uncovered it. Both of them shall be cut off from among their people.

<sup>19</sup>You shall not have intercourse with the sister of your father or mother, for that would dishonor a close relative. Both

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*The stranger shall be to you as the native among you (v. 34). You will note that Scripture, which forbids sharing with pagan foreigners, always insists on respecting the alien living in Israel. Along with widows and orphans, foreigners are the most defenseless and they must be protected.*

• **20.1** This chapter lists penalties corresponding to the previously listed faults. In some

cases, human justice punishes. In others, people are threatened with God’s curse.

Chapters 21 and 22 deal with the responsibilities and privileges of the priests. All these details may seem too external and foreign to the authentic sanctity which the priestly office requires. But, in those days, these prescriptions were valuable teaching and they still teach us about the sacredness of serving the Lord.



14:4 would be guilty. <sup>20</sup>The man who lies with his aunt dishonors his uncle. They will be guilty and die childless. <sup>21</sup>It is a wickedness for a man to take his brother's wife. He has dishonored his brother and they will be childless.

Num 13:27; Dt 6:3; Jer 11:5 <sup>22</sup>Keep, therefore, all my decrees and laws and act according to them so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out of it. <sup>23</sup>You shall not follow the customs of the nations I shall drive out before you. I felt hatred for them for they did all these things. <sup>24</sup>Because of this I said to you: You will possess their land and it is I who give it to you as your possession, a land flowing with milk and honey.

I, Yahweh, your God have set you apart from the nations. <sup>25</sup>You must therefore set the clean beast apart from the unclean, and the clean bird apart from the unclean and you shall not defile yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps along the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean.

<sup>26</sup>You are to be holy for me as I am holy, Yahweh, your God, and I have set you apart from the nations to be mine.

19:31; Dt 18:11; 2K 23:24 <sup>27</sup>Now a man or a woman who is a spiritist shall be put to death; he or she shall be stoned and they shall account for their own blood."

**21** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, sons of Aaron and tell them that not one of them shall make himself unclean for a dead person among his people <sup>2</sup>except for those relatives nearest to him, that is for his mother, father, son, daughter or brother, <sup>3</sup>or for an unmarried sister who is dependent on him because she has had no husband. For her, he may make himself unclean. <sup>4</sup>As a husband he must not make himself unclean for his family-in-law and so profane himself.

Dt 14:1 <sup>5</sup>They shall not make tonsures on their heads nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts in their flesh.

<sup>6</sup>They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for it is they who present offerings by fire, the bread of their God, so they shall be holy. <sup>7</sup>They must not marry women unclean by prostitution or a woman divorced by her husband, for the priest is holy to his God. <sup>8</sup>You shall regard the priest as holy for he offers up the food of your God. Holy he shall be

for you because I, Yahweh, am holy who makes you holy.

<sup>9</sup>If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she profanes her father and shall be burned in the fire.

<sup>10</sup>The high priest, the one among his brothers on whose head the anointing oil has been poured, and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head or tear his clothes. <sup>11</sup>He shall not go near any dead person or defile himself either for his father or his mother. <sup>12</sup>He shall not leave the Sanctuary nor profane the Sanctuary of his God for he has on him the consecration of the anointing oil of his God. I am Yahweh.

<sup>13</sup>The woman he marries must be a virgin. <sup>14</sup>He shall not take as wife a widow or a divorced woman or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin of his own people, <sup>15</sup>that he may not defile his children among his people. I am Yahweh who makes him holy."

<sup>16</sup>Yahweh said to Moses, <sup>17</sup>"Say to Aaron: No man among your descendants in future generations who has a defect shall approach to offer the bread of his God. <sup>18</sup>No man who has a defect may come near, no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed <sup>19</sup>or who has a broken foot or hand, <sup>20</sup>or is a hunchback or dwarf, or who has an eye defect or eczema or scabs or damaged testicles. <sup>21</sup>The descendant of Aaron the priest who has a defect shall not approach to offer the burnt offering to Yahweh. He must not approach to offer the bread of his God because of the defect he has. <sup>22</sup>He may eat the bread of his God, both the most holy and the holy, <sup>23</sup>but he may not go as far as the veil or advance towards the altar because he has a defect. Let him not defile my Sanctuary, for it is I, Yahweh, who make them holy."

<sup>24</sup>Thus spoke Moses to Aaron and to his sons and to all Israel.

**22** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: <sup>2</sup>"Tell Aaron and his sons when they have to abstain from the holy offerings of the people of Israel, lest they profane my holy name; for I am the one who makes them holy. I am Yahweh. <sup>3</sup>Tell them this:

Anyone of your descendants, in any generation, who in a state of uncleanness approaches the holy offerings consecrated

to Yahweh by the people of Israel, shall be outlawed from my presence. I am Yahweh.

<sup>4</sup>Anyone of Aaron's line who is afflicted with leprosy or a discharge must not eat holy things until he is clean. Anyone who touches something made unclean by a dead body, or has a seminal discharge, <sup>5</sup>or is made unclean by touching either some creeping thing or some man who has communicated to him his own uncleanness of whatever kind, <sup>6</sup>in short, anyone who has had any such contact shall be unclean until evening, and must not eat holy things until he has taken a bath. <sup>7</sup>At sunset he will be clean and may then eat holy things, for these are his food.

<sup>17:15</sup> <sup>8</sup>He must not eat an animal that has died a natural death or been killed by wild animals; he would become unclean by doing this. I am Yahweh.

<sup>9</sup>Let them keep these rules and not burden themselves with sin lest they die because of having defiled this food. I am Yahweh who makes them holy.

<sup>10</sup>No layperson may eat any of the sacred offerings: neither the guest of a priest, nor his hired servant. <sup>11</sup>But if the priest has acquired a slave by purchase, the slave may eat them. Likewise anyone born in the house may eat a share of the food.

<sup>12</sup>If a priest's daughter marries someone who is not a priest, she must not eat the holy portion set aside; <sup>13</sup>but if she is widowed or divorced and, being childless, has had to return to her father's house as when she was young, she may eat her father's food. No layperson may eat it; <sup>14</sup>if someone does eat a holy thing unintentionally, he shall restore it to the priest with one-fifth added.

<sup>15</sup>They must not profane the holy offerings which the people of Israel have set aside for Yahweh. <sup>16</sup>If they ate of them, they would have to pay a guilt offering. I am Yahweh, who have sanctified these offerings."

<sup>17</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

<sup>18</sup>"Tell this to Aaron, to his sons, and to all the people of Israel:

<sup>19</sup>This rule refers to anyone of the Israelites or to any stranger living in Israel who brings anything for a burnt offering either in payment of a vow or as a voluntary gift.

To be welcomed, he must offer a male ox, sheep or goat without any defect. <sup>20</sup>You must not offer one that has defects; for it would not make you acceptable. Dt 17:1; Mal 1:8

<sup>21</sup>If anyone offers to Yahweh a peace offering either to fulfill a vow or as a voluntary offering, the animal—from the herd or from the flock—will not please Yahweh unless it be without any defect. <sup>22</sup>You must not offer to Yahweh an animal that is blind, lame, mutilated, ulcerous, or suffering from skin disease or a sore. No part of such an animal shall be laid on the altar as a burnt offering for Yahweh. <sup>23</sup>As a voluntary offering, you may offer a bull or a lamb that is underdeveloped or deformed; but such will not be accepted in payment of a vow. <sup>24</sup>Don't offer to Yahweh an animal if its testicles have been bruised, crushed, removed or cut. This is not permitted in your land, <sup>25</sup>and you are not to accept any such from the hands of a stranger, to offer as food for your God. Their deformity is a defect and they would not make you acceptable."

<sup>26</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

<sup>27</sup>"A calf, lamb, or kid shall stay with its mother seven days after birth. From the eighth day it will be acceptable as a burnt offering to Yahweh. <sup>28</sup>No animal, whether cow or ewe, shall be slaughtered on the same day as its young. 22:29

<sup>29</sup>If you offer Yahweh a sacrifice of thanksgiving, do it so that Yahweh may be pleased. <sup>30</sup>You must eat it the same day, and nothing should be left till the morning. I am Yahweh.

**Final exhortation**

<sup>31</sup>You must keep my commands and put them into practice. I am Yahweh. <sup>32</sup>You must not profane my holy name, so that I may be proclaimed holy among the people of Israel, I, Yahweh who sanctify you. <sup>33</sup>I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God, I am Yahweh." Jer 11:4

**The annual feasts**

**23** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses, <sup>2</sup>"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: You proclaim holy assemblies on the appointed feasts of Yahweh, which are these: 23:14; 34:18; Dt 16:11

• **23.1** Here we are dealing with the feasts or "days" of Yahweh. God's people gather not only to celebrate their joys and sorrows: God is the

one who summons them for his feasts through those responsible for his church (do not forget that *church* means: *assembly* or *congregation*).

<sup>3</sup>After six days in which work shall be done, there is a Sabbath of complete rest on the seventh day, a holy assembly when no work shall be done; it is a Sabbath to Yahweh in all your houses.

<sup>4</sup>Then there are the appointed feasts of Yahweh at the times fixed for them, when you are to proclaim holy assemblies.

<sup>5</sup>At twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month is Yahweh's Passover. <sup>6</sup>And on the fifteenth day of this month it is Yahweh's feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you shall eat bread without leaven. <sup>7</sup>On the first day there will be a sacred assembly and no work of a worker shall be done. <sup>8</sup>For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to Yahweh and on the seventh day you shall hold a sacred assembly and do no work of a worker."

### Offering of the first sheaf

• <sup>9</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, <sup>10</sup>"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you enter the land that I will give you and you reap its harvest, you will bring to the priest a sheaf, the first fruits of your harvest <sup>11</sup>and he shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh for you to be accepted; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

<sup>12</sup>The day when you wave the sheaf, you shall sacrifice a lamb without de-

fect, born that year, as a burnt offering to Yahweh. <sup>13</sup>And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of a measure of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to Yahweh, a sweet-smelling offering, with its drink offering of a quarter of a measure of wine.

<sup>14</sup>You shall eat neither bread nor grain, whether roasted or new, until the very day you bring the offering to your God. This is to be an everlasting ordinance for all generations throughout your residences.

<sup>15</sup>From the day after the Sabbath, on which you bring the sheaf of offering, you are to count seven full weeks. <sup>16</sup>The day after the seventh Sabbath will be the fiftieth day and then you are to offer Yahweh a new offering. <sup>17</sup>You must bring bread from your houses to present with the gesture of offering—two loaves, made of two tenths of wheaten flour baked with leaven; these are first fruits for Yahweh. <sup>18</sup>In addition to the bread you must offer seven one-year-old lambs without any defect, a young bull and two rams, as a burnt offering to Yahweh together with a grain offering and drink offering, as a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh.

<sup>19</sup>You are also to offer a goat as a sacrifice for sin, and two one-year-old lambs as a peace offering. <sup>20</sup>The priest shall present

DL 26:1;  
29:24

The weekly day of rest (in Hebrew, Sabbath means rest) is the first of these sacred encounters with God (v. 3).

Then come the three great feasts of Israel:

– the week of unleavened bread, which began with the Passover and recalled the departure from Egypt (vv. 9-14);

– the feast of the seven weeks, or Pentecost (which means *fiftieth day*) which was connected with the remembrance of the law given on Sinai (vv. 15-21);

– the feast of Tabernacles, or of booths, to recall the years in the desert (vv. 33-34).

The yearly day of Atonement to ask forgiveness for the people's sins (vv. 26-32) was celebrated for a while along with the New Year, or during the feast of Tabernacles until it became fixed on a special day.

• 9. Below we single out the offering of the sheaf of the first fruits, during the feast of unleavened bread, marking the beginning of the harvest.

God does not need anything. If he does ask something from us it is because we need to give of ourselves to be truly human. There is no feast, no shared happiness, no soothed heart if something is not sacrificed.

*Tithing* or the tenth part of the fruits offered to God, which will serve to feed the Levites and the poor, becomes spiritual wealth for the people of the Scriptures.

In many churches or Christian groups, the members of the community give the tenth part of their revenue: no one, even in poor countries, has become poorer.

The first sheaf offered to God may also mean the first part of the workday given to God; the first contribution of the month given to assist a companion in need; the first moment of rest which spouses together offer to the Lord; it means each believer's cooperation in the church affairs to make the church free before the powerful.

them before Yahweh with the gesture of offering, in addition to the bread of the first fruits. These, and the two lambs, are holy things for Yahweh, and will belong to the priest.

<sup>21</sup>This same day you are to hold an assembly; this shall be a sacred assembly for you; you will do no work of a worker. This is a perpetual law for your descendants wherever you live.

<sup>22</sup>When you gather the harvest in your country, you are not to harvest to the very end of your field, and you are not to gather the gleanings of the harvest. You are to leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am Yahweh your God."

Ne 8:15 <sup>23</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

<sup>24</sup>"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: The first day of the seventh month shall be a day of rest for you, a sacred assembly proclaimed with trumpet call.

<sup>25</sup>You must not do any work of a worker and you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh."

<sup>26</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: <sup>27</sup>"The tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. You are to hold a sacred assembly. You must fast, and you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh.

<sup>28</sup>You are not to do any work that day, for it is the Day of Atonement, on which the rite of atonement will be performed over you before Yahweh your God. <sup>29</sup>Indeed, anyone who fails to fast that day shall be outlawed from his people; <sup>30</sup>anyone who works that day I will remove from his people. <sup>31</sup>No work must be done—this is a perpetual law for your descendants wherever you live. <sup>32</sup>This is to be a day of Sabbath rest for you. You must fast; on the evening of the ninth day of the month, from this to the following evening, you must cease to work."

<sup>33</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: <sup>34</sup>"Speak to the Israelites and say to them:

The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of Tents for Yahweh, lasting seven days. <sup>35</sup>The first day you shall hold an assembly; you must do no work of a worker. <sup>36</sup>For seven days you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh. On the eighth day you are to hold a sacred assembly and you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh. It is a day of solemn assembly in which you shall do no work of a worker.

<sup>37</sup>These are the appointed feasts of Yahweh in which you are to proclaim holy

assemblies for the purpose of offering offerings by fire, burnt offerings, grain offerings and drink offerings to Yahweh, according to the ritual of each day, <sup>38</sup>besides the Sabbaths of Yahweh and the presents, and the votive and voluntary gifts that you make to Yahweh.

<sup>39</sup>On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have harvested the produce of the land, you are to celebrate the feast of Yahweh for seven days. On the first and eighth days there shall be a complete rest. <sup>40</sup>On the first day you shall take choice fruits, palm branches, boughs of leafy trees and willows from the riverbank, and for seven days you shall rejoice in the presence of Yahweh your God. <sup>41</sup>You are to celebrate a feast for Yahweh in this way for seven days every year. This is a perpetual law for your descendants.

<sup>42</sup>You are to keep this feast in the seventh month. For seven days you are to live in tents and shelters: all natives of Israel must live in tents and shelters, <sup>43</sup>so that your descendants may know that I made the Israelites live in tents when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God."

<sup>44</sup>These are the regulations that Moses gave to the sons of Israel regarding the feasts of Yahweh.

**24** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, <sup>2</sup>"Command the Israelites to bring you oil from pressed olives for the light, that a lamp may be kept burning continually. <sup>3</sup>Aaron shall keep the flame in order from evening until morning in the tent of meeting, outside the veil of the Covenant. It shall be a lasting ordinance for all generations. <sup>4</sup>He shall set the lamps on the pure gold lampstand to burn continually before Yahweh.

<sup>5</sup>Then you shall take fine flour and make twelve cakes, two-tenths of a measure in each cake. <sup>6</sup>Place them in two rows, six in each, on the pure gold table before Yahweh. <sup>7</sup>On each row put pure frankincense, so that the bread may be a memorial, as an offering by fire to Yahweh. <sup>8</sup>Every Sabbath Aaron shall set the bread in order before Yahweh on behalf of the Israelites as a lasting covenant. <sup>9</sup>The bread will be for Aaron and his sons; they are to consider it as a most holy portion of the sacrifices by fire to Yahweh and they shall eat it in a holy place. This is a lasting law."

25:31

Num  
4:16;  
1S 3:3

1S 21:5;  
Mt 12:4

### The blasphemy

<sup>10</sup>The son of an Israelite woman, and whose husband was an Egyptian, quarreled with a man of Israel in the camp and <sup>11</sup>the son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the name of Yahweh with a curse, so they brought him to Moses. (His mother was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri of the tribe of Dan). <sup>12</sup>They put him under guard until a decision from Yahweh would be made known.

<sup>13</sup>Yahweh said to Moses, "Take the man who has cursed out of the camp. <sup>14</sup>All who have heard him curse will lay their hands on his head and the entire assembly shall stone him to death. <sup>15</sup>Then say this to the Israelites: The man who curses God shall pay for his sin <sup>16</sup>and whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall be put to death. The whole assembly shall stone him; the alien, like the native, shall be put to death when he blasphemes the Name.

Jos 7:25;  
Acts  
7:58

### The law of retaliation

- <sup>17</sup>Whoever kills a man shall be put to death.

<sup>18</sup>Whoever kills an animal shall replace the loss, life for life. <sup>19</sup>If a man injures his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him. <sup>20</sup>Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, just as he has injured another, so shall it be done to him. <sup>21</sup>He who kills a beast shall make up for it, and he who kills a man shall be put to death.

21:23;  
Mt 5:38

<sup>22</sup>There shall be one law, the same for the alien and the native, for I am Yahweh, your God."

Num  
15:16

<sup>23</sup>So Moses spoke to the Israelites and they brought the man who had cursed outside the camp and stoned him. In this way the Israelites did as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

• **24.17** *Eye for eye.* In verse 19 we have the so-called "Law of Talion." This law seems cruel. It appears to accept vengeance as normal. But, in fact, it was an attempt to limit violent impulses such as resentment or the desire for retaliation. This law establishes that an enemy should only be hurt in proportion to the harm suffered: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. This was a way of civilizing people who were quite far from the Christian ideal. Forgiveness, as Christ preached it, is something radically new.

• **25.1** The land needs to be given a rest. We know how, in our own time, many fields have been exhausted by overuse.

### The sabbatical year and jubilee

**25** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses on Dt 15:1 Mount Sinai: <sup>2</sup>"Speak to the Israelites and tell them: When you enter the land I am giving you, let the land rest for Yahweh every seventh year. <sup>3</sup>For six years you shall sow your field, prune your vineyard and harvest the produce, <sup>4</sup>but in the seventh year the land shall have a rest, or Sabbath, a Sabbath for Yahweh. You shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard; <sup>5</sup>you shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest nor gather the grapes of your uncultivated vines.

This shall be a year of rest for the land, <sup>6</sup>but whatever it produces of itself will provide food for you, for your male and female slaves, for your hired servant and for the stranger who lives with you.

<sup>7</sup>Its produce will likewise provide food for your livestock and for the wild animals on your land.

<sup>8</sup>When seven Sabbaths of years have passed, that is, seven times seven years, there shall be the time of the seven weeks of years, that is forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup>Then on the tenth day of the seventh month sound the trumpet loudly. On this Day of Atonement sound the trumpet all through the land.

<sup>10</sup>Keep holy the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom for all the inhabitants of the land. It shall be a jubilation year Is 61:2

The sabbatical year (or the year of rest) occurs every seven years. This custom in Leviticus has a precise meaning: people place their trust in God who will not allow them to die from hunger.

If this sabbatical year occurs in times of need, or after an invasion, we can see that it will be very difficult to observe this prescription (see 1 Mac 6:49). Yet, God himself promised to help those who faithfully observe it (v. 21), which is one of the issues in the Book of Judith.

Every fifty years a *Jubilee year* is to be celebrated: its value is even more sacred. The word *jubilee* does not come from *jubilation*, but both words come from the Hebrew *yobel* or *ram's horn* which was used to proclaim this holy

for you when each one shall recover his property and go back to his family. <sup>11</sup>In this fiftieth year, your year of Jubilee, you shall neither sow nor reap the aftergrowth, nor gather the grapes from the uncultivated vines. <sup>12</sup>This Jubilee year shall be holy for you, and you shall eat what the field yields of itself without cultivation.

<sup>13</sup>In this year of Jubilee each of you shall recover his own property. <sup>14</sup>When you sell something to your neighbor or buy something from him, do not wrong one another. <sup>15</sup>According to the number of years after the Jubilee, you shall buy it from your neighbor and according to the number of years left for harvesting crops he shall sell to you. <sup>16</sup>When the years are many the price shall be greater and when the years are few the price shall be less, for it is the number of crops that he is selling to you. <sup>17</sup>So you shall not wrong one another but

you shall fear your God, for I am Yahweh, your God.

<sup>18</sup>Carry out my precepts and obey my laws. In that way you will live securely in the land. <sup>19</sup>The land will give its fruit so that you may have food in abundance and live securely.

<sup>20</sup>But if you ask: What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not sow or gather crops? See that <sup>21</sup>I will send you my blessing in the sixth year that it may produce enough for three years. <sup>22</sup>So in the eighth year the remains of the old crop will provide you with what to sow and to eat until the harvest of the ninth year is ready.

<sup>23</sup>The land shall not be sold forever Ps 39:13 for the land is mine, where you are but strangers and guests of mine. <sup>24</sup>In all the territory you occupy, the land is to be redeemed.

<sup>25</sup>When your brother becomes poor Ru 4:1 and sells his property, his nearest relative is to come and buy back what his

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year. That year, all slaves had to be liberated: all mortgaged fields and houses would return to their owners without payment involved.

*You are but strangers and guests of mine* (v. 23). In the long chapters of Deuteronomy and Joshua which relate the conquest of the Holy Land and its distribution, the land is always seen as *inheritance*. It is the inheritance that God gives to the tribes of his people. The land, then, belongs to each of the tribes, and so, along with private property, there are also lands belonging to the community, lands which are distributed periodically.

The year of the jubilee is, therefore, very holy because it intends to establish a perfect reconciliation, not only among Israelite brothers, but also with God. He is also invited to cancel the debts. The holy year celebrated by all the people maintains the hope of a holy year whose cost will be shouldered by God himself, on the way to salvation: see Isaiah 61:1, a text which Jesus applies to himself (Lk 4:19).

This guaranty given to the poor and the unfortunate of an inalienable heritage is expressed within the framework of a rural society, but the spirit that gives life to it is at the heart of the Scriptures: in front of God any right to property has limitations. How can we not think here of the ravages of liberalism which have only expanded in the course of the centuries? Powerful nations, which enjoy years of economic

advancement over others, have preached and imposed on others the free-market. This allowed them to impose their products on others, while local production suffers and, with corruption, they became owners of the resources of the subsoil, of the markets of agricultural products, and finally, of real power itself. The past two centuries have justified the language of the prophets who do not speak of the rich and poor, but of poor and oppressors.

In the last century, the Church has not ceased to denounce the evils of liberalism. It must be acknowledged that, by doing so, she did not always have a clear vision of what the modern world was and was frequently mistaken, opposing the wrong adversary. But the condemnation is still justified more than ever in this time when the religion of liberalism holds quasi-monopoly on the means of communication and meets only token opposition. We anticipate the moment when Christians will openly proclaim the demands of the Scriptures. Every people of every race and nation have their own heritage which is more valuable than the land itself. No one should have the power to make workers jobless by making their way of doing things obsolete; no one should be able to control prices of life's necessities or hold a stranglehold on the economy or make excessive profits on goods that people need to survive.

relative has sold. <sup>26</sup>If the man has no relatives to buy back his property, but later has sufficient means to redeem it, <sup>27</sup>he will calculate the value based on the number of years since he sold it and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it and in that way he shall re-cover his property. <sup>28</sup>But if he does not find the means to repay him, what has been sold shall remain with the buyer until the Jubilee year when it must be given back to its original owner.

<sup>29</sup>In the same way, if a man sells a house in a walled city, his right of redemption shall last until the end of a year from the time of its sale; his right of redemption lasts a whole year. <sup>30</sup>If it is not redeemed by the end of a complete year, the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to the one who bought it and to his descendants, and it shall not be released in the Jubilee year.

<sup>31</sup>Houses in villages which have no surrounding wall are considered as fields; they have redemption rights and may be released in a Jubilee year.

<sup>32</sup>As for the towns of the Levites, their houses belong to the Levites and they have a permanent right to redeem what is bought from them. <sup>33</sup>Any house in a town of the Levites can return to them at the time of the Jubilee, for the houses in the towns of the Levites are their possession among the Israelites. <sup>34</sup>The field also belonging to their towns must not be sold forever; it is their permanent possession.

### How to share with your neighbor

<sup>35</sup>If your brother becomes poor and is unable to support himself, help

• 35. These paragraphs are the work of Jewish priests animated by worthy zeal but in the context of a primitive economy that no longer exists. They have given rise to many scruples, many refusals from 13th to 15th centuries when the extension of commerce called for capital. Many Christians, because of these prohibitions, refused to take part in the system.

“Do not take interest from him” (v. 36, see Dt 23:1-20 and Lk 6:34-38). Such is the law of solidarity and fraternal love. But the coming of big business and industry has raised another

him. Help this stranger or this guest that he may live with you. <sup>36</sup>Do not take interest from him, but fear your God, so that your brother may live among you. <sup>37</sup>Do not give him your silver at interest nor your food for gain.

<sup>38</sup>I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of the Canaanites and to be your God.

<sup>39</sup>If your brother becomes poor and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave, <sup>40</sup>but let him remain with you as a hired servant and an alien until the year of Jubilee. <sup>41</sup>He shall then leave you, he and his sons with him, and return to his own family and to the property of his fathers.

<sup>42</sup>For they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt and they are not to be sold as slaves. <sup>43</sup>Do not rule over them harshly, but fear your God.

<sup>44</sup>As for the male and female slaves, it is from the nations around you that you are to buy them. <sup>45</sup>You may also buy from among the aliens who live with you and from their families, born in your land, and they may be your property. <sup>46</sup>So you may leave them to your children as inherited possessions and make them slaves for life. But regarding your fellow Israelites, you must not rule over them harshly.

<sup>47</sup>If an alien or temporary resident becomes prosperous and one of your brothers becomes so poor as to sell himself to a stranger who is living with you or to a member of the stranger's family, <sup>48</sup>he shall have the right of redemption. One of his brothers may redeem him, <sup>49</sup>or his uncle or

question: it became necessary to “interest” investors and encourage them to lend the necessary funds. Here, as in many other human realities, we see that every law is linked to a certain time and a certain way of life. Each generation has to invent its way of living, its fidelity to the word of God. That is why, when we study in the Scriptures the laws relevant to a particular problem, we observe an evolution of one text to another, in fact of one epoch to another (cf. Ex 21:2-11; Lev 25:39-43; Dt 15:12-18).

22:24;  
Dt 23:20

11:45;  
Jer  
11:4

Dt 15:12;  
Jer 34:8

Jos 21

Dt 15:7

the son of his uncle or a near relative may redeem him. <sup>50</sup>If he becomes rich, let him redeem himself. He shall reckon with his buyer from the time he sold himself until the year of Jubilee and the price of his sale shall correspond to the number of years. If many years remain, he shall be reckoned at the price of a hired servant, according to the number of years. <sup>51</sup>If redeemed when many years remain, he shall refund out of the price paid for him, according to the remaining time. <sup>52</sup>If only a few years remain until the Jubilee year, he will calculate and refund accordingly. <sup>53</sup>He shall be with him as a servant hired year by year and he shall not be harshly dealt with.

<sup>54</sup>If he is redeemed in any of these ways, he shall be released in the Jubilee year, he and his sons with him.

<sup>55</sup>For it is to me that the Israelites are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh, your God.

**26** <sup>1</sup>You shall not make for yourselves idols or set up an image or pillar or carved stone in your land to bow before it for I am Yahweh, your God.

<sup>2</sup>You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my Sanctuary. I am Yahweh.

**Promises of God**

<sup>3</sup>If you walk according to my precepts and obey my commandments, if you carry them out, <sup>4</sup>I will give you rain in its season and the land will yield its produce, the trees in the field their fruit; <sup>5</sup>the threshing time will last to vintage time and the vintage till sowing time. You will have food in abundance and you will live securely in your land.

• **26.3** The law of God is a law of life. When people do not follow it, they destroy themselves. Here God requires of his people justice, kindness and respect for life. He can exact it for facts will justify his words: he promises infallibly benefits or disasters.

The end of this chapter, written during the exile, describes the decadence of the Jewish people just before their exile. This destruction was, in some sense, "God's punishment": but it was also the consequence of their faults, because

<sup>6</sup>I will give you peace in your country and you will sleep without anyone disturbing you. I will banish the wild beast and keep the sword of war from passing through the land. <sup>7</sup>You will rout your enemies and they will fall before your sword; <sup>8</sup>five of you will pursue a hundred of them and a hundred of you ten thousand of them, and they will fall before you by the sword.

<sup>9</sup>I will turn towards you to make your families fruitful and your people numerous, and I will confirm my Covenant with you. <sup>10</sup>When you are still eating from the old harvest you will have to discard what is stored to make place for the new. <sup>11</sup>I will make my Dwelling among you and I will not reject you. <sup>12</sup>I will walk among you; I will be your God and you will be my people. <sup>13</sup>I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be their slaves no longer. I have broken the bars of your yoke letting you walk erect.

**Curses**

<sup>14</sup>But if you do not heed me and keep my commandments, <sup>15</sup>if you reject my precepts and ignore my decrees, refusing to obey all my commandments and so break my covenant, <sup>16</sup>I, in turn, will do this: I will bring upon you a terror, a tuberculosis and fever, weakening your eyes and draining your life. In vain will you sow, for your enemies will eat it. <sup>17</sup>I will turn away from you until you are beaten by your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you and you shall flee when no one pursues you.

any society which disregards the foundations of moral life is digging its own grave.

This chapter presents as opposite poles: peace and fruitfulness on the one hand, and on the other, the insecurity, waste and division among people who do not listen to God:

- injustice breeds violence;
- sexual license weakens the sense of sacrifice;
- national resources are wasted on luxury and on repressive forces;

Such people come to the point of *eating the flesh of their own children* (Dt 28:53).

19:30;  
Jer 17:  
19:27

Ezk 34:  
26-27

2Cor  
6:16-17

Ezk  
36:28;  
Rev 21:3

Dt 28:15;  
Dn 9:11



<sup>18</sup>If after all this you do not obey me, I will continue to punish you sevenfold for your sins. <sup>19</sup>I will break the pride of your power; I will make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. <sup>20</sup>Your strength shall be spent in vain; your land will give no produce and the trees no fruit. <sup>21</sup>If you defy me and are unwilling to obey me, I will bring seven times as many plagues on you for your sins. <sup>22</sup>I will let loose the wild animals and they will rob you of your children and destroy your cattle and make you so few that your roads will be deserted.

<sup>23</sup>If, with all this, you do not repent but remain hostile towards me, <sup>24</sup>then I will be hostile towards you and strike you seven times for your sins. <sup>25</sup>The sword I will bring against you, and with the sword I will avenge my Covenant with you; and when you gather together in your cities I will send pestilence on you and you shall be delivered into enemy hands. <sup>26</sup>When I cut off your supply of bread and ten women bake bread in one oven and bring back rationed bread, you will eat and not be satisfied.

<sup>27</sup>But if with all that you do not obey me and remain defiant towards me, <sup>28</sup>I will go against you in fury and punish you sevenfold for your sins. <sup>29</sup>You shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. <sup>30</sup>I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars; I will cast your corpses on those of your idols and I shall hate you. <sup>31</sup>I will lay waste your cities and make desolate your Sanctuaries and no longer shall I relish your sweet-smelling offerings. <sup>32</sup>I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be astonished. <sup>33</sup>I will scatter you among the nations and unsheathe the sword behind you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities lie in ruins.

<sup>34</sup>Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies waste while you are in the land of your enemies; <sup>35</sup>then the land will rest and observe its Sabbaths. As long as the land lies desolate it shall have the Sabbath rest that it did not have when you inhabited it.

<sup>36</sup>As for those of you who are left, I will make them faint-hearted in the land of their enemies. The sound of a wind-blown leaf will chase them and even when no one pursues them, <sup>37</sup>they will flee as from the sword and will fall. They will stumble against each other as if running from the

sword even when they are not pursued, and you will be unable to stand up before your enemies. <sup>38</sup>You shall perish among the nations and die in the land of your enemies.

<sup>39</sup>Those among you who remain will rot away because of their wickedness in the land of your enemies and because of the wickedness of their fathers they will rot away with them. <sup>40</sup>Then they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers. They will admit that their treacheries and their hostility towards me made me hostile towards them <sup>41</sup>and caused me to bring them to the land of their enemies, and then their uncircumcised hearts may become humble and they will accept the punishment for their sin. <sup>42</sup>Then I will remember my Covenant with Jacob and my Covenant with Isaac and my Covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.

<sup>43</sup>For the land will be abandoned by them and it shall observe its Sabbath; it will be desolate without them, while they pay for their sin because they spurned my ordinances and ignored my statutes.

<sup>44</sup>Yet even so, when they are in the land of their enemies I will not reject them or ignore them to the point of destroying them and breaking my Covenant with them, for I am Yahweh, their God. <sup>45</sup>For their sake I will remember my Covenant with their forefathers whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am Yahweh."

<sup>46</sup>These are the statutes, the ordinances and the teachings of the Covenant Yahweh made with the Israelites, through Moses, on Mount Sinai.

### Vows and promises

**27** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, <sup>2</sup>"Tell the Israelites about the fixed price for those who have to be ransomed because of a vow.

<sup>3</sup>A man between twenty and sixty years of age shall be valued at fifty pieces of silver—the official standard; <sup>4</sup>a woman shall be valued at thirty silver coins; <sup>5</sup>between five and twenty years, a boy shall be valued at twenty silver coins, a girl at ten silver coins; <sup>6</sup>between one month and five years, a boy shall be valued at five silver coins, a girl at three silver coins; <sup>7</sup>at sixty years and over, a man shall be valued at fifteen silver coins and a woman at ten

Jer 14: 1-9

Ezk 5:17

Ezk 21:14

Is 3:1; 4:1

Jer 19:9; Lm 2:20

Is 1:7; Jer 34:22

Ezk 4:17

Jer 4:4; Is 40:2; Lk 1:72

Lm 3:22; 5:21

silver coins. <sup>8</sup>If the person who made the vow is too poor to pay the standard price, he must present the person concerned to the priest, and the priest shall set a value proportionate to the resources of the person who made the vow.

<sup>9</sup>As for an animal suitable for offering to Yahweh, any such animal given to Yahweh is holy. <sup>10</sup>It cannot be exchanged or a substitute offered—good for bad, bad for good. If one animal is substituted for another, both of them shall belong to Yahweh. <sup>11</sup>If it is an unclean animal, and not suitable for offering to Yahweh, whatever it may be it must be presented to the priest <sup>12</sup>and he shall set a price for it, judging it good or bad. <sup>13</sup>You must abide by his price. The person who wishes to buy it back must add one-fifth to the price set.

<sup>14</sup>If a man dedicates his house to Yahweh, the priest shall set a price for it, judging whether its value is great or little. You must abide by the priest's price. <sup>15</sup>If the man who has vowed his house wishes to buy it back, he must add one-fifth to the price and it shall be given back to him.

<sup>16</sup>If a man dedicates one of the fields of his patrimony to Yahweh, its value shall be calculated according to its productivity, at the rate of fifty silver coins to one bushel of barley.

<sup>17</sup>If he dedicates the field during the Jubilee year, he must stand by this price. <sup>18</sup>But if he dedicates it after the Jubilee, the priest shall calculate the price on the basis of the number of years still to run until the next Jubilee and the price shall be reduced accordingly.

<sup>19</sup>If he wishes to buy back the field, he shall add one-fifth to the price, and the field shall be given back to him. <sup>20</sup>If he does not buy it back but sells it to another, the right of redemption ceases; <sup>21</sup>when the buyer has to give it up at the Jubilee year, it becomes a thing dedicated to Yahweh,

the same as a field laid under the ban: the man's property passes to the priest.

<sup>22</sup>If he dedicates to Yahweh a field which he has bought, but which is not part of his patrimony, <sup>23</sup>the priest shall assess the price on the basis of the number of years still to run before the Jubilee year; and the man shall pay this sum the same day, as for a thing dedicated to Yahweh. <sup>24</sup>In the Jubilee year, the field shall return to the seller, to the man to whose patrimony the land belongs. <sup>25</sup>All prices must be made according to the official Sanctuary standards at the rate of twenty gerahs to one silver piece.

<sup>26</sup>No one may dedicate the firstborn of his cattle, for it belongs to Yahweh by right: whether ox or sheep, it belongs to Yahweh. <sup>27</sup>But if it is an unclean animal it may be bought back at the price with one-fifth added; if it is not bought back, the animal shall be sold at the price set.

<sup>28</sup>Nothing that is dedicated to Yahweh by anathema may be bought back; nothing whether a man, an animal, or a field of patrimony. What is dedicated by anathema becomes a most holy thing and belongs to Yahweh. <sup>29</sup>A human being dedicated by anathema cannot be bought back, he must be put to death.

<sup>30</sup>One tenth of all the produce of the earth or the fruits of trees, belongs to Yahweh. <sup>31</sup>If a man wishes to buy back part of his tithe, he must add one-fifth to its value.

<sup>32</sup>In all tithes of flock or herd, the tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff shall be a thing dedicated to Yahweh; <sup>33</sup>there must be no picking out of good and bad, no substitution. If substitution takes place, both the animal and its substitute shall be things dedicated without possibility of buying them back."

<sup>34</sup>These are the commandments that Yahweh laid down for Moses on Mount Sinai, for the people of Israel.

Num  
3:47

13:2

Num  
18:21Jer  
33:13